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Rural Landscape and Tourism Development in Japan: A Case Study of Kita village, Miyama Town, Kyoto

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1. Introduction

In Japan rural settings are one of the most popular eco-friendly tourist attractions which have been managed by and harmonised with local people in a resolute attempt to sustain their commercial and domestic environment. However, tourists are not usually aware of this effort, whereas they enjoy spending their leisure time in these settings and consider their tourism practices to be environmentally friendly. This different understanding of rural tourism practices may have created a distance between hosts and guests.

A key concept to explain this situation might be the notion of landscape since landscape is viewed subjectively and personally by each individual. In Japan, there is a common type of landscape called “*satoyama*”, the meaning of which has changed in line with the transition of land use and with nationwide environmental discussion. *Satoyama* has also become a popular tourist attraction, in which tourists tend to seek the ideal environment or their own imaginary hometown but where local residents try to diversify or to create extra value from what is their everyday environment. It is clear that the investigation into tourism practices in relation to rural tourism and the rural landscape will give us some insight into key issues of and potential for further tourism development.

This paper first describes the notion of landscape and *satoyama* and then examines the way the rural landscape is registered according to international and national systems of protecting properties. After these explanations, a case study of Kita village, Miyama Town, Japan, will be analysed as an example of rural tourism development.

2. *Satoyama*, a common type of rural landscape in Japan

The word landscape was originally a painters’ technical term, *landschap*, taken from the Dutch language and “what came to be seen as landscape was recognized as such because it reminded the viewer of a painted landscape” (Hirsch 1995: 2). Today, social scientists have expanded the meaning of this term and define it as “a way of seeing, a composition and structuring of the world” (Cosgrove 1985: 55). In other words, landscape “distances us from the world in critical ways, defining a particular relationship with nature and those who appear in nature, and offers us the illusion of a world in which we may participate

subjectively by entering the picture frame along the perspectival axis” (Cosgrove 1985: 55).

Eric Hirsch (1995: 5) claims that Denis Cosgrove’s interpretation neglects one factor which “exists as a part of everyday social life.” Referring to some ethnographic resources, Hirsch (1995) explains that landscape is defined by the relationship between foreground actuality and background potentiality. This foreground actuality can be seen in and strongly connected to everyday life while the background potentiality is formed abstractly beyond everyday life. In other words, landscape is something created by the individual as a result of the emotional movement between mundane experiences and ideal images. In this respect, the public recognition of specific landscapes is the collective form of the environment created through human-human and human-nature interaction.

In Japan, there is a common type of rural landscape called “*satoyama*” which exemplifies the notion of landscape because its meaning has changed depending on historical conditions as well as on human appreciation¹⁾. The term *satoyama* once meant the area surrounding villages or family properties where firewood, thatch and wild mushrooms could be collected (e.g. Arioka 2004). In other words, *satoyama* indicated the area located between agricultural land and forests and villagers went there to obtain necessities without staying overnight²⁾.

However, after the Second World War, urbanisation developed quickly everywhere in Japan and much of the land formerly described as *satoyama* was redeveloped for residential or industrial use, thus eradicating the buffer zone between villages and the wilderness. As a result, environmentalists and ecologists arranged symposiums and workshops in order to promote the conservation of *satoyama*. Through this promotion, it was emphasised that *satoyama* was a part of the rural setting and that these settings should be conserved.

Since the late 1980’s, the word *satoyama* has frequently appeared in the media with the new meaning. Articles in the Asahi Newspaper³⁾ in the early 1990’s reveal that the development of golf courses nationwide was accelerated by destroying rural settings near urban areas and the word *satoyama* was continually used to indicate these threatened places. In this context, *satoyama* came to signify endangered valuable natural areas adjacent to cities.

In the late 1990’s, during the planning stage for Expo 2005, which was held in Aichi in central Japan, one of the proposed sites was considered to be *satoyama* and environmental protestors carried out a campaign against its development. They claimed that the operating body had neglected the environmental conservation of this *satoyama*, and the word *satoyama* in this context was defined as a valuable, accessible, co-existing form of nature available for the benefit of human beings. These environmental protests succeeded in attracting a great deal of public attention and in the end Expo 2005 was held without destroying this site.

