The Impact of Host Community on Destination (re)branding: A Case Study of Hiroshima

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates local groups’ opinions on interpreting a dark heritage site for the promotion of tourism and analyzes their roles in tourism activities, through a case study of Hiroshima, Japan. As the first city suffered nuclear bombing, Hiroshima is a primary tourism destination in Japan but faced the challenge of revitalization. Fieldwork investigation methods, including semi-structured interviews, were applied. The results suggest that local people hold favorable attitudes toward tourism development. They conduct an alternative approach to rejuvenating Hiroshima by identifying the essence of the place – a cheerful and peaceful city – and incorporating it into tourism events. Copyright © 2013 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

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KEY WORDS urban tourism; identity; Hiroshima; host community; disaster destination

INTRODUCTION

Over the last decade, dark tourism (Lennon and Foley, 2000) has received increasing academic attention. Within the growing body of literature, the issues relevant to management of dark tourism sites have been addressed as the focus of academic research. Many researchers have researched factors influencing development, narrative, interpretation and value of the sites. Less attention, however, has been paid to the issue of dark destination (re)branding. To contribute some new knowledge about dark destination management, this paper explores the effects of local people on (re)branding and managing dark heritage sites, through a case study of Hiroshima City, Japan.

In this paper, the concept of dark tourism describes ‘the act of travel to sites associated with death, suffering and the seemingly macabre’ (Stone, 2006, p.146). Meanwhile, the term ‘dark heritage’ refers to sites including elements of death and atrocities (Ashworth and Hartmann, 2005) and their preservation as historic sites is mainly due to their sad pasts (Strange and Kempa, 2003). In dark tourism literature, the conceptualization of dark tourism encompasses tourist attractions that are most often classified as heritage (Biran et al., 2011). Some researchers have conducted research on dark heritage sites, such as Hiroshima (Siegenthaler, 2002), Alcatraz and Robben Island (Strange and Kempa, 2003), Lithuania (Wight and Lennon, 2007) and the Auschwitz-Birkenau death camp (Biran et al., 2011). Most researchers highlight aspects of the tourist experience or tourism industry; however, few researchers have noticed the effects of the host community.

Hiroshima is the biggest international tourism destination in Japan’s Chugoku region and provides an example to investigate how a host community selects and presents the images of a dark site to visitors. More than six decades since the atomic bomb was dropped, local people are receiving opportunities to present and recommend the sites based on their own opinions. This is not to say that victims have lost influence on the interpretation or presentation of Hiroshima. However, the narrative of dark heritage should be reviewed when the political or cultural context of the site changes based on a ‘continual, sequential process of stakeholder identification, the determination of the histories of each stakeholder, and the negotiated or co-operative writing or re-writing of the heritage narrative for the site’ (Sharpley, 2009, p.163). Even though the demise of surviving victims (hibakusha) is inevitable, it means a change in the way the memories are transferred. In Hiroshima, an interpretation system named kataribe (storyteller) has been developed after the Second World War, where the hibakusha relate their tragic experiences of the bombing to both visitors and students. According to Yoneyama (1999), listening to the atomic bombing stories of hibakusha was an important part of the itinerary for tourists to Hiroshima. In addition, local schools used this system in peace education classes. In Hiroshima, there is a unique Peace Education curriculum taught at all schools administered by the Hiroshima Municipal Board of Education (Short, 2005). This peace education aims to pass on the experiences of the hibakusha to the next generation to further the campaign for the worldwide abolition of nuclear weapons. Therefore, with the demise of surviving victims, new methods of passing on memories, such as tourism events (Winter, 2009), have to be established that differ in quality from direct transmission through kataribe.

However, conducting a detailed study on the role of tourism in transferring war memories to the next generations is beyond the scope of this paper. The purpose of this study is to focus specially upon the role of branding in the...
marketing of tourism destinations. The change in social value and tourist demand is producing very significant structural developments within the dark tourism industry. Since the 2000s, Hiroshima has adopted marketing approaches to bolster its tourism industry, such as the ‘Aquapolish Hiroshima’ branding project. Furthermore, the large-scale tourism promotion implemented by Hiroshima City also reflects that local government has been taking marketing approaches to promote its tourism industry since 2004.

