【Article】

Fan Created Tradition: The Votive Prayer Tablets of the *Sailor Moon* Pilgrimage

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Summary

This article examines the votive prayer tablets dedicated at Azabu Hikawa Shrine. The shrine which featured in the manga and anime series *Sailor Moon* drew the attention of fans who began a "pilgrimage." Through an exploration of the tradition carried on by fans of dedicating *Sailor Moon* votive prayer tablets, the author suggests considering the importance of visuality in the process through which *Sailor Moon* characters become cultural icons.

I. Introduction

In the heart of Tokyo stands the Azabu Hikawa Shrine (麻布氷川神社). Legend states that the Heian period noble Minamoto-no-Tsunemoto (源経基) established the shrine in the year 942 as the protectorate deity for the surrounding Azabu district (Ishii 2008, p. 215). Aside from this illustrious origin, the shrine carries another distinguished history as a site of "pilgrimage" associated with a classic of the manga and anime genres, that being *Bishōjo Senshi Sērā Mūn* (美少女戦セーラームーン，hereafter referred to as *Sailor Moon* per the English title). In this article I will attempt to show that

despite *Sailor Moon* reaching the zenith of popularity in the 1990s, manga and anime fans have kept the *Sailor Moon* pilgrimage to the Azabu Hikawa Shrine alive as evidenced through the dedication of *ema* (絵馬，votive prayer tablets). Perhaps there are numerous arguments to account for why the *Sailor Moon* characters have become cultural icons, but by narrowing the focus to a fan generated tradition of dedicating *ema*, I hope to cast light on the mechanism through which fans, who place value on visual aesthetics, transform manga and anime characters into objects of adoration.

II.　Background

Sailor Moon plays a celebrated role in the history of manga and anime in Japan. Takeuchi Naoko (武内直子) penned *Sailor Moon* which Kodanasha Ltd published in the manga magazine *Nakayoshi* from 1992 to 1997. As part of the *shōjo* manga genre, which are manga written by women for girls that feature female protagonists (Prough 2010, pp. 93-95), *Sailor Moon* has been cited as being one of the better known series centering on "magical girl fantasies" in which an "ordinary girl ... becomes a super-powered heroine" (Brenner 2007, p. 177). Summarizing the storyline, Buljan and Cusack explain that "five schoolgirls in Japan are the reincarnated Sailor Soldiers of the Moon Kingdom" (2015, p. 72). An anime adaptation roughly paralleled the span of the printed version running from 1992 through 1997. Despite being conceived of as a story for younger children, especially girls (Darlington & Cooper 2010, p. 166; Grigsby 1998, p. 59; Yoshitani & Satō 2014, p. 92), the viewing audience grew to conspicuously include men (Ishii 2008, p. 214). When aired on TV Asahi in the prime time slot of 7 p.m. on Saturdays *Sailor Moon* garnered the sizeable audience share of 12% (Grigsby 1998, p. 59). The popularity of the *Sailor Moon* series may be further substantiated by the financial success of its creator Takeuchi Naoko, who reportedly became a multimillionaire (Norris 2009 p. 244; Thorn 2001, p. 44). *Sailor Moon's* popularity led to a massive consumption of "everything from socks, T-shirts, and hair clips to lunchboxes, umbrellas, and handbags" (Allison 2000, p. 269). Although *Sailor Moon's* heyday of the 1990s may be over, its popularity survives in a participatory fan culture that continues to embrace the series as attested by, for instance, the perennial fashion of cosplaying[1] as *Sailor Moon* characters (Lamerichs 2018, p. 195; Rahman, Wing-sun & Cheung 2012, p. 326; Winge 2006, pp. 71-72).

In what is described by manga and anime fans as a *seichi junrei* (聖地巡礼，sacred site pilgrim-

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[1] The wearing of "clothing based on characters in anime and manga" is commonly referred to as "cosplay", an abbreviation of "costume play" (Kawamura 2012, p. 29).