Through a succession of environmental discussions about *satoyama*, the term has come to refer to almost every element of the rural setting, including mountains, forests, residential space, wooden houses, paddy fields and rivers. For example, Fukamachi Katsue and others (2001: 704) define it as the “social and ecological network of the village and its surroundings, which include agricultural lands, open forest [clearings] and forests.”

To sum up, the meaning of *satoyama* has shifted from a narrow space around villages to all elements of the rural setting. This shift resulted from both environmental change and

environmental discussions in Japan. In other words, the rural landscape has not only been recreated along with both ecological and social changes but has also been recognised as environmentally valuable by the public. Furthermore, these (re)created rural landscapes have become utilised for varied tourism practices such as ecotourism and green tourism.

A noteworthy option in the utilisation of the rural landscape in Japan is the nomination as a type of cultural property by the Agency for Cultural Affairs, since whenever a site receives this nomination tourist visits increase considerably. In the next section, international and national registration systems for rural landscape as property or heritage are examined.

3. Rural landscape as a type of cultural property

3.1 Rural landscape valued by UNESCO's World Heritage

Internationally, the nomination for World Heritage site seems to be one of the most influential factors in the context of tourism development. World Heritage was originally established in 1972 by UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) with just two categories of cultural and natural heritage. According to Peter J. Fowler (2003: 15), these two categories are “the opposites, almost the antagonists” since architects and historians identified individual magnificent structures and monuments as cultural heritage whereas nature conservationists approved sites with minimal human interference as natural heritage. The two ideals of heritage were extremes and World Heritage lacked a classification for a site which might combine cultural and natural features. In other words, at first there was no appropriate category for rural landscape.

UNESCO acknowledged this insufficiency and devised another category, i.e. the mixed cultural and natural site. However, this initiative does not seem to be perfectly successful, as potential sites for inclusion in it need to meet several criteria of both cultural and natural heritage. In fact, at present there are only 25 mixed cultural and natural heritage sites as against 689 cultural ones and 176 natural ones.

In consequence, the World Heritage Committee continued to discuss the characteristics of a different category which would cover the combination of cultural and natural sites. In 1992, “cultural landscapes” were introduced with the conception that they would be “based on the principle that such a landscape is greater than the sum of its parts” (Fowler 2003: 18). According to UNESCO World Heritage Centre (2008: 85), cultural landscapes are cultural properties and represent the “combined works of nature and of man” and “[t]hey are illustrative of the evolution of human society and settlement over time, under the influence of the physical constraints and/or opportunities presented by their natural environment and of successive social, economic and cultural forces, both external and internal.”

These explanations indicate that the category of cultural landscapes focuses on the relation between human beings and the natural environment. This invention has been visibly welcomed worldwide, since at present a varied range of 66 properties are inscribed under the category on the World Heritage List, including national parks, towns, villages, agricultural fields and buildings. One of these properties, the Rice Terraces of the Philippine Cordilleras, the Philippines, has a similar landscape to the Japanese rural one, and thus in Japan discussion about the eligibility of the rural landscape for inscription on the World Heritage List has

flourished as explained below.

3.2 Rural landscape in the Law for the Protection of Cultural Properties in Japan

In contrast to this international system, in Japan the Law for the Protection of Cultural Properties has dealt with both cultural and natural properties since the 1950's. Before the middle of the 20th century there were separate laws for the protection of cultural and natural properties yet, just after the Second World War, the Japanese government started to prepare a new law for the protection of cultural properties which might be neglected in due course owing to the defeat.

In this discussion, several ambiguous points were examined, such as the definition and interpretation of culture, the differences between science and culture, and the possibility that places of scenic beauty and natural monuments could be considered to be cultural. Eventually, the government decided that both cultural and natural properties would be protected by the Law for the Protection of Cultural Properties (Bunkacho 2001: 24-28). In 1950 this law was passed with the understanding that it is internationally unique because one single law covers and protects all properties.

