Anime "Sacred Place Pilgrimages":
The potential for bridging traditional pilgrimage and tourism activities through the behavior of visitors to anime "sacred places"
-An analysis of "votive tablets" (*ema*) at Washinomiya Shrine, Saitama Prefecture-

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1. Introduction

Recently the terms "sacred place" and "pilgrimage," which have previously been confined to the field of religion, have emerged within other disciplines as well. However, even while references to these religious concepts have widened, they have rarely become main topics of research in their own right. In light of these conditions, this paper takes "*otaku* culture," a powerful segment of Japanese popular culture, as its focus.

According to Azuma Hiroki, otaku is a generalized appellation that refers to a subculture of individuals who are addicted to a cluster of popular culture phenomena that are deeply connected to *manga* (Japanese comics), animation (hereafter abbreviated as "anime"), television games and personal computers[2]. Recently such individuals have begun flocking to the locations which manga and anime stories have been based on, calling them "sacred places" or "pilgrimage sites." Observing this phenomenon, Yamamura Takayoshi tentatively defines such "anime sacred places" as "locations that are used as the setting of anime stories, actual locations connected with the story or the author, as well as locations that fans value because of such connections."[3] In addition to anime, one could also cite "film tourism" or "cinema tourism," in which fans visit the locations of movies or television dramas, as related activities. In recent years, film tourism has joined ecotourism and green tourism as one of the areas of industrial tourism that the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI) is working hard to promote[4]. With METI's backing, beginning in 2000 film commissions were established throughout Japan for the purpose of creating and distributing guides to cinema and television locations. This paper looks, instead, at the practice of visiting anime locales, which film commissions do not cover. Furthermore, in contrast to top-down styles of package tours offered in film tourism, most visits to anime locations begin with individuals identifying the locations themselves and conducting tours entirely on their own initiative. There are of course major differences to consider when analyzing tours to anime locales as one form of tourism; likewise calling such tours "sacred place pilgrimages" also raises a number of questions that cannot be ignored. Okamoto Ken describes anime "pilgrims" through four characteristics:

1) Taking photographs of anime locales from similar angles as seen in particular anime and uploading these on one's homepage.

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[1] Doctoral Candidate, University of Tsukuba Graduate School of Humanities and Social Sciences (Department of Philosophy, Religious Studies and Comparative Thought). All rights reserved by the author.
[2] Azuma (2001), p. 8. Although this paper focuses on the "sacred place pilgrimages" in connection with anime, the primary anime analyzed here, "Lucky Star," is a media mix that began as manga and later became a video game as well.
[3] Yamamura (2008), p. 146.
[4] Ministry of Commerce (2002).

2) A tendency to leave some sort of memento of one's visit, such as by leaving some kind of note or through "votive tablets" (*ema*). Further, such practices themselves can become tourist resources that then draw more visitors.

3) While the primarily motive for the tour is to visit anime locales, interactions with locals and among fans is also a source of enjoyment.

4) […] Some regular visitors may visit the same area very frequently. Some visitors may also travel long distances for anime pilgrimages[5].

This paper builds off of Takayoshi's tentative definition of "anime sacred places" and Okamoto's four characteristics of anime "pilgrims" to empirically examine the example of Washinomiya Shrine in Kitakatsushika-gun Washimiya-machi, Saitama Prefecture which is used as the locale for the anime "Lucky Star." Since becoming known as the locale for the anime "Lucky Star" in the summer of 2007, there has been an upsurge in "pilgrims" to the shrine, and the popularity of anime "sacred place pilgrimages" to the shrine are representative of the contemporary "anime pilgrimage" phenomenon in Japan[6]. Trends in New Year's visits to the shrine (*Hatsumōde*) are an important indicator of the effects on visitor numbers to the shrine. In 2008, visitors to the shrine increased by 170,000 visitors to a total of 300,000 visitors (a 231% increase, raising Washinomiya Shrine from seventh to third-most visited shrine in Saitama). In 2009, their number increased by another 120,000 visitors to reach 420,000 visitors (a 140% increase from the previous year, raising Washinomiya Shrine to second-most visited shrine in Saitama). The influence of anime is also cited by the Saitama Prefectural Police Department (which conducted the surveys) as one of the reasons behind the increase in New Year's visits to the shrine[7]. As a shrine that receives a large number of visitors, this paper utilizes surveys of "votive tablets," called *ema,* a popular practice among "pilgrims" who embark on anime "pilgrimages".

As Okamoto references in his characteristics of "pilgrims," the *ema* at Washinomiya Shrine simultaneously serve as prayers to the enshrined deity and play the important role of pilgrimage mementos and tourism resources. A large number of the *ema* at Washinomiya Shrine feature drawings of anime characters and there are a wide variety of these so-called "anime *ema*" and so-called "painful *ema*"[8] (*itaema*) (both of which will be collectively referred to as *itaema* hereafter). The images on these *itaema* tend to differ greatly from common *ema*, and possibly because of this they are often mentioned in connection with various media treatments of Washinomiya Shrine in connection with "sacred place pilgrimages." For example, pictures of *ema* were featured prominently in early newspaper coverage of "sacred place pilgrimages" at Washinomiya Shrine, including a Yomiuri Shimbun newspaper article titled "Washinomiya becoming Fans' Sacred Place!?" and an Asahi Shimbun Newspaper article titled "Anime Believers at Washinomiya New Year's Visit."[9] Similarly, in one scene of the anime "Lucky Star" a character takes an *ema* in hand and declares, "I will write that Konata will be my wife!"[10], which could be

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[5] Okamoto (2008), p. 35.

[6] In the anime "Lucky Star," the *kanji* (ideograph) for Washinomiya Shrine is changed from 鷲宮神社 to 鷹宮神社. For the process of Washinomiya Shrine's transformation into an "anime sacred place" see Yamamura 2008.

[7] Asahi Shimbun (2007.12.21, Saitama column), Asahi Shimbun (2008.1.9, Saitama column), Asahi Shimbun (2009.1.8, Saitama column).

[8] This appellation for *ema, itaema*, borrows from the phenomenon of covering cars with stickers from anime or other otaku-related media, which are called *itasha*, combining the adjective *itaitashii* (painful) and *sha* (car). Thus the word *itasha* means cars that are "painful to look at [*miteite itaitashii*]." Pain here refers to the embarrassment felt by the onlooker for the owner of the car and its garish look.

[9] Yomiuri Shimbun (2007.8.4, Saitama column), Asahi Shimbun (2007.8.30, Saitama column).

[10] This line is spoken by the main character Konata Izumi in the anime "Lucky Star" Episode 21 (released on 2007.8.27, DVD Vol. 11). This can be said to reveal an important characteristic of the anime, namely scenes that exemplify the close psychological intimacy between the story's world and viewers. However, in the anime, this *ema* was not hung in the area that was modeled on Washinomiya Shrine.

seen as the anime itself authorizing the offering of such votive *ema* connected with the anime.

In addition to considering the importance of *ema* as part of the "sacred place pilgrimage" to Washinomiya Shrine, analyzing *ema* offers a method of distinguishing between "pilgrims" who are motivated by anime and those who are not. If it were possible to determine whether or not particular *ema* are derived from knowledge of anime and manga then it would be possible to retroactively posit that the motivation behind the visit to Washinomiya Shrine was a "pilgrimage." Further, in Iwai Hiromi's analysis of small *ema* as folk documents, the contents of *ema* are summarized as follows.

> The content of *ema* convey an extremely humble attitude. They include worries that cannot be confided in anyone and so are written on *ema* and offered to the gods; they express serious prayers and deep wishes in plain or sometimes cryptic language; they show clearly the happiness of those whose prayers have been fulfilled. In short, the motivation behind and content of *ema* are supported by deep folk beliefs[11].

In this way, *ema*—and small *ema* in particular—are media with extremely high readiness and immediacy, and as such we can anticipate that they reflect truthfully the wishes of the "pilgrims." As a matter of research ethics, inscriptions that could be used to identify individuals are avoided; nonetheless, with these limits in mind a survey of *ema* offers strong evidence as to the kinds of aspirations that "pilgrims" bring to Washinomiya Shrine.

Methodologically, the field survey in Washimiyamachi was carried out continuously between September 2007 and December 2008. This paper's analysis is limited specifically to data collected between June 20 and June 22, 2008.

2. *Ema* Survey Results

The data used in this paper comes from a comprehensive survey of the *ema* displayed in the *ema* area of the Washinomiya Shrine over the two-day period between June 20 and June 22, 2008. The 2,922 *ema* analyzed over this period were photographed with a digital camera (Nikon D70).

