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The impact of World Heritage Site designation on local communities – a case study of Ogimachi, Shirakawa-mura, Japan

Abstract

The paper examines economic, socio-cultural, physical and attitudinal changes in/around World Heritage Site (WHS) Ogimachi since WHS designation from the local communities' standpoint and explores the background of these changes and views. Both positive and negative changes for local communities in/around WHS Ogimachi after WHS listing are identified. There are three main factors behind these changes: the extensive and rapid tourism development after WHS inscription; the high level of appeal of a WHS status for domestic tourists; and local people's attitudes towards conservation of the cultural environment and WHS status. In addition to its conservation plan, WHS Ogimachi must have a comprehensive tourism management plan for its successful future as a place to live, as a WHS and a tourist destination.

1 Introduction

In tourism studies generally, the economic, socio-cultural, physical and attitudinal changes in the local community, resulting from tourism, have been examined by numerous researchers (e.g. Greenwood, 1989; Murphy, 1985; Pizam, 1978); however,

these studies do not focus specifically on World Heritage Sites (WHSs) and their designation but are concerned with general tourist destinations. Numerous studies have focused on the various changes since WHS designation at WHSs all over the world; however, these works mainly look at tourists, tourism development, conservation and visitor management (Hall & Piggin, 2003; Kim, Wong, & Cho, 2007; Leask & Fyall, 2006; Li, Wu, & Cai, 2008; Rakic & Chambers, 2008; Shackley, 1998a; Ying & Zhou, 2007). There is a lack of research on the views of local communities in/around the WHS. Furthermore, these studies have tended to focus more on the actual and tangible changes in local communities since WHS designation rather than on the local communities' views of the changes. However, true satisfaction for local people would depend more on their views of the changes rather than on the actual changes. Moreover, the local communities' views of the changes since WHS designation are vital for long-term tourism development as WHSs. In addition to economic, socio-cultural and physical changes in local communities, the changes from tourism and/or WHS designation also occur in local people's minds. Although this kind of change has not received much attention in tourism studies, especially those on WHSs, it is also significant for the local communities and tourism development as WHSs. Moreover, the tourism research which examines cultural and heritage tourist destinations in Japan is highly limited. The aim of this study, therefore, is to examine four major areas of change: economic, socio-cultural, physical and attitudinal changes in/around WHS Ogimachi since WHS designation from the views of local communities and to explore the background of these changes and local communities' views. For the above-mentioned reasons, the survey has contributed to the study of the impact of WHS designation and tourism on local communities.

2 Shirakawa-mura and Ogimachi

Shirakawa-mura is a rural village located in a mountainous region with heavy snowfall. Although Japan has a highly-developed transportation network, Shirakawa-mura is still difficult to access. This factor has contributed to the conservation of this authentic traditional Japanese village. Ogimachi is an area in Shirakawa-mura. In terms of architectural history, the gassho-style house is one of the most significant types of Japanese farmhouse, because of its rarity and the fact that the surviving examples remain as clusters (Agency for Cultural Affairs, 1994). Hence, the central part of Ogimachi (WHS Ogimachi), where gassho-style houses remain as a group, corresponds to the definition of "groups of buildings" described in Article 1 of World Heritage Convention (UNESCO World Heritage Centre, 2010a) and was inscribed as a WHS in December 1995 together with Gokayama. Gassho-style houses are characterised by a steep thatched roof (Fig. 1). The shape of the roof looks like the hands' shape folded in a prayer and this is called "gassho" in Japanese. Most gassho-style houses in WHS Ogimachi were built between the mid-18th century and the mid-19th century (Saito & Inaba, 1996).

Fig. 1. Gassho-style houses in WHS Ogimachi

Kumi is the self-governing community unit and yui is the traditional custom of mutual help based on the exchange of labour and operated by the members of the kumi. These customs show that Shirakawa-mura still has a certain level of community spirit which has seriously declined or been lost in most Japanese cities and towns. Kumi and yui have also supported the conservation works of gassho-style houses. WHS Ogimachi is important as a living example of a historic village because of its historic buildings and landscape, and the continued existence of traditional life in all forms (Agency for Cultural Affairs, 1994). The Preservation Plan for the Shirakawa-mura Ogimachi Important Preservation District for Groups of Historic Buildings was enacted in 1976 (Shirakawa-mura Ogimachi, 1994). The buildings and structures forming WHS Ogimachi are described in the Preservation Plan. The proper management of these buildings is the obligation of the owners of the buildings, and alterations to the existing state are strictly controlled. Canals, trees, and irrigated rice fields are also important elements of the landscape of WHS Ogimachi, and these elements are listed as environmental features in the Preservation Plan (Agency for Cultural Affairs, 1994). Regarding tourism, a great increase in the number of tourists was confirmed after WHS

