

Authentic fakes: the case of the Tomb of Christ in Japan¹

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AS A REPRESENTATIVE EXAMPLE of a tourist site that is obviously unauthentic, the case of the Tomb of Christ [*Kirisuto no haka*] in Shingō Village (新郷村) of Sonnahoe District (三戸郡) located in the south of Aomori Prefecture (青森県) in Japan offers a new perspective on 'contents tourism'¹ (also known as media-induced tourism). Positioned roughly 30 km to the west of an important regional center, Hachinohe City (八戸市), Shingō Village stretches along the country road connecting Hachinohe with Lake Towada (十和田湖). Its population has been shrinking since the 1970s, with the current number of residents recorded at 2,679 (March 2016). And in this small village, a peculiar legend of Jesus has been handed down for generations.

The legend has its roots in the Takenouchi Documents (竹内文書), one of the most famous hoaxes in the history of modern Japan. According to the legend, Jesus Christ returned to Judea to teach after spending his youth in Japan; he escaped persecution by fleeing back to Japan, where he lived until his death. The place where, the legend claims, he was buried gained the spotlight as a tourist attraction thanks to the

Kirisuto Matsuri (Christ Festival, キリスト祭), a memorial service for Jesus Christ held on the first Sunday of June every year since 1964. Given that Shingō has fewer than 3,000 residents, it is remarkable that an estimated number of over ten thousand tourists, over 30% of whom are foreigners, visit the village every year. Most of the foreign tourists come to see the tomb, and their contribution to the local economy is significant.

Despite media attention for the tomb and its fame as a B-grade tourist spot, it has never been argued that the place is authentic. On the contrary, the majority of local residents and tourists recognize that the Tomb of Christ in Shingō is a fake. A large number of tourists visiting the tomb do so out of curiosity. They obtain information about the occult practice from the internet or magazines and come to the village to enjoy the forged nature of the tomb or the exoticism of the festival. Many want to experience the unique space created by the festival, regardless of the tomb's authenticity, or lack thereof. There is, of course, a minority of tourists who believe that the legend is true.

Above:
Christ Festival,
photo courtesy of
Ryosuke Okamoto.

In general, the authenticity of a tourist attraction is an important factor directly related to the site's capacity to lure tourists. Because there is 'something real that is worth seeing', tourists flock even to difficult to reach places. Especially in the case of historical sites, to what extent the place has preserved its original appearance is important. Where repairs or maintenance has been performed, the key to preserving a site's value is in meticulous scientific examination of its historical authenticity.

In contrast, the Tomb of Christ in Shingō has its very origins in a forged document, and therefore it could not claim any historical or scientific authenticity even from the very beginning. The fact that both the local residents and tourists are aware of this is particularly intriguing. There are instances where the Tomb of Christ has been mentioned in critical terms, as a suspicious fake tourist site or an evidence of mercantilism. However, this case demonstrates an example of the pursuit of a kind of authenticity distinct from traditionally accepted historical authenticity in the process of developing a tourist destination.

Instances of authenticity deriving from the fake and the consequent formation of the sense of community can be observed in other cases of modern tourist culture as well. Contents tourism, such as visiting movie sets and places appearing in animation films, has become a major object of investigation in tourism studies. Uno Tsunehiro (宇野常寛) defines contents tourism as an infusion of color into an ordinary space or an act of making a familiar living space a special one by fictionalizing a part of reality through the introduction of a forged history. Such a process of sanctifying an ordinary place based on a forged history took place in Shingō Village. In this light, the case of the Tomb of Christ in Japan can be seen as an example of thriving contents tourism and valuable material for the study of a new focus of modern tourism, festival events.

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Reference

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The spatial occurrence of international tourism: China's experience

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FEWER FOREIGNERS VISIT CHINA THESE DAYS due to the global economic crisis. According to the China National Tourism Administration, the number of inbound foreign tourists decreased from 27 million people in 2011 to 26 million in 2015. However, if visitors are categorized by nationality into those from developed and developing countries, it becomes clear that the decline applies only to tourists from developed countries whereas the number of visitors from developing countries has actually increased. What is the reason for this phenomenon? Very few of the existing studies have discussed the differences in tourism trends by nationality.

This essay examines the reasons why more and more people feel the need to travel and looks into the factors stimulating the development of tourism through the prism of 'migrant tourism'.¹ Several macro- and micro-factors behind the emergence of migrant tourism have been suggested in existing literature. These include 1) the globalization of the labor market as more people are choosing to live in a foreign country after retirement based on their experiences overseas; 2) instability of the labor market due to the rising mobility of labor; 3) aging populations in developed countries;

4) growing similarities between different countries and regions due to the postmodern tendency to imitate each other in order to satisfy their visitors; 5) more opportunities for tourist migration as many retirees enter the tourism-related businesses or become migrants with the acquisition of severance payments or other assets; 6) re-evaluation of the values of quality of life and job satisfaction, which results in more frequent travel and migration to the countryside as more people in developed societies now appreciate the rural way of life and beautiful scenery; and 7) decreasing differences in production and consumption as well as wider distribution of products due to the development of transportation and communications.

Studies of tourism migration divide migrant tourists into two types: tourist-consumers and tourist-workers. The latter appear in response to the demand in an emerging service industry created by an increase of travelers to a certain tourist site. They may also be filling in the gaps due to labor shortages in an existing tourist industry. The category of tourist-consumers is more diverse in its composition and includes seasonal migrants, lifestyle migrants, retirees, etc.

Above: Tourists
in the Forbidden
City, Beijing. Image
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We used a survey (Center for Social Surveys of National Management Institute, Sun Yat-sen University, 2016) targeting foreigners who entered China through the immigration offices of Guangzhou and Foshan to analyze the relationship between entry for tourism and entry for other reasons. The results demonstrated a difference between visitors from developed countries and visitors from developing countries. To the former, tourism is the only purpose of entry in the majority of cases, whereas people from developing countries rarely have a singular purpose. The fact is that the respondents from developing countries come to China to travel, to work in a local office of their home company, to work for a Chinese company, or to search for business opportunities, and this shows that they have multiple purposes, most of which are related to economic reasons.

The social networks of migrants serve as a source of information on the travel destination in many ways. They reduce moving costs, alleviate difficulties in adapting to the local culture, and help migrants to find jobs in the new location. In this respect, the social capital of respondents from developing countries grows in China. The multiple purposes they have when entering the country leads them to engage with different kinds of people more actively, and this, in turn, promotes the creation and accumulation of social capital locally. Furthermore, such migrants soon gain the ability and motivation to invite friends and family from their home countries to China. Seen from this perspective, compared to tourists from developed countries, visitors from developing countries make a more important contribution to the steady growth of local social capital, which leads to a cumulative causal effect. Therefore, there is mutual influence between tourism and the economic purposes of entry to China by visitors from developing countries, and after their arrival, we can observe the expansion of local social networks and social capital.

We hope that this study will enrich readers' understanding of foreign tourism in China and, particularly, the behavior of visitors from developing countries.

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Reference

- 1 Migrant tourism refers to the phenomenon of tourists, who just like migrants, are employed or participate in commercial activities beyond the purpose of tourism.