While the local government (Hiroshima City) has launched the branding project and formulated the message of the new brand, this paper stresses the role of local people in distinguishing and selling a destination brand to tourists (Freire, 2009). As Kavaratzis and Ashworth (2005) argued, consumers’ orientation would have to be how the residents encounter the city they live in and how they make sense of it. In this paper, the old brand of Hiroshima is a city that ‘symbolizes lasting peace and Japan’s renunciation of war’ (Hiroshima City Hall, 2009). The new brand of Hiroshima is a city ‘comfortable to live, amazing to visit, and with millions of visitors’; while ‘Aquapolish Hiroshima’ is sub-brand used to promote tourism. This paper uses a term ‘(re)branding’ to highlight a shift of Hiroshima’s image from ‘bomb memory’ to ‘cheerful peace’. This study could help city planners or academic researchers to understand the impacts of local people on rebranding dark heritage sites for more flexible and varied tourism developments.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Destination (re)branding
Brand is a competitive factor for destinations (Ritchie and Crouch, 2000), while destination branding is a process to develop a unique identity and personality for a place (Morrison and Anderson, 2002). Meanwhile, the main part of destination branding activities is to identify and distinguish a destination through positive image building (Cai, 2002). According to Kavaratzis (2005), there are five trends in the studies in the literature; which are place-of-origin branding, nation branding, culture/entertainment branding, destination branding and place/city. Furthermore, personality branding, flagship construction and events branding are the main marketing techniques used in the place branding (Kavaratzis and Ashworth, 2005).

Above all, destination planning is a re-branding exercise (Hankinson, 2007). The co-production factor of the place product would lead to a continual sequential process of destination branding. The place product is co-produced by a multiplicity of stakeholders and autonomous organizations; and this product always evolves in an unplanned manner. Different from other marketing, which always starts with a new product, place marketing always begins with an old product; and the design of place has had little market influence.

Whilst the concept of destination (re)branding has not been found in the previous tourism literature, this issue has received attention from some scholars since the 1990s. Bramwell and Rawding (1996) argue that old industry cities in England used re-imaging as a response to the acute problems of industrial decline as well as to promote tourism. Dahles (1998) says that Amsterdam’s ‘City on the Water’ rebranding campaign has increased the competitiveness of Amsterdam in international markets. Recently, García et al. (2012, p. 649) point out that ‘while a new product or service is launched by means of a branding campaign, the destinations are already developed products that require a re-branding strategy’.

Dark destination (re)branding
The previous tourism studies of dark heritage sites mainly focused on the political and cultural influences on the design and presentation of the dark sites. Siegenthaler (2002) compares the presentations of Hiroshima and Nagasaki as postwar tourism destinations and finds that Hiroshima is standing as emblematic of the rebuilding of the nation as a whole, while Nagasaki remains largely outside of the social and cultural dynamics of postwar Japan. Strange and Kempa (2003) compare the design and interpretation of two former penal institutions: Alcatraz and Robben Island. They suggest that Alcatraz has a higher commercial and entertainment image in its design, but Robben Island possess a higher degree of political influence in its interpretation.

Recently, some researchers have paid attention to the issue of disaster destination (re)branding. Sharpley (2009) builds a governance framework to reduce the dissonance among the stakeholders based on a continual sequential process of stakeholder identification and argues that it is necessary to re-write the narrative when a new political and cultural context of the site evolves. Yang et al. (2011) evaluate the impact of the Wenchuan Earthquake on local tourism destinations in terms of tourism resources, number of tourists and tourism revenue; as well as propose tourism reconstruction strategies for the quake-hit areas. According to Yang et al. (2011), it is essential for local governments and tourism organizations to promote a new theme of ‘the safety and beauty of Sichuan’ and to adjust tourism construction within the whole quake-hit area. Although perhaps simplifying the influence of local community and victim(s), this paper provides a base for understanding how tourism planners and government could rebrand disaster destinations to achieve a better reputation.

