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Furusato and Emotional Pilgrimage

Ge Ge Ge no Kitarō and Sakaiminato

The town of Sakaiminato, on the western coast of Japan, has revitalized its local economy through the transformation of the downtown into a tourist destination for fans of the popular manga creator Shigeru Mizuki. The strategy used by the local community closely replicates the traditional pilgrimage patterns established in Japan; however, the focus has been shifted from a religious to secular world view. While the iconography and meaning has changed, the emotional resonance has remained the same, with fans of the series developing a shared sense of community and a connection to some trans-societal force. This attempt to link older religious practices with modern fan cultures has been further strengthened by directly tying tourism with new releases of Mizuki's work.

KEYWORDS: pilgrimage—Sakaiminato—popular culture—Mizuki Shigeru—*yōkai*—*Ge Ge Ge no Kitarō*

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JAPAN HAS a long history of large-scale domestic pilgrimages, and as early as the mid-Tokugawa period the large-scale movement of the population between major religious sites was a common occurrence during major economic upturns. While these travel circuits had significant spiritual aspects, which acted as the official motivation for individuals to take the personal and financial risk to travel across great distances, often another motivation factor was that of entertainment or personal enrichment. Early accounts of pilgrimage-motivated travel can be found in the writing of the aristocratic class, who use their travels as an antidote to emotional or psychological strain, religious crisis, poor health, or socialization. By the Kamakura period texts begin to show that this practice had spread, or had already existed, outside of the extreme elite (HOSHINO 1997, 272–75). Travel, as a form of entertainment and leisure, therefore has a centuries-long history in Japan that can be utilized by contemporary tourism.

The publication of travelogues became a widely consumed media for both travelers and those who remained at home. These books contained both practical advice and a list of potential literary allusions for those who wished to send educated and sophisticated-sounding letters home to their relatives (NENZI 2008, 122). There existed numerous listings of *arigatai basho*—wondrous locations—that cultured individuals should visit before the end of their lives (HOSHINO 1997, 241). Additionally, these guides were only unofficial versions of those produced by local authorities. Official maps were restricted by the government of the period, but the draw of travel prevented the state from completely banning the creation of commercially produced guidebooks. Commercial and official travel was allowed, but the numerous checkpoints stymied those without an official permission from moving between the various provinces that made up medieval Japan. Yamanaka noted in his work that “the locations described in what would now be called tourist guidebooks for cities, such as Edo, are mostly shrines or religious sites” (YAMANAKA 2012, 33). It may be very likely that a somewhat significant amount of otherwise “tourist”-driven travel was performed either under the guise of pilgrimage or that the concept between travel for spiritual reasons or pleasure was only divided later, creating an intersection between the two activities that continues to the present day.

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However, the majority of travelers were often working under the shared framework similar to both the modern conception of pilgrimage and travel. Pilgrims during the period had free reign of movement, similar to the situation in Europe during the medieval era. Gatzhammer, in his research on contemporary pilgrimage in Europe, writes that their motivations mirror their medieval counterparts in the combination of religious and secular motivations that coalesce into a desire for the socially and spiritually transcendent (GATZHAMMER 2012, 253). Even the existence of kitschy souvenirs and districts are seemingly universally shared (FOSTER 1982, 17). Travelers were often driven to visit distant locales for their intrinsic entertainment value; however, they emotionally understood and socially justified their actions through the guise of pilgrimage. The connection between travel as entertainment and travel as a necessity as religious devotion was thereby closely interlinked throughout Japanese history as travel became largely and officially limited to pilgrimage.

However, in the contemporary era there are few limitations, with the exceptions being time and expense, on travel within Japan. Pilgrimages continue to draw in travelers, especially the major pilgrimages that have created bus or train tours of their circuit. But pilgrimage is no longer the primary motivation for the movement of individuals across large distances. Now the majority of travelers are “purely” tourists, traveling largely for pleasure rather than using religion as the reasoning for their efforts. Okamoto succinctly states that “Those who step foot on a pilgrimage are not just the religious but also the touristic” (OKAMOTO Ryōsuke 2015, LOC 28). While there are many locations that are purely designed for leisure, such as beaches and national parks, many have an emotional or psychological component that is similar to those underlying the spiritual aspects of pilgrimage. Even the practice of pilgrimage itself had a modern revival, as during the Meiji Period the number of pilgrims decreased dramatically only to have a resurgence in the 1920s when pilgrimages were touted in the media for secular reasons, such as local economic revival and health (READER 2007, 17–18). This has made the study of modern pilgrimages challenging, with scholars like Hoshino Eiki and Ian Reader noting that the delineation of pilgrims and tourists can be ambiguous.

A large number of Japanese tourists who travel to destinations as disparate as national monuments, places like Sanrio Puroland, and even historical pilgrimage destinations are drawn to these areas by the need to connect to a larger community and to transcend the mundane. These destinations are often designed to pull the traveler from their daily lives and into the lives of something transcendent, such as national memory or the popular culture works that form a collective imagination, a secular form of its spiritual analog. The use of a circular circuit containing a multitude of specifically designed locations, commonly seen on Japanese pilgrimage routes, can be seen in the design of theme parks

such as Disneyland. While this pattern can be obscured simply due to the scale of the geography involved, most of the major Buddhist pilgrimages in Japan are plotted along a circular path that allows pilgrims to travel in either direction from any starting point (HOSHINO 1997, 284–86).

