Anime Pilgrimage and *Ema* (Picture Tablets)  
*the Case of Oarai Isosaki Shrine*  

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**Keywords:** Anime Pilgrimage, *Ema*, Oarai Isosaki Shrine, the Great East Japan Earthquake of 2011, Cruiser Naka

**Summary**

This paper is based on a recent lecture I gave in English entitled “Japanese Pop Culture”, presented on May 17, 2016 at Komatsu College, for visiting students from the PSU (Prince of Songkla University) in Thailand. Komatsu College has entered into a cooperative agreement with PSU for student exchange. Although I have already written a few articles about the Anime pilgrimage to Oarai Isosaki Shrine in Ibaraki Prefecture, which forms the main case study, this paper is based on a talk designed primarily to enlighten the foreign students, and included some new data and considerations, slightly different from my previous papers in Japanese. Therefore I decided the thesis based upon that presentation had sufficient originality and significance to merit a new paper.

To begin with, this paper surveys previous studies around Anime pilgrimage and points out how some commentators within the field of tourism studies regard this phenomenon as secular tourism. Contrary to these views, this paper focuses on the religious-related side of Anime pilgrimage, mainly in a number of cases where certain Shinto shrines and Buddhist temples have become sites visited by Anime pilgrims, and the general interpretation of the *ema* that the pilgrims dedicate at the sites. Next, this paper examines the case of pilgrimage to Oarai Isosaki Shrine, focusing on the *ema* dedicated by Anime pilgrims. As a result of the above analysis, this paper concludes that the reasons for the religious implication of the Anime pilgrimage to this shrine are as follows: Firstly, Oarai Isosaki Shrine was affected by the Great East Japan Earthquake in 2011; and secondly, this shrine serves as a war memorial to commemorate the more than 200 lives lost when the Battle Cruiser Naka was sunk in the Southern Pacific Ocean in 1944.

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1. Introduction; the aim of this paper

This paper treats Anime (aka Japanimation) as an example of Japanese pop culture. The reason I have come to refer to Japanese pop culture stems from my recent lecture entitled “Japanese Pop Culture” in English, presented on May 17, 2016 at Komatsu College, for a group of exchange students from PSU (Prince of Songkla University), Thailand. This paper is mainly based on that lecture, so it will tend to be more educational in its tone.

As for the topic of Anime, there have been many studies and arguments; some examples are as follows:

- Research on the creators or the process of creation
- The sociological approach to Otaku culture
- Analysis of the works from a literary perspective, and so on.

I do not find the studies on the latter two viewpoints in the English-speaking world.

Contrary to the above viewpoints, this paper focuses on the topic of Anime pilgrimage, or seichi junrei in Japanese. It is said that the model locations where famous Anime are set have come to be referred to as seichi (sacred places) by diehard fans, since around the year 2002. According to a generally accepted theory, it was the fans of Onegai-teacher! (Please Teacher!, broadcast in 2002) who first started to use the term seichi to describe Lake Kizaki in Nagano prefecture, which is said to be the backdrop to the main story, and they started travelling there in the name of junrei (pilgrimage).

As a result, scholars of tourism, which is the pioneering viewpoint of studies on Anime pilgrimage, considered that seichi had no implication of a religious nature. This is clear because the above example is a lake, and other examples include a school (eg. Nishinomiya Kita High School) and a dwelling (e.g. NAGATO Yuki’s condominium), in The Melancholy of SUZUMIYA Haruhi (aired in 2006 & 2009), and so on.

However, I do not subscribe to that view. Because I have spent many years studying traditional religion and folklore in Japan, I began to examine the Anime pilgrimage to Yuwaku hot spring resort in Kanazawa City and Nishigishi station in Noto Peninsula, two seichi of Hanasaku-iroha (Blossoms for Tomorrow), which aired in 2011.

Since October 2011, the Yuwaku resort association for tourists inaugurated the “Yuwaku Bonbori Festival”, copying the fictional ”Bonbori Festival” in Hanasaku-iroha. Both the fictional and the real “Bonbori Festival” are assumed to send the deity of the hot spring to Izumo country, because all deities must gather there each year in October, according to traditional Japanese beliefs.

In the finale of that festival, box-like wooden frames are ignited on the banks of Lake Gyokusen, in Yuwaku hot spring resort, in order to send the deity of the hot spring to Izumo country. Before they are set alight, one Shinto priest recites a formal norito (Shinto ritual prayer) for sending off the deity. In fact, as the real Yuwaku Inari Shrine has no Shinto priest (because this shrine is located in the precincts of a Buddhist temple), someone is hired just for the day of this festival, but this person is nevertheless an authentic Shinto priest.