Stakeholders involved in the destination (re)branding process
Destination branding involves many stakeholders, such as local people, investors, employees, students, retired people, visitors, media and opinion leaders, entrepreneurs, service industries, foreign governments and exports purchasers (Gilmore, 2002). Subsequently, García et al. (2012) point out that local people, entrepreneurs and tourists are three key stockholders involved in the branding process. While destination branding has been performed in a top-down fashion, Freire (2009) argues that the local people, including the employees of the tourism industry and members of the local society, make up one of the dimensions that compose a destination brand.
However, it is difficult to evaluate the role of local people in dark heritage site branding. There are four primary stakeholders interested in any dark heritage development (Seaton, 2001): owners or controllers, visitor groups, subject community, and host community. Here, the owner or controllers may be public sector or private sector groups or organizations, or a combination of both. Tourists visit the sites with an intensity of interest in the experience associated with death and suffering. The subject community refers to the focus or subject of the heritage narrative. Last of all, the host community refers to local groups or residents located near the heritage site. Yet, for local people, dark tourism may be viewed as an unwanted disruption of their living space, particularly if it involves a tragedy from a past they did not play any part in (Seaton, 2009).

HIROSHIMA AS A TOURISM DESTINATION RELATED TO ATOMIC BOMBING

Identity of Hiroshima
Hiroshima Prefecture is situated in the southwestern region of Japan. It enjoys the rich natural surroundings of the Seto Inland Sea and the Chugoku region mountain ranges. It is home to two World Heritage sites: the A-bomb Dome and Itsukushima Shrine. Hiroshima City, the capital of the prefecture, is built on the delta of the Ota River. It was a flourishing castle town in the Edo period (1603–1868). After the Meiji restoration, the Higher School of Education opened. Together with the nearby port city Kure, the city developed a large concentration of army facilities after the Russo-Japanese War in 1905, and was the military center of western Japan during World War II.

On 6 August 1945, the American bomber Enola Gay dropped the first atomic bomb in human history on the center of the city. The bomb exploded in the air 580 meters above the center of the city. The blast and ferocious flames toppled and burned all buildings within 2 kilometers of the hypocenter. Most buildings within a radius of 4 kilometers were at least partially destroyed. Over 140,000 people were dead by the end of 1945, and hundreds of thousands were injured as a consequence (Hiroshima Peace Culture Foundation, 1998).

After World War II, the Government of Japan reconstructed Hiroshima as a city that ‘symbolizes lasting peace and Japan’s renunciation of war’ (Hiroshima City Hall, 2009). According to the Hiroshima Peace Memorial City Construction Law, the central area of the city was reconstructed with three key elements: Peace Avenue, riverside green belts and Peace Memorial Park designed by Kenzo Tange, in which various memorials were created and preserved, including the A-bomb Dome. The identity of this city is also articulated in Japan’s justifications for UNESCO to nominate the A-bomb Dome as a World Heritage. (1) The A-bomb Dome is the only remaining structure witnessing the disaster caused by the nuclear bomb and conveys a physical image of the tragic situation immediately after the bombing; and (2) it is a monument symbolizing the hope for eternal peace and the ultimate elimination of all nuclear weapons on earth (UNESCO, 1996).

As in other Japanese big cities, urban sprawl has occurred in the city of Hiroshima. Especially, the area around Peace Park has experienced continuous population decline. Recognizing it’s unique water landscape and well-developed waterfront infrastructure, the city of Hiroshima started a project called ‘Aquapolish Hiroshima’ in 2003 with permission from the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure and Transport of Japan (MLIT) and Hiroshima Prefecture. The three main contents of the project are as follows: (i) to create an urban waterfront environment for the citizens; (ii) to promote the waterfront as a key element in urban tourism; and (iii) to build distinctive and attractive scenery that is commensurate with the ‘Aquapolish Hiroshima’ brand. Different from its former brand as a city that ‘symbolizes lasting peace and Japan’s renunciation of war’ that related to atomic bombing history, the new brand aims to improve the pride of local citizen as well as to compete efficiently with nearby destinations using the beautiful water landscapes (Miura, 2004).

