



Traditional village forest landscapes: Tourists' attitudes and preferences for conservation



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H I G H L I G H T S

- Contributes to research on tourists' assessments of traditional village landscapes.
- Proposes traditional forest landscape be used to attract repeat tourists.
- Those under 40 years of age and with their family were more supportive of traditional forest conservation.
- Those with higher household income/education level were unwilling to pay more.
- A donation or entrance fee can be used to collect village forest conservation funds.

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This study examines a traditional village tree landscape on the Ryukyu Islands that provides tourists with an integrated experience of local culture, history, and nature. Using data derived from a sample of 417 respondents collected over a two-year period, it found that respondents under 40 years of age, or who were travelling with their family, were likely to give more to the tree landscape conservation fund, while respondents with a higher household income or higher education level tended not to donate more to the conservation of the village tree landscape. This study suggests that requests for a donation or entrance ticket can be used to collect conservation funds for natural resources.

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1. Introduction

Okinawa Prefecture, in the southernmost part of Japan, has attracted an increasing number of domestic and international tourists in recent years. Tourist numbers totaled 7.94 million in 2015, the largest number ever recorded (Okinawa Prefectural Government, 2016) and an increase of approximately 10.7% over 2014. The Okinawa Prefecture government has positioned tourism as a leading industry and has made numerous efforts to promote it. The "Okinawa Prefecture Basic Plan for Tourism Promotion" was issued to guide tourist development in Okinawa (Okinawa Prefectural Government, 2012).

According to the Tourism Statistics Handbook (Okinawa Prefectural Government, 2014), repeat visitors to Okinawa

accounted for 81% of total domestic visitors in 2013. Obviously, visitors-particularly repeat ones-will require an "authentic experience of Okinawa." In the most developed tourism regions, such as Europe, new holiday patterns are growing as tourists' preferences turn to a desire for more direct contact with nature and the environment and as interest increases in local customs, folklore, and resources (Eurostat, 2008). Some small villages will become new tourist destinations because of the attractiveness of their natural environment and culture and the opportunity for interaction with the local community. Okinawa Prefecture has a traditional village landscape built based on the "fengshui" concept during the Ryukyu Kingdom period, approximately 300 years ago. To protect against strong winds, village houses on the islands are encircled by multilayered forest belts consisting of house-embracing trees, well-preserved forests in the rear hill, and a forest belt in the front, which, together, enclose the village, along with forest belts along the coastline. To become an alternate tourism destination, it is

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important to understand tourists' attitudes to and preferences for village forest landscapes and develop a sustainable tourist strategy at each level of the administrative policymaking process to meet new tourist demands. Tourist attitude is defined as the psychological tendencies expressed by tourists' positive or negative evaluations when engaged in certain behaviors (Ajzen, 1991; Schiffman & Kanuk, 1994). Tourist attitude has been found to affect future tourist behavior (Lee, 2009).

Numerous empirical studies have reported on the monetary value of the amenity benefits of urban forests as recreational areas. Tyrvaïnen and Vaananen (1998) suggested that residents in Finland were willing to pay for small forest parks as a contribution to the quality of the housing environment. The monetary value of urban forests' non-priced benefits to residents (e.g., Jim & Chen, 2006; Tyrvaïnen, 2001) and to tourists (Majumdar, Deng, Zhang, & Pierskalla, 2011) have been widely studied. Residents' willingness to pay for community forest preservation is positively correlated with their perceptions of the benefits of forests but negatively associated with their annoying features (Lorenzo, Blanche, Qi, & Guidry, 2000). However, the mechanisms of tourists' valuations of village tree landscapes are still largely unknown.

In Okinawa Prefecture, traditional village tree landscapes that have been established and maintained over a long period played a significant role in earlier agricultural life and have protected the settlements from typhoons and strong seasonal winds (Chen, Nakama, & Kurima, 2008). Since the end of WWII, however, the old growth Fukugi (*Garcinia subelliptica*) tree lines in many villages have been facing destruction owing to rapid urbanization, economic and societal change, and transformations in lifestyles (Ishimura, 1997; Inagaki, Osawa, Onozaki, Fujisaki, & Katsuno, 2004).

The local administration needs to understand the value of these shelterbelts and raise the community's environmental awareness in order to conserve traditional tree landscapes. Understanding the recreational value of lines of Fukugi trees, as well as their traditional value as windbreaks, will facilitate the building of an effective rural planning strategy. Estimating the monetary value of recreational use provides a universal and tangible basis for policymakers and other stakeholders such as private business owners, tourist agencies, and hotel owners. It also facilitates the pursuit of financing towards a conservation fund for Fukugi shelterbelts.