designation (Fig.2). Overall, this trend continued until 2003. 2008 saw a huge increase again as the Shirakawa-go interchange was opened in July (Shirakawa-mura Commerce Industry and Tourism Section, 2009). The proportion of overnight tourists has been relatively small, especially after 1997.
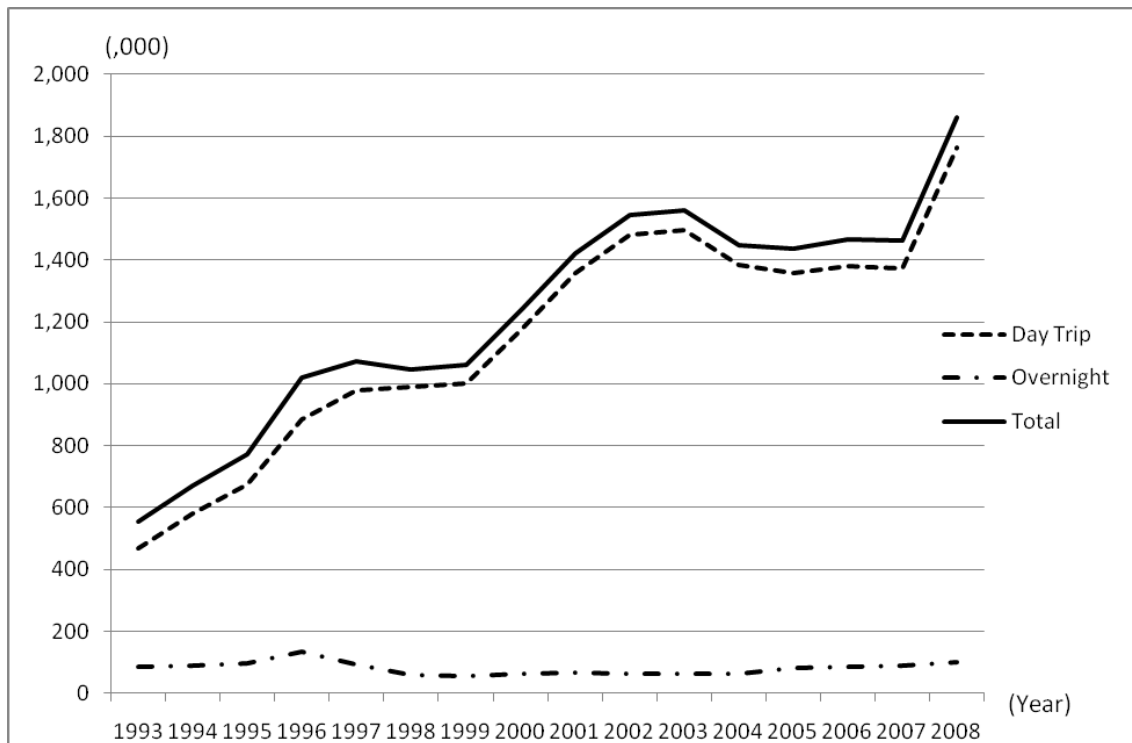
Source: Shirakawa-mura Commerce Industry and Tourism Section (2009).

Fig. 2. Number of tourists to Shirakawa-mura

Tourism development since WHS designation has caused "real" changes in the environment of Shirakawa-mura. The number of tourism-related businesses, such as restaurants, cafes, souvenir shops, and parking lots, has increased (Jimura, 2007; Saitsu, 2003, 2004, 2006). Intriguingly, however, the number of accommodation facilities has hardly changed in the WHS and has slightly decreased around the WHS (Jimura, 2007; Shirakawa-go Tourist Association, 2008, 2009). Overall, these accommodation facilities

are small minsyuku (Japanese-style inns) and are family-run; however, the young

people who can take over the business tend to stay in a big city after they graduate from

a university or college (Jimura, 2007). This trend is noticeable in young people whose

parents' homes are located outside the WHS (Jimura, 2007). Traffic congestion has

become a serious problem. It worsens during the consecutive holidays at the beginning

of May and in the middle of August (Jimura, 2007). Taniguchi, Koike, and Seto (2006)

suggest that Shirakawa-mura should introduce a system which can control traffic

volume. In fact, a park-and-ride system in peak seasons was introduced in 2006 to

mitigate the level of traffic congestion in WHS Ogimachi (Shirakawa-mura Commerce

Industry and Tourism Section, 2006).

3 Theoretical framework

3.1   *The implication between heritage and tourism*

The accelerating pace of heritage resource creation is a well-remarked contemporary

phenomenon (Graham, Ashworth, & Tunbridge, 2000; Hewison, 1987). Hall (2001)

points out that renovation, re-use or reconstruction of past urban landscape has become

an almost universal aspect of the contemporary urban scene. Regarding tourism, some

researchers admit that heritage is regarded as one of the most significant and fastest

growing components of tourism (Alzua, O'Leary, & Morrison, 1998; Herbert, 1995).

Along with this phenomenon, tourists over the last 30 years have increasingly become

more interested in consuming heritage (Ashworth & Tunbridge, 2000). Consequently,

today historic towns and quarters are competing to attract tourists, and previously

unknown places are appearing on the heritage market (Orbasli, 2000). For instance,

Eastern Europe has become accessible and former industrial cities seem to have discovered historic areas which can attract tourists within their urban structure (Orbasli, 2000).

