

# A Policy-based Assessment of Nature Conservation at Kamikochi.

## 上高地における自然保護政策の変遷とその評価

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### 【Abstract】

This paper provides a critical analysis of the key policies underpinning 20<sup>th</sup> century nature conservation at Kamikochi, gateway to the Chubu Sangaku, an IUCN Category 2 national park. It first challenges the stereotype of virgin forest propagated by Alpinists such as Weston and Kojima, acknowledging that Kamikochi was already a quasi-natural landscape prior to the Meiji era. Next, the double-edged sword of tourism is examined; firstly in the 1905–1935 context of an economic alternative to exploitative industrial use, then the subsequent threat of mass tourism from 1952–1975. Conversely, the policies which have emerged to counteract mass tourism are investigated, including development restrictions such as the rejected ropeway plan (1963) and ban on private cars (from 1975). These and other policy successes have played a key role in protecting visitor experience and, to a lesser degree, the natural environment. In conclusion, this case study suggests that Kamikochi's success is due to 1) flexible and timely managerial responses to changing visitor demand, 2) local stakeholder collaboration, as symbolized by the Beautification Association, which has provided a platform for far-sighted policies, backed up by 3) national support for the conservation of Kamikochi's brand image as a nature-based tourism (NBT) destination.

**Keywords** : Kamikochi, nature conservation, nature-based tourism (NBT)

## 1. Introduction

This paper aims to provide a critical analysis of the development of nature conservation at Kamikochi. The 20<sup>th</sup> century emergence of this highland basin as a nature-based tourism (NBT)<sup>1)</sup> destination is assessed via two critical periods before and after

WWII. These will be examined chronologically along with the internal and external factors driving change, including access infrastructure and socio-economic trends. The final section of this paper re-examines some of the historical factors which underpinned Kamikochi's rise as a nature conservation brand, summarizing the impact of key policies using a framework based on the 5 novel ideas of competitive brand identity theorized by Anholt (2008).

Kamikochi is a mountainous basin in Nagano prefecture roughly 1500m above sea level, a V-shaped valley characterized by the steep slopes that rise up on all sides of the River Azusa to heights of over 3000m. The core zone, known as the General Facilities Area (GFA), stretches from Konashi Daira Campsite to Teikoku Hotel on one side of the Azusa and from the approach path to the Nishihodaka climbing route as far as the Heliport on the other



Fig.1. Location of Kamikochi in Nagano prefecture, central Honshu  
(Source : Kamikochi Kanko Ryokan Kumiai).

side. The 71.8 Hectares this area encompasses falls under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of the Environment while the rest is run by the Forestry Agency as National Forest. Over 99% of the extended Kamikochi valley is therefore nationally owned (Fig. 2.), with the only privately-owned section being the shrine land around Myojin Pond. There is also a cluster of privately-managed hotels, inns and gift shops around the Kappabashi bridge from where the view of the Hodaka mountain range is one of the main attractions. Annual visitor numbers soared in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century and are estimated to have topped 2 million in 1994 before stabilizing at around 1.5 million per annum (Fig. 3).

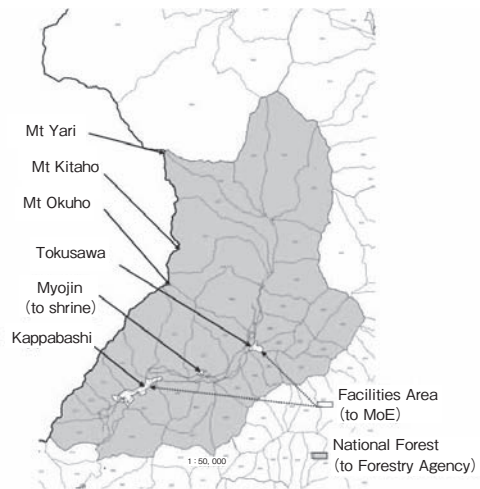


Fig.2. Map of land ownership in Kamikochi basin. (Source : author original compiled from Forestry Agency data 2008).

‘Nature’ is a vital asset for Nagano’s tourism industry, with national parks among the most common destinations for overnight stays in Japan. Moreover, the ten most visited national parks account for 77.1% of all visitation (Hirose, 2007). Among them is the Chubu Sangaku, one of 4 mountainous national parks which surround Nagano prefecture. As Chubu’s most renowned gateway community, Kamikochi has shown the greatest increase in visitor numbers over the last 20 years of any tourist attraction in the pre-

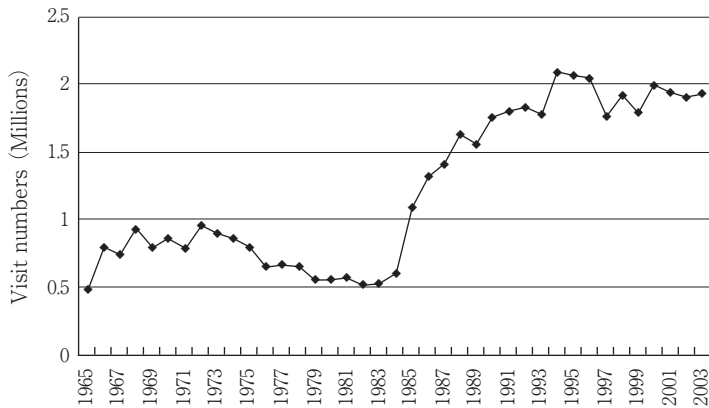


Fig.3. Number of Annual Visitors to Kamikochi  
(Source : MOE, 2005).

fecture, ranking Nagano's 6<sup>th</sup> most popular tourist destination in 2000 despite its birds-nest location (Watanabe, 2005). Crucially for the local economy, its hotel occupancy rate of 47.8% in 2003 compared favourably with the national average of 39.5%.

