From Timber to Tourism: Recommoditizing the Japanese Forest

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ABSTRACT
Timber plantations make up nearly half the Japanese forest area. However, in recent decades domestic timber has been displaced by imports. The decline of Japanese forestry forms the background to the emergence of forest tourism whereby domestic forests become important sites for the recreational leisure of Japan’s urban middle class. This article describes the ways in which the Japanese forest is exploited as a tourist resource, and examines the problems that arise in this process of recommoditizing a timber forest into a tourist forest.

INTRODUCTION
Japan is one of the most urbanized societies in the world. An almost continuous urban belt has developed stretching from Tokyo in the east to Kita Kyushu in the west — a ‘megalopolis’ comprising some 78 million people or 63 per cent of the Japanese population (Karan, 1997: 23–5). Almost two-thirds of the national population live on just 3 per cent of Japan’s land (ibid.). This integration affects rural space, as well as urban space, as the megalopolis absorbs much of the arable part of rural Japan. These rural areas in turn take on a quasi-urban character whereby local livelihoods come to be based on urban-type employment in conjunction with part-time farming. According to Kelly’s formulation, the age of rural Japan is over, and in its place there exists only ‘regional Japan’ (Kelly, 1990) — a derivative space wholly subordinate to the megalopolis.

This development has profound implications for upland areas of Japan. One of the features of post-war Japan has been a national preoccupation with the rural village as a spiritual home, or furusato, an unchanging locus of affective belonging in a rapidly urbanizing society. But the era of the megalopolis heralds the disappearance of rural Japan, and this ongoing urbanization has the effect of valorizing remoter, upland areas as the new site of the Japanese pastoral.

This is the background to the present-day transformation of upland areas of Japan into sites of mass recreation. One form which this trend takes is
large-scale resort development in which leisure space is created by felling forest, levelling hillsides, and building large-scale tourist facilities. Another centres on the forest itself as the prime tourist attraction. This article examines the process by which a forest dominated by industrial timber forestry is being transformed into a recreational forest, drawing on ethnographic data from the Kii Peninsula in western Japan, and on written sources on forest tourism from other regions of the country.

RECREATIONAL FORESTS

Plantation forestry is practised throughout the world. In the early 1990s, plantations or ‘man-made forest’ accounted for around 150 million ha of the world’s 4 billion ha of forest — less than 4 per cent of the global forest area (Mather, 1993a: 4). In the mid-1980s around three-quarters of the industrial plantation area was located in temperate regions, with a quarter in the tropics and sub-tropics (Kanowski and Savill, 1992: 122). Timber plantations are set to become much more ubiquitous in the twenty-first century, especially in the tropics, as states attempt to realize a range of important resource-related and environmental objectives. Afforestation policies can help to secure long term wood supplies (for fuel, timber, paper) on a renewable basis; restore tree cover to bare land; slow rainwater flow and prevent flooding; re-utilize degraded farmland and other derelict land; and meet national targets for carbon fixation.

However, monocultural timber plantations have also attracted much criticism. There have been many examples of failures in industrial plantations, especially those in tropical areas, due to their biological instability, to mismatches between site and species, and to poor management (Sargent, 1992a: 9–12). One consequence of this critique of plantation management is the emergence of a trend towards the diversification of plantations. Timber plantations in the future can no longer be simple monocultural ‘tree farms’, ‘green deserts’ or ‘biological deserts’, but must meet certain minimum standards of biodiversity (Spellerberg and Sawyer, 1996).

Many erstwhile monocultural plantations are set to become new kinds of forest — variously characterized as ‘multi-purpose forests’, ‘multi-objective forests’, ‘post-industrial forests’, and so forth. If ‘industrial forests’ are ‘geared to the production of wood for industrial purposes’, ‘post-industrial forests’ offer ‘a wider range of social and environmental benefits’ (Mather, 1993b: 217–18). The 1992 Convention on Biological Diversity gave a further fillip to the establishment of forests which have environmental, recreational and other non-industrial sources of value (Spellerberg and Sawyer, 1996).

Recreational forests have become common in recent decades. Forests in Europe, North America and Australia are being strategically re-defined and modified — and even new forests created — as sites of recreation which
provide a range of outdoor leisure opportunities for national populations (Bell and Evans, 1997; Cloke et al., 1996; Romano, 1995; Selin and Lewis, 1994). This shift is sometimes characterized in terms of a change in management ethos away from ‘commodity production’ towards ‘non-commodity resource management’ (Farnham et al., 1995). Yet the move towards ‘tourist forests’ is often explicitly couched in commercial and marketing language — with forests defined as a touristic ‘resource’ to be exploited, and forest administrators and managers charged with the task of ‘marketing the forest’ to metropolitan populations (Sogar and Oostdyck, 1994).

