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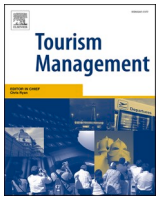

Dressing up the place: Urban lifestyle mobilities and the production of "fashionable" tourism destinations in rural Japan

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ABSTRACT

The past three decades of neoliberal structural reforms in Japan has established tourism policy favoring privatization, deregulation, and flexible mobility of capital to encourage decentralized markets. Within this system, attracting skilled urban migrants to rural regions has emerged as a central component of planning and development. Drawing on Kawamura's theory of fashion-ology, this study details the process of how rural tourism destinations are produced and (re)fashioned by urban-to-rural lifestyle migrants who bring new practices, aesthetics, and meanings to place. Based on ethnographic fieldwork conducted between 2021/2022 in the rural coastal town of Aoshima, we outline the co-constitutive dynamic between "star migrants", industry "gatekeepers", and "consumers as producers" in the production and consumption of "fashionable" rural destinations. The article contributes to literature on how rural tourism destinations are governed in contemporary neoliberal societies and provides insights into the unequal urban-to-rural power relations that continue to define Japan's regional revitalization programs.

1. Introduction

"Stylish" shopping districts. "Cool" cafes. "Trendy" Tokyo. Or as in the case of this study, a rural Japan coastal town dressed up in "shabby chic" (Doering, 2018). Everyday conversations of places are infused with the language of fashion. Fashion, style, and entrepreneurial creativity have become a critical part of place branding and knowledge-based tourism development (Ji & Imai, 2022; Klien, 2020; Rao et al., 2024), as destination marketers and management strive to become "fashionable" (Lewis et al., 2019). A focus on fashion draws attention to the aesthetics of place-making—the designs, architecture, colors, clothes, representations, and subcultures—that play a critical role in producing distinctive meanings and experiences of place (Kawamura, 2013; Rabbiosi, 2015). Recent literature also notes that the production of "fashionable places" for tourism consumption has become increasingly important as neoliberal reforms in many developed nations has led to policies favoring privatization, market deregulation, and flexible mobility of capital to encourage decentralized markets (Rabbiosi, 2015; Speake & Kennedy, 2022).

Within this context, producing a "fashionable" destination within a highly competitive tourism marketplace is an important strategy for planning and development (Lewis et al., 2019; Speake & Kennedy, 2022). Although recent literature has begun examining the role fashion plays in the production of place, there remains limited research into the intersection of fashion and tourism development. One exception is Lewis et al. (2019), whose Destination Fashion Conditioning Framework identified the key elements and communication processes required for destination marketers to make a destination fashionable. While Lewis et al. (2019) allow us to imagine the production of tourism destination as "fashionable", detailed empirical insights from a diverse range of contexts is needed to better understand how rural tourism destinations are being (re)fashioned by urban-to-rural migrants who bring new practices, aesthetics, and meanings to place.

Over the past three decades, Japanese national policy and planning has positioned urban migrants as key actors for the revitalization of depopulating and ageing rural regions (Cabinet Office, 2018; Klien, 2020). Current research concerning urban-to-rural lifestyle mobilities have examined the economic influence of urban migrants in rural regions of Japan, especially with respect to tourism development (Klien, 2020; Kurochkina, 2022; Shikida, 2009). Research has also explored how the acceleration of domestic urban-to-rural mobilities during the COVID-19 pandemic in Japan has led to the establishment of an

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increasing number of remote work environments in rural areas (Matsushita, 2023). It is argued these urban-to-rural mobilities transport new values and aesthetic sensibilities from the metropolis into rural landscapes, which Hansen (2022) refers to as a hybrid "rur-bane" sensibility. However, most studies have focused on the mobility of the urban population and how they (re)negotiate life and livelihoods in rural Japan (Klien, 2020; Odagiri & Tsutsui, 2016). Lesser known is how these urban-to-rural mobility practices introduce and circulate new values and aesthetics that are refashioning a sense of place in rural Japan (Eimermann & Carson, 2023; Hansen, 2022; Speake & Kennedy, 2022). To extend current understandings concerning the governance and production of "fashionable" tourism destinations in post-COVID-19 society, this article details how fashionable lifestyle mobilities are discursively and materially "dressing up" rural regions of Japan.

The purpose of this article is therefore to offer detailed empirical insights into how rural tourism destinations in Japan are being produced and (re)fashioned by urban-to-rural lifestyle migrants who bring new practices, aesthetics, and meanings to place. We begin by positioning the discussion within two lines of literature, examining how lifestyle mobilities and fashion inform the production of place in rural tourism destinations. Next, Kawamura's (2018) theory of fashion-ology is introduced and the importance of fashion theory for tourism studies is discussed. The research context and history of tourism development in Aoshima (Japan) is then outlined, followed by a description of the interpretivist methodological approach used for the study. Three interconnected thematic findings are then explored, 1) "star migrants" as producers, 2) gatekeepers of "fashionable" destinations, and 3) "consumers as producers", with empirical analysis focusing on the co-constitutive relationship between these actors in the co-production and co-consumption of "fashionable" Aoshima. This is followed by a discussion concerning the role fashion theory can play in furthering understandings of how places become "fashionable", while also providing much needed insights into the unequal urban-to-rural power relations embedded within neoliberal rural revitalization efforts.

2. Literature review

2.1. Lifestyle mobilities and rural tourism development

Over the past two decades, the mobilities paradigm has emerged as an important social systems theory for examining the diverse (im)mobilities of people, materials, money, and information, in what is described as a "world on the move" (Urry, 2007). Within this literature, examining the contested politics and power relations of such mobilities has become a critical site for understanding contemporary society (Cresswell, 2010; Sheller, 2018). The mobilities theory has been widely adopted in tourism literature, specifically examining the intersections of tourism and various forms related mobilities—second homeowners, long-stay tourists, lifestyle migrants and digital nomads—and the implications these multifaceted mobilities have for tourism development, destination governance and place-making (Cohen et al., 2015; Eimermann & Carson, 2023; Hannonen et al., 2023). It is argued that in a mobile world privileging the hyper-mobility of people, material, and capital, urban places tend to be imagined as fast, fluid and dynamic saviors of the economy, while rural regions are commonly positioned as "marginal" (Jóhannesson et al., 2024), "undressed places" (Veijola et al., 2019), reliant on urban resources, creative industries, networks and knowhow to "re-dress" these peripheral regions (Ren, 2024). However, as Ren (2024, p. 114) reminds us "re-dressing places is not an innocent endeavour." To better understand how rural places are being re-dressed through dynamic and complex place-making processes, Ren (2024) argues it is important to begin by unveiling the power relations informing the intersecting and co-constitutive modes of urban-to-rural mobilities. We use the term "dressing up the place" to add to this discussion, detailing how place-making in rural regions are being (re)produced by fashionable lifestyle mobilities.

The study of lifestyle mobility, its relationship to tourism development and the production of place has been examined in a diverse range of contexts, with research from Europe offering some early insights for the field (Cohen et al., 2015; Eimermann & Kordel, 2018; Mattsson & Cassel, 2020; Williams & Hall, 2002). This literature noted the challenges and difficulties of migrant entrepreneurs to connect with local communities and expand their businesses (Eimermann & Kordel, 2018). Other studies describe how urban elite migrants also act as co-producers in local redevelopment efforts and are expected to contribute economically by through rural revitalization projects (Mattsson & Cassel, 2020). Furthermore, lifestyle mobility patterns "dress up" rural regions through production and consumption (Williams & Hall, 2002). Lifestyle migrants become "producers" of place through their employed work in tourism and/or destination marketing, as well as through their consumption practices, whereby in living their chosen lifestyle they actively embody the representations and meanings used in the promotion of rural regions (Williams & Hall, 2002). Speake and Kennedy (2022) argue this creates a situation where urban lifestyle migrants establish an "aesthetic common sense" of place, a situation where "the less wealthy adopt the preferred aesthetic of the affluent elite" (p. 1198). In other words, affluent migrants have the skills, networks, and finances to create and shape meanings of place, mobilizing an urban image of the "good life" into the value systems and physical landscapes of rural regions (Åkerlund & Sandberg, 2015). The mobilization of this urban gaze disseminates and distributes new representations, aesthetics, and meanings into rural regions, turning places into "fashionable" destinations for tourism consumption, a trend identified in both Western (Cohen et al., 2015; Torkington, 2012) and Japanese contexts (Doering, 2018; Klien, 2020).

