

Gaps and Limitations - Contrasting Attitudes to Newcomers and Their Role in a Japanese Island Community

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Abstract: The historical harbor village of Mitarai on the island of Osakishimajima epitomizes the problem of social decline in Japan's Seto Inland Sea. This research focuses on both Mitarai's local community and the wider society. Through conducting a year-long survey of island residents, this research highlights how villagers expect to overcome the challenges relating to tourism development, maintenance of festivals and attracting in-migrants during a time when severe shrinkage, aging, and economic stagnation hinders all forms of community revitalization. Many residents wanted more people to know about Mitarai and its charms. The authors responded by creating an exhibition about Mitarai at the Hiroshima University Museum that promoted the town and the region to a young generation of students and other museum visitors. The results of a survey conducted among museum visitors showed how the exhibition increased awareness of Mitarai as a destination and respondents were more willing to support Mitarai's annual festival. However, they were less likely to relocate permanently to the island. The research on the island combined with the subsequent survey of museumgoers highlighted a disparity between the hopes of the community and the reality of the situation. This paper considers the recent emergence of in-migrants with a relational role in revitalization and commuters with small businesses aimed at both locals and tourists as the main mechanisms for overcoming social decline and bringing vitality back to the community.

Keywords: Relational Population, In-migrants, Community Revitalization, Declining Island, Rural Japan

Introduction

Like most peripheral island communities across the Japan's Seto Inland Sea, the village of Mitarai on the island of Osakishimajima (Fig. 1), suffers from severe depopulation, aging, and economic decline. Within the community's social structure, the younger generations are few and far between. The population as a whole is at risk of disappearing altogether in the coming decades. As with many other Japanese communities facing the real possibility of extinction, attracting in-migrants and developing tourism as an alternative industry have become topics of existential importance to Mitarai. Furthermore, as the serious depopulation taking place across rural Japan is widely considered a precursor of what other developed (or even developing) countries will face in the near future, the successful revitalization of communities like Mitarai through tourism would have significant implications both domestically and internationally.

The recent emergence of small businesses aimed at

tourists run by entrepreneurial newcomers is considered one of the main mechanisms for developing a new tertiary industry in the village, as well as bringing new vitality to the community. The current research framework for community revitalization employed by the Japanese government (defining visiting, relational, and stable populations)²⁾ provides a new way of approaching the subject. However, this static, spatial model based on a person's place of residence is limited in its ability to explain the more rapidly changing and nuanced dynamic of relational development in rural Japan. People with a relational role in a rural community often exhibit both insider and outsider traits. They might have a stable role within the community while facilitating the exchange of information and resources, connecting the region with Japanese urbanites and the international community. A better understanding of the dynamic is required, along with a more complete picture of the challenges faced by entrepreneurial in-migrants in sustaining their businesses in shrinking communities

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Fig. 1 The Location of Mitarai, Author' Illustration; Source of the Map^{a)}, Software QGIS^{b)}, authors' illustration
^{a)} Geospatial Information Authority of Japan (GSI). (2016). Global Map Japan. Retrieved October 25, 2019, from https://www.gsi.go.jp/kankyochiri/gm_japan_e.html
^{b)} QGIS Development Team. (2019). QGIS Geographic Information System. Retrieved January 14, 2020, from <http://qgis.osgeo.org>

(Koizumi, 2016, p. 141), or so-called marginal villages (*genkai shuraku* in Japanese) (Ohno, 2005). This paper aims to highlight the gap between the opinions of those living inside the rural community and those of young urbanites. The paper will also try to find aspects that could potentially bridge the divide.

The findings in this paper come from original mixed methods research that targeted residents in an aging community combined with action research through the creation of a special exhibition to promote Mitarai. The exhibition was held in a regional university museum and aimed to explore young people's reactions through a year-long participant observation study. This research explored community perceptions regarding the different challenges faced by in-migrants, small businesses aimed at tourists, and Mitarai's traditional festival. The results show the complexities of community revitalization in a time of severe shrinkage, aging, and economic stagnation. While highlighting positive trends in Mitarai, the findings also point to particular challenges. Specifically, Mitarai receives an inadequate number of visitors and in-migrants to sustain tourism-related businesses. On top of that, the type of new in-migrants preferred by the community differs greatly from what the community actually receives.

We examined the government definition of relational populations and their roles, focusing on both in-migrants and trans-migrants. We focused especially on how the relational population can be agents for change by facilitating social exchanges and creating small businesses. We decided on Mitarai in Osakishimojima as a case study for this research due to its strong population shrinkage and aging process that mirrors the issues faced by other rural islands and mountainous communities. The case we witnessed in Mitarai is likely to appear with increasing frequency across Japan, where opportunities for entrepreneurship in a shrinking peripheral community with potential for tourism attract a dynamic but unstable population of in-migrants who facilitate global-domestic, urban-rural, and/or inter-regional relational resource exchange, thereby effecting a more sustainable mode of tourism development and regional revitalization. This paper argues, for rural tourism and in-migrant studies, the conventionally understood duality of local/non-local or insider/outsider groups is not a suitable framework. The author instead suggests a new, dynamic framework typified by personal relationality, or rural entrepreneurs with complex origins and community ties, who are uniquely predisposed to leverage a relational role. These individuals can act as a bridge and encourage tourism

growth and community revitalization. In short, the diversity and variety of in-migrants is more important for island revitalization, relationality and connectivity than mere population figures.

Issues with visiting, relational, and stable populations in rural Japan

In contemporary rural Japan, disadvantaged communities are threatened by depopulation, aging, out-migration, and development stagnation. Matanle (2006, p. 173) has offered two possibilities for the future of rural Japan: either to continue the unsustainable capitalist pursuit of growth at all costs, or to adapt to a smaller, less consumptive, more sustainable condition. While a return to economic and population growth for most of peripheral Japan is unrealistic, initiatives to arrest shrinkage while boosting vitality offer these communities a future. Japan's regional communities recognize that attracting in-migrants is essential for a return to stability and invest heavily on promoting themselves to urban out-migrants (Kanai, 2016; Obikwelu et al., 2017). But rather than prioritize net population growth, something unachievable in nearly all cases, communities that instead focus on small, strategic gains that increase variety and vitality are better positioned to achieve long-term viability and avert collapse (Sasaki et al., 2014). Applied universally, this approach presents rural Japan with the possibility of future sustainability (Kanai, 2016).

