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Definition of Visitor Arrivals to Japan and Their Entry Patterns

Masashi Kusumoto, Doshisha University

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CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF THE CREATIVE ECONOMY

Discussion Paper Series

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Abstract

Visitor Arrivals to Japan reached a record high in 2025. However, there are no statistics on their entry routes or arrivals by prefecture, and few studies have analyzed their entry patterns in detail. In contrast, official statistics provide information on entry routes and prefectural distributions for all foreign entrants. This raises the question of which entrants are defined as Visitor Arrivals to Japan. This study defines the term based on international statistical standards and Japan's immigration system, estimates the number of visitors based on existing entry statistics and analyzes their entry patterns.

Most foreign visitors enter Japan by air. However, visitors from China represent a relatively high share of sea travelers than those from other countries or regions. Entry regions vary by the origin of the visitors, and those from geographically closer countries or regions tend to arrive across multiple entry points.

Foreign visitors arriving in Japan are disproportionately concentrated by country or region of origin and this concentration is more pronounced at the prefectural level. Besides Chiba, Tokyo, Kagoshima, Aichi, and Osaka, travelers from one or two countries or regions of origin account for an overwhelmingly large share of arrivals.

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1. Background

Visitor Arrivals to Japan reached a record high of 42.68 million in 2025 (URL1). While the increase in foreign visitors has attracted attention for its economic benefits, it has also led to social issues such as excessive congestion and negative impacts on local living environments. To address this problem, the Japanese government introduced policies aimed at distributing economic benefits nationwide and preventing and mitigating overtourism (URL2). Accordingly, prior studies, such as Yabe et al. (2021) and Sogo and Hirata (2017), have examined tourist travel routes, regional visitation factors, and destination choice behavior.

However, although the White Paper on Tourism provides detailed time-series data on total arrivals and breakdowns by country or region, it does not report entry routes (airports or seaports) or arrivals by prefecture. As a result, few studies have analyzed the entry patterns of the 42.68 million visitors to Japan. As an island nation, Japan has limited entry routes and points, leading to a concentration of initial arrivals in regions with major airports and seaports. Therefore, understanding entry patterns is essential for analyzing regional visitation by foreign visitors.

Meanwhile, the total number of foreign entrants to Japan in 2025 was approximately 46.48 million, marking a record high (URL3). Statistics from the Immigration Services Agency of Japan (Ministry of Justice) provide data by entry port, making it possible to identify entry routes and prefectural distributions. This raises the question of which entrants can be classified as Visitor Arrivals to Japan. This term generally suggests individuals traveling from abroad, but the scope of “visitors” remains ambiguous. For example, it is unclear whether “visitors” include individuals entering Japan for short-term business or study and engage in leisure activities. Although the term Visitor Arrivals to Japan is widely used in the media, its objective definition has not been well established.

Therefore, this study clarifies the definition of Visitor Arrivals to Japan based on international standards for international travelers. This definition is used to estimate the number of visitors from existing entry statistics and to analyze their entry patterns.

The rest of the paper is structured as follows. Section 2 reviews previous studies on the definition of tourism and international travelers. Section 3 examines the International Recommendations for Tourism Statistics 2008 (IRTS 2008), a set of international statistical standards developed by the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UN Tourism)[1] in collaboration with organizations such as the International Labour Organization (ILO), and clarifies the definition of international travelers (URL5). Section 4 classifies the forms of entry based on Japanese immigration laws and institutional frameworks, identifies the entrants by purpose and length of stay, and defines Visitor Arrivals to Japan. Section 5 analyzes the entry patterns of Visitor Arrivals to Japan using statistics from the Immigration Services Agency of Japan (Ministry of Justice) based on the definition established above. Finally, Section 6 concludes the paper.

2. Previous Studies

This section reviews previous studies on tourism and examines their definition of international travelers as established by international standards.

Yamashita (2011a) defines tourism as a comprehensive phenomenon constituting a leisure activity from the perspective of tourists, an economic impact from the perspective of host societies, and a political, social, and cultural phenomenon depending on the actors involved. Yamashita (2011b) further examines the definition provided by the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UN Tourism), which defines tourism as “activities involving travel and stays in places outside one’s usual environment for no more than one consecutive year for leisure, business, or other purposes.” He points out that short-term business trips are also included in tourism, that ambiguous categories such as working holidays blur the distinction between work and leisure, and that products such as long-stay travel similarly blur the boundary between tourism and migration. He argues that tourism is a comprehensive phenomenon that is inherently

[1] The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UN Tourism: World Tourism Organization) is a specialized agency of the United Nations responsible for the promotion of sustainable and responsible tourism. It was established in 1975 as the World Tourism Organization (WTO), succeeding the International Union of Official Travel Organisations (IUOTO). The WTO became a specialized agency of the United Nations in 2003 and used the abbreviation UNWTO from 2005. In 2024, it changed its abbreviated name to UN Tourism (URL4).

difficult to define, and that its scope changes over time.

Leiper (1979), who examined the theoretical framework of tourism, noted that the statistical standards established by the International Union of Official Travel Organisations (IUOTO), the predecessor of the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UN Tourism), included travelers whose purposes extend beyond the conventional understanding of tourism, such as business trips, within the category of international tourists. He explained that this expansion of definition arises because statistical definitions of tourism prioritize the size and characteristics of tourism markets for the collection of comparable statistics. Furthermore, the diverse aspects of tourism make it difficult to capture its full scope, leading to an implicit broadening of its specific statistical definitions. To address this conceptual ambiguity, Leiper (1979), citing Burkart and Medlik (1979:39), argued that it is useful to distinguish between the concept, which identifies the essential characteristics of tourism and provides a theoretical framework, and a technical definition, which serves statistical, legislative, and industry purposes.

Nishimura (2022) examined the definitions of "tourist" used by international organizations and those used in Japanese tourism statistics, focusing on their historical development. Nishimura (2022) notes that IRTS 2008 defines a tourist as a person who travels outside their usual environment but returns to their place of residence, stays for at least one night and less than 12 months without taking up residence at the destination, and engages in non-remunerated activities at the destination, including business purposes but excluding local employment. Nishimura (2022) also notes that, in Japan's international tourism statistics, the term Visitor Arrivals to Japan is currently used as a measure of tourist numbers. It defines Visitor Arrivals to Japan as the number of legally registered foreign entrants compiled by the Ministry of Justice, excluding foreign residents whose main country of residence is Japan (such as permanent residents), and including temporary visitors and other short-term entrants. This indicates that Visitor Arrivals to Japan include travelers entering the country for a variety of purposes other than tourism.

Satake (2010) examined the definitions of tourism, its translation in Japanese, and their conceptual differences. Satake (2010) argues that, based on the etymology of the term tourism and the historical development of its definition as an international statistical standard, a definition enabling international comparability has been constructed through continuous refinement of

terminology. However, it also points out that in Japanese, the word for “tourism” is broader in meaning than its English counterpart, and argues that no single Japanese term fully satisfies all the conceptual requirements embedded in the definition of “tourism.” From this perspective, the study highlights the problems with treating “tourism” and its translation in Japanese as equivalent concepts.

