



## **Delineating Peasant-like and Community-based Entrepreneurial Modes of Rural Tourism: A Case Study of Takachihogo–Shiibayama, Japan**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*In this paper, we aim to capture and unravel the complexity of rural tourism that has evolved in rural Japan since green tourism was introduced in the 1990s, with a close examination of the case of the Takachihogo–Shiibayama area. Small-scale farmers and rice farming communities have traditionally been important features of Japanese farming villages, as in other Asian countries. In this paper, we focus on how these small farmers and communities can demonstrate their autonomy in rural tourism. After reviewing the overall rural tourism situation in Japan from literature and policy documents, we illustrate that three forms of rural tourism coexist, namely, mass tourism, peasant-like, and community-based entrepreneurial rural tourism with a comparative study approach, selecting embedded cases of the study area, where we had a series of interviews and observations regularly and continuously since 2015. The critical difference among them lies in the different ways in which they mobilize social and material resources, the basis of autonomy, and the arrangement of tasks and operations. In contrast to mass tourism, peasant-like rural tourism is operated by family labor, using their accessible resources, and individual families are the ones who exhibit autonomy, whereas community-based entrepreneurial rural tourism is run by the village as a whole, connected to all local resources and human resources of the entire village, and each villager has different roles and responsibilities, with their capacities and skills always being polished through training opportunities. In the context of the general trend of depopulation in rural areas of Japan with weakening functions of rural communities, this research demonstrates that (1) attempts by various individual small households in peasant-like rural tourism are loosely connected with intermediary support organizations in a broad area and (2) the community-based entrepreneurial rural tourism business is managed and operated by a small village as a whole. This study indicates the value of learning how to enhance the distinctive and unique assets of the rural community. The crucial aspect lies in devising strategic initiatives that effectively embrace and deepen unique rural characteristics, establishing an environment that fosters continuous learning for each individual and strengthens the rural community as a whole.*

**Keywords:** Rural tourism, peasant-like rural tourism, community-based entrepreneurial rural tourism, Japan, rural community

### **INTRODUCTION**

Rural areas are receiving more attention as locations with various potentials. Among these potentials, tourism has been gaining much attention as a promising industry that can bring economic and social benefits to rural

areas (Grefe 1994; Wilson, 2001). However, there is no unified view on what rural tourism<sup>1</sup> entails because it takes many different forms. It has followed various paths depending on the strategies, policies, and contexts in each country. To cite a few examples, capitalists may develop agricultural theme parks, farmers themselves may operate farm inns (facilities to receive travelers) (Cartier 1998; Yang *et al.*, 2010), or residents of a rural community may operate local restaurants to accommodate guests (Cánoves 2004; Randelli *et al.*, 2014).

The question, then, is how small farmers or villagers can be involved in rural tourism. In Asia, small farmers had typically formed rural communities with relatively strong ties because of the need to share water resources for rice cultivation, which allowed a relatively large population to be accommodated on a small amount of land (Rigg 2016). In the modern Asian context, how can such smallholders demonstrate their autonomy in rural tourism? Do rural smallholders still operate and manage their businesses individually, or can communal forces still be exerted? Or are private enterprises the main actors in modern rural tourism?

In response to these questions, the experience of rural Japan provides meaningful insights. Over the past 40 years, Japan has been witnessing different and widespread processes of rural tourism initiatives. Receiving attention as a means of regenerating rural areas and bringing a source of off-farm income, rural tourism was first promoted under the term *green tourism* (GT), which has been advocated in policy documents related to agricultural and rural development in Japan since the 1990s (Sato 2022). According to the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries [MAFF], Japan's GT was defined in 1992 as “staying-type leisure activities in nature rich rural areas to feel local nature, culture, and life by interacting with local residents”<sup>2</sup>, and GT projects have been typically led by small farming families under the management of a rural community. Since then, the forms of rural tourism have evolved in various ways; the farmers who started GT at that time are now elderly, and rural areas have experienced a progressive depopulation and aging of the local population. In considering the potential of rural tourism, it is important to grasp the actual situation with the identification of its diversity that has evolved over the past 40 years. This research, then, aims to capture and unravel the complexity of rural tourism that has evolved in rural Japan with a close examination of a case of the Takachihogo–Shiibayama area, where a variety of experiences of rural tourism has existed since the 1990s. Many previous studies of rural tourism in Japan have discussed the topic in relation to policy development and/or rural regeneration. One significant study discussed it from the perspective of the multifunctional nature of agriculture (Ohe 2007). This research uniquely discusses rural tourism from the viewpoint of the mindset and behavior of local smallholders living in their village and their community arrangement instead of positioning it in relation to agricultural or tourism policy or national socioeconomies. This perspective differs from previous studies on rural tourism in Japan.

