

# **Overview of Soft Infra-structure Development for Tourism in North-East Asia**

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**Hirohide Konami (Ph.D.)**

**Professor**

**Faculty of International Studies**

**Tokyo Jogakkan University, Tokyo, Japan**

## **1. Introduction**

Soft Infra-structure may sound strange in some way. Because, the word of infra-structure is usually used for the meaning of public facilities such as highways, railways, airports, optic fiber cables, water supply and drainage systems, energy and electricity supply systems, hospitals, schools, and so on.

Soft Infra-structure means the total supporting system to manage the tourism excluding the hardware listed above. They will be categorized as legal system, institutional system, information system, management system and hospitality spirit.

This paper tries to make those topics clear as much as possible.

## **2. Legal System**

“Japanese Laws Related to Tourism”<sup>(1)</sup> by Mr. Tamao Tokuhisa, published in 2005, made 6 groups of Japanese Laws related to tourism. They are integrated ones, laws for natural environment protection, laws to keep historical heritage, a law to control tourism industries, laws to regulate hotels and laws to promote international tourism.

Integrated ones are The Basic Law of Tourism, Resort Area Development Act, Promotion Act for Leisure Activities in Rural Areas, The Law of Landscape Improvement and The Law of Hot Springs. All of these are intended to develop the tourism by means of developing some facilities or improving the landscape.

Laws for natural environment protection are Basic Law of Environmental Protection, Law for Natural Parks, Natural Environment Protection Law and The Law to Protect Endangered Species and Animals. These are the laws to control the development and sometimes work as a brake of development.

Laws to keep historical heritage are The Law to Protect Cultural Heritage, The Law to Promote Tourism, Commerce and Manufacture in Limited Areas by Developing the Traditional and Local Arts, Protection Act of Old Capitals and The Law to Protect Asuka Ancient Village. These laws have both functions to develop something or regulate the disordered development.

The Law to Control Tourism Industries is intended to keep the benefit and security of tourists by means of the official registration of tourism industries. This law strictly controls the assistant charge for making up the travel plan, booking or purchasing tickets, and other tour assistances.

Laws to regulate hotels are The Law of Hotels and The Law to Develop Hotels for International Tourists. The former law regulates western style hotels, Japanese style hotels, simple inexpensive hotels and long stay (over a month) apartments and the latter law promotes the construction of high standard western style hotels by means of their official registration.

The laws to promote international tourists are The Law to Develop the Various Traditional and Cultural Areas for International Visitors, The Law to Promote the Bidding of International Conferences, The Law to Control the Immigration and Refugees and The Law for Custom Duty. The former two laws are trying to

increase the international visitors to Japan and the latter two laws are intending to keep the international order.

The biggest problem of legal systems in North-East Asia would be the entry permission. In most areas in North America European countries, we do not need any visa process for sightseeing, but in North East Asian Countries, we still need to take visa even for the sightseeing trips. For example, Bhutan required US\$3,000 for my single entry permission and Japan requests almost all of the Asian visitors to take visa to enter Japan.

Therefore, no visa rule for sightseeing tourists should be proposed and adequate legal control system or regulation would be required for transportation, development permission, tourism industries, security, medical and sanitary affairs in order to develop the tourism.

### **3. Institutional System**

Institutional system can be different from country to country and may be difficult to discuss on the same table. Japanese case is as follows.

The central responsibility belongs to the Minister for Land, Infra-structure and Transport (MLIT) of Japanese Government except the passport control and custom duty. The former is managed by the Ministry of Law and the latter by the Ministry of Budget and Finance. MLIT has four divisions named Tourism Planning Division, International Tourism Promotion Division, Regional Development Division and Travel Promotion Division. All of the works of these divisions are supported by the similar divisions or sections established in 47 prefectural governments and 14 designated big cities. And over 2000 municipalities have similar functions in each municipality government. The top priority of tourism administration of MLIT is to increase the inbound foreign tourists in order to keep balance of the number of inbound and outbound oversea tourists. Japan has over 16 million outbound tourists but has only 5 million inbound tourists. This would be caused by the strict passport control, high travel cost and language problem in Japan. These governmental organizations are supervising the tourism industries such as hotels and restaurants, travel agencies, and guides and interpreters.

