

Regional Identity in a Tourism-dependent Country: The Case of Tourism Education in Okinawa

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観光立国における地域アイデンティティ
－沖縄における観光教育の事例から－

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Abstract

The Japanese government has encouraged tourism in Japan since the Japan Tourism Agency was founded in 2008. The number of visitors to Okinawa from not only mainland Japan but also from around the world has increased dramatically. This paper introduces how education for tourism has an important role in the future of the travel industry and cultivating students' identities in Okinawa.

Keywords : identity, region, culture, tourism

1. Introduction

1. Education With an Aim to Make a Country a Travel Destination
2. The Textbook for Tourism Education in Okinawa
3. Cultivating Students' Identities and Global Concepts through the textbook and Demae Classe
 - 3-1 Invitation to a Global View and Cultivating Identity through the Textbook
 - 3-2 Occupations in the Tourism Industry
 - 3-3 Why "Demae" classes (School Visits) are important in cultivating students' identities and enhancing the tourism industry in Okinawa.

Conclusion

Introduction

The Japan Tourism Agency was founded in 2008 in order to increase domestic and international travel, as well as to promote tourism in the future. When the prefecture of Okinawa was returned to mainland Japan in 1972 after the American occupation, they welcomed 440,000 tourists a year. In 2015, Okinawa welcomed more than 7,760,000 visitors¹⁾

and this number is still increasing.

The economy of Okinawa still relies greatly on the American military presence and a national budget provided by mainland Japan. If they wish to be truly economically independent, they should learn how to cultivate an innovative tourism industry by themselves.

There is an agency in Okinawa which is trying to proceed with the development of tourism and a leader who is supporting this program through education. The agency is OCVB (Okinawa Convention & Visitors Bureau) and the leader of Okinawan tourism education is Mr. Yukio Yoshihama, who is also the principal of Oroku elementary school in Naha city. There, they are trying to cultivate an encouragement for tourism through education. At the same time, they are learning about their own cultural identity through tourism education in Okinawa.

First of all, education for tourism with an aim to make a country a travel destination should be explained. Secondly, the textbook about tourism in Okinawa should be introduced according to individual school activities and through tourism resources in Okinawa. Finally, examples of tourism education in Okinawa will be described.

1. Education With an Aim to Make a Country a Travel Destination

In 2007, a Tourism-based Country Promotion Basic Act was passed in the Japanese Cabinet. The purpose of the Act was to invigorate Japanese people with pride in their regional societies. The government also focused on cultivating students' motivation toward the development of tourism by providing special attention to their regional cultures so that they might become facilitators to their hometowns and local culture.

- Fostering Human Resources for Tourism Development

Schools should teach students about the local culture and its history in order educate them more about tourism.

- Preparation of Textbooks for Students Who Learn Tourism at School

Textbooks for tourism which enforce the students' understanding toward regional tourism should be provided. The textbooks for tourism which are used in Miyazaki and Okinawa prefecture.

- “TABIIKU (Education for Tourism)” Demae classes (School Visit)”²⁾

In Okinawa, the OCVB is promoting school visits by inviting guests who work in the tourism industry like airline companies, hotels, and travel agencies. The purpose of school visits is to show the importance of tourism in Okinawa to students in elementary and junior

¹⁾ Text book for Tourism in Okinawa 11th version

²⁾ http://jinzai.ocvb.or.jp/docs/kyouzai_book.pdf

high schools. They sometimes introduce their activities to students outside of Okinawa as well. On the 15th of May in 2017, they had an anniversary of when Okinawa was returned back to Japan. The OCVB was requested to introduce Okinawa to the students of Hirano elementary school in Osaka over the internet. During this online school visit, they showed Osakan students the history of Okinawa from the American occupation to the reversion of 1972. The students in Osaka could watch activities like karate and learn about Okinawan vegetables and Okinawan Soba noodles.

The Japan Tourism Agency supports not only the activities of Convention & Visitors Bureau like the OCVB, but it also the issues the tourism textbooks which are mainly provided to elementary school students.

2. The Textbook for Tourism Education in Okinawa

The purpose of issuing a textbook for tourism education is so that students are able to learn about their regional culture and history in elementary schools. The students can also cultivate an interest in tourism. They are expected to use these textbooks in the Period of Integrated Study, a class set aside for students to learn various subjects. Though only four prefectures (Yamagata, Miyazaki, Okinawa, and Miyagi) provide tourism textbooks at schools, more regional agents are planning to issue their own tourism textbooks.

