Otaku tourism and the anime pilgrimage phenomenon in Japan

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Abstract: This article analyses one aspect of the emerging phenomenon of otaku tourism: travel by mainly male fans of otaku subculture to anime 'sacred sites' (the locations that feature in favourite anime). It starts by placing discussion of otaku culture in the discourse of postmodernity and elaborating on how otaku subculture is generating new forms of communication. Then, the origins and characteristics of anime pilgrimage are traced. The article concludes by explaining how otaku tourism and anime pilgrimage generate distinctive forms of communication both among fans and between fans and the communities that experience influxes of anime tourists.

Keywords: otaku; tourism; anime pilgrimage; communication

Introduction

In recent years, the travel behaviour of otaku has gained increasing scholarly (for example Hasegawa and Midorikawa 2005, Masubuchi 2010, Yamamura 2011, Okamoto 2013) and media attention in Japan as a number of municipalities have seen surges in tourism after they featured in or were otherwise somehow connected to a popular anime film or series. Visiting sites related to anime films is called *anime seichi junrei* (anime pilgrimage) by fans in Japan. It is a form of travel behaviour closely related to film-induced tourism, literature tourism and other forms of media-induced tourism that in Japan are more commonly referred to under the blanket term 'contents tourism.' As described in the introductory article to this special edition, the language of anime tourism (with Japan itself as a 'sacred site' for fans) now permeates government policy documents; furthermore, there is a shift away from seeing Japanese popular culture as simply an export business and a shift towards seeing popular culture as a tourism resource that will encourage inbound tourism to Japan. Otaku tourism and anime pilgrimage, therefore, are core elements of the Japanese government's 'Cool Japan' strategy in the 2010s.

This article has two main aims. The first is to clarify the processes of anime pilgrimage within the broader context of otaku tourism. Otaku are primarily male fans of manga, anime and computer games, and *otaku tourism* refers to the broader touristic behaviour patterns of these fans of otaku subculture with a very strong and particular interest in their favourite series, characters or games. The second is to study *anime pilgrimage* (or anime tourism) as one form of otaku tourism and to explore how the travel behaviour of otaku creates new forms of interpersonal links and communication.

Similar to the types of popular culture-induced tourism described in a number of other articles in this special edition, anime pilgrimage has a longer history than the relatively recent increase in interest in the phenomenon might at first suggest. This article's principal argument is that a distinctive travel culture has emerged among otaku, and this travel culture is best revealed through exploring new forms of communication among fans and communities that have developed during the course of anime pilgrimages.

Communication in the modern age and its relationship with tourism

Throughout the 2000s, there was a rapid development and spread of communications technology in Japan. As indicated in Figure 1, the number of internet users rose from 11.55 million in 1997 to 94.62 million in 2010, a more than
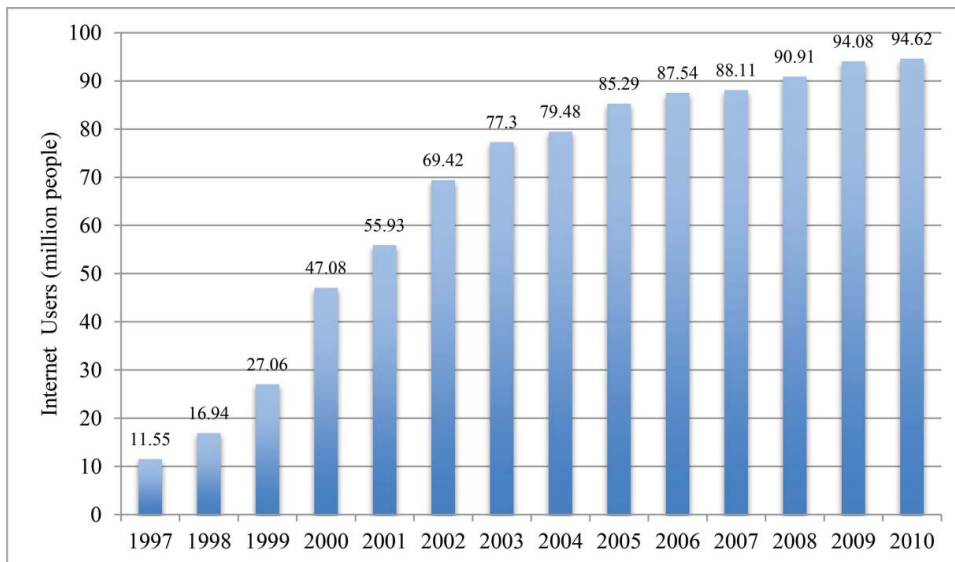
Figure 1 Internet users (Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications 2011, p. 186)

eight-fold increase. The percentage of the population who were internet users rose from 9.2 per cent to 78.2 per cent. With approaching 80 per cent of the population using the internet, the extent of the 'internet age' becomes clear.

But it is not simply the number of internet users that is significant. Qualitative changes have been seen in the ways that people use the internet. This is evident in the 'u-Japan Policy' started by the Japanese government in May 2005, whose aim was: 'Working toward realizing the ubiquitous network society by 2010 in which "anyone can easily access and use a network anytime from anywhere and from any appliance"' (Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications 2005). According to Tagami (2007, pp. 1−4), the u-Japan Policy meant the prioritization of people−people, people−thing and thing−thing communication, thereby precipitating a change from the previous emphasis on IT (information technology) to a new emphasis on ICT (information and communication technology), in other words using technology in communication.

