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Experience-based consumption in a dramatised space: the history of the Toyako Manga Anime Festa

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Abstract: This paper uses the Toyako Manga Anime Festa (TMAF)—held at the *onsen* (hot spring) resort of Toyako in Hokkaido since 2010—as a case study and presents its start-up strategy and development process. By focusing on the TMAF cosplay event, for which the entire town is transformed into a 'venue of cosplay', the paper reveals the key element behind the event's success: the town's opening of its public space to tourists as a cosplay stage where they become primary characters in a journey and can interact and communicate with other participating characters. Finally, the paper shows that TMAF points to a new direction in 'experience-based consumption'.

アブストラクト：本稿では、2010 年から北海道洞爺湖町洞爺湖温泉で開催されている TOYAKO マンガ・アニメフェスタを事例として、その立ち上げから発展プロセスを整理する。そのうえで特に、「温泉街まるまるコスプレ会場」というプログラムに注目し、このプログラムが多くの参加者に支持された背景として、参加者個々が主役を演じることができ、さらに他の登場人物とのコミュニケーションを通して感動的に物語を展開できる舞台として温泉街が機能したことを示す。そして、同フェスタが、「体験型消費」の新たな方向性を示していることを指摘する。

Keywords: experience-based consumption, Toyako Manga Anime Festa, Toyako Onsen, cosplay, event, character

キーワード：体験型消費、TOYAKO マンガ・アニメフェスタ、洞爺湖温泉、コスプレ、イベント、キャラクター

Introduction

In recent years, the term 'experience-based consumption' has attracted attention as a keyword associated with the development of tourist sites. In general, this term is used to refer obscurely to experiencing things that cannot be experienced in places other than 'in situ'. If tourism is dependent on an ambiguous concept such as 'experience-based consumption' then satisfying modern travellers becomes difficult. There are at least three dimensions of 'experience-based consumption' that need to be understood when examining the reasons for the attention to such consumption in recent years. First, the use of social media (e.g. Twitter and Facebook) is spreading, which enables people to broadcast their experiences. Second, travellers tell of their experiences using the personal pronoun 'I'; in other words, tourists assume the leading role at each destination while travelling. And third, travellers generate interest in their key roles and destinations along their journeys by telling stories.

In other words, what is important is whether the tourist can play the role of the primary character in the journey. Furthermore, how he or she interacts and communicates with other characters is

crucial. Following from this, the destination community is faced with the challenge of preparing the stage and story when organising an event.

The history of the Toyako Manga Anime Festa (TMAF)

An example of an event that has attracted much public attention is the Toyako Manga Anime Festa (TMAF), organised by the Festa Project Promotion Committee and the Toyako Onsen Tourist Association. It is held at the *onsen* (hot spring) resort of Toyako in Hokkaido. The festival was held for the first time in June 2010 as part of a series of events celebrating the centenary of a volcanic eruption which created a new hot spring in 1910. Since 2010, TMAF has been held annually in June.

Figure 1: Toyako (Lake Toya)

The Toyako area was designated as a national park in 1949. It developed tremendously as a hot spring resort during the period of high economic growth in the 1960s and 70s. The people living in the area worked together as a community and survived dramatic decreases in tourism following the collapse of the bubble economy, and also two volcanic eruptions of Mt. Usu in 1977 and 2000. Over time, tourists' preferences have changed from travelling in large groups to travelling in small groups or as individuals. Large hotels, therefore, have become less important in the tourism sector. After 2007, Toyako saw a dramatic decrease in the number of tourists until 2011. The number of recorded tourists in 2011 was less than half of the number in the peak year of 1993 (Figure 2).

In response to these circumstances, TMAF was designed as a way of attracting young people to Toyako. It began on the initiative of local volunteers from both public and private sectors with the purpose of revitalising the *onsen* town.

The festa features various events, including a forum on community development, a show with anime voice actors and an exhibition of original cartoon pictures. The most unexpected occurrence, however, was that through TMAF the entire town was transformed into a 'venue of cosplay'. Travellers transform themselves into their favourite characters and perform as the leading actors in a story.

At the time of the initial event in 2010, there were various opinions and concerns in the community. The organisers held a meeting in advance of the event to explain the objective of the festa to community residents and participants and to establish guidelines to maintain order and ensure courteous behaviour. Cooperation and advice from companies organising cosplay events throughout Hokkaido made it possible to respond comprehensively to the needs of the community. On the days of the festa, the organiser's staff members continually patrolled the venue. Thanks to such efforts, despite there being 3,000 visitors (including 300 cosplayers) during the two-day festa, the event ended successfully and without incident. Tourists who attended were mainly young people from various regions in Hokkaido and the overall attendance was much larger than initially expected. Following this successful beginning, it was decided that the event would be held annually.