Japanese studies most commonly consider urban-rural or "I-turn" in-migrants (Obikwelu et al., 2017) and "U-turn" in-migrants who moved to the city and then returned to their hometowns (Matanle, 2006, p. 151) as a local (villagers)-outsiders binary division. But less focus is placed on their networks and creative professions (Zollet and Qu, 2019) and the relational rurality (Heley and Jones, 2012). The pursuit of a new lifestyle is considered the main motivation for entrepreneurs to relocate to rural communities, who then maintain their new lives economically and support their families by creating new businesses (Akgün et al., 2011). Mixed businesses involving multiple industries and "creative professions" (Zollet and Qu, 2019, p. 4) are common in the Seto Inland Sea area. Around the world, lifestyle or amenity migration play a key role in social reform (Gosnell and Abrams, 2011; Paniagua, 2002).

Microbusinesses in rural regions are significant both culturally and economically, filling a void left by the decline of primary industries (Bosworth and Atterton, 2012). "Post-productivist" or "multifunctional" landscapes attract in-migration that in turn brings about social restructuring due to shifts in ownership, usage and management of rural land, as well as in new socioeconomic activities (Gosnell and Abrams, 2011). The value of in-migrant businesses in rural Japan is best expressed through evaluation of in-migrants' own characteristics within the phenomenon of the "disappearing community" (Kanai, 2016, p. 6), where rapidly shrinking communities can no longer maintain their social function. As local populations decline and local entrepreneurship stagnates, the influence of in-migrant entrepreneurs grows proportionately and more radical change occurs (Akgün et al., 2011).

Typical local/non-local dualism groups people as either insiders (e.g., local farmers) or outsiders (usually tourists) (Daugstad, 2008). Much research considers in-migrants as belonging to the outsider group (Gosnell and Abrams, 2011, p. 310). As part of efforts to alleviate problems associated with its shrinking society, the Japanese government introduced a new term, "relational population,"²⁾ as a bridge between the insider ("stable") and outsider ("visiting") groups (Fig. 2). This relational group contains people who are neither within the stable population, which includes long-term and in-migrant residents, nor within the visiting population, i.e. tourists. The government divided the relational population into four types: people who come and go, people who have some connection (e.g. used to work in this area, stayed there for some time), people who have roots in that area and live nearby, and people who have roots in that area and live faraway.

This framework attempts to expand the previous insider/outsider dichotomy. However, the 'Relational Population' category dilutes the importance of each attribute mentioned within its range. There are many cases where an in-migrant who falls within the stable population bracket also performs roles considered to be relational (Heley and Jones, 2012). This articulates the dynamic or periodic nature of social connections brought about by new patterns of in-migration, exemplified by global-domestic/urban-rural networks and resource exchanges. After relocating to and establishing

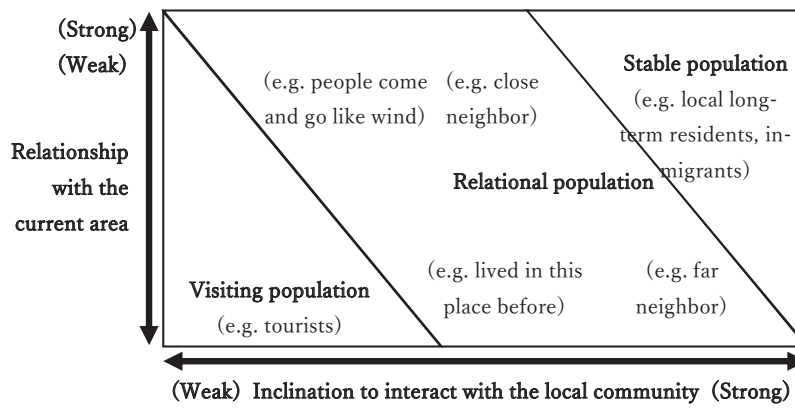


Fig. 2 Framework of “Relational Population”²⁾, authors’ translation

themselves within rural communities, entrepreneurial in-migrants play key roles in the region’s societal advancement through tourism (Paniagua, 2002). They leverage their knowledge, skills, and complex relational networks to establish businesses that appeal to tourists from the cities while enriching local social dynamics. This is something inadequately expressed in the existing frameworks.

Similar to the problems with insider/outsider, local/non-local, and urban/rural dichotomies, Bosworth and Atterton (2012) argue that evaluating rural transformation via top-down/bottom-up models is unsuitable and simplistic. Instead, a network-based, relational method of analysis that emphasizes links between “local” and the “extra-local” is a far more useful tool for examining in-migrant entrepreneurs (Bosworth and Atterton, 2012). With this method, it is possible to shift the Japanese government’s problematic ‘relational population’ into a practical “local/local” (Duval, 2004, p. 96) framework.

In an effort to further this more dynamic approach, the author suggests a new, overarching and flexible structure for understanding new rural entrepreneurs: highlight the relationality of in-migrants rather than limiting ourselves to the relational population. In-migrants also function in some way as a bridge between the fixed rural locale in question and any number of other locations, cultures, and societies. Relational individuals can include weekly or seasonal in-migrants as well as commuters. People who are motivated by an idealistic vision of bringing positive change to the community, not simply by economic pragmatism. This framework supplements rather than replaces the others discussed previously. For the purposes of this article, the author will use existing terminology while considering

how the particular qualities of relationality impact the community and how they are received by its inhabitants.

Case Study: Mitarai

Mitarai has plenty of cultural, historical and aesthetic appeal. It sits on the eastern end of Osakishimajima island, located in the Seto Inland Sea between Hiroshima Prefecture and Ehime Prefecture. Mitarai forms part of Yutakamachi Town, which is administered by Kure City in Hiroshima Prefecture. Yutakamachi’s history can be traced back to 901 AD⁴⁾. Due to Mitarai’s favorable geographic location as a natural protective harbor against the winds and strong tides of the Seto Inland Sea, the village developed rapidly into a port and a sea transportation hub during the Edo period (Tsuchiya, 2012, p. 96; Wu and Suzuki, 1994, p. 230). In addition, Mitarai cultivated a flourishing prostitution and prostitute entertainment business along the so-called “flower street” between 1900 and 1958 (Kato, 2009). However, the need for shipping in the Seto Inland Sea to sail with the tides diminished after the introduction of modern mechanical vessels. Mitarai’s port gradually lost its importance and its economic prosperity dwindled (Kato, 2009, p. 110). Though much quieter today, Mitarai can boast a unique culture and local practices. One such practice involves residents decorating the doorways of the houses every morning with fresh flower arrangements. In recent years, Mitarai has shifted from shipbuilding and citrus production to developing its tourist industry (Tsuchiya, 2012, p. 96, 105).