With the spread of the internet and the new focus on communication in the use of information technology, debate has begun to take notice of these changes in the forms of communication and identities. For example, Tomita (2009) borrows the title of the 2004 French film and 2006 Hollywood remake *Intimate strangers* to describe a new form of relationship with others. An 'intimate stranger' is someone with whom one is intimate only via the media (Tomita 2009, p. 156), and the relationship is characterized by anonymity or secrecy. People who are anonymous and not intimate are simply 'others'; people who are not anonymous and with whom we are intimate are family and friends; while those who are not
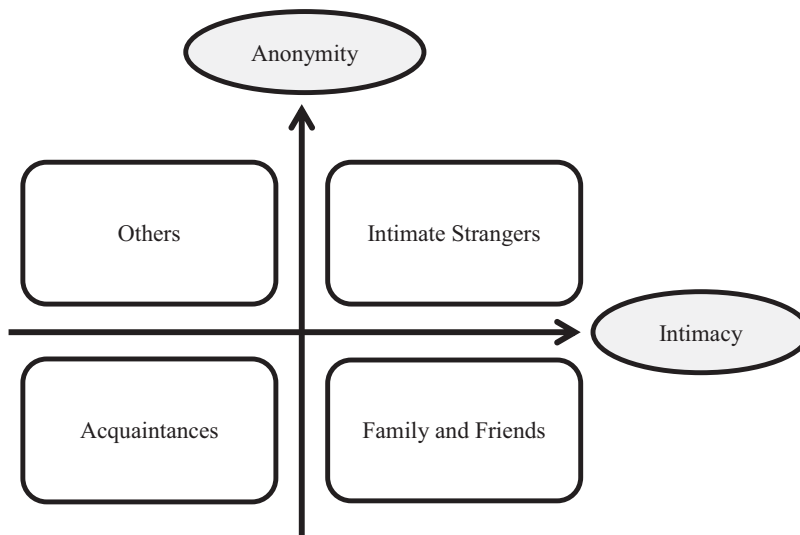

Figure 2 The position of intimate strangers. Based on Tomita (2009, p. 158)

anonymous but with whom we are not intimate are 'acquaintances'. Into this framework, represented in Figure 2, intimate strangers are a new form of 'others' who are anonymous yet intimate.

Individualism and avoiding others within reflexive modernity

In modern society, where tradition or the 'grand narratives' established by the community have less power than they used to, one must create values for oneself through one's own behaviour and choices. There is a change from the modern individual to the reflexive individual. Yamada (2009, p. 19), referring to the work of Giddens (1991), describes this as follows:

> With the progression of reflexive modernity, we are being released from the bonds of tradition or community. We freely choose our own lifestyles and have assumed more control over our own behaviour. Furthermore, with the system and basics of life that support a reflexive society already in place, we do not need to rely on others and it has become possible to live without caring too much about others. In this sort of society where individualization is advancing, we can think and act freely without the interference of others. But on the other hand, with the dilution of relationships with others within this process of individualization we feel a lack of places we are drawn to and tend to lose sight of the meanings of life.
>
> (Yamada 2009, p. 19)

People living in modern Japan feel less bound to tradition and community than they used to. People's choices have increased and the amount of information available to them is huge. Through the construction of a system by which individuals' qualities are judged, people are freed from tradition and community. But, with the emergence of this situation, individuals have had to take increasing responsibility themselves for various decisions. Society offers various opportunities, but turning these opportunities into success relies on the ability of the individual. With the individual having to take responsibility, the individual has to make choices and judgements. This means that one may live without relying on others or having them interfere in one's life, but it also means interfering in the lives of others less.

Formerly, society had the ability to establish a set of universal values referred to as a 'grand narrative' (Lyotard 1979), but this is being lost in Japanese society. Referring to the grand narrative, Azuma[1] writes:

> From the end of the eighteenth century to the mid-twentieth century in modern countries, various systems were consolidated for the purpose of organizing members of society into a unified whole; this movement was a precondition for the management of society. These systems became expressed, for instance, intellectually as the ideas of humanity and reason, politically as the nation-state

and revolutionary ideologies, and economically as the primacy of production. *Grand narrative* is a general term for these systems.

Modernity was ruled by the grand narrative. In contrast, in postmodernity the grand narratives break down and the cohesion of the social entirety rapidly weakens. In Japan that weakening was accelerated in the 1970s, when both high-speed economic growth and 'the season of politics' ended and when Japan experienced the Oil Shocks and the United Red Army Incident.

(Azuma 2009, p. 28)

In this way, the ability to create universal values ceases to function, and, as individualization progresses, the issue of how people find meaning in their lives has become an important one for modern Japanese society.

In tackling this issue, Azuma introduces the concept of 'database animals' (2009, pp. 25−95). Satisfying human emotions and meanings in life is not a matter of negotiation with others, but something one does on one's own. People undertake communication as a means of exchanging information, not of finding meaning. Azuma argues that this sort of lifestyle became prevalent after 1995, and he calls it 'The Animal Age'.

However, is it possible to find satisfaction in human emotions and meaning in life without negotiating with others and by acting individually? In principle, this is difficult because one needs to refer to others in order to establish one's own identity and to find meaning in life. What is indisputable, though, is that the way we are relating to others is changing. This can be seen in the emergence of 'intimate strangers' and the decline of the 'grand narrative', and it raises the question of what sort of relationships can be built. In attempting to answer this question, Yamada (2011) distils the arguments of Azuma (2001) and Uno (2008) in the following way.

Whether it is a community in cyberspace or in the real space of a political group, 'island universes' [*shima uchū*] are exclusive communities made up of people who believe in small narratives and share values with other members. People who possess different value systems are completely excluded as 'noise'. For this reason, colleagues in the island universes are 'others', but 'others' who have had their extreme otherness blanked out. In other words, through otherness being thoroughly concealed, the avoidance of others is undertaken. Azuma states that database animals can live while avoiding others, and describes this as an appropriate strategy in the database consumption postmodern condition. But Uno, criticizing Azuma, argues that contrary to Azuma's predictions, as we have entered the twenty-first century the 'decolorization of otherness' strategy has led to the creation of excluded communities, and society today is suffering from the logic and violence of that exclusion.