One of the obstacles to this new trend of forest ‘marketing’ is the forest’s previous history of commoditization, particularly as a site of timber growing. In many cases, this new, ubiquitous landscape legacy of conifer plantations is the object of public complaint on aesthetic grounds, in terms of both their monocultural uniformity and the visual impact of clearcuts (Bass, 1992: 55; Gillmor, 1993: 46–7; Lindhagen, 1996; Lucas, 1997). The rise of forest tourism often leads to restrictions placed on industrial forestry, such as reduced clearfelling (Bostedt and Mattsson, 1995). The emergence of forest tourism in Japan, in a landscape dominated by industrial forestry, illustrates the tensions that can exist between these two different forms of forest commoditization.

**JAPANESE FORESTS**

Two-thirds of the Japanese land area consists of mountain forest. In Japan forest is synonymous with mountain, as mountains are generally wooded and forest elevated. The word *yama*, written with the Chinese character for mountain, applies to both mountain and forest. Japan consists of two main ecological zones corresponding to two kinds of indigenous forest: beech forest (*bunarin*), a deciduous forest distributed towards the northeast of the country and at higher elevations (700–1,500 metres); and Lucidophyllous or shiny-leafed forest (*shoyojurin*), a warm temperate forest widely found to the southwest and at lower elevations (below 500 metres), which forms part of a wider East Asian ecological zone. Both types of forest are found in the upland interior of the southern Kii Peninsula, and some local writers proclaim the special importance of this area’s natural environment as the place of the most southerly Japanese beech forest and even the site where Japan’s two ecologies meet (Ue, 1994: 4–6).

However, since the late nineteenth century, much beech and Lucidophyllous forest has been replaced by industrial forest — first by fuelwood forest (for charcoal) and then by conifer forest (for timber). In the 1990s around 45 per cent of the Japanese forest area consisted of timber plantations of cypress (*hinoki*, *Chamaecyparis obtusa*) and cryptomeria (*sugi*, *Cryptomeria japonica*). The scale of plantation forestry greatly increased after the war. Japan’s mountainous landscape had lost much of its tree cover,
resulting in floods, landslides and river silting. In response, the government launched a nationwide reforestation campaign, involving public tree-planting ceremonies attended by the emperor who took the lead in planting conifer saplings himself, along with many other local tree-planting events. The campaign succeeded in restoring tree cover to hillsides and mountainsides throughout the archipelago. The total plantation area established since the war exceeds ten million ha.

One of the hopes for post-war reforestation was that it would secure the future of upland areas through economic development based on a modern forestry industry. Through large-scale state-supported investment, the mountain forests would become the place of modern, technologically advanced, mechanized forest work. Mountain forests would be made more accessible through the development of an enhanced network of roads, the introduction of mechanized saws would increase the efficiency of forest labourers, and advances in science would boost productivity and product quality in forestry. The combination of scientific, technical and logistical improvements suggested that forestry would bring mountain villagers a prosperous future.

Yet despite the achievements in reforestation — in restoring tree cover to the mountains — Japanese forestry is in decline. In the course of its post-war recovery, Japan experienced a shortage of usable wood products, and from the 1960s began importing large quantities of wood. Wood imports have continued to grow ever since, and by the 1990s domestic timber growers were complaining that their product had been displaced by wood imports from southeast Asia, Siberia and North America. In the mid-1990s, imports accounted for some 80 per cent of the wood consumed in Japan. In this same period, rural Japan underwent large scale outmigratory depopulation resulting in a forestry labour shortage and the neglect of much of the post-war plantation forest. At least one-third of the nation’s timber plantations suffer from complete neglect, while a much larger proportion of the plantation forest suffers from partial neglect and, therefore, commercial devaluation. Another consequence of rural depopulation and forestry decline has been the depreciation of forest land. It is against this background that new forms of forest land use have emerged.

Forest Tourism in Japan

Many Japanese people visit forests. A 1993 survey found that 70 per cent of respondents in their twenties and thirties had visited ‘the mountains, a forest, valley or other natural area for a non-work purpose during the past year’ (Fujitake, 1993). In a 1994 survey of urban workers in Tokyo, three-quarters of those surveyed expressed a positive preference for visiting village areas; two-thirds of these indicated a preference for forest hiking and rambling and one-third for fishing and forest gathering activities (Inoue,
National park areas which include much primary forest, from Shiretoko in the north to Yakushima in the south, have become major tourist destinations (Mitsuda and Geisler, 1992: 33–4).

The recreational use of forests is something promoted by the Japanese government: ‘560,000 hectares of national forests at about 1,100 sites throughout the country are designated as forest recreation areas, which include forests for nature observation and outdoor sports’ (NLAPO, 1991: 54). Forests are becoming the site of a variety of recreational activities, including hiking, gathering (nuts, herbs, mushrooms, flowers etc.), camping, birdwatching, fishing, canoeing, mountaineering and paragliding. There is also a growing number of wildlife parks (including monkey parks, bear parks and deer parks) and other nature parks in Japan. Some leisure parks have established ‘ecology camps’ in which tourists learn about forest flora and fauna.