age), fans travel to places that are linked to manga and anime such as the real-world locations on which a story's setting is based in an effort to foster a deeper connection to the media. *Sailor Moon* has played a significant role in the emergence of these fan pilgrimages. Taking the stance that anime pilgrimages emerged at the beginning of the 1990s, Okamoto hypothesizes that the term *seichi junrei* came in to use at that time in conjunction with the visitation by *Sailor Moon* fans to Azabu Hikawa Shrine (2009, p. 39).[2] In the case of *Sailor Moon*, various places such as the Azabu shopping district in Tokyo's Minato Ward served as models for scenery in the anime (Okamoto 2014, p. 31).[3] Deciphering visual clues and other information from the production, fans deduced that one key setting pictured in the anime was modeled on Azabu Hikawa Shrine. In the story, one of the main characters, Hino Rei (火野レイ), works as a *miko* (巫女, shrine maiden)[4] at her grandfather's shrine, which is allusively named Hikawa Shrine (火川神社).[5] Ishii relates that from 1993 to 1994 fans gathered in mass at the Azabu Hikawa Shrine[6] on New Year's Day with a number of males attired in the same skirted school uniform worn by *Sailor Moon* characters (2008, p. 215). In apparent recognition of its distinguished role, the Azabu Hikawa Shrine currently advertises that it served as the model for the *Sailor Moon* shrine (where Hino Rei lives) and moreover that the shrine continues to attract fans who visit as part of their *Sailor Moon* pilgrimage.[7] All things considered, the fans' relationship with Azabu Hikawa Shrine has differed from that of ordinary shrinegoers. Ishii explains that for *Sailor Moon* fans the Azabu Hikawa Shrine is not the tutelary deity of the Azabu area as it is to local residents, but rather is *Sailor Moon's* Hikawa Shrine, the residence of Hino Rei (2008, p. 215).[8]

III. Azabu Hikawa Shrine's Votive Prayer Tablets

A. Votive prayer tablet research method

In Japan today, *ema* (votive prayer tablets) are commonly identified as small, rectangular slats of wood (technically referred to as *koema* 小絵馬, literally "small *ema*") with one side for writing

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2 However as pointed out by folklorist Yoshitani, the term "*seichi*" (sacred site) was at that time not yet known to be conversantly associated with the act of traveling to real-world places connected to manga and anime (Yoshitani & Satō 2014, p. 92).
3 Takeuchi Naoko herself was a resident of the Azabu district (Saito 2011, p. 122).
4 The female *miko* perform alongside Shinto priests in various rituals and shrine activities.
5 Although the two shrine names are identical in pronunciation, the fictional shrine's name substitutes the *kanji* 火 for the Azabu Hikawa Shrine's 氷.
6 A shrine custodian recounted this situation to the author on July 2, 2010.
7 Azabu Hikawa Shrine [Online] Accessed March 24, 2021. Available at: https://www.azabuhikawa.or.jp/about/
8 Such perceptions are similarly shared by fans of the anime *Higurashi-no-naku-koro-ni* (*When They Cry*) toward the Shirakawa Hachiman Shrine in Shirakawa Town, Gifu Prefecture (Andrews 2014).

prayers and the reverse side displaying a pre-printed auspicious image. Visitors can dedicate them at shrines and temples by placing them on special racks in order for the prayers to be delivered to the deities. On July 2, 2010, I undertook a survey of the *ema* dedicated by visitors to Azabu Hikawa Shrine.[9] At the time of the survey, a small framework of horizontal bamboo poles functioned as a dedication rack for both *ema* and *omikuji* (お御籤，written fortunes). Shrinegoers could hang their *ema* on the rack by string and attach their *omikuji* by folding the paper around the bamboo rods. The rack was small in comparison to those of other shrines as was the number of dedicated *ema*. Only 31 *ema* were found to be displayed on the rack. Using a digital camera all the *ema* were photographed for documentation. Afterwards, textual and illustrative information was extracted from the *ema* and recorded using Microsoft Excel.

B.　Research posture

I will now present the data extracted from the *ema*. The primary purpose of this article is to identify *ema* related to the *Sailor Moon* pilgrimage, but as Imai suggests, we can expect that studying fan *ema* can further *ema* research in general (2018, p. 165). Therefore, I will detail various information related to *ema* dedication that typically is not presented in research on *ema*. Specifically, I wish to report not just the content of prayers and messages, but also to more fully document how text is written down on the *ema*. This sort of information has been noticeably absent in the presentation of findings made by other researchers (Iwai 1974; Mabuchi 2001, 2003; Meshida 1967; Morishita 1985; Murata 1985; Nishigai 1999; Nishiyama 1985; Nobori 2009; Satō & Tamura 1978; Tamura 1977; Yamanoi 1991, 1992, 1994). We generally know what people pray for, but not how the prayers are penned. And if Matsuzaki is correct that in the future folklorists will no longer be able to peruse the content of *ema* due to growing concern over privacy (2020, pp. 13-14), then we must act with urgency to document how *ema* are written. Thus, it seems necessary to fill in the historical record to whatever degree possible.

