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CREATING NEW RELATIONSHIPS THROUGH TOURISM: A QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF TOURIST MOTIVATIONS OF OLDER INDIVIDUALS IN JAPAN

Eunju Ryu
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ABSTRACT. The current study is an exploration to examine older Japanese individuals' motivations for travel. The study employed an open-ended survey and in-depth interviews in order to gain insight into the creation of human relationships through tourism. Our results show that tourism is perceived as offering extraordinary opportunities to meet new people, and to form and develop new relationships by Japanese older individuals, who experience fewer opportunities to interact with other people in their everyday lives compared to individuals in younger generations. In particular, distinct features of tourism settings, such as liminality and touristic communitas, allow older tourists to express themselves more freely by escaping from their existing relationships as well as from many social norms, hierarchies, and prohibitions.

KEYWORDS. Older individuals in Japan, human relationships, tourist motivations, liminality, touristic communitas

INTRODUCTION

In 2011, Japan became a super-aged society as individuals older than 65 exceeded 23.3% of the total population (Statistics Bureau of Japan, 2012). As the shifting demographics have affected Japanese society in many ways, such as pensions and health care systems, scholars have increasingly addressed various issues surrounding the aging population. Initially, scholars perceived the elderly as people who passively received help and

services from younger generations, and focused on their medical and psychological welfare. However, in recent years, the perception of older individuals in Japanese society has undergone a rapid transformation (Mitani & Furuya, 2006; Muramatsu & Akiyama, 2011). For example, a recent survey showed that the majority of older individuals perceived themselves as healthy and socially active, and wanted to be viewed as people who play active leading roles in society (Tohoku Regional Advancement Center, 2006). In

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particular, participating in leisure activities was a major part of their daily routine: the Cabinet Office (2012) found that 59.2% of those over 65 years of age in 2008 participated in leisure activities such as exercise, sports, cultural and local events, and hobbies, and that this represented a 15.5% increase from 1998. The lower employment rate for older individuals removes the distinction between work and leisure that is so crucial for younger generations. This implies that to identify the major characteristics of older individuals' daily lives, it is critical to understand how they spend their leisure time, as it influences their daily lives to a greater extent (Annear, Cushman, & Gidlow, 2009; Lietner & Lietner, 2004).

One of the most common leisure activities among older individuals in Japan is tourism. Recent tourism statistics indicate that older individuals have led the tourism market in Japan. For example, the Japan Association of Travel Agents (2011) found that older tourists accounted for 20% of all tourists as of 2010, and that the number of overseas travelers over 60 years of age increased by 4.4% between 2005 and 2010, whereas there was a decrease in the number of overseas travelers in their twenties and thirties. The Japan Travel Bureau Foundation (2010) also reported that as of 2008, travel frequency for those over 60 years of age was higher than that for those in their twenties. Since these patterns have been similarly observed in many other aging or aged societies such as Western Europe and North America (Reece, 2004; Shoemaker, 1989), tourism researchers have increasingly focused on various aspects of older individuals' tourist behaviors, including their tourist motivations, travel patterns, and travel constraints (Cleaver, Muller, Ryus, & Wei, 1999; Hsu, Cai, & Wong, 2007; Huang & Tsai, 2003; Jang & Wu, 2006; Jang, Bai, Hu, & Wu, 2009; Norman, Daniels, McGuire, & Norman, 2001). These researchers have suggested that because older individuals tend to go through physical, psychological, and socioeconomic changes that affect their tourist motivations and behaviors, they may interpret the meaning and importance of their tourist experience differently to younger generations.

Nevertheless, previous studies of older individuals' tourist motivations have generally focused

on identifying various types of motivations that induce them to travel. Employing quantitative research methods, they tended to take traditional approaches to tourist motivations, namely a two-dimensional approach with push and pull factors (for some notable exceptions, see Hsu et al., 2007; Stone & Nichol, 1999). Although quantitative studies have provided valuable insights into this issue, they have failed to obtain a detailed and contextual understanding of each type of tourist motivation and how such motivations develop from physical, psychological, and socioeconomic conditions formed in each culture. Furthermore, given that Japan became an aging society four decades ago, much earlier than in developed countries in the West, existing models of tourist motivation developed in Western countries may not fully reflect various aspects of tourism that attract older individuals in Japan.

