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국제학석사학위논문

**Promotion of Regional Tourism in Japan
through the use of Mascots
- Case Study of Destination Branding
using Local Mascots in the Miyagi Prefecture -**

**마스코트 캐릭터를 이용한 일본의 지역 홍보
- 미야기현 마스코트의 관광목적지 브랜딩 연구 -**

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권 그 리

Promotion of Regional Tourism in Japan
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- Case Study of Destination Branding
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A thesis presented

by

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to

Graduate Program
in International Area Studies
In partial fulfillment of the requirements
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Abstract

**Promotion of Regional Tourism in Japan through the use of Mascots
- Case Study of Destination Branding using Local Mascots in the Miyagi Prefecture**

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The promotion of regions by utilizing famous characters is a common way for local governments to attract tourists in Japan. This is because cuteness creates brand power and character industries are already well developed. Recently, local governments have taken this process one step further by creating local mascots to attract tourists and stimulate the economy. These local mascots are referred to as *Yuru-kyara* and their numbers are on the rise as they have turned out to be very effective in tourism promotion. Kumamoto Prefecture's mascot, known as *Kumamon*, is one such exemplary case.

Through field research in Sendai city, Miyagi Prefecture, which is the center of Tohoku region, this study researched the role of *Musubimaru*, the tourism promotion mascot of Miyagi Prefecture, in promoting its home region.

Miyagi Prefecture has employed destination branding pertaining to its

principal products and historical figures. However, it was heavily damaged by the 2011 Tohoku earthquake. Thus, regional revitalization became an important issue. Therein, Sendai has been a central part of the recovery movement.

Miyagi is known for its local rice as well as the warrior and founder of Sendai in the Edo period, *Date Masamune* and Musubimaru was based on these regional characteristics. After the 2011 earthquake, this tourism mascot was endowed with new meaning as logos for the recovery plan. In particular, the concurrent increase in sales of Musubimaru products signifies that the earthquake served as a stage for the mascots to become quite well known, whereby Japanese tried to support the Miyagi prefecture by buying Musubimaru products. This implies that local mascot can play a pivotal role in regional solidarity and economic revival.

Miyagi and Kumamoto each employ different designs and promotion styles for their mascots. As Kumamon possesses a simple design expressing no regional characteristic, this shows that Kumamoto chose to promote the mascot itself rather than destination branding of the region. On the other hand, Musubimaru embodies strong historical features of the region and works as a supporter of tourism promotion for Miyagi. Moreover, this particular feature of Musubimaru was helpful in fostering cooperation in the region after the earthquake. Therefore, by comparing Musubimaru with Kumamon, this thesis

reveals that the local mascots can bring not only positive economic effects, but also promote regional solidarity.

The defining characteristics of local mascots are that they may be used freely and that they are treated as human beings. Local producers can freely use the mascots with the pride that their products represent and promote their region. Also, by treating the mascots as human beings, the mascots act as public figures that promote the regions devotedly and encourage the local peoples.

Keywords: Local mascot character, Yuru-kyara, Destination Branding, Tourism Promotion, Musubimaru, Kumamon

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I . Introduction

1. Purpose of the Study

It is becoming increasingly difficult to ignore the influence of mascots in Japan. The licensed character industry, including copyrights and merchandising, is worth \$30 billion a year.¹ Mascots promote tourism, where fans go on ‘pilgrimages’ to regions affiliated with a particular mascot. The regions that are fortunate to become the settings for famous animations or games are happy to welcome the fans of the characters. Also, local companies make limited licensed products of famous commercial characters, such as Hello Kitty or Rilakkuma, which people can only buy in particular regions, so as to encourage tourists to buy the goods as souvenirs. These facts demonstrate how Japan lies at the forefront of destination branding, especially in the use of mascots.

Destination branding is the notion that places offer branding opportunities while tapping into the emotional power of travel as ‘experience’. As style symbols, destinations can offer consumer benefits to highly branded lifestyle

¹ABS-CBN news, ‘In pursuit of cute: Japan's character industry is worth \$30B’, <http://www.abs-cbnnews.com/business/07/06/12/pursuit-cute-japans-character-industry-worth-30b>
(access date: November 10, 2013)

items. Currently, many countries and regions are embarking on brand-building initiatives that are inclusive of tourism and economic development.² Most destinations have superb five-star resorts and attractions, with each place describing itself as having the friendliest people, whereas high standards of customer service and facilities are now all but expected. As a result, the need for destinations to create a unique identity - to differentiate themselves from their competitors - is more critical than ever. Indeed, it has become the basis for survival within a globally competitive marketplace dominated by a handful of leading destinations (Piggott, 2001).

Nowadays, destination branding movements using characters are evolving. In recent years, there has been an increasing interest in local mascots inspired by characteristics particular to a region, such as foods, animals, or traditional cultures. Since the 2000s, as mascots have turned out to be very effective means of attracting tourists and stimulating economic growth, local governments have become more enthusiastic about making their own characters and trying to build a regional brand. Hikonyan, Hikone castle's mascot in Shiga Prefecture, was the local mascot that initiated the Yuru-kyara boom,³ creating

² Nigel Morgan, Annette Pritchard and Roger Pride, 2004, Destination Branding: Creating the unique destination proposition, p.4

³ During the 2000s, lots of local mascots were created by the national government and this nationwide phenomenon was called the 'Yuru-kyara boom'. The word 'Yuru-kyara' was created by an essayist Miura Jun and it stands for 'Yurui Character(ゆるいキャラクター)'. It means

profits of 5.1 billion yen from 2007 to 2011.⁴ Before these local mascots emerged, characters inspiring pilgrimage movements were non-regional characters, such as animation characters or commercial characters designed by character companies. Nowadays, Kumamon, the mascot of Kumamoto Prefecture, has gained lots of popularity and there are many people who want to visit Kumamoto to know more about its mascots. Thus, it is very important to examine this new nationwide destination branding phenomenon using local mascots and its effectiveness through empirical research.

There has been much research on the character industry of Japan and its economic influences, such as that on the success of Hello Kitty. However, far too little research has been done on regional promotion using local mascots. *Kankou machizukuri* (観光まちづくり), the combination of tourism and regional revitalization initiatives, is a new concept that has become the focus of much attention in recent years (Sorensen, 2007). The purpose of this study can be understood in the same context, as it endeavors to elucidate how tourism is helpful not only for the tourism industry itself, but also in terms of regional

an easy-looking, heart-warming, laid back mascot character, representing groups and organizations or events mainly for public relations. Now, it is meaningless to divide Yuru-kyara and non-Yuru-kyara in Japan. Nowadays the word Yuru-kyara is presumed to be a synonym for local mascots in a much broader sense.

⁴ Nihon Keizai Shimbun, Increasing number of tourists due to Hikonyan effect (「ひこにゃん」効果で観光客倍増, ご当地キャラが熱い) <http://www.nikkei.com/article/DGXDZO49301150X01C12A2TY1P01/> (access date: November 13, 2013)

development as a whole.

Each region has different destination branding mechanisms and it is impossible to examine all the mascots of Japan. Thus, this paper will examine how local mascots facilitate regional promotion and the meaning of these mascots for the local people through a case study of one region: Miyagi Prefecture of the Tohoku area.

In Miyagi Prefecture, there is a tourism promotion mascot, named ‘Musubimaru’ (Picture 1). This is a mascot of the Sendai-Miyagi Destination Campaign of 2008 and 2013. Created in 2008, its design was based on a historical figure of the region. Miyagi Prefecture has continuously promoted its region in the manner of the Sendai-Miyagi Destination Campaign and Musubimaru,

<Picture 1> Musubimaru



Note: This is the basic version and there are two more types of costumes. (<http://www.sendaimiyagidc.jp/musubimaru/profile.php>)

full of local color, is exemplary of this fact. Therefore, examining Musubimaru of Miyagi Prefecture is suitable for shedding light on the subject of destination branding using mascots in terms of tourism.

Miyagi Prefecture was one of those areas most damaged by the 2011

Tohoku earthquake and tsunami. Due to this monumental disaster, tourism promotion became a much more important issue in this area, leading to an emphasis on the role of Musubimaru. It is interesting to note how Musubimaru was utilized amidst this crisis. Although the mascot was created purely as a gimmick for tourism promotion, following the earthquake, it began to take on a much broader role. In order to understand the process of destination branding using mascots, examining how the 2011 earthquake affected Miyagi Prefecture and its mascot of Musubimaru can be quite useful.

This case study endeavors to answer the following questions: What makes the local mascot become effective in the public relations of the region? What is the role of the local mascot in the region? Musubimaru and Miyagi Prefecture provide an exemplary case of the meaning local mascots provide for communities, as well as their effectiveness in promoting tourism.