(Yamada 2011, p. 11)

In other words, because it is difficult to reconstitute the lost 'grand narrative', groups of like-minded people gather together and produce 'small narratives' that give meaning to them as individuals. Belief in these small narratives is shared with groups of like-minded others in 'island universes'. For the small narrative to be believed, the values must be valid within the 'island universe'. The 'grand narrative' no longer exists, so people must construct meanings themselves that give power to the 'little narrative'. One strategy for achieving this is the exclusion of other values. First, people raise the purity of their own values, and then by increasing intimacy within the 'island universe' they can create a 'little narrative'.

But this is where a problem arises. There is nothing that guarantees the value of the small narrative. There is no grand narrative to supply meaning to individuals. Whenever values clash, one's values are compared to others, and, in order to give power to the values that one believes in, the strategy is to assert difference. In this way, island universes with their small narratives take on an exclusivity and it can be assumed that they engage in competition with each other. In fact, this situation has been described in terms of the diversification of values within modern Japanese society (Okamoto 2013, pp. 20−21). People gravitate towards others who share similar values and small narratives. Meanwhile, 'others possessing otherness' are excluded and ignored within this system of communication.

Is tourism a solution for these issues?

This article considers whether tourism, and particularly otaku tourism, is a means for resolving the situation described thus far by creating a cycle of encounters with 'others possessing otherness'.

First it is necessary to define some terms, particularly 'others possessing otherness' (*tashasei wo motta tasha*). As long as people live within society, it is very difficult for them to live their lives without coming across other others. People share their homes with family members. Family members, in this sense, are 'others'. Even those who live on their own will come across people they do not know when they venture outside. These are also 'others'. But, in the argument thus far, the issue has not been that people do not meet 'others' at all. The issue has been as one 'other' forms a relationship with another 'other', otherness is removed and we choose to interact with others possessing low levels of otherness. In other words, whether the person has the same interests or enjoys the same contents, we choose others with whom we have been able to confirm 'sameness' and develop relationships with them. When differences are discovered with these others, we avoid the differences. However, 'others possessing otherness' are those with whom commonality cannot be guaranteed.

It has been hypothesized that tourism has the function of enabling encounters with 'others possessing otherness' (see, for example, Yamada 2008, Yoshida 2008, Endo 2010). Endo (2010) theorizes that the superficial elements of fun

and play within tourism are actually important for the construction of the public sphere (*kōkyōken*). In this sense, Endo describes the public sphere as follows.

> The public sphere is not a 'community' underpinned by common identity where people share similar values. Even if people do not share the same values they are able to enter the public sphere, and even if they do not share the same values with others, they are able to exchange feelings, opinions and thoughts in an atmosphere of mutual respect. This is the essence of the public sphere.
>
> (Endo 2010, p. 36)

In other words, tourism does not take place in 'island universes' (or 'community' in Endo's terminology) and it does not involve only the members of an 'island universe' group ('people who share the same values') who share a particular small narrative. Tourism has the potential to create a space where people can meet 'others possessing otherness'. If this is the case, society does not simply value commonality, or sharing the same narrative, but through tourism a society allowing differentness and multiple narratives becomes possible (Endo 2010, p. 37).

This is the potential of tourism in theory, although the extent to which this kind of space generated by tourism is actually possible is open to debate. To explore whether it is possible in practice, I will analyse otaku tourism, and specifically anime pilgrimage.

Otaku and the development of anime tourism

The term '*otaku*' (literally 'your house') was coined in 1983. The development of the otaku phenomenon is closely related to the development of the media. Namba has traced the history of media liked by the '*otaku zoku*' (otaku tribe) from the 1960s to 1980s, when they were called mania, hardcore fans or 'nekura tribe' (Namba 2007, pp. 247−248). Otaku subculture had its roots in the science fiction novels in the 1960s, but it was the development of video games, anime, television programmes, comic markets, magazines, computers and video players that underpinned the development of otaku culture. In 1989, the rape and murder of a number of young girls by an otaku (the Miyazaki Tsutomu case; see Azuma 2009, pp. 4−5) gave otaku culture notoriety and made the term widely known. Since the 1990s, the arrival of the digital age has meant the diversification of otaku culture and otaku have lost their previous cohesion as a 'tribe' (Namba 2007, p. 259). As we shall see a little later, anime pilgrimage, the main subject of this article, is a form of otaku behaviour that began in the 1990s.

The social commentator Azuma Hiroki has analysed the consumer behaviour of otaku, the products they consume and their postmodern characteristics. In *Otaku: Japan's database animals* he says otaku is 'a general term referring to those who indulge in forms of subculture strongly linked to anime, video games,

computers, science fiction, special-effects films, anime figurines, and so on' (Azuma 2009, p. 3). In other words, the definition revolves around the objects of their interest.[2] The sociologist Osawa Masachi has argued that, from the second half of the 2000s, the personality traits of otaku have been considered an ordinary phenomenon among young people (Osawa 2008, p. 86). In other words, while otaku have diversified they have also become more mainstream. Rather than limiting the definition of otaku to the type of person, therefore, it is more appropriate to define otaku according to the objects of their interests. Hence, in this article I use Azuma's definition of otaku.

As we have seen, the scale and nature of otaku culture have changed over time. Azuma (2009, pp. 6−7) identifies three otaku generations. The first generation comprises mainly those born around 1960 who grew up watching *Space Battleship Yamato* and *Mobile Suit Gundam* in their teens. The next generation was born around 1970. They spent their teens consuming the otaku culture of the previous generation, which had achieved maturity and split into various subcultures. The third generation was born around 1980 and was in high school around the time of the *Neon Genesis Evangelion* boom (around 1997).

Anime tourism began in the 1990s. Consequently, this article concentrates mainly on the third generation, which has two main characteristics. First, they have an easy familiarity with modern communications technology. As Azuma (ibid.) states, this generation was in its teens when the internet became part of everyday life. They send or collect information via the internet, or make computer graphics, and as a result their patterns of communication, expression and consumption differ greatly from those of previous generations.