Forests are being re-designed to enhance their touristic appeal. Aya-machi in Miyazaki Prefecture promotes itself to tourists as a site of Lucidophyllous forest, the natural vegetation of southwest Japan (Takeuchi, 1993: 116–18), while other areas, especially in northeastern Japan, appeal to would-be visitors as sites of native beech forest. But forest tourism extends to secondary forests. In Japan, the pine is one of the most popular trees, and secondary pine forests have considerable touristic appeal. Japanese people express a preference for an airy forest where they ‘can walk, play and enjoy flowers’, and the pine forests provide an ideal environment for this kind of recreation (Kamada et al., 1991: 61). There are also examples of explicitly non-native forest tourism — such as *doitsu no mori*, ‘the German forest’, that has been re-created in Okayama Prefecture.

On the southern Kii Peninsula, visitors are encouraged to try hiking through the forest and tracing the footsteps of ancient pilgrims. Skyline roads have been built along mountain ridges in order to facilitate scenic drives. ‘Forest showering’ or *shinrin’yoku*, a kind of group-hike through the forest, is promoted as a recreational activity in many areas of Japan (see Kamiyama, 1983; Mishima, 1994), including municipalities on the Kii Peninsula. Also known as the ‘forest remedy’ (*shinrin ryoho*), it is believed to be a health-enhancing pastime which benignly stimulates the workings of the main internal body organs (Kamiyama, 1983: 12).

More generally, the forest forms a pervasive motif in tourism in upland areas of Japan. Guest-houses and restaurants are named after the forest (for example, *Mori no sato*, ‘The Village in the Forest’); forest imagery is ubiquitous (scenic forest posters and framed forest photographs are common in coffee houses and guest-houses); a range of souvenirs, made from forest wood, are on offer; small wooden or ceramic models of forest animals are sold as souvenirs; guesthouses display stuffed animals (such as deer or pheasant) and caged forest songbirds in their lobby areas; dishes of wild boar meat, venison and forest herbs are served to guests; and books about the forests (on hunting, charcoal burning etc.) are on sale.
There is a revival of traditional skills and crafts associated with forest areas such as charcoal-burning, wood-turning, bamboo crafts, paper making, and dyeing. Tourism provides a stimulus for farming parts of the forest. One example of this is wildlife farming, for meat and medicinal wildlife products. Forest plants, including medicinal herbs, are also cultivated in connection with tourism.

Problems with Tourist Forests

This process of converting the forest into a tourist resource faces a number of problems. First of all, despite the fact that many rural areas appeal to past traditions of forest visiting, such as pilgrimage, in Japan the forest has a rather frightening image. The forest is the place where the souls of the dead go, while in folklore it features as a site ‘of the terrifying and mysterious, of violent abductions and ghastly crimes’ (Ivy, 1995: 108). This negative image of the forest extends to the local human population: itinerant charcoal-burners, hunters, and loggers have often been viewed as primitive, backward and dangerous, while remote mountain villagers have been seen variously as demons, as half-man half-bird monsters (tengu), as monkeys and as bears. There are even recent reports of hikers in the forest hiding in fright on encountering foresters (Ue, 1980: 165).

The forest also poses real dangers to tourists. Traffic accidents occur on the narrow, winding forest roads, and herb and mushroom collectors slip on the steep mountain slopes or get lost in the mountains. Bears, feral dogs and poisonous snakes pose a physical threat to visitors; there are regular newspaper reports of tourists attacked by wild animals, including herb gatherers attacked by bears (see Maita, 1996: 107–8; Miyao, 1989: 198–201). Hunting can also be dangerous for tourists. In general, hunters travel to the remote

1. Deer products include venison, deer ‘ham’ on the bone, deer horn alcohol (tsunoshu), and deer velvet (rokajio). Some proponents believe that deer farming could become a mainstay industry for depopulated upland areas in Japan (Drew et al., 1989: 345). Demand for wild boar meat, marketed as ‘the taste of the wilds’ (yasei no aji) or ‘the taste of the forest’ (yama no aji), has soared in the 1980s and 1990s (Takahashi, 1995: 40–55; see also Nagata, 1989: 346; Ue, 1994: 151–4). Venison and boar meat are served in ryokan tourist inns in rural areas and sold in mail order farm produce businesses as a quintessential winter taste of the Japanese countryside (e.g. Asahi Shinbun 15/12/92). There is also a demand for the gall of wild boar. In some areas, snakes are farmed to make snake tonic and health products.

