［投稿論文：研究論文］

Inhabiting the Exhibition Site Through Dōjinshi

The Role of Fan Works in Place-Making

同人誌にみる物が住まう展示会場

二次創作が場所形成に果たす役割

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Abstract: The changing and malleable exhibition space is one regularly considered from the perspective of curator and audience. This paper brings forward an alternate one: that of the object. Such a perspective is revealed in analysis of exhibition dōjinshi (fan works) inspired by Japanese popular culture: in particular, those written by the female fanbase of the franchise 'Touken Ranbu'. Their works imagine Japanese swords as social inhabitants, and bring a new perspective to the discussion of exhibition spatiality and purpose of display, centring the object and rendering the exhibition a communicative space between humans and non-humans.

展示空間はしばしばその姿を変えていくが、これまでは主にキュレーターと観客の視点から考察されてきた。これに対し、本論文は物それ自体のパースペクティブをとるべきことを提案し、日本のポップカルチャーの影響を受けた同人誌、特にゲーム「刀剣乱舞―ONLINE―」と関連作品展開についての女性ファンによる二次創作に着目する。そこでは日本刀が展示空間に住まう社会的存在として想像されており、展示を人間と非人間のコミュニケーション空間として想像すべきという意味で、展示の空間的性格に関する議論に新しい視角を導入する。

Keywords: exhibitions, fan communities, popular media, heritage, place-making
展示、ファン研究、ポップカルチャー、文化遺産、場所形成

1 Introduction

Across towns, regions, and even countries, exhibitions frame their objects of display in similar ways. Large rooms, with nondescript walls in solid colours, emphasising artworks or artefacts; conversation is quiet, so as to not disturb others. Objects sit static in their cases to be examined, as visitors move around them before eventually moving on. While one might linger in a particularly emotively designed space, ultimately, the exhibition site is one to be moved through and not dwelled within. As exhibition contents change, and the objects displayed are rotated through others in the collection, it remains to the visitor a temporary space.

But what if considered from the perspective of the object? How does it view the places it has been, past and present? How does it feel towards its display, and the objects around it? What happens when it is no longer in the exhibition room - can the spirit of an object wander the museum, free from the restrictions on movement placed on visitors?

These questions may seem fanciful, but ask for consideration of the meaning of exhibition sites and displays beyond those held by curator or visitor. These questions are not drawn from theoretical musing: rather, they come from ideas presented in creative works produced by visitors to Japan's sword exhibitions. These works fall under the umbrella of *dōjinshi*, and are made by the largely female base of contemporary Japanese sword enthusiasts. Dōjinshi [同人誌], meaning 'like-minded publications', are a common creative product of pop-culture fan communities. Those made by sword fans are inspired, in large part, by the pop-culture franchise *Touken Ranbu* [刀剣乱舞] (DMM GAMES, 2015-, https://www.dmm.com/netgame/feature/tohken.html), a series that transforms Japanese swords into human forms. These human-shaped characters express memories, emotions, and experiences gathered while they were still in sword-form. As these characters are based on real-world swords, frequently displayed in Japan's historical and artistic exhibitions, fan authors use them to explore what it means to be an object inhabiting a site of display.

Dōjinshi are designed to be shared, and not simply made and read but negotiated by their respective communities. For the exhibition, Touken Ranbu dōjinshi reveal an

understanding of the exhibition site from the object's perspective. They connect spatially distant sites, through a sword's movement between inhabited collections; they question typical evocations of historical time; and they expand the social dimensions of exhibition visitation to include the sword alongside the human visitor. In examining these perspectives, we are asked to consider what exhibition sites mean for the *objects* they display, and the implications this holds for exhibition practice.

2 Aims

I propose that, through dōjinshi and other fan works, exhibitions are framed as social places for the objects within them, which disrupts the assumed experience and purpose of exhibitions as sites of display. Here, I use 'exhibition site' to refer to both the typical museum or gallery, as well as the various heritage sites that host displays in Japan. Through this, I use an anthropological approach to space and place to integrate experiences of the 'fan' and their 'fan creation' within broader human experience.

'Places' have long been of interest to social researchers. I draw on anthropological interpretations of place as one *inhabited* by actively present, interactive social beings. This framing, proposed by Ingold (2006), does not require that social beings be human - rather, it is one that directly draws non-human actors into the process of habitation, and acknowledges their ability to designate meaningful places. In the dōjinshi I will discuss, swords appear as this kind of social being, inhabiting exhibition sites and rendering them into places.

Place as determined by an inhabiting being has been explored by other anthropologists. For example, natural landscapes have been understood by tourist visitors as places, due to one's embodied inhabitation of them (Tilley and Cameron-Daum, 2017). Similarly, various aspects of place-meaning, from the natural, to the material, to the metaphorical, have been seen through their convergence on the beings that inhabit them (Dripps, 2005; Lavoilette, 2011). Place and inhabiting being are both aspects of the social world, and give and derive meaning from each other. In examining dōjinshi, I propose that the social world crafted by fan authors exists

within this process of meaning making for the subject of the sword and the exhibition it inhabits.

