World Heritage Site Management: a Case Study of Sacred Sites and Pilgrimage Routes in the Kii Mountain Range, Japan

ABSTRACT**:**

This research examines three themes: heritage management and conservation activities, local communities, and tourism development in Kii World Heritage Site (WHS) after WHS designation. Kii is a cultural WHS having links with Japanese religions and consisting of shrines, temples and pilgrimage routes. This study inductively and qualitatively examines these three themes. Overall, the current status of Kii WHS is satisfactory. Local people, tourists/visitors and experts are all actively involved in heritage management and conservation activities. WHS listing seems to have enhanced local identity, increased local people's pride in their culture and place of residence, and triggered a revitalisation of local culture. Moreover, tourism's negative impacts appear to be minimal, despite an increase in the number of visitors since UNESCO inscription. There are a few issues to be improved, which derive mainly from a lack of understanding of WHS status or conflicts between heritage management/tourism and religious practices. A more holistic approach, such as establishing a forum consisting of all key stakeholders would be useful for the further success of Kii WHS as a religious and sacred site, place to live and tourist destination.

KEYWORDS: World Heritage Sites, heritage management, local community, tourism development, Japan, religious sites

INTRODUCTION

According to Riis and Woodhead (2010), religion envelops a sense of awe, inspiration and amazement, often focused on a person, deity or symbol. Spirituality and religion have important connections to nature and tourism, and many pilgrimage trails throughout the world have developed in response to these relationships (Timothy, 2013). Pilgrimage routes associated with non-Christian religions have not been well explored in heritage or tourism studies (Timothy & Boyd, 2015). Even less known is how such locations are managed, perceived and visited by tourists. This paper examines the case study of the sacred spaces and pilgrim trails associated with Shintoism, Buddhism and Shugendo in the Kii Mountain Range, Japan, which is a UNESCO WHS. While the pilgrimage routes of Kii are important places of spiritual practice, they are also a place to live for residents and a tourist destination for visitors.

This study assesses the 'Sacred Sites and Pilgrimage Routes in the Kii Mountain Range' World Heritage Site (WHS) in Japan to examine its heritage management and conservation activities, local community involvement and perceptions, and tourism development since WHS designation in 2004. These three themes are worth examining for the following reasons. First, only three WHSs in the world include pilgrimage routes and, of these, Kii is the only one whose pilgrimage routes are linked to Shintoism, Buddhism and Shugendo—a syncretism of Japanese ancient mountain worship. Second, the significance of tourism for WHSs has been increasingly acknowledged by UNESCO, ICOMOS, academics, and practitioners, although this has not been well researched in the context of Japan.

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**DESTINATION COMMUNITIES, WORLD HERITAGE MANAGEMENT
AND TOURISM**

Jimura (2007) suggests that having an excellent management and conservation plan does
not always guarantee appropriate management and adequate conservation of WHSs. The
involvement of, and support from, local communities in the management and conservation
of heritage is vital (Jimura, 2011; Leask & Fyall, 2006; Nicholas, Thapa, & Ko, 2009;
Timothy, 2011). In fact, part of the mission of WHSs is to "encourage participation of the
local population in the preservation of their cultural and natural heritage" (UNESCO,
2015a: n.p.). The World Heritage Committee allocates the World Heritage Fund (WHF)
according to the urgency of requests, priority being given to the most threatened sites
(UNESCO, 2015b). However, WHS designation does not guarantee financial support
(Jimura, 2007).

WHSs are forms of economic, socio-cultural, and political capital, which is allocated
different relative values depending on conditions prevailing in UNESCO States Parties
(Henderson, 2014). At the local level, UNESCO designation may cause diverse changes in
local communities and tourism in the designated area (Hede, 2007; Jimura, 2007, 2011).
Based on a thorough review of the literature, several sub-themes are among the most
significant changes in local communities and/or tourism development after WHS
inscription.

The first is local culture. In their study of Bukhara, Uzbekistan, Airey and Shackley (1998)
argue that WHS designation could revitalise local products, such as silk carpets. Shackley
(1998) confirms similar impacts in Ninstints, Canada, while Bianchi and Boniface (2002)
note that the degradation and commercialisation of local culture might be triggered by

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enhanced publicity brought on by WHS inscription. Local culture can also be damaged or threatened by a country's attitudes towards its WHSs. The case of WHSs in Indonesia is a good example where "The tendency to adopt top-down, rational comprehensive planning procedures has resulted in the disenfranchisement of local people, giving greater prominence to expressions of national, 'official' culture and nationalism at the expense of local culture…It has tended to freeze sites and displace human activities, effectively excluding local people from their own heritage" (Wall & Black, 2004, p. 436).