2. In some areas, in an effort to incorporate wild plants into the tourist economy, perilla juice and wild grape wine (yamabudo no wain) are produced, to serve as a counterpart to the consumption of local wildlife products such as venison or wild boar dishes (Asahi Shinbun 24/3/93). In some cases, the cultivation of kanpoyaku herbs is emphasized (e.g. Nakase, 1993: 17).

3. On the stigmatization of upland dwellers as ‘bears’, see Sakurai (1990: 599), and as monkeys, see Himeda (1984: 52) and Nebuka (1991: 91).
forests to hunt, whereas tourists visit the proximate forests; overlap between the two is rare, and tends to involve, at most, hikers hearing the sound of distant gunfire. However, there are hunting accidents involving hikers who unwittingly stray into the scene of a hunt and get fired on by mistake, attacked by a hound, or chased and injured by a wounded wild boar.4

Another problem with forest tourism in Japan is topographical. The elevated character of Japan’s forests permits a range of vertical recreations, including mountaineering, skiing and para-gliding. Ski grounds, in particular, have become common on the snowy Japan Sea side of the country. However, the temperate climate on Japan’s Pacific side, on which the Kii Peninsula lies, does not permit skiing. This mild climate does allow for year-round hiking, but hiking through the mountain forests of the region can be a physically demanding activity. Although the tourist areas of the Kii Peninsula are popular among older people, the elevated character of the land effectively rules out hiking for many of them. The forests do not really permit the kind of gentle exertion appropriate to the elderly visitor. The mountainous landscape of the Kii Peninsula also inhibits golf-course development, despite the proliferation of golf courses across Japan. The vertical spaces of the peninsula are inappropriate for the basically horizontal game of golf.

Another problem arises from the degradation of pine forests. Many pine trees have withered due to pine rot. The tall pale skeletons of rotted pines (which stick out from the forest) are an unpleasant sight, and some tourists wonder if this is the effect of acid rain. Moreover, since the 1960s, the exploitation of the pine forest (for timber, resin, forest litter, charcoal etc.) has largely ceased. The consequent accumulation of organic litter on the forest floor and the increase in undergrowth and scrub make the pine forests difficult to pass through and diminish their recreational value. Some rural areas are attempting to arrest this trend and restore local pine forests on account of their aesthetic value and wider national appeal to tourists (Kanzaki, 1988: 165). There is also a trend towards the restoration of grasslands to produce flower-laden landscapes in the spring and early summer. In an effort to brighten the forest, picnic spots and parks within the forest area have spread, as have airy nature trails.5

The new trend of forest tourism also encounters problems of forest access. Tourist activities clash with local activities, for instance, where both tourists and locals pick the same mushrooms, herbs or flowers. The depletion of

4. See Asahi Shinbun (18/11/91; 6/12/93; 23/5/94).
5. However, one of the problems that arises from this trend of opening up the forest to tourism by creating open spaces is that the new grassland becomes a prime feeding ground for forest herbivores such as deer and serow and contributes to the increase in their numbers, with adverse consequences for local foresters and farmers. Indeed, the spread of golf courses, one of the primary forms of ‘tourist grasslands’, is also said to cause an increase in deer numbers (Asahi Shinbun 9/12/94).
such a limited good by one side is the cause of complaint or anger by the other. Although no longer central to local livelihoods, the forest continues to be a site of local productive and income-earning activities — forest-labouring, hunting, gathering etc. — as well as a site of local recreation. Wild herb gathering, an important source of local income as well as a popular tourist activity, leads to local complaints about tourists picking valuable wild herbs.

Tourism is a cause of environmental destruction. Resort development — golf courses, ski resorts, theme parks, and so on — leads to large-scale forest clearance, attracting much public criticism (Honda, 1993: 178–9). Tourist skyline roads have certain negative environmental consequences. Road widening itself can lead to considerable forest clearance, while the new roads are said to undermine the scenic beauty of many remote spots (in addition to the flat road itself, the roadside hill-face often has to be sandblasted and fenced). Tourist skyline roads, as well as forest roads, also adversely affect wildlife by cutting-up and fracturing wildlife habitat and sealing off animal sub-populations from one another. The building of toll highways along mountain ridges, as part of tourist development, has partitioned and fragmented monkey habitat (Suzuki, 1972), while new skyline roads (for example, on the southern Kii Peninsula) often cut through bear habitat. This disruption of wildlife habitat can exacerbate crop-raiding on village farms. For some local people on the southern Kii Peninsula, tourism, far from bringing local benefits, makes village life that much harder.

Forest tourism in Japan thus encounters a range of different problems — concerning both tourist perceptions of the forest and local perceptions of the tourists. The next section focuses on an even more basic problem for forest tourism, one which centres on the industrial character of much of the national forest landscape.

