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Creation of Authentic Culture: Reexamination of Hyperreality

Junko Kimura

1. Introduction

What is “authentic culture”? This study builds a bridge between the tourism-as-culture theory argued by anthropologists and the marketing theory of tourism argued by marketing researchers. Previously, anthropology has not deeply considered how the tourism culture is developed and consumed as a product. Marketing had not considered tourism culture as something created through interactions among local people and tourists since it has regarded tourism as essentially a product/service provided and consumed as a package. It is true that there has been an accumulation of research on tourism marketing, but unfortunately this type of research has been based on the premise that tourism culture is essentially a product (see for example Kotler, et als. 1996). We propose a means of examining phenomena that can overcome the limitations of each approach and bridge the arguments of these two different research areas.

The present study avoids becoming trapped in the muddy conflict between essentialism and constructionism over how culture should be examined. An effective means of avoiding this pitfall is the hyperreality concept. A several years ago in Japan, some youth have become petit-nationalist, enthusiastically shouting “Samurai Nippon!” Do they truly believe in their hearts that the samurai spirit is the essence of Japanese culture? They do not object if you tell them that nationality (in this case, Japanese culture) is only a social construction. Why do they not care? Hyperreality concept provides an answer.

This study consists of the following sections. Section two provides a review of previous literature. First, anthropological literature concerning changes in cultural epistemology is reviewed. Meaning of “reality” is clarified there. Next, the hyperreality concept is reexamined. A framework is proposed for explaining the process of constructing and perpetuating cultural authenticity. Section three explains the methodology of this research. Section four examines the research question proposed in this study using videography. Section five summarizes the discussion and presents issues for further research.

2. Literature Review and Research Question

2.1 Changes in Cultural Epistemology

2.1.1 Essentialist Epistemology

A change has occurred in the field of anthropology. Interpretation of authentic culture has come to mean “cultural epistemology”; change is being wrought on the conventional, fixed ways of interpreting and perceiving culture. Previously, cultural anthropologists regarded culture as essentially a localized phenomenon. When this framework views tour destinations, culture changes are regarded as results of impacts from the outside, interactions with the outsiders, and/or inputs from such interactions. Under this framework, interactions are noises because they destroy the “pure” culture. For example, there is a narrative known as “imperialist nostalgia”. It expresses the attitude of Western European nations towards indigenous cultures that have been destroyed under colonization. This attitude incorporates

wistfulness for the pure culture that is perceived as having been lost.

If we attempt to seek out primary cultures, we will advocate a narrative such as, “the present is a degeneration of past”. Such a narrative regards all cultural elements established through contact or hybridity with different cultures as impure culture. In other words, the local people are perceived as passive entities who strive to continue the “pure” and “authentic” culture of the past. In this perspective, the dynamism and historical creativity of their culture is dismissed.

Cultural Imperialism is an example of essentialist epistemology. Cultural imperialism emphasizes that culture moves towards homogenization. It argues that culture is imposed unilaterally as the superior Western powers colonize and subjugate others.

There is a sample story of Cultural Imperialism. One of the Japanese students talked with a Chinese exchange student. They were discussing which was tastier: McDonald’s or KFC. The Japanese student said that the Japanese students preferred McDonald’s. In contrast, the Chinese student said that in China, KFC is overwhelmingly popular. In recent years, even in China, American fast food restaurants can be seen all over the cities. Of course, the situation is the same in Japan. Not only fast food restaurants but also theme parks (such as Universal Studios and Disneyland), retail stores (such as Wal-Mart and Office Depot) and a large number of other American enterprises have penetrated various sectors of the economy. The US has become familiar to Asian people as Watson (1997) pointed out.

This is not just a phenomenon in Asian countries. The US has an overwhelming influence on cultures throughout the world. The European countries are no exception. Levi Strauss (1952) pointed out that due to the US economic power, it exerts a tremendous influence on other cultures. From 1947, the US implemented the Marshall Plan, known officially as the European Recovery Program,

as an assistance program aimed at Western Europe. The Marshall Plan contributed enormously to the economic recovery of Western European countries, following the devastation inflicted by the Second World War. It also transformed consumer culture in Western Europe. For example, from around 1948, French people began to celebrate Christmas in a much more extravagant way than they did before the war. Sparkling illuminations, wrapping paper for Christmas presents, beautifully trimmed Christmas cards: these were all influences of the American Christmas. The custom of displaying Christmas cards over the fireplace for the week preceding Christmas was also brought in from the US, as were the Salvation Army members’ fundraising activities, standing in plazas and along streets with pots symbolizing the poor hung on these sites. Material wealth transformed French Christmas. Both the wealth and the form of change are the direct result of postwar American power and its influence.

