



Title	Dishing out Silver Spoon : Agricultural Tourism in the Tokachi-Obihiro Area of Hokkaido
Author(s)	Mason, Michele
Citation	International Journal of Contents Tourism, 1.2: 31-43
Issue Date	2016-06-13
Doc URL	http://hdl.handle.net/2115/62624
Type	bulletin (article)
File Information	IJCT-Vol-1.2-Mason-2016.pdf



[Instructions for use](#)

Dishing out *Silver Spoon*: Agricultural Tourism in the Tokachi-Obihiro Area of Hokkaido

Michele M. Mason

Abstract: Arakawa Hiromu's best-selling manga *Silver Spoon*, which began serialization in 2011, kicked off an impromptu migration of fans to the story's setting, the Tokachi-Obihiro region of Hokkaido. Both local tourism officials and agricultural stakeholders quickly devised a number of strategies to capitalize on the newfound interest in their region. Their efforts only intensified when anime and film versions were released in 2013 and 2014. This article examines the ways local officials, business owners, and other constituents have pursued not only profits from *Silver Spoon*-inspired tourism, but also the chance to offer a different picture of agricultural life than is typically disseminated in the media. Below, I demonstrate how the promotion of Ban'ei horse racing, a wide-variety of agricultural products, and hands-on farming and food production experiences are at the heart of local community's attempts to appropriate the cultural capital of *Silver Spoon* to craft narratives of Tokachi identity, heritage, and pride.

アブストラクト：荒川弘によるベストセラーマンガ作品『銀の匙 Silver Spoon』は、2011年の連載開始後すぐに、舞台地・北海道十勝帯広への作品ファンの流入を引き起こした。地元の観光行政担当者と農業関係者の両者は、新たに地域に生まれたこうした好機をフルに活かすための多くの戦略を素早く立案した。こうした彼らの取り組みが活発化したのは、2013年のアニメ版の放送、2014年の劇場版公開に依るところが大きい。本稿では、地元の行政・事業者・その他の地域構成員が、同作品に触発されたツーリズムによる利益をどのように追及したのか、さらにそうしたツーリズムを、メディアを通して広まっている農業生活のステレオタイプなイメージとは異なる、新たなイメージを提供する機会としてどのように捉えたのか、について分析する。そして、ばんえい競馬や農畜産物、実際の農畜産業・食糧生産などのプロモーションを通して、地域コミュニティがどのように、文化資本としての同作品を十勝のアイデンティティ・遺産・誇りに関する語りの生成へと結びつけていったのかを示す。

Keywords: contents tourism, *Silver Spoon*, Ban'ei racing, agricultural labor, local identity.

Introduction

The award-winning manga *Silver Spoon*, written by Arakawa Hiromu of *Fullmetal Alchemist* fame, debuted in July 2011 and continues to run in *Weekly Shōnen Sunday* to wide acclaim. This light-hearted series features the struggles and friendships of a group of students who attend Ōezo Agricultural High School in the Tokachi-Obihiro area of Hokkaido.¹ The lead character, Hachiken Yūgo, unlike most of his fellow students who hail from local farms, chose to enroll in the rural dairy program to escape a troubled family life in the big city of Sapporo. Readers follow the motley group as they learn the science and practicalities of raising animals—cows, pigs, chickens, and horses—and discover the thrill of making delicious food—cheese, bacon, sausage, and pizza—with their own hands. The endearing quirks of each student and teacher draw the audience into storylines that adroitly blend raw anguish of dreams gone awry, delightful humor anchored in human foibles, and tender moments of deepening camaraderie in this coming-of-age drama. Although dramatically different from her action-fantasy *Fullmetal Alchemist*, Arakawa's *Silver Spoon* dishes up a winning recipe that has captured the hearts and minds—and stomachs—of millions of readers in Japan and abroad.

Silver Spoon quickly drew the attention of fans and critics alike in 2011 and has sustained its popularity in the years since. It swiftly became the publisher Shogakukan's top seller and by October of 2013 had sold twelve million copies in Japan. In 2012, the series won the coveted Grand Prize of the annual Manga Taishō Award and the Shogakukan Manga Award in the youth category. Another early trend that signaled *Silver Spoon*'s reputation was the 110 per cent increase in applicants to the Dairy Sciences Course at Obihiro Agricultural High School the year after the manga debuted.² More recently, it numbered among the nine nominees for 2015 Tezuka Osamu Cultural Prize. Responding to *Silver Spoon*'s wide and growing following, a two-season anime series was aired between July 2013 and March 2014, and the “high-profile” show was picked up by NoitaminA, an alternative-audience, late-night programming block reserved for anime (Fuji TV).³ Additionally, a live-action film (dir: Yoshida Keisuke) premiered in Tokyo in March 2014, with the catch phrase “A Most Outrageous Story of Youth!” Teen idol Nakajima Kento, who played the main character, rallied his adoring fans to the flic, which was viewed by over 89,000 people in just the first two days.