Thus, Hiroshima fulfills a variety of identities: flourishing castle town, military center, disaster destination related to the first atomic bombing and mass death, reconstructed city symbolizing lasting peace, a remaining structure or monument, and an urban area with beautiful water landscape. In this paper, Hiroshima is regarded as an attraction interpreted for the promotion of peace. It reflects Yoneyama’s (1999) opinion that Hiroshima represents a post-war image of Japan, as a peace-loving nation faced with devastating victimization, as well as Siegenthaler’s (2002) argument that Hiroshima is, as a whole, emblematic in terms of the rebuilding of post-war Japan.

The role of local people in registering the A-bomb Dome on the world heritage list
The A-bomb Dome is a bombed building which stood 160 meters northwest of the hypocenter. The blast and thermal rays destroyed most of the buildings’ roof and floors; however, the center of the building escaped total destruction. Because of the skeletal dome on the top, the people of Hiroshima spontaneously began calling it the A-bomb Dome after the war. The processes of registering the A-bomb Dome as a World Heritage can help to us to understand how and why local people preserved an A-bombed building.

In the 1950s, the locals were divided into two groups regarding their attitude towards A-bomb Dome preservation. While some locals wanted to remove the dome to forget the violence, some called to preserve the dome as a memorial. With reconstruction of the city, many A-bombed buildings vanished from view. In the 1960s, the calls for preservation became stronger, and the supporters begun to donate money for conservation projects.

Supported by the donations, two preservation projects were carried out, in 1967 and 1989. Now, the building is left almost exactly as it was after the bombing. In 1993, after Japan joined the World Heritage Convention, the Hiroshima City Council requested the Japanese National Government to nominate the A-bomb Dome as a World Heritage Site. Initially, the National Government rejected this request for two reasons: (i) The A-bomb Dome lacked a vital prerequisite
for nomination as a World Heritage, as it was not protected under the domestic Cultural Properties Protection Act. (ii) The A-bomb Dome was not old enough to be designated as a national cultural asset.

Reacting to the rejection, the local lawyers, doctors, hibakusha, and others set up a citizen’s group named ‘The Committee to Promote the A-bomb-Dome as World Heritage’. Then, this group initiated a nation-wide signature movement to petition the Diet to recommend Hiroshima, and obtained over 1.65 million signatures in a short time. As a result, the national government revised the criteria for historic site designation and submitted the nomination to the UNESCO World Heritage Committee in 1995. In December 1996, the Dome was registered on the World Heritage list.

Tourism in Hiroshima

Hiroshima was a primary destination for Japanese tourists in 1949 (Siegenthaler, 2002). Sendai and Yokoyama (2006) argue that Peace Memorial Park has been the most popular place for bus tours since the 1950s. These bus tours emphasized ‘peace education’ but included neither urban industry nor the landscape of the Seto Inland Sea. Peace memorial facilities, including the A-bomb Dome, war museums and memorials of people killed by the bomb, have been serving as tourist attractions. Meanwhile, living memories of hibakusha – authorized storytellers – were the main context of the interpretation. Listening to the atomic bombing stories of hibakusha was an important part of the itinerary for tourists to Hiroshima (Yoneyama, 1999).

Hiroshima Peace Museum is one of the most visited places in the park: nearly 60% of student groups visiting Peace Park also visit this museum. There was a rise in visitor numbers between 1983 and 1989, but since then, there has been very little overall growth (Figure 1). Between 1989 and 2010, the number declined from 1.6 million to 1.3 million. Meanwhile, the social environment has changed, especially after the 9/11 terrorist attack (2001) and the SARS outbreak (2003). During the same period, Hiroshima also enjoyed a 56% increase in foreign tourists. In 2010, 339,000 foreign tourists from more than 47 countries and regions visited the city of Hiroshima. Figure 2 shows that over 64% of these tourists came from Europe, the United States, Australia and New Zealand, but only 15% came from China, South Korea and Taiwan. It is rather different from other regions. For example, in 2010, 59% of tourists visiting Japan originated in China, South Korea and Taiwan. Unfortunately, the share of tourists agreeing that Hiroshima is a destination with an excellent image decreased harshly from 60% in 2008 to 50% in 2010.