When deciding where to live, in-migrants often express a preference for places with a strong and a well-preserved cultural or environmental identity (Paniagua,

2002). In this regard, Mitarai is perhaps better positioned than many. As a place of rich historical significance, Mitarai was officially designated as a national cultural property in 1994, labelled an “Important Preservation Districts for Groups of Traditional Buildings” (in Japanese it is referred to as *Judenken* for short)¹⁾.

Osakishimojima is connected to nearby islands and to the mainland via a series of bridges called the Akinada Tobishima Sea Route (Akinada Tobishima Kaido in Japanese). The bridges were erected in stages and the construction of the final bridge was completed in 2008. While the village’s cultural property status brought it newfound attention, the construction of the bridges was critical to Mitarai’s potential as a new tourist destination

(Tsuchiya, 2012).

However, Mitarai’s favorable qualities have not exempted it from the challenges facing all rural communities in Japan. The Hiroshima Prefectural Government’s official website⁵⁾ classified Osakishimojima and nearby islands as depopulated regions (*kaso chiiki*). The population pyramid of Yutakamachi (Fig. 3), indicating that 67.4 percent of residents are more than 65 years old and the number of adults of working age between 20 and 60 years old is shrinking, placing it among the most severely depopulated areas in Kure City³⁾. Significantly, 31.1 percent of Mitarai’s residents are more than 80 years old. Mitarai’s population has declined steadily (Fig. 4),

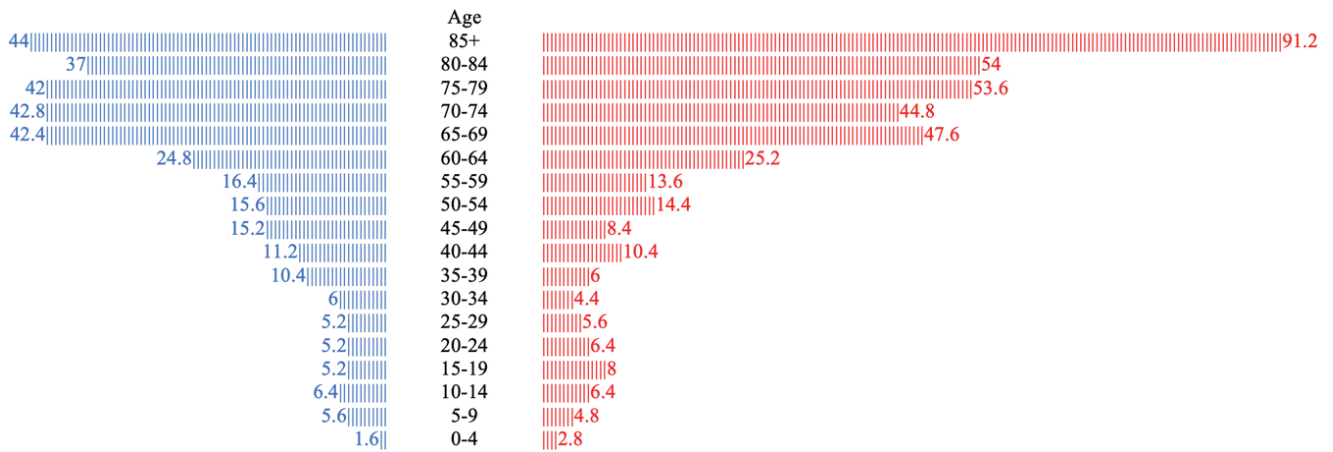


Fig. 3 Population Pyramid of Yutakamachi^{a)}, Osakishimojima 2018³⁾, authors’ calculation and illustration
^{a)} The left side represents male, and the right side represents female population

Demographic change in Mitarai (2005-2018)

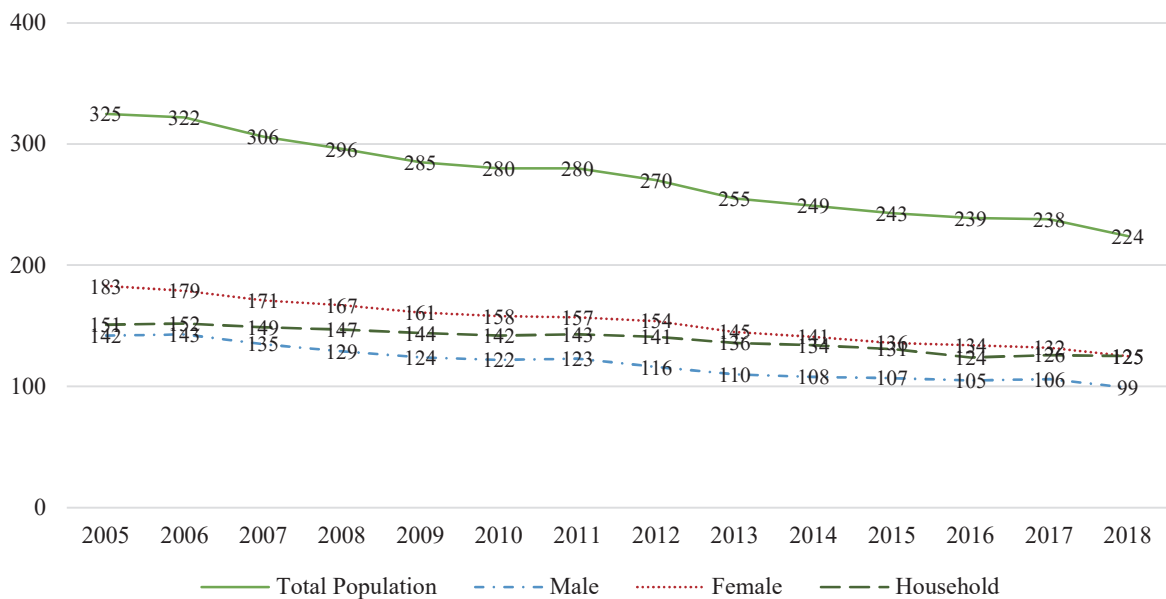


Fig. 4 Population change in Mitarai³⁾, authors’ calculation and illustration

dropping by almost a third in the last 12 years. As these dire trends illustrate, without in-migrants and newborns to fill the population gap, the cultural aspects that make Mitarai so special might be lost forever.

