

5 History girls and women's war-related contents tourism

Akiko Sugawa-Shimada

Rekijo ('history girls') refers to young female (*joshi*) fans of history (*reki-shi*). Since the early 2000s, several anime, manga, and videogames have featured handsome young male characters modelled on actual historical figures/events. Consuming this history for women has become equivalent to consuming history-based popular culture. The Japanese media described such women's perceived 'gender crossover' into a formerly 'male' interest using the catchy term *rekijo*. Pop culture works have prompted young female fans to visit related sites such as birthplaces and graves of actual historical figures, battlefields, festivals, and museums in a phenomenon that clearly meets the criteria of contents tourism (Sugawa-Shimada 2015: 39). This chapter discusses history-based popular culture, especially about the Warring States (Sengoku) period, 1467–1590, and contents tourism by *rekijo* by examining Kuwabara Mizuna's light novel *Mirage of Blaze* series (1990–2004; spin-off works 2007–2017) and Capcom's video game *Sengoku BASARA* series (2005–present).

The *rekijo* phenomenon became relatively visible in the 2000s because Internet blogs and social media platforms (including Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Japanese social media platform mixi) enabled online interaction among anonymous users. However, female history fans existed before the term *rekijo* was coined. One representative example is fans of the *Mirage of Blaze* series, a psychic action fantasy novel for young readers featuring handsome young male characters based on samurai feudal lords (*daimyō*) of the Warring States period. The series was adapted into multiple formats: CD dramas (1992–1997), TV anime (2002), original animation video (2004), manga comics (2001; remake 2021), and theatre performances (2014–2018). Fans have travelled sites related to the stories since the 1990s. They were dubbed 'mirajennu'¹ and their tourism was called the 'mirage tour' (Hashimoto 2006).

The story is set in 1990s Japan. The protagonist, Ōgi Takaya, is an ordinary but disobedient high school boy in Matsumoto city, Nagano.

One day a man in black, Naoe Nobutsuna, appears before Takaya and tells him that his true identity is Uesugi Kagetora, the first adopted son of Uesugi Kenshin.² In actual history, Kagetora was driven to kill himself by *seppuku* at the Battle of Otate (1578) for fighting against Uesugi Kagekatsu, his stepbrother, over their inheritance after their father's death. Based on these historical events and the ancient Japanese belief in vengeful spirits (*onryō*), in *Mirage of Blaze* Kagetora turns into a furious vengeful spirit after his death. However, Kenshin designates Kagetora as the leader of all exorcists to subdue other vengeful spirits with esoteric Buddhist power. The spirits of Kagetora and his four followers, nicknamed *yasha-shū* (demons), have survived by possessing human bodies for over 400 years. But Kagetora lost his memory after a battle against Oda Nobunaga in the 1950s. However, in 1990 numerous vengeful spirits of 'losers' in the Warring States period, including the surviving Oda Nobunaga, resume taking vengeance called 'Dark Sengoku'. Takaya/Kagetora is caught up in it with the *yasha-shū*. Meanwhile, Takaya/Kagetora recovers his memories and discovers that in his previous battle against Nobunaga, Naoe snatched the soul of Kagetora's girlfriend in order to transfer Kagetora's soul from his dying human body to her body. Naoe did it because 'he deeply loves Kagetora'. In addition to the thrilling storyline based on historical facts and its many action scenes, therefore, large numbers of *mirajenne* were absorbed in Naoe and Kagetora's love-hate relationship with its Boys' Love connotations.³

Wars and battles in the *Mirage of Blaze* series are fantasized to provide a site where Takaya/Kagetora recovers from his identity crisis and deep distrust of human beings. They are also used as backdrops to the story about love and hatred between Takaya/Kagetora and Naoe. Moved by the story, *mirajenne* went on 'mirage tours' to 'sacred sites' of the series in Nagano, Miyagi, Tokushima, Yamaguchi, and Kumamoto, and also sites and events related to historical figures on whom the protagonists were modelled, such as the ruins of Samegao Castle in Niigata (where Uesugi Kagetora killed himself) and Yonezawa Uesugi Festival in Yonezawa city, Yamagata prefecture.

Yonezawa Uesugi Festival started as a Shinto spring celebration when Uesugi Kagekatsu started ruling Dewa province after the Battle of Sekigahara in 1600. The 'mock battle' performance of the (Fourth) Battle of Kawanakajima (1561) between Kenshin and Takeda Shingen (feudal lord of Kai province, today Yamanashi prefecture) has been held since 1905. Yonezawa is not the actual battlefield, but Yonezawa Shrine, which enshrines Kenshin, allowed it to take place there. During the Asia-Pacific War (1937–1945), the mock battle performance was used as propaganda (Yonezawa Uesugi Festival Committee 2008). After 1945

the mock battles were cancelled, but following the hit NHK Taiga drama *Ten to chi to* (1969), the mock battle was restarted in 1973. In the 1990s, *mirajenne* besieged this performance and photographed the performers who played characters appearing in *Mirage of Blaze* (Figure 5.1).

Local residents performed the main roles in the Battle of Kawanakajima during the initial stages of the mirage tour phenomenon, so *mirajennes'* enthusiasm boosted local pride and identity. A local brewer collaborated with a local college to produce a wine as a souvenir for *mirajenne* called *chigiri* (noose), which was a reference to Naoe (Hashimoto 2006: 179). Visitation to the festival also enabled *mirajennes* to have off-line meetings with other *mirajennes* (Drian no sasayaki 2007). Thus, contents tourism related to *Mirage of Blaze* generated sociocultural impacts on the Yonezawa Uesugi Festival and helped revitalize the local economy.