Though the date of offering could be confirmed for only 630 (22%) of the *ema*, these dates can serve as a rough estimation for the dates of the other offerings. The fluctuation of the *ema* on display over ten-day periods is shown in Figure 5-1. There were 9 *ema* dated before 2008, and out of those, 3 were dated between December 30 and 31, 2007, 4 were dated between January 1 and 5, 2007, and 2 were dated March 9 and March 16, 2007, respectively. From these dates it is clear that some *ema* were not removed at the end of 2007, and those dated in January 2007 are probably mistakenly dated 2007 rather than 2008. Additionally, the presence of *ema* dated March 2007—before the anime "Lucky Star" was broadcast—indicates that there must also be a mistake in the dates for these two as well. Thus, the *ema* analyzed in this paper can be categorized as those offered during the roughly six-month period between the end of 2007 and June 22, 2008[12]. An analysis by offering period shows that the majority date from the New Year's visit period in the first half of January, with 216 *ema* offered. The second most active offering period was the first half of April, with 49 *ema* offered. The April activity can be accounted for by an event held on April 6 at Washinomiya Shrine in connection with a special resident card that features a (manga or anime) character related with the shrine[13].

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[11] Iwai (1974), p. 98. *Ema* are divided into comparatively large horizontally formatted objects usually hung in the *emadō* (votive offering tablet hall) or *haiden* (front shrine / hall of worship), and small ornament-like objects hung in the *ema* hanging area. The former are referred to as "large *ema*" and the latter as "small *ema*," with the general size of 30 cm or smaller being the cutoff (see Iwai 1974:98). Among the *ema* surveyed several approached 30 cm in size, but this survey did not distinguish *ema* based on size.

[12] Not all *ema* include their date of offering and so it is difficult to determine exact dates, but on June 20, 2008 a shrine worker confirmed that *ema* from the previous year had all been collected.

[13] Twenty-three *ema* were marked with the date April 6, 2008, which was the day of the event.
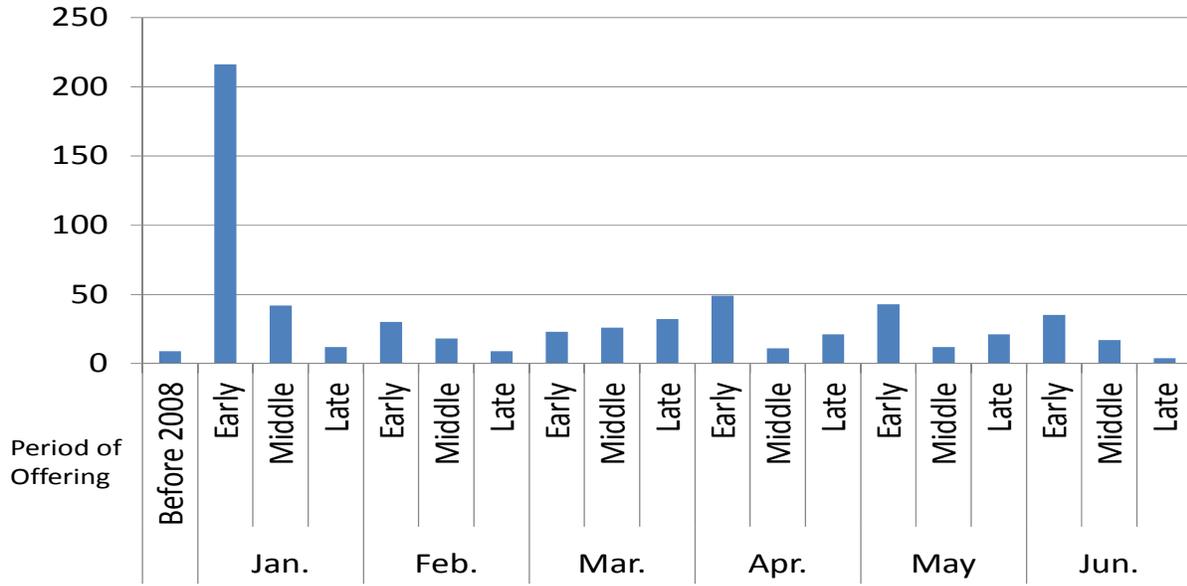
Figure 5-1 *Ema* **by offering period**

Figure 5-2 examines the *ema* that can be classified as *itaema* (*ema* with otaku-related drawings). *Ema* with some type of image comprise 899 of the *ema* surveyed (31%). Excluding images of Zodiac animals and *hagoita* (a child's New Year decorative paddle), 803 *ema* (27%) featured images of anime or other characters[14]. Thus, one quarter of all *ema* featured some sort of character. The vast majority of these images are characters from the anime "Lucky Star," but illustrations from other works are also present.
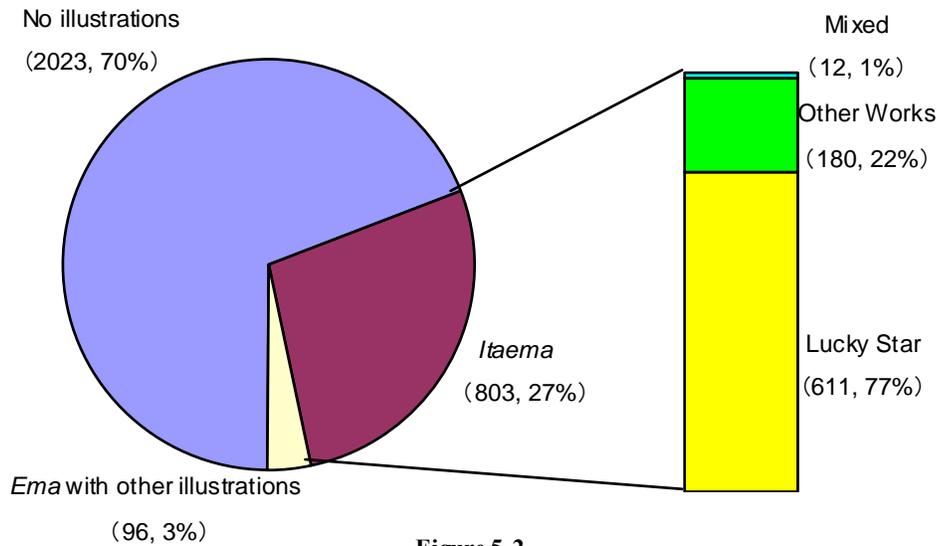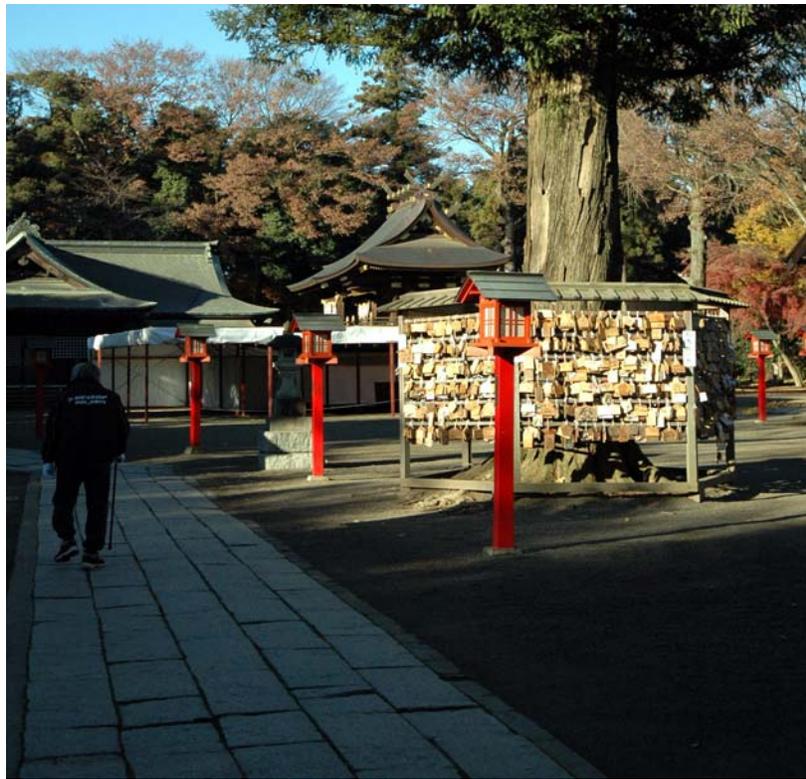

Figure 5-2
Percentage of *ema* with illustrations (Left, N=2922);
subcategory of *itaema* by work (Right, N=803)

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[14] Note that this survey does not include so-called "emoticon" marks such as "ascii art" (AA) or "smileys." One reason for this is that due to the normalization of "emoticons" through the automatic conversion functions of recent cell phones, "emoticons" do not have the same "painful" characteristic of the *itaema*. Further, the "emoticon" used to express the character Konata Izumi, ＼(≡ω≡.)／ was often used on *ema* at the shrine, but this has been simplified to （≡≡.） which makes it difficult to label as an illustration. In order to reduce the ambiguity of the coding rule, all markings that could be classified as "emoticons" were avoided in this survey.

Out of the 803 *ema* classified as *itaema*, "Lucky Star" characters comprise 611 of these (76%), characters from other works comprise 180 *ema* (22%), and 12 *ema* (1%) contained characters from "Lucky Star" with those from other works. From these numbers we can infer that fans of other anime apart from "Lucky Star" also visit the "Lucky Star" locale of Washinomiya Shrine.