2.2. Lifestyle mobility and the production of tourism destinations in rural Japan

The reproduction of an urban "aesthetic common sense" in rural regions through lifestyle mobility is also occurring in Japan. Post-economic bubble Japan has become increasingly moving towards neoliberal structural reforms in tourism policy and planning. During the "bubble economy" of the 1980s, the Law for the Development of Comprehensive Resort Areas, the "Resort Law Era", tourism planning and development was centrally planned and vertically structured as part of the national government strategy to promote domestic tourism in rural regions at a mass scale (Funck, 1999). When the bubble burst in the 1990s, a new economic and tourism development strategy started to emerge, one characterized by flexibility, mobility, privatization, and decentralized markets (Kato & Horita, 2018). These neoliberal reforms have become even more pronounced in tourism policy of the 2000s, when lifestyle migrants have been positioned as key actors in several free-market rural revitalization programs (Kato & Horita, 2018).

One such policy is *Machi-Hito-Shigoto Sosei* [Town-People-Work Revitalization program] (Cabinet Office, 2018). This policy aims to address the problems of an aging population and diminishing number of children in rural regions by redistributing the urban population to these areas, with the aim of delivering a better quality of life and more equal opportunities for rural communities. In this context, the entrepreneurial lifestyle migrant class has become a highly sought after commodity in rural Japan. At times referred to as *yosomono* [outsiders], *wakamono* [young], and *bakamono* [crazy], these "young, crazy, outsiders" are a central figure in Japan's neoliberal rural redevelopment projects (Doering, 2018; Klien, 2020; Shikida, 2009). *Yosomono* frequently visit and invest in tourism development projects to contribute to the economic and social development of rural regions, a process known as the '*yosomono* effect' (Shikida, 2009). For Shikida (2009), *yosomono* collaborate with the government, but often at a distance, to be more flexible and independent in mobilizing their skills, knowledge and resources. This flexibility and independence connects to the discourse of entrepreneurial migrants as *bakamono* [crazy], as the urban ideas and values that travel with them are considered unique, radical, or even

"crazy" in the context of rural communities (Shikida, 2009). Lifestyle entrepreneurs are therefore considered innovative and in alignment with broader urban trends, but from a rural perspective *yosomono* often remain outsiders.

Lifestyle migrants are positioned as "producers of place" as they carry with them new concepts, ideas, experiences, and formations of the "new local" as "new settlers" in rural Japan (Kurochkina, 2022). Research has shown how this production of *rur-bane* sensibilities relies on the creativity and aesthetic values imported and translated into rural regions by highly skilled urban migrants (Hansen, 2022; Ji & Imai, 2022). Although many studies have paid attention to the economic development role of lifestyle migrants in rural Japan, research concerning the socio-cultural transformations and power relations embedded in the mobility of urban values and aesthetic sense is limited. To better understand how rural regions are being re-fashioned for urban lifestyle and tourism consumption, it is important to grasp the mechanisms behind how places become "fashionable destinations" (Lewis et al., 2019).

2.3. Fashion and the production of tourism destinations

The relationship between fashion and the production of place has been well documented, particularly in the case of what Breward and Gilbert (2006) refer to as the "fashion capitals" of the world: Paris, Tokyo, Milan, London, and New York. In these urban centers, fashion events and fashion brands, especially luxury brands (e.g., Chanel, Louis Vuitton, Burberry), shape the city image and attracts visitors through cultural experiences associated with fashion (Rabbiosi, 2015). These urban spaces become fashion hubs where creative workers gather and establish a fashionable destination that supports urban promotion and tourism branding (Budnarowska, 2012). However, despite the importance of fashion for tourism development, research into this relationship is still in its early stages and deserves further attention (Gravari-Barbas & Sabatini, 2024; Lewis et al., 2019).

Previous research has examined the interrelationship between fashion and various tourism related sectors. Shopping tourism studies have emphasized the co-branding effect of fashion retail brands and the hospitality sector, which work together to develop a unique sense of place in the global market (Rabbiosi, 2015). de Bulnes and Sobrinho (2018) argued the gathering of brand retailers in urban centers, particularly international luxury brands, is important for building a cultural hub of a country; areas commonly referred to as a "brand district". Budnarowska (2012) broadened the concept of a brand district to describe the "fashion destination", defined as a place that connects a places' history and culture with fashion brand retailers. Both high-end fashion brands and more local, low-end, fashion producers help shape a fashion destination (Budnarowska, 2012). These studies point to the importance of creating a diverse range of fashion tourist experiences to maintain loyal customers and repeat visitors to fashion destinations (Weaver, 2009).

Most literature concerning the study of fashion and the production of place concentrates on large fashion capitals and urban centers (Budnarowska, 2012; Rabbiosi, 2015). However, as exemplified in Walters' (2019) study in the New Zealand city of Dunedin, the relationship between peripheral areas and fashion is gaining attention in tourism research. Walters argued there is a co-constitutive relationship between fashion and place image: fashion and fashion events shape the image of tourism destinations, but fashion is also informed by the style and characteristics of place. Lazzeretti et al. (2017) described the reason for the expansion of fashion from the fashion capitals to peripheral towns was due to the transformation of the fashion system becoming more flexible and diversified. Rabbiosi's (2016) study demonstrated how a coastal tourism destination in Italy adopted the style of urban street fashion to "refashion" the destination image away from a mass tourism marine resort to an outdoor leisure and fashionable shopping destination. This form of symbolic and theme-oriented production of place is now being applied in peripheral fashion regions (Lazzeretti et al., 2017).

Previous research shows how fashion and tourism overlap, and yet as Lewis et al. (2019) argue, few studies have incorporated theory from fashion studies into tourism. Tourism literature typically approaches fashion as a tool for economic development, improving the city image and establishing a unique experience of place. However, recent work of Lewis et al. (2019) and Skivko (2016) reverse this trend by employing fashion theory to better understand how destinations become "fashionable". These studies demonstrate the value of analyzing the intersection of fashion and tourism to examine the mobility of fashionable images, lifestyles, and products as they move between urban and rural places. Tracing these fashionable lifestyle mobilities allows us to critically examine how places are transformed by fashion and the institutions that support them, offering nuanced insights into how neoliberal, free-market, mobile and decentralized tourism policies transform rural regions into "fashionable destinations". Inspired by Lewis et al. (2019), this article draws on fashion theory, specifically Kawamura's (2018) theoretical framework of fashion-ology, to examine the processes and mechanisms behind the production of fashionable destinations.

2.4. Fashion-ology: how materials and places become "fashionable"

How do materials and places become "fashionable"? How can we better understand how rural places are being "redressed" through urban-to-rural lifestyle mobilities? To address these questions, we argue Kawamura's (2018) theoretical framework of fashion-ology offers a timely and unique interpretive tool for examining the intersections of fashion, lifestyle mobilities and the production of "fashionable" tourism destinations in contemporary neoliberal economies. To date, fashion-ology has only been indirectly discussed in the tourism literature (Gravari-Barbas & Sabatini, 2024; Lazzeretti et al., 2017; Lewis et al., 2019), and has yet to fully engage with the complexities of what Kawamura's theory has to offer.