Drawing upon this perspective, a review of the overall situation of rural tourism in Japan is firstly provided, followed by a case study of the Takachihogo–Shiibayama area. Then, peasant-like and community-based entrepreneurial rural tourism are compared by identifying these different modes as coexisting realities.

## OVERVIEW OF RURAL TOURISM IN JAPAN

The literature on Japan's rural tourism has highlighted several distinct features in comparison with Europe's experience (Daigaku and Nohguchi 2019). Japan's GT placed more of a focus on its efforts toward rural regeneration, enhancing residents' pride of living in a place of value. The term *rural regeneration* (or *rural revitalization*) was frequently used in depopulated rural areas to inspire the rural communities to fight against depopulation (Sato 2022). Another distinct aspect of Japan's rural tourism is the type of guest: Most guests stay for a short time, about one night, and most GT guests are students taking part in educational experience tours (Shinkai 2016).

Previous research has discussed the classification or categories of rural tourism: Yorimitsu and Kurisu (1996) pointed out three types of rural tourism as of the 1990s by describing each type with a strong focus on (1) urban–rural exchange (often found under the category of GT initiatives), (2) guesthouses and pensions along with the preservation and improvement of the landscape, and (3) rural resort development with tourism

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<sup>1</sup> The term “rural tourism” is generally understood to take place in rural areas to cover a wide range of tourism activities that are linked to nature-based experiences, agriculture, rural lifestyle / culture, angling, and sightseeing.

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.maff.go.jp/j/nousin/kouryu/kyose\\_tairyu/k\\_gt/pdf/1siryu2\\_2.pdf](https://www.maff.go.jp/j/nousin/kouryu/kyose_tairyu/k_gt/pdf/1siryu2_2.pdf), accessed on August 23, 2023.

and exchange facilities. Although local farmers' participation and community-based management were found in the case of (1), the involvement of local people in the cases of (2) and (3) was weak; more private or public investment was put in the case of (2), and larger scale capital was invested in (3). In the late 1990s, Japan experienced the collapse of its bubble economy, and has since then been in a prolonged period of economic stagnation during which many resort developments in rural areas came to a halt (Tsuchiya 1993). The study of rural tourism has increasingly focused on long-lasting grassroots activities, in the aspects of urban–rural exchanges and environmental education programs (Sato 2010). The local farming families (as GT operators) typically have hosted the urban–rural exchange program and/or environmental education activities, yet it should be noted that the most GT operators had other means of livelihood, such as farming, and did not position GT as their main income source. The GT activities that have been maintained over a long time have lasted because of their willingness to contribute to community development and rural regeneration as well as the satisfaction they derived from the exchange program, not because of its profitability (Saito 1997).

Related to such paths taken by Japan's GT, difficulties in GT initiatives that have been recognized in recent years include weakness in economic sustainability and, therefore, difficulties in handing over the aging GT programs to the younger generation (Sato 2022). Considering such challenges, policy support has been developed in Japan to increase the profitability of rural tourism since 2017 by introducing *Nohaku* (countryside stay) promotion measures. Government support is now available to cover the cost of improving tourist sites and activities and to implement a broad-based *Nohaku* initiative to enhance the capacities of various sectors in the area, such as transportation, travel, lodging, retail, dining, finance, and telecommunication. Such governmental support has been given to approved *Nohaku* promotion areas. As of March 2022, 599 areas were approved as promotion areas and, in terms of the demand side, the number of visitors who stayed overnight at *Nohaku* increased to 5.89 million in 2019. The government even sets a target of 7 million visitors by 2025<sup>3</sup>.

This *Nohaku* promotion policy seems to encourage community-based approaches, as evidenced by the approval of the *Nohaku* “area” (rather than an individual entity). It is, however, unclear how these “areas” are functioning in the depopulated (and aged) rural areas. Moreover, the development of entrepreneurship and network-building among diverse stakeholders in rural areas is now receiving more attention than holding onto traditional community ties (Ohe 2019).

## A CASE STUDY AND CONCEPTS

### Study area and method

The Takachihogo–Shiibayama area is in the center of the Japanese islands' Kyushu region, which consists of five municipalities of the Miyazaki Prefecture, namely Shiiba village, Morotsuka village, Takachiho town, Hinokage town, and Gokase town (see Figure 1). The population of the area was approximately 22,700 as of 2020, a number that had decreased by about a half over the preceding 50 years, and the aging rate (the proportion of the population older than 65 years) is 43.6%, making depopulation and aging extremely serious problems<sup>4</sup>. Still, the local people, with a passion for maintaining agriculture and forest resources, have fostered a spiritually rich lifestyle by effectively managing their pluriactive livelihoods. The area is in remote mountainous areas with difficult access and small areas of flat agricultural land. Under such conditions, people typically manage various means of livelihood simultaneously and perform multiple ranges of tasks, whether cultural initiatives, socially responsible work, or activities to protect nature.