The studies reviewed above indicate that tourism is a comprehensive phenomenon; hence, it is difficult to establish a clear theoretical framework for the concept itself. However, because of the need to understand the scale and characteristics of the tourism market, international organizations have developed definitions of tourism and tourists as a common basis for collecting comparable statistics. Furthermore, it has been noted out that although “tourism” in international usage and “tourism in Japanese” share overlapping meanings, they are not identical in scope.

Following these discussions, this study clarifies the definition of Visitor Arrivals to Japan for statistical purposes. Nishimura (2022) showed that Visitor Arrivals to Japan are calculated from statistics compiled by the Ministry of Justice, adopting the definition developed in Japan while incorporating international standards. However, few studies systematically examine Visitor Arrivals to Japan from the perspective of Japan’s immigration system and legal framework alone. Therefore, this study (i) clarifies the definition of Visitor Arrivals to Japan from the perspective of immigration laws and institutional arrangements, (ii) extracts the number of entrants corresponding to Visitor Arrivals to Japan from official statistics based on this definition, and (iii) analyzes their entry patterns.

3. International Definitions

This section first reviews the definition of international travelers as established by international statistical standards, examines the data sources used to measure inbound tourism visitors among international travelers to Japan, and provides an overview of the sources and definitions used to compile the data.

3.1 International Statistical Standards

This subsection provides an overview of the contents of IRTS 2008 and clarifies the definition

of international travelers. IRTS 2008 classifies terminology describing human mobility, both international and domestic, into four groups, “travelers,” “visitors,” “tourists,” and “same-day visitors” based on form, purpose, and duration of movement. According to IRTS 2008, “Travel refers to the activity of travelers. A traveler is someone who moves between different geographic locations for any purpose and any duration.” Regarding tourism and visitors, IRTS 2008 states that “Tourism is a subset of travel and visitors are a subset of travelers,” and that “Tourism refers to the activity of visitors.” In other words, visitor is a subcategory of the broader category of traveler.

IRTS 2008 defines a visitor as “a traveler taking a trip to a main destination outside his/her usual environment, for less than a year, for any main purpose (business, leisure, or other personal purpose) other than to be employed by a resident entity in the country or place visited.” It further classifies the main purposes of visitors into the following nine categories.

- Business and professional
- Holiday, leisure and recreation
- Visiting friends and relatives
- Education and training
- Health and medical care
- Religion /pilgrimages
- Shopping
- Transit
- Others

Thus, the definition of visitor is not limited to travelers whose purpose is leisure, but rather encompasses a broad range of travelers with various purposes and durations, as long as their stay is less than one year in duration and does not involve employment in the place visited. Furthermore, “Visitors” are divided into the following two categories depending on whether they stay overnight at the destination:

Tourist (or overnight visitor): a visitor whose trip includes an overnight stay

Same-day visitor (or excursionist): a visitor who does not stay overnight

Thus “visitor” constitutes a component of “traveler;” hence, the term also encompasses “tourist” and “same-day visitor”. Next, we examine the definition of international travelers. IRTS 2008 classifies travelers into the following three categories based on the relationship between the travelers’ place of residence and travel destination:

Domestic travelers: residents traveling within a country

Inbound travelers: non-residents traveling to a given country

Outbound travelers: residents traveling outside a country

This classification distinguishes travelers into domestic and international travelers. As indicated by the statement in IRTS 2008 that “for inbound trips, it is essential to classify all arrivals by country of residence rather than by nationality,” the criterion for classification is not the traveler’s nationality but whether the traveler is a resident or non-resident.

In other words, even when non-residents return temporarily to their country of nationality to travel there, they are categorized as “inbound travelers.”

For a comparison with the definition of “foreign visitors to Japan” discussed later, Figure 1 summarizes the above discussion with focus on inbound traveler and inbound visitor.

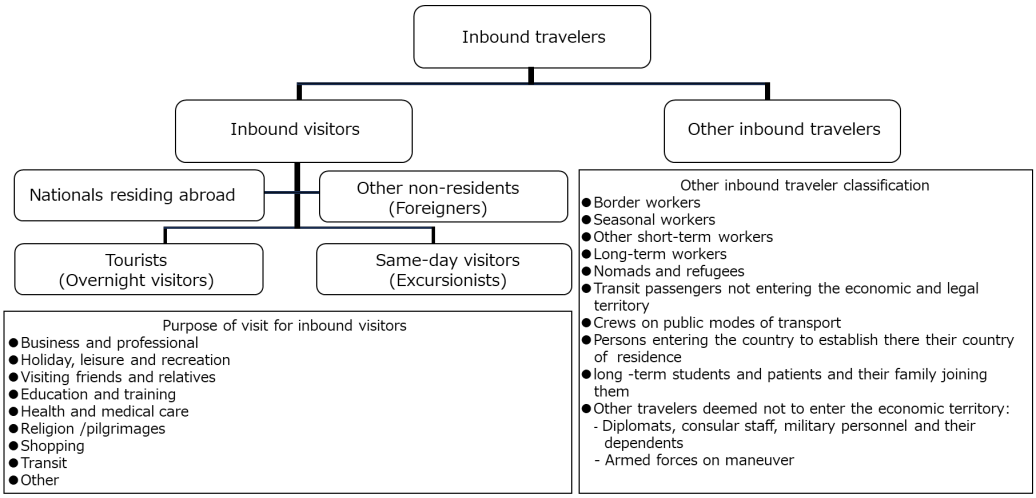

Figure 1. Classification of inbound travelers

Source: compiled by the author based on IRTS 2008.

3.2 Data Sources for Inbound Tourism Visitors

Next, IRTS 2008 states that multiple data sources should be integrated to understand the flow and characteristics of inbound visitors. It also identifies the possible sources of data collection.

For cases where inbound travelers can be measured and managed at the border, IRTS 2008 identifies information collected by immigration authorities at entry points and surveys conducted upon departure as sources. In particular, IRTS 2008 presents examples of various categories of visitors and other travelers that can be identified at the time of arrival, indicating that data collected at the border play an important role in the identification and monitoring of travelers.

In cases where a comprehensive border control system is not in place for all travelers, IRTS 2008 identifies surveys of guests staying in collective accommodation as an alternative data source. While this approach is often used when data from the border is not available, it has limitations because not all visitors stay in collective accommodation, and those who do not may exhibit different behavioral patterns.

In addition, IRTS 2008 mentions surveys conducted at major tourism sites and other destinations as supplementary data sources.

One reason why multiple data sources are specified in IRTS 2008 is that immigration systems and statistical compilation standards differ across countries and regions. Thus, the data sources used to measure inbound visitors vary across countries, inevitably leading to differences in the

resulting statistics published by each country or region.

For example, differences in data sources—and hence in the definition of inbound visitors—can also be observed in statistics published by UN Tourism. In its International Tourism Highlights (URL6), UN Tourism presents international tourist arrivals by country and region. It classifies international tourist arrivals into the following four categories based on the nature of the underlying data.

- TF：International tourist arrivals at frontiers
  (overnight visitors, i.e. excluding same-day visitors)
- VF：International visitor arrivals at frontiers
  (tourists and same-day visitors)
- THS：International tourist arrivals at hotels and similar establishments
- TCE：International tourist arrivals at collective tourism establishments

This classification further confirms that the definition of international tourist arrivals differs across countries and regions. According to URL6, 164 countries and regions, including France, Spain, and the United States—use TF as their data source. This is followed by TCE, used by 20 countries and regions (including Germany, Austria, and the Netherlands); VF, used by 18 countries and regions (including Vietnam, South Korea, and Australia); and THS, used by nine countries and regions (including Macao, Kuwait, and Cabo Verde)[2].

