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Kamikaze Museums and Contents Tourism

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Abstract

The kamikaze have been the subject of dozens of films and television dramas in post-war Japan. The genre blends human dramas of 'tragic heroes' going to their deaths with war action entertainment. Many commemorative sites to the kamikaze also exist, particularly around the bases in Kyushu from where they flew their missions. From the 1990s, films triggered additional tourism to the museums; the museums introduced displays or merchandise related to some films; and municipalities started using films or novels about the kamikaze in their tourism promotion strategies. This paper introduces the 'kamikaze world' as a form of tourism imaginary to show how kamikaze contents (the narratives, characters, locations, and creative elements of kamikaze stories) are triggering contents tourism to a network of sites in southern Japan, and how this represents a gradual shift in kamikaze sites from being sites of commemoration to sites of popular culture pilgrimage.

KEYWORDS:

Notes

1 '[S]trictly speaking the only real kamikazes were the aerial attack groups organized under Vice Admiral Ohnishi [in the Philippines in October 1944]' (Inoguchi, Nakajima and Pineau [1958](#), p. xvi), but kamikaze in English is often used to mean any form of suicide attack. In Japanese tokubetsu kōgekitai (tokkō) refers to the various types of suicide weapon in which an attack ordered by military commanders required the death of participating soldiers in order to be carried out. Precise casualty figures remain unknown, but a Chiran Peace Museum internal document given to the author estimates there were 3,963 aircraft pilots who died (1,438 army and 2,525 navy) and another 1,889 who died in other forms of tokkō attack, including tank, submarine, and speedboat (272 army and 1,617 navy). Tokkō does not include suicide attacks made on the initiative of the individuals or group (for example the 'banzai charges' of isolated garrisons choosing death over surrender), nor to operations, like the final one-way mission of the battleship Yamato in 1945, which left open the possibility, however slim, for survival or surrender. This paper discusses only plane attacks, so I will use the term kamikaze, which is also most familiar for an English readership.

2 For many years, I have seen the Chiran museum advertised on the same billboard at Hamamatsucho station in Tokyo while taking the monorail to Haneda Airport. The location of the board in a spot used by millions of air travellers reinforces the image of Chiran as a tourist site, not simply a commemorative site.

Additional information

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Notes on contributors

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Philip Seaton is a professor in the Research Faculty of Media and Communication, Hokkaido University, where he is the convenor of the Modern Japanese Studies Program. He is the author of Japan’s Contested War Memories (Routledge 2007), Voices from the Shifting Russo-Japanese Border: Karafuto/Sakhalin (Routledge 2015, co-edited with Svetlana Paichadze), Local History and War Memories in Hokkaido (Routledge 2016) and Contents Tourism in Japan: Pilgrimages to ‘Sacred Sites’ of Popular Culture (Cambria Press, 2017, with Takayoshi Yamamura, Akiko Sugawa-Shimada, and Kyungjae Jang) as well as numerous articles on war memories and contents tourism in Japan. His website is www.philipseaton.net.

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