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Author(s)	Sabre, Clothilde
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French Anime and Manga Fans in Japan: Pop culture tourism, media pilgrimage, imaginary

Clothilde Sabre

Abstract: Japanese pop culture, particularly anime and manga, have been an important part of the French cultural scene since the 1980s. French fans have created communities that share references about this pop culture and more generally about Japan. This specific imaginary drives some fans to travel to Japan to discover the actual places which appear in their favourite manga/anime. Focusing on the travel experiences of French tourists, this article introduces the notion of media pilgrimage as a useful way of conceiving such behaviour. Taking an anthropology of tourism approach, the article details the processes that guide the tourist experience on trips induced by media-contents-related imaginaries. This clarifies the connections between media-related images, perceptions of Japan as a tourist destination, and the concrete activities of foreign tourists during their stay. The article also identifies a gap between the Japanese perception of Western tourists, as indicated by the 'Cool Japan' campaign, and the tourist experiences of French visitors. Places chosen as sites for media pilgrimage by French fans are heavily influenced by the ways in which the Japanese contents were first viewed and consumed in France, but there is little evidence of awareness of this in Japanese promotional materials aimed at French tourists.

アブストラクト：日本のポップカルチャー、とりわけアニメやマンガは、1980年代より、フランスの文化シーンの重要なパートのひとつであり続けている。フランスでは、日本のポップカルチャーおよび、より一般的な日本についての情報をシェアするファン・コミュニティが構築されてきた。こうした具体的なイマジナリーが、彼ら・彼女らの多くを日本に赴かせ、好きなマンガやアニメに登場する実際の場所への訪問を生んでいる。本稿では、フランス人旅行者の旅行経験に注目することを通して、「メディア巡礼」という概念が、こうした行為を考えるうえで有効であることを示す。そして、観光人類学的アプローチにより、メディアコンテンツに関連するイマジナリーが旅行者経験をどう誘発するのか、そのプロセスを詳細に記述する。そのうえで、メディアに関連するイメージ、旅行目的地としての日本に対する認識、外国人旅行者の日本滞在中の具体的活動、といった事柄間のつながりについて明らかにする。また本稿では、クールジャパンキャンペーンに示されているような、外国人旅行者に対する日本人の認識と、フランス人訪日旅行者の旅行経験との間のギャップについても明らかにする。現在のフランス人旅行者のメディア巡礼地選定に際しては、フランスにおける過去のある時期の、日本のコンテンツの消費形態が大きく影響している。しかし、こうした点は、日本の対フランスプロモーション素材を見る限り、日本側はほとんど認識をしていないように思われる。

Keywords: fans, tourism imaginary, pop culture tourism, media pilgrimage, interculturality.

Introduction

August 2008, Akihabara, Tokyo: Near the train station, a group of French tourists is posing for a photo with a young Japanese woman. She is dressed in a maid costume and has just spent two hours guiding the group around Akihabara and presenting the essentials of 'otaku culture': Japanese subculture primarily related to manga, anime, video games and idol music. This is one of the many tours I have joined as an ethnographer studying the connections between the success of Japanese pop culture in France and the trips of French fans in Japan, initially as a participant observer and later as a guide.

This research began when I joined a French manga-themed package tour in July 2007 organised by the travel agency Autrement le Japon and the French manga publishing house Pika. We went to Comiket (Comic Market, the biggest manga convention in Japan, which is held twice a year in Tokyo), on walks in Akihabara, on a visit of the Ghibli Museum and, as an 'exclusive experience', on a guided visit into the building of the Kodansha publishing house, which publishes some of the leading manga magazines such as *Shūkan Shōnen Magajin*. Later, I joined other groups of tourists and also had the experience of being the guide, leading tours to Akihabara for French tourists and creating the programme of package tours dedicated to manga.

Figure 1: Chūō dōri, the main street in Akihabara

These trips allowed me to collect data about what may be called pop culture tourism or 'contents tourism' (Seaton and Yamamura 2014). In this article I develop the analysis of this phenomenon through the specific case of French fans of manga and anime travelling to Japan. There have been various studies of contents tourism (Okamoto 2014; Seaton 2014; Sugawa-Shimada 2014; Yamamura 2014), but the focus was on Japanese fans visiting Japanese sites. To study international contents tourism, we need to consider the intercultural dimension of the diffusion and reception of contents because the ways that fans (and general audiences as well) appropriate the contents through the prism of their own cultural background play a large part in their tourist experience.

Indeed, France, where Japanese pop culture is very popular, provides a case of diffusion with a distinctive context and implications for the way French fans picture and visit Japan.[1]

I will examine contents tourism by French fans as a 'media pilgrimage', and I will make the link with the anthropology of tourism through analysis that connects imaginaries and pilgrimage to travel (Amirou 1995; Graburn 1983). The notion of media pilgrimage is useful for describing the behaviour of people who are attracted to Japan by an imaginary based on their affinity and love for its pop culture. Nick Couldry has defined media pilgrimage as 'specific journeys to points with significance in media narratives' (Couldry 2005, p. 72). Couldry bases his arguments on fieldwork conducted on the set of the long-running British soap opera *Coronation Street* and he argues that visiting a place strongly linked to media images is a way of connecting media experiences to concrete ones. Consequently, I will introduce the French fans' community and their common imaginary of Japan in order to present and analyse the activities and feelings of fans when they visit Japan as tourists.

