

# Being a Tourist in Hawai'i: Japanese Tourists and Authentic Hawai'i and *Rizokon*

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## Abstract

While COVID-19 pandemic now restricts travels around the world, there are still a number of the Japanese who want to travel Hawai'i, including couples who are dreaming to have a wedding in Hawai'i. Based on the research I conducted in 2015, in this paper, I investigate how and why Japanese tourists have pursued in authenticity during their stay in Hawai'i. While some scholars criticize Japanese tourists' ways of seeking authentic Hawai'i, in this research, I unveil how and why questions by especially paying attention to the analytical concept of home and away relationship. Authenticity makes clearer the difference between their ordinary lives at home and away. At the same time, however, I argue that most of them acknowledge the limitation of their understanding of authenticity and that must be seen as created by a desire strongly connected to their home. This project is one of the first attempts to prove how Japanese tourists use authentic Hawai'i to fashion themselves and how they absorb it with their own styles.

## Keywords

Transnational Tourism, Japanese Tourism, Authenticity, Hawai'i

## Introduction

Since before WWII, Japanese people have considered Hawai'i a paradise resort. They have branded Hawai'i as a place where people can enjoy the bluest sky and beaches that cannot be seen in Japan. Historically, after the Japanese government in 1964 liberalized foreign travel restrictions, ever-increasing numbers of Japanese travelers visit Hawai'i and enjoy “paradise” by lying down on the beautiful beaches and shopping in Waikiki or Ala Moana Shopping Center.

While a number of Japanese tourists preferred particular places that are famous among the Japanese, recently we can see a gradual shift of a focus of Japanese tourists that they have become increasingly interested in finding “authentic” Hawai'i. In an article for Honolulu Advertiser.com, Frank Haas, a marketing director for the Hawai'i Tourism Authority, says that, “Truly, the Japan traveler is just different from the historic

Japanese visitor, who came to Hawai'i only to shop and go to the beach. We're seeing more of an interest in authenticity and culture. You're seeing Japanese travel for fitness and wellness.”<sup>1</sup> Japanese travelers are traveling to more diverse destinations, and Hawai'i is no longer regarded as a novel place for most Japanese travelers. Even so, the number of Japanese travelers to Hawai'i is still increasing. Yaguchi Yujin notes that most recent Japanese travelers are repeaters, and their purposes for taking trips to Hawai'i are changing gradually from “typical” Hawai'i destinations into “authentic” Hawai'i and mentions that these travelers seek the things and places that only local people know.<sup>2</sup>

By specifically focusing on tourists who visited Hawai'i for their weddings, this research analyzes how Japanese tourists interpret authenticity and explain the analytical tie between home and abroad. Through this research, I argue that Japanese society provides the background to understand why they desire authenticity when traveling in Hawai'i. The transnational perspective on authenticity reveals the complex processes by which other nations and peoples reconstruct meanings of authentic Hawai'i based on their own needs and sociocultural background embedded in their own nations.

The reason why I feature the connection of home and away in this research is that I argue that Japanese tourists' hopes to experience something authentic tightly connects to the analytical concept, home and abroad. According to Chris Rojeck, tourists are different from the groups of people moving around the globe such as immigrants, refugees and exiles. Because tourists know that they have limited time to travel and can return to a safe place “home,” they can travel for pleasure without any anxious compared to people who barely return to their home. Rojeck adds that this “enjoyment” is also a particular feeling that travelers have.<sup>3</sup> Based on Rojeck's argument about the relationship between home and away and the characteristics of travelers, this research investigates the process how Japanese travelers modify the meaning of authentic Hawai'i by analyzing the connection between Hawai'i and their home, Japan. While it is impossible to define only one type of modern society, to pick up one society and focus on the cultural and social background concretely is important to analyze the tourists themselves. Considering this, it is inevitable to think about their home context before we can understand their desire to see and experience authenticity in Hawai'i.