Kawamura (2018) defines "fashion" as a concept and practice that gives meaning to tangible materials, such as clothes and architecture, and as explored in this article, place. Broadly speaking, Kawamura (2018, p. 48) understands "fashion as an institutional system", with fashion-ology analyzing the systemic and institutional production of fashion as both a micro and macro phenomenon. The methodological aim of fashion-ology is to examine the processes of emergence and transformation of what is deemed "fashionable" in society by investigating the broader structures of the fashion system. In other words, fashion-ology examines who defines what is deemed fashionable in specifics contexts—like a "fashionable destination"—and how these aesthetic judgements are produced and consumed in an institutionalized and systematic way.

The fashion system comprises a complex network of actors, involving what Kawamura (2018) refers to as proposers and adaptors, who introduce new styles and activate changes in fashion. She identifies three key agents who play a co-constitutive role in the production of fashion: star designers, gatekeepers, and consumers. First are the "star designers" who become the symbolic face of production. However, instead of seeing star designers as individual success stories or creative geniuses, fashion-ology investigates how fashion is produced within social structures and the process of how designers and their designs become "fashionable". Kawamura (2018) considers the discourse of "creativity" itself to be "a legitimization and a labelling process", which is a critical element of the star designers' success (p. 58). For Kawamura, star designers are not inherently talented, but are socially constructed "stars", who need to attract followers of their work to maintain their social status as fashion leaders. To do this, star designers collaborate with various stakeholders, as by themselves they cannot turn clothes into fashion or transform their creative work into a fashionable object.

Second are what Kawamura (2018) refers to as "gatekeepers". Gatekeepers are defined as the institutional elements and individuals

that set the criteria to judge what is fashionable or not. Kawamura (2018) details the multiple gatekeepers of the fashion institution—fashion show organizers, fashion journalists, fashion magazine editors, and advertisers and marketers—who contribute to production of fashion trends by determining what is "fashionable" and legitimating this vision within a specific networked context. Gatekeepers play a discerning role by disseminating a particular designer's vision and style to a wider audience. Fashion shows/events act as gatekeepers that serve two main roles in the legitimization of style; first, to sell the product to retailers, and second, to establish and activate a public relations network. Traditional gatekeepers like magazine editors and fashion journalists have gradually seen their influence diminish with the invention of the Internet. In their place, fashion bloggers and street-style photographers have gained influence as gatekeepers in the production and dissemination of aesthetic judgement. Kawamura (2018) maintains current technological developments of social media has led to the decentralization of traditional "fashion capitals", which means peripheral regions now have greater opportunities to share information more widely and independent of the institutionalized fashion system. Social media—especially individuals with the networks, skill, and knowledge of how to use it—is a powerful gatekeeping tool for defining what is or is not "fashionable."

Third, Kawamura (2018) draws attention to the importance of consumers in the fashion system arguing, "consumers participate indirectly in the production of fashion" (p. 87). As long as consumers share in the belief system of fashion institutions, a certain structure can be maintained through continuous production and reproduction of fashion (Weaver, 2009). Today's consumers are themselves creative agents as they seek out their own unique and individual style; or as Hall et al. (2013) understand it, are enabled to discover this "newness" by continually re-fashioning their own identities in an ever-evolving neoliberal society. Kawamura (2018) agrees, and posits that fashion today is "a process of collective selection of a new style from numerous competing alternatives" (p. 96). Consumers as producers ensures the fashion system remains fluid, decentralized, emergent and ongoing, which places further pressure on producers to keep up with shifting consumer demands, and continually reinventing "fashionableness" in the process.

Kawamura has employed fashion-ology in several cases to examine the tensions and transformations between traditional fashion systems and emerging alternative fashion practices. For instance, Kawamura's (2013) ethnographic study in the Akihabara District in Tokyo investigated the ways teen consumers act as producers of subculture fashion. Kawamura (2013) detailed how the production of subcultural fashion also helps to develop a unique sense of place in urban areas, showing how the emergence of the *otaku* subculture, a word used to describe people with an obsessive interest in Japanese pop-culture, has refashioned the community in significant ways. Kawamura (2013) concluded, "the manga and anime industries are central to Akihabara subculture, and there are related auxiliary industries, such as video games, anime songs, anime and manga figurines, maid cafés, cosplay restaurants and cosplay costumes" (p. 76). Consumers of fashion in Akihabara actively participate in production of this subculture and the transformation of the communities in which they gather. They dress up as characters of anime and manga, a practice called *cosplay*, and gather in Akihabara creating a visual and embodied representation of place. This work highlights the co-constitutive dynamic between producers, consumers and related creative industries while also demonstrating the important role consumers play in the production of fashion *and* fashionable destinations. From these studies we can begin to see how Kawamura's theory of fashion-ology could provide useful insights into how tourism destinations are produced through fashion. Kawamura's examples take place in the megacity of Tokyo, but we argue such a refashioning of communities is also occurring in rural regions of Japan.

3. Making the rural "fashionable": the context of Aoshima, Japan

This study is located on the rural beach town of Aoshima in Miyazaki Prefecture, one of the southernmost prefectures of mainland Japan. With a warm coastal climate and southern tropical image, Miyazaki has a long and successful history of tourism development, and more recently, with attracting lifestyle migrants (Doering, 2018; Iwamoto, 2019). Moritsu (2011) identifies Iwakiri Shotaro as the key figure of tourism development in Miyazaki. Known as the "father of tourism", Iwakiri began producing the southern tropical island aesthetic of Miyazaki in the 1930s by planting hundreds of palms trees along the stretch of coast called the *Nichinan Kaigan*. This established what Iwakiri referred to as a "moving frame" for driving tourists to enjoy as they travelled south from Miyazaki City (Doering, 2018) (Fig. 1).

Moritsu (2011) describes how a romantic gaze was inscribed into the tropical landscape when the Showa Emperor's daughter, Shimadzu Takako, visited Aoshima in the 1960s for her honeymoon, transforming Miyazaki into Japan's top honeymoon tourist destination. The honeymoon boom ended in the late 1970s when overseas travel became more accessible, but the tropical image remained (Moritsu, 2011). In 1993, the Phoenix Resort Company opened The Seagaia Ocean Dome, which included the world's largest indoor surfing wave pool, as part of the "Resort Law Era" development. This established Miyazaki as a Japan's premier surfing destination. During the latter half of the 1990s, the *suro raifu* [slow-life] movement became popular throughout Japan (Odagiri & Tsutsui, 2016). With its southern tropical imaginary well-established, warm coastal weather enabling year-round farming, and an emerging image as Japan's "surfing mecca", Miyazaki was in a good position at the turn of the millennium to attract tourists and lifestyle migration to the area (Doering, 2018).

Over the past decade, more entrepreneurial and tech-savvy lifestyle migrants have arrived in greater numbers, once again producing new representations and imaginaries of Miyazaki, particularly in Aoshima area (Ishikawa, 2022; Kanayama, 2016). For example, the introduction of the "shabby chic" designed Surf City Miyazaki and transnational aesthetic of Aoshima Beach Park by urban entrepreneurs (Doering, 2018) has rebranded this once rural fishing village/honeymoon resort into a fashionable outdoor fitness destination, transforming the representations, meanings and practices in the area in subtle but important ways (Fig. 2). Today, domestic low-cost carriers operate frequent flights from the major urban centers of Tokyo and Osaka to Miyazaki. Located minutes from the airport, Aoshima's accessibility to these highly populated urban areas has encouraged an increasing amount of lifestyle mobilities in recent years, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic (NHK, 2023). The recent increases in urban lifestyle mobilities to the region have invited new business opportunities seeking to combine the benefits of remote work and rural outdoor leisure (Doering, 2018).

