



|              |                                                                                                                    |
|--------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Title        | A Genealogy of “Cultural Criticism” of Osaka :<br>An English translation of Uno Kōji’ s “Osaka”<br>with commentary |
| Author(s)    | Murakami-Smith, Andrew                                                                                             |
| Citation     | 言語文化共同研究プロジェクト. 2026, 2025, p. 57-74                                                                               |
| Version Type | VoR                                                                                                                |
| URL          | <a href="https://doi.org/10.18910/106336">https://doi.org/10.18910/106336</a>                                      |
| rights       |                                                                                                                    |
| Note         |                                                                                                                    |

*The University of Osaka Institutional Knowledge Archive : OUKA*

<https://ir.library.osaka-u.ac.jp/>

The University of Osaka

## A Genealogy of “Cultural Criticism” of Osaka: An English translation of Uno Kōji’s “Osaka” with commentary

Andrew Murakami-Smith

Oda Sakunosuke (1913-1947), perhaps the best-known Osaka fiction writer in the modern period, at first wanted to write plays. While a student at the Third Higher School in Kyoto (precursor to Kyoto University) from 1931 to 1936, it was drama in which he was interested. Oda’s shift to fiction seems to have been brought on by his reading of Stendhal’s *Le Rouge et le Noir* in 1938, during a three-year sojourn in Tokyo. He returned to his native Osaka in 1939, but as he had lost his parents in the interim, he returned as a “wanderer.” He now saw his hometown with new eyes.<sup>1</sup> As he wrote in the essay “Waga bungaku shugyō” (1943), “my literary training must have been, in a way, the study of Osaka. Osaka is my birthplace, and my teacher.”<sup>2</sup>

Oda’s entrée into the literary scene was his 1940 *Meoto zenzai*. This was a work filled with the names of Osaka neighborhoods, restaurants, and foods; Osaka dialect (“non-standard” from the perspective of Tokyo readers) is used in characters’ dialogue and even sometimes in the narration itself. Moreover, its two main characters are a pair of Osaka “types” or stereotypes, the practical, hard-working woman and her good-for-nothing, profligate man, which had appeared in several previous works of Osaka literature, such as Edo-period love suicide plays by Chikamatsu Monzaemon<sup>3</sup> and Kamizukasa Shōken’s “Hamo no kawa” (1914).<sup>4</sup> *Meoto zenzai* brought Oda notoriety, but also some criticism from established writers such as Shiga Naoya, who called it “dirty” (*kitanarashii*). In his 1946 essay “Kanōsei no bungaku,”<sup>5</sup> Oda recalls that *Meoto zenzai* was denigrated as vulgar and frivolous, but also for having “the spirit of a craftsman and a merchant’s soul.”<sup>6</sup> These last target the work specifically in terms of stereotypes of Osaka, and no doubt contributed to a growing consciousness on Oda’s part of his own status as a “writer of Osaka.” In fact, Oda set many of his subsequent works in Osaka, with many Osaka-dialect-speaking characters. Further, Oda also investigated Osaka, its history, and the character of its people in the essay form. He published an essay entitled “Osaka hakken” (“Osaka Discoveries”) just four months after the appearance of *Meoto zenzai*, and a steady stream of essays followed, including “Osaka, Osaka” (1941), “Saikaku shinron” (“A New Theory of Saikaku,” 1942) and many others about the Edo-period Osaka fiction writer Ihara Saikaku, “Osaka no sakka” (“Osaka Writers,” 1943), “Niryū Bunraku-ron” (“A Theory of Second-Rate Bunraku,” 1946), and “Osaka no kanōsei” (“The Possibilities of Osaka,” 1947).

The 1941 “Osaka, Osaka,” shows how Oda’s status as a “writer of Osaka” was not merely a tautology predicated on the simple fact of being born in Osaka. In this essay, “to be published in the Osaka Edition of an Osaka newspaper and read only by Osakans” (Oda 1941/1970, p. 281) Oda begins by criticizing Osakans’ failure to patronize the Bunraku puppet theater during the summer months, when the entire troupe is forced to tour the provinces to bring in revenue, and asks, “Could Osaka be, after all, a city where it is difficult for art to thrive?” (Oda 1941/1970, p. 282). He then explains that “the reason why I continue to live and bear the inconveniences of writing literature in such a city that is – let’s stop beating around the bush – unsympathetic to the arts is that, after all, I love Osaka, and find it difficult, body and soul, to part from Osaka.” Then, asking himself the question, “Why do I love Osaka? And find it difficult to part from Osaka?” he answers that “it is because Osaka is my hometown. It is because it is the city where I was born and raised” (Ibid.). The ambivalence in his attitude toward his hometown, critical but still attached to it, can be seen in his description of his evolving feelings toward Osaka dialect from childhood through youth to adulthood.

...when I was a child, I spoke the only dialect I could have, in other words, Osaka dialect. I spoke it more skillfully and easily than I do now. But I entered middle school, gradually became more and more impudent, and around the time when I began to... prepare for entrance exams to higher school, I made great efforts to escape from Osaka dialect... I was successfully admitted to the Third Higher School in Kyoto, and in the five years (three years for most) spent there, I learned an odd student slang, then spent two years here and

---

<sup>1</sup> Murakami-Smith (1997), p. 286.

<sup>2</sup> Oda (1976), p. 164.

<sup>3</sup> *Sonezaki shinjū* (1703) and *Shinjū ten no Amijima* (1720), for example.

<sup>4</sup> Translated as “The Skin of the Pike Conger Eel,” Murakami-Smith (2013). (<https://uchicago.app.box.com/s/v2po8omcmlyl4e726rp770k4yemxdkmvm>)

<sup>5</sup> Translated as “The Literature of Possibility,” in Murakami-Smith (2025).

<sup>6</sup> Oda (1946/1999), p. 253.

there, and three years in Tokyo. While there, I expended a foolish amount of effort learning Tokyo dialect... I was now able to speak a somewhat off-key Tokyo dialect, and was constantly saying, 'Look here, in Tokyo, you know –' But even while speaking this way, I thought carefully, and the language spoken by those around me – in other words, the Osaka dialect I had hated – began to seem much better. ... I began speaking Osaka dialect again. And this has continued until today. (Oda 1941/1970, p. 283, tr. Murakami-Smith)

By focusing on Osaka in both fiction and essays, Oda pursued answers to questions such as “What sort of place is Osaka? How does it differ from Tokyo?” and “What sort of people are Osakans? How are they different from the people of other cities and regions?” But these preoccupations of Oda’s were not only his. By writing such “cultural criticism” of Osaka, he joined a lineage of modern writers, both Osaka natives and non-natives, who attempted to find answers to similar questions.

The well-known writer Tanizaki Jun’ichirō (1886-1965), for example, came to the Kansai in 1923 on what he thought would be a short sojourn, just until Tokyo and Yokohama could be rebuilt after the Great Kantō Earthquake. He recorded his initial, somewhat negative impressions of what seemed to him the very different culture of the Kansai in “Hanshin kembunroku” (1925),<sup>7</sup> lamenting, for example, the vulgarity and pushiness of people who borrow one’s newspaper to read instead of buying one of their own. As he became more interested in the life, culture, and dialect of Osaka and the Kansai, however, he stayed on in the Hanshin area between Osaka and Kobe. The much wider-ranging essay “Watakushi no mita Osaka oyobi Osakajin” (1932)<sup>8</sup> gives a more balanced view of what he continued to see as an area culturally distinct from Tokyo, but also one that preserves traditional aspects of Japanese life that he remembers nostalgically from his childhood in Tokyo.

Tanizaki’s increasing interest in the Kansai and traditional aspects of its culture was reflected in works of fiction such as *Tade kū mushi* (1929, featuring traditional *ningyō jōruri* puppet theater)<sup>9</sup> and “Shunkin-shō” (1933, featuring *shamisen* and *koto* playing, and the keeping of Japanese bush warblers [*uguisu*] and larks [*hibari*]).<sup>10</sup> This attention to the traditional is usually portrayed as a “Return to the Classics” (*koten kaiki*) or “Return to Japan” (*Nihon kaiki*). However, one should not forget his initial, somewhat horrified fascination with the strange customs of Kansai people portrayed in “Hanshin kembunroku.” For Tanizaki, the Kansai was initially a “foreign” region, and essentially remained one even as he discovered aspects of traditional Japan there. His fascination with the unfamiliar aspects of Kansai culture can be seen as a direct evolution of his Taishō-era fascination with things Western, Modern, and Chinese. And, just as the versions of the “West” as constructed in such stories as “Aoi hana” (1922, tr. as “Aguri” by Howard Hibbett) and “Dokutan” (“The German Spy,” 1915) are just that – *constructed* – by Tanizaki’s imagination, the Kansai of Tanizaki’s fiction and essays, blending the traditional and the unfamiliar, is an “imaginary Kansai” (Cronin, 2025, p. 11).<sup>11</sup>

Any hasty equation of Tokyo with Modern and Westernized, while the rest of Japan is seen as traditional, is also belied by the Osaka-born painter Koide Narashige (1887-1931). Koide was a painter in the Western style (*yōga*), who went abroad to Paris in 1921-22. His still-lives and nudes betray the influence of Western painting, and often show Western dolls, furniture, and interiors. Like Tanizaki, he lived in the Modern Hanshi area (and in fact knew Tanizaki, and illustrated his *Tade kū mushi*). Koide was an essayist as well as a painter, writing humorously of his weak stomach and delicate constitution, as well as on art and his travels in Europe. His investigations of Osaka and its people are recorded in essays such as “Getemono mandan” (“Some Remarks on Low Things,” 1930), “Shunmin zatsudan” (“Drowsing in Spring,” 1930), and “Yōkisugiru Osaka” (“Too-upbeat Osaka,” 1936). “Shunmin zatsudan” explicitly points out the Modern character of the Hanshin area. Koide first laments that the scenery of the area does not lend itself to landscape painting because the bright sunlight, white ground, and dark green of the pines make all colors look washed-out. (In fact, Koide seems better-known for his still-lives and nudes, rather than his landscapes.) He then asks what pictorial elements might be suited to this scenery. His answers are all thoroughly Modern things: “the wonderfully flat Hanshin Highway; the roar of a motorcycle racing along it; a luxury automobile out for a drive; a sportsman’s white shirt; the stripes of bathing suits; filming movies ... gentlemen at golf... mountain-

<sup>7</sup> Translated as “Hanshin Observations” by Michael P. Cronin in Tanizaki (2025).