A series of interviews and observations have been made by the research team regularly and continuously since 2015 involving various rural regeneration projects in Miyazaki, Japan. Action research has also been conducted, including staying at farm inns in the area as well as running community-based entrepreneurial rural tourism. Currently, a comparative study approach is employed by selecting embedded cases of various rural tourism modes and operations.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.maff.go.jp/j/nousin/kouryu/nouhakusuishin/attach/pdf/arikata-26.pdf>, accessed on August 23, 2023.

<sup>4</sup> Population and aging rate are calculations from the 2020 Population Census, Statistics Bureau of Japan, data available at <https://www.e-stat.go.jp>.



Figure 1. Location of the Takachihogo–Shiibayama Area, Miyazaki, Japan.

### Concepts: Three different modes of rural tourism

In the Takachihogo-Shiibayama area, various forms of rural tourism can be found. First, Takachiho, the largest of the five municipalities of the area, is known as one of the major tourist destinations in Japan, and relatively large hotels and scenic tours have been developed. This form of tourism can be referred to as *mass tourism*, and relatively large entities manage the tourism by employing salaried workers. In this form of tourism, scenic spots and local traditional culture are used as tourism resources, and service is provided to guests and travelers to meet their demands with the objective of profit maximization. The local traditional *kagura* ritual performance is performed every night for tourists for entertainment purposes, even though actual traditional *kagura* is held once or twice a year at local festivals at Shinto ritual events. In mass tourism mode, the *kagura* is made somewhat artificial, to be more in tune with tourists' demands. To note, the area has a robust foundation of authentic culture, which is considered spiritually and socially important part of local people's lives. Because of this foundation, the area can afford to share its cultural assets with the tourism industry, and *kagura* is performed for tourists in a way that does not ruin local authentic culture. By cherishing and maintaining their intrinsic culture rather than prioritizing economic benefits, local tourism industry results in sustainably benefiting from their precious authentic culture as a tourism resource.

The second form of rural tourism found in the area is rural tourism operated by local families. This form of rural tourism is related to GT and its subsequent *Nohaku*, promoted since the 1990s. Typically, local small farming families invite guests to their farm inns and provide them with agricultural experience programs and meals, and interaction between host families and visitors is often the most important part of the experience. In this area, the GT project was initiated not by individual farming families but by a commune in the town of Gokase in the 1990s (see Figure 2, Panel A). A recent trend, however, is for individual households to be involved in rural tourism initiatives, offering their houses as farm inns. Such individual households are connected to a broad network (Figure 2, Panel B), and the host families are not necessarily engaged in farming. With the aging of the rural population, there have been many cases of elderly people engaging in rural tourism and, for instance, those who have returned to their hometowns after retiring from work in the cities are involved. In this form of rural tourism, family labor, their own house, and agricultural crops grown on their own land are the main inputs. It is often the case that the number of visitors who can be received by one family is limited to one group per night. Under such a condition, maximizing profits by expanding the scale cannot be their goal. The host families who operate rural tourism in this form do not want to invite guests into their houses for the sake of profit. In their daily lives, they wish to enjoy doing what they can do within the limited resources available to them. Their mode of operation can be referred to as a *peasant-like* mode, which drives rural smallholders to conduct self-provisioning farming in conjunction with another gainful activity (i.e., they are exercising pluriactivity<sup>5</sup> as their livelihood strategies), with sustained use of their assets

<sup>5</sup> The term “pluriactivity” describes the phenomenon of farming in conjunction with another gainful activity, whether on-farm or off-farm, including self-employment, waged labor, and unwaged payments (Fuller 1990, MacKinnon *et al.*, 1991).

available in their livelihood. Smallholders, or modern “peasants” in Japan are not necessarily poor; Farmers in Japan are typically engaged in off-farm work and therefore often have other sources of income, or retired farmers are able to live on their pensions. The main reason for running their farm inns is not to increase economic profits, but rather to sustain a qualitatively fulfilling life and to contribute to community regeneration.

