

THE RISE OF SMALLER CITIES AND ITS MEANING IN INTERNATIONAL TOURISM TO JAPAN

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ABSTRACT. The number of foreign tourists visiting Japan has steadily increased in the recent decades. The country has much variety between districts in spite of its small area, and there is a close relation between the variety of tourist resources and preferences of foreign visitors according to their nationalities. For example, prefectures located in the Hokuriku and Hida district, which do not have large cities, have shown a rapid increase in foreign visitors in the recent years and become one of the major international tourist areas in Japan. The district is mainly supported by visitors from Taiwan and Europe seeking tradition of Japan in smaller cities and the beauty of nature. It is true that 75% of foreign tourists visiting Japan come from Asia and many of them prefer shopping in large cities. But it is also important to enhance historic and cultural value of tourist resources to heighten the attraction of Japan: variety between districts.

KEY WORDS: Japan, international tourism, foreign tourists, Hokuriku and Hida district

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1. Introduction

The number of foreign tourists visiting Japan was about 6.05 million in 2008. It is still much smaller than that in Western countries such as France, Spain, Italy or the USA. But foreign visitors to Japan have increased steadily in the recent decades and will increase further in the future despite the serious damage by the earthquake and tsunami which attacked the north-east part of the country on March 11, 2011. Following this tendency, also studies of tourism to Japan have seen a great increase, especially in the first decade of the 21st century. For example, in *Jinbunchiri*

(Human geography), which is one of the major geographical journals in Japan, a new column was set up in 2007 to review geographical theses or books about tourism every year following other geographical studies. Among them, one of the most remarkable is that edited by Kanda (2009), written by young Japanese geographers and analysing tourism to Japan from various sides.

But in spite of that, most of the studies about tourism to Japan deal with domestic visitors or entities preparing for tourists, such as self-governing bodies, enterprises, and national government. Studies focusing on tourists themselves, especially foreign tourists visiting Japan, are still

Table 1. Ranking of Japanese prefectures by the number of foreign visitors (2010).

Ranking of prefectures and ratio of foreign visitors they receive (%)	Change in rank between 1997 and 2010
1. • Tokyo (60.3)	No change
2. ○ Osaka (26.1)	No change
3. ○ Kyoto (24.0)	+2
4. • Kanagawa (17.8)	No change
5. • Chiba (15.0)	-2
6. Aichi (10.9)	No change
7. ■ Fukuoka (9.1)	No change
8. Hokkaido (8.8)	+9
9. • Yamanashi (8.2)	+3
10. ○ Hyogo (7.6)	-1
11. ○ Nara (7.5)	+1
12. ■ Oita (5.0)	+3
13. ■ Kumamoto (4.3)	No change
14. Hiroshima (4.1)	+2
15. • Tochigi (3.6)	+4

Source: homepage of JNTO (Japan National Tourism Organization). Sample investigation at main international airports and ports in Japan (sample size 21,342). The prefectures are located in: • Kanto district (Tokyo metropolitan area), ○ Kinki district (Keihanshin metropolitan area) and ■ Kyushu district.

very few with rare exceptions, such as Shimizu (2007), Ohyabu & Ohuchi (2008), and Matsumura (2009). The main reasons are as follows: the number of foreign tourists to Japan is still small and they do not have enough importance for the economy yet; Japan is an island country and has had no experience of receiving so many tourists from foreign countries like European countries until now; and recently the Japanese do not have enough interest in travelling abroad because of the current economic decline.

But if we want to develop international tourism and make it one of the important industries in the future, we have to consider international tourism to Japan from a wider point of view. First, we must not forget that in spite of its relatively small area, Japan has much variety, from a sub-Arctic climate in the north to a subtropical climate in the south, and from large cities to small villages. Also, we cannot approach foreign tourists in a simple way, because they vary greatly by nationality and preferences. It means that there is much difference in the districts visited by foreign tourists according to their preferences. Also, we have to regard visitors not only as a means of using money, but as the most important subject in international tourism. In this study, we inves-

tigate the variety of preferences among foreign tourists according to their nationality, and how they relate to the tourist resources of the districts they visit.

The basic structure of international tourism to Japan has not changed much over the recent decades in spite of the relative increase in the number of visitors. As is shown in Table 1, the top-ranking prefectures are almost the same: Tokyo, Kyoto and Osaka, with the only exception of Hokkaido, which improved its ranking from 17th in 1997 to 8th in 2010, especially in the first decade of the 21st century.

