‘Transference of Traditions’ in Tourism:
Local Identities as Images Reflected in Infinity Mirrors

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Abstract: Local identities are created for tourism purposes as if they were reflected in infinity mirrors. Local identities are synchronized with each other, and are deprived of their authenticities. They drift as rootless (deracinated) ones for the purposes of tourism. In this presentation, I will show that local identities are not objective phenomena but rather they constructed by people’s desires and interests, based on my survey of studies regarding transformations or inventions of tradition. Next, I will analyze ‘transference of traditions’ by referring to the festivals known as Yosakoi Matsuri and Yosakoi Soran Matsuri. Yosakoi Matsuri is the festival held every year in Kochi, Japan, from August 9 to 12, and Yosakoi Soran Matsuri is the festival held in Sapporo, Japan, in June. Finally, I will point out that tourism makes local identities fluidized mobile ones without the aura.

Keywords: Transference of traditions, Invention of tradition, Local Identities, Fluidity, Mobility

Introduction

There are many cases of local communities inventing new traditions or customs, as well as events, through their relationship with tourism. Tourism research has identified many examples of the transformation or invention of local traditions. However, a closer examination reveals curious cases that cannot be explained by theoretical concepts like the ‘transformation of traditions’ or ‘invention of traditions’. These cases are examples of a phenomenon that I called the ‘transference of traditions’. In this presentation, I would like to consider this phenomenon.

First, I will explore the transformation and invention of traditions in the context of tourism, arguing that traditions are not objective phenomena but, rather, social constructs that reflect people’s desires and interests. Next, I discuss
the transference of tradition with using data from a specific case study: the Yosakoi Festival. Then, I highlight the issue that I believe the transference of tradition raises and argue that local identities have become fluidized.

Transformation and Invention of Traditions in Tourism

Eric Hobsbawm defined the invention of tradition as follows: ‘Inventing traditions, it is assumed here, is essentially a process of formalization and ritualization, characterized by references to the past, if only by imposing repetition’ (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1992). Hobsbawm discussed the invention of tradition in the context of nation-building. However, the invention of traditions is also frequently observed in tourism phenomenon.

Kecak, for instance, is one of the traditional Balinese dances performed for tourists. However, as is well known, Walter Spies, a Russian-born German who was a painter and musician during the 1930s, helped invent kecak as a tourist-oriented art form. Originally, kecak did not include narrative elements; it simply involved intense chanting and dancing to a simple rhythm. The dance subsequently became linked with the Ramayana epic poem and evolved into a tourist spectacle (Yamashita 1996, 1999). The hula is another example; Yamanaka argues that this highly admired Hawaiian dance is an invented tradition reflecting the popular image of Hawaii (Yamanaka 1992).

Another example is Kyoto’s Daimonji bonfire (Daimonji Gozan Okuribi). This event is a summer tradition in Japan. However, the modern-day Daimonji bonfire becomes one that has been invented and transformed via its relationship with tourism. There are various bonfire events involving the lighting of ceremonial bonfires, including the Daimonji bonfire on Mount Higashiyama Nyoigatake, the Hidari Daimonji bonfire on Mount Okita behind the Kinkakuji pavilion (Mount Daimonji), the Myoho bonfires on Mount Matsugasaki Nishiyama (Mount Mantoro) and Mount Higashiyama (Mount Daikokuten), the Funagata bonfire on Mount Nishigamofune, and the Toriigata bonfire on Mount Saga Mandala. These ceremonial bonfires (okuribi, literally ‘send-off bonfires’) originally had religious connotations; they signified a time when the spirits of the dead, having visited the land of the living for the Bon season, would return again to the netherworld. Nowadays, however, these events are accompanied by modern features such as ‘Daimonji concerts’ and ‘Daimonji sales campaigns’ in department stores. Thus, the ceremonial bonfires have
been reinvented and redefined as tourist events, and their form is continually in flux (Wasaki 1999).

Nara City’s annual Tokae lantern festival is another example, as it is an invented and transformed tradition. The Tokae lantern festival is held annually in Nara City from early to mid-August. It is characterized as a ‘light and darkness event’ in which the streets on summer nights are illuminated by candlelight.