Figure 1: Bookstore display of *Silver Spoon* manga. August 2015.

More than is apparent at first, *Silver Spoon* is a work deeply rooted in place. All the main characters' names derive from districts in Hokkaido, mostly the Tokachi region. For instance, Yūgo's crush is Mikage Aki, named after the Mikage district in the northwestern part of Tokachi. The name of the young man who has to give up his dreams of becoming a pro baseball player to pay off the debts on his family's farm, Komaba Ichirō, is borrowed from the central-northern area. Likewise the family names of Tokiwa Keiji, who is destined to take over his family's chicken farm, Aikawa Shin'ichi, who dreams of becoming a veterinarian but faints when he sees blood, and the agribusiness-savvy Inada Tomoko, all derive from districts in the region. Yūgo, who is the lone character who hails from the big city of Sapporo, is named after Hachiken, the second largest ward of that municipality. Although Arakawa's decision to pay homage to the region in this and other crucial ways was not made with tourism per se in mind, it has certainly inspired and facilitated promotions that celebrate the agricultural history and bucolic flavor of Tokachi.

Now, four years after *Silver Spoon* began inspiring a unique migration to Tokachi, it seems apt to consider how this case can be understood within the framework of media mix contents tourism. The emergence of the term and active promotion of "contents tourism" began in the early 2000s at the national level in Japan as a central component of a long-term economic revitalization project. Since then there has been a concerted effort to collaborate among national, prefectural, and regional entities to capitalize on Japanese popular culture—especially manga, anime, and film—to raise awareness of and encourage tourism to specific localities. Noting the diverse and proliferating cases of tourism driven by Japan's celebrated forms of media, scholars have increasingly turned a discerning eye toward the phenomenon of contents tourism with the goal of "identifying works of Japanese popular culture that have triggered tourism and...analysing that touristic behaviour and its local impacts" (Seaton and Yamamura 2015, pp. 5-6). Local tourist agencies and stakeholders in Tokachi-Obihiro were quick to recognize the interest generated by the various incarnations of *Silver Spoon* and have astutely built on the associations between the charming characters, distinct cultural sites, and regional agricultural products depicted in the early storyline.

Not long after the release of *Silver Spoon*, when a number of enthusiastic fans showed up to farms in the Tokachi area unannounced, both local tourism officials and agricultural stakeholders responded in a number of creative ways to capitalize on the interest.⁴ An energetic turn toward *Silver Spoon*-based promotion of travel to Tokachi was invigorated when Aniplex, the producer and copyright holder of the TV-anime series, reached out to collaborate on designing promotional materials with a number of constituents before the launch in 2013 and again during the filming of the movie version on numerous locations in the Tokachi region. In addition to predictable items, such as t-shirts, towels, and clear files decorated with the colorful clan of characters, locally made cheesecakes, special sauces for grilled pork rice bowls, candy, and cookies with customized packaging were created. The summer 2014 edition of *Namara*, a seasonal magazine published by the Hokkaido Tourism Promotion Organization (Hokkaidō kankō shinkō kikō), sported a special feature article on activities related to the filming locations of *Silver Spoon*. After visiting the original sites where scenes of the equestrian club practicing and Yūgo accidentally spilling a copious amount of milk were shot, a visitor can stop by recommended restaurants, cafes, or cheese and sweet shops. In the virtual world, true devotees might also channel the experience of their beloved characters through "The Pocket Dairy" App (pokketo rakunō apuri), a simulation game wherein aspiring farmers earn points by successfully raising animals, exchanging harvest bounty, making delicious goods, and shipping them to market.⁵

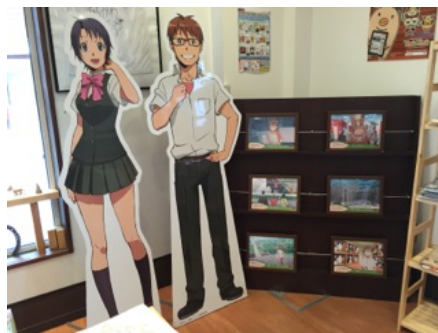


Figure 2: Cardboard cutouts of Aki and Yūgo at Tokachi Village. August 2015.

