

### 3 The Mongol invasions of Japan and Tsushima tourism

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Tsushima Island lies in the straits between South Korea and Japan, approximately halfway between Busan and Fukuoka. This strategically important island has been a staging post for Korean–Japanese exchange and trade for centuries but also a site of various wars: the Battle of Tsushima Straits during the Russo–Japanese War, the 1592 and 1597 Japanese invasions of Korea (when the island was a forward staging post), a Korean invasion in 1419 to curb the activities of *wakō* pirates, and the Mongol invasions of 1274 and 1281, known as *Genkō* in Japanese. Kublai Khan (1215–1294), the first emperor of the Yuan Dynasty, attempted to invade Japan twice, along with the already colonised Goryeo Dynasty on the Korean Peninsula (Turnbull 2010: 6). This was the first large-scale attack by outside forces on the Japanese archipelago. Japanese warriors struggled in the face of the Mongols’ gunpowder weapons. Even so, strong Japanese resistance led to protracted war. Both invasions were ended abruptly by typhoons (the *kamikaze*, divine winds) and have assumed an important position in early Japanese history and national mythology.

On 8 November 2020, the Genkō Summit was held in Matsuura city on mainland Kyushu. It was attended by the mayors of Tsushima and Iki (another island halfway between Tsushima and Matsuura), which were the two main sites of fighting during the Mongol invasions. The three municipalities produced a joint declaration to utilize their shared history of the invasions for the purpose of tourism promotion. Previously, the Mongol invasions had barely been used as a tourism resource and with only minimal success. There has been a small Mongol Invasions Museum (Genkō shiryōkan) in Fukuoka since 1904, and a Mongol Village in Matsuura opened in 1993, but then closed in 2016 (the grounds are now a free-to-enter park). The reason for the new joint declaration was the release of two works of popular culture that have raised considerably expectations for Mongol-invasion-related tourism: the manga/anime

*Angorumoa: Genkō kassen-ki* (*Angolmois: record of Mongol invasion*, 2013–) and the PlayStation game *Ghost of Tsushima* (2020).

## Entertainmentization of the Mongol invasions

The Mongol invasions have long been depicted in popular culture, such as movies and dramas. Many representations draw on *Mōko shūrai ekotoba* (*Illustrated Account of the Mongol Invasion*, Figure 3.1), a set of two illustrated handscrolls from the late Kamakura period (1185–1333). They are said to have been painted in the 1290s by order of the *gokenin* (vassal of the shogunate) Takezaki Suenaga, who fought during the invasions. As illustrations commissioned by a warlord who participated directly in the war, *Mōko shūrai ekotoba* is typically reproduced in most elementary, junior high, and high school history textbooks and was designated as a national treasure in 2021.

Manga artist Takagi Nanahiko is the author of *Angolmois*. His ten-volume manga (2013–2018) was set in Tsushima in 1274 and was adapted into a TV anime with 12 episodes in 2018. From 2019 onwards, season two of the manga began about the Hakata invasion, an entirely fictional storyline in which the hero Kuchi sneaks aboard a Goryeo dynasty ship and fights in Hakata, Fukuoka. Takagi acknowledges the role of *Mōko shūrai ekotoba* in his creative process:

The text was difficult and I could not understand it at all, but just following the pictures was interesting. There were many kinds of battles on land, at sea, using gunpowder weapons ... Hearing about the Mongol invasions in class [at school] did not make much of an impact, but thanks to the handscrolls I had fascinating material to work with.

(Aou 2015)



Figure 3.1 A section from the *Illustrated Account of the Mongol Invasion*. Source: Kyushu University Library (n.d.)

He created a prototype of the manga based on the handscrolls prior to *Angolmois*. However, publishers rejected it for lack of ‘entertainment’ value. Learning from that failure, he made *Angolmois* more entertaining by using many fictional characters (Aou 2015). This relates to issues discussed in Chapter 1 about how war memories transform into entertainment. *Mōko shūrai ekotoba* is a realistic record of war experiences, and contents based faithfully on such historic texts are inevitably inferior as entertainment. The entertainmentization of war memories requires that they are ‘edited, interpreted, and rewritten with reference to the contemporary cultural milieu’ (Chapter 1). Consequently, the *Angolmois* plot includes loyalty and betrayal, and characters have secret or special abilities that do not appear in actual history but have entertainment value. Some characters are purely fictional, for example, the heroine is a princess of Tsushima who did not exist in actual history. She commands the exiled samurai who live in Tsushima to fight for the island.