Note that Japan classifies its international tourist arrivals under VF, and this figure corresponds to the number of foreign visitors to Japan published by the Japan Tourism Agency under the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism. This indicates that the inbound visitors shown in Figure 1 corresponded to foreign visitors to Japan, and Japan's statistics on inbound visitors are based on immigration entry data.

[2] The classifications for each country and region are as of 2023.

4. Forms of Entry into Japan and Definition of Visitor Arrivals to Japan

This section classifies the forms of entry of foreign nationals into Japan based on the Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Act (hereinafter the Immigration Control Act) and related legislation governing Japan's immigration system. It then clarifies the definition of Visitor Arrivals to Japan based on this classification.

It should be noted that the arrival of Japanese nationals to Japan is defined as "return to Japan" under Article 61 of the Immigration Control Act and is therefore not considered "entry" into Japan. Accordingly, the return of Japanese nationals is excluded from the classification of visitor entry forms in this section. Furthermore, Article 3(1) of the Immigration Control Act specifies the categories of foreign nationals not permitted to enter Japan, such as those without valid passports. Individuals who enter Japan in violation of these provisions are classified as illegal entrants (Immigration Services Agency, 2025: 46). This study does not address illegal forms of entry such as unlawful entry and focuses only on lawful forms of entry.

4.1 Japan's Immigration Control and Residence Management System

In Japan, the Immigration Control Act governs the immigration control and residence management systems. However, not all forms of entry by foreign nationals to Japan are governed by this Act.

Some forms of entry are based on international law rather than the Immigration Control Act, such as those based on the Agreement under Article VI of the Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security between Japan and the United States of America, regarding Facilities and Areas and the Status of United States Armed Forces in Japan and the Agreement regarding the Status of United Nations Forces in Japan.

Thus, the forms of entry into Japan can be classified into those based on the Immigration Control Act and those based on international law.

The Immigration Control Act states that "foreign nationals entering and residing in Japan are, in principle, required to possess one of the statuses of residence prescribed by the Act" (Immigration Services Agency, 2025: 161). Status of residence is defined as a framework that classifies in advance the diverse activities of foreign nationals and clarifies the types of activities

under which entry and residence in Japan are permitted (Immigration Services Agency, 2025: 161). Thus, in principle, foreign nationals must hold a status of residence to enter Japan.

However, even within entry based on status of residence, two forms can be found: one where the status of residence is granted at the time of entry (new entry), and the other where a foreign national residing in Japan departs temporarily while retaining their status of residence and subsequently re-enters Japan (re-entry). Furthermore, the Immigration Control Act provides an exception to this principle for Special Cases of Landing that do not require a status of residence.

Thus, the forms of entry to Japan based on the Immigration Control Act can be classified into the following three categories (URL3):

- New entry: A form of entry where a foreign national is granted a status of residence and permitted to land upon entry into Japan.
- Re-entry: A form of entry where a foreign national residing in Japan temporarily departs and re-enters while retaining their existing status of residence.
- Special Cases of Landing: A form of entry where temporary landing is permitted through simplified procedures when certain conditions are met.

The Immigration Control Act provides for 29 statuses of residence (Immigration Services Agency, 2025: 162–65). In addition, as a legal status analogous to the status of residence, the Special Act on the Immigration Control of, inter alia, Those Who Have Lost Japanese Nationality Pursuant to the Treaty of Peace with Japan defines “special permanent residents.” This study collectively refers to these as “statuses of residence, etc.,” that indicate the purpose of entry at the time of entry into Japan.

Furthermore, the Immigration Control Act stipulates seven types of special landing permission (Immigration Services Agency, 2025: 160). The categories of special landing permission can likewise be regarded as indicating the purpose of entry.

4.2 Definition of Visitor Arrivals to Japan

The Japan Tourism Agency of the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism

defines Visitor Arrivals to Japan as “foreign visitors entering Japan, calculated by taking the number of legally registered foreign entrants compiled by the Ministry of Justice based on nationality, excluding foreign residents in Japan, and adding temporary landing visitors and similar categories” (URL1).

The definition used in the Japan National Tourism Organization’s (JNTO)[3] , “Statistics on Visitor Arrivals to Japan,” which serves as a source for calculating this figure, is as follows: “The number of foreign visitors entering Japan is calculated by taking the number of legally registered foreign entrants compiled by the Ministry of Justice based on nationality, excluding foreign nationals whose primary country of residence is Japan (such as ‘permanent resident’, ‘spouse or child of Japanese national’, ‘spouse or child of permanent resident’, and ‘long-term resident’), and adding temporary landing visitors and similar categories. Entrants and re-entrants such as expatriates, their families, and international students are included, while crew members (airline and ship crews) are excluded” (URL8).

Both definitions remain ambiguous due to terms such as “permanent residents” and “temporary landing visitors.” However, according to the Immigration Services Agency, “Visitor Arrivals to Japan (as published by the Japan Tourism Agency) are calculated by subtracting from the total number of foreign entrants those entering under the statuses of residence ‘permanent resident’, ‘spouse or child of Japanese national’, ‘spouse or child of permanent resident’, and ‘long-term resident’, as well as ‘special permanent resident’, and adding those granted landing permission under ‘landing permission for cruise ship tourists’, ‘permission for landing at a port of call,’, and ‘permission for landing in transit’” (URL9).

Thus, the entry forms included in Visitor Arrivals to Japan are new entry, re-entry, and special cases of landing, covering 24 residence statuses and 3 special cases of landing types. Figure 2 summarizes the relationship between the forms of entry and Visitor Arrivals to Japan discussed in this section.

[3] The Japan National Tourism Organization (JNTO), is an independent administrative institution and adopted its name in 2008; this is its commonly used designation. It is a Japanese public specialized organization established to promote the visitation of international tourists and to advance international tourism (URL7).

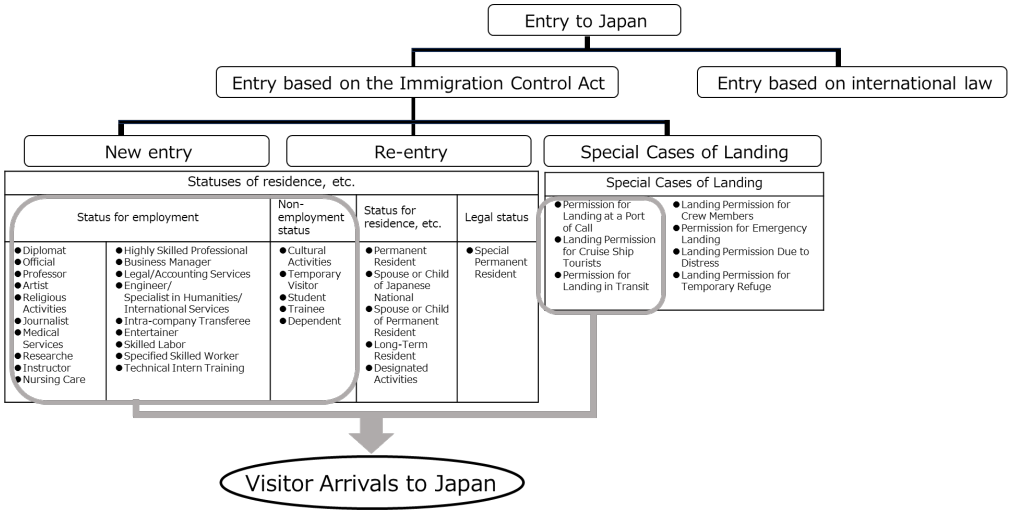

Figure 2. Forms of entry into Japan and Visitor Arrivals to Japan

Source: compiled by the author.

