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‘Rekijo’ and heritage tourism: the Sengoku/Bakumatsu boom, localities and networks

Akiko Sugawa-Shimada

Abstract: This research note explores the heritage tourism of *rekijo* (history fan girls) related to Ishida Mitsunari, a notorious samurai during the Warring States period. As a result of the positive portrayal of Ishida as a handsome young man in anime and taiga dramas in the 2010s, a growing number of young female tourists have visited his birthplace in Ishida town, Shiga. The commitment to the local community of *rekijo* and the grass-roots hospitality of local people helped to establish cross-generational psychological connections via the spirit of Ishida Mitsunari. The feeling of being connected is a vital factor for *rekijo*.

アブストラクト：本研究ノートでは、歴史上逆賊とされる石田三成に関する、「歴女」（歴史好きな女性）の歴史ツーリズムについて論じている。『戦国無双』『戦国 BASARA』や『天地人』『江』において、三成が好人物に描かれたことで、生誕地石田町（滋賀）に若い女性観光客が増加した。ここで顕著なのは、ホスト・ゲスト関係を越えた「歴女」の地元への貢献と、地元顕彰会の草の根的なおもてなしが、三成を介して世代を超えた精神的繋がりとして構築されていることである。

Keywords: *rekijo*, heritage tourism, anime, taiga drama, networking.

キーワード：歴女、ヘリテージ・ツーリズム、アニメ、大河ドラマ、ネットワーキング

Objectives of this research

Visiting historical sites such as battlefields, Buddhist temples, Shinto shrines, castles, and the tombs of historical figures is often considered to be a hobby for older men in Japan. However, the gendering of leisure activities has been blurred since around the early 2000s when young women surged into the fields of ‘men’s’ leisure such as photographing trains (Ariyoshi 2005, p. 46).ⁱ *Rekijo*, or history fan girls, have also become a nationwide phenomenon and turned Japanese history into a popular and fashionable cross-gender leisure field (Sugawa-Shimada 2015). Since around 2004, young women have visited famous historical sites particularly connected to the Sengoku period (Warring States period, approximately from the end of the fifteenth century to the end of the sixteenth century) and the Bakumatsu period (1853-1868). The *rekijo* phenomenon was an attractive story for the mass media. Discourses regarding *rekijo* began to increase in 2004 and 2005 when video games featuring well-known samurai warriors in the Sengoku period gained great popularity. The discourses expanded and reached their peak between 2008 and 2012. During this period, a growing number of TV dramas, TV anime, films and plays characterised historical figures such as Ishida Mitsunari (1560?-1600) as attractive men, and a new genre of history writers called *rekidoru* (female history fan idolsⁱⁱ) gained much public attention around the time of the release of

the Chinese historical film *Red Cliff* in 2008 and 2009. Although it is often regarded as a fad, women's heritage/contents tourism can help revive local communities and create a new type of communication model between fans and communities. Through the case study of Ishida town, this research investigates how the pop-culture-induced *rekijo* phenomenon in the 2000s has impacted on local communities and analyses how this type of women's historical contents tourism differs from other cases.

Research outline

The *rekijo* phenomena has been observed nationwide in heritage sites that were already established sightseeing spots as well as in those almost unknown to tourists. This research particularly focuses on the latter to illustrate how women's historical contents tourism functions as a form of 'autonomous tourism' ⁱⁱⁱ and how it changes values and communication networks in local communities.

- I. Period of the research: July-September 2012.
- II. Site: Ishida town, Nagahama city, Shiga prefecture where Ishida Mitsunari (1560?-1600) was from. The population of Ishida was approximately 740 and there were approximately 270 households in February 2011.
- III. Sites in Ishida town: The tombs of Ishida Mitsunari and his family, Ishida Shrine, the well for Ishida's first bath (*Ubuyu no ido*), and Kan'onji Temple.
- IV. Methodology: Textual analysis and qualitative research (individual interviews).
- V. Interviewees: Kinoshita Shigeaki, president of the Society to Honour Mitsunari Ishida (Ishida Mitsunari kō jiseki kenshō kai) and some anonymous staff.

Case study: Ishida Mitsunari and Ishida town (Nagahama city), Shiga

Historical facts about Ishida Mitsunari and his birthplace, Ishida town

Ishida Mitsunari was born in Ishida village, in what is now Shiga prefecture, around 1560. He is well known as the manager of Toyotomi Hideyoshi's finances, and after Hideyoshi's death he became the de facto commander of the western army at the Battle of Sekigahara in 1600.^{iv} He was executed after losing the battle and went down in history as the defeated commander at Sekigahara and a rebel who fought against Tokugawa Ieyasu. According to one Japanese history textbook published by Yamakawa Shuppansha (one of the most popular textbooks for middle and high schools in Japan) 'Ishida Mitsunari along with Konishi Yukinaga plotted the battle and fought against Tokugawa Ieyasu' (Gomi and Toriumi 2011, p. 150). Mitsunari is negatively represented. Due to his negative reputation and notoriety, 'the residents of Ishida town used to be ashamed of their town and concealed their birthplace' (AERA 2009, p. 60).