With the COVID-inspired expansion of remote work in Japan and increasing number co-working environments (Matsushita, 2023), Aoshima has become a popular destination for dual-life migrants and workcation tourists. The term "dual-life migrants" denotes individuals who regularly move between urban and rural areas (Kawachi et al., 2018), while "workcation tourists" refers to those who adopt a digital nomadic work lifestyle (Matsushita, 2023). The meanings differ slightly in that the former moves between two established nodes while the latter may remain "nodeless". The diversification of urban-to-rural lifestyle mobilities is one of the key objectives of Miyazaki City's (2022) current rural revitalization policy titled, *The 2nd Comprehensive Strategy for Regional Development of Miyazaki City*. The policy aims to attract urban migrants by focusing particularly U-turns and I-turns migrants, who contribute to creating new flows of urban-to-rural mobility (Miyazaki City, 2022). "U-turn" refers to a trend of return migration to one's hometown, while "I-turn" denotes a migration to a rural region where individuals have no previous experience or family connections (Klien, 2020). These forms of mobility are contrasted with "local" residents,

Fig. 1. *The* southern *tropical "moving frame" of Miyazaki, Japan. Photo: Second author.*

Fig. 2. Aoshima's emerging fashionable beachscape, July 2021. Photos: Second author.

which in this case refers to somebody who was born, currently lives, or has previously lived in the area. In this context, U-turns may be considered locals, but not I-turns. Today, the population of Aoshima comprises individuals engaged in various urban-to-rural mobilities—I-turns, U-turns, dual-life migrants, workcation tourists—which indicate that urban bodies and investment are increasingly circulating through the region. This new combination of diverse urban-to-rural lifestyle mobilities is once again refashioning Aoshima in important ways, making it a timely and interesting context for this study.

4. Methodology

Kawamura's (2013, 2018) theory of fashion-ology is founded on the guiding principles of social constructionism. The social constructionist perspective is an epistemological lens attempting to understand how meanings and experiences are produced and performed (Crotty, 1998). This includes enquiries into meaningful constructions of tourism places and spaces, and how tourism social issues are constructed and by whom (Pernecky, 2012). For social constructionists, the focus of analysis is the "mode", or the process of meaning-making, and examines how one's way of seeing is shaped by their socio-cultural context and background (Crotty, 1998). This approach is emphasized by Kawamura (2013) who described the social and institutionalized construction of what it means to "be fashionable", explaining "fashion is all about aesthetic taste, but it is not about an individual taste" (p. 99). Fashion is socially constructed by different institutions and the fashion system that produces and disseminates a variety of aesthetic judgments. Aesthetic taste is not inherent within the individual. Rather, through collective works of making the aesthetic judgment, the meaning of fashion is produced, interpreted, and disseminated.

In this study, we employ an interpretivist ethnographic approach to unpack the situated meanings of fashion with a focus on the social-cultural transformations of a rural tourism destination. Inspired by the rich history of tourism ethnography, specifically Bruner (2005), Tucker (2003), Rantala (2011), and Yamashita (1999), our ethnographic approach is hermeneutic, meaning that reading, thinking, data collocation and analysis are co-constitutive and inseparable. For this approach, specific research questions and themes emerged from closely engaging with the literature, fieldwork, and analytic reading of ethnographic material. This hermeneutic approach of negotiating the different

elements of the entire research process is common to the interpretive tradition, allowing things to co-emerge with participants, the field, the researcher, and various secondary resources (Rantala, 2011). Through this process, three broad research questions helped guide this study: (1) How are urban lifestyle migrants producing, redressing and refashioning a new sense of place in rural Japan?; (2) How is the produced place and lifestyle consumed, diffused, and legitimized in the context of expanding urban-to-rural mobilities?; and (3) What tensions and politics emerge through this process?

The study builds on previous experience and networks established by the second author, who has been involved in longitudinal research in Miyazaki since 2007 (e.g., Doering, 2007, 2018; Todaka & Doering, 2023). Previous contextual knowledge provided early insights into the historical transformation of the site and helped establish relationships with the new Tokyo migrants during the initial phase of fieldwork. The ethnographic fieldwork centered around the lifestyle migration hub of the Aoshima Social Residence (ASR), a pseudonym for the accommodation. The ASR opened in 2021 and was one of the earliest remote workspace services to open in the area. The ASR is owned and operated by a Tokyo lifestyle migrant. The owner, Yamashita (pseudonym), is a middle-aged man who moved to Aoshima in 2019, after retiring early from an executive role in IT company based in Tokyo. The ASR building is a modern and urban architectural design, with large glass windows facing the street looking out from the co-working space; the central feature of the building. Inside, large tables with screen monitors are provided, complemented by carefully selected luxury office chairs. These facilities enable visitors to transition smoothly from an outdoor leisure mindset, shaped by activities like surfing or beach walks, to a familiar urban work environment. The ASR opened during the Covid-19 pandemic era when overseas travel was limited and remote work was popularized throughout Japan. As one of the earliest remote workspaces, the ASR and its owner soon became a central hub for new migrants, dual-life migrants, and workcation tourists in Aoshima. This makes the ASR, the owner, and the associated networks, a timely case to examine the changes in the region's attractiveness and representations overtime, and more specifically the important transformations of place that occurred during and shortly after the Covid-19 pandemic.

The ASR played a central role in the ethnographic fieldwork, which was conducted between 2021 and 2022. Aoshima was visited four times for data collection comprising a combination of participant observation, informal interviews, and semi-structured interviews. The researchers stayed at the ASR during fieldwork, allowing them to spend time with visitors and connect with the broader network that circulates through the ASR on a daily basis. Consequently, study participants were recruited at, or through, the formal and informal networks of the ASR accommodation. Within this fluid context, the fashion-ology theoretical framework initially helped to identify the various actors who may influence the production and consumption of "fashionable" Aoshima. From the ASR network, participants were actively sought who comprised a cross section of fashion-ology theory elements including, star designers, various gatekeepers, and different kinds of consumers. Centering on the ASR as a social hub of lifestyle mobilities therefore allowed us to examine the intersections and relations between these actors, the ways they are networked, and how they interact to co-produce a new urban aesthetic in post-Covid Aoshima.

In total, 22 interviews and informal conversations with temporary visitors, locals/U-turns, I-turn migrants, dual-life migrants, seasonal workers, and Miyazaki Immigration Center Officers were conducted and documented through fieldwork notes (Table 1). The informal conversations supported developing ideas, thoughts and interpretations, as well as helping to develop the interview guide, and leading to further official semi-structured interviews. Twelve semi-structured interviews were undertaken to ask more formal and specific questions. The interview length varied from 45 min to 3 h, with permission to take notes and/or voice recordings being granted by the participants of the study. The interviews were transcribed and participants names replaced with

Table 1
Profiles of research participants and forms of interview.

	Pseudonym	Occupation	Age	Previous residents	Forms of Interview
Local/U-Turns					
1	Masuoka	Café owner & Farmer	Mid 30s	–	Informal interview
2	Morimoto	Immigration Center officer	30s	–	Semi-structured interview (1.5 h)
3	Taka	Guesthouse owner	40s	–	Semi-structured interview (1.5 h)
U-turn migrants					
4	Asada	Web marketing consultant	30s	Tokyo	Semi-structured interview (1 h)
5	Bando	Social worker	30s	Yamaguchi	Semi-structured interview (1 h)
I-turn migrants					
6	Yamashita	Accommodation manager	48	Tokyo	Semi-structured interview (3 h)
7	Yasuda	Web news editor	48	Tokyo	Semi-structured interview (1.5 h)
8	Satoko	Ex-marketing consultant	60s	Tokyo	Semi-structured interview (2 h)
9	Sho	Business writer	30s	Fukuoka	Informal interview
10	Takeda	Surf shop owner	50s	Osaka	Semi-structured interview (2 h)
Dual-life migrants					
11	Kosuke	IT consultant	27	Kanagawa	Semi-structured interview (45 mini)
12	Yuka	Yoga instructor	Mid 30s	Kanagawa	Semi-structured interview (45 mini)
13	Taiyo	Internal entrepreneur	Mid 40s	Tokyo	Informal interview
14	Kuroda	IT company executive	Mid 40s	Kanagawa	Informal interview
Other forms of visitors					
Digital nomads and workcation tourists					
15	Ryu	System engineer	Mid 30s	Tokyo	Informal interview
16	Shin	Sales engineer	45	Chiba	Semi-structured interview (45 mini)
Seasonal workers					
17	Kaho	Café staff	Mid 20s	Tokyo	Semi-structured interview (1 h)
18	Marin	Café staff	22	Nara	Informal interview
19	Lacy	Students & Housekeeper	22	Canada	Informal interview
20	Mai	Café staff	27	Hyogo	Informal interview
Surfing visitors					
21	Tom	University researcher	30s	Tokyo	Informal interview
22	Akane	TV producer	30s	Saitama	Informal interview

pseudonyms to allow for anonymity before further analysis. Secondary data was also collected and analyzed including, web news articles from *Hinata Miyazaki Keizai Shimbun*, The Miyanichi newspaper, two lifestyle magazines *CANVAS* (2015) and *UNABARA* (2016), and online magazine articles published in *LEON* (published online in 2017) and *TABI LABO* (published online in 2016), as means to understand how "fashionable Aoshima" is produced, disseminated and legitimized. Information brochures, made by Miyazaki City Immigration Center were also included as this public institution aggregates the various practices of lifestyle migrants to represent and disseminate the "ideal" rural lifestyle to potential migrants.

