

A Study on the International Cooperation of Local Governments in Tourism

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Abstract

This study aims to examine the relationship between the international cooperation conducted by Japan's local governments and inbound tourism. In so doing, we firstly looked at the actual situations of the cooperation and the previous related academic research. The findings have revealed that the cooperation of local governments in tourism was not fully conducted until the 21st century and the previous academic research has been extremely scarce. However, it has clarified that some projects received high social evaluation through winning awards and achieved a level where global diffusion can be attained by the central government and international organizations.

Key words: Tourism, Local government, International cooperation, Community development

1. Purpose of the study

Since the latter half of the 1990s, local governments in Japan have rapidly lost interest in outside world affairs due to the recession of the Japanese economy and weakened these finances. As there has been decreasing support from local residents toward international cooperation, the numbers of international cooperation projects of local governments have also declined significantly.

Under such circumstances, however, international cooperation related to Japan's inbound tourism¹⁾ has only been increasing. After former prime minister Jun'ichiro Koizumi's policy speech²⁾ on making Japan a "tourism-oriented country"³⁾ in 2003, inbound tourism has been recognized as a new important industry. The "Basic Act for Promoting a Tourism-Oriented Country" was enacted in 2006, and the "Basic Plan for Promoting a Tourism-Oriented Country" was established in 2007; moreover, there has been expanded exchange through tourism promotion that takes advantage of friendship and

sister city relationships. In this plan, the numerical goals for four years were set at 10 million inbound tourists (36% increase) and 20 million outbound tourists⁴⁾ (14% increase), drawing much attention in Japan and abroad. As a result, as of 2008, there were 8.3 million inbound tourists, and the number of foreign tourists in local cities has rapidly increased. Many local governments now have an industrial policy of inviting foreign tourists.

Reflecting these changes, the Council of Local Authorities for International Relations (CLAIR) plays a major role in expanding international exchange and cooperation in tourism through cooperation exchange projects for local government officials and investigation research at overseas offices. The Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) is also expanding the international cooperation of local governments in tourism.

In this climate, some government-affiliated foundations and local municipalities are seeking a new inbound tourism that utilizes past experience of

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friendship and sister city exchange and international cooperation. This is because international cooperation can be utilized as an effective means for projects based on a long-term viewpoint such as human resource development, collaborative research, and policy development. However, since the cooperation of local governments in tourism was not fully conducted until the 21st century, previous academic research has been extremely scarce, and the reality of the situation is almost unknown. This paper aims to clarify the actual situation in Japan and problems to be solved by grasping the trend and categorizing activities. I hope that this study will be of some help in the study of the cooperation of local governments in Japan in tourism.

2. Previous studies

To date, the Japanese government has been involved in many 1) cooperation projects in tourism between central governments and 2) cooperation in tourism with local municipalities of recipient countries. Therefore, a large number of previous studies are related to the above. However, there have been very few cases in which local governments take the initiative in international cooperation in tourism, which is the theme of this paper. For this reason, very few previous studies are related to the above.

We first look at studies conducted overseas. Even in representative studies that analyzed international cooperation of local municipalities such as Michael Shuman's *Towards a Global Village: International Community Development Initiatives*⁵⁾ and Purnendra Jain's *Japan's Subnational Governments in International Affairs*⁶⁾, there is no analysis by cooperation field such as tourism. This is because in those days, a) there was no crosscutting database based on a uniform standard, which is indispensable for analysis by field, and b) therefore, the only material used for research was the inconsistent data announced by different municipalities.

The previous studies in Japan conducted were under similar conditions, and there are very few by-field studies. In JICA's *Participation of Local Municipalities in International Cooperation Phase 1 and Phase 2*⁷⁾, an epoch-making study that involved many researchers and local government officials from all over Japan, the analysis was limited to the system and method of implementation. The case studies were conducted for different municipalities. This is due to the same reasons as above.

