The Utilization of an Ethnic Business Cluster-Zone as a Tourism Resource: A Case Study of Oizumi, Gunma Prefecture

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Abstract　Following the revision of the Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Act in 1990, the number of Brazilians in Japan increased, and clusters of Brazilian ethnic businesses emerged in some areas.　The clustering of ethnic Brazilian businesses in Oizumi in Oura District, Gunma Prefecture, led to the formation of "Brazil Town." This thesis analyzes the present situation of Brazil Town and the initiatives utilizing it as a tourism resource.　The thesis also examines the problems and potential of utilizing ethnicity as a tourism resource, doing so from four viewpoints: "progression into the mainstream economy," "visual consumption," "ethnic categorization," and "frameworks."

I．Introduction

Under the 1990 Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Act (hereinafter, "Immigration Act"), second and third generation overseas Japanese and their families were granted the status of "Spouse or Child of a Japanese National" or "Permanent Resident," meaning that they could live in Japan without any restrictions. Consequently, the number of overseas Japanese and their families coming to Japan from South America soared. The total number of Brazilian nationals registered as living in Japan is 190,581 at the end of 2012. After the 1990 amendment to the Immigration Act, the number of Brazilian nationals in Japan continued to increase, albeit with a slight decline in 1998, to 316,967 at the end of 2007. After the financial crisis triggered by the 2008 Lehman Shock, the number of Brazilians who subsequently returned to Brazil increased. Thus, the number of Brazilian nationals in Japan, which had surpassed 300,000 in 2005, dipped below 200,000 in 2012. Despite this decline, Brazilians still account for a large share of all minorities in Japan.

In the areas of Japan that are home to large numbers of Brazilians, many Brazilian ethnic businesses were established. In the past, ethnic communities were negatively treated as slum communities. Accordingly, ethnic businesses were often perceived in terms of their negative aspects, i.e., as a barrier to assimilation into the host nation. Such an interpretation may be found in the works of Ward (1968), who discussed the process of ghetto formation; Sassen (1988), who highlighted the increase in immigrant sweatshops and their substandard conditions; and Portes et al. (1989), who pointed out that ethnic businesses have been viewed as breeding grounds for the informal economy. On the other hand, as argued by scholars of the "Chicago School" of urban sociology, there are also positive aspects to ethnic businesses and ethnic communities, including the way they facilitate support between members of a particular ethnic group and provide a soft-landing in the host country. The trend toward a positive evaluation appears to have strengthened in recent years, and "we tend now to positively evaluate ethnic communities" (Gold 1991). Likewise, the effectiveness of ethnic business functions is now being highlighted, as is the

importance of the occupational mobility they provide immigrants, for whom self-employment represents the endpoint of upward mobility.　In addition, attention is now being given to how businesses established by migrants may bring economic benefits to the host community as well as new job opportunities.

　　Associated with this trend are moves to utilize Brazilians'ethnic business clusters, perceived as "local resources," as tourism resources, in the areas of Japan that are home to large numbers of Brazilians.　An example of this can be seen in Oizumi, Gunma Prefecture, where efforts are being made to turn "Brazil Town" into a tourism resource that utilizes a Brazilian ethnic business cluster comprising more than 100 shops.　However, there remain a number of problems associated with viewing ethnic businesses, which were originally established and developed for a particular ethnic group, as a tourism resource in the host society.　Therefore, taking Oizumi as a case study, this thesis analyzes the potential and problems associated with "Brazil Town" as a tourism resource, and attempts to verify the ways in which the various phenomena accompanying "ethnicity" in a local community can become local resources.　Regarding the structure of this thesis, Chapter II provides an overview of the development of Brazilian ethnic businesses in Oizumi, Gunma Prefecture; Chapter III analyzes the present situation concerning the utilization of "ethnicity" as a tourism resource.　Then, Chapter IV considers the problems and potential associated with the utilization of ethnicity as a tourism resource.

