

Doctoral Thesis

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

(Digest)

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## Table of Contents

<b>ABSTRACT .....</b>	<b>I</b>
<b>ACHIEVEMENTS .....</b>	<b>VII</b>
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....</b>	<b>IX</b>
<b>LIST OF FIGURES.....</b>	<b>XVII</b>
<b>CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 RESEARCH BACKGROUND.....	1
1.2 AIM AND SCOPE OF THE THESIS .....	3
1.3 DEFINING KEY TERMS .....	4
1.3.1 <i>Boundary</i> .....	4
1.3.2 <i>Non-human animal</i> .....	5
1.3.3 <i>Wildlife</i> .....	5
1.3.4 <i>Wildlife tourism</i> .....	5
1.4 WRITING STYLE.....	6
1.5 RESEARCH PARADIGMS .....	6
1.6 RESEARCH APPROACH.....	7
1.7 STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS.....	10
<b>CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW .....</b>	<b>13</b>
2. INTRODUCTION .....	13
2.1 TOURISM’S INTERFACE WITH NON-HUMAN ANIMALS: A HISTORICAL BACKGROUND .....	13
2.2 A NEW WAVE AND A NEW CHALLENGE.....	17
2.3 ETHICAL TOURISM FOR FREE-RANGING NHAS: TOWARD A CONTEXTUAL APPROACH.....	24
2.3.1 <i>Ecofeminist philosophy</i> .....	25
2.3.2 <i>Animal geography</i> .....	26
2.4 POLITICAL ECOLOGY AS AN ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK .....	28
2.5 FOCUSING ON DEER AT JAPANESE TOURISM DESTINATIONS.....	32
2.5.1 <i>Management laws concerning wildlife in Japan</i> .....	35
2.5.2 <i>Wildlife management at national parks in Japan</i> .....	36
2.5.3 <i>UNESCO World Heritage Convention</i> .....	39
2.6 SUMMARY AND RESEARCH OBJECTIVES .....	40

<b>CHAPTER THREE: A COMPARATIVE CASE STUDY ON NARA PARK AND MIYAJIMA ISLAND (PRELIMINARY STUDY).....</b>	<b>41</b>
3. INTRODUCTION .....	41
3.1 A COMPARATIVE CASE STUDY: NARA PARK AND MIYAJIMA ISLAND.....	41
3.1.1 <i>Background</i> .....	41
3.1.2 <i>Wild sika deer at Nara Park</i> .....	45
3.1.2.1 History.....	46
3.1.2.2 Deer-related problems.....	48
3.1.2.3 Management of the deer for tourism.....	49
3.1.3 <i>Wild sika deer at Miyajima Island</i> .....	51
3.1.3.1 History.....	52
3.1.3.2 Deer-related problems.....	54
3.1.3.3 Management of the deer for tourism.....	56
3.1.4 <i>Summary</i> .....	59
3.2 CONCLUDING REMARKS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR THE CURRENT RESEARCH .....	62
<b>CHAPTER FOUR: METHODOLOGY.....</b>	<b>63</b>
4. INTRODUCTION .....	63
4.1 RESEARCH SITES.....	63
4.1.1 <i>Miyajima Island</i> .....	64
4.1.2 <i>Yakushima Island</i> .....	66
4.2 FIELDWORK PERIOD.....	70
4.2.1 <i>Miyajima Island</i> .....	71
4.2.2 <i>Yakushima Island</i> .....	71
4.3 DATA COLLECTION METHODS.....	71
4.3.1 <i>Interviewing</i> .....	73
4.3.2 <i>Literature and documental sources</i> .....	77
4.3.3 <i>Participant observations</i> .....	77
4.3.4 <i>Behavioral observation</i> .....	78
4.3.5 <i>Tourist questionnaire survey</i> .....	80
4.4 TRANSCRIPTIONS .....	81
4.5 DATA ANALYSIS.....	81
4.5.1 <i>Qualitative data analysis</i> .....	81
4.5.1.1 Coding process.....	82
4.5.2 <i>Quantitative data analysis</i> .....	82

4.5.2.1 Behavioral observation.....	82
4.5.2.2 Tourist questionnaire survey.....	82
4.6 DATA PRESENTATION.....	83
4.7 CONCLUSION.....	83

