

## Hawaii image and Japanese tourists

### *Changes in the Japanese image of 'paradise' and the Japanese tourism in Hawaii*

Hiroshi Sudo

ABSTRACT: The desire for tourism is based on a human nature that seeks a taste of the 'extraordinary' or 'otherness' remote from everyday daily life. This essay illustrates the structure that underpins this kind of desire in tourism through the example of Japanese tourism in Hawaii from the 1950s to the present. The Hawaii tour has been a 'national dream' for Japanese people, even though its pattern was transformed from a full service system controlled by the Japanese travel agencies into an individualized experience due to a transformation in tourist trends. In this context, Hawaii tourism is now shifting towards a form of sustainable tourism, because the desires for tourism depend on the sustainability of the tourism resources. This essay will also demonstrate how Japanese tourism in Hawaii does not seem to follow this trend.

Keywords : Hawaii image, Japanese tourism, individualization, sustainable tourism

#### 1 Japanese overseas tourism and the 'Hawaiian Dream'

Cross-cultural 'extraordinary' experience which is a characteristic of tourism itself, Japanese Hawaii tourism operates as a prototype of Japanese fantasies for overseas tourism. A TV quiz show titled the 'up-down quiz' started with the soundtrack music of the film 'blue Hawaii' followed by the narrator exclaiming 'get ten answers correct and win a chance to go to Dream Hawaii'. The catchphrase of this program 'Dream Hawaii' proved that tours to Hawaii were one of the most popular dreams for Japanese at that time. Also, in the 1960s, Suntory promoted tours to Hawaii with a lottery prize system with their *Toris* whisky with the catchphrase 'Let's drink *Toris* and go to Hawaii', a term still known among the Japanese in their fifties. After the Japanese government liberalized individual overseas tours in 1964, tours to Hawaii became internalized as a typical tourist destination.

One week after the liberalization of Japanese overseas tourism, the first group of tourists

went on a nine day tour of Hawaii. Although the tour price at the time was six times as much as the average monthly salary, even middle class office workers thought that they could reach this goal if they saved enough money for several years during the period of economic growth. As much as 20% of oversea tourists in 1964 headed for Hawaii showing how the Hawaiian tour became the 'national dream' for Japanese people in the 1960s.

## 2 The Hawaiian fantasy and Japanese show business celebrities

Before continuing, one other point must be made clear. It was not after the liberalization of travel in 1964 that fostered fantasies of Hawaii. In Japanese popular culture of the time the song '*Akogareno Hawaii Koro*' ('Longing for Hawaii cruise' sung by Haruo Oka) had already been a hit in Japan in 1948. This suggests that the patterns of a particular fantasy had, in fact, been in formation before the liberalization of oversea tourism.

Japanese immigrants who had experienced hardship and discrimination in the sugar cane fields before and during the second world war mediated between the creation of Hawaii dreams and Japanese lust for travelling to Hawaii. After the second world, Nisei (second generation of Japanese immigrants) who fought as soldiers in the US army came back to their home land Hawaii and took over powerful positions in Hawaii's economic and political domains. These descendents of Japanese created the foundations of Japanese Hawaii tourism.

Although most of them had become Americans through the Naturalization Act of 1949, their language, culture and entertainments still remained firmly rooted in those of their old hometowns in Japan. Two big theaters, *Nihon Gekijo* (opened in 1941), *Toyo Gekijo*, situated at Japanese Street in the downtown area (now called China Town) in Honolulu specialized in Japanese movies. These theaters were popular among not only Japanese communities but also other race communities, becoming a big business for their owners. Muneo Kimura, and other Japanese owners of theaters and some agents invited Japanese movie stars and athletes, and other celebrities (Gondo 2004: 139-144). Through the mediation of Japanese Hawaiian agents, Kinuyo Tanaka, a popular actress at that time, visited Hawaii in 1949, and Masao Koga, Ryoichi Hattori, song writers, and one of the most famous singers of the time, Hibari Misora were invited by them (Tasaka 1991: 260-270). From the world of sports, Mainichi Orions, which won the first Japan championship in 1950 visited Hawaii in the next year, and moreover Rikidozan, one of the most famous pro-wrestlers in post war Japan came in 1952. A '*Sakura Matsuri*' (Cherry Blossom Festival) was held from 1952 as an invitation event for entertainers in Japan. Takarazuka actresses, Shochiku Revue Dancers and other popular actors visited Hawaii one after another. Japan's New Year Eve T.V. special '*Kohaku*'