This endeavour requires critical reevaluation of the 'Cool Japan' strategy, a nation-branding campaign through the active promotion of cultural industries and contents (see Daliot-Buhl 2009; Valaskivi 2013). The Cool Japan strategy has been built on the idea that soft power emanates from the success of Japanese contents abroad and was inspired by Douglas McGray's 2002 article 'Japan's Gross National Cool'. After this article was published, the idea of a 'national cool' emerged and was taken up by the Japanese authorities and other organisations (like public broadcaster NHK) to promote Japan internationally.

Cool Japan has been vigorously debated by academics, who question its impact and the way it distorts or simplifies the many aspects of Japanese pop culture and presents an artificial image that has nothing to do with actual practices of Japanese fans (see Daliot-Bul 2009; Galbraith 2010; Iwabuchi 2010; Miller 2011; Valaskivi 2013). Cool Japan has enhanced the status of Japanese pop culture from 'low culture' to a kind of national art and testament to the cultural creativity of Japan. It 'legitimises' pop culture in order to take advantage of the alleged soft power it generates. Analysis of this policy has questioned its effectiveness from the basic observation that 'official cool' is not 'fan cool', so ultimately the branding process manipulates and transforms the real practices of fandoms.

In this article, I examine Cool Japan from an outside perspective and consider how French fans and tourists are integrated into this promotion. Fieldwork among French fans shows that there is a considerable gap between contents tourism as conceived and promoted officially, and the references of the fans visiting Japan. Looking at this gap provides a means to understand the intercultural appropriation of foreign audiences, and therefore to show that the tourism imaginaries of French tourists, if related to contents, are more influenced by the fandom's local appropriation of the contents than by any official promotion.

Ethnographical methodology

The local promotion of Japanese contents will be discussed later, but our starting point is understanding how French fans are attracted to Japan through these contents and how they choose specific places as sites of media pilgrimage. The research is based on fieldwork conducted in France and Japan among fans of Japanese pop culture and tourists.

Participant observation was the main method of data collection, particularly during trips I joined with French tourists. These trips were intense periods of fieldwork, which included sharing the activities of tourists and talking about their feelings. I joined 'manga package tours'[2] as a tourist

(August 2007) and as a guide (August 2009, December 2013, July-August 2015), and joined groups of tourists who were spending one month in Tokyo (July-August 2008, July 2014). Data was collected through participant observation, interviews and questionnaires.[3] This research grew out of a hypothesis that there was a connection between the massive success of Japanese pop culture in France (see Ratier 2011) and the rise in French tourists in Japan. The number of French tourists grew from 85,179 in 2003 to 214,228 in 2015, a steep upward trend only interrupted by the 2008 financial crisis and tsunami of March 2011. The creation of a package tour dedicated to manga culture seemed to epitomise the connection and provided an opportunity to investigate the link between French fans of manga and French tourists in Japan.[4]

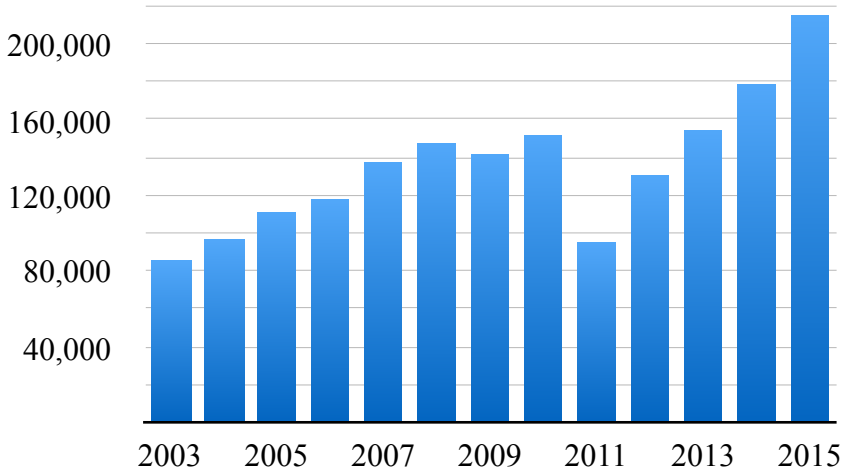

Figure 2: French Visitors to Japan, 2003-2015
Source: Japan National Tourism Organization (2016)

The tours were organised by Autrement Le Japon ('Japan differently', hereafter ALJ). ALJ is not a travel agency in the common meaning of the term and its position in the French tourism market is unique because it is the only travel agency in France offering these kind of 'manga tours'. This tiny company was founded in 2002 by a French-Japanese couple who are passionate about Japan and know the manga industry well. The company has no office in France and operates almost exclusively over the Internet (www.autrementlejapon.com). ALJ runs an online newsgroup and since 2011 a Facebook page where former and future travellers can communicate freely to showcase ALJ and maintain the ALJ community. ALJ built its reputation by attracting young French people who want to visit Japan and are passionate about its pop culture (particularly manga, anime, video games and music). A feeling of community is a characteristic of ALJ and is evident in the participation of 'ALJistes' (as the travellers call themselves) in the newsgroup and Facebook page. Moreover, long-term observation of the newsgroup suggests that there is a strong bond with Japanese contents. Therefore, ALJ and its online community constitute a valuable case study of pop culture tourism in Japan.

The French context: creating the conditions for media pilgrimage

Before examining further the attitude of French fans and tourists in Japan, it is necessary to outline the reception of Japanese pop culture in France. This context demonstrates how fans discover the Japanese contents they like and how the contents drive pop culture tourism.