Since 2004, the city of Hiroshima has implemented a large-scale tourism promotion project. As a result, there was a significant rise in visitors to the museum after 2004 (Figure 1). At the city level, domestic tourists visiting Hiroshima increased 12% since then, from 8.7 million in 2004 to 9.9 million in 2010. Changes in the number of visitors must be seen in the context of the nearby Itsukushima Shrine on Miyajima Island, which was also registered as a World Cultural Heritage Site together with the A-bomb Dome in 1996. Here too, the number of visitors increased after 2000 as the trend changed from visiting abroad to domestic trips, especially after the 9/11 terrorist attack (2001) and the SARS outbreak (2003).
and to what extent did locals contribute to the tourism rejuvenation. On the other hand, the branding project has had little impact on the destination image of Hiroshima. Thus, it is necessary to explore the reasons that led to this result and to indicate the future needs for city planners.

**STUDY AREA AND METHODOLOGY**

The study area, Hiroshima Peace Memorial (Genbaku Dome), is the most visited place in Hiroshima. The designated area of this heritage site is 0.4 hectares, and the main part of the heritage site is the A-bomb Dome. The buffer zone is a 42.7-ha area, including Peace Memorial Park and the Museum, a part of Peace Memorial Boulevard, the Motoyasu River and the Honkawa River (Figure 3).

Focusing on the role of local people in selecting and promoting destination brand to tourists (Freire, 2009) and the concept of ’governance framework’ built by Sharpley (2009), this study investigates local people’s participation in dark heritage site development (Seaton, 2009) in two aspects. (1) What images local people promoted to tourists: a tragic place related to bombing memory or a cheerful place with a sense of peace, and why; (2) What opinions local people had: preserved for memory, or utilized for tourism development. Document examination, fieldwork including site visits, participation and observation and key-person interviews were the main methods used in this study.

To collect information, we carried out a document examination, mainly including local newspapers and magazines, peace education documents, market reports and academic papers. We analyzed the results of peace education questionnaires surveys conducted by the Hiroshima Peace Education Research Center before 1996 to understand local resident’s attitudes toward the atomic bombing and peace education. Then, we checked the local newspaper ‘Asahi Shimbun’ during the period 1997 and 2010 to collect information about citizen participation in tourism promotion. Furthermore, we analyzed the annual tourism report and tourist questionnaire survey result provided by the Hiroshima Tourism Bureau. In particular, we reviewed academic papers to build the research framework of this paper.

Then, fieldwork including site visits, participation and observations were carried out to select tourism events based on three indicators: scheduled events held within the Hiroshima Peace Memorial, events operated by locals (such as volunteer tour guilds, NPOs and local groups) and events providing annual visitors’ reports. Then, we sent an email to the organizer of each

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**Table 1. Images of Hiroshima from the tourists’ experiences**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Image Description</th>
<th>2002(%)</th>
<th>2010(%)</th>
<th>2002–2010 changed (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>City of Peace</td>
<td>18.1</td>
<td>17.71</td>
<td>−0.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beautiful town</td>
<td>17.2</td>
<td>17.33</td>
<td>0.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A city of green and river</td>
<td>13.4</td>
<td>12.57</td>
<td>−0.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A city with delicious food</td>
<td>11.6</td>
<td>11.9</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A city famous for train town</td>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>10.03</td>
<td>−0.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A city with a good public transport networks</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>5.53</td>
<td>1.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A city with a good road maintenance</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>4.42</td>
<td>0.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A city with friendly citizen</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>3.72</td>
<td>0.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A city with comfortable climate</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>3.36</td>
<td>−0.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A seaside city located in Seto Inland Sea</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>2.84</td>
<td>−0.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>10.59</td>
<td>−0.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Tourism Bureau of Hiroshima City*
event asking for an interview. In the email, we explained the study purposes. Finally, six organizers accepted our invitations, and one refused. In June of 2009, six semi-structured interviews with event organizers and one interview with a related officer were carried out in Hiroshima. All the interviews were recorded. The indicators for analysis are based on the results of the interviews.

