

# **What Motivates Anime Viewers to Undertake an Anime Pilgrimage? Examining Three Types of Anime Pilgrims**

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## Abstract

This study investigated two types of social exclusion as determinants of *anime* pilgrimage by examining three categories of *anime* pilgrims: *otaku*, consisting of individuals who had experienced social exclusion from both general society and the *anime* community; fans, consisting of individuals who had experienced social exclusion from general society but enjoyed communication with the *anime* community; and general *anime* viewers, with no sense of social exclusion. Then, given that new connections with other members of the *anime* community and with *anime* characters during an *anime* pilgrimage can alleviate a sense of social exclusion, we constructed a model describing the influence of social exclusion on the intention to undertake an *anime* pilgrimage. A dataset was collected from a street survey in Akihabara and Ikebukuro areas of Tokyo. Regression analyses showed that only fans were more likely to undertake an *anime* pilgrimage if the expectation of new connections with other *anime* community during the *anime* pilgrimage was high. By contrast, all three types of *anime* pilgrims were motivated to undertake an *anime* pilgrimage if the expectation of pseudo-social connections with *anime* characters was high. Thus, researchers as well as policymakers should focus on the relationships between pilgrims and *anime* characters rather than on the relationships among pilgrims.

## 1. Introduction

In recent years, Japanese animation (*anime*) has become famous worldwide both as a subculture and as part of Japanese culture. With the spread of *anime*, the word *otaku* has also become widely known. As a subcultural term, it refers to people who are not accustomed to building friendships and who spend most of their time at home alone. It also refers to people with poor communication skills, who tend to use bookish expressions in their conversations (cf. Kinsella, 1998). Other types of *otaku* include idol *otaku* and train *otaku*. *Anime otaku* are typical of the *otaku* type. They consist of individuals who seldom engage in interpersonal communication because they stay at home and spend most of their time alone watching *anime*. Due to their poor communication skills and asocial personality, members of general society have a negative image of them (Takada, Kikuchi, and Yin, 2020) and tend to reject them (Tagawa, 2009). As a result, *otaku* have a strong sense of social exclusion (Okada, 2008).

However, in the 1990s, the behavior of *otaku* and other *anime* viewers began to change, through their participation in *anime* pilgrimages to *anime seichi*, defined as the “sacred” places used in an *anime* work as background images (e.g., Okamoto, 2015). For example, Chichibu City in Saitama Prefecture is one of the locations of the *anime* “The Flower We Saw That Day” (*Anohi Mita Hana no Namae wo Bokutachi wa Mada Shiranai*). Fascinated by this work, *otaku* have visited Chichibu City as well as other *anime seichi* scattered around the city. By participating in an *anime* pilgrimage, *otaku* can no longer be defined solely as people who watch *anime* at home alone.

As *anime* pilgrimages have become more commonplace among *otaku*, this group of *anime* viewers have begun to attract academic attention. In addition to the many case studies based on field research of *anime seichi* (e.g., Imai, 2009; Okamoto, 2011; Yukawa and Sato, 2017), empirical studies have explored the motivations behind an *anime* pilgrimage. For example, Ono, Kawamura, Oguro, Nishimori, Shimizu, and Yamamoto (2020) suggested that *anime* pilgrims are motivated to visit *anime seichi* in order to form connections with other people. Through its empirical analysis, that study showed that *anime otaku*, traditionally considered as people who stay at home and remain socially isolated, are able to build connections with others through *anime* pilgrimages.

Ono et al. (2020) first classified *anime* pilgrims into two types: location seekers and followers. Location seekers are defined as *anime* pilgrims who are the first to seek out the locations of an *anime* work and thus *anime seichi*. Driven by their curiosity and expending considerable effort, they search for and discover locations that have not been publicly identified by *anime* production companies and then share this information on

social networking services. Followers are pilgrims who use the information provided by location seekers to go and visit those locations. They convey their appreciation to location seekers, as they themselves have not had to expend the time and energy needed to find *anime seichi*. The gratitude extended to location seekers in turn motivates them to engage further in finding *anime seichi*. Furthermore, according to Ono, et al. (2020), *anime* pilgrims, whether location seekers or followers, are often welcomed as tourists by residents when they visit *anime seichi*, which motivates them to visit those places again. As a result, *otaku* can no longer be viewed as solitary beings, but as people able to form communities with location seekers and followers and, during an *anime* pilgrimage, connections with residents.

However, previous research on the motivations for *anime* pilgrimage have failed to take into account the sense of social exclusion shared by *anime* pilgrims. Given that *otaku* have a sense of social exclusion (Okada, 2008) but are also motivated to build connections with other people during an *anime* pilgrimage (Ono, et al., 2020), it can be inferred that *anime seichi* provide *otaku* with a respite from the sense of social exclusion that characterizes their daily lives. This may in turn motivate this group to undertake further *anime* pilgrimages. However, this possibility has been ignored in previous research.