This Alpine resort has become synonymous with images of 'nature,' 'rivers' and 'mountain scenery' which have come to symbolize Nagano Prefecture as a whole. The wide variety of trails available on the relatively flat valley floor ensures that hiking is one of the activities and guided tours are on the increase (Jones, 2009).

The rate of repeaters is high, with national park visitors from all across the country and the urban centres in particular (ibid.). Also the increasing reality of an international resort brand, combined with a transition in key visitor markets and a slight decrease in annual numbers suggest a possible fluctuation in Kamikochi's visitor lifecycle (Butler, 1980). Yet a long and largely under-explored history of nature conservation underpins its current role as an NBT

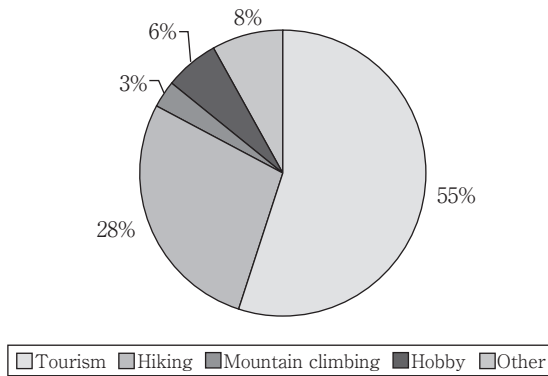


Fig.4. Motivation for visiting Kamikochi (n=186).  
(Source : Jones, 2009).

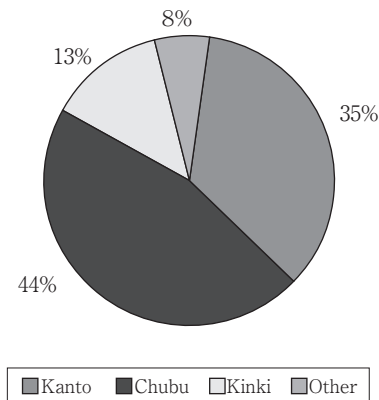


Fig.5. Origin of Kamikochi visitors (n=202).  
(Source : Jones, 2009).

hub. The paucity of existing research only underlines the necessity of a critical analysis of the key policies which safeguarded 20<sup>th</sup> century nature conservation at Kamikochi and provided the platform for today's success as an NBT destination.

## 2. Nature conservation policy at Kamikochi

### 2. 1. Pre-modern Kamikochi

The first written references to Kamikochi date back to 1694 (Yokoyama, 1981) and evidence suggests that the area was consistently logged by the local Matsumoto fiefdom over a period of at least 200 years from the mid 17<sup>th</sup> century. Woodsmen from the four hamlets which would later become Azumi Village<sup>2)</sup> spent the spring and summer period chopping wood, before floating the timber down the River Azusa to the plains in Autumn. As well as firewood, this wood was used by the Matsumoto fiefdom for a variety of raw materials for the coopers<sup>3)</sup> and roofers in the townships below.

The substantial area of flat land which the Kamikochi basin represented in an otherwise mountainous region, along with the quality of its water supply, had inspired agricultural development plans as early as 1809 (ibid.). Yet forestry was the staple industry, and the large-scale nature of the annual logging operation survives in place names such as Ropyyakuzan,<sup>4)</sup> which records the 600 trees allegedly felled in a single year. With a community of more than ten buildings, the summer population was estimated to be around 250–400 woodsmen (NPF, 1993). By the end of the Edo period, this selective felling had removed most of the old growth timber and transformed the mixed woodland in which beech (*Fagus crenata*) and oaks (*Quercus crispula*) would once have been widespread (Kawai, 2009).

The Kamikochi basin also contained a hot spring inn; this served as a post house on the Hida Shindo, a mountain road

completed in 1836 which linked the Matsumoto area with Takayama to the West. This hot spring had served as a stop-over point for Banryu, an ascetic priest who made several pilgrimages to nearby Mt. Yari in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century.

When the fiefdom system gave way to prefectures at the start of the Meiji era, all logging was banned at Kamikochi, driving the woodsmen down onto the plains to work in sericulture or odd jobs. Kamijo Kamonji was the only one who consistently remained in Kamikochi, living off the abundant fish, as well as bears and Japanese serow, of which he is said to have killed over 80 and 500 respectively over the course of his life (NPF, 1993).

In 1885, the start of cattle & horse rearing at Kamikochi ushered in a new era of agricultural development. The following year, a formal cultivation plan was submitted along with an application to manage the hot spring. In summary, despite its natural inaccessibility due to rugged mountainous terrain on all sides, the pre-20<sup>th</sup> century Kamikochi basin had already seen a lengthy history of involvement with a series of interconnected local villages. As well as holding significance for woodsmen, wayfarers and hunters, the Azumi villagers perceived the area as a resource for timber, firewood, meat, minerals and medicines, as well as potential farmland.