But we also have to know that a little but important change is occurring. Some prefectures, such as Toyama, Ishikawa and Gifu, have improved their ranking remarkably in the number of foreign visitors in the recent decades and now occupy a middle rank among the total of 47 prefectures in Japan (their locations are shown in Fig. 1). They showed the highest growth in the ranking of all prefectures. For example, between 1977 and 2010 Toyama Prefecture rose from 37th to 27th position, Ishikawa Prefecture from 31st to 21st, and Gifu Prefecture from 25th to 16th. And the change occurred in only about five years. Moreover, these prefectures are adjacent to each other. We can see no other prefectures like that. Toyama and Ishikawa belong to the Hokuriku district



Fig. 1. Location of Toyama, Ishikawa, Fukui, and Gifu Prefectures and other major cities and districts in Japan
1. Toyama Prefecture, 2. Ishikawa Prefecture, 3. Fukui Prefecture, 4. Gifu Prefecture. Okinawa Prefecture, located at the southwest end of Japan, is excluded here.

with Fukui Prefecture. Strictly speaking, Gifu Prefecture is not part of the Hokuriku district, but most of the popular tourist spots in this prefecture, such as Takayama and Shirakawago, are located in its northern part called the Hida district, which is adjacent to the Hokuriku district. The climate of the Hida district with its heavy snow in winter also bears much resemblance to that of the Hokuriku district. Therefore, in this study, we use the phrase 'the Hokuriku and Hida district' for the sake of convenience.

We mainly deal with the rapid increase in foreign tourists to the Hokuriku and Hida district and its background by focusing on the relationship between preferences of the tourists by nationality and tourist resources offered by the district. We also analyse the meaning of the rise of this district in international tourism to Japan.

2. The character of tourist resources in the Hokuriku and Hida district

The Hokuriku and Hida district is located in the central part of Japan between the Sea of Japan and the Central Mountains, more than 3,000 m in height. It takes about 3 hours by limited express from Osaka or Nagoya to Kanazawa, the capital of Ishikawa Prefecture, and 2.5 hours from Kyoto. In winter, this district is famous for the heaviest snow in Japan, but it is not so cold as in other districts, like Hokkaido located in the northern end of the country. The temperature in summer is almost equal to that in other major cities, like Tokyo and Osaka.



Photo 1. The Kenrokuen garden in Kanazawa.

The population of the Hokuriku and Hida district is about 322.7 million (according to the 2010 national census) and accounts for about 2.5% of the total population in Japan. There are no cities with a population of more than 1 mil-

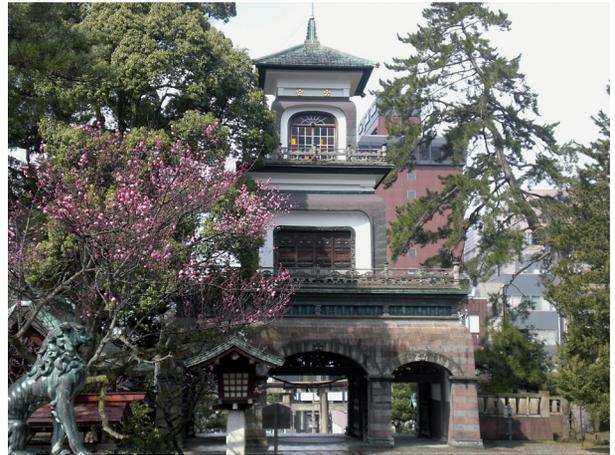


Photo 2. The gate of the Oyama shrine in Kanazawa.



Photo 3. Higashichaya Street in Kanazawa.



Photo 4. Traditional houses of samurai in Kanazawa.



Photo 5. The Tateyama Mountains from the city hall of Toyama.



Photo 6. A street in the downtown of Takayama.

lion. Even Kanazawa, the largest town in the district, had only 462,000 residents in 2010. But the beauty of nature changing with the season in the Hokuriku and Hida district, such as cherry blossom in spring, maple leaves in autumn, and heavy snow in winter, has long been highly appreciated. There are also many hot springs and mountain peaks which attract not only mountain climbers but also ordinary tourists using the cable car and the ropeway, such as the alpine route of Tateyama and Kurobe. Also, there are many medium-sized or small towns, such as Kanazawa and Takayama, famous for maintaining the atmosphere of Japan in the good old days and for excellent handicrafts. The latter is the largest town in the Hida district with a population of about 93,000 in 2010.