The third form of GT is characterized by community-based businesses with an entrepreneurial spirit that have emerged as a community enterprise (see Figure 2, Panel C). This initiative was launched in 2010 when a community-based enterprise, Takachiho Muratabi Co. Ltd., was established by a village called Akimoto in Takachiho-town, with a population of approximately 100.<sup>6</sup> In this form, all villagers are involved, and various kinds of local resources are used to produce a wide variety of products and operate services such as local restaurants, shops, and guesthouses. The scale of operation is larger than the peasant-like rural tourism because this form can use area-based inputs that are larger than family-based ones. Their entrepreneurship is evident, for example, in their efforts to increase the value added per product and to diversify their business operations and in their ability to offer high-quality products and services, using indigenous knowledge and traditional skills of the village while continuously learning and updating their business and marketing knowledge and skills. Overall, this form of rural tourism is economically sustainable and creates rewarding jobs for the younger generations. The mode of operation in this form is referred to as *community-based entrepreneurial rural tourism*.

There are three different forms of rural tourism coexisting in the Takachihogo–Shiibayama area (see Figure 3). The critical difference between them lies in the different ways in which they mobilize social and material resources and their interrelations with others. It is important to note that the strategies they use to operate rural tourism are different, and these are reflected in their different modes of operation. Both the second and third forms have community regeneration as one of their objectives but operate rural tourism in different ways and modes. What is in common for both is importance of community as a foundation of villagers’ autonomy, and both of peasant-like and entrepreneurial rural tourism can be conducted in connection with community as it can be observed in “Community-based GT” in Gokase town since 1995 and Community-based entrepreneurial rural tourism in Takachiho town since 2010. The differences, however, are found in arrangements made among villagers and degree of specialization of their goods and services provided, while both modes are undertaken voluntarily and driven by individual initiative, and they share a collective vision as a community. In the former situation, each family performs comparable activities within the community, whereas in the latter case, community members perform distinct activities, optimizing individual strengths and available resources, thereby creating a system of division of labor within the community. Nevertheless, the situation is intricate and subject to fluctuations. Occasionally, a member of a family who operates a farmer inn under the peasant-like mode may also partake in mass tourism, or there are possibly families of community-based entrepreneurial rural tourism that engage in a form of peasant-like rural tourism. The demarcation of each mode is not always distinct, and furthermore, the mode itself may undergo a transition from one mode to another over time.

To understand such differences and their context, in the next sections we illustrate each of these in more detail.

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<sup>6</sup> <https://takachiho-muratabi.com>, accessed on August 23, 2023.

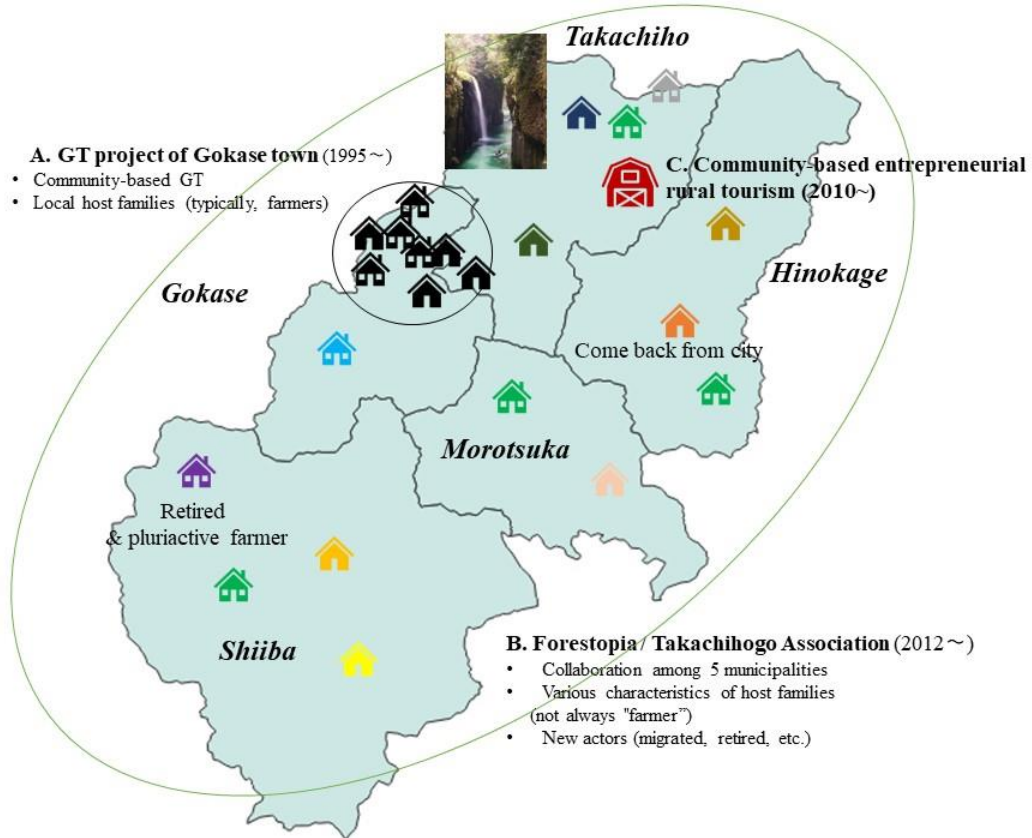


Figure 2. Rural Tourism in the Takachihogo–Shiibayama Area. GT = green tourism.