Before turning to the content of the particular prayers and wishes found on the *ema* it is necessary to examine the boards of Washinomiya Shrine where the *ema* are hung. These are located along the walking path to the main shrine and thus guarantee to catch the eye of all traveling along this path (Figure 5-3). However, owing to their circular, six-sided position one cannot view all of the *ema* simply by walking past. Because the number of *ema* hung on each side varies, I combined the number of *ema* on each side and also calculated the residual adjustment using the application SPSS for Windows 10.0.7J. The results are shown along with the diagram of the precincts of the shrine in Figure 5-4. The side with least number totaled 318 *ema* and the side with the largest number totaled 653 *ema*, revealing a large disparity depending on the side. Further, as can be seen in Figures 5-3 and 5-4, a greater number of *ema* are hung out of the field of vision of those walking along the walking path; it can thus be inferred that there is a tendency to hang *ema* offered at the shrine in a location where visitors to the shrine will not see them. Nonetheless, "Originally *ema* were offered for personal reasons not to be known by others[15]," and thus they "reflect the religious psychology of the "secrecy" and "anti-sociality" that lies at the core of the act of personal prayer itself[16]." As a result, this trend is not particular to Washinomiya Shrine.

Figure 5-3　From Washinomiya Shrine's torii gate, looking toward the main shrine. The *ema* boards are on the right. (12/7/2008. Photograph by the author.)

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[15] Iwai (1974), p. 105.
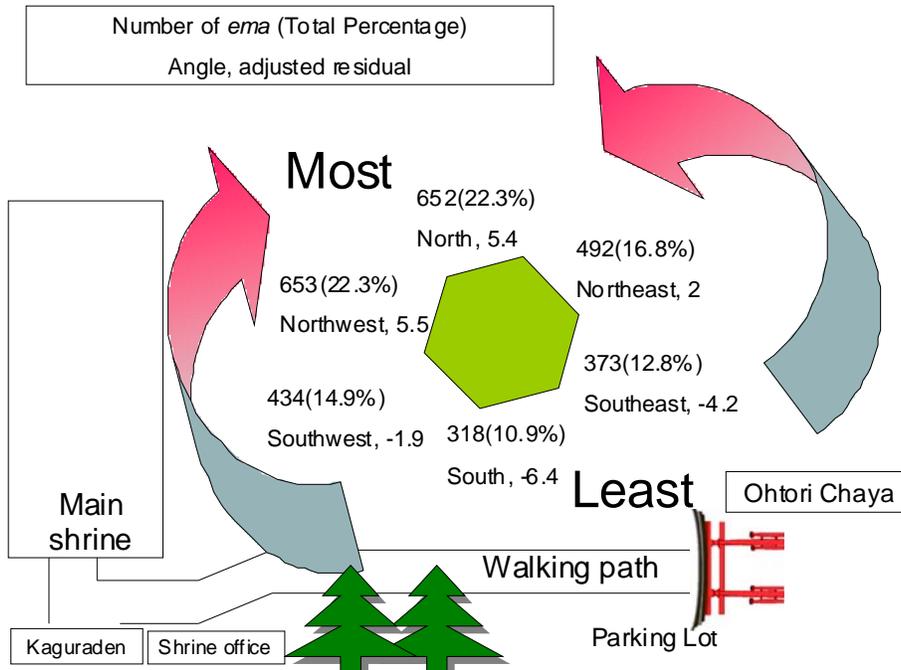[16] Yamanoi (1992), p. 66.

Figure 5-4　Number of *ema* by direction of board.（N=2922）

　　　To closely analyze the characteristics of the *ema* at Washinomiya Shrine it is instructive to classify them according to the content of their prayers. However, due to the fact that the *ema* under analysis do not have a specific prayer inscribed in the "prayer column" of the *ema*, the content varies widely; likewise there are also too many *ema* to classify individually by content. As a result, coding would be extremely difficult in this case. In order to make the results comparable for analysis with other shrines this paper follows the coding rule developed by Nishigai Kenji [17] for analyzing Hōtoku Ninomiya Shrine (in Odawara City, Kanagawa Prefecture), with the addition of a category for "otaku related" content. The results of this categorization of prayer content for Washinomiya Shrine, analyzed by percentage of total *ema*, and its comparison with the *ema* at Hōtoku Ninomiya Shrine combined with residual adjustment is shown in Table 5-1. In what follows an explanation of the coding rule is combined with a specific focus on the variance found in prayer content for both shrines as well as the characteristics of the Washinomiya Shrine *ema* prayer content that showed a significant level of variance of 1% (where the absolute variance value was greater than 2.58).

Chart 5-1　Comparison of Washinomiya Shrine *ema* and Hōtoku Ninomiya *ema* by prayer content category (*p<0.01)

Prayer Content	Number (%, adjusted residual)	Prayer Content	Number　(%, adjusted residual)
Passing Exams	955 (33%, *−29.7)	Romance−related	162 (6% , *2.8)
Scholastic Success	151 (5 %, *−9.3)	Domestic Safety	138 (5% , 0.8)
Skill Improvement	137 (5 %, *3.7)	Safe Travel	42　(1%, 1.3)
Child−related	72　(2%, −2.1)	Work−related	288 (10 %, *9.0)
Fulfillment of Personal Desires	439　(15%, *6.9)	Removing Bad Luck	49　(2%, 2.2)
Physical Health	259　(9 %, 2.5)	Prayers by Foreigners	25　(1%, 0.8)
		Otaku−related	1282 (44%, *24.0)

Total number of *ema* = 2922. Out of these, 20 were unclassifiable, leaving a total number of 2902 classifiable *ema*.
Many *ema* fell into multiple categories, thus the total number of *ema* and the total number of classified *ema* do not match.

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[17]　Nishigai (1999), pp. 46-51.

The prevalence of so-called "Otaku related" content is of course a main characteristic of the prayer content of Washinomiya Shrine's *ema*. Those *ema* included characters from anime, manga, video games, and the World Wide Web's online bulletin board system "2ch," often accompanied with quotations and other content related to the characters. Taken as a whole, they are thus underwritten with knowledge connected to "otaku related" content as defined by Azuma Hiroki, namely a subcultural cluster deeply related to manga, anime, video game, and PC content. This kind of knowledge was found to lay behind 44% of the *ema* at the shrine, indicating that many of the visitors to the shrine come precisely because of the shrine's use as an anime locale. As with the *itaema* described above, many of the *ema* are related to "Lucky Star" and many of the *ema* themselves are shaped in the eponymous star shape[18]. The many *ema* that are adorned with diverse inscriptions and shapes, bright colors, and stickers also make an enjoyable feast for the eyes of visitors. This collection of *ema* thus also serves as a "tourist resource" as is made clear in the kind of prayer content found on some of the *ema* that state, "I hope that this year will also bring many enjoyable *ema*!" Additionally, these *ema* also reveal a number of visitors who come frequently or from far away in order to offer *ema* at the shrine. Many of the *ema* left by such visitors include the number of "pilgrimages" they have made to the shrine and the number of *ema* they have offered alongside their prayer. For example, one "pilgrim" offered *ema* praying for the development of the town and the "Lucky Star" anime nearly 30 times in the first six months of 2008 alone[19]. In addition to such frequent "pilgrims," inscriptions on the *ema* also reveal "pilgrims" who come from across the country—even from overseas—and their inscriptions have their own distinct style[20]. Though *ema* from local residents are also not uncommon, among the *ema* analyzed here that mention prefectural names a large number include the phrases "I came from X" or a similar phrase that plays on the Japanese pronunciation of "star," *suta-*, in "Lucky Star" and the Japanese word for "came," *kimashita*, as in *kimasuta*." These latter plays on the word "star" originate from internet phrases such as those found on the "2ch" bulletin board system threads and thus reveal an intimate level of knowledge of this specific internet culture. Furthermore, as revealed by the term "2ch resident," some *ema* include phrases such as "I came (*kimasuta*) from VIP[21]" or other "addresses" which are actually World Wide Web URLs.

It is clear that the "otaku related" *ema* have become tourist resources at Washinomiya Shrine and that a variety of "pilgrims" including repeat visitors and those traveling from geographically distant locations now frequent the shrine. However, we must also not forget that these kinds of "strange" *ema* were also the source of "bashing" when this phenomenon began[22]. While it is a matter of personal opinion as to whether one thinks that *ema* featuring anime characters are "cute" or "unsettling," there is also a tendency for some shrine visitors to feel uncomfortable when confronted with *ema* containing prayer content that they cannot understand and that have been left by a kind of visitor that long-term visitors had never

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[18] In the manga book-form of "Lucky Star," "Lucky Star" (in English) is printed on the front cover.

[19] The prayer content from such offering individuals include the date of receiving a special residency card [a special residency card is given to persons, animals or even things such as anime characters who are considered to have contributed to the public promotion of the awarding locality], or in the case of special events something in relation to these. Although not part of this survey on *ema*, on December 7, 2008 an *ema* with the number 57—indicating the number of visits to the shrine—was found, implying that all 57 had been offered by the same individual.

