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International Tourism Research Salon

“Transforming Tourism Research:

Reshape, Rethink, Renew, Regenerate, Restart”

Center for Tourism Research, Wakayama University

和歌山大学 国際観光学研究センター



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Preface

COVID-19 has had a profound impact on the state of tourism and tourism research worldwide, creating the need to rethink tourism research and address urgent challenges. As 2023 emerges, there are signs of a tourism recovery, but there are still considerable constraints standing in the way of any recovery.

This conference was held on March 8-9, 2022, under the theme of “Transforming Tourism Research: Reshape, Rethink, Renew, Regenerate, Restart”, and there were four keynote speeches. Prof. Philip Seaton from Tokyo University of Foreign Studies presented a perspective on the transition and future of content tourism based on entertainment productions, a field in which Japan excels. Prof. Carolin Funck from Hiroshima University discussed the possibilities and challenges that emerged from the COVID-19 disaster, with a focus on island tourism, and Associate Prof. Susanne Klien from Hokkaido University spoke about the paradigm shift toward rural and urban areas brought about by COVID-19. Prof. Etsuko Higashi from Wakayama University and Ms. Noriko Matsuyama from The Koyasan Cross-cultural Communication Network provided a short history of the development of tourism in Wakayama from a historical perspective drawing from the bird’s-eye maps of artist Yoshida Hatsuzaburo. Through the various suggestions provided by these keynote speeches, we were able to engage in discussions with tourism researchers from around the world in attendance. Once again, we appreciate the five keynote speakers for their presentations.

In addition, at conference sessions, 29 CTR researchers and CTR Visiting Fellows presented their research, and twelve papers written on the basis of this presentation are published in the CTR journal “Wakayama Tourism Review Vol.3 Special Issue”. We hope you will enjoy the journal as well.

Finally, thanks to the CTR team Dr. Joseph Cheer, Dr. Hayato Nagai, Dr. Prozano Ricardo Nicolas, Dr. Husna Zainal Abidin, Ms. Kazue Nakamoto, Ms. Murano Misato, Ms. Yumiko Matsubara and Ms. Maki Kobayashi. Without their support, this conference would not have happened. Thank you all very much.



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The 'Golden Age' of Contents Tourism: Already Over or Still to Come?¹

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Abstract

Contents tourism is travel behaviour induced by works of popular culture such as manga, anime, dramas, films, and computer games. It has gained considerable attention (along with its siblings film-induced tourism, media tourism etc.) both at the levels of scholarly research and tourism policy particularly since around 2005. However, the increasing awareness among policymakers and contents producers regarding the potential of entertainment works to induce tourism causes a conundrum. Is it possible to generate genuine fandoms around works of popular culture if they smell of tourism PR, and do fans enjoy visiting sites that smell of contents tourism commercialism? In this sense, the explosion in contents tourism promotion and research might have precipitated the demise of the very phenomenon it promotes/researches. In other words, the golden age of contents tourism — understood to be, in a purist sense, travel by fans wanting to connect more with the works they love — could be over as contents tourism gets increasingly planned and commercialized from the contents production stage. But, in the past two years the Covid-19 pandemic and deepening climate crisis have reset our thinking on travel. With people likely to be more restricted in their geographical mobility from now on, does contents tourism have a bright new future as a means of us enjoying more our immediate localities by connecting with local stories and local places? In this sense, is contents tourism on the cusp of a new golden age as a way of enhancing our enjoyment of socially-distanced and carbon-light travel to nearby destinations in the coming years? These questions are considered against the backdrop of the unfolding war in Ukraine and its implications for both the environment and tourism.

Keywords

Contents tourism
Commercialism
Regenerative
Sustainable
Covid-19
Ukraine War

In 2022 the world is just emerging from perhaps the greatest shock to the international system since 1945, namely the Covid-19 pandemic. Since early 2020, the global tourism industry has been ravaged by the pandemic. The aim of this paper is to think about how we move into the 'post-Covid', or 'with Covid', era from the perspective of contents tourism. I will explain how I envisage contents tourism as part of the future of tourism as we 'reshape, rethink, reload, renew, regenerate, and restart' our travelling.