Concerning categories for rural landscape, originally the law had only the category of Places of Scenic Beauty which includes gardens, bridges, gorges, coastal areas and mountains. A potential area for this category is assessed to determine whether it possesses a high artistic or aesthetic value for Japan (The Agency for Cultural Affairs 2008: 40). In this category, gardens and bridges are considered to be cultural places and other places of scenic beauty such as coastal areas and mountains are recognised as natural ones. The nomination in this category, especially nominations of natural places, is given to protect beautiful sites as ideal and genuine forms of nature, in other words, the most essential point of the category is that the selected natural environments remain intact.

In fact, before the 1990's the Agency for Cultural Affairs seemed to avoid discussing the potential for selecting cultivated land since it has always been modified by local residents and it is therefore difficult to judge its genuine or original form. However, since the 1990's, rural environments such as paddy fields and forests have been considered as potential areas for Places of Scenic Beauty. This shift resulted from nationwide environmental discussions in which the conservation of *satoyama* had continually been raised and the movement to conserve rice terraces had grown, inspired by the inscription of the Rice Terraces of the Philippine Cordilleras on the World Heritage List. Indeed, in line with this series of movements rural environments came to be assessed in terms of cultural properties.

The first nomination was carried out under the category of Places of Scenic Beauty, yet today a more appropriate category for rural environments is Cultural Landscapes, which was included in Japanese law in 2002, ten years after recognition by the World Heritage Committee. This Cultural Landscapes category overlaps Places of Scenic Beauty, yet the artistic or aesthetic scenery constructed by human-nature interaction, namely the rural landscape, is usually categorised as a Cultural Landscape (see Bunkacho Bunkazai-bu Kinenbutsu-ka 2005). In addition, if one place is selected as a Cultural Landscape in Japan, it could easily be decided whether it would meet the criteria for recognition as a World Heritage site. Indeed, these days the Japanese rural landscape as a distinctive form of nature

is recognised as a potential national and international property.

In contrast to these two categories for natural environments, since the middle of the 1970's the Agency for Cultural Affairs has been involved with rural conservation by considering rural settings as being cultural and by creating another category, Preservation Districts for Groups of Historic Structures. This was introduced in 1975 in order to protect not only a group of historic structures such as old buildings, temples or traditional houses but also the whole area, namely cities, towns and villages, where those structures exist. This category, as opposed to Places of Scenic Beauty, was developed in order to conserve not only artificial objects but also their surroundings, including natural settings.

Originally, prior to the national government action, several local authorities enacted bylaws for streetscape or townscape conservation. These authorities aimed to protect their local landscapes including groups of traditional buildings as well as the natural settings around these artificial structures. The Agency examined both these bylaws and foreign systems concerning townscape conservation and then created the unique and appropriate category for Japan, i.e. Preservation Districts for Groups of Historic Structures (see Ito 2000). In this Preservation Districts category, groups of buildings or artificial objects are registered as cultural properties and the areas surrounding them are approved as conservation areas.

In addition, when the Agency established this category, it intentionally set up a number of financial support systems: for example, if an area is registered as a Preservation District, the local community obtains national and regional government grants through the local authority in order to protect and sustain its historic structures. Furthermore, "support is also given through preferential tax treatment" (The Agency for Cultural Affairs 2008: 42), meaning that local residents receive a tax reduction on their properties including houses and land. In addition, the local governments of these selected areas become eligible to apply for other national government funding. Thus, it can be seen that this category is useful for rural development in terms of financial support.

Accordingly, rural environments such as *satoyama* are eligible for classification under several categories of properties each of which has advantages and disadvantages. Places of Scenic Beauty and Cultural Landscapes are the categories in which the national government protects beautiful scenery by giving it ideal and genuine status, whereas the category of Preservation Districts for Groups of Historic Structures attempts to conserve whole areas including man-made and organic features.

In relation to tourism, if a particular rural landscape is nominated as a cultural property, not only the landscape but also the neighbouring areas attract a great number of tourists, and so the local people can take the opportunity to develop new commercial ventures. However, tourists appreciate cultural properties in their own, different ways from the local people who provide tourism services on site. Therefore a key objective in carrying out tourism development is to strike a balance between tourist exploitation and responsible rural management.