Second, the presence and designation of WHSs can enhance local or national identity (Jimura, 2015; Shackley, 1998). UNESCO designation may encourage residents' support for an attraction once it is inscribed (Spencer & Nsiah, 2013). Jimura (2007) and Smith (2002) argue that WHS inscription can strengthen ties among different agencies within a WHS area, although such a positive change might be slow (Suntikul & Jachna, 2013). This view is supported by the results of a resident survey at Saltaire WHS (UK), which found that 24.0% of respondents felt that the 'feel' and spirit of the area had intensified since WHS designation, while 12.0% thought it had become weaker (Jimura, 2007). However, a similar survey at Ogimachi WHS (Japan) shows different results: only 5.4% of respondents believed the 'feel' and spirit of the area had become stronger since WHS inscription, while 47.3% felt it had weakened. Weakened neighbourliness and a rise in materialism were postulated as potential reasons for this negative change (Jimura, 2007). UNESCO inscription may increase local people's pride in their culture and community (Evans, 2002; Jimura, 2007, 2011; Shackley, 1998; Timothy, 2011).

Third, WHS listing can make a site more recognizable (Jimura, 2007; Shackley, 1998; Smith, 2002) and enhance its image (Bianchi, 2002; Jimura, 2007; Smith, 2002). WHS

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status may also be an ostensible marker of authenticity and a measure of quality (Bianchi, 2002; Poria, Reichel & Cohen, 2013; Smith, 2002). In short, acquiring WHS status can mean external validation and 'branding' by an international authenticating organisation such as UNESCO (Bryce, Curran, O'Gorman, & Taheri, 2015).

The role of WHS inscription as a brand has been examined well. Buckley (2004) argues that WHS status works as a global brand in nature-based tourism. Ryan and Silvanto (2009) note that WHS designation is regarded as a widely-respected brand by both countries and tourists. Countries that have WHSs seem to utilise the UNESCO brand to attract heritage tourists (Cassel & Pashkevich, 2014; Seidl, 2014; Timothy, 2011), while tourists also rely on it while selecting their destinations (Mason & Kuo, 2007; Ryan & Silvanto, 2009; Yan & Morrison, 2007). However, some studies show that overall, even when visitors who have a good level of cultural and heritage awareness may have only minimal WHS awareness (Dewar, du Cros & Li, 2012; Poria, Reichel & Cohen, 2011). Poria et al. (2011), nonetheless argue that the collective impact of WHS designation positively influences willingness to revisit a particular country.

Finally, visitation may be affected by WHS inscription. Many studies have examined the relationship between WHS status and numbers of visitors/tourists. However, no consensus has been established among researchers, because each site is unique in terms of reputation, accessibility and other influential and place-specific characteristics. A study by Poria et al. (2013) suggests that WHS listing does not affect tourist demand in Israel, and several other studies illustrate that WHS inscription does not necessarily guarantee an increase in visitor arrivals (Cellini, 2011; Hall & Piggin, 2003; Huang, Tsaur & Yang, 2012). Buckley (2004) asserts that WHS designation should be treated as just one possible reason for an increase

in overall visitor numbers at Australia's national parks with WHS status, although he believes it can be influential in increasing overseas visitation. Frey and Steiner (2011) were unable to confirm significant increases in visitor arrivals because of WHS inscription at sites that were already established tourist destinations before WHS enlistment, although a significant increase was observed at less established tourist destinations post-UNESCO listing. This view is echoed by Asakura (2008), who argues that Japanese WHSs that were not famous destinations before inscription are more likely to see a sizable increase in visitation after inscription. Cuccia (2012) cautions that such an increase might only be temporary in response to the site's new 'brand'.

Some studies have investigated changes in WHS visitation by visitors' countries of origin. Jimura (2007, 2011) found that at Ogimachi WHS, the numbers of both domestic and overseas visitors clearly increased after WHS listing, while Shepherd, Yu, and Huimin (2012) concluded that most tourists visiting Wutai Shan (Mount Wutai) WHS, China, are still domestic tourists with religious intentions even after WHS inscription.

