

# Transformation and Adaptation of Traditional Culture in Contemporary Tourism: A Case Study of Kyoto Minshuku

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**Abstract.** Culture is a solid foundation for the development of tourism in Kyoto. Minshuku, as a product that meets the needs of culture tourism well, has been developing better and faster along with Kyoto's tourism industry year by year. With the global modernization of cities, the preservation and balance of traditional culture has turned out to be an outstanding topic, and the role of Kyoto Minshuku in cultural heritage is an example worth studying under this broad topic. This paper specifically explores how minshuku, as a cultural carrier, can help traditional culture and old architecture find their place and play an important role in contemporary tourism. The key driving factors include the internal sale and remodeling needs of the old house, as well as the external tourism development, market demand, and policy support, among others. Meanwhile, this phenomenon has both positive and negative impacts on Kyoto's society. As a case of effective transformation and adaptation of traditional culture, Kyoto's minshuku has numerous references and examples for research in similar fields and many other urban planning, such as the combination of traditional culture and tourism, and the preservation and development of traditional culture.

**Keywords:** Kyoto; Tourism; Traditional Culture; Minshuku.

## 1. Introduction

At a time of rapid scientific and technological development, as the modernization of cities advances, people all over the world have begun to discuss the importance of preserving cultural property. Culture is the foundation of a region, nation, or country, and how to adapt traditional culture to contemporary society has become an increasingly important topic both from academic and practical perspectives. The capital of Japan moved to current-day Kyoto in 794 CE, and it remained the capital until the late nineteenth century [1]. Kyoto has witnessed the most brilliant thousand years of Japan's cultural development, so the traces of culture are deeply engraved in every palace, every festival, and every custom of this city. It is precisely because of such deep deposits and historical roots that culture is the core attraction of Kyoto's tourism industry.

There are nearly two thousand places of worship in Kyoto [2], and such an extremely large number of temples and shrines demonstrates the depth of the city's cultural heritage and the success of its preservation of old buildings. Kyoto has thousands of traditional architectures and retains traditional festivals that have been passed down for thousands of years. The people who live here also retain traditional living habits such as flower arranging, tea drinking, meals, and clothing habits [3]. In Kyoto, culture and tourism have a complementary relationship. It is a city full of culture, and visitors from both domestic and foreign countries come to Kyoto to experience history, culture and tradition in the contemporary context of the city [4]. Therefore, culture promotes the development of tourism in Kyoto, and the maturity of tourism plays an important role in the preservation of culture.

Architecture, as one of the important carriers of traditional culture, has also found its niche in contemporary tourism, and minshuku is one of how traditional culture is transformed and adapted. Currently, most of the research on Bed & Breakfast (B&B) in East Asia focuses on apartment-type B&Bs in modern cities. However, as a new and popular type of B&B consumption, minshuku-type housing which is rich in the local culture is not simply about accommodation and tourist consumption, it's also tied to the culture of the city. Based on Kyoto's historical and cultural background, this paper takes Kyoto minshuku as a case study to examine the adaptation and inheritance of traditional culture

in the development of modernized tourism. It will introduce the current state of Kyoto's tourism and minshuku industry, and specifically analyze the characteristics of minshuku and the reasons for its successful transformation and adaptation of traditional culture to contemporary tourism. It also focuses on the relationship between minshuku consumption and cultural tourism in Kyoto and explores the various impacts of the development of minshuku on Kyoto and its tourism.

In the context of fast-paced modernization, Kyoto has well preserved and protected its traditional culture in various ways. This is an important reference for the preservation of traditional culture in other cities. This paper focuses not only on the traditional culture itself but also on the connection point between traditional culture and the modern society. The purpose of this study is to fill the research gap on the combination of traditional constructions and contemporary industries by examining the case of Kyoto minshuku and exploring better ways for cities to preserve traditional culture in the process of modernization.

## **2. Development Background of Cultural Tourism and Minshuku in Kyoto**

### **2.1. Current status of tourism in Kyoto**

Tourism is one of the important economic industries in Kyoto. The economic report published by the Kyoto government in 2019 illustrates that tourist consumption accounts for 55% of the annual income of the Kyoto economy [5, 6]. Because of the epidemic that started in 2020, the development of Japan's tourism industry as a whole has been hampered by the policy; and Kyoto, as a major tourist city in Japan, is part of the impact. However, with the impact of the epidemic gradually diminishing, the data from the Japan National Tourism Organization (JNTO) shows Japan's tourism industry is also returning to its pre-epidemic levels [6]. In the 2023 Visitor Arrivals & Japanese Overseas Travelers (Compared to 2019) Report published by JNTO in January 2024, the number of tourists visiting Japan in October 2023 has already exceeded the number of visitors in the same month in 2019. The recovery of tourism throughout Japan has led to the recovery of a bunch of tourist cities, led by Kyoto.