Two phases of analysis were conducted. First, initial coding was conducted, followed by a second round of axial coding (Saldaña, 2013). The former approach supported synthesizing the range of ethnographic materials collected. During this phase, the specific terms used by participants were identified and coded. For example, the terms "*kuoritei kontororu* [quality control]", "*tetsukazu* [untouched]", "*kokochi ii kukan* [comfortable atmosphere]" and "*konseputo* [concepts]" were highlighted. The aim here was to first interpret the perspectives and understandings of a particular phenomenon in the participants own words (Saldaña, 2013). The latter axial coding phase allowed us to understand the links between fashion-ology theory and the transformation of Aoshima. Through this analysis, the interpretation and understanding of multiple realities were deepened and crystallized, resulting in three thematic findings based around the concepts of "star migrants", industry "gatekeepers" and "consumers as producers". The aim of analysis and discussion is to offer detailed contextual insights into the co-constitutive dynamic of these multiple mobilities in the co-production and co-consumption of "fashionable" Aoshima.

5. Findings

5.1. "Star migrants" as producers: konseputo making in fashionable Aoshima

Kawamura (2018) situates "star designers" as a central figure for the production and dissemination of what is deemed fashionable. A similar process can act as a starting point to understand the production of "fashionable Aoshima". The idea that Aoshima was becoming "fashionable" and "stylish" was a common discourse in the secondary data and research participants' explanations of current revitalization efforts of Aoshima. As one local news report commenting on the current changes in Aoshima exclaimed, "The area has recently become more attractive with an increasing number of *fashionable* spots" (Miyazaki Telecasting Co. Ltd., 2019). A sentiment echoed by a Miyazaki City Immigration Center employee who explained, "It was after the Aoshima Beach Park was built that I felt like, 'Oh! Something *fashionable* was built', and I think that's when things changed." (Morimoto, personal communication on August 30, 2022). These excerpts are indicative of how central the discourse of "fashionableness" has become in the current revitalization processes in Aoshima and highlights the central role urban entrepreneurial migrants play in the production of place in rural Japan.

Borrowing the term of Kawamura's (2018) "star designers", urban entrepreneurial lifestyle immigrants could be considered "star migrants" as they become the focal point for creative revitalization and tourist destination development in rural regions of Japan (Ji & Imai, 2022). Commonly self-identifying as a "*purodusa*" [producer], star migrants' self-described mission is to actively "produce" a new sense of place, with the aim of transforming rural places into fashionable destinations suitable for urban migrant and tourism consumption. The production of this "new rural" aesthetic is commonly narrated by star migrants as building something out of nothing, like painting on a blank canvas. For instance, *UNABARA*, a Japanese beach culture magazine, introduces one such star migrant of Aoshima Beach Park who explained in an interview "… we want to create a beach culture in Japan" (Osanai, 2015, p. 38). He would later elaborate that one reason for choosing Aoshima as a revitalization project was that "Miyazaki was untouched, for better or worse. If I was going to move here, I wanted to support the development of the town myself, so I eventually decided on Aoshima" (Honda, 2015, pp. 70–71). Star migrants' production of place is narrated against the idea that a previous beach culture did not really exist, it was "untouched", or at least did not align with the urban gaze of new star migrants.

Another star migrant Yamashita, the owner of ASR, describes his role of being a producer in a similar way. He explained the *konseputo* [concept] of his business is characterized by three key terms: surfing, remote workers, and urban–rural "dual life" mobilities. As producers, star migrants like Yamashita stress the importance of having a vision and mission that is encompassed in the English loanword, *konseputo* [concept]. Yamashita summarized his entrepreneurial activity in rural Japan as a "concept-making business". When asked to describe more precisely what the term "concept-making" means, he explained that concept-making is about developing an idea from *scratch*, so it requires more time and money to develop (personal communication, July 15, 2022). With an early retirement and previous business experience in Tokyo, he is exemplary of how star migrants have the time, skills, urban networks and finances needed for "concept making", a capability that is not evenly shared amongst all members of this rural community.

Concept-making is neither value neutral nor emerging out of nowhere. Star migrants do not produce concepts from scratch or develop them in untouched areas. Rather star migrants are products of the systemic institution of rural revitalization in Japan that creates the conditions of possibility allowing them to disclose their concepts. The specific aesthetic currently being mobilized throughout Aoshima is inspired by new urban trends of Tokyo; a place commonly described by the star migrants as the fashion leader in Japan. Through concept-making, Tokyo-centric practices and aesthetics are incorporated into Aoshima by star migrants who produce a "rur-bane sensibility" that combines rural culture and materialities with urban values and social practices (Hansen, 2022). Aoshima's star migrants employ Tokyo social, economic and symbolic capital in Miyazaki to produce a fashionable sense of place that becomes a standardized urban gaze or "aesthetic common sense" (e.g., Fig. 3, Fig. 4). For example, as one star migrant describes,

> having worked in advertising for 17 years in Tokyo, I have seen the work of a lot of people in the profession …. Tokyo always maintains a high level of quality because of the competition between these top-notch people. That's why I was so particular about the quality of everything here [in Aoshima], from the shop set-up, the texture of the deck chairs and tables, the flags, the free paper, the website, the PR photos, and the marketing catchphrases (Maeda, 2017).

The excerpt highlights an urban-centric discourse where star migrants can legitimize a "Tokyo standard" in rural Japan through rural revitalization efforts. However, star migrants also recognize how this urban sensibility is not always welcomed, explaining in a 2017 interview, "Even when I joined, there was already a movement to change Aoshima. What was very difficult was to share the overall image with the city administration and to implement the *high standard* of Tokyo in Miyazaki" (Maeda, 2017). Maintaining "a high standard" is a frequent rhetoric employed by the dominant class of any society to convince others their vision is the best, the highest quality, the standard, universal, or the only way forward.

However, discussions with local business owners reveal an emerging tension. Asada, a marketing officer for a local IT company, explained that since Aoshima Beach Park opened in 2015, the "Tokyo style" is becoming increasingly prevalent, which in turn attracts other urban migrants to the area and inspires local business owners to refashion their own businesses in a similar style (personal communication, July 20, 2022). Taka, a local accommodation owner whose family has been an integral part of Aoshima business community for generations, described a tension between the locals and visitors (personal communication, March 20, 2022). The new lifestyle migrants often self-identify as "neo-

Fig. 3. Tokyo standard co-working space. Summer 2022. Photo: First Author.

Fig. 4. Rur-bane seascapes of Aoshima. Summer 2022. Photo: First Author.

locals", a term that sits uncomfortably with Taka. For him, there is a clear distinction between locals and visitors. Star migrants and other outside investors are still considered visitors for him. He notes a shift in migrants' approach to life in Aoshima. In the late 1990s to early 2000s, migrants were attracted to Aoshima because of the surf, sea, food, environment and slow life, whereas the post-Covid Tokyo migrants approach Aoshima as an investment opportunity. He describes Aoshima as becoming a "southern Niseko", a popular international ski resort in Hokkaido, where investment and real-estate is subjected to increasing competition by outside forces.