According to Cooper, Ogata and Eades (2008), there is increasing recognition that any observable differences in heritage conservation between Japan and other developed countries are not of kind but of degree in the post-modern world. Japan, however, has struggled to avoid being involved in a growing global homogeneity caused by globalisation in the post-modern world. This struggle is similar to the heritage phenomenon observed in many Western countries (Ohnuki-Tierney, 1990). Consequently, the significance of religious pilgrimage, restoration of historical monuments, conservation of ceramic and artistic traditions, and an increasing interest in war and peace, are now recognised in the Japanese heritage tourism tradition as much as in European, Middle Eastern or Australasian traditions (Cooper, Ogata & Eades, 2008). Moreover, a trend which tries to rediscover the positive aspects of traditional Japanese society and culture has become prominent, especially since the economic bubble burst in 1991 (Jimura, 2007; Nishiyama, 2006). In Japanese rural villages, however, this tendency could be already observed in the late 1970s (Moon, 2002). Many rural villages suffered from decaying rural conditions such as depopulation and an aging society. Known as the muraokoshi (village revitalisation) movement, these villages tried to revitalise themselves utilising their cultural and natural resources unique to each village (Moon, 2002). In short, everything considered exclusive to the locality was turned into commodity and exploited in order to attract tourists (Moon, 2002). For example, more than 200 folk museums were opened throughout Japan from the early 1970s to the late

1980s (Kanzaki, 1988). In Shirakawa-mura, the mayor from 1963 to 1971 already advocated that tourism should be developed making use of Shirakawa-mura's cultural and natural heritage (Committee for Compilation of the History of Shirakawa-mura, 1998). For the above-mentioned reasons, it could be said that the heritage phenomenon in Japan emerged in the 1970s and has become more remarkable since the early 1990s.

Heritage is the most important single resource for international tourism and is multi-sold and multi-consumed (Graham, Ashworth, & Tunbridge, 2000; Peil, 2005). Heritage is the contemporary use of the past and the use of heritage is not only for economic purposes but also has cultural aims (Lowenthal, 1998). Hence, the cultural value of heritage, both abstract and monetary, is evaluated in the present situation (Graham, Ashworth, & Tunbridge, 2000). The majority of newly-opened tourist attractions all over the world are actually old (Dann, 1993; Urry, 1990). This means that heritage tourism is experiencing a period of growth (Turley, 1998). Heritage tourism has developed as one of the main sectors in the establishment of new spatial patterns of tourism (Williams, 1998). This trend is also evident at the sites investigated in this research. In WHS Ogimachi, many local people still live in the traditional gassho-style houses. In recent years, some owners of the houses, especially large ones, have made some parts of their houses open to the public with admission fees, because these houses are too large for today's daily use and the owners need additional revenue to maintain large gassho-style houses more comfortably.

3.2   Local communities and tourism development

Considering the nature and characteristics of the areas in/around WHS Ogimachi, this research adopts the definition of a community suggested by Pacione (2001, p. 356): "a group of people who share a geographic area and are bound together by common culture, values, race or social class". The communities examined in the research are regarded as locality-based communities; hence, they are called local communities. Tourism has become a community development tool for many places, especially rural and/or isolated areas, because in many of these areas, primary industries which local people were dependent upon have declined. Thus, there is a need to develop alternative means in order to supplement traditional industries (Andereck & Vogt, 2000; MacDonald & Jolliffe, 2003). WHS Ogimachi is not an exception. The decline of traditional industries for Shirakawa-mura such as construction, forestry and agriculture led to the development of tourism as an alternative, especially after WHS designation. Various agencies associated with tourism exist in local communities. Local government, private sectors and local people play important roles. Sometimes, local people even establish organisations such as a tourist association and a conservation group and this also applies to WHS Ogimachi and Shirakawa-mura. These groups play significant roles in local tourism and the management of the WHS. As of November 2009, WHS Ogimachi does not have a specific tourism management plan, though it has a well-considered conservation plan. Of various issues which are involved in local tourism planning, community involvement and reconciliation among diverse agencies with different aspirations would be especially significant (Orbasli, 2000). To realise these two issues simultaneously is a vital task for every tourist destination, especially for WHSs to keep

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their prestigious status.

3.3   *Tourism impact and local communities' views of changes caused by tourism*

From an academic view, local communities' attitudes towards tourism are a key

component in the identification, measurement and analysis of the changes caused by

tourism (Hall & Page, 1999; Ryan & Montgomery, 1994). However, studies about local

communities' attitudes towards tourism are not only an academic exercise but also a

practical one (Hall & Page, 1999), and there are different reasons behind this. According

to Pearce (1980), examination of local people's attitudes towards tourism is important in

the determination of local policy, planning and management responses to tourism

development, and to establish the extent to which public support exists for tourism.