### **Previous Studies**

In tourism studies, authenticity has played an important role and has been discussed by many scholars. In the case of Japanese tourists, many scholars discuss the concept of Japanese tourists' authenticity and criticize a focus of authenticity done by Japanese tourists. Yaguchi, for example, argues that Japanese tourists have a number of misconceptions about the authenticity by explaining “local,” particularly that they can never understand any local concept after staying for just a few days. Yaguchi notes the meaning of “local” in Hawaiian language, “Thus, there has been a clear difference between people who belong to a

Hawaiian society and who do not by tangling with a concept of locality, history, and race in terms of the notion of 'local.' By distinguishing who are 'local' or not, they try to define Hawai'i as a place where only 'local' Hawaiian people live.”<sup>4</sup> In addition to this, historically, the meaning of “local” has been a political concept. Yaguchi argues that Japanese advertisements completely ignore the historical meaning of “local” in Hawaiian society.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, Yaguchi mentions the impossibility of Japanese to understand the concept of “local.”

While Yaguchi cites Japanese tourist's limited experience of authenticity, Jennifer Beer questions whether the model of tourists seeking authenticity fits Japanese tourists at all. Beer says that most Japanese do not seem to care about authenticity when traveling abroad.

In the case of Japanese overseas packaged tourism... Japanese tourists seemed more interested in acquiring status through cultural and material capital, escaping the confines of urban life, cementing social ties and establishing one's identity as Japanese.<sup>6</sup>

Obayashi Junko also criticizes Japanese tourists for not trying to see the “authentic” points in Hawai'i. In her Master's Thesis, “Hawaii in the Japanese Tourist Gaze,” she argues that,

How and why are such rich historical and cultural aspects of Hawai'i missing from Japanese tourist views? Are we continuing to reproduce such a singular tourist discourse about Hawai'i? If it is true that Hawai'i is so special to the many Japanese who visit here, isn't it also true that there could be multiple alternative ways to learn about this place?<sup>7</sup>

Obayashi thinks Japanese tourism is based on materialism and criticizes Japanese travelers who visit Hawai'i mostly for shopping expensive brand products, souvenirs, and Hawaiian local products. In addition to that, Obayashi argues that Japanese travelers do not come to Hawai'i to seek “authenticity.” Both Beer and Obayashi argue that Japanese tourists mostly do not focus on authenticity but seek a resort to have a rest in “paradise.”

As these scholars argue about the importance of authenticity for Japanese tourists, it may be impossible for Japanese tourists to understand perfectly about other countries during their short vacation. Also, it is questionable whether the general notion of authenticity among the Japanese is appropriate or not. I agree with these scholars' arguments on the point that whether Japanese travelers care about the authenticity or not, they cannot understand the concept of authenticity. However, I argue that to simply confining the study to whether Japanese tourists see authenticity is not enough to understand Japanese tourist behavior. Instead, in this research, I analyze the cause of how and why Japanese tourists are seeking authenticity, showing that

the trend of pursuing authenticity especially in the case of Hawai'i relates to their home, Japan.

Among scholars of tourism studies, some have already discussed authenticity by utilizing comparison between home and away. For example, in *Being a Tourist*, Julia Harrison pays attention to the reason why tourists desire authenticity and explains how tourists seek the authenticity by mentioning the distance between home and away. Harrison interviews thirty-three Canadians and analyzes the impact of traveling on their lives in Canada and the reason why they travel abroad. Harrison notes the “liminality” that tourists experience while they are away from their home.<sup>8</sup> Within such a “liminal” experience and place during their vacations, Harrison says tourists can forget the existing order they encounter in their own countries. For example, in one interview a woman says that, ““All of a sudden you don't have to conform to any kind of basis social mores. If you want to do something that makes you look idiotic, there's no one to look at you expect someone else who you've never seen, and it really doesn't matter. It's always in great fun and joy.””<sup>9</sup> Although it is likely that tourists forget their standard norms in their own country during their travels, Harrison argues that actually these travelers still keep their social norms and use them as criteria to make some difference between the locals and themselves. Harrison notes that tourists are regarded as “myth-makers,” creating their own authenticities based on their own culture and standards used in their own country.<sup>10</sup> Harrison argues that tourists cannot enjoy their travel without thinking about their home, and that “we have a sense of home only in relation to away, as it is when ‘we are on the road’ that we most assiduously produce homes.”<sup>11</sup> To realize our home is to see it from some distance. Harrison further notes that tourists often come to appreciate their home through their travels. “Home was affirmed as a desirable place, no matter how anxious they had been to depart from it.”<sup>12</sup> Therefore, even though some argue that tourism is “superficial humanizing,” an inability to understand the local places, people, culture, and customs, Harrison argues for a different perspective, one focused on how tourists develop their own self-understanding based on the relation between home and their tourist destinations.

