HOKKAIDO UNIVERSITY

Title	The Anohana Rocket at the Ryūsei Festival and Menma’s wish : contents tourism and local tradition
Author(s)	Jang, Kyungjae
Citation	The Theory and Practice of Contents Tourism, 51-56
Issue Date	2015-03-16
Doc URL	https://hdl.handle.net/2115/58310
Type	report
File Information	IMC Articles 20150316_9.pdf

Hokkaido University Collection of Scholarly and Academic Papers : HUSCAP

The Anohana Rocket at the Ryūsei Festival and Menma's wish: contents tourism and local tradition

Kyungjae Jang

Abstract: This essay considers the links between contents tourism and local tradition, with a focus on the TV anime *Anohana*. First, the phenomenon of anime pilgrimage is introduced as a form of contents tourism linked inextricably to the use of digital technology. In anime pilgrimage, fans use travel as a way of creating forms of communication with local residents. Then, the links between contents tourism and local tradition through the example of municipality–fan collaboration at the Ryūsei Matsuri in Chichibu city, which is central to the story of *Anohana*, are discussed.

アブストラクト：本稿の目的は、コンテンツ・ツーリズムと地域の伝統文化の関係について明らかにすることである。具体的には、2011 年に放送されたアニメーション『あの花』と、その背景となった秩父地域の龍勢祭の事例を取り上げる。まず、2000 年代から新たな観光現象として注目されているアニメ聖地巡礼と、アニメーションを活用した地域振興における地域コミュニティの参加について述べる。次に、『あの花』と秩父の龍勢祭の例を通じて、コンテンツーリズムの観光客が地域の伝統文化保存に寄与する可能性について述べる。

Keywords: contents tourism, animation, traditional culture, *Anohana*, Ryūsei Festival.

キーワード：コンテンツツーリズム、アニメーション、伝統文化、あの花、龍勢祭

Introduction

It is 13 October 2013. In the quiet rural town of Chichibu in Saitama prefecture, handmade bamboo rockets called *ryūsei* (literally 'vigorous dragon') shoot up into the sky trailing white smoke. People wearing traditional *happi* (a Japanese straight-sleeved coat) are watching the launch of the rockets with baited breath. Around the venue of the festival there is a bustling atmosphere. The smoke from stalls selling grilled chicken rises into the sky. The success rate for the rockets is a little less than 50 per cent, but nobody cares if the launch is a success or failure because it is a *matsuri* (festival) not a competition.

This handmade rocket festival in Saitama prefecture is called the *Ryūsei Matsuri* and has a long history. It is the annual festival of Muku Shrine, located in the Shimoyoshida district of Chichibu city, Saitama prefecture, and is held on the second Sunday in October. There are 27 groups that continue the tradition of *ryūsei* and each group creates and launches its own rocket. The theory for the origins of the name *ryūsei* is that the trails left by the rockets look like a dragon, so the rockets came to be called 'vigorous dragons'. *Ryūsei* sometimes include smoke or fireworks, while others

might have a small parachute. All the *ryūsei* are handmade by the groups preserving the festival traditions, so they are also commonly known as 'farmer's rockets'.

Figure 1: The *Ryūsei Matsuri*, 13 October 2013 (Author's photo)

The *ryūsei* festival is primarily a festival for local residents. However, at this festival in 2013 there are young women and men wearing the clothes of anime characters. They have been enjoying the festival just like other participants, but suddenly these groups of young people begin to focus on the launch of the next *ryūsei*. The fifteenth rocket is being prepared for launch. Its name is *Chō Heiwa Basutāzu* (Super Peace Busters). The rocket has been made especially in honour of the anime *Anohana*: *The Flower We Saw that Day* and its fans. Meanwhile, a young woman is being introduced on the stage. Everyone is cheering, taking photos and videos. The woman is Kayano Ai, a well-known voice actress who played the role of Menma in *Anohana* and has been invited to Chichibu to attend the event. She does the countdown and the rocket shoots up into the blue sky.

In this short essay, I consider the links between contents tourism and local tradition, and what it means for regional development and tourism. I focus on the TV anime *Anohana: The Flower We Saw that Day* and the *ryūsei* festival. First, I will introduce the anime and the phenomenon of anime pilgrimage. Then, I will discuss the links between contents tourism and local tradition through the example of municipality—fan collaboration at the *Ryūsei Matsuri*.

Anohana

Anohana: The Flower We Saw that Day, commonly called *Anohana,* is an original anime that was broadcast during the Noitamina (late night anime) time slot on Fuji TV between April and June 2011. A movie version was released on 31 August 2013. It was written by Okada Mari, a famous screenwriter who wrote *True Tears*, *Toradora!* and *Hanasakuiroha (The Colors of Blooming)*'.