An example of a textbook from Okinawa will be introduced in this section. The textbook consists of five main chapters. The first chapter is an outline of tourism. The second chapter talks about tourists who come to Okinawa every year from mainland Japan and the rest of the world. Chapter three introduces attractive features of Okinawa and chapter four deals with occupations which are closely related to the tourism industry. The fifth chapter centers around so-called "Hospitality," where students have a chance to work on positive attitudes and behaviors when welcoming tourists and guests from around the world.

The catchphrase for the promotion of the Okinawan tourism industry is "Be Okinawa."³⁾ This phrase means "Let's fit in Okinawa." The government of Okinawa decided on this phrase, not only to encourage tourism, but also to show how students in Okinawa can share their knowledge of local tourism to the rest of the world. The textbook starts with an introduction to the teachers who have to teach "tourism in Okinawa" to the students. This introduction shows the purpose of the textbook and how to use the textbook in the classroom. The textbooks are expected to be mainly used in the in the Period of Integrated Study, which is usually allocated once a week. Besides that period, teachers can teach "tourism" during almost any period in school. For example, students are able to learn about nature and biological resources of Okinawa and also pay attention to environmental problems. Students can enjoy traditional music and dance during the periods of physical education and music classes. Social

³⁾ Text book for Tourism in Okinawa 11th version

science classes are closely related to the tourism industry as well.

As for the definition of “tourism,” the word “tourism” has three definitions in the textbook. The first definition is a “mutual understanding” beyond their regional area and the national border. The second definition of “tourism” is to encourage people to recognize the importance of local traditions. The third definition shows the development of the tourism industry itself.

There are two important expressions which refer to the facts of cultivating a student’s identity as Okinawan. Here are some quotations from the textbook.

The significance and effectiveness of traveling to different places: ⁴⁾

◎We can find good points about different places around Okinawa and are also able to appreciate our own regional resources by looking at Okinawa from the outside.

◎Traveling gives us a good opportunity to learn about local behaviors and the difference in behaviors in other parts of Japan.

This introduction should be the backbone of intercultural study and the cultivation of individual identities for students in Okinawa.

In the next section, how the textbook and Demae classes (School Visits) encourage cultivating students’ identities will be explained.

3. Cultivating Students’ Identities and Global Concepts through the textbook and Demae Classes

3-1 Invitation to a Global View and Cultivating Identity through the Textbook

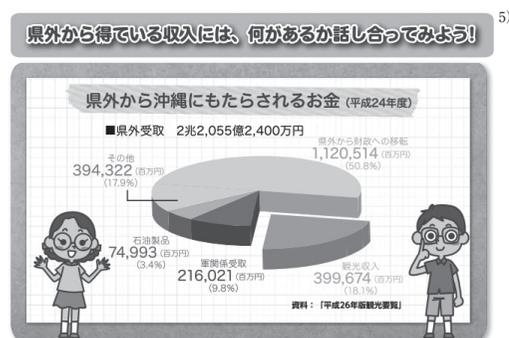
Students learn about sightseeing spots and tourist sites from around the world and Japan, as well as Okinawa in the first chapter. This enables students to grasp the objective concept of well-known places for tourists. The first chapter of the textbook also refers to the history of immigrants from Okinawa who live around the world. Every five years, people from South America, Hawaii, and other countries around the world get together in Okinawa to share their heritage. This big event contributes to an encouragement of cultivating their identities with a reunion in Okinawa.

Chapter two of the textbook refers to Inbound Tourism in Okinawa and how the number of visitors have dramatically increased in the last four decades and how 84.2% of them are repeat visitors. Chapter three talks about tourism resources in Okinawa, including its World Heritage Sites. These three World Heritage Sites are closely related to the imperial era of Ryukyu. This allows students to be easily interested in their own regional history. The traditional culture of Okinawa is introduced in that chapter as well. For example, the traditional dance of “Eisa” and one of the Japanese martial arts, “ Karate” is mentioned. The editors of the textbook are also the facilitators of the tourism industry in Okinawa. They inform students that their culture has the potential to attract many tourists from around the world.

In chapter four, they refer to the reality of the tourism industry and the financial frailty of Okinawa. The chart below shows that the government supports about 50% of Okinawa’s Gross

⁴⁾ Text book for Tourism in Okinawa 11th version., P.10

Domestic Income. The military base revenue accounts for almost 10% and the revenue from tourism accounts for almost 20%. Students can easily understand the present budget of Okinawa and they can also understand the importance of the tourism industry on the Okinawan economy. This chapter also talks about various jobs which are related to the tourism industry in Okinawa.