Here, a comparison can be made between inbound visitor as defined in IRTS 2008 and discussed in Section 3, and Visitor Arrivals to Japan. First, inbound visitors are classified based on whether they are residents; thus, Japanese nationals who reside abroad are also included. However, in Visitor Arrivals to Japan, Japanese nationals are not treated as entrants but as returnees, and, hence, are excluded.

Second, inbound visitors exclude travelers employed in the destination country. However, Visitor Arrivals to Japan include individuals who are employed and work in Japan. Third, inbound visitors include travelers staying for less than one year. In contrast, Visitor Arrivals to Japan include those entering Japan with residence statuses such as “engineer/specialist in humanities/international services” and “skilled labor,” which allow them to stay up to five years. Thus, entrants staying for more than one year are also included (Immigration Services Agency, 2025: 162–65).

When considering only foreign nationals, Visitor Arrivals to Japan cover a broader range of purposes and lengths of stay than inbound visitors in IRTS 2008.

5. Entry Patterns of Visitor Arrivals to Japan

5.1 Data for Analysis

The section describes the data used in this analysis that consist of figures compiled independently from the Immigration Control Statistics Tables published by the Immigration Services Agency of Japan (Ministry of Justice) (URL10), extracting only values corresponding to Visitor Arrivals to Japan. The dataset includes Visitor Arrivals to Japan by port of entry, prefecture of arrival, and country or region of origin.

The total number of Visitor Arrivals to Japan thus compiled from the Immigration Control Statistics Tables is 36,870,148 in 2024. This number agrees with that published by the Japan Tourism Agency (URL3) and the JNTO (URL11).

It should be noted that data on Visitor Arrivals to Japan by port of entry and prefecture of arrival are available only from 2022. In view of this limitation, the significant impact of COVID-19 during 2022–2023 and the decline in Chinese visitors due to strained political relations between Japan and China at the end of 2025, this study examines data from 2024.

In addition, Visitor Arrivals to Japan are classified based on nationality or region rather than place of residence. Therefore, unless otherwise specified, travelers hereafter are classified by nationality or region.

Table 1 presents the entry ports of Visitor Arrivals to Japan. Narita and Kansai airports together account for more than 50% of total airport arrivals, while the top seven airports account for over 95%.

In contrast, among seaports, the top ten ports account for 92% of arrivals and all these ports are located in Kyushu and Okinawa. Seaports in Kyushu and Okinawa record a large number of cruise ship calls (URL12). As noted by Sugimura and Asaoka (2020), who examined the factors behind the increase in calls at Hakata port, this is likely due to the increasing numbers of Chinese cruise passengers and the geographical proximity to China.

Furthermore, seaports in Kyushu and Okinawa often serve as the first port of call in Japan due to geographic factors, enabling them to function as entry ports into the country. This is likely the key reason why these ports record a large number of arrivals.

Table 1. Number of Visitor Arrivals to Japan by Port of Entry (2024)

Airports	Number of Visitors (Airports)	Cumulative Share (Airports)	Seaports	Number of Visitors (Seaports)	Cumulative Share (Seaports)
Total	35,058,182		Total	1,811,966	
Narita	10,467,376	29.86%	Hakata	481,439	26.57%
Kansai	9,224,585	56.17%	Naha	324,949	44.50%
Haneda	5,966,181	73.19%	Nagasaki	218,262	56.55%
Fukuoka	3,367,065	82.79%	Hitakatsu	177,936	66.37%
New Chitose	1,671,454	87.56%	Sasebo	134,986	73.82%
Chubu	1,434,606	91.65%	Ishigaki	108,937	79.83%
Naha	1,356,724	95.52%	Kanmon (Shimonoseki)	72,284	83.82%
Sendai	187,993	96.06%	Kagoshima	62,600	87.27%
Kumamoto	181,185	96.57%	Hirara	50,341	90.05%
Takamatsu	176,380	97.08%	Yatsushiro	41,299	92.33%
Matsuyama	112,231	97.40%	Osaka (Hanshin)	27,608	93.86%
Hiroshima	100,072	97.68%	Kobe (Hanshin)	17,483	94.82%
Hakodate	83,555	97.92%	Hakodate	17,416	95.78%
Okayama	80,119	98.15%	Izuhara	13,943	96.55%
Komatsu	75,990	98.37%	Sakai	10,124	97.11%
Kagoshima	69,858	98.57%	Otaru	9,705	97.65%
Kitakyushu	60,964	98.74%	Aomori	5,343	97.94%
Saga	60,645	98.91%	Tokyo	5,225	98.23%
Shizuoka	58,251	99.08%	Kanazawa	4,580	98.48%
Oita	47,405	99.21%	Muroran	4,032	98.70%
Others	275,543	100.00%	Others	23,474	100.00%

Source: compiled by the author.

5.2 Entry Patterns by Country and Region of Origin

Table 2 presents the number of Visitor Arrivals to Japan via airports and seaports for the top 20 countries and regions of origin. The airport and seaport shares indicate the proportion of each country or region's visitors relative to total Visitor Arrivals to Japan, while the airport and seaport usage rates indicate the proportion of arrivals via airports and seaports within each country or region.

From the table, approximately 95% of total Visitor Arrivals to Japan enter via airports, indicating that most visitors arrive by air. In terms of combined share of arrivals via airports and seaports, visitors from South Korea, China, and Taiwan account for approximately 59% of total arrivals. The airport share shows a similar pattern, with South Korea, China, and Taiwan accounting for about 58% of arrivals.

In contrast, the seaport share shows heavy concentration of visitors from China, who alone account for approximately 48% of seaport arrivals, a significantly higher proportion than that of other countries and regions. In terms of the seaport usage rate, only China exceeds 10%. These results indicate that while most Visitor Arrivals to Japan enter the country by air, visitors from

China show a relatively higher tendency to use sea routes compared to those from other countries and regions.