**CHAPTER FIVE: HUMAN-DEER RELATIONSHIP AT MIYAJIMA**

**ISLAND: HISTORY, TOURISM DEVELOPMENT AND CHALLENGES ..... 85**

5. INTRODUCTION.....	85
5.1 HISTORY OF HUMAN-DEER INTERACTIONS.....	85
5.2 DEER AS A TOURISM ATTRACTION.....	93
5.3 HUMAN-DEER CONFLICT.....	98
5.4 MANAGEMENT OF HUMAN-DEER INTERACTIONS.....	98
5.5 CONFLICT OVER DEER MANAGEMENT: RESIDENTS, TOURISTS AND ACTIVISTS	102
5.5.1 Residents.....	103
5.5.2 Tourists.....	106
5.5.3 Activists and oppositions.....	113
5.6 CONCLUSION.....	114

**CHAPTER SIX: HUMAN-DEER RELATIONSHIP AT YAKUSHIMA**

**ISLAND: HISTORY, TOURISM DEVELOPMENT AND CHALLENGES ... 117**

6. INTRODUCTION.....	117
6.1 HISTORY OF HUMAN-DEER INTERACTION.....	117
6.2 DEER AS A TOURISM ATTRACTION.....	120
6.3 HUMAN-DEER CONFLICT.....	126
6.4 MANAGEMENT OF THE INCREASING DEER POPULATION.....	126
6.5 MANAGEMENT ISSUES AND CHALLENGES AT LOCAL LEVEL.....	129
6.5.1 Unwanted prey.....	129
6.5.2 Stakeholder conflict.....	130
6.5.3 Changing hunting practice.....	132
6.5.4 Discarded deer bodies.....	133
6.5.5 Disappearing deer.....	135
6.6 DEALING WITH UNCERTAINTY.....	138
6.6.1 Experts.....	138
6.6.2 Hunters.....	138
6.6.3 Tour guides.....	139
6.7 CONCLUSION.....	139

<b>CHAPTER SEVEN: DECONSTRUCTING DISCOURSES OF TWO CASE STUDIES, ENCOMPASSING DEER .....</b>	<b>141</b>
7. INTRODUCTION .....	141
7.1 REVISITING THE CONCEPT OF BOUNDARY .....	141
7.2 HOW DEER ARE FRAMED AS <i>WILD</i> .....	142
7.3 TRANSGRESSION OF THE BOUNDARIES .....	148
7.4 MANAGED TO BE <i>WILD</i> .....	150
7.5 BORDERLAND POLITICS .....	153
7.6 MORE THAN JUST A RESOURCE: EVIDENCE OF DEER AS AN ACTIVE AGENCY..	155
7.7 CONCLUSION .....	158
<b>CHAPTER EIGHT: CONCLUSION .....</b>	<b>161</b>
8. INTRODUCTION .....	161
8.1 SUMMARY AND FINDINGS .....	161
8.2 CONCLUSION .....	164
8.3 LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH .....	165
8.4 MOVING FORWARD .....	166
8.5 FINAL REMARK .....	167
<b>REFERENCES .....</b>	<b>169</b>
<b>APPENDIX A.....</b>	<b>195</b>
<b>APPENDIX B.....</b>	<b>203</b>

## **Dissertation Summary**

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. 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. The leading question that guided this research was, “What is the nature of human and deer boundaries at Japanese tourism destinations?”

### **Chapter One**

Chapter One introduced the reader to the starting point of the research by discussing recent developments in tourism in relation to NHAs, the problem statement, and the scope of the thesis and its objectives. Definitions of key terms were supplied to ensure that the intended meanings would be conveyed clearly.

### **Chapter Two**

Chapter Two offered a review of the relevant literature drawn from tourism, human-animal studies, and political ecology. The first two sections of the review looked at the historical background of wildlife tourism development while highlighting trends in wildlife tourism research from its initial stages to more recent years. Given the nature of this research that could split the opinion on the debate whether NHAs be granted for moral consideration, it was necessary to explain my

philosophical orientation first, and I did so in the third section of the chapter. In the following section, political ecology was introduced as a framework adopted for this thesis. In the last section before concluding the chapter, necessary background information about deer in Japan, wildlife management, and national park systems are introduced briefly.

### **Chapter Three**

Due to the scarcity of wildlife tourism studies in Japan, Chapter Three provides a comparative case study of wildlife management at two classic tourism destinations both known for free-ranging deer—Nara Park and Miyajima Island—in order to characterize wildlife tourism management practices. The findings of the case study provided the foundation for the present research.

### **Chapter Four**

Chapter Four explains the methodology adapted for this study. The chapter covers: the descriptions of study sites and the rationale for selecting them; fieldwork period; data collection methods, including interviews, literature and documentary sources, participant observations, behavioral observation and tourist questionnaire survey; transcriptions; data analysis; and presentation.