Similar phenomena can be observed in contents tourism related to Ishida Mitsunari. Mitsunari was the closest subordinate of Toyotomi



Figure 5.1 Two *mirajennes* with a performer who played Irobe Katsunaga. He was Kenshin's military commissioner in actual history and a Kageyora follower in the novel. Author's photo.

Hideyoshi and was executed because he lost the Battle of Sekigahara against Tokugawa Ieyasu in 1600. The Tokugawa shogunate treated him as the rebel leader and destroyed Mitsunari's hometown Ishida village (today Ishida town, Shiga prefecture). Thereafter, villagers concealed their identities and hid the Ishida family graves from the Tokugawa authorities. However, in 1941 the tombstones of the Ishida clan were discovered underground at Hachiman Shrine (now Ishida Shrine). The Association in Honor of Ishida Mitsunari was created, which built a memorial building, Ishida Hall, at his birthplace and erected a statue near the Hall.

Initially, there were only two or three tourists a month (Asahi Shinbun 2009). Tourist flows changed drastically around 2010 after the first anime adaptation of the video game *Sengoku BASARA* was broadcast. Mitsunari is characterized as a young, crazy *ikemen* (hunk) who fanatically admires Hideyoshi. Negative images of Mitsunari as a conspirator and loser were swept away by this anime and two NHK Taiga dramas, *Tenchijin* (2009) and *Go* (2011), which depicted Mitsunari as a loyal samurai and casted popular young actors to play the role of Mitsunari. Visitor numbers per year to Ishida town in search of Mitsunari sites increased to over 1,000 around 2009, and approximately 90 percent of them were women (Asahi Shinbun 2009). Visitation by *rekijo* to Ishida town motivated young residents to revalue Mitsunari as a local brand. When I visited Ishida Hall in 2012, the chairman of the Association in Honor of Ishida Mitsunari, Kinoshita Shigeaki, told me that young residents of Ishida town were unwilling to support the Ishida Festival (held each November for Mitsunari's death day), but the number of young women visiting Ishida was motivating them to host tourists. The festival committee also relies on the participation of *rekijo* and they recruit 20 female volunteers from the Ishida Mitsunari Supporters' Club (Ishida Festival Committee 2016). The contents tourism of *rekijo* facilitates the generation of townspeople's local identity and enhances local pride.

Ishida Mitsunari is also used as a 'character' to promote Shiga prefecture. Shiga Prefecture set up the 'Ishida Mitsunari x Shiga portal site' (<http://mitsunari.biwako-visitors.jp>) in which Mitsunari appears as an anime-like character. It runs parodic videos on YouTube suggesting how Mitsunari was a loyal and talented governor, and how the image of Mitsunari was distorted by the victors of the Battle of Sekigahara. Meanwhile, Gifu prefecture, where Sekigahara is located, opened the Sekigahara Memorial (a large interactive facility with a museum) on 21 October 2020, the 420th anniversary of the Battle of Sekigahara. The banner above the entrance has the crests of Ishida Mitsunari and Tokugawa Ieyasu side by side.

Although it is named the Sekigahara Memorial, the museum's special exhibitions cover a variety of themes. In 2020, when the NHK Taiga drama featured Akechi Mitsuhide (who killed Oda Nobunaga at Honnō-ji Temple in 1582), a special exhibition about him was held, even though he also died in 1582, well before the Battle of Sekigahara. A special exhibition of Japanese swords was also held in 2020, probably because of the 'swords boom' among *rekijo* induced by the video-game/anime/play *Tōken Ranbu* (Chapter 8). In the summer of 2021, a Mitsunari special exhibition was held.

In summary, the Battle of Kawanakajima, Battle of Sekigahara and historical figures in the Warring States period have been popularized via history-based popular culture. They have attracted many young women, called *rekijo*, whose enthusiasm and contents tourism have contributed to the revitalization of Yonezawa and Ishida towns, both economically and socioculturally. The phenomenon also provides a different way of viewing history, that is, history as seen from the perspectives of 'losers'.

Notes

- 1 *Mirajennu* combines 'mirage' with the French suffix -enne, as in Parisienne. Members of the all-female Takarazuka Revue theatre troupe are called *takarajennu* and this inspired the term *mirajennu*.
- 2 Uesugi Kenshin was a strong feudal lord who ruled Echigo province (today's Niigata prefecture) in the late sixteenth century.
- 3 Boys' Love is a manga/anime genre targeting women which deals with male homosexual relationships.

References

- Asahi shinbun, 2009. Oshiyoseru rekijo: gēmu de jinbutsuzō ni kyōkan. *Asahi shinbun*, 20 May, p. 25.
- Drian no sasayaki, 2007. *Honō no mirage kikō 2007 Uesugi matsuri repōto mikkame!* <http://make-only-one.seesaa.net/article/370069590.html>.
- Hashimoto, H., 2006. Matsuri: tsukurareru tabi. In: T. Oguchi, ed. *Kankō no shakai shinrigaku*. Kyoto: Kitaojishobo, 167–183.
- Ishida Festival Committee, 2016. *Ishihaku no oshirase*. Ishida Mitsunari Festival. <https://ameblo.jp/mitsunarisajikko/entry-12481271518.html>.
- Sugawa-Shimada, A., 2015. *Rekijo*, pilgrimage and 'pop-spiritualism': pop-culture-induced heritage tourism of/for women. *Japan Forum*, 27 (1), 37–58.
- Yonezawa Uesugi Festival Committee, 2008. *Kawanakajima kassen no rekishi*. Yonezawa Uesugi Matsuri homepage. <http://uesugi.yonezawa-matsuri.jp/log/?l=350454>.



Taylor & Francis

Taylor & Francis Group

<http://taylorandfrancis.com>