For star migrants, competition is a central component of producing the Tokyo standard "high quality", but for many local businesses such a competitive attitude was not the foundation of their business practices. Furthermore, Taka explains there is a difference between building relationships with the community and establishing "networks". Relationship building establishes deep connections with people and the local environment whereas a network is simply connecting with people to achieve an outcome. From Taka's experience as a local business owner, the new migrants do not necessarily need to build relationships, but need networks for their businesses to be successful. Taka describes this as a "cultural difference" where the investment and networking mindset of new migrants can tend to overpower the local small businesses that may not share the same experience with competitive business practices or capabilities to network. This is one reason that Taka explains the local power is undermined as star migrants are afforded the space to create and produce their vision. Of course the economic development brought by such lifestyle migration is welcomed, but Taka describes this as a trickle-down effect, describing the benefits that arise from this kind of development come in the form of "*afureta hito*" [overflow customers] from new accommodations.

The discourse of producing new concepts on Aoshima's "blank canvass" maybe also be interpreted as a sign of silencing or undermining local voices. Taka explains complaints by the local community have surfaced, but such voices are at times ignored by the local municipality. Star migrants establish a discourse of "creating concepts" and "producing places" as if they are self-autonomous actors who are somehow inherently "creative", however they cannot be "stars" without institutions and social networks that diffuse and legitimize their concepts. As Kawamura (2018) argues, the "star" quality of the designer is not something that comes naturally through individual talents but is socially constructed by and for the *institution* that produces them. To better understand how urban aesthetic values become embedded in rural touristic landscapes it is important now to examine the role of gatekeepers in the dissemination and legitimization contemporary "fashionable Aoshima".

5.2. *Gatekeepers of fashionable destinations: legitimizing a rur-bane sense of place*

According to Kawamura (2018), clothes and designs do not become "fashionable" by themselves. Similarly, star migrants and destinations do not become fashionable without the gatekeeping activities of various social institutions. Kawamura (2018, p. 71) argues gatekeepers are a

critical element of this process explaining,

> After clothes are manufactured, they go through the transformation process and the mechanism of fashion production passing through different institutions … then those items must go through the legitimation process and pass the criteria set by the gatekeepers of fashion before they are disseminated to the public.

In fashion, gatekeepers include fashion shows, models, journalists, and media editors, who work in a networked collaboration to disseminate and legitimate "fashionableness". Lewis et al. (2019) echo this sentiment, arguing endorsements and promotion from authoritative institutions through multiple media and events are critical for tourism destination images to reach a large audience. A similar process helps us to understand the production of fashionable Aoshima. Once star migrants' "concepts" are produced they then pass through the gatekeeping system, which involves both local institutions and non-local networks, in this case based in urban centers like Tokyo. Both local institutions and individual networked gatekeepers are critical for disseminating and legitimizing star migrants' concepts.

Monthly beach cleaning events organized by star migrants provide interesting insights into how events become a gatekeeping practice by bringing together local institutions and urban-to-rural networks. In Kawamura's (2018) theory, fashion events serve two purposes; first to entertain and gain the audience's attention, and second to establish public relations for a particular style, vision and fashion. This is also the case for the star migrants who play a central role in organizing local events, and by taking the lead in the production of these events, become an integral component of the gatekeeping process. By organizing social gatherings like the monthly beach clean events, star migrants gain public attention and social capital from audiences not only locally, but also throughout their wider business networks in urban centers. On the one hand, local institutions are often invited to join the event to provide networking opportunities between immigrants and local residents. As Yamashita describes,

> They [migrants] want to connect to the locals but they do not have many opportunities to build a relationship with locals. In particular, it was difficult the last two years due to the pandemic; many social events were cancelled. But the beach clean was still possible. So, beach cleaning is important to many immigrants to interact with people. (personal communication, July 17, 2022).

On the other hand, these small-scale events also offer social capital for star migrants within the wider urban networks. In the era of social media, there is a social pressure and/or business need to disseminate information of local events as widely as possible. As Yamashita explains, "After the beach clean event, it is important to take a group picture. So participants of events can show the contribution to the local resources" (personal communication, July 17, 2022). By capitalizing on these beach clean events, this dissemination and legitimization process is reminiscent of a story Kawamura (2004) recounts from a fashion industry executive who emphasized the importance of fashion shows. For the executive, participating in a fashion show "is the way to make yourself an official designer and make yourself known to the world eventually" (p. 62). As with fashion shows, public relations opportunities provided by beach clean events are important for star migrants as they provide evidence of local engagement that are circulated throughout urban networks and become a central component of a legitimation strategy at local and non-local levels.

Star migrants in Aoshima are closely networked with authoritative institutions as part of the gatekeeping process. Star migrants frequently appear in government-published materials, which provides another form of institutional legitimization. For instance, Yamashita became officially sanctioned "immigrant ambassadors", further exposing a particular urban vision of Aoshima to the public while legitimizing the social status of star migrants as central characters in the story of rural revitalization. Furthermore, he supports the private–public collaborative event titled,"Surf Work", that took place on June 20, 2022. This event drew the attention of local media as it was the "first public–private collaboration event" occurred after the launch of the"Miyazaki City Port"; a platform established on May 12, 2022, by the Miyazaki City government to accelerate collaboration with the private sector (The Miyanichi, 2022). This kind of networked public–private collaborations are central to the gatekeeping processes. Producers work in collaboration with the Miyazaki City government and the Miyazaki City Immigration Center to gain the attention of mass media and disseminate their concepts through promotional materials published by the city. Local newspapers and television stations tend to celebrate star migrants and the producers' concepts, which is important for legitimization and diffusion of this urban style in rural Japan. These public appearances are a gatekeeping process as they discursively produce the idea of the "good migrant" for others to follow, celebrating the star migrants, their "concepts", and chosen lifestyle, thereby legitimizing certain meanings, migrant subjectivities, and values of place over others.

Alongside these institutional gatekeeping practices, star migrants also involve individual gatekeepers, such as freelance writers, vloggers, and occasionally other star migrants themselves. For star migrants like Yamashita and Yasuda, social media is a central strategy to disseminate and legitimate their concepts and visions for Aoshima. As they have both worked in the IT industry in Tokyo, they have the skills needed to take advantage of this opportunity. Once a vice editor of an online newspaper, Yasuda shares information about Miyazaki throughout Japan in response to what he described as a lack of online promotional material about Aoshima. Yamashita also actively supports an independent content writer, who reports from different remote workplaces, and a YouTuber who makes surf trip videos to introduce the concept of his business online to viewers in urban areas. These social media networks are integral gatekeepers to this system of urban-to-rural lifestyle mobilities. Other star migrants produce self-published magazines like *Aoshima Beach Style*, which reports on new restaurants and upcoming events in Aoshima, and the *California Style* magazine associated with a local real estate agency showing how to "create a comfortable space learned from California" (Fig. 5). This practice of self-gatekeeping promotion is an important activity for producers to establish a media platform and constant presence, reinforcing how a place should be produced and represented within the locality and beyond. These individual gatekeeping activities may not have enough influence to disseminate the "concept" of the star migrants, but taken collectively, these multiple, networked representations are crucial for the legitimization and dissemination of fashionable urban sensibilities throughout Japan.

5.3. Consumer as producer: the reproduction and performativity of concepts

A material object or place cannot be "fashionable" without consumers. Kawamura (2018) understood this process well in her analysis of how fashion is adopted, consumed, contested, and transformed through acts of consumption. During fieldwork, a diverse range of lifestyle mobility consumption was found to be contributing to the production of fashionable Aoshima, including temporary visitors, tourists, dual-life immigrants, full-time immigrants arriving at different times, and local visitors to the area. By examining how these different modes of lifestyle mobilities reinforce or transform the current production of fashionable Aoshima, we can begin to understand how the various forms of mobility consumption aid in the reproduction of urban sensibilities in rural Japan.