Methodological Framework

The overall research consists of two major fieldwork studies of relational approach covering both insiders on the island and outsiders from urban areas. It is impossible to acquire a clear picture of the relationality of the urban-rural dynamic merely by focusing on the island community. The first stage of fieldwork study is a community insider survey conducted in Mitarai using convergent design mixed methods (Creswell, 2017). It attempts to explore the most urgent community needs for both old and new residents and Mitarai's festival participants. The second stage is a Participatory Action Research (Creswell, 2017) based on the community's needs. It involves creating and promoting an exhibition about Mitarai while conducting an outsider visitor survey. The mixed method aims to collect as much data as possible but with higher quality under limited conditions. Mixed methods and action research approaches offer highly comprehensive ways to understand the challenges faced by the community, the festival, and in-migrants, from the perspective of a range of stakeholders. By examining the views of both insiders and outsiders, it is possible to isolate and compare competing demands and mismatched expectations.

The first stage of mixed methods (Creswell, 2017) fieldwork included quantitative approaches such as questionnaire and qualitative methods such as interviews. The questionnaire surveyed 106 respondents during the annual festival (July 28th, 2018) of which 72 respondents were residents observing the festival. Only residents' responses were used for the analysis. Some of the questions asked for respondents to record their opinions on the type of newcomers Mitarai needs/is willing to receive. The Yagura Festival held on July 28th, 2018, is Mitarai's largest traditional Shinto festival in the calendar year. During the festival, a wooden *yagura* scaffold containing two drummers is carried through the village. For the participants, this is a feat of strength and endurance. Since there are not enough able-bodied locals to carry the scaffold, community members invited the author to participate in the festival and help with the

task. In the qualitative step we targeted long-term residents (n=10) and in-migrants (n=6) who moved to Mitarai within the last 10 years and relational personal who created businesses on the island (n=4). They were asked their opinions on the future development of the community and its challenges through 20 semi/unstructured interviews, community meetings with local long-term residents, and in-migrants of various types. The authors translated all Japanese interview recordings into English before using them in this study. All interview data was processed via content analysis, which includes open coding, axial coding (community development, challenges, depopulation, in-migrant, tourism issues) and selective coding on the theme of tourism, festival, and in-migrants.

After the local festival, the author gained a deep appreciation for the needs and desires of community members, many of whom wished to attract more tourists, maintain the festival and receive more in-migrants. The second part of the fieldwork involved a period of action research centered around the organization of a special exhibition to promote Mitarai at Hiroshima University Museum. The exhibition was held between December 14th, 2018 and March 3rd, 2019. The exhibition, entitled "Nature, History, Culture, Art - Rethinking the Island's Soul of Mitarai, Osakishimojima", combined presentations of academic results from project fieldwork with artwork created by Mitarai's creative in-migrants. Beyond presenting Mitarai to visitors, the exhibition was an opportunity to gather insights into what might attract visitors and migrants to the village and thereby facilitate its revitalization. The exhibition questionnaire gathered more speculative feedback regarding what might attract young people to Mitarai in the future, asking if they were willing to visit Mitarai, participate in the local festival or migrate to the village. To this end, the author collected 396 questionnaires from exhibition visitors (Table 1).

The research is clearly limited by the sample groups for all questionnaire surveys. Specifically, it is challenging to gather data from elderly residents of Mitarai, who are often unable or unwilling to answer questionnaires, particularly due to poor health and bad eyesight. Therefore, the author's data was restricted to the local festival participants at a time when the greatest concentration of local residents could be found. However, the qualitative finding balanced this weakness

Table 1 Characteristics of respondents from both the community festival survey (July 28th, 2018) and the exhibition of “Nature, History, Culture and Art” in Hiroshima University Museum (December 18th, 2018 to March 3rd, 2019), authors’ calculation

		Residents from local festival survey		Exhibition visitors	
		Frequency (n=72)	Percentage (%)	Frequency (n=369)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	30	41.7	203	55.0
	Female	42	58.3	166	45.0
	Non-response	0	0.0	0	0.0
Age groups	10~19	1	1.4%	42	11.4
	20~29	3	4.2%	127	34.4
	30~39	7	9.7%	59	16.0
	40~49	11	15.3%	52	14.1
	50~59	10	13.9%	40	10.8
	60~69	11	15.3%	36	9.8
	70~79	10	13.9%	12	3.3
	80~89	15	20.8%	1	0.3
	90+	4	5.6%	0	0.0
	Non-response	0	0.0	0	0.0
Place of residence for Japanese; Nationality for Non-Japanese	Japanese within Hiroshima Prefecture		269	72.9	
	Japanese outside of Hiroshima Prefecture		60	16.3	
	Non-Japanese nationals		40	10.8	
	Non-response		0	0.0	

through interview with them. For the action research outside Mitarai, the author’s exhibition venue necessarily limited respondents to visitors to the Hiroshima University Museum. However, the results were considered adequate given the intention of the author to collect the opinions of younger people, as most museum visitors were young people.

Findings

Community insider – not enough tourists, festival supporters, and in-migrants

All interview respondents felt strongly about the dire situation regarding depopulation, aging, and the resulting social inconveniences. Social inconveniences included declining transportation networks and diminished infrastructure - fewer schools, hospitals and shopping facilities. Respondents believed Mitarai was lacking three things: there were not enough people, not enough efforts to attract tourists (a lack of promotion), and not enough in-migrants. Because of the lack of people in the community, there was not enough manpower to sustain local infrastructure and the maintain the traditional festival. The long-term elderly residents (often the parents of Mitarai’s out-migrants) maintained the hope that their children would eventually return home. However, many acknowledged that this was unlikely to happen. Most of the younger respondents believed it was impossible to turn back the clock and

make the community what it once was.

“It’s increasingly difficult to maintain social and cultural practices. Festivals that take a lot of manpower are difficult to maintain. Already the island has seen some festivals disappear for lack of manpower.” (in-migrant with business)

Respondents offered insights about the local Shinto Yagura Festival (Fig. 5), which could only continue with the help of an extended network of participants from neighboring communities and out-migrants who returned to Mitarai just for holidays and the festival. While participating in the Yagura Festival, the author observed less than 20 percent of local residents took center stage in this event. The most important local event in the calendar was already shifting key roles, bringing in outsiders to become core players while locals, especially elderly locals, became spectators.