However, waiting for us as we emerge from the pandemic is the climate crisis, which has been largely sidelined in media and public attention as we have tackled Covid-19. The Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC 2021)² has repeated the familiar line that the looming disaster is driven by human activity, and we are rapidly running out of time to do anything meaningful about it. The magnitude of the climate crisis makes the problems created by the pandemic seem relatively small-scale. Given that the tourism industry is a major contributor to carbon emissions, the question perhaps should not be, 'How can we restart tourism?' Instead, the question should be 'To what extent is it right to restart tourism?' In this context, I will be arguing that contents tourism has much potential as a low-carbon form of tourism fit for the age of climate breakdown.

But then on 24 February 2022 there was another major shift in the global mindset when Russia invaded Ukraine. The pandemic receded drastically in media and public attention, while environmental destruction issues returned to the fore amidst worrying stories of fighting around nuclear reactors and stark images of flattened cities and burning oil refineries.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine has precipitated the next major challenge facing global tourism by disrupting international travel, plunging energy supply chains into turmoil, and unleashing severe inflation in the global economy. However, war is also a major (contents) tourism generator, as described in our most recent book *War as Entertainment and Contents Tourism in Japan* (Yamamura and Seaton 2022).³ The theoretical framework of this book suggests potential directions for tourism in Ukraine and Russia both during and after the conflict, although it does seem obscene to be discussing this while this brutal conflict is ongoing.

This paper, therefore, draws together many themes at a major junction for tourism and tourism research: we are not quite yet 'post-pandemic', and the full consequences, both destructive and creative, of Russia's invasion of Ukraine have not yet become apparent either. However, both the pandemic and the war are deeply connected to contents tourism, and both have major implications for the climate crisis, which looms large as the greatest existential threat to humanity.

Contents Tourism: Golden Age Over?

Contents tourism (*kontentsu tsūrizumu*) is a Japanese term which was created using loan words from English and has now returned to English. Our basic working definition is:

travel behavior motivated fully or partially by narratives, characters, locations and other creative elements of popular culture forms, including film, television dramas, manga, anime, novels and computer games. (Seaton *et al* 2017: 3)



We still use this definition as it is relatively simple for newcomers to this research area to grasp, especially for people working in English who are familiar with terms like film-induced tourism or literary tourism. However, our more recent and refined definition is as follows:

Contents tourism is a dynamic series of tourism practices/experiences motivated by contents (defined [...] as 'information — such as narratives, characters, locations, and other creative elements — that has been produced and edited in popular culture forms and that brings enjoyment when it is consumed'). Contents tourists access and embody 'narrative worlds' that are evolving through 'contentsization', namely the continual process of the development and expansion of the 'narrative world' through both mediatized adaptation and tourism practice. (Yamamura 2020: 9)

There are two things we prefer about this second definition. The first is the focus on narratives and narrative worlds as opposed to media platforms. In our understanding of contents tourism, the power of narratives to induce travel, rather than the means by which we access the narratives, are the real focus of contents tourism research. The second is the way in which the role of tourism practice contributes to the evolution of narrative worlds. In other words, whereas there is always an original work or franchise that establishes the narrative world, the fans take an active role in developing that narrative world, including via their activities as tourists.

Year zero for contents tourism research in Japan is 2005. This is when the Japanese government first talked about using local contents and narratives as tourism resources, and encouraged municipalities to use these resources for regional revitalization. Research then developed in a number of distinct trajectories. Masubuchi Toshiyuki and others in the Academy of Contents Tourism followed the spirit of the Japanese government policy and analyzed how contents tourism connected to regional revitalization. Another group of Japanese scholars, including Yamamura Takayoshi and Okamoto Takeshi, considered contents tourism particularly as a form of manga and anime fan practice. Since Sue Beeton, Yamamura Takayoshi and I published the first article in English defining contents tourism (Beeton *et al* 2013), our research team has tried to demonstrate the relevance of contents tourism beyond anime, manga, and Japan within a broad international context. As already mentioned, the most recent focus of our research project has connected contents tourism to war-related travel. After all, war is a powerful creator of narratives, iconic historical figures, representations in popular culture, and sites of pilgrimage.

