

Doctoral Thesis

**Close and Distanced Being: Human and Non-human Animal Boundaries  
at Tourism Landscapes in Japan**

**Rie Usui**

Division of Integrated Arts and Sciences  
Graduate School of Integrated Arts and Sciences  
Hiroshima University  
March 2019

**Abstract**

Tourism provides an opportunity for humans to have a close encounter with non-human animals (NHAs). Yet, NHAs are often simply exploited for the needs of humans and are excluded from moral considerations. The title of this paper, *Close and distanced being: human and non-human animal boundaries at tourism landscapes in Japan*, describes our relationship with NHAs in the context of tourism. In the new millennium, NHAs have become closer to humans in the sense that they are much more easily accessible by traveling. Nonetheless, there remains an invisible ethical boundary that divides humans and NHAs, creating an unequal power relationship between them. Boundary—a term featured in the title of this thesis—is a particular conceptual construct that people sometimes impress upon the world (Barth, 2000, p.19). Essentially, this thesis explores such boundaries constructed between humans and NHAs. By so doing, my motivation for writing this thesis is to bring forward the voices of NHAs that are seldom heard.

This thesis critically examines the assumption that underlies the use of the term, *wildlife*, and shows that different understanding of the word could generate conflicts among various stakeholders and entail unequal power relationship between humans and

NHAs. In particular, the study highlighted humans' relationship with free-ranging Japanese deer found in Miyajima Island and Yakushima Island, which are generally considered to be *wild* under the applicable law, but the level of their habituation with humans varies. Thus, these sites were considered ideal for investigating the concept of *wild*. Moreover, a majority of animal ethics debates in tourism context have limited to charismatic megafauna, which are more valued and that the human relationship with them is largely positive. Unlike these cases, the present study involving deer highlights comparatively conflict-laden relationships. Less iconic species of NHAs should also be included in the circle if humans are to advance the discussion about the ethics of NHAs in tourism. The leading question that guided this research was, "What is the nature of human and deer boundaries at Japanese tourism destinations?"

I adopted political ecology as a framework to explore human-deer boundaries through the lens of ecofeminist philosophy. Political ecology holds an idea that environmental challenges are influenced by political system (Robbins, 2012) and examines the interactions between humans and their environments (Bryant, 1992). Yet, it has been pointed out that political ecologists have inadequately addressed or considered the subjectivity of NHAs in the political system (Hobson, 2007; Srinivasan, 2016; Tsing, 2005). Thus, this study responds to such criticism and acknowledges that NHAs are active individuals whom humans have moral obligation. Specifically, in this research, I employed discursive political ecology (Bryant, 2000) to examine how the deer are discursively framed as *wild* and what kind of power relationship is implicated from it. Focusing on discourses is "important because they have power to make certain ideas and practices a norm (Barnes & Duncan, 1992 cited in Bryant, 2000)." Discourses generated through language as a form of text or conversations (Neumann, 2004) can be examined to elucidate how NHAs are conceptually framed into a humans' political system.

This research has mainly employed a qualitative comparative case study method engaging with an ethnographic approach. Miyajima Island and Yakushima Island, chosen as case study sites, are both designated as national parks and UNESCO World Heritage Sites, which make them readily comparable. Furthermore, their dissimilarity in the type of tourism developed (i.e., Miyajima as a cultural tourism destination and Yakushima as a

nature-based tourism destination) would provide an opportunity to examine how the deer are positioned within a tourism community in a broader context. This is the first study to dissect Japanese tourism from an animal ethics perspective. Therefore, the findings of this research should make an important contribution to the animals and tourism research domain. The objectives of this research are: (1) to investigate how deer are used for tourism at Miyajima Island and Yakushima Island; and (2) to identify how people perceive the deer and discuss what kind of power relations exist in drawing the boundary between humans and the deer. The data were collected from varieties of ways including semi-structured interviews, literatures, documentary sources, online sources, participant observations and field notes. These data were qualitatively analyzed using latent content analysis and critical discourse analysis (Phillips & Hardy, 2002; Waite, 2016).