C.　Writing Practices

In principle, minimally, *ema* only require a prayer. Historically, however, prayers were mainly conveyed through images. In the modern era, the faithful began to write out their prayers and the content of those prayers paralleled the symbolic meaning invested within the images drawn onto the *ema*. This

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9　Azabu Hikawa Shrine provides *ema* to shrinegoers at a cost of ¥1000.

changed around the 1970s when the written prayers began to diverge from the imagery on the *ema* (Satō & Tamura, 1978, p. 168). From that point onward text-based prayer progressively became the mainstay.

Shrinegoers who dedicate *ema* may add information beyond the prayer. Examples include the *ema's* dedication date (i.e., the date of visit to the shrine) and more personal information such as name, address, age, and date of birth. Dedicators may be inclined to write such information with the belief that it will pinpoint the recipient and thus increase the efficacy of the supplication. In the formal rituals performed by Shinto priests, the name, address, and age of the individual on the receiving end of the blessing are commonly read aloud to the enshrined deities. There were, however, no instances of age or date of birth inscriptions discovered among the *ema* in this survey.

Shrinegoers often inscribe the dedication date on the *ema*. Of the 31 *ema* in this survey, 17 (54.8%) had a written dedication date. All the dated *ema* were seemingly dedicated on or after January 1, 2010. Of the 17 dated *ema*, three were written with the word *gantan* (元旦, the first day of the year, New Year's Day) along with the calendar year. Another had only the word *gantan*, without a date, although it likely referred to January 1, 2010. Only one *ema* had the year alone. The remaining twelve *ema* were all dated with year, month, and day (the customary ordering in Japan), except for one *ema* dedicated by a woman from Singapore who dated it day, month, and year. Excluding the *ema* having only "*gantan*" written, ten were written using the Western calendar year and six with the Japanese era name, which at the time was Heisei. The number of *ema* dedicated each month was as follows: twelve in January, three in March, and one in May. The high number in January likely corresponded with the custom of visiting a shrine at New Years as well as it being the beginning of the school entrance examination season. It should be noted that the lack of *ema* from the even numbered months of February, April, and June was likely incidental and does not concur with the data from other shrines (Andrews 2018, p. 25).

Of the 31 *ema*, 30 (96.8%) had some form of signature. Although a signature is not required, the practice is widely adhered to. From the signatures on the *ema* we can ascertain that a total of 37 people dedicated the 31 *ema*. That is, 28 *ema* were dedicated by individuals, whereas three were jointly dedicated. A composite of both individually and jointly dedicated *ema* shows that of the 37 people, 17 (46%) were men and 13 (35%) were women, with the gender of seven (19%) indeterminable. A close reading of the names revealed that 19 individuals, eleven men and eight women, wrote both their first and last name using *kanji* (漢字, Chinese characters) and/or *hiragana* (平仮名, Japanese syllabary). Additionally, a woman from Singapore signed her first and last name using Roman alphabet, her Eng-

lish written *ema* being the only instance of a language other than Japanese. Two individuals, gender unknown, wrote only their last name, one using *kanji* and the other *hiragana*. In contrast, two women wrote only their first name, one with *kanji* and the other in Roman alphabet. Also, it would seem that three *Sailor Moon* fans dedicating *ema* as individuals used pseudonyms, all written in Roman alphabet. Lastly, among the 28 instances of individually dedicated tablets, there was only one instance of an *ema* left unsigned, but prayer content and handwriting suggested that it too was dedicated by a single individual. On the other hand, there were three instances of jointly dedicated *ema*. A married couple and two families comprised these collective dedications. Using all *kanji*, the couple signed in the order of surname, husband's name, and wife's name. A family of three praying for "everyone in the family" (家族みんな *kazoku minna*) wrote their surname along with their first names using both *kanji* and *hiragana*. The other family dedicating an *ema* had a prayer for "all four members of the family" (家族四人 *kazoku yonin*), but was signed with only the surname along with the suffix *ikka* (一家), which translates as "household" or "family," and thus the gender breakdown could not be determined. The names as well as the prayers of each of these collective dedications were written with the same handwriting, indicating that only one family member actually penned the messages and signatures. When a collective dedication is written in the hand of a single individual, it may prove difficult to determine if all members were present when the *ema* was inscribed and dedicated. In the cases noted above, it is unknown whether all the dedicators were present or not when the *ema* was written. That said, one convenient facet of *ema* offerings is that prayers can be made in absentia.