“We would of course benefit from the region’s revitalization if it became famous as a tourist destination, a lot of people would come and a lot of people would see it, and I would like to see the region become more and more lively.” (commuter with business)

Most of the small businesses have several common attributes: 1) creative design, 2) innovative ideas on how



Fig. 5 Yagura festival in Mitarai (July 28th, 2018), Photo by Swagata Das

to attract visitors, 3) relational connection with nearby urban cities and resources. However, actual and potential in-migrants and commuters to Mitarai find opening new tourism businesses to be troublesome. After Mitarai was designated a cultural property, the government began providing subsidies for renovating old houses, with the work done by a community group called the *Judenken o kangaeru kai* (Historical Preservation Group). But the subsidies only cover exterior renovations, and Mitarai lacks an efficient share-house system seen in other communities that would allow in-migrants to settle temporarily during renovation work. In other words, Mitarai's incentives are not well positioned to attract in-migrants, and instead focus on renovating the aesthetic attributes of vacant houses to attract tourists. Some respondents suggested a lack of government support systems likely caused some young in-migrants who moved to Mitarai to move out again and return back to their cities. Responses indicate that Mitarai lacks any real promotion efforts sufficient to attract both tourists and young in-migrants to open businesses. In reality, more than half of local businesses are run by people who commute between Mitarai and a city nearby. Small businesses perceive they receive little support from their government in terms of policy and promotion. Most stakeholders in Mitarai's tourist industry and some local residents believed tourism could be the right path for revitalizing Mitarai. However, they consider the main issue is not attracting enough visitors rather than focusing on getting tourists to spend more money when they are in Mitarai. Elaborating on this point, one respondent with a business reliant on Mitarai's tourist trade mentioned:

“Normally we need 3 or 4 times more tourists to fit our business requirement, but I believe instead of attracting 100 more tourists to the town, it is better to attract 10 tourists that are willing to pay more money during their visit.” (long-term resident)

Besides business, the consensus among those who have moved to the island is that the positive aspects relating to lifestyle outweigh any negatives. In-migrants praise Mitarai's attractive natural scenery, good food, slow pace of life, low cost of living and affordable property. Furthermore, many of these factors offer favorable conditions for creating businesses aimed at tourists. When asked to relate their understanding of revitalization to Mitarai's future prospects, many in-migrant respondents highlighted the top-down issue of a lack of local government policy and financial support. The successful neighboring island of Osakikamijima was often mentioned by respondents. Respondents said Osakikamijima have received hundreds of in-migrants due to better local government policy and support, well-established high-speed internet connectivity, and an effective share-house system to provide temporary accommodation for newcomers looking for opportunities on the island.

The authors found that local long-term residents held mixed opinions about tourism development in the village. In general, the relationships between this group and in-migrants were positive. However, one seasonal in-migrant mentioned that long-term locals were not willing to sell houses to people looking to establish businesses aimed at tourists. This study showed while local elders do not want vacant houses to be used for private tourism development, they do not have a better alternative to prevent these old houses falling into disrepair and collapsing. Aside from the new businesses aimed exclusively for tourists, some businesses also cater to the community as a whole. Some of these businesses provide discounts for locals, create art workshops and set up English schools that are appreciated by the entire community. During participant observation, the author found that local elderly people clearly favored businesses that made efforts to serve both locals and tourists. In contrast, businesses that exclusively targeted tourists were looked on unfavorably

by locals.

“The islanders love having new shops to visit. Although there’s a distinction between making businesses aimed at tourists and catering for locals. You might hear grumblings if they think you’re just aiming your business at tourists to make a profit.”
(tourist trade business owner, in-migrant)

In the community questionnaire survey, we asked what type of in-migrants residents wanted in Mitarai. The respondents showed a preference for young I-turn and U-turn migrants (Fig. 6). There is no expressed bias towards or against Japanese newcomers from within versus outside the region, nor a bias for or against foreigners, whether from developing or developed countries. Only 4.2 percent mentioned that they wanted more commuters to Mitarai, indicating a clear preference for full-time residents. There was significant statistical difference on option 8 “Young people” between age and gender by crosstabulation with Chi-square in SPSS. Here, 85.7 percent of female respondents want more young in-migrants to the island compared with 63.3 percent of the male group ($p \leq 0.05$). The age groups between 30 to 39 (85.7 percent) and 50 to 59 (100 percent) show more concern on receiving young people compared with less than 66.7 percent for other age groups ($p \leq 0.05$). In the open-ended section of the survey, respondents provided more information about their preferred types of in-migrants. Preferences included in-

migrants between 20 and 40 years old, with occupations such as farmers or self-employed owners of business geared towards tourists.

By combining qualitative data from interviews with participant observation, it became clear that promotion of Mitarai as a destination gradually increased its visitor numbers. Although all respondents believed the current numbers of tourists are not enough to sustain Mitarai’s tourist industry, the relational role of in-migrants and trans-migrants could be the key to a more sustainable form of development. The community believes the need for newcomers is a pressing issue. They prefer to have stable U-turn migrants, but this is unlikely to happen in the near future and it will take time for local residents to acknowledge this fact. By comparing the approaches of all the small businesses in Mitarai, it is clear a newcomer who can adopt a strategy that aims to capture the tourist trade while being local-friendly will enjoy a quicker path to community integration.

Overall, the mixed method results indicate that residents favor an approach to community revitalization that reduces the speed of depopulation by attracting newcomers to live on the island and promote tourism development while maintaining infrastructure and local identity. The author’s participation in the Yagura Festival revealed there is not enough local manpower to maintain this traditional event, putting this aspect of local culture in danger. Therefore, attracting in-migrants, maintaining local events and developing tourism are high on Mitarai’s agenda.

Which type of newcomer does Mitarai need? (Multiple answers, n=72)

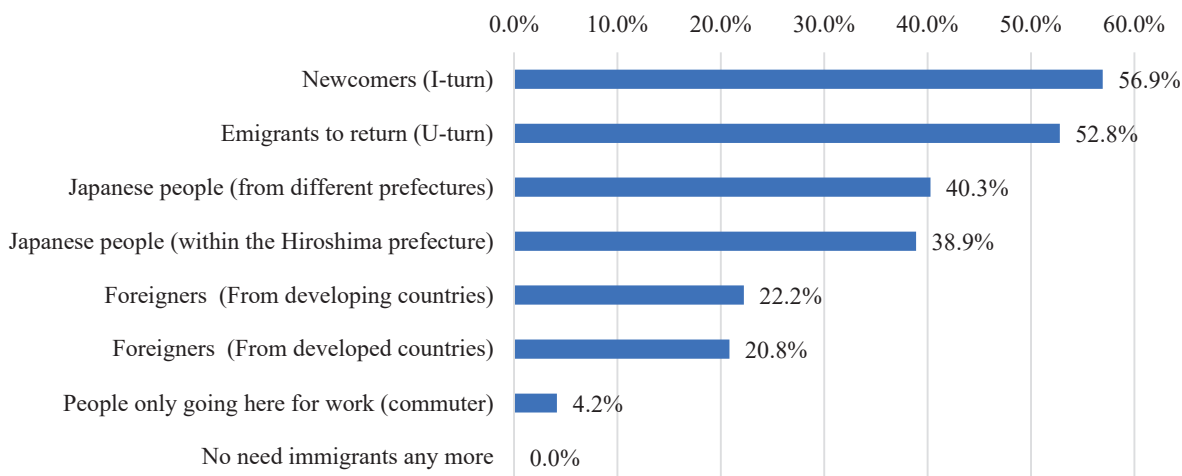


Fig. 6 Answers to the question, “Which type of newcomer does Mitarai need?” from the survey during the Yagura Festival in Mitarai (July 28th, 2018), authors’ calculation and illustration