In the interview, the interviewees were asked to answer the following five questions: (i) Why do you hold the tourism events in Hiroshima Peace Memorial? (ii) What kind of image do you want to present or recommend to tourists? (iii) Do you think that the event is relevant to peace promotion? (iv) How should the tourists be managed during the event? (v) What comments, if any, do you have regarding the tourism events held within the World Heritage site? Questions 1–3 were designed to analyze the image that local people promoted to tourists; questions 4–5 concern site management issues.

RESULTS

Seven events were selected for this study (Table 2). While some events are regarded as ceremonies to remember the victims, the remaining events involve entertainment, such as a festival with a parade or celebrations of the reconstruction of the city. The following is a description of the events carried out by each operator. Descriptions of each event are based on our documents analysis. All of these selected events were designed and operated by local groups, rather than by survivors or their direct descendents.

Table 2. General information of selected tourism events

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event (date)</th>
<th>Started</th>
<th>Organizer</th>
<th>Describe</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Toro-Nagoshi-Floating of paper lanterns (6th of August)</td>
<td>1959</td>
<td>Hiroshima Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Tourism Foundations</td>
<td>A ceremony to memorize victims of the bombing as well as a festival celebrating the reconstruction of Hiroshima</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flower festival (FF) (1st–3rd of May)</td>
<td>1977</td>
<td>Local newspaper, TV broadcasting, Hiroshima Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Tourism Foundations</td>
<td>A festival with parade to express joy of locals after being reborn from the ruins of the A-bomb like a ‘phoenix’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flower candle message (1st–3rd of May)</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Same as FF</td>
<td>An event providing tourists a unique, memorable and enriching experience of the world heritage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bon Odori (6th of August)</td>
<td>1982</td>
<td>Citizens in the Honkawa district, School</td>
<td>A ceremony to memorize victims of the bombing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guide tour (Annual)</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>Volunteer Guide Associations</td>
<td>Free guide tour visiting Peace Memorial, Hiroshima Castle or Shukeien Garden</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gangi River tour (Annual)</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>NPO</td>
<td>River cruise to promote tourism and Aquapolis Hiroshima project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waterfront concert (Annual)</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>NPO</td>
<td>Music festival</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
School
Honkawa Elementary school, which is located 350 meters away from the hypocenter, is the first peace education model school in Japan. Recently, the students are encouraged to take part in peace activities. For example, the school drama in 2008, ‘Message from the Tree of Heaven’, encouraged students to take part in peace activities as volunteer tour guides. In the drama, three students were bored with peace studies and fell asleep in front of the A-bomb Dome. In their dream, they met a hibakusha, Mrs. Kiyoko San. Deeply impressed by her uniquely tragic war experience, these students decided to be volunteer guides to send the message of ‘Hiroshima must not be repeated’ to visitors.

Meanwhile, locals living in the Honkawa district take part in peace activities through the Parent–Teacher Association (PTA). The Council of Social Welfare of the Hirokawa Area Supporter Club holds an annual Bon Odori at this school in the evening of 6 August to memorialize the students and teachers who were killed in the blast. Locals and tourists can take part in this ceremony freely. In the ceremony, people sing, dance, eat and drink freely on the school playground. However, this casual atmosphere is different from another public ceremony named ‘Toro-Nagoshi–Floating of Paper Lanterns’ held in front of the A-bomb Dome on the same night. The Bon Odori at this school may be the only original memorial event for bomb victims within the World Heritage area.

