

## Preface

### Promoting people-to-people exchanges with China and Japan's neighboring countries

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The *Journal of Global Tourism Research* (JGTR) celebrates its 10th anniversary. Japan's international tourism strategy has faced a variety of challenges over the past decade. The period from 2015 to 2019 has seen a rapid increase in the number of foreign visitors to Japan, and it is no exaggeration to say that this was a time when the foundation for Japan as a tourism-oriented nation was constructed. The number of visitors reached 31.2 million in 2019 and shed light on the country's tourism industry. The COVID-19 pandemic hit the tourism industry from 2020 to 2022 and the country experienced a major blow and a significant decline. The Tokyo Olympics were postponed and the number of visitors fell to approximately 4.11 million in 2020. Strict restrictions on entry into Japan (border control measures) continued in 2021, but these measures were relaxed in 2022 and individual travel and visa exemptions were resumed. The number recovered rapidly between 2023 and 2025 with the focus shifting from "explosive shopping" to "experiential tourism". It reached 32 million in 2024, and it is expected to exceed 40.0 million in 2025 as the Osaka Kansai Exposition is being held. It is possible to achieve the government's 2030 target of 60 million foreign visitors to Japan and 15 trillion yen in travel consumption. This journal must also play an important academic role to achieve this goal while also looking at the international situation. JGTR has every potential to successfully contribute to the next decade.

The growth in the number of foreign visitors to Japan is largely dependent on the number of visitors from neighboring countries. The number of foreign visitors to Japan in the first half of 2025 is reported to be 21.52 million with a travel consumption of 4.8 trillion yen according to the JNTO (Japan National Tourism Organization). These values were achieved through the Fourth Tourism Nation Promotion Basic Plan which was formulated in March 2023. The following items are the main pillars in the plan:

- Sustainable tourism
- Increased consumption
- Promoting tourism to regional areas

The top five countries and regions for foreign visitors to Japan in the first half of 2025 are as follows:

- South Korea: 4.78 million people
- China: 4.72 million people
- Taiwan: 3.28 million people
- U.S.A.: 1.70 million people
- Hong Kong: 1.67 million people

The number for Hong Kong was expected to be slightly higher, but it dropped significantly after false information spread on social media that "a major earthquake will occur in Japan in July". The number of visitors from Hong Kong to Japan in May was down 11.2 % compared to the same month in the previous year. This decline has led to reduced or cancelled flights between Hong Kong and regional airports in Japan. It is important to disseminate information based on scientific knowledge. This field is also a research area of this journal. It is also necessary to verify false information and to take countermeasures.

Global warming has led to the occurrence of various disasters. Although there is no clear evidence linking global warming and disaster occurrence, it is said that there is a strong correlation between those occurrences. Disasters include the following: earthquakes, heavy rain, heavy snow, tsunamis, volcanic eruptions, typhoons, extreme heat, and cold waves, etc. and they threaten human society. COVID-19 (an infectious disease) is also considered a kind of disaster. Those disasters have had a major impact on the tourism industry. Once a disaster occurs, not only local residents but also tourists staying in the area suffer severe damage. It is necessary to establish a plan of action in the case of encountering a disaster while sightseeing. It is said that 20 % of the world's major disasters occur in Japan. Tourists and local residents will enter evacuation shelters without distinction in the event of a disaster. The unfamiliar environment at evacuation shelters can cause adverse effects, such as stress and difficulty sleeping. Sleeping is the most important factor in maintaining good health. A lack of sleep also contributes to disaster-related deaths. There are also lan-

guage barriers and differences in customs and culture. These issues can be resolved by utilizing ICT in many cases. In other words, information and communication technology is essential in times of disaster. JGTR welcomes submissions of papers on how ICT can be utilized in disaster situations to provide safe, secure, and comfortable tourism.

The top three countries in terms of foreign visitors to Japan were China, South Korea, and Taiwan in the five years up to 2019 before the COVID-19 pandemic. China was at the top. South Korea is at the top after the pandemic, although the difference in the number between South Korea and China is small.

The phrase “cold politics, hot economics” was used to describe Japan-China relations from the late 1990s to the early 2010s. This term was coined by former President Hu Jintao. This year marks the 80th anniversary of the end of World War II, and there are concerns that anti-Japanese sentiment will rise in Asian countries as it is a milestone year. There are active investments and trades between Japan and neighboring countries in the economic sphere. China leads the way in total trade volume in the first half of 2025 and the amount is US\$ 3.32 trillion. Japan and China have very close economic ties with exports totaling US\$ 1.81 trillion.

There are a variety of potential issues between Japan and China. For example, there is the issue of security regarding the sovereignty of the Senkaku Islands. China is moving economically to reduce its dependence on Japan. Although the exchange (people-to-people) has been on a recovery trend since the COVID-19 pandemic, visa restrictions and deteriorating political relations are factors that could affect the exchange. In particular, the recovery in the proportion of Chinese tourists is somewhat lower than the expected value. It is necessary to promote people-to-people exchanges and return to pre-COVID-19 levels. China's population is approximately 1.4 billion. There is great potential for exchanges between the two countries, and the country is a large market in terms of tourism.

This journal has two branches in China, and this is achieved with an awareness of the importance of future exchanges between Japan and China. There are also two branches in Indonesia. There is a strong need for strategies, research, and development to promote exchanges both economically and in terms of people. Of course, a strategy that takes into account the promotion of exchanges not only with China but also with neighboring countries, is also essential. People-to-people exchanges with countries experiencing rapid economic growth have a significant effect on other countries. Naturally, branches of this journal in Korea and Taiwan are necessary. It is also necessary to look at global tourism from various perspectives and to develop academic strategies, and publicize them widely. JGTR welcomes submissions not only from editorial committee members, but also from researchers and academia involved in tourism in general. It is expected that JGTR will make a significant contribution to Asia and become a world-leading academic journal over the next decade.

#### About the author


Takashi Oyabu is the vice president of Nihonkai International Exchange Center. He received a B.E. and M.E. in 1971 and 1973 from Kogakuin University and also received a B.A. in 1975 from Waseda University, Tokyo, Japan. He received his Ph.D. in engineering from Kogakuin University in 1984. He joined Kanazawa Seiryo University, Kanazawa, Japan as a professor of the Graduate School of Regional Economic Systems in 1998. He is honorary chairman of the Society for Tourism and Informatics of Japan from 2023 and chairperson of the International Society for Tourism Research from 2016. His current research activities are on tourism strategy with advanced information technology, and its applications to welfare fields.

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