The current study aimed to examine Japanese older individuals and their motivation to travel. We employed a stepwise analysis with two phases: firstly, we conducted open-ended surveys with 60 older individuals to identify their primary motivations to travel; and next, we conducted in-depth interviews with 25 participants whose motivation was related to creating human relationships, because this is the tourist motivation that was most frequently identified in the survey. Indeed, many scholars such as Hsu et al. (2007), Huang and Tsai (2003), Jang et al. (2009), Stone and Nichol (1999), and Yu (2012) have suggested this (in addition to meeting new friends and social interactions) to be one of the most frequently mentioned motivations of older individuals. In particular, Yu (2012) found that older individuals take trips mainly to meet new people and culturally interact with local residents, arguing that this function of tourism particularly appeals to older individuals, who generally lack sufficient opportunities to interact with others. Therefore, the current analysis was expected to answer why older individuals have particular travel motivations; how such motivations develop from physical, psychological, and socioeconomic conditions in Japan; and why these individuals choose tourism over many other leisure alternatives.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Older Individuals in Japan

Older individuals are euphemistically referred to as seniors, senior citizens, older adults, elders, and the elderly, and are generally defined based on age. The World Health Organization (WHO) defines people over 65 as older individuals, and this definition has been adopted in many developed countries including Japan. It has been suggested that in the 1890s, the age of 65 was selected as an indicator of being old because this age group was allowed to participate in the national pension plan in Germany, where most people were expected to die before reaching this age (Pearce, 2010). In general, many governments have accepted the categories set by the International Association of Gerontology, which divides older individuals into the early elderly (65–74) and the late elderly (over 75) (Orimo et al., 2006). These definitions of older individuals based on their chronological age have been widely used to determine the standards for making legal and administrative decisions, including those related to retirement and pension.

However, some scholars such as Roebuck (1979) have suggested that defining older individuals by age may not reflect their physical, psychological, and sociocultural characteristics and individual differences, and argued that age-based definitions are an invention of modernism. In other words, definitions of older individuals vary according to social, natural, and cultural backgrounds, and reflect how a given society views them (Gorman, 1999; Roebuck, 1979; Thane, 1989). In this sense, many recent studies have adopted Gorman's (1999, p. 3) understanding of these individuals, which emphasizes "the constructions by which each society makes sense of old age" and "the roles assigned to older people".

Regardless of how these individuals are defined, the world population is rapidly ageing, and many countries are becoming ageing societies. At the global level, those aged 60 and over have increased from only 8% in 1950 to 11% in 2012, and a dramatic rise still

lies ahead as this group is expected to reach 22% of the world population by 2050 (United Nations, 2011). This global phenomenon is even more pronounced in developed countries such as Japan. In 1970, Japan became an aging society when those 60 and over first exceeded 7% of the country's total population, and by 1980, it became an aged society when individuals older than 65 accounted for 14% of the total population. In 2011, Japan became a super-aged society when this group exceeded 23.3% of the total population. In 2060, individuals over 65 are projected to account for 39.9% of the total population (Cabinet Office, 2012). The National Institute of Population and Social Security Research of Japan (2010) reported that by 2030, every individual over 65 would be supported by two working-age individuals in comparison to 11.2 as of 1960 and 2.9 as of 2009.

This considerable demographic shift has caused markets and industries targeting older individuals to become major consumer segments at the global level, particularly in light of the increased scheduling flexibility and disposable income for tourism available to this age group relative to other age groups (Greenberg, 1999; Shoemaker, 2000; Wuest, Emenheiser, & Tas, 2001). In Japan, the "Dankai Generation", which refers to the first generation of baby boomers born after World War II, will turn 65 starting in 2015. This generation consists of approximately eight million individuals and is larger than any other generation, allowing this group to exert an increasing influence over Japanese society (Cabinet Office, 2012). Muramatsu and Akiyama (2011) also point out that the growth of this ageing population has become an urban phenomenon after previously being primarily limited to rural areas experiencing the outmigration of younger people. The demographic shift has been recognized as a critical societal concern, and scholars in many academic fields pay particular attention to the issues relevant to this population, including medical concerns (e.g., the ageing process, disease, brain function) and social science issues (e.g., social security, social participation, community health, and long-term care).