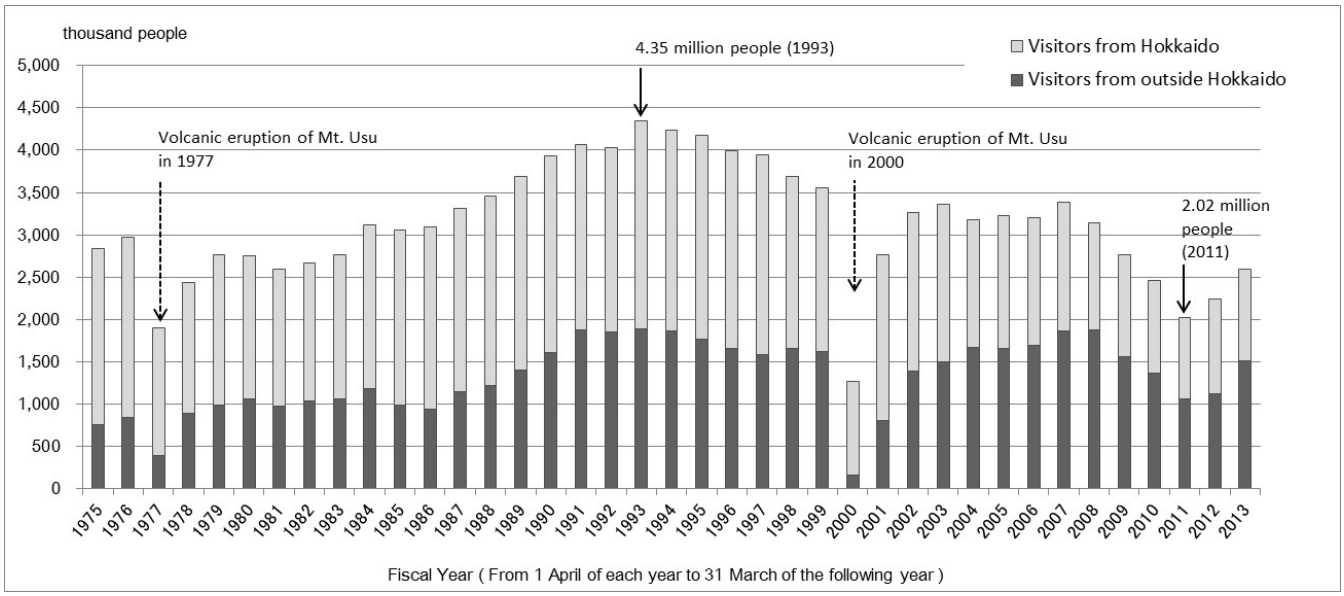

Figure 2: Number of tourists in Toyako Town
Source: Prepared by the author based on the values provided by the town of Toyako

Factors behind the success of TMAF

The success of the event in the initial year attracted widespread attention. At the second festa in June 2011 the number of visitors over the two days was 7,000 (including 1,200 cosplayers), more than twice the number of visitors from the previous year. The number of visitors to TMAF has continued to rise since then as well (Table 1).

There are two particular reasons for the success of TMAF. First, the public space of the entire *onsen* town was set as the stage. Second, the organisers further relaxed the qualifications for participants and welcomed cosplay debutantes wholeheartedly.

Typically, cosplay events are held at a special venue that is isolated and away from public view. They are frequently aimed at a group of regular cosplayers. In the case of the Toyako cosplay event the stage is Toyako's entire *onsen* area and organisers actively called for debutante cosplayers to participate in the event. The Toyako cosplay event was successful because the organisers found potential in a group of people that previously had not been deemed a part of the market and integrated these people into the market.

Table 1: Visitors at the Toyoko Manga Anime Festa.

Year	Visitors
The First TMAF, 2010	3,000 (including 300 cosplayers)
The Second TMAF, 2011	7,000 (including 1,200 cosplayers)
The Third TMAF, 2012	30,000 (including 1,200 cosplayers)
The Fourth TMAF, 2013	49,000 (including 1,500 cosplayers)
The Fifth TMAF, 2014	57,000 (including 1,600 cosplayers)

Source: the Festa Project Promotion Committee

Figure 3: The Opening Parade of TMAF2014 in the main street of Toyako Onsen (21 June 2014)

The organisers simultaneously assumed leading roles as cosplayers and offered support to amateurs to acquaint them with the cosplay stage. During the festa they held a cosplay contest for debutantes, thus demonstrating great effort to create a new atmosphere in which people might understand that the event was not simply dedicated to experienced cosplayers. The event was conducted in a public space, so participants walked in the streets wearing the unique costumes of various characters. Participants and residents had the opportunity to observe them closely. New participants and townspeople became more interested in the event, and attendance has been increasing from year to year as individuals hope to have new experiences.

The cosplay event at Toyako is unique and its format is unprecedented. It currently utilises an expansive public space as its stage where both debutantes and proficient cosplayers may enjoy the experience alongside each other. Its success suggests new directions for the 'experience-based consumption' model by demonstrating that it is possible for every participant to play the role of a leading character in the story associated with a particular travel destination.

Figure 4: An event participant enjoying an *onsen* (hot spring)

Figure 5: An event participant posing in front of amateur photographers (Photo by Jang Kyungjae)

Challenges for the future

Enhancements to the management system and the coordination of local resources will be major issues in the future. Currently, only several core staff, members and volunteers organise and operate this huge event. If the goal is to develop this project further, it will be necessary to seek a wide range of support from the community.

Thus far, the project appears to be only in its initial stage and it seems that the cosplay event itself is the ultimate goal for both the organisers and participants. I have taken part in TMAF as an organiser/chair of the forum and the open seminar and also as a cosplayer since 2010. Through these experiences, I have discussed various issues with the project committee members and local government officials. From such a participant's point of view, in the future I hope that participants will be cosplay fans who not only enjoy the stage but who also love the surrounding area. The community has sufficient potential to reach this goal and we, the project members, are eager to see this happen.

Takayoshi Yamamura is a Professor in the Center for Advanced Tourism Studies, Hokkaido University. His main research areas are heritage tourism and contents tourism, with a focus on anime-induced tourism. Since 2008, he has published numerous books and articles about contents tourism and has served as the chair of several governmental advisory boards, including the Meeting of International Tourism Promotion through Animation Contents of The Japan Tourism Agency, Screen Tourism Project of The Japan Tourism Agency, and the ANIME-Tourism Committee of Saitama Prefecture. His book *Anime/Manga de Chiiki Shinkō* (Community Development Through Anime & Manga) has strongly influenced the tourism policy-making of local governments in Japan. His website is http://yamamuratakayoshi.com/en

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