

# THE IMPACTS OF WORLD HERITAGE SITE DESIGNATION: SACRED SITES AND PILGRIMAGE ROUTES IN THE KII MOUNTAIN RANGE

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This research aims to investigate the impact of World Heritage Site (WHS) designation on the area designated as "Sacred Sites and Pilgrimage Routes in the Kii Mountain Range", Japan. The research adopts qualitative approach to explore detailed issues related to the impacts of WHS designation on heritage management and conservation, local communities, and tourism. Primary data was collected through the visits to the WHS, observation of and ad hoc small interviews with people in the host side of tourism, and scheduled in-depth interviews with key stakeholders in the host side of tourism. The initial findings show that the WHS designation has positive impacts on tourism and local communities in the WHS. For instance, the level of conservation of the WHS, the level of pride of local people in their living place, and the number of overseas tourists have also increased since its WHS designation in 2004.

## 1. Introduction

This research aims to examine the impacts of World Heritage Site (WHS) designation on the area designated as "Sacred Sites and Pilgrimage Routes in the Kii Mountain Range", Japan. The impacts of WHS listing on (a) heritage management and conservation, (b) local communities, and (c) tourism are explored in the research. At the time of writing (December 2012), the research is still a work-in-progress, and this paper is presented as a working paper.

The number of WHSs in the world as of December 2012 is 962: 745 cultural, 188 natural and 29 mixed properties in 157 State Parties (SPs) (UNESCO World Heritage Centre, 2012a). There are 16 WHSs in Japan as of December 2012: 12 cultural and 4 natural WHSs (UNESCO World Heritage Centre, 2012a). The area explored in this research was inscribed as a cultural WHS in 2004. The WHS encompasses an extensive area and extends over several municipalities in three different prefectures, Wakayama, Nara and Mie. The impacts of WHS designation on the above-mentioned three fields is worth investigating and vital mainly with the following reasons.

First, there are only three WHSs which encompass pilgrimage routes in the world as of December 2012, and these routes have not been studied enough as cultural WHSs in previous tourism studies. Second, except the WHS looked at in this research, other two WHSs which include pilgrimage routes are “Route of Santiago de Compostela” in Spain (listed in 1993) and “Routes of Santiago de Compostela in France” (listed in 1998). In fact; however, both of the two WHSs mean the ways to Santiago de Compostela in Spain, one of the most significant pilgrimage sites for Christianity, and both WHSs are located in Europe (West). On the other hand, the sacred sites and pilgrimage routes studied in this research is located in Japan (East) (listed in 2004), and has close links with “Shintoism”, “Buddhism” and/or “Shugendo”. “Shugendo” means a syncretism of Japanese ancient mountain worship. The routes related to such non-Christian religions, especially “Shugendo”, have not been explored well in previous tourism studies. Lastly, the significance of tourism for most WHSs, especially for cultural WHSs, in terms of the sustainability of WHSs has been more and more recognised by UNESCO, ICOMOS, academics, and practitioners in recent years. This could be evidenced by an increase in the number of opportunities to share and exchange various ideas, views and practice at conferences, symposiums, workshops and so on.

## **2. Theoretical Framework**

### **2.1 Sacred Sites, Pilgrimage Routes and Religious Tourism**

Tourism is not a new phenomenon. In the Western world, some types of activities which can be seen as tourism in a current context already existed in the Greek and Roman eras (Page and Connell, 2009). Early tourism had various purposes such as leisure, trade and military.

In the Western world, people began to travel to attend religious festivals and events, or for pilgrimages in the Middle Ages (the 5<sup>th</sup> – 15<sup>th</sup> centuries) (Page and Connell, 2009). During this period, the Western world saw the rise of Christianity, including the development of monastic orders and a feudal system. In this situation, most holidays were taken to attend religious festivals, though this did not always include movement to a different place. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, in England, the most important holidays for people were still related to their religion (e.g. annual parish feast, wake or revel), and still did not always include movement. During the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Grand Tour became very popular amongst young aristocrats in some Western countries (Page and Connell, 2009). Some of the activities taken in the Grand Tour can be seen as religious tourism. For example, Venice was popular around May and June for the Ascensiontide, whilst Rome was favoured at Christmas, both for the renowned festivities (Towner, 1996).

Generally speaking, Christianity and the Western world have been studied more than other major religions and the rest of the world in previous tourism studies. In fact, as far as the researcher is aware, there are not many tourism studies which deal with “Shintoism”, “Buddhism” and/or “Shugendo and Japan.

