

14 Theatre (contents) tourism and war as a backdrop to romance

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Wars and natural disasters are often used as story backdrops because of their dramatic moments and the opportunities for *deus ex machina* plot twists, especially in romance stories. Often in contents tourism, the more that readers/audiences are moved by dramatic stories, the more they are motivated to visit related locations. This chapter examines two instances of war as a backdrop for romance stories that have triggered theatre (contents) tourism. Theatre going can often be considered to be tourism, especially when a theatre district forms a key part of a destination's appeal (such as Broadway or London's West End), or when fans travel long distances and stay overnight to attend performances. The two case studies in this chapter are of stage productions that form part of transmedia franchises, making theatre tourism contents tourism. Theatre tourism among young people in Japan is often induced by stage adaptations of narrative worlds originating in manga, anime, and videogames (Sugawa-Shimada 2020: 128).

The first example is *Samurai X (Rurouni Kenshin: Meiji swordsman romantic story)*. *Samurai X* was a manga for boys by Watsuki Nobuhiro serialized from 1994 to 1999 in *Weekly Shōnen Jump*, although it was also quite popular among women (Watsuki 1994). The story takes place in Tokyo in 1878. Himura Kenshin, a wanderer (*rurouni*), meets a cute girl, Kamiya Kaoru. She has taken over Kamiya kendo school in Tokyo after her parents' death. Kenshin's old nickname is Assassin Battōsai (lit. 'master of drawing a sword'). He killed a number of samurais loyal to the Tokugawa shogunate during the Bakumatsu period (1853–1868) and Boshin War (1868–1869), but he has taken an oath not to kill anybody since the Meiji Restoration.

Some actual events and historical figures are used in the story. For instance, Saitō Hajime, an actual ex-Shinsengumi member, is a life-long rival of Kenshin; and a fictional character, Sagara Sanosuke, who

becomes Kenshin's friend, is an ex-Sekihō Army member.¹ Sagara Sōzō, the leader of the Sekihō Army, who in actual history was executed by the Meiji government, is Sanosuke's mentor. By using the battles of the Bakumatsu period and the Boshin War as backdrops, the story depicts how Kenshin atones for his past deeds and is saved psychologically by Kaoru's dedication to him and through his romance with her.

Samurai X was adapted into a TV anime (1996–1998), anime film (1997), original anime videos (1999–2012), live-action films (2012–2021), and musicals (2016; 2018). The live-action films featured a popular young actor, Satō Takeru, as Kenshin. This prompted both domestic and international fans to do film-location tourism in Shiga, Kyoto, Nara, Shizuoka, and Tochigi prefectures. The official website of the final two films, *Rurouni Kenshin The Final/The Beginning*, has a film-location map which covers over 43 location sites in 12 prefectures (Warner Brothers 2021).

Samurai X also induced theatre tourism. The 2016 musical, *Roman katsugeki Rurouni Kenshin*, was directed by Koike Shuichiro of the Takarazuka Revue² and staged at the Takarazuka theatres in Hyogo prefecture and Tokyo. Koike's 2018 version was produced by Shochiku and Umeda Art Theatre, and was performed at Shinbashi Enbujo Theatre in Tokyo and Osaka Shochikuza Theatre. Both musicals cast the same actress, Sagiri Seina, as Kenshin, although other roles were played by different actors. Whereas fans of Takarazuka tend to be female, the audience for Shochiku's 2018 version was demographically varied. Some were fans of the manga and anime *Samurai X*, some were Sagiri Seina fans, and some were fans of Kamishiraishi Moka, an up-and-coming actress who played the role of Kaoru.

Watching this play at the theatre in 2018, it was notable how the production focused on how human drama and romance were influenced by battles in the Bakumatsu period and Boshin War, rather than focusing on action scenes. For instance, Kenshin rescues Kaoru after she is kidnapped by Kanō Sōzaburō, a fictional ex-Shinsengumi member who does not appear in the original manga. Kaoru stops a furious Kenshin from trying to kill Kanō, which ultimately leads to Kenshin feeling even more affection towards her. Here conflict and the introduction of a new character for the stage adaptation were used primarily to intensify the love story. While fans have many reasons to visit theatres, in this case, theatre (contents) tourism appears to be about consuming a romantic story rather than a war-related story. Even so, the wartime backdrop clearly gives tourism linked to the productions an element of war-related contents tourism.

Another example is *Here Comes Miss Modern* (*Haikara-san ga tōru*), Yamato Waki's comics for girls (1975–1977). The term *haikara-san* (a person wearing a high collar) was coined in late nineteenth-century Japan to refer to a liberal-minded person strongly affected by Western culture. It was often used sarcastically by those who favoured Japanese traditional culture. *Here Comes Miss Modern* was adapted into a TV anime (1978–1979), TV dramas (1985; 2002), a live-action film (1987), theatrical plays (1978; 1980; 1991; 1995), anime films (2017; 2018), and a musical by the Takarazuka Revue (2017; rerun in 2020).