2. Literature Review

A considerable amount of literature has been published on the Japanese character industry. Miyashita (2002) points out that those successful characters are ones that consumers can empathize with. Shin (2006) explains the success

factors of popular characters in general, while Park (2003) emphasizes the importance of marketing in the character business, giving Japanese examples. Especially, there is a large volume of published studies describing the success of Hello Kitty in the 2000s. Therein, one significant study is Ken Belson and Brian Bremner's 'Hello Kitty: the remarkable story of Sanrio and the billion dollar feline phenomenon', which explains how Hello Kitty succeeded on a global scale. As well, Kim (2010) focuses on Kitty's marketing strategy. These studies show how the Japanese character industry is enormous and effective in Japan.

Numerous studies have attempted to explain the existence of so many successful characters created in Japan, as well as why Japanese themselves love these characters. Previous studies have reported the tradition for Japanese to love cute characters (Miyashita, 2002; McVeigh, 2000). Miyashita explains that the Japanese have been very good at making small and cute things that symbolize meanings, such as talismans, lucky charms or *Manekineko*.⁵ Moreover, Japan's comic culture also plays an important role in the growth of the character industry.

Especially after the Yuru-kyara boom, several attempts have been made

⁵ The manekineko (招き猫) is a common Japanese lucky charm, that is usually believed to bring good luck to the owner. It depicts a cat beckoning with an upright paw, and is usually displayed at the entrance of shops.

to explain how successful local mascots, such as Hikonyan and Kumamon, enjoyed such popularity. (Wassvik, 2012; Team Kumamon, 2013) Preliminary work on Yuru-kyara was undertaken by Kotaro Akizuki (2010). He endeavors to verify the meaning of Yuru-kyara and concludes that the range of Yuru-kyara is becoming vaguer than before with the birth of more and more Yuru-kyara. This demonstrates that the word ‘Yuru-kyara’ is just a buzzword referring to existing local mascots.⁶ This is the reason why the term Yuru-kyara will denote local mascots in this paper.

Meanwhile, recent evidence suggests the importance and effectiveness of destination branding (Piggot, 2001; Morgan and Pritchard, 2004). A seminal study on destination branding is ‘Destination branding: creating the unique destination proposition (Nigel Morgan et al, 2004)’. With regard to Japanese local tourism studies, Nakamura (2008) explains how local vernacular cultures become tourist attractions. This is related to the actions of the Japanese government, which has tried to utilize the vernacular cultures of local areas as tourist attractions since the 1980s. Horita (2012) asserts that the concept of Kanko machizukuri was made possible due to the simultaneous development of tourism and civilian management of the shared space known as machizukuri

⁶ The reason why the word Yuru-kyara has still not disappeared is because the term is still used at the name of events such as the Yuru-kyara Grand Prix, which is the biggest event about local mascots. The first Yuru-kyara Grand Prix was held in 2010 and Hikonyan won first place, while Kumamon won first place in the second Yuru-kyara Grand Prix.

within Japan's historic context.

This paper attempts to integrate these two approaches by focusing on both the growing interest in local tourism for regional revitalization as well as the growing number of local mascots based on the strength of long-standing Japanese character industries. This research complements the lack of studies on destination branding and regional revitalization using local mascots. In the future, it would be very meaningful to see the promotion of regional tourism utilizing local mascots.

3. Method of study

As explained above, the main questions in this paper are: What makes the local mascot effective in the public relation of a region? What is the role of the local mascot in the region? However, even advanced research is not enough to find answers for these questions. That is why this paper is based on in-depth field research.

As field research is integral for empirical case studies, I visited Sendai in which the Miyagi Prefectural and Sendai City governments are situated. Musubimaru falls under the jurisdiction of the Miyagi Prefectural Government.

The main reason why I visit Sendai is that it is not only the largest city but also prefectural capital city of Miyagi Prefecture. It is very important to gather primary sources because there is no advanced research on the local mascots of Miyagi Prefecture in terms of destination branding. In order to know how Musubimaru was created and employed, I need to visit the Miyagi government and observe its process in determining the use of Musubimaru, collect primary sources and conduct interviews. Interviewing local people as well was required in order to discern local attitudes to Musubimaru.

Every August 6th to 8th, a major festival of the Tohoku region is held in Sendai called ‘The Sendai Tanabata Festival’.⁷ People erect huge bamboo sticks in the shopping district and decorate them. Since this is the biggest festival of Miyagi Prefecture, I assumed this event would be utilized as a part of Miyagi’s recovery movement, and this is the reason why I visited Sendai from August 5th to 14th. I tried to examine events or activities relating to the 2011 Tohoku earthquake in this festival and find out the use of Musubimaru among them, as Table 1 shows. I believed it would be very useful and meaningful to do participant observation in this festival since local events are a big part of the destination branding of the region.

⁷ <http://www.sendaitanabata.com/> (access date: July 18, 2013)

<Table 1> Schedule of Sendai Tanabata Festival and my participation

Date	Schedule of Sendai Tanabata Festival		My participation
August 5th 2013	Eve festival (fireworks)		Watched eve festival and interviewed local people
August 6th 2013	Bamboo decoration at Arcade on Tyuuou(中央) Street &	Local Character Summit at Aoba Castle (18:00~21:00) (*It was canceled due to heavy rain)	Participated in the main event and observed how Musubimaru was used in this festival
August 7th 2013	Events relating to recovery movements of 2011 Tohoku earthquake at Aoba(青葉) Street &	Show of Datebusyoutai(伊達武将隊) at Aoba Castle (18:00~21:00)	Watched Datebusyoutai show and observed the work of Datebusyoutai
August 8th 2013	Main events at Koutoudai(勾当台) park event stage (10:00~21:00)	Candle event call ‘Tanabata night’ at the tomb of Date Masamune (瑞鳳殿) (19:00~21:00)	Visited event sections of Aoba Street and observed support sections for damaged places of 2011 Tohoku earthquake

Before my visit to Sendai, I conducted preliminary interviews with the chief of the Tourism Division of the Miyagi Prefectural Government and an officer of the International Promotion Section of International Economy and Tourism Department via E-mail, before deciding to do additional interviews in person.

For the purpose of conducting interviews, I visited the Miyagi Prefectural

Government and Sendai City Hall. My main interviewee was the chief of the Tourism Division at Miyagi Prefectural Government who was in charge of Musubimaru. I also interviewed two officers of the International Promotion Section of the International Economy and Tourism Department at Sendai City Hall in order to hear about tourism policies and the promotion of Sendai city (Table 2). I also tried to interview as many local people during the festival as possible and gathered primary sources. This thesis was based on the information and materials that I gathered and witnessed during that time.

<Table 2> Interview schedule ⁸

Interviewee	Place to interview	Date and Time
Tour guides of information center of Sendai station	Sendai Station	August 5th, 2013 (13:00~13:20)
Okuyama, High school teacher and Tyubati, Accountant	Evening festival at Nishi park	August 5th, 2013 (18:00~19:00)
Machida and Umehara, office workers & Asano, citizen	Evening festival at Nishi park	August 5th, 2013 (19:00~20:00)
Takahashi, citizen	Events stage of Koutoudai park	August 6th, 2013 (10:00~11:30)
One of the actors of Datebusyoutai	Aoba Castle	August 7th, 2013 (18:20~18:40)
Saitou, a member of the volunteer group for foreign students of Tohoku University	Tyuuou Street	August 8th, 2013 (11:00~11:30)
Mukai Teruyuki, The chief of the Tourism Division of the Miyagi Prefectural Government	Miyagi Prefectural Government	August 9th, 2013 (10:00~12:30)

⁸ With regard to the Korean and Japanese names, this paper will use the order of Korean and Japanese name, which is family name first and given name last.

Ito Takahiro, Administrative Staff of the Tourism Division of the Miyagi Prefectural Government	Miyagi Prefectural Government	August 9th, 2013 (12:30~12:40)
Sudou Yumiko, Officer of the International Promotion Section of the International Economy and Tourism Department of Sendai City Hall	Sendai City Hall	August 9th, 2013 (13:30~14:30)
Saitou and Irie, citizen	Sendai Station	August 9th, 2013 (19:00~19:30)
Sudou Yumiko and Abe Masayuki (2nd interview)	Sendai City Hall	August 12th, 2013 (11:00~12:00)
Mukai Teruyuki (2nd interview)	Miyagi Prefectural Government	August 12th, 2013 (13:30~15:00)