As has been mentioned, the main tourist resources in the Hokuriku and Hida district are

the beauty of nature changing with the season, mountains, hot springs, and medium-sized or small towns with the tradition of the good old days of Japan. As for tourist spots, here are some photos (all the photos taken by the author).

3. Preferences of foreign visitors by nationality and their relationship with tourist resources in the Hokuriku and Hida district

In this chapter, we mainly analyse the relationship between preferences of foreign visitors and the tourist resources of the Hokuriku and Hida district. At first, we examine the composition of the tourists by nationality. Table 2 shows this in Toyama, Ishikawa, Fukui and Gifu Prefectures in 2008.

The largest number of foreign tourists visiting the Hokuriku and Hida district come from Taiwan. They are the second largest group visiting Japan. And the proportion of Taiwanese tourists to prefectures located in the Hokuriku and Hida district is even higher than for the whole of Japan. The proportion of tourists from western countries, such as the USA, Canada, the UK, France, and Germany, is also high. The proportion of visitors from European countries to Ishikawa and Gifu Prefectures is much higher than the figure for Japan as a whole. This means that the proportion of tourists from Taiwan and Europe to the Hokuriku and Hida district is much higher than for the whole of Japan in spite of them being a minority in terms of numbers (especially Europeans).

Next we investigate the concrete destinations of foreign visitors to the Hokuriku and Hida district by nationality. Table 3 shows data on tourists from Taiwan, who contribute the bulk of visitors to the district. We especially focus on package tours because a lot of Asian tourists travel abroad in this way, unlike those from western countries, who mostly come on an individual basis. For example, 37.9% of tourists from South Korea and 52.3% of those from Taiwan come on package tours in the strict sense of the word, with a professional guide and prearranged hotels and tourist destinations (JNTO 2009). Guidebooks in Asia

Table 2. Composition of foreign tourists by nationality in Toyama, Ishikawa, Fukui, and Gifu prefectures in 2008 (%).

Prefecture	Nationality				
	South Korea	Taiwan	China	USA and Canada	UK, France and Germany
Toyama	16.3	51.1*	2.8	6.4	2.8
Ishikawa	5.3	30.7*	4.2	15.9	13.7*
Fukui	15.0	37.5*	10.0	7.5	5.0
Gifu	9.7	30.6*	5.7	12.2	11.4*
JAPAN	27.0	17.4	9.9	13.0	7.5

Source: JNTO (2009). The USA and Canada as well as the UK, France and Germany are summed up together. * - means that the proportion is more than 1.5 times that of tourists of this nationality in the whole of Japan. Data from a sample investigation at main international airports and ports in Japan (sample size 14,963).

often offer too much information and it is very difficult for an individual to distinguish unique tourist spots from ordinary ones.

Table 3 shows data on package tours from Taiwan to the Hokuriku and Hida district in March and April 2011 when they can enjoy both the cherry blossom in towns such as Kanazawa and a snow landscape in the mountain area along the alpine route of Tateyama and Kurobe. Many of them were cancelled after the disastrous earthquake Japan suffered on 11 March this year, but

Table 3. Main tourist spots in the Hokuriku and Hida district visited by package tours from Taiwan.

Type of tourist destination	Name of tourist destination
Tourist spots visited by more than 70% of package tours from Taiwan	☆ Kanazawa, ☆ Takayama, ☆ Shirakawago, ★ Nagoya*
Tourist spots visited by more than 50% and less than 70% of package tours from Taiwan	No tourist spots
Tourist spots visited by more than 30% and less than 50% of package tours from Taiwan	☆ Magome and Tsumago ☆ Guzyo hachiman △ alpine route of Tateyama and Kurobe ★ shopping area at Chubu international airport with atmosphere of old Japanese town*
Tourist place for appreciating cherry blossom	Nagoya* (in March) Hokuriku and Hida district (in latter half of April)

Symbols:

☆ - traditional medium-sized or small town or village

★ - large city with population of more than 1 million

△ - natural beauty spots (including national parks)

* - tourist spot located outside Hokuriku and Hida district

judging from the homepages of tourist companies in Taiwan, they were full before the earthquake, so the data have much value for a research into the preference of Taiwanese visitors. We investigated 52 package tours from Taiwan to the Hokuriku and Hida district sponsored by four major tourist companies in Taiwan and sold on the Internet. Those tours also included some destinations located outside the district, such as Nagoya, the third largest city in Japan (Fig.1).

