8 Following *Oshin* and *Amachan*

Film tourism and nation branding in the analogue and digital ages

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Introduction

The *asadora* (morning drama) is considered one of the most representative and influential formats on Japanese television. With each series running for half a year, the *asadora* presents a female heroine in her struggle for personal fulfilment and happiness for 15 minutes every morning since 1961. Yoshimi (2005: 544) noted that “[f]rom the early 1960s, television became a prominent medium linking the family with the state, defining the national consciousness, and dominating people’s imaginative views of both the past and the present”. This is very true for the *asadora*: the show’s daily presence and the ritualistic habits of many viewers give the *asadora* steady public attention as well as a prominent place in the collective memory of Japan. Although some critics have diagnosed the slow decline of this format – along with classic television in general – and criticized the sometimes very conservative narratives, the *asadora* remains an important flagship for the public broadcaster NHK. Furthermore, it also receives notice beyond national borders, especially in East Asia.

Even though various *asadora* have long been closely linked to specific regions of Japan as filming locations, their impact on tourism has only been investigated recently (e.g. Maruta et al., 2014; Tajima, 2015; Jang, 2016; Scherer & Thelen, 2017, 2018). Research on media tourism in Japan usually focuses on the genre of anime (Yamamura, 2015) and historical television series (Seaton, 2015). In Japan, the term “contents tourism” is commonly employed, a buzzword initiated by the Japanese government in the early 2000s as an umbrella term for any kind of tourism associated with a trans-medially marketed and locally anchored story. This story can be embedded in movies, manga, video games, or literature, though historical personalities and events are also considered “content”. The theoretical and methodological approaches to film tourism in Japan are similar to those of film tourism studies in Western research discourse (see also the Introduction to this volume for a discussion on the Western academic perspectives). One peculiarity in the case of Japan, however, is the strong political interest in this kind of tourism, which is regarded as a tool for the economic promotion of peripheral regions and for Japanese “nation branding”. Likewise,

asadora are firmly embedded into the “soft power” (Nye, 2004) strategy of Japan’s cultural and foreign policy. In our chapter, we will discuss this political dimension related to the locations of popular media products (see also Chapters 6 and 8 of this volume, which offer case studies of “nationalized” media content in Denmark and Slovenia).

Moreover, our research provides answers to the question of how the phenomenon of film tourism has changed over time. In particular, there is only little research on the effects of the shift from the analogue to the digital age concerning the activities of viewers and their “fan pilgrimages”. The examination of *asadora* as a steady TV format that has run for many decades provides new insights here. We consider film tourism as a part of the phenomenon of media convergence, that is, media content marketed and consumed across multiple platforms. As case studies, we selected two of the most influential *asadora* in the history of this format: *Oshin* (1983/1984) as an example of the analogue age and *Amachan* (2013) for the digital. Additionally, both series relate to narratives of national reconfiguration: the economic boom of the 1980s in the first case and the renewal after the triple disaster of 11 March 2011 (tsunami, earthquake, and nuclear meltdown in Northern Japan) in the latter.

Media convergence and film tourism

Tourism induced by movies and TV series should no longer be regarded as a phenomenon that occurs more or less randomly and only as a *result* of the popularity of media products. Rather, it is important to look at tourism in the larger context of media convergence, that is, in the interplay of various media through which a particular story is sold and received.

According to Jenkins (2006: 2), “media convergence” includes the “flow of content across multiple media platforms” and “the cooperation between multiple media industries”. In many cases, tourism fits very well into this concept and has become an integral part of the strategy for optimizing all possible sources of revenue: films and series are funded by certain regions in the hope of increasing tourism by representing their cities and landscapes in the media. TV programs, magazines, and online media reports about the filming spread images of the locations. And through licensing, local stakeholders have the opportunity to give a material presence to key figures and symbols from the series that are important to the locations – and thus create a clear link to the story (e.g. Yamamura, 2015).

Visits to filming locations may become part of the strategy of “trans-media storytelling”, which, according to Jenkins (2006: 21), means that fans (as “hunters and gatherers”) are encouraged to collect fragments from various media to “fully experience any fictional world”. Visiting the landscapes of a series or entering the “home” of a fictional character can also be a way for fans to experience all the nuances and dimensions of a given story.