### **2.2. Characteristics of Kyoto and its Cultural Tourism**

There are also several reasons why Kyoto was chosen as the case study city in this paper. First of all, Kyoto, as the cultural center of Japan, is huge in terms of city scale and tourist scale, which is of practical significance. Secondly, Kyoto's architectural and cultural heritage are well protected, and the government's support and people's awareness make the city always maintain a strong cultural atmosphere, which is the basic condition for minshuku to become a kind of cultural consumption. It has an important reference value for the development of other tourist cities with cultural tourism as their core industry.

Kyoto retains and passes on the richest historical and cultural heritage in Japan. In *Lonely Planet Kyoto*, Chris Rowthorn narrates that "with over 1600 Buddhist temples, more than 400 Shintou shrines and 17 UNESCO World Heritage sites, Kyoto is one of the world's most culturally rich cities." [4] Such rich architectural preservation lays a solid foundation for cultural tourism in Kyoto.

In Kyoto, the government has invested even more in the preservation and transmission of traditional culture. Architecture, such as Kyoto's minshuku, as an important part of cultural life, is one of the substantive ways of presenting the culture. The overall development of minshuku in Kyoto is showing an upward trend. Until 2019, when there was no interference from the epidemic, the number of minshuku increased from 460 in 2014 to 3,197 in 2019, according to the data provided by the Kyoto City Tourism Association [7].

### **2.3. Kyoto minshuku as a case study**

Kyoto minshuku is one of the most important carriers of cultural heritage in its tourism industry. Before specifically analyzing how minshuku in Kyoto have transformed and adapted to the local tourism industry, first, the concept of minshuku explored in this paper needs to be defined. The

minshuku can be in various styles, such as detached, inside the main house, for children, for large groups, for general use, a campsite, or a luxurious room [8], and this word is used to describe the house managed by farmers. This paper chooses the term "minshuku" to describe the scope of travel accommodations in this study precisely because minshuku distinguishes itself from large-scale, standardized, and well-managed commercial inns. Minshuku are mostly operated and managed by individuals, and the scale of the houses is usually small. Besides, definitions of minshuku within the scope of the study are culturally distinctive, innovative, highly accepted by tourists, and highly integrated with the cultural experience [9]. The minshuku explored in this study has a multi-level nature, which can not only meet the most basic lodging needs and have the accommodation function of traditional hotels but also provide cultural scenes for the residents, which makes the consumption of minshuku itself become a kind of cultural tourism consumption.

Minshuku has been transformed into a carrier of traditional culture in contemporary society through a combination of government policy support, business opportunities, and demand for tourist accommodations. For example, the policies and various regulations for transforming old houses, "*Kyomachiya*", into minshuku are creating new development opportunities while preserving traditional architecture. Kyoto's traditional houses are called "*Kyomachiya*", which is defined as a wooden townhouse built before 1950 using the traditional wooden shaft construction method [10]. *Kyomachiya* were built as commerce, industry, and construction techniques developed. Its origins can be traced to the 12th century. *Kyomachiya* used to be a combination of business and residential space, and it typically has deeper house structures with enclosed street frontages, their own internal gardens, and narrow internal corridors connecting the front and back of the house [11]. It is an architectural style that has witnessed the historical changes of Kyoto, represents the common life of Kyoto, and is an element that connects people to the whole city and is rich in culture. Minshuku transformed from it have become one of the specialties of Kyoto's tourism industry while preserving the structure and interior style of the traditional houses.

Thus, Kyoto's minshuku has a unique cultural nature. Unlike the case of Bed & Breakfast (B&B) in modern cities, traditional Japanese-style minshuku in Kyoto gives tourists a strong sense of immersion and participation. The expanding tourism market is accompanied by expanding and upgrading demand for accommodations, and because Kyoto retains its traditions and cultural atmosphere, the consumption of minshuku can shift from the most basic accommodation consumption to cultural consumption.

### **3. Transformation and adaptation of traditional culture in Kyoto Minshuku**

In Kyoto, minshuku has become a carrier of culture, and the formation of minshuku consumption is a combination of internal and external demands. The relationship between minshuku consumption and various demands is interconnected and intertwined. A wide range of reasons make minshuku a perfect cultural carrier, including government support, the need for cultural heritage, the need for travelers' experience, the need for market development and expansion, and much more.