3-2 Occupations in the Tourism Industry

Tourism consists of seven general tourism industries and typical jobs in Okinawa.

【Seven General Tourism Industries】

1. Accommodation
2. Tourist facilities
3. Restaurants and souvenir shops
4. Travel agencies and tour support companies
5. Transport companies and airports
6. Resort wedding companies
7. Safety support organizations

Within these industries, there are many occupations which are familiar to students in Okinawa. For example, a hotelier, a cook, a taxi driver, a travel agent, etc. This chapter also introduces typical occupations in Okinawa such as port workers, glass factory workers, Ryukyu dancers, and diving instructors. Students are able to imagine possible jobs of the future which are really important to the tourism industry. In addition, “safety support organizations” are examined in this section. Those who work in a hospital, police station, electric company, gas company, should also be considered as support services for tourism. Foodservice distributors for hotels and restaurants make up a great part of the tourism industry as well. Teachers who teach tourism at schools are also supporting the future of tourism in Okinawa. In this way, this textbook tries to allow students to look at an outline of tourism as a whole with a bird’s-eye view.

⁵⁾ Text book for tourism in Okinawa 11th version., P.43

3-3 Why “Demae” Classes (School Visits) are Important in Cultivating Students’ Identities and Enhancing the Tourism Industry in Okinawa

As mentioned in section one, “Demae” classes started in 2006 when they issued the first textbook for tourism. This program is closely related with career counseling at schools. Here is an example of a third grade class at a local Okinawan elementary school.

(Table 1)⁶⁾

	Program, Class Title	Name of subject	Month	Instructor, Organization	Job
1	Spring School Excursion	Science	4	Butterfly Garden	Environmental Protection Workers
2	Exciting Expedition	Integrated	9	Monorail Museum, Airport	Monorail, Airport Company
3	Exciting Expedition	Integrated	11	OCVB	Job in Tourism
4	Factory Workers	Sociology	11	Morinaga Milk Company	Manufacturing Workers
5	Lifestyles of Ancient Times	Sociology	2	Okinawa Prefectural Museum	Museum Curator

The reason this school enhanced the “Demae” class project was because the labor turnover rate in Okinawa exceeded that of the Japanese average.

(Table 2) The rate of people leaving within three years after they graduate.⁷⁾

	Japanese Average	Okinawan Average	Difference
Intermediate Graduates	65.3%	Over 90%	25%
Senior High Graduates	39.7%	61.7%	22%
University Graduates	32.3%	48.6%	16.3%

Oroku elementary school decided to start the Demae class project because students had no ideas of potential jobs in their future. Table 1 shows four tourism related program out of five. If they are well motivated to think about possible careers while they are young, the tourism

⁶⁾ Oroku Elementary School Journal 2017

⁷⁾ Oroku Elementary School Journal 2017

industry would greatly benefit and students would be able to cultivate their own identities as Okinawans.

Conclusion

Mr. Yoshihama pointed out that education seems to lack the concept that students will eventually move on to be valuable members of society. In a previous school journal, he stated that “The attractive feature of tourism education is that we can start this program from the ground level, expand student’s interest in their surroundings, and finally return their interest back to their home grounds. And his paper also concludes with the help of his opinion, “Students can expand their interests through the tourism industry and cultivate their regional identities. They can study about their local cultures and reflect on their home grounds with pride. This leads to the cultivation of their skills of intercultural understanding and provides various potentials for society.” Those who are in the education field should pay more attention to how students may cultivate their own regional identities.⁸⁾

Since the purpose of the Tourism-based Country Promotion Basic Act in 2007 is to encourage Japanese people with pride in their regional societies, those who belong to the local tourism industry should help students increase their skills and knowledge about tourism. If every prefecture in Japan adopted the tourism learning tool of “Demae classes” (School Visits) at their schools, most students would surely conceive some sort of a regional identity. These regional identities would provide the Japanese tourism industry with more activity in the future. The tourism industry could be a leading industry in areas of Japan which lack other industries or natural resources. These examples of how Okinawa uses its dependency on Tourism as an educational policy is a good example of how to make Japan a Tourism-dependent Country.

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⁸⁾ The school journal of Matsushima elementary school in 2016

