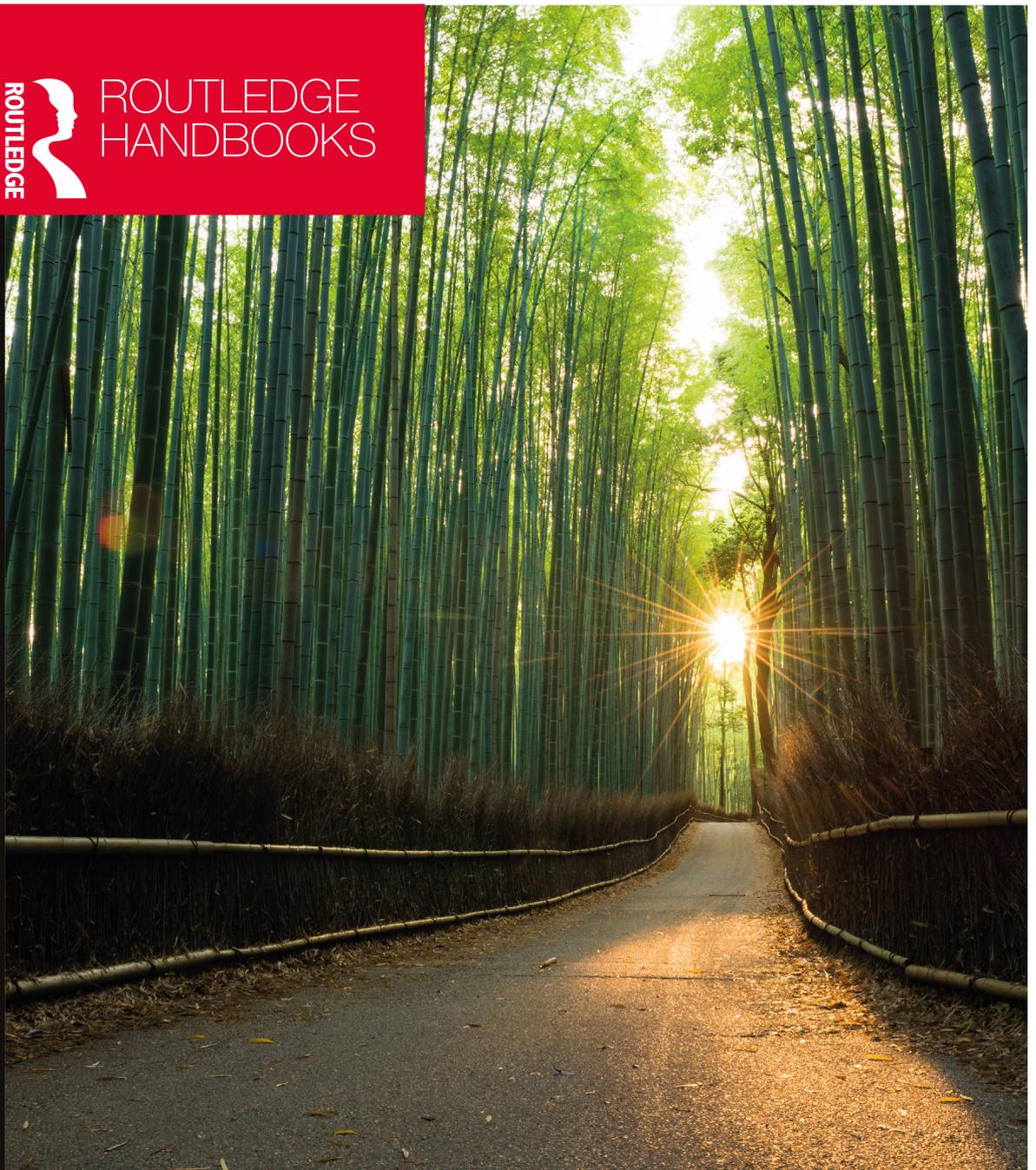




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PART II Chapter 16

Tourism

Takayoshi Yamamura and Philip Seaton

Introduction

Like in many other countries, the history of travel in Japan can be traced back to religious pilgrimages in ancient times (Graburn 1983; Ishimori 1989; Funck and Cooper 2013). After the unification of Japan in the sixteenth century, the history of travel separates into four broad periods. The first is the popularisation of travel in the Edo period (1603-1868). Domestic peace and stability under the Edo Shogunate and the development of *kaidō* (main roads) and *shukuba machi* (inn towns) made safe travel possible for ordinary people. *Oshi* (shrine or temple staff who guided visitors and made accommodation arrangements for pilgrims) began appearing in places such as Ise, the site of the most popular pilgrimage to Ise Shrine. They acted much in the way travel agents do today and popularised travel throughout the whole country (Kanzaki 1990: 190; Shirahata 1996: 191). The second period is from the Meiji Restoration (1868) up to the Asia Pacific War, when travel was based on the policy of *fukoku kyōhei* ('rich nation, strong military'). The origins of *ensoku* and *shūgaku ryokō* (school field trips) were in military training and this tradition spread throughout the country from the Meiji Period. Moreover, many people took trips to overseas territories such as Korea and Manchuria (Yamamura 2015b). The third period incorporates the rise of group leisure travel, both domestically and internationally, during the period of Japan's rapid economic growth following World War II (Yamamura 2011). And the fourth period, which began around 2000, is characterised by an increase in independent travel, changes to tourism business practices and tourist behaviour caused by the computer and Internet revolution, shifts in government priorities and tourism policies, and a rapid increase in inbound tourism.

In this chapter, first we present an overview of Japan's postwar tourism to establish the historical context of tourism in Japan today. Then, we outline changes in the country's tourism policy following the year 2000 and summarise some key tourism issues facing Japan today. Finally, we discuss national branding and contents tourism (tourism induced by works of popular culture such as anime) under the 'Cool Japan' strategy.

Japan's postwar tourism: from mass tourism to next-generation tourism