**FORESTRY AND FOREST TOURISM**

Forest tourism can co-exist with forestry to a certain extent, and forestry can benefit tourism in a number of ways. First, forest tourism relies on forestry roads which, although established by the forestry industry (to

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6. The clash between tourism and wildlife conservation is illustrated in the recent controversy on the World Heritage island of Yakushima, where the proposed expansion of a forestry road to permit tourist buses to circle the island has led to a clash between tourist interests and the conservationists who oppose the road expansion plan (JPN, 1995: 1–3).

7. Another cause of wildlife crop-raiding is tourism-related provisioning of wild animals. The provisioning of wild monkeys for tourism, critics argue, has caused or at least exacerbated farm crop-raiding because it has lured the monkeys down from the forests to the edge of the village and has made them accustomed to village food. Impromptu provisioning of monkeys by tourists also occurs and can have similar effects. To a somewhat lesser extent, problems arise with other wild animals, such as deer, wild boar and bears.
enhance access to timber plantations and expedite timber extraction and transportation etc.) also permit the exploitation of the forest for tourism. Many forest roads have been widened to permit access to the remote forest by tourist coaches and other traffic.

Secondly, timber plantations can, up to a point, appeal to tourists. In Japan there is not the degree of intense antipathy to conifers reported elsewhere. Mature timber forests can be an object of aesthetic appreciation, especially for the forester (as in the expression birin or ‘beautiful forest’, applied to a fine timber plantation). Reflecting the Japanese forester’s perspective, Totman characterizes the well-maintained plantations of Akita Prefecture as ‘the jewels of Japan’ (Totman, 1985: 3). For many urban Japanese who visit rural areas, the plantation forest is viewed as yama (forest) or midori (greenery) and does not readily stand out as artificial. The background to such positive views is that the two main commercial conifers, cypress and cryptomeria, are indigenous species which occupy an important place in Japanese culture and history.8

More specifically, older plantation forests, which have undergone successive thinnings, become airy, light places attractive to visit. Indeed, the more advanced-aged plantations, with a small number of large trees and green expanses in-between, come to resemble parkland. In areas where older plantations predominate, deer congregate to feed on the herbaceous undergrowth that emerges, and become a wildlife spectacle for tourists, especially as the deer gradually become tame. Thus, in addition to formally established ‘deer parks’, a kind of deer parkland can develop in forestry areas (cf. Dizard, 1994: 12–13).

On the other hand, tourism can benefit forestry in certain ways. Tourism provides new markets for plantation wood — through the construction of prestigious tourist buildings made of local wood; through the use of (inferior and otherwise discardable) plantation wood to make tourist souvenirs; and through the creation of new non-wood products.9 Tourism also revives the demand for charcoal products. In the 1990s, demand for charcoal in Japan increased, in part due to the rise in outdoor camping.10

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8. They are mentioned in Japanese mythology — for example, as two of the trees planted by the kami spirit from his body hair, and from the timbers of which were built the boats (cryptomeria) with which the Japanese travelled to the outside world and prospered, and the houses (cypress) for people to live in (see Wada, 1978: 196). Many celebrated Japanese shrines and temples around the country have been built from cryptomeria and cypress.

9. One of the main plantation conifers, cypress, with its distinctive smell, is used to make a variety of products such as cypress milk cream, cypress skin oil (for skin diseases), cypress shampoo, and cypress air-fresheners.

10. It has also been proposed that conifer wood be used to make charcoal for camping use (Tanaka, 1996: 92–7). In addition to the use of charcoal as fuel, a Wakayama company markets charcoal bath salts, charcoal pillows, charcoal mattresses, charcoal slippers, and charcoal for cisterns etc.
Woodcraft production for tourism boosts demand for low grade wood such as wood thinnings (kanbatsuzai). At present, much of the wood grown in rural Japan goes to waste; the commercial value of thinned logs is so low that they are often just left lying on the ground in the forest. If wood thinnings could be made commercially valuable, this would provide an extra incentive for forest landowners to thin their timber plantations. Due to large-scale outmigration and the decline of forestry, unthinned forests have become a major problem. A tourist woodcrafts market for wood thinnings encourages plantation thinning and, in turn, can help to improve the quality of maturing timber stands. Local woodcraft industries provide a new source of income for retired foresters and help to occupy other foresters who have developed vibration white-finger (through overuse of chainsaws) and can no longer perform outdoor manual labour.

Tourism can provide employment for retired foresters as tourist guides — for example as herb-picking or mushroom-gathering guides for tourists (Kamata and Nebuka, 1992: 415). The knowledge of the forest accumulated over decades by former charcoal-burners, loggers and plantation foresters can be put to use in tourism. Older foresters have typically acquired an impressively wide knowledge of forest flora and fauna and can use this to point out and name the distinctive plants as well as the wild animals of the forest (their tracks, trails and other signs). They can also explain charcoal-burning at the sites of old kilns; talk about the timber plantations and their care; and recount the various bits of folklore associated with particular places in the forest (magical trees, monster-sightings, ghost stories etc.).