Urban outsider – great to visit Mitarai, some willing to help with the festival, but fewer wish to become in-migrants

For collecting outsider’s opinion, we conducted a survey at the Hiroshima University Museum to include people who live close to but never visited Mitarai. During its three-and-a-half-month run in the Hiroshima University Museum, the special exhibition introducing the island’s nature, history, culture, art and academic research received 1046 visitors (Fig. 7). From the exhibition questionnaire survey (n=369) (Table 1), more than half of the respondents were between 20 and 40 years old, the age demographic considered ideal for young in-migrants by Mitarai’s residents. When asked what they found most attractive about Mitarai, 76.2 percent mentioned nature, with culture and history also found to be appealing (Fig. 8).



Fig. 7 Special exhibition – Nature, History, Culture and Art of Mitarai, Rethinking the Island’s Soul of Mitarai, Osaki-Shimajima in Hiroshima University Museum (December 18th, 2018 to March 3rd, 2019), Photo by Meng Qu

There was a significant statistical difference between the different residential statuses of respondents and their interest in Mitarai (as assessed by Chi-square, SPSS). It shows respondents who live in Hiroshima Prefecture and foreigners had a stronger positive response to art and academic research about Mitarai compared to Japanese respondents who live outside of the Hiroshima region (p≤0.05) (Table 2).

There is 84 percent of respondents expressed an interest in visiting Mitarai, 61.2 percent were willing to participate in local festivals, and 30.4 percent had an interest in migrating to an island (Fig. 9). There was a significant statistical difference between different types of residential status and nationalities among exhibition visitors (as assessed by Chi-square, SPSS). The respondents from Hiroshima Prefecture and foreigners had stronger positive responses to all questions compared with Japanese respondents from outside Hiroshima Prefecture (Table 3). This was especially the case regarding the question of their willingness to migrate to the island (p≤0.05). We also found Japanese respondents living in Hiroshima Prefecture were the keenest to support Mitarai’s festival. (p≤0.05). From the open-ended portion of the questionnaire, respondents elaborated on their reasons for or against a speculative move to the island in the future.

For respondents who answered “Yes, I want to go” (n=112, 30.4%), important factors included the attractiveness of the island’s landscape, seascape and climate, which were mentioned by 11.1 percent of people. Lifestyle (6 percent) and regional culture (3 percent) were also highlighted. For respondents who

What interested you about Mitarai? (Multiple answers, n=369)

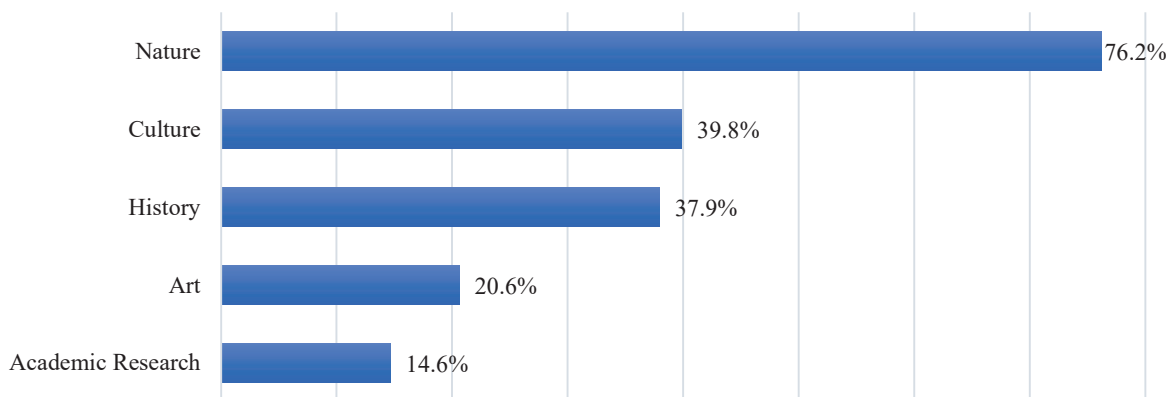


Fig. 8 Answer to the question, “What interested you about Mitarai?” (December 18th, 2018 to March 3rd, 2019), authors’ calculation and illustration

Table 2 Cross tabulation result (Chi-square) with residential status, authors' calculation

	0 = Unselected 1 = Selected	Hiroshima Pref	Respondents Outside of Hiroshima Pref	Foreigners	Total
Art ($p \leq 0.03$)	0 Count	214	56	23	293
	% Total	58.0 %	15.2 %	6.2 %	79.4 %
	1 Count	55	4	17	76
	% Total	14.9 %	1.1 %	4.6 %	20.6 %
Academic Research ($p \leq 0.00$)	0 Count	214	56	23	293
	% Total	58.0 %	15.2 %	6.2 %	79.4 %
	1 Count	55	4	17	76
	% Total	14.9 %	1.1 %	4.6 %	20.6 %
	Total Count	269	60	40	369
	% Total	72.9 %	16.3 %	10.8 %	100.0 %

Are you willing to come to Mitarai after seeing the exhibition? (n=369)

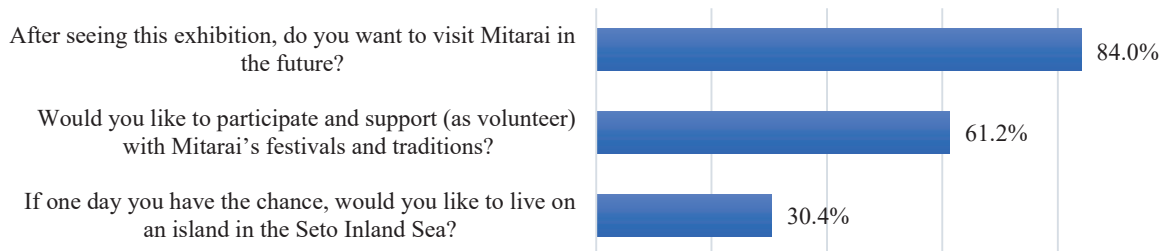


Fig. 9 Answer to the question, "Are you willing to come to Mitarai after seeing the exhibition?" (December 18th, 2018 to March 3rd, 2019), authors' calculation and illustration