In 2015, when I conducted field research on *Silver Spoon* tourism, the visual invitations to connect the area to the manga were still abundant. Glossy posters and flyers, eye-catching cardboard cut-outs, fluttering banners of characters, promotional displays, souvenirs, and food items could be found at the Obihiro Tourism and Convention Center (Obihiro kankō konbeshon kyōkai), Tokachi Village (Tokachi mura), the Ban’ei horse racing track (Obihiro keibajō), and many other locations. The varied campaigns continue to offer visitors opportunities for experiencing hands-on and outdoor recreational activities, enjoying local delectables, viewing exciting horse racing, and visiting unique historical sites, film locations, museums, and gardens.

The following analysis of *Silver Spoon*-inspired contents tourism is informed by a variety of research methods and resources. In the summer of 2015, I conducted scheduled and impromptu interviews with tourism officials, local stakeholders, current and former students from the model high school, a service provider for the film production, and fans. In addition to reading all of the manga available by August of 2015 and viewing the anime and film versions, I collected and studied numerous promotional materials by tourism offices and local businesses. I drew from magazines, websites, and academic scholarship to contextualize and historicize this particular case of contents tourism. The central organizing component of my fieldwork was the stamp rally produced by the Obihiro Tourism and Convention Center (see Figure 5). I was able to visit all ten destinations and took part in a range of hands-on activities. These included guided tours of farms, cow milking, and ice cream, cheese, and pizza making.

This study overall is shaped by my training in cultural studies. I have previously written about historical representation and activism in manga on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and dominant discourses of colonial Hokkaido (Mason 2009; 2012). I am, moreover, keenly interested in the power of manga and anime to not only entertain but also to witness histories, provoke debate, educate, and shape transformative narratives. When researching the origins of contents tourism, I was struck by the governmental agencies’ deliberate use of Japan’s notable forms of “soft power” to generate revenue during an interminably long and debilitating recession. Soft power, a term coined by Joseph Nye, generally refers to the ways actors (national or otherwise) leverage persuasive power rather than coercive power to influence others and produce particular outcomes (Nye 1990; 2004). Japan’s world-renowned popular culture has come to exemplify a distinct brand of soft power. The phrase “Gross National Cool” (McGray 2002), in particular, brings together the economic and cultural aspects that resonate with the push for contents tourism at the national level. My interest in this project was anchored in the ways actors at the local level attempt to appropriate the cultural capital of the *Silver Spoon* phenomenon to craft specific narratives of Tokachi identity.

A fundamental aspect of contents tourism is infusing new stories, new appeal, and new meaning into a particular place, person, tradition, activity, and/or food. The celebration of Tokachi’s singular

tradition of Ban'ei horse racing and Obihiro Shrine's charming horse-shaped votive tablets (*ema*) that pay homage to this history are certainly in keeping with typical trends. Moreover, in a country so accustomed to purchasing local specialty items (*meibutsu*) as souvenirs when traveling, it is hardly surprising that advertising Tokachi's unique food items, agricultural products, and restaurants and sweet shops was at the heart of promoting this pastoral region. As with any tourism project, securing economic support for the community is a central goal.

Still, I would argue that there is also something more fundamental at stake here. It was particularly obvious that local officials, business owners, and other stakeholders have been pleased with not only the profits from the increased patronage, but also the chance to offer a different picture of agricultural life than is typically disseminated in the media. It may not have been written explicitly in the slick tourism materials, but a driving force behind *Silver Spoon*-based tourism is the desire to present the human history of Tokachi's long agricultural legacy, to deepen people's appreciation for the labor involved in bringing food everyday to their tables, and reveal the noble spirit of the farming families. Local actors are clearly invested in the benefits of rejuvenating local identity, heritage, and pride that *Silver Spoon* contents tourism offers.

Preserving Tokachi's Farming History Through Ban'ei Racing

Silver Spoon—in all its formats—lends itself to popularizing Hokkaido's agricultural history through its focus on Ban'ei horse racing, arguably one of the most distinct cultural attractions in the Tokachi-Obihiro area. This form of horse racing originated during Hokkaido's colonial era when settlers from Japan used draft horses to open and cultivate fields and haul heavy loads to market.⁶ Farmers entertained themselves by showing off the prowess of their workhorses in competitions on rare days of rest. Beginning with the very first volume of *Silver Spoon*, Aki, whose family has a long history of raising horses and participating in the Ban'ei enterprise, informs the protagonist and readers alike of its origins, the particulars of this towing race, and its status as an officially designated "Hokkaido heritage" (Hokkaidō isan). In the present form of this cultural practice, the huge muscular horses pull heavy sleds along a linear sand track with two "hills" (ramps). Jockeys spur on their horses from the sleds that sometimes weigh upwards of one ton. Ban'ei horses are unlike the sleek and speedy ones of conventional flat races, but they are certainly impressive in their own way. Although speed is not the name of the game, as Aki argues, one can be caught up in its special spirit when the horses' bodies are put in motion. These formidable animals—with their overpowering size and strength—are awe-inspiring.