#### **3.1. Internal and External Motivation of Minshuku to Promote Cultural Development**

The formation of the minshuku has its internal motivation for change. As a city that has well preserved its traditional history and culture, Kyoto's modernization and urbanization have constraints and limitations. The city has long paid attention to urban planning in ways attentive to tradition, including constructing views of the surrounding hills and maintaining the narrow roji (alleyways) lined with machiya (townhouses) [4]. Meanwhile, because of the development of cultural tourism, other industries have been squeezed out of the city, resulting in a serious exodus of the young labor force, and the uninherited land and families' houses [12]. These properties for sale are the internal motivations for the renovation and development of old houses.

In addition to internal demands, external demands also drive the formation of the minshuku industry. For example, one of the external demands comes from the development of tourism. According to

JNTO, apart from the time when it was affected by the epidemic, the number of visitors and the room occupancy rate are stable [6], which provides a great guarantee for the operation of minshuku. At the same time, the core attraction of Kyoto's tourism—culture—provides a higher-dimensional demand for spiritual consumption, which is the demand for tourism coupled with culture. To adapt traditional culture to modern social changes, and to achieve the purpose of experiencing local culture more deeply in the process of traveling, each part of the journey is given the demand for cultural consumption, and minshuku consumption is the embodiment of consumption upgrading in the segment of lodging. Thus, the formation of minshuku consumption is promoted by both internal and external demands.

### **3.2. The Forms of Traditional Cultural Inheritance Mediated by Minshuku**

The intrinsic nature of a minshuku that carries culture comes from several sources: the first is its house structure itself, the wood materials and overall structural plan of the house; the second is the overall decorative style of the house; and the third is the surrounding public cultural hub centered on the house.

In Kyoto, there are both newly-built and remodeled minshuku, and those remodeled from old houses, such as "*Kyomachiya*", retain not only the traditional Japanese style of architecture on the outside but also the internal structure of the house. The government has many detailed regulations for renovating old houses and the operation of minshuku, such as the preservation of the interior architecture of the house [13]. While the exterior of the home can be redecorated and the furnishings inside can be rearranged, the most basic wooden structure of the house must not be removed. To preserve the original structure of the house, they cannot be demolished outright. Although there are situations where these woods are not directly usable because of their age, the renovator has the option of decorating and reinforcing them with new materials only. Besides, to maximize the preservation of old architecture, the Kyoto government has introduced many policies that place restrictions on the construction, height, and remodeling of houses. To protect the house, the government even has policies that the number of days a minshuku can be operated per year according to the width of the road in front of the house [13]. This is all about the protection of the architectural and cultural industry.

Next, the cultural characteristics of minshuku also come from their classical Japanese architectural styles. As mentioned in the first point, some of the houses are newly built, but even if they are new, the style of the house and the interior decoration are kept in the Japanese architectural style to maximize the cultural characteristics. This style is consistent with the overall cultural atmosphere of Kyoto and also allows the cultural experience of tourists to exist not only in the outing experience but also in the time of rest to feel the Japanese culture.

Thirdly, in addition to preserving the old buildings and generating new profits from them, the renovation of "*Kyomachiya*" is a way of expanding the public cultural space around the house by retaining the original location of the house. Because they are houses for local residents to live in, they are located in residential areas, which allows tourists to have a strong sense of cultural immersion while living there. Turning residential housing into tourist accommodation also stimulates the public cultural space around the residential area and consumer behavior in the original neighborhood [4]. It is more likely that multiple industrial ecosystems will be derived as a result, such as kimono rentals, local cuisine, cafes, and restaurants. Taking minshuku consumption as the center, it connects a variety of other tourism resources, realizing the cultural experience of travel in a larger space.

It is precisely because the design and construction of Kyoto minshuku have the characteristics of Japanese cultural aesthetics, and are at the center of integration with the local culture, under the protection of the government's regulations and measures, that it realizes the possibility of cultural inheritance and dissemination, and makes the perfect combination of traditional culture and modern tourism.