Meanwhile, *Ghost of Tsushima* is set during the same 1274 Mongol invasion of Tsushima. Released in July 2020, it is an open world action-adventure game in which the protagonist is a samurai who resists the invasion. The game attracted attention for its detailed artwork in a production announcement video shown at Paris Games Week in 2017. The game sold 2.4 million copies worldwide in three days after release and had sold 6.5 million copies by March 2021, when a film adaptation was announced (Fox 2021). *Ghost of Tsushima*, like *Angolmois*, is based on historical events but is completely fictional. The game is in the Chanbara (sword fighting) genre and all the characters are fictional, too, which distances the game from history. The main character, Sakai Jin, is the only surviving samurai after all other samurais on Tsushima Island are wiped out on Komoda Beach by the invading Mongols. In actual history, this battle (in 1274) also ended in a one-sided victory for the Mongols, but in the game Sakai fights on.

The game takes place in an open world with Tsushima Island as the background. There is a high degree of freedom of movement. The main character can visit most of the island, and players fight while visiting natural locations, villages, castles, and shrines as if they were actually travelling on Tsushima. Furthermore, the user interface was excluded from the screen as much as possible so that players could be immersed in the locations. This creates an atmosphere that can lead people to the real space, Tsushima.

## Contents tourism in Tsushima

While Takagi’s manga raised domestic interest in the Mongol invasions, *Ghost of Tsushima* raised expectations of new forms of international

tourism in the post-COVID-19 era. Tsushima is where the Mongols invaded first and is on the periphery of Japan. In fact, it is closer to Korea than the main islands of Japan, so the proportion of Korean tourists is high. In 2018, before the COVID-19 pandemic, nearly 300,000 of the island's 418,000 overnight guests were Koreans, accounting for 75 percent of total guests and 99 percent of foreign guests (Nagasaki Prefecture Tourism Promotion Division n.d.). However, this dependence on Koreans for Tsushima tourism poses risks. There was a boycott of tourism in Japan by Koreans in 2019 due to a worsening diplomatic row over contemporary historical issues (a tit-for-tat trade row flared followed by a ruling by a Korean court to seize Japanese corporate assets to compensate colonial-era forced labourers). In addition, the travel patterns of Korean tourists, usually short visits and minimal consumption, were also problems in Tsushima tourism.

In this context, the municipality is trying to revitalize tourism through collaboration with the content producers. In 2018, when the *Angolmois* anime was produced, in cooperation with the production company a pre-broadcast screening of one episode was held at the Tsushima City Exchange Center to inform residents of the existence of the anime. Since 2019, Tsushima has been selected every year as one of 88 Japanese anime spots designated by the Anime Tourism Association. However, the distance of Tsushima from mainland Japan and the time required to get there can put off many travellers.

For *Ghost of Tsushima*, in collaboration with Tsushima City, a special webpage was created to provide foreign tourists with information on related places appearing in the game, albeit without discussing tourism directly. However, the year of the game's release was also when the COVID-19 'invasion' occurred. The game's effects on tourism post-COVID-19 must be a subject for future research. Nevertheless, the potential is reflected in the Mayor's decision to name game director Nate Fox and creative director Jason Connell as permanent tourism ambassadors in March 2021 (Nichols 2021).

## Conclusions

These two recent works about the Mongol invasions constitute interesting examples of turning war memories into entertainment and tourism resources. The entertainmentization of the invasions is made possible by the free interpretation and use of history. While the invasions happened in East Asia, a place that is politically and diplomatically divided over more recent issues of invasion and war, more than 700 years have

passed since the Mongol invasions. Direct stakeholders no longer exist. Furthermore, the Yuan and Goryeo dynasties, and the shogunate, have little bearing on current national politics. The fact that the contents depict a war with an indecisive conclusion due to the intervention of nature also plays a part in reducing political sensitivity.

Even so, the entertainmentization of war history and subsequent increase in the attractiveness of the region for travellers are characteristics of war-related contents tourism. *Mōko shūrai ekotoba* inspired the creation of manga and anime, and a game based on the period gave the region more international appeal. In other circumstances, this chapter could have been about tourism revitalization induced by popular culture in Tsushima in 2020. Due to the pandemic, however, the story of contents tourism on Tsushima is, for now, encapsulated in another question one often hears asked regarding history and wars in an entertainment context: What if ...?

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