The Cultural Imperialism perspective sees the transformation of French Christmas as a cultural encroachment or invasion by the US. Saeki (1996) views Americanization as the standardization and cheapening of culture, as well as the loss of national traditions on a global scale. Saeki’s perspective belongs to the framework of Cultural Imperialism. Within this framework, one has no choice but to resist Americanisms in order to preserve authentic cultures. In fact, the French deemed the transformation of Christmas as a cultural invasion and in 1951 burned down Santa Claus, the symbol of the American Christmas (Levi Strauss 1952).

2.1.2 Constructionism Epistemology

Again, what is a “pure and primary culture”? Did the “different culture” truly exist prior to the contact? Anthropologists, who focus on the process of creating culture, ask these questions. A new framework is now required. One that focuses squarely on the independence of local residents and responds to the unavoidable reality that people come into contact with other cultures, thereby

deriving a locale for forming a new culture and local identity (Ota 1998).

While emphasizing the independence of local people, these anthropologists regard cultural shifts that gradually arise from contact with other cultures as “creation” — not destruction — of traditions (Ohashi 2001 p177). Yamashita (1996) has shown that the Balinese folk art was created via the gaze of Western artists and tourists.

2.2 Authenticity as Creation

What is important here is not the debate over whether culture is intrinsic or created. The cultural authenticity within the context of tourism takes on the nature of a “created authenticity” to a certain extent. How is “created culture” presented to tourists? Yamashita (1999) showed how tourists consume “savagery” on cannibal tours in Papua New Guinea. Yamanaka (1992) showed that Hawaii’s paradise image was desired by Westerners and created by the US media. In such cases, the local people and tourists established a conspiratorial interactive relationship.

We can say that culture is discourses rather than something intrinsic. In the context of tourism, we must consider the contexts in which culture is discussed as different discourses, as well as the process of interactions between local people and tourists, and the dynamic nature of culture observed under such contexts (Ohashi 2001 p176).

2.3 Reexamination of the Hyperreality Concept

One view of created culture is that of hyperreality. “Hyperreality” was originally described by Boorstin (1962) using the concept of pseudo-events. What tourists seek is not “essential reality” but “a sense of realness”. Hyperreality is the world in which “real” experiences are created. Comparing a wax museum and Disneyland, Eco (1987) says that in contrast to the former, which creates a sense of falseness because it attempts to imitate real people and objects (reality) as closely as possible, the latter

creates a greater “sense of realness” than actual reality by faithfully reenacting people’s fantasies and images. Ohashi (2001) describes how Hawaii’s Polynesian Cultural Center has created a “more realistic” presentation of Polynesian culture by selecting and modeling those cultural elements that tourists will feel to be realistic rather than displaying examples of actual culture, typical in the Polynesian islands.

We propose that, by utilizing hyperreality concept, it is possible to take a step away from the essentialist versus constructivist debate over the perception of culture. Instead, it discusses how “a sense of realness” is created, lived by locals, and perceived by tourists.

2.3.1 Hyperreality as a Spatial Strategy

Previous research has regarded hyperreality as simply a spatial strategy. Much research has been compiled on methods for staging spaces that appear more real than reality. According to Notoji (1990), hyperreality encompasses the following spatial strategies. Construction of the world of hyperreality involves two processes. First, from numerous facts concerning some phenomena that occurred in a certain time and place, specific aspects are chosen and simulated. Next, this simulated image is given existing forms by a stage, building, and mechanical dolls, placing it within an actual location. These processes are double tricks: (1) reality is first turned into fiction, and then (2) the fiction is turned back into reality (Notoji 1990 p159).

Disneyland is a successful example of hyperreality. Notoji explains the process involved in creating a specific hyperreality, using one of the attractions “Pirates of Caribbean.”

It is insufficient for hyperreality to merely imitate reality. By exaggerating the sense of realness even further, hyperreality exceeds being “just like the real one” and becomes “more real than the real thing.” Thus, the images that people have are reproduced perfectly, regardless of

whether or not any references to reality exist.

Here we again realize that cultural authenticity is not attained by deciding whether something is essentially real or imitation. Authenticity is attained when something is recognized as being exactly the same as people's image. Even an imitation of a great masterpiece can acquire "a sense of realness."

