A Profile of Osa Town and Things Japanese (1)

Kiyoshi YAMAUCHI

英 語

大佐町概要及於日本的事象 (1)

山内 圭

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Osa Town 大佐町

Osa Town is located in the northwestern part of Okayama Prefecture. The town is surrounded with rich nature, such as beautiful mountains and clear Osakabe River. The total area of the town is 121.25 square kilometers, and spreads from south to north along Osakabe River, which is a branch of the Takahashi River, one of the three major rivers in Okayama Prefecture. The town is generally mountainous and has little flat land. The two major flat lands in the town are the center of the town and areas alongside of the Osakabe River. The center of the town is about 350 meters above the sea level and the fields and rice paddies are 250-600 meters above the sea level. There are nine high mountains of which the height are around 1,000 meters. Among them, Mt. Osa (988m) is considered as a symbol of the town. The town has 1,700 milliliters of rainfall/snowfall on average in a year, and the average temperature is 13 degrees centigrade. The climate of this town is inland type and is different from that of southern part of the prefecture.

The population of this beautiful town is around 4,200. The townspeople are positively influenced by the great outdoors of the town, and they are cheerful and generous in character.

The town flag of Osa

The design of Osa Town flag represents the letter “大” (which is the first letter of the town’s name “大佐”(Osa) in kanji character. The upper part stands...
for the union of Osakabe-cho, Osakabe-mura and Tajibe-mura in 1955, and it represents Mt. Osa at the same time. The lower circular part stands for harmony and peace of the town.

Main Gate of Entsu-ji Temple

円通寺山門（えんつうじさんもん）

This gate was built when Katsuyoshi Mizunoya（水谷勝能） who is a brother of Katsuemon Mizunoya（水谷勝宗），the 2nd Feudal Lord of Matsuyama Feud (present Takahashi City) became in charge of this 2000-goku (about 360 kiloliters or about 94,737 gallons) rice producing Osakabe District in 1664. After the Haihan-Chiken（廃藩置県）Replacement, which literally means “replacement of Feuds with Prefectures, the gate was transplanted to Entsu-ji Temple, which was the Mizunoya’s family temple, and used as the main gate of the Buddhist temple. It was not usual for a temple to use a gate of samurai style. This gate is similar to that of Himeji Castle which has God of Osakabe on its donjon and the similarity might stem from the connection of Osakabe.

Entsu-ji Ancient Tombs

円通寺古墳（えんつうじこふん）

These two ancient tombs were discovered near Entsu-ji Temple in 1977 and excavated in 1977 and 1979. Both tombs are round mound type with stone caves and date back to the 6th century. These tombs are the largest ones in this Ashin District (Atetsu County and Niimi City), so these are considered as tombs of powerful lords of this area.

A lot of swords, jewelry, rings, earthenware and so forth are found in the site. Among them, the grass balls were proven to be made in the Orient near the Black Sea and imported through the Silk Road.

Osa Shrine 大佐神社（おおさじんじゃ）

This Shinto shrine was branched off from Higo District (present Kumamoto Prefecture in Kyushu) in 784. The main building was rebuilt in 1736. The roof was thatched and slated again and again, but the building still remains.

The vast woods in the precinct of the shrine is one of the greatest in Okayama Prefecture. It has more than 300 great Japanese cedar trees and over 100 trees of them are a few hundred years old. When you step into the great woods, it is dark even in daytime, and you can find it tranquil and sacred.

Hokoku-an Hermitage 方谷庵（ほうこくあん）

A scholar of the Wang Yang-ming school and educator, Hokoku Yamada was called “the Great Saint in Bitchu (the Western half of present Okayama Prefecture).” He reformed the feud government in Matsuyama-han Feud. He also founded schools and produced many excellent students.

Towards the end of Edo Era (1603–1867), Hokoku supported his master and an adviser of Tokugawa Shogunate, Katsukiyo Itakura（板倉勝静）and dealt with many difficult matters. After that, Hokoku moved to his mother’s hometown, Osakabe and founded a private school there in 1870.

In 1872 he built this hermitage in Kongo-ji Temple（金剛寺）which has graves of his mother’s family, the Nishitanis in order to worship his grandparents’ souls. This tea-ceremony room style building is composed of two rooms, which are an altar room and an alcove room with a fireplace.

Hokoku Yamada 山田方谷（やまだほうこく）

The Great Saint in Bitchu, scholar of the Wang Yang-ming school, educator, politician and reformer
(1805–1877) (Bunka 2 – Meiji 10)

He was born in a common family in Bitchu–Matsuyama–han Feud. He was called a wonder child in his boyhood. After he learned Confucianism under the guidance of Shoin Marukawa in Niimi–han Feud, he studied the doctrines of Chu–tzu under Hakushika Terajima in Kyoto, then the teachings of Wang Yang–ming under Issai Sato (佐藤一斎) in Edo (present Tokyo).

