

# **Understanding the impacts of residency length on locals' attachment to tourism attractions**

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## **Understanding the impacts of residency length on locals' attachment to tourism attractions**

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**Keywords:** *place attachment, attraction attachment, environmental change, locals, urban-rural mixed town, Yanabe, Japan, community event, mythical images, residency length*

### **1. Introduction**

The effects of environmental problems on our everyday lives have been well documented but one area that has received far less recognition is the effect on tourism. Problems in the natural environment, such as global warming, water pollution, biodiversity loss and species extinction, pose a threat to the sense of destination. Meanwhile, social environment issues, such as population change of host communities, also can change the interpretation and identity of destination. One method of responding to these challenges is to maintain or rebuild destination attractiveness. However, there is a challenge for stockholders who involved in tourism industries to do so: it is difficult to quantify destination attractiveness as it comprises complex relationships between natural human beings, social and natural environment.

The study purposes of this paper are to explore the impacts of resident length on locals' attachment with their town and touristic attractions; and relationships between place and attractive attachment from view of host community. This study offers some statistical finding of this theory to destination operators, through a case study of Yanabe town, Handa City, Japan. The results suggest that residency length plays a low degree of impact on locals' feelings of destination attractiveness. However, place attachment could be significantly predictive of residents' attachment to tourism attractions: higher the attachment to their town, higher the attachment to attractions. Therefore, exploring the level and nature of locals' attachment would be useful for destination authorities in tourism planning.

## **2. Place Attachment and Attraction Attachment**

Current trends in tourism planning, landscape designing and destination marketing are moving in direction of human-spatial relationship study. “Sense of place” is a term in geography and environment physical to describe this relationship, which can be defined as “an experiential process created by the setting, combined with what a person brings to it” (Steele 1981). While there are various constructs associated with sense of place, Jorgensen and Stedman (2001) argued that place attachment, place dependence and place identity are main constructs of sense of place in academic literature. Generally, place attachment refers to the emotional bond that develops between a person and their environment (Altman & Low 1992). Place identity is defined as a component of personal identity, a process by which people describe themselves in terms of belonging to a place (Hernández et al. 2007). Place dependence which is described as the perceived strength of association between a person and specific places (Stokols & Shumaker 1981). According to Williams et al. (1992), the construct of place attachment is constituted of place identity and place dependence (also see Qian, Zhu and Liu 2011).

As a key construct of the sense of place, the dimension of attachment has been addressed as the focus of academic. For example, Gerson et al., (1977) defined attachment by two dimensions: subjective feeling toward the geographical locale of neighbourhood; and commitment to neighboring by contributing personal resources. According to Low & Altman (1992), attachment may be set up both with mythical, hypothetical, and imagined places, and the real places. Furthermore, Cresswell (2004) said that attachment can be formed between people and buildings, environments, homes, objects, landscapes, neighborhoods, towns, and cities. In this study, place attachment is defined as locals’ emotional, cognitive and functional bond with their town, and attraction attachment is defined as locals’ emotional bond with touristic attractions, images and infrastructures.

The effects of place attachment on various dependent variables have been examined at different geographical scales. For example, university students’ place attachment to the university campus can give rise to a feeling of love to the city where the campus is based (Tuan 1974). The locals who feel a strong

sense of attachment to their community would also feel more satisfied with the service delivery of their local government, than those respondents who show lesser feelings of attachment (Scott & Vitartas, 2008).

Recently, researchers have started to integrate place attachment into tourism research. Yuksel et al. (2010) found the level and nature of place attachment affect tourists' evaluations of current experiences with a destination and future loyalty intentions. Gu & Ryan (2008) examined attitude of residents of Shi Cha Hai hutong in Beijing on tourism development with reference to theories of place attachment. However, there is a comparative lack of empirical evidence on impacts of residency length or place attachment on destination attractiveness from perspective of host communities.

On the other hand, some researchers sought to understand the relationship between time variables and attachment a local will have with a place. For example, Hernández et al.(2007) argued that non-natives always show lower degrees of attachment than natives; and Pretty et al. (2003) used the age of the resident as a key factor to describe the dimensions of sense of community, place attachment and place dependence in remote rural areas. In this study, the authors take residency length as a variable that influences the natural and level of sense of attachment as Gu & Ryan (2008) suggested. There are three study questions in this paper. (1) Does the duration of residency directly and significantly influence locals' attachment to their town? (2) Does resident length directly and significantly influence locals' attachment to local attractions? (3) Does the level of place attachment directly and significantly influences locals' attraction attachment?