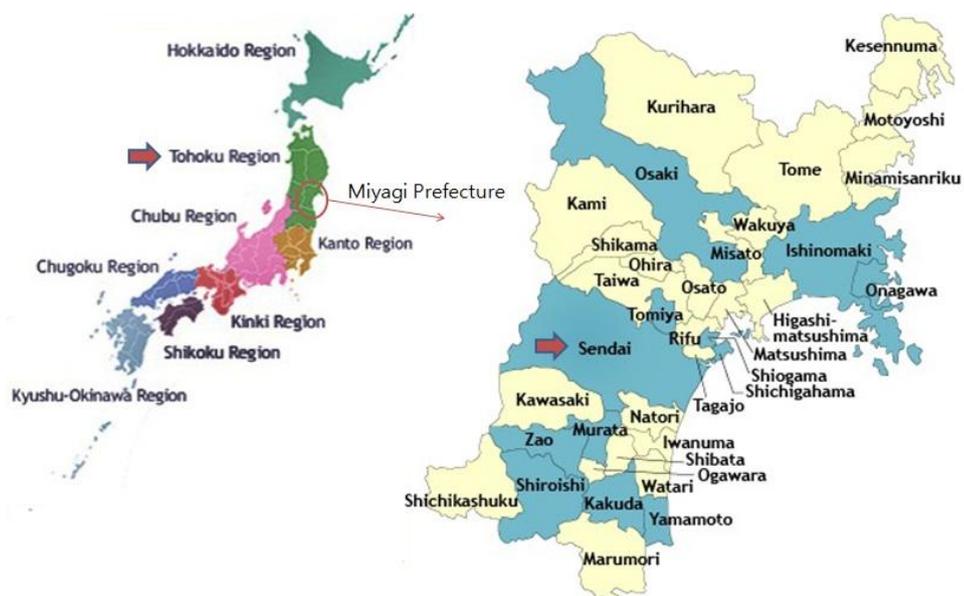
This paper has been organized in the following way. First a brief overview of Miyagi Prefecture and Tohoku region are given in order to know the background of Musubimaru and describes its basic usage and role. In chapter 3, the role of Musubimaru and its economic effects after the 2011 earthquake are covered. Then, in order to know the characteristics of Musubimaru in more detail, chapter 4 introduces the most successful local mascot, Kumamon and compares it to Musubimaru. Finally, the conclusion of this paper is presented in chapter 5.

II. Musubimaru, the local mascot of Miyagi Prefecture

1. Miyagi Prefecture

Miyagi Prefecture is one of the six prefectures of the Tohoku region in Japan (Picture 2). It covers an area of 7,285 sq km and has a population of 2.4 million people.

<Picture 2> The map of Japan and Miyagi Prefecture



(source: <http://web-japan.org/region/pref/miyagi.html>)

It borders Iwate Prefecture to the north, Akita Prefecture to the northwest,

Yamagata Prefecture to the west and Fukushima Prefecture to the south.⁹ It is located in the central part of Tohoku and its capital city, Sendai, acts as the nucleus of the Tohoku area. Therefore, field research in Sendai means studying not only about Miyagi Prefecture, but also the Tohoku region. This presents an opportunity to observe how Musubimaru, the mascot of Miyagi Prefecture, operates in both the greater Tohoku area as well as in Miyagi Prefecture.

Miyagi used to be called Mutsu country and it has been the political center of the Tohoku area since the ancient Yamato era. In the Edo period, the regional strongman Date Masamune (伊達政宗, 1567 –

<Picture 3> The statue of Date Masamune in Aoba Castle



1636) established the fief of the Sendai clan as its first Daimyo, and this was the origin of Sendai city.¹⁰ He is believed to have been very proud and a self-respecting tactician. He is also very popular for his distinct characteristics; a helmet with the shape of a crescent moon and an eye patch to cover his missing

⁹ <http://www.my-japan-travelguide.com/miyagi-prefecture.htm> (access date: November 10, 2013)

¹⁰ <http://www.japanguides.net/miyagi/miyagi-prefecture.html> (access date: November 10, 2013)

right eye.¹¹ Thus, Sendai has been performing destination branding using Date Masamune. Consequently, Masamune has become not only a very meaningful figure for the local people, but also the most recognizable person from Miyagi for tourists. There is a statue of Date Masamune in Aoba Castle (Picture 3), the main tourism spot of Sendai and the statue is also regarded as the symbol of Sendai.¹²

Paddy rice is cultivated almost all over the prefecture, and the yield of rice is one of the highest in Japan. Stockbreeding is also popular, and people keep dairy cattle in the broad areas of Zao, Kurikoma, and Sanriku. The Fisheries of Sanriku always give one of the best catches in Japan, and the processing of the marine products is also popular. The Industrialization of the area of Port Sendai has attracted the beer, pulp, electrical, and petroleum industries.¹³ Miyagi has promoted fresh fish and rice as well as milk products to tourists and local people.

Nowadays the big issue in the Tohoku area is the Great East Japan Earthquake¹⁴ (東日本大震災) and its aftermath. On 11 March, various places

¹¹ For this feature, he was called Dokuganryu (独眼竜), which means one-eyed dragon'.

¹² According to my interview with the people of Sendai, the locals think that he is the one that represents their hometown.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ In this paper, the term 'the 2011 Tohoku earthquake' will also be used to describe this earthquake.

in Japan, mainly the coastline facing the Pacific Ocean in the Tohoku area, were hit by a series of huge tsunamis, causing unprecedented damage. Iwate, Fukushima and Miyagi Prefectures were the most damaged places among six Tohoku Prefectures. The Fukushima Daiichi and Daini Nuclear Power Stations in Fukushima Prefecture were damaged and 20-kilometer radii around the power stations were designated as evacuation zones. After the disaster, the number of international visitors to Japan went down respectively: 50% in March, 63% in April, 50% in May and 36% in June from the previous year; an unprecedented rate of decrease (OECD Tourism Trends and Policies 2012, 2012)

In Miyagi Prefecture, seashore places were highly damaged while inland places, such as Sendai city, were unharmed. Many places were hit and swept away by the tsunami. One month after the earthquake, the Miyagi Government announced a 'Disaster Recovery Plan'.¹⁵ National recovery movements are still in progress.

The earthquake exacerbated the gap between the eastern damaged areas and western undamaged areas.¹⁶ As a result, the function of Sendai city as the business district of Miyagi Prefecture has been reinforced, while the damaged

¹⁵ <http://www.pref.miyagi.jp/site/ej-earthquake/fukkou-keikaku.html> (access date: December 9, 2013)

¹⁶ Lee Ho-Sang, 2012, the change of regional system of Tohoku area: transportation and business district of Miyagi prefecture (도호쿠지방의 지역체계 변화-미야기현의 교통과 상권을 중심으로), p.37, March 2012 symposium of Institute for Japanese Studies: 'a year after the Great East Japan Earthquake'

seashore places have totally collapsed. Nevertheless, Sendai is the vanguard in the recovery movement for the Tohoku area as well as Miyagi Prefecture.

Having no historical capitals, the Tohoku area has always been on the periphery in Japanese history. More recently, however, it has started to garner attention due to its centrality in the recovery and revitalization issues now of concern in Japan. After the earthquake, there have been many movements by the six Tohoku prefectures to work together for recovery and revitalization.

2. Tourism Promotion Mascot Musubimaru

(1) The birth and growth of Musubimaru

Musubimaru was created as a symbol of the Sendai-Miyagi Destination Campaign¹⁷ promoting the local charms of Miyagi as well as tourism itself. The first campaign held from October 1 to December 31 in 2008 was a large-scale national tourism promotion campaign taking place in Miyagi with the participation from municipalities throughout Miyagi and neighboring

¹⁷ This is a tourism promotion event for Japan Railways (JR) Group, promoting the use of JR to visit a promoted destination. Every year, JR hosts this event with one Prefectural Government. Since JR is spread all over Japan, this destination campaign is a nationwide local promotion event. A local government that wants to host this event should apply to JR in advance and decide which year to do this event.

prefectures in the southern Tohoku region. This campaign was implemented by the six companies of the JR group, Sendai City, Miyagi Prefecture and local tourist associations.¹⁸

Notably, the Miyagi Government decided before 2011 to hold the 2nd Sendai-Miyagi Destination Campaign in 2013. However, the 2011 earthquake made this 2013 Sendai-Miyagi Destination Campaign much more meaningful, as Miyagi Prefecture was now highly in need of regional promotion following the earthquake. This campaign was held again in 2013 and Musubimaru worked as the main mascot for this event as well.

As explained above, Musubimaru is a mascot of the Sendai-Miyagi Destination Campaign. This campaign was led by the Sendai Miyagi tourist campaign promotion Council (仙台・宮城観光 キャンペーン推進協議会). This council requested a designer, Terao Takeshi, to make an image logo for the campaign. The first suggested image was not cute and was canceled. The designer then suggested several logos mainly based on rice¹⁹ because Miyagi is famous for rice. Among these logos, a rice ball with a crescent moon on its forehead (Picture 4) was selected. The main reason why this logo was selected from several sample images was that it was a design symbolizing Date

¹⁸ <http://www.sendaimiyagidc.jp/en/> (access date: November 10, 2013)

¹⁹ I observed 6 to 8 images of them. But these images were not provided since they are undisclosed.

<Picture 4> Logo mark of Musubimaru



(source: <http://www.sendaimiyagidc.jp/>)

selected. ‘Musubi’ means ‘Rice ball’ while ‘maru’ means ‘boy’. This was the birth of Musubimaru.