Pilgrims who cannot form connections with other people have also been ignored by previous research. These pilgrims who experience social exclusion from members of general society with little interest in *anime* may instead try to form connections with other *otaku* who enjoy *anime*, and who also experience social exclusion, as well as with residents of the places they visit. Nonetheless, there may also be *anime* pilgrims who experience social exclusion even from an *anime* community and thus no longer try to form connections with other people, and visit *anime seichi* alone (cf. Molden, Lucas, Gardner, and Dan, 2009). The *anime* pilgrimage motivations of the latter group may not include establishing connections with other people, but these motivations have not been rigorously examined.

In this work, we first provide a review of previous research on *otaku*, *anime* pilgrimages by *otaku*, social exclusion, and related studies. We then present the results of our study based on three types of *anime* pilgrims: two types of *otaku* who experience social exclusion differently, and general viewers who do not experience social exclusion. We then examine the relationship between a respite from the sense of social exclusion provided by an *anime* pilgrimage and the motivations of *anime* pilgrims in visiting *anime seichi*, including those who visit *anime seichi* to form connections with other people, as observed in previous research, as well as those unable to form these connections. Our findings are significant contributions to research on *anime* pilgrimages.

## 2. Literature review

### 2-1. *Otaku* · 1

*Otaku* constitute a Japanese subculture who are largely incomprehensible to general society and tend to be disinterested in subjects of interest to people in general society (cf. Kinsella, 1998). For this reason, they tend to be viewed strangely and are sometimes reported as the perpetrators of heinous crimes. Shortly after the journalist Akio Nakamori referred to members of this subculture as *otaku*, scholars and critics in Japan and abroad began defining and studying them (e.g., Kinsella, 1998; Kam, 2013a, b; Niu, Chiang, and Tsai, 2012; Dan, 2015; Nagata, 2015; Takata et al, 2020).

Kinsella (1998) observed that, from the perspective of contemporary Japanese history, the transition from collectivism to individualism in postwar Japan has been accompanied by the disintegration of the Japanese as a unified people. Some Japanese have turned to *anime* initially as a hobby but then have become so absorbed in it that they have suffered exclusion from general society. However, Ono (2010) observed that, from a marketing perspective, all consumers are highly involved in a particular product or service, and *otaku* are therefore no different. They are excluded only because they are involved in something in which people in general society are less involved, rather than in things commonly of interest to general society, such as food, fashion, and romance.

According to Niu et al. (2012), *otaku* is a term that refers to people with a keen interest in *anime*, one that emerged with recent developments in media and information technology. Niu et al. (2012) conducted a factor analysis to extract the characteristics of *otaku*, identifying a strong immersion in *anime* and *manga*, deep knowledge of these art forms, and a preference for indoor activities. The same authors then performed a covariance structure analysis to determine whether these characteristics influence the purchasing of *otaku*-related products. Kam (2013a) interviewed members of general society about their impressions of *otaku*. These impressions included the perception that *otaku* tend to spend more time on their hobbies than communicating with others, they are not comfortable interacting with others, and tend to “stay in their shells” to avoid being rejected by general society (Kam, 2013b). Takada et al. (2020) conducted a web survey on general society's impressions of various *otaku* images, such as *anime otaku* and voice actor *otaku*. They found that *otaku* were negatively perceived as being daydreamers, quiet, and unhealthy.

## 2-2. *Otaku* · 2

In contrast to studies that consider *otaku* negatively and as excluded from general society, other studies have found that *otaku* have sociality. Okada (1996) observed that there is a hierarchy within the *anime* community to which *otaku* belong, and that *otaku* who spend more money and time on *anime* than other *otaku* are called *otakings* (kings of *otaku*); such *otakings* are respected by other *otaku* in the community. Annet (2014) noted that *anime* fans are active in social interaction within an *anime* community. Ono (2010) thus proposed that only truly isolated *otaku* be called *otaku*, in keeping with the original meaning of the word, with respected members within an *anime* community referred to as maniacs and those who respect them as fans.

Kirillova, Peng, and Chen (2018) studied motivations for undertaking an *anime* pilgrimage with respect to the image of *otaku* and sociality. Kirillova et al. (2018) surveyed *anime* pilgrims, classifying them into three categories based on the level of commitment to *anime*: *anime otaku*, *anime fans*, and general viewers. The connections between social belonging and *anime* pilgrimage were stronger for *anime otaku* than for fans or general viewers. Accordingly, these *otaku* cannot be viewed as solitary people who tend to shut themselves in at home, as originally defined; rather, they are equivalent to the group referred to as maniacs, who are more social than fans and not excluded from general society, unlike *otaku* as defined by Ono (2010).

