

Cultural Formation of the Expo in Japan: The Case of Producer Shinya Izumi

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Abstract

The Japan World Exposition Osaka 1970 was the first expo to be held in Japan and in Asia. The planners of the Osaka Expo not only struggled to express the uniqueness of the first expo in Asia, but also revised and reinterpreted its significance and format so that it would be accepted by Japanese society. It famously established a model that subsequent expos, large-scale expositions, and even theme parks followed. Despite this, little attention has been paid to producer and designer Shinya Izumi (1930-), who was involved in conceiving the idea of the Osaka Expo and went on to participate in all Bureau International des Expositions (BIE)-certified events held in Japan, thereby shaping the direction of expos in Japan. This paper seeks to examine the kinds of expos Izumi created through an analysis of his writings and activities, personal connections, and the influence of preceding expos. Specifically, I focus on two key concepts: *matsuri* (festival) and *kankyō* (circumstance/surroundings/environment), which I suggest played a crucial role in Izumi's (and by extension, Japan's) formation of expo images. Additionally, this paper suggests that the understanding and idea of the expo, originating in Osaka, eventually spread internationally until the 1994 BIE resolution.

Keywords: World Exposition, Postwar Japan, Cultural Studies

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Introduction

The history of Japan's expos would not have been what it is without the presence of Shinya Izumi. A graduate of Tokyo University of the Arts, Izumi worked for Canon Inc. as an industrial designer from 1955 to 1962. After that Izumi landed a job at the *Kankyō Kaihatsu Sentā* (Environmental Development Center) established by the architect and city planner Takashi Asada. Asada himself had been a former staff member in the laboratory of the famous architect Kenzo Tange at the University of Tokyo. Asada gave inspiration to young architects in Tange's Laboratory who would later become involved in the "Metabolism" movement. Their collaboration spread beyond genres and across professions to include artists, designers, and critics.

In this milieu, Izumi also began to expand his career network through collaborative projects. He joined the editorial staff of the quarterly magazine *Design Criticism* (1966-70), which featured an exhibition review and other Expo-related articles.¹ Izumi also visited the New York World Fair twice in 1964 and 1965, an experience that motivated him to participate in the planning of the Osaka Expo's entertainment district and transportation.²

Izumi's Engagement in World Expositions in Japan

Izumi also took part in the Okinawa Ocean Exposition, planning the government exhibition and the Sumitomo Pavilion. Planning for this started well before the opening of the Osaka Expo in anticipation of the return of Okinawa to Japanese sovereignty in 1972. Kotaro Ikeguchi (also known as Taichi Sakaiya), a bureaucrat at the Ministry of International Trade and Industry, who had planned the Osaka Expo, and many others involved in it similarly participated in the Okinawa Expo.³ Indeed, the staff members of the Osaka Expo, e.g. architects, designers, painters, and writers gradually became a consolidated group that would engage in the planning of subsequent projects. The Port Island Exposition opened on a newly created artificial island in Kobe in 1981. In other words, following the Osaka Expo large-scale expositions were held in Japan almost every five years.

The Tsukuba Science Expo in 1985 marked an important watershed moment as two prominent expo characteristics emerged. Firstly, the process of planning exhibitions was stylized and oligopolized by advertising agencies that had wide networks not only among architects, exhibition companies, producers, designers, and artists, but also in government offices and the mass media. In particular, the advertising agency Dentsu undertook 18 out of the 28 private pavilions. The second shift was caused by the transformation of Japanese society. In the wake

¹ Twelve issues were published by the publisher *Fūdōsha* as a quarterly magazine. It started under the joint editorship of Kiyoshi Awazu, Shinya Izumi, Noboru Kawazoe, Hiroshi Hara, and Ichirō Hariu, and from the 10th issue, was edited only by Awazu. In the second issue, under the title of "Play Concept and Design," (March 1967) Akira Tamura, who was one of the authors of the "Survey Report on the Amusement Area of the Japan World Exposition," explained the same concept as the report "Structure of Play." This issue printed the exhibition review of *Kūkan kara kankyō he* (From Space to Environment) by Ichirō Hariu. The 6th issue, under the title of "Expo and Anpo (Japan-U.S. Security Treaty), EXPOSE, 1968 All Records," (July 1968) was a detailed report of the 5-day event planned as a response to the expo. It shows the width of Izumi's network and the relation between this network and the expo.

² Izumi, S. (1988). *Kaku Heiki to Yūenchi [Nuclear Weapons and Amusement Parks-Now, the Age of Intellectual Resonance Society]*. Tokyo: Tokuma Shoten., Chapter 5, "The Road to Expo Producers" is the most detailed piece about his career during this period.

