

2 The narrative worlds of ancient wars

Travelling heroes in *Kojiki*

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The invention/adoption of writing in Japan was during the Nara era (710–794). This transition from pre-literate to literate society is regarded as the birth of written mythology and history in Japan (Sakamoto 2005: 2). It is also the dawn of the literary development of war-related contents. *Kojiki* (*Records of Ancient Matters*, AD 712) is a chronicle of myths and histories often regarded as ‘the oldest book in Japan’ (Kadokawa Shoten 2002: 3; Ō no Yasumaro, 2014). *Kojiki*’s purpose, as stated in its preface, was to ‘explain the legitimacy of the emperor’s rule’ as ancient Japan became a nation (Sakamoto 2005: 7). *Kojiki*’s narrative world consists of epic stories that oscillate between myth and history. Consequently, *Kojiki* is often treated as a literary book rather than a history book, and many of the stories are familiar to people in modern Japan. Research on *Kojiki* began in earnest during the Edo period with the publication of Motoori Norinaga’s *Kojiki-den* in 1798. Records of Motoori’s March 1772 travel to Hatsuse (Hase), Yoshino and Yamato suggest that he went ‘on a tour of the Imperial tombs for the purpose of writing *Kojiki-den*’ (Hashimoto 2006: 13), meaning that contents tourism related to *Kojiki* probably transpired during the Edo period.

Kojiki contains numerous tales depicting battles fought by heroic deities and imperial families to slay monsters and to pacify the nation. Emperor Jimmu was Japan’s first emperor and Yamato Takeru is the ‘greatest hero of ancient history’ (Sakamoto 2005: 42), who contributed to the pacification of the Japanese nation. Journeys in their footsteps are still practised in various ways today. For example, in September 2012, to commemorate the 1,300th anniversary of the compilation of *Kojiki*, the Miyazaki City Tourism Association held an event called ‘Jimmu tennō go-tōsen kyanpēn’ (Emperor Jimmu’s conquest of the east campaign) inviting people to visit locations associated with Emperor Jimmu’s eastward expedition. Participants departed from Miyazaki Jingu Shrine for a seven-day tour to Kashihara Jingu Shrine (Miyazaki nichinichi shinbun 2012). Kashihara Jingu was

built in 1890 at the eastern foot of Mt. Unebi in Nara prefecture, where it is said that the palace in which he unified the country and ascended the throne as Emperor Jimmu was located. Moreover, Wakayama Prefecture's official tourism website lists places associated with Emperor Jimmu and refers to 'Jimmu's far-reaching Eastern Expedition' (Wakayama Tourism Federation n.d.). Meanwhile, Kagoshima Prefecture's official tourism website introduces a 'power spot' at Kumaso no Ana (Cave of Kumaso), where chief Kawakamitakeru of the Kumaso (a people or region who are said to have resisted the Yamato kingship) lived before being conquered by Yamato Takeru (Kagoshima Prefectural Visitors Bureau n.d.).

However, in the section on Yamato Takeru in *Nihon minzoku daijiten* (the Japan Folk Encyclopaedia) it says,

the hero Yamato Takeru did not actually exist in ancient times, but the history of armed struggle and confrontation that accompanied



Figure 2.1 The flag of Yata-garasu (mythical three-legged raven), Kumano Hongu Taisha Shrine. In *Kojiki*, there is a story that Yata-garasu guided Emperor Jimmu from Kumano in Wakayama to Kashihara in Yamato during Jimmu's eastern expedition. The shrine still cherishes this mythical story today. Author's photo.

the establishment of the ancient state (the Yamato Court) can be seen as somehow being projected in the conception of this heroic figure. (Fukuta *et al.* 1999: 745).

Thus, the boundary between myths and historical facts is blurred, and archaeological and historical verification is often difficult. There are multiple interpretations of the narratives of *Kojiki* and whether the characters were real or not.