Given Harrison's thesis, the interrelationship between home and away can also be seen among Japanese tourists in Hawai'i. The created and widely known image of authentic paradise Hawai'i occurs from a comparison between Japan and Hawai'i. As Harrison says, Japanese tourists cannot seek authentic Hawai'i without comparing their own home and Hawai'i. Even though Japanese tourists try to forget and sometimes escape from their lives in Japan during their staying in Hawai'i, they cannot be completely cut off from Japan. Built upon Harrison's perspective, I argue that the persistence in authenticity and the comparison between Hawai'i and Japan work together, because the comparison between them makes Hawai'i more paradise through the existing image of Hawai'i and that produces a desire for authenticity. Consequently, the concept of authenticity also needs to be considered in order to understand Japanese tourists.

### ***Rizokon* in Hawaii**

In this section, I focus on Japanese resort weddings in Hawai'i as a case study from the perspective of a Japanese woman, because it demonstrates her desire to distinguish Hawai'i with Japanese society. Recently, resort weddings are becoming popular, and the word *rizokon* (resort wedding) has even been coined to describe the phenomenon in Japan. In this part, I argue that the desire of Japanese couples wanting a wedding in Hawai'i rather than in Japan relate to their longings for a Hawai'i distant from Japanese conventional practices. I also prove the strong demand for authentic Hawai'i for this couple and examine the reasons. I am aware that having only one informant has shortcomings to deepen my research. However, this interview is very valuable source for this research since they clearly represent the concept of authenticity, home and away relationship and the notion of conventional practices in Japanese society.

According to a research done by zekusī, a Japanese wedding company, the rate of *rizokon* held in foreign countries is still small, but that recently the rate of Japanese people who tried to do *rizokon* is about 30%.<sup>13</sup> Other market research shows that in 2017, about 68% of Japanese weddings abroad were held in Hawai'i in 2016, and that Japanese wedding companies have been forced to provide customers with ever increasing options to meet the new demand for *rizokon*.<sup>14</sup> Also, as is true of Japanese travelers generally, Hawai'i is well known as the most famous place for *rizokon*. Indeed, while I was staying in Hawai'i, I saw a lot of Japanese couples in wedding attires in Waikiki at the beach and even in a café.

In Japan, a wedding is considered to be one of the biggest events in one's life not only for the couples but also for their families, relatives, friends, and coworkers. According to Okamura and Iwashita, one of the main reasons Japanese have weddings is so the couples can say thank you to those around them.<sup>15</sup> There is a book called *Kekkon no Dandori & Shikitari no Subete ga Wakaru Daijiten* [The encyclopedia telling you everything about the plan and tradition of wedding].<sup>16</sup> This book tells a lot of information about weddings in Japan and explains tons of rules and tradition that couples are supposed to obey. There are ten chapters explaining what couples should do for their wedding. For example, the wedding ceremony and party chapter contains fourteen rules that couples are expected to follow. As another example, it shows their appreciations to the guests the couples have to send correct invitations and carefully choose good dishes for their party.<sup>17</sup> Overall, this emphasizes the importance of treating guests appropriately and obeying Japanese traditions and rules.

However, in most resort weddings the couples have their weddings only with their family and some close friends. *Rizokon* is getting popular precisely because it helps couples avoid traditional and rigid rules. As a result, couples seek authenticity that seems totally away from their daily lives.