### **3.3. Analysis of Potential Problems**

The development of minshuku has certainly brought many new business opportunities and vitality to Kyoto, but as it grows, it also brings many new problems. In general, the current situation of tourism in Kyoto and the development of minshuku is generally on the rise, and minshuku, as one of the carriers of cultural inheritance, has an objective advantage and a positive role in cultural inheritance. However, although minshuku reflects a good cultural adaptation in Kyoto's tourism industry, Kyoto's city size is after all limited. With the increase in the number of minshuku in operation in Kyoto over recent years, the volume of minshuku in this industry will eventually face the problem of saturation. Also, as mentioned in the analysis above, although the cultural tourism industry has developed well in Kyoto and created many new opportunities for the local community, it is precisely because it occupies too large a share of the market that other industries have been severely squeezed. This has led to a serious exodus of young labor from the city, which may also lead to a gradually growing demand without enough labor to meet it [12].

### **4. Suggestions**

The main reason why minshuku, as a new economic industry, can be integrated into the traditional cultural atmosphere of Kyoto, and even become an important carrier for traditional culture, is that minshuku meets the multiple needs of the Kyoto society. The formation of the minshuku industry cannot be separated from the stimulation of internal and external factors, so to maintain the development of minshuku, it is necessary to pay attention to these multiple factors.

To ensure the good operation of the existing minshuku, it is necessary to consider maintaining the popularity of the tourism market, preserving the core attraction of "culture" on which Kyoto's travel industry are based, and preserving the traditional architecture and folklore culture. In the above analysis, the internal factor for the formation of minshuku is the demand for old houses to be sold, and the external factor is the demand for the development of the tourism industry and the support and influence of government policies. Through the government's systematic management, the minshuku can be developed in the most appropriate, beneficial, and sustainable manner. And if the minshuku market is expected to continue to expand, it will depend to some extent on internal factors. The supply of houses for sale is not endless, so the growth trend of minshuku is inevitably going to come to a point of retardation, in which case it is even more important to maintain the existing well-run operations.

There are also issues to be aware of when it comes to minshuku's construction and design. As a building, a minshuku has a lot of practical aspects that need to be taken care of, such as construction, design, effects, and even the impact on the surrounding environment. For example, when remodeling houses, to better serve the tourism industry and cultural preservation, it is important to consider ways to ensure that the structure and style of the old house are safe and hygienic in terms of the balance between the old and the new degree of the house. It is necessary to consider the retention of the cultural symbols of the building itself so that travelers can feel the cultural atmosphere and at the same time live comfortably and enjoy the convenience of modern life. Meanwhile, the impact of renovation on the neighborhood environment also needs to be taken into account. The building, after all, is a large volume in society, and minshuku developers and managers should pay attention to the wider social consequences. Before renovation, communicate well with the surrounding neighbors in advance, and minimize the impact on public areas during the renovation process, such as cleaning up the waste in time, keeping the road clean and wide, and reducing the construction noise. All these ways can make the construction and operation of the minshuku more harmonious and smooth.

### **5. Conclusion**

In general, the cultural characteristics of Kyoto's tourism industry are the basis for the rise of the minshuku industry, and the combination of internal and external factors is why the development of the minshuku has flourished. Kyoto minshuku not only have their unique cultural values and charms

but are also supported by Kyoto's social environment and government policies. Starting from the minshuku as a physical architectural carrier, it not only discusses the inheritance and protection of culture but also explores practical ways of transforming and adapting traditional culture in contemporary society.

This study provides a closer understanding of both the background and the current state of minshuku development in Kyoto and also discusses why it has been successfully integrated into Kyoto's contemporary tourism industry. Although the development of minshuku may encounter problems in the future, such as market saturation and labor shortage, as well as many aspects of minshuku construction that need attention, the tourism industry will sustain its attraction as long as Kyoto maintains its sufficiently detailed attitude and management for cultural preservation. Therefore, minshuku will be able to create economic value and play a role in cultural inheritance simultaneously.

The relationship between “tradition” and “modernity” appears to be contradictory on the surface because they are in two opposite directions in the dimension of time, but in the case of Kyoto minshuku, they have reached harmonious coexistence and even mutual enrichment. The preservation and operation of cultural industries in Kyoto are very successful, and whether from an academic or a practical point of view, it is a valuable reference for the field of preservation of traditional culture and the cultural transmission work of other cities.

This paper, however, also has some limitations. Although the scope of minshuku discussed in this paper is defined at the beginning of the paper, there are other types of accommodations and minshuku have an impact on cultural tourism in Kyoto. Moreover, the relationship between culture and society is diverse and entwined, the transmission of traditional culture is not restricted to the minshuku alone, so it is difficult to get a universal approach by solely exploring the minshuku consumption. In future studies, more consideration should be given to the impact of other aspects to make the study more complete and comprehensive.

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