This third generation avidly transmits and collects information. One example is *dōjinshi*, or fan-produced magazines.[3] In otaku culture, *dōjinshi* are published in great numbers and borrow worldviews or characters from favourite anime. Fan-produced materials also include books, tapes or CDs, floppy disks or CD-ROMs, videos, figures, characters and other goods (Kobayashi 1999). These are exchanged and sold at comic markets and other events. In these *dōjinshi* and other derivative works, the already existing media texts (the original contents) are reinterpreted and reproduced by fans. Fans fill in the gaps in stories, interpret the metaphors and storylines or even combine the contents with elements of other publications (Murase 2003). The interpretations may differ from the original intentions of the contents producers, and the fans become an active audience that transmits its interpretations of the contents.

This kind of information collection and re-transmission has developed alongside advances in communications technology and is particularly evident on the internet. Representative examples are derivative videos or images, such as MAD and 'fan subs'. MAD (derived from 'MAD tape', an early form of cassette tape) is when an existing video, soundtrack, game or anime is edited and recreated. 'Fan sub' is shorthand for 'fan subtitles' and refers to the addition of foreign-language subtitles to videos by fans so that the contents may be enjoyed by fans

abroad, too. These videos are placed on video-sharing sites such as YouTube and Nikoniko dōga. In some of the 'fan sub' videos seen by the author, it is not only subtitles that have been added, but also commentary in foreign languages about some of the unexplained aspects of Japanese culture in the videos, for example what tatami mats or kendo are.

With such MAD or 'fan sub' videos, as well as with *dōjinshi* and other derivative works, there is a copyright issue. However, interesting fan-produced materials may create word-of-mouth publicity for the original contents and attract even more fans to the original works. Scouts on the lookout for promising new contents creators also actively look through derivative works. The 'fan sub' genre also has the potential to open up foreign markets to the original contents. In all of these ways, members of the third generation of otaku, with their deep familiarity with the internet, are very active in transmitting information.

The second characteristic of the third generation of otaku is that its behaviour exhibits postmodern characteristics. Azuma argues that 'database consumption' is a form of postmodern consumer behaviour and that the characteristics of 'animalization' (*dōbutsuka*) are evident in patterns of otaku 'database consumption'.

For Azuma, the consumption of a particular work is 'not simply to consume a work (a small narrative) or a worldview behind it (a grand narrative), nor to consume characters and settings (a grand nonnarrative). Rather it is linked to consuming the database of otaku culture as a whole. I call this consumer behavior *database consumption*' (2009, p. 54). He explains this in terms of '*chara-moe*' (*chara* means character, *moe* refers to an empathy or adoration for). *Chara-moe* grows in otaku according to the 'combination of *moe*-elements' that are extracted from the database. Among otaku, communication with others is based on information exchange, and their interest in that social interaction is based on their interest only in a particular set of information.

It is these forms of consumption and communication that give rise to the characteristics of animalization. Animalization is when 'each person closes various lack−satisfaction circuits' (ibid., p. 87). In other words, when people feel they lack something, they try to achieve satisfaction without the need for the existence of others or without interacting with others. This pattern of gaining satisfaction is increasing.

Tendencies to join 'island universes' or exclusiveness have been confirmed within otaku. But this does not mean that otaku never have contact with others. They gather at comic markets where people share the same interests and they are extremely active in transmitting information to others. Furthermore, otaku may meet up in real (as opposed to virtual) spaces with those possessing similar interests whom they have met online, a practice which is called *ofukai*, or 'offline meeting'.

Broadly speaking, *ofukai* are when the members of communities who have formed intimate relationships online actually meet in person. These *ofukai*

meetings may take place anywhere. People who like singing anime songs might meet in a karaoke box, for example. In *ofukai*, the most important thing is the links people share through their common interests. In other words, it is vibrant communication in 'island universes' where people share the same values and interests.

The question of most relevance to understanding otaku tourism, however, is what happens when otaku go as tourists to places where they are bound to meet 'others possessing otherness'. We can explore examples of precisely this situation by looking at the phenomenon of anime pilgrimage.

The beginnings of anime pilgrimage

Anime pilgrimage is defined as visiting sites depicted in anime, games, manga and other forms of otaku culture. Even though the term 'pilgrimage' has religious connotations, there is no particular link with religion. The term is used here primarily because it is the term that otaku use themselves to describe their own behaviour. Places of particular significance to anime fans have become known as 'sacred sites' (*seichi*) and the act of visiting sacred sites is called 'pilgrimage' (*seichi junrei*). A detailed comparison with other forms of pilgrimage is beyond the scope of this article and some commentators have discussed the inherent religiosity of anime or pop-culture pilgrimage.[4] But in this article the term 'anime pilgrimage' is used simply to refer to visitations to sites of importance for anime fans.

Determining when anime pilgrimage began means answering two separate questions: when the term 'anime pilgrimage' began to be used, and when the practices now referred to as anime pilgrimage began. Judging by the results of a survey of mainstream media sources, 'anime pilgrimage' began gaining attention in 2008. On 2 March 2009, I searched for articles over the entire period of the So-net online news database[5] (which carries the major daily newspapers in digital format from the mid-1980s) using the keywords 'anime' and 'seichi junrei'. After removing all articles not related to anime pilgrimage as defined in this article, a total of eighteen articles remained. There was one in 1995, one in 2003, one in 2007, eleven in 2008 and four in 2009. The year 2008 seems to be when the term attracted widest media attention and thus broadly entered popular consciousness.