### **3. Study Area**

Handa city is located in the central of Chita Peninsula, Japan. Dashi Festival, historical redbrick building, traditional architectures, the Museum of Nankichi Miimi and old home of Nankichi Niimi are tourism attractions in this city. Nankichi Miimi was a famous author born in Handa. His books are regarded as the main content of regional cultural for Japanese.

Yanabe, a rural-urban mixed town of Handa city, is the background to Nankichi's masterpiece "Gon, the fox"- a story about villagers, fox and Eel. This book was selected for primary school book since 1956; and included in all public primary school text since 1989. In this book, Yanabe was described as a traditional

Japanese village with beautiful natural landscape. However, both of natural and social environments of this region have changed significantly since 1990s, when Chubu international airport project started. In the last two decades, the population increased with urbanization. Villagers and animals described in the book disappeared. Handa faces a challenge to maintain or re-build its destination attractiveness.

#### **4. Research Method**

In January of 2011, a questionnaire survey with residents of Yanabe town was carried for this study. 498 questionnaires were distributed to families located in 4 districts of Yanabe town and 366 were returned. In total, 338 valid questionnaires were used in this study. In considering that the total number of family in the town is about 2800, the sample rate is about 13%. Also, the response rate which is 0.68 suggests that sample bias could not be an issue, as the higher the response rate the lower the sample bias

There are three portions of questions were used to address the research questions. The first portion was designed to check demographic information of samples, including years of residency in Yanabe Town. The second portion of survey involved questions targeting sense of place. This portion asks the respondent to answer several questions about their place attachment, place identity and place dependence to Yanabe city. A five-point Likert type scale (1, strongly disagree; 5, strongly agree) is applied to measure the degree of agreement. The samples are asked to score each sub-item in the questionnaire. Figure 1 shows the sub-items written in sense of place portion of survey. The design of these sub-items was based on existing studies (Jorgensen & Stedman, 2001; Pretty et al., 2003; Yuksel et al., 2010). The aim of this part is to exam the impacts of residency period on the sense of place attachment. The third portion of the questionnaire measures locals' attachment to different attractions. Figure 2 shows sub-items about attractions in the fourth portion of the questionnaire.

< Figure 1 about here>

< Figure 2 about here>

## 5. Analysis

Firstly, the reliability estimates of the three place dimensions in table 1 was verified by using the Cronbach's alpha. Secondly, the means and standard deviations of the aggregate samples' response to each dimension were calculated by SPSS. Thirdly, the relation between length of residence and attachment to attractions, as well as the relation between place and attraction attachment was estimated by Pearson Correlation. Correlation is a measure of the relation between two or more variables. The most widely used type of correlation coefficient is Pearson  $r$ , also called linear or product-moment correlation. The correlation coefficient  $r$  represents the linear relationship between two variables. If the correlation coefficient is squared, then the resulting value will represent the proportion of common variation in the two variables. Correlation coefficients can range from -1.00 to +1.00. The value of -1.00 presents a perfect negative correlation while a value of +1.00 represents a perfect positive correlation. A value of 0.00 represents a lack of correlation.

## 6. Results

Fifty-eight percent of the respondents were female and the age of the respondents ranged from 25 to 98. Seventy-four percent of the respondents were non-native. There is a relative percentage of newer (0-10 years: 18%; average age: 45.5), new (11-20 years: 14%; average age 51.4), average (21-30 years: 11%; 55.9), old (31-40 years: 21%; average age 63.1), and elder residences (over 40years: 31%; average age 67.1). It reflects a mixed residential environment in Yanabe. Figure 3 is the disaggregation of samples in term of residence length, and it can be observed that new residence is generally younger. The result of reliability estimates of the three place dimensions shows the alpha values range from 0.79 to 0.89, with an average of 0.85 ( Figure 4), exceeding the minimum hurdle of 0.7. It suggests the dimensions have acceptable coefficients of alpha.