A core group of establishments work in tandem to promote Ban'ei horse racing specifically and its attendant agricultural legacy more broadly. The Horse Historical Museum (Uma no shiryōkan), located adjacent to the racetrack, does its part to educate visitors on the history, different breeds of horses, protocol for naming racehorses, and various transformations after the mechanization of farming. There and in the nearby Tokachi Village, a market of regional foods, the connection between the powerful *banba* (Ban'ei horses) and local agriculture is emphasized. At the latter, while buying seasonal vegetables, fresh and cured meats, or other specialty foods, a visitor can behold the impressive portrait of a draft horse made entirely of differently colored, locally grown beans (Figure 3). Obihiro Shrine, where they sell wooden votive tablets modeled on *banba*, plays a supportive role in establishing this important legacy of the region's history (Figure 4). A dignified statue of a thoroughbred horse greets visitors to this shrine that prides itself on being the only one with horse-shaped votive tablets in the country.



Figure 3: Portrait of a *banba* made of locally grown beans. August 2015.



Figure 4: Votive tablets modeled on *banba* at Obihiro Shrine. August 2015.

It is common knowledge that the popularity of this form of racing had long been waning. In 2006, a headline in the *New York Times* proclaimed, “A Horse-Racing Tradition Lumbers Into Its Final Stretch” (Onishi 2006). By that time three out of the four former Ban’ei racetracks had closed. Now Obihiro hosts the only remaining year-round track featuring Ban’ei racing. No doubt the surprise decision by Softbank, one of Japan’s largest internet and cellphone providers, to bankroll the business certainly contributed to moving it from the red to black. Still, others recognize the importance of Arakawa’s repeated portrayals of Ban’ei in fostering renewed interest as a factor as well. As recently as summer of 2015, the All Nippon Airway’s complimentary inflight magazine included an article on Ban’ei horse racing in their “Things Japanese” series (Yoshikai 2015). This feature obliquely references Arakawa as one of a number of famous persons who produced works that helped “save” this form of racing from extinction. A free magazine devoted to Ban’ei racing, *Pommel  (Pomure)*, reinforces the ways that media like *Silver Spoon* has boosted the reputation of this otherwise obscure sport. The mayor of Obihiro, in the opening statement of the inaugural edition of the publication (Volume 1, 21 July 2015), claims, “movies, dramas, and many other mass media have conveyed the attraction of Ban’ei horse racing to people nationwide, and every year more people visit Obihiro Racetrack, see and experience Ban’ei racing, and feel the thrill of being its supporter.”

A discernible theme of community and cooperation emerge from the promotion of Ban'ei in the *Silver Spoon* works and the later tourism materials. In the original narrative, numerous scenes and storylines depicting the intense preparations for the Ōezo High School Agricultural Festival reveal the ways students helped each other to make this event a success. They volunteer their specific expertise, ideas, and labor. In particular, students work with Aki to make a Ban'ei track that meets official specs, refurbish (read “trick out”) an authentic sled, and help her prepare to compete in a competitive race. Similarly, promotional materials emphasize the cooperative nature of Ban'ei racing and the agricultural life from which it derives, both among people and between farmers and horses. The summer 2015 edition of *Pommel * carried profiles of individual horses, features on the crucial work of farriers, interviews with jockeys, horse handlers, and stable hands, and a photo collection of the many people and animals it takes to make everything run. In one pamphlet (*Silver Spoon Personal Experience Map*) this sentiment is captured in the following catch phrase: “You can't help but be excited. [Ban'ei racing] reveals how humans and horses working as one can pull out all the stops.” In this way, these campaigns leverage themes of how Ban'ei racing embodies the historically deep connection between Tokachi farmers and horses and reminds contemporary generations of Japanese of a great debt owed to agricultural communities of an earlier age.

Placing *Silver Spoon* within Tokachi's “Food Valley”

If *Silver Spoon* has put a little-known, predominately rural region of Hokkaido on the mental map of millions of devotees, Tokachi's varied tourism campaigns have endeavored to spotlight the delicious delights Tokachi has to offer. Arakawa, who was born in Hokkaido and attended the agricultural school that serves as the model for her story, specifically highlights the varied features of agricultural life and has thereby produced especially fertile ground for the promotion of the unique food products of the Tokachi area. Given the combined efforts at many levels to stimulate contents tourism, it is not surprising that in 2013 *Silver Spoon* was presented the inaugural Grand Prize of the Japan Food Culture Contents Award by the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries, which are conferred to anime and manga that promote Japan's exceptional culinary history and culture to a worldwide audience.