Tourism organizations
There are four annual grand events held within the heritage site: Hiroshima Flower Festival, Flower Candle Message, Peace Memorial Ceremony and Toro-Nagashi–Floating of Paper Lanterns. Only the Peace Memorial Ceremony is sponsored by the municipal government of Hiroshima to console bomb victims and pray for the realization of everlasting world peace (City of Hiroshima, 2001); the other three events are promoted by local commercial groups, the Hiroshima Convention & Visitors Bureau (HCVB) and the tourism promotion organization of Hiroshima City.

Hiroshima Flower Festival (FF) is one of nine major May events within Japan. This festival was started in 1977 by local newspaper and TV broadcasting companies in cooperation with the Hiroshima Chamber of Commerce and Industry. Since then, it has attracted more than 1.5 million tourists each year. In 2009, a parade of more than 7 000 people, including a brass band, Japanese folk song singers, dancers and local performing artists, marched along Peace Boulevard watched by 1.6 million spectators. In contrast with the Peace Memorial Ceremony that is described as ‘the festival of serenity’, FF is described as a ‘festival of exuberance’ since people express their joy of living and the bliss of peace as they rose from the ashes of the A-bombed city like a ‘phoenix’. ‘Peace’ has been an annual theme for the festival since 2002. Since then, the number of visitors taking part in FF has increased constantly from 140 000 in 2001 to 170 000 in 2010.

In 2004, HCVB started a new event, ‘Flower Candle Message’. Here, visitors can write their message on the candles and display the candles in front of the Memorial Cenotaph for a cost of 500 yen each. More than 7 500 visitors, including those from overseas, wrote their wishes in 2004. The organizer prepared 10 000 candles in 2009. According to the organizer, Flower Candle Message plays an important role in tourism development by: (1) providing tourists with a unique, memorable and enriching experience by allowing them to take part in a peace movement at a historical site; and (2) increasing the number of overnight stays.

‘Toro-Nagashi–Floating of Paper Lanterns’ was started in the Motoyasu River by local people in 1958 to remember those who were killed. In the 1970s, the Hiroshima Chamber of Commerce and Industry sponsored this event and used it to show tourists the success of city reconstruction. The daytime event was to remember the victims who died in the bombing, but the nighttime event was to celebrate the city’s reconstruction. Today, this ceremony has come to be a tourism event; as can be seen by messages written on lanterns, which have changed from the names of victims to visitors’ wishes. In 2008, visitors from more than 128 countries wrote their messages on lanterns. Despite its outstanding role in attracting tourists and increasing economic revitalization, this event was not for promoting commercial tourism. All the profits of lantern sales were donated to the A-bomb Dome Preservation Project Fund.

Volunteer guide associations
There are two volunteer guide associations located in the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Area: Hiroshima Peace Volunteers (HPV) and Hiroshima Tourism Volunteer Guide Association (HTVGA) (Table 3). HPV is a volunteer guide association supported by Hiroshima Peace Culture Foundation. The members of HPV, including 38 hibakusha, mainly introduce the collection of the A-bomb remains and stories of victims to visitors in Peace Museum. HTVGA provides free guide services in the Peace Memorial, Hiroshima Castle and Shukkeien Garden. Its main aim is to develop tourism in Hiroshima by showing tourists a warm welcome and sharing knowledge with them. One key person says that HTVGA ‘relates to a peace image in every way, but we seldom introduce the miserable story of the atomic bomb as HVP does. We would like to share our experiences with tourists and satisfy them by providing information or assistance. Essentially, giving a warm welcome to tourists is our main purpose’.

Non-profit organization
The non-profit organization (NPO), Gangi-gumi, Inc., was founded in 2004 to disseminate tourism development by operating the River Express Gangi Taxi, which is a six-seat open boat operated at 500 yen per person for a 10-minute cruise. Peace Memorial Park Cruise is the most popular one: the boat departs from the waterfront terrace on the right bank of the Motoyasu River. After showing tourists a view of the park and the A-bomb Dome from the riverside, it returns to its starting point. One member of staff sells tickets, and another is a licensed boat operator who also works as a guide during the cruise while steering the boat. As the only NPO permitted to charge for a tourism event within Hiroshima
Managing the world heritage site

Regarding the question of tourist management, one key person said that they did not limit the number of visitors but it was important to prevent visitors from falling into the river if the area becomes too crowded. The organizer also praised the visitors for their good manners.