II.　The Growing Numbers of Brazilians and the Development of Ethnic Businesses

(1)　The Growing Numbers of Brazilians in Oizumi

　　Oizumi is a city with a total population of 40,681, as at the end of March 2013. Together with its neighboring city, Ota, it is home to many leading manufacturers of transport and electrical equipment and their sub-contractors, and there are many manufacturing-related job opportunities in the area.　In December 1989, the town's small and medium-sized businesses came together to form the "Tomo District Employment Stability Promotion Committee," and began welcoming Japanese Brazilians.　At the end of December 2008, 5,140 Brazilian nationals were registered

as living in Oizumi, or 12.2% of the city's overall population. Later, a sizable proportion of Brazilians in that city headed back to Brazil owing to the worsening economic situation, and as a result, as of June 2013, the number of Brazilians in Oizumi had fallen to 3,915.

It should be noted that the stance of the host community toward foreign immigrants has varied somewhat over time. Broadly speaking, up to the year 2000, the community actively engaged in efforts to welcome the immigrants; however, between 2001 and 2008, the community became much more passive in its welcome of the immigrants.

(2) The Development of Ethnic Businesses in Oizumi

Ethnic Brazilian business in Oizumi began with the opening of a Brazilian restaurant in the shopping arcade around Tobu Railway Nishi-Koizumi Station in 1990. Whereas many immigrants had been men coming to Japan on their own to seek employment, the pattern changed to immigrants who came to stay with their dependents. Reflecting the shift in the pattern, many ethnic businesses were established by Brazilians, including grocery stores, restaurants, video rental stores, secondhand car dealerships, beauty parlors, boutiques, child care centers, and large supermarkets. According to Chiba (2001), from about 1994, there were around 30 Brazilian shops; from 1995, this number increased, and in 1997, there were 96 shops. The year 1996 marked the opening of the "Brazilian Plaza" (Photo 1) around Nishi-Koizumi Station.

Photo 1. "Brazilian Plaza" in Oizumi

The Brazilian Plaza was a large shopping center housing Brazilian shops including grocery/general stores, restaurants, clothing stores, electrical appliance stores, and beauty parlors.   After this, ethnic businesses in Oizumi Town continued to develop with the establishment of computer classes, aesthetic salons, Internet cafes, and Brazilian schools.   These businesses all developed while attracting Brazilian customers living in Ota City and other municipalities of neighboring prefectures.

The economic downturn following the 2008 financial crisis led to a shrinking of the Brazilian market.   Accordingly, a number of the Brazilian shops in Oizumi suffered business losses.   However, there are still over 100 shops, making this the largest cluster zone of Brazilian shops in Japan.   Many of the Brazilian shops in Oizumi were concentrated around Nishi-Koizumi Station and along Route 354, which rans past the station entrance (Photo 2).

Photo 2.   Cluster of Brazilian shops along the road

III.   Efforts to Utilize "Ethnicity" as a Tourism Resource

Clusters of ethnic Brazilian businesses, which as we have seen were established and developed in tandem with the growth of the Brazilian population, were also frequently featured in television programs and other media.   In recent years, local vitalization initiatives by the host community that considers such clusters tourism resources have expanded.

"Ethnicity"-related events in Oizumi began in 1991.   At that time, "The Tomo

District Employment Stability Promotion Committee," as part of its efforts to promote the welfare of Brazilians working in Oizumi, and also out of a desire to forge links between registered foreign residents and the host community residents, began incorporating a samba parade into the Oizumi Festival held each summer.　This parade developed into a major event, which in the late 1990s attracted as many as 250,000 visitors.　However, the committee was dissolved in April 1999, and the samba parade was discontinued from 2001 due to a lack of funds.