In the following section, the case of Kita village, Miyama Town, is introduced in order to evaluate tourism practices utilising a rural landscape nominated as a cultural property. In the case of Kita, the category Preservation District was considered to be the most suitable,

since on the one hand there were distinctive traditional thatched houses and rural settings in this village, and on the other the local people required financial support if they were to conserve their local environment.

4. A case study of Miyama: A brief introduction

Before examining the case of Kita in depth, the facts of Miyama Town are introduced briefly. Miyama Town is located 56 kilometres north of Kyoto City and 50 kilometres south of the Sea of Japan in the middle of the Tanba highlands, which consist of mountains 600-800 metres high and their valleys. The total area of this town is 340 square kilometres, 96 percent of which consists of mountains and forests, while the remaining four percent consists of farmland, rivers, and living space for the local residents. The valleys in Miyama were formed by the stream of the Yura River and its tributaries, along which most residential areas are located. The Yura flows westwards from the east end of the town until it finally reaches Tango-Yura, on the shores of the Sea of Japan.

Historically, there were about 60 villages in Miyama before the modern period, but at the end of the 19th century the Meiji government decreed that these villages should be amalgamated into five larger village clusters called Chii, Hiraya, Miyajima, Turugaoka and Ono. In 1955, following a government policy so-called the Showa Consolidation, these five villages were consolidated and called Miyama Town, although the former five larger village clusters still remain as administrative subdivisions, named *chiku* (district in English). In addition, in the five districts there are 57 isolated settlements called *mura* (village in English) which function as the smallest communal units.^{4, 5)}

There are about 30 households per settlement in Miyama and the total population consists of 5,200 people forming about 1,950 households. Miyama inhabitants continue to show a strong loyalty to their own village and district rather than to Miyama Town, probably owing to both the physical distance and the social and cultural differences between them. Reflecting the local people's preference as well as implementing local policies, these districts organise many local activities using local facilities such as the primary school and the community centre. In addition, every *mura* (i.e. village or settlement) still organises its own cultural and social activities including festivals, religious practices and communal services.

Concerning Miyama residents' economic activities, most households make ends meet from a combination of agriculture, forestry and paid employment. In 1995, about 900 households owned small-scale private plots of paddy field with most units being less than 100 square metres, and more than 1,000 households owned private woodlands, the average area of which was also small, less than 500 square metres (Miyama-cho Somuka 1996). These natural resources were used for obtaining everyday food products and for generating a cash income from the production of rice for *sake* (traditional Japanese rice wine), green tea leaves or flowers.

Regarding agriculture and forestry, along with the nationwide downturn in these industries, devastation of cultivated land and forests as well as depopulation had become severe by the late 1970's. These problems reached the lowest point in 1978 when both the local government and residents began to tackle the revitalization of their community. In the

first decade of revitalization, Miyama people concentrated on reclaiming their cultivated land and, since 1989, the Miyama government has promoted tourism development by emphasising the area's distinctive rural environments. This tourism development has been successful in terms of number of tourist arrivals, which has dramatically increased from 240,000 in 1989 to 700,000 in 2003, and Kita village, described below, is the village which has contributed the most to this success.

5. Kita village: Towards tourism development

Kita village is located in Chii district, Miyama, and in 1993 it was selected as an Important Preservation District for Groups of Historic Structures owing to its recognition as an outstanding mountain village. Since then, Kita has become the most popular tourist attraction in Miyama and more than 230,000 people visit annually. Kita was approved as an Important Preservation District not only because of a group of traditional houses with thatched roofs, but also because the surrounding views were typical of the scenery described in old Japanese folk tales. In fact, the vista of this village consists of the river, agricultural land, wooden houses with thatched roofs, forests and mountains, and as a result, it is interpreted as a typical example of *satoyama*.