In some cases, forestry is directly incorporated into tourism. Upland municipalities across Japan have established ‘tourist forestry’ (kanko ringyo) schemes in which visitors plant, weed, prune or thin timber plantations (see CRSC, 1995: 119–88). Another example of the use of forestry as a theme for tourism is the rafting experience offered by some upland municipalities.

However, forest tourism also clashes with forestry in a variety of different ways. First, the ubiquity of timber plantations poses a serious obstacle to forest tourism in Japan. As the existing network of roads has largely been built for forestry, it usually leads to plantation forest. The roads that admit one into the forest are themselves signs of its transformation. On much of the interior of the Kii Peninsula, a road to a natural forest is almost a

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11. One example of ‘tourist forestry’ from the Kii Peninsula is the Mountain Spirit Sweat Tour (yama no kami ase kake tsua) which has been held annually in Hongu-cho since 1994 in which women tourists recreationally undertake forestry labour tasks such as undergrowth-clearing and plantation thinning.

12. An example is Kitayama-mura on the southern Kii Peninsula. Tourists board converted rafts of the kind which used to transport lumber downstream, and experience the thrill of being carried by the river down the river valleys, just as raftsmen did in the past. Indeed, these tourist rafts are steered by former forestry raftsmen.
contradiction in terms: aside from the protected watershed forests/upstream locales, forest roads were built to fell such forest and replace it with fast-growing conifers.

A variety of environmental beautification measures have been undertaken in recent years in order to offset the uniformity of the conifer plantations. Roadside flower-growing and tree-planting (with cherry blossoms, maples, camellia etc.) have been carried out by youth groups and other civic groups. There have also been specific municipal initiatives aimed at re-naturalizing local forests. In the 1990s, for example, the municipality of Hongu-cho purchased an area of forest land along a local hiking trail popular with tourists. Known as the *Kumano sosei no mori* or ‘The Forest of Kumano Revival’, the long-term aim is to create a mixed forest by interplanting non-conifer species with existing older conifer stands — although such limited measures hardly conceal the prevalence of the conifer plantations.

Even though Japan does not suffer the same degree of conifer-phobia as reported for many other countries, conifers are increasingly criticized. The spread of conifer plantations at the expense of natural forest is said to create an ‘unhealthy’ or ‘sick’ forest (Kawasaki, 1993: 6; Matsuzawa, 1989: 114), a development which has been likened to cancer (Azumane, 1993: 115–17). Plantations are criticized as dull and ugly (see Tanaka, 1996: 103) and as creating a ‘black’ landscape (Azumane, 1993: 116, 126; Taguchi, 1993: 179–80). Another conifer complaint is the loss of seasonality in the Japanese forest that has resulted from the spread of cryptomeria and cypress plantations. Japanese culture is famed for its seasonal sensibility, and the changing forest has been the staple of much literary symbolism and many a haiku poem. But in contrast to the earlier mixed forest, conifer plantations are unchangingly ‘black’ throughout the year.

Even more than the standing plantations themselves, their clearfelling — still commonly practised in Japanese forestry — is the object of much criticism and complaint. Clearfelling creates the eyesore of bare mountainsides. It also leads to soil erosion and the silting up of rivers. Where the river is used as a tourist resource, for example for water sports such as canoeing, the river-shallowing effects of forestry pose serious problems (Noda, 1997: 37–8). Even routine plantation care attracts criticism. Uemura reports that foresters carrying out the thinning of timber stands find themselves accused of ‘nature destruction’ (shizen hakai) (Uemura, 1992: 200–1), while Tadaki tells a similar story about vine removal (Tadaki, 1988: 194). Tadaki argues that urban environmentalists crystallize an antipathy to forestry that is widespread in urban and suburban Japan (ibid.).

In addition to the plantations themselves, measures to protect them from pests disturb or offend recreational forest visitors. In Japan plantations need to be protected from wildlife pests such as deer, serow and bears, and one means to this end is provided by propane guns, the regular explosions from which serve to drive away the animals. Some tourists are disturbed by this noise which they mistake for actual gunfire. Similarly, the culling of deer to
protect timber forests from increased deer numbers is often criticized and opposed by urban dwellers (Asahi Shinbun 8/1/95).

As forest tourism increases, the nearby urban population comes to feel more involved in forest issues. One of the consequences of the increased sharing of the forest with the urban population is that the latter become more assertive in their views on forest management. The forest can no longer be managed simply in the interests of timber forestry. The strategic elimination of those wildlife parts of the forest deemed harmful to the timber stands ceases to go unchallenged. The ‘cute’ deer which so appeal to tourists cannot be simply removed at the foresters’ whim.