At times shrinegoers will write down where they come from. It may be as detailed as a street address, but more often than not it is usually the name of a town or prefecture, or in the case of visitors from abroad, a country name (Andrews 2018, p. 24). In this study, only three *ema* (9.7%) related such information. At the Azabu Hikawa Shrine, one male student, who prayed for successful entry into junior high school, wrote that he was from the city of Yokohama (he also dated and signed with his full name). Another instance was a local resident of the Azabu district who prayed for long life and world peace (they signed with only a surname and no date). The third instance was the aforementioned woman from Singapore.

As might be expected, punctuation and symbols were employed when writing on the *ema*. For example, six *ema* (19.4%) had exclamation points to conclude a message or prayer. Exclamation points were used in conjunction with a prayer for good health (two *ema*), a prayer for success on an examination (one *ema*), and a prayer for better grades (one *ema*). Additionally, exclamation points were used to offer someone encouragement (one *ema*) as well as to voice the words of an anime char-

acter (one *ema*). Aside from the use of exclamation points, single sentence text was seen both with and without full stops suggesting that people were free to punctuate as they pleased. One *ema's* text ended with an ellipsis to fill in for the unwritten words "I pray that" in a prayer for world peace. In the end, out of the 31 *ema*, 14 (45.2%) were written without any punctuation. As concerns symbols, two *ema* (6.5%) had stars drawn on them. Both were dedicated by *Sailor Moon* fans. One of these used a single star to end a line of text and the other drew seven stars in a decorative manner across the *ema*. No question marks, heart marks, or other punctuation or symbols, to include kaomoji, were used on the *ema*.

Additional points to consider when examining how *ema* are penned may include writing direction and coloring. Firstly, the direction of writing on the *ema* included examples of *yokogaki* (vertical) and *tategaki* (horizontal) as well as a combination of both. By the numbers, there were 19 *yokogaki ema* (61.3%), seven *tategaki ema* (22.5%) and five combination *ema* (16.1%). Although these tallies may appear inconsequential, the prevalence of *yokogaki* over *tategaki* and furthermore the mixing of vertical and horizontal writing may be understood to be a contemporary aesthetic. And that four of the five combination *ema* were written by fans or suspected fans of *Sailor Moon* (as addressed hereafter) hints that certain folk groups,[10] in this case manga and anime fans, may be influencing this aesthetic change. Comparing with a shrine unrelated to a fan pilgrimage, out of a sample of 547 *ema*, only 1.5% were written with a combination of *yokogaki* and *tategaki* (Andrews 2019, p. 22). Secondly, as concerns coloring, the lettering on all the *ema* was written in black ink using either a marker pen or ballpoint pen, with two notable exceptions in which the dedicator's signature was stamped onto the *ema* with red ink. Interestingly, these two exceptions were also dedicated by *Sailor Moon* fans.

D. Prayer Content

As might be expected, all the *ema* contained prayers. A total of 39 prayers were found on the 31 *ema* (See Table 1). Clearly there were *ema* with multiple prayers. In fact, seven *ema* (22.6%) had more than one prayer, whereas 24 *ema* (77.4%) had only a single prayer making one-prayer tablets more prevalent. Further examination shows that 17 prayers were made by men, eleven by women, five jointly by men and women, with the remaining six unknown.

Shrinegoers visiting Azabu Hikawa Shrine wrote out various petitions on their *ema*. They prayed

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[10] Providing a definition for "folk groups," Sims and Stephens state, "Folk groups express and share folklore that conveys to themselves and to others their understanding of the group's values, interests, and sense of identity" (2005, p. 38).