Let us now turn to the key phrase in the title of this paper: the 'golden age of contents tourism'. A major factor in our understanding of contents tourism is that the tourism is induced by works of popular culture that were not produced with the aim of inducing tourism. In principle, contents tourism is not the result of tourism marketing. Let's take the example of the anime *Lucky Star*, which was one of the first major case studies of contents tourism. The opening sequence of this anime features a shrine *torii* that has become a sacred site for fans. This is a real place, Washimiya Shrine in what is now Kuki city, Saitama prefecture. The producers of the anime did not create this scene with the intention of turning the shrine into a tourist site. Why would they? At the production stage of a new anime, they are mainly worried about whether their work will be a hit or not. Furthermore, an anime production company has little commercial benefit from turning a public place into a tourist attraction. Instead, this site was used as part of a trend within

anime production to use real places as locations as a way of enhancing the realism and detail of the work. In many cases, using real locations is also a cost-cutting measure: converting digital photos into anime backdrops can save time and money in the production process.

Heavily inspired by the catchy opening sequence, fans of *Lucky Star* started visiting Washimiya after the anime series was screened in 2007. It became one of the early case studies of contents tourism research. Here was a town with little prior tourism that was suddenly visited by thousands of fans. It also spawned academic discussion of contents tourism best practice, with Yamamura arguing that it emerged from collaboration among three main actors — fans, contents producers, and the local community — who are joined by their shared respect for the contents (Yamamura 2015: 77).

However, as more people recognized that anime works were generating significant tourism, or 'sacred site pilgrimage' (*seichi junrei*) in the term used by fans, the more difficult it became for contents producers to disregard potential tourism windfalls as part of the commercial strategy for their productions. Local authorities keen to attract more tourists became more proactive in trying to attract contents producers to use their communities as both story settings and as filming locations. As contents tourism policy and the Cool Japan Strategy gathered momentum, particularly in the period 2005-2015, it became increasingly difficult for works to exclude tourism considerations during the production process.

It would be wrong to suggest, however, that there was little understanding of contents tourism's potential before 2005, when the phenomenon received its name via recognition in government policy. Back in the 1960s, when NHK's Taiga Dramas first aired on Japanese television, the ability of television dramas to stimulate tourism was already clear (Seaton *et al* 2017: 153). And while there was no comprehension of it at the time as 'contents tourism', travelers such as the seventeenth century poet Matsuo Basho were clearly motivated to visit places appearing in other poems, stories, and historical narratives (Yamamura 2022). 'Traveling a story', *monogatari wo tabi suru*, to use Masubuchi Toshiyuki's resonant phrase, is a very old human practice indeed (Masubuchi 2010).

Into the 2010s, contents producers often did little to hide their considerations of tourism. Two clear examples were in 2013, when both NHK's Morning Drama *Amachan* and the Taiga Drama *Yae no Sakura* had explicit aims of inducing tourism to help areas of Tohoku devastated by the 2011 earthquake and tsunami. While NHK's drama institutions could get away with such explicit tourism promotionalism on the grounds that it was trying to help disaster zones, unobtrusive tourism advertising masquerading as a work of entertainment has often fallen flat. Ultimately, the work has to impress on an artistic level to create a narrative world that will attract a loyal fandom. Only then is the power of a work to induce contents tourism fully realized. Fans of a genre know instinctively when they are being treated simply as potential tourists or consumers, especially by productions with connections that seem too close to politicians and/or the commercialistic goals espoused by the Cool Japan Strategy.

As such, I have often thought of the period from 2005 to around 2015 as the golden era of contents tourism. This was the period when there was enough knowledge about sacred site pilgrimage to give it an economic impact beyond just a handful of dedicated fans. But it was also a period when contents production with an explicit purpose of promoting tourism was still relatively rare. All the time, however, the purist version of contents tourism, namely when tourism was induced by works that had no intention of inducing tourism, was being eroded.



The result was an increasing number of media articles like the following one about *Tenchi Muyo!*:

Representatives from the city of Takahashi in Okayama Prefecture announced on Monday that the city is raising money to fund a new *Tenchi Muyo!* series. The tentatively titled *Ai: Tenchi Muyo!* will be set in Takahashi, as the city hopes fans will come on a 'pilgrimage' to see the setting of the anime, and plans to sell goods and host related events. (Ressler 2014)

In such cases, we are witnessing the erosion of the purist version of contents tourism. And with it, in my view, we are also witnessing the breakdown of the ideal collaborative model espoused by Yamamura (2015) in his article about *Lucky Star*, namely collaboration between contents producers, fans and local communities based on a common respect for the contents. Producing an anime simply as a vehicle to promote tourism does not feel like 'respect for the contents', although perhaps such a position is being too idealist.