[20] The "pilgrims" come from all across the country, with inscriptions on *ema* confirming residences as far north as Hokkaido and as far south as Kyushu. Furthermore, because individuals applying for special status residency cards through institutions like the Washimiya Commerce Association require information regarding prior residences, information from these sources confirm that individuals from almost all prefectures and regions in Japan come to the area (from a June 20, 2008 interview with the Washimiya Commerce Association).

[21] This references "Breaking News (VIP)," a representative bulletin board within the internet bulletin board system (bbs) "2-channeru." Although it is labeled "Breaking News," it is subdivided into various sub-bulletin boards.

[22] For example, the MSN Sankei (Economic) News dated July 25, 2007, which was among the first to report that anime fans were visiting the shrine, included the following negative statement: "Kanto's oldest shrine is bombarded by *aniota* ["anime otaku"], even lewd ema are offered, locals are confused and bewildered." http://sankei.jp.msn.com/entertainments/game/070725/gam0707252202005-n1.htm (Last accessed 1/15/ 2009).

encountered before. As previously mentioned some *ema* include quotations from characters; in some cases, these quotations are considerably shortened to simple phrases such as "Wanna do it?" or "O-O-oa-oa" or "…But I'll decline." While those who understand the original context of these phrases might be amused by such content, it differs considerably from conventional *ema* content. Nowadays there is a certain level of understanding about the shrine's tourist appeal among locals, but it is easy to understand why in the early days of the phenomenon when knowledge of the anime was still limited these kinds of inscriptions were worrisome to locals.

Following "otaku-related" *ema* the most common prayers were "prayers for passing exams" and "prayers for scholastic success." Compared to Hōtoku Ninomiya Shrine, however, the ratio of these two kinds of prayers is not significant. This is because the deity enshrined at Hōtoku Ninomiya Shrine, Ninomiya Sontoku, is a deity connected with academics and thus these two kinds of prayers combined account for over three quarters of the prayers offered at the shrine. In contrast, the deity enshrined at Washinomiya Shrine is Amenohohi-no-Mikoto and is not seen as being connected to "prayers for passing exams" or "prayers for scholastic success."

As for differences in enshrined deities between the two shrines, it is notable that Washinomiya Shrine is seen as a beneficial shrine for prayers relating to "success in business." Amenohohi-no-Mikoto is a patron deity for success in business and Washinomiya Shrine is known first and foremost for its "Tori-no-Ichi" festival (Festival of the Rooster), where it serves as the main "Ōtori Shrine" (shrine affiliated with the "Tori-no-Ichi" festival) in the Kanto region. This accounts for the high number of "success in business" prayers offered at the shrine. Another reason for the difference in prayer content offered at the two shrines stems from the number of prayers at Washinomiya Shrine which can be classified as related to "success in business," such as prayers for career success or success in job-hunting. Furthermore, the survey conducted at Hōtoku Ninomiya Shrine took place in 1992 and thus reflects the social and economic conditions of the time. Moreover, individuals identified as *otaku* sometimes use their own jobless status as a topic in their *ema* and inscribe prayers such as "to escape from being a NEET (Not in Employment, Education or Training). Thus, some *ema* that contain prayers for success in job-hunting should be classified as an extension of an individual's personal circumstances and thus not necessarily reflective of the particular enshrined deity.

Following the coding rules used in Nishigai's survey, the content of prayers for "fulfillment of personal desires" also varied widely in the *ema* at Washinomiya Shrine. In Nishigai's classification a broad range of prayers including success in dieting and avoiding bullying (*ijime*) are combined under this category of "fulfillment of personal desires," which he describes as "reflecting to a great degree the difficult conditions of contemporary society." Although it could be said that the large number of anime and other related cultural references in *ema* is itself a reflection of contemporary social conditions, what is particularly noteworthy is that along with illustrations there are a range of prayers, from mundane everyday wishes to wishes for "Peace on Earth." Examples of the former include inscriptions that could be seen as matching the fundamental concept of the anime "Lucky Star"[23] with phrases like "[I pray for] warm and *mellow-w-w* days as a high school girl." However, in regards to the latter prayers for "Peace on Earth" it is hard to see how these messages are connected with the anime itself, and thus they reflect a particularly unusual prayer that differs from the majority of *ema* that are limited to private prayers. Thus, more than the prayer content of the *ema* themselves it is perhaps more instructive to consider the very action of offering *ema* as a meaningful activity for such visitors[24]. This can also be inferred by the large number of *ema* that appear to be written simply as "pilgrimage mementos" or as announcements listing

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[23] Comptiq (2007), p. 1.

[24] From the act of offering personal prayers for "Peace on Earth," it is not impossible to conceive of such offerings as indicating "world-type" thought. "World-type" is a story type primarily found in the genre of light novels and is characterized by the actions of the main character—and heroine—being depicted as dominating the social center and controlling the developments of the world. In other words, "world-type" thought could be summarized as the kind of thought/conception where individual/personal willpower can influence the world.

other "pilgrimage sites" that the visitor previously visited or will visit in the future.   The meaningfulness of the act of offering *ema* itself as well as the connection between *ema* offered at one shrine with those offered at other shrines points to how *ema* serve a similar function to pilgrimage practices in the conventional sense of placing *senjafuda* and *osamefuda* (personal stickers placed at shrines) to commemorate one's visit.

Ema that contain illustrations along with prayers for "skill improvement" are also noteworthy. There is also a double meaning in illustrated *ema* that pray for improvement in artistic skills[25]: the one dedicating the *ema* may be an amateur artist or aspiring manga artist who offers *ema* praying for a successful career, a characteristic that marks Washinomiya Shrine's connection with anime production.

Washinomiya Shrine features more *ema* that fall into the "romance-related prayers" category as compared to Hōtoku Ninomiya Shrine. This paper does not tally the total number of *ema* that express affection for particular anime or other characters, and no reason for the large number of "romance-related prayers" is determinable at this time. Incidentally, though it is not included in the classifications used for this research, 178 *ema* (6% of the total) included the set phrase used in the anime "Lucky Star," "O is X's bride," which could be read as romance-related[26].

This section analyzed the survey results and characteristics of the prayer content of *ema* at Washinomiya Shrine in relation to the previous study of prayer content conducted at Hōtoku Ninomiya Shrine. As previously mentioned the *ema* boards of the shrine are placed on a six-sided, circular position with an uneven distribution of *ema*; Figure 5-2 shows the cross-tabulation results of prayer content by location. This section on analyzing survey results of the *ema* will end with an analysis of this data.

Table 5-2 shows the patterns in prayer content depending on location of the board. Of particular note is the dominant trend of placing "otaku-related" *ema* close to the walking path. The overall trend shows that the majority of *ema* are placed out of the range of vision from the walking path, but the "otaku-related" *ema* show the exact opposite trend. Figure 5-5 displays the relation between number of *ema* and location in a simple diagram.

Figure 5-3 shows the trend of relatively more "otaku-related" *ema* hung on three sides. This trend cannot be explained by the desire for passersby on the walking path to see them; rather, it is possible that individuals offering "otaku-related" *ema* hang their *ema* on these three sides due to some feeling of timidity vis-à-vis the shrine itself or shrine staff. If "dedicating *ema* is one kind of religious action that calls to the deities,"[27] then it is natural that aspirations should be directed toward the enshrined deity of Washinomiya Shrine. However, the object of address in "otaku-related" *ema* can be assumed to be anime or related characters or else other similarly motivated "pilgrims." To give an example to illustrate this, some inscriptions include direct addresses to characters such as "X [character name], marry me please!" As with other *ema* that address the enshrined deities at various shrines, the *ema* at Washinomiya Shrine also serve as a method of addressing characters from the anime "Lucky Star" which are connected to the shrine due to the anime's locale[28]. Additionally, though the object of address is different, a similar category

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[25] Interview with Washinomiya Shrine workers on September 27, 2007.

[26] These are mostly found in *ema* that feature inscriptions where "O" is a character name and "X" is a first-person pronoun like "I [informal (masculine)]" or "I [neutral]." Though uncommon, there are also cases where the "X" is replaced by another "O" by which the writer intends to create new connections between characters in the anime (e.g. "Kagami [personal name] is Konata's bride"). This survey focuses on the use of the set phrase and thus it includes both cases. There are also many *ema* which use similar content (e.g. "Marry me Kagami"), but they have been excluded because they fall outside of the set phrase pattern.

[27] Kubota (1978), p. 296.

[28] Inscriptions range from romantic supplications to characters such as "Marry me" to petitions for characters' condignity such as "Kagami-sama, I have an important exam coming up. Please lend me your strength m(_ _)m." However, as we have seen, there are also *ema* that engage with works aside from the anime "Lucky Star." This can be understood as coming from the fact that Washinomiya Shrine has a connection to the anime "Lucky Star," and this connection extends to anime, manga and similar works more generally.