One of these locations is near the traditional pilgrimage route of Izumo, in the town of Sakaiminato. Here is the birthplace of the famous *mangaka* (comic artist) Mizuki Shigeru. His works tie into older religious and folkloric beliefs and, combined with the cultural importance of *furusato*, helped create a tourist location that mimics several aspects of traditional pilgrimage within Japan. The emphasis on the individuals' need to connect to their *furusato*, a Japanese term denoting a hometown personified as a spiritual location of safety and security, is part of the draw of Sakaiminato. The notion of *furusato* as a potential tourist draw has its origins in the postwar travel boom, which drew from the nostalgia of recent urban dwellers of their distant familial hometowns (READER 2007, 18). However, Sakaiminato is a relatively recent development, created by fiat by the conglomeration of several smaller towns in the postwar period and therefore it has had little opportunity to take advantage of this campaign. However, by recognizing early the potential of mass media fandom this town, which is several hours away from the urban centers on the eastern seaboard of Japan even when traveling by *shinkansen*, was able to leverage the relative disadvantage of its location into a positive image.

This is achieved through its association with the series *Ge Ge Ge no Kitarō*, created by Mizuki, which has been a part of the world of Japanese popular culture for nearly half a century and has become a beloved childhood memory for at least three generations. Beginning in 1989, the Town Management Organization and the *Midori to bunka no machizukuri* (Let's create green and cultural towns) campaign began work on how to revitalize local city centers in Japan (SAWADA and MATSUMURA 2011, 671; IKEDA 2012, 129). A combination of municipal support, local businesses, and support from Mizuki himself led to the opening of the Yōkai Road and related merchandise in the mid-1990s as well as a museum dedicated to the author. By the early 1990s *Ge Ge Ge no Kitarō* had become the focus of the revitalization of the incorporated city of Sakaiminato, which lay near the birthplace of Mizuki. This combined effort, of local volunteers, small business, municipal authorities, and economic support at the prefectural level is a common aspect of contemporary pilgrimage routes (YAMANAKA 2012, 166). Even the layout of the city center makes a clear circular pattern, starting at the train station, climaxing at the Mizuki Shigeru Museum, and then leading back to the station. The tourist board of Sakaiminato has linked the emotional safety of a beloved childhood icon with the idea that rural communities are better able to become one's *furusato* than one's actual birthplace in a city. The tourist board and industry of this town draws in the visitors who provide a critical contribu-

tion to the local economy through the canny use of pilgrimage traditions and modern popular culture.

The Intersection of Pilgrimage and Tourism

However, to properly delineate the distinctions and similarities between pilgrimage and tourism one must discuss the aspects of pilgrimage that provided the foundation of the later phenomenon of tourism. Obviously both require travel as one must move beyond one's daily life in order for the movement to have value. Sometimes this movement can be very brief, requiring only a day or an overnight journey. All major cities in Japan have established tourist locations within their borders and provide easy travel to and from the city center to the outskirts. Additionally, many pilgrimage routes now have smaller replications that can be undertaken in Tokyo or Osaka in only a few hours, rather than the many days or weeks in a distant location typically required.

However, the distance and difficulty often determines the value of a pilgrimage location for the traveler (COLLINS-KREINER 2009, 437–38). This is often true for the tourist as well, as short trips requiring little investment are often just for pleasure travel, but international journeys or multi-day trips require a significant sacrifice of both money and time in order to plan such expeditions. Few nostalgically recount their day-trip to the local aquarium, but major ventures to exotic and distant locations form the backbone of many individuals' reminiscences and fantasies. Often the travel to the location itself is a vital part of the pilgrimage, as HOSHINO has claimed (1997, 296). This factor has been taken into consideration in the case of Sakaiminato, where the local train station and sometimes the trains themselves, are decorated with characters from *Ge Ge Ge no Kitarō*. Several researchers have thereby noted that the distinction between the pilgrim and the tourist often overlap to the point that they are nearly indistinguishable (COLLINS-KREINER 2009, 440–41).

Both the tourist and the pilgrim also undergo a seemingly liminal stage in their travel. Pilgrims must often don particular clothing and use a certain route in order to have their travel recognized by the broader community. Tourists also undergo a similar change, as few locations are designed for the tourist to be simply deposited at the door of the park or museum. Many places are specifically designed to have an approach that must be done on foot in order to move the tourist from their normal everyday life into the suspended space of the park (BECKSTEAD 2010, 388–90). This creates a psychological sense of moving into a liminal space, a removal from the mundane that can be tangibly experienced by the traveler (COLLINS-KREINER 2009, 439). As mentioned above, all the Disney resorts built after the construction of Disneyland in California are explicitly

designed to have guests approach through a special transit system or walkway in order to facilitate the mood for the park.

This is similar to the construction of pilgrimage sites and temples within Japan, which often require the entering of a sacred space through numerous gates and the passing by of several monuments. This often places the tourist and pilgrim into a liminal space, where they are unified with their fellow travelers but are beyond their everyday lives and previous communities. Additionally, many of the recent revivals in pilgrimage circuits in Japan have been credited not to a growing belief in religion, but rather to their portrayal as a means of emotional or psychological renewal, to celebrate graduation or retirement, or a means of reconnecting to society (YAMANAKA 2012, 126–27). These motivations lie in a personal state of being internally or mentally in-between.

At some sites the intersection between pilgrim and tourist can become particularly evident. In Japan a number of culturally and historically significant tourist destinations are also popular pilgrimage sites and, if the pilgrims are not wearing distinctive clothing, it can be nearly impossible to distinguish the two cohorts from each other. Some are in fact performing both actions at once and make dividing the two groups both impossible and unwarranted (COLLINS-KREINER 2010, 161). Even “pure” tourist locations, that is, sites with no traditional religious affiliation, are often visited as if they were pilgrimage sites, as contemporary travelers have interlinked the two actions into their mind and have inadvertently mixed the two actions. Even the standard ritual behavior that normally defines the practice of pilgrimage has leaked into tourist behavior, as tourists also follow ritual forms in their patterns of picture taking and informal styles of dress (BECKSTEAD 2010, 387–88). Some scholars of pilgrimage and tourism have in fact argued that the two activities should be largely considered to be the same unless they are on the extreme side of tourism, such as bus tours of cities and visits to important shopping areas (COLLINS-KREINER 2010, 161).