However, this, in a nutshell, is the argument for the golden age of contents tourism being already over. The purist vision of fans traveling to sites made special by their connections to a narrative world has been replaced by a more functionalist reality, whereby contents producers and municipalities work on the assumption that fans will travel to places suggested by tourism promoters masquerading as contents producers.

Tourism: Sustainable vs Regenerative

The focus now switches to the era of climate breakdown, during which I think contents tourism will assume growing prominence as we move beyond the era of Covid-19 travel restrictions.

One of the key words in tourism studies at the moment is 'regenerative'. There is no fixed definition of regenerative tourism, but let me come clean and say I am a regenerative tourism skeptic. To me the term implies that tourism somehow leaves a place or the planet as a whole in better environmental shape than before the tourism. Maybe this can be achieved through cordoning off large areas of land in nature reserves, or via the transference of tourist sites to communities who truly care about their environment, and by taking such tourism resources away from corporations intent simply on extraction for economic profit. But the reality is that as soon as tourists become involved, there is inevitably environmental damage somewhere.

When I hear the word regenerative, what really comes to my mind is the phrase used by environmentalists such as the British journalist George Monbiot: 'rewilding' (Monbiot 2013; 2014). It is easy to see why this word fits uncomfortably in tourism studies. The assumption behind rewilding is that we create places where humans simply do not go. Regeneration means human non-intervention that gives nature a chance to heal. In a sense, tourism is the antithesis of rewilding. Jenny Cave and Diane Dredge (2020) give a good overview of some of the alternative economic models that have been proposed in the past few decades to make tourism more sustainable and even regenerative. But tourism researchers concerned about the environment understandably have problems talking about the elephant in the room: tourism is the problem, and the environmentally friendly thing is often not to do it. Only in extremely rare circumstances can tourism genuinely be called regenerative.

Instead we must accept that there is a certain minimal level of carbon emissions and destructiveness we incur just by being alive and being tourists. The challenge for humanity is to

minimize environmentally destructive consumption over and above the minimum level of inevitable destructiveness required for survival. This idea of meeting our minimum needs to survive while not overshooting into environmentally destructive practices is the essence of Kate Raworth's (2017) concept of doughnut economics. In Raworth's iconic model, human activity must take place in the safe space between the minimum threshold that allows us to meet the basic needs of human survival and the maximum boundary, the ecological ceiling, beyond which human activity is unsustainably destructive.⁴ The strength of Raworth's model is the practical lesson it gives us about our conduct as individuals. It seeks a pragmatic balance between our individual human rights to survival and our collective human responsibility not to harm others or the planet.

My primary concern with the term 'regenerative tourism' is that it can be easily coopted by the unscrupulous to trick people into thinking that tourism itself helps the environment, and so in order to help the environment we should be doing more and more of it. There are other such smoke and mirrors tricks used by the travel industry. The classic one is carbon offsetting when flying. We pay a little extra and feel virtuous because our carbon footprint has been offset somehow by somebody somewhere planting a few trees. Actually, the environmentally sound practice was not to take the flight in the first place. Indeed, it is even better to plant the trees without having taken the flight. So much of this environmental-sounding language from the travel industry, particularly carbon offsetting, is greenwashing. It masks the real agenda of maintaining tourism as a growth industry. The answer really should be 'de-growth' or 'non-consumption' of tourism ... until, that is, we drop below the level of economic activity required to allow people reliant on tourism to meet their survival needs.