Nash (1996) argues that local people's attitudes are useful clues to predict what is going

to happen and, considering their power, local people's negative attitudes towards

tourism development would prove to be more or less obstructive. Ap (1992) also

suggests that this kind of research is crucial, because of its usefulness for the

development of a successful tourism sector. Sirakaya, Teye and Sonmez (2002) state

that, as Doxey's (1975) Irridex and Butler's (1980) Destination Life Cycle Model

suggest, local people's attitudes towards tourism keep changing throughout various

stages of tourism development; hence, an investigation of local communities' attitudes

is important for community development. Local people's attitudes towards tourism are

also vital for themselves, because they have few opportunities to express their opinions

in the decision-making process (Carmichael, Peppard, & Boudreau, 1996). Andereck

and Vogt (2000) consider that this importance is derived from the fact that it is the local

people who ultimately decide which changes brought about by tourism are acceptable and which are not.

According to Andriotis and Vaughan (2003), local people may perceive tourism positively thanks to its potential for job creation, income generation and enhanced community infrastructure, whilst they may perceive tourism negatively because of the socio-cultural and environmental costs. More likely, local people are aware of both positive and negative implications of tourism and draw their conclusions based on the relative weightings they attach to the benefits and the costs (Andriotis & Vaughan, 2003). The view of Andriotis and Vaughan (2003) agrees with Butler's (1980) view which states that community attitudes towards tourism invariably simultaneously reveal both positive and negative aspects. Sharpley and Sharpley (1997) also conclude that local people's attitudes towards tourism can be both positive and negative. On the other hand, Andereck and Vogt (2000) state that most studies revealed that, overall, local people have positive attitudes toward tourism. Consequently, it could be said that there is no agreement on local people's attitudes towards tourism and the changes caused by tourism.

A notable conclusion from previous tourism studies would be that only some consistent relationships between diverse variables and local people's attitudes towards tourism can be confirmed. The most prominent example is the relationship between the place of residence or the level of contact with tourists and their attitudes towards tourism/tourists. In some cases residents living closer to tourist cores are more positive about tourism, while in other cases these residents have a more negative view than those who live far

from there. In previous tourism studies, the most researched factor is economic dependency on tourism and the most consistent relationship is the relationship between economic dependency and local people's attitudes towards tourism. On the whole, the residents who benefit from tourism are more likely to regard tourism impacts as positive changes.

3.4   The impact of WHS designation

In recent years, both developed and developing countries have competed for the acquisition of a WHS status and this movement appears to be growing; however, WHS designation can be viewed as a double-edged sword (Smith, 2002). Past studies found that the following positive and negative changes had been directly or indirectly brought about by a WHS status to local communities in/around the WHS.

3.4.1   Image and recognition of sites

Shackley (1998b) argues that WHS listing can bring the site the highest visibility. In other words, WHS designation can make the site well-known to the public (Smith, 2002). Bianchi (2002) and Smith (2002) state that WHS listing enhances the site image and tends to work as a marker of authenticity and quality for international tourists. Furthermore, Shackley (1998b) and Smith (2002) suggest that a WHS status has a symbolic value: it brings huge prestige at international and national level, and it, eventually, influences the decisions of local planning (Smith, 2002). On the other hand, Orbasli (2000) warns that the international recognition and publicity of a WHS may

invite a conflict between local association with the site and global ownership of it, and may place additional pressures on the physical and natural environment, and local people living in the site.

3.4.2   *Overcrowding and local people's life*

In principle, UNESCO places equal emphasis on the conservation and the use of WHSs. In other words, the policy of UNESCO is to keep WHSs in a good condition for future generations and making them available to the public as much as possible. The policy is commendable; however, it is apparent that the physical environment of WHSs, especially those which are fragile and/or not well-managed, has been severely damaged by too much visitation (Smith, 2002). Consequently, WHSs tend to face enhanced problems such as overcrowding (Bianchi & Boniface, 2002; Smith, 2002). On the other hand, Hall and Piggin (2003) investigated the number of visitors at various WHSs and concluded that a WHS status does not always invite an increase in the number of visitors. Rodwell (2002) also argues that there is no proven relationship between a WHS status and visitor numbers. Asakura (2008) examined Japanese WHSs and argues that the WHSs, not well-known to tourists before WHS listing, are more likely to see a huge increase in tourist numbers after the designation. Compared to the Japanese WHSs already famous amongst tourists before the inscription (e.g. Historic Monuments of Ancient Kyoto), Shirakawa-mura was relatively unknown to tourists before the listing. A large increase in the number of tourists to Shirakawa-mura after the designation (Fig.2) matches the view of Asakura (2008). Whatever the situation of the site is, tourist impacts on the physical environment can be mitigated by a combination of restricting

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the number of visitors with enforced visitor-education (Shackley, 1998c). WHS listing may bring international attention to WHSs. However, unless planners consider the presence of local people carefully, local people would regard the WHS status as a nuisance which can disrupt their previously quiet way of life (ICOMOS International Committee on Cultural Tourism, 1999).