The worldwide success of Japanese pop culture dates to the 1990s, in particular the massive hit Pocket Monsters (Pokémon) (McGray 2002; Tobin 2004). However, the popularity of Japanese pop culture in France has a longer history. Japanese animation was first broadcast on French television in 1972 (*Jungle Emperor*, translated as *le roi Leo*) and was occasionally offered to young audiences until the mid-1980s. After that, changes in the television sector encouraged broadcasters to air mainly Japanese animation because of its low price and the huge choice of different titles. Many famous series were shown, including *Dragon Ball*, *City Hunter*, *Ranma 1/2* and *Sailor Moon*. The series were enjoyed by children, but were harshly criticised by some adults who denounced the violence, mediocrity, silliness, eroticism and general 'harmfulness' of the programmes. Everything was 'westernised' and translated to resonate with its young audience, but mistrust of foreign contents, some tasteless programme choices by broadcasters and sub-standard translations precipitated moral panic regarding manga imports for many years (Sabre 2012).

Despite these difficult beginnings, the seeds had been sown for the success of Japanese pop culture in France. Manga followed on from anime's lead during the 1990s and became a huge part of the comics sector. In recent years the annual records compiled by the French journalists' association ACBD have indicated that translated manga now comprises about forty per cent of the French comic market. Today, manga and anime are an established part of the French cultural scene. Not everybody is interested in them, but manga and anime have a large fan base. Many events are organised, such as Japan Expo, which is the world's biggest anime and manga convention outside Japan (Silverman 2012). Japan Expo attracts more and more visitors every year and had 247,473 attendees in 2015 (Chao 2015). Japanese pop culture, therefore, has become an established part of the French cultural landscape. There is large media coverage for some artists, including Miyazaki Hayao, Kitano Takeshi and Taniguchi Jirō. The French public is still divided between lovers and detractors. An exhibition of artworks by Murakami Takeshi at the Palace of Versailles in 2010, for example, was denounced with a petition against the exhibition named 'No to manga. Against degrading exhibitions in Versailles Castle' (Libération, 2010). But the fans are a strong community of people who share a common past. A large number of anime series were broadcast from 1986 to 1997, when Japanese animation then disappeared from television screens until it came back with Pokémon. Nowadays, animation is mainly on specialist channels – although massive hits like *Naruto* were broadcast on public television - but all fans in their twenties to forties remember the heyday of Japanese animation with nostalgia. The main show which broadcast anime was called *Club Dorothée* and the expression 'Club Dorothée generation' is commonly used by individuals and the media to refer to the generation that grew up with Japanese animation and to explain why Japanese pop culture is now so popular in France.

Speaking with both fans and those not interested in Japanese contents, the reaction is always the same: 'these are the cartoons of our childhood!' The difference between fans and non-fans lies in the levels of knowledge developed by fans (for example, Japanese titles, differences between the original and the French version) and how it is applied to their activities, but for all in this generation, Japanese animation is strongly associated with childhood. They feel nostalgia for this period, as is regularly acknowledged by merchandising that targets this specific feeling of nostalgia for childhood through the contents which were popular at that time. Some TV shows also tap into the nostalgia, for example, *Génération Club Dorothée l'incroyable histoire d'une émission culte* (broadcast on 16 December 2014 on French channel D8), which was watched by more than one million viewers (Murgue 2014). Moreover, recent fieldwork with younger fans (teenagers and people in their early twenties) shows that even those who were too young to watch these programmes are also sharing these references and the idea that this period is part of the history of manga and animation in France.

The fandom and its common references

The fandom, as a gathering of people passionate about the same thing, can be considered as an 'imagined community' in the sense that Benedict Anderson (1983, p. 224) gave to the term: namely, the members do not know each other directly, but they know that they exist and share the same ideas, tastes and references. As Henry Jenkins has shown in *Textual Poachers*, fans constantly come back to the contents they enjoyed, and they select some elements which become the 'community's particular interpretative conventions' (Jenkins 1992, p. 89). By doing so, fans elaborate common understandings and judgments about the contents they love, and they share common references that are available to every member of the community. These include details regarding the contents (such as narratives, characters and sets), judgments about the origins and production of the work, and interpretation and discussion about the meanings (explicit or implicit) of the work. Moreover, these references serve as the basis for both collective and individual appropriation of the works: fans elaborate their own universes filled with all the details that circulate within the community and create their own personal imaginary worlds built on collective references. This process spans both the collective and individual levels and shows how being a fan consists of both feeling that one is a member of a specific community and also owning a personal and intimate universe drawn from the admired work into which all fans can project their own fantasies. This idea of what I would call 'fantasised Japaneseness' is close to what Susan Napier (2007, p. 11) calls fantasyscapes, defined as 'inherently liminal worlds, temporary alternative lifestyles that exist parallel to the mundane, which people enter and exit when they please.'

Picturing Japan

Napier is describing what Appadurai (1996, p. 25) called 'the work of imagination', the process by which people appropriate cultural (media) elements to create their own representations and, consequently, fantasy worlds. It is through the work of imagination that fans make the link with Japan as a country they like and want to visit. As mentioned above, the shared references are based on the contents admired by fans. Japan becomes presented as the country from which manga, anime, video games and other items come, but also as the cultural context in which the contents are produced. Japan, the nation, therefore, becomes an essential element which gives specificity to the contents the fans enjoy.

This is the key to understanding how French fans picture Japan through its pop culture: they view Japan as a major reference they need to know in order to enjoy the contents properly. All the fans I have met told me that they felt the need to be familiar with Japanese culture and mentality to really understand manga and anime. Furthermore, in that schematic process Japan is also a setting for a fantasyscape and fans feel intimacy with the places and culture with which they are familiar because they see them constantly in the contents they like. The link with a trip to Japan, therefore, becomes clear: once fans have integrated the country into their fantasyscape they have a concrete place to dream about and a place that they can visit to experience it for real.