was also broadcasted in Hawaii from 1951 and other Japanese programs from 1952. These events accelerated the fever to invite Japanese celebrities from the entertainment and sports world. However, at this time, only people who were invited by Americans could obtain passports, so both Japanese Hawaiian agents in Hawaii and Japanese celebrities in show business benefitted from these invitation programs. Thus, Japanese entertainment, sports and Japanese Hawaiian agents' strong connections were established in the 1950s. The news movies always showed popular movie stars playing at the beaches in Waikiki, which created celebrated images of Hawaiian tours. The image of Hawaii which had been linked to scenes of miserable sugarcane workers made up of poor migrant Japanese transformed to that of a 'paradise' in the 1950s.

Nisei Japanese show business agents also provided the locations for making films in Hawaii. '*Hawaii no Yoru*' (Hawaiian Nights 1953) especially served as a template for Japanese movies set in Hawaii, which always had love stories of Japanese Hawaiian girls and Japanese tourist boys on the one hand against a backdrop of all the touristic places in Hawaii. These patterns originated in the Hollywood movies of the 1930s which dwelt upon the love story of white American boys and Hawaiian girls. They also described the image of Hawaiians as 'happy savages' complementing it with the depiction of Hawaii as a 'paradise' (Yamanaka 1993: 92-100). Japanese films did not only follow this kind of 'paradise' image through Hollywood films, but also created a Japanese version of Hawaii: a hybrid of developed American modern life, gentle old Japanese (immigrants), and 'paradise'. Although the love story of 'Hawaiian Nights' still included traces of sorrow found expressed through previous Nikkei experiences in Hawaii, subsequent movies such as '*Hawaii Chin Dochu*' (Fooling around in Hawaii 1954), '*Hawaii no Wakadaisho*' (Young master in Hawaii 1963), '*Yumeno Hawaii de Bonodori*' (Bon-dance in Dream Hawaii 1964) had removed any reference to the past concentrating on optimistic and unique love stories experienced by Japanese Hawaiians.

Although this nostalgic framework, no longer exists within the Japanese Hawaiian community, especially from the third generation onward, Japanese in Japan still maintain a stereotyped image. This can be seen in the recent new film, 'Honokaa Boy' produced in 2009 which still operates within the same kind of framework which no longer survives in Hawaii.

### 3 The American paradise where tourists can communicate in Japanese

Even though Hawaii is made up of six big islands, due to the fact that Japanese was not spoken in other regions outside of Waikiki on Oahu, this remained the primary destination

for Japanese tourists.

In the Hawaiian language, Waikiki means the water spring as it used to be mostly muddy areas. The land had been used by Native Hawaiians for taro, rice fields and fish ponds even if the land owner was loyal family (Native Hawaiians did not have the habit of owning land). After liners started to operate between America and Hawaii in 1925 at the height of America's then big economic boom, they needed hotels and restaurants and shopping areas. Big development was necessary, and shops, theaters and hotels opened after driving native Hawaiians out of Waikiki. The then newly developed artistic 'Hawaiian' resort began copying directly from the image developed within Hollywood films. Hotels imitated scenes from Hollywood films, which arranged torches around the inlet of the sea (in actual fact swimming pools) and hula stages beside the swimming pool (Yamanaka 2002: 170-171). After the Second World War, the area completely developed into a theme park focusing on the key concept of 'paradise'.

As Japanese tourists increased in 1964 followed by entertainers and sports players, Waikiki changed into a Japanese spoken American resort. Small and medium-sized bus companies run by Japanese Hawaiians, such as the Kobayashi tour or Roberts, which had introduced Japanese immigrants to plantation companies before the Second World War, operated Japanese tours at the beginning. They entered into a partnership with Japan Airlines and Japanese travel agencies such as JTB, and they organized package tours accommodating to Japanese tastes.

Japan Airlines' 1965 'JALPACK' brand and Japan Travel Bureau's (the present JTB Corporation) 1968 'LOOK' brand began to sell Hawaiian package tours (Airline company organized package tours in the early days, but management power gradually shifted in to the hands of travel agencies). Thus the prototype of Japanese tours in the late 1960s with guides having flags, the pick-up service at the airport and the whole meal service in restaurants, became established. Japanese package tour users were guided to Hanauma Bay and North Shore by bus in the daytime, but they spent the night time in Waikiki having supper, enjoying the Hawaiian show, and buying souvenirs. As the number of the tourists gradually increased, Nisei (the second generation Japanese Hawaiians) shops and restaurants where Japanese were spoken, such as ABC stores (owned by Nisei Sydney Kosasa) opened and welcomed Japanese tourists in Waikiki areas.

