TOURIST GAZE IN VISITATION TOURS: SOCIAL INTERACTIONS AND POWER RELATIONS BETWEEN HOST AND GUEST IN AMA-CHO, OKI ISLANDS, JAPAN

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Abstract - This paper explores social interaction between host and guest in visitation tours to Ama-cho, in the Oki Islands, Japan. Ama-cho is a remote island with a population of about 2,400 in Western Japan. Until the beginning of the 2000s, the island had suffered from financial crisis and population decrease with declining birthrate and a growing proportion of elderly people. However, under the leadership of Mayor Yamanouchi from 2002, the town has been conducting radical reform, through cost reduction in various sectors, investment in processed marine product factories, and educational reform to prevent children and their families from leaving the island and also to attract new students from outside the island. The success of the reform has gained media attention, and currently about 2,500 people per year, including politicians, government officials, teachers and researchers, visit the island to observe the reforms and learn from the key individuals responsible for the change. In consideration of these situations, this sociological paper studies characteristics of "tourist gaze" on the island, and the interpretation of power relations between host and guest.

Keywords - Power relations, Tourist gaze, Visitation tours.

I. INTRODUCTION

Ama-cho, a remote island in Shimane Prefecture in Western Japan, has gained media attention due to the success of radical reform under the leadership of Mayor Yamanouchi. The island, with a population of about 2,400, had suffered from financial crisis as well as population decrease with a declining birthrate and a growing proportion of elderly people. However, the mayor conducted both "defensive and aggressive reforms" from 2002 onwards. "Defensive reform" included cost reduction in various sectors such as a 45 per cent reduction in personnel expenses by cutting 16-30 percent from the wages of the local government officials[1]; abolishing position of treasurer, outsourcing night duty and the mayor's official car; and rationalising travel expense rules and overtime allowances. On the other hand, "aggressive reform" included an investment of 500 million yen ($880,000) in an innovative instant freezing facility called the CAS (Cell-Alive System) freezing centre in the fiscal years of 2004-2005,[2]as well as commercialisation of sea salt, turban shell curry, rock oysters and dried sea cucumber through joint public-private sector funding projects. Ama-cho also succeeded in integrating 361 new residents (those who are called "I-turn migrants") from outside the town in the seven years after 2004, and currently those newcomers make up about 15 per cent of the population.[3] The island also managed to increase the number of students at the local high school, Douzen High School. The number of freshmen in 2008 was 28, but it increased to 45 in 2013 through radical reform, called the "miryokuka project," including accepting students from outside the island as well as instituting curriculum reform.[4] The success of Ama-cho gained media attention and led to an increase in the number of visitation tours by politicians, government officials, teachers and researchers. Currently, approximately 200 groups, 2,500 people in total[5]visit the island annually to observe the reform and learn from the key individuals responsible for the change. This raises the following questions. Firstly, what kind of "tourist gaze" do visitors on visitation tours have? In the context of what John Urry calls "signs" in the tourist gaze[6], what kind of signs were embedded in their gaze? Secondly, in the contact zone between host and guest, what kind of social interactions are occurring and how can the power relations between them be characterised? Thirdly, how can these social interactions and power relations be interpreted from the perspectives of the sociology of tourism as well as the anthropology of tourism? This paper explores these points above, based on the author's fieldwork, including semi-structured interviews with 25 respondents as well as informal interviews with local residents, conducted between 2010 and 2017.

