

# BORDER BITES

## “Digesting the world’s borders

### ...One bite at a time”

An exchange between two academics at a conference in Sapporo in 2017:



A: Border Tourism – isn’t that about superficial, nostalgia-laden views of borders?

B: In East Asia academics also have to look for solutions to the region’s border problems. Talk about borders and their social construction only goes so far.

The first academic did not expand on his critical view of border tourism. Maybe he was sceptical of border tourism because of the well-known ‘touristification’ of controversial borders in East

# Border Tourism and modes of remembrance

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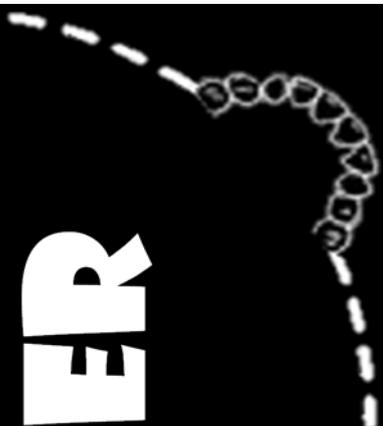
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Asia such as the demilitarized zone between North and South Korea. There, visitors can pick up ‘DMZ’ fridge magnets and caps, and see the jokingly named ‘World’s most dangerous golf course’ as part of their tour. The second academic was right to rebut the criticism – especially because of his view that border tourism should be a way of fostering economic activity in some of Japan’s most marginalized regions. With these contradictory assessments about border tourism in mind, I prepared to go on a ‘border tour’ from Fukuoka to Tsushima Island and then to Busan in Korea from 10-14 November 2017.

Those who go on border tourism do so for a variety of reasons. In a 2008 survey, Japanese tourists visiting the Japan-Korea border region cited ‘shopping’, ‘Korean cuisine’ and ‘sightseeing’ as the most important.<sup>1</sup> If surveyed, those who went on the tour I

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<sup>1</sup> Naoki Arai, ‘Cross-strait Tourism in the Japan-Korea Border Region: Fukuoka, Busan, and Tsushima,’ *Journal of Borderlands Studies* 26 no.3 (2011), 315-25, 319.



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was on might have given similar reasons for travelling. However, marketing the tour as ‘border tourism’ (in Japanese as a ‘kokkyō kankō tsuaa’) is also likely to appeal to perceptions of ‘the border’ as a place of ‘fascination’ (miriyoku). Part of that interest derives from history. Several of the participants on the tour suggested that visiting a border was a way to learn about history from ‘another perspective’. This alternative viewpoint could be that of Japan’s history as seen from the borderlands such as Tsushima. Alternatively, it could be Japan’s history, or the borderlands’ history, as understood by a foreign other, in this case Korea.

Participants on border tourism, therefore, travel with images of ‘the border’ in mind. Japan’s imperial expansion during the last years of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century involved colonising and occupying surrounding lands. Japan’s current borders and border disputes are the result of this imperial history. Some history should be essential for the border tourism mix. The alternative is committing the kind of mistake flagged up by scholarly sceptics of border tourism.

Although we talk of history, more often social memory is what shapes views of the past. In particular, modes of remembrance influence how individuals think about the past. Bull (no relation) and Hansen identify three ‘modes of remembrance’: antagonistic, cosmopolitan and agnostic. Examining Europe, they argue that the antagonistic mode of remembrance became more widespread during the last decade. This mode understands the ‘nature of conflict’ as dividing into ‘Us’ as ‘good’ and ‘Them’ as ‘evil’. It also encourages ‘Perpetrator perspective presented as victim’. According to the authors, the antagonistic mode increasingly overshadows the cosmopolitan one. The latter mode emphasised ‘victims’ perspective on all sides’, encouraged historical context to be ‘transcended, universalised’ for the purpose of fostering ‘Compassion for human suffering’. Bull and Hansen call the third mode – the one they advocate – the ‘agnostic’. This mode emphasises ‘Remembering historical context’ and ‘Learning from the memories/perspectives of victims, perpetrators and third party witnesses’.<sup>2</sup>

The sceptic perhaps feared that border tourism risked supporting a simplistic understanding of borders that in turn promoted an antagonistic mode of remembrance. However, those

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<sup>2</sup> Anna Cento Bull and Hans Lauge Hansen, ‘On agnostic memory,’ *Memory Studies* 9 no.4 (2016), 391-404, 400.

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people on the tour with whom I spoke, who gave learning about history as a reason for participating, did not seem likely to develop an antagonistic perspective. Their interest in learning the other's history means that the cosmopolitan mode is more likely to frame their visit to the border. A cosmopolitan mode of remembrance, however, is also problematic for border tourism, especially in a location like the Japan-Korea borderlands. This is because historical interpretation should go beyond the colonized-colonizer dichotomy to consider how Koreans and Japanese interacted in Imperial Japan.