## **2. 2. National park foundations 1905–1935**

The set of socio-economic circumstances outlined above are by no means unique to Kamikochi; the focus on forestry, coupled with agriculture and non-timber forest products could just as easily be applied to any number of the mountain villages which dotted the

Japanese hinterlands at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Yet just as with many other mountainous areas, the 3000m Shinano highlands which flanked Nagano's Western border were a distant object of worship. Despite or, in some cases, because, of their massive presence which loomed larger than everyday life on the plains below, human interaction was largely restricted over the centuries due to a combination of natural and enforced inaccessibility, veneration and religion. The extent of the remoteness of these mountain ranges can be inferred from the fact that the first ascent of Maehodaka (at 3090m the 11th highest mountain in Japan) was not until 1893. Likewise the scale of the map-making operation which was carried out in the late Meiji era demonstrates how little quantitative data existed on the Chubu Sangaku region, whose ridges "had never been systematically surveyed" (Wigen, 2005). It was therefore an extraordinarily rapid train of events which propelled unknown Kamikochi to the forefront of national consciousness so that in a 1928 poll it was voted the "most beautiful valley in Japan" (Tanaka, 1981). This preceded the run-up to its national park designation in 1934 and thus laid the foundations for today's global brand. This next section will examine that train of events and the fierce battle which was fought between conflicting forces of conservation and development in the founding era of Japan's national park system.

A British chaplain, Walter Weston (1860–1940), is often misquoted as being the first to have coined the phrase 'Japan Alps;' in fact, he borrowed it from his compatriot Gowland, a mining surveyor who had climbed Mt. Yari in 1877. Yet Weston, who first visited in 1891 and ascended Mt. Yari the following year, is the better remem-



bered of the two, not least because he made a total of 3 separate visits to Japan, living there for a total of 15 years. The consensus of existing research is that his role in popularizing Kamikochi and linking its name to the newly-introduced Western sport of Alpinism was an indispensable force of legitimization as Kamikochi shot to fame over the course of the next few decades. Weston's "Mountaineering & Exploring in the Japan Alps" was published in London in 1896 and to this day, the Meiji neologism "Nippon Arupusu" remains far more widely used than the official "Chubu Sangaku" national park title.

Weston's experience climbing in the Swiss Alps became the basis for a new sport-based mountain climbing culture, known as Alpinism, which appealed to the upper echelons of a Japanese society embarking on a fast-track modernization mission. Weston's legacy is large, yet it remained largely underexplored by Western academics until Wigen (2005) unpackaged the culture phenomena of 'Alpinism' to unveil a complex range of domestic causative factors including the drive for exploration, scientific observation and patriotic fervour which coincided with Japan's imperial expansion abroad. Of these, science was an important factor coupled with newly-imported academic disciplines such as geography and civil engineering.

Yet although "the high-altitude zones were a treasure trove for scientific observation" (ibid.) the scenic delights of Kamikochi and other viewpoints were at least as influential in fixing the affections of several key players who would be closely involved in the transformation of Kamikochi's fortunes, among them Kojima Usui (1875-1948), who established the Japan Alpine Club (JAC) in 1905 along with 5 other members. For Kojima, the panoramic views from

Kamikochi rivaled the intense natural beauty he had witnessed while climbing in the Swiss Alps. For example Kojima (1907) described the snow-melt of the Isar in Munich as a “mixture of mud and milk” compared to the “pure flowing” Azusa River. This kind of thinking was readily translated into nationalist overtures reflecting an era where victory had just been achieved in the Russo-Japanese War.

However, although Alpinism may have inadvertently become a tool for youth mobilization and nation-building as Wigen suggests, its driving forces were socially oriented; “mountaineering was reinvented for scientific or recreational purposes by the newly emerging middle class” (Manzenreiter, 2000). Thus if the inspiration had been Western Alpinism, the driving forces behind the increasing penetration of the Chubu Sangaku came from closer to home.

Yet the same forces of development which were opening up hidden beauty spots like Kamikochi to an elite but influential few were simultaneously threatening radical change to the fragile mountain environments. The supreme suitability of Kamikochi’s V-shaped valley to dam-building has been noted in previous research (Murayama, 2009). The steep valley walls and fast-flowing river offered a potential source of hydroelectric energy in a country with few petrochemicals or other natural resources. Indeed, the eruption of Yakedake in 1915 had already created a type of natural dam, so perhaps it was no coincidence that a formal excavation plan was raised in the same year (ibid). But Tamura Tsuyoshi and others were adamant that conservation was the best bet in the long term, and when 7 classifications of Protection Forest (*Hogorin*) were established by the Agency for Mountain Forests<sup>5)</sup> the following year



Fig. 6. Protection forest still plays a range of roles in today's National Forests.

(Source : author original).