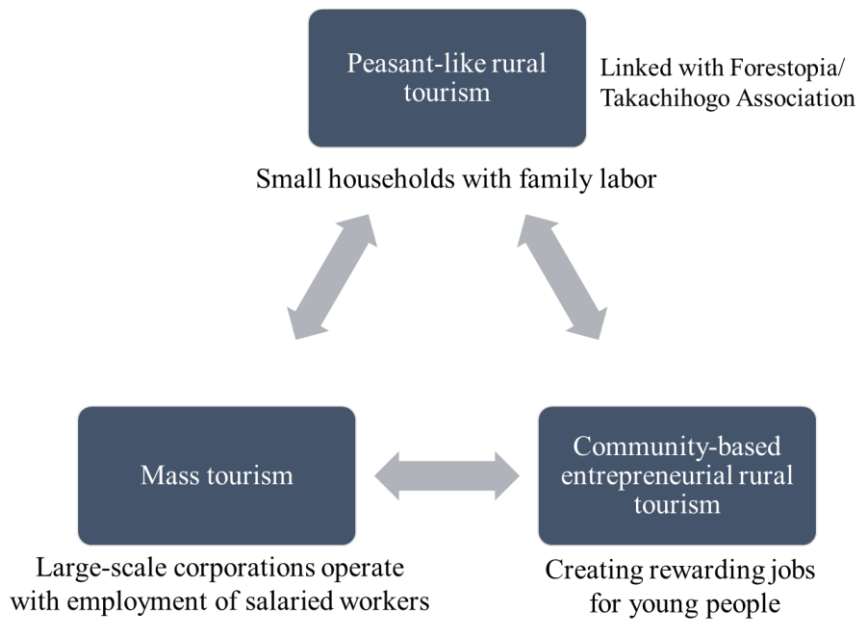


Figure 3. Different modes of rural tourism.

## PEASANT-LIKE AND COMMUNITY-BASED ENTREPRENEURIAL RURAL TOURISM

### Transition of GT and peasant-like rural tourism

The Takachihogo–Shiibayama area consists of five municipalities, each of which has its own independent and unique characteristics. Within each municipality are hundreds of self-governed villages, which have historically formed a strong bonding-type solidarity in their village. After the postwar reconstruction in Japan, a large population shift from rural to urban areas was observed in the late 1960s, along with the wave of industrialization. Many young people left the area, and depopulation has progressed since then. However, in response to the depopulation trend, those who remained in the area had a desire to regenerate their homelands. GT was the strategy that people in the village of Gokase hoped to undertake to contribute to the regeneration of their community. The GT project was first started by a group of about 30 farming families in the village, which has beautiful sunsets, in the 1990s<sup>7</sup>. A network with bridge-type ties among the five municipalities began to form at the same time<sup>8</sup>. The following Table 1. is a timeline of key events to show how the GT project began in a single village, how network of five municipalities came into play, and how the wider area has evolved in recent years:

Table 1. Timeline of key events of GT and rural tourism development.

Timeline	Key events
1993	The GT project Village of Sunset, with farm inns (local farmers being host families) in Gokase, was designated as the model GT area. The village council was established to manage the project, making efforts toward revitalization in 1995.
1990s	The comprehensive area development project, Forestopia (forest + utopia), was implemented by residents of the Takachihogo–Shiibayama area (five municipalities). The project fostered 107 regional development producers and 24 instructors (Forestopians) with the participation of men and women of all ages (Ohchi 2019).
2012	Five municipalities and their tourism associations joined forces to establish the Forestopia Takachihogo Tourism Association, a broad-based organization (intermediary support organization) to promote GT farm-stay programs and to increase the “relationship population”. <sup>9</sup> The association was selected as a <i>Nohaku</i> promotion area under the MAFF scheme in 2017.
2015	The area was designated as a Greatly Important Agricultural Heritage System site by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations because its mountainous agriculture and forestry system was evaluated as distinctive for the harmony between the forest and agriculture (including forestry) and its precious traditional culture.
2020	The Forestopia Takachihogo Tourism Association was transformed into a new legal entity, the General Incorporated Association Tourism Takachihogo, promoting rural tourism—arranging and coordinating farm inns (more than 30 host families were registered as of May 2023); tea and mushroom production and processing experience programs, with the collaboration of local producers; and the development and sale of souvenir goods—in all five municipalities in collaboration with related actors and organizations in the area. The association also holds training activities for host families.

