

A Study on Foreign Visitors' Psychological Evaluation of Tourist Landscapes

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Abstract

In Japan, where declining birth rates and an ageing population make expanding domestic demand difficult, expectations for the tourism industry have grown in recent years. There is an increasingly urgent need to identify landscapes that elicit high psychological evaluations, particularly effective for promoting to foreign tourists and enhancing travel satisfaction. The Architectural Environment Laboratory at Hiroshima University has long pursued cross-cultural comparative research examining differences in psychological evaluation of landscapes. Here, I present recent research findings specifically examining differences between Japanese and Chinese subjects regarding tourism landscapes.

First, the results from an experiment presenting only simple visual information are presented. Next, the results from an experiment adding textual information to the visual information are discussed. Finally, the results from an experiment where subjects were subsequently asked to actually visit the tourist destinations represented by the tourist landscapes are described. It is concluded that evaluations of tourist destinations are significantly influenced by the extent of knowledge and understanding the subject possesses about that destination.

Keywords: Tourism Landscape, Cross-cultural Comparison, SEM

1 Introduction

Research on the psychological evaluation of landscapes typically employs student subjects or local residents as evaluators who enjoy the landscape. However, studies conducted in Japan often use Japanese evaluators, with few examples employing foreigners who possess different socio-cultural backgrounds and limited knowledge or experience of Japan.

Conversely, in Japan, where an ageing population and declining birth rate make expanding domestic demand difficult, expectations for the tourism industry have grown in recent years. Consequently, there is an increasingly urgent need to identify landscapes that elicit high psychological evaluations, particularly those effective for promoting to foreign tourists and enhancing travel satisfaction.

This paper introduces the research conducted to date by the Architectural Environment Laboratory at Hiroshima University against this backdrop.

2 Psychological Evaluation of Tourist Landscapes by Foreign Nationals Residing in Their Home Countries

First, considering the need to clarify foreigners' psychological evaluations of Japanese landscapes, Yoshihara et al. [1] compared the psychological evaluations of 40 tourist landscape images from Hiroshima Prefecture by Korean and Chinese international students with those of Japanese students. They demonstrated that for both groups of international students, "Japanese-ness" potentially links to "desire to visit". However, as these students already had residency experience in Japan and, for some landscapes, prior visitation experience, Kawase et al. [2] conducted a similar evaluation experiment in China with students residing there who had no prior visitation experience to Japan. Then these results were compared with those from Japanese students and Chinese international students. The results revealed differences between Chinese international students and Chinese students regarding traditional landscapes representative of Hiroshima. The latter group showed little correlation between "Japanese-ness" and "intention to visit", suggesting an influence based on the degree of understanding of "Japanese-ness". Furthermore, Takagishi et al. [3] conducted an experiment in mainland China, similar to Kawase et al. [2], targeting ordinary Chinese citizens, who are considered the actual visitor group to Japan, instead of students with limited potential for visiting Japan. Results from Multi-Group Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) of Chinese students and Chinese citizens revealed that while the latent variable "Inherency" (indicating the presence of distinctive characteristics) significantly influenced visit intentions, the impact of "Japanese characteristics" – also strongly influenced by "Inherency" – on visit intentions was weak for both groups. This revealed a common tendency among Chinese residents in their home country: motivation towards visually novel and attention-grabbing objects outweighs interest in Japanese things themselves.

3 The Impact of Information Provision on the Psychological Evaluation of Tourist Landscapes

As visual information alone regarding tourist landscapes often fails to convey the inherent meaning and value of the destinations they represent, another experiment was conducted. In this experiment, subjects were presented with tourist landscapes alongside textual information about the respective scenes, modelled on standard tourist guides and pamphlets that combine photographs with descriptions. For this experiment, 32 images were selected from the aforementioned set of 40 tourist landscape images. Chinese students residing in China and Japanese students served as subjects. Liu et al. [4, 5] compared their results with those of Kawase et al. [2], who presented only tourist landscapes to Chinese and Japanese students. SEM revealed that for Japanese students, who possess extensive knowledge and experience of Japan, the presence or absence of textual information had little effect on evaluation structure. This suggests they could largely anticipate the content of the added information or already understood it well beforehand. Conversely, for Chinese students, the provision of textual information reversed the direct effect of “Inherency” on the preference of the tourist landscape. This indicated that “Inherency” first influences “Japanese characteristics”, and then an indirect pathway from “Japanese characteristics” to “Preference” is strengthened (Fig. 1). This is considered to stem from a deeper understanding of which visual elements constitute Japanese characteristics. For foreign tourists, this clarifies the significance of presenting tourist landscapes with added textual information.