The story is set in Chichibu city, Okada's birthplace. Six childhood friends organise a group called *Chō Heiwa Basutāzu* (Super Peace Busters). Meanwhile, after the death of Menma, the heroine of *Anohana*, the group splits up and the member go their own ways. *Anohana* tells the story of the five members as they become high school students, mainly from the point of view of the

group's former leader, Jinta. One day, Menma appears to Jinta as a ghost. The members of the Super Peace Busters get together again to try and fulfil Menma's wish, thereby letting her pass on to the afterlife. But the friends do not know what her wish is, so they try to various things that they think might be Menma's wish. One of these things is to launch the *ryūsei* rocket. Thus, the *Ryūsei Matsuri* is central to the story of *Anohana*.

Anime pilgrimage

With the story of *Anohana* strongly linked to Chichibu city, fans on an anime pilgrimage (*anime seichi junrei)* started visiting Chichibu immediately after the first episode of *Anohana*. Anime pilgrimage is one form of contents tourisms in which fans visit places used as the locations or backgrounds of anime. The origins of anime pilgrimage go back to the 1970s, when anime such as *Heidi* and *Anne of Green Gables* featured in the anime series *Sekai Meisaku Gekijo* (World Masterpieces Theatre). However, strictly speaking, such tourism in the 1970s resembles film-induced tourism more than anime pilgrimage (see Seaton and Yamamura 2015). Anime pilgrimage is inextricably linked with digital technology. With the development of digital technology from the 2000s, it became standard practice for anime production companies to use digital photos for backgrounds in animations. Production companies take photos of real places and process them digitally to create the backgrounds. With this development, the backgrounds in anime have become modelled on real spaces. It can be said that anime now have real locations that fans can visit.

As described by Okamoto (2015), there are various forms of anime pilgrimage. Fans may take pictures of the same scenes in the anime, visit the general area, try to discover first the locations in a sort of competition, or use anime as a way of meeting and creating new forms of communication with local residents. After the broadcast of *Anohana*, all these various patterns of anime pilgrimage were seen.

Involvement of the local community

Anime pilgrimage is an activity initiated by fans. These anime fans are a minority in broader Japanese society. Many anime are broadcast between 22:00 and 2:00 at night and their fans are not very visible within society. Consequently, there were few cases in which the local community became involved in anime pilgrimage. However, after the success of *Lucky☆Star* in 2007 (see Yamamura 2015), local administrations started to get actively involved in the phenomenon, along with companies providing transport from the Tokyo area to anime locations, the so called 'holy sites' (*seichi)*. The value of having fans visit their communities had been recognised by municipalities and they tried to attract even more fans as tourists. The increase in the number of anime pilgrims boosted the economy of the local community. Given these trends, collaboration between animation production companies and local community can now be seen at the stage of pre-production. *Anohana* is one such case.

Chichibu city, site of the background locations for *Anohana*, created the Chichibu Anime Tourism Executive Committee in July 2010, a year before the broadcast of *Anohana,* to promote local development through the anime. This committee and Seibu Railway Co. Ltd were involved from the pre-production stage of *Anohana.* The Seibu Railway operates the line that connects Tokyo and Chichibu. Before the anime, tourism of Chichibu was primarily day trips by car by elderly people. The proportion of people using public transport was small. Anime pilgrimage had the potential to increase public transportation use because many younger fans do not have driving licenses. Thus, the Seibu Railway ran an advertising campaign based on *Anohana* – comprising

seven different types of banners ads and video ads at stations in Tokyo and in the trains of Seibu Railway – in April and May 2011 during the broadcast.

Local government in Chichibu also used the anime as a new way of promoting the region. On 3 May, a column called 'Pilgrimage Notes' about *Anohana* was placed in the local information centre newsletter *Hotto supotto Chichibu kan* (Hot Spots in Chichibu) by the city of Chichibu, and on 6 June an exhibition about *Anohana* began at the Ryūsei parking area (Michi no eki ryūsei kaikan). After that, the '*Anohana* in Chichibu' campaign was launched by the Chichibu Anime Tourism Executive Committee, co-sponsored by the city of Chichibu, the Seibu Railway, and Chichibu Railway Co., Ltd.