In recent years, however, there have been attempts to develop by-field studies that use a small-size database produced experimentally. Such databases include, for example, "International Cooperation Activity Case Search" of the CLAIR Citizens' International Plaza (explained in further detail in Section 4, below), and by-field studies include the author's *International Cooperation of Municipalities*⁸⁾. In the limited previous studies, the field is limited to major fields such as environment conservation, industrial technology, and health and medicine, and there is no analysis of international cooperation in the field of tourism. As discussed in the next section, this is because international cooperation in tourism was mostly in the form of human resource training as exchange programs, and projects with specific purposes were not active until the 21st century, making it difficult to collect case examples.

If we look at regional policy in tourism, international cooperation projects can be found in reports, etc., concerning economic policies and regional development. Case examples include the Kyushu Bureau of Economy, Trade and Industry's *Survey Report on the Potential Regional Economy Revitalization by Increase of Tourists from within Japan and Overseas*⁹⁾ and Kyushu Economic Research Center's *New Tourism Strategies for Japan-Korea Strait Area*¹⁰⁾. However, these are not studies from the viewpoint of international cooperation and only contain a few case examples in some places.

Therefore, a study on municipality cooperation from the viewpoint of tourism is a study from a totally new point of view.

3. Political support system

First, we look at a relevant law. Article 18 of the Basic Act for Promoting a Tourism-Oriented Country contains an item that stipulates the promotion of international mutual exchange where there is a provision related to local municipalities.

“Article 18 The national government, aiming to promote international mutual exchange in tourism, shall implement measures that are necessary for promotion of mutual cooperation with foreign governments, promotion of exchange between areas between Japan and foreign countries, and promotion of international exchange by youth”¹¹⁾.

The Basic Plan for Promoting a Tourism-Oriented Country, which was established on the basis of the above basic act, refers to the exchange of friendship and sister cities in “(2) Promotion of international mutual exchange” under “3. Promotion of international tourism,” as is shown below. As project activities of relevant items, district transport bureaus such as the Kanto District Transport Bureau dispatch missions and implement media exchange projects as exchange programs between friendship cities.

“(Utilization of sister and friendship city affiliations) There are many opportunities for community residents to take part in international exchange based on sister and friendship city affiliations, and such exchange is very important as a help to public diplomacy. ...Based on these, exchange shall be expanded through tourism promotion utilizing sister and friendship city affiliations.”¹²⁾

Tourism projects by government-affiliated public

utility foundations, especially international exchange support programs including inbound tourism, are mainly implemented by the Japan National Tourism Organization (JNTO)¹³⁾. However, since the main work of JNTO is to provide support in the business field, and its purpose is not to promote international cooperation of local municipalities, an explanation is omitted here.

As for international cooperation projects in tourism conducted by local municipalities, the Council of Local Authorities for International Relations (CLAIR)¹⁴⁾ plays a major role. It supports exchange and cooperation in tourism through municipal officials exchange projects, investigation, and research at overseas offices. The Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA)¹⁵⁾ expands international cooperation in tourism, which has been conducted at a national level, to grassroots technological cooperation projects that local municipalities can apply for, and supports them.

4. Overview of cooperation in tourism

First, the trend of projects that receive cooperation from local municipalities in Japan is analyzed. As far as the author knows, there is no tourism cooperation list compiled by the Japanese government so far. Among international cooperation organizations, CLAIR Citizens' International Plaza publishes the most extensive and solid database. Searching for the tourism field in this database will give 36 hits on items concerning international cooperation¹⁶⁾. The results of the analysis of the general tendency of cooperation in tourism using the list are as shown below.

What is remarkable about the target areas is the fact that 78% of the total is occupied by cooperation between multiple regions (see Table 1). This cooperation, however, is not between many regions where multiple municipalities are linked on an equal basis, but, in many cases, a particular municipality in Japan operates projects with the same name with

multiple friendship and sister cities.

What is characteristic is that 83% of the total is occupied by projects that include municipalities of East Asian countries. This is because there are a significant number of projects that include municipalities of China and/or Korea. Projects that include China as the cooperation area occupy 69% of the total, and those including Korea occupy as high as 67%. In contrast, projects that include non-Asian regions such as Europe and U.S.A. occupy a small percentage of 36% of the total (see Table 2).

