

22 *Shin Godzilla*

Tourism consuming images of JSDF,
kaiju characters, and destroyed sites

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Godzilla, a giant lizard-like monster surfacing from the sea, has been a star of Toho Co., Ltd's movies since 1954, when the original *Godzilla* (dir. Honda Ishirō) premiered in Japan. Since its first appearance, Godzilla was more than just a *kaiju* (giant monster) providing entertainment to cinemagoers. The story of a monster created by a nuclear bomb evoked a number of interpretations as an anti-war message, a portrayal of the Japanese-American relationship, a symbol of post-war moral decline, and most commonly a living symbol of a nuclear bomb (Kalat 2017).

As of August 2021, only within Japan Godzilla has starred in 29 live-action movies (special effects films), three animation films, and one animated television series. The most recent live-action movie, *Shin Godzilla* (2016, dir. Anno Hideaki and Higuchi Shinji) not only brought back the franchise after a 12-year hiatus, but also offered a complete reboot to the series: it is the first movie that does not continue the story after the 1954 original but uses the premise that Godzilla appears for the first time in 2016 Tokyo. Japan is presented realistically, including its landscape, international relations, military equipment, and legal regulations.

In the film, the heroic representation of JSDF (Japan Self-Defense Force) stands in contrast to the critical portrayal of Japan's political leadership. 'The victory in *Shin Godzilla* is a victory achieved through the hard work and sacrifice of Japanese soldiers' (Hall 2017: 156) – they are committed, brave, and ready to die for their country. *Shin Godzilla* pays tribute to JSDF members' bravery in the face of a threat, suggesting a need for strong leadership and effective national defence. Godzilla's attack and the paralysis of the country's political leadership reflect post-2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster Japan, tapping into 'renewed nuclear fears ... and the government's subsequent failure to act quickly to ameliorate damage' (Rhoads and McCorkle 2018: 178).

JSDF was not only consulted by the film's producers regarding military language and procedures but also provided equipment and soldiers to appear on screen. Such extensive collaboration would not be possible without a positive portrayal of JSDF in the film (Hall 2017: 151). The production team's records indicate that various steps were taken to secure the cooperation of JSDF in filming: 'the director Anno himself first went to the Ministry of Defense to interview them in order to improve the accuracy of the script' (Toho 2016: 28–30). In addition, the Public Affairs Office at the Ministry of Defense confirmed just before the release of the film that '*Shin Godzilla* is a typical example of the cooperation of the Ministry of Defense and JSDF in the production of films' (interview conducted by Yamamura Takayoshi, 20 July 2016).

Godzilla-related attractions around Tokyo

The film may be rooted in present-day Japanese political issues, but it is also a successful blockbuster aiming to entertain. Toho used the movie's premiere to promote not only *Shin Godzilla*, but the whole franchise. As a result of the studio's strategy and cooperation with other parties, Tokyo, as Toho's home and the location of the movie, gained several Godzilla-related tourist attractions.

Probably the best-known landmark is located in the Kabukichō district of Shinjuku Ward. A fire-breathing 12-metres-tall head of the giant monster was placed on top of Shinjuku Toho Building on 17 April 2015. The statue was planned as part of the *Shin Godzilla* promotional campaign, as well as a new symbol of the ward (Toho 2015). Godzilla was given the title of Shinjuku Tourism Ambassador (*Shinjuku kankō tokushi*) during a special ceremony on 9 April and also received a special ward residency certificate from Shinjuku Ward mayor Yoshizumi Ken'ichi. He expressed hope that the new Godzilla landmark would bring 'new crowds and energy' to the area (*ibid.*). Hopes for new visitors in Shinjuku, especially *kaiju* fans, rested not only on the Godzilla head statue but also on other attractions. Shortly after the landmark's unveiling, a Godzilla-themed room opened in Hotel Gracery Shinjuku, which offers a close-up view of the landmark. Furthermore, the Godzilla Store Tokyo operated by Toho opened in October 2017. It is a place to get various Godzilla goods but is also an attraction in its own right. It has a human-sized Godzilla figure next to which tourists can have their photos taken. Another statue can be found outside Shinjuku, at Hibiya Square in Yūrakuchō between the Toho office and a shopping mall. Godzilla has occupied this spot since 1995, but in 2018 changed its form to the creature in Anno and Higuchi's film. All these spots are easy to

find and access, and are located in areas popular among general Tokyo tourists.