Long before *Silver Spoon* started its serialization in 2011, the Tokachi tourism bureau had coined the motto “Food Valley Tokachi” and had been promoting the diverse food products grown and produced in this productive region. The prominent items are milk, milk products, pork, beef, lamb, potatoes, corn, sugar beets, and beans. In particular, dairy production in the Tokachi region is remarkable. It is the highest single provider of milk in all of Japan, shipping out more than 1,000,000 tons across the nation each year. A variety of milk products, cheese for instance, are made from the yield as well. *Silver Spoon's* focus on students studying in the dairy program, the many lessons learned in coming to grips with the responsibilities involved with raising animals and slaughtering (including cute piglets) for food production, and the joys of collaborative culinary projects naturally lend themselves to tourism projects in the region.

As a focal point of my research, I took up the challenge of a *Silver Spoon* stamp rally created by the Obihiro Tourism and Convention Bureau (Figure 5). Their high-quality, six-page pamphlet is headed by the catch phrase “Let's learn as we enjoy food!” Ten characters of the much-feted manga have each been assigned a specific location in the region around Obihiro, the majority of which are connected to food production. At each place—for instance, a dairy farm that sells ice cream, a cheese shop surrounded by lush forests, a garden that serves vinegar drinks made of local beans, and a caf  featuring mouth-watering cheese cakes—I could stamp the head of the appropriate

character. Informational sections on milking experience, cheese production, modern farming, meat making, and the pleasure of cooking your own pizza feature iconic color images from the manga that signal key scenes related to these topics.



Figure 5: Cover page for *Silver Spoon* stamp rally, Obihiro Tourism and Convention Center.

Online at: http://occi.or.jp/ginsaji_web/img/common/ginsaji.pdf [Accessed 31 March 2016]

Permission to use image granted by Obihiro Tourism and Convention Center.

Some of the assignments grew organically out of the character's interests. For example the rural cheese shop NEEDS (Northern Eco Economy Developing System) is naturally connected to the plucky Yoshino Mayumi, who is delightfully obsessed with cheese making. Tokachi Farmers Restaurant is given to Inada Tamako, who has a brain finely tuned for formulating winning business plans for promoting food products. The stamp of the pet dog named Vice President waited for me at Tokachi Hills, a wide garden space with stunning views of the valley below, where he might well have liked to frolic. The sometimes ill-tempered horse, Marron (whose name at least signals a food, namely chestnuts), is assigned to Obihiro Shrine, where tourists can buy votive tablets that look like draft horses. While other links between characters and place are random, all locations have been chosen to showcase the history and natural bounty of the area. Toteppo Factory is a café, walking distance from Obihiro station, famous for its wide array of cheeses and sweets. It is named after a historical railway known for carrying enormous hauls of sugar beets into the largest city of the region. At Tokachi Millennium Forest visitors can take in picturesque views of variously themed gardens and stunning natural landscapes, enjoy the gallivanting goats whose milk is used to make cheese on site, and eat meals at one of the several restaurants there.

This stamp rally and *Silver Spoon*-inspired tourism materials more broadly have a discernible emphasis on hands-on experiences connected to making, harvesting, and eating food. In addition to the tantalizing culinary-agricultural scavenger hunt, the glossy promotional guide prepared by the Obihiro Tourism and Convention Bureau details how to get hands-on experience at no less than eighteen different locations. Visitors, much like the outsider main character Yūgo, are invited to brave new experiences. These include sausage, ice cream, cheese, and pizza making. One can also milk a cow, ride and feed horses, pet farm animals, or see up close the enormous combines used to harvest crops. Some attractions allow tourists to walk the wide fields of a farm, pluck vegetables from the earth, and eat their personally-harvested bounty at a picnic. In such activities, tourists

come in contact with real people who make their livelihood in agricultural jobs, learn of the enormous knowledge-base that is required of farmers, and hear their personal stories. Through their hands visitors get some sense of the labor involved in bringing food to the tables of Japanese across the nation and may even enjoy a sense of pride and accomplishment by enjoying the fruits of their own labor.

