



Ecotourism and World Natural Heritage: Its influence on islands in Japan

Dajeong Song^a, Suelo Kuwahara^{b,*}

^a Graduate School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Kagoshima University, Japan

^b Faculty of Law, Economics and Humanities, Kagoshima University, Japan

Received 22 April 2016; accepted 30 May 2016

Available online 11 July 2016

KEYWORDS

Ecotourism;
Yakushima;
Ogasawara;
Iriomotejima;
Amami Oshima;
World Natural Heritage

Abstract The article discusses the influence of World Natural Heritage registration on ecotourism by looking at the cases of Yakushima as the first World Natural Heritage site and Ogasawara as an advanced region of ecotourism in Japan, and also the Amami Islands and Iriomote Islands where various efforts have been taken toward the registration of World Natural Heritage.

© 2016 Publishing services by Elsevier B.V. on behalf of Institution for Marine and Island Cultures, Mokpo National University. This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC-ND license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>).

Introduction

Ecotourism in Japan started for the first time in the Ogasawara Islands as a form of whale watching in 1988, and was introduced further into Japan in the 1990s. In 1991, a survey on resources for ecotourism undertaken by the Ministry of the Environment was the first approach that took up ecotourism as a national initiative (Kaizu, 2008: 91). While ecotourism in foreign countries had its background in the Stockholm conference of 1972 and/or sustainable development theory, in Japan it was introduced with the aim of regional development and/or the promotion of natural experiences (ibid: 91). Further, Japanese ecotourism has been deeply related with World Natural Heritage, thus, in the registered or candidate areas for World Natural Heritage, aspects of regional development and environmental protection have often been the focus of the argument.

The Ministry of Environment chose five areas (Shiretoko, Tateyama, Okunikko, Hachijojima and Yakushima) as a

model area and initiated research on the promotion of nature-experience activities. The Ministry made specific proposals such as utilization and promotion, and the improvement of facilities according to each area's actual condition to make it possible to have guided tours such as the observation of wild animals in nature parks and experiences that bring people into contact with nature.

The two-year survey by the Ministry of the Environment clarified that a way to balance regional development with the preservation of the natural environment was absolutely necessary for the proper promotion of nature experience activities. As one of its points, the survey focused on ecotourism and studied the conditions and directions for its domestic promotion.¹

In this way, the Japanese approach to ecotourism that is different from overseas is connected to World Natural Heritage and shows a further development. Yakushima Island, where the first World Natural Heritage site in Japan was registered in 1993, shows a very successful case of ecotourism

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: kuwahara@leh.kagoshima-u.ac.jp (S. Kuwahara).
Peer review under responsibility of Mokpo National University.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.imic.2016.05.006>

2212-6821 © 2016 Publishing services by Elsevier B.V. on behalf of Institution for Marine and Island Cultures, Mokpo National University. This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC-ND license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>).

¹ Zaidan Hojin Kokuritsu Koen Kyokai & Zaidan Hojin Shizen Kankyo Kenkyu Senta, 1993: 3.

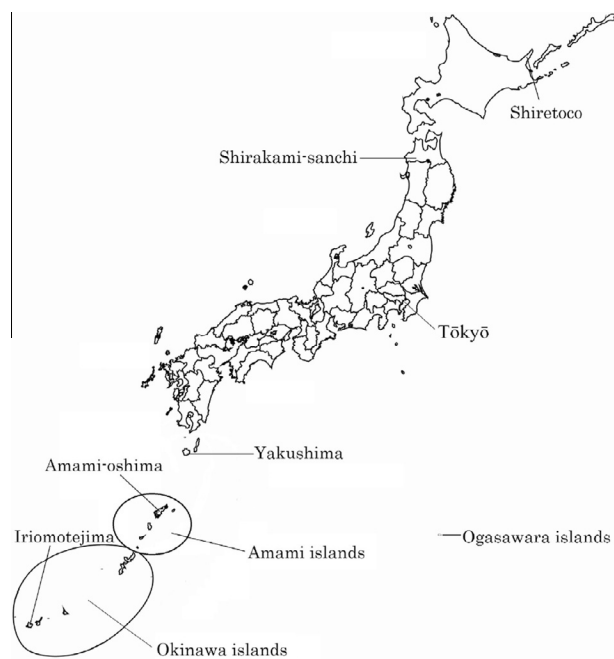


Fig. 1 Map of World Natural Heritage sites.

not only domestically but also globally, and thus it can be seen that Japanese ecotourism has a strong tendency to utilize the name value found with World Natural Heritage.