<sup>8</sup> Translated as “Osaka and Osakans as I See Them” by Cronin (Tanizaki, 2025).

<sup>9</sup> Translated into English as *Some Prefer Nettles*, Edward Seidensticker, 1955.

<sup>10</sup> Translated into English as “The Story of Shunkin” by Roy Humpherson and Hajime Okita, 1936, and as “A Portrait of Shunkin” by Howard Hibbett, 1963.

<sup>11</sup> See also, for example, the discrepancy between the quiet, high-class Doshōmachi (the drug-merchants’ district of Osaka that is the setting for *Shunkinshō*) depicted by Tanizaki and the bustling, noisy commercial district it really was in the Meiji era (Mishima, 1994).

climbing, horse-racing, tennis, baseball, the Girls' Opera..." (Koide 1930/1987, p. 110, tr. Murakami-Smith). Koide then draws a parallel between the sunlit scenery and a "sultriness" he feels in the Kansai, which he says is lacking in Tokyo, where "something like a vein of coolness" flows. This sultriness is not a matter of climate and temperature, however, but something psychological, which leads to "decay, tedium, yawning, and dullness, and makes it too much of a bother to think about things clearly" (Ibid.).

Koide also describes something like this sultriness in the 1936 "Yōkisugiru Osaka" (the title might be translated as "Too-Upbeat Osaka"). Koide first refers to the mild climate and beautiful scenery mentioned in "Shunmin zatsudan," and continues as follows.

However, for those who intend to engage in the somewhat melancholy pursuits of scholarship, literature, or the arts, in Osaka the surroundings are too relaxed, too cheery and uncomplicated, and... too upbeat. ... As a painter I often hear this kind of 'compliment': 'What a great racket you guys got: dash off a few scribbles with a brush, and you've made a hundred or five hundred yen. What an easy life!'

Hearing such a comment when you're suffering from poverty and can't put your hand to anything makes you just want to give up: the Muse flees. And so, the thoughtful aspiring artist escapes to Tokyo, which is somewhat more melancholy than Osaka. Thus, Osaka is as a rule devoid of men of letters. (Koide 1936/1987, p. 242, tr. Murakami-Smith)

Koide did not, in fact, decamp to Tokyo (in "Shunmin zatsudan," he relates how he once visited realtors and viewed vacant houses outside Tokyo, but the coolness of early autumn on the Musashino plain brought to mind the melancholy of winter, and so he gave up the idea of moving to Kantō), instead staying on in Hanshin area and maintaining a complicated ("yayakoshii" in Kansai dialect) relationship to his home region.

Koide's and Oda's complicated or ambivalent attitudes toward their hometown, and the inhospitality to art they both point out, provide a partial answer to a question raised by Tanizaki in his 1927 essay "Kansai bungaku no tame ni" ("For a Kansai Literature"): Why are there no major writers in the Kansai?<sup>12</sup> Because many aspiring writers move to Tokyo. Nevertheless, Koide and Oda continued to live in the Kansai as they created their art and literature, and as a secondary undertaking, carried on writing essays investigating Osaka, and comparing it with Tokyo. Perhaps their essays were in part an attempt to articulate or "work through" their ambivalent attitudes in writing. Further, this seems to have been a need felt by a variety of Osaka and Kansai artists and writers from the prewar period through to the present day – those whose names we might add to the "lineage" of essayists on Osaka and the Kansai referred to above, including Yosano Akiko (1878-1942), Uno Kōji (1891-1961), Ono Tōzaburō (1903-1996), Fujisawa Takeo (1904-1989), Tanabe Seiko (1928-2019), Tomioka Taeko (1935-2023), Miyamoto Teru (1947-), Murakami Haruki (1949-), Machida Kō (1962-), Shibasaki Tomoka (1973-), and Tsumura Kikuko (1978-).

However, this lineage or genealogy of cultural criticism of Osaka constitutes more than a chronological list of works. These authors restated, built upon, modified, refuted and rejected the opinions of previous writers. A lineage of essays on Osaka should properly be conceived of as shading into a genealogy also comprising works in other genres, such as scholarly and non-scholarly works on Osaka dialect (cf. Maeda 1977, Tanabe 1985, Onoue 1999, Wakagi 2011, Kinsui 2025), biographies of Osaka historical and literary figures (Oda 1942, Ōtani 1998), memoirs and autobiographies (Ono 1975, Fujisawa 1981), literary criticism on Osaka writers, literature, and theater (Kobayashi 1989, Kawauchi 1990, Yasumizu 2005, Yoshida 2008, Yamada & Hosomi 2009, Dodd 2014, Kō 2018, Cronin 2025), and ultimately linking to works in diverse fields such as reportage and nonfiction (Kitao 1932/1989), cultural history (Saitō 1995, Inoue 2011, de Ferranti & Tokita 2013), political and economic history (Wakaichi 1996, Sakai 2011), urban studies (Hashizume 1996, Sugihara & Tamai 1996, Katō 2002, Hashizume 2003), and architectural history (Unno 1987). In this context, Uno Kōji's 1936 "Osaka," an excerpt of which is translated into English below, plays a pivotal role, in that it responds to and even quotes from previous writers' essays. It also, as will be explained below, went on to influence Oda's work.

Uno's own relationship to Osaka might be characterized as "yayakoshii" or ambivalent, although he did follow the pattern of those Osaka natives who put some distance between themselves and their hometown by becoming a writer after moving to Tokyo. He was born in Fukuoka, but came to Osaka with his mother and grandmother at the age of five, upon the death of his father. He entered the military school Kaigyōsha in 1897, and two years later moved to Sōemon-chō, along the northern bank of the Dōtombori Canal, to live with his uncle and grandmother. Uno moved to Tokyo to prepare for entrance to Waseda University in 1910. He began writing and publishing stories for children in 1915, but he first drew attention

---

<sup>12</sup> Tanizaki (1927/1983).

with “Kura no naka” (1919; tr. as “In the Storehouse” by Elaine Gerbert). As noted above, Uno, who lived from 1891 to 1961, lived in Osaka only during the years 1895-1910, from five to 19 years of age. As might be expected, these years had a formative effect on Uno, and, like other Osaka writers, he thematized Osaka in many of his works, both fiction and essays.

As would later be the case with Oda Sakunosuke (as discussed above), some critics approached Uno’s debut work in terms of his status as an Osakan. For example, contemporary writer Kikuchi Kan called the work “nothing but Osaka *rakugo*<sup>13</sup>” (quoted in Gerbert 1997, p. 34, n. 26). Critics were no doubt put off by the work’s chatty, verbose written style, described as “comical, almost annoyingly chatty” (Yanagisawa 1996, p. 321). Elaine Gerbert, Uno’s English translator, points out that Uno was criticized for his “inappropriately ‘flippant’ attitude,” and continues: “Lacking the sobriety associated with ‘pure [high] literature,’ he was called by less sympathetic observers a popular (*tsūzokuteki*) writer, with all the condescension the word *popular* implied” (Gerbert 1997, p. 4). In other words, Uno was criticized for not measuring up to certain ideals of “pure literature” (*junbungaku*): for being comical, flippant, popular and entertaining instead of serious and intellectual. As we have seen, this criticism is paralleled by the later criticism of Oda’s debut work as vulgar and frivolous. And just as Oda’s work was said to have “the spirit of a craftsman and a merchant’s soul” (gesturing to Osaka stereotypes), Uno’s was called “Osaka *rakugo*.” I believe such criticism strengthened in Uno a sense of being an Osaka writer, just as it did for Oda in later years, even though Uno had already been living in Tokyo for years when he began his literary career. And, also like Oda, he went on to investigate Osaka and Osakans in his fiction and essays.

In *Osaka to kindai bungaku (Osaka and Modern Literature, 1989)*, Kobayashi Yutaka gives a partial list of Uno’s fictional works set in Osaka, listing nine works (p. 87). Uno and his works are introduced in a chapter entitled “Eccentric People”; Kobayashi contends that Uno saw in his idiosyncratic Osakan friends and acquaintances (on which many of the characters in his fictional works were based) “typical ‘Osaka people,’ and this kindled in him the literary passion of a native Osaka writer” (Kobayashi 1989, p. 83). Such an interest in “strange people” can be seen in “Jukken roji” (“Ten-House Alley,” 1925), a nostalgic work that relates memories of Uno’s childhood spent in Sōemon-chō. As the title suggests, the work focuses on the inhabitants of the row-houses lining an alley, beginning with the narrator’s first encounter with Usakichi, the boy with whom he would become closest, and then introducing the inhabitants of the alley in turn, even reproducing a plan of the alley, each house labeled with the name of the family resident therein. Uno seems intent on recording everything he can remember about the alley and its denizens, from an ingenious system of “doorbells” in the days before electricity (a wire extended from a bell at the door of each house to a tab at the front gate of the alley, which was locked after midnight), to the main character’s weak constitution, to a form of communication through whistling that the narrator and Usakichi used, to Usakichi’s sister’s debut as a geisha.... Although not quite as chatty as “In the Storehouse,” the written style is verbose and disorganized, starting and stopping, branching off onto tangents, and including second-hand information on what became of the residents in later years. The reader does indeed feel the Osaka writer’s nearly insatiable curiosity about eccentric Osakans mentioned by Kobayashi (1989). Indeed, the story ends as follows:

When I went to Osaka the other day, I walked around the old neighborhood in Sōemon-chō and found it completely changed, but there was, in the same spot as before, a much more modern ten-house alley. I wonder what kind of people are living there now?