II. GAZE IN VISITATION TOURS

Gaze in visitation tours differs from that in mass tourism. In mass tourism, "front stages" such as tourist attractions and famous scenery are "gazed." Even in alternative tourism, including heritage tourism, cultural heritages become a tourism resource. However, gaze in visitation tours can be characterised by the following three points. Firstly, "narratives" of local people are the most common tourism resource in visitation tourism. Erik Cohen, in discussing five modes of tourists, from "recreation mode" to "existential mode," highlights "experiential mode" as the way in which tourists value interaction with local people and learn from experiencing it.[7]

Yoshinobu Ota also studies cultural tourism in Okinawa in southern Japan, pointing out that the self-esteem and identity of local fishermen were reinforced through the process of talking to visitors about their traditional knowledge and lifestyle.[8] In the above research, cultural interaction with local residents was seen as the common practice of cultural tourism. However, in the case of visitation tourism, the main purpose of the visit is to observe the "achievement" of the local people and listen to the local people. Furthermore, visitation tours wereundertaken as "work," whereas most other forms of tourism are a form of "leisure." To sum up, visitation tourism is different from other types of tourism in terms of tourism resource as well as mode of tourism. Secondly, the gaze of the visitors in visitation tourism to Ama-cho can be characterised by nostalgia. It involves longing for something that is left behind in the process of modernisation. John Urry, in presenting the characteristics of tourist gaze, discussed as follows:

Gaze is constructed through signs, and tourism involves the collection of signs. When tourists see two people kissing in Paris what they capture in the gaze is 'timeless romantic Paris'[9]

In considering the case of Ama-cho within Urry's context, in Japanese media, Ama-cho is commonly referred to as "a remote island," which had suffered from financial crisis as well as population decrease, has become a "model of regional revitalisation for other local governments in Japan." This sort of representation is reproduced in media or visitors' social networking, and can be characterised bycontrasts such as those between big city and countryside; centre and periphery; progress and stagnation; the haves and the have-nots. The geographic feature of a remote island also accentuatesthe unusual nature of the success.

Thirdly, visitation tourism has a particular feature in that the visit itself has a meaning. The fact of the visit results in a "business trip report," and it has also become the "proof" that the person visited the place. This point relates to Susan Stewart's discussion on tourists' practice of sending postcards from their tourism destinations. Stewart regards photo postcards as "personalisation" of the scenery that was originally "public."[10] In short, postcards can be proof that they visited the place.

For visitors on visitation tours to Ama-cho, photos of themselves with key individuals responsible for the reform, as well as their business cards, have similar meanings tothose which Stewart posits for postcards. Those key individuals in Ama-cho are interviewed often in the media, therefore for politicians who visit the island, photos with them have a special meaning for their public relations. For them, the visit to the island is seen as a sort of pilgrimage to the model of regional revitalisation, and the photos, as proof of havingvisited the place, are often used in Social Networking and on Internet blogs.

Name cards of Ama-cho government officials also have a particular meaning for visitors. The name cards have a logo showing Ama-cho's slogan, "Naimono wa nai." The catchphrase has two meanings in Japanese: "We can't complain about what we don't have" and "We have everything." With its limited resources, the island succeeded in the radical reform, and the slogan represents the island's will and effort. Put simply, those meanings are embedded in the logo, and for visitors such as politicians and local government officials, the name cards also carry the meaning of a proof of personalpilgrimage.

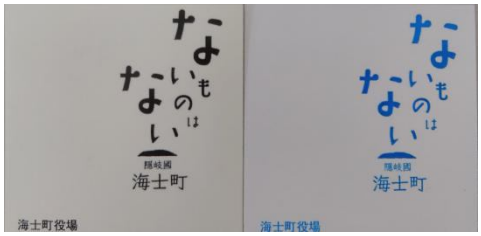

Photo 1. Logo on the name cards of local government officials at Ama-cho



Photo 2.A view of Hishiura port at Ama-cho

III. SOCIAL INTERACTION AND POWER RELATIONS BETWEEN HOST AND GUEST

Visitation tours involve a gap in power relations between host and guest, and this can be interpreted in the light of anthropological theory of exchange and power. Peter Blau, in Exchange and Power in Social Life, argued the imbalance in exchange leads to the hierarchical relationship: if one does not have enough things to exchange, either object or non-object, one individual tends to be submissive to the other person.[11] In the case of visitation tours, those who observe hold a dominant position, whereas those who are observed are forced to spare time to host the guests and explain their effort and achievements. Things being exchanged are, for the observers, information to support the writing of business trip reports, as well as the experience of learning at the destination. On the other hand, the hosts gain less

thanthe observers do. It also takes much time to host the guests, and in most visitation tours in Japan, it is done for free. Although hosts might achieve long-term political or economic benefits as a result of receiving big-name politicians, at the contact zone of visitation tours, there is a clear gap in power relations between host and guest.