The other type of Godzilla-related attraction scattered around Tokyo is ‘sacred sites’, or *Shin Godzilla* locations. The Internet has many articles and blog entries providing information about locations, like Tokyo Bay Aqua-Line (where Godzilla surfaced in the film), the Kamata district, Japan Ground Self-Defense Force (JGSDF) Camp Kisarazu, Tamagawa Sengen Shrine, and Tokyo Station. Fans encourage others to visit listed locations by including Google map links and useful information (opening hours, possible fees etc.) in their posts (Shōgo 2020). Pilgrimages can also be supported by local authorities – in Kamata, Ota City Tourist Information Centre produced an unofficial map showing the monster’s route (Togech 2016). Finally, some locations offer more than only a view known from the movie. For example, at the Tokyo Bay Aqua-Line fans will find giant Godzilla footsteps in the parking area as a result of an East Nippon Expressway Company initiative (East Nippon Expressway Company Limited 2016).

Contents tourists at JSDF sites

Shin Godzilla has also increased interest in JSDF and triggered contents tourism at JSDF bases. For example, *Seichi junrei hōkoku-sho: Shin Godzilla* (*Shin Godzilla* pilgrimage report), a self-published booklet (*dōjinshi*), contains both movie locations and photographs of JSDF figures during firepower demonstrations (Bōsō Ryodan C Shōtai 2016). It contains information about the military equipment used in the movie and JGSDF Camp Kisarazu. Moreover, *Yasutabi*, a travel information site for women, introduced the annual air festival at JGSDF Camp Kisarazu as one of the recommended sites for *Shin Godzilla*, saying, ‘At the air festival, you can actually see helicopters that appeared in the film, and can even board them. This is the perfect event for fans to experience the atmosphere of the film’ (Shōgo 2020). For these fans, JSDF is as much a part of the film as Godzilla itself. These are examples of fan initiatives derived from the film’s portrayal of the military. The film portrays the activities of JSDF in a more positive light than any previous works, and the weapons are described in a detailed manner. This has led to a high level of interest in JSDF among some fans.

Furthermore, Godzilla has traditionally been associated with tourism, and in particular the enjoyment of finding and visiting places that were destroyed by Godzilla in the films. There is a detailed list of such sites on online travel information site Wikitravel (2019). This kind of tourism is also found in the case of *Shin Godzilla*. In 2018, Ota City and Kawasaki



Figure 22.1 Viewing the place where Godzilla first appeared in *Shin Godzilla*. ‘The tower of wind’ of the Tokyo Bay Aqua-Line as seen from Umihotaru parking area. Photo: Yamamura Takayoshi.

City collaborated to organize the ‘*Shin Godzilla* Bus Tour’ and the tour’s slogan was ‘We will visit locations, such as the street where the second form [of Godzilla] was destroyed’ (Ota city 2018).

Conclusion

Godzilla-inspired tourism seems primarily character-, weapon-, and destroyed sites-driven, rather than driven by other issues presented in the film. In other words, despite the fact that *Shin Godzilla*, like the first *Godzilla*, can be interpreted as being anti-nuclear, the associated contents tourism is mainly about enjoying the character of Godzilla, seeing the JSDF equipment that appears in the film, and imagining places being destroyed by Godzilla. It induces little tourism that considers anti-nuclear issues in depth.

This is an important issue in terms of how the audience interprets the narrative world and constructs the tourism imaginary. In particular, it contrasts with the audience reaction to *Grave of the Fireflies* in Chapter 17.

Grave of the Fireflies and *Shin Godzilla* contain anti-war and anti-nuclear elements, respectively, but the former induces contents tourism mainly with anti-war intentions, and the latter induces mainly tourism to consume characters, weapons, and images of destroyed sites.

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