Currently, Japanese World Natural Heritage sites that are registered by UNESCO comprise four areas, that is, Yakushima (1993), Shirakami-sanchi (1993), Shiretoko (2005) and the Ogasawara Islands (2011). The candidate locations are Amami-Oshima, Tokunoshima Island, Yanbaru area of northern Okinawa Island and Iriomotejima Island (Fig. 1).

From the above description, we can see that Japanese ecotourism started from islands, and the ratio of island areas as World Natural Heritage sites is high. In this study, we look at Amami Oshima together with the other three islands that are advanced regions for ecotourism and discuss ecotourism in relation to World Natural Heritage. That is, how ecotourism and World Natural Heritage started in each island, and how such move affected each island. Finally, we will discuss the issues and prospects of the “Amami-Ryukyu” World Natural Heritage candidate site from the viewpoint of the registered World Natural Heritage areas. Our paper is based on data collected during our own fieldwork in Amami Oshima, and from earlier studies on Yakushima, Ogasawara and Iriomotejima.

Ecotourism promoted by World Natural Heritage registration

Ogasawara Islands

The first commercial whale watching in Japan was in Haha-jima in the Ogasawara Islands in the year of 20th anniversary in 1988 of Ogasawara’s reversion to Japanese administration in 1968. Members of the Ogasawara Commerce and Industry administration made an inspection of whale watching in Maui Island of Hawai’i as part of a regional development project

and this created an opportunity for initiating whale watching in the Ogasawara Islands.²

Historically, the Ogasawara Islands were known as uninhabited islands until 1830. Around that time, whaling was very popular in Europe and the United States. In Ogasawara, Chichijima’s Futami Bay was a natural port and attracted westerners to stay as a supply base of fuel and water for whaling ships (Morita, 1999: 42). Since then, the Ogasawara Islands have had a long history of whaling, which had been practiced in the coastal waters until just before whale watching was started in 1988. However, it was said that Ogasawara people felt bewilderment in realizing that whales had suddenly become an object of watching (Morita, 1999: 42–43, Ishihara et al., 2010: 12–13).

Meanwhile, a new approach to whale watching made steady progress, and the Ogasawara Whale Watching Association was established in 1989. Some researchers also belonged to the Association and engaged in whale research that was entrusted to the Ogasawara Village administration. Self-imposed rules for whale watching were made in 1992, and the 4th International Conference for Dolphins and Whales was held in 1994.³ Thus, the Association was established not only for receiving tourists, but also for playing a role as a research organization (Morita, 1999: 43).

Whales, which had long been the object of catching were utilized as a tourism resource, and Ogasawara’s tourism business saw a great turning point. “Promotion for Ecotourism” was decided as one of the basic policies for the tourism promotion plan for islands in 2000, and full scale efforts were undertaken. The purpose of Ogasawara’s ecotourism is clearly stated in the basic policies. That is, for tourists to get to know the history and culture of Ogasawara which were nurtured by nature, and for the islanders to develop the islands to live well while protecting the irreplaceable nature of the Ogasawara Islands (Zaidan Hojin Nihon Kotsu Kosha, 2005: 1). To realize the above goals, Ogasawara Ecotourism Promotion Committee was established in June 2002.

In May 2003, the Ogasawara Islands became a candidate site for World Natural Heritage together with Shiretoko and the Ryukyu Islands⁴ in the review meeting set up by the Ministry of Environment.⁵ By this time, the decrease of endemic and rare species by invasive species and the deterioration of the natural environment were known and the Ministry started the “Promotion Plan for Nature Regeneration of Ogasawara” (Suzuki, 2010). Since an oceanic island such as Ogasawara is vulnerable to invasive species, the concept of World Natural Heritage was introduced as a way to protect the unique ecological system of Ogasawara, and an attempt for registration was initiated (ibid).

On the other hand, the idea and practice of Ogasawara’s ecotourism was introduced and promoted by the Tokyo Metropolitan government with a top-down policy (Ishihara et al., 2010). At the initial stage, the promotion of Ogasawara’s ecotourism was advocated by the Tokyo Metropolitan government (Nakai, 2002). However, considering the fact that the Whale Watching Association was established before that, eco-

² Zaidan Hojin Nihon Kotsu Kosha, 2005: 27–30.

³ Ogasawara Whale Watching Association: <http://www.owa1989.com/owa/aboutus>.

⁴ Later, the name changed to “Amami-Ryukyu”.

⁵ See the website: <http://www.env.go.jp/nature/isan/kento/>.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/1107026>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/1107026>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)