Another characteristic fact is that 89% of the project content consists only of the reception of

trainees. Projects that include the reception of non-trainees such as participants in collaborative research and international conferences only account for 11% of the total. Only 6% of all the training projects are specialized in tourism and 58% are those that cover five or more fields (see Table 3). For these reasons, it is considered that the majority of the training projects introduce tourism as part of many training fields. International cooperation in tourism by local municipalities is mainly limited to mere human resource development as described above, and the rate of cooperation specialized in a specific theme of tourism is very low.

Table 1: Target region

	Target region	Number of cases	Percentage
1	Cooperation between two regions	8	22%
2	Cooperation between many regions	28	78%
	Total	36	100%

Prepared by the author on the basis of note 16

Table 2: Target countries

	Target region	Number of cases	Percentage
1	Projects including East Asian region	30	83%
1-A	Of 1, projects including China	25	69%
1-B	Of 1, projects including Korea	24	67%
2	Projects including Southeast Asia	17	47%
3	Projects including non-Asian regions	13	36%
	Total	36	100%

Prepared by the author on the basis of note 16

Table 3: Content of cooperation

	Content of cooperation	Number of cases	Percentage
1	Reception of trainees only	32	89%
1-A	Of 1, training limited to tourism	2	6%
1-B	Of 1, training covering five or more fields	21	58%
2	Projects including reception of non-trainees	4	11%
	Total	36	100%

Prepared by the author on the basis of note 16

5. Case examples of international cooperation with new potential

After entering into the 21st century, however, new types of cooperation in tourism, which focus on specific content of cooperation, are being developed one after another. This section introduces symbolic case examples of such cooperation.

Early cases of cooperation in tourism that focus on the target and theme between two regions include “Russian Coastal Area Tourism Development Cooperation Project (1996)” of Toyama Prefecture. This project receives support as a model project of CLAIR, and focusing on the Russian coastal area, it holds important tourism-related seminars and discussion sessions and receives trainees.

As a support project of JICA, there is “Uzbekistan Regional Tourism Promotion Trainee Reception Project” (2001–ongoing) of Nara Prefecture. In this human resource development project, 10 trainees from Uzbekistan have been received each year since 2001, and lectures and hands-on training related to tourism promotion measures that utilize historical heritages are conducted.

As cooperation in tourism between local municipalities is based around a particular theme, there are multiple technology transfer projects related to “roadside stations”¹⁷⁾. Gifu Prefecture has been conducting the “Feasibility Survey on Building Roadside Stations in Thailand” (2001–ongoing) in Pisanulok Province in order to investigate the locating conditions of roadside stations and the method of processing and selling local specialties in agricultural communities. Nara Prefecture received financial support from the yen loans provided by JICA and introduced the “michi no eki” (roadside station) system that produces and sells local produce in the “Tourism Development Plan to Visit Uttar Pradesh for Places Sacred to Buddhism (2004–ongoing)” jointly with the state of Uttar Pradesh in India. These projects were highly evaluated for their cooperation effect, and in 2004,

the World Bank, the Japan Bank for International Cooperation (presently JICA), and the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism jointly held the “Michinoeki” seminar in order to introduce the know-how of “michi no eki” (roadside stations), when three “michi no eki” from Ehime Prefecture extended cooperation. The World Bank prepared the “Guidelines for Roadside Stations Michinoeki” in order to make use of the “michinoeki” know-how for regional development in developing countries.

Another theme-specific cooperation is the “Recovery Project of Affected Area through Recovery of Tourism Using Hot Springs in Sichuan Province” (2010–2012) conducted as a JICA grass-roots technological cooperation project by a council consisting of Yamanashi Prefecture, Kofu City, Fuefuki City, Fujikawaguchikomachi, etc.

Case example 1: “Recovery Project of Affected Area through Recovery of Tourism Using Hot Springs in Sichuan Province (2010–2012)”

In 2010, Yamanashi Prefecture organized a council together with Kofu City, Fuefuki City, Fujikawaguchikomachi, etc., and is planning cooperation related to hot springs in Sichuan Province of China. With support from a grass-roots technological cooperation project of JICA, the council is now preparing for a project that aims at recovery from the massive 2008 earthquake that occurred in Sichuan Province with the local government of Chengdu City.