Nonetheless, Ono et al. (2020) also found that these *otaku* undertake *anime* pilgrimages to form connections with other *otaku*. As noted above, *otaku* who make *anime* pilgrimages can be categorized into two types: location seekers and followers. *Otaku* are also motivated by the spontaneous warmth of residents at *anime seichi*, which encourages them to revisit those sites. These findings demonstrate that *otaku* do not stay at home but, rather surprisingly, engage in *anime* pilgrimages as a social activity and thus possess sufficient social skills.

## 2-3. *Anime* pilgrimage

In Japan, the scenery and buildings present in a certain area are often incorporated into *anime* work. An *anime* pilgrimage refers to visiting or touring these locations, which are referred to as *anime seichi*. Most of the previous research on *anime* pilgrimage was conducted in Japan, as one of the world’s leading producers of *anime* works, but the phenomenon of *anime seichi* has been investigated only in case studies. For example, Yamamura (2008, 2009a, b) focused on “Raki☆Suta”, in Washinomiya, Kuki City, Saitama

Prefecture, examining how the site became an *anime seichi*, the acceptance by residents of the pilgrims, and how companies outside the area played a role in the growing momentum to revitalize the town. Okamoto (2009a, b, c, d) reported on the creative efforts of both the Chamber of Commerce and Industry and residents in the *anime seichi* of “Raki ☆Suta” to attract *anime* pilgrims.

In the study of *anime seichi* by Okamoto (2009c), three categories of *anime* pilgrims to those sites were identified: pioneering pilgrims, following pilgrims, and secondary pilgrims. The first two groups have a leader-follower relationship such as *otaking* and *otaku* (Okada, 1996) or maniac and fan (Ono, 2010). In both cases, *otaku* with sociality support *anime* pilgrimages.

While many such case studies exist in Japanese journals, several empirical studies have been developed in foreign journals (e.g., Kilillova et al. 2018; Ono et al. 2020; Liu, Lai Huang, and Li, 2021), such as the above-mentioned study of Kilillova et al. (2018), in which the motivations of three groups of *anime* pilgrims (*otaku*, fans, and general viewers) to undertake an *anime* pilgrimage were investigated. The results showed that, although *otaku* were perceived as immersing themselves in the *anime* world and avoiding the real world to a greater extent than fans or general viewers, they also exhibited the strongest relationships between the studied factors: integration of the real world and the *anime* world, social belonging, and self-improvement and the *anime* pilgrimage.

By categorizing *otaku* as location seekers and followers, Ono et al. (2020) examined the motivations of these groups for undertaking an *anime* pilgrimage. For both groups, besides discovering/confirming the location of *anime seichi*, a motivation for an *anime* pilgrimage and for revisiting *anime seichi* was the warmth of the interaction with local residents. Accordingly, the negative image of *otaku* as someone who stays at home and does not form connection with others, i.e., the original meaning of the word *otaku*, has been at least in part discredited; instead, it is recognized that some *otaku* have the social skills needed to connect with others. But do true *otaku* undertake *anime* pilgrimages? And are socially conscious *otaku* also socially competent? Such questions must also be considered.

## 2-4. Social Exclusion

The term “social exclusion” refers to a situation that a person is unable to establish a relationship with a particular group or individual. A person who experiences social exclusion feels left out and perceives a large gap between himself and his surroundings (Baumeister and Leary, 1995). *Otaku* are often the object of contempt in general society,

because of their immersion in *anime*. This can lead to *otaku* feeling socially excluded.

According to Baumeister and Leary (1995), people who experience social exclusion but prefer to work with others rather than alone try to satisfy their desire for community by making new connections with other communities.

However, Heimberg, Lebowitz, Hope, and Schneier (1995) found that some people who experience social exclusion choose to protect themselves from potentially threatening social encounters rather than build new connections with others, due to the fear of being negatively evaluated. While these individuals are isolated and do not form new connections with other people, they may still seek to lessen the sense of social exclusion, such as by building connections with pets, photos of friends, fictional characters (Kipling, 2009), or anthropomorphic brands (Chen, Wan, and Levy, 2017).

These findings from previous research on social exclusion are relevant for the study of *anime* pilgrimages, as they suggest that *otaku* with sociality are people who, after experiencing social exclusion, try to overcome it by forming connections with other pilgrims to, or local residents of, *anime seichi*. According to this view, these individuals should not be seen as sociopathic but as people who, after being rejected by general society, choose to be part of an *anime* community and to participate in *anime* pilgrimages.

However, there may be other types of *otaku*, such as those who are unable to be part of either general society or an *anime* community and, instead, undertake an *anime* pilgrimage on their own. This group experiences more or less complete social exclusion and, thus, contrary to the conclusions of previous research, their motivation for an *anime* pilgrimage is not to form connections with members of an *anime* community, given that such attempts would risk failure, as would any attempt to connect with people generally. Instead, these *otaku* reduce their sense of social exclusion by forming connections with things that resemble people. The possible reasons for this are discussed below.