However, in 1966, the Society to Honour Ishida Mitsunari was set up by local residents. At the site where Ishida's house used to be, Ishida Hall was built to preserve the limited number of documents and artefacts related to Ishida. They are exhibited in showcases in the small museum inside. The Hall itself is also used as a community hall and functions as the centre of the local community.

Although the association and Ishida Hall existed, Ishida town was poor in tourism resources with no castle, no particularly attractive scenery and few souvenir shops. The location was inconvenient, too. It was approximately three kilometres from the nearest station (JR Nagahama), and there were few bus services. For history fans, documents and artefacts related to historical figures are very important; however, few remained and they were displayed in exhibits of only 13 square metres.

There were no fan notebooks (visitor books) in the venues related to Ishida. According to Kinoshita Shigeaki (president of the Society to Honour Ishida Mitsunari), usually only a few middle-aged male tourists per month used to visit Ishida town. This situation drastically changed from around 2009, when ten to twenty young women started visiting Ishida town every month. In 2009, annual visitors to Ishida town exceeded 1,000, approximately 90 per cent of whom were women (*Asahi Shinbun* 2009a).^v

Representations of Ishida Mitsunari in popular culture and their influence on rekijo

What attracted young women to this notorious rebel? Pop culture products featuring Ishida in the 2000s served to considerably improve his image. For instance, the video games *Sengoku Musō* (2004-) and *Sengoku BASARA* (2005-) portrayed Ishida as a handsome young man. *Sengoku BASARA*, in particular, was marketed via several media platforms, including plays (2009-), the Takarazuka revue (2013), three anime series (2009, 2010 and 2014), an animation feature film (2011), and a TV drama (2012), and these were appealing to young women (*Asahi Shinbun* 2009a). The NHK taiga drama *Tenchijin* (2009) cast Oguri Shun as Ishida, representing him as a tragic hero who was a close friend of the protagonist, Naoe Kanetsugu. In *Gō* (NHK's taiga drama in 2011) Hagiwara Masato was cast as Ishida, and portrayed Ishida as a passionate and naïve samurai warrior.

The increase in visitors was helped by the collaboration between Shiga Prefectural Tourism Bureau and the taiga drama *Gō* from 2010 to 2011. During these years, a special bus service ran from Nagahama station to Ishida town. The regular bus service from the station to Ishida town only departed once or twice an hour, so the special bus service on top of the regular service motivated more tourists to visit Ishida town. As post-taiga drama publicity, in 2012 Nagahama city's tourist bureau organized the Warring States Taiga Drama Hometown Festival (*Sengoku taiga furusato matsuri*) and attracted young tourists with *yuru-kyara* (cute mascot characters) such as Mitsunari-kun. The private-sector-promoted 'Ishida Mitsunyan' in Hikone city also improved Ishida's image (*Asahi Shinbun* 2009b).^{vi} Thus, Ishida was idealised as an ambitious, strong, beautiful young warrior in popular culture products, and he was represented as an attractive, intimate character to appeal to young tourists by the local government.

Impacts of rekijo on Ishida town and the Society to Honour Ishida Mitsunari

The growing number of young female fans of Ishida had various impacts on Ishida town and its community. The most obvious change was the reconstruction of the local community through the interplay between the hospitality of local people and activities of *rekijo*.

The major annual event organised by the Society to Honour Ishida Mitsunari is the *ireisai* (a memorial ceremony to console the spirit of Ishida) in November. The society has a limited number of members, so the preparations for the memorial ceremony are done not only by the members of the society but also by young local non-members. The president of the society told me: 'young local people used to complain about such painstaking preparations. One said, "A memorial ceremony is usually held until 50 years after a person's death. Why should we hold Mitsunari's ceremony for over 400 years?"'. In fact, the number of participants in the ceremony had gradually decreased.

However, from around 2009, many *rekijo* began to take part in the ceremony. In 2009, 160 people came to a talk given after the ceremony. Women made up eighty per cent of the audience (AERA 2009). In my interview with Kinoshita, he told me that approximately 300 people came to the ceremony in 2011, and he noticed that the majority of people were women and families. Women tended to bring their families, friends, and partners to the ceremony, and there were young men with no knowledge about Ishida who accompanied their girlfriends to the ceremony (AERA 2009). Social Network Services (SNS) such as mixi also connect people with an interest in Ishida. Kinoshita greatly appreciated that some people who only knew each other online via SNS came to

the ceremony to meet offline at the *ireisai* ceremony. He said, ‘We feel happy that people are connected through Mitsunari and visit our town’.

He also added that the increase in the number of visitors encouraged young local people in Ishida to continue the ceremony for Ishida Mitsunari. Ishida’s ceremony has even become like a reunion for his fans and local people. One of the museum staff, a man in his 50s, commented: ‘we will solemnly continue the annual ceremony. Unlike Sawayama Castle, which wants to generate tourist business, we are indifferent to profits.’^{vii} This clearly differs from other sightseeing sites related to Mitsunari. There are no fan notebooks left in Ishida Hall except our visitor’s notebook.^{viii} We don’t count the exact number of visitors; however, it is obvious that most visitors have been women since around 2010’.