Ultimately, this is why I prefer the term sustainable tourism. It reminds us that tourism — however much we all love doing it, and whatever its benefits in providing us with education or simple joie de vivre — has a destructive element that needs to be minimized. While academics love talking about noble case studies of alternative, ethical or regenerative tourism, the reality is that the vast majority of tourism policy and practice tends to follow the destructive, consumerist growth model. Just look at Japan's relentless increase in targets for inbound tourists during the early 2000s, when inbound tourism rose from 5.2 million people in 2003 to 31.8 million in 2019 (Yamamura and Seaton 2021: 404). The Covid-19 pandemic sent that bonanza crashing down, but when national policy is exponential growth, there is little chance of regenerative tourism practices being anything more than a worthy exception to business as usual. It is also helpful to think of regenerative tourism and sustainable tourism in their negative formulations. It is better to call out bad practice by calling it unsustainable than 'unregenerative', which is a contradictory mouthful of prefixes. In short, regenerative tourism is a utopian idea that is applicable in some cases, but sustainability (or perhaps unsustainability) is the key issue that every tourist and tourism operator needs to be addressing right now.

Contents Tourism: Golden Age to Come?

After this detour into environmental issues, let us return to discussion of contents tourism. In a nutshell, contents tourism has the potential to be a relatively sustainable form of tourism with a relatively low environmental footprint suitable for the age of climate breakdown in the twenty-first century. This is despite that fact that so much of the early Japanese government rhetoric surrounding contents tourism since 2005 has been

about growth and revitalization, rather than sustainability or regeneration. Early government policy in Japan was about returning economic vitality to aging, depopulating, and stagnating local communities via the use of narratives and contents as tourist resources (Yamamura and Seaton 2021: 409). In other words, the focus, as in national inbound tourism policy, was commercial growth. Environmental protection was significant only in as far as the conservation of sites, stories, and tourism resources was a precondition for their continued utilization as commercial tourism resources.

Nevertheless, contents tourism has the ability to be a relatively sustainable form of tourism. Let me start this argument by going back to an early traveler who has featured prominently in contents tourism research: the Japanese haiku poet Matsuo Basho. Basho is interesting because he was both a 'contents tourist'⁵ and a person who continues to inspire contents tourism today. As a 'contents tourist' he traveled to places made famous by other poems and he also visited places associated with historical battles popularized in *gunkimono*, or epic military tales (Beeton 2020; Yamamura 2022). The poems that he wrote while at these places have themselves become tourism resources. His poems are put on monuments at the sites that Basho visited, and form part of the modern-day tourism trail in many parts of Japan. In terms of environmental issues, Basho is also interesting as the ideal model of the carbon-neutral contents tourist. He walked on his long journeys around Japan and took with him only the minimal number of possessions. The places he visited were not tourist sites in the sense that they had undergone a commercial touristification process. His carbon emissions were essentially what they would have been if he had stayed at home. This must be the aspiration for tourism in the twenty-first century: our environmental footprint as tourists is no greater than if we had spent the equivalent amount of time meeting our basic survival needs in our homes.

To understand the implications further, it is helpful to think of the environmental impacts of tourism in terms of fixed costs and variable costs. The fixed costs are the environmental costs of creating a tourism destination. This means the construction of hotels and attractions, cutting down trees for access roads, and creation of other such infrastructure. Laying concrete is one of the most carbon intensive and environmentally destructive practices humans have devised. Every tourist site with extensive concrete has already had a massive carbon footprint even before the first tourist arrives. Then there are the variable costs. These are environmental impacts associated with each individual visit. They include transportation to the site, the laundering of bed sheets and towels after just one night in a hotel, and the consumption of souvenirs.

One of the keys to the environmental sustainability of contents tourism is that it often entails very few fixed environmental costs. Many sacred site pilgrimages by fans of a work of popular culture are day-trips to places that are otherwise unremarkable as tourism destinations. The shrine in Washimiya is a good example. There was no need for hotels, car parks, or other site development. The fans wanted to see the shrine as it appeared in the opening sequence of the anime. If they could get to the site on public transport, their contents tourism was approaching the Matsuo Basho ideal of no environmental footprint over and above the inevitable environmental footprint that comes from just being alive for a day. This, fundamentally, is how contents tourism can be highly sustainable. It has little to no fixed environmental costs and negligible variable environmental costs, but it still results in a meaningful tourism experience. This is sustainability in practice.