3.4.3   Local culture and commercialisation

Airey and Shackley (1998) conclude that WHS designation revitalises local products, such as silk carpets, textiles and silver in Bukhara, Uzbekistan. Shackley (1998b) also notes the same kind of phenomenon in Ninstints, Canada. On the other hand, negative changes such as degradation and commercialisation might be caused as a result of enhanced publicity of the site by WHS listing (Bianchi & Boniface, 2002).

3.4.4   Management and conservation

The site nominated by its State Party must have a detailed Management Plan and a strong legal framework as part of the Nomination Documents for a WHS status (Shackley, 1998b). This means that the management and conservation plan of the site has been improved through the nomination process (Smith, 2002), and even after WHS listing, WHSs need to keep improving their management and conservation plan (Bianchi, 2002; Smith, 2002). Moreover, encouraging participation of local people in the preservation of their heritage is part of the mission of WHSs (UNESCO World Heritage Centre, 2010b).

3.4.5   Local identity, community spirit and local pride

Smith (2002) asserts that WHS listing brings national, regional and local political support. According to Shackley (1998b), WHSs can be a centre of nationalism through the enhancement of identity. Jimura (2003) and Smith (2002) suggest that WHS designation can enhance the ties among different agencies within a WHS. A historic urban zone designated as a WHS will become a magnet for local people living in/around the site (ICOMOS International Committee on Cultural Tourism, 1999). Orbasli (2000) argues that WHS designation can also increase local people's interest in their town, eventually, leading to an increase in local people's pride in their culture (Evans, 2002; Shackley, 1998b).

4   Methodology

This research adopts deductive and inductive approaches, and is conducted through the combination of quantitative and qualitative methods. Questionnaire surveys to local people who live in/around the WHS are adopted for the former, and semi-structured interviews with local specialists, who are familiar with the WHS, tourism and heritage conservation, are used for the latter. Through the review of data collection methods in past tourism studies (e.g. Andereck & Vogt, 2000; Andriotis & Vaughan, 2003; Bramwell, 2003; Burns & Sancho, 2003; De Bres & Davis, 2001; Getz & Nilsson, 2004; Kuvan & Akan, 2005), some crucial issues emerged (Jimura, 2009a). As Pearce, Moscardo, and Ross (1996) argue, most studies ask questionnaire respondents to rate in

some way a list of tourism impacts and very few studies develop this list from respondents, or give their respondents an opportunity to add to or comment on these lists. This implies that tourism researchers have had a very limited view of the nature and content of a local community's views of tourism (Pearce, Moscardo, & Ross, 1996). In light of their assertion, the researcher decided to use a qualitative method as well as a quantitative method.

Within the limitations of labour, time and budget, the best feasible methods were explored (Jimura, 2009a). If a questionnaire consisting of open-ended questions was utilised, serious difficulties would emerge in the data collection, although highly detailed data could be collected. This is because the questionnaire respondents are ordinary people in the street and in general they do not want to spend a lot of time on such surveys (Jimura, 2007; Veal 2006). Furthermore, not all local people would have comprehensive knowledge of the issues in the questionnaire surveys (Jimura, 2007). These difficulties would become more serious if interviews were adopted to obtain local people's views. It also can be said that these methods would not be appropriate to obtain relatively simple data from a lot of people to examine overall tendencies in the local communities (Riley, Wilkie, & Wood, 1998). These problems were successfully overcome by adopting the questionnaire survey for local people and semi-structured interviews for local specialists in tourism, heritage and community issues (Jimura, 2009a). The questions in the questionnaire and interview sheet are identical as the research identifies the changes since WHS designation in local communities by two different methods (quantitative and qualitative) from two different points of view (local people and local specialists) (Jimura, 2007).

Of various probability sampling procedures, systematic random sampling was confirmed as the only viable sampling procedure for the questionnaire surveys. The minimum sample size (135) was calculated based on the various values such as the population of in/around WHS Ogimachi (1.248 as of 1 December 2004) and other values (Jimura, 2007, 2009a). On the other hand, the sampling strategy for the semi-structured interviews was a combination of judgement/expert choice, and networking/snowballing (Jimura, 2007, 2009a). As a result of the fieldwork, 150 answered questionnaires were collected, more than the required minimum sample, and seven semi-structured interviews were completed (Jimura, 2007, 2009a). The quantitative data was analysed using SPSS. The qualitative data was analysed manually focusing on the changes after WHS designation, the causes of these changes and the outcomes from the changes.

5 Study results and discussion

5.1 *The issues set as questions in the questionnaire and interview sheet*

Local people (questionnaire respondents) and local specialists (interviewees) were asked to answer 17 questions, three regarding economic changes, seven about socio-cultural changes, three about physical changes, and four regarding attitudinal changes. They were also asked to discuss the most positive and most negative changes for local communities since WHS listing. Of all the changes examined in the research, only the noteworthy issues are presented here.