During the period of high growth (the 1960s and 1970s), transportation and social infrastructure developments triggered new forms of tourist behaviour. Capacity and speed were the key characteristics of new public transport systems, such as bullet trains and jumbo jets, and continuous technological progress led to increased passenger volumes and reduced travel times. It became common for groups of tourists to visit those areas where transportation infrastructure had been developed. Increases in disposable income and the development of the aviation industry also led to the popularisation of overseas travel. Japanese citizens were permitted to travel freely overseas after 1964 and the number of people departing the country exceeded one million for the first time in 1972. Travel was still an unusual activity for most people in this period and group travel was the norm for overseas travel. Transportation companies (airlines, railways and buses, etc.) and travel agencies played the central role in developing the tourist industry. The *hatchi-gata-kankō* model ('point of departure tourism', in other words, package tours organised by the tourism operators outside the destination) was predominant.

From the 1970s, increased car ownership facilitated the growth of independent travel, and travel campaigns by Japan National Railways and media coverage in magazines like *an-an* and *non-no* made independent travel more acceptable and fashionable, particularly for women (Sugawa-Shimada 2015: 41). During the 1980s and 1990s, therefore, attention shifted to developing tourism facilities and the value of regional resources in destinations. During the years of the bubble economy, many resorts were developed with capital from outside the local areas. Local governments supported and promoted the construction of facilities such as parks, museums and *onsen* (hot spring) resorts based on the policy of *furusato sōsei jigyō* (hometown creation projects, 1988–89). After the collapse of the bubble economy, tourism promotion was regarded as a key strategy for revitalising devastated local economies. Public facilities and resources deemed critical for local reinvigoration were (re)developed, but local governments could not always afford to take the lead and tourism promotion often relied on the initiative of local residents. Regional initiatives to create new forms of tourism, so-called 'new tourism' or *chakuchi-gata-kankō* (community-based tourism), emerged

alongside conventional mass tourism in the 1990s. Tourism in Japan today continues to exist primarily as community-based tourism.