The objective of tourists is not to see and experience "reality" but "a sense of realness." For this reason, hyperreality enables the fascinating phenomenon. The authentic work is given honorable mention while the imitation is hailed as a masterpiece (Boorstin 1962). When artificiality (the imitation masterpiece) exceeds reality (the authentic honorable mention), people see the reality (the authentic work) as faded and boring. For example, there is a district in New Orleans, Louisiana (even after the hurricane), known as the French Quarter. Disneyland has an area that recreates New Orleans' French Quarter. In this case, New Orleans is the reality and Disneyland is the imitation. Tourists want to see that reality fits the images they have and prefer Disneyland replica to the original French Quarter. In Disneyland, a show presented to visitors under favorable conditions is called a "good show" and anything else is called a "bad show". In this sense, the real French Quarter is full of "bad shows." This is because, unlike Disneyland, the real French Quarter has weeds sprouting from the bitumen on roads and unsightly walls. When people cannot be satisfied with reality, they can even go so far as to yearn for the imitation (Notoji 1990 p163). In other words, the powerful appeal of hyperreality far exceeds that of reality. In this way, under the concept of fictional reality: hyperreality invalidates the referential relationship between reality and imitation. It is possible for the experience that is closest to the perceived image to become the "reality" (Belk, 1996).

A world that is created through a system that perfectly reproduces fantasies is no longer an

imitated reality, which is copying actual reality. It has become the fictional reality that invalidates the referential relationship between reality and imitation (Baudrillard 1981). People who visit the world of hyperreality do not travel to check the images they have a priori but rather to check reality against these images (Boorstin 1962).

2.3.2 Hyperreality as a Concept for Explaining Phenomena

This study seeks to consider not only the question of "In what ways is the hyperreal world created?" but also "How do local people and consumers experience hyperreal world?" We already share the view of hyperreality as a social construction. Consequently, how do we relate to hyperreality — a world "more real than reality itself" in our lives — and experience it? In what ways is "a sense of the real" experienced?

Living in "a sense of the real is ambiguous" is its answer. What is hyperreal continues to be discussed essentially by local people and consumers, and at the same time, it is looked upon somewhat coolly. In the "Samurai Nippon!" example above, a man believes he has a samurai alter ego. Living with threat of death, samurai are the epitome of masculinity. He is able to express his own individuality by facing off against others with the fighting spirit he possesses as a samurai himself. At the same time, however, he is aware that it is impossible for him to become a samurai. As long as he is a salaried office worker, he cannot live the life of a lone wolf. Even though possessing this cool awareness, he is able to acquire this performative identity by acting the role of a samurai.

The hyperreality world as constructed authentic culture can also be regarded as an interactive process involving ambiguity. While coolly aware that this culture is hyper (artificial) to a certain extent, people essentially portray the culture as real (more real than reality).

The next section will present an example of a

specific tourist area and examine how local people and tourists create a shared hyperreal world. How do the local people live in hyperreality? How do the tourists experience it?

3. Research Outline

3.1 Research Subjects

This research takes up Santa Claus as a research theme. There are two reasons for selecting Santa Claus. First, the model of Santa Claus was not originally an American creation but draws on elements from Turkey to Europe and then to the US. From the US, the image again spread throughout Europe and the rest of the world. Thus, it can provide insight into changes in consumer culture and cultural interactions. Second, there are far more data available on Santa Claus than those on Christmas trees, Christmas gifts, and other popular Christmas phenomena.

What kind of a person is Santa Claus? In books and films, he lives in the North Pole. Movies portraying this image include *Miracle on 34th Street* (1994 remake), in which Kris Kringle (Santa Claus) on his resume gives his hometown as the North Pole and emphasizes that Santa has a toy factory in the North Pole. In *Santa Clause* (1994), a middle-aged office worker signs a contract (clause) to become Santa Claus and goes to the North Pole where he actively takes on his new duties. In *Santa Who?* (2000) Santa Claus loses his memory while in our world, threatening the very existence of Christmas. *The Polar Express* (2004) also depicts Santa Claus as living in the North Pole.

The fiction that Santa Claus lives at the North Pole, or in the Earth's northern region, is not restricted to movies and books. In Japan every year around the Christmas season, "real Santa Claus" visits from Northern Europe. For example, before Christmas, the Finnish Santa Claus attended a photography session at the Imperial Hotel, Osaka and a subsequent boat cruise. A Norwegian Santa made visits to nationwide retail stores such as Mycal and Universal City Walk. A Green Santa

Claus visited Japan from Denmark.