Another member of staff, a man in his forties, told me that some female fans voluntarily help at the ceremony. This is the moment at which the host—guest relationship disappears. In fact, during my interview with this man, a young woman entered the museum. She seemed familiar to the staff, so I thought that she was a local resident. However, it turned out she was a visitor who regularly comes to Ishida Hall to help the staff. Although she lives in Fukui Prefecture, she seemed deeply committed to the local community.

One of the secrets of maintaining good relationships between *rekijo* and the local community is hospitality. Kinoshita told me that he always tries to talk to visitors. ‘They have come a long way to come to visit our Mitsunari. In most cases, they are solo travellers. It would be sad if they came alone and had no one to talk with’. In fact, when I was paying my respects at the Ishida family tomb, he came up to me and started speaking to me. While chatting about Mitsunari, he informed me about the upcoming ceremony and invited me to attend. After our conversation, some more visitors came to the tombs. He immediately spoke to them as well.

Similarly, in the museum, a member of staff spoke to me when I was looking at the exhibition. He showed me a video that introduced Ishida and his village. Another member of staff brought a comfortable chair for me. Such individual hospitality is made possible by Ishida being such a small community. Although this type of grassroots hospitality takes time and effort, it obviously makes *rekijo* want to return to the town and to do something for the local community in return.

Conclusion

Revitalisation of local communities through pop-culture-induced contents tourism has created some instant success stories in previously small, unknown towns. These include Washimiya town, Saitama, which became famous as a site of pilgrimage for *Lucky Star* fans (Yamamura 2009, pp.13-18), and Toyosato town, Shiga, which became famous as the site of pilgrimage for *K-On!* fans (Okamoto 2015). Ishida town is also small and has been revitalised through pop-culture-induced contents tourism. However, in Ishida town’s case, the emphasis is not on commercialisation, but the emotional ties between the local people and *rekijo* through the spirit of Ishida Mitsunari. Although *rekijo* voluntarily assist at the solemn ceremony, they do not drastically change the tradition and would be unwilling to do so. The Ishida ceremony has become larger in size year by year, and some celebrities have been invited to attract even more fans. However, as Kinoshita repeatedly emphasised, for women’s historical tourism ‘the feeling of being connected’ to the spirits of historical figures and among local people and *rekijo* is a vital factor. It also serves to generate cross-generational communication in the local community.

Notes

- ⁱ *AERA*, a weekly news magazine, printed an article titled ‘Female otaku invading the male citadel’ in 2005. This article introduces women who consider railways/trains, insect collecting, and bonsai to be their hobbies.
- ⁱⁱ Young female models and idols such as Kohinata Eri, Mikako, and An are some of the best known *rekidoru*.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Autonomous tourism is defined as ‘tourism in which the local community takes the initiative in the management of the tourism’ and ‘that focuses on the spontaneity of local communities and tourists’ (Shikida and Morishige 2006, pp. 243-245).
- ^{iv} The official commander was Mōri Terumoto.
- ^v I asked for the precise number of visitors to Ishida Hall. However, Ishida Hall only asks visitors to fill out the guest notebook with their names and addresses. Only one representative of a group of visitors is asked to write their name. Thus, staff did not know the exact number of visitors.
- ^{vi} Ishida Mitsu-nyan is one of the mascot characters of the local community FM radio station, FM Hikone, in Shiga Prefecture. Ishida’s servant, Shima Sakon was also the model for Shima Sako-nyan. They were probably inspired by the better-known Hiko-nyan, the official mascot character of Hikone.
- ^{vii} Sawayama Castle is located in Hikone, Shiga, where Ishida used to live. In 2010, Sawayama Castle collaborated with Sengoku BASARA (Capcom) to hold a large event for fans.
- ^{viii} Fan notebooks play an important role at sites of fan pilgrimage in Japan (see Okamoto 2015).

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Akiko Sugawa-Shimada, Ph.D., is an Associate Professor at Yokohama National University, Japan. She is the author of a number of books and articles on anime, manga and cultural studies, including *Girls and Magic: How Have Girl Heroes Been Accepted* (2013), *An Introduction to Anime Studies: Nine Tips for Research on Anime* (2013), *Japanese Animation: East Asian Perspectives* (2013), 'Rebel with Causes and Laughter for Relief: "Essay Manga" of Tenten Hosokawa and Rieko Saibara, and Japanese Female Readership' in *Journal of Graphic Novels and Comics* (2011).

須川亜紀子 横浜国立大学教育人間科学部／都市イノベーション研究院准教授。専門は、メディアとジェンダー。アニメにおける少女表象、女性オーディエンス研究、2.5 次元文化研究など。主な著書に『少女と魔法—ガールヒーローはいかに受容されたのか』（2013 年）、『アニメ研究入門』（2013 年）など。