Table 1.　The prayer content of votive prayer tablets dedicated at Azabu Hikawa Shrine

Prayer content	Prayer count	Gender of dedicator				Altruistic
		Male	Female	Joint male & female	Unknown	
Pregnancy	1		1			
Social relations	2		1	1		
Household protection	1				1	
Health	8	3	1	2	2	1
Recovery from illness & injury	2	1	1			2
Academic achievement	1	1				
Graduation & examination	10	6	4			
Extra-curricular activies	1				1	
Athletics	1	1				
Finding employment	1		1			
Work related	1			1		
Business prosperity	1	1				
Good fortune	2	1	1			
Happiness	1			1		
Thanksgiving	1		1			
World peace	2				2	
Blessing for manga artist	1	1				1
Fan activities	2	2				
Count total	39	17	11	5	6	4

for pregnancy (子授け祈願 *kosazuke kigan*), good social relations (人間関係 *ningen kankei*, 仲良し *naka-yoshi*), protection of the household (家内安全 *ka'nai anzen*), good health (健康 *kenkō*), recovery from illness & injury (病気平癒 *byōki heiyu*), academic success (学業成就 *gakugyō jōju*), graduation & examination success (合格祈願 *gōkaku kigan*), success in extra-curricular activities (部活 *bukatsu*), athletic competition success (競技 *kyōgi*), success in finding employment (就職 *shūshoku*), success at work (仕事成就 *shigoto jōju*), prosperity in business (商売繁昌 *shōbai hanjō*), good fortune (開運 *kaiun*), and happiness (幸福 *kōfuku*). There were also expressions of gratitude (thanksgiving) for blessings received (お礼 *orei*, 感謝 *kansha*), which are typically categorized along with prayers by *ema* researchers. All of these aforementioned prayers can be observed at shrines and temples throughout Japan and may generally be considered common and conventional.

On the other hand, there were some prayers that were less conventional and call for special attention as they may be indicative of a particular type of shrinegoer, who may possess a disparate reason for visiting Azabu Hikawa Shrine. For example, one *Sailor Moon* fan made a prayer on behalf of *Sailor Moon* creator Takeuchi Naoko and another anime fan wished for success at the Comic Market.[11]

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[11]　The Comic Market refers to an annual event for manga and anime fans held in Tokyo.

In the context of an anime pilgrimage site, such prayer content reveals that the dedicator is likely a pilgrimaging fan. Some prayers may be less easily discernible to those unacquainted with manga and anime pilgrimages. For example, there were two *ema* in this survey with messages calling for world peace (世界平和 *sekai heiwa*). Although a prayer for world peace may not seem unusual per se, it has been identified by Yoshitani as characteristic to pilgrimaging fans (2014, pp. 123-126).

As mentioned, seven *ema* were found to have multiple prayers. Specifically, six *ema* had two prayers and one *ema* had three. The two prayer combinations were as follows: good health & good social relations (two *ema*), good health & academic success (one *ema*), good health & good fortune (one *ema*), good health & world peace (one *ema*), and success in extra-curricular activities & world peace (one *ema*). A single *ema* contained three prayers requesting good health (健康 *kenkō*), happiness (幸福 *kōfuku*), and success at work (仕事成就 *shigoto jōju*). As is evident, prayers for good health dominate prayer combinations, conceivably because good health is seen as requisite for other endeavors.

Two further results from the survey are notable. Firstly, although prayers were made mostly for the benefit of the person or persons dedicating the *ema*, prayers were also made for others. In this survey altruistic prayers were found on four *ema*, two of which were health related (See Table 1). Secondly, no example could be found of any prayer specifically addressing or naming the Azabu Hikawa Shrine's enshrined deities, Susano'o-no-mikoto and Yamato-takeru-no-mikoto.

E.   The *Sailor Moon* Votive Prayer Tablets

Now I will shift the focus to the *ema* (votive prayer tablets) linked to the *Sailor Moon* pilgrimage. Generally speaking, *ema* dedicated by fans can be identified through textual or illustrative cues. Textual cues are references in the written text of prayers, messages, signatures and so forth that draw a connection to the manga or anime production, its creators, its characters, the fan community, or some combination of these. This could be as straightforward as the naming of the media's title or less penetrable such as fans' argot. Illustrative cues are drawings and artwork that visually signal a link to the media. Illustrations of the characters are the primary visual cues but other things may be drawn (i.e., objects), even kaomoji (Andrews 2020), which can function in this capacity.

Among the 31 *ema* displayed at Azabu Hikawa Shrine there were seven *ema* which may be identified as being connected to manga and anime fans. Looking at all 31 *ema* only five were found to possess illustrations. Examining these five *ema* reveals that they were clearly connected to *Sailor Moon* by means of visual as well as textual cues. The remaining two *ema* lacked visual references, but pro-

vided textual cues in the form of prayer. Next, I will examine these fan *ema*, beginning with those that are illustrated. As all five illustrated *ema* were dated, they will be introduced in chronological order.