Considering these things, in this part I focus on *rizokon* and point out how the relationship between *rizokon*

and tourists' desires for authenticity are tangled among Japanese couples. I analyze one interview done with my friend who got married and had a wedding in Hawai'i in 2014. The style of the interviews is a casual talking.

When I talked with my friend, Miyo [pseudonym], she was twenty-six years old and had worked at a health insurance company for four years in Nagoya. Her fiancé was twenty-seven years old and works at a cell phone company in Osaka. They had dated for approximately four years and had lived separately since Miyo's boyfriend graduated from university. Miyo explained to me that she planned for a wedding ceremony at a church in Honolulu, and a party at an expensive hotel in Waikiki, Halekulani. She told me that in Hawai'i, generally, there are three types of wedding venues: church, chapel and hotel.

I have really wondered which is better to have a wedding in a church or a chapel. But I decided to get a wedding in a church, since all the chapels are constructed by Japanese wedding companies just for earning money. I thought that these chapels may be gone and reconstructed in the future, but the church may last longer than that. That's why I chose a church. Also, I want my wedding to be Hawaiian style. Since the church was established by the locals, I prefer a church, and my dad said the same thing (Interview, 12/03/04).

Miyo showed me a picture of Honolulu Community Church where she will have a wedding party and said that,

The point of this church is that the stained glass is not like a drawing of Jesus Christ but that of Hawaiian flowers like Hibiscus. There is also a beautiful garden in the church and I want to have a wedding in an open-minded space because Japan seems very closed. Oh, we will also have a Hawaiian salt ring pillow. Before exchanging rings, a priest will bring a deep wooden plate filled with Hawaiian salt, and our rings will be put in the plate to cleanse. In addition, we will have a lei ceremony during the wedding when we give leis to our parents and hug them like Hawaiians. I think it is the alternative of a flower gift in Japan but we have to pay for the lei ceremony. I didn't tell you but my dad will wear an Aloha-shirt and my mom will wear a Hawaiian dress, Muumuu. I also hope all my friends will wear colorful dresses not like the formal outfits in Japan. One more thing, we will have a photo tour. There are two types, and one of them is a tour of the beach where a professional photographer takes pictures of couples at the beach. There are many types of shots and it will be a really good memory after that for us. The other tour is of the town, and the photographer takes some pictures of the couples in the town. Ah, do you know Hawaiian theater? It is one of the famous places to take a photo for newlyweds. Anyway, we chose a beach photo tour (Interview, 12/03/2014).

Considering the part of the interview, we can see Miyo is clearly peculiar about authentic Hawai'i for her weddings. Surprisingly, there are a variety of means for the couples to experience "authentic Hawai'i" prepared by wedding companies like choosing a historical and local Hawaiian church, a lei ceremony, and a photo shooting. Furthermore, she asked her parents and also friends to wear dresses like Hawaiians do. By decorating their wedding with something authentic Hawaii, the couples tried to create their wedding authentic as much as possible. The authentic Hawaiian style wedding based on an image of "paradise" Hawai'i as Miyo mentions seems liberating, although in fact she does not know anything about Hawaiian style wedding at all. In short, it is clear that how Miyo and her husband created their own notion of authenticity just for themselves.

I asked her the reason to get married in Hawai'i, and she answered that,

I know that there are so many countries that we can have a wedding. But every Japanese likes Hawai'i, and I want my family and best friends to enjoy Hawai'i, too. Also, I guess because of an image of Hawai'i, I chose Hawai'i. I really like the atmosphere of Hawai'i since it seems open-minded and people walk around in T-shirts. If we have a wedding party in Japan, in most cases we do that in a hotel, and we have to greet so many guests who are mainly a boss or some other people I do not know well. For me, the atmosphere is too closed. Since I want to have a more open party, we decided to have one outside where we can see Diamond Head. I know that since we have lived separately, it was kind of annoying to decide one place to get married, so we decided *rizokon*. But furthermore, I just need an open place for our wedding" (Interview, 12/03/2014).