Aimed at promoting the employment of residents involved in tourism, 1) support for the development of tourism policy that centers on hot springs, 2) technology transfer of the method of utilization of hot springs as resources for tourism, and 3) technology transfer concerning the know-how of management of hot springs have been planned. This project is characterized by mutual benefits between

Japan and China. The Chinese side promotes the invitation of tourists from within China and from Japan, and the Japanese side benefits by tourism promotion of Yamanashi Prefecture in the western part of China and learning the know-how of inviting Chinese tourists.

The “2009 Pan-Yellow Sea Year” is a well-known project involving cooperation between many regions. Ten cities from Japan, China, and Korea that belong to the pan-Yellow Sea zone such as Kitakyushu City set up the Organization for the East Asia Economic Development, which is implementing the project. In this project, all the participating cities obtain mutual benefits by conducting PR activities and tourism promotion using mass media in each city, and they are examining new tours to create a pan-Yellow Sea tourism brand. In this project, Kitakyushu City was evaluated for cooperation with Dalian in China and the Incheon Metropolitan City, both friendship and sister cities of Kitakyushu, and was presented the Minister of Internal Affairs and Communications Award in the 2010 “4th Award of Excellence in Independent Sister City Alliances.” Another case example is the Northeast Asian Region (NEAR)¹⁸⁾, which was founded in Gyeongju City, Korea, in 1996, and organized the Tourism Subcommittee as one of the International Subcommittees in 2008. This subcommittee plans to hold a joint tourism exhibition, PR activity, and tourism cooperation forums for the development of participating municipalities.

Case example 2: “2009 Pan-Yellow Sea Year (2009)”

Kitakyushu City concluded affiliation with Dalian (1979) and Incheon Metropolitan City (1988) as friendship and sister cities and has been conducting extensive exchange with them for many years.

In 1991, in order to realize a pan-Yellow

Sea economic zone, Kitakyushu together with Shimonoseki City established “East Asian (Pan-Yellow Sea) City Conference” and, in 2004, reorganized the conference into the “Organization for East Asian Economic Development,” which serves as an organization for economic exchange. The membership of the organization consists of ten cities from Japan, China, and Korea including Kitakyushu, Shimonoseki, Fukuoka, Dalian, Qingdao, Tianjin, Yantai, Incheon Metropolitan City, Busan Metropolitan City, and Ulsan Metropolitan City, with Kitakyushu working as the international secretariat. At present, this organization has several divisions such as “manufacturing,” “the environment,” and “tourism,” and member cities clean the coast and conduct tourism campaigns in cooperation.

The tourism division plans the “Pan-Yellow Sea Year,” produces common PR programs and TV programs using mass media in each city, and conducts common tourism promotion activities using international film festivals and international tourism exhibitions. It also promotes mutual traffic of international ferries and international sightseeing cruises¹⁹⁾.

6. Summary

As analyzed in Section 2, international cooperation in tourism by local municipalities in Japan does not include much specialized training in tourism. Instead, many training programs just incorporate tourism as a part of the introduction to Japan. Such international cooperation is low in maturity level as a project, and the effect of support is low. The target of most international cooperation is friendship and sister cities, and these cities are mostly located in China and Korea. As a whole, it has overtones of goodwill exchange for mutual understanding and is generally not considered as international cooperation.

However, as mentioned in Section 3, in the 21st century, highly specialized forms of cooperation in tourism, which did not exist before, have been developed. There is also a rise of projects that aim at equal mutual-beneficial relationship without the division of the supporting and supported countries. Some projects have received high social evaluation through winning awards and have achieved a level where global diffusion can be attained by the central government and international organizations.

International tourism is, in other words, international exchange using private funding, and it significantly contributes to mutual understanding between citizens and regions. Therefore, it is an important means to achieve global peace and stability. When we think of tourism from the viewpoint of regional development, it is closely linked with regional development strategies since it offers a high level of employment and encourages renewed recognition of regional cultures. Thus, international tourism can become an important regional policy in a world that is rapidly being globalized. Considering these points, tourism will be a very important field in cooperation. To this end, it is desired that tourism will be incorporated into international cooperation strategies as a diplomatic policy of Japan and that the project effect will be enhanced. In the future, it is necessary to improve the political complementarity between the central government and local municipalities and to strengthen the cooperation between local municipalities.