Yet the practice clearly predates 2008, and use of the term '*seichi junrei*' in mainstream media has also lagged behind its use within the otaku community. In the introduction to his 2005 book *Seichi junrei: anime, manga, 12-kasho meguri* ('Twelve sites of anime and manga pilgrimage'), Kakizaki (2005, pp. 4−5) describes visiting sites in 1995 on the Japan Railways Iida Line that featured in the anime *Kyūkyoku Chōjin R* (an 'original video animation', OVA, sold by Bandai Visual in 1991). Kakizaki also mentions visiting Tarō Shrine in Okayama prefecture, which appeared in the 1992 OVA *Tenchi Muyō!* It is clear that fans were

visiting the shrine on a 'pilgrimage' and that they interacted to some extent with local people. However, Kakizaki does not say whether the travel behaviour was called 'anime pilgrimage' at the time.

Meanwhile, Fujiyama (2006, p. 218) writes that some of the oldest instances of anime pilgrimage date from the time of *Sailor moon*, which was broadcast on television between 1992 and 1997. During the traditional first shrine visits of the year (*hatsumōde*) there were long queues of fans at Hikawa Shrine in Azabujuban, Tokyo, which appeared in the anime.

Finally, Hashimoto (2006, pp. 178−180) discusses how the light novel *Mirage of blaze* by Kuwabara Mizuna induced a lot of travel by young women to the Uesugi festival in the early 1990s. This episode is described in detail by Sugawa-Shimada Akiko in another article in this issue.

Putting together all this evidence, one may conclude that clear examples of anime pilgrimage existed by the early 1990s, although the term 'anime pilgrimage' was not commonly used then. However, the term was being used in otaku circles well before the mainstream media started using the term more regularly after 2008.

The motivations of anime pilgrims

The desire to undertake anime pilgrimage begins with the viewing of anime. But if the fan simply views the anime and is unable to access information about the locations featured in the anime, the fan has no way of knowing where to visit. When fans have obtained information about locations, including those that actually exist, then anime pilgrimage can begin.

Information may be divided into 'known' and 'acquired'. 'Known' information refers to that which is already part of the fan's knowledge. When a previously seen and recognized place appears as a location in an anime, the existence of the location is quickly confirmed. 'Acquired knowledge' is when the fan learns of the location by word of mouth, over the internet or from media and other sources.

Based on differences in the ways in which fans have obtained information about locations, we can identify three types of anime pilgrimage. The first is pioneer pilgrimage. The pioneers are the people who, after watching the anime, work out where the locations are. Based on my interviews with pioneer pilgrims, they use various forms of information to identify the locations: these include landmarks or geographical features in the background scenery, information from novels on which the anime was based, other materials such as photos, information about the home towns of the directors or scriptwriters and road signs or stations that appear in the anime. Then, using internet tools such as Google Street View or Yahoo Maps, they find the precise locations. Many pioneers refer to this practice of seeking out and visiting locations as '*butai tanbō*', literally 'finding and visiting the stage'.

The second type of pilgrimage is undertaken based on the information posted on the internet by the pioneers. When pilgrims arrive at the locations, they carry with them printouts of the pioneers' websites and blogs or check the locations on the internet using mobile devices.

The third type of pilgrimage is undertaken by people who have obtained information about the locations from the news or mass media. Many instances of anime pilgrimage go unnoticed by the media, but sometimes the pilgrimage attracts sufficient attention to make them mainstream news. Whatever the type of anime pilgrimage, the fundamental motivation of travellers is to visit the sites that appear in anime.

Finding information about anime pilgrimage

There are two main sources of travel information for anime pilgrims: organizations, such as companies and/or local authorities, and individuals, whether pilgrims or local residents.

Much information is provided by organizations such as travel agents, hotels, companies holding the copyright for the anime, local government, tourism associations and local trade associations. Anime pilgrims seek out information on transport, accommodation and other tourism infrastructure in much the same way as other tourists. There are few guidebooks published about anime pilgrimage sites, although some do exist, for example *Twelve locations of anime and manga pilgrimage* (Kakizaki 2005), *Moe rurubu Cool Japan – the Otaku Japan guide* (JTB Publishing 2008) and *Anime and comics pilgrimage navi* (Drill Project 2010). There are also tour packages offered by travel agents, such as tours to take part in a specific anime-related event, but none is offered on a regular basis. Anime pilgrims tend to travel individually or in small groups, and group tours are rare.

The second source of travel information is individuals, either pilgrims or members of the local community, who post information on blogs or homepages. On the social networking service mixi there are communities for many individual anime films, and social networking services (SNS) are also a useful way for fans to exchange information. There are various fan communities and some have more than 1,000 members. Sometimes people living in the anime locations are also members. One such example is Washimiya, discussed in the article by Yamamura Takayoshi. In this case, the local traders' association even put notifications of new anime-related products on internet notice-boards so that they can gain feedback from fans.

Such patterns of information exchange differ from traditional forms of information exchange between tourist, agent and destination. The information flows go in two directions. Previously, tourist destinations or travel agents would mainly send publicity about their tourist resources in one direction to potential tourists. Or, in other forms of contents tourism, such as Taiga drama-induced

tourism (the subject of the article in this issue by Philip Seaton) the drama itself provides much information about locations, either in a segment at the end of the programme that lists locations and/or related sites or in spin-off publications such as magazines.

However, the particular characteristic of anime tourism is the incalculable volume of information being exchanged among tourists, and the extent to which travellers are also active in telling local communities their views too. Some fans read the pilgrimage journals of others and then embark on a pilgrimage to the sacred site themselves; people read the journals online and ask questions of the authors; and I have seen during my own visits to sacred sites that many pilgrims carry printouts of fan sites with them when they go travelling. Such trends are increasingly being seen across the tourism industry in the internet age, but they have been a conspicuous aspect of anime pilgrimage from the outset of the phenomenon.

The touristic behaviour of anime pilgrims

Based on my observations during extensive fieldwork among fans on anime pilgrimages, broadly speaking we can identify six particular forms of otaku behaviour among anime pilgrims. Not all anime pilgrims exhibit all six forms of behaviour (and many people who do not consider themselves otaku might do similar things), but they may all be called particularly characteristic of otaku tourism.