Kamikochi was the first area in the country to be designated as a Protection Forest for Academic Consideration.<sup>6)</sup>

The eruption of Mt Yakedake had also inadvertently created the forest-lake phenomenon which served to cement Kamikochi's image as a scenic place, linked to a burgeoning reputation as an Alpine resort where the beauty of European-esque mountain scenery could be enjoyed. With its red-roofed huts and alpine atmosphere, this was Japan's equivalent of a Swiss village and in the Taisho Period from 1912–1925 a number of new mountain lodges, inns and rest-houses were built to cater for the growing numbers of climbers in the area. With word spread by an ever-increasing body of literature inspired by Shiga Shigetaka's (1863–1927) *Nihon Fukeiron* and Kojima's *Nihon Sansuiron*, the Taisho mini-boom saw Kamikochi become a more mainstream area for mountaineers; not only specialist organizations



Fig. 7. Taisho Pond created by the eruption of the Yakedake volcano.  
(Source : author original).

such as the JAC, but also high schools and university climbing clubs. The number of annual visitors was estimated to have increased from approximately 600 visitors in 1916 to 5000 in 1921.

Yet even as Kamikochi was carving out a niche for itself as a European-style Alpine climbing base-cum-resort, a number of potential construction projects threatened its very existence. Neither the legislation preventing removal of Alpine plants (1909) nor the designation as a Protection Forest (1916) had terminated talk of hydroelectric development; indeed a Keihin Denryoku plan as late as 1924 would have flooded an area from Taisho Pond as far upstream as the midpoint between Myojijn and Tokusawa, submerging sites such as Kappabashi bridge and Myojin Pond and shrine (Tanaka, 1981). Even when a new law was passed to protect natural objects

of cultural value in 1919, it still seemed Kamikochi would slip through the conservation net because there was no precedent for designating an entire valley as a national treasure. Nonetheless the persistence of Tamura paid off after a meeting in December 1924 succeeded in aligning an unlikely mix of nobles, academics, mountaineers and bureaucrats against the real threat of hydroelectric development (Murayama, 2009).

Yet the trade-off set the course for future generations of NBT, with Tamura's canny recognition of tourism's economic impact coming true on an unimaginable scale. Ironically, the dam-building itself had succeeded in providing an alternative entrance to the Tokugo Pass, a narrow, punishing mountain track which had kept mass tourism at bay. Access had been a crucial factor from the start, and the 1924 opening of Kama Tunnel, followed by the 1933 start of a regular bus service was a pivotal movement in its development. Alpinism, and the new-found sense of nature conservationism would be the main source of justification used for Kamikochi to immediately scoop the No. 1 nomination in the 'Valley' category of the infamous Nippon Hakkei of 1927. The Hakkei Poll was a joint publication by the Osaka Mainichi and Tokyo Nichinichi newspapers and it was intended to be the essential list of Japan's scenic points – as determined by a new wave of Western-influenced think-tanks. Playing a key role in the intense debate which followed was the same Kojima Usui; he was adamant that Kamikochi – and not the previously nominated Tenryukyo – should gain the Hakkei seal of approval as officially the most beautiful valley in Japan. Sure enough the original decision was overturned, and the Kamikochi valley

gained first place in the chart (ibid.).

The Hakkei nomination cemented Kamikochi's name at the forefront of the burgeoning Japanese conservation movement and proved influential in the Chubu's nomination among the first Japanese National Parks in 1934. The year before had witnessed the opening ceremony of the Imperial Hotel (with a specific proviso to cater for foreign guests) and the resort gained further recognition when members of the royal family stayed there. The consequential surge in the number of annual visitors instigated the construction and enlargement of roads, car parks and lodges. Then in 1935 a regular bus service began from Shimashima, trimming several hours off the journey time up from the Matsumoto plain.

This assessment of the 1905-1935 period demonstrates how Kamikochi was able to avoid the kind of large-scale construction projects which radically transformed the landscape of other mountainous beauty spots, such as Kurobe in the same mountain range. The nature conservation movement can be traced at a bureaucratic level to a number of policies including the legislation preventing removal of Alpine plants (1909), designation as the first Protection Forest (1916), Natural Treasure (1919) and culminating in national park designation in 1934. Yet the legitimization for this conservation movement was the hard-fought public support that originated in the literary works of Kojima and Shiga, among others, that planted the seeds of an Alpine image and propelled the hitherto unknown Kamikochi to designation as the "most beautiful valley in Japan" in the 1928 newspaper poll.