The study results suggest that local people prefer to build Hiroshima a positive image as a cheerful and peaceful city and incorporate it into tourism events. Table 4 shows that local groups selected the Dome to hold tourism events for various reasons. For the question ‘What message should be conveyed to tourists’, the commercial and tourism groups recommend post-war city reconstruction, happy life of locals and a unique atmosphere of peace. Alternatively, Gangi-gumi and NPOs introduce the river scenery. Thus, local people prefer to show tourists the city reconstruction or the happy life of locals instead of the experience of victims. It is similar with Siegenthaler’s (2002) argument that Hiroshima tourism publications throughout the postwar period have emphasized the postwar period storia culture of Hiroshima City for its significant contribution to the ‘Aquapolis Hiroshima’ re-branding project.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The study results suggest that local people prefer to build Hiroshima a positive image as a cheerful and peaceful city and incorporate it into tourism events. Table 4 shows that local groups selected the Dome to hold tourism events for various reasons. For the question ‘What message should be conveyed to tourists’, the commercial and tourism groups recommend post-war city reconstruction, happy life of locals and a unique atmosphere of peace. Alternatively, Gangi-gumi and NPOs introduce the river scenery. Thus, local people prefer to show tourists the city reconstruction or the happy life of locals instead of the experience of victims. It is similar with Siegenthaler’s (2002) argument that Hiroshima tourism publications throughout the postwar period have emphasized the postwar period storia culture of Hiroshima City for its significant contribution to the ‘Aquapolis Hiroshima’ re-branding project.

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museums play a role in involving the younger generation in tourism activities. Second, the tourism foundation plays a principal role in combining tourism events with the culture of peace. Third, volunteer guide groups are trying to offer a welcoming atmosphere and build new communication channels between locals and visitors. Fourth, these newly established groups such as NPOs are helping to promote Hiroshima’s new identity, ‘Aquapolis Hiroshima’, by creating new events. However, the effects of these new events are too limited, and the economic problems raise question about further development.

With respect to the management of the heritage site, unfortunately, the committees pay hardly any attention to space pattern issues. It is maybe a reason led to the decline in satisfaction of tourists. In fact, the mixing of space patterns of serenity and exuberance brings potential threats to the value of the site, as can be seen in the arrangement of main dance stage at the entrance of the Peace Memorial Museum. Furthermore, the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Area has changed, both in and outside of the Buffer Zone, since it registered as a World Heritage site. Before the registration, Peace Memorial Park was a public space where the local community could easily get permission from the park management for activities. Now, it has become very difficult. Even though some groups were finally able to get the special permission, the strict limitation of advertising and sales promotion has brought about a tough situation. As a result, locals are leaving this area. The park is becoming nothing but a tourism destination.

Hiroshima’s tourism industry has undergone transformation, at least in two aspects. First, social participation has integrated local people and tourists into the new images of Hiroshima. As in FF, activities of local people come to be the key element of the tourism product. Meanwhile, tourist actives (e.g. writing messages on lanterns or lighting candles) started to be a key part of some tourism products. Second, the orientation of the events has changed. For example, ‘Toro-Nagashi – Floating of Paper Lanterns’ has changed from a ceremony for locals to remember the victims who died in the war in the 1950s, to an occasion to show the successful reconstruction to tourists in the 1970s, then to an event providing tourists with a chance to take part in actives at a World Heritage site in the 2000s. Hiroshima was a flourishing castle town for several centuries, but has been reconstructed as a tourist attraction, mainly due to the painful history of the atomic bombing. The re-interpretation and re-branding of a tragic historic event with an entertainment orientation has helped Hiroshima’s tourism industry to shift to the rejuvenation stage in the last 10 years. In Hiroshima, local people conduct an alternative approach to the rejuvenation of the city by identifying the sense of place – a city with bright and cheerful peace – and merging it with tourism events. The authors consider a comparative study on local groups’ participation at different dark attractions as a topic for future research.