3 Methodology

To examine this form of place-making in the context of fan works, I have chosen to focus on those related to the franchise Touken Ranbu. Touken Ranbu is a multimedia franchise originating in 2015, with adaptations ranging from online games to animation, stage productions, and film. In these works, famous Japanese swords are personified into human warriors. This franchise, and its female target audience, has the potential to reveal an understanding of exhibition sites and fan activities that have been overlooked by previous studies of dominantly male fan communities, particularly as historical exhibitions are largely assumed to target middle aged and older men (Okamoto, 2015; Sugawa, 2017). Touken Ranbu fans, being interested in historical swords, are frequent exhibition visitors who exist outside of this assumed context.

I aim to expand upon existing investigation involving female fan communities. This previous research has combined material elements of fan activities with imagined constructions of historical figures in the historical sites they visit (Sugawa, 2017). This previous research, on franchises such as the Warring States-set Sengoku Basara, or the numerous retellings of the late Edo period's famed Shinsengumi, includes drawings and notes created by fans at historical sites in their imagining of past peoples. I expand this scope to not only include fan works set outside the historical heritage site, such as contemporary exhibition spaces, but to consider how this designation of place is mediated when the subjects in question are not long-dead humans, but rather, still-present and tangible objects.

This paper focuses on the analysis of dōjinshi and other fan works featuring personified swords as they relate to the interpretation of real-world places. Touken Ranbu fans are prolific creators of fan works. Production company Nitro+ provides additional guidelines regarding the creation of these works, indicating a particular interest by fans to Touken Ranbu in comparison to others under their oversight

(Nitro+, 2017). However, there are methodological considerations that must be made in an analysis of fan works. One consideration lies in access for the non-fan. The term 'dōjinshi' covers a constantly shifting and expanding library of independently created works. Nitro+'s guidelines for production has limitations for the quantities an author is able to print and distribute (Nitro+, 2015). In addition to these limitations, dōjinshi are typically distributed at fan-organised, irregularly scheduled, in-person events, further contributing to their scarcity and difficulty for non-fans to access.

As well as access, an examination of dōjinshi must pay attention to legal concerns. While Touken Ranbu fan works are accepted under specified guidelines, not all producers share this view. Recent legal proceedings on the use of copyrighted characters in "obscene" derivative works has prompted the need for additional caution in research (Sawada, 2021, p. 40). This ambivalent acceptance of fan works requires caution lest the researcher's work negatively impacts the fan community.

With these difficulties in mind, I present my analysis both as a researcher, and as one positioned within the fan community, who is capable of navigating it, and striving to present this social phenomenon whilst ensuring its community is protected. This paper deals with analysis of thematic elements, rather than the direct quotation of specific works. The themes analysed were identified through gathering physical dōjinshi published between 2018 and 2021, as well as sustained engagement over 2020-2021 as an anthropological researcher with the online fan community and fan work producers. In conjunction with this thematic analysis, I have provided my own examples of visual fan works common to the Touken Ranbu context, providing illustration in a form that will remain accessible (figs. 1-3, in later sections of this paper). As dōjinshi are constantly produced and circulated, new works will undoubtedly enter the fan community from hereon after, providing further examples for the curious reader.

To supplement this analysis, I have included responses from female fan visitors at exhibitions. Dōjinshi are an expression not only of the author's experiences, but feed into wider understandings circulated throughout the fan community. As such, I have included the thoughts and experiences of fans gathered at exhibition sites across

Japan. I draw on unstructured interviews recorded immediately through written notes with fifteen visitors to Mito's Tokugawa Museum, conducted on-site after exhibition attendance. These responses have been chosen due to their relevance to the topic of dōjinshi, as well as their resonance with responses from other fans at six exhibitions across Japan. This has been further supplemented by my own visits to exhibition places, as I relate the experience of visiting exhibition sites with knowledge of these places gained from analysing dōjinshi. In doing so, I aim to situate Touken Ranbu fan works and the communicative space of sword fans together in the examination of exhibitions as places beyond sites of display.

4 Results and Discussion

4.1 Dōjinshi and the Negotiation of Fan Works

Before examining exhibitions as seen in dōjinshi, it is important to discuss dōjinshi and fan works themselves. Colloquially referred to as 'secondary' or 'derivative' works (二次創作), dōjinshi and other fan works are creations inspired by an original fictional work. They utilise the characters, visuals, and concepts derived from this pre-existing original in the production of fan-made narratives. Dōjinshi and their creation have long been discussed in fan and media studies. I present this previous work as a base from which further insights can be gained in their inclusion as aspects of social negotiation in anthropological discussions of place-making.