As for pilgrimaging fans, there are those who make the pilgrimage more than once, classified in Tourism Studies as "repeaters." In a similar vein, fans with a passion for illustrating *ema* may repeatedly dedicate *ema*. Some even serialize their work by inscribing on the *ema* the number of visits they have undertaken or the number of *ema* they have dedicated. Such fan artists have had a particularly strong presence at Washinomiya Shrine in the city of Kuki, Saitama Prefecture, which has been the pilgrimage destination for many fans of the televised anime series *Lucky Star*.[12] When I spoke with a fan at the Washinomiya Shrine on September 12, 2008, it was explained that those renowned for their illustrative skill are referred to as "*karisuma*" (charisma) votive artists within the fan community. A pair of such *karisuma* go by their *dōjin* (同人，fan artist group) name "Sugar-and-Salt." Despite being avid fans of *Lucky Star*, they made their way to Azabu Hikawa Shrine to post two illustrated *ema* on January 31, 2010 (See Photo 1 & 2). Yoshitani, who observed these *ema* on a visit to the Azabu Hikawa Shrine in 2012, noted that the illustrations by Sugar-and-Salt were in fact *Lucky Star* characters costumed as *Sailor Moon* characters (Yoshitani & Satō 2014, p. 129).[13] In other words, these illustrations of cosplaying characters were mashups. Aside from the illustrations, messages were written on both sides of the *ema*. Sugar and Salt both signed their individual pseudonym in black, but additionally stamped their team *dōjin* name of Sugar-and-Salt in red ink. While Sugar-and-Salt's signatures and their serialized numbering were written as *yokogaki*, the messages were presented in both *yokogaki* (fan non-illustrated side) and *tategaki* (fan illustrated side) style. Both *ema* featured quoted lines from *Sailor Moon* characters. The *ema* illustrated by Salt (See Photo 1) with *Lucky Star* character Hiyori Tamura costumed as Sailor Mars (alter ego of Hino Rei) read *"Kasei ni kawatte sekkansu yo!!"* (火星にかわってせっかんすよ!!). And the one by Sugar (See Photo 2) with *Lucky Star* character Kagami Hiiragi dressed as Sailor Moon (alter ego of Tsukino Usagi) read *"Ooshioki yo!!"* (おっお仕置きよ!!). These scripted lines from *Sailor Moon* are typically delivered to the bad guys prior to an ensuing fight scene and can loosely be translated as "I'm going give you a beating!"[14] Both *ema* also carried prayers written on the reverse side from that on which the character illustration appeared. Salt's prayer was *"Natsu-komi gōkaku kigan!!"* (夏コミ合格祈願!!) that translates as "Prayer for

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[12] In his 2014 survey at Washinomiya Shrine, Imai discovered that one *Lucky Star* fan had dedicated close to 200 *ema* (2018, p. 174).

[13] The illustrations were also discussed in Sugar-and-Salt's February 14, 2010 blog entry concerning their visit to the Azabu Hikawa Shrine. Accessed March 14, 2021. Available at: https://ameblo.jp/0721893/entry-10457725425.html

[14] All translations are the author's.

Photo 1.   *Lucky Star's* Hiyori Tamura costumed as Sailor Mars

Photo 2.   *Lucky Star's* Kagami Hiiragi costumed as Sailor Moon

success at the Comic Market." On the other hand, Sugar's prayer of *"Inori zenkoku hōnō 108 mai"* (祈願全国奉納 108 枚) sought the successful dedication of 108 *ema* at shrines across Japan, the team's expressed goal to each illustrate 108 *ema*.[15] At the point that these two *ema* were dedicated, Sugar had

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[15]   In a November 24, 2009 blog entry, Sugar announced a plan to illustrate 108 *ema*. Accessed March 14, 2021. Available at: https://ameblo.jp/0721893/entry-10395467769.html

reached the 62nd and Salt the 69th out of their 108 *ema* goal. It is worth noting that the two *ema* used by Sugar-and-Salt were procured at the Washinomiya Shrine, which is evident from that shrine's printed name on the back side. This suggests that instead of purchasing and writing their *ema* at the Azabu Hikawa shrine when they visited, the more common practice among fans, that the duo illustrated their *ema* prior to arriving. It also bears witness that fans may travel to multiple anime pilgrimage sites beyond the one(s) that they are especially endeared to. Not only do fans operate within a folk group devoted to a particular manga or anime, they may also be seen to identify with the greater manga and anime fan community as well.