The first is that fans take photographs of the locations they visit from the same angles that the places are shown in the anime. Many take pictures with direct reference to the original contents and compare their photos with the originals. Fans may take figurines from the anime with them and photograph them against the background. Photographs may not only be of views that would normally be considered photogenic, such as shrines or scenic viewpoints, but may be of places of little intrinsic or photographic interest to others who are not fans of the anime, such as a car-park or a station (see Figure 3). Such filmic re-enactments are a common feature of many forms of film location tourism (see Roesch 2009, pp. 162−164).

The second form of behaviour is that travellers leave mementoes or evidence of their trips such as objects, comments or illustrations. Particular examples include comments or illustrations in pilgrimage notebooks, drawings of scenes or characters from the anime on *ema* votive plaques hung in shrines, and leaving anime goods purchased in the pilgrimage site or their own original illustrations. The pilgrimage notebooks are sometimes created by the fans themselves, while on other occasions they are created by the host communities and left in restaurants, stations or tourist offices. Such fan notebooks have been found in a number of anime pilgrimage sites including Washimiya (*Lucky star*) and Toyosato (*K-On*).

(a)

(b)

Figure 3 (a) Recreating a scene from *Lucky star* at Kasukabe Station, Saitama prefecture;[6] (b) A nondescript 'sacred site': bicycle park in Nishinomiya, Hyogo prefecture (*The melancholy of Haruhi Suzumiya*)[7]

In the notebook at Washimiya, for example, pilgrims signed their names, drew illustrations, said how many times they had visited, wrote comments about the places they had visited, gave their thoughts about the anime, said where they were from and whether they were planning to visit again (Okamoto 2008).

The third is that fans take laptop computers or mobile phones with them and provide live updates or pilgrimage diaries in real time on internet notice-boards, blogs or video sites like YouTube. Such online postings may also be done after the pilgrimage is over. In the internet and Facebook age, posting travel pictures online as you go may be considered a very normal sort of behaviour, but in the context of otaku tourism the point is that a person who does *not* do this would be quite unusual.

The fourth form of behaviour is decorating cars with anime stickers and illustrations. Such cars are called *itasha*. The term *itasha* is derived from otaku humour. The cars look *itaitashii* (painful, in the sense of embarrassing), but at the same time *itasha* is the same term as for an Italian-made car, so it has the ironic nuance of being upmarket too. The practice of decoration with anime stickers can also be seen on bicycles, motorbikes and other vehicles. The interiors of cars may also be decorated with figurines, cushions and other anime goods.

The fifth form of behaviour is cosplay: dressing up in the costumes and appearances of anime characters. Cosplay is not limited to characters of the cosplayer's gender: men may dress as female characters and vice versa. Cosplayers may be seen at events that range in size from huge international conventions to small-scale events held in sacred sites. Often these events are organized by municipalities and cosplaying is permitted only within the venue. However, cosplayers may also be seen in public as part of promotional events, particularly when the town is actively welcoming fans as part of its anime tourism promotional activities. For example, in Chichibu, Saitama prefecture, location of the anime series *The flower we saw that day*, a local newspaper report shows fans posing with a cosplayer at the local train station next to a train with a picture from the anime on the front of the train (Saitama Shinbun 2011).

The sixth form of behaviour is the acceptance of interaction between traveller and host community, and among fellow travellers. It is very common to see anime pilgrims in conversation with local people at sites of pilgrimage. There is also considerable interaction among pilgrims. But this can vary according to the location. As mentioned above, there are some anime pilgrimage sites in nondescript urban spaces such as car parks. There is typically little interaction between pilgrims and local communities or other fans in such sites. But in locations where the pilgrims may stay in the community, there may be interaction between pilgrims and locals.

In many instances, the relationship is positive. An influx of visitors to a locality can bring economic benefits and other forms of community revitalization, so many towns welcome pilgrims. In Chichibu, for example, the Chichibu Anime Tourism Executive Committee estimated that 80,000 fans of *The flower we saw*

that day had visited the town in 2011, generating 320 million yen (Saitama Shinbun 2011). And the best-known example of an extremely positive relationship created between fans and the local community is the case of Washimiya, described in the article by Yamamura Takayoshi.

However, the relationship is not always so smooth. Some localities and communities that have featured in anime have expressed concerns. Kanda (2012) writes that some members of the community in the location for the anime *Higurashi when they cry*, Shirakawa in Gifu Prefecture, said that the image of their community created was 'not the real Shirakawa'. In other words, they were unhappy with the way that their community had been represented. Shirakawa is an immaculately preserved old village famous for its thatched roof houses and is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. But the anime was a murder mystery story and this was not the type of image that locals wanted created for their town.

Other communities feel uncomfortable with the influx of fans. Kanda (ibid.) reports that members of some communities have complained that fans visiting their town in cosplay do not fit in with the atmosphere of the community. In other words, they have no issues with people cosplaying or driving around in *itasha* cars in major cities or secluded spaces, but they feel uncomfortable when such activities occur in their communities. On occasions, there have been incidents of a more serious nature. For example, the location of the anime *The melancholy of Haruhi Suzumiya*, Nishinomiya Senior High School, experienced incidents of trespassing by fans, leading the school to call on fans to behave appropriately.

As can be seen from these examples, when a location appears in an anime and this results in anime pilgrimage, there are opportunities for conflict to arise between groups of people with differing values. However, there are also occasions on which, through mutual cooperation, a positive relationship can be forged between community and fans.

Post-pilgrimage behaviour

As has been described, otaku are very active in information dissemination. There are three primary forms of information dissemination by pilgrims during or after their visits: via the internet, in the real space of the site of pilgrimage and among circles of friends and acquaintances.