Miyo told me that she only invited her family and some close friends because to invite her boss, relatives and coworkers is troublesome. Considering the comparison between Hawai'i and Japan, and the Japanese traditions for weddings highlights that couples who do *rizokon* in Hawai'i are exhausted with Japanese society and social customs. Since authenticity lets Japanese couples feel more distant from Japan, they seek authentic Hawaiian elements for their weddings. The point is that although there are many foreign countries where Japanese couples feel remote from Japan, Hawai'i is special for most Japanese because Hawai'i has already been endorsed as a paradise. Also, the desire to experience authenticity represents the couples' resistance to standard Japanese wedding style over which they have little control.

I also asked the difference between Hawai'i and Japan for Miyo. She told me that,

As I said there is an open-minded atmosphere in Hawai'i. But in Japan, it is not like that. Japan is ordinary, daily life for me. I know whenever I travel, I would feel the same thing. But at the same

time, I don't know why but whenever I go back to Japan, I feel so relieved. I only know that staying in Hawai'i is not real but just a dream. I think such kind of limitation makes our wedding in Hawaii more valuable. I am not sure whether I want to live in Hawai'i as a citizen. I prefer being travelers for now! (Interview, 12/03/2014).

The interesting point that Miyo states here is while Miyo illustrates how Hawai'i is special for her, she does not want to live there forever. This tells us that the curiosity tourists have towards different cultures and societies are limited, but the larger point is establishing a sense of herself, Japanese. Miyo knows that she is Japanese and is ready to be back to her home, Japan. For her, home is always visible during her trip and that also shows us how *rizokon*, authenticity, and Japanese society are tightly interwoven.

### Conclusion

Hawai'i has been positioned as “paradise” and always ranked as one of the best places where Japanese people most want to travel. However, as seen, recently the demand of Japanese tourists in Hawai'i has been shifting. According to Lynda Arakawa, a writer at Honolulu Advertisement.com, “the more independent Japanese traveler, who ventures beyond typical tourist spots, provides an opening for local shops and businesses that traditionally have not catered to the Japanese visitor market.”<sup>18</sup> Arakawa explains a shift of Japanese tourists who focus on authenticity. In addition to this article, in several guidebooks, such as *Mapple* and *Rurubu*, it is also clear that the word “local” is one of the most important keywords to attract Japanese tourists since in almost every page, the word “local” is used at least once.

Although, many scholars have criticized Japanese tourists for their inability to experience authentic Hawai'i and argue that they do not care about authenticity at all, obviously many Japanese tourists hope to see and experience authentic Hawai'i. Since Hawai'i has been defined as “paradise” among the Japanese, the term of “authenticity” permits the Japanese tourists to associate “authentic” Hawai'i with “paradise” Hawai'i. From my perspective, one of the reasons Japanese continue to seek authenticity is their definition of the remoteness between Hawai'i and Japan based on an existing image among Japanese tourists. In other words, the distance between the two countries makes Hawai'i a beautiful paradise compared to “daily” Japan. Hence, travelers come to focus on the authenticity since they believe that the authentic Hawai'i lets them forget their real lives in Japan.

As noted in the last part, for instance, the resort wedding trend among Japanese tourists stands for the couples' desire to escape from Japanese traditions. Ceremonial occasions in Japan are especially bound by many rules and social expectations. The increasing number of couples who get married in Hawai'i regard their wedding mostly as an event for themselves and not for their families, relatives, and coworkers. Interestingly, an interviewee, Miyo, talks about her obsession about an authentic Hawaiian wedding

ceremony. Couples persist in exploring authenticity in their weddings hoping it will give them more distance from their daily lives in Japan. Most couples do not know about the history and culture of Hawai'i. Instead, authenticity gives them the freedom to escape from daily difficulties. At the same time, however, a number of tourists including Miyo realize their limitations to understand authenticity and do not have desires to fully understand it. While they enjoy their stay in Hawai'i, they identify themselves as Japanese and in the end of the travels, most of them are ready to be back to their daily lives in Japan. Through the interview, I introduced how Japanese tourists manipulate the authenticity to meet their needs. In response to their sociocultural background in Japan, their ways of understanding authentic Hawai'i is very vague and they know their limitations to understand it. This means travelers are continually reconstructing the image of authentic Hawaii and reinterpreting its meanings.