The lantern festival began in 1999. The Young Entrepreneurs’ Group of the Nara Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Young Entrepreneurs’ Group of the Nara Economic Association spearheaded a plan to end the Nara Festival, which had run for 10 years, and invent a new Nara event to replace it. The second Tokae lantern festival was held in 2000, and the voluntary organization Nara Tokae Association was established to ensure that the Tokae lantern festival would become a permanent event in the local community. In 2001, the Ministry of the Environment selected it as one of the 100 most beautiful landscapes, and in 2003, the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism awarded it the Minister’s Community-building Organization Prize. In 2016, the 18th Nara Tokae Festival was held from August 5 to August 14.

Many local volunteers take part in this event, including local residents and students of universities located in Nara. The number of volunteers (called ‘day supporters’) alone stands at about 300 each year. Since so many local residents participate in the event, it has come to be represented by people as a classic summer tradition in Nara (Endo 2005).

The Yuwaku Bonbori Festival in the Yuwaku Onsen district of Kanazawa City, Ishikawa Prefecture, may become another example of an invented tradition. This festival was invented based on a fictional festival depicted in the anime series Hanasaku Iroha (broadcast from April to November 2011). Recently, tourists and local residents have started representing the event as a tradition. Endo identifies this case as an interesting example of how popular culture (anime) can foster the invention of traditions (2014).

As the above cases illustrate, in the context of tourism, traditions are invented and transformed, and during this process, they begin to be represented by people as traditions. Therefore, whether a traditional event historically existed in the area is not an important issue. What important is that people start to
represent such events as long-established local traditions (Endo 2003; Bruner 2005). Adachi explored this issue, focusing on the case of the Gujo Odori dance festival in Hachiman-cho, Gujo-gun, Gifu Prefecture. The key issue, according to Adachi, was how this local dance festival was constructed around the shared narrative that ‘it is a local tradition dating back to ancient times’ (2010). Handler and Linnekin argued that traditions are not necessarily objective phenomena; rather, they are social constructs that are determined by people’s various interpretations, meanings, desires, and interests (1984).

However, there are tourism cases today that cannot be adequately explained by theoretical concepts like the transformation or invention of traditions. Rather, we must move the discourse forward. To this end, I propose the theoretical concept of the transference of tradition.

**What is the Transference of Traditions? Case Study: The Yosakoi Festival**

What is the transference of traditions? I will illustrate this concept by referring to the Yosakoi Festival.

The Yosakoi Festival is a Tosa Province carnival held over a four-day period from August 9 to 12 (August 9 is ‘Yosakoi eve’, August 10 and 11 are the main carnival days, and August 12 is the concluding day of the festival, culminating with a national dance competition). The carnival takes place in the streets and in performance venues in Kochi City; it features dazzlingly ornamented floats and dancers carrying wooden clappers (*naruko*). The festival was initiated in August 1954 by the Kochi Chamber of Commerce and Industry with the intention of promoting trade in the shopping district. In this sense, it is another invented tradition now represented by locals as a traditional event of Kochi Prefecture (Figure 1 and Figure 2).
Figure 1. Yosakoi Festival. Source: the author.

Figure 2. Yosakoi Festival. Source: the author.
Only 750 people and 21 organizations took part in the first festival in 1954. Subsequently, the festival grew in scale. At the 30th festival, more than 10,000 dancers took part. As the scale of the festival grew, it increasingly took on the appearance of a major tourism event of Kochi Prefecture; music, hairstyles, costumes, and choreography became more extravagant, incorporating elements of samba and rock. This phenomenon illustrates how traditions are adapted for tourism purposes (Tsuboi and Hasegawa 2002).

However, an analysis of the Yosakoi Festival reveals an issue that cannot be fully accounted for by theoretical concepts (e.g., invention or transformation of traditions). The Yosakoi Festival is an example of the transference of tradition in that a tradition was transferred from the area where it historically existed to different areas.

For instance, the Yosakoi Festival has been transferred to Sapporo, Hokkaido, where it exists as the Yosakoi Soran Festival. The Yosakoi Soran Festival emerged as a blend of Kochi’s Yosakoi Festival and Hokkaido’s Soran Bushi (a sea shanty). It was initially started by university students in Hokkaido. One of the students was impressed by the Yosakoi Festival in Kochi and persuaded her friends to create a similar festival in the local community.