## **2-5. Religious Pilgrimage to Sacred Sites and Film Tourism**

### **-Connections with Non-human Objects-**

By drawing on previous research on the motivations for undertaking an *anime* pilgrimage, we identified two types of *otaku*: one who uses the *anime* pilgrimage to form connections with other people and thus counteracts the sense of social exclusion and another, one who is unable to form connections with other people during an *anime* pilgrimage but who counteracts the sense of social exclusion by forming connections to human-like objects. Insights into these two types can be gained from studies on religious pilgrimages and film tourism.

The similarities between a religious pilgrimage and an *anime* pilgrimage have long been recognized. A religious pilgrimage is a visit by a follower of a religion to a place that is significant to that religion (Barber, 1993). The motivations for a religious pilgrimage are diverse but they include building spiritual connections with pilgrims to the same sacred sites and with people on the way to and at their lodgings (Kim, Kim, and King 2016). Simon, Gareth, and Anthony (2018) cited the desire for religious experiences and the experience of God's presence. Thus, among religious pilgrims, some make a pilgrimage to form connections with other people and others to form connections with God.

Similarities between film tourism and an *anime* pilgrimage have also been pointed out. In both, viewers visit the location of the work of art after viewing the content; however, as Okamoto (2009c) and Ono et al. (2020) have noted, the difference is that in film tourism the location is usually clear whereas *anime* locations must be searched for and confirmed. Nonetheless, film tourists, like *anime* pilgrims, visit the movie locations based on their sense of connection to fictional characters, whom they treat as if they were real friends (Kim, 2012). Furthermore, Kim (2012) observed that the percentage of movie fans who visit film locations to build connections with their favorite characters, though their favorite characters are obviously not there, increases with the level of their involvement in the film. In their model aimed at identifying the motivations for an *anime* pilgrimage, Ono et al. (2020) incorporated factors related to the interaction between location seekers and followers as well as factors identified in film tourism research. They found that the degree of character involvement was one of the motivations for an *anime* pilgrimage by their survey at *anime seichi*.

As described above, previous research on religious pilgrimage and film tourism identified people who make pilgrimages for reasons other than the social connections, including forming a connection to a god or to a film character. Similarly, *anime* pilgrims include both those who seek to form connections with other people and those who seek to form connections with *anime* characters. However, to the best of the author's knowledge, previous research on *anime* pilgrimages has dealt only with the former and overlooked the latter.

### 3. Hypotheses

#### 3-1. Classification Method

*Otaku* have a negative image in general society as they and their interest in *anime*

are poorly understood (Ono 2010). Those highly devoted to *anime* are judged as being withdrawn from general society and as not being skilled at communicating with others (Kam 2013b). Although previous research has not explicitly dealt with either issue, it can be inferred that respite from social exclusion (Maner, DeWall, Baumeister, and Schaller, 2007) experienced by *otaku* is behind the intentions of *otaku* to undertake an *anime* pilgrimage. However, as discussed above in the comparison with religious pilgrimages and film tourism, many *anime* pilgrims seek connections with the characters they love, not with other people.

Recently, people in general society have also come to appreciate *anime*, albeit only the most representative works. The increased popularity of *anime* has also popularized *anime* pilgrimages. This is evidenced by the publication of *anime seichi* guidebooks for general tourists and the marketing of many *anime*-related products. Unlike the two types of *otaku* discussed above, these tourists are able to enjoy an *anime* pilgrimage without it serving as an antidote to social exclusion.

Accordingly, three categories of *anime* pilgrims can be recognized: *Anime otaku* are extremely devoted to *anime* and have a significantly reduced involvement in the activities of daily life, including communication with others. As a result, they are excluded not only from general society but also from the larger *anime* community. *Anime* fans are moderately devoted to *anime* and have moderately reduced their involvement in the activities of daily life, including communication with others. As a result, they are excluded from general society but, instead, form connections with other members of the *anime* community. General *anime* viewers are slightly devoted to *anime* and maintain their involvement in the activities of daily life, including communication with others. Therefore, they are not excluded from general society.

These three groups differ from those of Okamoto (2009c), who described pioneering pilgrims, following pilgrims, and secondary pilgrims, derived from the location seekers and followers identified by Ono et al. (2020), and from the *otaku*, maniacs, and fans, as proposed in Ono (2010). Although Kirillova et al. (2018) used the same three categories, their conceptual definition differed as it was based on the level of commitment to *anime* rather than on perceived social exclusion. Also, in previous research, *otaku* and fans were subcategories of fans as defined in this study; people equivalent to *otaku* in this study were not identified.

In the following, the three categories of *anime* pilgrims defined in this study are considered in detail.