In Japan, marketing of stories across various media channels has long existed, especially in the field of anime. In research on Japan, this phenomenon is usually referred to as “media mix” (Ito, 2008; Steinberg, 2012). As Ito (2008: 52–53) describes, in the 1960s and 1970s, a system evolved in which manga characters wandered into other media such as games, anime, and merchandise, reaching consumers in their everyday lives in a variety of ways. This system did not disappear with digital media but resulted in an “interaction between long-standing and emerging media forms” (ibid: 53).

The audience is conceptualized as a very significant, active part of this system. Consumers access media content through a variety of platforms and can become producers themselves by sharing opinions on their favourite series, writing articles, creating fan art, or simply gathering knowledge that will help them to access the “world” of a story to its farthest corners. Jenkins (2006) calls this principle of fan networking “collective intelligence”. Especially when gathering information on filming locations, this principle has proven to be of great value to fans. As Seaton et al. (2017: 221) also stress, one important aspect of marketing filming locations may be not handing over all the information on a silver platter. For fans, it is often the detective work, the meticulous comparison of sceneries on location with stills from films and series, that stimulates their enjoyment.

And as Couldry (2003: 93) noted, when people who have already been to the scene share their experiences on the Internet, it generates further enthusiasm among other fans: “the replication of images of actual pilgrimage sites on the Web reinforces their original significance”. Publishing their work is also important for the photographers themselves because they perceive “their travel experiences through the eyes of others” (Sheungting Lo & McKercher, 2016: 240), and part of the pleasure of their journey is being able to show off their cultural capital as experts. When they watch the series after the trip, they see the places with fresh eyes: they were there; they have become part of something that is “intrinsically significant” (Couldry, 2000: 72), which (in the case of the *asadora*) millions of people pay attention to every day.

Digital media, and especially social media, are often seen in research as factors that have brought about revolutionary changes – whether as part of media convergence, as a means of connecting the audience, or as a tool for tourism marketing. For example, TV series from Japan are increasingly spreading through Asia and beyond thanks to digital technology – through legal channels, of course, but maybe even more through fan networks that share recordings and create subtitles (Iwabuchi, 2004; Hu, 2005) – and it has become easier for fans to connect transnationally. “User-generated content” now has the potential to be received by a large number of people and is often considered more credible than what is distributed via conventional media, making it an important factor in the field of tourism. However, Bird (2011) cautions against an uncritical glorification of the “produser” – as the active consumer is also called – and her power, as the media industry has

also become quite skilful at instrumentalizing fan activities and controlling the online environment.

In the following sections, we will explore how media convergence and audience activity can be entangled with nation branding strategies and the role digital media plays in this by drawing on the examples of two popular *asadora*.

Interacting with *Oshin* and *Amachan*: audience participation

The series *Oshin* (April 1983–March 1984) follows the life of the eponymous protagonist, who rises from a poor peasant daughter from Yamagata prefecture to the owner of a supermarket chain. The plot of the 297 episodes takes place between 1907 and 1983 and thus also deals with the time of World War II. With average audience ratings of 52.6%, *Oshin* is the most successful *asadora* of all time and shows how the audience actively participated in a media phenomenon before the Internet age. The reactions and interactions were so far reaching that the audience reached visibility well beyond the abstract numbers of audience ratings. A lively interaction of commercial offers, fan practices, and cultural policy developed, which can still be observed in a similar form today.

According to Harvey (1995: 75), one of the reasons for *Oshin*'s success was that this series was written and produced by women. He sees in *Oshin* a “powerful statement” that reflects the situation of women in Japan and their position in 20th-century history. The series is also evidence of the successful implementation of the “media mix” principle, which was already highly professionalized in Japan at the time. The so-called “oshindrome” included very extensive marketing beyond the series: music, merchandise, a stage play, and even *Oshin* toilet paper, for example (Asahi Shinbun, 1983, 27 June; Mainichi Shinbun, 1983, 20 August). As a full-page advertisement in the newspaper *Asahi Shinbun* shows on 14 January 1984, the target group of *Oshin* was extended to include children with an anime film and related toys. The slogan “Experience the enthusiasm beyond television” speaks of the underlying strategy of media convergence. Fictional characters thus gain material presence in everyday life and connect the audience even more closely with the series: “The character good functions as a monad or medium through which the consumer can pass into the character's world” (Steinberg, 2012: 188).