Conclusion: Redefining Agricultural Work

Among the many aspects of Tokachi tourism, what emerged clearly as I conducted research was a pride of place and profession. When I conducted fieldwork in the Tokachi-Obihiro area during the summer of 2015, interviews revealed that many community members were pleased to pursue a symbiotic relationship with the producers of the multi-media forms of *Silver Spoon*. Local farmers and food producers were naturally invested in and appreciated the opportunity to educate and testify to the many satisfying aspects of their occupations and lives. To a person, everyone showed great respect for Arakawa and were grateful for the ways in which her story had offered a realistic yet humanizing depiction of Tokachi farmers and agriculture-related jobs.⁷

Hirose Fumihiko, a congenial and dedicated farmer, and his wife Mayumi run Liberty Hill Hirose Farm and Uemon's Heart Ice Cream Shop. This dairy farm, which has been passed down in the family for multiple generations, was committed to educating people about dairy farming in Tokachi even before *Silver Spoon* began attracting attention. The origin story for Hirose's educational activism began with a question from a school grader: "Do you feed coffee to the cows to get coffee milk?" Stunned by the lack of basic information in the general population, Hirose remodeled his farm to include a viewing gallery for the milking rooms and designated spaces for giving lectures and making ice cream. He is an entertaining and patient educator, who uses his custom-made handouts on milk production, replete with helpful visuals and explanations of each step of the process. I accompanied a group of students who had traveled from Shizuoka on a tour, during which we saw the grounds and barns, met the new calves, tried our hands at milking a cow, and made ice cream. On his farm homepage (<http://www.uemons.com/about/>), Hirose states, "First I have children and consumers come to my farm, and I have them learn by seeing the actual site where we milk the cows and feeling with their own hands the preciousness of nature, food, and life." In our interview (on 28 July 2015), he stressed that what he hoped for most was to leave a lasting impression on visitors so that when they return to their daily lives they can envision the respectable lives of the animals and people who labored to provide milk for them. "When they reach for a carton of milk on the shelf of their grocery store, I want them to know what is behind it." Also a graduate of the local agricultural school, Hirose was thankful that *Silver Spoon* afforded him yet even more opportunities to carry out this mission.

At the artisanal cheese shop NEEDS, I participated in a cheese (mozzarella) and pizza making class. A master cheese maker, Mr. Suzuki, was my teacher. In our conversation (on 27 July 2015) he was especially appreciative of how *Silver Spoon* fosters a respectful understanding of a variety of agricultural professions that are too often denigrated as the "three Ds", dirty, dangerous, and demanding.⁸ When I asked what he most wanted people to know, he was quick to answer: "That we make food that people put into their mouths and that we take pride in making this. That the work is not as dirty as they think." He confirmed that the company owner did not hesitate to cooperate with the stamp rally and other promotions. They are all happy to have the help in promoting their products and changing common misconceptions of agricultural work and life.

It would be misguided, however, to paint too bright a forecast for the future of local farms and farm workers in Tokachi just because *Silver Spoon* serves up a more appealing image of agricultural labor. Reality is much more complicated. In fact, the *Silver Spoon* character Inada Tomoko may be a harbinger of things to come. Tomoko, who studies agricultural finance, is obsessed with envisioning enormous, efficient factory farms. Her dreams of creating a large-scale cattle enterprise make her delirious with fantasies of massive profits. Given that Japan has signed the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), there are justifiable anxieties about the future of farming in Japan, especially meat and dairy farming.⁹ Couple this with the industrialization of farming that has already appeared on the Tokachi landscape, and one must question the power of *Silver Spoon* to dramatically change what some believe to be inevitable.¹⁰

Still, there is some indication that *Silver Spoon* has had positive effects the likes of which Hirose and Suzuki hope for. For instance, the greater interest in programs at Obihiro Agricultural High School was confirmed in an interview with one devoted female fan, who was inspired by Arakawa's works to study for an agricultural career. A sophomore in high school, she had traveled from Honshu to attend Obihiro Agricultural High School's open house. She intends to apply to the school and become a veterinarian. Her face lights up when I ask how *Silver Spoon*—she has enjoyed all three formats many times—had inspired this life plan. She stressed that she was profoundly moved by how the works portray a deep respect for nature and animals and appreciated the message of the importance of communication between humans and animals. There is nothing hesitant in her about moving far away from her family at a young age—just like Yūgo did—to study a profession so removed from everyday expectations. She recognizes that it will be challenging, but is in no way put off by the proverbial “three Ds.” Rather, she speaks confidently of the rewards of what she knows will be a meaningful vocation.