< Figure 3 about here>

< Figure 4 about here>

### 6.1 *Sense of place*

A universal analysis of the questions suggests that length of residence is a key indicator that determines residents' the sense of place: new residents always show lower degree of place attachment, identity and dependence. For each dimension, scores of individual questions were integrated to reach an indicator for the intensity of each of the three constructs of sense of place. Figure 5 shows the means and standard deviations of the total sample's response to each dimension. It can be observed that samples with less 10 years resident history reported the lowest scores for all place dimensions, probably due to they have not yet formed strong bonds to Yanabe town. In contrast, residents with over 40 year's resident length reported the highest scores for all the three dimensions. Meanwhile, these statistics show a lower degree of scores of new residents (11-20 years), and a slightly higher ranking of old residents (21-30 years) over participants with 31-40 years residency history. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy to see living history has played different patterns on each of the place dimension. For example, samples (with less 10 years residency length) reported a low score (mean 2.54) for place identity dimension; but slight higher score (mean 3.17) for place attachment. It may be reasonable to assume that, it is difficult for new residents to develop the feeling of place being part of me" or "a sense of belonging"; but it is easy for them to develop attachment to their resident place. In this sense, we can conclude that new residents always show lower degree of attachment to their town.

< Figure 5 about here>

< Figure 6 about here>

### 6.2 *Attachment to touristic attractions and infrastructures*

Figure 6 shows mean and standard deviations of the sample's responses to questions in figure 2. The top three items that received the highest scores are question 11 "I am attached to Red Spider Lily Flower" (mean 2.82; S.D. 1.412); question 10 "I am attached to "Fairytale story of Gon, the fox" (mean 2.63; S.D.

1.355); and question 12 “I am attached to Museum of Nankichi Miimi” (mean 2.34; S.D. 1.387). Meanwhile, these statistics show a poor attachment to local vegetables (question 15), local fish dishes (question 15), and traditional architectures (question 20), and a slightly stronger feelings to community event and natural environment such as natural landscape and climate. This revealed that locals have developed a strong attachment to attractions that related to Nankichi Niimi and his book: Red Spider Lily, fox and the Museum. Instead of the “center of Chita Peninsula”, Chubu Airport becomes a landmark for Yanabe.

Figure 6 also shows there is a slight positive correlation between attachment to various attractions. The significant positive correlation between length of residence and attachment to community event ( $r = 0.223$ ,  $\text{Sig} = 0.000$ ) suggests that participants with longer resident history show higher degree of attachment to community occasion Spring Dashi Matsuri. In contrast, the negative correction between the item 10 suggest that participant with shorter resident period demonstrates a stronger attachment to the fox.

< Figure 7 about here >

However, a further analysis of distribution of scores yielded various relationships between residence length and attached items. Figure 7 detail the response to each question. It can be observed that participants with 0-10 years of residency gave the highest scores to the fox (mean 2.65) and the lowest scores to community events (mean 1.23). Residents with 21-40 years residency gave highest scores to Gon, the fox, Red Spider Lily Flower, Museum of Nankichi and natural landscape; while samples with more than 40 years residency length show more feelings to community event, Chubu Airport and comfortable weather.

< Figure 8 about here >

### *6.3 Impacts of place attachment on destinations attachment*

Figure 8 illustrates there is a clear positive correlation between place attachment and attraction attachment. The Pearson Correlation result shows significant positive corrections (significant at the 0.01



level, 2-tailed) between place attachment and attachment to Red Spider Lily flower, Community event, the Museum of Nankichi Miimi. Meanwhile, the significant positive correlation was also found between “I would be sad if Yanabe changed” and “I am attached to Gon, the fox” ( $r = 0.199$ ,  $\text{Sig} = 0.000$ ). And, there is no significant positive correction was found between place attachment and attachment to Chubu Airport.

## 7. Conclusion

This paper explores the locals’ feelings to destination attractiveness under environmental change, through a case study of Handa town, a small-scale heritage site located in Japan. The author checked the impacts of resident length on locals’ attachment with their town and attachment to tourism attractions, and examined the interaction between these two attachments.

There are three results of this study. (1) Residency length is a key factor that effects locals’ attachment to their town, as sample with shorter resident history shows a lower degree of feelings in all of three place constructions. (2) There is a slight positive correlation between place attachment and attachment to tourism attractions. However, residence length is not key element that decides local’s attachment to tourism attractions. For example, the locals with a shorter period residency would have strongest attachment to the fox, as well as samples with 21-30 years residency gave highest scores to main attractions. (3) Place attachment could be significantly predictive of residents' attachment to tourism attractions: higher the attachment to their town, higher the attachment to attractions.

The result also suggest that creating an attractiveness “fairytale town of the fox” will help Yanabe to development tourism, as locals have developed strong attachment to attractions that related to Nankichi Niimi and his book: Red Spider Lily, fox and the Museum. Besides, community event is also an important tourism attraction. It is acknowledged that an equation model will be tested in future work.

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