Although there are many issues concerning local communities and tourism development, the issues discussed above are especially relevant to WHSs. This research investigates whether these and other issues are also observable at Kii WHS.

SITE DESCRIPTION AND METHODS

Kii WHS extends over several municipalities in Wakayama, Nara and Mie Prefectures, comprising three areas—Yoshino and Omine, Kumano Sanzan, and Koyasan—and three major pilgrimage routes: Omine Okugakemichi, Kumano Sankeimichi and Koyasan Choishimichi. Yoshino and Omine encompass Yoshinoyama (Mount Yoshino), three Shinto

shrines and two Buddhist temples. Kumano Sanzan is home to three grand Shinto shrines,

Kumano Hongu Taisha, Kumano Hayatama Taisha, and Kumano Nachi Taisha, and

includes two Buddhist temples, Nachi no Otaki (a big waterfall) and Nachi Primeval Forest.

Koyasan in Wakayama Prefecture includes four religious properties in the mountains

(UNESCO, 2015c, 2015d).

From an interpretivist perspective, this research adopts a case study approach, which begins

with observations and descriptions of data, followed by an explanation through data

analysis (Veal, 2011). The research uses qualitative data to achieve a deep understanding of

issues associated with identified themes. Four methods were used to accumulate primary

data: field visits to the WHS; observations; scheduled in-depth interviews with experts

from regional or local governments, tourism associations and visitor attractions selected

through purposive sampling; and ad hoc short interviews with the frontline staff of

organisations that did not respond to requests for an in-depth interview. The interviews

provided most of the data for this study and were backed up with fieldnotes and

observations.

Fieldwork was undertaken in summer 2012 in Yoshino and Omine, Kumano Sanzan, and

Koyasan. Observations were conducted at main visitor attractions and one of the main

pilgrimage routes. Field notes were developed to record the visits and observations. 11

organisations were identified to provide key informants; of these, six agreed to in-depth

interviews, and short interviews were conducted with the remaining two (Table 1). Although

the organisations were selected by the researcher, each interviewee was determined by the

organisation, considering his/her expertise and availability. All interviews were recorded and

then transcribed. Notes for the main content of the short interviews were also developed. All

data were analysed qualitatively through a coding system that adopted three stages: descriptive, topical and analytical (Richards, 2009). First, the transcripts, notes and observation field notes were scrutinised to identify key elements based on degree of relevance to the research aims, and then entered into MS Excel worksheets (descriptive coding). Second, the key elements were categorised by the themes and sub-themes identified through the literature review (topical coding). Thirdly, the meanings of key elements were analysed under relevant themes and sub-themes, and interpreted in the context of each interview (analytical coding). Some new sub-themes arose through this process. Lastly, the key elements were summarised under relevant theme or sub-theme as findings of the research.

Table 1: List of interviewees

This research has some limitations. Observations can be easily influenced by the observer's interpretation (Adler & Adler, 1994). Nevertheless, observations are still valuable and do not require direct interaction with people (Meyer, 2001), which may provide data separate from those collected through interaction with participants. Considering these points, observations were utilised in combination with the interviews. Concerning the interviews, the relatively small number of organisations involved limits the generalisability of key findings from the sample. Regardless of these limitations, the findings provide additional insight into the situation on the ground at a specific WHS in Japan.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents key findings by theme and sub-theme, indicating the data sources

(organisations) by three-letter codes (Table 1). The findings are also discussed within the framework reviewed earlier.

Heritage Management and Conservation

Awareness of Proper Management and Conservation

The awareness of proper management and conservation of Kii WHS, especially the pilgrimage routes, was raised among tourists and residents (YRO, TCO, NTA, SCO & WPO) as evidenced by Yomiuri Online (23 August 2012). However, the lack of such awareness among some residents was noted by KNT and WPO. Jimura (2007) states that a lack of awareness among local people and tourists is one of the key challenge in conserving and managing WHSs, and UNESCO listing does not always enhance it. This seems to apply to Kii to some extent; however, the findings suggest that overall such awareness has been raised among most locals and tourists since WHS designation.

Issues in Management and Conservation

According to WPO, there have been man-made disasters (e.g. fires by negligence and devilment). Some of them have been done without knowing the area is a WHS. WPO also revealed that in 2011 trees in Gongenyama (Mount Gongen), which are administered by Kumano Hayatama Taisha, were cut down by a forestry cooperative without obtaining permission from the Taisha or SCO, as they did not know the forest was part of the WHS. Jimura (2007, 2011) asserts that conservation and management problems can still be caused by local people even after WHS listing because they do not fully understand the conservation requirements. Another cause of these problems appears to be a lack of a sense

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of awe and amazement, or reverence, which is typically regarded as an essential element of religious devotion to place (Riis & Woodhead, 2010).