(Uno 1925/1973, p. 33, tr. Murakami-Smith)

However, in fact, “Jukken roji” does seem to have a central focus more specific than the ten-house alley and its people. The narrative of times past is set off by a framing story in the narrative present: the narrator has received a postcard announcing that Yamaki Usakichi, being one of the highest-paying taxpayers in a certain prefecture, has qualified to run in an election for a seat in the prefectural legislature. Usakichi, the narrator’s friend in childhood, has in later years become the owner of a successful café. The end of the story returns to the present, recounting (immediately before the passage quoted above) the narrator’s chance encounter, 10 years before, with a dignified, well-to-do Usakichi in a Tokyo-bound train from Osaka. The narrator, meanwhile, is in “straitened circumstances,” wearing a kimono borrowed from the master of the publishing house where he works. I would contend that the subtext of the story, though understated, is the contrast, even rivalry, between the former childhood friends – the one now a successful businessman and candidate for the prefectural legislature, the other a writer in “straitened circumstances,” working for a publisher. Thus, I hypothesize that, along with the ten-house alley specified in the title, Usakichi is a focus for the work. This is supported by a remark by the narrator when he is recounting what happened to Sakuzō,

---

<sup>13</sup> 落語, a kind of comic storytelling.

a son of the oil merchant at the entrance to the alley. This Sakuzō was at first apprenticed to an oil merchant, but later became interested in literature, entering a university in Tokyo and becoming good friends with the narrator. Having furnished this information, the narrator then stops himself, saying, “as he is not the main subject here, I will omit him, but as for the crucial Usakichi...”<sup>14</sup> This reticence on the part of the narrator – who has never hesitated to share all manner of seemingly extraneous information – would seem to intensify the contrast between the narrator (and his literary friend) and the presumed “main subject,” Usakichi. In other words, behind an Osaka writer’s curiosity about eccentric Osaka people lies a desire to contrast Osakans with the people of Tokyo and other regions – and it is among the latter that the narrator places himself.

Another Uno story focusing on Osakans is “Rakuseikara” (1934; the title, written 楽世家等, seems to be a neologism of Uno’s based on “*rakutenka*” [楽天家], and might be translated as something like “The Optimists”). The story details the interactions of the main character Fukami (based on Uno himself), resident in Tokyo, with his friend Takegi Rintarō, with whom he attended middle school in Osaka, over the course of several visits by Fukami to Osaka. Various seemingly inconsequential events involving Takegi, other former middle-school friends, and various geisha are related, but the main focus of the story seems to be to depict Takegi’s outgoing but down-to-earth personality, and his boundless energy, whether focused on business, food, drinking, or women. All of Takegi’s conversations are represented in a strong Osaka dialect, while Fukami speaks Tokyo dialect (the so-called “standard” language), creating a strong contrast with Takegi and the other Osaka characters. For example, when a waitress in a café bar shows Fukami (a literature student at the time) a love letter and criticizes its written style, Fukami states (in Tokyo dialect) his opinion that “With love letters, it is not whether the style is skillful or unskilled that is important, but whether it has passion.”<sup>15</sup> The waitress replies in Osaka dialect, “I hate passion, I hate passion.”<sup>16</sup> The contrast is not only between Tokyo and Osaka dialect, but also between the romanticism of the literature student and the pragmatism of the Osaka woman. As was the case with the narrator of “Jukken roji,” Fukami, though he grew up in Osaka, is depicted as an “outsider,” no longer at home among the Osakans who hold such fascination for him – and for Uno.

Uno was in poor mental health from 1927 to 1932. Toward the end of this period, he resumed writing children’s stories, but his first literary work after recovery was “Kareki no aru fūkei” (1933; tr. as “Landscape with Withered Tree” by Elaine Gerbert). The chatty, disorganized style of his earlier works, that had “called attention to the physical mechanics of speaking” (Gerbert 1997, p. 10), is replaced by a more “transparent” style that seems more concerned with telling a story than in the way it is told. The work also lacks the first-person narrator of the “I-Novel” form, which Uno had often adopted in his earlier works.<sup>17</sup> “Kareki no aru fūkei” is based on the life of Koide Narashige (called “Koizumi” in the story), the Osakan Western-style painter whose essays we have discussed above. Fellow painter Shimaki, the main character, tries to analyze the seemingly contradictory aspects of Koizumi’s life and work: on the one hand, an entertaining, humorous conversational skill paired with a “commercialized” painting skill capable of producing for sale multiple copies of the same work, and on the other, his great talent, never waning even as his health deteriorates,<sup>18</sup> and shining forth in every single copy produced for sale. In “Kareki no aru fūkei,” we see again the fascination with (typical or stereotypical) Osaka people that we saw in “Rakuseikara” and “Jukken roji.” But in the character of Koizumi, there is a combination of Osakan and non-Osakan elements, a balance between “Osaka” and “art” – which, as we have seen above, have been posited as antithetical in the essays of Oda and Koide.

The troubled relationship between Osaka and art is one of the central questions raised by Uno’s 1936 essay “Osaka,” excerpts of which are translated below.<sup>19</sup> “Osaka” also touches on the other questions investigated by essay-writers like Oda, Tanizaki, and Koide, discussed above: What kind of place is Osaka? What kind of people are Osakans? How do they differ from the people of other regions? Uno’s essay joins the genealogy of “cultural criticism” on Osaka and Osakans, not only by focusing on some of the same questions, but by referring to, quoting from, agreeing and disagreeing with other Osaka essay-writers.<sup>20</sup> The

<sup>14</sup> 「ここでは彼が主題ではないから、その事は省くが、肝心の宇三吉に就いては…」 (Uno 1925/1973, p. 29, tr. Murakami-Smith).

<sup>15</sup> 「恋文というのは、文章の上手下手より、情熱の籠っている方が優等だよ」 (Uno 1934/1972, p. 115).

<sup>16</sup> 「あて情熱きらいや、あて情熱きらいや」 (Ibid.).

<sup>17</sup> This does not mean that all of his early works actually were I-Novels; “Kura no naka,” for example, is based on the experiences of another writer, Chikamatsu Shūkō.

<sup>18</sup> Koizumi, like the real-life Koide, dies of tuberculosis at the end of the story.

<sup>19</sup> The translation includes Section 1, “A City without Trees – or, Things just as they were in the old days” and Section 2, “Various Osaka Personalities – or, Two types of Osaka soul,” while omitting the last three sections of the essay, on Osaka food, ways of getting ahead in Osaka, and various Osaka entertainers of the time.

<sup>20</sup> Uno even quotes from his own “Jukken roji,” reproducing the same plan of the ten-house alley, with each house labeled.

essay thereby functions as a kind of omnibus of the state of opinion on Osaka and Osakans as of 1936. And Oda, at least, read and responded to it: the title of his story “Ki no miyako” (1944, tr. by Burton Watson as “City of Trees”) is a reworking of the title of the first section of Uno’s essay, “Ki no nai miyako” (“A City without Trees”). In fact, the first words of Oda’s story explicitly disagree with Uno’s assertion: “People say Osaka is a city with no trees, but when I think back to my childhood I find I have a remarkable number of memories that involve trees” (Oda 1944/1994, p. 107).<sup>21</sup>

As discussed above, the lineage of essays on Osaka constitutes a continuing dialogue of cultural criticism on the city and its people. Uno Kōji’s “Osaka” joins and contributes to this lineage by quoting and responding to other essay-writers like Tanizaki Jun’ichirō and Koide Narashige, adding Uno’s own opinions, and, in turn, becoming something that is read and reacted to by subsequent readers and writers. And whether such readers and writers restate and reinforce its arguments, or whether – as did Oda Sakunosuke – they reject and refute them, they nevertheless sustain and renew debate on Osaka as a site of diversity and cultural specificity, an alternative to Tokyo. This is what I hope to enable by making available the following English translation of “Osaka.”

