

Regional Performance, Stage Setting and Authentication in Heritage Tourism

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One of key attributes of rural tourism is authenticity. This concept is especially important for tourist areas, like the city of Amakusa in Japan, which attempt at promoting tourism venture with intangible cultural heritage (e.g. oral tradition, performing arts, and knowledge), although possessing little tangible cultural heritage (e.g. buildings, monuments, historic sites, and artefacts). The city of Amakusa has inherited the European Culture which came from Portugal through propagation of Christianity in the first half of the 17th century, while few physical properties related to the inherited culture remain today. An important issue for this city is: how to establish authenticity in tourism with such intangible cultural heritage. This study develops a theoretical framework of authentication in heritage tourism as a process in which cultural heritage is confirmed as original, genuine, and real among regional actors. It also investigates the case of tourism venture in Amakusa on the basis of developed framework. The authenticity of cultural heritage, especially intangible heritage, cannot be constructed and preserved without a reiterative, performative process in tourist areas, according to Cohen & Cohen (2012), “hot authentication”, in which various actors including hosts, tourists, residents, and experts generate, protect and amplify their beliefs with regard to authenticity of the heritage through their performative acts. On the other hand, the authenticity of cultural heritage also depends on formal, official procedures, or “cool authentication”, by which the authenticity is certified through the act of experts or an authority. Reviewing tourism literature on the concept of authenticity and authentication, the study proposes a practical approach to authentication through staging and coordinating regional performative practices in heritage tourism.