There are about 40 households in Kita, whose residences are located along the Yura River. The residents used to generate income by working in forestry and agriculture but in the late 20th century these industries became unprofitable. The village also became such an aging community that, like other aging villages, it was often described as "the village where no baby cries." In Kita, as a result of these circumstances, on the one hand old houses were not replaced by new ones and, on the other, alternative commercial activities were needed to increase the existing villagers' income and to encourage young people to move into the village. Accordingly, from the middle of the 1980's the residents started to consider tourism development by using their living environment as the inspiration for a new local revitalising activity.

Since the 1970's both the Agency for Cultural Affairs and Kyoto Prefecture had considered Miyama as a potential area for Preservation Districts for Groups of Historic Structures. In 1989, these authorities gave methodological and financial support to the Miyama government's in-depth research into assessing future nomination. However, in 1984 Kita villagers had already started their own discussion about ways of sustaining the village, especially its outstanding scenery of cultivated land and thatched houses. As a result of this discussion, for example, a cooperative for thatched roof maintenance was created.

Then in 1989 when the government research commenced, the residents arranged their own bimonthly workshops to learn about the system and examples of Preservation Districts in order to judge the feasibility and eligibility of their own application. Furthermore, after the authority published its report, the residents held a meeting to review it and they conferred with Miyama Town government about the conservation of Kita village and the application for nomination as an Important Preservation District.

After 1993 when Kita village was selected as the 36th Preservation District, several tourist facilities, such as restaurants, souvenir shops, car parks and toilets, were built. These

facilities have been owned and managed by the company run by the local community and have achieved 63 million yen in sales annually. Most residents consider their local tourism development positively. Referring to a survey conducted by Kita village (Hozonchiku 10-shunen kinen gyoji jikko iinkai 2003), 82 percent of them claimed that jobs and income had increased owing to tourism and 79 percent of them considered that the village was now able to offer several new jobs to young people. In addition, 70 percent stated that the change in the village gave them great expectations for the future. Simultaneously, however, most residents worried about the dramatic change of their village into a major tourist site. In fact, more than three quarters of the residents expressed a preference for tourist numbers to remain stable or even decrease.

The residents continue to discuss ways of managing tourism and surviving within the village. According to some local workshops, the majority opinion of the residents is that the most important consideration is not visitors but the residents themselves, so the residents do not meet all the tourist demands, preferring to give priority to their own satisfaction with their everyday lives in Kita. In addition, most residents agree with the idea that the more the residents enjoy their own life in Kita, the more tourists will want to visit to appreciate them as well as their village.


Indeed, tourism development in Kita aims to conserve the village itself with the traditional houses and the attempt seems to be successful so far.

5.1 Kita village: Tourism practices

There are several types of tourism practices in Kita of which one of the most common is a one-day coach tour arranged by several nationwide tour agencies. Most coaches stop at Kita village for about 45 minutes, and so passengers can look around and purchase some local vegetables during the break. Independent travel is also popular, with individual tourists arriving by private car or motorbike to look around the village in their own time. After the selection of Kita as a conservation area, the number of tourists increased dramatically from 50,000 in 1993 to 235,000 in 2003.

According to the results of my original interviews conducted with approximately 70 tourists⁶⁾, a main motive for their visit was that they had seen a TV programme or had heard news about Kita and wanted to check the facts for themselves. Another major purpose was that visitors came to see the traditional houses with thatched roofs. Some tourists came to appreciate the beautiful scenery and of these some enjoyed only natural features, whereas others were interested in a variety of rural settings. In addition, 60 percent of the respondents once lived in the countryside, and they came to Kita village to remind themselves of their former lives in rural areas.

However, most respondents had little interest in contributing to the conservation of rural settings in Kita and Miyama, though most of them regarded environmental protection there as important. In fact, about 40 percent of interviewees thought there was nothing they could do themselves to conserve the rural settings in Kita and Miyama, although 16 percent of the respondents were motivated to donate small sums of money to the village itself. There was one respondent who insisted that the conservation of Kita was a task only for local residents, not visitors.



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Picture 1 Visitors exploring Kita village.