Later, Musubimaru became an anime-style mascot with a full body. Musubimaru has three costumes and each type has a 2D and 3D version. Most local mascots have 3D versions in order to appear like living things. Usually a trained actor dresses up as Musubimaru.²⁰ The 2D version of Musubimaru is used in lot of goods (Picture 5) or for promotion of materials such as guidebooks. The 3D version is used in shows for the local people or to participate in regional promotional events such as the Tanabata festival. Musubimaru sometimes participates in events with other local mascots or other promotion group such as Datebusyoutai.²¹

²⁰ Therefore, when this paper says that Musubimaru visits some places and takes pictures with the local people or participates in some events, it is talking about Musubimaru’s 3D version. The anthropomorphous 3D version is a common way to utilizing local mascots.

²¹ Due to his distinguished characteristics, Date Masamune has been a character in several Japanese period animations, games and dramas. In 2008, after the great success of the game

<Picture 5> Various Musubimaru products;
T shirt (left), lunch box (middle) and cookie package (right)



<Picture 6> three types of Musubimaru



Among three versions, the most basic one is the armor version (The left of Picture 6). It wears an ornamental armor helmet with the shape of a crescent moon just like Date Masamune. It is the most common version people usually

series ‘Sengoku Basara(戦国BASARA)’, many tourists, especially females, visited Miyagi for a pilgrimage to the place related to Date Masamune. These women were called ‘Rekizyo(歴女)’, which means ‘history girl’ in Japanese.

In order to follow up the Rekizyo boom, Sendai city launched a tourism performance group called ‘Datebusyoutai’ (伊達武将隊, Date military commander Corps) in 2010. Datebusyoutai consists of professional costumed actors who play historical figures and perform such feats as sword-fighting action to promote the charms of Miyagi. There are other tourism performance groups in other places based on their regional historical figures, so these groups sometimes play together at events. For example, Yamagata Prefecture has ‘Ainobyushoutai (愛の武将隊)’ based on the famous historical figure, Naoe Kanetsugu(直江兼続).

see. This version is used on the welcoming sign in Sendai International Airport (Picture 7). The Second version is used to promote local events (Middle of Picture 6). Finally, the last version is a sport version, which is for promotion of local sports teams (Right of Picture 6). By having different types, Musubimaru is able to be widely used in different situations and to promote many different things.

<Picture 7> welcome sign and flag of Sendai International Airport



One interesting manner in which mascots are utilized, as with the 3D Musubimaru, is in their treatment as humans. Musubimaru is now designated as the chief of the PR department of Miyagi and communicates with fans via social network services. For this reason, while the use of illustrations of Musubimaru is free, the use of only the head of the mascot is forbidden, as this

would entail its decapitation.

Musubimaru also has likes and hobbies. It likes the things which are famous in Miyagi, especially fish, and its hobby is visiting hot springs. In this sense, Miyagi Prefecture does not have to promote what is famous in the region; it just promotes what Musubimaru likes. By presenting the characteristics of Miyagi in this particular manner, people sharing an empathetic bond with the mascot can feel a greater level of closeness and intimacy with Miyagi's local products and places. This is a novel way to promote local charms by using the power of the character.

When Musubimaru showed up at the street during the festival, people gathered around him and lined up to take a picture with it (Picture 8). The chief of the Tourism Division said that this is the basic way to use local mascots; it shows up for the people and makes them smile.

<Picture 8> Musubimaru at Sendai Tanabata Festival



The local people I interviewed said they think Musubimaru is the most famous and popular character in Sendai and it is understandable to choose Musubimaru as the symbol of Miyagi. This shows that local people recognize the mascot as a representative character of the region. When Musubimaru visited other regions, 50% of people of the region recognized Musubimaru. Since it bears the unique helmet design of Date Masamune, even non-local people can easily recognize that Musubimaru was based on Date Masamune and therefore that it is from Miyagi.

(2) The use of Musubimaru

As a mascot of the Sendai-Miyagi Destination Campaign, Musubimaru utilized all the materials provided. Since the campaign, Musubimaru has been being used to promote tourism for Miyagi. The Sendai Miyagi Tourist Campaign Promotion Council still pays for all the operating expenses of Musubimaru. This organization consists of 46 local governments including the Miyagi Prefectural Government, local companies, such as 77 Bank and Sendai Airport Railway, and 29 various local organizations. They gather to jointly fund the tourism promotion of Miyagi through this organization.

The Tourism Division of Miyagi Prefectural Government is the executive office of the Sendai Miyagi Tourist Campaign Promotion Council and is the

place where the practical operations pertaining to Musubimaru are carried out on behalf of all owners. Since the organization does not require loyalty²² for the use of Musubimaru, it basically cannot earn profit from Musubimaru except from the sale of official goods. It decided on the free use of Musubimaru in order to ensure it and the Miyagi prefecture's renown.

There are two types of Musubimaru products. First, there are official goods from the Sendai Miyagi Tourist Campaign Promotion Council. Then, there are authorized goods made by local companies. Any companies or institutions that want to make products of Musubimaru can use the mascot freely if they apply for it properly and get permission.

If companies or organizations want to use Musubimaru for its products or some kind of event, they have to file an application form at the Tourism Division of the Miyagi Prefectural Government. Even though the use of the mascot is free, it is meant to be used toward the promotion of tourism, and thus permission is required. This is because the goal of Musubimaru is simply to promote the tourism of Miyagi, and not everything else.

Musubimaru can also be found in textbooks. Musubimaru is explained in a Middle school social studies textbook.²³ It was also introduced as a mascot

²² Usually most local mascots don't charge fee for the use of mascots.

²³ 公民用語 ハンドブック 宮城県版, 2012, 新学社, p.4

representing the Miyagi Prefecture in a Middle school social studies textbook²⁴
and a textbook for elementary school students.²⁵

²⁴ 'ウイニングフィニッシュ 社会' 2012, 好学出版 p.8

²⁵ 福岡 政行、2011、しくみがわかる政治とくらし大事典5 「地方自治」がささえる地域のくらし、学研教育出版 & Murio Michiko, 'what's up? 2013-14 Elementary', PEARSON, P18

Ⅲ. The Great East Japan Earthquake and Musubimaru

1. New role of Musubimaru:

The official logo for the Earthquake Disaster Recovery Plan

As explained in chapter 2, Musubimaru is a tourism promotion mascot created in the Sendai-Miyagi Destination Campaign. Musubimaru was ranked in the top 10 in the 2010 Yuru-kyara Grand Prix, which is the highest score among Miyagi characters, and it was the only official mascot from Miyagi.²⁶ As it was created at the beginning of the ‘Yuru-kyara boom’, Musubimaru was able to take part in major local mascot events, such as the Yuru-kyara Grand Prix, from the very beginning of such events.

However, after the 2011 Tohoku earthquake, Musubimaru took on important role in the recovery movement. It became the official logo (Picture 9) for the Miyagi Prefecture Earthquake Disaster

<Picture 9> The official recovery logo of Miyagi Prefecture



(source: <http://www.pref.miyagi.jp/fukensui/logomark.htm>)

²⁶ <http://www2.yurugp.jp/ranking/2010.html> (access date: November 10, 2013)

Recovery Plan²⁷ and has been used in lots of official events concerning revitalization. Picture 10 shows the first use of ‘MIYAGI Towards recovery! Never give up! (復興へ 頑張ろう！みやぎ)’ logo on April 11th 2011 when Murai Yoshihiro(村井 嘉浩), the governor of Miyagi Prefecture, announced the disaster recovery plan after the earthquake in a press conference. This logo became official after this press conference.

The chief of the Tourism Division also said;

It was unplanned to use Musubimaru as the logo of disaster recovery plan when making the slogan. But after decided the slogan we felt the necessity to add an image when announcing the slogan to the press. So we urgently inserted Musubimaru with the slogan and added a crescent moon, the symbol of Date Masamune, in the background. But we didn’t know it would become the official logo at that time. The designer actually said that he would have designed it better if he had known it would be official.

Since the recovery logo was made very hurriedly, there were design mistakes, including the fact that the slogan letter even covered the character’s hand (Picture 10) when it was first shown to the public. Later it was corrected

²⁷ <http://www.pref.miyagi.jp/uploaded/attachment/36634.pdf> (access date: November 10, 2013)

and the image of Picture 9 became a symbol of revitalization.

<Picture 10> Musubimaru's first appearance as a recovery logo



(source: <http://www.pref.miyagi.jp/kohou/kaiken/h23/k230411.htm>)

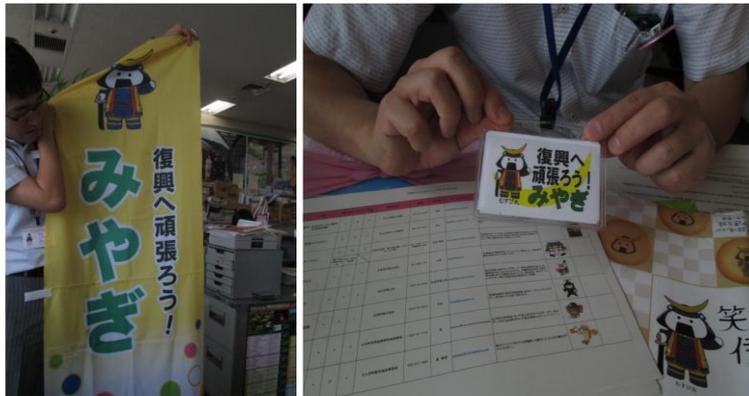
Thus, Musubimaru was imbued with new meaning as a recovery logo because of the earthquake. The theme of the Sendai Tanabata Festival in 2013 was "Coming Together" in order to pray for a quick recovery of the entire Tohoku region,²⁸ so there were lots of support booths for damaged places and events to express the hope for the revival of Tohoku. The recovery logo of Musubimaru was visible at this festival.