Since around 2000, the Internet has transformed travel behaviour and has joined transportation infrastructure, public facilities and regional resources as one of the most significant factors shaping the tourism industry. The Internet has enabled people to buy plane tickets or book hotels without travel agencies acting as intermediaries. Consequently, the mass tourism model has undergone a fundamental test of its significance and value. The dissemination and reception of tourism information has also been transformed. Private companies provide most information within the package tours of mass tourism, and local tourism associations play the central role in the independent travel of community-based tourism. But today, individual tourists share information via social media and Internet sites such as TripAdvisor. A wide variety of web-based communities exists and these share information about travel free from conventional local ties and business connections. For example, some people share information online about sub-culture, such as the locations of anime, which travel agencies and local communities have not yet realised have become sites of tourism (Okamoto 2015). In other words, tourists are no longer just customers, but they themselves provide tourism information and thereby become tourism creators and tourism generators. Ishimori and Yamamura (2009) have called this ‘next generation tourism’, namely tourism created by tourists themselves autonomously in the digital age. A good example of this is so-called ‘contents tourism’, which we discuss at the end of the chapter.

The Internet has also had an enormous impact on the behavior of individual tourists and the meanings of their travel experiences. Next generation tourism has precipitated a shift in consciousness for both the host and guest, from a relationship where travel goods are bought and sold to a joint interaction between people of equal standing. For example, after the Great Hanshin Earthquake in 1995, volunteers (particularly younger people) rushed to Kobe from all over the country and helped with recovery work. After the Great East Japan Earthquake in 2011, locals and volunteers exchanged information via the Internet, giving way to a more comprehensive movement. So-called volunteer tourism or ‘voluntourism’ challenges traditional definitions of tourism as ‘travel for the purpose of leisure’ in that it represents travel ‘combining voluntary work and leisure’ or ‘for work as leisure’; but nonetheless it has become a widely-recognised social phenomenon. Furthermore, the idea of ‘tourism for post-disaster restoration’ continues to gain prominence and exists as a subcategory of contents tourism, whereby media

producers set dramas or anime in disaster areas in the explicit hope that the resulting contents tourism will aid recovery (Seaton *et al* 2017: pages will be added later).

Next generation tourism, therefore, demonstrates a fundamental desire to link the virtual connections between people made in the online world with actual connections made through tourism that result in face-to-face interaction. As such, next generation tourism constitutes an implicit critique and reconsideration of postwar Japan's ideal of prioritising the economy and workplace while family, regional communities, hobbies and connections with friends come second. It is not simply tourism for the economy or as a form of consumption, but a form of tourism where travelers interact with one another and make personal connections. People who are not considered travel professionals—such as travelers, local private businesses, and chambers of commerce and industry—cooperate in various ways and forums outside the conventional tourism networks of travel agencies, event organisers, and the aviation and transportation industries (see Ishimori and Yamamura 2009). This has led to various forms of tourism experience, such as face-to-face interaction only made possible via travel, being generated in modern Japan that do not necessarily fit into the conventional definition of 'tourism goods'.

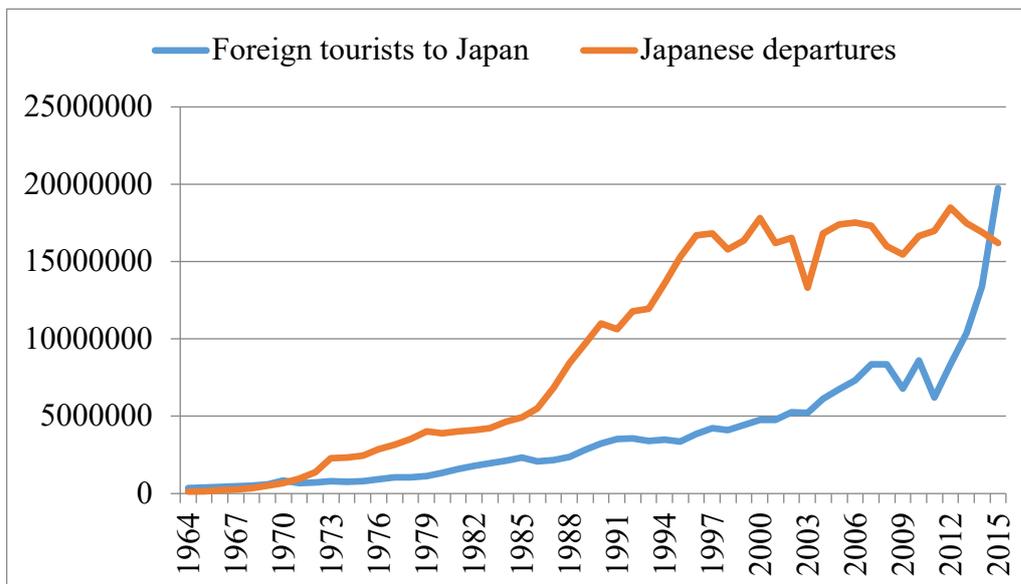
Tourism policy since 2000: the Tourism-Oriented Country Policy and Cool Japan Strategy