Another attractive facet of Japan is its exotic appeal. In France, Japan is pictured not only as a distant and different culture, but also as a rich nation which is at the same developmental level as western nations. In that conception, the paradox of tradition and modernity co-existing in Japanese everyday life is the main paradigm which explains the uniqueness of Japan. This is the basis of the exotic structure which frames perceptions of Japan in France and this perspective is part of the

French fans' interest in Japan as they picture the country through the contents they like. Exoticism is understood here in its common meaning, as an interest for what is far, different and picturesque (Sabre 2013).

When dreaming about Japan and going to visit Japan, fans are guided by the specific imaginary composed of elements selected from pop culture, a process that characterises the appropriation of the contents by fans. This imaginary is then shaped by the exotic filter which determines their perception of the country. This exotic aspect plays a large part in the pleasure the fantasyscape can bring. Since fans are constantly immersed in the universe of Japanese pop culture they feel a strong intimacy and familiarity with Japanese culture, even if they have never visited the country. They have a strong longing for Japan, a kind of nostalgic and projective desire that comes from their personal fantasy of Japan and that pushes them to travel and experience the 'real' country.

Longing for Japan through its pop culture

The discussion thus far has sought to explain how fans act as tourists. In tourism, what precedes the trip is as important as the trip itself for comprehending the world views which guide the travel and which give the travel its collective and intimate meanings. This point is illustrated by the voices of travellers who posted comments on the Autrement le Japon newsgroup website.[5] While speaking of what gave them the desire to go to Japan, many clearly identify pop culture as a fundamental reason for their broader interest in Japan. The following comments express clearly the path from an interest in pop culture to a longing for the 'authentic' Japan, with constant cross-references between pop culture contents and everyday life:

> I have to say that I have been attracted to Japan since I was a child, in fact ever since I became interested in anime. Then, I began to gather information on everything about the country: religion, temples, food, and language, but, above all, the lifestyle. Reading manga allowed me to learn a lot about everyday life and Japanese youth (especially high school life, which was the stage my life was at in France at the time). Being young and a dreamer, I was longing for a kind of 'Japanese way of life', if you know what I mean. At that time, I was already thinking of going to Japan, but I was prevented by it being 'too far', 'too expensive', or 'too complicated to organise'. But as much as I love manga and anime, it was no longer enough to know Japan only through these images from the media. I was afraid of being manipulated, of being ignorant, and having a false vision. It is then that I said to myself: 'I should go there to see it for myself.'
>
> (Male, 4 July 2008).

We can see here a good illustration of the process by which an interest in contents leads to interest in the country as a whole. This example is also consistent with comments by tourists made during the participant observation fieldwork I have undertaken. During trips organised by Autrement Le Japon, I observed how the tourists were constantly making the link between pop culture references and what they were experiencing in Japan. Moreover, the majority of these tourists were in the eighteen to thirty-five age range, namely the generation who discovered manga and anime on French TV and who share the same common references about what they used to watch during their childhood.[6]

Media pilgrimage in Japan: French fans becoming travellers

In the first part of this paper, we saw how fans picture Japan through the references from pop culture and how it makes them dream of the country. Now we will follow them to Japan in order to see what happens during their stay when the fantasy meets the concrete experience. Media pilgrimage in Japan can be defined as a trip undertaken because of a tourism imaginary stemming from pop culture references, which are common to the fans and which give them the desire to have concrete experiences of the place. In media pilgrimage, the passage from fantasy to concrete reality occurs during the stay as the fans can anchor their references in material places. The previous imaginary, built by fans through their love for pop culture contents, then acts as a prism, a code that gives orientation and frame to the discovery of Japan. Rachid Amirou (1995) calls tourism a 'quest of meaning', arguing that travel destinations are always chosen based on some pictures, dreamy images and exotic representations. In media pilgrimage, these images are drawn from contents. Consequently, once in Japan the fans are constantly mobilising their specific references in the superimposition of the fantasyscape on their concrete experiences. Once they are in the country they have dreamt of for so long they use their previous images to understand what they actually see and perceive, which gives them a feeling of closeness, or at least of understanding, of the concrete reality they experience. Everything can be spontaneously associated with pop culture references: 'It is *Sailor Moon* everywhere', said one traveller about the ubiquitous schoolgirl uniform; 'I thought that the characters in *Nana* were so thin, but indeed Japanese people are really like that!', stated another; and while seated at the fancy bar of the Tokyo city hall, a young man remarked 'It feels like being in *City Hunter*.'

There are many such examples, although they are actually difficult to isolate precisely: even if the tourists are passionate about pop culture, the majority of them do not experience their trips simply focusing on contents. Long before the actual stay they have elaborated their own and intimate imaginaries of Japan, which are fantasyscapes built on references from contents but also enriched with other elements of Japan and its culture. Consequently, a tourist exclusively concentrating on pop culture would be engaging in a pure form of pop culture tourism, but 'pure pop culture tourism' is inevitably diluted by other general attitudes common to every kind of tourist. Nevertheless, the purer form plays a major part in the way French fans of Japanese pop culture comprehend the reality they discover. It is expressed in the following comments:

> Fiction has met reality, or rather it is reality which has finally met fiction! Here you have passed through the TV screen!
>
> (Female, age 26)

> You build some images [through manga and anime] and then, without clearly noticing it, you have built a whole image of a country. When I first came here the question was always, 'Is it true or not?' I was searching for how much of the inspiration for the manga and anime came from reality and I realised that it was quite large.
>
> (Male, age 30)

> Since arriving, I still have the music of *Spirited Away* in my mind. I feel like I am Chihiro. I am discovering another world, which is both familiar and strange.
>
> (Female, age 25)

Tourism and pilgrimage as extra-ordinary moments

When asked about their feelings during the trip, fans use many hyperbolic expressions like 'dream', 'magical', 'fantastic' and 'wonderful'. This feeling of living a dream can be related to what the anthropologist Victor Turner called the *liminoid* period. Turner has described pilgrimage in traditional and modern societies in terms of a three-step structure and draws a parallel with the rite of passage, which consists of three phases: separation from the society, a moment where the pilgrims are outside the rules of everyday life, and the reintegration of the individuals to the society having been changed by the experience (Turner 1969, p. 1974). The second period, when the usual rules are abolished and members of the group are separated from their everyday life, is qualified as 'liminal' and changed to 'liminoid' when applied to contemporary societies.