While dōjinshi 'derive' from an original work, their production, distribution, and negotiation are strongly tied to independently organised activities of fan communities. Dōjinshi trace their place in Japan's media landscape to the post-war period (Murakami et al., 2013). From this early period, the production and consumption of dōjinshi has coincided with like-minded fan communities, where these fan works largely exist on equal footing (Wilson, 2003). A panel discussion between contributors and creators of early dōjinshi collections of the 1960's-1980's, emphasised community as an important aspect for dōjinshi authors and readers (Murakami et al., 2013, p. 126). This was particularly evident in the experiences of young female fans, with the difficulties they faced in accessing large-scale events

(Murakami et al., 2013, p. 139). Dōjinshi, from these early stages, have been the products of dedicated, like-minded communities as well as those deriving from an inspiring work.

Dōjinshi are typically circulated at fan-organised market events such as the bi-annual Comiket (Lamerichs, 2018; Wood, 2006). Works made for women became increasingly visible from the 1980's, and at the time of writing, it is estimated around 60% of authors at Comiket are women (Ishikawa, 2020). Their modes of participation highlight the social realm of fan communities as separate from that of the original work. For example, the display and promotion of female-oriented dōjinshi is described by Ishikawa (2020) as deliberately "difficult to understand", utilising specialised textual and visual elements that are "understood by those who understand it" - in this case, the female fan (Ishikawa, 2020, pp. 307-308). Fan works have become further specialised as they are increasingly published online, rather than physically, requiring existing knowledge of an author and their work (Ishikawa, 2020, p. 308). This online sharing has increased access to dōjinshi on a global scale (Ogura, 2000), revealing the expansive, yet still specialised, nature of fan creator communities. Particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, online communities allowed for distribution while in-person events were suspended, ensuring the ongoing exchange of ideas.

Dōjinshi specialisation reveals them as products of a specific community, and not merely as the by-products of an inspiring franchise. They are flexible, not only changing in setting, style, and media formats, but are works open to the exploration of social norms (Wood, 2006). There is further flexible acceptability in what constitutes a fan work, which is negotiated by the fan community itself. Adherence to specific elements of the inspiring franchise can determine wider fan acceptance (Hahn, 2007). However, this does not mean that the most acceptable fan works are those that seamlessly mimic the original narrative.

The negotiation of accuracy is largely tied to a fan work's use of the original work's conceptual elements. In the case of Touken Ranbu, its licensed works rarely reference the present-day exhibition of swords. Regardless, they are a common theme

in dōjinshi. Touken Ranbu's fan works are particularly flexible, inclusive of non-fiction research and place guides as well as typical fictional narratives (Teikyodo, 2020). This flexibility has perhaps been helped by Japan's 'Media Mix' (Benson, 2018). Here, popular franchises are adapted across different media forms by licensed actors, without necessarily remaining 'true' to the original narrative, instead maintaining the work's core concepts in exploration of further possibilities. While the Media Mix is largely used to describe licensed adaptations, its characteristic use of concept-based negotiation is similar to the production and fan mediation of dōjinshi.

Touken Ranbu's originating work, the 2015 online game, has thin story and characters that appear more as concepts than narrative participants. Rather than diminishing adaptive potential, the concept-framework of this game provides highly flexible elements for both licensed and fan works. The flexibility found in official adaptations is amplified when taken to the even more malleable realm of dōjinshi.

Touken Ranbu is not a single historical narrative featuring personified Japanese swords in a strictly defined historical setting. Rather, it is a concept-based framework that highlights swords as beings with consciousness, allowing both authors and audience members to view any number of social experiences from their perspective. In this sense, it is an example of a media franchise where the choice of utilising specifically conceptualised characters and settings determines which narrative themes are further explored. For the licensed Media Mix, the concept framework of Touken Ranbu is largely explored in historical fiction. For the wider scope of fan works, this flexible framework allows authors to utilise their own interpretations extending beyond historical narratives, exploring settings and experiences not covered by licensed works, such as the museum or exhibition site.

It is for this reason that I focus on the franchise's character concepts as they impact on exhibition-related fan works. Touken Ranbu's characters are primarily defined by their conceptual design, rather than a set historical narrative. These designs are directly inspired by the artefact of the sword, and serve as the primary visual connection between the physical exhibition space and the fan community, separate from the franchise's own narrative context. The characters of Touken Ranbu

are understood as having particular historical associations with people, places, and events, gathered in the life-history of the sword. These characters are employed in fan works to signify the visual, voiced perspective a sword might have towards its display, as mediated by fan authors. This is an employment of franchise visuals in association with experiences of exhibitions.

Thus the exhibition site, wherever it may be in Japan, is drawn into a social process of exploration and negotiation by the fan community, inclusive of the perspective of the object. This differs from other examples of fan visits to historical sites, often strictly associated with a specific historical event or actor (Sugawa, 2017), as the tangible sword and its intangible character concept can be introduced in any context of exhibition, regardless of longstanding historical place-connection. Touken Ranbu fan works thus combine the specialisation and independent creation of fan works with the flexibility afforded to works derived from a conceptual, rather than strictly narrative, franchise. Through the creative products of Touken Ranbu fans, the depiction of exhibition sites and their displays reveals a conceptualisation of the world in which the object is a social being in its own inhabited place.