Even beyond the largely individualized practices listed above, scholars like Hoshino, Yamanaka, Reader, and Okamoto have noted that in Japan, the division between tourist location and a pilgrimage is often unclear. Hoshino created a graph in 2012 that demonstrates the diversity of contemporary pilgrimages by placing religious and irreligious pilgrimages along an x-axis with a y-axis consisting of differing cultural factors (HOSHINO 2012, 4–5). Yamanaka noted that many prefectures have attempted to recreate the success of the pilgrimage revival by resurrecting lesser-known older pilgrimages or by creating new routes (YAMANAKA 2012, 149–50). He notes that the origins of many routes of modern practices derive from a multitude of sources and ascribing a theoretical distinction between pilgrims and tourists can be self-defeating (YAMANAKA 2012, 165). While there seems to be a certain status given to pilgrimage routes whose origins

are obscure or ancient, recently created routes and locations can have a similar effect on the visitor. Locations can straddle both tourist sites and pilgrimages, particularly when connected to fan culture.

The motivations of a pilgrim and a tourist, as mentioned above, are often similar, if not identical. Pilgrims undertake their journey in order to have a sublime experience, to connect to their spiritual core, to transcend their ordinary lives, and to move, even briefly, into the sublime. Tourists also seek to move beyond their everyday lives, often seeking respite from the stresses of their normal lives and responsibilities. Tourists too are seeking an experience that would provide them with a fulfillment that they cannot otherwise obtain. This fulfillment can be religious in nature, although for many this is not a prerequisite (READER 2007, 25). This often means that the tourist is looking for a connection to a broader community; many seek out locations of national or cultural importance like battlefields, museums, or high-profile cities (COLLINS-KREINER 2009, 441–42). In Japan this means that locations popular for both tourists and pilgrims often claim both groups as visitors; for example, the Kumano pilgrimage often counts the number of pilgrims each year according to the numbers of individuals who have visited the local area, even if there is no evidence that they actually ever visited the designated shrines (KNIGHT 1996, 171).

Many tourists are explicitly traveling to locations of emotional or cultural importance, ones that are often as important psychologically as those visited by pilgrims. Therefore, separating two phenomena is perhaps of no value, with tourism likely serving the same psychic needs that pilgrimage also performs (COLLINS-KREINER 2010, 157–58). This may be particularly true for locations like the aforementioned Sakaiminato as it provides an emotional haven for visitors with a connection to a broader social community of fellow fans as well as perceived premodern belief systems while being near, but not connected, to a historical pilgrimage route. As Collins-Kreiner has noted in his research, tourists visiting cultural and nationally important sites are often in an “existential mode,” similar to the emotional state of pilgrims, binding them to the wider community that is beyond the mundane (COLLINS-KREINER 2009, 439–40). Sakaiminato, as the birthplace of the creator of a popular series, offers to thereby connect the visitor on a symbolic level with the artist and therefore their fellow fans and the national community. The small town aspects of the city, with the tourist location being clearly defined and limited to a particular location, gives the visitor a sense of safety and security in a rural environment.

This emotional drive has been a source of economic revival worldwide. In Europe, travel agencies have arisen that cater solely to modern pilgrims who are seeking self-fulfillment (HUNIG 2001). It is estimated that 11 percentage of the population of Germany have undertaken some form of pilgrimage, although most of these people are not affiliated closely with organized religion and are instead

using the pilgrimage to attain individual goals. This phenomenon has been both monetized and studied under the name of Spirituellen Tourismus (GATZHAMMER 2012, 254–59). This is very similar to the motivations for nonreligious pilgrims and tourists in Japan. For example, one of Ian Reader’s informants claimed that they had been drawn to the Shikoku pilgrimage by its portrayal on an NHK program that tied the practice to community and history (READER 2005, 82). Yamanaka also found that cultural tradition and the formation of a deep emotional connection to a broader community are a major motivation of contemporary Japanese pilgrims (YAMANAKA 2012, 147). Consequently, contemporary pilgrimage and focused forms of tourism are often the same phenomenon divided by an ambiguous and fluid nuance of meaning.

Okamoto highlights this issue when he notes that, while there may be a popular perception that travel to sacred locations for secular reasons somehow diminishes its importance, many pilgrims are drawn to a location for many of the same reasons as tourists. For example, those who travel to a shrine out of a desire to connect to familial traditions are not dissimilar from those who visit a secular location to connect to their heritage or community (OKAMOTO Ryōsuke 2015, LOC 46–48). He states: “When all is said and done, there are multitudes of tourists appearing on pilgrimages” (OKAMOTO Ryōsuke 2015, LOC 42). In particular it can be difficult to categorize youths as either purely pilgrims or tourists as they cite personal, rather than religious, reasons as the motivation behind their journeys (OKAMOTO Ryōsuke 2015, LOC 48–53). YAMANAKA (2012, 162) states that the distinction between the two may be fading as devotion to established religious institutions declines. Sakaiminato, while not a religious destination, has added a veneer of religiosity by creating a small shrine along the Yōkai Road that venerates the supernatural creatures featured in the *Ge Ge Ge no Kitarō* comic series.

The location itself could be an iteration of a safe and secure space, as even obscure towns like Sakaiminato are no longer completely unknown to the traveler thanks to the internet. Both tourists and pilgrims move to locations they have typically investigated or have heard a great deal about. Not only do these locations provide an amelioration of everyday stress and a space that is protected from the outside world, but they also provide spaces that were often preconstructed in the imagination of the individuals before they even departed. Modern tourists and travelers have an added sense of confidence as communication infrastructure improves, which gives them the ability to freely maintain ties to their home communities as they wish (BECKSTEAD 2010, 387–88). As tourists and pilgrims can now readily contact their friends and families left behind, they in turn can influence the expectations of those left behind. This is especially true with the rise of social media, where real-time updates can be shared with one’s fellow travelers and community.