Pilgrims post information about their trips on homepages, blogs, SNS community pages or notice-boards. Many pilgrims publish 'pilgrimage journals' online including photographs or videos that they have taken in the sacred site. In September 2013, one of these sites (http://legwork.g.hatena.ne.jp/) contained an online archive of over 1,000 diaries listing visits to sacred sites related to manga, anime, novels, games and light novels.

There are sites in which the photos taken by the tourists are published alongside images from the anime for comparison. During my interviews with the producers of such sites, they said that they use information from the internet

(such as Google Earth) as well as visits by bicycle or on foot around the location to obtain detailed information. Many of these sites have a huge following. The website Butai Tanbō Matome (http://wiki.livedoor.jp/lsh_er/), for example, receives around 850,000 hits per year. Many pilgrims post videos online, too. There are many anime pilgrimage videos to be seen on video sites such as YouTube or Nikoniko dōga. In one such example, a live action version of the opening scenes of the anime *K-On* filmed on location was produced by fans and uploaded to YouTube.[8]

In all these types of online activity, consideration is usually shown to the people from the site of pilgrimage. For example, if people or their vehicles (number plates) appear in the photographs, the photos may be altered so that the individuals cannot be identified. If private residences are involved, the locations are concealed. There is a sort of code of conduct among anime pilgrims that all photos from the sacred sites should in no way cause *meiwaku* (harm or inconvenience) to the people in the local communities. The reason for this attitude is negative feelings toward otaku that otaku have often seen or felt themselves. On various occasions, I have heard comments that people are afraid that, if they cause trouble to local communities, fans will no longer be able to go on pilgrimages.

The second form of post-pilgrimage behaviour is information transmission in the offline world. Some pilgrims make guidebooks about the locations at their own expense (see Figure 4); some produce *dōjinshi* which are distributed at comic markets or exchanged among fans. Fan-produced materials may even be found at shops in the locations themselves. Sometimes these publications are produced for more altruistic motives. Yamamura (2011, pp. 90−91) presents a transcribed interview in which the author of one such publication explains how helping out fellow fans on a pilgrimage to sites related to the anime *Lucky star* was a reason for his activities. Other fans, meanwhile, have shown concern for the locality. In one fan-produced guidebook that I have seen about the anime *K-On*, the author wrote a detailed manga history of the old Toyosato elementary school buildings where the anime was set.[9]

Such fan activities are not just limited to Japanese tourists. One pilgrim from Hong Kong whom I met at the location of *Please teacher* in Nagano Prefecture had been to Japan several times and was involved in the production of guidebooks in both Japanese and Chinese. There is also a market for such fan-produced literature outside Japan. This traveller also recounted how he talked about his experiences to friends and sometimes returned to Japan with different travel partners. Through such examples, we can see that anime tourism and otaku tourism is not simply a Japanese phenomenon but has international dimensions too.

The third and final form is when fans talk to their friends or revisit sites with different friends. In this sense, anime pilgrimage is no different from other forms of tourism. In August and September 2009 I visited four sites of anime pilgrimage and distributed questionnaires to fans to ask where they obtained their information about sacred sites (Okamoto 2010). Out of the 1,189 people who

Figure 4 Fan-produced guidebooks

responded, the commonest answer was the internet (42.4 per cent) followed by 'from acquaintances' (24.3 per cent). Other information sources included television news (8.8 per cent) and books/magazines (6.2 per cent). Another survey conducted by the Japan Travel and Tourism Association (2010) also placed people (in this case 'family and friends') in second place with 36.4 per cent. The precise percentages vary, perhaps according to different question wordings and other survey conditions, but direct people-to-people communication is clearly an important element when planning and undertaking anime tourism.

Forms of fan: community communication

While on an anime pilgrimage, fans may use various forms of self-expression, such as drawing and writing messages on *ema* votive plaques or decorating cars (*itasha*), that mark them as otaku tourists. In this way, people in the local communities realize that anime fans are visiting their communities. Sites of anime pilgrimage are often residential areas that would not normally expect to have any tourists. Consequently, there are many instances in which local people do not even realize that their neighbourhood has become a tourist site. However, when local people become aware of the fact that anime fans are visiting their communities, dialogue and interaction with the fans may begin. Through that dialogue, a tourism culture involving many different actors is built from the bottom up.

One of the most important examples of this is in Washimiya, which was the location of the anime *Lucky star* (see the article by Yamamura Takayoshi). Another example of positive collaboration is the town of Toyosato in Saga prefecture, site of the anime *K-On*. Since June 2010, the standard road signs warning motorists that children might jump into the road have been replaced with ones featuring characters from the anime (Figure 5). There are signs featuring different characters at various places in the town. The original idea for, and production of, the signs came from fans with the help of the local community.

Furthermore, in the old buildings of Toyosato elementary school (Figure 6b), the model for the high school that the main characters in the anime went to, there is a tourist site created by fans. *K-On* is about the daily life of a group of high school girls in the light music club. In the anime there are many scenes where the girls sit down to have tea together using expensive crockery. Some anime fans are known as *tokuteichū,* fans who seek out the real identities of objects that appear in the anime (they are close relatives of the pioneers who seek out the locations). The *tokuteichū* post the information on the internet when they have discovered the identities of the objects. In the case of Toyosato, anime pilgrims who had seen information about the crockery in the anime bought an actual set of the same crockery and plastic replicas of the sweets and placed them in the school buildings of the old Toyosato elementary school. This scene is shown in Figure 6a.

As we can see, in the communities where anime pilgrimage takes place there are many ways to link the locality – its festivals, culture, scenery or buildings – and

Figure 5 K-On-inspired road signs in Toyosato

anime culture or otaku culture. This combination itself becomes the contents which people come to see and enjoy. This phenomenon turns on its head traditional notions of host and guest because fans visiting the communities create spaces, events or objects that are enjoyed by the local community and other visitors. This is the bottom-up creation not simply of tourism information, but tourism culture itself.