However, let us remove our rose-tinted spectacles and inject

a little more realism. Those fans visiting Washimiya were also looking for souvenirs and mementoes. Indeed, fans are known to be highly active consumers of merchandise. There are clear environmental impacts here via consumerist behaviour linked to contents tourism. There are also plenty of examples of fixed environmental costs associated with contents tourism, such as the construction of Disneyland and literary museums. One might even argue that the environmental costs of producing films, anime, and other pop culture works in the first place should count as a fixed cost for contents tourism. As a general principle, though, in contents tourism the thing that gives value to a site is its *narrative quality*. The site does not have to be particularly beautiful, convenient, or developed. It has to be *meaningful*, and there is little environmental footprint associated with 'meaningfulness'. As such, there can be tourism without many of the environmental impacts of touristification.

Contents tourism is also a way of encouraging people to stay local in their tourism. We often overlook the tourist attractions closest to our homes because it only feels like tourism if we have gone a long distance. Things closer to home feel restricted — or perhaps like leisure rather than tourism. But during the Covid-19 pandemic we have had to get used to geographical restrictions on our mobility. One way to enhance the enjoyment of localized tourism is to enhance its meaningfulness via stories. In other words, doing local contents tourism.

Let me explain what I mean via a simple local example. Here are a few of the sets of contents I can access from my office at Tokyo University of Foreign Studies (TUFS) within half an hour on my bike:

- Kondō Isami, the leader of Shinsengumi, was born just a stone's throw from campus. The spot is marked with a little monument and this is a sacred site for Shinsengumi fans. There are numerous dramas, anime, and novels associated with this group of Tokugawa loyalists active in the 1860s. It is also only a short train ride from campus to Hino, where there are many other Shinsengumi sites.
- Mizuki Shigeru, the famous manga artist and creator of the *yōkai* (a supernatural entity or spirit in Japanese folklore) character Kitarō, lived close to Jindaiji temple. Near the temple entrance there is the Kitarō Tea House that sells all sorts of Mizuki memorabilia. There are also various objects and statues of Mizuki's characters dotted around Chofu city, particularly Tenjindōri shopping street.
- TUFS is in Fuchu city but right on the border with Chofu city. Chofu brands itself as the 'city of film' because of the major studios that have operations in the city, including Kadokawa and Nikkatsu. Chofu distributes walking tour maps around the various industry locations within the city.
- Tama Cemetery is just a stone's throw to the east of campus. Literary fans wanting to visit the graves of Mishima Yukio, Ōoka Shōhei, Yosano Akiko, and Edogawa Ranpo can pay a visit. There are also many military figures buried here, such as Admiral Yamamoto Isoroku, who has appeared as a character in countless war films.

These are just four obvious examples of sites of contents tourism within easy cycling distance of campus. Indeed, we could even call TUFS campus a sacred site because it has been used as a filming location for various television dramas including *Shitsuren Chocolatier* and *Aibō* Series 13 and 18. In the spring of 2022, I walked past film crews shooting on our campus on at least three occasions.⁶

At this point I want to reiterate the most recent definition of contents tourism we use, and particularly this part: 'Contents tourists access and embody "narrative worlds" that are evolving through "contentsization", namely the continual process of the development and expansion of the "narrative world" through



both mediatized adaptation and tourism practice' (Yamamura 2020: 9). Notice how tourism practice is positioned as a means by which the narrative world is expanded. In other words, Shinsengumi fans, for example, are contributing to the Shinsengumi world via their travel. There is no better indication of this than the people who travel from afar to take part in the Shinsengumi Festivals in Hino city and Hakodate city each May. These tourists take part in a parade, thereby becoming part of the tourist attraction itself, and they also contribute to the growing legend surrounding the Shinsengumi via their blogs, social media posts, and cosplay performances (Seaton 2022). It is this dynamic interaction between tourists, fans, and narrative worlds that our research group considers to be such an important characteristic of contents tourism.