#### **4 Japanese mass tourism in Hawaii and Japanese companies**

The Introduction of the Boeing 747 in the 1970s caused a revolution in tourism in Hawaii. This was not only a revolution in air fares but also a revolution in the initiatives of

travel agencies. A new air fare system which was called BULK fares (40% discount) only applied to tourists who stayed for more than four nights, and to groups bigger than 40 people. From that time on, the standard for Japanese group tours that is six-days and four-nights became a fixture in tour packages. The short holiday fixture suited Japanese who weren't accustomed to taking long vacations and have now remained a staple of package holidays.

Due to limitations on the amount of foreign currency Japanese nationals could take with them overseas, the Japanese were restricted to 1,000\$ dollars in 1970, rising to 3,000 in 1971 before regulations were abolished in 1978. With this change, Japanese travel agencies such as Kinki Japan tourist agency, Hankyu transportation company and Japan travel entered the market with their own brands.

The rapid rise of the yen exchange rate after the collapse of the Breton Woods system led to a floating exchange rate system in 1973 which helped increase the enthusiasm of Japanese tourists who were infatuated with goods. Duty free shops (DFS) opened in 1968 and the Ala Moana shopping center attracted the attention of Japanese who liked to buy '*Omiyage*' (souvenirs). As more new travel agencies started to participate in mass tourism, the price of group tours went down to equal one month's salary of white collar workers at the end of the 1970s. Hawaii tours were not dreams any more, and the narration of the 'Up-down quiz show' on the Japanese TV program omitted references to 'dream Hawaii'. From the image of a paradise in Southeast Asia to an America where Japanese can be spoken, the image of Hawaii inverted.

In the 1970s, Japanese companies took over the mediating role that Japanese Hawaiian Nisei had played. This is partly because Nisei politicians such as the then well known George Ariyoshi had strong ties with Japanese companies like Seibu, and affluent Japanese money helped by a strong yen encouraged investment (Cooper and Daws 1985: 278-279). Deregulation of Japanese investment in 1971 caused the first investment boom. *Kokusai Kogyo* owned by Kenji Osano bought six famous hotels in Waikiki from the 1960s to the 1970s. First, Osano purchased '*Kyoya*', a Japanese restaurant, owned by Nisei Japanese Hawaiians, then continued to snap up high grade old hotels, such as the Moana, the Kaiurani, and the Royal Hawaiian (all sold off at a later date). This was followed by a series of Japanese developers occupying the resort areas. *Daiei*, which opened some shops in the 1970s bought the Mecca of Japanese '*Omiyage*' shopping, Ala moana shopping center (even though this took place through a partnership with DE Investment). Thus, as can be seen here, Japanese interests had almost completely created an all encompassing system for tourists by the beginning of the early 1980s.

It was at this time, in the middle of the 1980s, that the 'bubble' economy hit Hawaii and captured the main Hawaiian resorts. In merely two years, 1986 and 1987, 2.2 billion dollars, a half of the total Japanese money invested after the Second World War was spent on the investment in Hawaii. Moreover, a total of 2.6 billion dollars was invested just in 1989 alone (East West Journal 1991:182).

The number of Japanese visitors which was around 130 thousand in 1970 increased up 640 thousand in 1984 and then jumped to 1,300 thousand in 1989 (which is almost the same number 2007). Although tourism which had become the number one industry for Hawaii's economy in that period was sustained by Japanese tourists at the end of 1980s, Hawaiian people including Japanese Hawaiians became critical toward the Japanese investment systems which did not have any benefits for Hawaiian communities. The Japanese comedian and film director *Takeshi Kitano* opened a curry restaurant and *Tonneruzu* (the tunnels), a stand-up comedy duo opened a souvenir shop in the center of Waikiki, followed by a host of other 'talent shops' from the late 1980s to the early 90s. Hawaii slowly transformed into a Japanese theme park in America.