Tourist Motivations of Older Individuals

Tourism researchers have long paid close attention to the factors influencing individuals to travel and participate in various tourist activities (e.g., Andreu, Kozak, Avci, & Cifter, 2005; Baloglu, 2000; Jang & Cai, 2002; Kim, 2008; Murphy, Benckendorff, & Moscardo, 2007; Park, Reisinger, & Kang, 2008). This inquiry is fundamental to understanding tourist behaviors and thus is crucial for those engaged in the development and marketing of tourist destinations. Tourist motivation is a key factor in this inquiry because it influences all stages of the decision-making process during tourism, including travel intentions, destination selection, the stay length, attraction choice, and satisfaction. Employing conceptual, quantitative, and qualitative methodologies, scholars have suggested that individuals leave their home in response to psychological needs, and have identified various types of tourist motivations, including relaxation, knowledge, escape, excitement, novelty, togetherness, self-esteem, self-actualization, and prestige (Bansal & Eiselt, 2004; Crompton & McKay, 1997; Dann, 1981; Fodness, 1994; Jang & Wu, 2006; Oh, Uysal, & Weaver, 1995; Yoon & Uysal, 2005).

Because older individuals represent a new and promising market in the tourism industry worldwide, an increasing number of tourism researchers have examined what motivates these people to travel and what characterizes their tourist motivations as distinct from those of younger tourists. For example, Horneman, Carter, Wei, and Ruys (2002) suggested that in Australia, the tourism market for older individuals is not uniform and conservative, but divided into six segments in terms of preferred attractions and tourist motivations, namely enthusiasts, big spenders, pioneers, conservatives, indulgers, and Aussies. Huang and Tsai (2003) found that older individuals in Taiwan are likely to take trips for rest and relaxation and to meet people and socialize, and Jang and Wu (2006) identified knowledge-seeking and ego-enhancement motivations as the most important ones for these tourists. Fleischer and Pizam (2002) reviewed

previous studies of tourist motivations of older individuals and found rest and relaxation, social interactions, physical exercise, learning, nostalgia, and excitement to be most frequently mentioned.

Nevertheless, these previous studies of older individuals have largely been limited to identifying their tourist motivations and have rarely employed qualitative research methods, with the exception of a few studies. Employing individual and focus group interviews, Stone and Nichol (1999) examined older female tourists in the United Kingdom (UK) and found that the participants had four major tourist motivations, namely social interactions, escape, self-esteem, and recreation, and that social interactions were mentioned most frequently by these tourists who sought companionship, and new friends and partners. More recently, Hsu et al. (2007) employed in-depth interviews with older individuals in China and identified several tourist motivations based on their physical, psychological, social, cultural, and economic conditions, and on their resulting desire to improve well-being, escape routines, socialize, and obtain knowledge, retain pride and patriotism, achieve personal rewards, and seek nostalgia. Despite mixed results in various contexts, previous studies have generally found that tourist motivations of older individuals are different from those of younger ones because the former undergo physical, psychological, and socioeconomic changes that have a considerable influence on their decisions and behaviors (Backman, Backman, & Silverberg, 1999; Cleaver et al., 1999; Horneman et al., 2002; Hsu et al., 2007; Huang & Tsai, 2003; Jang & Wu, 2006; Jang et al., 2009; Prayag, 2012; Shoemaker, 2000; Stone & Nichol, 1999; You & O'Leary, 1999).

METHODOLOGY

In order to examine the tourist motivations of older individuals in Japan, we employed a two-phase qualitative research method based on an open-ended survey and in-depth interviews.

Phase I: Open-ended Survey

The first phase aimed at obtaining descriptive information on tourist motivations of older individuals in Japan. For a better understanding of the current status of the market for older individuals in Japan, we conducted an extensive literature review of tourist motivations of older individuals before the open-ended survey, and conducted short interviews with dozens of individuals over 60. We then conducted an open-ended survey of Japanese respondents over 60 who resided in Tokyo and had participated in packaged tour programs targeting their demographic. The questionnaire addressed their tourist experiences and focused mainly on their tourist motivations. Among the 80 questionnaires distributed, 60 were returned. We originally planned more surveys but did not conduct them because of the Tohoku earthquake and the 2011 tsunami, which were likely to have affected various socioeconomic factors influencing travel among older individuals.

Phase II: In-Depth Interview

Based on the results for the first phase, the second phase provided a more in-depth analysis of motivations associated with the desire to create new relationships through tourism. In other words, the purpose of this phase was to identify the themes inherent in older individuals' motivation to meet other people through tourism. Therefore, we conducted in-depth interviews with 25 individuals who indicated in the survey that their motivation to travel was related to human relationships.

We employed unstructured interviews based on free discussions without a predetermined set of interview questions to allow for their opinions in their own terms. We considered unstructured interviews to be the most appropriate method for this study (which provides a preliminary analysis of this research topic) because their spontaneous nature and conversational tone allow for interviews to tell their story at their own pace and in their own way (Morse, 2002; Patton, 1990). Interview times and locations varied according to the participant's

preference, and each interview lasted from one to five hours. The interviewer conducted some interviews more than two times if more information on the particular participant's tourist experience was required. We tape-recorded all interviews and took written notes of key terms for the minimal loss of information. To protect the participant's privacy, we used only their initials, not full names.

