

## 7 War-related narratives and contents tourism during the ‘Tokugawa peace’

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Matsuo Basho (1644–1694) is one of the most famous *haiku* (Japanese 17-syllable poem) poets of the early Edo era. Modern domestic Japanese tourists and international tourists continue to visit the places where Basho wrote his *haiku* (Beeton 2020).

The following is one of his war-related *haiku*:

The summer grasses —  
Of brave soldiers’ dreams  
The aftermath.

(Matsuo 2007: 125)

It appears in the chapter *Hiraizumi* in his travel writing masterpiece *Oku no Hosomichi (The Narrow Road to the Interior)*. The chapter containing this *haiku* depicts the deep emotion that Basho felt when visiting a historical battle site.

War-related contents tourism in the early Edo period can be understood from the preamble to the *haiku*.

It was at Palace-on-the-Heights that Yoshitsune and his picked retainers fortified themselves, but his glory turned in a moment into this wilderness of grass. ‘Countries may fall, but their rivers and mountains remain; when spring comes to the ruined castle, the grass is green again’. These lines went through my head as I sat on the ground, my bamboo hat spread under me. There I sat weeping, unaware of the passage of time.

(Matsuo 2007: 125–126)

Basho was visiting Takadachi (Koromogawa-no-tachi), the former residence of the warlord Minamoto no Yoshitsune (1159–1189). He felt that he had travelled back in time to when Yoshitsune died at this place.

The tragic warrior Yoshitsune, 'despite his many exploits in battle, was treated with hostility and tracked down by his elder brother Yoritomo' (Inumaru 2014: 42). In 1189, he was reportedly attacked by the soldiers of Fujiwara no Yasuhira, who had sided with Yoritomo at Hiraizumi. Despite his loyal subjects' efforts, Yoshitsune was forced to commit suicide (Kadokawa Shoten 2001: 115–116).

While few accurate records of Yoshitsune remain (Yabumoto 2011: 1), the book *Gikei-ki* (*Military Epic about the Life of Yoshitsune*, author unknown), appeared in the early Muromachi era (around the fourteenth century) (Sato and Kobayashi 1968: 274). It dramatically depicts the end of Yoshitsune's life at Hiraizumi. Therefore, one can reasonably assume that in Hiraizumi Basho saw 'the remains of a battle, as narrated in *Gikei-ki*' (Nakagawa 1997: 11). Moreover, *The Narrow Road to the Interior* features the following *haiku* by Kawai Sora, a disciple who accompanied Basho on his travels.

In the verberna  
I seem to see Kanefusa —  
Behold his white hair! (Sora)

(Matsuo 2007: 125)

'Kanefusa' is Jurogon-no-kami Kanefusa, a character in *Gikei-ki* (Takagi 2004: 646), who is not mentioned in the historical record. This suggests that Basho and his disciple Sora were reliving *Gikei-ki*'s narrative world, which was based on historical facts, albeit containing a strong fictional element.

### ***Gunki-monogatari* and its popularisation in the Edo era**

Japanese literary works based on historical battles (for example, *Gikei-ki*) are called *gunki-monogatari* or *gunki-mono* (military epics or war chronicles). This literary genre was reportedly established between the Kamakura era (twelfth to fourteenth centuries) and Muromachi era (fourteenth to sixteenth centuries) (Takahashi 2015: 677). *Heike monogatari* (*The Tale of the Heike*) exemplifies the genre in this period (Kusaka 2008: i–ii). The *gunki-monogatari* genre developed greatly during the Edo period (seventeenth to nineteenth centuries). After the Warring States period (fifteenth to sixteenth centuries) ended, many *gunki-monogatari* were published and gained a large readership (Takahashi 2015: 677).

During the Tokugawa peace or 'Pax Tokugawa' (Okuno 2007: 102), which lasted for about 250 years, Japanese popular culture and entertainment flourished in two aspects: the popularisation of tourism (Kanzaki

2004: 237) and the rise and diversification of entertainment industries, including kabuki, sumo, and *yose* comedy (Ando 2009: 58). The foundations of modern Japanese popular entertainment were formed during this period. Basho's war-related contents tourism can be understood within this context. In short, war-related contents tourism was popularized and matured during the Edo era, both in terms of contents and tourism.