## Works Consulted

- Cronin, Michael P. (2025) “Introduction,” in Tanizaki Jun’ichirō, *“In Praise of Shadows” and Other Essays*, tr. Michael P. Cronin. Tokyo, Rutland, Vermont, and Singapore: Tuttle, pp. 7-13.
- de Ferranti, Hugh and Alison Tokita, eds. (2013) *Music, Modernity and Locality in Prewar Japan: Osaka and Beyond*. Surrey, England and Burlington, Vermont: Ashgate.
- Dodd, Stephen (2014) *The Youth of Things: Life and Death in the Age of Kajii Motojirō*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.
- Fujisawa Takeo (1981) *Osaka jijoden*. Chūō Kōronsha (Chūkō Bunko).
- Gerbert, Elaine (1997) “Introduction,” in Uno Kōji, *Love of Mountains and other Stories*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, pp. 1-38.
- Hashizume (1996) *Osaka modan: Tsūtenkaku to Shinsekai*. NTT Shuppan.
- Hashizume (2003) *Modan toshi no tanjō: Osaka no machi, Tokyo no machi*. Yoshikawa Kōbunkan.
- Inoue Ritsuko (2011) *Saigo no iromachi, Tobita*. Chikuma Shobō.
- Katō Masahiro (2002) *Osaka no suramu to sakariba*. Osaka: Sōgensha.
- Kawauchi Atsurō (1990) *Machi wa gekijō: Taishū to iu umi e no kōro*. Osaka: Kansai Shoin.
- Kinsui Satoshi (2025) *Osaka kotoba no nazo*. SB Creative.
- Kishi Masahiko and Shibasaki Tomoka (2024) *Osaka*. Kawade Bunko.
- Kitao Ryōnosuke (1932/1989) *Kindai Osaka*. Osaka: Sōgensha.
- Kō Hiroki (2018) *K-shi no Osaka bungakuron*. Kyoto: Mishimasha.
- Kō Hiroki and Tsumura Kikuko (2017) *Osakateki*. Kyoto: Mishimasha.
- Kobayashi Yutaka (1989) *Osaka to kindai bungaku*. Kyoto: Hōritsu Bunkasha.
- Koide Narashige (1930/1987) “Shunmin zatsudan,” in Haga Tōru, ed., *Koide Narashige zuihitsu*. Iwanami Shoten, pp. 109-112.
- Koide Narashige (1936/1987) “Yōkisugiru Osaka,” in Haga Tōru, ed., *Koide Narashige zuihitsu*. Iwanami Shoten, pp. 242-43.
- Kōno Taeko (1976) *Tanizaki bungaku to kōtei no yokubō*. Chūō Kōronsha.
- Kōno Taeko (1993) *Tanizaki bungaku no tanoshimi*. Chūō Kōronsha.
- Maeda Isamu (1977) *Osaka-ben*. Asahi Shimbunsha (Asahi Sensho).
- Mishima Yūichi (1994) *Tanizaki Jun’ichirō Shunkinshō no nazo*. Kyoto: Jinbun Shoin.
- Murakami-Smith, Andrew (1997) *Dialects and Place in Modern Japanese Literature* (Ph.D. dissertation). Princeton University.
- Murakami-Smith, Andrew (2025) “Is the ‘Literature of Possibility’ Possible? A translation of Oda Sakunosuke’s *Kanōsei no bungaku* with commentary,” in *“The Rhetoric IS the Message”: Shūji, imi, ninchi no kakawari (Language and Culture Cooperative Research Project 2024)*. University of Osaka Graduate School of Humanities, Division of Language and Culture, pp. 55-70.
- Oda Sakunosuke (1941/1970) “Osaka, Osaka,” in *Oda Sakunosuke zenshū*, vol. 8. Kōdansha, pp. 281-84.
- Oda Sakunosuke (1943) *Godai Tomoatsu*. Osaka: Nisshinsha.
- Oda Sakunosuke (1944/1970) “Ki no miyako,” in *Oda Sakunosuke zenshū*, vol. 5. Kōdansha, pp. 29-36.
- Oda Sakunosuke (1944/1994) “City of Trees,” tr. Burton Watson, in *Stories of Osaka Life*. Weatherhill, pp. 107-124.

<sup>21</sup> 「大阪は木のない都だといわれているが、しかし私の幼時の記憶は不思議に木と結びついている」 (Oda 1944/1970, p. 29).

- Oda Sakunosuke (1946/1999) “Kanōsei no bungaku,” in *Meoto zenzai*. Kōdansha Bungei Bunko.
- Ono Tōzaburō (1975) *Jiden Kūsō ryokō: Hi wa sugisarazu*. Asahi Shimbunsha (Asahi Sensho).
- Onoe Keisuke (1999) *Osaka kotobagaku*. Osaka: Sōgensha.
- Ōtani Kōichi (1998) *Oda Sakunosuke: Iki aishi kaita*. Chūsekisha.
- Saitō Masao (2020) *Shōsetsuka Oda Sakunosuke*. Suita, Osaka: Osaka University Press.
- Saitō Shunsuke (1995) *Kamagasaki fudoki*. Osaka: Saitō Henshū Jimusho.
- Sakai Takashi (2011) *Tsūtenkaku*. Seidosha.
- Sugihara Kaoru and Tamai Kingo (1996) *Taisho, Osaka, suramu*. Shinhyōron.
- Tanabe Seiko (1985) *Osaka-ben omoshiro sōshi*. Kōdansha (Kōdansha Gendai Shinsho).
- Tanabe Seiko (2003) *Naniwa no yūnagi*. Asahi Shimbunsha.
- Tanizaki Jun’ichirō (1927/1983) “Kansai bungaku no tame ni,” in *Tanizaki Jun’ichirō zenshū*, vol. 22. Chūō Kōronsha, pp. 220-23.
- Tanizaki Jun’ichirō (2025). *“In Praise of Shadows” and Other Essays*. Tr. Michael P. Cronin. Tokyo, Rutland, Vermont, and Singapore: Tuttle.
- Tomioka Taeko (1997) *Osaka senchimentaru jānii*. Shūeisha.
- Tomioka Taeko (2005) *Naniwa tomoare koto no yoshiashi*. Chikuma Shobō.
- Unno Hiroshi (1987) *Modan shiti futatabi: 1920 nendai no Osaka e*. Osaka: Sōgensha.
- Uno Kōji (1925/1973) “Jukken roji,” in *Uno Kōji zenshū*, vol. 5, Chūō Kōronsha, pp. 7-33.
- Uno Kōji (1933/1996) “Kareki no aru fūkei,” in *Omoigawa, Kareki no aru fūkei, Kura no naka*, Kōdansha Bungei Bunko, pp. 221-53.
- Uno Kōji (1934/1973) “Rakuseikara,” in *Uno Kōji zenshū*, vol. 7, Chūō Kōronsha, pp. 101-140.
- Uno Kōji (1936/1973) “Osaka,” in *Uno Kōji zenshū*, vol. 12, Chūō Kōronsha, pp. 122-67.
- Wakagi Efu (2011) *“Hai” to iwanai Osaka-jin*. KK Bestsellers.
- Wakaichi Kōji (1996) *Osaka ga shuto de arieta hi*. Sangokan.
- Yamada Kenji and Hosomi Kazuyuki, eds. (2008) *Ono Tōzaburō o yomu*. Shichōsha.
- Yanagisawa Takako (1996) “Sakka annai – Uno Kōji,” in *Uno Kōji, Omoigawa, Kareki no aru fūkei, Kura no naka*, Kōdansha Bungei Bunko, pp. 321-33.
- Yasumizu Toshikazu (2005) *Ono Tōzaburō: Uta to wa gyaku ni uta*. Osaka: Henshū Kōbō Noa.

## OSAKA (excerpt<sup>1</sup>)

By Uno Kōji

Translated by Andrew Murakami-Smith

### 1. A City without Trees — or, Things just as they were in the old days

When I first moved from Osaka to Tokyo twenty-five or -six years ago, the first thing that surprised me was how many trees there were in the middle of Tokyo. Back then, there was not a single house on Kuze Hill towering to the east of the Edogawa streetcar stop I used on my way to and from school. As it was spring, the new, spring grass sprouting here and there set off the reddish brown of the earth. This hill has not greatly changed since those days, but as there were no tall buildings around it as there are today, looking from Tsurumaki-chō or Suidō-chō, bald Kuze Hill looked extremely tall, as if towering loftily over the city. And from the Edogawa streetcar stop, one could see the zig-zag path that climbed the hill. Friends from my year at school often went to Toyamagahara, but I preferred to climb Kuze Hill. Looking down from the Hill, the city below was perhaps three-fifths houses, and interspersed among them, trees accounted for two-fifths. Every time I came here when I was twenty, I would sit down at the foot of the huge tree – what kind it was I don't know – that stood at the northern extreme of the hill, and, in surprise, say to myself, “Tokyo's nice, they got so many trees smack in the middle of town.”

The reason I was so surprised is that there was not a single tree in the narrow garden (of about six and a half square meters) of my uncle's house in Osaka, where I had lived for about 10 years, until about a year before I moved to Tokyo. Tanizaki Jun'ichirō has written, “Osaka's Semba, Shimanouchi, and the area from Shinsaibashi-suji to the Dōtombori area comprise the center of Osaka.” This is not the kind of “center” that a Tokyoite like Tanizaki means, but it is *one* of the centers of Osaka. That house of my uncle was in Sōemon-chō in Shimanouchi. Sōemon-chō is the easternmost edge of the famous pleasure district of Osaka, Minami no Shinchi (also known as the “Five Streets”), and has some of the city's best geisha houses and “establishments” (like a geisha agency in Tokyo, but also a little different). My uncle had gone into business with two of his cousins, wholesaling Western umbrellas, broadcloth, shawls, and blankets. His shop was in Semba, but for the sake of his aging mother and for me, his nephew, and also to have somewhere to rest his own bones, he rented rooms here in Sōemon-chō, Shimanouchi, although he himself was almost always at the shop. These rooms of my uncle's were in a ten-house alley. As I have in the past written a story about this ten-house alley in Sōemon-chō, I will here copy as needed from that story. “It had a gate two yards<sup>2</sup> wide, and inside the gate a two-yard wide dirt-floored passage, down the much-traveled center of which were laid a row of rectangular granite paving stones, spaced about a foot apart. This alley ran north-south, and five units were lined up on each of the east and west sides.” In other words, this was the origin of the name “ten-house alley.” I lived in this ten-house alley from thirty-five or -six years ago, until twenty-four or -five years ago.