On an *ema* dedicated on March 15, 2010 (See Photo 3), a fan illustrated two characters standing together that resemble Sailor Mars (left) and Sailor Moon (right). The horizontally penned prayer of "*Kotoshi mo kenkō de sugosemasu yō ni!!*" (今年も健康ですごせますように!!) wished for a year of good health. Additionally, the fan interspersed seven stars in and around the text and illustrations in a decorative manner. Another *ema* was also dedicated on March 15 (See Photo 4), which may be a sign that the two fans visited Azabu Hikawa Shrine together. This fan however drew three cat-like faces presumably portraying the cat characters Luna (companion to Sailor Moon), Artemis (companion to Sailor Venus), and Diana (daughter of Luna and Artemis), which suggests that two child-like faces of *Sailor Moon* characters on the *ema* likely represented Sailor Venus (left) and Sailor Moon (right). Two vertically written lines of text demonstrably confirm that the *ema* was presented by a pilgrimaging fan. The first line addressed to the creator of *Sailor Moon*, Takeuchi Naoko, reads "*Takeuchi Sensei gan-*
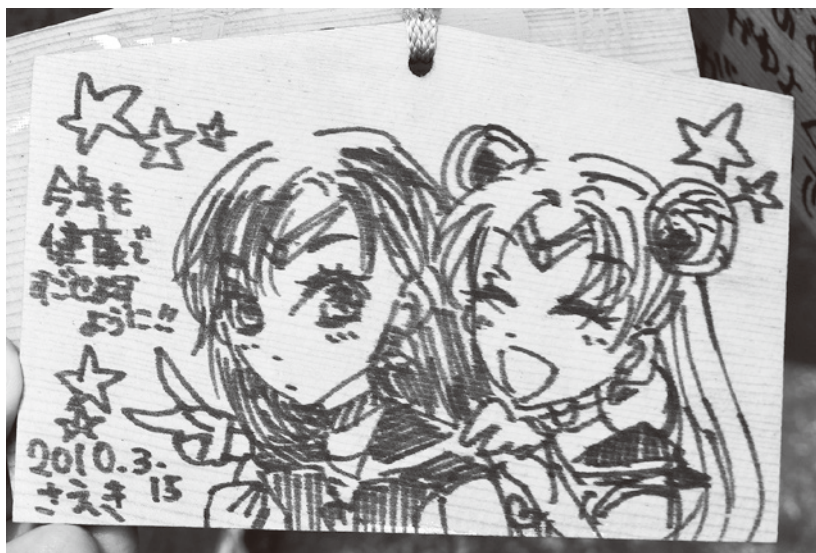

Photo 3.　Sailor Mars and Sailor Moon

Photo 4.   Sailor Venus and Sailor Moon accompanied by Luna, Artemis, and Diana

batte!" (たけうち先生がんばって！). This can be simply translated as "Good luck!" However, it also can be taken as a prayer offering encouragement toward Takeuchi's continued work. The second line of "*Hatsu seichi junrei*" (初聖地巡礼) declared that this was the fan's first visit to Azabu Hikawa Shrine as part of their *Sailor Moon* pilgrimage.

The final illustrated *ema* was placed at the shrine on May 15, 2010 (See Photo 5).[16] The fan, who signed the *ema* using an apparent English name moniker, presented a portrait of Sailor Mars next to two prayers written out horizontally. In the order they were written, the first supplication reads as "*Shikijima no mirai ga akaruku narimasu yō ni*" (敷島の未来が明るくなりますように), which requested a bright future for "Shikijima," although what "Shikijima" referenced was unclear. In the second prayer of "*Kaisha ga motto seichō shimasu yō ni*" (会社がもっと成長しますように) the fan prayed for their company's continued growth.