That is to say, this seichi (to Yuwaku hot spring resort) resembles a sacred place with religious meaning.
The following considerations examine other seichi pilgrimage sites that seem to have a religious significance.

2. On the relation between ema and Anime pilgrimage

Among seichi (sacred places) that have a religious significance, this section deals with some traditional Shinto shrines and Buddhist temples, to which have been dedicated many ema (picture tablets) by Anime pilgrims.

2.1. Some interpretations of ema

To begin with, I will explain what an ema is. Ema is a wooden tablet or plaque on which visitors write their wishes or prayers. The Japanese word ema literally means picture horse. The reason why the word ema includes the symbol for horse is said to stem from a centuries-old custom of dedicating horses to the deities, based on the conventional consideration.

However, YANAGITA Kunio (1875-1964), the founder of Japanese folkloric studies, opposed this view (mainly, as a substitute for dedicating a real horse to the deities). YANAGITA claimed that the reason for painting images on wooden tablets was derived from the desire to appeal more urgently to the gods or Buddha, in visual rather than written forms.\(^{(2)}\)

In fact, traditional ema had various patterns of paintings representing particular wishes or prayers. For example, the figure of the Jizo (Ksitigarbha-bodhisattva) represents a prayer for the safety of children,\(^{(3)}\) due to the fact that Jizo have long been considered in Japan as guardian deities who protect the souls of children. Incidentally, I once wrote a thesis on one variation of the beliefs surrounding Jizo.\(^{(4)}\)

Consequently, the following discussions are not concerned with any horses, but instead focus on Japanese characters written on ema.

2.2. The relation between ema and Anime pilgrimage

According to previous studies, fans of the “Sailor Moon” series (broadcast from 1992-97) began to dedicate ema to Azabu Hikawa Shrine in Tokyo.\(^{(5)}\) This shrine was thought to be the model for the shrine where HINO Ray resides, one of the principal characters, who turns into Sailor Mars. In the story, this character lives in a shrine with the same name, together with her grandfather, who is the chief priest of the shrine, and she often serves as Miko (Shinto maiden) for this shrine. However, the new Anime series called Pretty Guardian Sailor Moon Crystal started from 2014, and a few pilgrims seem to have started visiting this shrine again.

In other words, as we cannot find any recent ema relating to Sailor Moon in Azabu Hikawa Shrine, this paper examines the following six religious facilities, famous for many ema dedicated by Anime pilgrims in this century (See Table 1). The following survey describes the five cases, except the main case of Oarai Isosaki Shrine, which is dealt with in the following section.
(Table 1) Religious facilities, famous for many *ema* dedicated by Anime pilgrims in the 21st Century

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of the religious facility</th>
<th>Place</th>
<th>the related contents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Misode Tenman-gu</td>
<td>Hiroshima</td>
<td>Kami-chu! (2005) and others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shirakawa Hachiman Shrine</td>
<td>Gifu</td>
<td>Higurashi, When They Cry (2006-13, the original game 2002-)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washinomiya Shrine</td>
<td>Saitama</td>
<td>Lucky Star (2007)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jorinji Temple</td>
<td>Saitama</td>
<td>Anohana: The Flower We Saw That Day (2011)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oarai Isosaki Shrine</td>
<td>Ibaraki</td>
<td>Girls und Panzer (2012-13) and others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kanda Myojin</td>
<td>Tokyo</td>
<td>Love Live! (2013 &amp;14) and others</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

① The first case is Misode Tenman-gu in Onomichi City, Hiroshima Prefecture. Onomichi City is featured in many novels, films, comics, and Animes, including Kami-chu (broadcast in 2005) and Tamayura (first published as OVA in 2010, broadcast in 2011-13, followed by a four film series run in 2015-16).

Kami-chu! is set in 1983 to 1984 in the city of Onomichi. The story follows the adventures of HITOTSUBASHI Yurie, an ordinary middle school girl who is suddenly transformed into a teenage goddess called “Yurie-sama”. Misode Tenman-gu is the model for the shrine called Raifuku Shrine in the story, which enshrines “Yurie-sama” as the deity. On visiting this real-life shrine, it is possible to see a number of *ema* that depict her as the figure of a goddess (i.e. wearing a formal Shinto priest’s costume).

