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Forest Imagery in Japan and Russia

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This study investigated the ways of seeing the forest in Japan and Russia by using Landscape Image Sketching Technique (LIST). With the globalization of tourism, the recreation needs are diversifying on the one hand; local culture and customs can become a new tourist resource on the other. Understanding culturally different meanings of forests will give a new insight into tourism promotion as well as natural area management.

For cross-national research, Japan and Russia were selected. Japan and Russia are neighbouring countries, however, the mutual communication has been not enough. This report is an interim report of JAPAN-RUSSIA Joint Research Project since 2008 'Comparison of Natural Landscape Evaluation between Japan and Russia', which is financed by Japan Society for the Promotion of Science (JSPS) and Russian Foundation for Basic Research (RFBR).

Landscape Image Sketching Technique (LIST) is an empirical methodology to exteriorize an individual landscape image as a scene sketch by respondents. The 'landscape image' is defined as a medium between one's individual values and social construction as well as physical landscape and landscape representation. The visual data from one's perspective mirror the respondents' identification and symbolization of the landscape and then reconstruction of the meaning in its composition as a figure-ground relationship. In other words, the sketching procedure can coordinate the inconsistent verbal accounts in a symbolic picture, which is the advantage of the scene sketch. LIST reveals 'what' people are looking at as well as 'how' they are viewing their environment, thus giving us new insights into the understanding of the public image through landscape perception.

The empirical data were obtained with questionnaire in Japanese and Russian language. The respondents were students of Moscow University, Irkutsk University, Chiba University and Hokkaido University. The site selection intended to diversify the forest images considering geographic position as well as vegetation of each research site.

About 50 respondents in each research site were asked to make a landscape image sketch of their spontaneous imagination of a 'forest' with some keywords and text. The visual data were analyzed through three phases. Landscape elements were identified visually and linguistically and labeled first. View angle and distance were classified according to the visual appearance and combination of each landscape elements and viewpoint. Then, self-orientation in the represented landscape was classified in terms of the combination and structure of the elements and viewpoint. Finally, the meaning or motive of the landscape image sketches was interpreted comprehensively with relation to the labeled elements and verbal description.

As results, landscape image sketches showed diverse variety in each research site, but different characteristics between Japan and Russia suggested the fundamental difference in the ways of seeing the landscape through cultural framework. The preference for broadleaf wood forest in Japan and mixed forest in Russia was main difference concerning 'what' they are looking at as a forest. The result also showed a contrast between the wide ranges of categories in Japan and the certain distance in Russia, which represents 'how' they are viewing the forest.

The results implied locality-specific forest uses and accessibility of forests in each research site. In Japanese sample, the viewpoints were seen in the sketches representing scenes of their recreational uses in forest. In Russia, their romantic scenes were usually objectified describing the forests in detail. The results can suggest the different aesthetic norm in each cultural framework. In short, the research findings indicate different ways of seeing the landscape: a mere backdrop to one's experience in Japan and romantic and aesthetic harmony of forest landscape in Russia.

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