Turner's analysis has been incorporated into the anthropology of tourism, for example in the works of Nelson Graburn (1983) and Rachid Amirou (1995), who saw in pilgrimage and leisure travel a 'symbolic and common skeleton, which is the rite of passage' (Amirou 1995, p. 139). All these extra-ordinary events – rites of passage, pilgrimages and trips – are processed in the same way with three temporal stages (before, during and after) and each moment corresponds to a particular phase of the process. A tourist trip follows the same three temporal stages as pilgrimages and rites of passage, but the contents and the meanings of each phase are different; in other words, the structure of the process is similar but not the substance.

Consequently, the religious aspects of pilgrimage can be set aside if the notion is untied from the strict idea of a trip to religious sites, such as temples, shrines and churches. Some studies have developed this conception of 'pilgrimage', such as *Pilgrimage in Popular Culture* (Reader and Walter 1993), which uses the framework of 'pilgrimage' to analyse contemporary interest in specific sites like Graceland for Elvis Presley fans, Glastonbury for those interested in the tale of King Arthur, or the battlefields of the First World War. The notion of 'pilgrimage' here is not directly associated with a religious narrative but with a story which creates the desire to undertake and which gives meaning to the travel.

The idea of a founding myth, a narrative which forms the paradigm of the trip, is also explicitly made in the research of French sociologist Gabriel Segré (2003) about French fans of Elvis Presley travelling to Graceland, Presley's former residence in Tennessee and also the site of his grave. The case described by Segré is strikingly close to media pilgrimage, as it is based on the charismatic character of a famous singer, an archetypal celebrity who is praised and idolised in pop culture contents and media entertainment. Fans express their love for Presley, share a mythical (and official) history about 'the King' and his life, and then participate in certain activities, among which is the pilgrimage to Graceland. Fans have a code, a common imaginary fed by the references spread as myth, and these images are the basis for the intimacy they build with Elvis as they picture him and feel closeness with those images.

These examples mirror the general characteristics of travel by French fans in Japan: trips to places that appeared in contents are motivated by strong imaginaries related to a site that induces strong positive emotions. Going back to the idea of an extra-ordinary experience, we can insist on the importance of the imaginary: previous pictures and fantasies of the fans trigger the trip to Japan but it also give meanings to the activities related to the 'media pilgrimage'. The feeling of 'leaving a dream' can be understood as an emotional expression of the experienced encounter between fantasyscape and concrete reality during the liminoid period.

Figure 3: French tourists posing in front of the Pokémon Center, Tokyo

A mythical fantasy map

Returning to the example of trips to Graceland described by Segré, we can make the link between the narrative and the concrete places: 'The city of Memphis, where Elvis lived, constitutes a sanctified place in fans' eyes' (Segré 2003, p. 207). According to Segré, Graceland and all the places visited by fans are made sacred because they are part of the mythical history of the King: 'the place where "everything began" is presented as sacred by fans. Memphis, Graceland and Tupelo are evoked with a lot of respect and emotion and are given a specific aura, a singular, magical charm because it was where Elvis lived and evolved.' (Segré 2003, p. 199).

In the same way, for fans of Japanese pop culture some specific places are included in the shared narrative references: the hometown of a famous person, the setting of a story, or the place where the contents are produced. When they travel to these sites, fans are guided by their common and previous images and they experience the travel as the connection and superimposition of fantasy with real life. As with Elvis fans in Graceland, all the images they have integrated are mobilised and they operate as a prism or a filter which gives meaning to the visit. As there are multiple references associated with any given place, fans can choose various and different types of sites, depending on the references that feature most prominently in their personal fantasyscapes.

First, shops and places explicitly dedicated to manga culture are the most obvious sites to visit. Places like the Ghibli Museum, Comiket (Comic market) or the Kyoto International Manga Museum exhibit artefacts and give insights into the cultural industries world, while maid cafés epitomise the quintessence of 'otaku culture'. In shops, travellers may want to buy things, but they will also stroll around shops as if they were in a museum. Many even try to take photos (although it is usually forbidden) and make comments about everything they see. In other words, their behaviour mixes the attitudes of being a customer and being a visitor and demonstrates that shops are for them tourist sites that allow physical immersion into their fantasyscape.

Second, areas like Akihabara, Harajuku and Shibuya are incorporated into tour itineraries because they symbolise youth and otaku culture in the eyes of French tourists who want to be immersed into the youth subcultures of Japan.