Oshin became a morning ritual for many people, a favourite subject of everyday conversation, and a role model. People held meetings where they exchanged views about *Oshin*, and they even published their own fanzines. According to newspaper articles from the time of the show's broadcasting, *Oshin* also encouraged the re-enactment of the series' narrative. *Oshin*'s family is portrayed as very poor, so they have to eat rice with radish (*dai-konmeshi*). During the broadcast of the series, it became a popular custom in Japanese families to eat this simple dish together, and even today, one can

find countless recipes on the Internet that refer to the series. This is a simple example of how TV series are integrated into everyday life and how the audience participates in the narrative not just by watching but also through performative acts. Shefner-Rogers et al. (1998: 10) regard *Oshin* as a series that has produced a particularly high degree of such (parasocial) interaction. NHK and other stakeholders offer manifold opportunities for audience participation, but the viewers do not necessarily enter these predetermined (and commercially viable) paths of interaction.

Much has happened in the more than 30 years since *Oshin*, and in the digital age, the audience has even more options to become productive and participate in a series. Today, series are often enjoyed independently of a certain TV broadcasting time, which might lead to the conclusion that this destroys the sense of community that comes with experiencing a story simultaneously (and nationwide). On the other hand, the audience is now able to exchange views about the *asadora* instantly, and new forms of fan communities emerge, such as Facebook groups (called *shisetsu ōendan*, “private support groups”) where fans provide each other with detailed information about the series, actors, and so on. These platforms also play a major role in disseminating information about and images from the *asadora* locations.

With *Amachan* (April–September 2013), these digital fan activities during the broadcasting became very prominent for the first time. The story follows the life of Aki, a high school student who becomes an *ama*¹ diver in her mother’s hometown in Northern Japan (Tōhoku). She is eventually discovered as an idol by the music industry and goes back to Tokyo to pursue her career. After the triple disaster in 2011, which is featured and discussed in the series, Aki decides to return to Northern Japan to help with the reconstruction work.

Amachan, like all *asadora*, was deeply embedded in the media mix machine, which continues to function much like in *Oshin*’s days. The audience ratings of 20.6% were rather average. Nevertheless, the series was very present in public discourse, which, as a study by the NHK Broadcasting Culture Research Institute shows, is strongly related to the online activities of the audience (Nihei & Sekiguchi, 2014). A survey (with 1,298 respondents) on *Amachan* revealed that audience activity consisted mainly of talking to family (39%) or friends (30%) about the show, watching TV shows linked to *Amachan* (13%), or repeating certain slogans and dialect terms from the series (11%). Only 1% of the respondents said they read or write on SNS about the series (Nihei & Sekiguchi, 2014: 18). *Amachan* still had a tremendous online presence: more than six million tweets were posted from 880,000 accounts, about 12 times as many as during the previous *asadora* broadcast (Nihei & Sekiguchi, 2014: 24, 28). There is thus a small but extremely committed part of the *asadora* audience which is increasingly showing its presence on the Internet, exchanging views on social media, publishing fan works (especially illustrations), and thereby strongly shaping the public perception of the series. That these fans are a rather small group among the *asadora* audience is certainly also due to the fact that today a

high proportion of viewers are 70 or older, an age group where social media usage is less widespread (Takō, 2012: 285).

In addition to audience ratings, social listening has become an important instrument for measuring the success of an *asadora*. And, of course, various stakeholders are trying to influence SNS discourse: besides producers such as NHK, numerous interest groups currently employ online media, such as the Kitananriku Amachan Tourism Promotion Group, which still launches tweets about *Amachan* and the filming locations on a daily basis, while local people from the region often also comment on social media. As Tajima (2015) explains, the identification of the local population with a series is regarded as an important factor for the success of film tourism in Japan; through the presence in national media, the awareness of the local culture's value grows among the local communities, and with the new self-confidence subsequently gained, they can also succeed in attracting a larger fan base from outside. In the case of *Amachan*, measures to create enthusiasm among the people of the city of Kuji were involvement in the shooting (for example, as extras or experts for local customs), a local fan magazine, and public screenings of the series. Local people thus became the primary “active audience”, a role model for the national audience.

