

Transformation of Pension Villages  
in the Outer Zone of Tokyo Metropolitan Area:  
A Case Study of Minenohara Kogen, Nagano Prefecture

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## **Abstract**

The purpose of this study is to clarify the transformation process of pension villages in the outer zone of Tokyo metropolitan area. The results of the study can be summarized as follows.

Pensions are concentrated in the vicinity of the mountain and tourist areas in the outer zone of the Tokyo Metropolitan Area. The main factors behind the formation of pension villages in this zone have been identified as 1) increased accessibility from the DIDs in the Tokyo Metropolitan Area, following the completion of expressways from the 1960s to the 1980s, 2) the existence of tourism resources, and 3) the lack of accommodation facilities in tourism areas and changes in customer demand.

The following features are emphasized in the transformation of Minenohara Kogen's pension village. Starting in the late 1990s the number of skiers in Japan declined, forcing some pensions that relied on skiing out of business, while others run by elderly managers have downsized. At the same time, a new group of pensions have emerged that actively take steps to attract new customers during the green season, by hosting track-and-field groups or taking advantage of the manager's hobbies or special skills such as astronomical observations, music playing, and so on. The second point to be noted is that pension managers spend a longer time interacting with visitors, than managers in ryokans and minshukus. The third point is that, with the spread of the Internet, accommodation and reservation websites have become important for advertising and accepting reservations. In Minenohara Kogen, the hobby-oriented type pensions and the track-and-field-camp accepting type pensions have begun to utilize these means for advertising and

accepting reservations since the 2000s. The fourth point is that the demand for high altitude training from track-and-field groups increased in the 1990s, and Minenohara Kogen is a suitable location for such training.

Finally, this study used Butler's "Tourist area life cycle" model to discuss the transformation of pension villages in the outer zone of the Tokyo Metropolitan Area. The developmental stages of pensions in this zone can be classified as 1) the beginning, 2) the early years, 3) development, 4) consolidation, 5) stagnation, and 6) decline. In first stage, second homes were developed, creating a tourist area. During the period from the early years to consolidation, the number of pensions and tourists at sites in the outer zone of the Tokyo Metropolitan Area continued to increase, against the backdrop of a period of high economic growth. This growth reflected the bubble economy, Second Ski Boom of the 1980s and early 1990s, and surge in the popularity of pensions during the 1980s, among other factors. During the Stagnation stage, the protracted economic slump that followed the collapse of the bubble economy saw a decline in the number of pensions and tourists, depending even on mass tourism resources. In the decline stage, the pension villages transformed from tourism areas dependent on mass tourism into areas that had incorporated alternative tourism in various forms.

**Key words:** pensions, accommodations, tourism, ski field, the outer zone of Tokyo Metropolitan Area, Minenohara Kogen