“Okage-mairi” in the Edo period (1603-1868) can be seen as the oldest type of religious tourism in Japan, and is also ‘recognised as a forerunner of modern-day Japanese tourism’ (Linhart and Fruhstuck, 1998 cited in Cooper et al., 2008: 111). Okage-mairi means the religious tourism to Ise Jingu (Shinto shrine) in Mie prefecture made by ordinary people. This travel was seen as an once-in-a-lifetime opportunity as ordinary people, especially farmers, could not travel freely and need a large amount of time and money. People travelled to Ise Grand Shrine from other regions of Honshu Island and Shikoku and Kyushu Islands to receive good luck or protection from the gods. The pilgrimage routes to Ise Jingu were also developed with the growing popularity of okage-mairi.

It can be said religious tourism is still popular as type of current tourism in both the Western world and Japan. The WHS studied in this research can be regarded as sacred sites and pilgrimage routes because of its historical linkage with religions such as “Shintoism”, “Buddhism” and/or “Shugendo”. Shackley (2001) developed a classification of sacred sites (see Table 1). In light of the categorisation in Table 1, shrines and temples examined in this research would fall into Categories 4 and/or 10, and the mountains which have such sacred sites (Koya-san and Yoshino-yama) would fall into Category 8. In recent years, Kumano Sanzan has been seen as one of “power spots” (In Japan, this means the places which can give a spiritual power of the site to people). Hence, some Japanese people, especially young women, visit the sites such as Kumano Sanzan to receive the power. In this sense, Kumano Sanzan would fall into Category 11.

**Table 1: Classification of Sacred Sites (Source: Shackley, 2001)**

Category	Type	Examples
1	Single nodal feature	Canterbury Cathedral, Emerald Buddha (Bangkok), Hagia Sophia (Istanbul)
2	Archaeological sites	Machu Picchu (Peru), Chichen Itza (Mexico)
3	Burial sites	Catacombs (Rome), Pyramids (Giza)
4	Detached temples/shrines	Borobudur, Angkor Wat, Amritsar
5	Whole towns	Rome, Jerusalem, Assisi, Varanasi, Bethlehem
6	Shrine/temple complexes	Lalibela (Ethiopia), Patala (Tibet), St Katherine's Monastery (Egypt)
7	Earth energy' sites	Nazca Lines (Peru), Glastonbury
8	Sacred mountains	Uluru, Everest, Tai Shan, Athos, Mt Fuji
9	Sacred islands	Rapa Nui, Lindisfarne, Iona, Mont-St-Michel
10	Pilgrimage foci	Mecca, Medina, Mt Kailash, Compostela
11	Secular pilgrimage	Robben Island (RSA), Goree (Senegal), Holocaust sites

## 2.2 Management and conservation of WHSs

To be inscribed as a WHS, first every candidate site needs to be listed on the Tentative List which is prepared within each States Party (SP) through consultation with local authorities, non-government organisations, members of the public, private owners (Leask, 2006). In fact; however, some stakeholders such as the member of the public and private owners at a candidate site might not be involved enough in this process (Jimura, 2007) and these stakeholders are unlikely to understand the meaning of WHS fully even after its listing (Jimura, 2007; 2011).

The candidate site nominated by its SP must have a detailed management plan and a strong legal framework as part of the Nomination Documents for a WHS status (Jimura 2007; 2011, Shackley, 1998). This means that the management and conservation plan for the candidate site would need to be improved or enhanced accordingly through the nomination process (Smith, 2002). In other words, central government in SPs would need to develop the plan based on the advice from World Heritage Centre, advisory bodies from within the States Party, IUCN, ICOMOS, regional authorities, local government, local trusts and experts and consultation (Leask, 2006). The site needs to keep improving their management and conservation plan even after it was designated as a WHS (Bianchi, 2002; Smith, 2002). However, having an excellent management and conservation plan is not enough for the management and conservation of the WHSs. Jimura (2007) conducted the resident survey in Saltaire, the UK and Shirakawa-mura, Japan. In case of Saltaire, 32.0% of the questionnaire respondents think the level of conservation of the site has increased since WHS listing in 2001, and only 2.0% think it has decreased. In case of Shirakawa-mura, on the other hand, only 12.6% of the respondents think the level of conservation of the site has increased, and 44.6% think it has actually decreased. Hence, it can be said that an increase in the level of conservation of the site cannot be fully guaranteed even after WHS designation. In case of Shirakawa-mura, a decrease in the level of conservation was caused mainly by rapid and extensive tourism development after its WHS listing in 1994 (Jimura, 2007; 2011).

The involvement of local communities in the management and conservation of the WHS as well as its nomination process is essential. In fact to 'encourage participation of the local population in the preservation of their cultural and natural heritage' is part of the mission of WHSs (UNESCO World Heritage Centre, 2012b). In addition to the management and conservation plan, Jimura (2011) suggests that a comprehensive tourism management plan is also required for WHSs (e.g. Shirakawa-mura, Japan) for the successful future of the site as a place to live, a WHS and a tourist destination.