The samba parade was then brought back in a scaled-down form from 2007 as the Oizumi Carnaval, which is held by the Oizumi Tourism Association every September.　This event was initially small in scale, being held in indoor venues such as gymnasiums.　However, it later grew into a large-scale outdoor event held at a baseball ground owned by a local business, with samba contests featuring performers from other prefectures and cuisine and grocery booths set up by the Brazilian shops of Oizumi（Photo 3）.　The numbers of visitors keep increasing each year, with 5,000 in 2007, 20,000 in 2011, and 35,000 in 2012.　Many of the visitors are Japanese, and many of these Japanese tourists are from other towns and cities in Gunma Prefecture.　On the other hand, whereas many of the Brazilian participants are

Photo 3.　Poster advertising Oizumi Carnaval

Oizumi residents, they represent a small proportion of the overall visitors, so that it can be said that the event has shifted from its initial focus on the "welfare of the Brazilian community" to "attracting Japanese tourists and promoting local development."

Utilizing Brazil Town as a tourism resource, the Oizumi Tourism Association organizes tours of Oizumi's Brazilian shops for Japanese tourists. In the towns, cities, and villages of Gunma Prefecture, tours that start and finish within the prefecture have been organized for tourists attracted by the "Gunma Destination Campaign" to the prefecture. An aspect of this initiative involved the Gunma Tourism Association working with the Oizumi Tourism Association to implement the "One-Day Walking Tour in Brazil Town." The one-day tour begins in Tobu Railway Nishi-Koizumi Station and provides participants the opportunity to eat Brazilian cuisine, watch samba shows in Brazilian restaurants, and shop for Brazilian goods in Brazilian supermarkets and grocery stores. The tour participants are accompanied by Brazilians living in the town, and Brazilian culture and the history of Oizumi are introduced. Charging participants 5,400 yen, the tour was conducted three times in 2009, and just under 70 Japanese took part. In addition, in 2012, the Oizumi Tourism Association worked with the bus tour company Hatobus and twice held one-day bus tours starting and ending in Tokyo under the banner of "I found Brazil in Japan！ Oizumi dances！ Brazil samba show！" It cost around 8,000 yen to participate. The tour incorporates tours of Oizumi's businesses, Brazilian cuisine, samba viewing, a lecture on bosa nova and the Portuguese language, and shopping in Oizumi's Brazilian shops. The "Lively World Gourmet Town" event, held by the Oizumi Tourism Association every month in the park near Tobu Railway Nishi-Koizumi Station, is worth mentioning. In this event, foreign residents of Oizumi and its surrounding areas, including Brazilians, Indians, and Koreans, exhibit food booths. The tour participants are sometimes able to go to this event and spend some time wondering around the booths.

Aside from the events, Oizumi Tourism Association has prepared and distributed articles explaining the history of Oizumi and the formation of Brazil Town, a map of the Brazilian shops around Nishi-Koizumi Station, and a pamphlet listing the

Brazilian shops. This pamphlet titled "Go to Brazil in Japan! Bem-vindo Oizumi Guide" (Photo 4), was produced with the help of an advertising company run by Japanese-Brazilians in Ota-city, Gunma Prefecture. In addition, the Oizumi Tourism Association produced a map entitled "Guide to Brazilian Shops in Oizumi," which it distributes in paper form and publishes on the association's homepage.

Photo 4. Guide to Brazil Town produced by Oizumi

Incidentally, the cluster of Brazilian shops in Oizumi is one of the 78 areas targeted for "public-private projects for reconstructing/strengthening the appeal of tourist sites," as part of the "Emergency Economic Measures for the Revitalization of the Japanese Economy," approved by the Cabinet Office in January 2013. The cluster was selected as "the part of Oizumi where you can enjoy 'Brazil' anytime," and became one of the projects of the "Japan Travel College for Locals and Visitors to Learn Together," established by the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism.