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47.3% of questionnaire respondents think that the variety of businesses has increased and 46.7% deem that it has not changed. Two out of seven interviewees believe that it has increased and four mention that tourism-related businesses have replaced previous industries. New businesses started after WHS designation thanks to an increase in the number of tourists: a convenience store was opened around the WHS in 1996 and a hot-spring hotel was opened in 2002 in the WHS (Jimura, 2007; Shirakawa-go no Yu, n.d.). This phenomenon matches the argument by Page (1995) and Page and Hall (2003) which states that, thanks to the increase in the number of tourists, new businesses may be attracted to tourist destinations. The specialists highlight the shift of local industry from the mixture of agriculture, construction and forestry to tourism. The reasons why this shift has occurred is that tourism is more stable and less risky than the former industries and it is easier and quicker to earn income. This view is noteworthy as the dominant view in past tourism studies is that tourism is fragile and tourism-related jobs cannot be regarded as desirable jobs, considering their low-paid and highly seasonal nature (e.g. Gordon & Brian, 2000; Krippendorf, 1987; Pearce, 1989; Williams, 1998).

Two main reasons behind this view were identified. Firstly the previous industries, agriculture and construction, are more likely to be influenced by external factors which workers cannot control, compared with tourism. In principle, tourism tends to be influenced by external factors (Page & Hall, 2003) as tourists come from outside the local communities. It is an established argument in tourism studies. For instance,

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international tourism is influenced by currency exchange rates, and domestic tourism is affected by access to a destination and the economic situation. Interestingly, however, this argument does not apply to Shirakawa-mura and tourism can be regarded as a more stable industry than others for the following reasons.

In Japan, the prices of agricultural products dramatically fluctuate due to external factors such as weather and supply. As Japan has many typhoons, farmers often suffer bad harvests. If an excessive supply occurs, the crop's price becomes extremely low. Furthermore, Shirakawa-mura is not suitable for growing crops because of the mountainous terrain and the shortage of flatland. Concerning construction, due to the curtailment of public construction works and business depression since the 1990s, the construction industry has declined. Moreover, the amount of jobs in the construction industry is heavily influenced by external factors such as the amount of public work, which occupies a large proportion of construction companies' works. Construction companies, however, cannot control the amount of works as local government decides this and they must win competitive bidding to get works. Consequently, small construction companies in rural villages such as Shirakawa-mura are extremely affected by external factors since they have limited financial and human resources.

Secondly, tourism-related jobs in Shirakawa-mura do not have negative characteristics. For example, Shirakawa-mura has improved the problem of seasonality by organising events for lighting up the gassho-style houses at night during winter. The problem of seasonality is also compensated by an increase in income through tourism which comes from the fact that now Shirakawa-mura is a famous tourist destination and can attract

tourists throughout the year. Consequently, the shift from previous industries to tourism has occurred in Shirakawa-mura and this background is similar to the arguments in previous tourism studies which state that the destinations, where traditional industries have declined, are keen to encourage tourism to create new employment opportunities which replace the jobs lost in declining industries (Fleischer & Felsenstein, 2000).

5.1.2 Privacy

31.3 % of questionnaire respondents, all of whom live in the WHS, feel that their privacy has been invaded by tourists. This view is shared by six out of seven interviewees. It was found that this invasion is caused by two factors: the structure of houses/sites and tourists' attitudes. As Shirakawa-mura has much snow, people cannot put a hedge around a house. Therefore, each house is open in all directions and thus it is difficult for tourists to recognise where a private site is. Furthermore, many tourists do not understand the WHS well and believe that they can enter wherever they want. The latter is a more serious factor as it represents the current situation of tourism in/around WHS Ogimachi.

5.1.3 "Feel" and spirit

47.3% of questionnaire respondents believe that the "feel" and spirit of local communities has become weaker, whilst another 47.3% deem that it has not changed. Overall, interviewees regard that it has become weaker. As stated above, Shirakawa-mura has maintained a certain level of community spirit thanks to kumi and yui. The

most serious problem is that the yui system has weakened. Yui is a traditional mutual help system which has played an important role in re-roofing gassho-style houses. The negative change has been caused by the delivery of subsidies and an increase in income for local people who are engaged in tourism-related jobs. Local governments give subsidies to cover the expenses of re-roofing gassho-style houses: 90% of the expenses are subsidised for the gassho-style houses in the WHS and 70% are subsidised for those in other areas in Shirakawa-mura. However, many households who run tourism-related businesses in the WHS pay the costs for re-roofing themselves and spend the subsidies on business purposes. Even if the subsidies are spent on the original purpose, they do not use the yui system any longer as they can afford to employ professional carpenters for re-roofing.

Deeply-related problems are also reported: the ties among local people and the sense of cooperation have weakened, and some people who are engaged in tourism-related jobs ignore local rules. The backgrounds of these problems are various: local people who are engaged in tourism-related jobs have become busier, local people in the WHS have become business rivals, and the number of new residents has increased. These problems imply there are intangible negative changes in local culture. Concerning the changes in the sense of community, there are opposite views in tourism studies: tourism can promote solidarity among local people (Boissevain, 1996), whilst tourism can lead the loss of community cohesion (Ryan, 1991). The case of in/around WHS Ogimachi seems to be closer to the latter.