Notes

- 1) Inbound tourism in the context of Japan is the tourism of travelers from abroad who come on tours in order to explore Japan. Therefore, inbound tourists generally refer to foreign tourists visiting Japan.
- 2) In January 2003, former Prime Minister Koizumi, in a policy speech at the 156th Diet session, clarified the goal of doubling the number of visiting foreign tourists to 10 million in 2010. Following this, the Visit Japan Campaign,

- a full-fledged foreign tourist invitation project, was started.
- 3) Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism, 2007, *Basic Plan for Promoting a Tourism-Oriented Country*, pp. 39-40.
- 4) Outbound tourism in the context of Japan is the tourism of the Japanese people who go on overseas tours.
- 5) Michael Shuman, 1994, *Towards a Global Village: International Community Development Initiatives*, London & Boulder; Pluto Press.
- 6) Purnendra Jain, 2005, *Japan's Subnational Governments in International Affairs*, Routledge.
- 7) JICA Institute for International Cooperation, 1997, *Participation of Local Municipalities in International Cooperation Phase 1*, JICA. JICA Institute for International Cooperation, 2000, *Participation of Local Municipalities in International Cooperation Phase 2*, JICA.
- 8) Hitoshi Yoshida, 2005, *International Cooperation of Municipalities*, Kazumi Goto, Izumi Ono, Toshio Watanabe, Vol. 4 *Japan's International Development Cooperation*, Nippon Hyoronsha, pp. 203-226.
- 9) Kyushu Bureau of Economy, Trade and Industry, 2009, *Survey Report on the Potential Regional Economy Revitalization by Increase of Tourists from within Japan and Overseas*, Planning Office, General Affairs and Planning Division, Kyushu Bureau of Economy, Trade and Industry.
- 10) Kyushu Economic Research Center, 2008, *New Tourism Strategies for Japan-Korea Strait Area*, Kyushu Economic Research Center.
- 11) Basic Act for Promoting a Tourism-Oriented Country (enacted in 2006, enforced on January 1, 2007). The underlines are the author's own. The exchange between the regions mentioned in this provision is adequately considered to include international exchange by local municipalities when the content of the Basic Act for Promoting a Tourism-Oriented Country is considered.
- 12) Basic Act for Promoting a Tourism-Oriented Country, pp. 39-40. The underline is the author's own.
- 13) JNTO was established in 2003 in order to promote inbound tourism by efficiently carrying out operations that are necessary for the promotion of foreign tourists visiting Japan such as tourism advertisements overseas and provision of tourist information to foreign sightseers.
- 14) CLAIR was established in 1988 as a collaborative organization of local municipalities in order to support international exchange and international cooperation by local municipalities.
- 15) JICA was established in 1974 in order to support the social and economic development of developing countries

and conduct various types of international cooperation together with the national government, international organizations, NGOs, and private businesses.

- 16) When searching for the tourism field using “Search case examples of international cooperation activities of local municipalities” on the website of Citizens’ International Plaza, 36 international cooperation projects will be listed. The URL of this search system, as of September 2010, is http://www.plaza-clair.jp/jichitai/act.php?act_field=&act_field=12.
- 17) Rest facilities have been built alongside ordinary national roads. Michi no eki sells folk crafts and local specialty products, offers meals and drinks, and provides tourist information.
- 18) The Northeast Asian Region (NEAR) was founded in Gyeongju City, Korea, in 1996, and has a standing secretariat in Gyeongsangbuk-do. At present, the NEAR membership consists of 69 local governments from six countries including Korea, Japan, China, Mongolia, Russia, and North Korea.
- 19) Council of Local Authorities for International Relations, the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, 2010, “Recipient organizations of the 4th Award of Excellence in Independent Sister City Alliances (internal affairs minister’s award),” Council of Local Authorities for International Relations. The Organization for the East Asia Economic Development, 2010, “6th Tourism Group Fukuoka Meeting.”