The image of the "real Santa Claus" who visits Japan from the north is, however, a made-in-America Santa (Kuzuno 1998). In every Northern European country, there have always been legends of elves, fairies, or saints who deliver gifts. For example, Finland has the legend of Youlupukki, an elf who rode on a sleigh pulled by pigs. Norway has the legend of Yul Nisse, a fairy who protects farms and forests. Sweden has the story of a saint, Santa Lucia.

The image that many people today have of Santa Claus — flowing beard, driving a sleigh pulled by eight reindeer, flying down out of the sky to deliver presents — was developed in 1823. A writer of children's stories, Clement Clark Moore, melded the image we now have of Santa Claus to the conventional one of a bringer of gifts (someone who delivers gifts at Christmas). The children's book written by Moore and illustrated by W. W. Denslow, *The Night before Christmas*, depicts Santa Claus as a large, jolly man riding in a sleigh drawn by reindeer.

It was not until after Moore published this story that Santa Claus came to live in the North Pole. It was because the wild reindeer that pulled Santa's sleigh only live in the cold regions of Northern Europe.

3.2 Data Collection

Of four northern Nordic countries — Denmark, Norway, Sweden, and Finland — this study focuses on Finland. The reasons for this are, first, even though there are Santa Claus villages in Norway, Sweden, and Finland, the village in Finland is by far the most visited, with 400,000 visitors annually as opposed to 250,000 for the village in Norway and 75,000 for the one in Sweden. Furthermore, only the Finnish Santa Village is located within the Arctic Circle.

We gathered data by conducting interviews and undertaking fieldwork in both Japan and Finland. We gathered data in Japan as follows. Interviews

were conducted with representatives of the Finnish Tourist Board, with representatives of the Tokyo Office for Santa World, Sweden, and a representative of the Marketing Company Another One, which every year brings Santa Claus to Japan from Norway, and Sumisho Urban Kaihatsu, Co., Ltd., which has cooperative dealings with Norway. To complement these interviews, we also interviewed representatives of the Scandinavian Tourist Board. We conducted fieldwork at the Finnish government-endorsed Santa Claus Photo Session and Boat Cruise and with Paradise Yamamoto, a Japanese official Santa Claus endorsed by the Greenland International Association of Authorized Santa Claus, on his way to the World Santa Claus Congress held in Denmark.

We gathered data in Nordic countries as follows. Prior to visiting there, questionnaires containing 40 items were e-mailed to the Santa Claus villages in Norway, Sweden, and Finland. A written reply was received from Finland before the fieldwork commenced. With Norway and Sweden, replies to the questions were received verbally during the fieldwork in each country. We conducted fieldwork in Denmark, Norway, Sweden, and Finland in December. In Denmark, Denmark's Santa Claus was observed at Tivoli Park in Copenhagen, the world's first amusement park. In Norway, an interview was conducted with Eva Johannsen, who operates a Christmas House and Christmas Post Office. In Sweden, an interview was conducted with the management director of Sweden's Tomte Land (Santa World), Camilla Collett, who also provided a daylong tour of Tomte Land. Swedish Santa Claus was also interviewed. In Finland, interviews were conducted at Santa Claus Village in Rovaniemi, within the Arctic Circle, with the manager of the Santa Claus Village Association, the sales manager at Santa Claus Main Post Office, the managers of each retail stores, the attendant at the information desk, and tourists from various countries, including Italy, Hungary, Australia, Japan, Finland, and the

US. We conducted fieldwork at Santa Claus Village over two days under the guidance of the Japanese coordinator and translator Takumi Kato.

The next section examines reality Finland has created. How is "a sense of the real" perpetuated? How do tourists experience it? we will examine the processes involved in creating this "sense of real" and the way local people live in this reality.

4. Santa Claus Story in Finland

Finnish Santa Claus Village is located in Rovaniemi, Lapland, at a northern latitude of 66° 33' within the Arctic Circle. Rovaniemi is a very popular area with tourists, also famous for the Aurora Borealis seen there. The area is a one-and-a-half hour flight from the capital of Finland, Helsinki, or an overnight train trip on the Santa Claus Express. Four-hundred thousand tourists make the pilgrimage to Rovaniemi annually — 100,000 during the Christmas season. One-hundred thousand visitors are from within Finland and 300,000 are from other countries.