Chart 5-2 *Ema* **offering board cross-tabulation by direction of side and prayer content**

			Direction of Side						
			S	SE	NE	N	NW	SW	Total
Prayer Content	Passing Exams	Frequency	96	121	128	223	246	141	955
		Adjusted Residual	−0.3	1.1	−4.3	1.0	2.5	−0.2	
	Scholastic Success	Frequency	18	19	25	31	40	18	151
		Adjusted Residual	0.6	0.4	−0.5	−0.5	1.1	−1.1	
	Skill Improvement	Frequency	19	22	23	29	25	19	137
		Adjusted Residual	1.4	1.6	−0.4	−0.3	−1.3	−0.4	
	Child-related	Frequency	4	7	12	18	18	13	72
		Adjusted Residual	−1.3	−0.5	−0.3	0.6	0.5	0.7	
	Fulfillment of Personal Desires	Frequency	42	37	104	90	84	82	439
		Adjusted Residual	−0.6	−2.2	3.3	−0.9	−1.9	2.3	
	Physical Health	Frequency	22	23	39	58	80	37	259
		Adjusted Residual	−1.0	−1.4	−1.3	0.1	3.2	−0.3	
	Romance-related	Frequency	17	19	26	38	34	28	162
		Adjusted Residual	0.1	0.0	−0.7	0.4	−0.6	0.8	
	Domestic Safety	Frequency	14	14	21	28	40	21	138
		Adjusted Residual	−0.1	−0.6	−0.9	−0.5	1.8	0.1	
	Travel Safety	Frequency	5	4	4	14	6	9	42
		Adjusted Residual	0.3	−0.4	−1.4	1.7	−1.3	1.2	
	Success in Business	Frequency	22	30	50	59	70	57	288
		Adjusted Residual	−1.6	−0.7	−0.3	−0.7	0.6	2.4	
	Removing Bad Luck	Frequency	4	3	8	13	15	6	49
		Adjusted Residual	−0.5	−1.2	−0.3	0.7	1.3	−0.5	
	Prayers by Foreigners	Frequency	2	2	11	5	4	1	25
		Adjusted Residual	−0.4	−0.6	3.4	−0.3	−0.8	−1.5	
	Otaku-related	Frequency	149	165	270	281	249	168	1282
		Adjusted Residual	1.8	1.6	3.4	−0.3	−3.5	−2.3	
Total		Frequency	414	466	721	887	911	600	3999
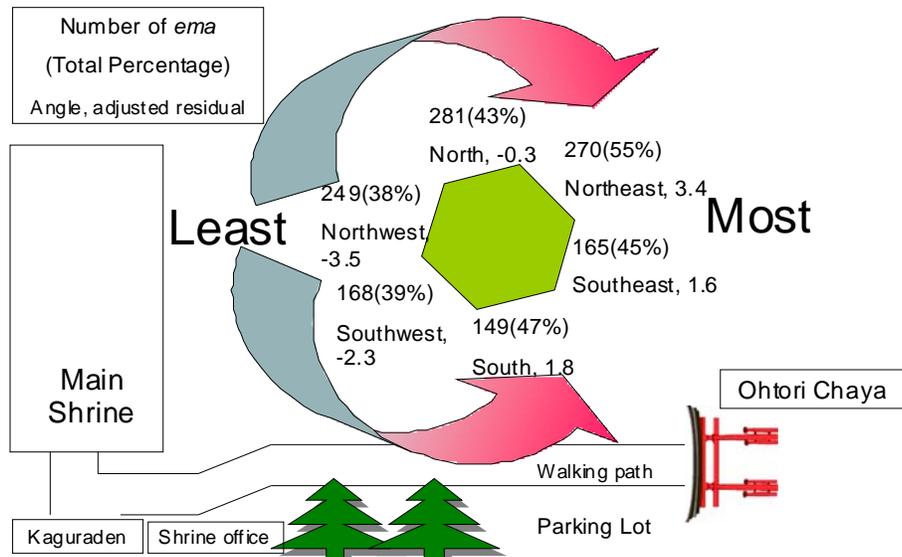
Figure 5-5   Number of "otaku-related" *ema* **by direction of side of offering Area   (N=1282)**

of inscription includes phrases like "O is X's bride." While this could be seen as individuals recording their own goals and proclaiming them on *ema* in order to earn divine blessing, it is perhaps more natural to think of these proclamations as made with the awareness that other "pilgrims" will visit the shrine and view them. If viewed in this light, as a practice of communication, dedicating *ema* is not limited to communicating with deities. This is also clear when considering *ema* that reference the content of other *ema* via arrows pointing to other *ema* hung nearby. Thus when considering the entirety of the Washinomiya Shrine *ema* boards it is intriguing to note that each *ema* is not part of a one-on-one relationship between the dedicator and the deity but rather the entire space itself resembles the content and structure of an internet BBS (bulletin board system).

In this way, "otaku-related" *ema* frequently emerge from a different context than the original traditions of Washinomiya Shrine—and Shinto itself—but this does not mean that the holy nature of the space is completely overlooked by those who dedicate such *ema*. For example, the survey found one *ema* with the inscription, "God, I am sorry for coming to the shrine with impure motives, but I did the proper offering for my visit." This inscription reveals that such visitors feel self-conscious about coming to Washinomiya Shrine for reasons other than the motivation of religious devotion. This feeling among "pilgrims" was also examined in a hearing held with Hariya Shigetake, president of the Hajiichiryu Saibarakagura (Washinomiya Saibarakagura) Preservation Society on June 22, 2008. In response to the rising number of young visitors to the shrine beginning in May 2007, President Hariya welcomed the trend and noted approvingly that "respectable people are coming," further adding:

> When everyone comes, they end up interacting with each other.
> When everyone comes, they look at a particular *ema*, smile, and then write their own before going home. That's why that kind of *ema* is not found in other shrines.
>
> Talking with young people, there are some who say, "I am sorry for getting to like this shrine through impure motives like anime and manga." I say, "No no, that's fine!" Hearing them speak in this way, I really feel it is a great thing. It is great that they have such an apologetic feeling. But I don't feel like they should worry so much about it, you know. But I think that having that kind of feeling is good."

Reading the inscription on one *ema* that said, "Kagamin[29] is my bride," President Hariya noted "It's interesting, isn't it," without a hint of criticism. In regards to the *itaema* that made up the bulk of the *ema* he continued, "They made some really great ones for us." Speaking with deep emotion, he said of the young people coming to dedicate *ema*, "In the end, they come with a heart of prayer. That's a good thing." President Hariya was clearly happy about the kinds of activities that revolved around the *ema* space of the shrine, even if the young people are motivated by anime in their visit, as they are able to dedicate *ema*, interact with others, and achieve satisfaction. Moreover, in speaking with local individuals based around the Washimiya Commerce Association about their impression of individuals who come to the shrine motivated by "Lucky Star Pilgrimages," while they acknowledged that they were surprised by the *itasha* [cars decorated with "otaku-related" characters], the majority said that they are well-behaved and seem to enjoy themselves at the shrine and town. In observing these anime-motivated individuals, it was clear that even while they arrive at the shrine in *itasha* and dedicate *itaema* with an eccentric style, these "pilgrims" do not come to the town with arrogant attitudes[30]. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that among the

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[29] A nickname for the "Lucky Star" anime character Kagami Hiiragi.

[30] Before the boost in visitors caused by the anime "Lucky Star," Washinomiya Shrine was ranked 7th in the prefecture for New Year's shrine visits. In comparison to the manners of New Year's shrine visitors, visitors for "Lucky Star" events have been lauded for the comparatively low incidence of illegal parking, the positive interaction with local residents, and the low amount of trash left after events. (From an interview with the Washimiya Commerce Association Representative Shop Owners on December 7, 2008.)

"otaku-related" *ema* the phrase *jichō* [an Internet phrase meaning "restrain yourselves"] was often used[31]. In fact, given the detailed information that "pilgrims" collect regarding "pilgrimages" to Washinomiya Shrine, a sense of self-deprecation can be felt[32]. Taking this trend into account, and considering that *ema* are a communication tool used between "pilgrims," we can see why "pilgrims" would call to each other to "restrain yourself" in this way. Additionally, returning to the visibility of the *ema* to others, it is also clear that the "otaku-related" *ema* are hung in positions of low visibility from the main worship hall's entranceway, the shrine administrative office, and other areas. As long as *ema* are not slanderous in some way, Washinomiya Shrine staff will not take them down, but even so dedicating "otaku-related" *ema* is not officially encouraged by the shrine[33]. "Otaku-related" *ema* stem from the desire to leave a "pilgrimage" memento and the desire to create communication among "pilgrims," but they are also mixed with calls to shrine staff to "respect us;" and can, thus, be summarized as seen in Figure 5-5.