Third, there are places like Tokyo Tower, the University of Tokyo, and Lumine (a department store in Tokyo). These places have appeared in famous series and it is their roles as locations that make them important for visiting fans. The purpose and meaning of the visit is only significant for those who share the imaginary. For example, Tokyo Tower is significant for the crucial role it plays in the manga released by Clamp, while many fans visit the University of Tokyo because in the hit series *Love Hina* the hero is endlessly trying to be admitted to that prestigious institution. And My City, a department store in Shinjuku, used to be a popular site because it was the mysterious communication point for the detective hero in *City Hunter*, which ran during the 1980s. The store was renamed Lumine in 2006, but French people are always trying to find it. One interviewee also told me that she decided to visit all the 'Kekkai' which appear in *X 1999*, a famous science-fiction manga and anime. 'Kekkai' are sites invested with magical power hidden in Tokyo buildings: Tokyo Tower, the Diet (Japanese parliament), Shinjuku's skyscrapers, Sunshine 60 (a building in Ikebukuro) and Shibuya 109 (a famous building full of fashionable shops for teenagers that appears in numerous manga and anime).

All these otherwise 'ordinary' places become important sites for fans and the deeper meaning of the visit is only shared by them. Moreover, the sites visited are not always explicitly related to pop culture or even to tourism per se. Fans are unifying a territory through the specific prism of their imaginary. They create a fantasy map, composed of highlights which are meaningful only with the comprehension key provided by the fans' knowledge. In the same manner as pilgrimages to Memphis by fans of Elvis, places become sacred sites because of their significance within the myth, the story and interpretations which guide the 'pilgrims' to those specific places. The visit has significance only if it is understood through the prism of the fantasyscape, the imaginary built before the stay.

Cool Japan and the gap between official promotion and fans' media pilgrimage

Consequently, for those who possess the code simple places become important sites and they have a specific aura due to their meanings and connotations within the context of the common narrative of the fandom. As a result, the more important a place is for fans the more likely it is to become a tourist site. But, to be fully recognised tourist sites also need to be officially identified and promoted.

This process by which mundane places are converted into tourist sites can be related to the idea of sacralisation of sites (MacCannell 1976). Sacralisation, like the term media pilgrimage, has explicit religious connotations. Places become sacred because they are of particular spiritual importance for people who share the same references. These sites can be global icons, such as the Eiffel Tower in Paris or the Egyptian pyramids, or significant to a narrower group of passionate people, such as Graceland for Elvis fans. This process of sacralisation in the context of the creation of tourist sights has been described by Dean MacCannell as a process in five stages: the naming phase, framing, elevation, mechanical reproduction and, finally, social reproduction. The place is then 'marked off from similar objects as worthy of preservation', displayed, duplicated on various goods (like postcards), and finally recognised as a special sight, a tourist sight (MacCannell 1976, p. 44).

In pop culture tourism the first stage of sacralisation is the recognition of the location by the fans. But, to be more than anecdotal this recognition has to be made official by actors within the tourism sector. The concrete development of pop culture tourism lies in the dialogue between fan-travellers and local actors. In the case of French fans there is an interspace created by the gap

between the official promotion and the fans' celebration of different places. Not everything matches, as we can see by comparing the experiences of the fans when they visit Japan with the official sacralisation through the label of Cool Japan.

Mapping Cool Japan: local actors' initiatives

Cool Japan is an official (and controversial) campaign that aims to promote Japanese contents and improve the image of Japan based on the international success of Japan's contents industries. The Cool Japan theme has been progressively integrated into the discourses of the main actors of the tourism sector. These include the Japan National Tourism Organization (JNTO) and the Japan Tourism Agency (JTA). These two organisations have complementary roles: JTA (created in 2008) coordinates tourism development, while JNTO is in charge of communication with tourists. Their aim is to attract foreign visitors who like Japanese contents and to give them information about tourist sites. These efforts give visibility to and concretise pop culture tourism.

The focus on Cool Japan is part of a larger investment in tourism. Japan has always tried to increase foreign visitors, but a new era began in 1996 when the entire tourism sector was reorganised. The objective was to welcome ten million people by 2010, a goal finally achieved in 2013. The targets have been regularly renewed: 20 million for the Tokyo Olympics in 2020, and then upgraded to 30 million as the number of foreign visitors exceeded expectations (The Japan Times 6 November 2015). Part of this policy, the Visit Japan campaign, was launched in April 2003 under the slogan 'Yōkoso Japan!' The Cool Japan campaign fits into that broader publicity effort, as described in the 2008 JTA White Paper (Japan Tourism Agency 2008, p. 51). The Yōkoso Japan campaign ended, but Cool Japan is still linked to new efforts to promote tourism (see Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry 2015).

Signs of sacralisation can be found in JNTO websites, where information is provided about sites related to pop culture and contents. The most striking example is the map for 'Pilgrimage to sacred places' (Japan National Tourism Organization n.d.). This combines traditional shrines such as Ise jingu and Izumo taisha with sites directly related to pop culture: locations of dramas and movies (including *If You Are the One* and *Tokyo Love Story*) and places related to manga and anime (including *Lucky Star* and *Crayon Shin-chan*). There is also the 'Japan Anime map', which introduces 'pilgrimage sites' related to famous anime like *Sailor Moon* or *Neon Genesis Evangelion* (Japan National Tourism Organization 2014). We can see here a concrete example of the sacralisation of sites. These maps 'officially' acknowledge the Cool Japan territory.

This reveals a will to promote the kind of pop culture tourism observed among French tourists, even if many sites that are highly regarded by the majority of French fans are not listed by JNTO. Indeed, on JNTO's French-language website, the information is less detailed and more factual. The idea of pilgrimage is evoked in the introduction: 'For all amateurs of anime and manga, Japan is a paradise. Nowadays more and more fans are coming on a "pilgrimage". Here are the places not to miss' (Office National du Tourisme Japonais 2015). However, many places favoured by French tourists are not mentioned, neither are the sites mentioned by the maps in English. The idea of pilgrimage is not associated with many places favoured by fans (such as the University of Tokyo, Tokyo Tower or Lumine department store) and the information delivered to French fans is more a list of shops and museums about manga.

