

## 16 The sense of belonging created by *In This Corner of the World*

*Luli van der Does*

The commercial and artistic success of the 2016 animation film *Kono sekai no katasumi ni (In This Corner of the World)* directed by Katabuchi Sunao was an unexpected boon for tourism in the cities of Kure and Hiroshima, where the film's story was set. Tourists and fans of the film make sacred site pilgrimages to locations in the story. Furthermore, according to fans and tourists, the film gives you an *ibasho*, or a place where you belong. This chapter discusses the sense of *ibasho* as a powerful form of motivation in contents tourism.

In the tourist imagination, Kure is a navy port city, and Hiroshima is the atomic-bombed peace city. Despite being only about 40 minutes apart by train, tourists rarely visit both cities, partly because their contrasting images of 'military' and 'peace' differentiate the motivations of tourists. This, however, gives a false impression of separation. Both communities were built around the military (Hiroshima was an important army base), and they were closely linked politically, socio-economically, and by population movements between them. In *In This Corner of the World*, Suzu, the daughter of a seaweed farmer in Hiroshima, marries Shūsaku, a clerical officer at the Kure Naval Base. The film depicts Suzu's life for 12 years from her childhood in Hiroshima to her married life in wartime Kure, and ends with her adopting a girl in the ruins of Hiroshima. Thus, Suzu's life links these two cities.

In Kure, fans of Suzu (known also as KonoSeka Walkers) follow in her trail from the bayside, past the Sawahara family's house with its famous triple warehouses (known as Mitsukura), up to her home high on the slopes of Haigamine Hill. Another popular route leads to the downtown areas and Asahi-machi, a former red-light district that Suzu mistakenly wanders into and where she first meets Lin, a courtesan and former lover of Shūsaku. Then the trail continues to the Nikō park, where Suzu happens on Lin again viewing cherry blossoms. Before Lin disappears in an air raid, she leaves Suzu a message of encouragement: 'You won't lose

your place in this world [*ibasho*] that easily'. These words echo at crucial moments of Suzu's life thereafter, and fans repeat this phrase at their 'sacred' spots.

The film also depicts Suzu living with death next door. She meets Teru, Lin's colleague, who is dying from pneumonia that she contracted after a failed suicide attempt. Sons of the neighbourhood are sent to the frontline one by one. Mothers on the home front keep their families going with meagre rations under frequent air raids. Suzu herself loses her right hand and her little niece, Harumi, during an air raid. On 6 August, Suzu, her family and friends witness an ominous pillar of cloud rising beyond the hills over Hiroshima. The atomic bomb killed tens of thousands, including Suzu's family. For ordinary people, the war ended abruptly with the emperor's radio address on 15 August. It left Suzu feeling betrayed as she thought of all the losses and sacrifices in vain. She goes to Hiroshima looking for her family, and in the barren landscape she meets Shūsaku, who has just been discharged from military duties. In the last scene, they meet a girl orphaned by the atomic bomb, and they bring her with them to her new home.

### **Creating authenticity**

The film is based on the original manga of the same title by Kouno Fumiyo. Born in Hiroshima, Kouno has met many bomb survivors, some of whose life stories were reflected in the narrative of *In This Corner of the World*. Kouno is meticulous in her research. In the manga, fans can learn about the geography of Hiroshima and Kure, street names, wartime recipes and popular songs, the contents of rations, air-raid drills run by the *tonarigumi* (neighbourhood mutual-aid association), and what children did at school. Kouno checked, for example, the records of the day when the warship *Yamato* arrived back in Kure, which was 17 April 1944. Survivors of the war appreciated the accuracy of her depictions. Younger fans enjoy historical details that feel authentic. Fans have found her work reliable and informative, which inspired fans to dig even deeper into the world of Suzu and ordinary people's lives during the war.

When turning the static, two-dimensional visuals of the manga into a moving image, Katabuchi, like Kouno, sought authenticity (see also Chapter 17). He consulted testimonies of the local community (Nakagawa 2010) and met former residents of the Nakajima District, where the Peace Memorial Park is now. He took detailed notes of local culture and the town's atmosphere and visited archives and museums. He also consulted Moritomi Shigeo, an amateur artist who had

published a book of testimonies and pencil drawings of Hiroshima during his childhood (Moritomi 2020). The bomb destroyed Moritomi's family and his home. With no surviving photographs, he drew scenes from his hometown entirely from memory. Moritomi's sketches became the basis for the film's scenes of downtown Hiroshima. In the opening scene, Suzu boards a small wooden boat and goes up one of the seven rivers of Hiroshima to the centre. She gets off at the Hiroshima Prefectural Industrial Promotion Hall (now the Atomic Bomb Dome). She crosses the Motoyasu bridge and passes Taishōya kimono shop (now the Resthouse) on the corner of Nakajimachō (Figure 16.1). Opposite the kimono shop, Suzu admires toys and caramel boxes in the shop windows. People are cheerfully enjoying the latest gossip in front of Ōtsuya Muslindō, a fashionable cloth shop. Further on, Suzu passes Hamai's barbershop where the barber and his wife are standing outside chatting with a neighbour.