The Taisho period (1912–1926) is associated with the liberal movement, Taisho democracy, and the romanticism art movement (*Taishō roman*). This resonated with the women's liberation movement in the 1970s when the manga *Here Comes Miss Modern* was serialized in the girls' manga magazine *Weekly Shōjo Friend*. Many liberal young female readers admired Benio, who is a strong, thoughtful, and independent girl. She works as a journalist and marries an *ikemen* (hunk) with half-Western roots. However, the Taisho period is also when Imperial Japan expanded its military presence into Russia (Siberia) and China after victory in the 1904–1905 Russo-Japanese War. The plot of *Here Comes Miss Modern* deftly utilizes these sociocultural and political upheavals to dramatize the separation and miraculous reunion of Benio and Shinobu.

The anime films were released in two parts: the first was released in 2017 and covered the story from Benio's encounter with Shinobu to her arrival in Manchuria; the second part was released the following year and covered from Benio's time in Manchuria to the happy ending. The films tied up with Butai Meguri ('visiting the stage'), a Sony smartphone app utilizing GPS to indicate the locations of *Here Comes Miss Modern*. This app prompts fans to visit 'sacred sites' in Tokyo, Yokohama, and Fukuoka. Interestingly, it also pins several 'tie-up' places that collaborated with the movies on the map, such as Japan Taisho Village (JTV, an attraction in Gifu prefecture that has preserved buildings built in the Taisho period, Figure 14.1) and Taisho Roman Dream Street in Kawagoe city, Saitama prefecture. Although they have nothing to do with the story, they were chosen as places where fans/audiences can feel the atmosphere of the Taisho period.

JTV ran a collaborative campaign called 'Taisho Roman de kyun' (literally 'heart-strings tugged by Taisho Romanticism') with the film *Here Comes Miss Modern* from September to December in 2017. Visitors could wander around JTV in a rental kimono with blue and white arrow-feather patterns and *hakama* trousers like those worn by Benio (Yoshioka 2017). Although Shinobu wore a Japanese Imperial Army uniform



Figure 14.1 Taisho Romankan hall, Japan Taisho Village. © PhotoAC/HiC

in the campaign poster and cardboard cutouts displayed around JTV, Shinobu's uniform was not for rent. Neither Japan's role in the Siberian Intervention nor the Russo-Japanese War were described in the *Here Comes Miss Modern* exhibition in the JTV museum, which avoided any connections to Japan's wars in the story. Instead, JTV targeted women who identify with Benio and enjoy the atmosphere of Taisho Roman that JTV provides.

The 1923 Great Kanto Earthquake also had a pivotal role in the plot. Approximately 69,000 people died or were missing in Tokyo alone (Disaster Management 2006: 114). The number of Korean and Chinese residents killed by Japanese mobs in the earthquake's aftermath is reported to be in the thousands. However, the musical avoids such negative incidents. The earthquake is rather divine intervention, leading Shinobu to find Benio in a collapsed church which is on fire due to the earthquake. The earthquake, like the history of the Siberian Intervention, is used as a device to enhance dramatic moments in the romance between Shinobu and Benio.

While the plots, wars, periods, and themes of the works vary, both narrative worlds have in common the plot device of wars and battles being used as backdrops to emphasize the protagonists' hardships.

Furthermore, the extreme circumstances of war help the lovers to come together in the end. Both *Samurai X* and *Here Comes Miss Modern* are successful transmedia franchises that have included theatrical adaptations, and have therefore induced theatre contents tourism. The plays are somewhat different, however, from Kuramoto Sō's *Kikoku* (Chapter 15), which focuses directly on war themes (rather than having war as a backdrop). The two case studies in this chapter are also distinguishable on a narrative level from the yōkai stories in Chapter 21. In Mizuki Shigeru's manga, war is always in the background, but in a metaphorical and unspoken way rather than as an explicit backdrop to the plot. The various examples indicate how wars exist on a sliding scale from 'centre stage', to 'backdrop', to 'behind the scenes' in the narrative worlds of war-related popular culture, and therefore war-related tourism, too.

Notes

- 1 Sekihō Army was a group of political extremists formed during Boshin War with the support of Saigō Takamori and Iwakura Tomomi of the new Meiji government.
- 2 The Takarazuka Revue is a women-only theatrical troupe founded in 1914. It has its own theatres in Takarazuka city, Hyogo, and Tokyo.

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