Furthermore, Liu et al. [6] compared evaluation results of tourist destinations based solely on textual information prior to presenting the tourist landscape with results obtained after presenting the landscape alongside the textual information. In this paper, Chinese students were classified to three groups based on evaluations using textual information alone and the groups were compared. It was observed that perceptions of the information differed depending on knowledge and experience of Japan or Hiroshima, with greater knowledge and experience correlating with a tendency to perceive the subject more profoundly. Additionally, in Liu et al. [7], Japanese and Chinese students were asked to explain their evaluations of individual tourist landscapes based on their evaluations of textual information about those landscapes, and compared the results between two subject groups. Japanese students tended to emphasise textual information highlighting Hiroshima's distinctiveness, while Chinese students emphasised textual information indicating uniquely Japanese elements or experiences. This revealed differences stemming from socio-cultural backgrounds, where the comparison group for the former was other locations in Japan, and for the latter, mainland China.

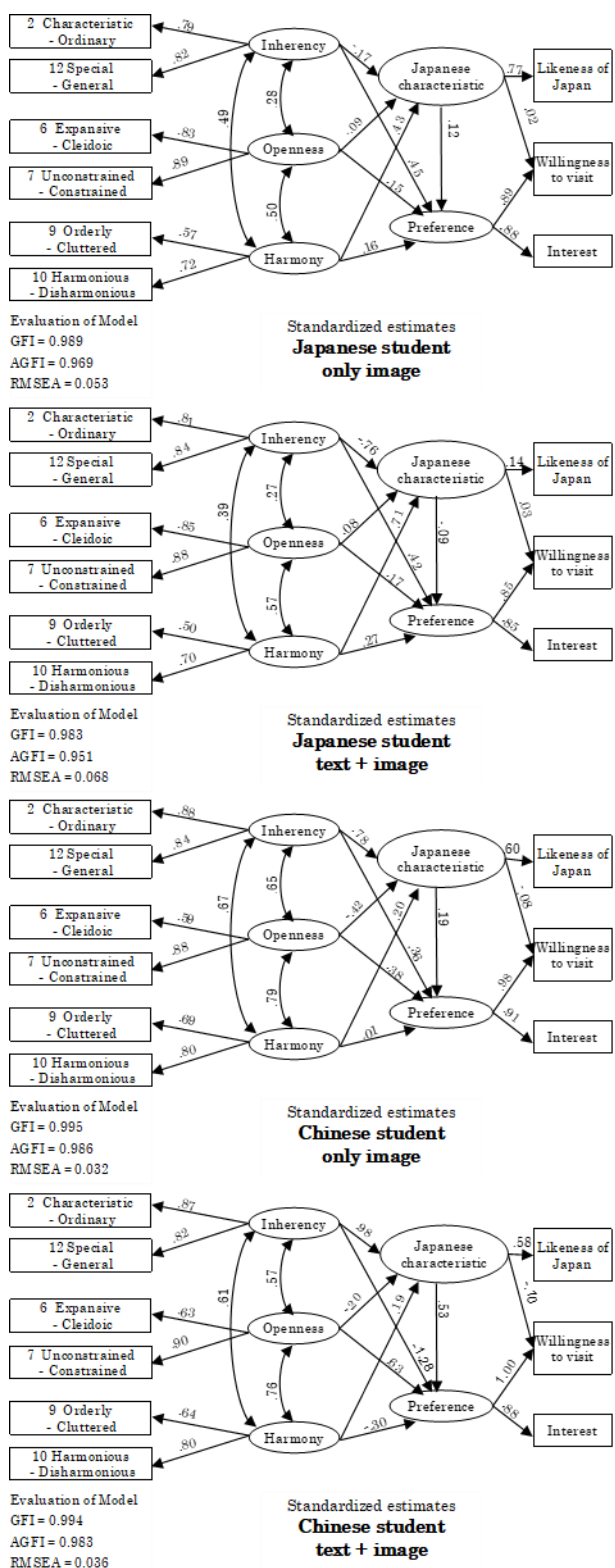


Fig. 1 Results of Structural Equation Modelling comparing Japanese and Chinese subjects when presented with landscape alone versus landscape combined with textual information