The first Yosakoi Soran Festival was held in June 1992. Ten teams and 1,000 individuals took part; additionally, there were 200,000 spectators. In the 25th festival in 2016, there were 280 teams and 28,000 individuals participating, and approximately 2,054,000 spectators. The festival is held every June; it is a well-established early summer event of Sapporo and Hokkaido. As such, it has come to be represented by local people as a tradition.

The Yosakoi Festival has also been transferred to Nara, where it is known as the Basara Festival (Figure 3). Held in late August, the Basara Festival is intended as a rallying call to inspire a bustling, vibrant, and energetic 21st-century Nara. The festival began in 1999, and it was held for the 18th time in 2016. Using Kochi’s Yosakoi Festival as a motif, various teams perform creative and unique costumed dances.
Figure 3. Basara Festival. Source: the author.

As a new summer festival of Nara, the event has drawn the interest of not only locals but many people who visit Nara in the summer, and it is often featured in local media. The festival is organized by the Basara Festival Implementation Committee, a body of young entrepreneurs from the shopping district near Kintetsu Nara Station and local supporters. This body manages all aspects of the festival, including the production of posters and brochures, as well as the design of the *naruko* and templates for costumes and choreography. For example, it has stipulated ‘odoru-nara, sora!’ as a Basara Festival dancing song.3

Thus, the transference of tradition occurs when an event represented as a local community’s tradition is transferred to another local community and redefined in the new community’s context. The Yosakoi Soran Festival and the Basara Festival are nothing other than traditions that have been transferred to and redefined in Hokkaido and Nara, respectively. Kochi Prefecture’s Yosakoi Festival has been transferred to various places as far north as Hokkaido and as far south as Okinawa. Almost every region of Japan now has its own Yosakoi Festival.
Local Identities as Images Reflected in Infinity Mirrors; With Reference to the Ideas of Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan

In the cases of both the Yosakoi Soran Festival and the Basara Festival, an event ‘represented’ as a long-established local tradition was transferred to another local community and redefined in the new local community’s context. As such, authenticity is not an issue here. What, then, is the issue posed by the transference of tradition?

The issue concerns local identities. In the transference of traditions, something that was originally invented and represented as a cultural tradition of a local community is presented as the tradition of another local community. One could expect local events to be invented and represented according to local contexts, but this is not so in the case of the Yosakoi Soran Festival and Basara Festival; both these events assume the form of the Yosakoi Festival, which is a representation of Kochi’s local identity. In other words, the desires and interests that are projected onto a traditional event of one local community mirror the desires and interests projected onto a traditional event of another local community. I believe that this issue is central to the transference of traditions.

Transference is a concept developed by psychoanalysts such as Freud and Lacan. The concept describes the synchronization of one’s thoughts and feelings with those of another. In Lacan’s discussion of the case of a paranoid patient, whom he named Aimée, he reported that during the psychotherapy, his emotions and desires synchronized with those of Aimée’s; in fact, he developed a desire to be Aimée’s son, and Aimée, conversely, developed a desire to be his mother.

Shingu, who employed Freud and Lacan’s theories and advanced psychoanalysis in Japan, discussed one of his cases in which a similar phenomenon occurred. During the therapy, Shingu’s desire to study in Britain synchronized with his client’s desire to study in France. As a result, Shingu ended up studying in France, and his client switched her major to British culture (Shingu 1995). The transference of the client’s affection and resentment toward her father onto the person conducting the psychoanalysis was a manifestation of the synchronization of thoughts and feelings.
To paraphrase from Lacan’s famous thesis, ‘the desire of man is the desire of the other’ (*le désir de l’homme est le désir de l’autre*), though it may seem that our thoughts, intentions, and desires originate from within, in fact they originate from others. Insofar as we are mutually bound with others through the medium of language, we absorb the thoughts, intentions, and desires of others and they become our own.

Arguably, a similar phenomenon occurs with local identities. The thoughts and intentions projected onto traditional events of Hokkaido and Nara synchronized with the thoughts and intentions projected onto a traditional event in another local community, Kochi, such that this other community’s traditional event came to be identified with Hokkaido and Nara.

The thoughts and intentions we project onto local traditional events may appear to originate from within us, but this is not the case. They are constructed by other people and other local communities in an infinity mirror effect. One of the dancing teams participating in the 2006 Yosakoi Festival provided a striking illustration of this phenomenon. This team from Kagawa prefecture performed the Yosakoi dance in Kochi prefecture, incorporating elements from the Awa Dance of Tokushima prefecture (Figure 4).