Visiting *Oshin* and *Amachan*: film tourism

Although film tourism has only been studied extensively in Japanese-language research since about ten years ago, the case of *Oshin* shows that the phenomenon of fan tourism, even in a commercialized form, has existed for a much longer period. Yamagata Prefecture, in particular, where the heroine grows up, was marketed as a tourist destination in the early 1980s and transformed into a “place of imagination” (Reijnders, 2011) for fans. For example, some large advertisements in the daily newspaper Yomiuri Shinbun promoted tours to Oshin's home, including visits to Sakata City and Ginzan Onsen (hot spa) and, depending on the season, a cherry harvest experience or a snowscape boat cruise (Yomiuri Shinbun, 1984, January 17). The leading Japanese tourism agencies sold such tours with great success at that time (Yomiuri Shinbun, 1983, July 25). There are relatively few sources documenting this kind of tourism, but in light of general tourism trends, it can be assumed that the “fan pilgrimage” related to *Oshin* consisted primarily of group travelling, which means it was characterized by a “collective gaze” (Urry & Larsen, 2011: 19) shared by all the visitors. This shared travel experience of the filming locations affirms their authenticity for the fans. Moreover, in this era, one can surmise that it must have been much more difficult and time consuming for individual travellers to rediscover the significant spots known from media content on their own in the countryside.

As screenwriter Hashida (1983) reports in a newspaper article, at an early stage of *Oshin*'s production, residents at the filming locations initially doubted the positive impact of the *asadora* because Yamagata is associated

in the series with poverty and hard living conditions. Hashida, however, insisted that the series had to be located in Yamagata because of the snow, the Mogami River, and the local dialect. She describes personal memories related to these elements, which support the image of “romantic poverty” in Yamagata, an image that ultimately became very marketable in terms of tourism. Eventually, local authorities in Yamagata also recognized and adapted *Oshin*’s potential: The Bashō Line, which operates on Mogami River, was renamed Oshin Line, and a life-size statue of Oshin was installed in front of Sakata Station (Asahi Shinbun, 1983, July 23). When tourists in Sakata repeatedly asked for the house where Oshin spent her youth, the city government designated a building as an equivalent or model (Yomiuri Shinbun, 1983, July 25). Even in Tokyo, the prefecture drew attention as “Oshin’s home” by organizing an apple festival in November 1983 (Yomiuri Shinbun, 1983, November 14).

In Sakata, *Oshin* sweets, sake (rice wine), wooden dolls (Figure 8.1), straw mats, etcetera, were offered as souvenirs (Asahi Shinbun, 1983, July 23; Yomiuri Shinbun, 1983, July 25). Local specialties and artisan products were enhanced by the label of *Oshin* and received a new appeal. According to the newspaper Yomiuri Shinbun (1983, July 25), there were also copyright infringements that brought local merchants a complaint from NHK. Copyright is generally a critical issue in film tourism; the often very limited possibilities for the marketing of locally produced souvenirs demonstrate the gap of power between the media producers based in the major cities and the film locations on the periphery (Scherer & Thelen, 2017: 14–15). NHK does indeed draw much public attention to rural areas, through the *asadora* itself and by reporting on the filming locations in various shows, but at the same time, the broadcaster carefully protects its own benefits derived from tourism through the licensing of souvenirs (Maruta et al., 2014: 64–65) and thus exploits all opportunities offered by media convergence.

However, the depiction of a certain place in a TV series does not automatically promise benefits. A serious conflict between the heroine Oshin and her mother-in-law plays out in Saga Prefecture, for instance. As a result, the local tourism association of this prefecture worried about the prefecture’s image being damaged during the broadcast of *Oshin* and filed a complaint with NHK. To allay these worries, the producers reassured them that the character of Oshin’s mother-in-law would undergo a positive development throughout the narrative (Asahi Shinbun, 1983, September 7). This anecdote illustrates the importance that was attached to *Oshin* regarding regional development. For Yamagata prefecture, the impact of the series lasts until today, as local tourism promotion illustrates. In addition to the original series, Yamagata Prefecture also advertises itself as a filming location for the *Oshin* feature film, which was shot in 2013 to celebrate the series’ 30th anniversary (Yamagatakanko, 2013). The prefecture invested its own funding in the production of this film in an effort to increase its appeal to visitors, especially in the wake of the triple disaster of 2011. The number of tourists, for example, coming to the Shōnai Movie Village, a large-scale open movie

Figure 8.1 *Kokeshi* (wooden doll).

