

Local Heritage Groups and Support of Cultural Heritage from Fan Tourism

Objective:

This fieldwork was undertaken with two objectives:

- 1) To conduct a planned interview with Setouchi City Government regarding their revitalization and tourism plan aimed at fan tourists, postponed from January 2021, and
- 2) To conduct interviews with local community groups and event participants at a series of fan-oriented events in Okayama Prefecture over the days of the 20th-23rd October, 2021.

The aim of these interviews was to gain data related to my PhD research, involving the ways in which communities and visitors are connected in supporting local heritage through the lens of fan and contents tourism.

Results:

The results of this fieldwork were as follows:

- 1) Interviews conducted with Setouchi City Government were able to confirm previously assumed motives behind their formation of the ‘山鳥毛里帰り・里づくりプロジェクト’. These motives included particular interest in attracting fan tourists and supporters to Setouchi City, based around the purchase and promotion of the sword ‘Sanchomo’.

In particular, it was confirmed that the purchase of Sanchomo was made possible due to particular interest and attention from female fans of the multimedia franchise ‘Touken Ranbu’, in which ‘Sanchomo’ appears as a character. This was confirmed by project organisers, who relayed to me their surprise at the sudden support, and own ability to trace this support back to Touken Ranbu.

In addition, this interview allowed for deeper explanation into the formation of the purchase/revitalisation project in general, such as long-term plans, inclusion of multimedia promotion and production technologies, and how this plan is intended to incorporate multiple aspects of Setouchi City. From these interviews, I was able to deeply understand the approach taken by the government actors in their plan to manage cultural resources alongside identified interest from fan tourists.

- 2) Interviews with local community groups were able to further expand upon the information gained by interviews with government actors. These interviews took place at event sites and with event organisers, and revealed the depth of the grassroots aspect to the support of local heritage by actors attracting fan tourists.

One interview was conducted with the Marugame branch of ‘ニッカリ青江友の会’, a group aimed at supporting activities around the sword ‘Nikkari Aoe’ for the support of Marugame’s local heritage and development. This interview took place at Aoe Shrine, located in Okayama Prefecture, and revealed how these community groups interact with others outside of their designated local areas in the support of wider regional heritage. In this interview, further information was gathered regarding the activities non-fans take towards fan tourists, and how such events can bridge the divide between local and tourist actors.

A second interview was conducted with the Kurashiki branch of ‘ニッカリ青江友の会’. Here, further evidence was gathered in the cross-prefectural operations of grassroots community groups, and further information was gained as to the recruitment of local businesses in their event and promotional activities. At this interview site, I was also able to speak with fan tourists, and observe their interactions with the event organisers and purchases made in support of Marugame and Kurashiki.

A final interview was conducted with members of ‘大笑い一座’ and ‘山鳥毛応援団’, two community groups of Setouchi City, held at the Bizen-Osafune Sword Museum. These community groups spoke of how they mobilized local community members in supporting the

purchase of the sword 'Sancho', recognizing its tourism and economic potential; in contrast to the official actors of Setouchi Government, I was able to grasp the grassroots and person-facing elements of this project, as these members described their own efforts in promotion and connection with visiting fan tourists. At this meeting, the member of the Kurashiki branch of 'ニッカリ青江友の会' was also present, further revealing the interconnected nature of community groups involved in the preservation of local heritage.

Conclusion:

From this fieldwork, I was able to not only experience the events that attract and are supported by fan tourists, but also able to understand more deeply the processes by which such events occur, and the reasons their organizers put them together. I was able to see two sides to the organizational aspects of this phenomenon of local heritage preservation through fan tourism: that of the long-term, institutional activities of government actors, and the in-the-moment, grassroots activities of local community groups.

Within the allocation of budget and funds, as well as the larger organizational reach and capabilities of government actors, there remains an acknowledgement of and a support of local community actors outside of the government organization. The activities of all community groups had been acknowledged by government actors, and in the case of Setouchi City, had been monetarily supported and events arranged to coincide with official government tourism activities. Here, the interaction of official and grassroots actors for a common goal becomes clear in the success of such events.

However, the efforts of grassroots organizers were also clearly on display. At the events I attended, these local community groups outlined their legwork in organizing for the inclusion of local manufacturers, and in the case of Aoe Shrine, making them aware of and supporting their promotion to fan tourists, to whom they otherwise would not have known existed. These community groups are significant in the activities of this form of cultural heritage preservation and promotion, as they are more directly situated in an interactive capacity with fan and contents tourists, and have the ability to form their events around the knowledge of fan tourist activities gained from this face-to-face interaction. In turn, fan tourists appreciate the effort of these events, and heavily support them through their own community promotion and purchase of locally made merchandise.

The activities observed, and the interviews conducted, in this fieldwork was able to confirm the motives and actions only theorized until this point by the researcher. In addition, I was able to make further connections with local actors, and plans for deeper on-site investigation should the opportunity arise with the current situation of COVID-19.