## 5 The individualization of overseas tours and the peaking of Japanese tourists

One characteristic of the change of Japanese overseas tourists' patterns has not only been a full service system controlled by the Japanese travel agencies and land operators, but it has been the individualization of tourists' trends which at first glance look contradictory to the former. Companies which paved the way for the individualization of travel arrangements were the new discount wholesalers such as HIS, and MAP International (now known as Across). These companies were born from the politics of deregulation that took place within international tourism. As the owners of these companies such as HIS used to be individual backpackers, they taught their customers the way to travel individually and sold travel tickets and hotel accommodation separately. This helped young people become independent travelers. By the 1990s, most tours became what is known as a 'Skeleton' type tour which includes only transportation and accommodation. This kind of individualized travel has conflicted with the older full service tour systems from this period.

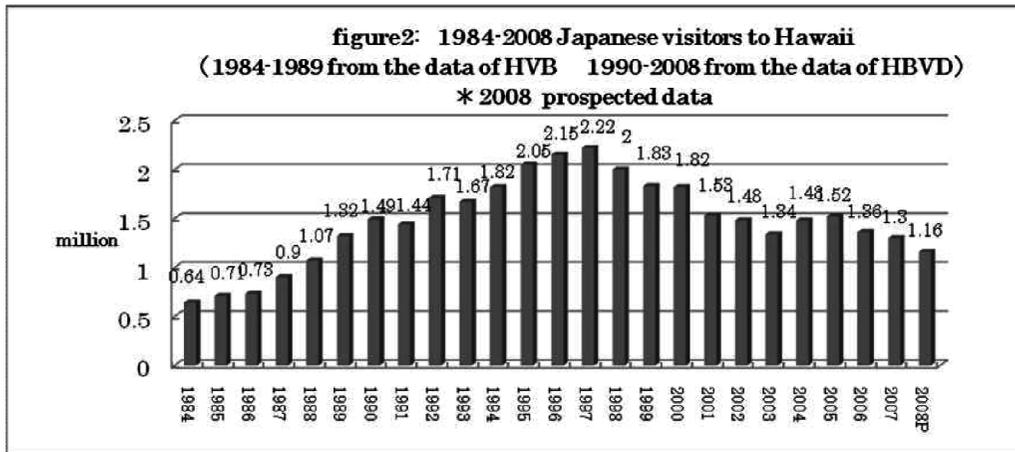
By the end of the 1980s, most of the package tours transformed into skeleton type tours and free ride stagecoach bus systems, such as the Waikiki trolley and Olioli trolley which connected the hotel areas of Waikiki with some shopping centers and tourist attractions near Waikiki. While the price of the air fare dropped, the introduction of the skeleton systems led to a reduction in profits, leading to operators trying to claw back other profits through shopping for gifts and optional tours. As tourists' freedom increased, tour operators needed

the well-controlled management of the tourists and highly controlled customer information. As the number of individual repeaters increased, tourists who got tired of going to stereotyped tourist destinations began to search for travel information for themselves. Tourists were not so dependent enough to be obedient and spend money for the operators. Thus it is clear that a struggle was taking place between tourists and operators whereby on one hand, tourists wanted independence and on the other travel agencies wanted them to be incorporated into their business model: this tendency was not only seen in Hawaii tours, but also in other overseas tours as well.

The strong price of the yen after the Plaza Agreement in 1985 further helped to increase overseas tourists. The overseas tourist magazine such as *AB-road* in the 1990s helped consumers compare tour prices, which in turn propelled the discount of fares. The peak in Japanese tours to Hawaii was in 1997 (2.22 million).

In addition to the yen's sudden appreciation and the drop in air fare prices, the American government offered Japanese visitors a visa waiver program, which led to the rapid expansion of the number of Japanese tourists. The total number of Japanese visitors in 1989 doubled from that of 1984 reaching 1,300 thousand, almost the same level of 2007 (which is more than figures for 2008).

After the Japanese economic bubble burst, Hawaii tour fever did not come to an immediate end, rather it just shrank for one year. With the help of the yen's high appreciation, the number of the Japanese tourists increased, but it was also a result of a business model centered around small profits (and quick return) selling cheap skeleton type tours. Even JTB created a FIT (Foreign Individual Travel) center and took part in the cheap tours wars. One reason for the reduction of prices was that the travel magazines such as 'AB road' (published from 1984 by *Recruit* a large publishing company) and 'Blanca' (by *Gakusei Engokai* from 1989) helped people to compare prices. Thus the number of Japanese visitors to Hawaii went over the two million mark in 1995, reaching two million 22 thousand in 1997 (which was the peak of the Japanese visitors from that time on). Selling Japanese FIT tourists who had visited Hawaii several times, the stereotyped package tours reached their limit. The desire of going to extraordinary places led to Japanese turning their interest toward cheaper Asian resorts. As a result of this, the number of Japanese visitors fell by half since the peak in 1997.