The tourist companies are Southeast Tour, Ez Travel, Star Travel and Lion Travel. For the homepages of these companies (all in Chinese), see the References. For the location of the tourist spots, see Fig. 2.

Judging from Table 3, there are some very popular spots among tourists from Taiwan, such as Kanazawa, Takayama, and Shirakawago, which is a village famous for traditional houses included in the World Heritage List. Nagoya, the capital of Aichi Prefecture and the third largest city of Japan with a population of more than 2.2 million in 2010, is also visited as the gateway to the Hokuriku and Hida district and also as a shopping place represented by Sakae, the largest shopping area in the city. The high ratio of visitors to these tourist spots shows that the Hokuriku and Hida district has already set its position as one of the most popular tourist destinations in Japan for tourists from Taiwan. There are also other popular tourist places, such as the alpine route of Tateyama and Kurobe where tourists can cross the mountains by various vehicles such as bus, cable car and ropeway from the middle of April to the end of October. Also, tourists

Table 4. Main tourist spots in the Hokuriku and Hida district visited by package tours from South Korea.

Type of tourist destinations	Name of tourist destinations
Tourist spots visited by more than 70% of package tours from South Korea	No tourist spots
Tourist spots visited by more than 50% and less than 70% of package tours from South Korea	☆ Kanazawa ☆ Shirakawago
Tourist spots visited by more than 30% and less than 50% of package tours from South Korea	☆ Takayama ★ Nagoya* △ alpine route of Tateyama and Kurobe ◇ Kaga hot springs

Symbols:

☆ - traditional medium-sized or small town or village

★ - large city with population of more than 1 million

△ - natural beauty spots (including national parks)

◇ - hot springs

* - tourist spot located outside the Hokuriku and Hida district

from Taiwan have an inclination to appreciate cherry blossom higher than tourists from other nations. This can be concluded from the fact that most of their package tours come at the best time for appreciating cherry blossom in the destinations they visit, for example Nagoya in March and the Hokuriku and Hida district in the latter half of April. And some tours even go to Kyoto or Osaka to appreciate cherry blossom more.

By contrast, only few package tours from South Korea visit the Hokuriku and Hida district, although they are the largest in terms of the number of foreign tourists visiting Japan. As in the case of package tours from Taiwan, we investigated 35 package tours from South Korea to the Hokuriku and Hida district by the homepages of major South Korean tourist companies. As Table 4 shows, the Hokuriku and Hida district is still not very popular with package tours from this country, because there are no tourist spots there visited by more than 70% of them. As for tourists from China, there are no group tours visiting the Hokuriku and Hida district at all, although they show the biggest increase in terms of numbers and are likely to become the largest group of visitors in the future.

The tourist companies are Hana Tour, Mode Tour and KAL Tour. For the homepages of these companies (all in Korean), see the References. For the location of the tourist spots, see Figure. 2.

On the other hand, the number of tourists from Europe visiting the Hokuriku and Hida district showed a similar increase as those from Taiwan. And we must consider that the total number of visitors from Europe is much smaller than those from Asian countries, such as South Korea and Taiwan (Tables 2 and 9). Still, the number of tourists from Europe to Takayama and Kanazawa, the most famous tourist destinations in the district, is almost equal to those from Asia except Taiwan and Hong Kong, as Tables 5 and 6 show.

Table 5. Number of foreign tourists visiting Takayama.

Origin of tourists	1999	2004	2008
Asia	14,213	32,519	101,812
Europe	6,974	8,975	37,740
North America	12,626	15,545	18,487
other	6,467	3,870	13,441
Total	40,280	60,909	17,1180

Source: homepage of Takayama city.

The composition of tourists from major countries and areas in 2008 was as follows:

- Asia: Taiwan 60,334; Thailand 8,579; South Korea 6,832; Hong Kong 6,566; Singapore 5,044; China 2,176
- Europe: France 5,919; UK 5,691; Germany 4,269; Spain 4,009; Italy 3,485
- North America: USA 16,291.

We must not forget that Europeans have to buy more expensive air tickets and experience a much longer travel to visit Japan than tourists from such Asian countries as South Korea, Taiwan and China. Also, there is a great difference in per capita GDP between European countries and South Korea, Taiwan and Hong Kong.

Table 6. Number of foreign tourists visiting the Kenrokuen garden in Kanazawa.