Furthermore, through repeated visits some anime pilgrims have come to see the wider value of interaction with the local community and residents. Among pilgrims who visited Toyosato, for example, there are those who were simply interested in the elementary school as the location of the anime *K-On*. But they came to appreciate other local buildings and visit them, too.

There are even examples of fans who have moved to anime sacred sites or found work there. In a conversation with one fan of *K-On* who had moved to Toyosato, he explained that he first visited the town after watching the anime, but thereafter he built relationships with various people in the town and Toyosato assumed a more important position in his life. This was why he decided to move there. There were principally two types of people he met there. The first type was anime fans and sacred site pilgrims. The second was people who lived in the locality. In this way, he possessed a hybrid network of acquaintances not simply formed through a shared interest in the contents and facilitated by the internet, but formed in the real space of the anime sacred site.

(a)

(b)

Figure 6 (a) The tea set from *K-On*; (b) Toyosato Elementary School

While the internet plays a vital role in otaku tourism, it is very difficult to form links with local communities simply through communication over the internet. Of course, if there are people in the locality who are well versed in online communication such links may be formed. But that would mean that only local people who understood the values of the online community could interact with the anime pilgrims. It is inconceivable that all residents of a sacred site are also members of online communities that discuss the site. This would mean the opening up of the 'island universe' to those with other values, and it is debatable whether this is ever possible. In other words, tourism, the act of visiting a particular place, is what allows the links between fans and local communities to be formed.

Among anime pilgrims, many fans call each other by their online user names. This is a largely anonymous form of communication. During my fieldwork, I have witnessed many instances of pilgrims using their real names, although there are also many fans who use their online user names when on pilgrimage. In the latter case, local people call the pilgrims by their user names, too. The user name is used for a more anonymous form of communication. Of course, if the interaction took place only in the virtual world, it would be completely anonymous and easier to cut off the relationship. But with anime pilgrimage, even if pilgrims use a user name, they have gone in person to visit a site in the real world and their existence can be confirmed. Even if the person's real name is not known, others will have memories of his face; and, even if the user name changes, as long as the person's appearance does not change too much the relationship can continue. It might be anonymous and the relationship might be based on incomplete disclosure of basic personal information, but nonetheless the existence of the person has been confirmed. This is another distinctive form of fan–fan and fan–community communication created by otaku tourism.

Conclusions

This article has sought to define and explain the processes of anime pilgrimage through a particular focus on distinctive forms of communication that have emerged within otaku tourism. Anime pilgrimage is tourism starting with the exhaustive pursuit of an interest. Using modern information technology, information is collected from a 'database' created by the bottom-up participation of a wide variety of actors. As a result of increased pilgrimage by people sharing the same interest, the effects become visible in real communities. There are increasing opportunities for people in local communities and pilgrims (or even those whose travel purpose is not pilgrimage) to interact with each other. There are some communities where this interaction is quite sustained. As a result of visiting the localities, the pilgrims' opportunities to experience other forms of local culture increase. Through repeated mutual effects on each other, a distinctive travel culture is created by a variety of actors and information is spread using various

forms of information technology, which in turn attracts more people with similar interests.

Otaku tourism involves meetings in real spaces of various people of diverse interests who have engaged in the collection and dissemination of information. In sites of otaku tourism, connections are created between people whom we would not normally expect to come together. Otaku tourists, by pursuing their interests to the limits and embarking on journeys to visit sites related to the contents they enjoy, have chance encounters with others. Through those encounters and a desire to enjoy the travel experience, they have ended up creating new forms of communication both among fans themselves and also between the fans and local people in those communities that host anime sacred sites.

Notes

1. Azuma Hiroki's seminal 2001 book *Dōbutsuka suru posutomodan* was translated into English in 2009. Citations from this book are taken from the 2009 English version. When Azuma's work is referred to in other Japanese language sources, the 2001 version is cited.
2. Other definitions focus on forms of behaviour, clothing or communication styles. See, for example, Tagawa (2009, pp. 73−80) and Yoshimoto (2009).
3. As Nakajima (1991) argues, there are a number of significant differences between *dōjinshi* produced by men and women. In this article, otaku refers mainly to males and I am analysing their anime pilgrimage. Female anime pilgrimage is a topic for further research, although the related topic of travel by *rekijo* (female history fans) is the subject of the article by Sugawa-Shimada Akiko in this issue. For more information on fan-produced magazines by and for women, see Kaneda (2007).
4. Imai (2009, 2010) and Sato (2010) analyse anime pilgrimage from a religious perspective.
5. Database Top Page: http://www.so-net.ne.jp/database/G-search/general/general_ohdan.html
6. For an online example of a fan's pilgrimage, see http://www7.atpages.jp/sasa90/seichi-rakisuta.html [Accessed 5 June 2014].
7. For an example of a fan's site that compares scenes from the anime with actual locations, see http://seesaawiki.jp/w/lsh_er/d/TV%A5%A2%A5%CB%A5%E1%A1%D8%CE%C3%B5%DC%A5%CF%A5%EB%A5%D2%A4%CE%CD%AB%DD%B5%A1%D9%C9%F1%C2%E6%C3%B5%CB%AC%A4%DE%A4%C8%A4%E1%A5%B5%A5%A4%A5%C8 [Accessed 5 June 2014].
8. This can be seen at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iWtbU7_KDFs&feature=related [Accessed 2 June 2014].
9. For an example of a fan's site that compares scenes from the anime and actual locations, see <http://seesaawiki.jp/w/lsh_er/d/%A4%B1%A4%A4%A4%AA%A4%F3%A1%AA%C9%F1%C2%E6%C3%B5%CB%AC/%C0%BB%C3%CF%BD%E4%CE%E9%40%B5%EC%CB%AD%B6%BF%BE%AE%B3%D8%B9%BB%237%A1%C1%2313 [Accessed 5 June 2014].

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