Words like “alley” and “row house” sound somehow run-down, but the houses on this alley, though they were connected together as row houses, were trim, neat houses with wooden lattices on sliding doors and windows, of two stories, and though they all looked the same from outside, each had a different number of rooms and floorplan. But, like the garden of my uncle's house, nary a tree was to be found in the gardens of any of these houses. Instead, in the summer, there was a useful and interesting contrivance: five or six thick wires were strung from the eaves on one side of the alley to those on the other, and a cloth was suspended for shade. In the morning, this cloth would be rolled up at the eaves of the houses on the east side, and when the rays of the sun became too strong, the cloth would be drawn across the alley for shade by pulling cords attached to the edge of the cloth from the west side. In the evening, when the sun began to set, now pulling the cords attached to the edge of the cloth from the east side, the cloth would be rolled up again. And when the long, hot day was finally over, people would bring out *shōgi* (a uniquely Osakan kind of wooden bench

---

<sup>1</sup> This translation omits the last three sections of Uno's essay, on Osaka food, ways of getting ahead in Osaka, and various Osaka entertainers.

<sup>2</sup> Translator's note: One *ken* (間), or about 1.8 meters.

or stand) from the houses on both sides, and sit facing each other across the alley, and since (as I already mentioned) the alley was only about two yards wide, could conveniently get a light for their smokes from people across the alley without even getting up from their *shōgi*, and talk about anything, no matter how confidential, while cooling themselves in the evening air. This was the easygoing custom of the alley. Another such custom was the following. The gate to the alley had double doors that swung open to right and left, and these would be opened in the morning by whichever resident of the alley was the earliest to rise, and at night would be locked exactly at midnight by the house on duty. However, as I mentioned before, since it was in a neighborhood with “some of the best geisha houses and establishments,” close to 20 geisha and courtesans lived in this alley (in Osaka, courtesans have their own establishments and teahouses, and attendants come to pick them up and see them home again), and thus many residents came home after midnight. But these women, coming home so late, could knock on the gate all night and never be heard in their own houses down the alley. This was because even the houses closest to the gate were separated from it by the depth (eight to ten yards<sup>3</sup>) of the *tabi* sock-maker on the west side, and the household goods store on the east side of the alley’s entrance. Further, even if the sound of knocking could be heard at the houses within the alley, there was no way to know who was knocking to be let in to which house. For this reason, in a corner next to the gate on the east and west sides, at an easily reachable height, hung five wooden tags (for five houses), about half the size of a postcard, each bearing the name of a family living on that side of the alley. Each tag was tied to a thin wire, which ran back to that family’s house and inside it, and was attached to a bell. Anyone who came home after the gate was closed would pull the tag bearing the name of their own family. In other words, this contrivance played the role of a doorbell, in the days before doorbells became common.

One night in the autumn of a certain year, when I was strolling along Shinsaibashi Street, I met Y, an old friend of mine. As soon as he saw my face, he said, “It’s been a while,” and then immediately said, “Your ‘Ten-house Alley’ is still there, looking just as it did back in the old days. Want to go see?” His phrase “Ten-house Alley” was the title of a story I had written about 10 years before, and referred to the actual ten-house alley that I have been describing. Without further ado, I asked him to take me there. Thereupon we turned from Shinsaibashi Street into Sōemon-chō, and walked past Ebisu Bridge, Tazaemon Bridge, and Aiai Bridge in silence. As we passed Aiai Bridge and gradually approached Section 1, Sōemon-chō, where the ten-house alley was located, my heart was all aflutter with anticipation. This was probably because, although the houses and shops on both sides of the street from Ebisu Bridge until past Aiai Bridge were just the same as in the old days, the neighborhood where I had lived back then (from about 35 years ago to about 25 years ago), from the corner of Sennen-chō to around the north end of Nippombashi Bridge, was so changed that it was barely recognizable. Thinking, “We must be almost to the oil dealer’s, can I spot the Sōei Baths yet? Wasn’t it right around here...?” I looked around to right and left, but the oil dealer’s was not there, nor was the *tabi* sock-maker’s next door, nor the public bath across the street. Wondering where we were, I kept walking next to Y, when suddenly he said,

“Here we are!”

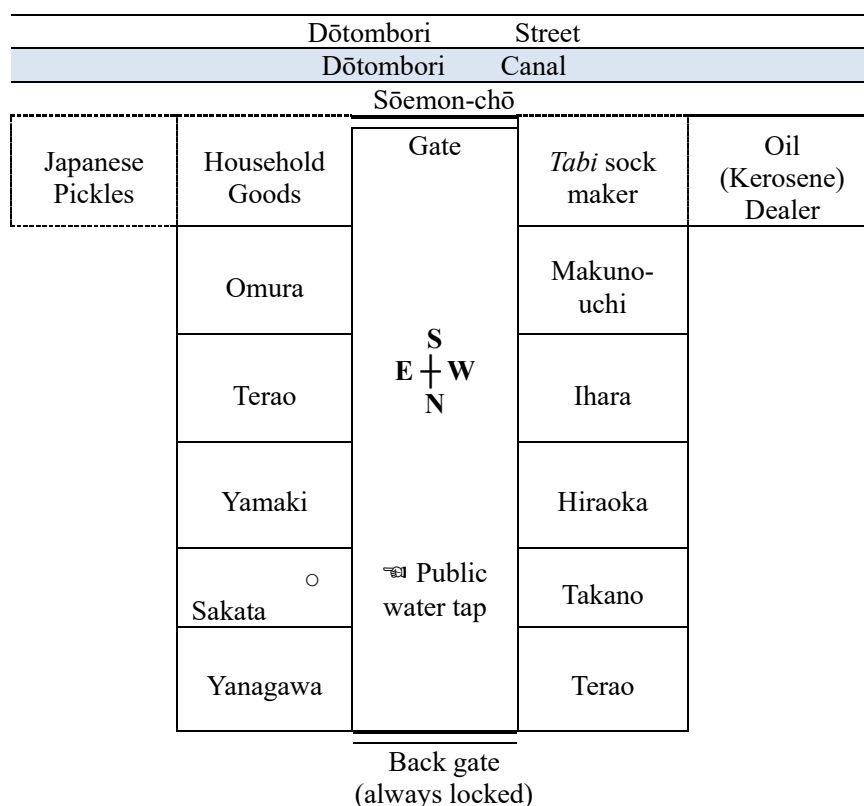
Hearing this, I looked to the left (west) side, and saw standing in the lots where the oil dealer and *tabi* maker must have stood, two long, narrow, two-story cafes, dim inside given their brightly-lit exteriors, standing next to each other. Never having been much interested in that kind of café, I merely gave them a glance, and hurried a few steps behind Y, who had quickened his steps and turned left.

Following Y, I turned the corner (the place where the gate had been, though there was no trace of it now), and the ten-house alley stood before me, looking almost as it had in the old days, just as Y had said. I crept forward until I was close to the entrance of the third house on the left side of the alley. That had been my uncle’s house, where I had lived in the old days. The shape of the house, as well as the “thousand-slat” lattices on the windows, the latticed sliding door, and the black wall next to the entrance, though they were not old, looked no different from the old days.

When I had lived in this house, in the spring when I was eleven, I think (first year of middle school then; fifth grade of elementary school now), I stayed home from school for about a month with some strange illness due to exhaustion, and when I was finally able to get up and walk around outside, egged on by a neighborhood rascal and using a nail he gave me, I scratched on the black wall next to the entrance to my house (the house I was now standing in front of), the following plan of the ten-house alley.

---

<sup>3</sup> Translator’s note: Four or five *ken* (間).



(North and south are inverted on this map: the gate faced south, and Dōtombori Street, Dōtombori Canal, and Sōemon-chō were all to the south of the alley, but it seems more real to the author to draw it in this way.)

While I'm on the subject, as it may provide background information, I will briefly introduce the families and social stations of the people who lived in the ten-house alley at the time. On the west side were:

1. "Makunouchi" (An old woman living alone, running a place for secret rendezvous.)
2. "Ihara" (A house of only women: three or four geisha and two or three courtesans; master of the house was an amateur broker of women.)
3. "Hiraoka" (My uncle's house. Occupation already mentioned. My grandmother and I were often the only ones at home, so we sometimes rented out the upstairs room.)
4. "Takano" (A gambler and three or four geisha and two or three courtesans rooming together.)
5. "Terao" (The rooms of two sisters who were both geisha. The elder sister had a son, and the younger a daughter.)

And on the east side:

1. "Omura" (A middle-aged salaried employee and his wife, who was older than he.)
2. "Terao" (Another sister of the Teraos in the fifth house on the west side, formerly working in Kyoto. Mistress of a candy manufacturing company executive, who rarely visited. Liked to keep things clean.)
3. "Yamaki" (The old father was a real estate broker; obsessed with cleanliness. The old mother worked setting up secret liaisons between men and women. The three daughters were geisha, and there were three sons. One son was stationed at a fort as an artillery gunner, and another had been a sailor on the battleship Yoshino, but had gone missing. The third son was my age; a poor student at elementary school, but later a great success through his own efforts.)
4. "Sakata" (A wig-maker living with both wife and mistress; the wife had a daughter and the mistress a son.)
5. "Yanagawa" (A former sumo wrestler who loved to gamble; constantly going around with Takano. His daughter was a geisha specializing in *gidayū* singing.)