The manager of a guesthouse in Kita comments on this situation saying that villagers once enjoyed communicating with visitors in depth. However, currently they cannot find time to do this, as on the one hand visitors explore Kita for less than one hour, and on the other hand, the villagers are too busy to cope with so many tourists. This manager is disappointed with a situation in which they can neither select their guests nor share their thoughts about Kita village with them. A young resident also states that it is not necessary for Kita to become a popular tour site, yet it is important for the villagers to consider how they offer their hospitality to visitors.

It seems that Kita villagers struggle to manage tourism practices and build a relationship with tourists. To give some insights into this struggle, there are two noteworthy programmes in Kita which allow villagers to interact with visitors: school trips with homestay and thatching experience tours.

5.2 School trips with homestay

Since 2003 a noteworthy alternative tour form in Kita village has been the hosting of several school trips from urban areas, mainly from the Tokyo metropolitan area. The starting point was that a tour agency, here called K Company for convenience, proposed hosting school trips to Miyama Town. The main aim of K Company was to develop a method for managing a new type of school trip in relation to environmental education. At the beginning, K Company asked Miyama Town for some Japanese style accommodation and for several local people who could instruct students so that they could experience agricultural and rural

activities on site.

However, by mistake, K Company promised one school that they would be able to offer a homestay type of accommodation for the students, so the school tour manager asked Miyama Town whether it could help the company to provide homestay accommodation. The first contact, a local government official in the tourism section, here called AB, happened to be a Kita villager, and he persuaded his neighbours to let the students stay in their homes during the school trip. According to AB, this task was the most difficult to achieve, as the idea of homestay was brand-new for most villagers, and they could not imagine what they would have to do. Therefore, AB visited every villager's house to explain the aims of this school trip.

At first, most residents did not approve of the request, as they could not visualise how homestay would work but finally they accepted. AB commented that most villagers eventually agreed only because one of Kita's own, i.e. AB himself, was in charge of that difficult task. Despite the difficulties of the first experiment, Kita village officially showed its approval by reporting that this could be a brand-new and useful way of managing tourism and urban-rural interchange. In fact, most Kita residents were willing to offer homestay accommodation again.

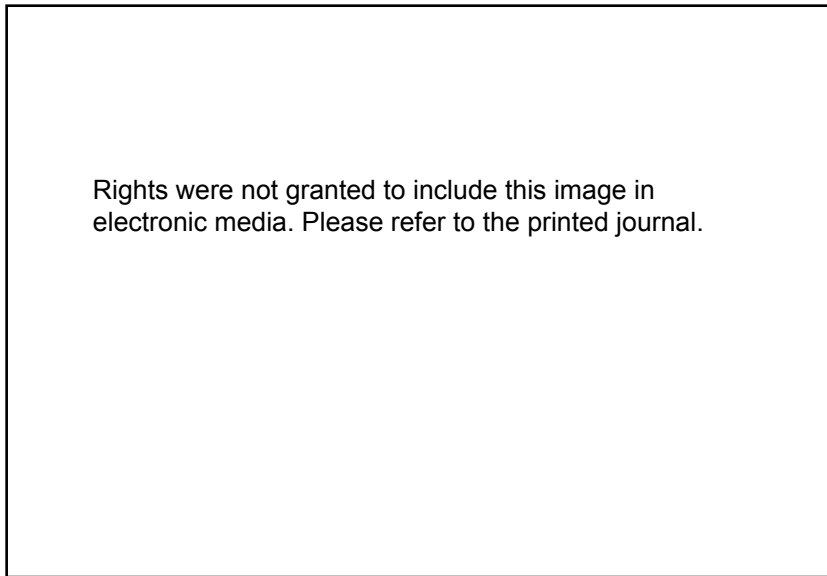
Despite local villagers' approval, some officials of Miyama Town are not enthusiastic about the result, since they consider that in the future this type of tour should be managed by tour agencies without support from the local authority. In addition, the tour agency realises that other types of accommodation, such as hotels and bed and breakfast, can be more profitable than homestay. Therefore, the school tour manager admits that homestay is unlikely to be an option when K Company launches school trips in Miyama as an ordinary tour product.