We analyzed qualitative interview transcripts in four steps based on Dey (1993), Elo and Kyngäs (2008), Graneheim and Lundman (2004), and Zhang and Wildemuth (2009). Firstly, we became familiar with the data by listening to each tape in its entirety several times along with transcripts and field notes. In this step, we interpreted the interviews based on previous knowledge of the wider socioeconomic context. Secondly, we systematically generated the initial code by selecting frequent and interesting features from interview transcripts. We considered the use of physical linguistic units (e.g., words, sentences, or paragraphs) as the unit of analysis to potentially lead to fragmentation, and thus selected a block of text representing a single idea related to relationships. That is, the unit of analysis in this study was that the block of text was deemed to represent a single theme or issue of relevance to tourist motivations of the interviewees. Thirdly, we categorized codes according to broader themes, identifying common themes that united several discrete codes with relevant meanings. We generated general themes by analyzing themes contextually. Fourthly, we assessed the consistency of coding for each general theme to ensure that the themes sufficiently represented the initial codes.

RESULTS

Phase I: What Motivates Older Individuals in Japan to Travel?

In the first phase of this study, 60 individuals participated in the open-ended survey. All respondents were over the age of 60, and 40 (66.7%) were male. Among these 60 respondents, 20 (33.3%) were employees, 13 (21.7%)

were self-employed individuals, 24 (40%) were unemployed (including housewives), and 3 (5%) provided no response. In terms of the household status, 34 (56.7%) lived with a spouse, 9 (15%) lived alone, 8 (13.3%) lived with a spouse and children, 3 (5%) lived with a spouse and parents, 4 (6.7%) lived with others, and 2 (3.3%) provided no response.

As shown in Table 1, the results reveal four frequently mentioned tourist motivations: relationships, recreation, knowledge, and family ties. Among the respondents, 25 (41.7%) most frequently mentioned relationships as their tourist motivation, indicating that they perceived tourism as a wonderful opportunity to strengthen friendship ties, make new friends, and interact with other tourists and local residents, and that their primary motivation was to interact with new as well as old acquaintances. Secondly, 15 (25.0%) emphasized recreation, indicating that they pursued tourism to relax, refresh, relieve stress, and get away from

routine. Thirdly, 8 (13.3%) pursued tourism to achieve some intellectual purposes, focusing on fulfilling their curiosity, experiencing other cultures and food, and expanding their knowledge. Finally, 7 (11.7%) traveled for family-related reasons and perceived a trip as a family event allowing for family members to spend some time together and strengthen family ties.

Phase II: What Aspects of Tourism Facilitate Relationship Formation for Older Individuals in Japan?

According to the results of the survey, the most important motivation of the respondents was to form and develop relationships; therefore, in the second phase, our in-depth interview focused on obtaining a more in-depth understanding of why and how the respondents sought relationships through tourism. The results of in-depth interviews with 25 participants indicated that there are three steps involved in the development of relationships through travel. For the analysis of qualitative data, we regarded these steps as three main themes, labeled “creating new relationships through tourism”, “forming touristic communitas”, and “maintaining lasting friendships” respectively. We also adapted several concepts of the tourist experience discussed in Kim and Jamal (2007), Turner (1973), and Wang (1999) (including liminality, touristic communitas, and interpersonal relationships) in our analysis of the interviews.

Creating New Relationships through Tourism: “I Travel to Make New Friends”

Erich Fromm, a German psychologist, asserted that people want to meet others because of their fear of loneliness (Fromm, 1941). In contemporary society, there are many factors that can leave older individuals feeling particularly alienated, including retirement, the death of friends and loved ones, and the reality of a smaller nuclear family instead of an extended one. This alienation extensively influences multifaceted aspects of older individuals’ daily