Non profit organizations for tourism such as Japan National Tourist Organization (<http://www.jnto.go.jp/>) and Tourism Development Associations in each prefecture and municipality are also functioning well to develop the tourism. They serve as information and research centers.

Each group of tourism industries usually has their own association such as Japan Hotel Association, Japan Association of Guides and Interpreters, and etc. Those associations are functioning to develop the human resources.

These pyramid like organizations are working very well for domestic tourists but not enough for international visitors. For example, homepages of those organizations, especially those of small municipalities sometimes do not have English pages and the information might be out of date.

Therefore, it is vitally important to activate these organizations and make them awake for North-East Asian Tourism.

In the field of education and training, Japan has over 20 universities and colleges to educate students in the field of tourism and several vocational schools to educate and train human resources to be official tour conductors or managers.

#### 4. Information System

Information system is supported by both public and private and internet is now developed so much that the usual search and reservation will be easily completed through the internet system. Problem would be the language choice. Especially in North-East Asia, four different languages, Chinese, Hangeul, Russian and Japanese are commonly used. Then the only common language would be English. Table 1 shows the languages used in the homepages of selected 41 Japanese municipalities facing the Japan Sea. Even the selected cities in the sense of advanced tourism administration, 17 municipalities out of 41 do not have English pages.

**Table 1 Languages used in the homepages**

Language	Number of Cities
Japanese	41
English	24
Korean	9
Chinese	11

It is also said that the 54 world heritages in North East Asia do not have reasonable English homepages. Homepage evaluation based on the general information, access information, hotel information, food information and languages showed that just 3 heritages out of 54 had satisfactory English homepages. UNESCO homepage has a system to link domestic networks but most of the domestic homepages were written in their native languages and not linked from UNESCO. As far as the world heritages concern, we may need to prepare English homepages and link them to the UNESCO homepage.

In general, Asian information network of tourism should be improved.

#### 5. Management system

Better management system would be the fundamental soft infra-structure of tourism. There are at least four important functions in management. They are environmental management, cost management, service level management and planning capability.

##### (1) Environmental Management

Tourism has a tendency to be hazardous for natural and cultural environment. Sometimes, to visit a valuable natural reservoir may become a very charming tourism spot. For example, many people like to climb Mt. Fuji, the highest mountain in Japan, in every summer but Mt. Fuji does not like to welcome them because they leave a mass of waste including bodily waste. In case of a cultural heritage, too many visitors may cause the demolition of the cultural value because of the bad effect on the cultural heritage. So in Japan, some tourism areas introduced volume control, strict entering education, prohibition of car usage, and etc. It is always too much of a bother to keep the good balance of the number of the visitors.

In case of a new big project, we need the strict environmental assessment in order to preserve the natural environment. Eco tourism and exposure trips in forest and farmland may be useful to educate the tourists.

## **(2) Cost Management**

Cost management is important for both visitors and tourism industries. If the customers' satisfaction exceeds the cost impression or in other words the amount of payment, they may become the repeaters. To depress the cost within the customers' satisfaction is the most important strategy. The fact that the per capita income level of resort areas is rather low in Japan indicates the difficulty of cost management. Usually family workers are common and get small payment because they are the family. Therefore, no big cities grow in Japanese resort areas.

In case of city tourism like Tokyo, Yokohama, Osaka, Kyoto, Kobe, Sapporo, Hiroshima, Fukuoka and Nagasaki, mother cities have enough number of populations supported by the industrial, cultural and educational functions. In this case the cost management is not so important as resort areas, and it may be important to prohibit the overcharge for the tourists. It is very common that the price is completely different for Japanese tourists but this may cause the decrease of the number of Japanese repeaters.

Japanese hotels are trying to introduce the per room charge instead of the Japanese traditional per head charge. This may be urgent for Japan to get more foreign visitors.