According to Jimura (2011, p. 291), "In principle, UNESCO places equal emphasis on the conservation and the use of WHSs". However, damage caused by excessive visitation and lack of appropriate conservation and management are serious environmental threats for WHSs (Smith, 2001; Zhang, Fyall & Zheng, 2015). Other tourist-induced management concerns are vandalism, crime and litter (Jimura, 2007). In Kii, there has been no serious vandalism, crime or litter problems since WHS listing despite an increase in the number of heritage consumers (WPO). This was confirmed by the researcher's site visits and observations.

However, irresponsible visitors do cause problems owing to their lack of awareness and understanding of religious sites and the meaning of WHS status (WPO). For example, some people use the pilgrimage routes for sporting activities such as trail running and bike riding (WPO). In 2012, three men climbed up the sacred Nachi no Otaki (KNT & WPO). The major causes of these activities and incident appear to derive from the lack of a sense of inspiration and awareness of WHS conservation as noted before. Jimura (2007, 2011) suggests that issues in WHS management and conservation could also be caused by rapid and extensive tourism development after UNESCO branding. Concerning Kii, however, evidence of such issues has not been confirmed in spite of the increased number of tourists and visitors. To prevent these problems, a mini-guide containing eight rules for pilgrimage tourists and other visitors was compiled in 2005 by a council comprised of representatives from Mie, Nara and Wakayama Prefectures based on the ideas generated by the public (WPO). The rules have been promoted on the Internet and with leaflets (Wakayama

Prefecture, 2004).

Conservation Activities

WHSs must keep improving their management and conservation plans even after WHS

inscription (Bianchi, 2002; Smith, 2002). Kii has been enhancing its plan and practices

since WHS listing, as evidenced by the findings from this research and the documents from

WPO. Conservation activities on the pilgrimage routes have blossomed (TCO, SCO &

WPO). The 'michi-bushin' (footpath maintenance) programme organised by regional and

local governments is an excellent example of such activities. Any individual or company

can be involved in the programme as a volunteer or part of a company's CSR activities

(TCO & WPO). Site visits and observations confirmed that Daimon-zaka was in good

condition. NTA states that residents of Nachi Katsuura, where Kumano Nachi Taisha is

situated, have started to do whatever they can for Kii WHS (e.g. planting flowers, keeping

the fronts of their houses clean, and cleaning up Daimon-zaka).

The examples above are evidence of the active involvement of visitors and local people in

conservation activities. This is echoed by Spencer and Nsiah's (2013) suggestion that WHS

listing may inspire residents to assist in managing WHS visitor attractions. These findings

also demonstrate that part of the mission of UNESCO sites to "encourage participation of

the local population in the preservation of their cultural and natural heritage" (UNESCO,

2015a: n.p.) is well acknowledged at Kii WHS. The sustainability of WHSs depends

chiefly on local communities' attitudes towards support for and understanding of

conservation and management activities (Jimura, 2011; Nicholas et al., 2009). At Kii,

overall, positive attitudes towards conservation and management were confirmed, and good

support is provided by the public sector, local residents and visitors. Compared to this, the degree of residents' and visitors' understanding of the meaning of UNESCO status appears to be limited. In short, they seem to understand well what they should do, but not well why they should do it. The views of local people living in WHSs, particularly newly inscribed ones, are important, as they are responsible for the future of their heritage (Jaafar, Noor, & Rasoolimanesh, 2015). Young monks in Koyasan (KGB) and the priestesses of Kumano Hayatama Taisha (KHT) recognise their responsibilities for the future of Kii WHS.

