

Summary of dissertation in English	
Dissertation Title	Fan Visits to Shintō Spaces Motivated by Pop Cultural Narratives
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This dissertation investigates the interplay between Shintō sacred spaces and Japanese popular culture in the context of international fan tourism, often referred to as ‘anime pilgrimage’ (Okamoto 2015). As such, it examines Japan-specific examples of contents tourism, defined as ‘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). Contents tourism is also understood as ‘communication between people in an actual space and time with contents at the centre of those interactions’ (Yamamura 2015c, 76). Accordingly, this study examines both the *motivations* of foreign fans of Japanese popular culture (shaped by pop cultural narratives), and also the *on-site ritualised behaviours* of foreign fan visitors in the context of Shintō shrines related to popular culture.

Methodologically, the dissertation adopts an interdisciplinary approach. It introduces the author’s concept of *pop Shintō content*, referring to any mediatised narrative representations of Shintō religious tradition. It also adapts terms like ‘anime pilgrimage’ (Okamoto 2015) and ‘media pilgrimage’ (Norris 2013, c.f. Couldry 2003), and introduces the term *pop pilgrimage*, which aligns with the idea of ‘purposeful contents tourist’ by Seaton’s et al. (2017) and echoes the notion of ‘pop spiritualism’ by Sugawa-Shimada (2015).

This study incorporates the *Typology of Representation in Popular Culture* (TRiP) framework, developed by the author in order to analyse how shrines appear in media narratives, measuring the degree of realism, on screen presence, narrative role, and narrative context. It also emphasises liminal qualities and significance of fictional characters in conveying and contextualising pop Shintō content to the audience. Throughout the chapters, Shintō-related places, objects, characters, beliefs, and other narrative elements depicted in works of popular culture are analysed through the framework of ‘religious playfulness’ (*shūkyō asobi*, Thomas

2007), not only as motivational factors but also features that develop and sustain *fan gaze* (adapted from Urry's *tourist gaze*).

The empirical chapters draw on an online survey of one-hundred-and-six foreign fans, semi-structured interviews with shrines' staff members, and long-term field observations at various shrines. Additionally, by adapting MacCannell's (1976) framework of 'sight sacralisation', the author introduces a *pop sacralisation* framework of seven stages, outlining a bottom-up process in which sacred spaces (*seichi*) of already established narratives are given additional layers of pop cultural meanings, elevating them to real-life sacred spaces (*seichi*) of popular culture.

The process is initiated by fans who first locate real-life Shintō shrines that serve as inspirations for pop cultural narratives, then name and recognise these sites as *seichi*, transforming them into contents tourism sites. Consequently, these sites become shared spaces for fan communities (in relation with pop cultural narratives) and local parishioner communities (in relation with Shintō-related narratives). As a result, site-specific devotional practices become amalgamated with fan-specific devotional practices. In turn, the management of some shrines decides to engage with fan visitors through pop cultural content. Both rural and urban shrines are examined, ranging from small community shrines unexpectedly depicted in narratives, to major shrines that have deliberately incorporated pop culture into their premises.

The findings reveal several interconnected insights. Analysis of pop Shintō content shows that pop cultural depictions of shrines are not mere backdrops but narrative vessels imbued with meaning. They retain core Shintō symbols and function as liminal nodes between narrative and real world. Repetitive symbolic elements (e.g. votive plaques or *kagura* dance) carry many second-order meanings (e.g. hope, courage) for fans. The earlier mentioned fan gaze allows fans to perceive Shintō shrines (and/or themselves) through the overlay of narratives, effectively transforming ordinary sites into personally sacred spaces.

In regards to pop sacralisation, some shrines remain cautious, permitting respectful fan visits and displaying fan-made offerings, while separating commercial practices from spiritual qualities of the site. Other shrines fully embrace their pop identity, collaborating on pop-themed festivals, stamp rallies, or limited-edition merchandise. Crucially, even when shrine management is ambivalent, fans continue to treat the sites as sacred through their own practices. Therefore, shrine engagement can be analysed as recurring patterns: of official or unofficial characteristics and also non-existent, low, or high engagement levels. In all cases, Shintō

shrines emerge as dynamic, negotiated environments in which tradition and fan reinterpretation meet.

From the fans' perspective, the results show that pop cultural narratives depicting pop Shintō content educate audiences, deepening their understanding of Shintō religious tradition and Japanese culture. Pop Shintō content therefore provides a shared semiotic matrix that fans are able to recognise when visiting real-life shrines. This means that pop cultural narratives act as a database, and their theoretical and practical knowledge is consciously applied during on-site visits. Fan performative practices create a hybrid 'Thirdspace' (Soja 1996) where the narrative memory and lived experience coexist. During visits, fans often recreate fictional scenes and enact character-inspired fan rituals. Importantly, foreign fan visitors generally observe site-specific etiquette and infuse it with new meanings. For example, writing prayers on *ema* may simultaneously express fandom affiliation and genuine wish, without diminishing the shrine's sanctity. In some cases, fans' presence and support of their favoured Shintō shrine may also serve as an apparatus of heritage preservation.

The dissertation bridges gaps between media studies, tourism, and religious studies. It shows that Japanese popular culture can act as a bridge to Shintō tradition, motivating international fans to become content tourists who respectfully and playfully engage with sacred sites outside their cultural background. By developing new analytical tools (i.e. TRiP typology, fan gaze, and pop sacralisation), this dissertation offers a comprehensive framework for understanding contents tourism to sites of already established role. It highlights how narrative content reshapes the meanings of real sacred spaces, and how real-life shrines give inspire fictional stories. Overall, this research contributes to explaining the dynamic intersections of popular culture, tourism, and spirituality in contemporary Japan. It reveals that even when foreign fans travel for entertainment, they often engage deeply with Shintō religious tradition, allowing related practices to evolve within a global fandom context.

Keywords: contents tourism, fan pilgrimage, pop pilgrimage, Shintō, shrine, tourism, fan rituals, TRiP, fan gaze, pop sacralisation, popular culture, pop culture, narratives, anime, manga, games.