Wondering if there was any sign of the drawing I had scratched on the wall with a nail 31 or 32

years before, but knowing there couldn't be, I lingered in front of the house I had lived in for ten years (for some reason there was not a single passer-by), looking closely at the black wall and running my hand over it. I recalled Leo Tolstoy having written somewhere that, when in his old age he visited a house he had often played at in his youth, even the traces of scribbling on the wall made him nostalgic.

I felt it was somehow natural but nevertheless surprising that the ten-house alley itself was still there, looking almost exactly the same as it had in the old days, but what really struck me as extraordinary was that the ten-house alley alone, for some reason, as if it were some famous historical site, still stood in almost exactly the same form as in the old days, in spite of the passage of a quarter-century or a half-century, while almost all of the houses in the surrounding area (Section 1, Sōemon-chō) had changed completely. But, putting it abstractly and sentimentally, for my ten-house alley, the 20 years or so made up of the ten-some years when I lived there and the ten-some years before that must bear no comparison, as far as stimulation goes, with the 24 or 25 years after I left – years which saw the advent of streetcars, buses, airplanes, radio, express and super-express trains, subway trains, aerial tramways ascending mountains on the outskirts of cities, and so on. Perhaps for that reason, it seemed to me that my ten-house alley, though its form remains the same as it ever was – if it were a person, the traces of its former visage remain – it had at some point aged and faded, had grown old. Maybe I should resign myself to aging and fading as the natural result of strong stimulation, but if I am allowed to speak poetically, the way my ten-house alley looked exceedingly lonely – again, speaking as if it were a person – made me feel the nostalgia one feels about someone doomed to perish. This was because, speaking in concrete terms, my ten-house alley was now surrounded by dubious cafes, inns for group tours, modern barber shops, cheap à la carte Western restaurants, and so on, everything newly and cheaply built, up-to-the-minute, novel and innovative, and among these, presented a lonely figure, as if it alone had been left behind by the times.

“Why are you standing there vacantly? What do you think – it really is just the same as it used to be, isn't it?” Y said suddenly. “Here's an idea. You like sweets more than drinking, right? Me, too. Why don't we go to Kogetsu or Meoto Zenzai?”

“All right,” I answered indifferently, and set off next to Y.

This ten-house alley was not the only thing that remained “just like the old days.” Not only in Shimanouchi and Semba, but wherever you go in the old parts of Osaka, except for the streets where streetcars and buses pass – no, even on such streets – there are many places that are “just like the old days.” What I mean by “just like the old days” is that there are a fair number of places here and there that are almost unchanged from when I was living in Osaka (from 37 or 38 years ago until 24 or 25 years ago). It is not too much to say that everything you can see from the windows of a streetcar passing through Tennōji Ward on the outskirts of Osaka – the shop windows, the signs and entrances, the aspects and fixtures of the shops – are all the same as they were in the old days, to such an extent that someone who left home 30 years ago could come back today and be able to step unerringly over the threshold of his or her own home, the only difference being that streetcars and buses now pass by. As Tanizaki writes,

Walking the streets of cities in the Kansai, ... reminds me of my own boyhood, making me feel thoroughly nostalgic. This is because, while the old neighborhoods of Tokyo have lost all traces of the old days, one unexpectedly comes across neighborhoods of houses with similar earthen storehouses and latticework on windows and sliding doors in the old parts of Kyoto and Osaka. ... When I go to places in Osaka like Tanimachi, Kōzu, and Shimoderamachi,<sup>4</sup> I think, “That's right, Tokyo used to be like this,” and feel like I have found my forgotten hometown.

Crossing the Nipponbashi Bridge from Sōemon-chō, Y and I turned west at the southern end of the bridge into Dōtombori Street. I commented,

“When I first went to Tokyo, no matter what neighborhoods I visited, I felt like a tourist walking around a foreign town. It was when I went to Kagurazaka that I first felt like I had come to a familiar neighborhood. Don't you think Kagurazaka is the neighborhood in Tokyo that feels most like Osaka?”

“Yes,” Y agreed immediately, and continued, “That's because the streets are so narrow there... and because there are no trees.”

“I see... No trees, huh? Narrow streets are nothing unusual for us; even Shinsaibashi Street is pretty narrow.”

“It's so narrow that if they open it to automobiles, it's doubtful whether two autos could pass each other between Shinsaibashi Bridge and Ebisubashi Bridge.”

---

<sup>4</sup> Author's note: None of these are in central Osaka, however.

“Somebody said a characteristic of Shinsaibashi Street is that you can look at the shops on both sides of the street in just one walk down the street. I remembered that when I passed by there today.”

“Yeah, that’s why nothing ever comes of these proposals to widen that street.”

Presently we came to the southern end of Tazamonsashi Bridge, so we turned south and walked to Sennichimae. Hōzenji Alley, our goal, was nearby. Hōzenji is a temple, but the grounds are long and narrow, and the main hall is in a corner near the back gate; near the front gate, I think there was a *seki* (in Osaka, *yose* vaudeville theaters are called “*seki*”). The front gate faces Sennichimae, the greatest entertainment district in Osaka, and the back gate faces the “Moshimoshi-ya,” a particular kind of pleasure quarter (I will write more about this later). However, when you say “Hōzenji,” eight or nine out of every 10 Osakans will think of the adjacent alleyway. This alley is so narrow that three people cannot walk abreast, and, like the temple, has its east entrance on Sennichimae and its west entrance on the pleasure quarter, but there is also a way into the alley from the Hōzenji Temple which is located to the south, and from the Dōtombori located to the north. But these alleys from the south and the north were so narrow that two people could barely pass each other. In this cramped Hōzenji Alley were Kogetsu and Meoto Zenzai, two shops selling *zenzai* (the Osaka word for the sweet red-bean broth called “*shiruko*” in Tokyo). The former was said to be high-class, and the latter more plebian. However, the latter was famous for serving their *zenzai* in two bowls (corresponding to the “*meoto*” or “*man and wife*” of the shop’s name).

The reason why eight or nine out of every 10 Osakans think of this alley when they hear “Hōzenji” is that, in addition to these *zenzai* shops, there are in the alley two of the most famous vaudeville *seki* in Osaka, three or four refined (“*sui*” in Osaka; “*iki*” in Tokyo) little restaurants popular among the discerning gourmets of the city, fashionable notions shops for women and children, and so on. The Shōben Tango-tei, known even to a few Tokyoites on account of its strange name<sup>5</sup>, is one of these refined little restaurants. The two of us decided to go to Meoto Zenzai.

Meoto Zenzai is a corner shop, at the intersection of the alley from the Dōtombori and Hōzenji Alley, and at one corner of the shop on the Hōzenji Alley side is a famous landmark. The shop is said to have been here since the Tokugawa Era, and looks old and sooty all over, both inside and out; the ceilings are low and no special measures have been taken to let in light, so it is dim inside even in the daytime. — In a corner of the outer wall of the shop is a rectangular alcove about a meter square, and there is something like a show-window sufficiently deep to allow a person to sit, but whereas a typical show-window projects outward, this is recessed, and inside sits an Otafuku doll about the size of a small person, this Otafuku doll being about as old and sooty as the shop itself. This is the landmark that serves the shop in place of a sign. — It has taken me several hours to write this far, but nevertheless, I have not been able to describe it adequately. It seems there is nothing for it but to ask an artist to show it in a picture, so I have asked Nabei Katsuyuki<sup>6</sup> to draw it for me (see the illustration below).



Illustration by Nabei Katsuyuki

(There is an iron railing around the lower part of the lantern to protect it by preventing passers-by from colliding with and damaging it, and this iron railing also seems to indicate “Do Not Touch.”)

<sup>5</sup> Translator’s note: Although written with different characters, “*shōben*” is a homophone for “piss.”

<sup>6</sup> Translator’s note: Nabei Katsuyuki (鍋井克之, 1888-1967). A painter in the Western style and an associate of Koide Narashige.

Anyway, before going inside, we gazed upon this Otafuku doll sitting cramped in her little alcove, like a bird in a cage unable to move. The first time I saw this Otafuku doll was 35 or 36 years ago. If I remember correctly, the face was white like an Otafuku mask, with the hint of a smile at the corners of her eyes and mouth; her expression had none of the silly vacancy of the typical round-faced Okame doll, rather incorporating some mischievous, uncanny quality. In the way she sat there with her black, straight hair, wearing an old, sooty kimono – it was impossible to tell whether it had once been red or blue or lavender, whether it had once been patterned or a solid color – but in any case, the way this Otafuku doll, usually only seen in the form of a mask, wore a kimono anyone might wear and bowed like anyone might do to people passing by or loitering there, had something in it that was uncanny, like a person who grows older and older but never dies, or, to put it more bluntly, something that had long ago passed from being charming to ghoulish.

In Kamizukasa Shōken's masterpiece "The Skin of the Pike Conger Eel" (regarding this Osaka food, see the section "Various Osaka Foods" below), there is a scene in which the characters look at this Otafuku doll. I will quote just that scene.

"This Otafuku is pretty old, isn't it? She's always got the same expression no matter how many years pass... I bet she's been here since you were a child, Uncle."

... Ofumi thought the appearance of the statue ... had not changed at all since the first time she had seen it several decades before. From the first time she had seen this Otafuku statue as a child to today, countless things had happened, Ofumi thought. And in the future, she wondered, how long would this statue continue to show her smiling face?