## 6 Changes in the image of 'paradise' and the new Hawaiian tourism

As mentioned previously, the Hawaiian illusion of 'paradise' plays upon the image of the 'happy savage'. Over time, the culture of Hawaii has changed in the way in which people can easily understand the context of White American culture of mainland America. Native Hawaiians call this imagined Hawaiian created by White Americans the 'Happa Haole': meaning half White American in Hawaiian, which in turn has strongly emphasized the Hawaiian Renaissance movements from 1970s onwards. This movement made the Hawaiian tourist culture develop in two directions. One is the sophistication or the gentrification of tourist culture commercialized for an affluent American class. The American nouveau riche avoided mass tourist areas such as Waikiki and went directly to Maui or Big Island where there remained a trace of the former Hawaiian atmosphere. Kaunapari, Kihei or Waimea which have low rise hotels and condos along the coast and are surrounded by green areas at the back, thus they are popular among the nouveau riche. Many of them move to Hawaii as seasonal settlers or lifetime settlers after retirement. Although they do not have an older stereotyped Hawaii image, they have a more sophisticated understanding of the image of 'paradise' or 'happy savage'. This also causes conflicts with local native Hawaiian communities, through issues such as an increase in land prices (too expensive for their children to buy), a lack of water, and the destruction of their original culture. Natives do not think that mainland developers and Japan bring locals any benefits without some form of low income employment. Some local native Hawaiians' groups are fighting against the developments for rich settlers, because the developers don't

deeply understand these problems and still create the conditions that make new settlers seek the 'Happa Haole' illusion.

This has brought about a movement that protects native culture and nature against the white American gentrification that is also spreading among the local natives in Molokai, Maui and Oahu (Sudo 2008). At present they are recalling and remaking native Hawaiian nature and culture and creating their own indigenous eco-cultural tours. This is not only a movement to preserve nature and culture but it is also a form of community business. It is also a fact that some activists have a bias toward white Americans through their 'anti-White American' stance. Many white Americans, however, do take part in the local managed eco-cultural tours and deeply understand the meaning of their movement. I observed a white American volunteers who help their community businesses.

When I stayed in Molokai for some weeks as a volunteer to help with their eco-cultural tourism, I realized that even for natives who are accustomed to the modern life, the Hawaiian Renaissance Movement itself also exists as a kind of 'illusion'. However, I also realized that the 'illusion' should be made from the perspective of the life of the indigenous people living in their culture who at the same time are making efforts to recreate their culture and nature. If tourists experience and can deeply appreciate their indigenous culture, they can come to know another way of living and recall the 'extraordinary' spirit that resides in the tourism 'illusion'. This is the possibility of future tourism in Hawaii.

Japanese travel agencies have not provided any Hawaiian tours that introduce to tourists a deep sense of Hawaiian indigenous cultures and a way to sympathize with them. Yet, Japanese FIT tourists who have been to Hawaii several times are now seeking new experiences that go beyond the stereotyped image of Hawaii. Japanese travel agencies have not responded to their needs. This will cause the number of Japanese tourists to seriously decrease.

To conclude, as I discussed before, the desires for tourism are based on a human nature that seeks the 'extraordinary' or 'otherness' remote from everyday daily life. The sustainability of tourism consists in how to maintain a sense of 'extraordinariness' or 'otherness' and experience them without depleting their capacity. As such, the sustainability of tourism is directly connected with the sustainability of indigenous nature and culture.

## References

山中速人1993.『ハワイ』岩波新書

山中速人2002.『『楽園』幻想の形成と展開』春日直樹編『オセアニア・ポストコロニアル』国際書院

須藤廣、遠藤英樹2005.『観光社会学—ツーリズム研究の冒険的試み』明石書店

須藤廣2008.『観光化する社会』ナカニシヤ出版

Cooper George & Daws Gavan 1985. *Land and Power in Hawaii*, Benchmark Books Honolulu  
Hawaii

権藤千恵2004.「ハワイ日米キネマにみる戦後ホノルルの日本映画上映」『アトリサーチvol.04』  
立命館大学アトリサーチセンター

田坂ジャック1991.「ハワイ日系移民発展史」『新ハワイ百科』East-West Journal Honolulu Hawaii

East West Journal取材班1991.「日本投資の実態」『新ハワイ百科』East-West Journal Honolulu  
Hawaii