Table 1. Summary of key dates and policies 1905–1935

Year	Brief description of event and significance
1905	JAC established by Kojima Usui with Weston as first honorary member.
1906	Cattle and horse grazing company registered as Ltd. company by Azumi Village.
1907	Yakedake eruptions start and continue intermittently, with bald patch at the top.
1909	Ban on picking alpine plants at Hidakasan symbolizes conservation legislation.
1914	Karamatsu ( <i>Japanese larch</i> ) planted in present car park area.
1915	Eruption of Mt Yakedake blocks River Azusa creating Taisho Pond. Hydroelectric dam plan but Tamura group is adamant that conservation is best.
1916	Sanrinkyoku designates Kamikochi as Hogorin, banning removal of plants.
1919	Keihin Denryoku starts construction of new road to generator. Law is passed to protect natural objects of cultural value.
1920	Kobayashi Kisaku, a local guide and hunter, opens a new trail. Light railway is approved. Track reaches Niimura (1921) and Shimashima(1922).
1923	Raicho ( <i>Lagopus mutus</i> ) is designated as Natural Treasure. Keihin Denryoku starts pumping at Ryujima. Also Nakanoyu Ryokan opens.
1924	Kama Tunnel opens; access road changes to opposite bank from Kama tunnel.
1925	Keihin Denryoku starts pumping at Nagawado and Oshirogawa. Paved road reaches as far as Nagwado allowing visit of royal family.
1926	Of 5000 mountain climbers entering via Tokugo Pass, 90% are students. Kappa novel written by Akutagawa Ryunosuke published in Tokyo.
1927	Kamikochi not first selected as No.1 Valley in national poll of 8 Sceneries. Akutagawa Ryunosuke commits suicide and sales of his book surge. Dr. Nakai discovers Keshouyanagi ( <i>Chosenia arbutifolia</i> ) at Kamikochi
1928	Nippon Hakkei result is overturned by panel of judges. Kamikochi gains national recognition as most beautiful valley and is designated as Meisho & Natural Treasure. Forestry and farming phased out in favour of tourism.
1929	Bus service reaches as far up the valley as Nakanoyu.
1931	New national park law bill is passed.
1933	Kamikochi Hotel (current Teikoku) opens for business as Imperial Hotel (c.f. Shiga Kogen & Nojiriko). The first bus passes through the newly opened Kama Tunnel, rapidly reducing the time required to reach Kamikochi.
1934	Kamoshika ( <i>Capricornis crispus</i> ) designated as Natural Treasure and hunting banned. Kamikochi designated as part of the Chubu Sangaku National Park. Finish of cattle rearing at Kamikochi.
1935	A regular bus service begins from Shimashima to Kappabashi.

### 2. 3. Mass tourism at post-war Kamikochi 1952–1975

Although the pre-war era and run-up to national park designation were the cornerstones of Kamikochi's modern brand, the postwar period threw up new challenges that were unprecedented in terms of their speed and scale. After 1952, Kamikochi was desig-

nated as a Special Heritage Site and Natural Treasure,<sup>7)</sup> but although this provided additional bureaucratic protection, it also added an extra layer of complexity. The following year, land ownership of the central area around the Bus Terminal (what is now known as the GFA) was transferred from the Forestry Agency to the Ministry of Health and Welfare, yet this did not solve the symbolic divide between these two national government bureaus who represented land ownership and ad hoc management.

The decade from 1955–1965 saw the construction of massive dams in the mountains to reduce landslides and the flow of rubble triggered by rampant clear-felling during the Second World War. Dam technology echoed pre-war US civil engineering in its implementation, aiming to simultaneously store water and generate electricity for the growing number of urbanites. Again in 1954 Kamikochi faced a fight for its survival, as another large-scale dam plan was proposed by a consortium backed by Nagano Prefectural government and the Tokyo Electric Power Company (Murakushi, 2009).

As in the pre-war example, these forces of development inadvertently paved the way for the socio-economic change which was to spark an unprecedented increase in visitor demand, providing improvements in access infrastructure which would link the mass market to its supply of natural resources. Tourism was indeed becoming a reality for the masses. The publication of an ongoing novel called ‘Ice Wall’<sup>8)</sup> from 1956 helped spark a mountain climbing boom which would later become known as the Golden Years of Japanese Alpinism. The following decade was marked by a splurge of road-building and public works both prompted by the rise of the



automobile and simultaneously encouraging its continued growth. This was a period of unchecked growth for motorcar use into Kamikochi. At first, the relatively small number of privately-owned vehicles meant that casual day trips became a feasible possibility for an area that was still virtually uncharted territory in terms of mass commercial use. The 'limited edition' appeal of an exclusive 'hikyo' mountain resort previously accessible only to 'Alpinists' has been expounded by Kikuchi (2005). Its traditional role as gateway to the mountains beyond was still a motivating factor for some, but a significant change in visitor patterns saw Kamikochi emerge as a mass tourism destination in its own right. The increasing ease of access was encouraging a new type of visitor to Kamikochi – the day-tripper. 1972 saw the one million mark for annual visitors passed for the first time, and it was around this time that claims of 'overuse' began to be made, based on a body of academic research in US national parks which from the 1960s began to focus on the issue of Carrying Capacity (Manning, 1999).

Researchers such as Eyama (1977) likewise looked for a numerical definition of carrying capacity at Kamikochi, but in the end it was topography, rather than social science, which shaped the subsequent access policy. Squeezing the rows and rows of private motorcars into the tiny car park at Kamikochi was proving to be a physical impossibility. Meanwhile, there was severe traffic congestion due to the rising volume of drivers attempting to negotiate the single lane national route 158, a winding mountain road rife with switchbacks which is also the trunk route that connects Nagano and Gifu prefectures. Summer months, weekends and public holidays

became a traffic black spot, with the journey time from Matsumoto, in theory reduced to 3 hours or less, now taking anywhere between 7 and 10 hours. Kamikochi –the self-styled “nature-lovers’ Mecca” – was becoming more synonymous with traffic jams and illegal parking along the banks of the River Azusa.



Fig. 8. Traffic jams and illegal parking prior to 1975 access regulations. (Source : Chubu Regional Office for Nature Conservation).