5.1.4 Level of pride

64.0% of the respondents think that the level of their pride in/around WHS Ogimachi has increased, whilst only 0.7% feel that it has decreased. All interviewees also note an increase. The primary reason is that WHS designation has an ability to increase the level of local pride (Evans, 2002). One local specialist argues that WHS listing has directly contributed to an increase in the level of local people's pride in Shirakawa-mura. On the other hand, five local specialists view that WHS designation has indirectly contributed to this increase. WHS designation enables people who have links with Shirakawa-mura to understand that now Shirakawa-mura is noticed by foreign people as well as Japanese people, and this leads to the increase in the level of local people's pride in the whole of Shirakawa-mura. Another interviewee refers to an increase in the number of tourists as a cause of an increase in the level of local people's pride. He notes that in the past local people tended to hesitate when talking about their hometown as it was just a small rural village; however, now they are proud of living in Shirakawa-mura. In short, in/around WHS Ogimachi, WHS designation has achieved great success in increasing local people's pride. Considering the above argument, the level of local people's pride seems to have increased not only in their living area but also in their culture thanks to WHS designation and this point agrees with the assertion by Evans (2002) and Shackley (1998b), and other researchers (De Bres & Davis, 2001; Puppim de Oliveira, 2003).

5.2   The issues emerging through the questionnaire surveys and interviews

5.2.1   Tourism since WHS designation

Shirakawa-mura has experienced a rapid increase in the number of tourists since WHS designation (Fig.2). The number of overseas day-trip tourists was not available at the time of fieldwork in 2005; however, it became available later (50.000 in 2005, 79.000 in 2006, 119.000 in 2007 and 123.000 in 2008). Considering this data, it is clear that most tourists to Shirakawa-mura are domestic tourists. Hence, it can be said that this rapid increase is mainly caused by the nature of domestic tourists. Traditionally, Japanese tourists tend to visit in groups well-known sites with a certain brand (Moon, 2002). This view is supported by Graburn (1995) who argues that Japanese people usually visit famous "culturally approved" attractions. Shackley (1998b) and Smith (2002) assert that a WHS status has a symbolic value and brings huge prestige at international and national levels. Hence, WHS designation must have been a highly appealing brand for Japanese tourists.

The tourists to Shirakawa-mura concentrate on the attractions in the WHS with the route taken almost fixed, because many of them participate in a coach tour and stay in the WHS for up to two hours. This means that they do not have time to visit other unknown places, get to know local people and understand local culture. Of these tourists, the biggest spenders are those who have lunch in the WHS; however, even their spending is small, less than 2.000 Japanese yen (around 11 US dollars). According to one local specialist, the number of tourists who are keen to understand the cultural significance of

Shirakawa-mura does not seem to have increased since WHS designation, though the number of tourists shows a large increase. As WHS Ogimachi has not decided what types of tourists should be targeted since WHS designation, now WHS Ogimachi is almost at a loss what to do in the current situation of tourism: a huge number of tourists but little spending.

5.2.2   The split between the WHS and its surrounding areas

The "feel" and spirit of local communities has been weakened and a split between the WHS and its surrounding areas has occurred since WHS designation. This negative change is pointed out by 47.3% of questionnaire respondents (5.1.3), and is also regarded by 5.3% of the respondents as the most negative change. All interviewees also refer to this as one of the most negative changes. The problem can be regarded as a kind of social polarisation brought about by tourism and comes from various differences between the WHS and its surrounding areas. The WHS has experienced a large increase in the number of tourists and economic benefits brought by this increase, whilst other areas have not obtained these advantages. In other words, most tourists to Shirakawa-mura visit only WHS Ogimachi (Kuroda & Ono, 2003). The local population has increased in the WHS, while it has not changed or has slightly decreased in other areas. The differences in every aspect caused by WHS designation between the WHS and its surrounding areas can be regarded as the cause of this split. During the fieldwork, the researcher had the impression that several local people living outside the WHS envy those living in the WHS. In fact, four respondents living outside the WHS voluntarily stated that they cannot understand why only the WHS receives preferential treatment

from the local government and great attention from the public.

5.2.3   A gap between the level of interest in conservation and the actual level of

   conservation

66.0% of questionnaire respondents think that local people's level of interest in conservation has increased. Contradictorily, however, only 12.6% deem that the actual level of conservation of WHS Ogimachi has increased, and 44.6% think that it has decreased. This decrease is also confirmed by six out of seven interviewees: five argue that the number of fallow fields has increased and three reveal that some local people in the WHS have changed their empty lands or fallow fields into parking lots without permission. This section explores why this decrease has occurred despite a WHS status.

Firstly, local people, especially those who live in the WHS, need to understand the meaning of a WHS status. The Society for Conservation of Natural Environment of Ogimachi, Shirakawa-go started in 1971 (Miwa, 2000), and its main purpose was understood by local people to conserve gassho-style houses rather than their surroundings. Hence, local people still tend to focus more on conservation of gassho-style houses than conservation of their surroundings. Moreover, the area designated as the WHS is the same as the district inscribed as a Preservation District for Groups of Historic Buildings in 1976 (Saito & Inaba, 1996); hence, it must have been difficult for local people to refresh their aspirations for conservation through WHS designation. In fact, one local specialist states that local people are likely to regard WHS designation as an enhanced version of the inscription as a Preservation District for Groups of Historic

Buildings.