Japan's economic policies following the War focused on obtaining foreign currency via the export of manufactured goods and tourism policy was a low priority. But with Japan's growing trade surpluses, in 1987 the then Ministry of Transport formulated a plan to double overseas travel (the 'Ten Million Programme'). A key aspect of this plan was using outbound tourism to offset Japan's trade surpluses.

However, the economic structure underpinning Japan's export-led economy changed when the bubble economy collapsed. The economy did not recover for over ten years (the 'lost decade'), companies restructured, many local authorities merged to cut costs through economies of scale (Rausch 2014), and the tourism industry gradually gained policymakers' attention because the existing resources of a region could be used to generate revenues and promote local economies. In the 1990s, the imbalance between inbound and outbound tourism was also becoming a problem. The promotion of

outbound tourism had not been matched with measures to attract inbound tourism. Consequently, the Japanese government shifted its policy emphasis and made inbound tourism an important national priority from the late 1990s (Funk and Cooper 2013: 46). In 2003, Prime Minister Koizumi Jun'ichirō stated that the number of foreign tourists in Japan would be doubled to ten million by 2010 and made his Tourism Nation Declaration. The Visit Japan campaign was launched to promote inbound tourism. Furthermore, the Tourism Nation Promotion Act was enacted in 2007, and the Tourism Nation Promotion Basic Plan was formulated. Specific objectives of this plan included: 1) a target of ten million foreign tourists visiting Japan by 2010 and ultimately increasing the number of inbound tourists to the same level as outbound tourists; 2) a target of twenty million Japanese tourists traveling abroad by 2010 and expanding mutual international exchange; and 3) increasing the number of nights per person that domestic Japanese tourists (excluding business travelers) stay in accommodation from 2.77 nights in 2007 to four nights a year by the year 2010 (Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism 2007). Amidst this increased focus on tourism policy, the Japan Tourism Agency was established in 2008 as an external bureau of the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism and given the task of realising the Tourism Nation vision.

Figure 1: Inbound and Outbound Tourists, 1964-2015



Source: JNTO, 'Visitor Arrivals, Japanese Overseas Travelers 1964-2015.' Accessed October 27, 2016: http://www.jnto.go.jp/jpn/statistics/visitor_trends/index.html

The target of ten million inbound tourists was achieved in 2013, three years later than planned. The Visit Japan campaign that began in 2003 boosted foreign tourist numbers, but the global financial crisis and economic downturn of 2007-08 caused considerable decline in 2009 and there was another slump in 2011 due to the Great East Japan Earthquake and Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disaster. The number of tourists visiting Japan recovered and reached over ten million people for the first time in 2013. The primary factors behind the sharp increase in foreign visitors were relaxed visa requirements for people from China and ASEAN countries, streamlined immigration procedures, increased flights offered by low-cost carriers (LCC), and the further weakening of the yen under the economic policies of the Abe government dubbed 'Abenomics'.

Having achieved the ten million inbound tourists target and with the 2020 Olympics and Paralympics awarded to Tokyo, '2014 Action Programme Toward the Realisation of Japan as a Tourism-Oriented Country – "Toward the 20 Million Age of Inbound Tourists"' was announced (The Ministerial Council on the Promotion of Japan as a Tourism-Oriented Country 2014). A new inbound tourist target of twenty million people by 2020 was set.

