

# ICT-driven Regional Revitalization

— *seichi junrei* by the numbers —



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## 1. Background

In 2016 the animated feature film, *Your Name*, premiered to critical acclaim, and the same year the neologism *seichi junrei* (anime pilgrimage site) made the short list for the buzz word grand prize of 2016. More specifically, *seichi junrei* refers to travel by dedicated fans to the towns or sites where animated films or dramas were staged, and sites that attract repeat visitors in particular are dubbed *seichi junrei*, or anime pilgrimage sites.

To capitalize on this growing trend, Sony launched a startup business called *Butai Meguri* in March 2013 that currently links over 70 anime pilgrimage sites and offers a wide range of content. *Butai Meguri* is by far the largest service in the content tourism industry. Leveraging augmented reality (AR), location information (GPS), and content, the service is an app-type platform that opens up a whole new experience to the fan user base. The key point of *Butai Meguri* is that it's not just another on-screen game, but an application that harnesses real images, allowing users to actually see the local landscape, and immerse themselves in the community. These capabilities bring fans back to anime pilgrimage sites as repeat visitors, and this is what really distinguishes *Butai Meguri* from other services.

## 2. Seichi Junrei by the Numbers

In 2016, more than 50,000 fans made pilgrimages to anime sites accompanied by *Butai Meguri*. Table 1 is a summary overview of the number of users visiting the top-ten sites.

As one can see from the table, the place that is currently drawing the most visitors is the town of Oarai in Ibaraki

**Table 1: 2016 Butai Meguri Visitor Ranking**

	Title and City/Region	Visitors
1	Girls und Panzer (Oarai)	9683
2	Love Live! Sunshine!! (Numazu)	9596
3	Wake Up, Girls! (Miyagi)	3850
4	Aohana: The Flower We Saw That Day (Chichibu)	2582
5	Flying Witch (Hirosaki)	2402
6	The Anthem of the Heart (Chichibu)	2182
7	Encouragement of Climb (Hanno)	2034
8	High School Fleet (Yokosuka)	1800
9	Hyōka (Takayama)	1587
10	Meikoi (Nagoya Meiji Mura)	1114

1 and 2 earned high rankings with good storylines and local efforts, while 3 gained visitors over time through ongoing events.

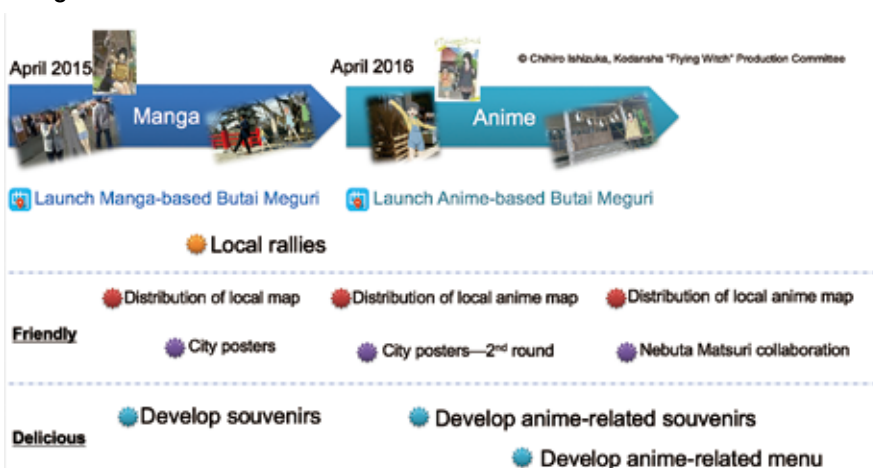
Prefecture, a quintessential *seichi junrei* pilgrimage site. Oarai was placed under a spotlight when the movie *Girls und Panzer* was released in 2015. A six-part anime series has been announced that will play out over five years, and excitement is building with each passing year.

Close on its heels in second place is the city of Numazu in Shizuoka Prefecture. Actively promoted by the copyright source animation studio Sunrise and the local community, the *Love Live! Sunshine!!* fan base has skyrocketed thanks to a series of ongoing events.

