Changes in the Promotional Images of Yakushima Island as a Tourist Site

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This paper clarifies the chronological changes in promotional tourism images of Yakushima Island as a tourist site, designated as a world natural heritage site in 1993, using textual as well as visual information for photos published in Japanese travel guidebooks, such as “Tabi” and “Rurubu.” This study found that the images of Yakushima have changed across the ages. In the 1950s, Yakushima’s images emphasized its remoteness and local livelihoods, which were favored as tourism resources over its mountainous areas. Photos of hot springs and falls adjacent to the seashore were frequently picked up until the 1980s except for the age (around 1965) mountainous area of Yakushima Island was designated as a part of a National Park. After the 1990s, however, the main tourism resources in Yakushima shifted to the mountainous areas, such as Jomon-sugi Cedar and Shiratani-Unsuikyo. Recently, other tourism resources related to the ecotourism industry, such as Taiko-Iwa, known as Drum Rock, and Wilson’s stump, with its heart-shaped cavity, were newly exploited. These newly developed resources had a strong influence on changing images of Yakushima.

There are several reasons the images of Yakushima have shifted over time. In the early stages of tourism development, limited means of transportation to Yakushima Island and to its mountainous areas critically affected the production of tourism images. Development of infrastructure, such as an airport, roads, and footpaths, enabled visitors to Yakushima to venture into its mountainous areas, and articles in tourism magazines focusing on the mountainous areas gradually increased as a result. Disclosure of information about the mountainous areas led the penetration of mass tourism and the development of the ecotourism industry in Yakushima. With this increase in interest in the mountainous areas, publishers repeatedly updated their tourism magazines with newly found Yakushima information. However, the quick commodification of natural resources might cause conflicts, including issues of overuse and of alpine accidents. Public authorities must consider to what extent information about the mountainous region should be disclosed for the purpose of sustainable tourism development in Yakushima.

Key words: world heritage sites, values, media, tourism development, irreversibility, ecotourism