Table 2. Number of Visitor Arrivals to Japan and Entry Routes by Country and Region (2024)

Country/Region	Number of Visitors	Share by Country/Region	Number of Airport Users	Airport Share	Number of Seaport Users	Seaport Share	Airport Usage Rate	Seaport Usage Rate
Total	36,870,148	100.00%	35,058,182	100.00%	1,811,966	100.00%	95.09%	4.91%
South Korea	8,817,765	23.92%	8,444,670	24.09%	373,095	20.59%	95.77%	4.23%
China	6,981,342	18.93%	6,103,439	17.41%	877,903	48.45%	87.43%	12.57%
Taiwan	6,044,316	16.39%	5,761,292	16.43%	283,024	15.62%	95.32%	4.68%
United States	2,724,594	7.39%	2,642,282	7.54%	82,312	4.54%	96.98%	3.02%
Hong Kong	2,683,391	7.28%	2,646,224	7.55%	37,167	2.05%	98.61%	1.39%
Thailand	1,148,848	3.12%	1,146,033	3.27%	2,815	0.16%	99.75%	0.25%
Australia	920,196	2.50%	892,386	2.55%	27,810	1.53%	96.98%	3.02%
Philippines	818,659	2.22%	811,718	2.32%	6,941	0.38%	99.15%	0.85%
Singapore	691,226	1.87%	686,485	1.96%	4,741	0.26%	99.31%	0.69%
Vietnam	621,173	1.68%	619,439	1.77%	1,734	0.10%	99.72%	0.28%
Canada	579,445	1.57%	558,018	1.59%	21,427	1.18%	96.30%	3.70%
Indonesia	517,651	1.40%	514,962	1.47%	2,689	0.15%	99.48%	0.52%
Malaysia	506,883	1.37%	502,690	1.43%	4,193	0.23%	99.17%	0.83%
United Kingdom	437,230	1.19%	415,740	1.19%	21,490	1.19%	95.08%	4.92%
France	385,071	1.04%	380,614	1.09%	4,457	0.25%	98.84%	1.16%
Germany	325,870	0.88%	308,810	0.88%	17,060	0.94%	94.76%	5.24%
India	233,061	0.63%	232,015	0.66%	1,046	0.06%	99.55%	0.45%
Italy	229,785	0.62%	227,578	0.65%	2,207	0.12%	99.04%	0.96%
Spain	182,284	0.49%	180,431	0.51%	1,853	0.10%	98.98%	1.02%
Mexico	151,835	0.41%	146,796	0.42%	5,039	0.28%	96.68%	3.32%
Other	1,869,523	5.07%	1,836,560	5.24%	32,963	1.82%	98.24%	1.76%

Source: compiled by the author.

Table 3 presents the proportion of Visitor Arrivals to Japan by Japanese region for each country and region of origin. Among the total Visitor Arrivals to Japan, the Kanto region has the highest proportion of arrivals, followed by the Kinki region. Kanto and Kinki together account for approximately 70% of all arrivals, indicating that the entry of visitors into Japan is highly concentrated in these two regions, forming a dual concentration structure.

Table 3. Proportion of Visitor Arrivals to Japan by Japanese Region of Entry, by Country and Region (2024)

Country/Region	Hokkaido	Tohoku	Kanto	Chubu	Kinki	Chugoku	Shikoku	Kyushu	Okinawa
Total	4.91%	0.71%	44.66%	4.44%	25.15%	0.80%	1.05%	13.43%	5.06%
South Korea	8.28%	0.37%	24.30%	3.37%	27.91%	1.65%	2.50%	27.79%	4.52%
China	2.39%	0.15%	40.00%	5.35%	34.40%	0.49%	0.52%	12.75%	4.13%
Taiwan	8.11%	3.29%	32.13%	7.13%	22.14%	1.19%	1.47%	10.54%	14.01%
United States	1.35%	0.21%	82.63%	0.77%	10.40%	0.25%	0.08%	3.06%	1.27%
Hong Kong	4.76%	0.15%	37.33%	6.82%	27.47%	0.35%	1.20%	15.29%	6.64%
Thailand	9.35%	0.10%	48.36%	4.85%	26.89%	0.05%	0.03%	8.96%	1.41%
Australia	2.47%	0.11%	75.07%	0.87%	16.84%	0.25%	0.09%	3.53%	0.78%
Philippines	0.85%	0.05%	57.33%	7.51%	26.86%	0.21%	0.02%	6.44%	0.73%
Singapore	3.95%	0.06%	56.12%	4.13%	26.26%	0.06%	0.03%	6.47%	2.92%
Vietnam	0.41%	0.18%	48.90%	11.92%	30.23%	1.43%	0.16%	6.40%	0.38%
Canada	2.06%	0.23%	77.35%	1.19%	12.74%	0.27%	0.16%	4.47%	1.53%
Indonesia	1.77%	0.08%	68.19%	3.74%	21.22%	0.42%	0.04%	3.86%	0.67%
Malaysia	5.95%	0.26%	55.56%	2.27%	30.69%	0.07%	0.04%	3.63%	1.54%
United Kingdom	2.34%	0.18%	74.11%	1.67%	13.45%	0.46%	0.20%	5.77%	1.85%
France	0.62%	0.04%	75.68%	0.53%	19.84%	0.26%	0.07%	2.16%	0.84%
Germany	0.65%	0.05%	75.05%	1.08%	15.63%	0.30%	0.07%	5.19%	2.02%
India	0.58%	0.02%	83.59%	1.41%	12.60%	0.05%	0.02%	1.29%	0.44%
Italy	0.36%	0.03%	81.69%	0.46%	15.40%	0.13%	0.03%	1.21%	0.72%
Spain	0.37%	0.04%	65.93%	0.54%	31.26%	0.15%	0.06%	1.16%	0.51%
Mexico	0.78%	0.39%	88.81%	0.27%	6.61%	0.45%	0.15%	2.30%	0.39%
Other	1.10%	0.09%	72.13%	2.44%	18.17%	0.29%	0.13%	4.34%	1.36%

Source: compiled by the author.

The similarities in regional entry patterns are captured through a cluster analysis for 20 countries and regions. Cluster analysis is a type of multivariate analysis done by grouping data with similar characteristics into clusters. This study applies a hierarchical cluster analysis using the proportion of arrivals by Japanese region as the input data.

The results of this analysis are shown in Figure 3. The figure classifies 20 countries and regions into three clusters labeled as Cluster A, B, and C. The average proportion of arrivals by Japanese region for each cluster is presented in Table 4.

Cluster A consists of countries and regions with an extremely high proportion of arrivals through the Kanto region. Except for India, all countries and regions in this cluster are non-Asian and are geographically distant from Japan.

Cluster B is characterized by relatively high proportion of arrivals through both the Kanto and Kinki regions. However, it has the lowest Kanto share among all the clusters and shows the most geographically dispersed entry pattern. All countries and regions in this cluster are East Asian and geographically close to Japan.

Finally, Cluster C consists of countries and regions with high proportion of arrivals through both the Kanto and Kinki regions, showing a dual concentration pattern similar to that of the total Visitor Arrivals to Japan. Most countries in this cluster are Southeast Asian and geographically intermediate in distance compared with Clusters A and B. However, Spain, a European country, is also included in Cluster C.