"My old Granny, who's dead now, said it'd been here since she was a child, so it's gotta be pretty old," said Gentarō. He tried imagining what it was like when his grandmother, who had died the year before last at age 71, had first seen this Otafuku statue. In those days, they say, Sennichi-mae was a cemetery...

Judging from this, the Otafuku doll at Meoto Zenzai would seem to be chief of all the things that have not changed in Osaka. Like the words quoted above, I, too, wonder "how long this statue will continue to show her smiling face?"

## 2. Various Osaka Personalities —— or, Two types of Osaka soul

In his piece "Osaka and Osakans I Have Known,"<sup>7</sup> Tanizaki Jun'ichirō, citing as an example the poet Raisan'yō, full of righteous indignation and concern for the fate of Japan, but also, as an Osakan, pragmatic enough to make plans and save up money for after his own death, writes that most Osakans, not excepting many Osaka artists, have such an inclination. He continues, "Regardless of their status, skill, or talent, and whether they are first-rate or second-rate, they are all equally good at making money." This is perhaps more than half right. But what he goes on to write about the deceased Koide Narashige is, I think, more than half wrong:

In that respect, ... [Koide] was the epitome of the artist in Osaka. ... It was probably because the deceased was someone who had a deep love for his hometown, and never left Osaka throughout his life, ... that in his dealings with art dealers he had an acumen as sharp as that he displayed in his works.

To the best of my knowledge, if Koide saved up money to prepare for his own death, it was not he himself who saved it; if Koide seemed, as Tanizaki says, to have "brought a sharp intellect to bear both on his life and on his work," it was not he himself who did it. "Then who did?" you may ask. Since this is a personal matter, I am not at liberty to say, but since he did not do those two things, Koide had almost none of the "Osakan inclination" mentioned by Tanizaki. Further, as Tanizaki says, Koide "never left Osaka throughout his life," but in his later years, he intended to move to Tokyo, and had a great desire to make a second trip to Europe. As Kunieda Kinzō puts it:

Since around the autumn of 1929, perhaps for a change of mood and body, and to renew his family life, he had the idea of moving to Tokyo. For Koide, who had put down deep

---

<sup>7</sup> Translator's note: "*Watakushi no mita Osaka oyobi osakajin*," published 1932.

roots in the Hanshin area, this was a major decision, but it did not come to pass. His desire to make another trip to Europe grew stronger, but, as it happened, he was not in the best of health from around the autumn of 1930. On Empire Day (February 11) of 1931, there was an unusually heavy fall of snow in Osaka, and Koide suddenly passed away two days later.

I consider Koide Narashige to be a true Osakan and artist of Osaka, but in a different way than does Tanizaki. By this I mean that I do not agree with Tanizaki when he writes that “In every way, there was no one else who integrated so well the characteristics of an Osakan with the genius of an artist. I felt that he was truly an artist born of his hometown.” Of course, Tanizaki and Koide knew one another for only about the last two years of Koide’s life, so it is natural if the Tokyoite Tanizaki did not truly understand an Osakan with a complicated personality like Koide. So what kind of person was Koide, this true Osakan and artist of Osaka? The following passage, written by Koide himself, may give us some idea.

I [Koide] used to have many dislikes, and I especially didn’t like Osakans. When I used to go home from Tokyo for the summer holidays, when the train would come out the western end of the tunnel under the hills between Shiga and Kyoto, it was pleasurable that the world was suddenly bathed in light, but even greater was the annoyance when my ears were suddenly drowned in Osaka dialect. Ironically, I am a true Osakan born right in the center of Osaka, so this was all the more distasteful and infuriating. Even at [Tokyo Fine Arts School] I made a point of hardly exchanging a word with anyone from Osaka. It’s just like how all Japanese traveling in the West, as if they’d decided beforehand, don’t like to meet another Japanese. You might expect that off in a foreign land, they’d be happy to meet a countryman, but in fact that’s not the case; all the Japanese in Paris try to avoid one another. ... In my art school days, I used to feel just like the Japanese do in Paris. I’m now great friends with Nabei Katsuyuki and Ōkubo Sakutarō, for example, but ten-some years ago, when I’d run into them in the dining hall at school, I’d hardly exchange a word with them. “Jerks from Osaka,” I’d think, glaring at them. When I asked them about it recently, they said that they, too, thought, “Here’s a strange one.” But when we chanced to talk to each other, we found that we shared the same ideals. ...

Nabei Katsuyuki, mentioned in this quote from Koide, was asked by a certain newspaper what he, as an Osakan, thought of Tanizaki’s “Osaka and Osakans I Have Known,” referred to above. In response, he wrote a piece called “The Osaka Soul.” Nabei’s “Osaka soul” and my “Osaka personality” are nearly the same in meaning. As the characterization of Nabei, an almost “pure” Osakan (I will explain what I mean by this below), hits the nail on the head, and as it supports Koide’s idea introduced above and constitutes a correct explanation of my “Osaka personality,” I will quote as needed from Nabei’s piece:

Tanizaki’s view of Osaka is not incorrect, but it has nothing to do with the weight of this thing like an “Osaka soul” we Osakans are burdened with at birth. So even if it is logically argued, it does not strike our hearts... Tanizaki says that to get used to the feel of Osaka, one must put up with five or ten years of feeling ill at ease and unpleasant. This is even true for me, an Osakan; from the day I was born until today, I have been weighed down by and had to put up with a certain kind of Osaka mood. ... But artists especially feel this; if Tanizaki were not an artist, he probably would not feel it as strongly as he does. In other words, the problem is that Osaka is not compatible with artists.

Tanizaki himself agrees with this view, as he writes:

Upon Koide’s death, the obituaries that appeared in the major newspapers of Osaka were comparatively brief, so brief that I wondered if it were too much to expect a few more articles regretting the demise of such a remarkable local artist. I keenly felt that in such an environment, art cannot be expected to develop.

But Tanizaki, envious of Osaka’s yearly festivals and observances, goes on to write:

If events like the Hoekago parade on January 9<sup>th</sup> [part of the Tōka Ebisu festival on January 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup>] were discontinued, how lonely would be the yearly calendar of Osaka’s

citizens! ... It is a great regret that in the Osaka that boasts such events, there are no literati like Kubota Mantarō. If even one great writer had lived in Osaka, surely one or two works comparable to “*Takekurabe*”<sup>8</sup> or “The River Sumida”<sup>9</sup> would have appeared during the Meiji or Taishō years. But the fact that not even one such work has appeared can be called a disgrace to such a great city. In this connection, the fact that all Osaka writers abandon their hometown and go off to Tokyo can be considered a loss to Japanese literature.

It is not my intention to become argumentative in this article, but as it is necessary in order to explain the true Osaka and Osakans, I must not mince words. Even if Koide Narashige had, as Tanizaki writes, a tenacious personality and art, it is also true that “in such an environment, art cannot be expected to develop,” and this is why Koide, in his last years, thought of moving to Tokyo or going abroad again. In fact, Koide became thoroughly sick of going abroad after just one trip to Europe. The reason Koide, a true Osakan, would even think of going again to a place he had got thoroughly sick of, was not something lukewarm like Tanizaki’s “my fellow writers must give up living in the Kansai because it is easier to live as a writer in Tokyo,” but rather because Osaka is a hard place for artists to live. Further, Tanizaki calls Koide “truly an artist born of his hometown,” but Koide’s art was not born for some lukewarm reason like his being from Osaka; it has nothing to do with Osaka. — I *have* become a bit argumentative, but Nabei, too, has the following to say on this point. (I do not quote Nabei’s words to support my opinion, but because I believe them to be true.)

He [Tanizaki] asserts that it is a disgrace to such a great city that there is in Osaka no one who has produced literature of the folk-art type like Kubota Mantarō’s, but this is just the commonplace demand of an outsider, shallow words from one who does not know the inside story. As I have argued above, for artists from Osaka, the “Osaka Soul” is a heavy burden, and all the artists we know from Osaka curse this “Osaka Soul” that is within them. That is why, even in special cases like the Hoekago (one of Osaka’s yearly festivals) he refers to, if one were to write about “Osaka” merely out of the kind of pure love of hometown that Kubota Mantarō has for Tokyo, the real soul of the Osaka local could not be captured. It is very difficult to write intoxicatedly of “Osaka” while thinking, “That vulgar stuff can go to hell.” And *unless* one thinks, “That vulgar stuff can go to hell,” one cannot be a truly artistic Osakan. That is why, even if someone like Kubota Mantarō were born in Osaka, he would doubtlessly escape to Tokyo, like Uno Kōji. I do think Iwano Hōmei’s story “The Young Master” is a masterpiece that depicts the agony of what I am calling the “Osaka Soul” in an interesting way, but even this is nothing but a lament for hometown.

So, then, what kind of “Osaka Soul” or “Osaka Personality” could make the best use of Osaka in art? — This question cannot be answered by one such as me, who lived in Osaka for 14 or 15 years in childhood, but who has since lived in Tokyo, so I have no choice but to leave it to Nabei Katsuyuki, who, though he is not a pure Osakan, has lived in Osaka since his childhood, and who is not only a painter but also possesses the sensibility of a novelist. Nabei writes as follows. This is the answer to the foregoing question.

In professions other than artist, the “Osaka Soul” disliked by artists acts, in many ways, as the engine of Osaka’s success. ... Artists from other parts of Japan think this fact is of no importance, but artists from Osaka affirm it. Although both think the “Osaka Soul” is unpleasant, this is the source of a major difference between them. ... It can be said that there is not a single artist from Osaka who did not fight continually against this “Osaka Soul” that we all have.