²⁸ <http://www.tanabata-negaigoto.jp/en/index.html> (access date: November 10, 2013)

2. Economic effect of Musubimaru after the earthquake

After the earthquake, Musubimaru took part in the recovery activities by becoming a logo of the recovery. This logo is widely used in all official recovery movements. There are lots of public works that employ this logo and all civil servants have name tags that have this logo on the back (Picture 11).

<Picture 11> The flag that was used at the presentation of the disaster recovery plan. (left)
All civil servants have a name tag that has the logo on the back. (right)



The fact that Musubimaru was based on the image of Date Masamune may be one reason why it was used as recovery logo. This image of bravery is suitable for the recovery movement. In fact, I witnessed several support posters using the image of Date Masamune (Picture 12). These images of Masamune are sometimes even placed together with the image of Musubimaru, as in Picture 12. This is because he was a famous hero of the region, bearing a strong image connoting the defeat of any threat, such as a great tsunami. Thus, it is not

a coincidence that Musubimaru became a recovery logo.

<Picture 12> Musubimaru on the left and the poster of Date Masamune, which reads, 'Pray for the recovery of Tohoku', on the right hand side.



Interestingly, the sales of Musubimaru goods have increased since the earthquake. Table 3 shows the revenue of the official goods of Musubimaru.²⁹ The sales of products decreased after the end of the destination campaign in 2008, but they dramatically increased after the great earthquake in 2011.

<Table 3> The Revenue of the Goods of Musubimaru

Year	Sum(Yen)	Note
2007	4,167,470	
2008	15,122,800	The 1st Destination Campaign
2009	10,744,448	
2010	8,267,390	
2011	23,285,078	The 2011 Tohoku Earthquake
2012	23,166,030	
Total	84,753,216	

(source: Tourism Division of Miyagi Prefectural Government)

²⁹ Therefore, it is not included the number of Musubimaru products made by local companies that use Musubimaru by no-fee policies.

<Table 4> The number of requests to use the symbol mark or logo of Musubimaru

Year	The number of Requests	Products among Requests	Note
2006	1	0	
2007	168	9	
2008	265	20	The 1st Destination Campaign
2009	191	45	
2010	188	25	
2011	302	46	The 2011 Tohoku Earthquake
2012	385	82	
2013 (~7/31)	200	48	The 2nd Destination Campaign
Total	1700	275	

(source: Tourism Division of Miyagi Prefectural Government)

Also, as Table 4 shows, the number of requests to use the Musubimaru logo also increased during the first Destination Campaign but decreased after the campaign, before increasing again in 2011, reaching 385 in 2012, the highest number of requests that year. These phenomena undoubtedly illustrate that Musubimaru became much more popular after the earthquake, where awareness of Musubimaru heightened as the region received national attention from media following the disaster. Inevitably, Japanese people have bought Musubimaru products to express their wish for the revitalization of the Miyagi region.

There is another example of local mascots that gained popularity after the earthquake. Hoyaboya, the local mascot of Ishinomaki city, which was also one

of the damaged places in the Miyagi Prefecture, was ranked 26 in the Yuru-kyara Grand Prix of 2011, which was much higher than Musubimaru.³⁰ It was mainly because many young people from all over the Prefecture came to Ishinomaki for voluntary service and became familiar with Hoyaboya. They spread Hoyaboya through SNS and voted for Hoyaboya at the Yuru-kyara Grand Prix.³¹ These examples show how local mascots are very accessible items for people who want to support the regions. Buying the products and voting for the mascots were one of the easiest ways for people who want to support the Miyagi region.

According to the Miyagi government, Musubimaru's economic effect amounts to 900 million yen as of September 2013.³² There are several internal factors for the success of this mascot. First, Miyagi prefecture, and especially Sendai, possess a very powerful symbol for promotion in the form of Date Masamune. Musubimaru wears a crescent moon helmet, borrowing the image of Date Masamune. Thus, local people have a natural affinity with Musubimaru. Secondly, as the Sendai-Miyagi Destination Campaign was held twice, in 2008

³⁰ <http://www2.yurugp.jp/ranking/2012.html> (access date: November 10, 2013)

³¹ Yomiuri, Hoyaboya is becoming popular (ホヤぼーや人気上昇中), <http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/feature/eq2011/information/20121106-OYT8T00913.htm> (access date: November 23, 2013)

³² Sendai Keizai Shimbun, Musubimaru was promoted to the position of section chief (むすび丸が「課長」に昇格 - 経済波及効果90億円、異例のスピード出世), <http://sendai.keizai.biz/headline/1493/> (access date: November 10, 2013)

and in 2013, Musubimaru was continuously employed. Musubimaru is still used as an official representative character of Miyagi under the control of the Miyagi Prefectural Government. Also, Musubimaru can be used freely when people apply for the use of the mascot properly. This also makes it much easier for local companies to use the mascots on their products.

The growth in popularity of both Musubimaru and Hoyaboya after the earthquake shows that the great earthquake actually raised awareness of local characters. The Miyagi Prefecture was exposed in the media, which inevitably led to the exposure of its local mascots. The subsequent rise in related product sales and requests to use the characters also shows that Japanese believed they could support the damaged regions by participating in commercial activity pertaining to local mascots. This demonstrates that local mascots may act as a medium for social cooperation as well as regional revitalization, and this can be seen as contributing to regional integration in a much broader sense. Hence, it could conceivably be hypothesized that local mascots could play an important role in regional integration.

The main reason that this kind of thing happened is that the seriousness of the 2011 earthquake rendered the recovery movement a matter not just of local concern, but of national concern. In Japan, the unique characteristics of the 2011 Tohoku earthquake are found in its subsequent revitalization

movement, linked to the ‘regeneration of Japan’ or ‘revival of Japan’.³³ Moreover, the seriousness of this disaster designated the Tohoku area as the center in terms of regeneration and revitalization. Japan now aims at economic stimulation through the recovery movements, regarding this as the ‘regeneration’ of Japan, and this is the reason why Japan terms these recovery activities as a ‘revival’ movement, and not just as a ‘recovery’ movement.³⁴ Therefore, Musubimaru was at the center of this ‘revival of Japan’.

Even though Musubimaru was chosen as a recovery logo unexpectedly, the fact that Musubimaru was based on Date Masamune must not be ignored as an influence on the decision to use it as the official logo of the Earthquake Disaster Recovery Plan.

³³ Han Young-Hae, 2012, Introduction: the life of people in the damaged place and the revival of Japan (총론: 피해민의 생활세계와 일본의 ‘부흥’), pp 3~4, March 2012 symposium of Institute for Japanese Studies: 'a year after the Great East Japan Earthquake'

³⁴ Ibid.

IV. Comparison of the Characteristics of Musubimaru and Kumamon

1. Kumamoto's destination branding using Kumamon

Kumamon (Picture 13) is one of the most successful and popular local mascots representing Kumamoto Prefecture in the Kyushu area. As its method of success is quite unique among other mascots, studying Kumamon and comparing it with Musubimaru is the best way to know the features of Musubimaru and local mascots more generally.

<Picture 13> Kumamon



(source: <https://kumamon-official.jp/present>)

Kumamon's 'kuma' is short for Kumamoto, while "mon" comes from the Japanese word for 'things'. It was first created for a campaign called Kumamoto Surprise in 2010 to draw tourists to the region. At that time, Kumamoto Prefecture urgently needed to raise awareness concerning the

Kansai area in order to attract the Kyushu Shinkansen line to the region.³⁵ Kumamon was a campaign character used to promote the allure of Kumamoto to other prefectures, one year before the opening of the entire line of Kyushu Shinkansen.

Kumamon became very famous after winning first place in the Yuru-kyara Grand Prix in 2011.³⁶ Thanks to this popularity, Kumamoto was able to attract lots of tourists, as well as the Shinkansen station, accomplishing the intended goal. Like Musubimaru, the costumed Kumamon has become the official marketing manager for the Kumamoto Prefecture, boosting sales of regional products and attracting tourists. It still shows up at lots of promotion and charity events throughout the nation and even visits foreign countries to promote Kumamoto. Thus Kumamoto has become the best example of successful destination branding using local mascots.

(1) Kumamon effect

Kumamon shows just how much a local mascot can be successful and make its region, Kumamoto, famous. Kumamoto also has a free-use policy just like Musubimaru. As of 2012, sales of Kumamon items reached 29.3 billion yen, up

³⁵ Team Kumamon, 2013, *The secret of Kumamon*, p.184

³⁶ <http://www2.yurugp.jp/ranking/2011.html> (access date: November 21, 2013)

from 2.5 billion yen in 2011.³⁷ In a prefectural survey of local companies, 90 percent said they believed Kumamon significantly boosted their business.³⁸ This magnificent economic effect that Kumamon brings is called the ‘Kumamon effect’.