Administrative Support from the Government

The Ministry of Environment has taken more care in maintaining the footpaths after UNESCO inscription (YRO). The government's main concern is that the site may lose its WHS status because of inadequate management and conservation. The installation of any new objects is prohibited. Informant YRO also stated that many signposts, which simply show directions and names of points of interest, have been installed by the Agency for Cultural Affairs. These are examples of government support. The signposts, however, caused an unexpected issue associated with Shugendo. According to YRO, religious practitioners of Shugendo based in Kii do not approve of the signposts, which they believe hinder their ascetic practices. A fundamental Shugendo practice is that a *sendatsu*, a senior practitioner who has mastered the mountain passes by practising and therefore can show the right way, has many disciples. To become a sendatsu, a disciple must memorize the mountain passes by making three or four mountain pilgrimages. The signposts undermine the concept of sendatsu and are believed to demotivate disciples from learning the passes, because the signs show the place names and directions to follow. Hence, it is a challenge for YRO and the Agency for Cultural Affairs to reconcile the needs of heritage

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management and tourism development with Shugendo spiritual practices.

Regional and local governments have been arranging various awareness-building activities (NTA, SCO & WPO). Special classes are organised by NTA and WPO for local pupils to provide a better understanding of Kii WHS. Expert lectures for residents are arranged by SCO and WPO, demonstrating support from regional and local governments. However, SCO laments that lecture participants tend to be limited to the residents who already have a high level of awareness. Consequently, the same people tend to attend the lectures every year, while others stay away. This tendency was also noted by Jimura (2007, 2011) in that there is a difference in the level of interest in WHS conservation and management among different segments of the local population. WPO argues that some residents have been so familiar with the area inscribed by UNESCO since their childhood that they do not fully appreciate its value as a WHS. While the area became a WHS with 'universal' value, it has always been home for the locals (Jimura, 2007).

Financial Support from Governments

Funding from the World Heritage Fund is available for WHSs; however, it is allocated to the most threatened sites (UNESCO, 2015b), such as those on the List of World Heritage in Danger (UNESCO, 2015e). KNT states that there is no funding for shrines or temples in Kii WHS from public or private sources for being part of the WHS. In the case of Ogimachi WHS, however, the owners of inscribed historic houses can obtain financial support from regional and local governments to maintain their houses (Jimura, 2007). This inconsistency seems to originate mainly from the difference in the nature of properties between those in Ogimachi (private houses that need to be maintained by their owners) and those in Kii

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(great shrines or temples that may receive donations from spiritual followers or other visitors). As an exceptional case, the Japanese government covered the entire repair cost of Kumano Nachi Taisha when Typhoon Talas caused major damage in 2011 (KNT).

Local Communities

<u>Local Communities: Bond, Pride and Attachment</u>

TCO and WPO claim that local people in Kii have begun to be much prouder of their place of residence and unique culture since WHS designation. They also recognise who they are and appreciate their roots thanks in part to Kii's UNESCO status (TCO & WPO). Moreover, they now have a stronger attachment to their communities than before inscription (TCO & WPO). This is evidenced by examples that demonstrate vigorous and spontaneous involvement of local people in conservation and tourism activities. According to YRO, a new movement for restoring the landscape and townscape in compliance with regulations has emerged, and an increase in the level of visitor satisfaction has been confirmed in Yoshino and Omine after WHS inscription. Now various stakeholders have started working together more closely for the area listed as Kii WHS. NTA stated that currently almost everyone in Nachi Katsuura town is involved in conservation activities and tourism promotion to revitalise the community.

Shackley (1998) argues that WHSs can be a centre of nationalism via the enhancement of identity, while Jimura (2015) asserts that WHS listing can help shape or enhance local identity. The findings above may suggest that local identity, rather than national identity, has been enhanced among the people of Kii. According to Jimura (2007), bonds among people living in a WHS can be either strengthened or weakened through WHS listing. The

identity of Kii appears to have been strengthened. Furthermore, UNESCO inscription can

enrich ties among different agencies within a WHS area and increase local people's pride in

their culture and their home region (Evans, 2002; Jimura, 2007, 2011; Shackley 1998;

Smith 2002). As the findings above display, these positive changes in people's mindset

appear to have occurred in Kii thanks to its UNESCO designation.

Rediscovering and Revitalising Local Cultural Heritage

The Kumano River, part of Kii WHS, is the only river in the world inscribed as a

pilgrimage route (SCO). Traditional boats once used for local transportation have been

rebuilt, and boat tours have been developed. Airey and Shackley (1998) and Shackley

(1998) argue that WHS listing can revitalise local culture and products, which has clearly

happened at Kii. Bianchi and Boniface (2002), however, caution that degradation or over-

commercialisation of local culture can also occur through WHS inscription. Wall and Black

(2004) also note that WHS listing can potentially lead to the exclusion of local people from

their own culture and the imposition of an 'official' cultural narrative determined by the

government because of its top-down approaches to cultural representation. In Kii WHS,

however, such an undesirable alteration or coercion of culture is not apparent thanks to a

balanced use of the rediscovered and revitalised local culture, and a combination of top-

down and bottom-up approaches.