During interviews with star migrants, it was explained that Aoshima has historically attracted two types of immigrants: retirees who want to surf and/or play golf, and relatively young counter-urban immigrants who want to escape from the social norms of urban Japan and live a slow life (Yamashita, personal communication, July 14, 2022). Research has

Fig. 5. *Left: California Style Magazine Collection. Right: Aoshima Beach Style, Volume 9. April 29, 2022.*

also shown an increasing trend in family immigration for those who want to provide a different environment to raise their children, one more closely connected to the sea and surf (Todaka & Doering, 2023). However, in recent years rural regions in Japan are also being transformed into lifestyle destinations for new modes of working and living. Commonly described as "digital nomads" and "mobile professionals", this mobility is comprised of people who have the capability to work from anywhere (Matsushita, 2023).

However, becoming a fashionable lifestyle destination does not necessarily mean being fashionable for everyone (Kawamura, 2018; Lewis et al., 2019). Instead, fashion can be constructed within and amongst a certain group of people, which means the place or concept needs to be fashionable only for those with whom Kawamura (2013) and Rabbiosi (2016) might label "sophisticated consumers". These are individuals who can appreciate and follow producers' concept, and align with the sensibility being encouraged and promoted by the producers and gatekeepers. In Aoshima, there are different types of sophisticated consumers, who each in their own way, act as a producer by reinforcing or reworking the current configurations of place.

Yamashita's Aoshima Stay Residence (ASR) accommodates a wide range of surfers, businesspeople, and dual-life immigrants. The founding concept of the accommodation is built around surfing, remote work, and urban–rural dual-life mobility. Consumers of this concept include people such as Kosuke, a 27-year-old man working at an IT company, and Taiyo, a 45-year-old man who is an internal entrepreneur at a large company in Japan. Both men work remotely for Tokyo-based companies. As the ASR is close to the beach, they can walk or ride a bicycle to the beach to surf before and after work, establishing a daily rhythm of surf-work. Within this context, these consumers are seen as sophisticated consumer who embody the concept of the surf-work lifestyle, reinforcing the star migrants' vision of producing a space for urban business-minded surfers in rural Aoshima. Through the production of concepts and various gatekeeping practices noted earlier, the producer attracts an increasing number of consumers, guiding them to adopt a certain style, sensibility and sense of belonging to certain groups. Although Yamashita's ASR has accommodated a variety of visitors, his aim to create a business and social environment based around repeat visitors. He explains how the "*kuoritei kontororu* [quality control]" of visitors is important, and to ensure the right fit, he uses his network to attract a target market of urban businesspeople (personal communication, July 15, 2022). He further explains that gathering like-minded people together enhances the cultural value of the place. Aligning with this thought, Kosuke explains how he appreciates the opportunity to interact with other visitors who work at well-known IT companies, which during his visits have included employees from Salesforce, Amazon, and Twitter (personal communication, July 16, 2022). Urban migrants are welcomed by the producers, as their mobility performatively embeds an urbanized "quality" and "standard" within the rural landscape of Aoshima. By performatively disclosing the producer's concept and rendering it visible, consumers themselves become active producers of place.

The urbane aesthetic introduced by immigrants is also encouraged by people like Satoko, who left Tokyo to care for her parents in Nobeoka city, in the northern part of Miyazaki. She soon grew bored and, several months later, found the ASR and began living a "dual life" within the Miyazaki prefecture. She stayed in Aoshima and travelled to her parents' house for cleaning and caregiving. She described herself as an avid supporter of the ASR, as she can interact with people with similar values and sensibilities. She explains,

> Aoshima is the right place. The community is flexible, as half of the residents in Aoshima are now immigrants. They share similar level of culture and aesthetic values as immigrants, so they can understand each other. In addition, tourists also come to Aoshima.

Satoko further describes that in Aoshima, she can enjoy the trendiness and uniqueness of the beach culture and music, adding, "If you want to listen to cutting-edge salsa music, you can hear it at the restaurant SANBARCO" (personal communication, July 18, 2022). Although she left Tokyo several years ago, she expresses wanting to live a life that shares the value and sense of Tokyo. Her story indicates that Aoshima has transformed into a place that can accommodate these fashionable urban immigrants. This is sometimes described as a sense of *kokochi ii kukan* (comfortable atmosphere), that is shared and appreciated by these immigrants. Yuka, a yoga instructor based in Aoshima and Miyakonojo, in the southern part of the Miyazaki prefecture, calls Aoshima an amazing place. She decided to migrate to Miyazaki from

Chigasaki, in Kanagawa prefecture, after her second trip to Miyazaki. During the trip, she finally found a "comfortable atmosphere" to teach her yoga classes. Although she did not create this place as other producers did, she is actively participating in the embodied (re)production of such places.

The cases of Satoko and Yuka indicate the important role consumers play in performative reproduction of the producers' concepts. Described as a "comfortable atmosphere", the producers' aesthetic sense becomes common sense by attracting like-minded people who actively engage with and embody the producers' concept. Although they may not be fully following the star migrants' concept, they appreciate the urban values and aesthetics present in this rural space. Without consumers, concepts would never be disclosed. Consumers are producers of place, as without their consumption no new representations could come into being.

6. Discussion: fashionable lifestyle mobilities and rural tourism place-making

This study demonstrates the influence of urban-to-rural lifestyle mobilities in the production of rural tourism place-making. However, as evidenced in the findings, urban mobilities establish circuits of people, materials, values and capital that often unintentionally exclude as much as include rural communities (Martini, 2023; Sheller, 2018), as economic gains, social status, and the ability to express, communicate and create representations of place are strongly influenced by urban-centered networks. The findings further reveal the pre-existing and ongoing unequal spatial conditions between the urban and the rural in Japan, with skills and resources being imported into rural regions rather than developing capacities and capabilities from within (cf. Rao et al., 2024). By tracing out the circulations of fashionable urban mobilities, the article provides evidence that rural regions remain dependent on urban finances, values and sensibilities, and in this way, urban-centric tourism development policies (Funck, 1999) remain embedded within contemporary rural revitalization efforts.

Government officials explain the aim of encouraging urban-to-rural migration is to decentralize the population of away from Japan's urban centers (Cabinet Office, 2018). However, as long as rural governments rely on high-skilled urban migrants, the hegemonic structure of the urban profiting from the rural is maintained and reinforced. Similar to Kawamura's (2004) discussion that star designers need to go to Paris once to be "successful", this form of rural revitalization still maintains what Klien (2020) describes as "the mindset that one needs to go to Tokyo to have a real career" (p. 53), or in this case, to gain the necessary capabilities to participate in the institution of neoliberal tourism/rural revitalization. This suggests that within the current system and the production of "fashionable" rural tourism destinations, place representations are mobilized through urban-centric social media and publishing networks, limiting residents' capacity to control the values, meanings and aesthetic judgements associated with their places.

The findings further show how the dissemination and legitimization of fashionable Aoshima is informally governed through a variety of more or less formally-related gatekeepers that ensure rural places become fashionable by/for urban migrants. Once established, star migrant mobility attracts an increasing number of visitors with shared values from urban areas. This in turn legitimizes the star migrants' *konseputo* [concept] locally through repetitive performative practices of visitors that disclose their meanings and values, and nationally by circulating these activities through the highly networked and institutionalized multimedia gatekeeping practices that reinforce how rural places should be "produced", understood and represented within the locality and beyond. The concept of "aesthetic common sense" introduced by Speake and Kennedy (2022) was shown to be a critical tool for examining this social construction of aesthetic sense in rural Japan. They argue that "aesthetic preferences of the affluent elite are adopted, largely without being questioned" (p. 1198). This study showed how the aesthetic common sense was produced and assembled around the star migrants' network of gatekeepers—government officials, local newspapers, urban magazines, social media—that reinforced a "common sense" vision of fashionable Aoshima for popular consumption.