Origin of tourists	2002	2005	2008	2010
Asia	15,755	61,086	116,437	100,240
Europe	3,537	5,926	17,337	20,914
North America	5,916	7,258	8,459	8,083
other	1,269	1,565	4,277	4,772
Total	26,177	75,835	146,510	134,009

Source: data of the management office of the Kanazawa castle and the Kenrokuen garden (the most popular tourist spot in Kanazawa, see Photo 1).

The composition of tourists from major countries and areas in 2010 was as follows:

- Asia: Taiwan 66,116; Hong Kong 11,284; South Korea 10,069; Singapore 4,902; China 3,959
- Europe: France 4,675; Spain 4,168; Italy 3,186; UK 1,961; Germany 1,834; Poland 432
- North America: USA 7,008.

To investigate why tourists from Taiwan and Europe appreciate the Hokuriku and Hida district while those from Asian countries except Taiwan do not, we used the data about preferences of foreign tourists by nationality and information from a local newspaper in the Hokuriku and Hida district, viz. the homepage of *Hokkoku shimbun* (a newspaper in the northern region). The newspaper's head office is located in Kanazawa and it sells mostly in the Hokuriku district delivering news about international tourism to Kanazawa, Ishikawa Prefecture and the Hokuriku district. We used the keyword analysis system of the newspaper to find past news about international tourism.

Table 7 shows preferences of foreign tourists by their nationality. It shows that while food is quite high on the expectation list of all visitors, there is much difference between the preferences of tourists from Asia and those from Europe or North America. The former come for shopping and hot springs, while the latter prefer tradition and the Japanese way of life. But strictly speaking, it is difficult to sum up all tourists from Asia in one word. It is true that those from Taiwan have much resemblance to those from South Korea or China in that they prefer shopping and hot springs. Visitors from Taiwan also prefer nature, just like those from China. But on the other hand, they have a stronger preference for the tradition

of Japan and a weaker preference for its large cities. We can therefore say that the preferences of Taiwanese tourists are a mixture of those of visitors from Asia and western countries. And we can say that these preferences of the Taiwanese bear a strong relation to the fact that they are by far the largest group of foreign visitors to the Hokuriku and Hida district with its traditional medium-sized or small towns, beauty of nature, hot springs, and no cities with a population of more than one million.

Next we investigated whether or not our hypothesis was right by using the keyword analysis system of *Hokkoku shimbun*, and confirmed the rapid increase in foreign tourists, especially from Taiwan and European countries.

The increase in the inflow of tourists from Taiwan was mainly promoted by the increase in direct flights from Taiwan to Kanazawa, Toyama or Noto airports located in the north of Ishikawa Prefecture, especially since 2004 (*Hokkoku shimbun* 2006b). This was due to Kagaya, one of the most famous traditional hotels (called *ryokan* in Japanese), and Southeast Tour, the largest tourist company in Taiwan, making an alliance to invite more visitors from Taiwan and to introduce the Japanese culture of hot springs into Taiwan at the same time.

But we can say that a more essential key to the great success is the preference of tourists from Taiwan for medium-sized or small towns with the tradition of the good old days in Japan. It is clearly proved by the high proportion of them visiting Kanazawa and Takayama, which are considered the most attractive traditional cit-

Table 7. Preferences of foreign tourists by nationality (2010) (%).

Total	South Korea	Taiwan	China	USA and Canada	UK, France and Germany	Italy and Spain
food 62.5	food 53.1	nature 64.4	nature 63.6	food 79.7	food 81.6	tradition 83.8
shopping 53.1	hot springs 46.0	food 62.3	shopping 59.1	tradition 73.8	tradition 78.4	food 76.9
tradition 45.8	shopping 40.8	shopping 56.7	hot springs 51.3	Japanese way of life 55.7	Japanese way of life 59.0	Japanese way of life 56.0
nature 45.1	tradition 35.6	hot springs 49.4	food 45.8	shopping 54.8	large cities 52.6	
hot springs 44.3	large cities 31.1	tradition 47.6	large cities 39.1			

Source: homepage of JNTO (Japan National Tourism Organization). Sample investigation at main international airports and ports in Japan (sample size 21,342).



Photo 7. Tourists from Taiwan arriving at the entrance of the hotel Kagaya (2011).