Therefore a new type of tour programme, the school trip with homestay, is welcome and fruitful at present, and Kita villagers have a strong motivation to develop this activity. However, other stakeholders do not totally approve of it for the future, so it will be a challenge for local people to carry out further development of homestay programmes.

5.3 Thatching experience tour

Another remarkable tour programme held in Kita is a thatching experience tour arranged by thatchers. There is no official national certificate or training programme for thatchers in Japan, yet customarily a person who has trained for ten years under a professional thatcher's instruction can obtain most permits for thatching and house construction. In Miyama, by the 1990's, the number of thatchers had plummeted to three owing to the decrease in the number of houses with thatched roofs. In addition, all three thatchers were about to retire, so Miyama Town and some local construction companies recruited young people from outside the town and trained them as thatchers. At present, owing to this last-minute intervention, several young thatchers are in business, and one, here called CD, came to lead the thatching experience tour programme.

CD graduated from a university in Kobe City in the Kansai urban area, where he gained awareness of environmental issues after taking some modules in environmental studies. After graduating, he came to Miyama to join the thatcher training programme, since



Picture 2 Thatching experience.

his dream was to become an architect with the skill of thatching. His main motive as tour leader is to offer the tour participants the opportunity to think about thatching and sustainable development, and in particular their connection with environmental issues. In fact, CD himself rarely tries to fit into the local community and almost never thinks about any matter from the community point of view. For example, he criticises various activities related to local revitalization in Miyama for wasting both the local budget and human resources. In Miyama, it is unlikely that anyone would welcome a person who is so disrespectful of the local community.

Despite the fact that CD's attitude is not appreciated in Miyama, the thatching experience tour in Kita was realised because a senior apprentice, named EF for convenience, supported CD's plan and allowed the tour participants to experience a part of his professional job, that is, thatching genuine traditional roofs. During the tour, EF as a leader of young thatchers, supervised both other thatchers and tourists learning how to thatch the roofs.

EF is a person of Miyama origin and grew up in Kita village. He once went to the Kansai urban area to become a musician, but returned to his home town and started to train as a thatcher. EF observed the process of local revitalization in Kita and has been inspired by several local residents who have led the tourism development. EF said that he always thinks about Kita village and its future whenever he works as a thatcher. In other words, for EF, and probably for most people of Miyama origin, Kita village and the community is the primary concern, and environmental issues or the sustainability of traditional techniques like thatching are secondary.

However, partly owing to the tour leader, CD, most participants prefer discussing environmental matters or the architectural value of thatched roofs to obtaining information and knowledge of Kita village or Miyama. The main interest of many participants, most of whom were art students or trainee architects, was thatched roofs, traditional architecture or environmental tourism. In fact, the reasons why these participants joined this programme were: an interest in traditional houses or houses with thatched roofs as a type of architecture; curiosity about traditional architecture and education; their affection for thatchers; and an interest in comparing Kita with other ecotourism or rural tourism destinations. In addition, one participant claimed that he joined this tour because he happened to have some free time. In contrast to these reasons, no participant showed an interest specifically in Kita village, Miyama, or the management of the local community.

Accordingly, an examination of the thatching experience tour reveals that there are explicit gaps between people of Miyama origin, some immigrant thatchers and tour participants in terms of tourism practices and the understanding of Kita village.

6. Diverse understandings of Kita: The outcomes of the case study

The case of Kita village, Miyama Town, shows a variety of tourism practices involving diverse stakeholders. Local residents are eager to manage tourism development in order to sustain and survive with the village, namely the local community. The selection as an Important Preservation District accelerates tourism development in Kita, yet the local residents give their own lives priority over tourist satisfaction. In contrast, the motives of independent and group tourists are spontaneous and casual, as they tend to visit the village only after exposure through the media.

There are two noteworthy tourism practices in Kita: one is the school trip with homestay and the other is the thatching experience tour. The first demonstrates that offering homestay accommodation can give local residents an opportunity to explain their concept of tourism development directly to house guests. However, other stakeholders do not appreciate school trips with homestay accommodation since the administration of the scheme entails unprofitable and time-consuming tasks.