Retrospectively, this can be seen as a make-or-break era for the Kamikochi brand. Across the country, mountain resorts in national park areas such as Hakone and Shiga Kogen were developing at a break-neck speed to cash in on the unprecedented surge in visitor demand. Yet building restrictions limited the number of hotels and inns at Kamikochi to 17; a number unchanged since the 1954 construction of a municipal hotel run by Azumi Village. Moreover, far-sighted intuition rejected the fast-track route to development

represented by new projects such as the ropeway plan of 1963, unlike Shinhodaka Onsen, a similarly remote mountain hamlet on the Gifu side of the Hodaka range. Also in 1963, the Kamikochi Beautification Association was established to counter the threat to the natural environment caused by poor etiquette among visitors and the problem of illegal littering in particular. This organization, with its hands-on, bi-monthly 'litter patrol' approach has had positive knock-on effects for stakeholder collaboration by uniting different actors against a common goal. In this respect, Kamikochi was ahead of its time in the sense that the *chiikisei*<sup>9)</sup> management framework employed by Japan's Natural Parks relies on active cooperation between stakeholders (Hiwasaki, 2005).

Just as the timing of Kamikochi's national park designation had been opportune, the traffic management issue was also at the right time for action. After a spate of severe pollution cases due to heavy industry in the 1960s, public outcry had reached a peak and the Environment Agency<sup>10)</sup> (hereafter EA) was created in 1971 with a mandate to promote policies for pollution control and nature conservation. This was the same year that a Visitor Centre was constructed at Kamikochi, a reflection of the recognition that visitor issues required similarly intensive management. In 1971, the Bika Zaidan was also established, who are responsible today for much of the legwork involved in national park management, including running the visitor centre, providing guided walks and managing the car park. Then in 1975, 65ha of land at the heart of the GFA around Kamikochi Bus Terminal were ceded directly to the EA to create the current landownership (Fig. 2). Although only accounting for

less than 1 % of the extended valley area, the strategic significance of this core zone would become clear in later years when calls were made to extend the area of the car park, for example by Azumi Village in 1987. The amount also appears substantial when considered as the second largest EA-administered area in any national park in Japan (Jones et al, 2009).

If land ownership was one key issue, then access was again dominating the headlines. Further north in the same Chubu Sangaku range, the Tateyama Kurobe Alpen Route between Toyama and Omachi was completed in the spring of 1971, followed in 1972 by the Nagawa-Azumi Super Rindo to the South of Kamikochi. These two examples were typical of road-building policy in a pre-EIA<sup>11)</sup> era; as well as the damage to the national environment caused by the construction process itself, there was widespread pollution of pristine beech forests at Tateyama due to exhaust gases from tourist buses (Ishikawa, 2001).

But in Kamikochi in 1975 a series of steps were implemented that would eventually bring a permanent, year-round ban on private cars into force. The initial trial ban lasted only 30 days – during the peak period from the end of July to the end of August – and the traffic pile ups in the days before and after the ban were worse than ever before. It would be more than 20 years after the original implementation of the trial ban before the year-round system would be brought into effect. Although the police played a key role in implementation, citing the danger of illegal parking and spiraling cost of road maintenance, yet crucially, the ban, which was the first of its kind in the country, was implemented and sustained by a sys-

tem of collaboration rather than a change in the law. This system of incorporating stakeholders into the planning process paid dividends with the subsequent long-term success of the policy despite teething problems including public complaints in 1977 that a 10% slump in

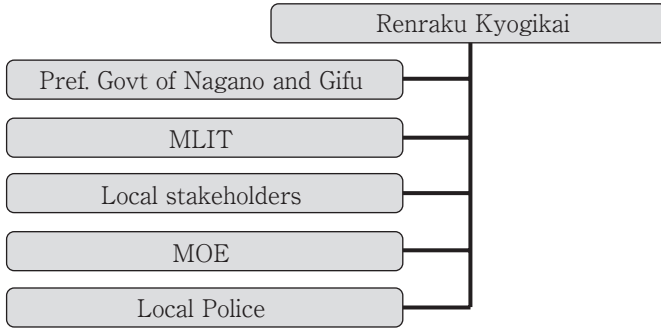


Fig. 9. Collaborative board for ban on private cars.  
 (Source : author original based on Kikuchi, 2005).

visitors was directly due to the ban.

Despite the success of the pre-war policies in safeguarding nature conservation at Kamikochi, the speed and scale of change in the postwar period created a variety of new challenges for management. National park status was not in itself sufficient to ward off the overtures of large-scale development to meet the needs of an ever-increasing mass tourism market. Instead, stakeholders allied against quick and easy ‘hard’ development options such as the ropeway plan, choosing to improve Kamikochi’s image with ‘soft’ policies such as the anti-litter campaigns which had the unforeseen benefit of improving local collaboration.