4 Psychological Evaluation Based on Actual Tourism Experiences

Finally, I present an example examining the relationship between expectations formed by the tourism landscapes and textual information foreigners are likely to encounter prior to visiting, and the evaluations arising after actually visiting the location. Specifically, six locations were selected from the tourism landscape images of Hiroshima Prefecture used in Chapters 2 and 3. An evaluation experiment similar to the previous section was conducted with Chinese students as subjects in their home country, involving the presentation of tourism landscapes accompanied by textual information. Subsequently, these subjects were actually sent to Japan. After experiencing tourism at each destination, they were asked to evaluate them again. These results were then compared with those obtained from Japanese students who underwent a similar experiment. Ishikawa et al. [8] primarily addressed differences in psychological evaluation. Comparing pre-visit motivation and post-visit satisfaction, they found improvements generally observed in both Japanese and Chinese students, though a decline was noted among Chinese students when expectations were excessively high. A tendency was observed where pre-visit superficial perceptions, valuing unique, rare elements or urban aspects, shifted post-visit towards an attitude respecting Japan's distinctiveness. This, coupled with an enhanced evaluation of “Japanese-ness”, suggested a deepening understanding of the tourist destinations. Furthermore, Kiyotani et al. [9] compared elements of focus based on caption evaluation experiments during tourism experiences. Chinese students focused on distinctive Japanese man-made features, whereas Japanese students focused on panoramic views encompassing the entire tourist site. Moreover, although the subjects differed between Japan and China, it was demonstrated that a common increase in evaluation was observed after the visit when focusing on the deeper meaning inherent in the elements of interest (Fig. 2).

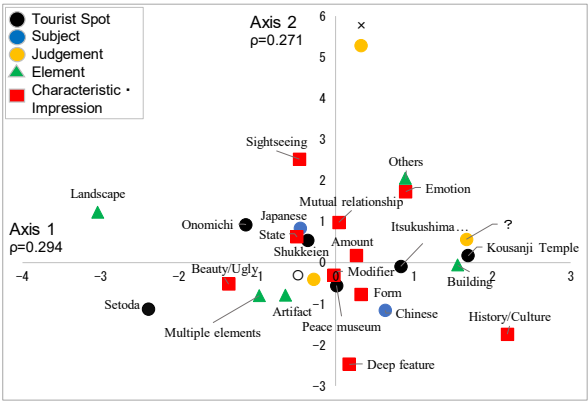


Fig. 2 Results of correspondence analysis based on caption evaluation experiment

Based on the above findings, Kiyotani et al. [10] proposed that the meanings found within each diverse element constituting a tourist site influence evaluation. Consequently, they created detailed information in the form of double-sided A4 pamphlets introducing five tourist sites (excluding the Peace Memorial Museum). After distributing these and having participants undergo the actual tourist experience, they compared the results with those shown by Ishikawa et al. [8] and Kiyotani et al. [9]. They noted that while providing detailed information improved post-visit evaluations at sites where the primary attraction was a building possessing historical or distinctive features, such as Itsukushima Shrine or Kōsanji Museum, at destinations where the panoramic view should be the focus, attention was instead drawn to individual elements within the viewpoint area, leading to lower evaluations. This highlighted the necessity for detailed information tailored to the specific characteristics of each tourist site.

5 Conclusion

I have reviewed ten papers summarising research conducted at Hiroshima University's Laboratory of Architectural Environment Studies. These consistently demonstrate that psychological satisfaction derived from tourism experiences is significantly influenced by the extent to which evaluators possess knowledge and information about the target country, region, and intended tourist destination. Conversely, this suggests that providing advance information and promoting understanding are of paramount importance. Building on this, we are currently investigating the effects of implementing tourism experiences using VR technology beforehand, which could be considered the ultimate form of pre-trip information presentation.

Please note that, with the exception of Yoshihara et al. [1], all papers introduced here were written in Japanese. While this may cause inconvenience to many non-Japanese speakers, machine translation technology has made significant strides in recent years. Therefore, if you find this article interesting, I encourage you to consult the original papers.

DECLARATIONS

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