Ⅳ. Problems and Potential of Utilizing Ethnicity as a Tourism Resource

There are many problems associated with these initiatives that see "ethnicity" as a tourism resource. This chapter examines the problems associated with utilizing Brazil Town as a tourism resource, and on the basis of the findings of this examination, discusses the ideal way to utilize an "ethnicity" that has the potential to become a local resource.

(1) Who Owns Brazil Town ? —A Reconsideration of the Target Tourists

Ethnic businesses provide an important means for migrant entrepreneurs to improve their social and economic position in the host community, and this in turn does lead to such improvement. For ethnic businesses to achieve sustainable development, it is essential that they progress into the mainstream economy. However, Kataoka (2013a), who discussed the attitudes of residents of the host community toward ethnic businesses, contends that three factors explain why ethnic Brazilian businesses, which increased in number after the revised Immigration Act, find it difficult to progress into the mainstream economy: (1) The Brazilian-dominated residential areas in Japan are located in provincial industrial cities, and so there is little demand for ethnic goods from residents in the host society. (2) The Brazilian shops are small in scale, and so residents in the host society find it difficult to make use of them. (3) The socioeconomic structure where the Brazilians are positioned within the host society is reflected in the way the host society's residents view Brazilian shops, and so there is no expansion of demand for ethnic goods. In this context, the utilization of Oizumi's Brazil Town as a tourism resource can be seen as a major turning point that will enable ethnic businesses to progress into the mainstream economy.

However, as potential tourism resources, ethnic businesses face two obstacles to progressing into the mainstream economy. The first, when utilizing ethnicity as a tourism resource, concerns the variation between the benefits that can be derived by the "ethnic assets" supply businesses, which can capture tourists of the

mainstream economy relatively easily and those that can be derived by the "non-ethnic assets" supply businesses, which cannot.　Moreover, if tourism strategies predominantly target Japanese people, there is the danger that they may diminish the social function that ethnic businesses are supposed to fulfill for that ethnic group.　At present, the tourism strategy of Oizumi that utilizes Brazil Town as a tourism resource is primarily targeting Japanese people.　In order to enliven ethnic businesses as a whole, however, including "ethnic assets" businesses and "non-ethnic assets" businesses, and to strengthen the social function the businesses play for members of that ethnic group, a tourism strategy must be devised that encourages Brazilians living in Oizumi and its surrounding towns and cities to come to Brazil Town as tourists.

With rising numbers of second generation immigrants, Brazil Town has the potential to become a space in which "the creation of a new urban culture" (Hondagneu-Sotero and Straugham 2002) takes place through a fusion of Japanese and Brazilian culture, as well as becoming a "third space" (Bhabha 1990) with a new identity. By broadening the tourism focus to include the ethnic group as well as people in the host community, Brazil Town has the potential to offer the host society not only a historical place formed by the Brazilians who migrated to Japan, but also, as a community that has created a new culture, the potential to become a new and vibrant place.

(2)　Does the Way in Which the Brazilian Shops are Situated Pose a Problem for Tourism?　The Importance of Defining "The Meaning of Place"

Urry (1995) argued that in postmodern tourism, significance is placed on the importance of visual consumption, and that there is "a broad tendency to seek to create 'themed' environments..."　In Oizumi's Brazil Town, rather than the area consisting exclusively of ethnic shops, Brazilian shops are intermingled with Japanese shops.　It is argued that this arrangement prevents tourists from easily consuming "ethnicity" visually, so that the Brazilian shops are situated in a way that may be interpreted as a potential barrier to the utilization of Brazil Town as a tourism resource.

Urry (1995) unveiled a tourism schema for postmodern tourism in which guests "consume" a "place's image." However, Brazil Town is not a theme park. It is ultimately nothing more than a cluster-zone of ethnic businesses established and developed by immigrants as they lived their lives in the host community. The place in which tourism takes place is a "living" place that is built by resident stakeholders in the course of their daily lives and utilized by the residents on a daily basis. It is also a place with many backgrounds including the conflict associated with the decline of Japanese shops and the advance of Brazilian shops.