Table 2. Summary of key dates and policies 1952–1975

Year	Brief description of event and significance
1952	Kamikochi designated as Special Meisho & Natural Treasure.
1953	GFA transferred from Forestry Agency to the Ministry of Health and Welfare.
1954	Large-scale dam plan was proposed by Nagano Prefectural government and TEPCO.
1955	Kamoshika and Raicho designated as Special Meisho and Natural Treasure.
1957	Publication of 'Ice Wall' sparks a mountain climbing boom.
1958	Kappabashi rebuilt. Start of regular bus service from Kiso.
1959	National forest at Tokuzawa is also ceded to Ministry of Health and Welfare.
1962	Yakedake erupts again, injuring 2 and wiping out Yakedake Hut.
1963	Ropeway plan proposed by Ministry of Health and Welfare but rejected.
	Kamikochi Beautification Association established (national first).
1966	Matsuden looks to Shinshimashima for Kamikochi Bus Terminal.
1967	First official mountain opening ceremony is held on 4.27.
1968	Completion of national route 158 (planned extension as highway).
1969	Completion of 3 big dams and new generators. Kamikochi Keibigun established.
1970	Kamikochi visitor centre opens in Konashi Daira.
1971	Natural Parks Foundation (NPF) founded with Beautification Escort Service(BES).
1972	1 million estimated annual visits exceeded for the first time.
	Completion of the Nagawa-Azumi Super Rindo forest road.
1975	One of first national park areas to report overuse problem due to access. Thus a ban on Private cars is introduced by Renraku Kyo Gikai based on stakeholder collaboration.
	65ha of land ceded directly to Ministry of Environment (#2 in JPN NPs).
	Fishing banned on Azusa river. Kappabashi rebuilt.

### 3. Conclusion

Although this paper has not explicitly employed a place branding rhetoric, the policies which have instilled Kamikochi's brand image at the forefront of nature conservation in Japan can be understood in terms of brand management. The final section will now re-examine some of the key factors which underpinned Kamikochi's rise as a popular NBT destination in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. These are now summarized using a brand framework based on the 5 novel ideas of competitive identity theorized by Anholt (2008):

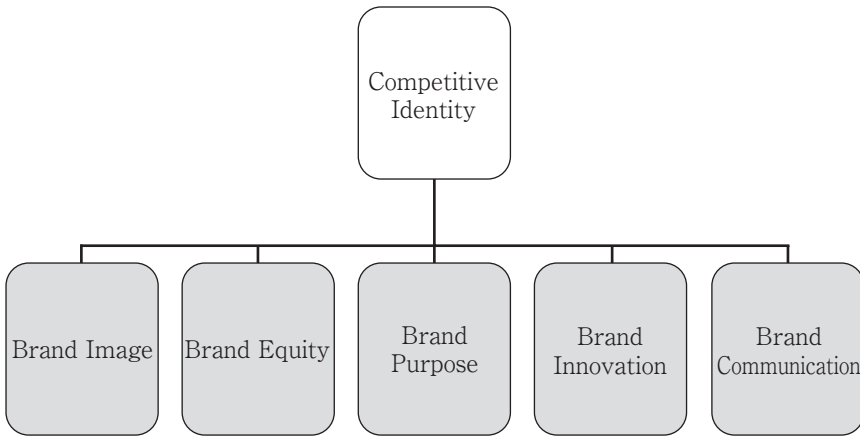


Fig. 10. Five novel ideas of competitive identity.  
 (Source : author original based on Anholt, 2008).

i ) Brand image; having gained notoriety through a 1915 volcano eruption which created a lake of standing trees, Kamikochi's status was sealed by a nationwide newspaper poll in 1928 of Japan's eight most beautiful sceneries. This national recognition as the most beautiful valley expanded its existing image as the gateway to the 'Japanese Alps,' a term popularized by Weston who described Kamikochi as the 'Zermatt of Japan'. The Western influence which cemented the sense of added value to domestic visitors is still visible today, demonstrated by the Swiss horns and outfits used in the mountain opening ceremony. Added to the image of a European-class resort was the added value derived from a long history of successful nature conservation campaigns.



Fig. 11. Swiss influence on the annual opening ceremony.  
(Source : author original).

ii ) Brand equity; Kamikochi's reputation as a 'natural' resort has been protected over the years, as demonstrated by the 1909 ban on picking alpine plants and the 1916 designation of a protected forest, both national firsts. National park designation followed in 1934, followed by the freezing of accommodation capacity in the aftermath of WWII with no new buildings permitted after the 1954 construction of a municipal hotel run by Azumi Village. Likewise, a 1963 ropeway plan was proposed by Ministry of Health & Welfare but rejected in contrast to other nearby mountain communities such as Shinhodaka. Also in 1963, the 'Kamikochi Beautification Society' was established to tackle the problem of discarded litter. This policy, another national first, involved members of bureaucratic, business and conservation groups in a bi-monthly clean-up program which encouraged collaboration.



iii) Brand purpose; nature conservation has been the stated strategic vision around which groups of stakeholders have united ever since a hydroelectric dam plan which would have flooded the valley was overturned in 1925 and the area designated as national park in 1934. The 'Kamikochi Beautification Society' mentioned above was influential not only in improving visitor etiquette, but also stakeholder collaboration. The ban on private cars, begun in 1975 and later extended to a year-round ban is another example of this multilateral collaboration.