Because he attained excellence of scholarship, he was entitled to have a surname and a sword. He became head of the feud school, Yushu–kan (有終館) and he devoted himself to teaching students in his private schools Gyuroku–sha (牛齢舎) and Nagase–juku (長瀬塾). Among many of his excellent students from all around Japan to come to Bitchu–Matsuyama to learn directly from Hokoku, there were Chushu Mishima (三島中州) who founded Nisho–Gakusha (二松学舎) (present Nisho Gakusha University), Kyujiro Yabuki (矢吹久治郎) who was a wealthy merchant in Chugoku District and Tsugunosuke Kawai (河井剛之助) who was from Echigo District (present Niigata Prefecture) and killed in Boshin War.

In 1849 (Kaei 2), Katsukiyo Itakura, the feudal lord appointed Hokoku to a high official. He reformed the feud government by economizing, paying off debts, renewing feud bills and industrializing, and in eight years the feud could pay off all their one–hundred–thousand ryo (*ryo is the monetary unit then) and saved one–hundred–thousand ryo. He formed the farmers’ army and strengthened the feud. Towards the end of Edo Era, Hokoku supported Katsukiyo Itakura, an adviser of Tokugawa Shogunate then, and when Katsukiyo asked Hokoku for a piece of advice Hokoku was always ready for three pieces of advice.

At the Restoration of the Imperial Rule, Hokoku took after Katsukiyo who devoted his life to Tokugawa Shogun Family. He proposed that the Shogun Family evacuate the Edo Castle and saved the castle town from war.

After Meiji Restoration, Hokoku declined the job offer from the Meiji Government. Then he moved his school from Nagase (present Nakai Town, Takahashi City) to Osakabe (present Osa Town) and renamed it to Osakabejuku school. He devoted himself to teaching students, and he made efforts to rebuild Bizen–Shizutani School.

Unlike well–known scholars in Wang Yang–ming school who met untimely deaths, Hokoku died a natural death on June 22, 1877 (Meiji 10) in Osakabejuku, with incense burned, a sword which was a gift from his former lord Katsukiyo and a complete Collection of Wang Yang–ming on his deathbed. He was 73.

Ryuo–daiko Drum Play

鰐王大鼓（りゅうおうだいこ）

This drum play has been done to call for rain near Ryuo–ike Pond in Mt. Osa, Aga–gori County, Bitchu since the first half of the 18th century and have been transmitted generation to generation.

Back then, in drought, people used to bring water from Ryuo–ike Pond and pray for rain playing the drum, and calling “Please give us rain, Ryuo Dragon” until it started raining. Ryuo–ike Pond was believed to be the place the Ryujin Dragon God (god of water and rain) lived in.

The tradition was abandoned after the World War II, but was restored by Osa Ryuo–daiko Preservation Association to preserve this ancient ceremony.

The music is composed of rhythms of cloud, wind, lightning, thunderstorm and then praying Buddhist sutra. This reminds us of our ancestors’ feelings.

Osa–so Home for the physically handicapped

大佐荘（おおさそう）

This is a home for the heavily physically handicapped. This home was founded in 1981. The home assists the handicapped to develop and live to their full potential. The facility provides rehabilitation, job training and things like that. They have 80 beds available for full–time residents, and 8 beds for respite care. We call respite care “short stay” in Japanese. You have to be over 17 to check in here with handicap
level 2.

Osa–en Home for the elderly

This is a home for the elderly. This home is built in 1989. There are 50 beds available for full-time residents, and 5 for respite care. You have to be over 64 when you check into this. They have a lot of events for the residents and the patients to make them happy.

Japanese top 独楽（こま）

Spinning tops is one of Japanese traditional plays for boys especially for New Year Season beside flying kites. We spin our tops trying to knock each other's off. Tops are said to come from China. And in Heian Era (794–1191) they became a popular pastime among the aristocracy.

Hanetsuki 羽根つき（はねつき）

Hanetsuki might be called a Japanese version of badminton. You use battledores called “hagoita” and shuttlecocks called “hago” to play this game. The battledores are usually made of wood and sometimes have ornament on it.

Etegami 絵手紙（えでがみ）

Etegami literally means picture letters. “E” means pictures and “tegami” means letters or mails. You can draw pictures and some messages on a postcard and send it to your friends or relatives. Nowadays it is very popular among Japanese.

Senmen 扇面（せんめん）

Senmen is paper part of Japanese version of fan, sensu. You can write some letters or draw pictures on the fan paper.

Tanabata 七夕（たなばた）

Tanabata is a festival observed usually on July 7, but in some districts you observe this around August 7. It’s a star festival, too. There is a Chinese legend about this festival. In the legend, the constellation Weaver Princess had to be separated to her boyfriend Cowherd. The Weaver Princess is on one side of the Milky Way, and the Cowherd another side. The God allowed them to cross the Milky Way to see each other only for one day a year. We decorate bamboo with a lot of ornaments for the Tanabata festival.

Bon–odori Dance 盆踊り（はんおどり）

Bon is like Halloween in America and is the time for our ancestors to come back to us in this world. During the season, people gather and dance bon–odori dancing. This dance is done to comfort your ancestors.

参考文献（References）
* 下記の項の執筆はそれぞれ以下の資料を参考に行った。
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7）Ryuo–daiko Drum Play：竜王太鼓保存会による紹介文。
8）Osa–so Home for the physically handicapped：『身体障害者療養施設 大佐 ごあいな』
9）Osa–en Home for the elderly：『特別養護老人ホーム おさ苑 ごあいな』

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