4.2 Inhabited Exhibitions

4.2.1 Places in the Historical and Cultural Landscape

Exhibitions are largely situated within places. Museums, galleries, and historical sites are a kind of place recognised as landmarks or cultural institutions. Landmark sites are recorded by overseeing authorities, and supported by tourists and visitors who, in choosing to visit, validate their place-value. This conventional practice has informed aspects of dōjinshi. As the established museum appears on official tourism maps and guides, so too do fans make maps outlining significant places for their own communities (Okamoto, 2015). Typically, such maps are of the places in which the fictional work is set. The exhibition dōjinshi of Touken Ranbu go further, with the variety of guides made of a single sword's diverse place relationships connecting spatially distant places. Here, the exhibition site is given meaning via the understanding of a sword as an inhabiting being.

The sword as inhabiting being is one with its own identity and history. It has moved between various sites and come under the ownership of various individuals and collections, accumulating associations with places as it does so. Fans recognise the movement, and subsequent place ties, of swords in their dōjinshi, implicitly recognising place associations gathered in one's life history. Fan guides do not necessarily reflect where a sword is displayed *now*, but where it *has been* in the past events of its life. In this case, the object itself does not need to be present in a display at all. Castle ruins, shrines, temples, and other common sites of Japanese historical exhibitions are given meaning not for what they display, but for what is *not* displayed. These sites may be present in conventional municipal tourism guides, but fan authors highlight potential new cross-city and cross-prefectural connections in their dōjinshi, based on their understanding as significant places for a sword. The sword is not treated as a conventional object, but with the status of a historical figure.

I will explain this through the sword Shokudaikiri Mitsutada, and its representation in dōjinshi. This sword is currently on display at the Tokugawa Museum, in Mito City, north of Tokyo. The Museum describes it as forged in the 13th Century by the smith Mitsutada, subsequently owned by the Warring States (1467-1615) warlord Date Masamune, and eventually gifted to the Tokugawa family. While in their collection, Shokudaikiri Mitsutada was damaged in 1923's Great Kanto Earthquake. In 2015, Shokudaikiri Mitsutada gained new significance after the launch of Touken Ranbu, with a rapid increase in female visitors searching for the sword they admired. In Touken Ranbu, Shokudaikiri Mitsutada is designed as a refined, suit-clad man with a distinctive eyepatch, a visual cue to his former owner, one-eyed Date Masamune. Due to fan attention, the sword Shokudaikiri Mitsutada's damaged form was restored and placed on long-term display (Tokugawa Museum, 2017).

The first thing of note is how this biography relates to Japan's landmark historical landscape. The brief biography traces the sword's historical movements, from the site of its forging, to its historical ownership, and finally the context of its current collection. For the sword fan, these are not separate places, but connected through their relationship with Shokudaikiri Mitsutada. The township of Osafune in

south-west Japan, where the smith Mitsutada worked, becomes significant as the area the sword is 'from'. Former Date lands, often represented by the city of Sendai in north-east Japan, are also significant, emphasised by the character's design relating it to Date Masamune. The sword fan is prompted by this biography to draw implicit connections between the two places, where conventional constructions of the historical landscape would render them as unrelated. Conventional landmarks, such as those of Osafune as related to sword-smithing and those of north-east Japan as related to Date Masamune, are re-contextualised through fan guides, derived from the understanding of Shokudaikiri Mitsutada not as a possession, but as a past inhabitant of these distant places.

It is this understanding of swords as capable of inhabiting broader places, as humans are, that reveals the second point of significance highlighted by fan works: that is, their emphasis on the exhibition room. Mito and the Tokugawa Museum are, like Osafune and Sendai, significant places related to Shokudaikiri Mitsutada. While museum and gallery buildings are conventional cultural landmarks, just as important for the fan is their interior. This is significant as, particularly in the Japanese context, the interior of these landmark sites is one regularly rendered impermanent. For example, even the permanent sword and metalwork exhibition room of the Tokyo National Museum frequently changes its displays throughout the year. Smaller museums and galleries, with limited interior space, often operate on seasonal exhibition schedules. Despite this conventional temporary nature, the interior of a landmark museum, gallery, or historical site remains significant in the fan production of object-inhabited places. It is the interior that the sword inhabits, and thus, is vital in their non-conventional framing of place.

The biography of Shokudaikiri Mitsutada highlights its time with the Tokugawa family, and informs the fan visitor of the context of its current display. Its gifting, restoration, and subsequent exhibition are not overtly present in the licensed works of Touken Ranbu. However, these are significant events in fan works, and draw modern-day Mito and the museum interior into their discussion of Shokudaikiri Mitsutada's associated places. Narrative dōjinshi have the ability to make place-connections not

through the designation of landmarks, as guidebooks do, but through the emotional framing of interiors such as the exhibition room. Works featuring Shokudaikiri Mitsutada regularly reference its display room in connection with emotional narratives detailing its movement from one collection to another. Rather than, as described in its museum biography, a simple act of gift-giving between prominent families, Shokudaikiri Mitsutada's journey to its current display is framed in terms of departure, arrival, and the emotional weight of leaving behind other object-beings as it does so. In these narratives, Shokudaikiri Mitsutada is not just a sword: it is a being with emotions, departing one home for another.