Table 3 Cross tabulation result (Chi-square) with residential status, authors' calculation

	0 = No response 1 = Yes, I want to go 2 = No, I am not interested	Hiroshima Pref	Respondents Outside of Hiroshima Pref	Foreigners	Total
After seeing this exhibition, do you want to visit Mitarai in the future? ($p \leq 0.01$)	1 Count	225	45	40	310
	% Total	61.0 %	12.2 %	10.8 %	84.0 %
	2 Count	44	15	0	59
	% Total	11.9 %	4.1 %	0.0 %	100.0 %
Would you like to participate and support (as volunteer) with Mitarai's festivals and traditions? ($p \leq 0.04$)	1 Count	164	28	34	226
	% Total	44.4 %	7.6 %	9.2 %	61.2 %
	2 Count	105	32	6	143
	% Total	28.5 %	8.7 %	4.2 %	38.8 %
If one day you have the chance, would you like to live on an island in the Seto Inland Sea? ($p \leq 0.03$)	0 Count	1	0	0	1
	% Total	0.3 %	0.0 %	0.0 %	0.3 %
	1 Count	72	17	23	112
	% Total	19.5 %	4.6 %	6.2 %	30.4 %
	2 Count	196	43	17	256
	% Total	53.1 %	11.7 %	4.6 %	69.4 %
	Total Count	269	60	40	369
	% Total	72.9 %	16.3 %	10.8 %	100.0 %

answered "No, I am not interested" (n=256, 69.4 percent), 13.6 percent of them mentioned that they aren't interested in a life change. Aside from this group, issues such as the perceived inconvenience of island living (8.4 percent), bad transportation (6.5 percent) and a lack of jobs (4.6 percent) were considered the major barriers to a new life on the island. Additionally, respondents' internal barriers included insecurities about the possibility of

establishing relationships with locals (1.9 percent) and loneliness (0.5 percent). There were some respondents (5.8 percent) who mentioned that they only wanted to visit Mitarai as tourists but didn't want to live there. Another 3.3 percent of respondents mentioned they already lived on an island. Only 0.8 percent of respondents expressed interested in establishing a business on an island but not living there, or a similar

situation.

From our observation research of visitors to the exhibition, the photographs, artwork and promotion video heightened the visitor's interest in visiting Mitarai. The author also met a number of Hiroshima University students who visited Mitarai after seeing the exhibition. A few students even made Mitarai the focus of their own research. This highlights the ripple effect of action research, connecting an urban university with a rural island community.

The gap and limitation between in and out, stable and dynamic

The exhibition survey indicates the potential future in-migration by urban youth is high (30.4%). This action study proves promotion through documentary, artwork, and academic exhibition attracts tourists, festival volunteers and supporters, leading the way to potential migration, rural-urban regional cooperation and socio-cultural exchange. This multifaceted research linking researchers, the university museum and the island community can be another confirmation of the importance of in-migrants being agents for change. This study found that younger generations and foreigners who live in urban areas within the same region have a higher chance of becoming in-migrants compared to those who live outside the prefecture.

The community research highlighted challenges faced by in-migrants. They included how insiders/locals strongly preferred in-migrants (I-turn and U-turn) to be a stable population rather than focusing on the easier option of attracting mobile and relational commuter in-migrants. To attract enough in-migrants to live in Mitarai to make a difference, the community must provide better living conditions and accommodation. The exhibition survey demonstrated how Mitarai still has potential to improve its current tourist trade and attract more younger in-migrants from urban areas.

Current local government policy focuses less on in-migrants and more on tourism development. Their strategy is also to attract more tourists rather than target tourists with higher spending power. The exhibition showed how tourism promotion plays an effective role in attracting potential visitors and/or festival supporters to Mitarai. The results also indicate the likelihood that Mitarai would receive a highly dynamic and relational

population of tourists/visitors. From a tourism development perspective, it is interesting to note that more than 80 percent of businesses aimed at the tourist trade in Mitarai have been established by in-migrants. Of those business owners, nearly half are relational and mobile – commuters, seasonal in-migrants, trans-migrants and other types of community supporters. In Mitarai, both relational individuals and in-migrants play key roles in developing tourism and ensuring long-term community sustainability. Rather than staying within the government's arbitrary boundaries of "stable" and "unstable" populations, they have formed strong networks and worked together. Unfortunately, the largely conservative aging community seems unaware of this dynamic. This situation could threaten Mitarai's chances of attaining resilience and a sustainable future. In-migrants and commuters come with innovative ideas that can create real change and improve the community.

When a community is able to adapt and change, that community becomes better equipped to sustain its culture and events. This change cannot occur without the involvement of local residents (Akgün et al., 2011). However, residents should not be expected to embrace instability out of hand for the sake of tourism development. These businesses aimed at tourists also form part of the community and if they invest prudently in local infrastructure and improved social interactions, they would go a long way towards securing the support of residents (Kim et al., 2013). In the case of Mitarai, some businesses benefited both locals and tourists, however, some did not regardless of whether they were set up by in-migrants or commuters. Although the businesses contribute to furthering tourism development, they differ in how they improve ties and benefit the community in general. But one thing is certain, small businesses geared towards tourism attract groups of creative, dedicated young people. Mitarai exemplifies how looking through the lens of relationality is more nuanced and impactful than viewing populations as stable entities.

Relationality, creativity and connectivity as a changemaker

By agreeing with Hui and Walker's relational theories for relational times in rural study (Hui and Walker, 2018), we found both relationality and creativity

are more important than stability in Mitarai's case. Even though the island community finds an unstable population harder to accept, an unstable population playing an important role in the community is more beneficial than a stable population that does not contribute.

Bosworth and Atterton (2012) demonstrated that new development should not be limited to rural scenarios. As demonstrated in Mitarai, increased immigration and a rise in people with relationality should lead to the development of new tourism-related businesses. These individuals have the flexibility that allows movement of tangible resource networks and intangible exchanges such as social connections, culture and knowledge from location to location. Through seasonality, periodicity, mobility and social bonds, they share characteristics with cross-national, second-home migrants (Akgün et al., 2011). This blurs the boundaries between rigid inside/outside, global/urban/rural, or I-turn/U-turn frameworks. The relational, mobile and connectivity of people continues to facilitate the creation of new social capital and cultural exchanges, benefiting both tourism-building and community welfare. These individuals can thus be considered valuable as potential vectors for revitalization.