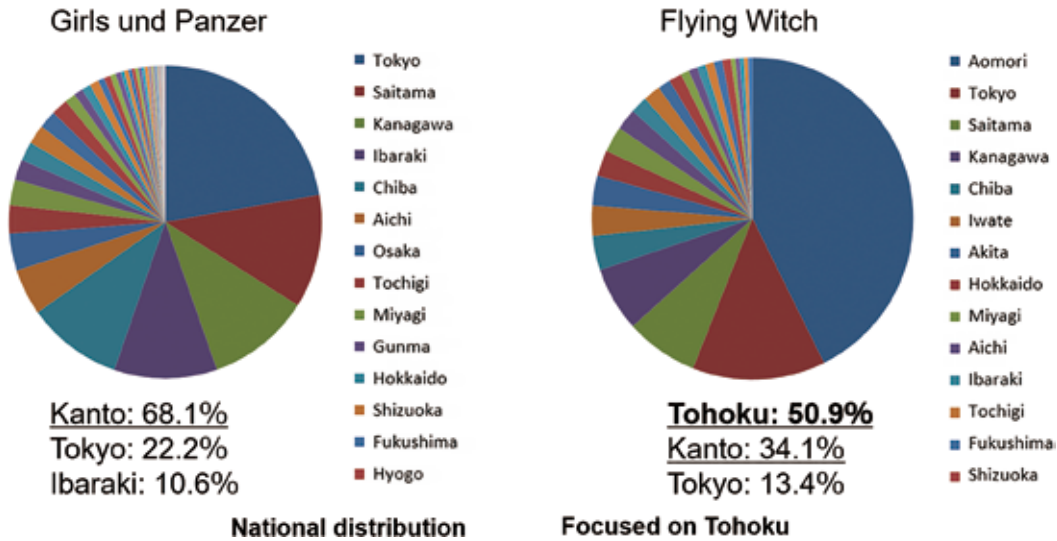
Currently, cities categorized as the *seichi junrei* pilgrimage site are flooded with over 100,000 fans every year, and is attracting much interest as a stratagem for rejuvenating local communities.

Generally, the anime-induced *seichi junrei* phenomenon is associated with fans in the Kanto region centering on Tokyo, but

**Figure 1: Collaboration with Hirosaki Tourism and Convention Bureau**



■ Figure 2: User Analysis (where visitors came from)



we rolled out the *Butai Meguri* service in other parts of the country far removed from Tokyo and here I will present some examples of how the service has gained traction among local fans in other areas.

First, let us consider Hirosaki in Aomori Prefecture, which came in 5th in the top-ten ranking for 2016. Working closely with the Hirosaki Tourism and Convention Bureau, we organized rallies through *Butai Meguri* about a year before the animated television series *Flying Witch* was aired, and we made sure that everyone in the community knew that the story was rooted in Hirosaki (See Figure 1). When *Flying Witch* started showing in April 2016, it was an immediate hit. That coupled with the warm reception of visitors to Hirosaki triggered a barrage of tweets and messages on social networking sites (SNSs) that brought in even more visitors.

What is remarkable here, as illustrated in Figure 2, is the prefectural origins of users enrolled in the *Butai Meguri* service. The left side of the figure shows an analysis of where fans using *Butai Meguri* came to Oarai in Ibaraki prefecture from in 2016. One can see that some 60-70% of fans visiting Oarai as an anime pilgrimage site came from the Kanto area, which can be attributed to easy access to Ibaraki from Kanto.

Now turning to *Flying Witch* shown on the right side of the figure, one will notice that about 50% of the visitors came from the Tohoku region in northeast Japan where Hirosaki is located. This is significant, for despite the inconvenience and the formidable distance from Kanto to Hirosaki, this pilgrimage site still ranked 5th and hosted thousands of visiting fans. This reveals that there are many fans in Aomori and other parts of Tohoku who are interested in visiting anime pilgrimage sites, and perfectly illustrates that content-driven tourism and pilgrimage sites can occur anywhere in the country.