This phenomenon has become so widespread that most pilgrims and travelers have a fair amount of knowledge of a location prior to their visit, which was historically limited by publically published information or word of mouth. They can now depend on a variety of sources, including detailed photographs and descriptions of the location that can simulate actual visits before even arriving at their destination. They can also receive advice on places to avoid and on locations to visit, giving them a sense that they are already experts on a region that they have never visited. Many have reported that the closer the location is to their expectations the more satisfaction they derive from their visit (McRAE 2003, 238–39). Therefore the emotional factors driving tourism and pilgrimage are formed prior to the arrival at a location, with the actual visit being a catalyst for the cementing of the destination's meaning in their mind.

Heritage tourism has been especially popular in Japan. This form of travel is intended to connect the individual to their larger cultural community and to their collectively shared history, an emotional tie that is similar to the one created through the journey that pilgrims also undertake (COLLINS-KREINER 2010, 155–56). This is especially true when this concept is tied to the purity or un-modern aspects of an area, as it is viewed as a place beyond the contamination of urbanized life (McRAE 2003, 238). Semi-rural locations such as Sakaiminato have an advantage as tourist areas because they are able to play off of this sense of purity to justify the difficulty one has visiting the region from the more urbanized areas of Japan, although there are no direct *shinkansen* lines to the city and one must transfer to regional trains at least once. Sakaiminato also has a yearly calendar of events, mimicking the older, rural traditions of the cyclical ritual events (CREIGHTON 1998, 131). With the emphasis on recreating an “emotional home,” Sakaiminato is able to create a form of pop culture pilgrimage, drawing in fans of *Ge Ge Ge no Kitarō* to the region year round with the promise that they can bond with their fellow fans and Sakaiminato's regional traditions.

The Emotional Expectations of Cultural Tourism

Sakaiminato is not alone with its use of emotional touchstones to create a positive image for itself. Nostalgia is a powerful factor in the formation of a shared national identity and thereby the drive of Japanese travelers to perform cultural tourism as religious observation and pilgrimage decline in relative numbers in Japan (McRAE 2003, 238–39). Postwar tourism in particular has been affected by this shift, as the rise in relative wealth and rapid transport has made visiting even isolated towns feasible. Tourist and state officials have also been active in the promotion of domestic travel as a means of creating a national community and boosting local economies, and have portrayed rural areas and landmarks as a means of tapping into the nostalgic past and collective childhood (GOLD-

STEIN-GIDONI 2005, 158–59). This campaign has also been critical to the marketing of rural destinations as a replacement *furusato* for individuals who no longer have a familial connection to their towns of origin (CREIGHTON 1998, 129–30). Sakaiminato therefore has a particularly unique position as a destination as it can tap into the pilgrim market of travelers heading towards Izumo due to the shared train line and also link to a popular children's series.

Another aspect of pilgrimage that is also replicated in contemporary tourism practices in Sakaiminato is the sense that visitors are free to intermingle with the local community. Pilgrims in Japan have long relied on the support of the local population, and the image of the hospitable stranger is a hook that draws in potential travelers. Some pilgrimage routes, like that in Santiago, still rely on religious authorities, but many have now developed networks at the grassroots level (YAMANAKA 2012, 136). These mutual exchange networks not only act as a type of economic support for the local communities, but also increase the perceived authenticity of the specific region for outsiders (YAMANAKA 2012, 160–63). Media attention is also vital, as many scholars have noted that the number of attendees of a pilgrimage spikes after it is shown in the media (READER 2007, 15–16), and this had been shown as true for Sakaiminato as well. Sakaiminato's local community, while limiting visitors to a specific region of the town, has advertised that their community is open and hospitable, a second hometown for fans of Mizuki's works.

However, tourists and pilgrims are not looking for a place that is completely ordinary; the draw is not an exact replica of their hometown or childhood, but rather something that is a purer, more sublime version of that experience. The idea is that through visiting a particular location designed to recreate this feeling a visitor can find a more authentic and true reality and bond to the whole. It is not a search necessarily for the Self, but rather the untouched other (WOOSNAM 2010, 616–17). Beckstead noted that this is similar to the concepts of Fernweh and Heimweh, which are used to describe travel and pilgrimage and the need to move beyond one's home and comfortable experiences but also the need to return to it once an individual's travels are finished. The tourist and pilgrim are both operating under this framework and are in a constant state of both return and departure (BECKSTEAD 2010, 385–86). This allows them not only to enter a liminal space, but also a space in which they can expand their boundaries temporarily with the awareness that this is safe—it is only temporary as they will never fully enter the daily lives of those they visit (MCRAE 2003, 240–46).

Sakaiminato, by creating a specific road along which a traveler can move, keeps them away from the more domestic areas of the town. This maintains the illusion that the visitor has entered a special world, a world that is a replica of their expectations developed through the work of promotional campaigns and various websites. It is a safe place with set expectations, a simplified version of

more complex pilgrimages designed to resonate on an emotional level with the visitors in a precisely defined way. Due to the planned nature of the area and the preexisting knowledge of *Ge Ge Ge no Kitarō*, its characters, and their relationships, visitors can feel as if they are already immersed in the experience without truly leaving behind the familiar. The transition between one's home and Sakaiminato is very swift, with the characters appearing immediately at the station when one first arrives and being the last thing seen by the visitor when they depart.

The Furusato Tourist Industry

Domestic tourism is comparatively weak when compared to the international travel industry due to the greater prestige of international travel. However, state ministries have focused on tourism and economic development as a means of fostering a positive national image and halting the economic decline of the rural areas. This began in earnest during the 1970s, when several campaigns emphasized the purity and primordial nature of the countryside over the bustle and modernity of the city (ARLT 2006, 200–201). These campaigns were even satirized in the media at the time, when they were ironically referred to in the 1977 horror-comedy *Hausu* when the characters pass a sign exhorting them to return to the countryside (*furusato*) to marry (ŌBAYASHI 1977). The state has furthered this policy by rearranging national holidays to encourage domestic travel by granting enough days off in a row that a family can visit the countryside and return home in a brief space of time (ARLT 2006, 202). In the author's personal experience, the manipulation of local culture and observances to better match the needs of urban tourists can also be altered locally, as a visit to a yearly kagura (sacred dance) festival was once thwarted by the Ise Shrine moving its festival to match the Golden Week holidays in 2005.