French fans are on their own, therefore, if they want to find places related to their shared references. Of course, some travellers search for information on English-language websites, too, but the list of anime and manga series in English does not cover the references shared by French

tourists. This is where actors like Autrement Le Japon, traveller networks or dedicated websites play their part by spreading knowledge about interesting places. The most famous example of this is Akihabara.

Filling the gap, the Akihabara case

Figure 4: Tourists photo spots in Akihabara

Akihabara is a neighbourhood in downtown Tokyo, formerly known for selling electrical and electronic goods. The area became the place where Japanese fans of manga and animation gathered during the late 1990s and Akihabara became popular as an 'otaku place' during the 2000s. This phenomenon has been nicknamed the 'Akiba Boom' (Galbraith 2009) and it is connected to the success of the book, drama, movie and manga *Densha otoko*, a funny love story which features Akihabara and its otaku culture, like figurine shops and maid cafés (Freedman 2009). As the story grew more popular, Japanese people began to go sightseeing in Akihabara (Galbraith 2009). After the broadcast of the *Densha otoko* drama and the peak of the series' popularity in 2005, tours started to be conducted in Japanese and then in English, too. Some non-Japanese did visit Akihabara before the Akiba boom, but there were no tours, no formal guides and very little information available. By contrast, during my fieldwork in the summer of 2009, there were at least three regular Akihabara tours, one in Japanese and two in English, more or less following the same route and showing the key spots of Akihabara culture: shops specialising in contents-related merchandise in specific fields (such as manga, anime, cosplay, idols and dolls), old shops for electronic goods, *gashapon* (capsule toys), duty-free shops and maid cafés. During more recent fieldwork in Akihabara in 2014-2015, the number of tours on offer was more or less the same, only run by different companies.

By creating a common route for tourists to see Akihabara culture, these tours formalise visits to Akihabara and then fix its image. This image can be used by foreign travellers to inject 'reality' (namely the concrete experience of 'being there') into their own fantasyscape. Moreover, the area has changed a lot in recent years. New buildings have been built while others were closed

and renewed. Galbraith writes: 'today, the area is being redeveloped into a tourist destination and a showcase of cool Japan' (2009, p. 17). This achieves touristification (defined as 'the process by which a tourist space is built' (Dewailly 2005, p. 31) via the collaborative efforts of various actors who have agreed to develop and enhance the pop-culture-related aspects of Akihabara and to develop them as tourist resources.

But what about the French fans? As the emblematic site of Japanese pop culture, Akihabara is an important reference for them, too, and I followed French tourists visiting Akihabara at various periods from the beginning of the Akiba boom to the summer of 2015. First, we can consider the touristification as a successful on-going process. Many of the places and activities French fans enjoy (like the manga- and anime-related shops, maid cafés, arcade games and cosplay) are located in the area, which is also the setting for many popular manga and anime. Akihabara, therefore, is completely integrated into the media pilgrimage as one of its highlights. But I have also noticed that even if fans have gathered a lot of information about Akihabara, once there they feel lost and find it difficult to access interesting spots without someone to guide them. I met a young man in 2008 who wanted to find the building where the hero of *Densha otoko* went whenever he felt sad, but had no idea how to find it.

This is where the gap lies between Cool Japan tourism development and fans' media pilgrimage: once in Japan, fans do not find the exact images they had in mind; or they feel lost and local tourism initiatives sometimes fail to guide them. As one couple told me in the street of Akihabara, 'It seems to be easier to find information about manga culture in France than here in Japan', meaning that information in French produced by French people was more accessible to them. Actors like ALJ are trying to fill this gap by adapting their services to what the tourists want to see, which means being aware of the references and the related sites that matter for French fans.

Generally speaking, Akihabara can be consider a successful example of touristification through pop culture and contents. But, on closer examination we can see the same gap in Japan National Tourism Organization (JNTO) websites. The media pilgrimage of French fans is based on an interaction between the reception and appropriation of the Japanese contents by a foreign audience and the Japanese initiatives to brand the country through contents and otaku culture, and interstices are left to an intercultural negotiation of what Cool Japan is. As a guide and tour organiser collaborating with Autrement Le Japon, I had to fill this gap myself by creating an itinerary that fits French fans' interests with activities like visiting Azabujūban, an area in Tokyo related to *Sailor Moon* and not officially listed by JNTO. It also meant helping tourists to find the places they wanted to see, like the quest in Shinjuku station to find the typical message board that appeared in *City Hunter* on the request of some travellers. In these ways, media pilgrimage is built on intercultural negotiations between official images from inside Japan, personal and collective appropriations by appropriations by fans from outside Japan, and multiple private initiatives within Japan.

Conclusion

From specific tourism imaginaries to media pilgrimage, the example of French fans travelling in Japan shows the creation of a tourism territory specifically connected to contents and pop culture. Examining this process through the lens of the anthropology of tourism, we can see the importance of the tourism imaginary that gives fans the desire to travel to Japan and shapes media pilgrimage. This connection between media contents and tourism imaginary is the central aspect of contents tourism and the analysis of media pilgrimage between France and Japan gives us details about the process of experiencing a tourist destination relating to media contents. Moreover, the intercultural

perspective informs us about the context of the reception and appropriation of contents-related elements as tourism images and we can see that intercultural appropriation and negotiation are at stake here.

