

RYOKAN: MOBILIZING HOSPITALITY IN RURAL JAPAN

March 16, 2022

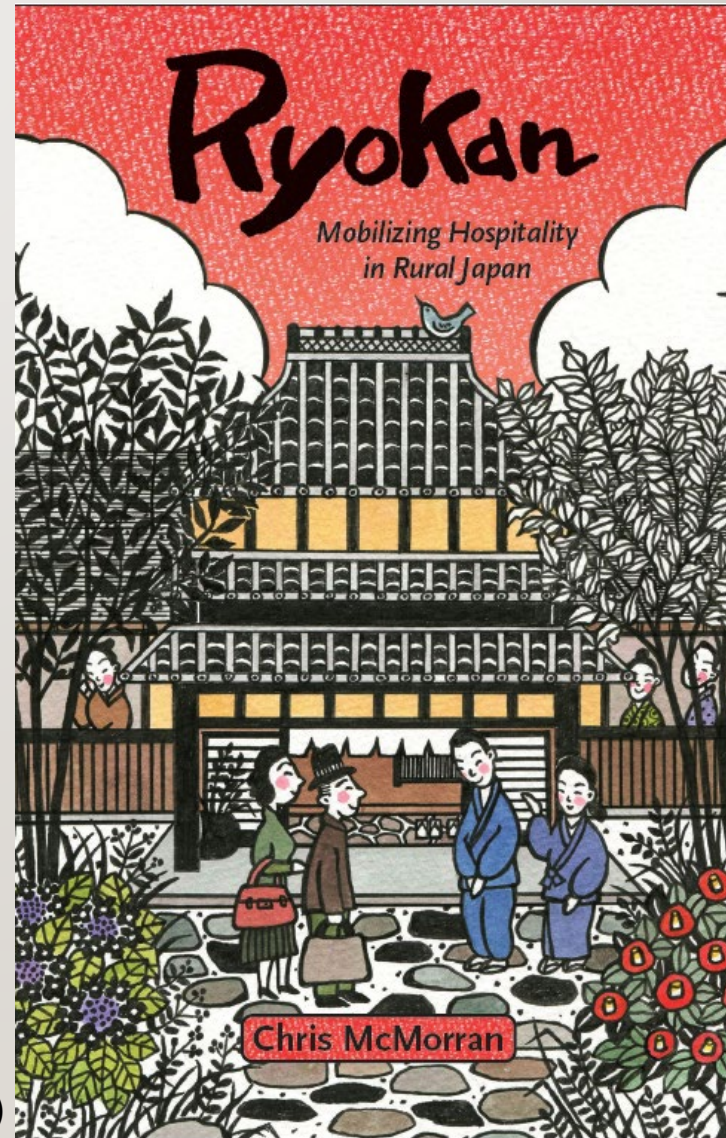
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Cover art by Sakaguchi Yoshie
Pub. April 2022 (U Hawai'i Press)



Ethnographic fieldwork in Kurokawa Onsen, Kumamoto Prefecture (Aug 2006-Aug 2007)



Map by Lee Li Kheng

Ethnographic fieldwork in Kurokawa Onsen, Kumamoto Prefecture (Aug 2006-Aug 2007)

Work = scrubbing baths, washing dishes, sweeping paths, vacuuming tatami mats, carrying luggage, laying out bedding... making guests feel “at home” in a ryokan

Plus, repeat sits nearly every year since

Focus: the daily, seasonal, and generational work found at a ryokan

Argument: work is a “last resort” for both ryokan owners and employees



For owners:

Spatial division of labor

Male – *shachō*
“outside” work

- Landscaping
- Building maintenance
- Attending meetings

Female – *okami*
“inside” work

- Welcoming guests
- Serving meals
- Cleaning rooms
- Training and managing employees

PLUS

- Caring for the family
- Biological/social reproduction (raising an heir)



For owners:

Fuzzy boundary between family
and business

- pass the business through generations
- provide jobs
- embody the neighborhood
- live on site
- no privacy
- “trapped” in place

Ryokan is a last resort

- to honor ancestors,
- to maintain communities, and
- to pass something to the next generation



For employees:

Flexible labor,
flexible time

Flexible labor: constantly
adjusting personality, body,
pace of work, language to
meet guest needs

- entertainer
- tour guide
- babysitter

Flexible time: constantly “on
call” to meet guest needs



For a busy ryokan, *okami* is not the body of hospitality

Ryokan needs “home-less” women

- Divorced
- Separated
- Widowed
- Unmarried
- Women whose family members do not need their everyday care

Ryokan is a last resort

- for economic stability,
- personal fulfilment, and
- a brighter future



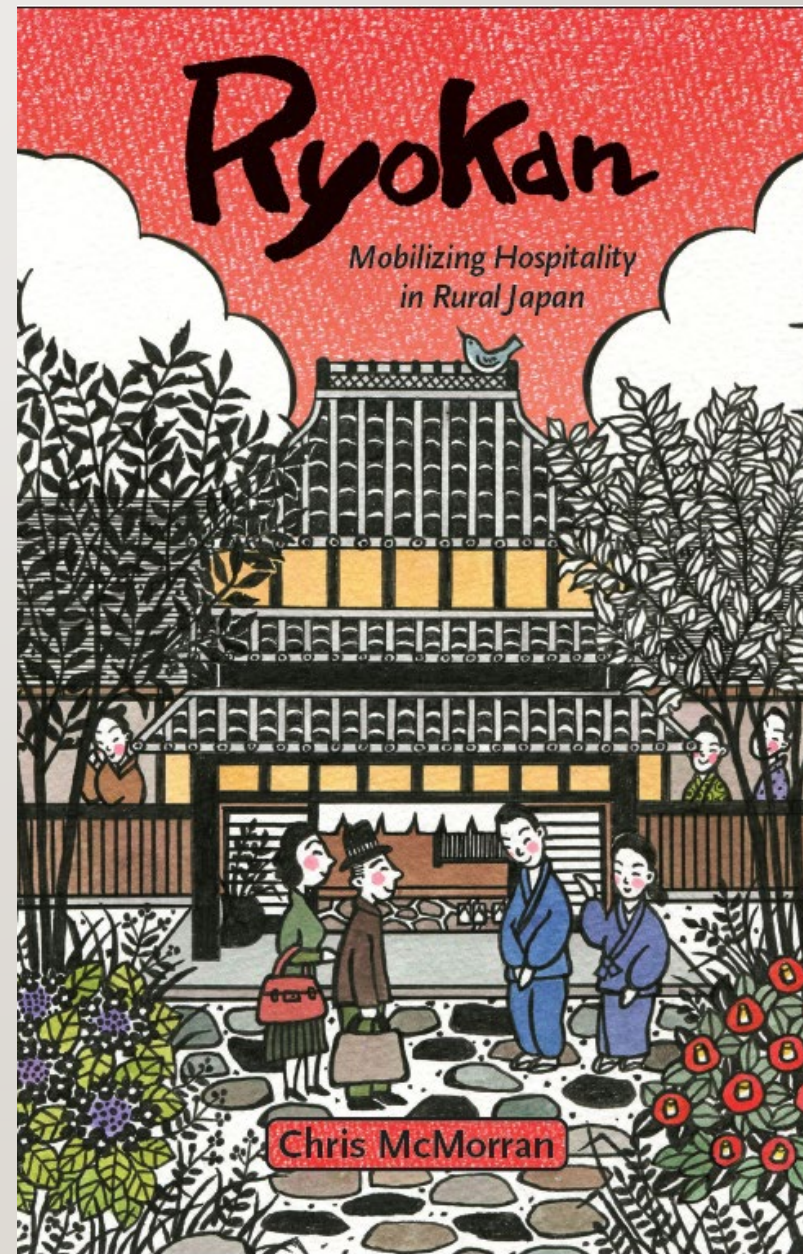
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- Thanks to my coworkers, supervisors, acquaintances, and friends in Kurokawa
- Research supported by Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT), the Japan Foundation, and the U.S. National Science Foundation (DDRI #0602711)
- Return visits supported by NUS and Japanese Chamber of Commerce & Industry Foundation, Singapore
- Special thanks to Nora Kottmann of DIJ and Konrad Kalicki of NUS for co-organizing this event