TABLE 1. Major Tourist Motivations of Older Individuals in Japan

Tourist motivations	Number of cases	Examples
Relationships	25 (41.7%)	To strengthen (promote) friendships To meet new friends To interact with other people To spend time with friends To spend time with coworkers To share experiences with other tourists To interact with local residents
Recreation	15 (25.0%)	To escape routine To relax To get refreshed To relieve stress
Learning	8 (13.3%)	To fulfill curiosity To experience a different culture To expand knowledge To experience the region’s food
Family ties	7 (11.7%)	To strengthen family ties To spend time with the spouse and kids To spend time with family For a family event
Other	5 (8.3%)	–
TOTAL	60 (100.0%)	

lives, particularly human relationships (Annear et al., 2009; Lietner & Lietner, 2004). For example, as previous surveys and previous studies showed, older individuals view tourism quite differently to younger generations. In particular, older individuals are less likely than younger generations to pursue travel for intellectual purposes such as expanding their knowledge or experiencing other cultures. Instead, they tend to seek recreational or social purposes, such as meeting new people. This trend was also well presented in our interviews with older Japanese tourists who perceived tourism as a satisfactory way to meet new people and thus to help them remain socially engaged.

Many people travel to find new people while traveling. You might consider it the best reason to travel ... finding people and friends. (Mrs. W)

People join tours because they enjoy meeting people, don't they? If they didn't like it, they would travel alone. Meeting is really fun. The reason to take a trip is to meet people. (Mr. O)

The participants' motivation to meet people through travel is generally consistent with Japan's current tourism market, in which older tourists enthusiastically participate in tour programs that promote interactions between tourists. For example, Club Tourism International, a Japanese travel agency, recently launched a package tour called "Single Participation Limited Travel", which allowed for no family members or friends to participate in the tour together but instead encouraged tourists to exchange personal information such as names, phone numbers, and addresses with one another. The program was successful, and older tourists accounted for 80% of all participants. In the current study, many participants explain that tourism settings allow them to interact with entirely new groups of people with no knowledge of one another's personal backgrounds. It enables them to freely choose whether and how much to interact with others, unlike in daily circumstances in which various existing human relationships are complicated and intertwined.

In my daily life, where people know me as Masako, I control myself to maintain the image of the person I want people to see me as. I have to keep this image in mind in order to build a reputation for myself when I'm old. It's more complicated than just saying "I am married", "I have a job", or "I have children". In this regard, traveling offers some relief from this, and I can create myself more freely. (Mrs. W)

I can make myself up when traveling ... When traveling with close friends, there is no opportunity to invent myself because I don't have much contact with outsiders. (Mrs. I)

It is really fun to meet people whose backgrounds I don't know ... In my daily life, I already have an established image. However, when I meet new people on such trips, there is no established image of me. I can see whether I have a new image of myself after the trip. It is like I can see myself objectively. This has occurred to me after taking several trips in the past. (Mrs. K)

These experiences in tourism environments can be referred to as "liminality", in which people are allowed to feel separate from their daily obligations, inauthentic relationships, social hierarchy, and prohibitions (Kim & Jamal, 2007; Wang, 1999). Indeed, many participants were likely to share their memorable experiences of the unique environment of tourism that helped them to express themselves and behave in ways different from those in their daily lives at home. Ichihara (2003) explained that older Japanese individuals have strong desires and needs to reinvent their self-images largely due to the loss of their social positions. In other words, liminal environments of tourism allowed them to develop new relationships by rediscovering their own selves and forming their new self-identity. The current results also imply that forming new human relationships among older individuals is more strongly affected by liminal environments than among younger generations because older generations who are deeply involved in traditional hierarchies may experience a greater gap

between tourism and daily settings. In this regard, tourism may provide the older individuals with an unusual opportunity for a unique experience called “*communitas*”, which is discussed in the next section.

Forming Touristic Communitas: “It Was Just Like Being with Family”

Using Turner’s (1973) term “*communitas*”, which describes people taking pilgrimages, Wang (1999, p. 364) suggested that tourists can easily become friends and experience “interpersonal” authenticity within the “touristic *communitas*” offered by liminal settings in which “differences arising out of the institutionalized socioeconomic and sociopolitical positions, roles, and status disappear”. Kim and Jamal (2007) also found that human relationships between tourists were developed quickly within touristic *communitas*, which involve unique conditions such as equality, acceptance, and the ludic nature of interaction. Indeed, the current results clearly demonstrate many characteristics of touristic *communitas*, which older individuals perceived as a key reason behind their motivation to travel, as reflected in expressions such as “a horizontal society”, “a pseudo-family”, and “an inseparable group”.