In 1984, Santa Claus moved 200 kilometers from the Korva Tunturi to Santa Claus Village. They built new village on the edge of the Arctic Circle because tourists would find it too difficult to visit Santa's home in Arctic Circle. Construction of the village cost 500 million yen or 4.35 million US dollars.

4.1 Creating a "Real" Santa

At Santa Claus Village, there is nothing religious, and there are no reminders of ethnic folk customs (Kuzuno 1998). Teruoka (2003) laments that when Santa Claus left the Netherlands and went to the United States and finally returned to Europe, he "ended up as an American tourism business in Finnish Santa Claus Village" (Teruoka 2003 p127). How does Finland operate what Teruoka terms an "American tourism business" and create a hyperreal world?

As mentioned in Literature Review in Section two, the construction of hyperreality encompasses

the following spatial strategies. First, from numerous facts concerning some phenomena that occurred in a certain time and place, specific aspects are chosen and simulated. Next, this simulated image is given existing forms by a stage, building, and mechanical dolls, placing it within an actual location. These processes are double tricks; reality is first turned into fiction; and then the fiction is turned back into reality (Notoji 1990 p159).

Our fieldwork could confirm the presence of both processes—the first, fictionalization, and the second, realization—at Santa Claus Village. The village used three hyperreality strategies—character creation, story creation, and involvement of visitors as characters in the story. We will examine creation of hyperreal world and the way of living of the local people in the hyperreality.

4.1.1 Creating Santa Character

The first strategy is to create the real Santa Claus by making him that is exactly as peoples' image. Everything about the Santa Claus in Rovaniemi—his appearance, his manner, and his voice—is exactly as we are used to envisioning him. Prominent among the Santa Claus images we are accustomed to seeing, the Coca Cola Santa springs to mind. Coca Cola Santa is a jolly and portly grandfatherly gentleman in a red suit.

Indeed, the Marketing Company Another One first contacted Finland for its Christmas season campaigns because the Finnish Santa was “visually the most recognizable and flawless” and “resembled what we thought Santa Claus looked like.” Finnish Santa was the closest to the image of Santa Claus held by the Japanese. Visitors to Santa Claus Village from Australia also excitedly told us how Santa there had been “Just how Santa should be!” In order to create “a sense of realness,” no images of Saint Nicholas, the original Santa Claus, are necessary.

So as not to destroy the image that people have of Santa Claus, he is very carefully made up with

something akin to special effects makeup so that children cannot tell his age. For example, it takes 30 minutes simply to attach his beard.

Already having an image of Santa Claus as “living at the Arctic Circle,” visitors to Santa Claus Village are overjoyed at meeting him that he exactly matches their image of him. People line up to meet him as soon as Santa Claus Village opens at 9:00 a.m. When it comes time for the tour buses to arrive, a waiting in line for over two hours outdoors in below-zero temperatures is common. During the period of our fieldwork, people from Australia, Italy, Hungary, Russia, China, and various other countries stood in line to meet him. Even when lining up outside in the cold, these people appeared happy. When asked, “What will you ask Santa?” one of the Italians jokingly replied, “I’m going to find out why he didn’t bring me any presents this year.” A Hungarian male visiting with his Finnish girlfriend said, “I don’t know. Peace?” An American boy who had just met Santa Claus said, “He is cool!” Unable to spend two of their three hours scheduled for seeing the village waiting in line to see Santa Claus, the Japanese families departed despondently for Helsinki.

As visitors move up the waiting line, the elves joyfully greet them. They do not speak to the visitors as park employees but as real elves, heightening visitors' excitement prior to meeting Santa Claus. A black curtain hangs in front of the room in which Santa Claus sits in his chair. As visitors move up in line, they move closer to Santa Claus physically, but they are unable to see him while they are waiting. They have to wait for their own turn before they can finally meet him.

Santa Claus responds politely to each visitor individually. The visitors shake his hand and sit on the armrest of his huge chair beside him as they chat. Some children cry from fear at the sight of his large frame and long beard, others cry with emotion at meeting the real Santa Claus. One little Finnish girl came every year to see him. I would like to point out that all of the visitors, from children to

adults, respond to my questions as if Santa Claus were real and an existing being.