The idea of a 'specific nostalgic picture' of Japan, shared by French tourists who were familiar with Japanese animation on television and inspired by these memories of childhood, is a good example of these specificities. All the French fans share this idea of a golden age of Japanese animation in France and tend to look for the references associated with this period once in Japan. But it is an experience that is also interesting for non-fans, like a French couple I met at the Kyoto International Manga Museum. They were looking for books related to the cartoons broadcast during their childhood. As non-fans they were quite lost as they did not know the Japanese titles, only the westernised ones. These two visitors were not in Japan because of a passion for pop culture, but they shared the same common references with fans, a memory of childhood strongly linked to Japan. In various places, from this manga museum to the streets of Akihabara, I have met lots of French tourists who were non-fans but shared the same images about Japanese pop culture. Many were disappointed as they were not able to find these references through Japanese tourism information on pop culture.

The example of French fans on contents-related trips to Japan reveals that there is often a gap between the sites of media pilgrimage for French tourists and the sites that are presented as pop culture highlights by JNTO. This gap is not anecdotal. France is one of the countries where manga and Japanese animation have been popular for a long time. So, we might expect that the history and references linked to this diffusion would be a basis for the Cool Japan initiative. Instead, we have seen that French fan references are partly ignored, a fact that points to a lack of intercultural consideration in the elaboration of this campaign. It shows that Japanese initiatives are probably not paying attention to the process of intercultural appropriation by foreign fans and tourists, a process that is the basis of their interest in Japan. It may not prevent them visiting Japan, but it is another weakness of the 'Japanese national cool' promotion, not only from an insider perspective but also from a foreign one.

Finally, this particular example of media pilgrimage is helpful for understanding contents tourism, a new field in tourism research in which tourism imaginary is closely related to media and pop culture. This example shows that contents tourism results from a sophisticated process and is related to many issues within the anthropology of tourism and media studies. Pop-culture-related tourism is not limited to fans, who may also be interested in other aspects of Japanese culture, while other non-fan tourists can be also interested in contents tourism and media pilgrimage. My discussions with non-fan travellers in Kyoto and Tokyo have revealed how they consider pop culture and contents as a part of Japanese culture that deserves their attention, even if they are not specifically interested in it. This indicates how contents tourism fits into the broader visions and motivations of French tourists on visits to Japan. So, it appears that media pilgrimage is a pure form touristic behaviour subsumed within a larger and more complicated conception of the trip. Fans are the most obvious tourists undertaking media pilgrimage, but this does not mean that other visitors will completely exclude pop culture tourism aspects from their trip. Contents tourism is not only for fans. It deserves to be treated not only as a specialist activity and more as part of general tourist behaviour.

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Notes

[1] There is various evidence for the popularity of Japanese culture in France. For example, since 2005 it has often been said that France is the second market for manga after Japan. Precise numbers are difficult to find but this is regularly repeated in French media, for example in a special radio report from France Culture (2014). Due to the popularity of manga, Japanese has been the second most common language translated into French after English since 2008 (Manganews 2008; Damasco 2015).

[2] These trips are exclusive to Autrement le Japon, in collaboration with the French manga publishing house Pika. They include the exclusive visit to Japanese publishing house Kodansha.

[3] Participant observation was the main ethnographical method used during every period of fieldwork. Recorded interviews were made during the summer of 2008, and questionnaires were collected during the summer of 2009 (research stay at the Kyoto International Manga Museum) and in December 2013, April 2014 and August 2014 (fieldwork in Akihabara).

[4] This qualitative research does not aim to prove the connection between the success of manga and the rise in numbers of French tourists in Japan. Nevertheless, the popularity of Japanese pop culture in France is an important context for understanding interest in Japan as a tourist destination among French people.

[5] Messages were collected from various sections of the newsgroup website: a) in the section dedicated to specific trips, including the two I joined: The manga package tour (July 2007) and Staying one month in Tokyo (summer 2008); b) in a section where members introduce themselves to the community (two topics called ‘Espace de presentation pour les nouveaux membres!’and ‘Petite fiche pour mieux se connaître et délirer’); and c) in a section created by the author in the spring of 2008 to ask explicitly the motivations of travellers, ‘Vos motivations pour cet été?’, which was included in the section dedicated to the trips during the summer of 2008. Comments are from travellers who were on trips I surveyed and who I met during the fieldwork. Quotations are abridged but exemplify the general discourse. All quotes are translated from French by the author.

[6] I am referring here to the trips made from 2007 to 2009; the youngest tourists I met in 2013-2015 were too young to be part of the Génération Club Dorothée, although it is important to stress that they knew the reference and the anime series from this period.

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Clothilde Sabre is a JSPS postdoctoral fellow in the Center for Advanced Tourism Studies, Hokkaido University. She holds a PhD in Anthropology and Ethnology from the University of Lille 1, France, and a degree in Media Studies. Her main research themes are anthropology of tourism, contents tourism, imaginary, exoticism and representation, and popular/fan culture. She has been conducting ethnography among French fans and tourists for many years. Her previous research focused on the connection between the success of Japanese pop culture in France and tourism in Japan, and she has published academic articles and book chapters on this topic in French and in English. Her current research focuses on the development of Hokkaido through contents tourism.

Clothilde Sabre（博士、文化人類学）。北海道大学観光学高等研究センター JSPS外国人特別研究員。リール第一大学（フランス）にてPhD（文化人類学）を取得。専門分野は観光人類学、コンテンツツーリズム、イマジナリー、エキゾチシズムと表象、ポピュラーカルチャーとファン文化。長年、フランス人を対象としたファンやツーリストのエスノグラフィー調査に従事。フランスにおける日本のポピュラーカルチャーの普及とフランス人の訪日旅行との関係性について、フランス語、英語の学術論文、学術書の章を発表している。現在は、コンテンツツーリズムを通した北海道の振興に関する研究も展開中。

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).