This policy has been relatively successful in promoting domestic tourism through this channel. With the ongoing recession, individuals can no longer afford expensive international vacations and the emotional satisfaction derived from visiting historical and culturally important sites is regularly emphasized in advertisements and the media. This phenomenon can be nearly ubiquitous. For example, the town of Matsue, a close neighbor of Sakaiminato, invested heavily in a commercial campaign in Tokyo to encourage travel to the area to celebrate the centennial in 2011 of the writing of *Kwaidan* by Lafcadio Hearn. These kinds of campaigns have caused a rise in the popularity of overnight travel in Japan as annually there are around 255 million overnight sojourns with each costing around ¥47,000 (HIWASAKI 2006, 675). Budget airlines are now joining the fray, serving markets historically overlooked by larger airlines like JAL. With a barrage of advertisements promoting the emotional rewards of tourism and its



FIGURE 1. The particular tourist draws of Sakaiminato as portrayed on a local tourist board website, with *Ge Ge Ge no Kitarō* on the left and the seafood industry's mascot on the right.

relative affordability, these campaigns have entered the public imagination and collective memory.

In 1989 the government began to focus particularly on emphasizing the concept of *furusato* as an ideal in tourism. While there had been other versions of this campaign, it gained a special importance in policy and media at this time (REA 2000, 646). The knowledge of regional variation and specialties were further embedded in the public mind by the creation of the system of having one mascot or special dish for each region in Japan (ARLT 2006, 201). This commodification of regional variation can be seen in the creation of souvenirs from the location, and Sakaiminato has a pair of mascots to further their own profile among tourists. One regional specialty is the local seafood, whose mascot has equal prominence on the city's tourist website with the characters from *Ge Ge Ge no Kitarō* (FIGURE 1; Sakaiminato Sightseeing Guide). Tourist officials have also encouraged community involvement, as an influx of tourists can cause resentment among a local population, in order to give a personalized sense of involvement in the success of the endeavor (HIWASAKI 2006, 677). This helps foster a friendliness toward visitors that aids in their feelings of safety and acceptance.

Sakaiminato, among many other communities, has noted the value in promoting their community as an artificial *furusato*. However, it is important to at least maintain the facade of authenticity, as satisfaction decreases if an area feels too constructed, even in places such as resorts that are by necessity pre-planned (KNIGHT 1996, 167–69). Like pilgrimages, part of the enjoyment of an area is its ability to connect to one's emotional core, and explicit artificiality can ruin the effect for the individual. For Sakaiminato, this is partially achieved by

its direct connection to *Ge Ge Ge no Kitarō*'s creator Mizuki Shigeru. Another aspect is direct marketing, as many of these campaigns specifically target young women and retirees. Not only do these two demographics have a relatively large amount of free time and money, but also the concept that rural areas are sanctuaries from the everyday seems to particularly resonate with these groups (ARLT 2006, 203–205). Perhaps the concept of *furusato* has become a new focal point of secular pilgrimage.

This concept is further connected to the act of pilgrimage by the nature of the *furusato*, where the individual can again merge with their ancestral community. Many tourist boards and authorities have noted this as an important factor in drawing in visitors from the urban regions of the country, and will often try to foster a sense of this both in the advertisements for a region and within the area itself (CREIGHTON 1998, 142–44). This draw of safety and growth is similar to that sought out by pilgrims seeking spiritual security; tourists to these cultural locations are also seeking a sense of internal harmony by outward movement towards an emotional center (REA 2000, 645). This has even been used to justify overseas tourism, as there has been an increase in the number of Japanese visitors to the Cumbrian home of Beatrice Potter or Prince Edward Island, the setting of *Anne of Green Gables*, who claim to be receiving a spiritual and emotional reward from their visits to these largely cultural locations (REA 2000, 639–41). Visitors to Sakaiminato are also encouraged to discover this feeling inside themselves to connect to the rural culture of premodern Japan through local cuisine and folkloric creatures and to the popular culture of contemporary Japan.

Ge Ge Ge no Kitarō and the Tourist Industry of Sakaiminato

The image of emotional importance and the concept of *furusato* are tied to the popularity of the manga series *Ge Ge Ge no Kitarō* and its numerous anime adaptations, which at least three generations have enjoyed. This is further entrenched by the advertisements produced by Sakaiminato. However, these traits may be most strongly seen in film. Films are likely to reach both a very young audience and an international audience that is either too young to have seen the television series, or does not have the inclination to make the investment in time to read an entire book series or watch a series on television. These films also often serve as a means of highlighting the area of Sakaiminato, as it is frequently the location of the action or the origins of the characters.

Sakaiminato, while initially developing the Yōkai Road, built upon the concept of *furusato* tourism. This has had a synergistic energy with the normalization of the *otaku*, or hardcore media consumer, and the rise of “contents tourism,” media-focused travel (OKAMOTO Takeshi 2015, 12). Heavy media consumers consciously create networks involving information sharing and discussion surrounding their

“island universes” (OKAMOTO Takeshi 2015, 14–20). Yamanaka has discussed anime-based tourism, often described in Japanese as *manga junrei* (comic pilgrimages) and how it closely aligns to the typical understanding of pilgrimage. He states: “Recently, the frequently undertaken visits to the locations found in anime and manga are described as ‘pilgrimage’” (YAMANAKA 2012, 170). Many of these series have unofficial guides created by fans and disseminated online, but numerous guides exist, such as *Anime tanbō seichi junrei gaido* (SEICHI JUNREI IINKAI 2013) and travelogues written by KAMON Nanami and HIGASHI Masao (2004) on the topic that have been printed by traditional publishing houses.