Unlike these general perspectives on power relations in visitation tours, the case of Ama-cho shows particular social interaction and "negotiation" in power relations between host and guest, or between "centre" and "periphery." The following sections will highlight these points by addressing the island's policies on "outsourcing" and "the right to price determination." Outsourcing was one of the key policies that Ama-cho conducted, and they did it for the sector of acceptance of visitation tours. Since their achievement gained media attention and accepted 200 groups per year, local government officials could not find enough time for the arrangements.[12]In line with what mayor Yamanouchi said in an informal interview with the author in 2011, "we will outsource whatever we can," the town outsourced the job to Ama-cho Kankokyokai (Tourism Association). After outsourcing the arrangements for visitation tours as well as general guidance for visitors, the town began to charge for visitation tours: 3,000 yen ($26) per visitor as an arrangement fee, and another 3,000 yen each for transport within the island.[13] The arrangements for visitation are conducted flexibly, however there are two main topics for visits: one is the effort and achievement of the local government of Ama-cho, and the other is the revitalisation of the local public high school, Douzen High School. For the town, this outsourcing meant utilising their own limited resourcesas a tourism resource. Indeed, the term, "tougaika," is often used among the town's key individuals. "Tou" means "island" and "gaika" means "foreign currency." For the town, acquisition of currency from outside the island as well as facilitating consumption within the town has been one of the important policies, as also seen in the introduction of the regional currency, "Hearn." One of the key individuals responsible for the town's revitalisation referred to this point as follows:

Residents here use Amazon so much more often thanin any other part of Japan...with that situation in mind, we also introduced theHearn. We need to consume on the island and let visitors use money on the island, and this leads to a good circulation within the local economy and industry.

For an island of about 2,400 people, the visitation tour was regarded as one of the biggest industries for this remote location. Since 2002, under the leadership of mayor Yamanouchi, the town has been trying to utilise what it already has, such as commercialising sea salt and turban shell curry under the slogan, "Naimono wa nai." Therefore, the large proportion of visitation tourists, which constituted more than 10 per cent of the total visitors to their island, was seen as a source of income.

In an anthropological sense, utilising visitation tours as a tourism resource can be seen as the subordination of power relations between host and guest, as well as centre and periphery. As mentioned earlier, in the contact zone of tourism, those who observe have power, and visitation tourism was based on the imbalance in exchange and power relations between host and guest. However, the visitors now cannot observe without paying a fee. The shift meant the visualisation of exchange, and the power relation between host and guest is subordinated by charging for what used to be free.

Utilising visitation tours as a tourism resource can also be seen as "tactics" in the context of what Michel de Certeau argues.[14] In terms of centre-periphery relations, a remote island was a typical periphery that had been left behind the progress of modernity. The geopolitical relationship was also reflected in the local economy,in that they relied on state subsidies and public works projects. Certeau refers to "tactics" of those in a subordinate position as logic and practices full of ambiguity and flexibility to negotiate with those in superior positions. This sort of tactical flexibility was also seen in the narratives of key individuals of the town's reform. A man working at local government office said:

The reason why inaka (countryside) is in a weak positioncompared totokai (big city) is that we have no choice but to be so. If a businessman from a big company comes here and says, "We'll buy all of them, if you can give us a 50 per cent discount," we have no choice but to comply. The thing is, we don't have the right or power to set the price. Ama-cho, in that sense, began to decide the price to suit our own side...This makes a critical difference.