³ Sakaiya, T. (2018). *Chijyō Saidai no Gyōji Bankoku Hakurankai [The Biggest Event on Earth : The World Expositions]*. Tokyo: Kōbunsha., 204-206.

of postwar rebuilding and rapid economic growth, Japan was changing into a consumer society where the demand for leisure increased and companies became aware of their corporate identity (CI). Advertising agencies took advantage of these trends.

Izumi, who had connections with Dentsu that began with the Osaka Expo, understood the value of entertainment in a leisure society and was conscious of the importance of CI in terms of media strategies; hence many companies adopted his plans at the Tsukuba Expo.⁴ Thereafter, Izumi worked as a general producer on various exhibitions such as the Seto Big Bridge Expo (1988), the Yokohama Expo (1989), the Nagoya World Design Expo (1989), and the Osaka Flower Expo (1990), which were all held at the height of the bubble economy.

From the latter half of the 1980s the local expo boom spread nationwide, culminating in the aforementioned Osaka Flower Expo (1990). Yet many became stereotyped and some ended in failure.⁵ For example, Izumi was nominated as the general producer of the Tokyo World City Expo, which was scheduled to be held in 1996, but one year before opening, a candidate who stood on a platform against the expo was elected as Governor of Tokyo, resulting in the expo's cancellation. This event symbolized the end of the bubble period and the virtual demise of the expo in Japan.

An Analysis on Izumi's Philosophy and Strategies

In what follows, I want to reexamine Izumi's philosophy and strategies. It is important to note that while Izumi was deeply committed to developing expos in Japan, he also visited many expos overseas and was therefore familiar with international trends. He served as the general producer of the Japan Pavilion at the Knoxville International Energy Expo (1982) and an adviser at the Daejeon International Expo in Korea (1993). He was aware of the differences between domestic and international expos and even the drawbacks of Japanese Expos.

Izumi's ideas are encapsulated in two terms: *matsuri* and *kankyō*. *Matsuri* was one of the key words at the Japan World Exposition Osaka 1970. The main stage was named *Omatsuri-Hiroba* (Festival Square), where not only foreign festivals but also domestic *matsuri* from across Japan were presented. Almost half of Japan's population visited the venue, so this expo has been remembered as a collective festive experience. Izumi seemed to learn the importance of urban *matsuri* and citizens' *asobi* (play) as spectacles and entertainment, and for consumption, while working for the Osaka Expo and planning an amusement park (Expo-land). The "Survey Report on the Entertainment Area of the Japan World Exposition" (1967) that Izumi coauthored defines the essence of entertainment/play as the epitome of the three elements: *Miru* (*Kiku*) (Watch (Listen)), *Suru* (Do), and *Yasumu* (*Taberu*) (Get rest (Eat)).⁶

The second and much more important key term for understanding Izumi's idea of the expo is *kankyō*, which was a relatively new and unfamiliar concept when Izumi experimented with it. Izumi was involved in the Environmental Development Center (*Kankyō Kaihatsu Sentā*) in his early career. The center was a pioneer for private planning companies that were tackling the

⁴ According to *News Material Science Expo-Tsukuba '85* (published by the International Science and Technology Expo Association in December 1984), Izumi participated in the Matsushita Pavilion, Fujitsu Pavilion, Steel Pavilion, Sumitomo Pavilion, and Japanese government's History Pavilion.

⁵ Kuwata, M. (2017). *Hakurankai to Kankō [Expo and Tourism-Tourism Strategy for Reconstruction and Regional Revitalization]*. Tokyo: Nihon Hyōronsha., 177.

⁶ The report was commissioned by the Japan Expo Association to the committee chaired by Yonezo Kobayashi, Kēhan Express President, and was prepared mainly by Awazu, Izumi, and Tamura.

issues of explosive population growth and rapid city-expansion. At that time *kankyō* meant the urban space itself, including the objects that could help to make human beings' lives more comfortable.

When McLuhan's media theory became popular in Japan in the latter half of the 1960s, his theory also influenced the artists involved in the Osaka Expo as it was mediated through the interpretation of art critics.⁷ The term *kankyō* began to take on new meanings, referring to the state surrounded by mass media and to information space or electronic space. The art exhibition *From Space to Environment (Kūkan kara kankyō he)* (1966), to which Izumi submitted his work, was a response from the field of art, which saw *kankyō* as a place of dynamic collision between artists and audience.⁸ The Osaka Expo was the last and largest place where these avant-garde artists gathered.