4.1.2 Creating Santa Story

The second strategy is the creation of the Santa Claus Story. Establishment of a story about Santa Claus living in Finland cannot be achieved without some mention of the reindeer connection. A story, that Santa Claus rides in a sleigh pulled by reindeer, became fixed with the publication in 1823 of Moore's children's book, "The Night Before Christmas." Lapland became Santa Claus' homeland because wild reindeer only live in the Arctic Circle. Following this, in 1925 an article, announcing that "Santa Claus has moved to Lapland because the mosses on which his reindeer feed have grown scarce at the North Pole", appeared in an American newspaper. Santa Claus' home in Finland became an accomplished fact when Markus Rautio, a host of the *Children's Hour* program on Finnish public radio, announced on air in 1927 that "Santa Claus lives in Lapland" (Endo and Otsuka 1989 p166).

Jarmo Kariniemi, The CEO of Santa Claus Village, emphasized that everybody in Finland, from small children to seniors, knows that Santa Claus lived in Korvatunturi. He comes to work at Santa Claus Village every morning. Kariniemi explained this and other Santa stories, such as there is a toy factory in Korva Tunturi, as if it were true. The Sales Manager of Santa Claus Main Post Office deliberately changed into the costume of Tonto, the elf, before our interview and remained in character as Tonto until the interview was over.

The main character at Santa Claus Village is, of course, Santa Claus. In order to create a story with Santa Claus in the leading role, it was necessary to erase folklore that had been passed down from long ago in this country. If they had wanted to insist on "the real thing" or "the original story," it would surely have been far easier to use stories from traditional Finnish folklore. There would probably have been no need for a running battle between

Denmark Santa Claus for recognition as the "original" Santa Claus if this had been the case. Yet Finland erased the traditional folklore. The story of Joulupukki, for example, was erased. Moreover, Saint Nicholas, the model for Santa Claus, is no longer celebrated. This is in sharp contrast with the Scandinavian countries — Denmark, Norway, and Sweden — which all hold a festival for Saint Nicholas on December 6 every year. Finland has shunned Saint Nicholas because his visual image was not the one chosen in the process of selecting an image in order to construct a hyperreality.

One of the characters from Finnish folklore, Tonto, was not completely erased. In Finland, people have believed in the existence of elves, called Tonto from ancient times. There were sauna Tonto and farmhouse Tonto. In fact, Tonto was Finnish original Santa Claus. Now, however, Tonto has been transformed into "Santa's helper." Tonto works at the Santa Claus Main Post Office as a postal employee. When the author asked the Sales Manager of Santa Claus Main Post Office "Tonto many years ago used to be the main character of Christmas in this country, didn't it?" in our interview, she expressed great surprise that the author, a foreigner, knew of Tonto. Somewhat unnerved, she answered evasively with "Oh, yes."

When the author was standing in line to meet Santa Claus, one of the country elves explained Santa Claus' character, saying that "he enjoys meeting lots of people." This is just one illustration that, like the visitors, the operators of Santa Claus Village talked about Santa Claus as if he were an existing being.

4.1.3 Involving Visitors as Characters in the Story

The third strategy employed at Santa Claus Village makes visitors "not observers but participants" (Yamashita 1999 p208). Let us examine how visitors become participants. Three tactics are used — photographs, letters, and souvenirs.

First, visitors have their picture taken with Santa Claus, but only by a village photographer using his digital camera. Photographs cost 17 euro. Visitors are prohibited from photographing Santa Claus with their own cameras. While they are waiting for the photographs to be printed, visitors wait in a side waiting room where they can buy, write, and post Christmas cards or buy souvenirs. A certificate certifying that the visitor met Santa Claus costs 4 euro.

Second, visitors write letters from the Santa Claus Main Post Office, which is located within Santa Claus Village. This is an official post office under the jurisdiction of Finnish Post Corporation. It is in this post office that visitors become participants in the Santa Claus story. The Main Post Office has two duties. The first duty is selling. Visitors buy letter sets and postcards printed with illustrations or photographs of Santa Claus, then write letters on the purchased stationary, purchase and attach Christmas stamps to their letters, stamp the letters with Santa Claus postmark, and then post them. Prices are 7 euro for an original postcard, a letter from Santa Claus to the visitor is 6 euro, and a postcard stamp to Japan is 0.7 euro. The purchased products all become proof that the visitor met Santa Claus.