<sup>7</sup> The details of the development of the GT project Sunset Village are described in Japanese in the following page: <https://yuuhi-no-sato.gokase-kanko.jp/about.html>, accessed on August 23, 2023.

<sup>8</sup> GIAHS Application document (available at <https://takachihogo-shiibayama-giahs.com/>) submitted from GIAHS Promotion Association of Takachihogo-Shiibayama made of 5 municipalities explains that the local people who had shared Forestopia vision had promoted interchange between cities and rural communities since 1988.

<sup>9</sup> The concept of *relationship population* was introduced in 2016 and defined as “the third population located between the exchange population and the settled population” (Sakuno 2019).

The area's experiences show that it has robust foundations for its vision and philosophy concerning its community-related identity, Forestopia. Over time, the social challenges of depopulation and aging hit the area. Those who engaged in GT or *Nohaku* are typically thinking about the future of their beloved areas, fostering the idea of increasing the "relationship population" rather than prioritizing profitability. Visitors typically communicate and interact with local people, staying with host families and gradually getting to know the virtues of the areas where local people have devoted their time and energy to sustainably manage the precious assets of landscape, food, culture, community, nature, and so on. Visitors who travel to the area to learn the value of local identity become fans and come back repeatedly. Some of those people return not only to stay at the farm inns but also to participate in local festivals and even be a part of supporting community activities.

Those who started GT in the 1990s are now quite old, and it is often the case that there are no successors to take over an activity because it is not a major source of income for the host families. In addition, many newly joined host families are older than 60 years: They are often retirees, enjoying small-scale agriculture for self-provisioning purposes, and have another income source, such as a pension, to maintain their livelihood. This phenomenon can be characterized as a form of repeasantization, wherein those who had previously migrated from rural areas to seek paid employment returned as small-scale farmers following their retirement. It is quite common for local people to engage in a variety of activities, including office work, growing vegetables, planting mushrooms, being a performer of ritual dance at festivals, being a member of the fire brigade, taking care of the forest, and so on. By engaging in multiple works and activities, people manage to contribute to the comprehensive and sustainable development of the local economy, society, and culture. People are involved in farming in conjunction with other gainful or socially responsible activities, whether on or off the farm. Participation in tourism-related activities can be positioned as one of their pluriactivities: Their focus is not on the tourism activity only but is extended to encompass a larger view of the comprehensive sustainability of their village.

Unlike in the past, visitors are not limited to schoolchildren; instead, each host family, with various characteristics, receives visitors with various needs, matching the characteristics of the two sides. For instance, one host family raises livestock with a variety of animals, like a zoo; another offers cooking experiences of distinctive cuisine with the use of home-grown vegetables, fruits, fish, meat, and so on. What is different from the past is that many hosts who have gained experience in non-agriculture sectors or cities are engaging in the activities after returning to their hometowns or migrating from other areas, and they are offering not a uniform, manualized hospitality but rather a variety of arrangements based on each house's characteristics. Profitability is not such a priority for family operators. This type of rural tourism can be sustained as long as small *Nohaku* business of each host family is not in a financial deficit, and host families do not have health problems. The cost of entry for *Nohaku* is modest. The *Nohaku* business can be privately initiated based on the families' discretion, requiring little initial expenditure, by making use of existing resources. The host families operate the farmer inns within a scope that does not compromise its own lifestyle, while effectively utilizing the unique characteristics of each family, and setting price to cover running cost. What host families wish is for guests to have a fruitful and pleasant life and share with them a good time.

### **Community-based entrepreneurial rural tourism**

Community-based entrepreneurial rural tourism originates from another initiative to rural regeneration, found in Akimoto village of Takachiho-town. Their initiative is characterized by the creation of a platform for village regeneration and by a solid philosophy and concept established on that platform. The Takachiho Muratabi Co. Ltd. is the platform established to manage and run an innovative business model. The organization invited local business groups and villagers who were willing to promote their agricultural products. With participation of all the villagers, the organization undertook a wide variety of different activities, including guesthouses and farmer inns, restaurants, and development and sales of local products (see Figure 4). A small farmers' market was first run by female villagers. The more customers visited their market to buy local products, the more villagers are motivated to offer another valuable service to visitors. The positive feedback from visitors resulted in the opening of a local restaurant in the village.