From a "relational population" framework as shown in Figure 2, the "stable population" group includes both local long-term residents and in-migrants, while relationality can indicate both relational and stable populations. This research argues real relational thinking should not mix and limit the dynamic relational concept of connectivity and mobility, confusing it with the static concept of fixed residence as location. However, this research found that relational people, both commuter and in-migrants can play key roles for change, implementing tourism-making as well as community revitalization efforts. In Mitarai, due to the ease of access afforded by the bridge to the mainland and other transportation, sometimes businesses run by commuters or seasonal in-migrants are more stable than those run by in-migrants, who may live off the island for months at a time, despite being considered an example of the 'stable' local population by the government. Although the government's static groupings are important and convenient for demographic statistics, they are insufficient when explaining the constant interactions

and exchange of resources characteristic to in-migrants. Relational individuals play an active role in the community revitalization process, displaying a self-employed working style, creativity, innovation, social connections, networking and transregional mobility. This dynamic underscores how the contributions by migrants and local entrepreneurs to natural and human capital in super-aging societies bear no meaningful difference (Akgün et al., 2011). While not considered 'stable', or even matching the ideal preferred by locals, the particular in-betweenness of relational individuals can be a tremendous advantage to communities. In short, rather than purely adding numbers to a super-aging island, a community like Mitarai needs relational change-makers with high-quality abilities to combat stagnation with innovative change.

Conclusion

This article grew out of a series of action-based mixed research projects conducted by the author to encompass a multifarious assessment of the challenges faced by relational tourism-based entrepreneurs to put down roots in a declining island community and bring about revitalization. For understanding both the depth and breadth of the situation, this research examines opinions from both insiders and outsiders. The findings suggest government policies should ensure tourism-based entrepreneurs can establish themselves in ways that benefit themselves as well as the community (Kanai, 2016). Further, local stakeholders must learn to appreciate the potential of not only stable but also relational individuals and not insist on a narrow (and likely impossible) quest to attract exclusively young, traditional in-migrants.

Rural tourism development resulting in an increase of relational individuals and a rise in businesses catering to tourists but not locals, may not be what community members expected. However, to the extent that these changes herald the start of a new tertiary industry, they bring resilience for all parties over time. New tensions should not prompt a restart from scratch, but rather a process of re-understanding, re-presentation and renewed thinking, with ever-evolving implementations that are based on current ideas—in other words, respecting the subjectivity of the community. A balanced approach to facilities mutual understanding is the final goal between

both long-term and new resident, modeling both resilience and sustainability.

The exhibition survey demonstrated the current advantages for Mitarai include its natural island scenery, historical legacy, culture and other attractions. It holds potential for further development while preserving its living culture such as the local Yagura Festival. The exhibition proved the need and the importance of promoting a location to attract regional and international tourists as well as potential newcomers. Challenges that face Mitarai include its super-aging society, a lack of in-migrants, a low number of tourists particularly on weekdays, and a lack of activities for tourists once they arrive. Additionally, tourism promotion efforts currently fail to target younger generations and inbound tourists. Finally, improvements to the current transportation system and other necessary infrastructure will benefit both tourists and residents.

This research and its implications are critical not only for the islands of the Seto Inland Sea, but for declining communities across rural Japan. To gain new insights on the issues surrounding the revitalization processes in Mitarai and other islands, further studies focusing on emerging changes in the community are needed. This could include focusing on the reshaping of traditional events and the emergence of an art festival. Additionally, future studies could turn their attention to Mitarai's neighboring communities, characterized by their perceived lower cultural attractiveness. This would help to better evaluate whether one community's particular qualities can become the driving force for creative regional revitalization. Like one island respondent said:

"To me, revitalization is creating a resilience or an innovative solution that will endure or even prosper under the current pressures of depopulation and aging. It will be impossible to 'stop the clock' or reverse these trends to the situation in the past where thousands of people lived on this island. But I think there is an opportunity here to create something different, while still supporting the traditions and the way of life of the community. Revitalization is doing something that benefits the community and at the same time enables your chosen way of life." (in-migrant with business)

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Appendix

Appendix A. Questionnaire in Mitarai

Questionnaire for Mitarai Resident	
(1) Gender:	1. Male 2. Female
(2) Age:	· 10-19 · 20-29 · 30-39 · 40-49 · 50-59 · 60-69 · 70-79 · 80 and above
(3) Where do you live?	_____ (Country) _____ Prefecture _____ Municipality / City
(4) Which type of newcomer does Mitarai need? (Multiple choice)	<input type="checkbox"/> Newcomer (I turn) <input type="checkbox"/> Emigrants to return (U turn) <input type="checkbox"/> People only going here for work <input type="checkbox"/> Japanese (within the Hiroshima prefecture) <input type="checkbox"/> Japanese (outside the prefecture) <input type="checkbox"/> Foreigners (developed countries) <input type="checkbox"/> Foreigners (developing countries) <input type="checkbox"/> Young people <input type="checkbox"/> No need immigrants any more <input type="checkbox"/> Others: _____

Appendix B. Questionnaire in special exhibition in Hiroshima University Museum

Questionnaire for the exhibition of Nature, History, Culture and Art	
(1) Gender:	1. Male 2. Female
(2) Age:	· 10-19 · 20-29 · 30-39 · 40-49 · 50-59 · 60-69 · 70-79 · 80 and above
(3) Where do you live?	_____ (Country) _____ Prefecture _____ Municipality / City
(4) What was interesting in the content of the exhibition? (Multiple choice)	<input type="checkbox"/> Nature <input type="checkbox"/> History <input type="checkbox"/> Culture <input type="checkbox"/> Art <input type="checkbox"/> Academic Research
(5) After seeing this exhibition, do you want to visit Mitarai in the future?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes, I want to go <input type="checkbox"/> No, I am not interested
(6) Would you like to be involved with Mitarai's festivals and traditions?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes, I want to go <input type="checkbox"/> No, I am not interested If you would like to receive more information, please write your e-mail address: _____ (* We will not share your personal information with any third party)
(7) If one day you have the chance, would you like to live on an island in the Seto Inland Sea?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes, I want to <input type="checkbox"/> No, I am not interested Could you tell us the reason? _____
Thank you very much for your support!	