Its new home is depicted in a number of ways. Some dōjinshi may merely mention Mito by name, with the implicit understanding of the emotions present in separating the sword from its long-known home and family in the Date domain. In other examples, fan authors utilise visual cues to depict the Tokugawa Museum and its exhibition rooms. These images can be as large-scale as the Museum's exterior, or as small-scale as the sword's display case. These visual depictions are not necessarily labelled, and as with the mere mention of Mito, rely on an assumed understanding that those reading are familiar with the Tokugawa Museum as the current home of Shokudaikiri Mitsutada.

Fan works use the exhibition site in communication that is "understood by those who understand it" (Ishikawa, 2020, pp. 307-308). That understanding is one that utilises the intimate interior of the exhibition space, as much as it does the large-scale historical sites of Osafune or Sendai, in designating Shokudaikiri Mitsutada's inhabited places. Further to this understanding is the assumption by authors as to the normative activities of fellow fan readers, such as visiting exhibitions and their ability to recognise these related places.

As reading narrative dōjinshi evokes emotions as to a sword's life journey, so too are these emotions present in exhibition visitors. The Tokugawa Museum has received consistent support and visitation from sword fans since 2015, and although exhibition attendance has been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, three visits made to the Museum between 2020 and 2021 revealed a significant portion of current

visitors as fan travellers. Some had brought merchandise depicting the sword-characters Shokudaikiri Mitsutada had been separated from as it moved from one place to another. Others spent significant time with the sword itself, leaning in as close as its protective case would allow, examining the burned blade that undertook these journeys: a unique appearance of the sword often depicted in dōjinshi. Amongst these fans, only one stated that they were not a regular visitor to the Museum. The others framed their repeat visits as one to visit the sword in its current home. Here, as with in dōjinshi, the exhibition site is not just one of display, but a place where one social, inhabiting being—the fan—recognises another in the sword.

The significance of the object as an inhabitant should not be understated. Places related to a sword's inhabiting presence, from historical domains to the intimate exhibition room, are specific destinations for fans that are subsequently shared in their fan works. The prevalence of these works has further impacts on conventional place-making. Years of independent fan travels, supported by fan guides and made emotionally resonant in fan narratives, solidified connections between Shokudaikiri Mitsutada's exhibition room at Mito to other related sites in Japan. This has been recognised by large-scale tourism organisers, with the East Japan Rail Travel Corporation running a limited train *Special Express Shokudaikiri Mitsutada* [特急燭台切光忠] between Mito and the former Date city of Sendai (East Japan Rail Travel Corporation 2018). The strength of this campaign is not necessarily on the typical historical and cultural designations of place, but on the significance fan travellers place on Shokudaikiri Mitsutada's current home. Here, the exhibition room—as a site of habitation, and not merely one of display—has had significant impact on the positioning of the landmark place in Japan's cultural landscape.

4.2.2 Time and Artefact in the Inhabited Exhibition

Exhibition dōjinshi are situated in the present. For the sword fan, the present is where they can inhabit the same places (exhibitions) as object-beings such as Shokudaikiri Mitsutada. The focus on the present in fan works is a departure from the historical fiction framing of Touken Ranbu, and further highlights the object's

perspective in regards to its collection and display.

Time in the historical exhibition is evoked primarily towards the past. Museum and gallery displays of artefacts such as swords are done so to prompt the visitor to think of past stories, and past peoples (Svašek, 2007, p. 146). This mode of display recognises an objects ability to "[make] the observer think of both here and there, of oneself and others" (Strathern, 1990, p. 160). This evocation of thinking, combined with the context of the purpose-built exhibition room, prompts an imagining of a life separate, both spatially and temporally, from the visitor.

Preserved historical sites play with similar notions of time, primarily through a sense of habitation prompted by thinking of people of the past (Prough, 2018). One such example is Kyoto's Teradaya, a building once inhabited by the historical figure Sakamoto Ryoma. This site evokes time by preserving a sense of the structure as it was in the late 1800's, when Ryoma experienced it, as well as displaying mementos left by visitors throughout the twentieth century (Prough, 2018, pp. 571-573). These displays ask visitors to think of those who once inhabited, as they now inhabit, the site. This process has been noted in connection with fan tourism as a linking across time (Tamai, 2016), as the present-situated visitor is asked to think of inhabitants of the past.

What if the *museum exhibition* is inhabited, as preserved historical sites are? Unlike figures such as Sakamoto Ryoma, or past visitors to Teradaya, swords do not exist through memory or imagination. They remain tangibly present. Inhabiting objects as seen in fan works do not provoke thought to the distant past, but rather, draw attention to their current context.