Findings showed that the deer on Miyajima Island are symbolic figures for the island because humans and deer have shared the space throughout history. However, the increase in the deer population has prompted rethinking of people's relationship with the deer, leading to an agreement among officials to decrease the number of deer and separate human and deer living space. Tensions over how to treat the deer remain among various stakeholders. The authority has taken a firm stance that Miyajima deer are not a tourism resource. In their discourse, deer are managed for ecosystem protection. One of the biggest challenges for Miyajima Island is to find an effective way to regulate feeding by residents, tourists and activists, the ban on which is a key component of the management policy. Analysis of narratives and observations of various stakeholders indicate that the root cause of this conflict is not uniform. That is, the conflict over the current deer management policy was not simply between the local government versus the residents. The opinions toward how to coexist with the deer are split between the residents. While the management authority's discourse places an emphasis upon insisting that Miyajima deer are *wild*, there is a claim by activists and opposition groups that the deer in Miyajima should not be considered *wild*. The opposition groups question the way the deer management authority approaches this issue. Another layer of challenge also lies in between the management authority and tourists who visit Miyajima Island.

People and deer have coexisted on Yakushima Island throughout history, but

without closely encountering with each other as seen in Miyajima. Their relationships has changed as human use of mountain resources has altered. Evidence indicates that in Yakushima, deer play a role that adds extra value to the tourist experience. Nevertheless, the deer population is considered to be overabundant and threatening the precious vegetation which forms the basis for Yakushima's world heritage registration, so culling has been used as a major population-control method. Interviews with different stakeholders revealed that subsidized hunting has generated some issues such as capturing the undesired prey and generating territorial conflicts among hunters. Yakushima's deer management authority and botanists have a strong view that the deer are the cause of vegetation damage—even though botanists themselves admit that the truth is uncertain. Like Miyajima's deer management authority, the focus was placed on ecosystem and biodiversity protection. Other stakeholders such as hunters and tour guides act under uncertain circumstances. The dispute over the deer management was, therefore, attributed to whoever's claim was implemented when there are so many uncertainties regarding the deer population. Contrary to the management authorities' discourse that the deer number has increased, most tour guides reported that the deer began disappearing from the hiking trails.

Critical discourse analysis revealed that people's image of *wild* deer was created by drawing two types of boundaries: spatial and behavioral boundaries. Spatial framing of the deer into *wild* was a common discourse, and the deer are placed in the mountains or forests, contrary to the fact that they are a type of animal that have adapted to live in the plain (Hayama, 2008). In addition, *wild* deer were expected to behave in certain ways. Feeding and habituation are the two key behaviors that people described *wild* deer. The common behavioral discourse was that “*Wild* deer should not rely on human to obtain food and thus, they should not exhibit tame behavior.” While humans create boundaries to contain deer in the *wild* space, the deer often resist against the deer management practice (e.g., fence-breakers and crop-raiders), thus they constitute essential actors at both Miyajima Island and Yakushima Island. Although some residents in Miyajima found some deer behaviors to be a nuisance, the presence of deer facilitates residents' daily conversations. This evidence shows that the presence of deer has, to certain extent, influenced the existing landscapes of both Miyajima Island and Yakushima Island through interacting with the

human community.

Conflicts between humans and deer are typically generated as a result of the imagined boundary transgression. The typical response to such situations is to restore the state of *wild* by managing the deer population. This ‘managed *wild* deer’ illuminated humans’ ambivalent relationship with the deer. While the deer are framed spatially into *wild*, human interests are often valued in the “deer’s space,” which demonstrates an unequal power relationship between humans and the deer. To move forward, wildlife tourism management practices and tourism activities require sensitivity toward NHAs who share the space with humans. With such recognition, we could seek for more rational solutions to truly co-exist with NHAs.