Although my research needs a broader perspective, it is still evident that the tie among the Japanese tourists' desires for authenticity and the comparison between home and away firmly relate to each other. Some scholars condemn the Japanese tourists' ways of traveling in Hawai'i as I already noted, but from my perspective the most important point to elucidate is to understand the causes for why the trend among Japanese tourists has been modified, and how the tourist is focusing on authentic Hawaii.

To analyze Japanese tourists in Hawai'i, we should notice that both a perspective of authenticity and a comparison between Hawai'i and Japan are strongly interrelated. The aim of this paper is not only to focus on authenticity but also to find a connection between how Japanese desires for authenticity relate to a comparison between Hawai'i and Japan that highly depend on the created images within Japanese society. To understand the cause for this contrast between Hawai'i and Japan among Japanese tourists, digging into Japanese society is inevitable. For these reasons, my research provides a perspective on Japanese tourism in Hawai'i that other scholars have barely explored.

### **Acknowledgement**

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup>Honolulu Advertiser. Com. “Japanese tourists shifting focus to Hawai'i's culture,” <http://the.honoluluadvertiser.com/article/2004/Oct/04/bz/bz01p.html>, (accessed November 30, 2014).
- <sup>2</sup> Yaguchi Yujin, *Akogareno Hawai: Nihonjin no Hawai Kan* (Chuōkōron Shinsha, 2011),198.
- <sup>3</sup> Chris Rojeck, “Indexing, Dragging and the Social Construction of Tourist Sights,” In *Touring Cultures: Transformations of Travel and Theory*, ed. C. Rojek and J. Urry (London: Routledge), 70-71.
- <sup>4</sup> Ibid.,206.
- <sup>5</sup> Ibid.,207-208.
- <sup>6</sup> Jennifer Beer, “Packaging Experiences: Japanese Tourism in Southeast Asia,” (Ph.D. Diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1993), 639.
- <sup>7</sup> Junko Obayashi, “Hawai’i in the Japanese Tourist Gaze,” (M.A. thesis, University of Hawai’i, 2000), 3.
- <sup>8</sup> Julia Harrison, *Being a Tourist: Finding Meaning in Pleasure Travel* (Vancouver, Toronto: University of British Columbia Press, 2003),156.
- <sup>9</sup> Ibid.,157.
- <sup>10</sup> Ibid.,31.
- <sup>11</sup> Ibid.,155.
- <sup>12</sup> Ibid.,157.
- <sup>13</sup> *Oyagokoro Zexy*, “Kaigai Kokunai Rizōto Kyosiki no Chekku Pointo,”[The check points of the domestic wedding and resort wedding,]” <http://zexy.net/contents/oia/party/resortabroad.html>, (accessed December 5, 2014).
- <sup>14</sup> *Travelvision uedding*, “Honshitsuteki na Kachi wo Uru Zidaini [The era of selling the intrinsic value is coming,]” <http://www.travelvision.jp/tokushu/hawaii/detail.php?id=212>, (accessed December 7, 2013).
- <sup>15</sup> Okamura Nana and Iwashita Nobuko, *Arigatou no Kimochi wo Okuru Happiueddingu Bukku* (Takahashi Shoten, 2014), 14.
- <sup>16</sup> Abe Toshiko, *Kekkon no Dandori & Shikitari no Subete ga Wakaru Daijiten* (Nagaoka Shoten, 2012),130.
- <sup>17</sup> Ibid.,132-199.
- <sup>18</sup> Honolulu Advertiser. Com. 2014. “Japanese tourists shifting focus to Hawai'i's culture,” <http://the.honoluluadvertiser.com/article/2004/Oct/04/bz/bz01p.html>,(accessed November 30, 2014).

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