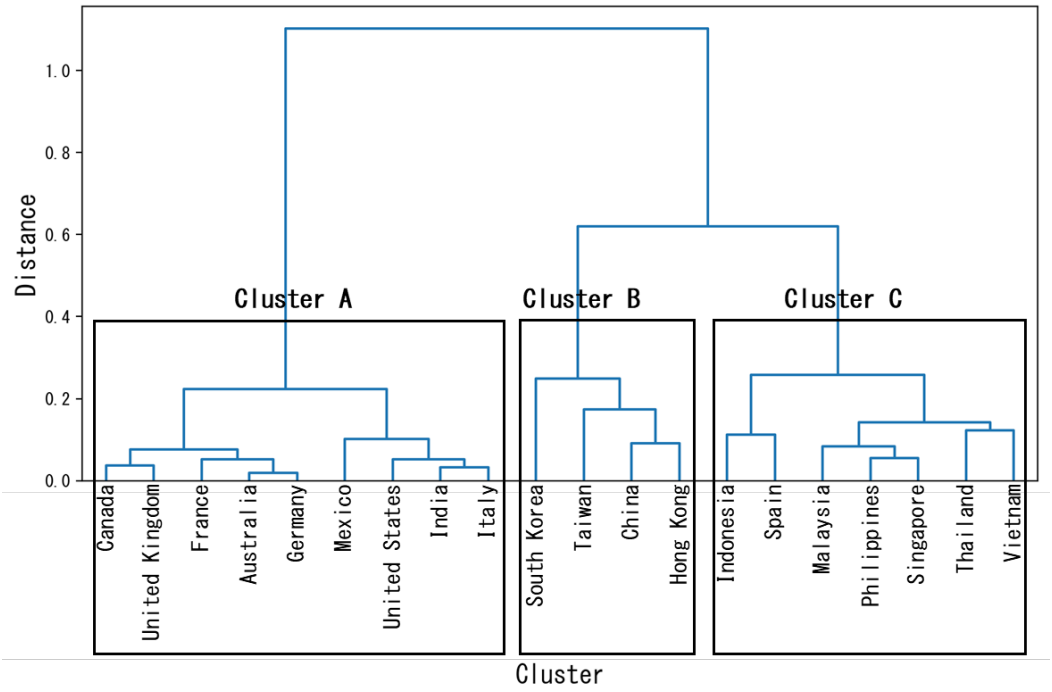

Figure 3. Classification of Countries and Regions Based on Entry Regions into Japan

Source: compiled by the author.

Table 4. The Average Proportion of Arrivals by Japanese Region

Cluster	Hokkaido	Tohoku	Kanto	Chubu	Kinki	Chugo	Shikok	Kyushu	Okinawa
Cluster A	1.25%	0.14%	79.33%	0.92%	13.72%	0.27%	0.10%	3.22%	1.09%
Cluster B	5.89%	0.99%	33.44%	5.67%	27.98%	0.92%	1.42%	16.59%	7.33%
Cluster C	3.24%	0.11%	57.20%	4.99%	27.63%	0.34%	0.06%	5.27%	1.16%

Note: Since these are average values by cluster, the total does not add up to 100%.

Source: compiled by the author.

Most Visitor Arrivals to Japan enter the country by air, while Chinese visitors exhibit a relatively higher proportion of sea-based travel compared to visitors from other countries and

regions. In addition, the visitors' entry points to Japan differ by their country or region of origin. Visitors from geographically closer countries or regions tend to show a more dispersed distribution of entry points to Japan.

5.3 Entry Patterns by Prefecture of Arrival

Table 5 shows the number of Visitor Arrivals to Japan by prefecture. The airport and seaport shares indicate the proportion of each prefecture's arrivals relative to the total Visitor Arrivals to Japan, while the airport and seaport arrival rates indicate the proportion of arrivals via airports and seaports within each prefecture.

The prefectures with the largest number of arrivals via both airports and seaports are Chiba, Osaka, and Tokyo, in that order, all of which host major international airports as shown in Table 1. The same ranking applies to arrivals via airports alone. In contrast, the prefectures with largest number of arrivals via seaports are Nagasaki, Okinawa, and Fukuoka, in that order; these three prefectures together account for more than 80% of all seaport arrivals.

Table 5. Number of Visitor Arrivals to Japan by Prefecture (2024)

Prefecture	Number of Visitors	Prefecture Share	Visitors by Airport	Airport Share	Visitors by Seaport	Seaport Share	Airport Arrival Rate	Seaport Arrival Rate
Total	36,870,148	100.00%	35,058,182	100.00%	1,811,966	100.00%	95.09%	4.91%
Hokkaido	1,809,138	4.91%	1,774,766	5.06%	34,372	1.90%	98.10%	1.90%
Aomori	23,218	0.06%	17,875	0.05%	5,343	0.29%	76.99%	23.01%
Iwate	15,465	0.04%	15,465	0.04%	0	0.00%	100.00%	0.00%
Miyagi	188,012	0.51%	187,993	0.54%	19	0.00%	99.99%	0.01%
Akita	18,379	0.05%	15,110	0.04%	3,269	0.18%	82.21%	17.79%
Yamagata	4,447	0.01%	4,446	0.01%	1	0.00%	99.98%	0.02%
Fukushima	12,560	0.03%	12,558	0.04%	2	0.00%	99.98%	0.02%
Ibaraki	21,764	0.06%	21,751	0.06%	13	0.00%	99.94%	0.06%
Chiba	10,467,391	28.39%	10,467,376	29.86%	15	0.00%	100.00%	0.00%
Tokyo	5,974,240	16.20%	5,968,925	17.03%	5,315	0.29%	99.91%	0.09%
Kanagawa	2,861	0.01%	0	0.00%	2,861	0.16%	0.00%	100.00%
Niigata	29,158	0.08%	27,124	0.08%	2,034	0.11%	93.02%	6.98%
Toyama	29,055	0.08%	28,928	0.08%	127	0.01%	99.56%	0.44%
Ishikawa	80,570	0.22%	75,990	0.22%	4,580	0.25%	94.32%	5.68%
Nagano	108	0.00%	108	0.00%	0	0.00%	100.00%	0.00%
Shizuoka	61,808	0.17%	58,255	0.17%	3,553	0.20%	94.25%	5.75%
Aichi	1,434,700	3.89%	1,434,678	4.09%	22	0.00%	100.00%	0.00%
Mie	17	0.00%	0	0.00%	17	0.00%	0.00%	100.00%
Kyoto	594	0.00%	0	0.00%	594	0.03%	0.00%	100.00%
Osaka	9,252,195	25.09%	9,224,585	26.31%	27,610	1.52%	99.70%	0.30%
Hyogo	17,520	0.05%	21	0.00%	17,499	0.97%	0.12%	99.88%
Wakayama	1,049	0.00%	1,043	0.00%	6	0.00%	99.43%	0.57%
Tottori	36,041	0.10%	25,917	0.07%	10,124	0.56%	71.91%	28.09%
Shimane	316	0.00%	316	0.00%	0	0.00%	100.00%	0.00%
Okayama	80,124	0.22%	80,119	0.23%	5	0.00%	99.99%	0.01%
Hiroshima	104,065	0.28%	100,072	0.29%	3,993	0.22%	96.16%	3.84%
Yamaguchi	75,046	0.20%	2,759	0.01%	72,287	3.99%	3.68%	96.32%
Tokushima	5,906	0.02%	5,903	0.02%	3	0.00%	99.95%	0.05%
Kagawa	176,383	0.48%	176,380	0.50%	3	0.00%	100.00%	0.00%
Ehime	112,233	0.30%	112,231	0.32%	2	0.00%	100.00%	0.00%
Kochi	18,066	0.05%	17,037	0.05%	1,029	0.06%	94.30%	5.70%
Fukuoka	3,911,197	10.61%	3,428,029	9.78%	483,168	26.67%	87.65%	12.35%
Saga	60,991	0.17%	60,645	0.17%	346	0.02%	99.43%	0.57%
Nagasaki	555,664	1.51%	10,537	0.03%	545,127	30.08%	1.90%	98.10%
Kumamoto	222,484	0.60%	181,185	0.52%	41,299	2.28%	81.44%	18.56%
Oita	47,408	0.13%	47,405	0.14%	3	0.00%	99.99%	0.01%
Miyazaki	20,564	0.06%	20,217	0.06%	347	0.02%	98.31%	1.69%
Kagoshima	132,523	0.36%	69,858	0.20%	62,665	3.46%	52.71%	47.29%
Okinawa	1,866,888	5.06%	1,382,575	3.94%	484,313	26.73%	74.06%	25.94%

Note 1: No inbound foreign visitors entered Tochigi, Gunma, Saitama, Fukui, Yamanashi, Gifu, Shiga, or Nara Prefectures.
Note 2: Entries at Sakai port, which spans Tottori and Shimane Prefectures, are counted as entries in Tottori Prefecture.