In the other story, Tamayura, we encounter a character called SAWATARI Fu, who moves during her high school days to Takehara City, Hiroshima Prefecture, where her late father grew up. She enjoys taking pictures with her father’s old film camera. In the second season of Tamayura, which aired in 2013, Onomichi City was depicted twice, but Misode Tenman-gu was not the setting. Nevertheless, we see several *ema* portraying HITOTSUBASHI Yurie and SAWATARI Fu side by side in Misode Tenman-gu. I researched the *ema* of this shrine last August and recently reported on my findings.

② The second case is Shirakawa Hachiman Shrine, located in Shirakawa-go of Gifu Prefecture, a UNESCO World Heritage site. This shrine is seichī of Higurashi, When They Cry (broadcast in 2006-7), the model for Furude Shrine in the story.

The *Higurashi* (cicadas) series started out as a computer game, first released in 2002. The series describes a murder mystery, which took place during June 1983, in a fictional village called Hinamizawa, based on the village of Shirakawa-go. The main characters, apart from MAEBARA Kei’ichi as the narrator, are HOJO Satoko, SONOZAKI sisters (Mion and Shion), RYUGU Rena, FURUDE Rika and Hany. Among these six girls, Rika is the daughter of the priest and lives at the shrine, and Hany is set as an incarnation of the deity called "O-yashiro-sama". Rika sometimes wears a *Miko* (Shinto maiden) costume.

As to *ema* dedicated to this shrine, Dale K. Andrews recently wrote a thesis.

③ The third case is Washinomiya Shrine, famous for many *ema* and “Lucky Star-mikoshi” (portable
shrine), which is carried by many anime fans at the Haji Festival every September. It is said that this shrine accepted the request of the Washinomiya association for commerce and industry, to construct a new portable shrine relating to Lucky Star in 2008, in the year after the program’s broadcast.

Anyway, the opening animation of Lucky Star (2007) featured shots of the O-tori’i (the biggest gateway) of Washinomiya shrine and HIIRAGI Kagami, one of the main characters.

Lucky Star is based on a four-panel comic strip. Lucky Star’s story mainly portrays the lives of four girls, IZUMI Konata, HI’IRAGI Kagami, HI’IRAGI Tsukasa, and TAKARA Miyuki, who attend a high school in Saitama Prefecture. HI’IRAGI sisters are depicted as twin daughters of the chief priest of this shrine, and they sometimes wear Miko (Shinto maiden) costumes, similar to Ray of Sailor Moon and Rika of Higurashi.

According to my research last September, there are many votive arts and messages on various ema praying for the success of the Haji Festival, although the number of ema has decreased in comparison with the most popular days (see IMAI Nobuharu's analysis from 2008-2010). Incidentally “Haji” is said to be one of the old names of Washinomiya Shrine.

④ The fourth case is Jorinji Temple in Chichibu City, Saitama Prefecture. This temple belongs to the Soto Zen Sect and one of the 34 fuda-sho (sacred places of Kannon for pilgrims; Kannon means Avalokitesvara) around the Chichibu area and also the seichi of Anohana: The Flower We Saw That Day (broadcast in 2011). That is to say, we often see the coexistence of traditional pilgrims for Kannon (Avalokitesvara) and Anime pilgrims in the same precincts. Also in Jorinji Temple, we can buy six kinds of ema, printed with each character of Anohana.

Anohana is a story about a girl called Menma as her nickname, who died in an accident at elementary school, and also a story about her five late-teens friends. Jorinji Temple is depicted as the place where the six characters used to hang out together in their elementary school days. In addition, this temple is also described as an important place in the 10th (penultimate) tale, where the five main characters except Menma get together to talk about the reason for Menma’s accidental death. The sequence of reminiscences of Menma's death features a swollen river. I once pointed out that this element of the story, which started just after the Great East Japan Earthquake of 2011, must have been influenced by the cruel disaster.

Concerning the painting of characters, we frequently find the figure of Menma, and among the votive messages, something about peace is conspicuous, as I have previously reported. The reason for the latter is thought to stem from the setting of "Cho-heiwa-busters" in Anohana. As "cho" means super or trans, and "heiwa" means peace, "Cho-heiwa-busters" is an upsetting word. However, according to the setting of Anohana, this word was made by six elementary school boys and girls, and stands for their friendship. Countless fans of Anohana are fond of using this term or the word “peace”.