All package tours were cancelled after the large earthquake that attacked Japan in March 2011, even though the Hokuriku and Hida district suffered no damage in it.

ies in Japan. Also, we cannot ignore the fact that the Taiwanese greatly appreciate the beauty of nature (Table 7). Cherry blossom in spring and heavy snow in winter are impossible to experience in Taiwan with its subtropical climate. But in Japan they can both be seen at the same time, especially in the latter half of April.

As to visitors from European countries, a rapid increase in their number began in the Hokuriku and Hida district in 2007, a little later than tourists from Taiwan. This was mainly due to the fact that some tourist spots in the Hokuriku district, such as the Kenrokuen garden in Kanazawa, the central area of Takayama city and the traditional houses in Shirakawago village, were listed as three-star tourist spots in the famous French Michelin guidebook (*Hokkoku shimbun* 2008). We can see this influence in the increase of foreign tourists visiting the Kenrokuen garden in Table 6. The garden is the most popular tourist destination not only in Kanazawa, but in the entire Hokuriku and Hida district. For example, the number of European tourists visiting the garden in 2010 was almost equal to those from all Asian countries except Taiwan and Hong Kong. And the flow of tourists from Europe keeps increasing and changing the record (*Hokkoku shimbun* 2011). We can say that this tendency comes under the heading of preferences of those tourists for the tradition of Japan, as shown in Table 7. These tourist spots are also highly rated by guidebooks written in English. Tourists from Europe and

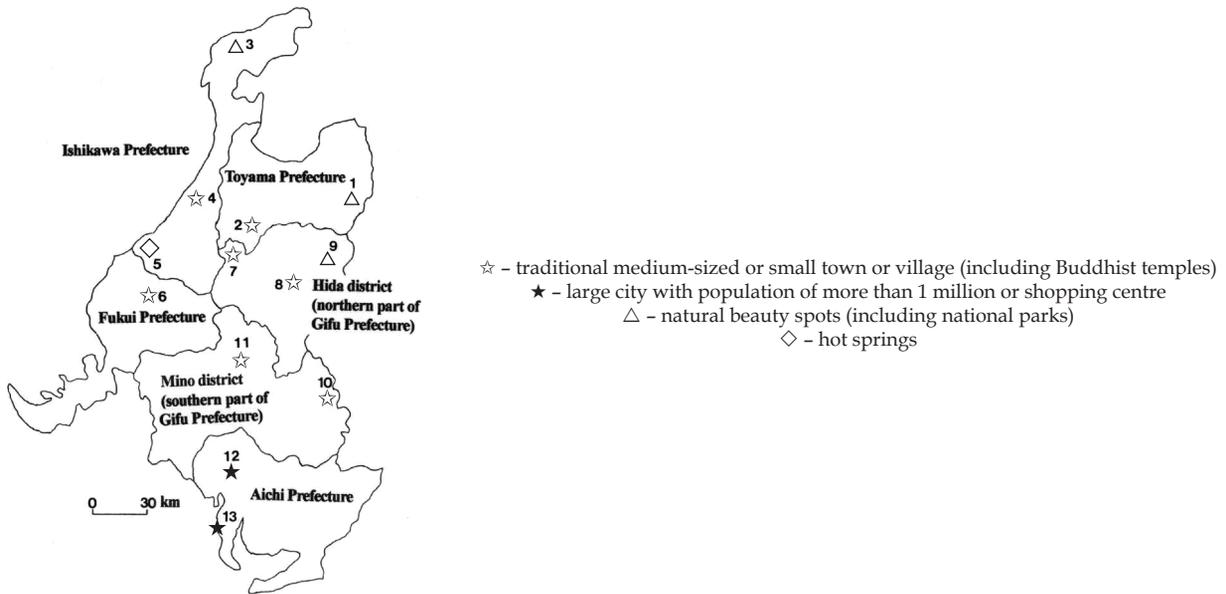
North America appreciate not only traditional buildings, but also many traditional handicrafts made in these cities, such as pottery and lacquer work described in those guidebooks. For example, more than 90% of gold leaf in Japan is produced in Kanazawa city.

On the basis of these analyses we can say that there is a close relationship between the preferences of foreign tourists by nationality and the tourist resource offered by the place they visit. In the case of the Hokuriku and Hida district, there are no large cities with a population of more than 1 million, and so tourists from South Korea and China do not have a very high opinion of it. But the tradition of Japan in medium-sized or small towns, the beauty of nature changing with the season, and hot springs are highly appreciated by visitors from Taiwan and Europe, which is reflected in their rapid increase in the recent years. The relation between the preferences of foreign tourists and the main tourist spots in the Hokuriku and Hida district is presented in Figure 2. The preferences of tourists from Europe and North America were assumed to be those suggested in the famous guidebooks, *Michelin cartes et guides* (2009) and *Lonely Planet* publications (2009). As to the ranking in *Michelin cartes et guides* (2009), which sometimes include several tourist spots with a different number of stars, we arranged the ranking by the tourist spots with the largest number of stars.