### 3-2. *Anime Otaku*

While both *otaku* and fans have a sense of social exclusion from general society due to their deep devotion to *anime* and poor communication skills, *otaku* also fail to connect with other *anime* viewers. They are therefore likely to visit *anime seichi* alone and to form connections with favorite *anime* characters—not with actual human beings. Thus, *otaku* will be motivated to undertake an *anime* pilgrimage only if they can connect with *anime* characters emotionally. This leads to the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis1 *Anime otaku* are more likely to undertake an *anime* pilgrimage when the expectation of making pseudo-social connections with *anime* characters during the *anime* pilgrimage is high. The expectation of making social connections with other pilgrims or local people has only a minor impact on *otaku*'s intention to undertake an *anime* pilgrimage.

### 3-3. *Anime Fans*

Like *otaku*, fans suffer from a sense of social exclusion from general society. However, in contrast to *otaku* and their desire to form connections with *anime* characters, fans have relatively good communication skills and thus seek connections with other pilgrims and with local people living near *anime seichi*. Thus, fans are more motivated to undertake an *anime* pilgrimage if it gives them the chance to connect with other pilgrims and/or local people. Connecting with *anime* characters at the site plays only a minor role in their decision to undertake an *anime* pilgrimage. This leads to the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis2 *Anime fans* are more likely to undertake an *anime* pilgrimage if the expectation of making social connections with other *anime* pilgrims or with local people during the *anime* pilgrimage is high. The expectation of making pseudo-social connections with *anime* characters has only a minor impact on fans' intentions to undertake an *anime* pilgrimage.

### 3-4. General *Anime* Viewers

As this group does not have a sense of social exclusion, their interest in visiting an

*anime* destination is not influenced by the opportunity to connect with other people or with *anime* characters during an *anime* pilgrimage. Thus,

Hypothesis3 For general anime viewers, the expectation of making new social or pseudo-social connections with other people or *anime* characters, respectively, during an *anime* pilgrimage is low.

## 4. Survey

### 4-1. Outline of the Survey

To test hypotheses 1–3, we conducted a street survey in two districts of Tokyo, Akihabara and Ikebukuro, in order to target *otaku*, fans, and general viewers. Akihabara and Ikebukuro were chosen because both are well-known for their *otaku* culture. Among the 287 potential respondents (124 males, 159 females, and 4 non-respondents), 282 (122 males [43.3%], 156 females [55.3%], and 4 [1.4%] non-respondents by gender) answered “yes” to both “Do you usually watch *anime*?” and “Do you have a favorite *anime*?” The percentage of respondents who answered “yes”, of the total number of potential respondents (including those who answered “no”), was 98.3%. The age ranges and respective number of respondents were as follows: 13–19, n = 99, 20–29, n = 162, 30–39, n = 20, 40–49, n = 4, 50–59, n = 1, and 70–79, n = 1. Respondents were asked to answer questions related to their sense of exclusion from general society or an *anime* community, and to their sense of connection with other people or *anime* characters, as well as to the motivation for their visit.

### 4-2. Social Exclusion

As the focus of this study was social exclusion as a motivation for an *anime* pilgrimage, both exclusion from general society and exclusion from an *anime* community were explored.

These two types of social exclusion were measured using Lee's (2017) measurement scale of social exclusion. However, Lee (2017) did not examine the source of the exclusion, which was surveyed in our questionnaire. The specific questionnaire items are shown in Table 1. A 7-point Likert scale, ranging from “1: disagree” to “7: very much agree” was used.

Table 1: Construct and Measurement Scale-1

Construct	Measurement Scale (Factor Loading)	$\alpha$	SCR	AVE
Social Ex- clusion from the General So- ciety	$X_1$ : I am lacking in companionship in the gen- eral society. (0.73)	0.90	0.90	0.69
	$X_2$ : I am omitted from the general society. (0.91)			
	$X_3$ : I am isolated from the general society. (0.89)			
	$X_4$ : I am all alone in the general society. (0.79)			
Social Ex- clusion from an <i>Anime</i> Community	$X_5$ : I am lacking in companionship in the com- munity of <i>anime</i> fans. (0.68)	0.91	0.91	0.73
	$X_6$ : I am omitted from the community of <i>anime</i> fans. (0.86)			
	$X_7$ : I am isolated from the community of <i>anime</i> fans. (0.96)			
	$X_8$ : I am all alone in the community of <i>anime</i> fans. (0.90)			

Cronbach's  $\alpha$  and synthetic composite reliability (SCR) were calculated to determine the reliability of the measurement scale for each question (Table 1). Cronbach's  $\alpha$  values met the criterion of 0.70 or higher, as recommended by Nunnally (1978), the SCR values met the criterion of 0.60 or higher, as recommended by Bagozzi and Yi (1988), and the AVE values met the criterion of 0.50 or higher, as recommended by Bagozzi and Yi (1988). Hence, both measurements indicated a high degree of reliability.