The enormous popularity of Kumamon makes people wonder about the possibility of whether the mascot could be globalized. Team Kumamon, the division in charge of Kumamon in the Kumamoto Prefectural office, has stated that they desire to promote Kumamon at events held abroad.³⁹ However, the more popular Kumamon becomes in foreign countries, the more fake Kumamon products will appear. Team Kumamon should maintain the quality of Kumamon products while getting rid of unauthorized goods to protect the image of Kumamon.⁴⁰ This is very important in maintaining brand power, as Nigel Morgan explains:

Once the brand personality has been identified, marketers must have the courage to stay with the brand’s essence; refinements may be made to how

³⁷ The Wall Street Journal, The branding of Kumamon: The Bear That Stole Japan's Heart, <http://blogs.wsj.com/japanrealtime/2013/06/28/the-branding-of-kumamon-the-bear-that-stole-japans-heart/> (access date: November 10, 2013)

³⁸ The Japan Time, ‘Mascots bear cash for local authorities’ <http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/01/13/national/mascots-bear-cash-for-local-authorities/#.UtKlnIawfDc> (access date: November 10, 2013)

³⁹ Team Kumamon, 2013, op. cit., P.236

⁴⁰ The Wall Street Journal, The branding of Kumamon: The Bear That Stole Japan's Heart, op. cit.

the values are expressed in the brand architecture, but the essentials of the brand personality should remain consistent. The secret is continually to evolve and enrich the original brand personality, building on the initial strengths to strengthen their appeal and to broaden the market.⁴¹

Bilateral national cooperation will be needed, such as Free Trade Agreements, in order to maintain the quality of Kumamon products. Further studies, which take these variables into account, will need to be undertaken.

(2) Kumamon's promotion strategy

Kumamoto focuses on character branding of Kumamon using all kinds of media, from blogs to newspapers and radio advertisements. In order to introduce this character, Team Kumamoto first carried out a strategy to spark conversations that were unrelated to the prefecture. First, they made Kumamon appear in Osaka city without prior notice. In doing this, people were led to wonder what the character was. Then, Team Kumamon kept spreading information about Kumamon using blogs and Social Networking Services (SNS).⁴²

After Kumamon gained wide recognition through SNS, the governor of Kumamoto held a serious press conference to call on people to "Search for

⁴¹ Nigel Morgan, Annette Pritchard and Roger Pride, 2004, op. cit., p.13

⁴² Team Kumamon, 2013, op. cit., p.31

Kumamon!", saying that Kumamon had disappeared from Osaka for nearly one month.⁴³ Thanks to the press conference, Kumamon was featured in the major media, helping it to become recognized nationwide. This ensured that it received the votes to be crowned as the winner at the Yuru-kyara Grand Prix.

After Kumamon became famous, Kumamoto Prefecture's no-fee strategy was acknowledged as a quicker way to attain brand recognition. Kumamoto let companies use Kumamon's image for free.⁴⁴ Unlike the case of Musubimaru, as long as a product had the slightest bit to do with Kumamoto prefecture, even in a single ingredient, part of the packaging, or in a small line inserted endorsing the prefecture, the product received permission to use the image.

Team Kumamon outlined three rules for using Kumamon.⁴⁵ First, one had to improve the brand value of Kumamon. Second, one had to improve the relevance between Kumamoto and Kumamon. Third, one had to ensure a sustainable system for this process.

(3) Success factors for Kumamon

I found that there are two factors that made Kumamon successful: character-oriented promotion and simple, even non-regional appearances of Kumamon.

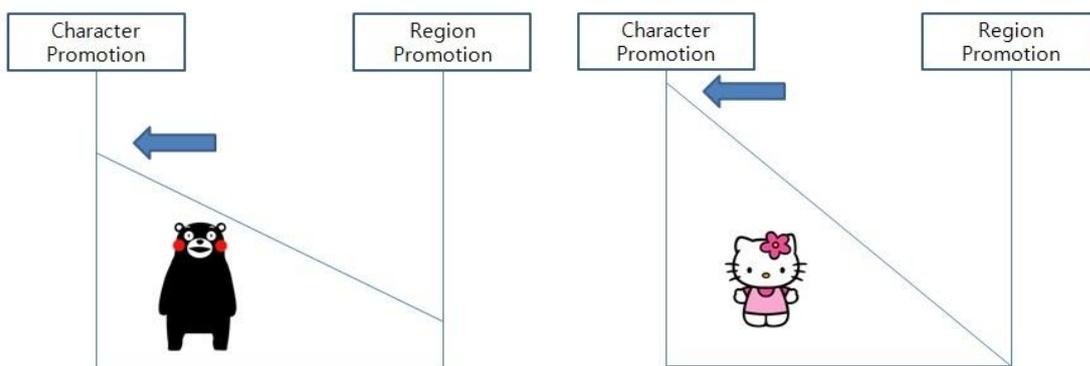
⁴³ http://web-japan.org/trends/11_culture/pop130812.html (access date: October 14, 2013)

⁴⁴ Team Kumamon, 2013, op. cit., p. 234

⁴⁵ Team Kumamon, 2013, op. cit., P. 212

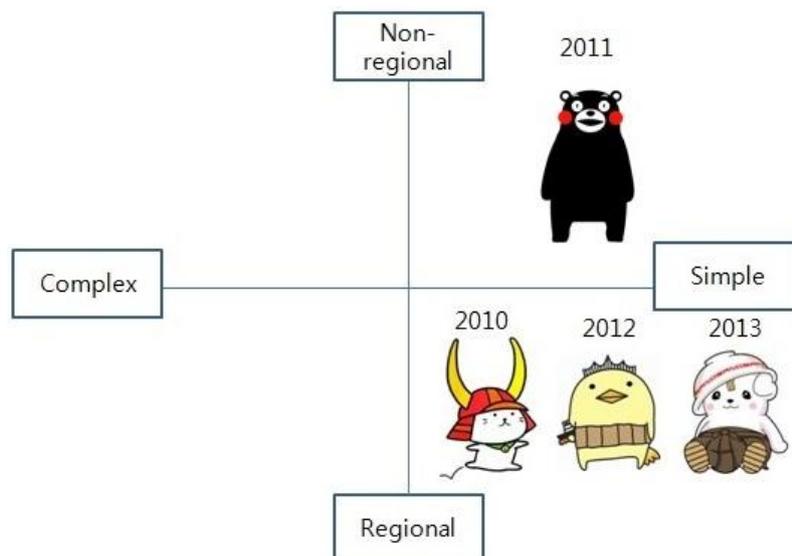
First, Kumamon was successful because of its character-oriented promotion. When Kumamon was first introduced, Team Kumamon purposefully did not reveal that it was the mascot of Kumamoto. In other words, they put much emphasis on promoting the character itself, rather than on the promotion of the region. The more people had interest in Kumamon, the more naturally people became curious about Kumamoto, before eventually applying for the use of Kumamon. Kumamoto can promote and boost its region based on the principle that it can be commercially used when products somehow have something to do with Kumamoto. Due to Kumamoto's indirect promotion strategy, Kumamon was treated like a commercial character, just like Hello Kitty (Figures 1 and 2). Although Kumamon is still a local mascot, and thus cannot be considered a commercial character like Hello Kitty, its promotion is distinctively weighted toward character promotion unlike other local mascots.

< Figure 1> Promotional Emphasis of Kumamon <Figure 2> Promotional Emphasis of Hello Kitty



Secondly, beside the fact that its name was derived from Kumamoto, Kumamon's appearance expressed no features of Kumamoto; there are no wild bears in Kumamon. Kumamon has a very simple design with no characteristics to reveal that it is from Kumamoto. The simplicity of the process and design itself encouraged many companies, stores, and even other prefectures, to get on board with Kumamon's popularity. Therefore, Kumamon was quite a unique character among other Grand Prix winners, since its appearance did not represent any characteristics of Kumamoto. What all winners have in common is that their designs were on the simple side. All other winners' appearances were created based on famous features of their respective regions, except Kumamon (Figure 3). The simple and non-regional appearance of Kumamon made it possible to produce more varied kinds of products.

<Figure 3> Appearance and Characteristics of Yuru-kyara Grand Prix Winners (2010- 2013)



This feature of Kumamon makes it possible for Kumamon to be utilized for many products, even for souvenirs that you can only buy in Sendai (Top of Picture 14)⁴⁶. Usually commercial characters, such as Hello Kitty, are used this way to attract tourists (Bottom of Picture 14)⁴⁷, but now Kumamon is following in Kitty's footsteps, even though it is not a commercial character. The main reason why there are limited editions of Kumamon for different areas is that Kumamon itself has no regional features. This makes Kumamon possible to be used in the same manner as Hello Kitty.