Involvement of Local Workers

This new sub-theme emerged through the analysis of primary data. According to NTA,

hospitality seminars are held for taxi drivers in Nachi Katsuura. NTA highlights that the

attitudes of local taxi drivers have changed since WHS listing. Most of them have been

learning from brochures and other resources voluntarily to expand their knowledge about Kii WHS. Therefore, interview and discussion evidence suggests that WHS designation has changed the attitudes of local tourism workers positively towards their workplace. This change of attitude may lead to higher levels of satisfaction among tourists using taxis in Nachi Katsuura, who tend to reserve a taxi for half-day or full-day sightseeing.

Tourism Development

Tourism and Global Recognition

UNESCO designation triggered the revitalisation of local communities in Kii through tourism development. The area inscribed as part of the site is full of cultural and natural tourism resources. Before inscription, however, it had limited outside visability, especially among foreigners, as the area was not well-established as a tourist destination (KNT, TCO, NTA, SCO, WPO, KHT & KGB). It has been suggested that WHS listing may increase recognition of a heritage site and improve its image (Bianchi, 2002; Bianchi & Boniface, 2002; Jimura, 2007; Shackley, 1998; Smith, 2002). As the findings above imply, such positive changes appear to have occurred in Kii WHS. As noted previously, WHS status may function as an indicator of objective authenticity for tourists (Poria et al., 2013; Smith, 2002) and create a marketable brand for the destination (Bryce et al., 2015). WHS status seems to have worked on Kii as a marker of authenticity and quality for foreign tourists and may be a reason why Kii has seen an evident increase in the number of overseas tourists since its WHS inscription.

WHS Status and Visitor Numbers

The relationship between WHS inscription and changes in visitor numbers has been well

investigated, but there appear to be mixed views. This is probably because the relationship can easily be affected by factors unique to each WHS. In some studies, WHS status is seen as a major brand in tourism marketing by both host countries and tourists in nature-based and heritage tourism (Buckley, 2004; Cassel & Pashkevich, 2014; Ryan & Silvanto, 2009; Seidl, 2014). In other studies, however, the impact of the WHS brand on tourism marketing seems to be limited (Dewar et al., 2012; Poria et al., 2011). For Kii, WHS status has played a significant role in tourism marketing.

There has been an increase in the number of both domestic and overseas tourists and day-trippers to Koyasan and Kumano Sanzan after WHS listing in 2004 (SCO & WPO). This trend is evidenced by Shingu City (2012) and Wakayama Prefecture (2012). Compared to 2003 (approx. 9.4 million), the number of domestic and overseas visitors to Kii WHS in Wakayama Prefecture increased by 16.7% in 2004, 18.4% in 2005, 14.4% in 2006, 21.7% in 2007, 17.7% in 2008, 13.9% in 2009 and 14.4% in 2010, while the number decreased by 4.8% in 2011 (Wakayama Prefecture, 2012). The decrease, however, should be treated as an exception since the area was severely hit by Typhoon Talas. At the local level, the city of Tanabe has seen an increase in the number of domestic and overseas tourists and day visitors since 2004 (TCO), and this trend is also confirmed at the attraction level such as Nachi Katsuura Taisha (NKT). Shingu City had the greatest number of domestic and overseas tourists and other visitors in 2007 (Shingu City, 2012). Both Kii WHS as a whole and the town of Nachi Katsuura also saw the largest number in 2007 (Wakayama Prefecture, 2012). Clear increases in visitation after WHS inscription have been found in Japan at Ogimachi WHS, Yakushima WHS, and Shirakami-sanchi WHS (Asakura, 2008; Jimura, 2007).

Asakura (2008) and Frey and Steiner (2011) suggested that a somewhat significant increase in visitor numbers is likely to be found only at WHSs that were not well-known tourist destinations before UNESCO listing, which is likely the case with Kii. As noted above, the area inscribed as Kii WHS was not a well-established tourist destination before inscription, although the site had considerable potential thanks to its rich cultural and natural resources. Although visitor numbers to Kii WHS have fluctuated since inscription, the numbers have been consistently larger than those before WHS listing, except in 2011. Hence, the assertion by Cuccia (2012) that an increase in visitor numbers after WHS inscription might be temporary appears to be the case so far at Kii in Wakayama.