### 3. Anime Pilgrimages: A Solution for Regional Revitalization

The question arises, does any blockbuster hit automatically

produce a pilgrimage destination? Within the content tourism genre, we find that the greatest motivator of fan tourism is not anime or manga, but rather NHK's year-long historical taiga drama series. Last year's series was *Sanada Maru*, named after a fortification defended by Sanada Nobushige during the Siege of Osaka in 1615. As the drama aired all through 2016, the number of visitors to the newly opened Shinshu Ueda Sanada Maru Taiga Drama Museum located near the site of the remains of Ueda Castle associated with the story topped one million.

It is typically the case, that once a town is featured as the setting for a taiga historical drama, the town is inundated with visitors for the year that the show is broadcast, but the numbers fall off precipitously as soon as the show is over. Certainly, if you can temporarily bring people into the community for special events and concerts this helps revitalize the local economy, but this alone will not benefit the community over the long term.

Some communities have found a way to successfully leverage the anime pilgrimage phenomena by bringing fans back to their towns repeatedly where they spend money for basic services—meals and accommodations—and thus contribute to revitalize the community and the region.

Let us now take another look at the *Butai Meguri* data for 2016 in Table 2. This time the content is ranked in terms of number of

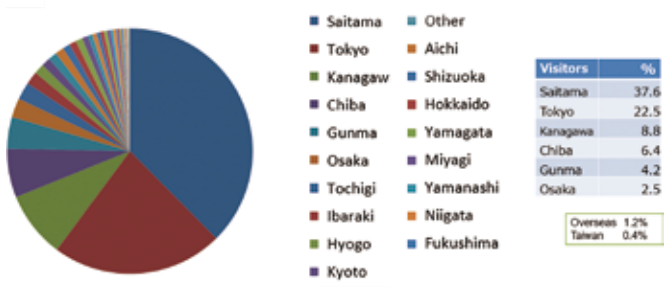
■ Table 2: Rate of Repeat Visitors

	Average number of visits
1 Wake Up, Girls! Another Real	2,750
2 Wake Up, Girls! (Miyagi version)	2,010
3 Love Live! Sunshine!!	2,006
4 High School Fleet	1,907
5 Encouragement of Climb	1,882
6 The Disappearance of Nagato Yuki-chan	1,755
7 Ordinary High School Girls Tried Being Locodols	1,747
8 Haruchika: Haruta and Chika Enjoy Their Youth	1,735
9 Wake Up, Girls! (Tokyo version)	1,661
10 In This Corner of the World	1,632

Repeat rate indicator—*Butai Meguri X (anime/manga + pilgrimage sites)*—reveals approximate number of core fans. Fans make repeat visits when attracted by events and appeal of the site. WUGAR took 1<sup>st</sup> place because it's a tour event, and many users visited over several days.



■ Figure 6: Where Visitors Came From



More than 60% of visitors came from outside the prefecture

- To raise awareness of the event in Saitama prefecture, and to increase the number of participants from within the prefecture.
- And to spread the word to people in Saitama and in other prefectures that Saitama has many anime/manga pilgrimage sites, with the idea of boosting tourism in the prefecture.

Figure 6 illustrates where the participants in this event came from. We saw earlier in our analysis of *Girls und Panzer* in Figure 2 that most of the fans flocked to the pilgrimage site in Ibaraki prefecture from Tokyo, but for this rally event most of the participants lived in Saitama prefecture. At the same time, the data also reveals that 60% of the visitors came from outside Saitama, which shows that the event successfully motivated people from other prefectures to take part in the event even though the theme was focused primarily on Saitama. Roughly 8,000 photos were posted to social networking sites while the event was in progress, and this generated enormous attractive interest in the prefecture.

Over a six-month period, the average stay to participate in this event was 2.74 days. In other words, fans coming for the event spent close to three days in Saitama. Through participation in this Saitama-oriented cross anime/manga event, visitors observed Saitama’s beautiful landscape first hand, developed a close fellow-feeling with the locals, and naturally this encouraged them to

come back to Saitama prefecture again as a repeat visitor. We realized that this kind of event did indeed have great potential.