In 2015, the number of inbound tourists shot up to 19.74 million people, of whom eighty per cent were from Asia (reference). Factors behind this sudden increase in 2015 included an increased demand in Asian countries for vacations abroad, particularly from China due to the expansion of the middle class, the ongoing weakness of the yen, tourism promotions, further visa exemptions and relaxations to requirements, policy factors such as an expansion of the system for consumption tax exemption, expanded air routes, an increase in cruise ships docking in Japan, and preference for a destination with minimal terrorism and infectious disease risks compared to other countries (Development Bank of Japan 2016). The government judged these conditions as being the likely circumstances that would make early achievement of the twenty million people target possible (the target was reached in 2016). They also held the 'Tourism Vision Design Council for Supporting the Japan of Tomorrow' in March 2013 and decided to set higher objectives for inbound foreign tourists, to 40 million in 2020 and 60 million in 2030.

The sharp increase in the number of inbound tourists in 2015 also meant that inbound tourists exceeded outbound Japanese tourists for the first time since 1970. After the Ten

Million Programme (1987-1992) the number of outbound tourists plateaued at around sixteen million from the mid 1990s. The crossover in 2015 (Figure 1), therefore, was a major turning point for tourism in Japan.

Tourism and Cool Japan

A characteristic of Japan's tourism policy today is that inbound promotions are not only part of the National Tourism strategy, but also part of the Cool Japan Strategy, which is a promotional strategy for overseas expansion in the creative industries (such as design, anime, fashion, and film) spearheaded by the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI). Both strategies have expanded together and have been influenced by the qualitative change of tourism in Japan discussed earlier.

The term 'Cool Japan' (mirroring the 'Cool Britannia' slogan in the United Kingdom of the late 1990s) had become widely known after NHK broadcast a television programme entitled 'Cool Japan: Hakkutsu! Kakkōii Nippon' (Digging Up! Cool Japan) from around 2006; but the Cool Japan Strategy as national policy effectively began in June 2010 with the establishment of the Cool Japan Room in the Manufacturing Industries Bureau of METI. Since the inauguration of the second Abe Cabinet in 2012, a cabinet minister has been placed in charge of the Cool Japan Strategy (concurrent with various other duties). The Cool Japan Strategy was originally focused on promoting exports from Japan's creative industries, which is a strategic industrial field, and had no direct relation to the tourism industry. However, a key turning point came the year following establishment of the Cool Japan Room when the Great East Japan Earthquake occurred on 11 March 2011. The Cool Japan Government and Private Sector Expert Conference drafted a proposal entitled 'Creation of a New Japan - Connecting "Culture and Industry" with "Japan and Abroad"' (Cool Japan Kanmin Yūshikisha Kaigi 2011) that touched on tourism. Post-3/11, harmful rumours (particularly about radiation levels) stemming from the disaster needed to be eliminated and trust in Japan's brand restored. The main initiatives were to: 1) rediscover and promote various resources and contents which existed all over Japan, 2) export them, and 3) use them to attract tourists.

Following this, in December 2012 the Media and Content Industry Division of the Commerce and Information Policy Bureau for METI published a report entitled 'Cool Japan senryaku: Chūkan torimatome' (Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry 2012). It contains an 'Overview of the "Large Earnings" Cool Japan Strategy', which proposes

a gradual transition from exporting content to attracting inbound tourists. The essence of the strategy is:

- Disseminate information about Japanese content, fashion, food, and tourism to consumers overseas and create a Japan boom;
- Create systems locally to raise profits through the selling of products and provision of services (stores, EC, TV shopping, etc.);
- Call on fans of Japan to visit the country (the sacred site) and create systems that generate consumption in Japan; and
- Increase inbound tourism to Japan (= ‘*seichi*’, the sacred site)

Noteworthy in this proposal is that in addition to giving the attraction of inbound tourists an explicit position within the Cool Japan Strategy, the expression ‘Japan = “*seichi*”, the sacred site’ is used. ‘The sacred site’ here is not being used in a religious context, but is rather a term used among fans of Japanese popular culture (particularly idols and anime) and refers to the location where their favourite idols, works and products originate. This term came into general use with a change in the media environment around 2007 when the digitisation of anime works was advancing (so the backgrounds in anime were often created using digital photos of real places) and it became easy for fans to share information, images and video about anime locations with each other online. Anime fans gained attention by creating a new form of travel where visiting the scenes of favourite works was equated to making a pilgrimage (for example, tourism induced by the anime *Lucky Star*—see Yamamura 2015a). Contents tourism became a pioneering and representative example of next generation tourism and is particularly interesting in the sense that fan culture had a direct effect on national policy.