3. The Rise of Anime "Sacred Place Pilgrimages": The Connection between Research on Traditional Pilgrimage and Tourism

"Pilgrims" who visit "anime sacred places" are not just absent-mindedly aiming to visit the area that makes up the anime's locale. Rather, their main goal is to draw out the same structure of objects and space that is depicted in the story, and to strike the same pose as characters at the correct locations. Or in other cases, they take photographs wearing character costumes or in *kosupure* ("cosplay" or "costume play" where fans wear costumes mimicking characters). In addition, a common practice is to upload these pictures alongside screen shots from the anime on the internet and to comment on their live reenactment of the scene. Of course, the current trend of viewing the anime, identifying the locales in order to visit them (the "sacred place pilgrimage"), and then announcing it on the internet requires the proper internet environment. Furthermore, in anime "sacred place pilgrimages," it is also necessary to have the adequate resources to locate the proper anime screen capture that corresponds to the same composition within the work[34]. Thus, in order to cover all of the requirements of an anime "sacred place pilgrim," individuals must possess a PC from at least the early 2000s that is capable of taking anime screenshots. The term "sacred place pilgrimage" in reference to this kind of activity took root in 2002, presumably after the

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[31] While the term *jichō* is used in the strict disciplining sense of refraining from flippant behavior, what I want to emphasize is that this term also implies a certain cliché among internet circles. Further, in addition to expressions such as "*Ota jichō* [Otaku, restrain yourselves!]", inscriptions such as "*Jichō w*" with the ending "w" are also found. The ending "w" means "laugh" (from the Romanization of the Japanese word laughter/smile, *warai*). This derives from consecutive transformations/abbreviations carried over from before the diffusion of the internet, where the character 笑 ("laugh/smile") had been written 藁 ("thatch/straw"), both being pronounced "wara," which was abbreviated to "(w" and then to "w." This character is often also used in multiples for added stress, as in "wwww".

[32] From continually conducted interview surveys of visitors to Washinomiya Shrine. In this regard, a man in his 30s from Komae City, Tokyo claimed in our conversation of June 20, 2008 that he had conducted as many as 20 "pilgrimages" to the shrine and collected and filed information related to Washinomiya Shrine "sacred place pilgrimages." These files are not just news files available over the internet or blogs maintained by related parties; they also include a broad range of resources such as regional newspaper articles and copies of columns from newspapers all over the country as well as fan-made magazines (*dōjinshi*) that deal with "sacred place pilgrimages."

[33] From an interview with Washinomiya Shrine workers on June 20, 2008. Shrine workers told me that anime "sacred place pilgrimage" visitors conducted themselves with good manners and they saw no problem with the *itaema* or "otaku-related" *ema*. Rather, they were happy that young people were coming to the shrine. They added: "of course we have a vain desire to have these visitors come, but this must not lead to a loss of this sacred domain." Shrine officials take a stance of non-interference vis-à-vis "'Lucky Star' sacred place pilgrimages," and in regards to their reasons for renting out parking spaces during events they explain this as being a request from the local organization of the Washimiya Commerce Association.

[34] In visiting "anime sacred places" I would occasionally meet "pilgrims" who had access to these kinds of resources. In addition to my observations, this was confirmed by interviews (conducted on September 14, 2009) with individuals who had conducted anime "sacred place pilgrimages" to 10 or more other locations.

broadcasting of the anime "Please, Teacher"[35], but a Google search of "sacred place pilgrimage（聖地巡礼）" today reveals anime titles at the top of the search results, as shown in Figure 5-6.

Figure 5-6　"Internet search results for 'Sacred Place Pilgrimage'" (Last Accessed 1/21/2009)

[Related keywords appear as: "Lucky Star Sacred Place Pilgrimage", "AIR Sacred Place Pilgrimage", "Higurashi Sacred Place Pilgrimage", Haruhi Sacred Place Pilgrimage", "kanon Sacred Place Pilgrimage" The first search result is: "National (All Japan) Sacred Place Pilgrimage Journey" (seichi-junrei.com/) which advertises "Travelogues from anime and manga locale visits. Spanning anime and manga locales all across Japan, [this site] unveils photographs gathered from the original locations that inspired the stories."]

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[35] Determining the origin of the use of the term "sacred place pilgrimages" to describe the behavior of visiting anime or other story locales is beyond the scope of this paper. However, the actual practice of visiting anime and other story locales is agreed to have begun in the early 1990s with the success of "Sailor Moon" (which includes the manga series that ran from 1991-1996 and the anime series that ran from 1992-1997). In regards to this phenomenon, Takeuchi Naoko writes that there were "passionate fans who prowled about the locations that appeared in the manga" and "the *ema* at the shrine [that appeared in the manga] were filled with 'Sailor Moon' references. Come New Year's, people actually wearing costumes were walking about." (Nikkei Shimbun (1995.10.2).) Furthermore, the behavior of ambulating around the locales that appeared in Kuwabara Mizuna's series "Mirage of Blaze" (published from 1990-2004, comprising 40 volumes, from Cobalt Publishing) was called "Mirage Travel" (*Mirāju kikō*, also potentially translated as "Mirage Travel Diaries," depending on the usage)." A number of very popular collections were published including "'Mirage' Travels" (1994), "Mirage Photo Travel Diaries—Eastern Japan Edition—Ambulating around Mirage" (1998), and "Mirage Photo Travel Diaries—West Japan Edition—Ambulating around Mirage" (2001). The Yonezawa Uesugi Festival, which figures in this work and which is held in Yamagata Prefecture, is particularly popular among female fans who visit it in great numbers.

　To propose one possible origin of the "sacred place pilgrimage" explored here, the game "Sentimental Graffiti" and the anime version "Sentimental Journey" (both released in 1998) may be considered. As implied in the subtitle for the "fan book" for the anime, "The Stories of 12 Girls in 12 Cities," the anime featured the theme of encounters with 12 young girls in Japan's 12 major cities. As this series grew successful, the phenomenon of young people traveling to these 12 cities in order to encounter the young girls, called "Sentimental Pilgrimages [*Senchi junrei*] can be confirmed at the latest by 1999. The phrase "Sentimental Pilgrimages" combines the word "sentimental" from the title of the work with the word "pilgrimage," here referring to "journeys to multiple places," but it is also conceivable that it is a compound word that is a modified form of "sacred place pilgrimages." This is important to consider when exploring the time when the current term "sacred place pilgrimage" came to be used.

This search engine automatically generates a list depending on the search terms used, but it clearly shows that anime "sacred place pilgrimage" results surpass other traditional pilgrimages. While this shows how anime "sacred place pilgrimages" are flourishing, can we actually call this phenomenon pilgrimage or tourism? The foremost scholar of pilgrimages, Victor Turner, observed that "a tourist is half a pilgrim, if a pilgrim is half a tourist"; likewise, from the context of tourism studies Ishimori Shūzō points out the affinity between pilgrimage and tourism[36]. This paper emphasizes the continuity between sacred place pilgrimage and tourism. In this way, anime "sacred place pilgrimages" that are labeled as pilgrimages and simultaneously invoked in "neighborhood revitalization" as tourism resources should also be categorized as existing within the specter of "pilgrimage."

Notoji Masako's study on Disneyland as a sacred place[37] offers a useful perspective in bridging these two concepts of sacred place and tourist site. Notoji writes that, "for the generation of Americans who were raised fully baptized in the culture of Disneyland, as they themselves grew they transformed Disneyland from a simple entertainment park and tourist site to a sacred place."[38] She continues, "transcending differences in birthplaces and class, when these individuals who spend most of their lives in isolation gather together at Disneyland they become equal citizens and, though only fleetingly, taste a sense of intense solidarity." Notoji's observations draw from Victor Turner's concept of the solidarity and equality of the non-hierarchical community he calls *communitas* that is experienced by individuals who are in the midst of liminality, or the transitional period that mark the pilgrimage experience[39]. The individuals engaging in the "sacred place pilgrimages" to anime locales can also be understood as embracing a similar kind of feeling. It is not difficult to see how individuals who have a feeling of longing for the anime world and post prayers like, "I hope that I can enter the two-dimensional world ╲(＝ω＝.)╱" could come to see the locale of their favorite anime as "sacred places." Another characteristic of these "pilgrims" is their enjoyment of interacting with locals and other fans; Washinomiya Shrine is host to the pleasant sights and sounds of "pilgrims" enjoying themselves at the *ema* boards and various places that are featured in close-ups in the anime, such as the *torii* gate and the restaurant *Ohtori Chaya* nearby. Sometimes calling each other by their "handles" (internet nicknames) rather than their real names, this is a space where social affiliation is suspended and communication requires only that one is a fan of "Lucky Star."[40]

One important difference between "anime sacred places" and Disneyland is that the latter is a theme park that offers a "fantasy land" whereas the former is structurally continuous with everyday life. For anime locales, there is not "spell" at the entrance to Disneyland that states "From here onwards you leave today and enter the world of yesterday, tomorrow and fantasy."[41] For "anime sacred places" that are embedded within the space of everyday life, viewing a certain defining feature from the proper angle—be it a *torii* gate ("Lucky Star"), a waste management facility ("When They Cry"), a jetty or a park swing ("Please, Teacher")—gives a sense of reality of the "sacred place." That "cut" is in the nexus of the anime world and the real world, and finding that "entrance" is difficult for those who are not deeply committed to the particular anime stories. As a result, "anime sacred places" are not merely embedded within the space of everyday life—their very nature is only recognizable by those who have a deep commitment to the anime. It is fully understandable that some local residents who have no interest in anime might feel a