The goals of these media consumers, and even casual fans, follow the pattern set down by pilgrims. To the dismay of some communities, fan pilgrims sometimes cosplay as favorite characters at the real world locations where the character visited (YAMANAKA 2012, 170–72). In contrast, Sakaiminato headed off potential conflict with local residents and fans by creating a safe zone for these fan pilgrims where cosplay and other demonstrations are encouraged. This acceptance is shown several times on the media produced by the local government and tourist board online. Pilgrimage also often focuses on replication (YAMANAKA 2012, 172–75), which Sakaiminato fosters through the creation of several local events that encourage the visitor to return multiple times.

The most obvious of these films is that based on the memoir of Mizuki Shigeru’s wife, Mura Nunoe, which was released in 2010 under the title *Ge Ge Ge no Nyōbo*. This film contrasts the warm, loving community of Sakaiminato and Izumo versus the cold, harsh, and competitive world of urban Tokyo. Mura is seen praying at the local shrine in her hometown and near her home in Tokyo, and she regularly references folk legends concerning the pilgrimage and shrine complex of Izumo. Her family is connected to their past, represented by their keeping of the *Gyoji* calendar cycle, their nurturing of all the members of their family, and their ethical framework. However, the city is a cold, competitive place demonstrated by the lack of care shown to the poor and to neighborhood shrines. The safe environment of Sakaiminato is portrayed as the ultimate *furusato*, a place of spiritual and emotional renewal if only one could reach it (SUZUKI 2010).

Ge Ge Ge no Nyōbo is focused on reaching a largely older audience, however the following two films are focused on the young child and pre-teen demographic. The first, *The Great Yōkai War*, is explicitly set within the town of Sakaiminato, which is portrayed as exceptionally rustic. In this film as well, the locals still adhere to the ritual calendar, and it is through this practice that the lead character is able to tap into the world of *yōkai*. The protagonist is from a broken home and initially is quite bitter and alienated; however, he learns maturity and compassion for others over the course of his experiences with the various monsters found in the area. Even the major tourist attractions of Sakaiminato are present. Characters flit in and out of Yōkai Road, where there are over three

hundred bronze figures of the characters of *Ge Ge Ge no Kitarō* lining the town's main street. The final showdown between the good and evil *yōkai* (traditional monsters or spirits) occurs out of the safe space of Sakaiminato, as the young boy and his new supernatural friends must travel to Tokyo to do battle (INOUE 2005).

The later film, *Kitarō*, is not explicitly set within Sakaiminato, although the setting is a rural community threatened by urban development and unemployment, a not-uncommon sight in contemporary Japan. In order to find a safe haven, the lead characters must leave their prefabricated apartment building and their broken family in town and hide in Kitarō's rustic home surrounded by his family and friends (MOTOKI 2007). However, this film, like the others, focuses on the importance of family and a place of safety and security found within one's natal environment. The idea that Sakaiminato can provide a space of spiritual and emotional renewal is repeated within these films, which is especially notable as these films are not directly based on the work of Mizuki. Within all three works, Kitarō exists as a fictional character, but one that can bring individuals into a family-like community of sympathetic fellow travelers, remedying the alienation of an urbanized society.

Historically, religious ritual and practice was one of the primary ties holding a community together. Religious practice and observation remains relatively common in Japan, which helps drive the variety of new religions formed during the twentieth century. However, with the rise of mass communication a new collective bond developed over the shared enjoyment of popular media. Individuals who claim no religious beliefs, or hold loosely to a faith, can experience an almost religious transcendence by their excitement over pop culture. Cosplaying, the creation of fanworks, and traveling to locations connected to the narrative have almost religious undertones and serve to draw people into an emotionally rewarding shared community with similar values that exists beyond the everyday. This has expanded into the practice of pilgrimage partially forwarded through the consumption of media. For example, after the release of *Ge Ge Ge no Nyōbo* Sakaiminato had 3.75 million visitors the following year (see "Kitarō and Yōkai-Sakaiminato Area," <http://furusato.sanin.jp/p/area/sakaiminato/1/> (accessed 11 July 2016)).

Other aspects of pilgrimage are replicated within Sakaiminato. One of the more obvious examples is the amount of mapmaking and monuments around the Yōkai Road circuit produced by the local community. There are over three hundred bronze statues along the primary road in Sakaiminato, and each comes with a stamp so one can fill up a stamp book to prove that one has visited every individual statue (Mizuki Shigeru Yōkai Road). As part of the ritualized aspects of tourism, many also take photos of themselves next to the bronze statues of their favorite characters and post them online; several can be seen on travel websites like Jalan.net next to their personal reviews of the location (FIGURE 2).



FIGURE 2. A visitor review with a picture of the Certificate of Completion from the *Yōkai Guidebook*. Mizuki Shigeru Museum Reviews. http://www.jalan.net/kankou/310000/310800/spt_31204cc3292012332/kuchikomi/?spotId=31204cc3292012332andafCd=androotCd=andscreeNId=OUW2001andvos=andefcid=> (accessed 11 July 2016).

On the Sakaiminato tourist board's official website there are a number of maps, several of which are interactive and responsive to the actions of the reader.¹ For those who do not have the ability to interact with these maps on their cellphones there is a printable PDF version (FIGURE 3). These maps show a circuit the visitor is advised to follow, listing each of the statues and the character they represent. The circuit begins at the local train station, which is covered in murals and images of the cast of *Ge Ge Ge no Kitarō*, and ends in the Mizuki Shigeru museum. This is full immersion into the realm of the series, with a distinct beginning and end, and allows for all the typical rituals of the traveler with souvenir shops and photo opportunities in a single dedicated area.