The second duty of the post office is sorting mails that arrive for Santa from all over the world, according to country of origin. Over the past twenty years, more than 11 million letters addressed to Santa Claus have arrived, and the number grows every year. For example, they received 216,000 letters in 1994, and 600,000 in 2002. Each year around 80,000 letters arrive from Japan. The letters that Santa Claus sends to people throughout the world are written in one of seven languages (Finnish, English, German, Polish, French, Italian, and Japanese). Applicants pay for their letter in advance and then receive their reply from Santa Claus in the mail. In fiscal 2003, Santa Claus sent 15,000 letters of reply. Finland Post, Ltd. and the government (taxes) pay the postage

cost. The sorted mails are displayed attractively depending on countries. Moreover, although the sorting room is in the back of the post office, Tonto puts on a performance of sorting some of the mails in front of visitors in which she actively engages visitors in the mail sorting. Through this activity, visitors become one of the characters in the Santa Claus story.

Third, visitors buy souvenirs as proof of their meeting with Santa Claus. The Shopping Arcade contains a variety of retail stores. Because each of these stores operates on an independent accounting system, there is no overall uniformity amongst the products. Let us look at kinds of products sold in just two of these stores. The store operated by Marco Yarsco is a large store selling over 1,000 items. Finland-made products account for around 60% to 70%, and the rest are products of either China or Germany. In contrast, Ms. Louri operates a cozy little store specializing in handmade Finnish products. This is because she has a policy not to sell products that gift receivers will soon throw away. Products include, for example, works by well-known Finnish artists and items fashioned from reindeer horns or hide by craftsmen at her workshop in central Rovaniemi. Since the shop is small, it is possible to select only high quality products for display. In these and other stores, visitors can buy gifts and souvenirs for family and friends.

4.2 Ambiguity in the Phenomena

The research showed that local people who live and tourists who consume in hyperreality possess two conflicting aspects—essentialist narrative and cool awareness.

4.2.1 Essentialist Narrative

The first point is that people speak hyperreality in an essentialist manner. At Santa Claus Village people spoke about Santa Claus as if he were an essential being. Let us look more specifically at how he was discussed. The CEO of Santa Claus

Village continually emphasized that “Santa Claus here is the only real Santa Claus.” He strongly rebutted suggestions by the author that the Finnish Santa Claus was copying the American Santa.

Furthermore, he was emphatic about the originality of his Santa Claus. Coca Cola Santa and Santa Claus in Hollywood motion films were dismissed as cheap imitations. In answer to my question, the CEO made responses along the lines of “Don’t lump our Santa Claus together with Coca Cola Santa,” exhibiting discomfort almost irritability. One of the factors that makes the Finnish Santa Claus appear similar to the American Santa Claus is his red costume. Hence at Santa Claus Village, Santa’s appearance has been gradually changed over time in order to somehow reduce the characteristics that appear in the US. When Jarmo Kariniemi became the CEO in 1995, Santa Claus wore a costume that was completely red. Today, however, only his vest and hat are red. They reduced the ratio of red color in his costume because people tend to associate the color with Coca Cola Santa.

Mr. Kariniemi said that these Hollywood movies were made based on inaccurate information. He said that it was not correct to say that Santa Claus lived at the North Pole: “The Santa Claus portrayed in these movies is different from the Finnish Santa Claus. In the movies, Santa Claus lives at the North Pole. I actually went there and checked, and found that reindeer cannot live at the North Pole. Santa Claus wasn’t there, either. Santa Claus lives in Finland. This country is the place that Santa Claus lives. The movies are no more than entertainment.”

4.2.2 Cool Awareness

The second point is that both local people and tourists look at hyperreality with a cool gaze. It is not my intention to point out the inconsistencies in their essentialist narrative nor did the fieldwork attempt to trip them up. No doubt, these people are themselves aware of their essentiality in their

behavior in response to hyperreality (artificial world). What I like to point out is the cool awareness exhibited by these people alongside their enthusiastic narrative. This is different perspective from that of Goffman (1959). Goffman developed the front stage and back stage concept, seeing drama as a metaphor for social life’ idea. He defines the front stage as the area of social interaction where people perform and work to maintain appropriate impressions. In the back stage as the area of social interaction that is away from the view of an audience, people can rehearse and rehash their behavior before stepping out on stage (Goffman, 1959). Whereas he distinguishes the front and back stages, this study points out that two different aspects, essentialist narrative and cool awareness, occur at the same time.

It is important to understand the ambiguity; the cool awareness of local people and tourists toward Santa Claus’ artificiality is in sharp contrast to their essentialist narrative. This can also be understood from the transformation of Santa Claus attribution. Local people are attempting to control Santa Claus, an essentialistic being who should be impossible to transform. An example of this attempted control is Santa Claus’ moving in 1984 from Korva Tunturi to Santa Claus Village in Rovaniemi.