Cost management in transportation may be a little difficult because of the strict governmental control. Japan started the deregulation of transportation charge about 20 years ago and air charges between Tokyo /New York, Tokyo/Paris, Tokyo/Soul, and etc. are almost one third or a quarter of before the deregulation. Japan Rail Pass would be also necessary for foreign tourists in Japan. In this way, transportation cost is going to decrease very quickly.

## **(3) Service Level Management**

Five star evaluation system of hotels is so convenient for tourists. If it is a five star hotel, we can expect the enough amount of hot shower water, a quiet refrigerator, a silent and comfortable air conditioner, good room service, good telephone and internet service and good sleep. In this way, to establish the world standard of service level evaluation is very much expected in the fields of restaurants, shopping centers, amusement centers, casinos, taxi and car rentals, municipality services, medical services and any other service industries. Then the tourists will find their well fitting travel plan.

## **(4) Planning Capability**

Planning capability is always required to keep a good management. This may require the careful study of the different management in different industries and the effort to listen to the opinions of the visitors. For this purpose, international symposiums, collaboration of different farms, listen to the experts and other efforts should be done.

## **6. Hospitality Spirit**

Hospitality spirit is the most important but indistinct topic. Hospitality spirit never expects the cash flow and expects the repeaters. This means that the relation between hosts and guests should be on an equal footing and that a host can sometimes select the guests. In other words, guests are also required to be disciplined and the host may not accept arrogant guests.

"Do at Rome as Romans do" would be the most important way of thinking to develop the sound tourism

and we need to send out the necessary information to the visitors.

The basic conditions to keep good hospitality spirit would be as follows.

- (1) Daily life of the region is not suffered from food, housing, clothes, security and diseases.
- (2) Literacy level reaches at least to the level of primary and junior high school.
- (3) People know the regional history and tradition and have a pride on them.
- (4) People know the outside world through TV and magazines and have some interest on them.
- (5) There are some supporting facilities such as hotels and restaurants.

It would be said that the mutual respect is the most essential factor to develop the tourism.

## **7. Conclusion**

Soft-infrastructure in tourism has so wide aspects as mentioned above. But the sound tourism would never be developed without the soft-infrastructure.

Japan is facing the big deficit of the number of inbound overseas tourists against the outbound. She has just 5 million inbound tourists in a year in spite of the 16 million outbound tourists. This was caused by the lack of soft infrastructure such as visa problem, language problem, expensive travel cost, lack of information service and the shortage of multi-language guides and interpreters. The Japanese government is now trying to increase the number of inbound overseas tourists. For that purpose, she has set its goal of promoting inbound tourism and attracting 10 million foreign tourists to visit Japan by the year 2010. In order to achieve this goal, it is necessary to start with getting across to the world the attraction of Japanese tourism and to create an environment in which attractive tourism products can be bought.

For this purpose, the Minister for Land, Infrastructure and Transport started in fiscal 2003 the Visit Japan Campaign, a strategic promotion of inbound tourism, with “YOKOSO! JAPAN” as catchphrase. YOKOSO means “welcome.”

The Campaign focuses on Korea, Taiwan, United States, China, Hong Kong, United Kingdom, Germany, France, Thailand, Singapore, Australia and Canada. Various combinations of projects are offered to meet the needs of people of these regions.

For details, please refer to the VJC Headquarters Secretariat at: <http://www.vjc.jp/e/vjc.html>

and also, Yokoso! Japan official site at: <http://www.visitjapan.jp/>.

(Sited from: <http://www.mlit.go.jp/sogoseisaku/kanko/top.htm>)

**Author** 1942 Born in Tokyo

1966 Graduated from the University of Tokyo, Faculty of Engineering

1966-1997 Ministry of Construction, The Government of Japan

1971-1972 Graduate Student of Harvard University, Graduate School of Design

1997 Professor of Toyo University

2004 Professor of Tokyo Jogakkan University

EAROPH Lifetime and Council Member

Mail: [hiro@konamike.net](mailto:hiro@konamike.net) URL: <http://konamike.net/hiro/>