This is an experience that intends to draw one completely out of the mundane world and into the world of the series, one for a specific cadre of fans who are dedicated enough for them to spend a day visiting each particular statue to complete their stamp book. The stamp book can be purchased from the local tourist board and can also be ordered from their webpage, with the nominal cost of ¥120, and if one completes the circuit they can receive a certificate of completion to show off to their friends. It is noted on the page from which one can order this guidebook that the booklet itself is written at a level that even a grade school child can read, allowing parents to introduce their children to the series (*Sakaiminato Yōkai Guidebook*). However, as the review seen in FIGURE 2 demonstrates, even adult visitors to Sakaiminato without children are interested in obtaining this certificate. This is a parallel of the stamp books and rewards that many pilgrimages created in order to recognize their pilgrims during their

1. See Sakaiminato Spots and Map. <http://www.sakaiminato.net/site2/page/roadmap/spotmap/kankoumap1/> (accessed 21 April 2013).



FIGURE 3. Map of the “Yōkai Road” (“Sakaiminato Spots and Map.”) Sakaiminato Sightseeing Guide. <http://www.sakaiminato.net/site2/page/roadmap/spotmap/kankoumap1/> (accessed 21 April 2013).

journeys, and follows the idea that this activity can lift the individual from the routine of travel into a specific, goal-orientated activity.

This activity also initiates the traveler into a larger community and gives them a status that is above the average fan, at least for them. This sense of becoming a member of an abstract family is noted in the websites created to draw in visitors, and is even a point of encouragement as one can meet the characters who are described as a family (*Sakaiminato Sightseeing Guide*—Japanese). Sakaiminato itself is a family-friendly destination, with little to upset even the smallest of children. Even the local Jazz Festival, which is held once a year, is connected to *Ge Ge Ge no Kitarō* and is touted as an appropriate place to bring one’s family (see FIGURE 4. “Yōkai Jazz.” Sakaiminato Sightseeing Guide. <http://www.sakaiminato.net/yo-kaijazz/> (accessed 11 July 2013)). Even foreign visitors are encouraged to come to the area in order to gain access to any “traditional” Japanese community. The English-language version of the Sakaiminato tourist webpage notes that Mizuki Shigeru has received multiple awards for his contributions to Japanese culture.

Fans have also constructed their own guides to the area for those who may not wish to use the official map designed by the city. These maps include additional information and reviews from the fans, as well as locations that tie into series by other authors.² This means that visitors to the area could theoretically complete the pilgrimages for several series, and not only the official *Ge Ge Ge no*

2. See Tottori Prefecture Anime Pilgrimage Map. <http://anime-tourism.com/cgi-bin/map.cgi?Area=Tottori> (accessed 11 July 2016).



FIGURE 4. A part of the *Sakaiminato Sightseeing Guide*—Japanese homepage.

Kitarō route. There are also numerous aggregator websites, such as Laughy and Naver Matome, that feature encouraging short articles written for fellow fans who are interested in visiting the area and are unsure as to whether the pilgrimage is worth the journey.

Yamanaka and Okamoto also noted that the ties between fan pilgrims and the local community are vital. Some communities can be hesitant to accept an influx of tourists, particularly if their behavior differs from local norms. “Fan pilgrims” and those interested in fostering their presence often emphasize the boost that they may have on a local economy that can provide merchandise and hospitality to a dedicated audience (YAMANAKA 2012, 176–78; OKAMOTO Takeshi 2015, 30–33). While “pioneer pilgrims” who trailblaze new destinations and routes can experience difficulties with their travel, often tourist agencies and even the media producers themselves are quick to create dedicated tours that are accepted by the local community (OKAMOTO Takeshi 2015, 22–24). Sakaiminato, by virtue of their well-established tourist board (the Town Management Organization), the participation of Mizuki Shigeru and his family, as well as the local and fan communities, were able to quickly harness this energy and guide it to a local revival.

The tourist board webpage also claims that Mizuki’s works are representative of Japan’s interest in maintaining harmony between humanity and nature, and the value that history and tradition has among the population. The site argues that by visiting the area, one can touch these aspects of the culture and be briefly

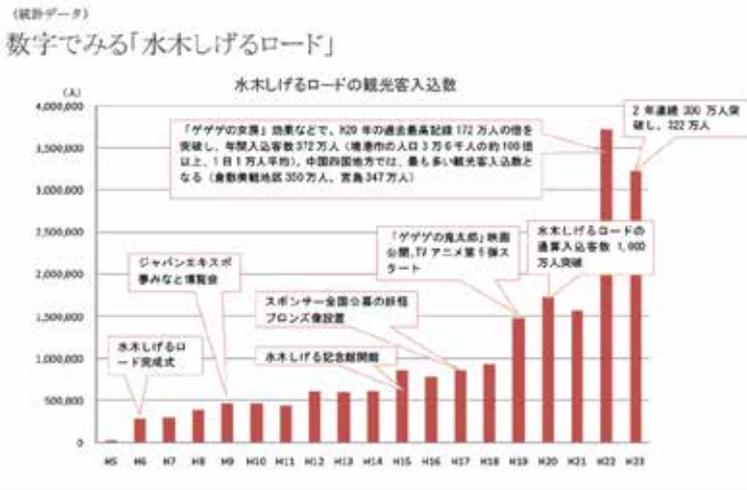


FIGURE 5. Number of tourists who have visited the Mizuki Shigeru Road, 1993–2011. Taken from <http://www.mlit.go.jp/common/000213058.pdf> (accessed 10 November 2016).

immersed into the “old days.”³ Mizuki Shigeru’s production company also sponsored an overseas tourist package called the “YōkaidōTour,”⁴ that claimed that it could connect travelers easily to Japanese culture and traditions through guided visits to Kyoto, Matsue, and, most importantly, Sakaiminato.⁵ This emphasis on the emotional and cultural importance of Sakaiminato places it as a spiritual core for the traveler, one that can place someone, however temporarily, into a large and safe circle of family. This theme can even move into other areas: for example, the local health authority created a program called Yōkai Pozu where adults, mostly elderly, perform gymnastic poses taken from the Kitarō characters that line Yōkai Road as a form of exercise (MURAKAMI and TANAKA 2008).