This research will examine (a) how the WHS is managed and conserved, considering the issues pointed out above (Section 1) in "Sacred Sites and Pilgrimage Routes in the Kii Mountain Range".

## 2.3 The Impacts of WHS inscription

WHS listing can bring a wide range of changes to local communities and tourism in the area designated as a WHS (Jimura, 2007; 2011). In light of the nature and characteristics of the WHS examined in this research, the following points should be noted as prominent examples.

- (1) **Funding** - According to UNESCO World Heritage Centre (2012c), 'The World Heritage Fund (WHF) provides about US\$4 million annually to support activities requested by SPs in need of international assistance. It includes compulsory and voluntary contributions from the SPs, as well as from private donations. The World Heritage Committee (WHCommittee) allocates funds according to the urgency of requests, priority being given to the most threatened sites'. As pointed out by Jimura (2007) in his study on Saltaire, a British WHS, the issue is that WHS designation cannot bring any funding automatically. This is true to all the WHSs in the world except some exceptive WHSs which could obtain some automatic funding from national, regional and/or local government (e.g. Shirakawa-mura, Japan).
- (2) **Site Image and Recognition** – More recognition of the site is caused by WHS destination (Jimura, 2007; Shackley, 1998; Smith, 2002). The image of the site is also enhanced by the designation (Bianchi, 2002; Jimura, 2007; Smith, 2002). Bianchi (2002) and Smith (2002) also state that a WHS status can be seen as a marker of authenticity and quality for overseas tourists.
- (3) **Tourists and Visitors** - In principle, UNESCO places equal emphasis on the conservation and the use of WHSs (Jimura, 2011: 291). However, it is clear that the physical environment of WHSs, especially those which are fragile and/or not well-managed, has been severely damaged by excessive visitation (Smith, 2002) and this could also mean overcrowding of the WHSs. Regarding the relationship between a WHS status and the number of visitors/tourists, Hall and Piggitt (2003) state that a WHS status does not guarantee an increase in the visitor number. On the other hand, Asakura (2008) notes that the Japanese WHSs which were not famous amongst tourists before WHS inscription are more likely to see a huge increase in the number of tourists/visitors after the designation. Jimura (2007; 2011) concludes that in case of Shirakawa-mura, a Japanese WHS, the number of domestic tourists has seen a much larger increase than that of overseas tourists. Shepherd, Yub and Huimin (2012) examined the tourists to Wutai Shan, China as a WHS and a tourist destination, and conclude that the majority of them are domestic tourists with religious (Buddhism) intentions. Hence, it could also be said that not all the WHSs see a clear increase in the number of overseas tourists.
- (4) **Local Culture** - In their study on Bukhara, Uzbekistan, Airey and Shackley (1998) argue that WHS listing could revitalise local products, such as silk carpets, textiles and silver. Shackley (1998) also confirms the same kind of impact in Ninstints, Canada. Whilst, Bianchi and Boniface (2002) point out that negative changes such as degradation and commercialisation of local

culture might be caused as a result of enhanced publicity of the site by WHS inscription.

- (5) **Local Identity, Community Spirit and Local Pride** - Shackley (1998) asserts that WHSs can be a centre of nationalism through the enhancement of identity. Jimura (2003) and Smith (2002) argue that WHS listing can enhance the ties among different agencies within the area designated as a WHS. This can be supported by the result of the resident survey conducted by Jimura (2007) in Saltire. 24.0% of the questionnaire respondents think the “feel” and spirit of the area has become stronger since WHS designation, whilst 12.0% think it has become weaker. However, the resident survey conducted by Jimura (2007) in Shirakawamura shows an opposite result. Only 5.4% of the questionnaire respondents think the “feel” and spirit of the area has become stronger since WHS inscription, whilst 47.3% think it has become weaker. For example, weakened neighbourly companionship and rise of materialism are the reason of this negative change (Jimura, 2007). WHS designation can also increase local people's pride in their culture (Evans, 2002; Shackley, 1998) and their place to live (Jimura, 2007; 2011). This research will investigate the various impacts of WHS listing on (b) local communities and (c) tourism, pondering the issues stated above (Section 1) in “Sacred Sites and Pilgrimage Routes in the Kii Mountain Range”.

### 3. Methodology

As stated in Section 1, this research aims to look at the impacts of World Heritage Site (WHS) designation on the area designated as “Sacred Sites and Pilgrimage Routes in the Kii Mountain Range”, and the impacts of WHS listing on (a) heritage management and conservation, (b) local communities and (c) tourism are explored in the research. Ideally, the primary data should be collected from both the host side (local people and experts in tourism and/or heritage management) and the guest side (tourists and visitors) should be collected in order to explore the topics specified in the above-mentioned research aim. The research; however, collect the primary data only from local experts in tourism and/or heritage management due to the constraints of labour and time, and tried to explore not only the facts but also their views towards the above-mentioned (a), (b) and (c). This weakness can be seen as a main limitation of the research. In light of the goal the research tries to achieve, the research should stem from interpretivism and adopts an inductive approach as the main research approach. This would mean that this research investigates mainly qualitative data rather than quantitative data.