The collected data were used to categorize participants of the survey into the three above-described groups: *otaku*, those who have a high level of social exclusion from general society and from an *anime* community; fans, those who have a high level of social exclusion from general society, but not from an *anime* community; and general viewers, those with a low level of social exclusion from both communities. Of the 282 respondents, 94 were classified as general viewers. Of the 188 respondents with a high level of exclusion from general society, 94 had a low level of social exclusion from an *anime* community and were thus classified as fans whereas the other 94 respondents had a high level of social exclusion from both and were classified as *otaku*. Thus, the 282 respondents were divided equally into three categories. The mean value of social exclusion from general society was 3.702 (standard deviation [SD] = 1.004) for *otaku*, 3.114 (SD = 1.061) for fans, and 1.356 (SD = 0.339) for general viewers. The mean value of social exclusion from an *anime* community was respectively, 4.072 (SD = 0.867), 1.731 (SD = 0.499), and 1.785 (SD = 1.002).

The validity of this classification was examined in a multiple comparison test using the Tukey method. The difference in the mean values for social exclusion from general society between fans and general viewers (1.758) and between *otaku* and general viewers (2.346) were significant at the 1% level. The difference in the mean values between *otaku* and fans (0.588) was also significant at the 1% level, but only slightly. The difference in

the mean values for social exclusion from an *anime* community was significant at the 1% level between *otaku* and fans (2.340) and between *otaku* and general viewers (2.287). The difference in the mean values of fans and general viewers (0.053) was not significant. Hence, the above classification was shown to be valid.

### 4-3. Connections with People/Characters and Motivations of the *anime* Pilgrimage

For questions related to connections with people and connections with characters, Kim’s scale of “Experience at a Drama Location” (Kim 2012) was used. In addition, Kim (2012) used several items that were not selected because they were not relevant to this study. The 7-point Likert scale, as described above, was employed as well. The questionnaire used in this study is shown in the Appendix. The motivation for the *anime* pilgrimage was queried using the scale devised by Lam and Hsu (2004), following Ono, et al. (2010). The questionnaire items are shown in Table 2.

Cronbach's  $\alpha$  and the SCR were again calculated to determine the reliability of the measurement scales selected for each variable (Table 2). Cronbach’s  $\alpha$  values met the criterion of 0.70 or higher, as recommended by Nunnally (1978), the SCR values met the criterion of 0.60 or higher, as recommended by Bagozzi and Yi (1988), and the AVE values met the criterion of 0.50 or higher, as recommended by Bagozzi and Yi (1988). Hence, both measurements indicated a high degree of reliability.

Table2 Construct and Measurement Scale・2

Construct	Measurement Scale (Factor Loading)	$\alpha$	SCR	AVE
Connections with Human Beings	$X_9$ : If I make <i>anime</i> pilgrimage, I can meet other people who like that works in person. (0.69)	0.87	0.87	0.58
	$X_{10}$ : I think that if I make <i>anime</i> pilgrimage of my favorite <i>anime</i> , I will be able to interact with other people who like that works. (0.77)			
	$X_{11}$ : I feel that if I make <i>anime</i> pilgrimage of my favorite <i>anime</i> , there will be other people there who like that works. (0.70)			
	$X_{12}$ : I think that if I make <i>anime</i> pilgrimage of my favorite <i>anime</i> , I will be able to communicate with other people who like the <i>anime</i> . (0.85)			
	$X_{13}$ : If I make <i>anime</i> pilgrimage of my favorite <i>anime</i> , I will be able to enjoy time with other people who like the <i>anime</i> . (0.79)			

Table2 Construct and Measurement Scale・2

Construct	Measurement Scale (Factor Loading)	$\alpha$	SCR	AVE
Connections with Characters	$X_{14}$ : If I make <i>anime</i> pilgrimage, I can meet my favorite characters in person. (0.75)	0.90	0.90	0.65
	$X_{15}$ : If I make <i>anime</i> pilgrimage, I will be able to interact with my favorite characters. (0.78)			
	$X_{16}$ : I feel that if I make <i>anime</i> pilgrimage, my favorite characters will be there. (0.78)			
	$X_{17}$ : I think that if I make <i>anime</i> pilgrimage, I will be able to communicate with my favorite characters. (0.87)			
	$X_{18}$ : If I make <i>anime</i> pilgrimage, I will be able to enjoy time with my favorite characters. (0.84)			
Visit Intentions	$X_{19}$ : I am likely to make <i>anime</i> pilgrimage within the next year. (0.94)	0.84	0.87	0.69
	$X_{20}$ : I intend to make <i>anime</i> pilgrimage within the next year. (0.93)			
	$X_{21}$ : I would like to make <i>anime</i> pilgrimage someday. (0.57)			

## 5. Analysis

### 5-1. Method

A multilevel analysis, in which the coefficients were estimated by fitting the three types of response data (*otaku*, fans, and general viewers) into the same model was not possible because the optimization calculation did not converge. Instead, the empirical validity of the hypotheses proposed in Section 3 was determined using a multiple regression analysis, with expectation of connections with other people and expectation of connections with characters as the explanatory variables, and motivations for the *anime* pilgrimage as the dependent variable.