I don’t ask about the family pedigree. For example, “How many brothers and sisters do you have? What does your father do for a living?” But I talk a lot about travel. For example: “I like this village” or “I love food” and so on. (Mrs. W)

We have been living in a society based on a vertical hierarchy. So we only know this life. We don’t know about a horizontal society. So we don’t get involved in community activities after retirement. However, taking a cruise has nothing to do with a career or age because it is not a vertical society. I don’t care about social status and age. (Mr. Y)

We don’t need to talk about business ... In some meetings, people don’t need to know what kind of job others have because they

have other things in common like hobbies. In business meetings, we have to stick to business, which cuts the pleasure in half ... For example, when we meet with others during travel or club activities, we don’t care about each other’s status or gender. (Mr. O)

The distinct features of tourism settings may be more special to older individuals who may be less familiar with horizontal relationships than to younger generations. In other words, older members of Japan’s highly developed urban society are likely to pursue authentic relationships or *communitas* through tourism, neither of which may still exist in their daily lives, as Wang (1999) and Kim and Jamal (2007) explained in their discussions on alienation. Our interview results clearly reveal what travel companions and touristic *communitas* meant to these older individuals.

... People are crucial in tourism. We have to be together except when we sleep. So they are my pseudo-family. I hated overseas travel because I hate flying, but I don’t mind if I can go with, say, that married couple over there ... I never knew that traveling could be so deep. I thought traveling was just traveling. It is amazing that I can be so close to people who I don’t know after two weeks and then I can open up to them. (Mrs. K)

It is fine if people I travel with are good even if the tourist attractions are not good. I like that most. I am sure everybody will agree. This is because we become such an inseparable group. (Mrs. O)

MacMillan (1996, p. 321) argued that people can express their authentic selves when they meet “people with similar ways of looking, feeling, thinking, and being”. Therefore, once older individuals start to feel a sense of community with other travelers, they are likely to disconnect from their existing social roles, obligations, and prohibitions and show their inner authentic selves, which may be quite different from their daily behaviors. Mrs. K’s story about her atypical behaviors during travel well exemplifies this.

I wanted go inside quickly and watch the opera. But I had to do only part of what I wanted to because someone else I met on the trip told me I would look like an unsophisticated woman from the country if I did. I took several photos without him knowing it. ... He says we all acted like country people. But I think it is better to be country people. It was a really good experience. I shouted Bravo for the first time in my life. (Mrs. K)

However, not all fellow travelers may become part of their touristic *communitas*. Many participants mentioned having “the same values”, which may be the standard for sensing touristic *communitas* for this population. In other words, for older individuals, tourism settings may be perceived as excellent opportunities to meet those with “the same values”.

She is a friend who’s on the same page as I am. She wants what I want while traveling. To travel with someone, we should share the same interests. The purpose of my trip to Poland perfectly matches her reason for going to Poland ... I thought we had something in common. (Mrs. W)

Even if you have pleasure when you travel with someone, it does not necessarily mean you think alike. You need to see what the standards are. For example, when we look at the same menu item, I might see an expensive dish, and others might see a delicious-sounding dish. Everybody has different ways of seeing things. If you see things the same way, you share the same values. (Mrs. I)

Maintaining Lasting Friendships: “Travel Was Only the Beginning of a Fine Friendship”

Turner (1973) and Kim and Jamal (2007) pointed out that touristic *communitas* is a type of spontaneous *communitas* and is different from normative (permanent) *communitas*, which inevitably involves some structural

conditions such as a set of hierarchies, norms, social roles, and prohibitions. An ambience of love, caring, and intimacy is present in both normative *communitas* and tourist settings, and thus allows members of some spontaneous touristic *communitas* to transform into their own kind of normative *communitas* over time. Our interview results show that the participants often voluntarily maintained and rebuilt their travel relationships successfully in various ways, for example, by exchanging cards or attending regular gatherings.

I keep in contact for decades with people I meet during travel. We exchange New Year’s Day cards, or they send sightseeing photos. We don’t actually meet very often, but we continue to be in contact for a long time. (Mr. A)

We planned some gatherings, a gathering for the French tour and a gathering for the Italian gathering, after the travel, and we became “friends”. The French gathering is held on the 30th of every month. Two other women of my age and I formed a gathering called the Italian Trio, and we meet with one another once a month. (Mrs. K)

There were quite a few gatherings after the cruise ... If I asked them to join me in going to a hot spring, at least 10 people would gather in an instant. (Mr. Y)

The maintenance of such relationships was sometimes supported by travel agencies that encouraged the exchange of personal information and photos during the trip, and provided opportunities for future reunions. For example, JTB Grand Tour and Service, a Japanese travel agency, regularly held reunion events for participants of various tour programs. At these events, in addition to seeing people they connected with on the trip, participants met with other travelers they did not yet have the chance to interact with on the tour.