4. The meaning of the rise of the Hokuriku and Hida district in international tourism to Japan

As has been mentioned above, there is a new tendency in international tourism to Japan, namely a rapid increase in the number of visitors from Taiwan and Europe to the Hokuriku and Hida district seeking Japanese tradition and the atmosphere of good old days in medium-sized or small towns represented by Kanazawa and Takayama. Tourists from Taiwan also appreciate the beauty of nature as represented by cherry blossom and heavy snow.

In the recent decades, prefectures popular with foreign tourists visiting Japan are mainly of two types, as shown in Table 1. One includes



	Tourist spots	Appreciation by			
		Tours from Taiwan	Tours from South Korea	Michelin guidebook (in French)	Lonely Planet guidebook (in English)
1	Alpine route of Tateyama and Kurobe	C	C		
2	Gokayama			A	
3	Noto Peninsula			B	A
4	Kanazawa	A	B	A	A
5	Kaga hot springs		C		
6	Eiheiji temple				A
7	Shirakawago	A	B	A	A
8	Takayama	A	C	A	A
9	Shinhotaka hot springs			B	
10	Magome and Tsumago	C			
11	Guzhohachiman	C			
12	Nagoya	A	C		
13	Shopping town at Chubu international airport	C			
	Standard to decide ranking between A, B and C (C in <i>Michelin</i> is excluded here and the high-light corner in <i>Lonely Planet</i> only includes A)	Proportion of visitors in Table 3	Proportion of visitors in Table 4	Number of stars in guide-book.	Tourist spots introduced in highlight corner

Fig. 2. Tourist spots in the Hokuriku and Hida district (including Aichi Prefecture and the southern part of Gifu Prefecture) and their evaluation by foreign tourists.

those with very famous tourist cities absorbing the largest number of foreign visitors from all over the world. Prefectures belonging to this type are Tokyo, Kyoto and Osaka. There are also other prefectures adjacent to them and ranking high in terms of the number of tourists, such as Kanagawa, Chiba, Hyogo and Nara. They also feature famous tourist spots, such as Tokyo Disneyland in Chiba Prefecture and Nara city in Nara Prefecture, which was the capital of Japan before Kyoto.

All these prefectures are located in the Kanto or Kinki district. As can be seen in Table 8, the proportion of tourists from Europe, North America and Australia to the Kanto and Kinki districts are a little higher than that the average for the whole of Japan.

The second type of prefectures are those located in the Kyushu and Hokkaido districts. Tourist spots located there are not so famous in the world as those in type 1 except Nagasaki city on which

an atomic bomb was dropped in 1945. But there are various tourist attractions like a volcano, hot springs, and snowfields with a romantic atmosphere. These spots are especially popular with tourists from Asian countries, such as South Korea, Taiwan, China and Hong Kong. Also, there are regional cities with a population of more than 1 million, such as Fukuoka in the Kyushu district and Sapporo in the Hokkaido district (Fig. 1), which function as shopping places, especially for young tourists from those countries (Photos 8 and 9). Other prefectures of this type in Kyushu are Kumamoto and Oita with many hot springs. In the Kyushu and Hokkaido districts, the proportion of tourists from Asia is much higher than in Japan as a whole (Table 8).

With the prefectures of Toyama, Ishikawa and Gifu in the Hokuriku and Hida district improving their ranking remarkably in the recent years, we can say that this is a rise of a third type of prefecture in international tourism to Japan. It is true that there are no large cities attracting tourists from Asian countries like South Korea and China. Rather, this change has been promoted by tourists from Taiwan and Europe seeking the tradition of Japan in medium-sized or small town towns like Kanazawa and Takayama, or the beauty of nature represented by cherry blossom and snow in the mountains. In Table 8, we can see that the prefectures in the Hokuriku and Hida district show a much higher proportion of tour-

Table 8. Nationalities of foreign tourists visiting Japan in 2010 (%).