Instead of separating the 'museum' from the 'heritage site', both are portrayed in dōjinshi as the same kind of inhabited place. These places are inhabited not by memory or evocation, but the object's direct presence. First is in the depiction of exhibition sites, carefully reproduced in dōjinshi artwork. This artwork makes note of floor plans, layouts, locations of display cases, etc., re-contextualising these furnishings of display as furnishings of an object's home. The sleek cases of a modern gallery or the antique ones of a shrine or temple are depicted with the same narrative

meaning: these are the structures that make up not the 'housing' of object display, but the 'home' of an inhabiting being. These details of display are conventionally designed to be minimised, unseen, and secondary to the displays themselves. To depict the inhabited exhibition place, they are rendered visible. As Teradaya's features are preserved to prompt visitors to think of Sakamoto Ryoma, so too are the features of exhibitions preserved as the living context of their own inhabiting beings.

Exhibition dōjinshi utilise the character designs of Touken Ranbu in their depiction of exhibitions as object homes. Alongside this they carefully depict the tangible sword, with the two images understood by readers as differing aspects of the same being. The human-shaped depiction may sit in its display case, alongside its sword form (fig.1); in other instances, fan creators superimpose illustrations of the characters over photographs of their respective exhibition sites (fig.2). In these depictions, the characters of Touken Ranbu are visual representations of the object's invisible, inhabiting being. They are often labelled in terms of spirit, such as 'rei' [霊], with the object beside them labelled as 'body' or 'hontai' [本体]. In conventional display, objects prompt the imagining of a past being that is not present. In the realm of dōjinshi, display signifies one that *is*, even if its 'spirit' can not be directly seen.

These inhabiting beings, rendered as object-spirits, are not restricted to their cases. They can be drawn within them, lounging inside, or stepping outside to visit

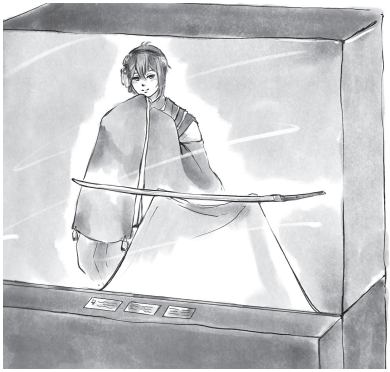

Fig. 1　A sword spirit with its display

Fig. 2　Sword spirits at Tokyo National Museum

other inhabitants of the museum or historical site. They might do so after hours, noting the typical display function of exhibitions and the responsibility the object-spirits have to participate in it. It should be noted, however, that this responsibility is not the object's entire purpose, as one might assume with typical exhibition curation: it is merely one aspect of their current-day lives.

Fan work depictions of long-term displays make effective use of present-day exhibition rooms. Particularly distinctive cases and layouts become recognisable even for those who have not yet visited, readily associated with the objects that inhabit them. One example is in the large-scale case that displays the spear Nihongō at the Fukuoka City Museum, with its spirit frequently depicted lounging inside it; another is the free-standing, antique cases of Kyoto's Kitano Tenmangu Shrine, where the spirit of their sword Higekiri (also called Onikirimaru) sits politely, surrounded by visitors. The repeated depiction of such sites by fan authors makes them recognisable as present-day homes for objects, even for fans who have yet to visit for themselves.

This framing of exhibitions not as sites of display, but as an object's home, impacts on how one visits and experiences exhibitions themselves. The exhibition site becomes the context of an object's everyday life. I experienced this for myself while undertaking fieldwork at Kyoto's Daikakuji, which annually displays the sword Hizamaru. Hizamaru, also known as Usumidori, is said to have been owned by the famed warrior family the Minamoto (Daikakuji, 2022). In Touken Ranbu he is designed with a simple, military-esque silhouette. When employed in dōjinshi set at Daikakuji, this warrior past combines with the peaceful ambience of the present. At times, his design is modified by fan authors, swapping military dress for styles suited to the Temple's ambiance and the sword's current social context as an artefact owned by a religious institution. Across two visits to Daikakuji, I recognised features of the temple complex as depicted in dōjinshi about Hizamaru's present-day life (fig.3). As the fan creates and reads works depicting Hizamaru wandering the complex, its hallways, lakes, and gardens, so too can they experience their own visit to the Temple. The emotional dimension of the exhibition is not only related to choices made in the specifically defined site of display, but is supplemented by the fan's

Fig. 3 Hizamaru and the lake at Daikakuji

experience of the entire complex. As Sakamoto Ryoma once inhabited Teradaya, Hizamaru inhabits Daikakuji: and through this, its display becomes evocative of present-day experiences, and not only those of the past.

Dōjinshi construct the exhibition as home for the objects inside them. Rather than the now-and-then evocation of visitor-focused display practices, the object-perspective as seen in dōjinshi may be more aptly described as one of the now-and-now, with display as an opportunity for visitors not to imagine a past figure, but to come face-to-face with a present-day one.