Similarly, a man who plays a main role in leading the revitalisation project of the local public high school remarked:

I don't like the expression "win-win." It is tokai(big city) thinking, and assumesthere are two sides, winner and looser. I try to think in term of "happy-happy" - both sides being happy with the process and result.

The extracts above are typical examples of the narratives of key individuals responsible for the town's reform. Throughout the fieldwork, many respondents referred to the imbalance in power relations between "chuo"(centre; big city) and "chiho"(periphery; countryside). They also mentioned that the relationship between the two sides

can be changed by connecting the two sides and "using" chuo wisely. Charging for visitation tours can be seen as a part of such efforts, and their efforts of "using chuo wisely" relates to what Edward Said refers to as "contrapuntal reading and analysis."[15]Said criticised the power of accumulated discourse on the non-west as cultural other, and discussed how it led to orientalism as a way of thinking which justified colonialism. For Said, "resistance" is not an armed one, but an ideological one that protests the accumulated discourse and gap in power relations. Rather than dividing into occidental and oriental, Said argues that a contrapuntal way of thinking, or an emphasis on the connection and hubs that relates the two sides, can be a step in such ideological resistance. In Ama-cho's case, opportunities for accepting visitation are used as a tourism resource, and sometimes for public relations to present their efforts and achievement to politicians and government officials of chuo. These flexible and tactical practices of the island show that power relations between centre and the periphery are not static fixed absolutes, but are full of dynamism and social interaction.

CONCLUSIONS

This paper explored social interaction and power relations between host and guest in the case of visitation tours to Ama-cho, a remote island in Western Japan. The tactics of the local government in utilising visitation tours were highlighted, and the changes in power relations between centre and periphery are interpreted from anthropological perspectives. The visitation tour is a particular type of tourism; however, despite its history and market size, few studies have examined this area, in particular from the field of anthropology and sociology. Further research on visitors could be on visitors' daily practices at the destination; identity politics of the hosts through interaction with visitors; and anthropological study on "place" by incorporating theories such as MacCannell's staged-authenticity and Goffman's dramaturgy. These topics were not included in this paper, however it is hoped that this study on Ama-cho can contribute to the anthropology of tourism as a case study on visitation tours.

NOTES

[1] M. Yamanouchi, Rito hatsu Ikinokoru tameno 10no Senryaku (Tokyo: Seikatsujinshinsho, 2007), pp.82-88.
[2] Ibid., pp.109.
[3] Based on interview at Ama-cho Kanko Kyokai (Tourism Association) in November 2017. This success in accepting new residents is largely due to support in finding jobs as well as financial aid for housing, child care and medical care: for instance, a 100,000 yen marriage allowance, and a maximum of one million yen childbirth allowance.
[4] Based on interview with Miryokuka Coordinator at Ama-cho local government in November 2016.
[5] Based on interview at Ama-cho Kanko Kyokai (Tourism Association) in November 2017.
[6] J. Urry, Tourist Gaze(London: Sage, 1990).
[7] E. Cohen, "Authenticity and Commoditization in Tourism," Annals of Tourism Research vol15, pp.377, 1988.
[8] Y.Ota,Transposition no Shiso: Bunkajinruigaku no Saisozo (Tokyo: Fukyosha, 1999).
[9] J. Urry, Ibid., pp.4-5.
[10] S. Stewart,On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection (Durham: Duke University Press, 1984).
[11] P. Blau, Exchange and Power in Social Life (New York; London; Sydney: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1964).
[12] Based on interview at Ama-cho Kanko Kyokai (Tourism Association) in November 2017.
[13] Based on interview at Ama-cho Kanko Kyokai (Tourism Association) in November 2017.
[14] M. de Certeau, The Practice of Everyday Life(Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002[1980]).
[15] E. Said, Culture and Imperialism (New York: Vintage Books, 1994).