Then in 2013, the Japan Tourism Agency, Japan National Tourism Organisation, METI, and JETRO jointly published the ‘Collective Action Plan for Promoting Inbound Tourism’. This marked the cooperation between the National Tourism Policy and Cool Japan Strategy in both name and substance. In this action plan, references to the ‘dissemination of information relating to regions implementing Cool Japan operations and promoting visits to Japan to tourist locations called *sō-honzan* [head temples], or *seichi* [sacred sites]’ mirrored the language of fans (Japan Tourism Agency, JNTO, Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, and JETRO 2013).

Problems facing tourism in Japan

Tourism as a sector typically flourishes within an environment of natural, political and economic stability. Tourism is vulnerable to uncertainty, and tourism plans easily change in response to natural disaster, meteorological conditions, epidemics, political unrest, war, terrorism, recession, and exchange rates fluctuations. For example, the number of outbound Japanese tourists decreased by 1.6 million people in 2001 in the wake of the 9/11 terrorist attacks (Figure 1). There was a decline of 3,220,000 people in 2003 because of SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome) and the economic downturn and financial crisis in 2008 resulted in a decline of 1,310,000 outbound tourists. Tourist numbers are always vulnerable to contemporary macro forces (Kuzuno 2011: 16). The same applies for inbound tourists, too. In 2011 the Great East Japan Earthquake and the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disaster led to a decrease of 2.4 million inbound tourists in 2011 compared to the previous year.

Another factor that affects travel to and from Japan is political discord, especially regarding territorial disputes. In 2015, Japan's neighbours China and South Korea were in first and second places respectively in the numbers of inbound tourists (third to fifth place were Taiwan, Hong Kong, and USA) and delicate political issues regarding history and territory represent a substantial vulnerability in Japan's tourism sector. For example, there was a 43.6 per cent decrease (a reduction of 52,000 people) in Chinese inbound tourists in 2012 compared to the previous year. This was due to the mass cancellation of group tours in the aftermath of a dispute over the purchase by the Japanese government of the Senkaku Islands (which are claimed by both China and Taiwan) in September of the same year (JCAST News 2012).

As previously mentioned, after the bubble burst, national and regional governments increasingly focused on inbound tourism as a means of acquiring foreign currency given the general slowdown in the economy. The emphasis of the economic benefits of tourism has shifted in the post-growth era. Now, tourism is also seen as a means of expanding the nonresident population, in other words, expansion of the local consumer base. Japanese society faces huge demographic challenges, such as a decreasing birthrate, aging population and a declining resident population (Matanle *et al* 2011). Regional communities in all areas (excluding Japan's biggest cities) are feeling the effects. Expanding the nonresident population through promoting tourism is considered an important policy for mitigating these problems via consumption-driven economic

revitalisation of regions (Kusatsu mirai kenkyūjo 2010).

When tourism is conceived in this way there are three important challenges. First, in the domestic tourism market there needs to be a reform of leisure and labour that allows for more travel over longer periods of time. Second, outsiders and foreigners need to be welcomed into regional societies (or local communities?). And third, tourism must be seen, not as an industry only for leisure, but also as a system for promoting local regions through cultural exchange.