The other practice reveals that thatchers differ in their understanding of tourism development in Kita depending on their personal background. Although the senior thatcher, who was brought up in Miyama, attempts to inform tour participants of local people's motives and opinions about tourism development, the thatcher who has been leading the thatching experience tours is more interested in environmental issues than in Kita. As a result, tour participants learn about conservation or the environment in general and do not pay attention to local matters during the tours.

Here it is clear that there are diverse stakeholders who differently understand the value of Kita and seek their own goals or enjoyment of tourism practices. The notion of landscape might well provide the key aspect when this result is evaluated further, since this notion implies that the images of rural environments as tourist attractions are created symbolically and subjectively by various stakeholders. In other words, although tours seem to be experienced in a unique place by various people, the landscape which is enjoyed, consumed

or used is clearly different for each person. Hence, it is important to grasp how all the stakeholders interpret the tour site as landscape and what features they include in this interpretation.

The case of Kita indicates that on the one hand local residents equate the landscape with their living environment and their own community; thus, the most important point for them is to sustain and survive with that community. On the other hand, other stakeholders such as tour operators or tourists search for some images of environmental friendliness or of magnificent structures. In addition, even if these stakeholders emphasise the importance of conserving the tour sites, what they denote is not the real environment where local residents live but their ideal interpretation of the landscape.

7. Conclusion

The notion of landscape is that every viewer has their own interpretation of a place which fits their ideal image. In discussing tourism practices, this notion is useful, as the practices are carried out not only in real places but also in the landscape which is abstract and subjective. *Satoyama*, a common type of Japanese rural landscape and a popular tourist attraction, exemplifies the fact that interpretation is subjective since historical conditions have changed the meaning of *satoyama* from forestry land around villages to all elements of the rural environment. This change has clearly been influenced by the recent environmental discussion in Japan.

Concerning the utilisation of rural landscape in terms of tourism practices, the nomination of properties and heritage has a strong influence. Originally, both internationally and nationally (in Japan), there was no category suitable for rural landscape, yet following a series of environmental movements rural landscapes can now be selected as World Heritage sites internationally and as cultural properties in Japan.

A case study of Kita village, Miyama, highlights the tendency for stakeholders to construct their preferred landscape on the rural environment and to attempt to achieve their own goals. Focusing on the types of stakeholders in this context, there are clear differences between local and non-local people. Local people develop their landscape based on the daily use of rural environments and consider their community as the most important aspect of conservation. In contrast, non-local people tend to see rural settings from some “environmentally friendly” points of view and they are often less interested in local people and their activities.

It can be seen that tourism practices in terms of rural development and revitalization are sometimes disadvantageous to local people since their view of the tour site, i.e. of their residential area, is hardly recognised by others, whereas non-local stakeholders easily share each other’s landscapes. In this respect, the argument for rural tourism is not related to the management of rural environments and societies but is to be understood as managing competing groups who wish to develop symbolic images of rural areas.

Notes

- 1) In Japanese, the literal meaning of the word “*satoyama* 里山” is village 里 plus mountain 山. However, as explained in this section, the meanings of this word have changed and are multiple.
- 2) The antonym of *satoyama* is “*miyama* 深山” which is a place so far away from home that people had to stay overnight to accomplish their purposes such as timber and charcoal production.
- 3) Asahi Shinbun 朝日新聞 is the original name.
- 4) In Miyama, these 57 settlements are usually called “*mura* (village in English),” for example, Kita *mura* (Kita village). In the Japanese government system *mura* (village) is a type of municipal authority, smaller than *machi* (town), but the use of *mura* (village) in Miyama is different from the official one. In this paper I will use the word “village” in order to indicate the settlements and the name “Kita village” following local usage.
- 5) In 2006 there was another nationwide consolidation in Japan. Miyama Town amalgamated with three neighbouring towns, and now Miyama is a part of Nantan City. However, as the data shown in this paper was collected before the amalgamation, Miyama Town is regarded here as an individual municipal authority.
- 6) I conducted interviews with about 70 tourists while I was doing my fieldwork in Miyama in 2003-2004.

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