There are some merits in having a cool awareness while expressing an enthusiastic and apparently sincere narrative. For example, using an essentialist narrative as a performance with outsiders enables the establishment of a local identity. Kuzuno (1998) says that Santa Claus is used for both Finland’s national business and an International promotion business. He can be called a national business because Finland’s Ministry of Trade and Industry, Finland Post, and the Finnish Tourist Board are involved. He can be called a star attraction because of his contribution in the improvement of Finland’s image overseas through the dispatch of letters from the “real” Santa Claus in Finland to countries throughout the world during

the Christmas season. Santa Claus is a goodwill ambassador and diplomat bearing Finland's name (Kuzuno 1998 p193-201). In 1995, Boutros Boutros-Ghali, former Secretary General of the United Nations, sent a Christmas message to Santa Claus and people in Rovaniemi (Business Developer nd). Finnish people themselves recognize that Santa Claus is a very important figure for the country. In a questionnaire, they ranked Santa Claus above the president and famous sports stars as the most important person in the country (Kuzuno 1998 p203).

5. Conclusion

5.1 Discussion

The phase of debating which of two conflicting philosophies — essentialism and constructionism — should be used in examining tourism culture is now over. We need to step forward from the conflict. Using a new framework for cultural epistemology, this paper investigates how cultural authenticity in tourist areas is constructed, and then clarifies how cultural realism (a sense of real) is created as a social construct. An effective means of explaining such phenomena is hyperreality concept.

Following the First World War, the American Santa Claus descended on Europe, particularly Northern Europe, along with America's enormous economic strength. Without doubt, the US has created the Santa Claus story and succeeded in popularizing it with a "world standard Santa Claus." However, the US did not force this Santa Claus unilaterally onto the rest of the world. Local people created a cultural authenticity as they utilized America's strength.

Using the spatial strategy of hyperreality originating in the United States, Finland has been able to achieve cultural authenticity and consequently build up a successful tourism business. This study examined the processes involved in this and how people live and consume the hyperreal world.

Both local people and the tourists had

ambiguous attitudes regarding the constructed authenticity (hyper world). The first of these was an essentialist narrative, and the second was cool awareness. Consequently, if one looks only at their essentialist narrative and says to them, "Santa Claus is no more than a construction," neither the local people nor the tourists will be upset because, while recognizing Santa Claus to be a construction, they are dabbling in and enjoying the world of hyperreality.

5.2 Future Researches

The present study leaves several issues for future researches. First, we need to consider the social context in which hyperrealization is affected to enable the hyperreality concept to be used as a means of analyzing culture. Kuzuno (1998) analyzed Santa Claus Village with a framework involving the social context of ethnic conflict in Finland. The present paper also discovered truths that had been banished from the front stage and people who had been forced to bear with great strain. For example, the elf Tonto had originally been the central figure in Finnish folklore, but was now relegated to the lower position of Santa's helper. The souvenir store manager, Ms. Lawely, had continued to insist upon selling only products that were handcrafted by Finnish craftsmen because she felt that what foreign tourists should be buying and taking home was Finnish culture. Among the souvenir shops, however, Ms. Louri's conviction was the exception. Most of the other stores sold both local and foreign produced souvenirs. This discussion needs to be further expanded in the future with a view to social contexts such as ethnic conflict.

Second, since there is diversity in the interactions between local people and different cultures, these different cultural engagements need to be examined more closely. For example, Norway also has Christmas House and Norwegian Santa Claus, Yul Nisse. The owner of Norway Christmas House operates it with a completely different

philosophy to that of Finnish Santa Claus Village. Differences styles of intercultural interactions need to be studied.

Third, there need to clarify the process that standardize the images that people have. This paper discussed the premise that people have the same image of Santa Claus. We need to examine what kinds of pressures were brought to bear to eventually standardize the image. Before that, however, we need to ask whether or not people really do have convergent images of Santa Claus. Perhaps everyone simply believes that the image is the same. This is another research question that requires answers.

Fourth, we need to study more carefully the responses of local people and tourists to a hyperreal world. How “real” did they perceive the world? We found that people in a hyperreal world display ambiguous responses. However, the discussion did not go so far as to consider how, and in what ways, hyperreality was perceived as “real.” The significance of ambiguity in the practical context of tourism (economic culture) requires clarification.

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