Regarding leisure and labour, the number of days Japanese people spend traveling domestically is extremely short compared to those in other advanced industrial countries. According to the Japan Tourism Agency, the average number of nights in accommodation per over-night trip (including business travel) for a Japanese person is 2.0, while the average number of domestic over-night trips (including business travel) per year is 2.8. Thus, the average Japanese person spends 5.6 nights per year in tourist accommodation. This compares to 13.3 nights in Australia, 14.1 nights in America, and 19.7 nights in France (Japan Tourism Agency 2010: 3-4). Not only does the custom of extended holidays not exist in modern Japanese society, but also, since the rapid economic growth period, there has been a deep-seated tendency to place high value on contribution to the workplace, resulting in a low rate of paid vacations being taken. Furthermore, the rate of employees with long working hours surpasses that of all advanced countries (Japan Institute for Labour Policy and Training 2007). These attitudes towards leisure and labour have had a huge impact on tourist destinations in Japan. They do not anticipate long-term stays and thus cannot support them sufficiently, both in terms of facilities and management. If revitalising the regional economy through tourism means increasing the number of days spent in accommodation by visitors, it is clear that attitudes towards leisure and labour constitute a considerable obstacle.

The second challenge is whether localities are welcoming to visitors. From the long period of national isolation during the Edo period, through the opening of Japan during the Meiji period, and up to the present day, Japan has had a relatively stable society with comparatively small numbers of foreign residents. From a tourism perspective, the Japanese have been enthusiastic about overseas travel (or policies to send people abroad), but until the Visit Japan campaign began in 2003 there was little focus, both politically and in the national conscience, on welcoming foreign travelers. As such, regional communities in Japanese society are not that accustomed to accepting foreign

travelers. However, in the past decade national policies have precipitated a sudden increase in the number of foreign travelers. While many communities have worked hard to accommodate the change, there have been some high-profile instances of trouble between foreign travelers and regional communities. Some of the best-known examples are the signs and posters at restaurants and public baths that prohibit foreigners (for example, Arudou 2013). Furthermore, hate speech and xenophobic attacks on specific individuals and minority groups have become an increasingly prominent social issue in Japan (references). But if Japan is to aim for truly nationwide tourism, it must accommodate cultural differences and provide an environment where diverse groups can coexist in regional communities. Intercultural communication is a two-way process, of course, and while host communities have needed to understand their guests, others within Japan have noted that tourists also have a responsibility to understand and respect Japanese culture.

The third challenge relates to how people think of tourism itself. Japan has tended to focus on the economic aspects of tourism. During the recent surge in inbound tourists, tourism as a means of acquiring foreign currency has monopolised public discourse. For example, in 2014 and 2015, ‘binge shopping’ (*bakugai*) by Chinese tourists gained widespread media attention and was chosen as the top trend word (*ryūkōgo*) of 2015. Little focus was given to cultural exchange with the Chinese. However, tourism, besides being an economic activity, is ‘one of the foremost vehicles of cultural exchange’ in the words of ICOMOS, an international NGO in charge of the registration screening of UNESCO’s World Cultural Heritages (ICOMOS 1999). If tourism is going to be used to mitigate the problems caused by demographic change and to revitalise regions, there needs to be not only an economic impact but also a social impact. In other words, if tourists do not participate in community activities then there will be some financial benefits, but it will not truly lead to a revitalisation of regional communities. In this context, rather than transient tourists, repeater tourists who develop a long-term relationship with communities and long-stay travelers become more significant for realising the non-financial benefits to a community of tourism. Understanding this, the term *kankō machizukuri* (community development through tourism) became established in tourism discourse relating to tourism’s broader benefits to a community (Yasufuku *et al* 2016). Successful community development through tourism requires fundamental re-evaluation of the host—guest relationship, a change in how people conceive of tourism, a refocus on the non-financial benefits of tourism, and development of welcoming attitudes towards the tourists.

National Branding and Contents tourism through the Cool Japan Strategy

As touched upon in the previous section, the Cool Japan Strategy for national branding to promote the exporting of Japan's culture, especially its pop culture, has been in full force since 2010. The concept of 'soft power' as proposed by Joseph Nye (1990) and Douglas McGray's (2002) concept of the 'GNC: Gross National Cool' both helped push the Cool Japan Strategy forward.

However, the strategy is not without its challenges and critics. For example, Fukushima (2006: 18-19) argues:

One could argue that karaoke, sushi, and manga have little to do with Japan per se. That is, the non-Japanese who are attracted to these products of Japan may or may not associate them with the nation or people of Japan. Thus, the fact that karaoke, sushi, and manga have gained fans around the world does not necessarily equate to Japan or its people or policies gaining supporters around the world.