Ancient war narratives in the era of empire

In Japan today, this type of contents tourism centred on heroic battle stories in *Kojiki* is frequently positioned as a journey in search of the romance of ancient history, as seen in the expression ‘Sites of ancient history evoking myth and romance’ (*Shinwa to roman wo kakitateru kodaishi no butai*) on the cover of one guidebook introducing locations in *Kojiki* (Takarajimasha 2020). Mythological and spiritual images of the places are also promoted and consumed as ‘power spots’ rather than as war-related historical sites (e.g. Kagoshima Prefectural Visitors Bureau n.d.). However, these ancient war narratives became strongly linked to Japanese imperialism. Particularly from the Meiji period (1868–1912) onwards, the story of Emperor Jimmu, as the story of the first emperor, played a central role in the construction of the modern centralized state system. For example, ‘the charismatic nationalist speaker Tanaka Chigaku’ gave a lecture that was ‘broadcast throughout the [Japanese] empire by radio in 1935’ and ‘drew comparison between the modern Imperial Army’s heroic victory over its Russian foe at Port Arthur and Emperor Jimmu’s earlier achievements’ (Ruoff 2010: 133). Contents tourism following in his heroic footsteps became highly politicized. During the Second World War, the government announced 21 locations ‘officially recognized as sacred sites relating to the first emperor’, such as Kashihara Jingu Shrine, in order to boost national prestige (Ruoff 2010: 40–41). Stories surrounding these sacred sites were widely publicized and ‘imperial heritage tourism’ flourished (Ruoff 2010: 82–105). The culmination of this fervour and flow of people was a series of national events held on a nationwide scale in 1940 to commemorate the 2,600th anniversary of the enthronement of Emperor Jimmu.

Creating multi-voiced imaginaries

Another discourse, however, emphasizes the importance of reading *Kojiki* from the perspective of the conquered. *Kojiki* was compiled as

a central history or a vision of the nation centred on the emperor, and it ‘reflects political intentions as a national policy’ (Shirakura 2004: 27). However, from the perspective of peripheral history, these heroic narratives in *Kojiki* are about the process by which ‘indigenous peoples’ were ‘conquered’ (Oguma 1995: 22). In recent years there have been academic attempts to present Yamato Takeru’s eastern conquest of the Emishi (the ancient name for indigenous people inhabiting eastern and northern Japan) in *Kojiki* as a history of the centralization and control of indigenous peoples in the context of indigenous Ainu history (Hirotake 2012: 56–58), or as a move ‘towards a multi-voiced history’ (Katō 2012: 204). In this regard, although not inspired by *Kojiki*, contents tourism triggered by the manga/anime *Golden Kamuy* (Chapter 11), which presents both *Wajin* (ethnic Japanese) and Ainu perspectives, demonstrates the potential of developing contents tourism based on a multi-voiced imaginary with perspectives from both centre and periphery, conquerors and conquered.

There are several noteworthy postwar adaptations of the heroic tales of *Kojiki* with a multi-voiced perspective, although I have been unable to confirm whether these adaptations have triggered contents tourism. The manga by Tezuka Osamu, *Hi no Tori: Yamato-hen* (*Phoenix-Yamato*, 1968–1969, later developed into an anime and an opera), introduces a character based on Yamato Takeru and depicts in detail the king of Kumaso (indigenous people or region in ancient southern Kyushu) and his sister Kajika. Another film in the same vein, though not a direct adaptation of *Kojiki*, is Miyazaki Hayao’s animated film *Princess Mononoke*. The ‘historical setting’ is ‘a remote area of Japan in the Muromachi period’ and ‘the main character, a boy, is a descendant of the Emishi, who disappeared in ancient times after being overthrown by the Yamato regime’ (Miyazaki 1996: 419–420).

Conclusion

The heroic tales in *Kojiki* blur the boundaries between historical facts and fiction, leaving them open to interpretation and stimulating the reader’s imagination. In this context, *Kojiki* is akin to the ancient Greek epic poems *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, and the British *Arthurian romances*. The common denominator is that these contents in a heroic format have since been adapted in various ways and continue to generate contents tourism. Regarding ancient Japanese heroic tales, academic interest has often focused on the misuse of mythology and Shintoism by the military, especially before and during the Second World War (e.g. Ruoff

2010). However, multi-voiced contents including the viewpoints of the periphery and the conquered have also been produced in postwar Japan, despite the motifs of these heroic tales. Multi-voiced contents and tourism phenomena also exist in international and modern contexts, for example, *Daichi no Ko* (1995 – a Japan–China co-produced TV drama based on the novel by Yamasaki Toyoko depicting the life of a Japanese orphan who remained in China after Japan’s defeat in 1945) and two films about the Battle of Iwo Jima directed by Clint Eastwood: *Flags of Our Fathers* (2006 – from the American perspective) and *Letters from Iwo Jima* (2006 – from the Japanese perspective). Despite their positioning as national myths, therefore, *Kojiki* and related contents tourism exemplify the temporal and historical consciousness (*rekishi ninshiki*) aspects of war-related contents tourism discussed in Chapter 1, namely the ways in which contents are continuously adapted and reworked over time within a national or cultural community; and in which national/cultural perspectives give rise to divergent interpretations of war-related contents.

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