We talk about our lives. We talk about France, too, for example, our wonderful experience in the museums in France ...

It formed naturally. In the case of the Italian gathering, we suggested “Will you join me in going to some place next time?” or “Why don’t we meet and talk about our next trip?” (Mrs. K)

Indeed, shared memories based on their positive experience with touristic *communitas* propelled them to keep in touch with one another and build relationships because their shared memories allowed them to perceive one another as like-minded people sharing the same values. Noteworthy is that some participants greatly missed the joyful moments and horizontal relationships from their trips, which they rarely experienced in their daily lives. These people tended to organize new trips with new travel companions because they believed that they would be able to experience special moments again with those like-minded friends (if not a pseudo-family).

We hold photo presentations after the trip with camera club members ... We have a chat while wining and dining, and someone suggests, “Why don’t we take a trip to shoot photos next time?” From that moment, new relationships begin. Our motivation to take a sightseeing trip doesn’t arise from our wanting to see some particular place. It is just formed while we are chatting. That is the fun part about tourism. (Mr. O)

... I told her (I met her while traveling) that I wanted to go to Poland. She said she would also like to. When we got off the plane, she gave me her address and phone number, saying she wished to go to Poland with me next time ... (Mrs. W)

DISCUSSION

Tourism studies are implicitly or explicitly rooted in the basic assumption that the tourist experience is a meaning-making process that develops from socioeconomic and cultural conditions formed in a given culture as well as from an individual’s personal worldview and desires

(Uriely, 2005; Urry, 1990; Wang, 1999). The current analysis of older Japanese individuals’ travel motivations strongly supports this assumption, showing that these participants are likely to imbue tourism with special meaning – as an excellent opportunity to create new human relationships. It is no wonder that various aspects of older individuals’ current sociocultural environment in Japan, such as the highly developed economy, vertical structures and groupism, and a higher life expectancy are well reflected in their unique attitudes toward tourism. In particular, the study results provided four significant findings that may allow us to more broadly understand older Japanese individuals’ motivations for travel and their tourist experiences.

Firstly, many older individuals in Japan perceive the human relationships involved in their trips as a crucial part of their tourist experiences. The results show that older participants are likely to share various experiences regarding how travel companions influence their overall satisfaction with a trip. The majority of participants enjoy interacting with new people and making new relationships; at the same time, they worry about meeting unappealing companions who may negatively affect their trips. For example, older Japanese individuals, most of whom have some previous travel experience, often explain that traveling is no longer just about visiting places or learning about other cultures. Instead, they tend to be more concerned about other features of their trips, such as human relationships. Our results also show that human relationships in tourism settings are especially important among those in a highly developed society like Japan, where people tend to seek “authentic” relationships that may not be available to them in contemporary urban society.

Secondly, our results imply that the special role of tourism in creating new human relationships strongly appeals to retired older individuals in Japan. In the first phase of the study, we found that many older individuals selected human relationships as the most important motivation to travel, while this motivation has been infrequently cited in previous studies on younger generations, whose motivations were

more varied and included education, excitement, self-actualization, and risk-seeking. This desire for human relationships is reflected in the high ratio of older individuals in special tour programs that encourage participant interaction. The interviewees often explained that they experienced fewer opportunities to interact with other people in their daily lives since most individuals in their age range were retired and likely to engage in a smaller range of activities, while they had a strong desire to reinvent their self-images due to the loss of social position after retirement. This implies that meeting and interacting with new people is in and of itself the greatest attraction of tourism for older individuals who may be less familiar with various horizontal relationships and are involuntarily marginalized in the rapidly changing world.

Thirdly, as a way of meeting other people, Japanese older individuals prefer travel more than any other type of leisure activity. The current results show that older participants, who had established social roles within various human and regional networks, could not freely create new relationships in other leisure settings that are more closely connected to their existing relationships and which tie them to many social norms, hierarchies, and prohibitions. In this regard, participating in tour programs is a very rare opportunity that allows older Japanese individuals to escape from their existing relationships and to construct new ones by establishing new self-images. The responses of the participants suggest that distinct features of tourism settings, such as liminality, touristic communitas, and horizontal relationships, can facilitate the ease with which older tourists form and maintain relationships outside of the pervasive structural elements of Japanese groupism. While several previous studies, including those of Kim and Jamal (2007) and Wang (1999), have confirmed the positive effects of the tourism environment on interpersonal relationships, the results of the present study (particularly the second and third findings) show that such effects may differently influence individual tourists whose ages and socioeconomic backgrounds vary.

