

INTRODUCTION

This monograph follows the transfiguration in the concept of *miyako* throughout its long history, and examines the nexus between this transfiguration and the emergence of urbanity in Japan. This relationship is at the same time placed in terms of the particular way in which urbanization has developed in Japan since the late nineteenth century. The theorizing of *miyako* is grounded in my own methodology, discussed in detail below, and from this methodological standpoint, the monograph seeks to further consider the applicability of *miyako* as a concept for the analysis of societies outside of Japan; to consider, in other words, the universality of the concept.¹

1. This monograph is a synthesis of two previous publications. One is a paper entitled *Nihon bunkaron to gyaku ketsujoriron* 日本文化論と逆欠如理論 (“Japanese Cultural Theory and the Reverse Absence Viewpoint”), which appeared in *Nihongata moderu to wa nanika—Kokusaika jidai ni okeru meritto to demeritto* 日本型モデルとは何か：国際化時代におけるメリットとデメリット (What is the Japanese Model? Merits and Demerits in the Age of Internationalization), edited by Hamaguchi Eshun 濱口恵俊 (Shin'yōsha, 1993). The other is a study entitled “*Miyako*” to iu uchū—Tokai, kōgai, inaka 「みやこ」という宇宙：都会・郊外・田舎 (The Space Called “Miyako”: Urban City, Suburbs, and Countryside, pub. Nihon Hōsō Shuppan Kyōkai, 1994). Relevant parts have been included from several later publications, and the introduction and methodological analysis in Chapter 1 of Part One have been newly written for this monograph.

Historically the term *miyako* has a strong association with Kyoto and is still widely used today in direct reference to Kyoto.² Moreover, the term is often erroneously understood as being synonymous with *shuto* 首都, the Japanese equivalent of “capital” in English, despite *shuto* being a concept which arose with the birth of the modern nation state in Meiji Japan. In fact, the English term “capital” has itself undergone numerous changes in meaning before arriving at its contemporary usage.

According to *The Oxford English Dictionary*, “capital” derives from the Latin word for “head” and originally referred to “the head or top of a column or pillar.” Over time the additional meaning of “the ruler of a mansion, estate, or manor” was acquired, and as an extension of this developed, from the seventeenth to eighteenth centuries, a near contemporary usage of capital as, “the head town of a country, province, or state,” or “a capital town or city” in its adjectival form. The Dutch *hoofdstad* and the German *hauptstadt* are close in meaning to this usage of capital, and might be translated literally as “head or principle city.” Importantly, “capital” here lacks any express political significance, and as such the nearest equivalent in Japanese would be something like *saidai no daitokai* 最大の大会, or literally “the largest of the metropolitan centers.”

Nowadays, a city referred to as a capital is generally understood as being the place in which governmental power is located, although this meaning did not become clearly defined until after the formation of the first modern nation states in the eighteenth century. Thus cities now

2. In the Japanese version of this text, *miyako* is rendered in katakana (ミヤコ) rather than kanji (都, 京, 京都) because of the close historical associations the kanji have with Kyoto, this being a nuance I wish to avoid in my analysis. My aim is to demystify the concept of *miyako*, and thus using katakana helps to bring the concept into focus as an object of study, rather than allowing the special nuances of the kanji to be a distraction. Even in the subsequent discussions about Kyoto, *miyako* does not refer to Kyoto itself, but to the aspects of Kyoto that express its sense of *miyako*-ness.

known as capitals, which predate the eighteenth century, are clearly more than simply locations of centralized power.

With the birth of the sovereign nation that governs over and administers a defined territory and the subjects residing within that territory, both international and domestic politics took on a greatly expanded significance. The major cities in countries having long and stable histories naturally formed the political centers, though there was little need to refer to these cities expressly as the capital. However, the emergent nation states, of which the United States is considered the first new nation, were without a history to fall back on, and thus the governmental centers had to be created through a variety of political machinations. It was as a result of this unfolding of history that the overt political associations of the term capital were established.

Seoul, Vienna, London, Paris, Bangkok, and Amsterdam—these are all present-day capital cities that are clearly more than mere seats of governmental power. In short, I believe that in addition to functioning as modern capitals, the character of each of these cities has aspects of *miyako* and may be better defined and analyzed with reference to this concept. Here, Amsterdam provides a slightly different example, for although the official capital, clearly the capital of the Netherlands is The Hague if the term is understood as the seat of governmental power. Thus despite the new meaning attributed to capital following the establishment of the modern nation state in the eighteenth century, *hoofdstad* in Dutch still apparently clings to the former notion of a capital as being the principle or leading city. In contemporary terms, Amsterdam is not strictly speaking the capital of the Netherlands, but its *miyako* as the concept had come to mean during the Edo period in Japan. In this respect, Japan from the seventeenth to mid-nineteenth centuries shares many similarities with the Netherlands of today.

Before moving onto the body of my analysis I would like to discuss the methodological approach referred to in the opening paragraph of the

introduction. This approach was developed as a challenge to the inevitable limitations of the relatively young discipline of the social sciences in modern Japan. Strictly speaking, this limitation applies not only to the social sciences, but also to the humanities and human sciences, and may be attributed to the borrowing of academic models grounded in the historical and social experiences of the West to analyze the historically and socially different context of Japanese society and culture.

I refer to the traditional methodology of the Japanese social sciences as the “absence viewpoint,” and to my relativized position as the “reverse absence viewpoint.” My intention is not to argue that the traditional absence viewpoint is of no value in analyzing Japanese society and that such analysis should only be conducted from the reverse absence viewpoint. Rather I believe that through combining aspects of both approaches, it will be possible to develop studies of Japanese society that are capable of withstanding a high level of international comparison. In reality, however, a great many academics in Japan continue to peruse their work, consciously or otherwise, from the absence viewpoint, and thus I still feel obliged at this stage to clarify the arguments in support of the reverse absence viewpoint.