The number of repeat tourists and day-trippers to Kii has also increased since WHS inscription (WPO), and the average age group of domestic visitors appears to be relatively old (SCO & WPO). NTA, however, expresses concern over a decrease in the proportion of tourists who stay overnight in Nachi Katsuura as a growing number of tourists have started visiting as many places in the WHS as possible and as quickly as possible. The low ratio of tourists to day-trippers is another theme emerging from the primary data. This trend is not ideal in terms of economic sustainability, given that overnight tourists spend considerable more onsite (Leones, Colby, & Crandall, 1998).

Overseas Tourists and Visitors

The number of overseas tourists to Kumano Sanzan and Koyasan has increased since WHS designation in 2004 (Shingu City, 2012; Wakayama Prefecture, 2012). Compared to 2003 (31,980), the number of overseas tourists increased by 55.6% in 2004, 49.7% in 2005, 86.0% in 2006, 196.1% in 2007, 214.8% in 2008, 145.5% in 2009, 176.1% in 2010 and

44.4% in 2011. The number peaked in 2008, a year later than the overall number of tourists and visitors which reached its peak in 2007. Overseas visitation also seems to have been negatively affected by the 2011 typhoon.

Koyasan already had a large number of overseas tourists and visitors, especially from France, even before WHS listing (WPO). The number has increased further after the UNESCO designation (WPO). KGB supports this claim and reveals that Kongobu-ji, part of Koyasan, has seen an increase in overseas visitors since WHS inscription. During low season and weekdays, most visitors to Kongobu-ji are Westerners, and sometimes nearly half of the people walking around Koyasan appear to be Westerners (KGB). Table 2 shows that France was the origin country of most tourists to Koyasan in 2013. The popularity of Koyasan among overseas tourists is also pointed out by NTA. Field observations confirmed this where even announcements on local buses were done in Japanese and French.

Table 2: The number of overseas tourists to Koyasan in 2013 by country of origin
(Source: Mainichi Shimbun, 28 February 2015)

Kumano Nachi Taisha has also seen an increase in overseas visitor numbers since WHS listing (KNT). Nachi Katsuura town has witnessed a large increase in the number of South Korean and Taiwanese tourists (NTA). The strong brand value of UNESCO WHSs has likely been a main contributor to a massive increase in the number of total overseas visitors (WPO). Contrastingly, Yoshino and Omine have not seen such an increase (YRO). Observations confirmed this assertion.

Buckley (2004) reports that WHS inscription has effected a large increase in the proportions of overseas tourists/visitors to Australian national parks. Jimura (2007, 2011) also states that the number of both domestic and overseas visitors has increased in Ogimachi WHS in Japan. The case of Kii is similar to the findings of Buckley (2004) and Jimura (2007, 2011) rather than those of Shepherd et al. (2012), which asserted that most visitors to Wutai WHS (China) continued to be domestic even after Wutai's inscription. Enhanced site recognition thanks to WHS status could be understood as one of main reasons why Kii has seen an obvious increase in the number of overseas visitors after its designation.

Attraction Factors and Tourist Motivation

Jimura (2011) suggests that comprehensive tourism management and appropriate conservation plans are necessary for WHSs to realise success as a WHS, residence and tourist destination. This part explores how Kii recognises the attraction factors and motivations of tourists. Overall, Western tourists are keener to understand Kii and more likely to want to have authentic experience unique to Kii WHS than Asian tourists are (TCO, SCO & WPO). MacCannell (1976) regards tourists as contemporary pilgrims escaping superficiality, instability, and inauthenticity of modern society in quest of 'authenticity'. There is a larger cultural difference between Western countries and Japan than between other Asian countries and Japan. Hence, experiencing 'authenticity' unique to Kii or Japan may be more important for Western tourists than for Asian tourists.

There used to be a French monk in Koyasan, who promoted the spirituality of the place (WPO). Koyasan's sense of spirituality may touch a chord with Europeans, specifically the

French (WPO). Visitors can participate in a *gongyo*, or prayer session, in the early morning at a *shukubo* (accommodations at temples), or an *ajikan* meditation session at Kongobu-ji (WPO). WPO believes these experiences are more appealing to Westerners than to Asians. Most Westerners come to appreciate walking the pilgrimage routes and visiting shrines and temples, while Asians are more likely to come for the hot springs, regardless of whether or not Kii is a WHS (SCO). According to KGB, the purposes for visiting Kongobu-ji vary, including studying Buddhism, religious practice and/or sightseeing, and this is common to domestic and overseas tourists/visitors. KGB, however, also suggests that visitors from Germany, France, and Northern and Eastern Europe tend to be interested in Kongobu-ji and its religion and history, while American tourists seem just to want to sightsee. Many Taiwanese apply for *shakyo*, making a handwritten copy of Buddhist sutras (KGB).