5. Law for Generating Repeat Visitors

In order to become a true anime pilgrimage site, the site must somehow inspire fans and visitors to come back again. We came up with a solution using *Butai Meguri* by working with multiple sites around the country.

In order for a site to emerge as a successful pilgrimage destination, the environment or atmosphere of the location is more important than the success of the anime or manga content associated with the site.

Fans who appreciate anime or manga content deserve the emotional experience seeing the scenes from the comics or anime before their own eyes when they make a pilgrimage to the actual site inspiring the story, and most first-time visitors to pilgrimage sites in particular hunger for this kind of emotional experience. The more popular content inevitably attracts a huge fan base, which translates into a correspondingly large number of first-time visitors. Consequently, first-time visitors come to pilgrimage sites in droves, which makes these sites look like genuine *seichi junrei*, yet most of these fans only visit the site once and don’t come back a second or third time.

But the real *seichi junrei* success stories are those sites that attract a certain number of fans to make more than three visits. These fans come back to the same site over and over again to relive the experience of their first visit. But they also find other reasons for coming back; they discover the novelty and charm of visiting new places, and spread word of the site to friends and acquaintances through social media to create other repeat fans.

These sorts of sites generally have two factors in common (see Figure 7).

■ Figure 7: Tips for attracting people back to your town



- First, they offer *appetizing food*: Usually when traveling, you will be eating in restaurants, and appetizing food makes for a good mood. It's important to find decent restaurants and pleasurable eating experiences at pilgrimage sites that motivate favorable tweets about the experience on social media.
- Second, the sites provide *affability*: For fans who are into anime and manga, they are looking for a place where they will be fully accepted. It is important that pilgrimage sites make fans feel welcome by showing interest and support for the anime and manga associated with their towns.

I think the proper term here would be *self-affirmation*, the idea of giving anime fans exactly what they want, and something they can write home about: make the fans feel safe and content just to be in the place associated with their favorite characters.

Or conversely, towns can attract repeat visitors by merely making these conditions available. When revitalizing cities by leveraging content, we recommend taking both of these factors into account—offering visitors appetizing food and pleasant affability.

### 6. Transition from “Moving Things” to “Moving People”

A major initiative in the regional revitalization effort is the hometown tax deduction system, known as *furusato nozei*. Basically, this allows taxpayers to make donations to municipalities and prefectures of their choice, and thereby qualify for deductions up to a certain limit on their income and residential taxes. The cities then hand out return gifts to the people who contributed to the hometown tax, but these gifts sometimes miss the mark. Local specialties are sometimes offered as return gifts such as meat or rice, but these products offer little in terms of PR

value for the local communities.

This led us to come up with a new *Butai Meguri* initiative in September 2016 called “*Ikeru! Furusato Nozei*.” We devised a more popular slate of return gifts including content-related goods and *Butai Meguri* experience tickets and coupons that give users access to original stories about the local community, which encourages the recipients of the gifts to actually come and visit the community. In effect, this scheme channels donations to municipalities through the hometown tax deduction system, but also brings money directly into the community when donors visit and make purchases in the community (see Figure 8). The town of Oarai in Ibaraki prefecture has already taken in ¥30 million in donations during the first year after this scheme was rolled out.

### 7. Conclusions

Anime pilgrimages (*seichi junrei*) and content tourism have enormous potential for revitalizing local economies. But just trying blindly to attract content to a community is not enough, for it is only by bringing together a fan’s plan to explore a local area and a platform that can provide such a plan that one can achieve continuous success.

App-type platforms are clearly an effective scheme for revitalizing local economies, and we can expect to see many revitalization schemes based on this approach in the years ahead. But when this happens, we cannot just depend on empirical rules. Rather, we must be capable of visualizing and quantifying user behavior in real numbers in order to come up with continuous, sustainable regional development plans. This is the real secret of success. If we can figure this out, then we will be poised to address the issue of how to produce repeat visitors—that is, how to achieve *seichi junrei* or anime pilgrimage sites—for any regional community.

■ Figure 8: Ikeru! Furusato Nozei