Source: Photo by authors.

set located in Sakata City, had harshly declined (Yomiuri Shinbun, 2012, September 4) after 2011. In newspaper articles about the feature film, the character of *Oshin* is now also associated with the strength and endurance of the people of Northern Japan after the catastrophe.

The triple disaster also played a major role in the production of the *asadora Amachan*, which was filmed at the same time; it had damaged the region's general image in public, in particular due to the possible risk of radiation. In order to support the region's rehabilitation, the series *Amachan* was set in the fictitious city of Kitasanriku in Iwate Prefecture, which was heavily damaged by the tsunami. The port city of Kuji, which served as filming location, suffered from serious devastation, but casualties remained relatively low there, with only four people dead. The triple disaster itself as well as the enthusiasm for reconstruction turned into important narratives in *Amachan*. Comments on Twitter exemplify how much the audience felt affected by the catastrophe's depiction, which probably helped the region acquire greater attention in the public consciousness. One Twitter user wrote that "Kitasanriku became a second home" for him, and another noted that thanks to the series, many people who live outside of Northern Japan realized that the triple disaster affects them as well; thanks to the series, everyone now had "relatives in Kuji", as he put it (Sun Ju Sun, 2013). After the broadcast of the episode in which the tsunami occurred, many tweets compared the depiction in the series (all characters survive) to the actual casualties at the filming location in Kuji. This illustrates the importance *asadora* viewers attach to authenticity, especially when it comes to the filming locations and regional features.

In addition to a greater interest in the filming locations and the region as a whole, the success of *Amachan* finally brought a tourism boom. In the year of broadcasting, 2013, Iwate Prefecture recorded an 86% growth in the number of visitors, which remained at a relatively high level in 2014 compared to the time before the broadcast (Tajima, 2015: 25). Various projects, largely driven by local initiatives, took advantage of *Amachan*'s content and utilized it for touristic means. For example, the facades of closed-down shops in downtown Kuji were embellished with pictures from the series and an "Amachan House" decorated with props from the series was opened.

In the digital age, SNS usage not only diminishes the boundaries between consumers and producers but also greatly influences travel behaviour and trends (Urry & Larsen, 2011: 59–60). While at the time of *Oshin*, group travel dominated the tourism market, such organized package tours are rarely offered today. In the case of *Amachan*, only a three-hour tour with a tourist bus was arranged for visitors (Tajima, 2015: 23). Tourists today act independently, and thanks to technical innovations like mobile devices with GPS, they can now easily explore peripheral filming locations on their own. Such a fan pilgrimage is nurtured by a "romantic gaze" (Urry & Larsen, 2011: 19): a seemingly individualized and solitary travel experience, which is, however, often significantly pre-influenced by the representations of travel experiences that others have shared on the Internet.

The example of *Amachan* also illustrates how members of the audience remodel and reproduce certain elements of the media content and then disseminate their own version online. For instance, many fans who came to

Figure 8.2 Unidon.

Source: Photo by authors.

Kuji visited the Café Moka (the model for Café Rias in the series) or ate a specialty called *unidon* (rice-based dish with sea urchin; Figure 8.2) that appears in the series. A fan from Thailand even describes on his English blog how he went to a store in Kuji early in the morning to purchase a sea urchin lunchbox, showing many photos of this undertaking and describing the taste in detail (AT1987, 2016). Such accurate reports give other fans a vivid impression of a pilgrimage, allowing for a kind of “vicarious media tourism”, which means that one fan is experiencing a location for many others, and his pilgrimage becomes accessible and consumable via social media. The great impact of *Amachan* fandom became obvious in 2016, when a severe typhoon on the 30th of August caused damage to Kuji City and Café Moka. The café owner obtained many letters encouraging him to continue