The findings also draw attention to the unequal urban-to-rural power relations embedded within the production of this aesthetic common sense. The discourses of maintaining a "Tokyo standard", or keeping "Tokyo quality", and achieving this by creating a new beach culture in "untouched" Miyazaki, is a familiar story in analyses of the commodification, colonization, and unequal power relationships in tourism destinations across the globe (Hollinshead, 2008; Zhang et al., 2022). We can begin to understand how aesthetic common sense is reproduced in rural spaces through the star migrant subjectivity, who are central agents within the broader neoliberal institution of lifestyle mobility-led rural revitalization. Although local residents also participate in Aoshima's revitalization projects, star migrants' network activities and programs maintain a strong influence over the wider national and transnational representations of "fashionable" Aoshima. This is because local residents often lack the extensive external networks, promotional skills and financial resources that star migrants possess. Urban migrants do not simply bring certain fashion with them, they also strategically employ their skills and networks to legitimize their worldviews and values as "the standard". The assumption that rural spaces are an untouched blank slate on which the urban can inscribe its own aesthetic values and sense of place may become a growing concern as urban-to-rural revisitation efforts continue to expand throughout Japan.

The article not only offers important contextual insights, but also proposes several theoretical contributions concerning the intersections of fashion, tourism and lifestyle mobility scholarship. For fashion studies, employing Kawamura's fashion-ology in the context of rural revitalization and tourism governance extends and broadens the scope of analysis beyond what was previously limited to the fashion industry or context of fashion. Kawamura (2018) previously acknowledged the potential of fashion-ology for analyzing other creative industries such as literature, music and art, but there is still limited application of the theory outside the context of the fashion (Zhang & Juhlin, 2012). Given the increasing importance of design, aesthetics, and the creative industries in neoliberal tourism development (Speake & Kennedy, 2022), integrating tourism with fashion scholarship could reveal interesting insights for both fields (Gravari-Barbas & Sabatini, 2024). The findings of this study indicate that expanding the role of "fashion-ology" beyond the fashion industry to include fields such as tourism and other creative industries allows for the examination of various aesthetic production and consumption practices. Additionally, the article's discussion of fashion theory in a rural region of Japan contributes to expanding the geographical possibilities of fashion theory. Although fashion-ology has been adapted to explore non-Western fashion systems, including Tokyo (Kawamura, 2013), studies that apply Kawamura's (2018) fashion-ology theory to the production of place still concentrate on the large fashion capitals of the world. However, in contemporary tourism studies, where much attention is directed to rural revitalization, there is emerging line of literature demonstrating the important role fashion is playing in peripheral regions (Lazzeretti et al., 2017; Walters, 2019). The empirical analysis provided in this study adds to this emerging research and contributes to the decentralization of fashion theory by offering a detailed account of the currently unfolding urban-to-rural production of "fashionable destinations". This study opens new research opportunities for fashion-ology to begin unpacking "the system of fashion" in other rural and peripheral regions of the world.

The article also advances discussions concerning lifestyle mobilities literature. By integrating fashion-ology theory with tourism development, the study contributes to the ongoing discussions concerning the intersections and politics of lifestyle mobility, entrepreneurialism, creative industries and rural tourism governance (Eimermann & Carson, 2023; Jóhannesson et al., 2024). The findings demonstrate how analytical attention to the fashion system provides needed insights into

the processes of how lifestyle mobilities are discursively and materially "dressing up" rural regions in Japan and beyond. Recent literature has started paying attention to the emergent creativity in "undressed" places that have limited resources and inhabitants (Jóhannesson et al., 2024). We argue that focusing on fashion enables us to carefully examine—and "re-dress" (Ren, 2024)—the aesthetic dimensions of lifestyle mobilities and the values imbued within the circulation of urban(e) sensibilities. Uniting lifestyle mobility with fashion studies allows us to carefully consider how urban-to-rural migration carries an aesthetic common sense into rural spaces and places, highlighting the uneven, and even unjust, ways rural tourism destinations are produced and informally governed in contemporary neoliberal societies. The article therefore contributes to the "politics of mobility" (Cresswell, 2010; Sheller, 2018) by offering empirical insights into the power relations of tourism development and rural revitalization strategies that depend on urban entrepreneurialism and creative industries (Speake & Kennedy, 2022).

7. Conclusion

Over the past three decades, the implementation of neoliberal policies in Japan has led to the formation of tourism development encouraging privatization, deregulation, and the fluid mobility of capital with the aim of encouraging decentralized markets. Within this context, urban migrants are seen as key actors in the revitalization of depopulating and ageing regions in rural Japan. This study introduced Kawamura's (2018) theory of fashion-ology to help guide the analysis on how rural tourism destinations are being produced and (re)fashioned by urban-to-rural migration who bring new practices, aesthetic values, and meanings to rural places. Through the lens of fashion-ology, this study demonstrated the co-constitutive dynamic between star migrants, various networked gatekeepers, and sophisticated consumers, detailing the convergence of multiple mobilities in the co-production and co-consumption of a "fashionable" rural tourism destination in the Japanese context. Doing so, the article not only offered valuable understandings concerning the production processes of "fashionable" rural tourism destinations, but also provided insights into the unequal urban-rural power relationships that characterize contemporary revitalization projects in rural Japan (Klien, 2020; Martini, 2023). While previous research on urban-to-rural mobilities in Japan has focused on the meanings, experiences, and tribulations of urban migrant entrepreneurs, not enough critical attention has been paid to the institution of rural revitalization itself. By examining the "system of fashionableness" structuring lifestyle mobility led rural revitalization, the article offered rich empirical insights into how this system works and the role urban lifestyle entrepreneurs play in the broader structure of the political economy.

This article also highlighted that integrating fashion theories into tourism studies can be beneficial to tourism practitioners seeking to better comprehend the dynamics and complexities of tourism planning and development in contemporary society. Although this study does not provide a "how to" guide for making a fashionable tourism destination (cf. Lewis et al., 2019), tourism practitioners, policy-makers and local communities can become more attuned and sensitive to the ways an aesthetic common sense is produced and the potential positive and negative consequences that result from neoliberal rural revitalization initiatives and governance processes. By engaging with fashion theory in the context of tourism, we argue policy-makers and destination management organizations can become more attentive and begin to "re-dress" the unequal power relations currently embedded in the refashioning rural tourism destinations.

While this study provides a detailed understanding of how the interaction of various mobilities contribute to the creation and maintenance of "fashionableness" in tourism destinations, further research in a variety of rural locations is needed to unpack various systems of fashion in different tourism destinations. For instance, conducting a comparative study within the same region could provide a more comprehensive understanding on how certain destinations became fashionable while others do not. In a neoliberal context, this is especially important as rural cities, towns and villages now have to compete with one another to become *the* "fashionable destination." Understanding how places compete with one another to become "fashionable" over a longer timeframe is an important area for future research. We look forward to seeing future research on the intersection of urban lifestyle mobilities and the production of "fashionable" tourism destinations expand our understandings of contemporary rural communities.

Impact statement

This study demonstrates how urban migrants, tourists and their networks collectively co-produce and co-consume fashionable rural tourism destinations. It offers insight for tourism policy-makers and destination management organizations by helping to understand the social and cultural changes resulting from increasing urban-to-rural lifestyle mobilities in rural tourism destinations. Additionally, tourism professionals can use this study to identify political, social, and cultural issues that underlie the process of becoming fashionable tourism destinations. This knowledge is essential for creating more balanced representations of rural tourism destinations. The study also emphasises the need for direct community members' participation in shaping representations of their place, given that urban migrant values and aesthetic preferences often dominate this process. By examining the processes behind making a "fashionable destination", both tourism practitioners and community members can gain a deeper understanding of stakeholder power dynamics and formulate strategies for more effective and sustainable tourism management.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Daijiro Yamagishi: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Methodology, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Adam Doering:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Methodology, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization.

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