⑤ The fifth case is Kanda Myojin, in Tokyo, seichi of Love Live!, and famous for the guardian deity of Akihabara electric town. As Akihabara is also known as a subcultural sacred place, many fans of comics and Anime already visited Kanda Myojin to dedicate their painted ema to this shrine before Love Live! was released (See three examples of Puella Magi Madoka Magica, on pages 104, 119 and 128 of my book).
Love Live! is set in a place where school idols are popular. KOSAKA Honoka and her eight friends start up a school idol group in order to prevent their high school from being closed down. Among the enormous numbers of ema, figures of TOJO Nozomi seem to be particularly prominent, because in the story she serves as Miko (Shinto maiden) of Kanda Myojin. In fact, Kanda Myojin now sells ema showing the figure of TOJO Nozomi having sought permission for the copyright.

Here, I would like to summarize the above data, briefly.

① Misode Tenman-gu; the model of the shrine enshrines “Yurie-sama” as its deity.
② Shirakawa Hachiman Shrine; the model of the shrine, where Rika lives, enshrines Hany as its deity.
③ Washinomiya Shrine; the father of the HI’IRAGI sisters serves as the chief priest for this Shinto shrine.
④ Jorinji Temple; the place where the six characters gathered in their elementary school days, and the important place where the five characters get together to talk about the reason for Menma’s death.
⑤ Kanda Myojin; Nozomi, one of the characters, serves as Miko (Shinto maiden) and Honoka, the heroine of the contents, sometimes prays sincerely.

Consequently, on the five religious facilities, the related stories have either a character who wears Miko costume (Rika, Kagami, Tsukasa and Nozomi), or a supernatural being (Yurie-sama, Hany and Menma). The other case of Oarai Isosaki Shrine is distinctive.

3. A Case Study; the Anime pilgrimage to Oarai Isosaki Shrine, with special reference to the dedicated ema by Anime pilgrims

By comparison with the above five examples, in the case of Oarai Isosaki Shrine, neither the haiden (the house of worship) nor the precincts of the shrine were employed as Anime scenery. I hear that the chief priest of this shrine rejected the representation of those sacred places in this shrine.

While Girls und Panzer (broadcast in 2012-13, henceforth referred to as GuP) is a well-known Anime with links to Oarai, it only describes some tanks proceeding along sando (the approach road) and through O-tori’i (the biggest gateway) of this shrine in the 4th tale, which is the first to depict the town of Oarai.

Incidentally, GuP portrays the fictional traditional martial art of sensha-do (which means “the way of the tank”; a competition between girls high schools practicing tank warfare as a sport).

In fact, Oarai town suffered from the Great East Japan Earthquake of 2011, and GuP depicted some disastrous (and already restorative) points in this town. For example, we can find Oarai Maiwai Market in the 4th tale, and Aquaworld Oarai in the 10th tale, both of which were severely affected by the violent Tsunami. Even though GuP did not describe the main facilities of Oarai Isosaki Shrine, at least in the TV series (2012-13), this shrine nevertheless came to be famous for the many ema that are dedicated by Anime pilgrims. This shrine has approached gradually the GuP-pilgrims, as follows.

3.1 The progress of the relation between Oarai Isosaki Shrine and Anime Pilgrims

October, 2012; GuP was first broadcast.
November 5, 2012; Firstly, two *ema-shi* (the painters of *ema*) dedicated their *ema*, described some GuP characters, to Oarai Isosaki Shrine. Their handle names are OGAMI Tomoyuki and Motosumiyoshi-no-Ito, and both of them were already known in Washinomiya Shrine.

December, 6, 2012; One blog introduced OGAMI Tomoyuki’s multiple *ema*. In the same month, GuP finished its run on television. According to one priest’s account, many fans visited the shrine in order to pray for the resumption of GuP, in addition to the influence of the above blog.

March 2013; Both the 11th and 12th (the last) tale of GuP were televised.

March 24, 2013; In response to the televising of the last chapter of GuP, the Oarai association for commerce and industry set 54 panels of GuP characters in front of shops along Magarimatsu street, described in the 4th tale of GuP.

April, 2013; The browser game Kantai Collection, or KanKore, was launched. In the game, World War II warships are depicted as cute girls, called *Kan-musu* (ship girls). Oarai Isosaki Shrine contains the *Chu-kon-hi* (a type of war monument, commemorating the souls of the war dead, from the Shinto style) for Battle Cruiser Naka (See, Figure), one of *Kan-musu*. So, it is said that fans of KanKore gradually began to visit this shrine as a pilgrimage. However, when I visited this shrine in August 2013, I could only observe a few *ema* relating to KanKore.