4.2.3 Encounters in Inhabited Place

So far, I have looked at how both large-scale sites and small-scale exhibition rooms are rendered inhabited places in dōjinshi. I now turn to how this sense of habitation further frames them as places of social encounter. Exhibition-related dōjinshi, as both fictional narratives and non-fiction reports, emphasise the meetings had with objects that inhabit them. By framing exhibitions as places of encounter, fan works further highlight the object's perspective and role in regards to its own keep and display.

To examine the significance of the object's perspective, we should first consider the motives of exhibition displays. In contemporary Japan, swords are displayed largely due to their historic and artistic value, as possessions of famous figures and examples of traditional craftsmanship. Their presence in national museum displays is reminiscent of practices established in the 1800's, where objects were framed with artistic status and importance inspired by contemporary practices in Europe and America (Pai, 2013). Swords displayed for their craft and past ownership imply value

derived from being objects belonging to high-status peoples of the past, highlighting the determining authority of the organising institution (Svašek, 2007). That they appear in institutional displays validates not the status of the object, but the status of its makers and former owners.

We might also consider the exhibited sword in terms of pop-culture exhibitions. In these exhibitions, as with historical ones, a particular authorial voice curates the object's value. The exclusion or inclusion of supporting information and primary authorial voice negotiates the 'correct' information for fans to consume, as seen in the use of George Lucas' approval in exhibitions regarding the status of the Star Wars franchise (Herrera and Keidl, 2017). In both the historic exhibition and the pop-culture one, object's value is determined by how their display can validate those who owned or crafted them.

However, objects are not merely representations. They are evocative of subjective emotions that may deviate from those desired by exhibition display (Strathern, 1990). The inhabiting sword is not representative of a past person, owner, or craftsman: it is representative of itself. Thus, its display as depicted in dōjinshi does not aim to validate curatorial narratives, but rather, is an exploration by fans emplacing the sword in its social context. The interpretive space of dōjinshi, not determined by institutional curatorial or authorial voice, allows for the object's social perspective to be made primary in consideration of exhibition displays.

This is not to say that fan authors do not value the history and craft of swords. Exhibition dōjinshi, particularly those written as reports, take care to note the craftsmanship of a sword and its provenance. However, there is an additional component present: encounters with these individual, inhabiting objects. Swords in exhibition dōjinshi are objects that take up space in exhibition displays both physically and socially. Examining this social inhabiting allows the fan to dissect exhibition planning, based not on overarching curatorial theme, but on the encounters objects have with each other.

A common setting for object encounters is the Tokyo National Museum. In dōjinshi, this collection's swords are depicted as familiar with each other and the

display-case furnishings of their home. Fan narratives draw on this social familiarity: who is in which case? With whom do they share it with? Who is not on display? What might they be doing, free from their responsibilities? The exhibition layout is here a social setting, and not just one for visitor's ease of movement. This is not restricted to single collections, but is assumed across sites of display in Japan. It is seen in fan works made in response to temporary exhibition announcements—examples include those made in response to the planned 2021 display of Sano Art Gallery's collection at Ehime Prefectural Museum, or Kyoto National Museum's 2018 exhibition *Swords of Kyoto*—focusing on the anticipation and excitement had by swords as they prepare to travel from one place to another, to meet with fellow objects from spatially distant collections. Such works rarely make note of the overall intent or messaging of a particular exhibition: what is important is the object's desires to engage in social meetings, facilitated by planned exhibitions.

As encounters are imagined in narrative dōjinshi, they are equally as present in non-fiction, report-style works: here, not between object and object, but between object and visitor. Such reports are where one is most likely to encounter the conventional value-framing of swords as historical artefacts. However, such information is paired with the author's personal experiences, which regularly use language of meeting between the sword, inhabiting its case, and the visitor, looking inside it. Reports may be illustrated, as other fan works are, with the Touken Ranbu character alongside its corresponding sword-shaped artefact. In these instances, the visitor is depicted coming into direct contact with the object and its social aspect, shifting the value of the sword purely from its historical qualities towards its social ones—that is, its responsibility to meet with those who have so eagerly travelled to see it.

Exhibition sites are social places for the human visitors that move through them (Black, 2005). Exhibition report dōjinshi include the artefact into this understanding. First-person reports recounting a single traveller's journey emphasise their encounters with swords; likewise, essays are produced to assist other fans on their own journeys of encounter (examples can be seen in Teikyodo 2020). At six sword-related

exhibitions held across Japan, ranging from Ibaraki to Kagawa Prefectures, I spoke with a number of solo travellers, who identified themselves as regular visitors to their closest exhibition sites. In doing so, they used language of meeting, emotional expectations, and thankfulness to be able to encounter the swords that inhabited them. At these exhibitions, a fan's travelling group ranged from one to more than five people. Regardless of the number of participants in one's travel group, visiting the exhibition site remained a social experience through the understanding of objects not as passive displays, but as active, inhabiting participants. Dōjinshi here act as means of orienting the fan experience, not just through maps and guidebooks, but in the social expectations and motives of exhibition visitation, where it is assumed the object is an equal participant.