Contents tourism and traditional culture

One of the features of the contents tourism in *Anohana* is the collaboration with a traditional local festival *(matsuri*). Festivals have traditionally functioned as a way of bringing residents together and forging the unity of the community. In general, therefore, superimposing external elements onto a traditional festival is not easy. The *Ryūsei Matsuri* is a traditional festival that has been held by local residents for more than 400 years. Therefore, it is highly significant that elements of *Anohana* have been added to the festival. This inclusion of the anime was made possible by a number of factors: first, Chichibu is the hometown of Okada Mari, who wrote the script for *Anohana*; and second, the local municipality had made great efforts to collaborate with the anime production company. Interestingly, the local residents who organise the festival were positive about collaborating with the anime. For example, the Yoshida *Ryūsei* Preservation Society, which comprises 27 *ryūsei* preservation groups, created a *mikoshi* (portable Shinto shrine) for Menma, the heroine of *Anohana*, and started a blog about the anime.

These efforts were considered to be helpful for the preservation of tradition. Financial support is required to organise the festival and there was a campaign to collect donations to the event from anime fans in 2012. As a result, 255 fans donated an average of ¥2,000 (around $20) each and the fans' *ryūsei* rocket was launched. In addition to financial support, creating new fans and sponsors of the festival is also important for conserving and passing on the culture of *ryūsei*, and collaboration with the anime is highly effective as a means of promoting the festival.

In return, the community came to respect the value of the animation for the local community. At the *Ryūsei Matsuri,* Yamato Takeru, the god (*kami*) of Muku Shrine is worshipped. For anime fans, the character of Menma is a kind of 'pseudo goddess'. Thus, Menma's wish to launch a rocket in the story of *Anohana* is similar to the wish of the shrine's *kami*. This is probably a reason why the local community respects anime fans' feelings for Menma. Against this background, and in contrast to more usual traditional festivals, there was collaboration between the *Ryūsei Matsuri* and *Anohana* from 2011-2013. There were posters advertising the event that featured the characters of *Anohana*, voice actors did the countdown at the launch of the *Anohana Ryūsei*, and the offering of the *Anohana* rocket to the *kami* by the anime production company. It is unclear what the long-term future involvement of the anime production will be because there have been no new series of *Anohana* since 2013. However, the Yoshida *Ryūsei* preservation society announced the launch of the Anohana rocket in 2014 and made a call for donations on their blog in July 2014.

Discussion

The launch of the *Anohana* rocket at the festival in 2013 failed. However, this did not particularly matter because the overall success rate for the launch of *ryūsei* rockets is less than fifty per cent.

What was more important was that residents and participants in the festival enjoyed the atmosphere more than the success of the rocket.

The aim of the organisers and each preservation group is to inherit the tradition through participation in the festival. The aim of anime fans is to deepen their own connections with *Anohana* while watching the launch of *Anohana Ryūsei.* The aims of both groups can be realised through the *Ryūsei Matsuri* in the collaboration of contents tourism and tradition.

But, ultimately anime is fiction. The feelings of fans who like a character in an anime and those of residents performing a ritual with hundreds of years of history are totally different, and the *mikoshi* (portable shrine) of the gods at Muku Shrine and the Menma *mikoshi* cannot be considered on the same level. All that can be said is that both are united in preserving something that people think have value, whether traditional or fictional.

Figure 2: A rocket is launched (13 October 2013, Author's Photo)

The attitude of residents towards fans is positive for now. How fans will be involved in the local community, and what community—fan connections will be created in the future is unknown. But, the *Ryūsei Matsuri* is an important example for considering the ongoing relationship between traditional festivals and contents tourism.

References

Okamoto, T., 2015. Otaku Tourism and the Anime Pilgrimage Phenomenon in Japan. *Japan Forum* 27 (1). Published online: 11 December 2014. Available from: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09555803.2014.962565 [Accessed 22 December 2014].

Seaton, P. and Yamamura, T., 2015. Japanese popular culture and contents tourism. *Japan Forum* 27 (1). Published online: 15 December 2014. Available from: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09555803.2014.962568 [Accessed 22 December 2014].

Yamamura, T., 2015. Contents tourism and local community response: Lucky Star and collaborative anime-induced tourism in Washimiya. *Japan Forum,* 27 (1). Published online: 11 December 2014. Available from: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09555803.2014.962567 [Accessed 22 December 2014].

Kyungjae Jang, Ph.D., is a research fellow in the Office of International Affairs, Hokkaido University. His research area is the authenticity of tourism spaces with a focus on contents tourism and indigenous tourism.

ジャンギョンゼ　北海道大学国際本部学術研究員。博士（観光学）。専門はオーセンティシティ論。如何なる要素が観光空間のオーセンティシティの形成に影響を与えるのかについて、コンテンツ・ツーリズム、先住民族ツーリズムなどの事例を通じて、理論的・実証的研究を行っている。