As the propeller plane left Fukuoka for Tsushima Island, I thought back to the difference of opinion that I had heard at the conference in August. I was looking forward to learning about how border tourism worked, what my fellow tourists were hoping to gain from the experience and what modes of remembrance we would encounter along the way.

### **Border Tourism to Tsushima:**

#### **Tsūshinshi and the cosmopolitan mode of remembrance**

Tsushima Island, located in the Tsushima Strait between the cities of Fukuoka and Busan, has had an important role in relations between Japan and the Korean peninsula for over a thousand years. This rich history includes periods of piracy interspersed with trade, and warfare intermixed with diplomacy. During the time of the Muromachi Shogunate (1338-1573) Tsushima was a notorious base for pirates (wakō) who conducted raids along the Korean coast. In response, Koreans retaliated with punitive attacks on the island. In 1592 and 1597, Toyotomi Hideyoshi, one of Japan's 'three great unifiers', invaded Korea but his armies failed to hold the territory they initially seized. After Hideyoshi's death in 1597, Tokugawa Ieyasu tried to rebuild

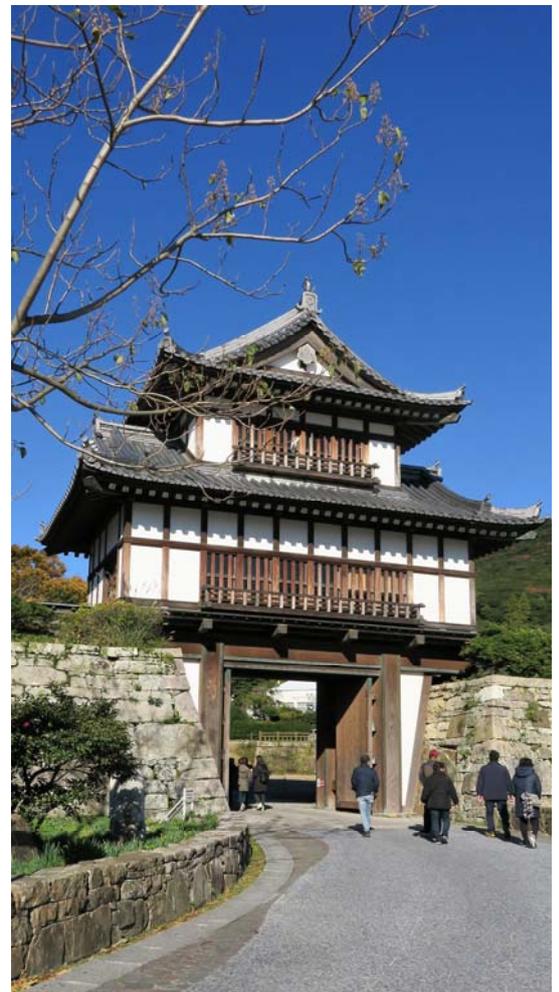


Figure 1: Reconstructed gate of Kaneshi Castle  
[All photos by Sasaya Megumi]

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relations with Korea. This led to the Korean Yi Dynasty sending delegations (known as Chōsen Tsūshinshi in Japanese; as Joseon Tongsinsa in Korean) to the Tokugawa rulers of Japan. Eleven missions journeyed from Korea to Edo (present-day Tokyo) between 1607 and 1763 (The last mission left in 1811). Involving hundreds of people, the missions went via Tsushima. Each mission usually lasted over a year, necessitating a considerable outlay from both Koreans and Japanese.



Figure 2: Seizanji Temple

The flight from Fukuoka to Tsushima Yamaneko Airport took 30 minutes. The Border Tourism tour began in Izuhara with a talk from a local guide at the town's new tourist information centre. From Izuhara the Sō family had ruled over the Tsushima domain for over 600 years. The Sō family were key figures in the history introduced above. They fought back against Korean punitive raids, dispatched troops in Hideyoshi's campaigns and worked to restore diplomatic and trading relations during the Edo Period (1600-1868). The tour included the Sō family's Kaneshi Castle and graveyard. Other sites visited included the Seizanji Temple where Korean envoys would sometimes stay on the tsūshinshi. The story of the tsūshinshi formed the bulk of the display at Izuhara's tourist information centre. Our guide was also particu-



Figure 3: Panel from Izuhara Tourist Information Centre display

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larly enthusiastic in recounting Sō family's travails at the time of Hideyoshi's invasions. The message seemed to be that of the small man caught up in, and trying to make the best of, larger forces beyond his control. Recently, a local drama group has produced a musical called 'A Tsushima Tale', dramatizing the struggles of the Sō family.