As exploitation went hand in hand with environmental development, resulting in the destruction of nature, there emerged a shift in the concept of *kankyō*, and this was not lost on Izumi. At the time of the Osaka Expo, pollution had already become a serious social problem. The Okinawa Expo visibly revealed its own contradictions. Large-scale development was carried out to make Okinawa a leisure venue, at the same time that the image of an uninvaded natural paradise was being given a central role in PR campaigns.⁹ What inspired Izumi at this critical juncture was the 1974 World Expo held in Spokane, USA, which featured the theme of "Progress without pollution." Subsequently, Izumi organized the "World Environmental Exhibition" in Harumi, Tokyo in 1976,¹⁰ and served as a member of the Natural Environment Conservation Council, an advisory body to the Environment Agency.¹¹ In fact, Izumi was one of the first in Japan to set the conservation of *kankyō* as the theme of an exhibition.

This shift in focus from development to conservation, however, was not reflected in the Tsukuba Science Expo '85, despite the fact that Izumi participated in it as a basic concept committee member. Its theme "Dwellings and Surroundings-Science and Technology for Man at Home" was first conceived in English, and then translated into Japanese. The word "Surroundings" was translated to mean "*kankyō*," but the basic concept of "Surroundings" alluded to extreme environments not suitable for life such as outer space or polar regions. A complex optical fiber system was constructed underground at the venue and the expo was conceived as an advanced information city. *Kankyō* still inherited the implications of the Osaka Expo era.¹²

At the Tsukuba Expo, many pavilions presented the optimistic hope that science and technology would bring a bright future. They projected films on wide screens to emphasize

⁷ For more information on McLuhan's influence on the environmental art, see: Yutaka Iida, "McLuhan, Environmental Art, Osaka Expo (Chapter 1)." In Iida, Y. (2020). *Medya Ron no Chisō [The Geological Layers of Media Theory-From the 1970 Osaka Expo to the 2020 Tokyo Olympics]*. Tokyo: Keisō Shobō.

⁸ Tsuji, Y. (2014). "From Space to Environment" Exhibition (1966). *Journal of architecture, planning and environmental engineering*, Vol. 79, No. 704, 2294.

⁹ This is also reflected in the basic philosophical construct of this expo, which advocates soft development. Tada, O. (2004). *Okinawa Imēji no Tanjō [Birth of Okinawa Image-Cultural Studies of the Blue Sea]*. Tokyo: Tōyō Keizai., amazon kindle Position No. 1466.

¹⁰ Izumi, S. (2005). *Izumi Shinya no Banyū Banbutsu Hakuran-E [Shinya Izumi's Universal Expo]*. Nagoya: Chūnichi Shimbun., 306-307.

¹¹ International Science and Technology Expo Association (Eds.). (1981). *Kagaku Mange Chō [Science Kaleidoscope Note-From the Mystery of Life to Space Colonies]*. Tokyo: Mizuumi Shobō. 88.

¹² Eto, M. (2021). Pavilion wo Yomu-Tsukuba Kagakuhaku niokeru Kankyō [Reading the Pavilions- Kankyō at Tsukuba Science Expo]. *Journal of modern languages & cultures*, Vol. 22, 18.

spectacle as entertainment. This trend could be traced back to Disney's EPCOT Center, which opened in Florida in 1982, and to Tokyo Disneyland, which opened in 1983. Many of the creators of the Tsukuba Expo visited these facilities and searched for new ideas.

Izumi was aware of the divergence between principles and practices. As he understood it, playfulness, entertainment, and *matsuri* elements had to be marginal, in principle at least, and commercialism should be avoided. This divergence was, as Izumi later acknowledged, caused by the fact that the Osaka Expo, a prototype for Japanese expos, was modeled after the New York World Fair, which was not certified by BIE and contained strong themes of commercialism.¹³

Criticism against the Seville Expo '92 as overly entertainment-oriented led to the 1994 BIE resolution that "Expos must address crucial problems of our time and tackle the challenge of environmental protection." In response, at the 2005 Aichi Expo, the meaning of *kankyō* changed radically from the one that the Tsukuba Expo had upheld. Conceived in 1988 and adopted at the 1997 BIE General Assembly, the plan for the Aichi Expo was reassessed many times because of concerns over conservation. The spirit of environmental conservation and citizen participation was emphasized in the final plan, which was highly evaluated by BIE. Izumi, as a general producer, created a huge green wall called "Bio-Lung," which symbolized a shift from modifying the natural environment for the sake of comfortable living to conserving it as indispensable for comfortable living.

Conclusion

Scholars have hitherto neglected the role that Izumi played in the history of Japan's expos. However, as I have discussed, Izumi's ingenuity significantly shaped Expos. During the decades that Japan transitioned from postwar rebuilding into a consumer society and then to the beginning of the era of sustainability, he reinvented new values such as leisure, festival, CI and ecology, relevant to each time and context.

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¹³ Izumi, S. (1992). Private View: World's Fair Exposition's Genesis. In Izumi, S. and Terazawa, T. (Eds), *DISPLAY DESIGNS IN JAPAN Vol.3 Expo & Exhibition*. Tokyo: Rokuyōsha, 9.

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