Figure

*Chu-kon-hi* for Battle Cruiser Naka

September or October, 2013; Because *ema* increased rapidly, a new *ema-kakesho* (a hanger-like facility for *ema*) was established.

January, 2014; A huge *ema* of GuP was erected in the precincts of the shrine. We should recall that the chief priest once rejected the representation of the sacred places in the shrine for the anime. This shows the alternation of this shrine’s attitude toward the subcultural contents. By the way, the huge *ema* of GuP has changed every January since 2015.

In the same month (Jan 2014); The formal paper of this shrine, called *Oarai-sama*, treated *kannai-jinja* (the enshrined shrine in the warship) in connection with Naka, because Cruiser Naka enshrined Oarai Isosaki Shrine as *kannai-jinja*. The article was written by FUJIMOTO Yorio, an expert in Shinto studies. This seemed to be the other evidence of the above alternation of attitudes at the shrine.

February 17, 2014; Firstly, fans of KanKore participated in the *Chu-kon-sai* (the memorial ceremony
for the war dead) of Naka. The origin of the ceremony is as follows. From 17-18 February 1944, Cruiser Naka was attacked and sunk, west of the Truk Islands (nowadays known as the Chuuk Islands), and over two hundred crewmen perished.

Incidentally, I participated in this ceremony last year. Apart from a few relatives of the war dead, the majority of the attendees were KanKore fans. They were rather older than most fans of GuP, whom I often saw in the Magarimatsu Street. I was very impressed with the devout attitude of KanKore fans in that ceremony.

May 2014; The repair works of haiden (the house of worship), honden (the main shrine) and shinmon (the center gate) started, in the name of restoration from the Great East Japan Earthquake, and continued until March 2015.

Omitting the later progress, the following examination focuses on the ema dedicated by many Anime pilgrims, mainly votive messages.

3.2. On the votive messages written on ema, dedicated to the Oarai Isosaki Shrine

According to my latest research from August 25, 2015, the dedicated ema displayed the following tendencies:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>3259</td>
<td>(100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With votive figures or messages concerning anime or games</td>
<td>1488</td>
<td>(45.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examples of other ordinary prayer</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prayers for success of entrance examination or schoolwork</td>
<td>343</td>
<td>(10.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prayers for health of the self or the family</td>
<td>294</td>
<td>(9.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prayers for work or placement</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>(2.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prayers for success of romance</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>(2.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>And so on</td>
<td>225</td>
<td>(6.9%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Once I had sorted the ema into categories, I discovered various tendencies(11).

So, the following discussion focuses on the votive figures and messages drawn on ema relating to Anime or games, mainly following the typical features in this shrine, and falling into three types.

As to the style of transcription established in my previous book, I set a circle mark(○) for the top of each votive sentence, the next is the character’s name of the figure, and the third is the English translation of the votive message in quotation marks. After that, I often add some comments in parentheses. In addition, almost all of the following examples are different from already quoted examples in my previous book(9).

① prayer for the eternity or prosperity of Oarai

○ REIZEI Mako (GuP); “I wish the growth of Oarai! 2012.7.14 OGAMI Tomoyuki” (His 37th ema, and he quotes Mako’s pose from the 2nd tale of GuP)

○ Anchovy (center) and Carpaccio (left; GuP); “I wish Oarai good luck!”

○ MARUYAMA Saki (GuP): “Oarai, ...the place I’ll come back again. 2014.11.7” (citation from her
lines of the 12th tale of GuP)

○ Darjeeling (GuP); “I wish the prosperity of Oarai town, and the success of the movie version of GuP!! 2015.8.22”

○ SAWA Azusa (GuP); “Congrats 19th Monk Fish Festival!! 11/16/’15” (it was dedicated by a visitor from the USA; Monk Fish Festival <or Anko Matsuri in Japanese> is the biggest festival of Oarai, held every November. From 2012, the event incorporated elements from GuP and it is said that more than one hundred thousand people took part).

○ TSURUKI Shizuka (the heroin of spin-off comics from GuP): “I pray, Oarai will keep on being the lively town from now on, and so on.”

○ Sendai Sisters (Sendai, Jintsu and Naka of KanKore); “Be more robust, Oarai.”□

As we see, this type of votive message is deeply connected with the characters of GuP, but there are a few exceptions.

② prayer for the restoration from the Great East Japan Earthquake of 2011

Oarai Isosaki Shrine suffered damage during the above earthquake. As seen in the above description in 3.1, repair work on the main shrine and gate were completed in March of last year, but all facilities are not yet recovered. For example, some upper parts of one torii (gateway) were broken and left on the ground. However, these kind of ema were almost all dedicated before 2014, so the following three examples were already quoted in my previous book⁹.