Brazil Town, which was created primarily as something to be "looked at," is, to use the words of Relph (1976) a "synthetic place" that is "kitschy, other-directed," and as such does not produce anything. The various places (throughout Japan) where Brazilian shops are located are "places that all have their own 'stories'." They have been formed based on the economic and social conditions surrounding the small-scale shops of provincial cities and are built upon the history of how the ethnic group settled in the host community. It is only in making tourists see or feel such a "story" that Brazil Town has any value as a local tourism resource.

The Oizumi Tourism Association's homepage and the pamphlet that introduces Brazil Town both give brief outlines of the formation of Brazil Town, brief descriptions of Oizumi, and brief introductions to the Brazilian community. The information given is limited. There is a need to produce information that will not only introduce Brazil Town, but also the historical transition of the locations of Brazil shops and the cluster-zone. The information must help guests to consider and get a feel of the problems in the host community, the changes in the socioeconomic structure of the host community, and how these problems and changes relate to the ethnic group's daily life, and thereby help the guests understand what the "true" ethnic town is.

(3) *Brazil* Town ? Emphasizing Brazilianness and the Danger of Ethnic Categorization

Kataoka (2013b) argued that the "ethnicity" of Brazilians whose number has increased since the revised Immigration Act has been perceived in a distorted way,

according to the host community's "ethnic categorization." Despite the fact that many of the Brazilians are actually ethnic Japanese with a family history of migration from Japan to Brazil and then from Brazil back to Japan, Kataoka says that their culture tends to be represented in terms of its "Brazilianness" (soccer and samba, etc.), and the aspects of "affinity to Japan" and "connection to Japan" tend to be overlooked.

If the utilization of ethnicity places too much emphasis on "Brazilianness," there is the danger that ethnicity will be interpreted according to the simplistic and fallacious schema of "ethnicity = culture." There exist various gradations of culture in an ethnic group determined by a number of different factors including discrepancies in identity among that ethnic group and socioeconomic status. If, in spite of this complexity, ethnicity is turned into something superficial and simplistic and then only sold to the public as "foreign culture," then the othering of that ethnicity will be the result, and a mere transient consumption of the "ethnicity" sold piece by piece. This danger is all the greater considering the existence of a framework that conceals the complex identity of "ethnically Japanese Brazilians" under "ethnic categorization." Such a superficial "foreign culture consumption" will never lead to "understanding" of foreign culture.

Incidentally, Sudo (2008) studied the utilization of the Kayan tribes of Thailand as a tourism resource. Sudo pointed out a change in the ethno-tourism's "form of display," whereby displays that focused simply on their physical appearance became displays of them acting naturally in their environment or displays of them acting in artificially recreated settings, and argued that under such a tourism structure, the mutually beneficial interaction between tourists and the tribespeople who welcome them is severed in advance. We can see the same thing happening in Brazil Town, where commemorative photographs with samba dancers, conversation with the staff in Brazilian shops, and lectures by Japanese-Brazilian guides serve as the contact points between Japanese tourists and "the objects of sightseeing," and there is very little interaction between tourists and the regular Brazilian residents of Brazil Town.

In his "Contact Theory," Allport (1954) argues that the rise in local areas of

friction and prejudice against foreign residents can be reduced through mutual contact. In this sense, there is great significance in utilizing an "ethnic town" as a tourism resource in such a way that it creates "contact zones," serving as points of contact between the ethnic group and the host community.　Currently, the tourism that takes place in Oizumi offers little contact between Brazilians and Japanese.　However, if in the future, a framework that increases opportunities for mutual contact between Brazilians and Japanese in shops and the community is established, or if the numbers of Brazilians coming as tourists (as discussed in Chapter I) is increased, then there is a potential that tourists will gain an understanding of the cultural diversity within the ethnic group, the diversity of ethnic identity, and the history of the ethnic group's connection with Japan.