There are, of course, cases in which a traditional event that was transferred to another local community influenced or transformed the style of the event in the source area. For example, Hokkaido’s Yosakoi Soran Festival has influenced the style of Kochi’s Yosakoi Festival. When discussing transference of traditions, the importance is not identification of the original version of the tradition or the means of transmission or imitation of that version; the issue is how local identities are constructed as reflected images within, as it were, an infinity mirror.⁴
The Fluidization of Local Identities; Tourism is expanding non-originality

In the context of modern tourism, there are many cases in which local identity appears as a reflected image in an infinity mirror. To use Nara Tokae as an example again, this event in which the ancient capital of Nara is illuminated with candlelight can be observed as well in Kyoto, which also promotes itself as an ancient capital and holds a similar event, Kyoto Hanatouro. The main difference between the two events is that electric candles are used in Kyoto Hanatouro festivities. Given that many residents of each community have come to regard their event as a tradition dating back to ancient times, it may be considered an invented tradition. However, we could also consider it as the transference of tradition. Both events showcase the ancient city aspect of Nara and Kyoto, respectively, as if the identities of each place are being reflected in an infinity mirror (Figure 5 and Figure 6).
Kobe also has a similar event; the Kobe Luminarie has been held at the end of each year since 1995. The event involves walking through an illuminated arcade from Kobe Chinatown (Nankin-machi, ‘Nanjing town’) to the ‘old foreign settlement’ (Kyoryuchi). The illumination creates a romantic atmosphere, and the event has become an essential representation of Kobe’s identity (Figure 7). The Kobe Luminarie concept was transferred to Tokyo’s Marunouchi district in 1999 with the initiation of the Tokyo Millenario. The event continues to be held albeit under a new name, Tokyo Michiterasu. As in Kobe, it has become an essential representation of Marunouchi’s identity.6

Thus, there are many tourism cases in which local identities are constructed as reflected images in an infinity mirror.7) Local identities are being stripped of their endemic contexts and are drifting about as deracinated entities. A local community’s tourism enterprises are always linked to the thoughts, intentions, and desires of tourists (the other) who come to the community from another one. As such, the local community must synchronize its thoughts, intentions, and desires with this other and construct its local identity accordingly. Therefore, in the context of tourism, local identities are increasingly fluid, and non-originality is expanding.

Figure 5. Nara Tokae. Source: the author.

Figure 6. Kyoto Hanatouro. Source: the author.
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In this paper, I have argued that in tourism, traditions are invented and transferred, which leads to the construction of local identities as reflected images in an infinity mirror.

However, our response to this phenomenon should not simply be to rebuke or ignore it. We need to challenge our assumption that the identities we discover within us - identities that have their origins within us - are inherent entities. We must then search for a new way to make local communities thrive in today’s fluidized mobile world.

It may be wise to learn from the post-modern approach, in other words, to accept the images in the infinity mirror with all their diffused reflections and utilize them deftly and flexibly for our own identities.

Notes

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1. Regarding authenticity in tourism, Endo outlines the discourses on this topic that have developed in fields such as tourism sociology and tourism anthropology (2003).


4. This is why I avoided using terms like ‘transmission of tradition’ or ‘imitation of tradition’ and instead used the psychoanalytical term ‘transference’. In using the notion of the ‘transference of tradition’ I intend to convey the nuance that local identities only exist as ‘reflected images’ and that they are constantly in flux.


7. Here, another issue arises, namely, the issue of hegemony over traditions/events. In cases of transference of tradition, hegemonic conflicts are beginning to emerge over which local community’s event is the ‘original’ version. In the case of the Yosakoi Festival, Hokkaido’s Yosakoi Soran Festival became even more of a major event than Kochi’s Yosakoi Festival. In response, Kochi Prefecture started holding a Yosakoi National Championship in an attempt to assert its version of the festival as the original version. A similar hegemonic struggle, albeit modest in scale, has emerged between Nara and Kyoto over which version - Nara Tokae or Kyoto Hanatouro - is the original. As I mentioned previously, the transference of tradition phenomenon is far removed from arguments about authenticity in tourism, and it renders somewhat meaningless the distinction between the original and a copy. Nevertheless, it paradoxically gives rise to hegemonic struggles over the original version. When it comes to tourism-based community development, hegemony over the original version may be closely connected to the issue of local identities.

References