Another problem is that the Japanese conifer forests generate allergic reactions in many people. The pollen of cryptomeria, the main plantation conifer, has been identified by scientists as the principal allergen causing kafunsho — a kind of hay fever which affects large numbers of Japanese people in the spring. Besides putting off visitors, the kafunsho problem, much covered in the Japanese mass media, somewhat undermines the image of forest areas as places of healthy recreation.

**Environmental Value of Tourist Forests**

A further aspect of the transformation of Japanese forests is their environmental value. In Japan, the dominant point of contrast is between the reforested present and the deforested past (and between reforested Japan and deforested southeast Asia). The ubiquitous conifer plantations are, in the first instance, a testament to the national achievement of reforestation, in making the ‘bald mountains’ (hageyama) of the immediate post-war years into green forest once again. This perception has tended to be reinforced by the emergence of the global discourse of ‘carbon forests’ according to which standing forest *per se* is accorded environmental value as a carbon sink.

However, Japanese plantations are also coming to be contrasted negatively against the primary and secondary forests they have replaced. Timber plantations are criticized on environmental grounds, as a cause of soil erosion, as acidifying streams and affecting fish stocks, and as contributing to wildlife pestilence. To a certain extent, this environmental critique of plantations articulates with the demands for a recreational forest. For one of the justifications of forest tourism is that it can help ameliorate the adverse environmental effects of industrial forestry. By promoting a re-diversification of forest vegetation, tourism promises to bring environmental benefits. The vegetative diversity of the new forest is justified both as an act of beautification and as a measure of environmental restoration or improvement. Forest tourism is often justified in an environmental idiom.

Tourism could contribute to the conservation of forest wildlife. As constituents of the timber forest, wild animals such as the deer and bear are
defined negatively as pests to be eradicated. In the tourist forest they are
defined and valued differently. Although, to a certain extent, they may be
deemed a threat to or problem for forest tourism (deer eat flowers, bears
maul tourists), they are also a potential tourist asset. In Japan, timber
forestry is seen as a major threat to the bear, but bear conservation is in part
justified in terms of the integrity of the Japanese forest. In the 1990s the bear
is often referred to in the Japanese mass media as the ‘King of the Forest’
(mori no oja) (Asahi Shinbun 17/7/94) or ‘King of the Mountains’ (yama no
oja) (Asahi Shinbun 5/4/95) — a play on the lion as the ‘King of the Jungle’
(janguru no oja). Some of those involved in the tourist sector feel that it is
the presence of the bear which makes the forest a place worth visiting.
Similarly, proposals for wolf reintroduction in Japan are justified, in part, in
terms of the animal’s potential contribution to forest tourism, although
there are also fears that the measure could be detrimental to tourism (for
this debate, see Knight, 1998: 58). The touristic re-evaluation of forest
wildlife can support wildlife conservation.

The rise in forest tourism in Japan is leading to a number of changes in
the Japanese forest. Japanese forestry is modifying its practices, away from
clearfelling towards selective felling and away from single-age toward
mixed-age plantations. More aesthetically appealing tree species (such as
cherry blossoms) are being planted, and aesthetic inter-planting of trees
in old timber plantations is being practised. Plantations are cosmetically
altered by the planting of a belt of other kinds of trees along their edges.
Rural municipalities are designating parts of their local forests as conser-
vation areas where old-growth forests are planned as a tourist resource for
the future (Kanzaki, 1997: 269–70).

Yet tourism also has adverse environmental effects. The growth of
outdoor tourism has resulted in an increase in forest fires, caused by camp
fires or by unextinguished cigarette butts (Nakazawa, 1992: 298). More
generally, the growth of domestic Japanese tourism has been destructive
of the natural beauty of many of the areas visited (Tokuhisa, 1980: 148),
while the recent large-scale resort developments have been highly destructive
of forests (including forest clearance to make way for ski slopes and golf
courses).

The future of primary forest in Japan is of particular concern. Primary
forest is now extremely scarce — only around 5 per cent of the forest area.
One of the justifications of plantation forestry in Japan, as elsewhere
(Sargent, 1992b: 31–2), has been that timber plantations alleviate the
logging pressure on primary forests (Tanaka, 1996: 154). But the logic of
tourism tends to work the other way: the diminution of primary forest
raises its touristic scarcity value, leading to increased touristic demand
for what remains. There must be fears that the large-scale tourism which
‘World Heritage’ forests such as Yakushima and Shirakami attract will be
detrimental to them, especially where new roads are built to accommodate
increased tourist numbers (see JPN, 1995).
CONCLUSION