○ KADOTANI Anzu (GuP); “Prayer for restoration of Oarai Town.”

○ HOSHINO and TSUCHIYA (GuP); “I pray for the spirits of Oarai Town, from restoration to happiness, and I hope also some regions, which have no clues to restoration, come to recover their happiness again. H25.2.12 Motosumiyoshi-no-Ito” (He dedicated ema related GuP, first, and H25 means 2013)

○ Fubuki (KanKore); “Prayer for restoration”

③ prayer for world peace, or something about war

These kinds of ema, dedicated in this shrine, are considered to originate from the following two points, although we can see similar kinds of ema in the other Anime related seichi (See pp.123-126 of my book)⁹.

1) Both GuP and KanKore are military related stories. That is to say, GuP concerns tanks, while KanKore describes warships.

2) Oarai Town was significantly affected by the Great East Japan Earthquake of 2011. In general, when it comes to relief from major disasters in Japan, the Self-Defense Forces (SDF) play a vital role. So the residents of Oarai town came to welcome the SDF. As a result, the town asked the SDF to lend a tank for the event to congratulate the restoration from the earthquake, called “Kairaku-festa” in March 24, 2013. In addition to the residents of Oarai town, many fans of GuP gathered for this event. I think, depending on this event, the fans of GuP came to regard (or misunderstand) the residents of Oarai town as sympathetic toward all things military.

By the way, the typical sentences of this kind are as follows.
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○ Naka showing peace sign; “I pray for world peace!  2013.12.23” (Naka’s costume is depicted as the uniform of Oarai Girls High School in GuP)
○ Naka; “I wish the war only exists in the game of Naka!”  
○ Naka; “I pray for peace.  2014.5.4”
○ Naka showing peace sign; “I pray for the peace of the world!  2014.6.21”
○ Naka laughing; “Mourning for Naka-chan. I represent sincerely my mourning for all of the war dead, who visited the front to protect the state and family, and were killed in the war, and all of the people who were sacrificed by war.  2014.8.16”
○ Naka singing in front of Chu-kon-hi monument; “I pray for the peace of the world, as all people can be relieved.”
OGAMI Tomoyuki” (his 101st ema)
○ KAWASHIMA Momo (GuP); “I pray for peace and happiness throughout the world. May God bless the people of Japan.  June 20, 2015” (this tablet was dedicated by a foreign visitor.)
○ ONO Aya (GuP); “I am very surprised at JS Chikuma, in addition to the patrol vessel Akagi, and the displays of Patriot, besides the public recording of radio…, I am enjoying so many events! 2015.7.11” (on the SDF related event, held in Oarai harbor on this date)
○ “Anko” (monk fish) team of GuP; “Panzer vor!!, World peace!!  2015/8/24” (“Panzer vor!” in German means “go ahead, tank”, and the key phrase of GuP)

As we see, this type of votive message has a close connection with Naka’s figure, but there are also a few exceptions. We should pay attention to the distinctive difference between the sense of mourning and the taste for military among the above votive messages.

4. Conclusion

I would like to conclude this paper by posing the following question: Is this apparent pilgrimage to Oarai Isosaki Shrine something we can categorize as a religious pilgrimage or is it simply a form of cultural tourism (what we call ‘contents tourism’)?

From the latter point of view, tourism studies often claim Anime pilgrims (or Anime tourists) do not visit their seichi, based on an authentic religious sensibility. I am loath to accept such a discourse, because no one can truly gauge the degree of religious sensibility.

Rather, as a specialist in sociology, I would like to point out the meaning of each seichi-place. For example, in comparison with seichi-places of the Melancholy of SUZUMIYA Haruhi, both Nishinomiya Kita High School and NAGATO Yuki’s condominium are ordinary buildings, except for the fact they are the models used as a backdrop for the Anime.

On the other hand, Oarai Isosaki Shrine is not the same kind of model, but rather stands out as exceptional for the following two reasons:
1) It was one of the places affected by the disaster of the Great East Japan Earthquake of 2011.

2) It is a sacred place which commemorates the loss of more than 200 lives who were the crew of the warship Naka, sunk in the Southern Pacific Ocean on February 17, 1944.

So this paper concludes that Oarai Isosaki Shrine is an exceptional place for some people, who have come to know the above points by means of GuP or KanKore, and a part of them regard “exceptional” as “sacred”.

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