his business, and even fans from Tokyo came to help with the cleanup. Once more, *Amachan*'s legacy supported the reconstruction of the city: the lead actress Rena Nōnen, known as “Non”, travelled to Kuji in September to encourage the locals and to re-visit the filming locations of the series (Non, 2006). Non wrote about her travel experience on a blog in cooperation with the instant messaging service Line. On this blog, she regularly declares her attachment to the Tōhoku region, which is well received, as many fans' comments show. Non has become an ambassador for the region, and her iconic presence on various media formats (backed by powerful media companies such as NHK and Line) continues to unfold the symbolic power of *Amachan* even today, years after its broadcast.

As the case of *Amachan* demonstrates, the media presence of filming locations generates effects beyond the promotion of tourism and sale of local products. The media representation of Northern Japan's landscapes in probably the most influential national TV format, the *asadora*, created alternative images that possess the power to (at least partially) replace the negative images of destruction that shaped the region's reputation after the triple disaster. The series established a new narrative that linked the coastal area of Northern Japan with thoughts of solidarity and reconstruction. Ultimately, this is embedded in a strategy of nation branding, as we will explain in the next section.

***Oshin* and *Amachan* going abroad: soft power**

Since the 2000s, Japan sought to increase its attractiveness and economic power by marketing popular culture – in particular anime, manga, and video games – using the buzzword and label “Cool Japan” (McGray, 2002). However, even before “Cool Japan” gained attention, popular culture served to improve national reputation. In the 1980s, the time of *Oshin*, Japan had good reasons to polish its international image. Although the Japanese economy experienced a massive growth at that time, Japanese products still had the reputation of being mere copies. Moreover, the Japanese government was interested in establishing new political and economic collaborations in the East Asian region, a complicated undertaking due to the legacy of the Pacific War (Iwabuchi, 2015). In addition, in the face of the Cold War, a positive image of Japan was also important for its relationship to the West, presenting the nation as a reliable ally and strong economic partner, especially for the United States.

The national success of *Oshin*, a story of renewal after the war, fitted these intentions perfectly. Since 1984, the Japan Foundation (a government-run institution for the dissemination of Japanese culture overseas) provided the series to broadcasters worldwide free of charge as part of its cultural program (Takahashi, 1998: 144). As Iwabuchi (2015: 421) points out, the series thus made a significant contribution to establishing a new international image of Japan, detached from the negative memories of imperialism. The

heroine Oshin was even considered a kind of symbol for Japan: US President Ronald Reagan drew an analogy between the rise of Oshin and Japan's economic success after World War II in November 1983 (Haberman, 1984).

To this day, NHK proudly points to the great impact and huge success of *Oshin* worldwide (NHK, n.d.-a), and the female protagonist continues to be deployed as an ambassador of local as well as national identity. The Japan National Tourism Organization (JNTO), for instance, promotes Yamagata Prefecture as the "Home of Oshin" on its English webpage and refers to Oshin as the prefecture's "most well-known person abroad" (Japan Monthly Web Magazine, 2014). Recently, Japanese travel agencies specialized in foreign tourists offer *Oshin* tours as part of their portfolio (WebTravel, n.d.). NHK also still reports on tourism related to the locations, for example, in a bilingual documentary aired on its international channel NHK World, in which a Malaysian actor explores "Oshin's home" for Japanese and international audiences (NHK, n.d.-b). In addition to attracting visitors from overseas, the media coverage of *Oshin*'s popularity abroad also serves as an affirmation for the Japanese audience: if even foreigners know *Oshin* and travel to the filming locations, then the series has to be really important. Accordingly, since the 1980s, Japanese newspapers have regularly reported on the success of *Oshin* in foreign countries and interpreted it as a part of a general "Japan boom".²

In the early 2010s, Japan again faced a complicated situation in the global context. The financial crisis of 2008 left the national economy weak and unsteady, while neighbouring East Asian states such as China and South Korea turned into serious competitors, not only in business matters but also concerning the quasi-hegemony of Japanese pop culture in East Asia. Furthermore, the triple disaster of March 2011 and the subsequent nuclear reactor accident raised doubts about Japanese technology as well as about the country's security as a travel destination. Since the mid-2000s, tourists coming from abroad have turned into an important economic force, which the government encouraged with large-scale tourism promotion campaigns (Uzama, 2009). The *asadora Amachan* clearly reflected this situation: recalling the glorious days of Japanese pop music idols in the 1980s (Johnson, 2018; Tajima, 2018) and at the same time turning the catastrophe of 2011 into a hopeful narrative of resurrection.