The community-based organization also developed their concept as "Making the whole village into an eco-museum," to make their village more attractive. Their "eco-museum" consists of local nature with a



beautiful landscape (see Figure 5); traditional culture; daily lifestyle; local agricultural products; and other precious local assets, including the Akimoto Shrine, which is well known for its spirituality, with sacred water springing from its grounds. Because there are many attractive local resources in their village for travelers, local villagers have also become prouder of their own village ever before. Such a transition of the local people's minds was brought about with the process of rediscovering and refining local resources as assets as well as protecting and appreciating the local natural environment and traditional livelihood. The village has started agricultural processing, making Japanese sake and amazake, which are made from fermented rice with traditional techniques. Their vision is to be a world-recognized travel destination and to offer world-recognized products. The organization is constantly striving to find and create new values, such as developing and selling sweets with the use of rice bran. Learning opportunities and marketing efforts, such as study tours to Europe and business-to-business exchanges, have continuously taken place. As a result, it is estimated that about 30,000 tourists visit the small village (with a population of about 100) annually.

During such business development, young people with various skills and interests have come to the village and joined in the initiative. Such highly qualified young people, who typically received higher levels of education, have become important players in the business.

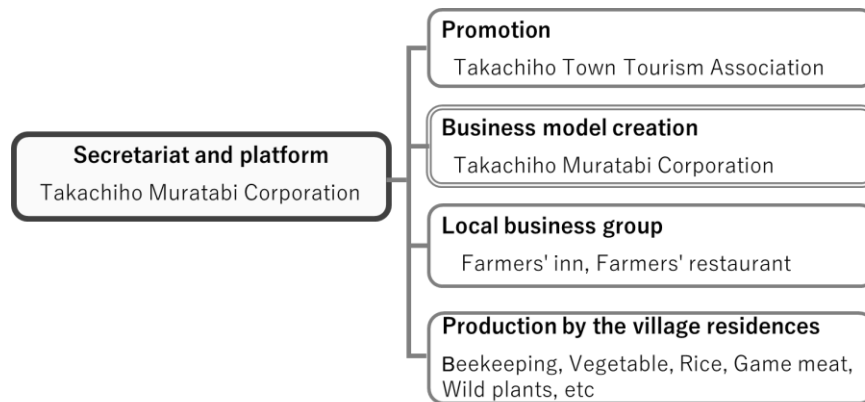


Figure 4. Structure of the Community-Based Organization Takachiho Muranabi Co. Ltd.



Figure 5. Landscape of Akimoto Village as an "Eco-Museum."

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The comparison between peasant-like and community-based entrepreneurial modes of rural tourism brings another insight into communities' autonomy that is different from the peasant and the entrepreneurial modes of farming (van der Ploeg 2018). For instance, the entrepreneurial farming mode is observed as disconnected from nature, with “artificial” modes of farming and scale enlargement as the dominant trajectory, whereas the peasant farming mode is built on local nature, placing co-production and co-evolution as central. This difference between the peasant and entrepreneurial modes of farming does not apply in the case of peasant-like and community-based entrepreneurial rural tourism in the case of the Takachihogo–Shiibayama area. This is because the entrepreneurial mode can be built on local nature, with co-production and co-evolution embedded in the village if it is operated by a local community. Community-based entrepreneurial rural tourism cannot use scale enlargement as their dominant strategy because they are connected to local ecological resources, and exhausting local resources leads to the end of the business. Entrepreneurship is directed toward qualitative enrichment and diversification rather than excessive scaling-up.

The basic difference between the peasant-like and the community-based entrepreneurial modes of rural tourism resides in the base of autonomy and arrangement of tasks and operation. More specifically, it is related to the question of whether the agency is exercised in the family or community base, and under what system these are applied. Under the peasant-like mode, all participating host farming families of GT engage in the same kinds of activities of providing lodging and exchanging farming experiences as members of the community. Even recent host families of *Nohaku* do not extend beyond the scope of traditional GT activities, even though their characteristics have become more diverse. In the peasant-like mode, each family takes the initiative in conducting similar activities. In the community-based entrepreneurial mode, the human resources of the community are divided into divisions of labor according to their areas of expertise, interests, and skills, satisfying travelers' needs and market demands. Community-based Tourism (CBT) in other Asian countries focuses on local community participation and local ownership, while considering environmental, social, and cultural sustainability, seeking for power redistribution to community (Okazaki 2008; Suansri 2003). The condition of Japan's rural areas differs significantly from other Asian countries due to a severe scarcity of labor caused by the continuous depopulation. Rather than obtaining participation and distributing opportunities fairly, the issue is whether a small number of people can generate high-value-added activities as a community as a whole.