Figure 4: Manseki Strait

Noticeable in the tourist centre's display was the relative lack of information about Tsushima's place in Japan's history before and after the Edo Period. On the third and fourth days, the tour included several sights that indicated the importance of the island as Japan began to build an empire towards the end of the nineteenth century. A boat trip around Aso Bay passed through the Manseki Strait – a channel hewn out of rock on the orders of the Imperial Navy in 1901. By building the channel, the Navy could move boats between the upper and lower islands of Tsushima more easily. The following day we saw why the channel was so important to the Navy. In the spring of 1905 Admiral Tōgō Heihachirō sank nearly all of Russia's Baltic Fleet in the Tsushima Straits during the Russo-Japanese War. On the coastline to the north of Tsushima at Tonzaki is the Japan-Russia Friendship Hill. This site has monuments listing the names of all the Japanese and Russian sailors who died in the battle and commemorating the actions of locals from Tsushima who helped Russian sailors coming ashore after Japanese battleships sank their vessels.

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Figure 5: Monument to Russian and Japanese sailors at Tonzaki

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After Tonozaki our tour went to another site with a military connection: the Toyo Battery. In 1934 the military authorities completed this gun emplacement to prevent enemy ships attacking Japan. After the Second World War the US military dismantled the guns but left the concrete bunker which had housed them. The large tunnels dug out of the rock form a U-shape. They lead towards a vertical concrete cylinder rising up from the hilltop. The cylinder once held the two huge guns that could fire with accuracy at ships over 30 kilometres away. At the time of the Second World War these guns were one of several such batteries located around the island. These ruins suggested the strategic importance that Tsushima had once held to Japanese commanders.



Figure 6: Former location of gun at Toyo Battery

The tourist centre display reflects how its designers could incorporate the Edo period into a narrative for tourists relatively easily. Japan's modern history, however, is more difficult to use for tourism purposes. Explanation of the *tsūshinshi* included information about what this period of history meant for Tsushima and how the island had an important role in relation to Japanese and Korean high politics of the day. In contrast, explanations of Tsushima's history in the first half of the twentieth century tended towards the factual with minimal attempt to explain wider historical context. Sights such as the Aso Bay channel and the Toyo Battery can become part of an itinerary but incorporating an explanation of what they represent in a tourist talk is tricky. The social implication of such sights becomes invisible when viewed in Japan. Explanations provided give the tourist little more than a factual account of the depth of the channel and the size of the guns rather than how these locations contributed to the empire.

A cosmopolitan mode of remembrance was central to the Border Tourism experience on Tsushima. The tour's emphasis on Tsushima and its people as good-natured go-betweeners for stronger Japanese –Korean relations presented a historical context that was close to the 'transcended, universalised' defining

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characteristic of the cosmopolitan mode.<sup>3</sup> Other characteristics present included 'evil' as an 'abstract category' in the form of the wider historical forces that buffeted Tsushima. Tsushima's residents were presented as 'victims' but ones whose inability to influence the decision-makers of the time was shared with people in Korea. Such a narrative suggested 'compassion for human suffering'.

### Crossing the border to Busan:

#### encounters with the antagonistic mode of remembrance

On the fourth day we crossed the border by hydrofoil to Busan, South Korea's second largest city. Passing dockside cranes standing over enormous cargo vessels showed the city in its role as the country's busiest port. By crossing the border we not only entered a different culture but also a contrasting mode of remembrance.

Korea became a Japanese protectorate in 1905 and an official colony in 1910. Busan was one of the most important cities in the empire. In the 1930s a traveller could get on an express train in Busan and journey all the way to Paris. By 1940, approximately 50,000 Japanese lived in Busan and the city played a crucial role as a gateway for goods and people going back and forth between Korea and Japan. According to the historian Bruce Cumings, 'Koreans never welcomed colonial rule because Japan was substituting rather than creating...Korea already existed and was taken over by Japan in a move always regarded as illegitimate'.<sup>4</sup> Cumings' point is that the pressure of Japanese colonialism built to its highest in Korea.

Following independence in 1948, South Korea's leaders forged a sense of national identity based on rejecting all the colonizer had done. Compared to other parts of Asia colonised by Japan, leaders in South Korea have inclined towards removing physical reminders of the colonial past. In the mid-1990s, the government decided to demolish the former Imperial Japanese headquarters building in Seoul.<sup>5</sup> This is in contrast to Chinese cities such as Changchun, Harbin and Dalian which have kept many of the buildings built by the Japanese. The mode of remembrance

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<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> Bruce Cumings, *Korea's Place in the Sun: A Modern History* (W.W. Norton & Co.: New York, 1997), 141. *ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> Koga, *Inheritance of Loss*, 72.

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that our group encountered in public spaces in Busan was mostly antagonistic.