It may be tempting to assume that an object understanding display as a responsibility of meeting with its visitor is an imposition of fictional character over historical artefact. However, it may be more apt to consider how this expands, rather than imposes, upon the exhibition experience. Fan desires, whether of historical figures or virtual characters (Sugawa, 2017; Annett, 2015), have been explained in terms of intangibility, placing fan motives purely in the realm of the imaginary. But swords on display are not imaginary. They embody exhibitions physically, as well as intangibly. Exhibition dōjinshi explore this physicality through the use of character images and real-world objects, while communicating the potential exhibitions hold as sites of encounter. Here, the exhibition site is not simply one of curated display, but is brought forward as one of social habitation.

5 Implications & Conclusion

I have here described one fan community, that of Touken Ranbu, and a single genre of its fan works. These works are part of a larger whole of creative output mediated by Touken Ranbu fans, and only a small section of the independent creative community in Japan. Nonetheless, this focus brings to light the ways in which fan's creative output is not restricted to the realm of pop-culture, but extends to multiple aspects of one's social life.

The fan works discussed here are those related to exhibitions, and produced in terms understood by their intended readers. They reveal an experience of exhibition sites where the objects on display have their own emotional and social capabilities. It is in this recognition that the exhibition is reframed: if an object has an emotional, social experience, how are we to understand its place of display?

First, it is important to note that the producers of these works are largely women. They are specialised for the Touken Ranbu fan audience, and arise in the post-2015 context of renewed interest in Japan's swords. As such, the framing of these fan works—of the exhibition as seen through the emplaced perspective of the sword—is one that arises alongside standard curation and exhibition design. As such curation has typically been aimed at an older male audience, the viewpoints of fans and fan authors regarding the valuable aspects of display, provides an opportunity to expand upon established practice.

One such way lies in the consideration of objects as taking up social space in exhibitions. This is not the first or only instance of object-based perspectives in displays: the Musée du Quai Branly's exhibition *Persona* deliberately invokes "alien encounters" across the "uncanny valley", in questioning the human/non-human binary in the exhibition space (Grimaud, 2020, p. 78). However, such use of disruption to unsettle audience's assumptions stands in contrast to the sense of normalcy regularly depicted in exhibition dōjinshi. Instead of an unsettling juxtaposition, dōjinshi present swords as an inhabiting being that has long understood its various states of use and display—such as the sword Hizamaru, with its social shift from a past weapon to a current Temple resident, or the various swords of National Museum collections, comfortable in their museum homes.

Fan works thus provide two means by which to re-consider the exhibition site: a space as seen and experienced by a newfound audience, and one that is inhabited by objects as part of their current, everyday social context. This latter re-contextualisation is one that firmly shifts the evocation of time from looking to the past to being experienced in the present. The object is inhabiting *this* exhibition place at *this* time. As much as the sword has a historical past, it has an equally relevant role

in the present. Part of this role is in its display, understood as its current social responsibility. Alongside this is an imagining of what a sword does when it is *not* on display, expanding the exhibition visitor's conceptualisation of the museum or gallery to be inclusive of its entire encompassing space. Here, the transient and distancing potential of exhibition sites is minimised, as the visitor is positioned to think of exhibitions not as a temporary holding, but a permanent 'home' for the object within.

The sword's ability to inhabit further re-contextualises the concept of the object collection. While fans are well aware of Shokudaikiri Mitsutada's presence at Mito's Tokugawa Museum, they are equally aware of the places it inhabited in the past, and the social ties it maintains with them. Dōjinshi and fan works make visible these networks of past homes and past social connections, including the fan community in the negotiation of significant historical sites in Japan's contemporary cultural landscape. In doing so, the 'collection' becomes not only a part of its individual museum, but is understood in relation to others throughout Japan. From the single exhibition room, fans expand an object's value and meaning to be inclusive of an expansive network of related historical and cultural sites.

I do not argue for exhibition curation to be subordinate to the ideas of a pop-culture franchise. Rather, I ask for consideration in the possibilities these new perspectives can bring to the exhibition experience, and the framing of exhibition spaces. The typical sword exhibition, aimed at the assumed male audience, may represent the perspective of the warrior class: however, an exhibition where the sword has its own perspective expands to be inclusive of viewpoints outside of this narrow social group. Fan work's interest in contemporary places expands this potential further still, where the 'historical' sword exhibition becomes capable of communicating the contemporary, current-day experience of a social sword and its collection.

Exhibitions in dōjinshi are places of potential, negotiated by independent creators who are themselves outside of typically assumed audiences, familiar with communication that is open to consideration of vastly different interpretations. They make visible the imaginative and emotional experiences had at exhibition sites, where

objects are social, as well as the visitor. Through the object-based perspective of the fan, and the production of fan works, the exhibition transforms from site of display to familiar, inhabited place.

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