Table 2 compares two different modes of rural tourism. The crux of the matter is not the superiority of one over the other, but rather the rationale and reality behind having a combination of both. The heart of the Forestopia concept is rooted in the practice of rural tourism in the area, regardless of the mode. Both uphold the premise that what is already there has value, rather than creating something new in the rural areas. Furthermore, both initiatives embrace the aspiration to warmly welcome visitors without belittling their traditional lifestyle. Over time, rural communities suffer from aging and depopulation, which ultimately leads to a decline in community viability. In such circumstances, people endeavor to engage in rural tourism by leveraging their family's labor and/or participating in the community's collective efforts.

Table 2. Comparison of peasant-like and community-based entrepreneurial modes of rural tourism

	Peasant-like mode	Community-based entrepreneurial mode
Autonomy	Family-base (Operation is feasible even if community function is fragile.)	Community-base (The community must have enough capacity to function as a harmonious entity.)
Economic / livelihood strategy <sup>10</sup>	Craftmanship - Sustainably make use of available resources (e.g., family labor and	Entrepreneurship - Create a new, often innovative, rural business, connecting with and

<sup>10</sup> This analysis is made with referring the discussion on “Entrepreneurship versus craftsmanship” (Ploeg 2018; pp.66-69).

	assets), realizing high productivity and value-added per family labor.) - Improve livelihood with pluriactivity, being more multifunctional.	responding to market. - Develop high-value products with mechanical technologies, utilizing and polishing community's traditional products, being more specialized in own products and services provided with division of labor among villagers. - Try to achieve sufficient profitability with marketing, R&D, and training activities, enabling to secure decent pay for young, highly educated members.
Relation with local nature	Built upon and connected with family-owned natural environment (with land often inherited from ancestors)	Built upon and connected with community's natural environment, considered as local commons.
Social relations	During the 1990s, farmers in a village had close relationships and collaborated on comparable initiatives in their community. However, as farmers become older and rural areas experience a decline in population, bridge-type solidarity has in part due to the presence of intermediary support organizations that link Nohaku operators scattered across a larger geographical area.	Villagers are connected to one another through the development of own projects in which they specialize, and the village as a whole becomes an appealing location as "Eco-museum".
Interaction with travelers	Travelers have memorable heart-warming experiences as they interact intensively with host families (farming and eating together, etc.), fostering genuine friendships.	Travelers explore shrines, local eateries, and lodgings, etc. in the village to experience the village's overall ambiance, making the village to be travelers' favorite place to visit.
Impact to rural regeneration	Increase in <i>relationship population</i> (Those who fostered strong ties to the farmer inns' host families (i.e., Nohaku operators) are more inclined to visit repeatedly, contributing to the growth of the "relationship population".)	Development of rural tourism destination, resulting in adding the tourism as new industry in rural areas.

This case study indicates the value of learning how to enhance the distinctive and unique assets of the community. This thrives on a common recognition of the fundamental values of the community, where villagers take pride in their unique identity. It is essential to acknowledge the varying characteristics of individuals and families living in rural areas. The crucial aspect lies in devising strategic rural initiatives that effectively embrace various personalities and establishing an environment that fosters continuous learning for each individual and strengthens the rural community as a whole.

Among the critical issues to be examined is the contribution of their initiatives to rural regeneration, which both modes desire. For communities that have been facing the problem of a hollowing out of pride due to population decline and aging, the contribution brought from rural tourism activities has already been confirmed for both modes, with "*relationship population*" increases and socioeconomic returns cheering up residents. However, the long-term contribution to the sustainability of the rural communities themselves will also need to be examined. Both modes contribute to environmental sustainability in the sense that they operate their activities within the limited resources available. It is, however, unclear how social sustainability can be ensured: whether the younger generations choose to live in the area or whether they contribute to the building of rural communities where men and women of all ages, including children, reside. To address the issue, it is necessary to further monitor the complex situation of rural areas and to look at various aspects of rural reality,

not limiting the analysis to rural tourism only.

Finally, difficulties arising from depopulation and aging rural communities need to be remembered. To compensate for such difficulties, some efforts must be made to develop networks among related actors beyond the community and municipality boundaries in the case study. The case study also confirms that community-based entrepreneurship can be implemented even in a small village. However, we also notice that it is difficult to continue to maintain and polish rural assets without strong community power, which is an important resource for rural tourism. The refinement of rural treasures through rural tourism can also pave the way toward strengthening the community's autonomy and power.

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### **AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS**

Kako Inoue made substantial contributions to the study concept and interpretation and drafted the manuscript. Atsushi Iihoshi contributed to the data and information on the part of community-based entrepreneurial rural tourism. Both authors approved of the final version of the manuscript to be published and have agreed to be accountable for all aspects of the work.

### **COMPETING INTERESTS**

The authors certify that there are no competing financial interests in the production of this article.