　　However, according to Kataoka (2013a), the experience of the mutual contact in the Brazilian shops that serve as "contact zones" may determine the way Japanese view Brazilians as a whole, and Kataoka introduced cases where negative contact around shops and within shops resulted in a negative image of Brazilians.　The Oizumi International Association and the Oizumi Tourism Association from time to time offer a number of Brazilian shops advice on customer service and product display with a view to their progression into the mainstream market.　What is important in this regard is the attitudes of the Brazilian shop owners to approaches from the host community and to the possibility that their shops may become "contact zones."

(4)　Negative Views within the Local Community Based on Two Frameworks

　　Incidentally, tourist destinations are places that often foster among the residents living there the seeds of discontent concerning the direction/focus of the local tourism planning policy (the way in which the area is utilized as a tourism destination), which involves government, affiliated organizations, and tourism industries.　Sudo (2008) argues that as a modern industry, tourism alters the locality's original relationships or the traditional relationships between the hosts and guests because of the population inflow from other areas.　The discontent caused by this change is inconspicuous while the tourist destin ation is still developing, but when the de-

velopment reaches saturation point and local interest is directed toward another framework such as welfare administration or municipal amalgamation, the discontent surfaces.

At present, efforts to utilize Brazil Town as a tourism resource have only just begun, meaning that Oizumi is still just emerging as a tourist destination. Despite this, there is considerable objection from the host community to the utilization of Brazil Town as a tourism resource and to the categorization of Oizumi as Brazil Town. The approach of "utilizing it as a tourist destination" causes friction within the framework of "multicultural harmony," and the further development of the area as a tourist destination may aggravate this friction.

Relph (1976) argues that places are "infused with meaning, real physical settings, and continuing activity," and "constitute a vital source of both individual and cultural identity, important sources of individual identity or shared communal identity." Using "Brazil" as the face of Oizumi in order to promote the city to the outside world will have a significant impact on issues concerning the host residents' local identity. This being the case, when utilizing "ethnicity" as a tourism resource, instead of using "tourism" as the starting point for discussion, there should first be a full examination of the ideal form of "multicultural harmony" in the "local community" and then discussions should be held that are based upon a "town planning" framework formed and agreed upon in advance. The framework of "utilization as a tourist destination" will only blend with the framework of "multicultural harmony" once there are full discussions about what kind of benefits the utilization of ethnicity as a tourism resource will bring to the local community comprising foreigners and Japanese, and what role it will play in the process of establishing a community of "multicultural harmony." Thus, the procedure necessary for the utilization of ethnicity as a tourism resource requires that first discussions be held regarding "local identity" and "town planning" involving both residents of the host community and members of the ethnic group, and then, based on the results of those discussions, further discussion on "utilization as a tourist destination" would follow.

V. Conclusion

Taking Brazil Town in Oizumi, in Oura District, Gunma Prefecture, as a case study, this thesis examined the problems regarding the utilization of ethnicity as a tourism resource from four perspectives: "progression into the mainstream economy," "visual consumption," "ethnic categorization," and "frameworks," and it presented perspectives that are indispensable for the utilization of an "ethnic town" as a tourism resource.

The perspective of ethnicity as a local resource is an extremely effective perspective that is useful not only for residents in the host community, but also for improving the socioeconomic position of the ethnic group and for encouraging their cooperation with the host community, thereby reducing conflict and friction. In this regard, while there are some problems, the efforts to utilize the ethnic town in Oizumi as a tourism resource should be favorably evaluated, since these efforts have the potential to produce a variety of benefits including local vitalization and intercultural understanding. In the future, it would be desirable to develop effective initiatives across Japan that involve cooperation between ethnic minority groups and host communities. Such initiatives would not only completely resolve the problems associated with the utilization of ethnic towns as tourism resources, but they would also provide a stepping stone toward local vitalization.

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