It is impossible to predict what the future holds for *Silver Spoon*-induced contents tourism now that we are five years out from the initial serialization and Arakawa has hinted she will be wrapping up the series soon.¹¹ These five years, however, represent an instructive study of contents tourism. With its multiple formats, *Silver Spoon* has certainly drawn out varied fan-bases to the northern reaches of Japan and every effort by local Tokachi-Obihiro constituencies has been made to welcome visitors and aid them in finding *Silver Spoon* related activities. The various campaigns appeal to individuals of all ages and families who are keen for adventure in nature with delicious food every step of the way. Tourist promotions throw in a dash of local history as well. The manga's well-informed portrayal of agricultural work lends outsiders a rare chance to see a sympathetic view of the all-too-often misunderstood farming world. Once visitors get to Tokachi, the locals gladly put on a final relish to the tourists' education, cultivating through their dedication and craftsmanship a deeper respect for Tokachi's history and their own earnest labor that brings delicious sustenance to tables across Japan. This case suggests that economic motivations, while important, are not the only reason for pursuing contents tourism. An equally strong contender is the drive to promote compelling narratives of a unique local identity, heritage, and pride.

Acknowledgements

Funding for this research was provided by a grant from the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science (Kiban A, Number 26243007, ‘International Comparative Research into the Reception and Transmission of Culture via “Contents Tourism”’, Project Leader Philip Seaton). I am especially thankful to Philip Seaton and Takayoshi Yamamura for not only affording me this opportunity but also their many encouraging remarks and helpful suggestions as I forayed into this new area and

mode of research. I could not have written this article without the help of many people who agreed to be interviewed, especially Hirose Fumihiko and Mr. Suzuki, who so kindly gave of their time. I am grateful to Paul Hansen for his more than generous hospitality as he took me on tours of farms and generously shared his knowledge of local agricultural history and politics. Finally, a big “thank you” to all of the Hokkaido University staff that patiently shepherded me through the paperwork.

Notes

- ¹ Tokachi is one of nine subprefectures in Hokkaido. Reaching from the inner-most area of the island to the Pacific Ocean, it is the largest subprefecture, which includes a variety of microclimates. Obihiro is the only designated city and capital.
- ² It is clear that tourist officials have been asked not to reveal the name of the model school, and it appears in none of the promotional materials. Most of the live-action film shooting related to the characters’ school life took place at nearby Obihiro Agricultural University. Still, all the locals know and were not in the least reticent to name the actual school—Obihiro Agricultural High School.
- ³ Scott Green (2013) suggests that *Silver Spoon* re-invigorated the programming block. “There have been some concerns about the future of alternative audience programming anime block noitaminA in light of the fact that this season’s continuation of *Psycho-Pass* and *Robotics;Notes* is going to be followed by a spring re-airing of White Fox (*Steins;Gate*) adaptation of Nisio Isin’s historical fantasy *Katanagatari*. Well, good news fans, it’s about to get high profile new material with the future addition of *Silver Spoon*.”
- ⁴ Of course, there were also concerns for the tourists’ and farm animals’ safety—thus, the prevalent “Field Trip Manners” (*kengaku no manā*) disclaimer on many promotional materials. One advises: “We must act in ways that prevent infecting crops and animals. When visiting sites, let’s enter only when we have permission, follow instructions from the establishment, and wash our hands and disinfect our shoes.”
- ⁵ Pocket Dairy app. Online at: <http://noitamina.tv/game/ginsaji/> [Accessed 31 March 2016].
- ⁶ Aaron Skabelund (2016) offers an insightful chapter on Hokkaido war horses and memory making that has a section devoted to Tokachi, wherein he discusses Ban’ei.
- ⁷ For an in-depth analysis on a synergetic and mutually beneficial relationship between local parties and copyright holders, see Yamamura Takayoshi’s work on the contents tourism spurred by anime *Lucky Star* in Washimiya, Saitama (Yamamura 2015).
- ⁸ In English these are known as the “three Ds,” while in Japanese they are known as the “three Ks,” namely *kitanai*, *kiken*, and *kitsui*.
- ⁹ The agreement was signed on 5 October 2015. Both the small-scale dairy farmer Hirose and cheese-maker Suzuki, whom I interviewed in July of that year, expressed their concerns about TPP. For basic information on TPP and Japan see Pollmann (2015).
- ¹⁰ Interview, Paul Hansen, 1 August 2015. See also Hansen’s (2014) stimulating article, “Hokkaido’s Frontiers: Blurred Embodiments, shared effects and the evolution of dairy farming animal-human-machine.”
- ¹¹ The Anime News Network (2015) reports that in Volume 13 (June 2015) Arakawa noted, “the climax of the manga’s story will be ‘imminent.’” The exact date is unclear.