Ultimately, the problem with debates concerning Cool Japan is that they tend to focus on exporting Japan's pop culture to acquire foreign currency and end up becoming an argument praising pop culture. What needs to be debated is essentially how the consumption of Japan's contents can be used to increase the number of fans of Japan, which is when consumption of Japan's popular culture converts into soft power. One answer is a fusion of the Cool Japan and tourism strategies by positioning inbound tourism for fans of the Japan brand as the ultimate goal of the Cool Japan Strategy. The report titled 'Creation of a New Japan - Connecting "Culture and Industry" with "Japan and Abroad"' (discussed above) drafted by the Cool Japan Government and Private Sector Expert Conference was the first report to clearly demonstrate this course of action.

As it turns out, a precedent had already been set for such arguments in the early 2000s when the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was actively debating the position of pop culture within Japan's cultural diplomacy. For example, the 'Report Concerning the Application of Pop Culture in Cultural Diplomacy' published in November 2006 points out the need

for pop culture in both cultural and public diplomacy based on the following definition of pop culture (*poppu karuchā*): ‘Culture which is formed through the daily activities of the people’ and ‘culture which is formed by people purchasing and refining it while using it in their daily lives, and culture which can convey the essence of Japan through this, such as the sensitivities and spirituality of the Japanese people’ (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2006). Pop culture easily crosses national borders and circulates as mass culture. It has an advantage, therefore, over cultural diplomacy based on, for example, World Heritage sites, which tends to be drawn into national politics and iconography of the nation.

In this context, contents tourism (*kontentsu tsūrizumu*) has emerged as a new tourism concept from Japan. Closely related to literary tourism and film-induced tourism that started gaining considerable attention within tourism studies from the 1990s (Beeton, Yamamura and Seaton 2013; Seaton and Yamamura 2015), contents tourism has been defined as ‘travel behaviour motivated fully or partially by narratives, characters, locations and other creative elements of popular culture forms, including film, television dramas, manga, anime, novels and computer games’ (Seaton *et al* 2017: pages will be added later). It was originally a buzzword among tourism policymakers that was jointly coined by the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure and Transport, the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, and the Agency for Cultural Affairs (Ministry of Land, Infrastructure and Transport *et al* 2005). At the time, though, it was not usually mentioned in relation to debates over cultural diplomacy or the Cool Japan Strategy. The argument was limited to how media contents could be utilised as tourism resources and for the tourism promotion policies of local governments. However, as already mentioned, the Cool Japan and Visit Japan strategies have converged. As the number of inbound tourists has increased in recent years, a conspicuous phenomenon of (usually young) foreign tourists visiting sites related to pop culture contents has emerged (see for example Sabre 2016).

Conclusions

In the 2010s, Japanese tourism is in a period of dynamic transition. As this chapter has demonstrated, tourism connects together many issues that have been discussed in other chapters of this book: digital technology, diplomacy, relations with Asian neighbours, trade relations, economic revitalisation, leisure and work culture, demographic change, nation branding and popular culture. Japan may have had unstable political relationships with neighboring countries, but the new middle and wealthy classes in China, South

Korea, Taiwan and the ASEAN nations are visiting Japan in unprecedented numbers creating new, more experientially-based relations between peoples in Asia.

While there are some more Japan-specific issues within Japanese tourism (for example, hot spring culture and the short length of the average trip), there are also some forms of tourism in which Japan is an important case study of global phenomena and Japan has much to contribute to debates of global relevance. These include disaster tourism and ‘voluntourism’ (which overlaps with the in-vogue concept of ‘dark tourism’), debates regarding sustainability and community building through tourism in countries with aging and shrinking populations, and contents tourism. In particular, contents tourism does not only have huge economic potential as domestic and international fans visit the ‘sacred sites’ of Japanese popular culture. It also has potential to change the nature of the tourism experience within Japan as people interact while in Japan with other travelers of various nationalities and cultures who share their interest in Japanese popular culture. In this way, Japan’s pop culture acts, not only as a driver of tourism in our increasingly mediatised age, but also as an intermediary and facilitator for intercultural exchange within Japan.

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