### 5-2. Results

The results of the multiple regression analysis of the *anime* pilgrimage motivations of *otaku* are shown in Table 3. The coefficient of expectation of connections with characters, but not the coefficient of expectation of connections with other people, was significant and positive.

Table3 Results of Multiple Regression Analysis on Visit Intentions of ‘otaku’

Variable	Standardized Regression Coefficient
X <sub>1</sub> : Expectation of connections with human beings	0.00
X <sub>2</sub> : Expectation of connections with characters	0.48***
R <sup>2</sup>	0.23
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.22
F value	13.74***
N	94

Note: \*\*\* p&lt;0.01.

For the visit by fans (Table 4), both the coefficient of expectation of connections with other people and the coefficient of expectation of connections with characters were significant and positive.

Table4 Results of Multiple Regression Analysis on Visit Intentions of ‘fans’

Variable	Standardized Regression Coefficient
X <sub>1</sub> : Expectation of connections with human beings	0.22**
X <sub>2</sub> : Expectation of connections with characters	0.40***
R <sup>2</sup>	0.31
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.29
F value	20.25***
N	94

Note: \*\* p&lt;0.05, \*\*\* p&lt;0.01.

For the visit by general viewers (Table 5), the coefficient of expectation of connections with characters but not the coefficient of expectation of connections with other people was significant and positive.

Table5 Results of Multiple Regression Analysis on Visit Intentions of ‘general viewers’

Variable	Standardized Regression Coefficient
X <sub>1</sub> : Expectation of connections with human beings	0.03
X <sub>2</sub> : Expectation of connections with characters	0.40***
R <sup>2</sup>	0.17
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.15
F value	9.20***
N	94

Note: \*\*\* p&lt;0.01.

### 5-3. Discussion

The results of our survey showed that in the decision to undertake an *anime* pilgrimage, connecting with others is a motivation only for fans, as hypothesized. For *otaku* and general viewers, the high likelihood of making new social connections with others during the *anime* pilgrimage does not play a role in choosing to visit sites of *anime seichi*.

This conclusion is consistent with the hypotheses of this study. Thus, for fans, interacting with other fans and with residents through an *anime* pilgrimage to *anime seichi* alleviates their sense of exclusion from general society and motivates this group to undertake an *anime* pilgrimage. This is not the case for *otaku*, because they cannot take advantage of the opportunity provided by the *anime* pilgrimage to connect with fellow pilgrims and local residents at the *anime seichi* and thereby escape the sense of social exclusion. General viewers do not have a sense of social exclusion, such that the opportunity to connect with other people does not affect their intention to visit *anime seichi*.

Connecting with *anime* characters can also be a motivation to undertake an *anime* pilgrimage, not only for *otaku*, as hypothesized, but also for fans and general viewers. In fact, for all pilgrims, the higher the expectation of pseudo-social connections with *anime* characters, the higher the willingness to visit *anime seichi*. Establishing connections with characters did not significantly differ from the motivation to visit *anime seichi*, nor was there clear evidence of a relationship between the latter and the degree of expectation of connecting with characters. However, the motivation of fans and general viewers to visit *anime seichi* was weaker than that of *otaku*. The regression coefficients and t-values were larger for *otaku* than for fans, and for fans than for general viewers.

This conclusion is partially consistent with the hypotheses of this study. Thus, as *otaku* are excluded not only by general society but also by the *anime* community, they do not attempt to form connections with other people and, instead, seek to alleviate their sense of social exclusion by forming connections with characters. Accordingly, the opportunity provided by *anime seichi* to form connections with characters has a stronger influence on the *anime* pilgrimage motivations of *otaku* than of fans or general viewers. However, the latter two groups also seek to form connections with *anime* characters associated with the *anime* pilgrimage site, with a strength comparable to that determined for *otaku*. This was surprising, given that fans and general viewers exhibit sociality. However, because they love *anime*, they may still choose to follow their favorite characters by visiting *anime seichi*.

## 6. General Discussion

### 6-1. Theoretical Contributions

There are three theoretical implications of this study. First, this study divided *anime* viewers and pilgrims into three categories, *otaku*, fans, and general viewers, based on the sense of social exclusion experienced by individuals in these groups. However, while previous research portrayed *otaku* as people who stay at home and who do not build connections with others, more recent research on *anime* pilgrims has shown that some *otaku* have diverse social skills and are able to form social connections. This study used the former definition and further included the inability to form connections also with the *anime* community. These *otaku* were shown to alleviate their sense of social exclusion by, instead, forming connections with characters. *Otaku* excluded from general society but able to maintain social connections by connecting with an *anime* community were defined as fans. Finally, the recent *anime* boom has given rise to a third group of *anime* pilgrims who have no sense of social exclusion but simply enjoy watching *anime*; they are referred to in this study as general viewers.