Source: compiled by the author.

As noted above, Visitor Arrivals to Japan are highly concentrated by origin, with visitors from South Korea, China, and Taiwan accounting for approximately 59% of the total. This concentration in specific countries and regions is undesirable from the perspective of airport and seaport operation as well as the tourism industry. If visitors from particular countries or regions show a decline for any reason, it would have a significant impact on the airports, seaports, and tourism-related industries that receive them.

To capture such concentration, the degree of dependence on specific countries and regions is analyzed using the Herfindahl-Hirschman Index (HHI) and the number of equally sized firms. The

HHI is a standard market concentration measure used in trade analysis to assess dependence on specific countries (Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, 2025: 206–208). The HHI is calculated using Equation (1). The index ranges up to 10,000; values closer to the upper bound indicate greater dependence on a small number of countries or regions, while values closer to zero indicate arrival distributions across a larger number of countries and regions, with no heavy dependence on any particular country or region.

$$HHI=\sum_{i=1}^{n} C_i^2 \quad (1)$$

i : country or region

n : number of countries and regions

C : Proportion of Visitor Arrivals to Japan by Country and Region for Each Prefecture (%)

Equivalent Sales Volume (Adjusted for Scale) is an index for the number of firms of equal size that would exist within a given industry (Hatta, 1995). In this study, the Equivalent Sales Volume (Adjusted for Scale) is used as an indicator of the number of countries and regions with equal visitor size that are effectively represented among arrivals. The Equivalent Sales Volume (Adjusted for Scale) is calculated using Equation (2) shown below.

$$\text{The Equivalent Sales Volume (Adjusted for Scale)}=\frac{10000}{HHI} \quad (2)$$

In 2024, Visitor Arrivals to Japan (including stateless persons) originated from 199 countries and regions. The country and region composition ratios of arrivals in each prefecture are calculated for these 199 countries and regions. Table 6 presents the HHI and Equivalent Sales Volume (Adjusted for Scale) for 31 prefectures with more than 10,000 visitor arrivals, listing the prefectures in descending HHI order.

For Japan as a whole, the HHI is 1,346, and Equivalent Sales Volume (Adjusted for Scale) is

7.43. Although visitors to Japan are distributed across 199 countries and regions, when converted into countries or regions of equally size, the distribution is effectively equivalent to having a market share of only around seven or eight countries or regions, indicating a relatively high concentration level, as reflected in the HHI values.

Table 6. Degree of Dependence by Prefecture

Prefecture	HHI	Equivalent Sales Volume (Adjusted for Scale)
Japan (Total)	1,346	7.43
Iwate	9,742	1.03
Oita	9,525	1.05
Fukushima	8,947	1.12
Kochi	8,930	1.12
Ibaraki	8,687	1.15
Miyazaki	8,106	1.23
Ehime	7,366	1.36
Akita	7,029	1.42
Yamaguchi	6,706	1.49
Miyagi	6,259	1.60
Ishikawa	5,608	1.78
Hyogo	5,266	1.90
Okayama	5,046	1.98
Tottori	4,581	2.18
Shizuoka	4,329	2.31
Nagasaki	3,898	2.57
Saga	3,409	2.93
Niigata	3,327	3.01
Fukuoka	3,242	3.08
Aomori	3,085	3.24
Kumamoto	3,021	3.31
Toyama	3,003	3.33
Okinawa	2,852	3.51
Kagawa	2,708	3.69
Hiroshima	2,646	3.78
Hokkaido	2,544	3.93
Osaka	1,690	5.92
Aichi	1,628	6.14
Kagoshima	1,508	6.63
Tokyo	1,046	9.56
Chiba	926	10.80

Source: compiled by the author.

Only Chiba Prefecture and Tokyo have an HHI lower than the national average. Thirteen prefectures have an Equivalent Sales Volume (Adjusted for Scale) of less than 2 and HHI

exceeding 5,000, indicating an extremely high concentration level. This indicates that these prefectures are highly dependent on visitors from specific countries or regions. In addition, 26 prefectures have an HHI of 2,500 or higher, suggesting that dependence on specific countries or regions is more pronounced at the prefectural than the national level.

Next, a hierarchical cluster analysis was conducted to identify the countries and regions that each prefecture depends on. The analysis covered 31 prefectures with more than 10,000 arrivals. The dataset consists of the composition ratios of arrivals by country and region for each prefecture, aggregated into 11 categories: South Korea, China, Taiwan, the United States, Hong Kong, Thailand, Australia, the Philippines, Singapore, Vietnam, and Others. The results are shown in Figure 4, which presents a simplified dendrogram with reduced branches for clarity. The analysis classifies the prefectures into six clusters and one standalone prefecture. The six clusters are labeled Clusters A, B, C, D, E, and F. The average country and region composition ratios, HHI, and Equivalent Sales Volume (Adjusted for Scale) are calculated for each cluster and summarized in Table 7. Using this table, the characteristics of each cluster were analyzed.

Cluster A consists of prefectures with an extremely high proportion of arrivals from Taiwan. Their average HHI is also very high, indicating strong dependence on Taiwanese visitors.

Cluster B consists of prefectures with an extremely high proportion of arrivals from South Korea. These prefectures also show a very high average HHI, indicating strong dependence on Korean visitors.

Hyogo Prefecture is characterized by an extremely high proportion of arrivals from China. Its HHI is also very high, indicating strong dependence on Chinese visitors.

A common feature of Cluster A, Cluster B, and Hyogo Prefecture is the heavy concentration of a single country or region, indicating strong dependence on one source market.

Cluster C consists of prefectures with a high proportion of Korean visitors and a relatively high average HHI. This pattern is similar to that of Cluster B. However, Cluster C has a lower average HHI than Cluster B, indicating lower dependence on Korean visitors, although this still indicates a strong concentration of a single country or region.

Cluster D consists of prefectures with high proportions of both Korean and Chinese visitors and also a high average HHI, indicating dependence on these two countries.