Kouno's original manga does not include this episode, but Katabuchi was determined to create this scene having met survivors of the Nakajima District through the Hiroshima Fieldwork Committee. Hamai Tokusō was away at his relatives' house that day, but his parents and siblings were at home. The bomb left him an orphan. A few days after the bomb, as people searched for his family, a hand-painted porcelain dish clock was discovered in the ashes. Next to it, they found the barber's scissors and charred bones. Seven decades later, Hamai says he watches Katabuchi's film to meet his family.



Figure 16.1 The Taishōya scene from *In This Corner (and Other Corners) of the World*. © 2019 Kouno Fumiyo, Futabasha Publishers Ltd., and the In This Corner (and Other Corners) of the World Production Committee.



Figure 16.2 Tourists visiting the Taishōya location in 2021. Author's photo.

### **Creating community**

The story was considered to be sweet but lacking the blockbuster qualities necessary for an anime adaptation. Unable to find a sponsor, Katabuchi turned to crowdfunding. He hoped to generate 21,600,000 yen. News of the initiative spread fast through social media. The campaign ran from March to May 2015, and 2,374 supporters raised 39,121,920 yen, which easily exceeded the target. The film went on nationwide release from 12 November 2016, ran for five years, received the first Hiroshima Peace Film Award, and was the top film in the Chiketto PIA viewer satisfaction survey for 2016 ahead of the smash hit anime *Your Name* (PIA 2016). Fans' enthusiasm crossed national boundaries. The second crowdfunding effort in 2019 for screening *In This Corner (and Other Corners) of the World*, the extended version of the film, abroad gathered donations from around 3,300 people and reached 32,238,000 yen, over three times the target of 10,800,000 yen.

Fans have created a vast network and the film was screened in many theatres, big and small. Katabuchi has travelled throughout Japan visiting theatres to greet fans and give introductory talks. Communal interaction

became an attraction and characteristic of viewing this film. People saw the film in groups of friends or as families. On one occasion, an atomic bomb survivor came to watch an anime film for the first time in his life. After the closing credits, he thanked the director for making the film, and the director thanked the elderly hibakusha for being there. Other cinemagoers turned out to be relatives of crew members of the warship *Yamato*, which featured in the film. The film was also shown at the theatre Hacchōza in the Fukuya department store, which Suzu sketches in the movie.

Fans and Katabuchi enjoy finding and sharing information about new and hidden associations between the details in the film and the real lives and locations that inspired it. Thus, Katabuchi's world has created an ever-expanding, intricate web of fans who enjoy being a part of and are obsessed with following the thread to see what new connection it leads them to. The more information they share, the more personal it becomes. This extended community has grown out of the fictional film *In This Corner of the World*, but members of the community find their *ibasho* (a place where they belong) in the real world.

## Conclusion

Yamamura (2011: 3) states that there are three principal actors in contents tourism: creators, fans, and the local community. He defines contents tourism as 'tourism in a region or particular place that functions as media, and where tourists feel its contents (narrative quality) through their five senses. Emotive bonds are created between people, or between people and objects, through the shared narrative world' (Yamamura, 2011: 172–173). *In This Corner of the World*, therefore, exemplifies a contents tourism phenomenon.

Katabuchi, with his dedicated community of fans, local experts, and witnesses of the last war, has visually recreated the wartime civilian community with remarkable authenticity. Through the eyes of a young woman and her daily chores, we learn about wartime life. Ominously, we witness how Lin gifts Suzu a lip powder to make her look prettier in case of an air raid because, as Lin explains, even in death, 'nice-looking corpses get better treated and cleaned away before others'. We also learn that Suzu's neighbour passed by a severely burnt dying man after the atomic bomb without recognizing that he was her beloved son. The tragedy is enhanced because it sneaks into a daily routine and suddenly destroys the mundane. Therefore, KonoSeka Walkers pay homage to the *futsū* (ordinary) sites of Suzu's world and report back to their fan community where they belong. In addition to being archetypal contents

tourism, the case of Suzu's world shows how the sense of *ibasho* can be a powerful motivational aspect of contents tourism.

## Acknowledgements

Information in this chapter is based on interviews with: former residents of Nakajima District (including Mr Moritomi Shigeo and Mr Hamai Tokusō); Mr Nakagawa Moto'o of the Hiroshima Fieldwork Committee; Mr Ishiodori Kazunori of Aki Shobō; Ms Kikuraku Shinobu of the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum; the Chūgoku News; and Hiroshima City (Tourist Policy Dept.), Manager Mizuguchi; as well as the lecture given by Director Katabuchi Sunao on 6 August 2021 at Hiroshima University's Peace Project, and his interview with Professor Ochi Mitsuo, President of Hiroshima University. I am grateful to Katabuchi Sunao and Ms Kouno Fumiyo for their advice on an earlier draft of this manuscript. Ms Akita Masuzu of Genco and Ms Shirai Hitomi of Kuroburue provided the still from the film.

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