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[36] Turner (1978), p. 20; Ishimori (1993), pp. 23-24.
[37] Notoji (1990; 2007); see also Moore (1980).
[38] Notoji (1990), p. 141.
[39] Notoji (1990), p. 204. See also Notoji (2007), p. 122 for an exegesis on Turner's analysis.
[40] While it is given that the interviewer identifies him/herself and expresses his/her intentions clearly when talking with individuals, in fact individuals were more interested in asking "Are you doing this research because you like 'Lucky Star?'" or—assuming that the interviewer liked "Lucky Star"—"Which character do you like?" Drawing from the Yomiuri Shimbun article quoted earlier that used the term "Anime believers," it could be said that these individuals are using the anime to probe for a "confession of faith" to determine whether or not they can commune with the interviewer as a fellow "believer."
[41] Notoji (1990), p. 202.

sense of discomfort in using the words "sacred place pilgrimage" to describe these sites and are unable to understand the motives of those who visit the locales[42]. As MacCannell[43] argues, a "marker" is necessary in order for the "sacralization of the site" to occur; hence, a specific anime, as a "marker," must be encountered in order for an "anime sacred place" to be seen as a "sacred place." If we consider Durkheim's claim that "sacred beings exist only because they are imagined as such. If we cease to believe in them, they will cease to exist,"[44] it is through a particular group of people with a shared orientation, or perhaps only *for* this group of people, that anime locales can become "sacralized" spaces.

A second difference with Disneyland is that most "anime sacred places" are not offered as "sacred places" in a top-down manner; rather, individual "pilgrims" build off of references to anime—sharing and exchanging information with kindred minds—and thus discovering "sacred places" together. Jonathan Smith[45] writes that Christian sacred places were discovered through examination of the texts of the gospels, and this is similar to "anime sacred places" as well. Otaku today replace the mythological texts of the gospels with various anime works from which they discover their "sacred places."

It is unlikely that anyone would feel uncomfortable by the sacralization of an area that is mentioned in the gospels. However, it is difficult to elicit sacredness from a cursory viewing of an anime work, and there is also some resistance among local residents to accept people visiting a locale used in a work that is not very popular[46]. Thus, contemporary pilgrimages, and specifically the kind of anime "sacred place pilgrimage" dealt with in this paper, have a promising potential for being accepted by local areas within the context of tourism and regional revitalization. Valene Smith[47] defines tourism activities through three elements: 1) leisure time, 2) disposable income, 3) regionally-rooted moral framework. When these three are operable then tourism activities can function. This paper follows these three elements while closely analyzing anime "sacred place pilgrimages" in the context of tourism. In examining "sacred place pilgrimages" within the context of tourism, we can expect that many of the guests are using a lot of leisure time and disposable income. Otaku first gained attention in 2004 when the Nomura Research

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[42] From an interview with a 50 year old female employee of Seikotei, a boat rental shop that gathers "pilgrims" for trips on Lake Kizaki in Ōmachi City, Nagano Prefecture (the "sacred place" of the anime "Please! Teacher"). However, this shop offered meals named after characters and an assortment of anime goods as well as an "exchange notebook" for pilgrims and thus they did not take a negative attitude toward "sacred place pilgrimages." Their website ("Lake Kizaki Seikotei—Shinshū/Ōmachi/Lake Kizaki Boat Rental—", http://seikotei.net/, last accessed 1/29/2009) also includes anime related contents. However, this shop calls "pilgrims" "Oneti-san [from the abbreviation of the anime's Japanese title, "Onegai Tīchā"]," and they recommend calling visits to Lake Kizaki "locale visits" rather than "sacred place pilgrimages." Their point in using these terms is to dispel any religious nuances connected with the term "sacred place pilgrimage." This is in consideration for their other customers including those who come for bass fishing as well as tourists who come for purposes other than interest in the anime. Drawing from V. Smith's necessary conditions for tourism activities, which will be described later, there is a clear difference here when compared to the case of Washimiyamachi where there is no sense of discomfort with the term "sacred place pilgrimage" in connection with Washinomiya Shrine. That this term "sacred place pilgrimage" has been naturally accepted in Washimiyamachi was confirmed in an interview conducted with the Washimiya Commerce Association on June 20, 2008, as well as by the fact that the first local souvenir I acquired was a "sacred place pilgrimage *manju* [cake]."

[43] MacCannell (1976), pp. 42-45, pp. 110-111.

[44] Durkheim (1912[1975]), p. 194; originally in Durkheim (1912[2001]), p. 256.

[45] Smith (1992), p. 89.

[46] "Anime sacred places" are not limited to shrines and temples or scenic areas; any unmarked and mundane location can become one. As a result, sometimes quiet residential areas can also become marked as "anime sacred places." In these cases it is not difficult to imagine how the sight of 20-30 year old men carrying large cameras prowling about a residential neighborhood could provoke unease among residents. For example, the March 2006 issue of the manga series "Comic Dengeki Daioh" included, in regards with the residential neighborhood that was used as the story's locale, the following request to readers: "we humbly ask you to please refrain from [sacred place pilgrimages]". (Dengeki Daioh Editorial Department (2006), p. 179).

[47] Smith (1977 [1991]), pp. 1-4.

Institute recognized their economic potential. At the time, Nomura Research Institute defined otaku as someone for whom "the ratio of money (or time) used for a particular hobby or leisure for which one has a strong passion [occupies a significant proportion] of the total consumption expenses (or time spent) on hobbies or leisure[48]." In other words, what makes one an otaku depends on the amount of disposable income and time someone pours into a particular area of personal interest. One example of the extent to which otaku are pouring their leisure time into otaku hobbies can be elicited from the large number of individuals who consistently dedicated *ema* at Washinomiya Shrine for nearly two years after Comic Market 73 was held on December 31, 2007. However, in considering Smith's definition of tourism activities, while the first two characteristics are covered by anime "sacred place pilgrimages," the main sticking point appears with the "shared moral framework." Smith claims that this "moral framework" is "something that regulates leisure configuration" and that it is "closely connected to motivations for tourism and the travel configurations that result from them[49]." In the case of anime" sacred place pilgrimages," those motives are hard to understand for local residents. Furthermore, in most cases these itineraries diverge from the usual tourist routes[50]. Local residents often strongly resist many of these anime "sacred place pilgrimages" that tend to transgress the local "moral framework," and this contributes to the joy expressed by those who visit the rare locales where the local areas have equipped them for tourism and prepared them for visitors[51]. In the case of Washinomiya Shrine, the hosts openly welcome the otaku's "sacred place pilgrimages" and this has helped to create the tourism activities there.

4. Quest for the Spiritual Center: "There is Substance in 2-D"[52]

What sorts of connections do the tourism activity-derived anime "sacred place pilgrimages" have with traditional sacred place pilgrimages? It is not impossible to argue that individuals who describe their visits as anime "sacred place pilgrimages" view the anime work as a spiritual text and are thus visiting a spiritual world. However, building off of the context of tourism, it is instructive to consider Erik Cohen's classifications of tourist experience. Cohen calls attention to the worldview of tourists, positing that "the various modes of tourist experience rely upon the relation of tourists to the 'center'."[53] The "center" that Cohen speaks of here is the "individual's spiritual center," "whether religious or cultural." Durkheim's remark that "sacred beings exist only because they are imagined as such; if we cease to believe in them, they will cease to exist," which is quoted above, is followed by this statement: "Men depend on the sacred for the sustenance of their individual existence[54]." Cohen's "individual's spiritual center" can also be said to play a similar role. However, the definitions of "religion" and "otaku" as concepts also differ depending on the scholar. Thus, rather than contrast the two concepts with each other, it is perhaps more

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[48] Nomura Research Institute Otaku Market Research Team (2005), p. 13.

[49] Smith (1977[1991]), pp. 3-5.

[50] The primary "pilgrimage place" of "Lucky Star" is Washinomiya Shrine and so it merges with the shrine as a tourist site as well, but there are also "anime sacred places" which are not tourist sites. Further, even in the case of tourist sites, there are examples where areas that are not considered as conventional tourism resources such as waste disposal facilities or children's parks become reapprorpiated as "anime sacred places." In Ōmachi City, Nagano Prefecture, the pride for conventional tourism resources is uncomfortably juxtaposed with newly-dubbed "anime sacred places," creating a sense of competition over Ōmachi City's identity as a tourist site. As "pilgrims" diverge from the usual tourist routes their motivations become clear, and while this could provide new chances for communication, it is also conceivable that they could be viewed with suspicion by local residents.

[51] The hosting structures provided by the locale regions described here include the sale of "pilgrim"-oriented goods which reveal that the local residents understand the motives of the "pilgrims." Rather than dismissing them as suspicious individuals it is clear that the visitors whose motives are understood are able to pass their time at these locations in comfort. Moreover, it is also important to consider that one of the joys pronounced by "pilgrims" is the fact that limited edition regional goods with a high collector's value are available at these locations.