All of this would be unimportant if this appeared to be limited to a specific core audience of fans. However, it is important to note that Sakaiminato has become a successful domestic tourist location, with visits increasing dramatically after the creation of the main *Ge Ge Ge no Kitarō* destinations in the town, and then a further increase in the number of visitors after the release of the related films. The graph above (FIGURE 5), compiled by MASUDA (n.d.), who

3. See Sakaiminato Guide for Sightseeing. <http://www.sakaiminato.net/foreign/en/mizuki.html> (accessed 11 July 2016).

4. This is a play on the Tōkaidō Road, which was the name of the highway linking Osaka and Tokyo (then Edo) in the medieval period.

5. See Yōkaidō Tour. <http://www.japanforyou.com/index.php/exclusive-tours/yokaido-tour.html> (accessed 21 April 2013).

is a member of the Sakaiminato tourist board, notes several points of interest. The Yōkai Road was opened in 1994 and the number of tourists increased nearly ten-fold. The numbers steadily increased, with a slight bump after the opening of the Mizuki Shigeru museum in 2003 that has become the apex of the tourist/pilgrimage route. But the numbers only broke a million after the renewal of the anime series and peaked just fewer than four million in 2010 with the release of *Ge Ge Ge no Nyōbo*. The triumph of Sakaiminato has been noted by research boards and individuals connected to the tourist industry in Japan;⁶ however, while they link the series popularity with the rise in tourist numbers, they have yet to fully discuss the emotional reasoning behind this development.

Their sense of community is reinforced by the constant presence of fellow fans, designated locations, and businesses catering to their interests, such as the frequency with which a traveler is confronted with the characters from *Ge Ge Ge no Kitarō*, as most of the shops and signs in the area are tied to the show in some way (Sakaiminato—*Ge Ge Ge no Kitarō*. Dru's Misadventures. <http://blog.hino-maple.com/2010/08/10/sakaiminato-gegege-no-kitaro/> (accessed 11 July 2016)). This creates a sense of Sakaiminato being a natural *furusato* for the fans of the program, a place where the fans can be emotionally cleansed from the troubles of their adult lives, and a safe place to retreat back into one's childhood. It is a form of pop culture pilgrimage, and from the various reviews left on a number of travel websites, it appears to be one that is emotionally rewarding for the traveler. The popular site *Jalan.net* gives the Mizuki Shigeru Museum four out of five stars, with comments such as: "As a fan of Shigeru Mizuki-sensei, this was the top place I wished to visit. If you come here, the life, career, and various works of Mizuki-sensei become clear. Mizuki is a genius."⁷ The Yōkai Road also received four out of five stars from 117 reviewers on Trip Advisor.⁸ Therefore, it seems that a visit to the area is largely a positive event for visitors, providing a sense of satisfaction that was historically provided by pilgrimage.

Fans have also called for a pilgrimage to Sakaiminato after the recent death of Mizuki. One website stated that in order to mourn the loss, the blogger undertook a pilgrimage to Yōkai Road to "walk in the footsteps" of Mizuki

6. The reader may wish to refer to the work done by SAWADA (n.d.).

7. Mizuki Shigeru Museum Reviews. Original text: 水木しげる先生のファンとしては、一度は訪れたい場所です。水木先生の生涯、経歴、作品等がここに来れば一目瞭然。水木先生は天才的なお方です。 http://www.jalan.net/kankou/310000/310800/spt_31204cc3292012332/kuchikomii/?spotId=31204cc3292012332andafCd=androotCd=andscreenId=OUW2001andvos=andefcid= (accessed 11 July 2016).

8. See Mizuki Shigeru Road Reviews. http://www.tripadvisor.jp/Attraction_Review-g1023598-d1508907-Reviews-The_Mizuki_Shigeru_Road-Sakaiminato_Tottori_Prefecture_Chugoku.html (accessed 21 April 2013); "I'd Like to Go at Least Once: The Charm of Mizuki Shigeru Road." <http://laughy.jp/1425349108183183936> (accessed 11 July 2016).

and described his journey so others can replicate it. The blogger additionally posted numerous photographs of buses, storefronts, and food tied to *Ge Ge Ge no Kitarō*.⁹ Another fan posted on Facebook that the Nezumi Otoko statue's extended hand could be shaken as a form of condolence, both for the fan's and for the character's mutual loss.¹⁰ For many of the fans the death of the artist was viewed as a personal loss and Sakaiminato as a place where they could come together to reconnect not only to Mizuki, but with one another through shared travel.

Conclusion

Sakaiminato is a particularly fortunate tourist location. As a somewhat difficult to reach rural location it did not have any particular aspects that would have drawn in travelers who could easily eat Sakaiminato's famous seafood in any number of cities that share the same access to the Sea of Japan. However, by capitalizing on their famous resident Mizuki Shigeru and his popular series, Sakaiminato has been able to establish a unique profile among destinations in Shimane prefecture. Sakaiminato has also been the beneficiary of the state campaign to promote tourism to off-the-beaten-track locations through the emphasis of the concept of *furusato* and urbanites nostalgic perception of the countryside. But the greatest influence on the success of Sakaiminato is the rise of tourist practices that mimic those of traditional Japanese pilgrimages, allowing for a deeper emotional impact and impression made on those that travel to the region. As this leads them to praise the destination, it creates a cycle of fans streaming in from the cities drawn in by positive reviews on travel sites and on social media. That Sakaiminato is not too far from the older pilgrimage route of Izumo, and has been linked to it by films like *Ge Ge Ge no Nyōbo*, is also a reflection of the importance of pilgrimage practices on the tourist industry of the town.

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