Amachan, unlike *Oshin*, was primarily distributed in Southeast Asia, in Taiwan, Thailand, Indonesia, Myanmar, and the Philippines (Bartolome, 2015). Why has the focus been put on this region? In recent years, Southeast Asia has developed into an important arena for Japanese foreign policy. On the one hand, the number of tourists from these countries travelling to Japan is increasing, and they became an essential target group for inbound tourism (JTB Tourism Research & Consulting Co., n.d.). This potential was also considered in the case of tourism related to *Amachan*: Iwate Prefecture advertises the *Amachan* Museum in its English newsletter (Iwata Prefecture, n.d.), and the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Tourism (METI) published

an English-language information brochure with the slogan: “Why don’t you come to Kuji to experience the world of ‘Ama-chan?’” (METI, n.d.). In addition to promoting tourism, a positive image of Japan is certainly beneficial in the competitive race against China for economic partnerships in the emerging ASEAN states (Alegado, 2018) and also for attracting foreign workers, which, despite many reservations, play an increasingly important role in Japanese society, especially in the care sector.

Conclusion

The digital revolution and media convergence are often considered major turning points in recent media history, and film tourism is thought to have undergone major changes as a result (e.g. Seaton et al., 2017). Drawing on the example of two popular *asadora*, our chapter showed that many principles have not fundamentally changed with digitization, though they have become more diversified. Viewers were already very active in the 1980s at the time of *Oshin*, but their fandom at that time was limited to “analogue” media such as fanzines and thus was less far reaching, unless national newspapers reported on it. The marketing machinery, which included merchandise and publications as well as travel packages, was already very much developed by the time of *Oshin* and very present in the media. At the same time, audience participation was not limited to consumption, and practices such as cooking dishes from the series became so common that the press dealt with it in detail.

In the 2010s, the time of *Amachan*, the Internet allows fandom to gain higher visibility; through social media, fan art and photos of individual trips to filming locations are spreading, thus expanding the world of the series. Fan activities probably have not increased per se. They are just more directly accessible today, as fans can distribute their works by themselves and do not have to rely on major media companies to get coverage. Local stakeholders, such as tourism promotion groups, can take advantage of this and use the wave of national attention to further strengthen a region’s image by spreading their own visual impressions and interpretations of regional identity. Still, only a small proportion of fans are active online, and the number of those who actually travel to the locations is limited. However, a kind of “vicarious media tourism” multiplies the number of those who are involved in the exploration of mediated landscapes, albeit passively.

As we have shown, even though regional landscapes with their special characteristics are presented in the *asadora*, they always stand for certain aspects of “Japanese identity” and are closely linked to messages related to the prevailing zeitgeist in Japan (Scherer & Thelen, 2017). The narrative package, which is present on all channels of media convergence – also in tourism – always contains an idea of what defines Japanese identity and how it can be presented and marketed internationally. *Oshin* and *Amachan* reveal similar tendencies of a nation-branding strategy: both series address resurgence after a difficult time, evoking a sense of

community and convey perseverance and strength (especially with an eye to the audiences overseas). However, the focus of these branding efforts has changed since *Oshin*: the target audience is now more likely to be found in Southeast Asia, with the development of international tourism playing an important role alongside economic interests such as a strong investment policy in these emerging countries.

Notes

- 1 *Ama* are professional divers who harvest seafood and seaweed without using air tanks or scuba gear; Martinez (2019) analyzed *Amachan* with focus on the depiction female *ama* divers and national identity.
- 2 For example, in Thailand (Asahi Shinbun 1985, July 25), in Poland (Yomiuri Shinbun, 1985, November 30), and on the occasion of a rerun in Iran (Yomiuri Shinbun, 2013, July 18).

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