The tour went to Busan for less than 24 hours but two destinations on the itinerary brought us into direct contact with Japan's imperial past. Completed at around the time of the Toyo Battery on Tsushima in the mid-1930s, an almost identical gun emplacement once stood at the cliff-face at Oryukdo in Busan. Like its counterpart on Tsushima, this emplacement held massive guns capable of firing over a long-range across the sea. Unlike Tsushima, the remains of the bunker are not open to the public. However, Busan's city authorities have erected an information board explaining the bunker's existence and its role as 'historical evidence to witness the Japanese invasion of Korea'.



Figure 7: Sign explaining history of gun battery at Oryukdo

We reached the second destination when our coach stopped on a busy three-lane boulevard in the centre of Busan outside the Consulate-General of Japan. Sitting on a small chair was a bronze-coloured metal statue of a young woman, fists clenched and staring straight ahead. Alongside her was an empty chair. Behind her was her shadow made up of black mosaic tiles with a single white tile in the shape of a butterfly. The statue represents Korean women forced into sexual slavery by Japan during World War Two. When activists erected it in 2016, the statue in Busan was the second in front of a Japanese diplomatic mission (activists placed the first in front of the Japanese Embassy in Seoul in 2011). Busan's city officials briefly removed the statue but strong criticism from the public forced them to put it back.

Some members of the tour photographed the statue and asked the tour guide questions about its construction and the views of local people. One participant noted that the tour guide repeatedly explained 'you asked to come here' suggesting that a group of tourists from Japan would not normally be interested. The tour guide seemed uneasy about showing the statue to the

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group, assuming that Japanese tourists would be unwilling to see a monument related to an inglorious moment in their nation's recent past.

That a South Korean city such as Busan should display a public history that is largely antagonistic as a mode of remembrance is unsurprising – post-colonial independence often takes this form. More in-

teresting was the reaction of the border tourists. Not everybody on the tour was primarily interested in history but some were. One comment I heard was that the tour was a good opportunity to reflect on how Japan had not always been the 'island nation' but had once had a border incorporating parts of the East Asian continent. Looking at the similarities between sites such as the gun batteries at Oryukdo and on Tsushima could reveal the role Japanese militarism had played in entangling two different countries in a common history. This comment struck me as close to a cosmopolitan mode of remembrance. It seemed to suggest that people in Japan and Korea could overcome history if only there was more recognition in contemporary Japan about the empire.

A cosmopolitan mode of remembrance is likely to be particularly controversial in a post-colonial context. That the border of Imperial Japan included Korea, meaning there was a shared political and cultural space, is historically less important than the fact of the internal border dividing metropole and colony. A cosmopolitan mode of remembrance risks overlooking the role of the internal border by promoting a shared sense of victimhood: 'ordinary' Koreans and Japanese exploited by Japan's imperial elite. An agnostic mode of remembrance that foregrounds 'remembering historical context' and 'learning from the memo-



Figure 8: Statue outside the Consulate-General of Japan building, Busan

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ries/perspectives of victims, perpetrators and third party witnesses' is necessary. In the context of Colonial Korea this would mean acknowledgement of collaboration between not only Korean and Japanese elites but lower down the social scale. In Busan, with its long history of Japanese settlers, such a narrative would be especially rich but also extraordinarily risky. As evident from the experiences of Korean academics such as Rhee Yong Hoon and others, publically confronting collaboration in Korea frequently results in strong criticism.<sup>6</sup>

### Conclusion:

#### Agnostic memory and border tourism

Advocates of agnostic memory have mostly applied their theory to a European context. They have yet to analyse post-colonial situations such as that between Korea and Japan. The experience of border tourism to Busan suggests that fostering an agnostic mode of remembrance for public history is necessary. However, exactly how this deepening of historical context can occur in the dynamic of a colonizer/colonized relationship is unclear.

Border tourism should have a role to play in fostering agnostic memory. A Japanese tour obviously has little influence in Busan but it might be able to make changes in Tsushima. This island – with its long history of interaction with Korea – is an ideal location for providing the deeper historical context necessary for agnostic memory. Historians making careful suggestions to complicate the narrative of Tsushima's history could help to make border tourism to the island a chance to think about the entangled history of Korea and Japan.

Neither of the academics in Sapporo succeeded in having the final word. Theorists of memory will not be fully convincing until they explain how they would apply an agnostic mode of remembrance to post-colonial situations. Advocates of border tourism should acknowledge the richness of approaches in the discipline of history and incorporate one into future tours. If the differing approaches could be successfully combined, border tourism as agnostic mode of remembrance might be a way to not only revitalize economies but also to politically reconcile contrasting social memories, as well.

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<sup>6</sup> Gi-Wook Shin and Daniel Sneider, *Divergent Memories: Opinion Leaders and the Asia-Pacific War* (Stanford University Press: California, 2016), 64-99.