Post-war Japanese society has long been marked by the self-imagery of ‘economic animal’, ‘worker bees’, ‘workaholics’, etc. While proud of their ‘economic miracle’, post-war Japanese have also tended to view their own variant of industrial modernity as inferior, in many ways, to that achieved elsewhere. In the 1980s and 1990s, after the end of the period of fast economic growth, one of the main preoccupations of government, academia and mass media in Japan has been with the national attainment of an improved quality of life and a more balanced lifestyle — balancing work with leisure, production with consumption, material needs with emotional needs etc. (Linhart, 1988; Najita, 1989: 17–19). Increasingly, ‘post-postwar Japan’ (Najita, 1989: 5) is said to have transcended the mass culture of the post-war period and to be undergoing diversification, individualization, and maturation. Along with technology, leisure is one of the main spheres in which this transition to a full modernity is measured, and much national attention in Japan is given to the increase in leisure hours and recreational activity and to the shift away from ‘passive’ to ‘active leisure’ (Linhart, 1988: 297–305). Late twentieth century Japan believes itself to be becoming a ‘post-industrial leisure society’ (Hamilton-Oehrl, 1998: 248).

One of the most visible expressions of the post-industrial leisure society is the new order of recreational land uses in rural Japan. This trend extends to the forests of upland Japan, many of which are being re-defined as recreational spaces. This shift from industrial timber forests to recreational forests can be seen as an instance of recommoditization whereby the forest ceases to be simply the site of timber products and becomes the site of a new kind of product — a touristic product. The enormous scale of capital investment in the leisure industry has changed the face of much of upland Japan.

However, this picture must be qualified. First, the emergence of tourist forests is not a simple replacement of the timber forest. Although Japanese domestic forestry is in serious decline, there are hopes that in the next two decades the demand for domestic timber will pick up again. In other words, rather than a shift from timber forests to tourist forests, upland Japan will be a site of both. The change in the Japanese forest is from a single-purpose industrial forest to a multi-purpose forest as much as a switch from timber to tourism. But this multi-purpose forest of the twenty-first century, to the extent that timber forestry and forest tourism spatially overlap within it, is likely to continue to be the site of some of the tensions described in this article.

Secondly, the trend towards forest tourism should be kept in perspective. Many of the resort developments of the 1990s have not succeeded. Much of this resort expansion had more to do with the vicissitudes of the so-called ‘bubble economy’ than with careful strategic assessments of particular market opportunities. Moreover, the emergence of tourist forests in Japan
should not obscure the fact that the forest recreations of many Japanese people take place in overseas forests — in other parts of Asia and beyond. Indeed, because of their industrial character, the Japanese forests would appear to be significantly disadvantaged as recreational sites compared with the forests of tropical southeast Asia or temperate North America.

Viewed in this way, the emergence of tourist forests in Japan would appear questionable over the long term on the grounds that, in the larger (international) market context of outdoor tourism, they represent an inferior tourist resource. However, the new tourist forests described here should be understood as more than simply a new market trend. The change represents a re-symbolization, and not just a recommoditization, of the Japanese forest. The post-war productionist forest was very much a site of national symbolism, as was clearly expressed in the national reforestation movement. In particular, the ceremonial presence of the tree-planting emperor represented a powerful ritual statement about the forest as the site for growing national strength through timber forestry.

However, the post-war era of mass conifer planting, monocultural forestry, and landscape uniformity is coming to an end, and the Japanese forest of the next century is set to change in accordance with a new complex of national objectives. The national reforestation campaign continues, along with the annual ceremonies featuring the emperor, but it has come to express the new national concern in Japan with multi-purpose forests. Significantly, in the tree-planting ceremonies of the 1990s, non-conifer tree species are also planted — including (local varieties of) cherries, maples, horse chestnuts, camphors and zelkovas — and the importance of vegetative diversity proclaimed.

The change is also expressed in the shift in emphasis in reforestation catchphrases and slogans over the years, from the national resourcist and hydrological functions of the post-war forest up until the 1980s, to the affective relation between the Japanese people and their forest in recent years. This new normative association of the Japanese forest and its diversity of growth with the Japanese people and their post-industrial well-being is well captured in a recent reforestation slogan: ‘Towards Affluence of the Heart through Forest Greenery’.13

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13. This (1994) catchphrase in Japanese is: mori no midori de kokoro no yutakasa o.


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**Newspapers**

*Asahi Shinbun* (18/11/91) ‘Tozan no josei o inoshishi osou’ (Wild boar attacks woman mountaineer).

*Asahi Shinbun* (15/12/92) ‘Tennen inoshishiniku o zenkoku ni okurimasu’ (Sending natural boar meat to the whole nation).


*Asahi Shinbun* (6/12/93) ‘Shika to machigai hoppo, Hyogo de sasatori no shufushibo’ (Mistaken for a deer and shot, the death of a Hyogo housewife out collecting bamboo grass). Hyogo.


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*Asahi Shinbun* (5/4/95) ‘Yama no oja’ (King of the Mountains).

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