We conducted and analyzed a survey on tourists' attitudes to and preferences for a traditional village forest landscape on the mainland of Okinawa Prefecture. This study seeks to (i) identify basic information about tourists' activities, (ii) assess visitors' preferences for village tree landscapes, (iii) calculate tourists' willingness to pay (WTP) to conserve village landscapes, and (iv) examine the impact of tourists' demographic characteristics and destination loyalties on their valuation of village landscapes.

Most tourists in Okinawa Prefecture choose to travel by rental car or private car or to participate in a sightseeing bus tour because of the inconvenience of public transport. A supplementary survey of visitors on bus tours (in addition to that on tourists travelling in a rental or a private car) was carried out for this study. To satisfy aim (i), individual, small group, and mass tourists were surveyed. The owner of a bicycle rental business informed us that people from Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Mainland China are among international mass tourists during the New Year Holiday, although they are seldom seen throughout the rest of the year. Moreover, mass tourists to Bise village stop there for only a very short time.

To satisfy aims (ii), (iii), and (iv), only individual and small group tourists travelling by car were surveyed.

The indigenous landscape and traditional culture of Bise village (see Fig. 1), in the north of Okinawa Island, is an important tourist attraction. Bise village is adjacent to Ocean Expo Park, one of

Okinawa's major attractions. Bise village is estimated to attract about 200–300 tourists daily as a stopover spot for those en route to Ocean Expo Park. However, this may underestimate actual tourist numbers, as 3.5 million tourists visited Ocean Expo Park in 2011. Due to the closeness of Ocean Expo Park and its unique attractiveness, Bise village may become a sightseeing hotspot in the near future. Some tourist attractions (see Fig. 2), such as a cattle cart and bicycle rental stores, have already been developed. Consequently, Bise village was chosen for the case study.

2. Methods

In this study, tourists both on sightseeing buses and travelling in a private/rental car were surveyed, using different approaches. Interviews and a questionnaire were selected for the diverse research purposes. Bus tourists stopped for only approximately 20 min and strolled along a small part of the village, making it difficult to use a questionnaire to collect data from them. Hence, for bus tourists, we recorded basic information about tour routes and interviewed the bus driver and/or tour guide about their destinations, in addition to Bise village, participant numbers, the tour's name, and the tourist agency's assessment of Bise's attractiveness to tourists. In addition, one surveyor followed the tourist group and mapped the sightseeing route they took in order to record to what extent they strolled in the village. The survey of sightseeing bus tourists was conducted from December 2014 to January 2015. All the tourist buses parked at the entrance to the village during the survey period were subject to interviews.

For the tourists travelling by car, a survey was conducted during August 2012 and from February to March 2014. Interviews were conducted in the parking lot at the entrance to the village. Every tourist group/individual, except for a few skipped when none of our surveyors was available, was approached and asked to cooperate with the survey after the surveyor confirmed that he/she had looked around the village and was about to leave.

Interviews with local policy and administrative staff and the local community were also conducted in order to collect additional tourist information and information on the infrastructure facilities inside the village.

The questionnaire is aimed at clarifying tourists' preferences for and attitudes towards the attractiveness of the traditional landscape and tourist facilities in the village. It has four themes. The first assesses tourists' assessment of the village's attractiveness in terms of culture, history, landscape, and other natural features. In the second part, respondents are asked about their willingness to pay for the protection and conservation of the village landscape, and the type of financing instrument (such as a donation and/or an entrance fee) is discussed. Collecting entrance fees from tourists may be difficult, for two reasons: (1) according to the hamlet head, the nearby large-scale tourist destination of Ocean Expo Park and local hotels requested that the village not levy any entrance fee from the tourists; and (2) entrance to the village cannot be secured while the entrance fee is taken, as in a park. Hence, only donation was used to run the contingent valuation methods (CVM) analysis.

In the last part, the individual's socio-demographic characteristics are collected in order to examine to what extent personal variables are associated with WTP and whether the respondent's WTP is a function of these variables.

For the first aim, we used a 5-point Likert rating scale for most questions because it produces reliable results and is easy to use (Tyrvaïnen, Uusitalo, Silvennoinnen, & Hasu, 2014). Both 5-point and 7-point Likert scales have been widely used to rate degrees of preference for forest landscapes (Tahvanainen, Tyrvaïnen, Ihalainen, Vuorela, & Kolehmainen, 2001; Zhang, Chen, Sun, & Bao, 2013). For the second aim, CVM were employed because

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