The research deals with both primary and secondary data. The data collection methods for primary data are (i) visitation to the WHS as a visitor, (ii) observation of the WHS itself and tourists/visitors to there, (iii) scheduled in-depth interviews with the experts (regional and local councils, tourist associations and visitor attractions), and (iv) ad hoc brief interviews with the front-line staff of the visitor attractions which did not get back to the researcher

when he had contacted them to make an appointment for an in-depth interviews. Of these, (iii) works as the main data collection method, and others work as supplementary data collection methods. On the other hand, the data collection method for secondary data are (v) collection of the resources available for visitors and general public at the WHS and on the websites, and (vi) collection of the resources available from the interviewees.

The fieldwork was conducted in August and September 2012. As a result of the fieldwork, the researcher visited three key areas in the WHS: Kumano Sanzan, Koya-san and Yoshino-yama (i). Observation was conducted at the main visitor attractions and pilgrimage routes in these key areas (E.g. Kumano Hongu Taisha, Kongobu-ji, Kinpusen-ji, and Daimon-zaka) (ii). Six in-depth interviews (iii) and two brief interviews (iv) were conducted. Through the process of (i) and (iii), a wide variety of the secondary data was also collected [(v) and (vi)]. All the in-depth interviews were recorded and the researcher transcribed each recorded interview for data analysis. The researcher took a note on the contents of brief interviews. The transcripts and notes are analysed manually by discourse analysis.

#### 4. Initial Findings

The data analysis has not been completed fully. Hence, only the initial findings from (iii) scheduled in-depth interviews with the experts are presented here.

##### (a) Heritage management and conservation

- Kumano Sanzan & Yoshino-yama: *'Our main concern is to lose a WHS status because of poor management and conservation of the WHS. We prohibit the new instalment of something artificial. For example, not the instalment of a new bridge but the restitution of footpaths should be done when footpaths in the WHS collapse'*.
- Kumano Sanzan: *'There is no automatic funding from public or private sector thanks to a WHS status'*. This is the same situation to WHS Saltaire, UK (Jimura, 2007), but different situation from WHS Ogimachi, Shirakawamura, Japan (Jimura, 2007).

##### (b) Local communities

- Kumano Sanzan: *'The area, our place to live, designated as the WHS is a rural area. Usually there is nothing interesting in such a rural area. However, now the area has a WHS status. This means that the area is not just a rural area. Everybody knows WHSs and they are special. Hence, the WHS status is helpful when we introduce our place to live to people living outside the WHS. The level of our pride in our place to live has definitely increased. We feel that the WHS is a really strong brand'*. The positive impact of WHS designation on local people's pride in their place to live is confirmed from this statement. This result fits the studies of Jimura (2007; 2011).

##### (c) Tourism

- Kumano Sanzan: *'The number of overseas tourists has increased since WHS designation in 2004. To meet their needs, we developed the brochures in English, Chinese and Korean'*. This result is different from the result of the studies of Jimura (2007; 2011) which look at WHS Ogimachi, although both of them are the cultural WHSs in Japan.

## **5. Conclusion at This Stage and Future Research Plan**

This research aims to investigate the impacts of WHS designation on the area designated as "Sacred Sites and Pilgrimage Routes in the Kii Mountain Range", Japan in terms of (a) heritage management and conservation, (b) local communities and (c) tourism. The data analysis has not been completed. Hence, only the initial findings are presented in Section 4. The amount of the findings is limited; however, it could be said that overall the impacts of WHS designation on the area inscribed as the WHS are positive in terms of the above-stated (a), (b) and (c).

Four data collection methods for primary data and two data collection methods for secondary data are adopted in this research. Due to a wide variety of data collected through different data collection methods, on places/attractions, and with various interviewees; the data organisation and analysis stages have been taking a lot of time. Moreover, almost all the collected data are written in Japanese. First, therefore, the researcher needs to organise and analyse the data in Japanese in order to maintain subtle nuances of Japanese words, and need to translate the results of the data analysis from Japanese to English very carefully.

As of January 2013, the data organisation stage has been completed, and the data analysis has just started. Needless to say, all kinds of primary and secondary data have to be analysed carefully. Of the data collected through six different data collection methods, those collected through (iii) should be most important because of the nature of the data. Hence, the data analysis will be proceeded focusing on the data collected through (iii) and considering the data collected by other data collection methods.

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