<Picture 14> Kumamon (top) & Kitty (bottom)'s limited edition goods of Miyagi



⁴⁶ Kumamon holds famous things in Sendai such as the helmet of Date Masamune, Zunda mochi (rice cake with sweet pea paste) or the decoration of the Sendai Tanabata Festival.

⁴⁷ Kitty also holds the decoration of the Sendai Tanabata Festival.

2. Similarities between Kumamon and Musubimaru

(1) Free use

Both characters do not charge companies for usage of the mascots' images. By using local mascots' images for their products, local producers can advertise where their products come from and capture people's attention. Consumers are attracted to the products since there are mascots they like. This results in an increase in sales, while simultaneously raising awareness about the characters.

(2) Being treated as human being

Musubimaru and Kumamon are both treated as human beings. Their likes are things that are famous in their respective local areas. Costumed characters work as real civil servants and participate in events (Picture 15) to promote the regions. They actually hold real

governmental positions. For example, Kumamon has its own business card and actually participates in major meetings of the Kumamoto government. In fact,

<Picture 15> Musubimaru and Kumamon



(source: by Abe Masayuki)

Musubimaru was promoted to a much higher position due to its positive economic effects.

This shows that local mascots are treated not just as characters of the region, but also as public figures or celebrities that devotedly work for the regions. Tourists naturally become interested in the region when they have a great interest in the local mascot. Also, local people can be encouraged when they see their local mascots doing their best to help the local people and promote their regions.

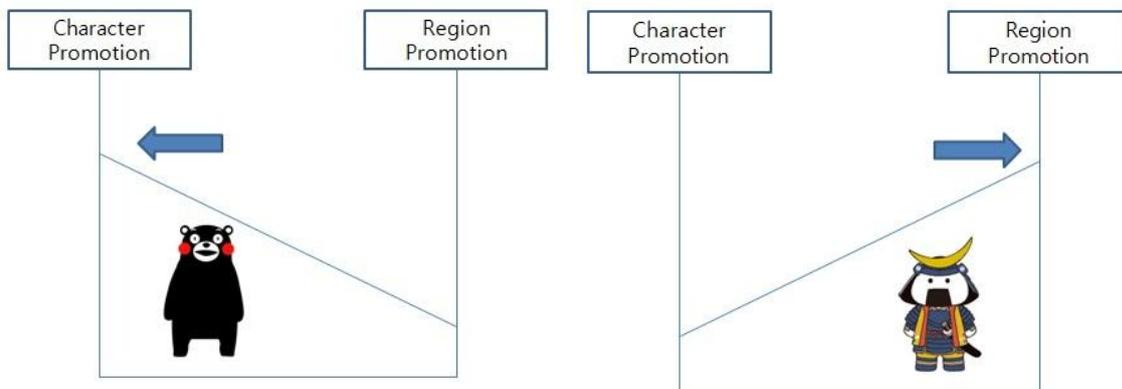
However, in order to be loved by the local people, characters should be recognized by as many people as possible as the local mascot. For example, Sentokun, the mascot of Nara Prefecture, ironically became famous because the local people did not like its design. It would not be desirable to make characters unloved by local people, even if Sentokun could attract tourists' attention and promote the region. Some local governments even promote their characters by emphasizing how low their popularity is or how ugly they are. They may receive the attention of the media, but it is another matter whether the local people really love and can be encouraged by these characters.

3. Differences between Kumamon and Musubimaru

(1) Character-oriented promotion versus Region-oriented promotion

Miyagi Prefecture and Kumamoto Prefecture show great contrast in terms of the use of mascots. Musubimaru is managed by the Tourism Division of the Miyagi government, whereas Kumamon has its own complete charge department, Team Kumamon. Kumamoto has used various marketing strategies to make Kumamon popular, aiming at a ripple effect for its own popularity. On the other hand, Miyagi simply focuses on increasing awareness about the Miyagi prefecture itself, employing Musubimaru as a mere means to promote tourism. In other words, the Miyagi government uses Musubimaru simply in support of tourism rather than promoting the mascot itself. (Figure 1 and Figure 4). Since Miyagi does not own the mascot solely, there are some limitations in taking the lead to promote the brand of Musubimaru.

<Figure 1> Promotional Emphasis of Kumamon <Figure 4> Promotional Emphasis of Musubimaru



In contrast, even though Team Kumamon is simply comprised of local civil servants, it actively promotes Kumamon. This is mainly because the Kumamoto government actually owns Kumamon and tries to improve the Kumamon brand through aggressive promotion. Even the governor of Kumamoto went on a TV show with Kumamon to promote him to others.⁴⁸ Thus, the success of Kumamon is very meaningful since it proves the effectiveness of government officials using proper marketing and promotion for their local mascots to promote their region.

The tourism department of Miyagi Prefecture also tries to promote Musubimaru by operating blogs and SNS as well as encouraging people to vote for him in the Yuru-kyara Grand Prix. However, it does not actively promote the character to the degree that Kumamoto did.

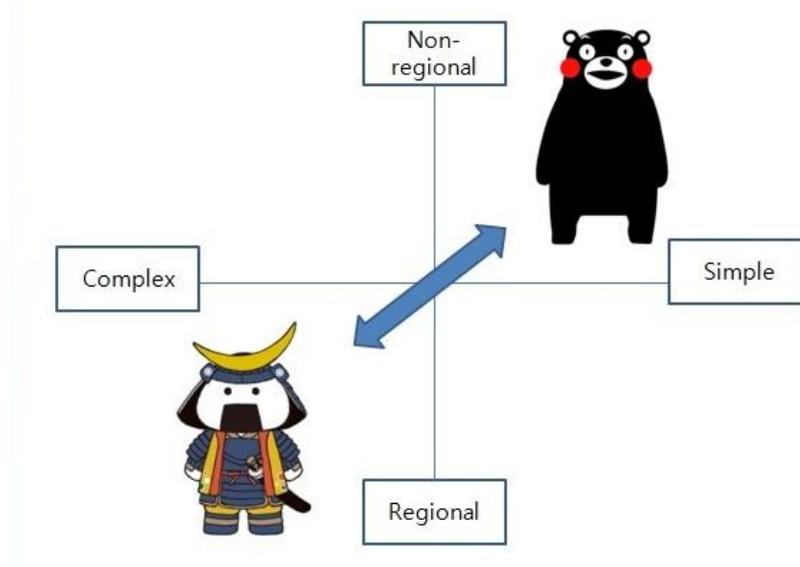
(2) Simple and non-regional appearance versus Complex and regional appearance

Kumamon was quite a unique character among other Grand Prix winners since its appearance does not represent any characteristics of Kumamoto. The simple and non-regional appearance of Kumamon made it possible to produce various kinds of products across other Prefectures.

⁴⁸ Team Kumamon, 2013, op. cit., P.77

On the other hand, the design concept of Musubimaru is the opposite of that of Kumamon. Musubimaru expresses the characteristics of Miyagi very well. Thus, people can easily recognize that the products of Musubimaru represent Miyagi (Figure 5). Even though Musubimaru may not be as widely used as much as Kumamon, its strong regional appearance has positive ramifications in the way that people can easily recognize it as a mascot of Miyagi, especially in buying its goods after the earthquake.

<Figure 5> Opposite Characteristic Appearance between Musubimaru and Kumamon



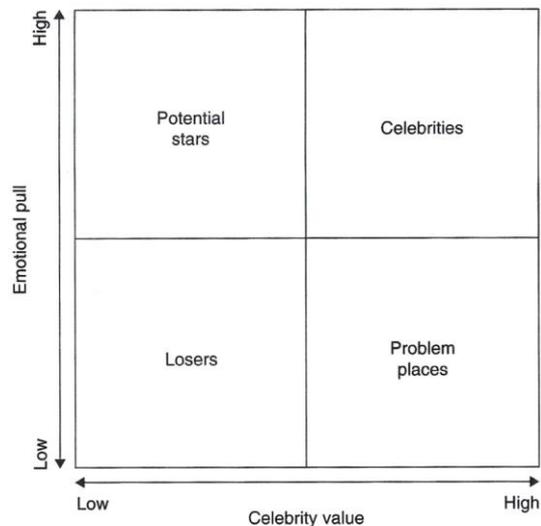
V. Conclusion

Local mascots are a novel means for local promotion and representation. As the Yuru-kyara boom has shown, Japanese love characters; it is possible to attract tourists who wish only to see and experience the character itself. Today's local mascot boom is the natural outcome of the Japanese love affair with characters and the movement to develop tourism destinations. Local governments' branding of their regions using mascots is the easiest way to attract tourists, especially if they have a few historical or cultural tourism spots. Even though the scope of this kind of promotion is limited to those who have an interest in characters, in Japan, where the power of cuteness and characters cannot be ignored, this is anything but a problem.