[52] This is the subtitle to Episode 19 (from Volume 10 of the DVD series) of the anime "Lucky Star."

[53] Cohen (1979[1998]), p. 40; originally in Cohen (1979), p. 167.

[54] Durkheim (1912[1975]), p. 194; originally in Durkheim (1912[2001]), p. 256.

fruitful to argue within this context that otaku's "sacred place pilgrimage" is a kind of tourism that is a quest for their spiritual center.

Cohen argues that people living in contemporary times where mundane and religious worlds have become detached, find temselves alienated from society, and thus tourism helps to activate their spiritual center. Cohen classifies tourism in five modes: "recreational mode," "diversionary mode," "experiential mode," "experimental mode," and "existential mode." These layers of motivation range from the "most 'superficial' mode of simply 'fun-seeking' to the 'deepest' mode of searching for meaning[55]." To repeat, otaku refers to a subculture of individuals with an intense interest in a cluster of popular culture phenomena that are deeply connected to manga, animation, television games and personal computers. Even as otaku's "sacred place pilgrimage" can be seen as similar to Cohen's "existential mode," this paper will conclude by analyzing the ways in which it also diverges from this categorization.

Cohen defines the "existential mode" as "characteristic of the traveler who is fully committed to an 'elective' spiritual center, i.e. one external to the mainstream of his native society and culture." This does not have to be a "religious" center in the narrow sense of the term, but rather for the traveler it is a place where "the only meaningful 'real' life" exists[56]. In the words of Osawa Masachi, within the realm of their particular passion otaku "internalize their own universal world"[57], and we may further conceive of otaku as aspiring toward this universal world within their individually elected spiritual center. Travelers of the existential mode are those who journey from a daily life that lacks deep meaning to a meaningful elective world, and "those who return yearly…exemplify the 'existential mode' of tourism[58]." In this way, otaku's "sacred place pilgrimages" which are marked by frequent "repeaters" would fall into this "existential mode." Furthermore, from the standpoint of tourism economics where "the purveyance of existential experiences becomes big business[59]," the Washimiya Commerce Association has been sagacious in using anime to revitalize the region.

The classification of otaku "sacred place pilgrimages" under the "existential mode", however, risks losing sight of their particular characteristics. The "existential mode" can be seen in travelers who elect a spiritual center that differs from their society and culture's mainstream, but "he necessarily arrives at the geographical one[60]." This condition is a crucial issue for the case of Washinomiya Shrine dealt with in this paper. The spiritual center that otaku "sacred place pilgrims" aspire for is clearly not an actual geographical location but rather exists within the anime world. The deep emotion inscribed on *ema* through messages like, "So this is the path that Kagami-san walked…" reveal that the "pilgrims" are aspiring for the equinox between a geographical location and the town where their anime characters from "Lucky Star" live. The extent of this aspiration comes across in how much attention is given to trying to recreate the anime's visual scene as closely as possible when individuals post on the internet about their "sacred place pilgrimages." In embarking on "sacred place pilgrimages," individuals who place the anime world as their "center" are aiming to fully immerse themselves within the atmosphere of the anime locale while also uploading and comparing their photographs with the anime world on their computer monitors. It is thus inevitable that the "center" for otaku who are passionate about anime is located in the images

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[55] Cohen (1979[1998]), p. 50; originally in Cohen (1979), p. 197.
[56] Cohen (1979[1998]), p. 48; originally in Cohen (1979), p. 195.
[57] Osawa (2008), pp. 87-94.
[58] Cohen (1979[1998]), p. 49; originally in Cohen (1979), p. 196.
[59] Cohen (1979[1998]), p. 53; originally in Cohen (1979), p. 200. It goes without saying that in offering goods and services for the "pilgrims," the Commerce Association is complicit in what Cohen cautions against: "one can hardly experiment with alternative ways of life if these are merely contrived for one's convenience, nor can one derive existential meaning from a 'spiritual center' outside one's society or culture, if such a center is only a chimera, advertised to lure tourists in quest of existential experiences" (Cohen (1998), p. 51; originally in Cohen (1979) p. 198). However, the Commerce Association is in contact with "pilgrims" and in providing event planning and product development they put effort into valuing and incorporating "pilgrims'" opinions.
[60] Cohen (1979[1998]), p. 53; originally Cohen (1979), p. 200.

projected on their computer monitors, but more than this, their motivation lies in slipping inside this two-dimensional space. The "sacred place pilgrimage" explored in this paper exemplifies this activity of seeking for the nexus of the otaku's aspired "center" (i.e. the anime/two-dimensional world) and real life. Moreover, in order to proceed further along the path through this nexus, they project themselves within these images on their computer monitors and transmit them to others. In other words, they objectify themselves by uploading their images on websites and become part of the circulation of visual consumption in the same way as the anime characters, thereby making it possible to plunge into the two-dimensional world. That is to say, posting an announcement on the internet in order to complete one's "sacred place pilgrimage" reveals that the ultimate goal of "pilgrims" is to achieve existence within their computer monitor.

5. Conclusion

This paper has aimed to explore the successful case of Washimiyamachi's usage of "anime sacred places" for local revitalization. Specifically, through a survey of *ema* offered at Washinomiya Shrine, this paper has attempted to portray the kinds of feelings embraced by "pilgrims" to "anime sacred places." This case shows how *ema* can become communication tools not just between individuals and deities but also between individuals and anime characters and between "pilgrims" themselves. It also shows how "pilgrims" motivated by an anime work to visit and pay their respects at Washinomiya Shrine also feel shy of their motives.

Saddled with these feelings of timidity, "pilgrims" hope for their hosts at the "sacred place" to understand their motives, and only when this occurs can anime "sacred place pilgrimages" succeed as actual tourism activities. Additionally, it is not advisable to treat otaku's use of the phrase "sacred place pilgrimage" as simply word-play, given their passion for the story world of anime. Though we must be restrained from the direct deployment of research on sacred places and pilgrimages within traditional religions, through these studies we can also read in the aspirations of pilgrims an existential orientation where individuals quest to live for an elective center that they have chosen out of the multidimensional world. Building off of Cohen, this paper has applied his analysis of the "existential mode" to anime "sacred place pilgrimages." In understanding the meaning of the term "sacred place pilgrimage" it is constructive to consider the deepening and diversification of tourism experiences that mark the transition from mass tourists to post-tourists[61].

This paper has been concerned foremost with the aspect of *ema* offered at Washinomiya Shrine within the context of anime "sacred place pilgrimages" and thus much of the analysis has focused on survey analysis of their content. Due to this focus, it was not possible to engage with the information available through many other aspects of the "sacred place pilgrimage" such as the events held at Washimiyamachi and the interactions among "pilgrims" who gather at nearby restaurants. An effort was made to consider other kinds of "pilgrims" in this space as well, but unfortunately this was insufficient. One potential topic for future research would be a comparison of the *itaema* dedicated at Washinomiya

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[61] This refers to the arguments presented by Feifer, Urry and Bruner. Furthermore, from their proposed context of "post-tourist," it becomes possible to analyze the "ironically immersed" (Osawa Masachi) or "critically fanatic" (Saito Tamaki) attitude of the otaku. See Feifer (1985), Urry (1990[1995]), Bruner (2005[2007]), Osawa (1996), and Saito (2000). The problem of authenticity has probably been the most intense object of tourism research and traditional pilgrimage studies. Following Feifer's argument, post-tourists perform a kind of game through their tourism. Generally these performances are given labels such as "pseudo-events" and are connected with a lapse of authenticity, but otaku themselves "construct the aura of 'fiction-replica'" (Saito 2000, p. 35). Furthermore, the term "sacred place pilgrimage" may be understood as the expression of this kind of constructed aura or authenticity. However, in considering this point it is necessary to further pursue Urry's discussion centering on "hyperreality" as well as Bruner's discussion on the fragmentation of authenticity, which I hope to theorize more in later projects.

Shrine with various other "anime sacred places"[62]. Additionally, there is little doubt that conditions are different for a space that is not accustomed to a religious term such as "sacred place pilgrimage," even if it is a tourist site, and for spaces that do not have the land to welcome individuals from other regions. Despite the aspirations of "pilgrims" for "meaningful 'real' life," it is entirely possible that that life can be swept away in the blink of an eye by the scornful reactions of others[63]. Anime "sacred place pilgrimages" are a space where reality becomes irradiated with the worldview of the story—but these "pilgrimages" are constructed and supported through the complicity of the host-guest relationship. Thus, given the diverse conditions possible within anime "sacred place pilgrimages," there is much potential for further research.

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[62] To raise just a few titles of possible works, *itaema* can be found dedicated at the locales used in "Sailor Moon," "Kamichu!," and "When They Cry."
[63] In order to maintain a subjective reality it is assumed that an individual must have social interactions with others who have a shared sense of the significance of that reality, and thus ridicule from those others can result in that subjective reality collapsing for the individual. See Barker and Luckman (1966[2003]), p. 235.

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