Prefecture or district	Tourists from Asia	Tourists from Europe, North America and Australia	Other
JAPAN	70.8	27.8	1.4
Kanto district	63.3	35.0	1.7
Kinki district	65.5	32.9	1.5
Kyushu district	80.4	18.7	1.0
Hokkaido district	82.6	16.3	1.1
Toyama Prefecture	89.4	10.3	0.3
Ishikawa Prefecture	51.6	48.2	0.8
Fukui Prefecture	54.0	44.0	2.0
Gifu Prefecture	55.3	43.2	1.5

Source: homepage of JNTO (Japan National Tourism Organization). Sample investigation at main international airports and ports in Japan (sample size 21,342).



Photo 8. Department stores in Fukuoka city (Tenjin area).



Photo 9. Canal city Hakata (shopping mall) in Fukuoka city.

ists from Europe, North America and Australia than the average for the whole of Japan, with the exception of Toyama Prefecture where most foreign tourists are those from Taiwan (Table 2). We must not forget that this change is caused by foreign tourists who are minorities in terms of numbers. For example, Europeans made up less than 10% of all foreign visitors to Japan in 2008 (Table 9). The Taiwanese are the second largest nationality of foreign tourists, but they may soon be outstripped by those from China, whose number has been growing the fastest in the recent years. But the important thing is that even districts in a local area without a large city can attract enough foreign tourists. Japan offers much variety in its districts, which makes it possible to accommodate foreign tourists with a wide range of preferences.

Table 9. Number of foreign tourists visiting Japan by nationality (2008).

Area or country	Number and % of total
Asia	4,647,940 (76.8)
South Korea	1,892,654 (31.3)
Taiwan	1,264,425 (20.9)
China	455,728 (7.5)
Hong Kong	513,185 (8.5)
Europe	521,133 (8.6)
North America	627,726 (10.4)
USA	474,137 (10.2)
Other	251,882 (4.2)
Total	6,048,681 (100.0)

Source: homepage of JNTO (Japan National Tourism Organization).

5. Conclusion

We analysed a small but important structural change in international tourism to Japan expressed by a rapid increase in foreign tourists to the Hokuriku and Hida district located in the central part of the country, between the Sea of Japan and the Central Mountains, in terms of the relation between their preferences by nationality and the tourist resources offered in the destinations visited. Here there are no cities with a population of more than a million, unlike in the Kanto district with Tokyo or the Kinki district with Kyoto and Osaka. There are large cities even in such local areas as Kyushu and Hokkaido. But in the Hokuriku and Hida district there are many medium-sized or small towns preserving the tradition of Japan in the good old days and the beauty of nature represented by cherry blossom and snow. The increase in foreign visitors to the district is mainly due to those from Taiwan and Europe. Tourists from Taiwan have the common feature with those from other nations in Asia such as South Korea or China in that they prefer shopping and hot springs. But unlike those two nationalities, they are also much interested in Japanese tradition preserved in medium-sized or small towns rather than in large cities appreciated by tourists from South Korea or China. Their preference made them by far the largest group in the Hokuriku and Hida district.

Visitors from Europe began to increase mainly after 2007 when tourist spots in the district, such as Kanazawa, Takayama and Shirakawago, came to be highly appreciated by the famous French

guidebook, *Michelin*. While Europeans make up less than 10% of all the foreign tourists visiting Japan, in the Hokuriku and Hida district they are the second largest group, almost equal in numbers to tourists from Asia, except Taiwan and Hong Kong, in spite of the very expensive fare and no direct flights from Europe.

These facts lead to two important conclusions. One is that foreign visitors can sometimes heighten the importance of a district in international tourism even if they are a minority in terms of numbers, like tourists from Europe to Japan. Another is that Japan has a sufficient variety of districts to attract tourists from different countries, and there is a close relationship between the preferences of tourists of a given nationality and the resources offered in the various districts.

Now the Japanese government is trying to invite more visitors and make international tourism into one of the country's most important industries. It is true that, economically, the most important group of tourists for Japan are those from Asia, who account for more than 75% of the total number of foreign visitors (Table 9) and spend a substantial amount of money on shopping, especially in large cities like Tokyo, Osaka or Fukuoka (Table 7). But we should not forget that cultural and historic values are also an important element of tourist resources, even if they are appreciated by visitors who are minorities in terms of numbers. The most important thing in developing international tourism to Japan is not getting more economic benefits, but focusing on a diversity of resources offered by the districts, thus attracting foreign tourists from different countries and catering to a great variety of their preferences.

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