How a destination rates according to its appeal and fame is critical. (Figure 6) On any positioning map, brand winners are those places that are rich in emotional meaning, have great conversation value and create high levels of anticipation for potential tourists. By comparison, brand losers have little meaning, even less status, virtually no conversation value and create zero anticipation for tourists. Furthermore, problem places are those destinations that are talked about for all the wrong reasons and, far from holding an emotional

appeal, actively repel potential tourists. Places that currently offer little emotional pull face an uphill task if they are ever to become destination winners. Other destinations that do have high emotional pull but currently have limited (although growing) celebrity value hold huge untapped potential and could be tomorrow's winner destination brands.⁴⁹

<Figure 6> The destination celebrity matrix



(source: Nigel Morgan et al.,2004,p.66)

Thus, the question is: is it possible to become famous through the use of local mascots? A region can either brand itself and or brand a local mascot. In other words, the strategy for destination branding is different in terms of whether a region puts emphasis on destination branding of the region itself or on indirect destination branding using local mascots. That is, there are two ways for promoting regional tourism through the use of mascots: Character-oriented promotion and Region-oriented promotion. Most local governments focus on destination branding, where local mascots are usually just a means for regional promotion, such as with Musubimaru. However, Kumamoto Prefecture focuses

⁴⁹ Nigel Morgan, Annette Pritchard and Roger Pride, 2004, op. cit., p.66

on branding its local mascot, Kumamon, which has turned out to be very effective. Even though there are likely those who do not know about Kumamoto itself, Kumamoto can still promote itself by allowing people to use Kumamon, if the products involved include anything related to Kumamoto. Therefore, the way of utilizing mascots is different depending on whether the government puts emphasis on its region or on its mascot.

There are also difficulties in branding local mascots. While characters have strong brand power for fans, it is hard to increase brand awareness outside this fan base. This is the reason why Kumamoto put much more emphasis on raising awareness of Kumamon. Nonetheless, local mascots can be helpful in increasing the emotional pull and celebrity value of a region within the destination celebrity matrix, perhaps even leading to their regions becoming brand winners.

In order to be successful in creating an emotional attachment, a destination brand has to be credible, deliverable, differentiating, convey powerful ideas, create enthusiasm among stakeholders and partners and resonate with consumers.⁵⁰ The existence of local mascot is useful in differentiating a product, to make it resonate with consumers. As well, the new role of Musubimaru after the 2011 earthquake shows that mascots can also be helpful

⁵⁰ Nigel Morgan, Annette Pritchard and Roger Pride, 2004, *op. cit.*, p.70

in conveying powerful ideas, such as the revitalization of Japan. Further work needs to be done to establish whether local mascot in Japan could become the main subject of destination branding.

Character design itself can influence the scope of the products in which mascots are used. When designs are very simple and do not reveal regional features, mascots are easily utilized across diverse products. On the other hand, when design is very regional and complex in its representation of local features, the scope of products in which mascots can be used is limited. However, if a mascot directly expresses the characteristics of a region, its associated products are well recognized as the products of the region.

The fact that the sales of Musubimaru products as well as the number of requests to use the Musubimaru logo have increased after the earthquake implies that local mascots are basically inseparable to their regions, as well as that mascot can be an effective tool in fostering regional integration (Table 5).

<Table 5> The main reasons and meaning of success for Musubimaru and Kumamon

	Musubimaru	Kumamon
The main reason for success	Region-oriented promotion and recovery movements after 2011 Tohoku earthquake	Character-oriented promotion excluding regional characteristics
The meaning of this success	Regional integration effect	Economic effect

Musubimaru’s highly regional design characteristic was partly why it was

widely used as a main character in the Japanese recovery plan. Japanese have bought Musubimaru products in order to encourage and revitalize places damaged by the 2011 earthquake. Musubimaru's marked growth in popularity after the earthquake shows that mascots can play a role in social cooperation and regional revitalization movements. Of course, Kumamon could also play an important role if a big disaster arose in Kumamoto. By examining the case of Musubimaru and comparing these two different local characters, this paper shows that the local mascots can bring not only economic effect but also regional integration effects.

Local mascots are different from other commercial characters since their first goal is to be helpful to their regions. Their two most distinctive features are 'free use' and 'being treated as human beings'.

Local governments usually don't charge companies for the usage of mascots' images. By using local mascots' images on their products, local producers advertise where their products come from and capture people's attention. Consumers are attracted to these products since they like the mascots. This results in an increase in sales as well as in awareness of the characters.

There are two roles of local mascots: To encourage and inspire local people and to promote their regions to outsiders. Local mascots are treated as human beings, in the sense that they are like public figures or celebrities that work only

for their regions. Tourists are naturally interested in a region when they have great interest in the local mascot. Also, local people are invigorated when they see their local mascots doing their best to help the local people and promote the regions.

Therefore, studying the use of local mascots is very important to understand destination branding strategies as well as regional revitalization movements of each region. Although this current study is based on a small sample of local mascots, the findings suggest that local mascots have great potential to promote the regions of Japan and even to change the life of local peoples. Further studies, which take more case studies into account, will need to be undertaken.

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국문 초록

마스코트 캐릭터를 이용한 일본의 지역 홍보

- 미야기현 마스코트의 관광목적지 브랜딩 연구

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캐릭터 산업이 발달한 일본에서 유명한 캐릭터를 활용한 지역 홍보는 일본 지방에서 잘 쓰이는 방법이다. 최근에는 한 단계 더 나아가, 그 지역의 캐릭터를 이용하여 관광객을 유치하고 지역 활성화를 꾀하는 지역이 늘어나고 있다. 이러한 지역 캐릭터는 '유르카라'라고도 불리며, 쿠마모토현의 '쿠마몬'과 같이 캐릭터가 인기를 얻게 되면 지역 홍보에 효과적임이 밝혀진 이후로 이러한 캐릭터의 수는 증가 추세에 있다.

이 논문은 일본 토호쿠 지방의 중심지인 미야기현 센다이시(市)의 현지조사를 통해, 미야기현의 관광 홍보 캐릭터인 '무스비마루'가 어떻게 지역 홍보에 활용되었고 그 역할은 무엇인지 고찰하였다.

미야기현은 그 지역의 특산물과 역사적인 인물을 관광목적지 브랜딩에 적극적으로 사용해왔다. 특히 토호쿠지방은 2011년 동일본 대지진으로 큰 타격을 입어 지역 부흥이 중요한 과제로 떠올랐고 미야기현의 센다이시는 그 중심이 되는 지역이기에 현지조사가 더욱 의미가 있다.

무스비마루는 지역 특산물인 쌀과 센다이를 건국한 에도 시대의 무장인 다테 마사무네를 기반으로 디자인되어 지역성이 강한 캐릭터이다. 2011년 대지진 이후로 무스비마루는 단순한 관광 홍보 캐릭터에서 부흥 계획의 로고로 새로운 의미를 부여 받게 되었고, 피해지 복구가 일본 전체의 부흥이라는 과제와 연결 됨으로써 캐릭터의 역할 또한 확장되었다. 특히 이후 무스비마루 상품 판매 및 사용 신청 건수의 증가는 대지진으로 인해 인지도뿐만 아니라 캐릭터와 지역의 밀착성이 더욱 증가 되었음을 의미한다. 또한 캐릭터가 지역 부흥의 구심점이 되어 지역 통합의 역할까지도 수행할 수 있음을 보여준다.

미야기현과 쿠마모토현은 캐릭터의 홍보방식 및 디자인 면에서 다른 노선을 취해왔다. 쿠마모토는 지역을 직접적으로 홍보하기 보다 캐릭터 홍보에 중점을 두었다. 특히 쿠마몬은 디자인상 간단하면서도 지역색이 잘 드러나지 않기에 적용될 수 있는 상품의 범위가 넓다. 반면 미야기현은 무스비마루를 미야기현 홍보의 수단으로 활용해 왔고 캐릭터 디자인 또한 복잡하면서도 지역색이 풍부하다. 그러나 이러한 무스비마루이기에 대지진 이후 지역 통합에 더욱 잘 활용될 수 있었다. 이렇듯 다른 운영 방식은 캐릭터 성공의 의미 또한 다를 수 있음을 시사하며, 무스비마루와 쿠마몬의 비교연구를 통해 지역 캐릭터는 경제 효과뿐만이 아니라 지역 통합의 효과까지도 가져올 수 있음을 알 수 있었다.

지역 캐릭터의 중요한 특징은 캐릭터 무료 사용 정책과 캐릭터를 인격체로 취급한다는 점이다. 무료 사용 정책은 그 지역 생산자들이 캐릭터를 좀 더 쉽게 사용할 수 있게 하여 사용빈도수를 높여준다.

또한 지방을 대표하는 상품을 만든다는 긍지를 줌과 동시에 캐릭터의 인기에 힘입어 매출 증가 및 캐릭터의 인지도를 상승시키는 호순환이 일어난다. 특히 캐릭터를 인격체로 취급해 줌으로써 캐릭터는 그 지역만을 위해 헌신하는 공인으로서 역할을 부여 받고 지역 홍보뿐만 아니라 지역민들에게 힘을 주고, 응원하는 역할을 수행하고 있다.

키워드: 지역 마스코트 캐릭터, 유르카라, 관광목적지 브랜딩, 관광 홍보, 무스비마루, 쿠마몬

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