### **Yoshitsune's legendary journey to Hokkaido and Mongolia**

*Gikei-ki* became the source of a large number of classical works, including noh theatre, ningyō-jōruri (Japanese puppetry), and kabuki (Tsuji 2017: 84). Kabuki plays such as *Yoshitsune senbonzakura* (*Yoshitsune and One Thousand Cherry Trees*, first performed in 1748) and *Kangjincho* (*A Subscription Book*, first performed in 1840) are typical examples of *Gikei-ki* adaptations (Inumaru 2014: 32–43). As these kabuki plays received many performances, Yoshitsune's popularity grew, especially in Edo (present-day Tokyo). In particular, Yoshitsune's 'tragic life', as depicted in *Kanjincho*, 'was overwhelmingly sympathized with by the common people of Edo' (Inumaru 2014: 42). As Kanzaki also points out, tourism had become popular among ordinary people throughout Japan by the mid-Edo period, and kabuki performances became regular events outside Edo, too (Kanzaki 2004: 100).

In this way, the narrative world of Yoshitsune, which mixed fiction and reality, captured the hearts of ordinary Japanese people and 'the image of a legendary hero was formed'. 'A story was created that Yoshitsune's suicide at Hiraizumi was faked, he escaped from Japan alive, and crossed from Ezo (Hokkaido) to the continent' (Fukuta *et al.* 1999: 776). Many sites connected to the legendary narrative of Yoshitsune's escape are still found in Hokkaido and Tohoku (northern Honshu), and they continue to attract many tourists (Figure 7.1).

Matsuura Takeshiro (1818–1888) was an explorer who surveyed Ezo-chi (modern-day Hokkaido) and invented the name 'Hokkaido'. He left many detailed written records of his surveys, and in his journals he recorded a number of Yoshitsune legends from around Hokkaido. For example, the book *Ezo kunmo zui* (circa 1860) contains the following explanatory text and a drawing of Yoshitsune and his loyal subject Benkei.

Once upon a time, Yoshitsune, Benkei and many other samurai came to this island in ships ... Then, they entered Karafuto (Sakhalin)



Figure 7.1 Kamuy Rock, Shakotan, Hokkaido. The monolith on the small island in the centre is one of the places where the legend of Yoshitsune's journey to the north survives. According to local legend, Charenka, an Ainu lady who adored Yoshitsune, threw herself into the sea in despair and became a rock when she heard that Yoshitsune had left for the continent. Author's photo.

Island, hoping that the countries to the north of Hokkaido would be controlled by Japan.

(Matsuura 1997: 80–81)

Moreover, in his book *Nishi-Ezo nisshi (Journal of West Hokkaido* [circa 1860]), he introduced the theory, advocated by Philipp Franz Balthasar von Siebold (a German doctor residing in Japan at the time) that Yoshitsune 'left Ezo (Hokkaido), crossed to Northeast China, went to Mongolia ..., and ascended to the imperial throne', becoming 'the original founder Genghis Khan' (Matsuura 1984: 64–65). Current historiography and archaeology do not support these narratives, and they are considered to be merely products of the imagination. However, such narratives were circulating widely among the public, including the intelligentsia, at a time (mid-nineteenth century) when Japan needed to demarcate its northern borders, especially those with Russia. This is one reason why Japan was particularly keen to incorporate Hokkaido into Japan.

The modern Japanese public continues to consume pop culture and generate tourism related to the narrative world of Yoshitsune, which has been repeatedly re-edited within a mixed context of reality and fiction. It has expanded into an almost fictional epic of heroism travelling across national borders. Several local governments or DMOs (Destination Management/Marketing Organizations) in Tohoku and Hokkaido, which are located further north than Hiraizumi (Iwate prefecture, where Yoshitsune is said to have died) are promoting places associated with the legend of Yoshitsune's journey to the north as tourist attractions today (for example, Visit Hachinohe 2019).

## Conclusion

This chapter has discussed how the *gunki-monogatari* genre was established during the Kamakura era and matured as a form of popular culture during the Edo era, which saw the growth of war-related contents tourism practices. The narrative world of Yoshitsune is a typical example of this development. It has been re-edited for over 800 years; furthermore, it was already inducing contents tourism almost 400 years ago. By tracing the adaptation processes of the contents and the tourism induced by *gunki-monogatari* as an early form of war-related contents tourism (both in terms of contents and tourism), discussion becomes possible regarding contents tourism from a historical and sociocultural perspective. It also becomes possible to consider the intersections of heritage and contents tourism studies, rather than seeing contents tourism simply as a theory relevant only to contemporary popular culture or media-induced phenomena.

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