iv) Brand innovation; any number of historical examples can be cited, such as the Imperial Hotel which opened in 1934, after investment from Nagano Prefectural government aimed at creating an international-standard accommodation facility. This hotel, and the direct bus service which its creation necessitated, are symbolic of the shift from mountain climbing to sightseeing which boomed in the post-war period as the access time was progressively reduced. Yet despite ongoing infrastructure improvements, such as the completion of the Nagano-do Highway in 1988 and the opening of the Abo Tunnel in 1997, conservation measures have not been neglected; air pollution from vehicles has been steadily reduced via the ban on private cars from 1975, the introduction of hybrid buses in 1994 and the ban on tourist buses from 2005.

v) Brand communication; early literature such as the works of Shiga and Kojima planted the seed of an Alpine image which

has flourished due to its appealing combination of adventure and romanticism, spiritual and scientific enlightenment, patriotism and comradeship. Yet as its visitor market has diversified, so Kamikochi has sought ever-more plural methods of communication; one recent example is a homepage, launched in 2005 that is run by the Innkeepers' Association.<sup>12)</sup> The website is viewable in Japanese, English, Chinese and Korean, underlining the increasingly international visitor profile.

#### **4. Discussion**

1993 saw the designation of Shirakami and Yakushima as UNESCO World Natural Heritage sites, followed in July 2005 by the Shiretoko peninsula. Although a fully-fledged movement to designate Kamikochi and the surrounding Chubu Sangaku national park as UNESCO has yet to emerge, the battle lines of conservation and development will need to be drawn in preparation for a campaign which may be swifter than any of its predecessors. Aside from this particular issue of branding protected areas, Kamikochi and the Chubu Sangaku management face ongoing challenges from a variety of sources;

◆ Tourism; although overall numbers of tourists have declined slightly in recent years, there has been considerable diversification and an increase in international visitors due to the Alpen route's proximity to the East Asian market. These challenges will require a new and innovative management response, which has only just begun to emerge in the past few years.

- ◆ Logging; as principal landowners, the Forestry Agency still have the theoretical right to extract timber from all areas of the Chubu Sangaku other than the 64,129ha (36.8%) designated Special Protection Zones (Kato, 2008). Although unlikely, the risk that logging has been constrained by the economic decline in timber prices rather than any change in policy is indicative of the continued threat of internal management conflict.
- ◆ Disaster-prevention; the appropriateness of land stabilization construction works carried out to safeguard the GFA has been questioned by some academics. Likewise, the issue of landscape preservation, such as whether or not to remove rubble from Taisho Pond, is another ongoing management issue which has ramifications for Kamikochi's image as an NBT destination.
- ◆ Access infrastructure; although overall budgets have been vastly reduced in recent years, the presence of public works still has a massive impact on Japan's rural regions. The Chubu region currently has a number of infrastructure improvement projects, including extending the highway and linking the Hokuriku shinkansen line by 2013.

Such projects require open, meaningful discussions of the impact on fragile NBT destinations such as Kamikochi. The same spirit of stakeholder collaboration which brought about the Beautification Society needs to be adapted to modern issues, such as the UNESCO one. It is hoped that lessons from successful policies in the past can assist today's managers in providing a flexible and timely response to these ongoing conservation challenges as they have done in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

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- 1) For more information on NBT see Jones (2009).
- 2) Onoda, Shimashima, Inekoki and Onogawa.
- 3) Coopers traditionally made wooden vessels of a conical form known as *oke*.
- 4) Literally, Mount Six Hundred.
- 5) Sanrinkyoku.
- 6) 11000 ha designated as *Gakujutsu sankou hogorin*. (Fukuda, 2008).
- 7) Tokubetsu meishou.
- 8) 'Hyouheki,' by Inoue Yasushi was published in the Asahi Shinbun from 1956-1957.
- 9) Management system to accommodate multiple landowners via "zoning and regulation," or "multiple-use parks" (Hiwasaki, 2005).
- 10) 65ha of land ceded directly to MOE (second largest among Japan's national parks).
- 11) The EA was rebuffed several times during the late 1970s and early 1980s and the Environmental Impact Assessment Law was not enacted until 1997.
- 12) *Ryokan kumiai*.

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## 【要旨】

本研究は、IUCN のカテゴリ 2 に当たる中部山岳国立公園上高地における自然保護の基盤を作った20世紀の重要な政策を批判的に分析するものである。手つかずの原始的な自然という説は、W・ウェストン、小島烏水などの登山先駆者達によって普及されたものであるが、実際は明治以前から上高地は既に二次的自然であった。次に、i) 1905～1935戦前期：観光が大規模な資源開発産業に代わる代替産業になるという側面と ii) 1952～1975戦後期：マス・ツーリズム自体が自然保護を脅かす存在になってくるといった側面の両側面を有していることが検討される。そして、ロープウェイ開発計画の拒否（1963年）、及びマイカー規制（1975年開始）などマス・ツーリズム対策の政策が成功し、利用体験も、ある程度の自然環境も保たれてきたことが明らかにされる。政策史を分析した結果、成功要因は次のようにまとめられた。1) 国立公園利用者の需要の変化に対する管理側の柔軟で時宜を得た対応、2) 長期的な政策のためのプラットフォームを提供できる「美しくする会」に象徴されるような地元の連携、及び 3) ネイチャーベースドツーリズム（NBT）の見本としての上高地のブランドイメージに対する国民の支援、である。

**キーワード：**上高地、自然保護、ネイチャーベースドツーリズム（NBT）