Tourism Marketing

Tourism marketing is another new sub-theme from the data. TCO, NTA and WPO fully recognise the significance of overseas tourists for tourism in Kii. TCO regards Asia, especially East Asia, is a big market. Domestic tourists tend to stay shorter than overseas tourists, but are likely to be repeat tourists who walk the entire pilgrimage routes by visiting the WHS multiple times (WPO). TCO focuses on differences in purposes of and motivation for visits between Western and Asian tourists, and believes that considering the meaning of Kii, Westerners should be set as their primary target market. TCO also deems that considering environmental and economic impacts of tourism, individual tourists rather than group tourists should be the main market segment.

The average number of nights tourists spend in Wakayama Prefecture is just 1.17, which is

the lowest of all prefectures in Japan (WPO). WPO assumes that this may be due to its

proximity to large cities (e.g. Osaka and Nagoya) with many hotels, although it is almost

impossible to explore Wakayama fully in just one day. This issue is similar to the problem

Nachi Katsuura has. WPO emphasises that regional/local governments and tourism

associations in Wakayama have been encouraging tourists to stay longer in the prefecture.

Equally, however, these stakeholders need to ensure that Kii does not experience excessive

visits, for this can cause irreversible environmental damage and overcrowding, which may

degrade the visitor experience (du Cros, 2008).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

One of the key issues in heritage management and conservation activities stems from the

dual nature of the mountainous area of Kii: a WHS and a place for the spiritual practice of

Shugendo. If signposts hinder religious practices, developing detailed visitor maps of the

area might be a solution to this conflict. Regional and local governments have adopted a

unique approach such as the michi-bushin programme for the conservation of the pilgrimage

routes. It enables locals and tourists to be involved in the conservation activities as volunteers.

This is innovative, as generally there are few opportunities for the public to engage in

conservation activities of WHSs. Enterprises can also utilise the programme as their CSR

activity. Hence, this approach seems to be effective to enhance various actors' understanding of

Kii WHS, strengthen ties among them and save the costs for conservation activities. The main

causes of the heritage management and conservation problems appear to be a lack of awareness

of Kii as a WHS and a dearth of a sense of inspiration towards the religious and sacred site

amongst some local people and tourists. These issues could be improved by further awareness-

building activities such as regular updates of the mini-guide for visitors and development of a

handbook for local people.

Overall, WHS designation appears to have caused positive alterations in local communities. Local identity seems to have been enhanced among people living in WHS Kii, and the bonds among these people and various agencies also appear to have been strengthened. Furthermore, local people's pride in their culture and home region seems to have increased. They also have rediscovered and revitalised their unique culture. Local workers, such as taxi drivers, as well as local people are actively involved in conservation activities and tourism development. There seems to be few major issues in tourism development after WHS listing. Kii WHS has already selected specific target market segments deciding what types of tourism they should pursue, which appears to be appropriate at the moment. As already noted, the regional and local governments and NTA appear to be highly aware of tourism marketing and the needs of visitors. Effective tourism marketing cannot be realised without a good understanding of tourists' motivations (Fodness, 1994; Yan & Morrison, 2007). Therefore, these organisations' analysis of their main attraction factors and the visitor motivations seems to be commendable, considering the meaning of Kii WHS. The main target markets they have chosen based on their analysis appear to be reasonable.

In conclusion, a more holistic approach should be taken to secure a sustainable future of the WHS, for instance, organising a forum consisting of representatives from various stakeholder groups, including both hosts and guests, to exchange their ideas and develop clear goals with appropriate strategies for the long-term success of Kii as a religious and sacred site, WHS, place to live, and tourist destination.

This research has some limitations. It would have benefited from more comprehensive in-

depth interviews with all key stakeholders. As this is an initial case study, the

generalisation and conceptualization of key findings are obviously limited. Similar research

at other WHSs around the world could result in the development of models that might

explain the main changes following UNESCO WHS inscription.

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