Local people's attitudes towards cultural heritage can also be regarded as a reason for the decrease in the level of conservation. Cooper, Ogata and Eades (2008) state that Japanese domestic tourists are not necessarily concerned with the quest for authenticity which is suggested by MacCannell (1976). Their view would be appropriate, though this inclination would be more or less common to overseas tourists to Japan. However, the more significant point when heritage tourism in Japan is discussed is that authenticity needs to be interpreted in a Japanese context. As Raz (1999) asserts, it is more important for Japanese people to be able to preserve the "form" of culture rather than its physical expression in landscape. For instance, the "spirit" of a historic building is more significant for Japanese people than the original appearance and features of the building because of various factors such as religion, history and nature (Jimura, 2009b). Hence, it can be said that to conserve cultural heritage as it has been is not always a first priority for Japanese people and this would also be related to the decrease in the level of conservation in/around WHS Ogimachi.

Overall, Japanese people pursued comfort and convenience in their daily life in the reconstruction process after World War II (Kitagawa, 1983), and this inclination does not seem to have changed dramatically (Fukuoka, 2000). This tendency would be different from European people, especially from British people, whose country has a long history of conservation of historic buildings as represented by the foundation of the National Trust in 1895 (National Trust, 2009). In fact, two local specialists mention that European people can be proud of the inconvenience caused by living in a cultural

heritage site or in a WHS, but Japanese people cannot. In other words, overall, Japanese

people are not good at accepting inconvenience (Fukuoka, 2000). This difference can

also be related to the current level of conservation in/around WHS Ogimachi.

6 Conclusion

WHS designation has brought both positive and negative impacts upon local

communities in/around WHS Ogimachi. It caused the shift of local industry from the

mixture of agriculture, construction and forestry, which had been declining, to tourism,

and enhanced the level of local people's pride. On the other hand, it caused the invasion

of tourists into local people's life, weakened the feel and spirit of local communities,

which led to a split between the WHS and its surrounding areas. Moreover, ironically,

the level of conservation seems to have decreased after WHS designation, despite a

WHS status.

Considering the above-mentioned study results and discussion, there are three main

factors which have influenced local communities in/around WHS Ogimachi since its

WHS listing. The first factor is the scale and pace of tourism development since WHS

designation. Overall, tourism development since the designation has been too large and

too rapid in both good and bad terms. This tourism development includes an increase in

the number of businesses, and more variety of businesses, as well as an increase in the

number of tourists. One of the main reasons behind this extensive and rapid tourism

development is that tourism is regarded by local government and communities as a

more stable and less fragile industry than former industries. This view does not agree

with the dominant view in previous tourism studies (e.g. Gordon & Brian, 2000; Krippendorf, 1987; Pearce, 1989; Williams, 1998) which argues that tourism is a fragile industry and tourism-related jobs are not ideal. There are two main reasons which have led to this unique view. Firstly, tourism is less likely than former industries to be influenced by external factors which local people cannot control. Secondly, tourism-related jobs in/around WHS Ogimachi have not suffered seasonality thanks to popular winter events, such as lighting up the gassho-style houses at night. Consequently, the shift from previous industries to tourism has occurred in Shirakawa-mura. This first factor has brought about both positive and negative changes in local communities in/around WHS Ogimachi.

The second factor is the level of appeal of a WHS status for domestic tourists as most tourists visiting in/around WHS Ogimachi are Japanese. Japanese people usually visit famous "culturally approved" attractions (Graburn, 1995); hence, it is reasonable that they are likely to visit well-known places with a certain brand (Moon, 2002) compared to overseas tourists. In other words, a WHS status must have been a powerful appealing brand for Japanese tourists. Consequently, the number of tourists to Shirakawa-mura has increased dramatically since WHS designation. This second factor has caused both positive and negative changes in local communities in/around WHS Ogimachi.

The third factor is local people's attitudes towards conservation of the cultural environment and a WHS status. Most local people still do not understand the significance of the cultural environment, especially the surroundings of gassho-style houses, and what a WHS status means. The conservation group in Shirakawa-mura

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needs to make further efforts to raise local people's awareness about the importance of the surroundings of gassho-style houses. In addition, what authenticity means in a Japanese context and preferences for convenience in Japanese daily life also need to be considered. This third factor has triggered negative changes in local communities in/around WHS Ogimachi.

In addition to the proper conservation plan WHS Ogimachi already has, WHS Ogimachi needs to have a detailed tourism management plan to develop tourism further in a sustainable manner and to conserve its gassho-style houses and their surroundings for its future success as a people's place of residence, a WHS and a tourist destination. Local communities, the conservation group and the tourist association in Shirakawa-mura need to work much more closely together to achieve this challenging goal.

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