The result is that contents tourism does not necessarily have to take you to afar in order to be meaningful. Furthermore, localized contents tourism facilitates a cycle — perhaps even 'recycling' — of tourism and mediatized consumption. You visit a local site and realize its connection to contents, for example on a trip to Jindaiji temple you learn there was a connection to someone called Mizuki Shigeru. You seek out the contents to understand why this local site exists, for example, by reading some of his manga. And then you return to the same site with a deeper understanding and to learn more. The interest deepens via repeated engagement with both works and tourist sites. Contents tourism as a means of engaging with local community, therefore, has much potential. This was obvious during the pandemic when we could not travel far. This will become increasingly necessary in the era of climate breakdown as we try to scratch our travel itches with the minimum possible environmental footprint. This is the case for contents tourism's golden age being yet to come as we use contents to inject meaningfulness into travel experiences that are ever more geographically restricted by environmental considerations in the era of climate breakdown.

Postscript: Contents Tourism 'Post-Covid-19' and Post-War

Finally, I want to address briefly the unfolding tragedy in Ukraine. When I gave the keynote lecture at the International Research Salon on 8 March 2022 on which this article is based, the Russian invasion of Ukraine had only just begun. Eleven months later as this article goes to press, we still have no idea of where the war will take Russia, Ukraine, and the planet as a whole. We are witnessing an epoch-defining moment unfolding in real time. The massive global effects of the war are already visible in terms of a burgeoning global food crisis, soaring commodity and energy prices, and disruption to much tourism activity, whether via the sanctioning of Russian travelers or the re-routing of flights caused by the closure of Russian/Ukrainian airspace.

On one level, the war seems to have ended the Covid-19 era, at least in terms of Covid-19 as the dominant media story of the day. Of course, infection numbers remain high, and the Covid-19 crisis has not gone away. But in early 2023 the pandemic no longer dominates media headlines and public discourse. In many ways the pandemic has been a media-induced psychological event as well as a public health event in that it fundamentally reset our thinking regarding in-person work, relationships, and mobility. Likewise, the Ukraine War has fundamentally reset the psychological and societal contexts in which we plan and carry out tourism in 2023 and beyond.

But there are other implications for contents tourism. However horrific and destructive a war is in real time, we know from repeated past experience that it will ultimately generate many works of popular culture entertainment, significant levels

of tourism, and at the intersection of these two, contents tourism. These are the processes discussed in our recent book *War as Entertainment and Contents Tourism in Japan* (Yamamura and Seaton 2022). We know from the examples of Hiroshima and Nagasaki that even nuclear devastation ultimately leads to cultural production, the construction of memorial sites, and in time a (contents) tourism industry. Analyzing how this happens is the task we set ourselves for the book. It is deeply disturbing that some of the theory we developed is being tested in real life so soon after the book came out.

In the book we hypothesize that war-related tourism emerges in four phases (Seaton and Yamamura 2022: 12). The first is tourism during war. The numbers may be small, but some people travel to war zones to witness it for themselves. Then, in the immediate aftermath of war, some people travel to sites of recent conflict before there has been any touristification process. The third stage is in the post-war era when memorials, monuments, museums and other such sites are developed as part of both commemoration and touristification processes. And the fourth stage is when the war is sufficiently far into the past, or the society has come to terms sufficiently with its war history. At this point, the war can be treated within works of entertainment, and tourism is for leisure rather than having a deeper commemorative meaning. But this process occurs at radically different speeds according to the nature of the war. In some circumstances entertainmentization and touristification can proceed rapidly. In other circumstances it will take a great deal of time.

How Russia's invasion of Ukraine fits within this theory has yet to be seen; indeed, Ukraine might cause us to radically rethink this model, which has been created in a largely East Asian context. However, what we can say with reasonable certainty is the following. Propaganda and national myth-making have existed for as long as there have been wars between nations. What our research highlights is the connection between war stories — whether truthful, fantastical, or propagandized — and future cultural production and tourism. We can already identify some of the key characters, locations, and narratives that will appear in future cultural productions relating to the Ukraine War, and probably therefore contents tourism in the region. We can already identify sites of memory that will, in time, transition to commemorative pilgrimage sites and eventually tourist sites. Russia, as the aggressor, is on a course to have divided memories of this war. We can already see the cracks in Russian attitudes towards the war, although if the war results in something that may be sold as a victory to the domestic Russian audience then critical voices will be much more easily suppressed in the post-war phase. In this scenario, Russian cultural production and war-related tourism is likely to have a sizable domestic audience, but gain little sympathy from an international audience (especially in Europe and the West). For Ukrainians, by contrast, this is a defining moment of nationhood. For as long as there are people who self-identify as Ukrainian, this war will be engraved into their national history. Large-scale cultural production about the war might take considerable time to emerge depending on the ultimate outcome of the war. But personal cultural responses (paintings, solo musical performances, and so on) are already emerging. On the assumption that post-war Ukraine can retain basic autonomy and territorial integrity as a state, in time this kind of cultural response to the war will generate pilgrimage/tourism to sites related to the war-inspired popular culture, probably with a significant international dimension. However, if Ukraine is swallowed up by imperial Russia, tourism in Ukraine will be subsumed into a nationalistic Russian travel