Cluster E has the lowest average HHI among all clusters. The prefectures in this cluster correspond to the five prefectures with relatively low HHI shown in Table 6, indicating lower dependence on specific countries or regions. Among them, Chiba, Tokyo, Aichi, and Osaka host major international airports as shown in Table 1; the presence of extensive international flight networks is considered to contribute to their lower dependence. However, Kagoshima Prefecture does not have a comparably large airport. Table 8 shows the country and region composition of arrivals at the five ports of entry in Kagoshima Prefecture. Of these, Kagoshima Airport and Kagoshima Port account for more than 99% of total arrivals. Visitor arrivals from South Korea and Hong Kong are more prominent at Kagoshima Airport and less prominent at Kagoshima Port. However, arrivals from other countries at Kagoshima Port exceed their share at the airport. This difference in composition between the visitors arriving at the airport and seaport contributes to the relatively low overall dependence on a specific country or region of Kagoshima Prefecture.

Cluster F consists of prefectures with high proportions of arrivals from South Korea and Taiwan, and a relatively high average HHI, indicating strong dependence on these two countries.

To summarize, Clusters A, B, and C and Hyogo Prefecture represent areas highly dependent on visitors from a single country or region; Clusters D and F represent areas highly dependent on two countries or regions; and Cluster E represents areas with relatively low dependence on specific countries or regions.

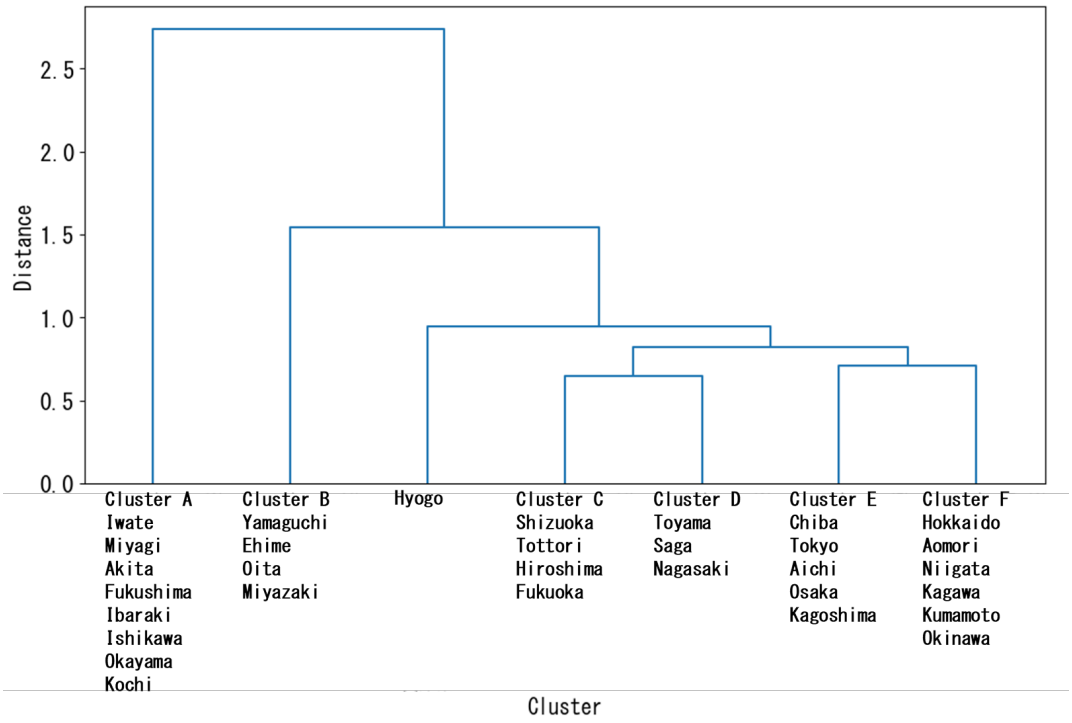

Figure 4. Classification of Prefectures Based on the Country and Region Composition of Visitor Arrivals to Japan

Source: compiled by the author.

Table 7. Average Country/Region Composition Ratios, HHI, and Equivalent Sales Volume (Adjusted for Scale) by Cluster

Cluster	South Korea	China	Taiwan	United States	Hong Kong	Thailand	Australia	Philippines	Singapore	Vietnam	Other	HHI	Equivalent Sales Volume (Adjusted for Scale)
Cluster A	5.13%	3.55%	85.51%	1.93%	0.48%	0.12%	0.59%	0.12%	0.09%	0.78%	1.69%	7,762	1.35
Cluster B	88.10%	4.24%	5.04%	0.69%	0.06%	0.09%	0.11%	0.04%	0.07%	0.07%	1.47%	7,926	1.28
Hyogo	0.50%	72.15%	1.40%	2.20%	0.99%	0.05%	0.73%	0.80%	0.43%	0.03%	20.71%	5,266	1.90
Cluster C	56.69%	11.92%	9.46%	3.05%	7.32%	0.80%	1.25%	0.76%	0.40%	2.32%	6.03%	3,699	2.84
Cluster D	37.46%	38.72%	17.73%	1.46%	0.29%	0.09%	0.52%	0.09%	0.09%	0.57%	2.97%	3,437	2.94
Cluster E	18.07%	18.94%	15.46%	8.93%	10.33%	2.72%	3.15%	2.45%	1.84%	2.24%	15.87%	1,360	7.81
Cluster F	34.27%	11.24%	35.82%	3.33%	7.74%	1.23%	0.74%	0.26%	0.54%	0.26%	4.56%	2,923	3.45

Source: compiled by the author.

Table 8. Number of Visitor Arrivals to Kagoshima Prefecture by Port of Entry

Port of Entry	Total	South Korea	China	Taiwan	United States	Hong Kong	Thailand	Australia	Philippines	Singapore	Vietnam	Other
Kagoshima Port	62,600	418	8,894	15,226	12,448	3,555	245	5,851	654	333	718	14,258
Kagoshima Airport	69,858	31,322	4,932	7,387	586	22,549	80	268	37	95	300	2,302
Kiire Port	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Makurazaki Port	27	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	27
Yamagawa Port	37	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	37

Source: compiled by the author.

6. Conclusion

This study reviewed the international statistical definition of international tourists and developed a statistical definition for Visitor Arrivals to Japan based on entry categories under the Japanese immigration framework. Using this definition, the study constructed original datasets by aggregating published immigration statistics, and analyzed the entry patterns of Visitor Arrivals to Japan.

The study has found that most foreign visitors enter Japan by air, while Chinese visitors represent a relatively higher proportion of entry by sea compared with visitors from other countries and regions. The study found that the entry points in Japan vary depending on the visitors' origin, and that visitors from geographically closer countries or regions tend to have more dispersed entry patterns across Japan.

Furthermore, Visitor Arrivals to Japan are highly concentrated to specific countries and regions and this concentration becomes even more pronounced at the prefecture level. Among prefectures, Kagoshima, which exhibits relatively diversified visitor origins, shows a different composition of country and region of visitors between airports and seaports. This suggests that in prefectures with both airports and seaports, selecting target countries and regions based on the route networks of these facilities may serve as a strategy to reduce dependence on specific markets while attracting Visitor Arrivals to Japan.

Finally, several limitations and directions for future research are noted. This study analyzed data for a single year; a time-series analysis is necessary to examine the changes in entry patterns over time. In addition, this study focused on the entry patterns of Visitor Arrivals to Japan. Future research should analyze visitors' destinations and accommodation locations to identify the factors underlying spatial concentration and dispersion, thereby contributing to the regional distribution of economic benefits and mitigation of congestion in urban areas.

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