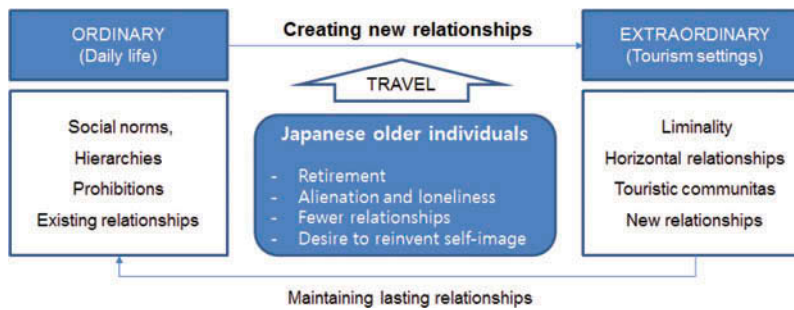
Finally, although motivations related to human relationships have been identified as

important elements of tourism in previous studies, the current study confirms that the role of tourism more broadly encompasses creating new relationships in particular. Several previous studies have suggested that tourism settings provide excellent opportunities to strengthen relationships between people who already know one another, such as couples, family members, old friends, and coworkers. In the unfamiliar environment of tourism settings, travelers are likely to have unique opportunities to deepen their relationships by experiencing new aspects of one another that go beyond what they have experienced in the ordinary context of their daily lives. Likewise, the results identified the tourism setting as an excellent space to create new relationships with new people. Some participants even expect to experience family-like relationships through the formation of close bonds with other travelers and to become *Nakama*, the Japanese term for a very good friend who shares the same values and interests. These motivations are similar in that they take the traveler on the common progression in travel experiences from the ordinary to the extraordinary and then back to the ordinary, although they involve quite different types of relationships.

CONCLUSION

The current study is an exploratory examination of older Japanese individuals' motivations for travel. We employed an open-ended survey and in-depth interviews in order to learn more about the creation of human relationships through tourism experiences. As summarized in Figure 1, our results show that tourism is perceived as offering extraordinary opportunities to meet new people and to form and develop new relationships for older Japanese individuals who experience fewer opportunities to interact with other people in their everyday lives than do younger generations. In particular, distinct features of tourism settings, such as liminality and touristic communitas, allow older tourists to express themselves more freely by escaping from their existing relationships as well as from many social norms, hierarchies,

FIGURE 1. Developing Human Relationships Through Tourism



and prohibitions. The results have two important practical implications for the tourism industry.

Firstly, tourism researchers and marketers should pay closer attention to how tourism programs encourage the development of relationships not only between old acquaintances but also between strangers, particularly for older individuals, because they tend to have fewer opportunities to form new relationships in their daily lives than younger generations. Given the rapidly expanding population of older individuals worldwide, this tourism trend is expected to apply not only to Japan, which has already become a “super-aged society”, but also to other developed countries, including those facing no immediate challenges related to the ageing population.

Secondly, the results indicate that people are likely to expect fresh and unique environments when they travel and thus want to experience something very different from their daily lives. This result closely reflects the extraordinary features of tourism settings, including liminality, touristic communitas, and horizontal relationships. In addition, the interview results show that such expectations can arise more frequently among older individuals, particularly those who live in a highly developed and hierarchical society such as Japan. In other words, for individuals in developed countries, tourism can be a rare opportunity to express themselves freely; make easier, less conflicting decisions; and experience “authentic” relationships, all of which are made possible by escaping the norms

for social roles and daily duties. Therefore, tourism researchers and marketers should identify more effective ways to distinguish their tourism programs from other daily leisure activities because tourists increasingly want something more than the travel itself from their tourist experience.

This study is the first to provide a qualitative analysis of tourist motivations of older individuals in Japan and thus has some limitations. Firstly, the study employs qualitative research methods in one specific cultural context and does not aim to generalize its findings. In other words, this new phenomenon pertaining to older Japanese individuals should be understood in the socioeconomic and cultural context of contemporary Japanese society, and may not be directly applied to older populations in other countries. For example, socializing was identified as only one of several motivations for travel in a recent study on older Chinese tourists (Hsu et al., 2007). To increase the generalizability of the results, future research should consider a wider range of research techniques and a more diverse range of participants. Secondly, this study focuses on illustrating trends in motivations of older travelers and does not fully relate the results to Japan’s current sociopolitical environment. In this regard, future research should provide a comprehensive literature review and employ a more extensive sample in the Japanese context to examine whether and/or why such trends may be particularly prevalent in Japan.

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