Second, it should be noted that previous research emphasized that all *anime* viewers enjoy social interactions during the *anime* pilgrimage, even if they are not accustomed to building friendships and spend most of their time watching *anime* at home alone. In those studies, no reason was given as to why anti-social people suddenly become sociable during an *anime* pilgrimage. In this study, this group were termed *anime* fans, i.e., individuals who feel socially excluded from general society but who are eager to make a new social connection with other people during an *anime* pilgrimage.

Third and finally, this study showed that, regardless of their sense of social exclusion, *anime* pilgrims are strongly motivated to connect emotionally with *anime* characters. Previous research focused only on pilgrims' needs to connect with others whereas our study found that this described only a subset of pilgrims; in fact, all pilgrims seek to connect with *anime* characters.

### 6-2. Managerial Implications

This study has two managerial implications. First, prior studies overemphasized the need of *anime* viewers to make social connections during their pilgrimages, thus concluding that policy makers and residents of the destinations should welcome *anime* pilgrims to stimulate the regional economy. However, this study found that only fans seek to make

connections with others during an *anime* pilgrimage; *otaku* and general viewers, by contrast, seek connections with *anime* characters. As *otaku* have a strong sense of social exclusion not only from general society but also from the *anime* community, their *anime* pilgrimage is a solitary activity. Local people should therefore not disturb these individuals.

Second, all *anime* viewers want to connect emotionally with *anime* characters during the *anime* pilgrimage. To promote the characters associated with these sites, destination hosts should maintain these *anime seichi*. To enhance the concordance of actual structures and scenes of actual places with the *anime* background paintings, local hosts should consider increasing their resemblance. Visualizations of the *anime* characters would be effective. Installing figures or panels of the characters in appropriate places would allow all pilgrims to connect more easily with the characters. Augmented reality photography that blends the real world with virtual characters is another option.

### **6-3. Limitations of the Study**

There are several limitations to this study. First, the model incorporates only two determinants of visit intentions: expectation of connections with other people and expectation of connections with characters. Both were assessed in relation to alleviating a sense of social exclusion. Other possible determinants of *anime* pilgrimage motivations, such as those related to destination image and film tourism, included in previous research, may have resulted in a more systematic model to explain the motivations for undertaking an *anime* pilgrimage.

Second, the inclusion in our model of the expectation of connections with other people or with characters did not directly demonstrate that alleviating the sense of social exclusion by the opportunity to form connections with other people or with characters are the sole motivations for an *anime* pilgrimage. Rather, we found that the expectation of connections with characters attracts a variety of *anime* pilgrims. Establishing a clear relationship between alleviating social exclusion and the motivation for a visit to *anime seichi* will require further research.

### **6-4. Future Research**

Two issues should be addressed in future research. First, the question of how connecting with other people and characters during an *anime* pilgrimage counteracts a sense of social exclusion should be explored, including how these opportunities to connect face-

to-face differ from those online, either individually or with many people at the same time. This is related to the practical issue of what type of fan meetings should be organized by the local government or Chamber of Commerce at the *anime* pilgrimage site. There are two different types of fan meetings: one in which the director or a voice actor of an animation work is invited to give a talk from a stage and the other is when members of the local Chamber of Commerce and from the industry welcome *anime* pilgrims personally in a private meeting. Which of these is more effective for attracting *anime* pilgrims and reducing a sense of social exclusion remains to be determined. In addition, given the importance for *anime* pilgrims of forming connections with characters, measures to install life-size panels depicting characters throughout the city and whether they are more effective than the above measures should be investigated. Whether character images such as idols on panels or via AR images is worthwhile should also be evaluated. For example, visitors to historical sites who are interested in viewing artifacts, such as castles, do not need statues of historical figures to enjoy their visit.

The second issue is to explore the behavioral changes of *anime* pilgrims after the pilgrimage. What is the effect of forming connections with other people and characters? Previous research suggests that *otaku* (fans, as defined in this study) who have interacted with other people and with residents during their pilgrimage return to the *anime seichi* again and again (Ono, et al., 2020). If these repeated *anime* pilgrimages alleviate fans' sense of social exclusion and increase their ability to communicate with general society, this may allow this group to assimilate with society more generally such that they no longer feel socially excluded. However, for *otaku*, who prefer to form connections with characters rather than with other people, to counteract their sense of social exclusion, the *anime* pilgrimage may further reduce their interpersonal communication skills and increase their sense of social exclusion. Thus, whether an *anime* pilgrimage alleviates or promotes social exclusion is perhaps the most interesting research question of this study.

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