### **Chapter Five**

Chapter Five provided findings about Miyajima deer concerning their historical relationship with humans and how they are used and managed for tourism. The deer on Miyajima Island are symbolic figures for the island because humans and deer have shared the island space throughout their history. However, proliferation of the deer population in the 1960s and onwards together with tourism growth changed Miyajima landscape and the way the deer are treated. The management officials have attempted to decrease the deer population and lure the deer to the mountain by banning deer feeding in the residential area. Yet, opinions are split into two: one side supports the official management claim that the deer in Miyajima are *wild* while the other side argues against and claims that the deer are not purely *wild*. Furthermore, inability to completely eradicate deer feeding is making it difficult for officials to achieve their management goal. This conflict over the deer management was

examined through the framework of political ecology, and I showed that the human-deer relationships are multifaceted. There are layers of various stakeholder interests' entangled.

### **Chapter Six**

Chapter Six presented the findings of the Yakushima case study. Human-deer relationship has altered, as the way humans utilize the forest changed at Yakushima Island. More than 5,000 deer are hunted annually these days, as the deer became nuisance. An increase in hunting pressure has generated several issues that include injuring people and pets, territorial conflicts among hunters, changing traditional hunting practices, and discarding deer bodies in the mountain. In addition, a number of tour guides reported that they have stopped seeing the deer in the forest when they give a tour to tourists since a few years ago. The deer management was practiced under the interests of the management authority and botanists who had a strong incentive to value rare plant species and ecosystem and biodiversity protection, which was similar to Miyajima's case. Various stakeholders commonly mentioned that they are acting under uncertainty including the deer management committee members.

### **Chapter Seven**

Chapter Seven critically examined the discourses pertaining to deer of Miyajima Island and Yakushima Island and how humans draw boundaries between humans and deer at two tourism destinations by analyzing how the deer are perceived and framed as *wild* and give insight into the possible power structure. The common discourse sees humans as a cultural element and deer as a natural element, and separates them spatially and behaviorally. While humans can transgress into the 'deer's space,' deer's crossing the boundaries into the 'human's space' was regarded unnatural. Negative connotations are attached to the deer once the conflict was generated and the deer are managed to become *wild*, in which there is clearly double standard in such a practice. This chapter also attempts to show that deer are in fact an active agency, resisting management boundaries humans constructed and thus influencing the decisions we make.



## Chapter Eight

The nature of human-deer boundaries was explored in this thesis and Chapter Eight concluded that the abstract ‘caging’ (Norton, 1996) was at work at both Miyajima Island and Yakushima Island. It was through the discourse of *wild* that deer were caged into as humans’ imagined *wild* entity. The term, *wild*, has political power in the way that it frames deer into the socially constructed natural space and can allow humans to escape from our moral consideration of them. Tourism has been criticized for its anthropocentric focus, and ethical approach is needed to create less anthropocentric tourism landscapes, although such an alternative is not straightforward and requires a context-sensitive approach. The findings of this thesis supported for the importance of contextual approach, which was acknowledged throughout this thesis. Only when we understand situations that NHAs and humans are in, we are able to analyze the root cause of site-specific issues and morally justifiable decisions can be made.

## Publications

### 1. Publication arising from this thesis

Usui, R. & Funck, C. (2017). Not quite wild, but not domesticated either: contradicting management decisions on free-roaming sika deer (*Cervus nippon*) at two tourism sites in Japan. In I.B. Limar & R.J. Green (Eds.), *Wildlife tourism, environmental learning and ethical encounters, geoheritage, geoparks and geotourism* (pp. 247-261). Cham, Switzerland: Springer. (Peer-reviewed)

Usui, R. & Funck, C. (2017). Analysing food-derived interactions between tourists and sika deer (*Cervus nippon*) at Miyajima in Hiroshima, Japan: implications for the physical health of the deer in an anthropogenic environment. *Journal of Ecotourism*, 17(1), 67-78. (Peer-reviewed)

### 2. Other publications

[Peer-reviewed]

Usui, R., Wei, X., & Funck, C. (2017). The power of social media in regional tourism development: a case study from Ōkunoshima Island in Hiroshima, Japan. *Current Issues in Tourism*, 21(18), 2052-2056.

[Not peer-reviewed]

Usui, R. & Anindita, M.J. (2017). Assessing inbound tourism development at Mitarai district in Kure City, Hiroshima through employing a monitoring tour. *Proceedings of Japan Institute of Tourism Research*, 365-368.

Usui, R. & Funck, C. (2016). Feeding and begging interactions between tourists and deer at Miyajima Island in Hiroshima: an analysis based on field observations and questionnaire survey. *Japan Institute of Tourism Research*, 249-252.