References

- Anime News Network, 2015. *Silver Spoon manga teases imminent ending* [online]. Available from: <http://www.animenewsnetwork.com/news/2015-06-18/silver-spoon-manga-teases-imminent-ending/.89413> [Accessed 4 April 2016].
- Green, S., 2013. Crunchy Roll news [online]. Available from: <http://www.crunchyroll.com/anime-news/2013/01/12/silver-spoon-anime-to-run-on-noitamina-block> [Accessed 23 October 2015].
- Hansen, P., 2014. Hokkaido's frontiers: blurred embodiments, shared effects and the evolution of dairy farming animal-human-machine. *Critique of anthropology*, 34(1), 48-72.
- Mason, M., 2009. Writing Hiroshima and Nagasaki in the 21st century: a new generation of historical manga. *The Asia-Pacific journal: Japan focus* [online]. Available from: <http://apjif.org/-Michele-Mason/3260/article.html> [Accessed 31 March 2016].
- Mason, M., 2012. *Dominant narratives of colonial Hokkaido and imperial Japan: envisioning the periphery and the modern nation-state*. New York: Palgrave.
- McGray, D., 2002. Japan's gross national cool. *Foreign policy*. 1 May.
- Nye, J., 1990. *Bound to lead: the changing nature of American power*. NY: Basic Books.
- Nye, J., 2004. *Soft power: the means to success in world politics*. NY: Public Affairs.
- Onishi, N., 2006. A horse-racing tradition lumbers into its final stretch. *The New York Times*, 25 December.
- Pollmann, M., 2015. What the TPP means for Japan. *The diplomat*, 8 October.
- Seaton, P. and Yamamura, T., 2015. Japanese popular culture and contents tourism: introduction. *Japan forum*, 27(1), 1-11.
- Skabelund, A., 2016. Local Hokkaido and national memories of war horses. In: P.A. Seaton, ed. *Local history and war memories in Hokkaido*. London: Routledge, 113-128.
- Yamamura, T., 2015. Contents tourism and local community response: *Lucky star* and collaborative anime-induced tourism in Washimiya. *Japan forum*, 27(1), 59-81.
- Yoshikai, T., 2015. The race goes to the strong. *Wingspan*, July edition (no. 553).

Michele M. Mason is an Associate Professor of modern Japanese cultural studies at the University of Maryland. She is author of *Dominant Narratives of Colonial Hokkaido and Imperial Japan* (Palgrave, 2012) and *Reading Colonial Japan: Text, Context and Critique* (Stanford UP, 2012, with Helen J.S. Lee). Mason's work on *Silver Spoon* grows out of an interest in manga, which can be seen in her article "Writing Hiroshima and Nagasaki in the 21st Century: A New Generation of Historical Manga" in *The Asia-Pacific Journal* (2009) and the chapter "Bodies of Anger: Atomic Survivors in Nakazawa Keiji's Black Series Manga" in *Rewriting History in Manga: Stories for the Nation* (Palgrave, 2016, Eds. Nissim Otamazgin and Rebecca Suter).

ミッシェル・メイソン： アメリカ合衆国メリーランド大学准教授（現代日本文化研究）。主著に *Dominant Narratives of Colonial Hokkaido and Imperial Japan* (Palgrave, 2012)、 *Reading Colonial Japan:*

Text, Context and Critique (Stanford UP, 2012, with Helen J.S. Lee)等がある。マンガについて高い関心を持ち、“Writing Hiroshima and Nagasaki in the 21st Century: A New Generation of Historical Manga” in *The Asia-Pacific Journal* (2009) や“Bodies of Anger: Atomic Survivors in Nakazawa Keiji’s Black Series Manga” in *Rewriting History in Manga: Stories for the Nation* (Palgrave, 2016, Eds. Nissim Otamazin and Rebecca Suter)といったマンガに関する著作もある。今回の『銀の匙 Silver Spoon』に関する論文もこうした一連のマンガ研究の流れに位置づけられるものである。

About the *International Journal of Contents Tourism*

The *International Journal of Contents Tourism* (www.cats.hokudai.ac.jp/ijct) is an open-access, refereed scholarly journal exploring the phenomenon of ‘contents tourism’, defined as travel behaviour motivated fully or partially by narratives, characters, locations and other creative elements of popular culture forms, including film, television dramas, manga, anime, novels and computer games. IJCT publishes articles of various lengths, from original research papers through to short blog entries. It is based at Hokkaido University, Japan, and the editors-in-chief are Professor Philip Seaton (Research Faculty of Media and Communication) and Professor Takayoshi Yamamura (Center for Advanced Tourism Studies).