Although, as I mentioned above, I have not lived in Osaka for 25 or 26 years, I can well understand Nabei’s argument here, but if a reader were to ask for a concrete example of what this “Osaka Soul” really is, no appropriate example comes readily to mind. In other words, though I am said to be from Osaka and lived in Osaka for 14 or 15 years, I have so lost touch with “Osaka and Osakans” that I first learned of the following customs of Osaka people from the episodes related by Tanizaki, who has only lived in the suburbs

---

<sup>8</sup> Translator’s note: 1895-96 work of Higuchi Ichiyō (1872-1896), translated as “Growing Up” (tr. Edward Seidensticker) and as “Child’s Play” (tr. Robert Danly).

<sup>9</sup> Translator’s note: “*Sumidagawa*” (1909), by Nagai Kafū (1879-1959).

of Osaka for seven or eight years.

In the first episode, Tanizaki goes to eat sukiyaki at a meat shop in Kyoto, and the mistress of a first-class teahouse who accompanied him puts the leftover eggs in her kimono sleeve to take home. In the second episode, salaried workers who have finished reading the evening edition of the newspaper stalk up to newsstands in the terminals of the Hanshin and Hankyū railway lines, hand over the newspapers, and are quickly given another, different newspaper – this is because in Osaka, the evening editions of the Osaka Asahi and Osaka Mainichi are the first to sell out while those of other papers are usually left over, so if one quickly reads the evening edition of the Osaka Asahi or Osaka Mainichi without wrinkling it too much, and gives it to a newsstand, the newsstand will gladly exchange it for a different paper – in other words, a win-win situation.

Upon reading these episodes in Tanizaki's piece, as mentioned above, I was impressed, thinking them truly Osakan episodes. But I was even more impressed when I read the following passage of Nabei's, commenting on the former episode regarding the eggs, and thought that this would be a concrete example of what Nabei calls the "Osaka Soul."

Tanizaki is surprised that the mistress of a first-class teahouse would put the eggs left over after sukiyaki in her kimono sleeve to take home, but as long as he writes about such things as unusual, his fondness for Osaka is still only skin-deep. There are even more elaborate examples, such as the thoroughgoing old man at a Western-style banquet who – perhaps from a dislike of Western food – dumped his plate of food into something like a waterproof bag he had brought for that purpose and took it home. When I went out eating and drinking with a certain rich man, it was only natural that he had the leftover food wrapped up to take away, but he even had the leftover rice-cakes (that had been provided for putting in the soup at the end of the meal) wrapped up in paper. He gave the wrapped-up food to his chauffeur, and the rice-cakes to the waitresses in the kitchen at a teahouse we stopped by later.

According to Nabei, such occurrences are examples of an "officially sanctioned Osaka disposition," which could be expressed in the form of a maxim as "One profits, but also lets others profit by about half as much." Further, regarding money, too, this means that one is frugal, but one also takes into account and makes allowances for the other party's pocketbook. This sort of thing is done not out of some principle such as "to show charity to others is the right thing to do" or "for the good of society," but because in using what is left over or thrown away (while one may worry about losing face as a gentleman or about what others may think), one wants to share at least a little of the benefit of such things. This kind of complicated (*yayakoshii* in Osaka dialect) disposition is Nabei's "Osaka Soul." This does not mean that every Osakan does such things, but even if they do not, to understand when they see others doing such things is the Osaka personality. In fact, Nabei himself writes about such occurrences, "When I myself see such things, I feel a tickle go down my spine, but I patiently endure it." In the case of the foregoing episode of the rich man who had even the leftover rice-cakes for the soup wrapped in paper, the waitress told to wrap them up would typically say – and not because she is used to such occurrences (or, perhaps in part because she is used to them, and also because she does not want to refuse a customer's request) but because she herself understands the customer's feelings – from such complicated (*yayakoshii*) feelings, she would typically say with a smile, "Yes, that's right, it's no use leaving them behind, now, is it?" But if this waitress had even a little of the Osaka artist's sensibility, she would probably – in Nabei's words – "feel a tickle go down her spine."

Now, I have used the word "*yayakoshii*" twice above. Lately this word seems to be making some inroads even in Tokyo, but if I were asked exactly what "*yayakoshii*" means, even I, who just used the word, would be hard-put to explain. However, luckily, the late Koide Narashige, even more of a true Osakan than Nabei Katsuyuki, has written a clear explanation of this word "*yayakoshii*," so I will quote its main points below. Both Nabei and Koide are (were) my friends, but even so, I am a little concerned that I am borrowing too freely from their writings and opinions in this section. However, as I have warned many times, I am actually woefully uninformed about "Osaka," and so I ask the understanding of Nabei, and of Koide beneath the earth, and of the reader for my repeated use of their writings and episodes as materials for a part of this essay "Osaka." Anyway, I will summarize Koide's explanation of "*yayakoshii*" below.

- "Lately that bank is *complicated*" means something like "It might fold at any time, so anyone with money there should withdraw it as soon as possible."
- "He's *complicated*" means there is something suspicious about him, but you can't say exactly what. It comprises "He seems dubious; he may not be, but he seems not quite right."
- If someone says, "*Complicated* rumors are going around," and, for instance, slaps your shoulder, this

*complicated*, unlike that in “He’s *complicated*,” means “Pleasant, enviable rumors of a love affair are going around.”

I will quote directly from Koide’s essay below.

To say “There’s something *complicated* between them” refers to a romantic entanglement. You can also say “This math is *complicated*,” or “This case has gotten *complicated*.” The word is used to express a troublesome kind of feeling, in other words a *complicated* feeling when you can’t tell if something is left or right, or maybe both, or if someone is friend or enemy, or when you feel some favorable feeling even toward your enemy, thinking of his or her situation and feelings, loving her while you hate her, hating him while you love him, when it’s not at all clear if you like someone or dislike them. Thus it is an extremely convenient and useful word.

In addition, when things are very similar, you can say “This and that are very *complicated*,” and you can call a somehow disagreeable, grizzled, dingy and grotesque face a “*complicated* face.”

The word can also be used for a painting that looks Surrealist but is poorly executed, or for a poor imitation of a Vlaminck: “a *complicated* Surrealist,” “a *complicated* Vlaminck,” or maybe “a *complicated* Picasso.”

And the good point of this word is that even when it is used of an illicit affair, or as abuse, or any other way, it does not have the harsh censure of a lawyer’s or policeman’s words, having at its foundation a nuance like a grin and a woman’s caress, so that no matter what is said about you, you do not get angry all at once, and even if you do get angry, it comes on at a slow pace. You might say goodbye to the other party, go home, and as you think about it overnight, gradually begin to feel a little angry. But then when you meet the other party again, your anger has passed: it’s that kind of *complicated* word.

I think the reason why this *complicated* word is prized and made great use of is that Kansai people, especially Osakans, have developed a wonderfully smooth sensibility since olden times, so that they say bad things about people without making them angry, show their goodwill while saying bad things about someone, and are amiable while arguing; the result of this sensibility is expressed using the word “*yayakoshii*.”

Therefore, those of rough dispositions from the provinces or from Tokyo, who do not understand our *complicated* nature, are baffled in their dealings with Osakans.

For example, when faced with a food they don’t like, Osakans won’t say they don’t like it, and so end up having to eat it. Saying, “This is nice,” with a happy look on their face, afraid lest they make a mockery of the other’s goodwill, they choke it down willy-nilly, and later, suffering from diarrhea and vomiting, end up secretly resenting the person who make them eat it. In spite of this, the next time they seem that person, they politely say, “Thank you for the wonderful food the other day; our entire family was overjoyed.”

Saying something polite like, “Oh, whichever is fine. I’ll take the one you say is best,” an Osakan is actually thinking, “I want that one,” and watch out, because he won’t forget it.

If both parties are Osakans, one can airily say, “All right, I’ll leave it all up to you,” because he can see in the depths of the other’s heart how everything will turn out, but if one party is a member of those uncomplicated peoples, this is a troublesome combination.

The course of arguments between Osakans are often set up in a similar manner. They do not develop in such a clear-cut manner as, “Do you like it, or not? If you don’t like it, then forget it! Idiot! It’s all over between us!”

In the example about food, I think it is safe to say that Koide Narashige is referring to himself and his weak stomach.

Nabei Katsuyuki states a similar opinion in the following words.

What Tanizaki writes about “voices” and “words” is interesting. He points out that when Osakans say, rolling their r’s, “I’m gonna tell him what I really think,” it is creepy how their voices strangely seem to crawl along the ground and coil around like a snake. I can see why it might seem so to him, but that is not the true import of such words. Even if one

says, “I’m gonna tell him what I really think,” these words include the hidden message, “It ain’t that easy.” Here we see the complicated flavor of Osaka. If you really don’t like something, of course it would be simpler to say so: it is hard for people of other regions to understand the depths of this Osaka flavor. In that mixed-up, muddy flavor is the true spice of Osaka. It is this that makes Tanizaki say that the speech of Osaka women is sexy; when a woman says, “I’m thinking of going and doing it,” the sex appeal arises from the fact that this includes, “I wouldn’t actually do it.” This Osaka flavor is something like blowfish milt: there’s no way to recommend it to someone who won’t eat such stuff. But if they bite the bullet and try a bit, they come to think, “This isn’t half bad.”

These two passages from Koide and Nabei are truly Osakan; in their own words, truly “*yayakoshii*. ” I think it is reasonable to consider that these two passages symbolize Osaka and Osakans. We can conclude that they write about “a *yayakoshii* metropolis and its *yayakoshii* people” – about Osaka and Osakans.

(1936)