industry. Such predictions are always risky, but these are the tourism trajectories that stem from the model presented in the book.

Warfare also links to the environmental issues that I have discussed. There is nothing more destructive to the environment than warfare. It feels futile to be worrying about the carbon footprint of a new hotel when we are watching whole towns being laid waste by indiscriminate shelling on the evening news each day. Do our air miles really matter given the tank, fighter and cruise missile miles that are being accumulated, or the plumes of smoke billowing from burning oil refineries? War is always an ecological catastrophe, with countless trees and animals killed alongside humans, and a massive spike in carbon emissions caused by wanton destruction followed by reconstruction, which only exacerbates the climate crisis.

So, to summarize the somewhat eclectic arguments in this paper ranging from the significance of Matsuo Basho for contents tourism to the war in Ukraine, I will end by answering briefly once again the question in my title: 'The "Golden Age" of Contents Tourism: Already Over or Still to Come?' The contents tourism purist in me laments the passing of an era in Japan during which people could enjoy an anime, manga, or drama without worrying if they were simply being advertised to as a potential contents tourist. The environmentally-minded optimist in me has made the case for why contents tourism has an important role in the coming years as we try to balance our love of tourism with the collective need to protect our planet. The war memory specialist in me sees the horrors of war in Ukraine as not only a terrible human tragedy whose scars will remain for generations, but also as a crucible for the creation of one of the most powerful forms of narrative world that will eventually generate significant future tourism: a national struggle for survival in war. But across all of these fields of inquiry, the common denominator is that telling stories is fundamental to who we are as a species. Traveling stories has centuries of history and will generate mobility for centuries to come — providing we can avoid the real and present dangers of environmental and military self-destruction. Our continued ability to enjoy traveling stories depends on reining in humanity's destructiveness and being mindful of how contents tourism can, with due ecological consideration, be incorporated into a brighter and sustainable future.

Endnote

¹ This article is a slightly modified and updated (in June 2022) version of the keynote lecture given on 8 March 2022 at the CTR International Conference, International Research Tourism Salon 'Transforming Tourism Research: Reshape, Rethink, Reload, Renew, Regeneration, Restart'. The video of the lecture is at <https://www.wakayama-u.ac.jp/en/ctr/research/webinar/Conference2022> I am grateful to Dr. Joseph Cheer and all the staff at Wakayama University for their kind invitation and arrangements.

² The report referred to in the video lecture is the Working Group II report, which was released on 28 February, just before the keynote lecture was given.

³ Before embarking on tourism research, my main research focus was Japanese memories of the Asia-Pacific War. In recent years this has connected back to our ongoing contents tourism project. For an overview of my work in both war memories and tourism, and the connections between them, see my website 'War Memory Tourism: A research and teaching resource': <https://war-memory-tourism.net>

⁴ I have discussed the doughnut model at length and demonstrated its significance for contents tourism research in

the concluding chapter of *Contents Tourism and Pop Culture Fandom* (Seaton 2020).

⁵ The issue of when contents tourism can be said to have begun is an ongoing debate among scholars. Matsuo Basho is sometimes given as an early example because he clearly traveled to places that he had read about in works of popular culture, thereby meeting our basic definition (Seaton et al 2017: 3). However, his technological age is so fundamentally different to ours that using the term contents tourism seems inappropriate given the updated version of our definition (Yamamura 2020: 9). My use of inverted commas around 'contents tourist' here is intended to reflect and draw attention to such debates.

⁶ TUFs has a document indicating which dramas, advertisements, and other works have been filmed on campus, although this document is not made public and there is no effort on the part of the university to promote itself as a film tourism location.

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