Two additional *ema* were also seemingly dedicated by pilgrimaging fans. Neither *ema* possessed any illustrative cues, but both contained two prayers. One had a supplication that prayed for some-one's health and the other had a prayer that asked for a successful school festival. However, it was the second prayer on each *ema* that they shared in common. Both had a prayer for world peace, which as previously mentioned, has been recognized as being characteristic to pilgrimaging fans. Despite the lack of illustrations or text directly referencing manga or anime, they were linked to the five illustrated

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[16]   A photograph of this *ema* appeared in Jolyon Thomas's *Drawing on Tradition* (2012, p. 77)

Photo 5.　Portrait of Sailor Mars

ema in one regard. The seven individuals identified as *Sailor Moon* fans, all chose to sign their *ema* with some degree of anonymity, by not signing their name (one *ema*), using pseudonyms (three *ema*), writing only a last name (two *ema*), or writing only a first name (one *ema*). Not one of the seven chose to write their full name despite this being the most common practice of people dedicating *ema* at Hikawa Azabu Shrine.

IV.　Creating Fan Tradition

Fan pilgrimages are often inconspicuous (Okamoto 2015, p. 30). This is because pilgrimaging fans at the pilgrimage site may be indistinguishable from the people around them. However, one distinctive way by which fans tip us off to their pilgrimage activity is by leaving *ema* at shrines and temples (Andrews 2015, p. 122). As previously mentioned, *Sailor Moon* fans began making their way to Azabu Hikawa Shrine in the early 1990s. As shown above, the present survey finds that manga and anime fans have continued that pilgrimage. Ishii reports that during the mass pilgrimage to Azabu Hikawa Shrine in the 1990s, fans dedicated *ema* on which they wrote down prayers asking to be able to meet the *Sailor Moon* characters (Ishii 2008, p. 215).[17] Whether the practice of dedicating *Sailor Moon ema* at Azabu Hikawa Shrine has continued unbroken through the years, occurred intermittently

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[17]　Because Azabu Hikawa Shrine did not provide *ema* to fans at that time, fans furnished the *ema* themselves (Ishii 2008, p. 215).

over time, or just resurfaced at the time of this survey is uncertain. What is certain is that the fan dedicated *ema* seen in this study are artifacts of a contemporary generation of fans, who carry on a tradition, which by all accounts, started in the early 1990s.

A tradition is the anchor by which folk groups, which in the present study are represented by manga and anime fans, preserve solidarity (Sims & Stephens 2005, p. 65). In his writing about fans of manga and anime, Azuma has outlined three generations of fans born around 1960, 1970, and 1980 (Azuma 2001, pp. 6–7). Okamoto indicates that the third generation of those born around 1980 were the ones who ushered in anime tourism (i.e., anime pilgrimage) (2015, p. 19). Of course, it seems plausible to suggest that a fourth generation of those born around 1990 would be participating in the *Sailor Moon* pilgrimage documented in this article.[18] Nevertheless, it is striking that fans have kept the tradition of dedicating *Sailor Moon ema* alive despite the fact that *Sailor Moon's* peak of popularity predates, for example, YouTube, smartphones, and mass-produced DVDs. Therefore, we might ask what the driving force behind this seemingly resilient tradition is.

It has been recognized that new traditions frequently arise as a group marks events and heroes as culturally significant (Ben-Amos 1984, p. 114; also quoted in Sims & Stephens 2005, p. 66). For those making the pilgrimage to Azabu Hikawa Shrine, important occasions in the history of *Sailor Moon* might include the publication of the manga, broadcast of the anime, and the subsequent birth of the pilgrimage itself. On the other hand, how are manga and anime characters conceived of as heroic figures? El-Shamy defines a hero or heroine as "a character depicted as the center of action in real or fictitious accounts of life and living" (2011, p. 650). The main protagonists in *Sailor Moon*, the Sailor Soldiers, fit this definition, as would manga and anime characters in general. But more intriguingly, El-Shamy further states that "the attributes of the hero/heroine depend on the narrator's intent (i.e., the genre through which a given cultural expression is made), as well as the psychological composition (national character, modal personality) of the social group" (2011, p. 650). Applying this to the case at hand, we should note that the medium of expression, manga and "their animated counterparts in anime" (Brenner 2007, p. xiv), is intrinsically visual (Cohn 2010, p. 187). Accordingly, it is not an overstatement to say that manga and anime fans likewise place value on visual aesthetics. Citing the specific case of *Sailor Moon*, according to Allison, the basis for the popularity of the Sailor Soldiers has less to do with them being superheroines and more to do with their outward attractiveness (2000, p. 269). Thus, I suggest that the aesthetic qualities, particularly in terms of a captivating visuality,

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[18]   And perhaps premised on the globalization of manga and anime fandom we might categorize a fifth generation of fans born around 2000 that includes fans living outside of Japan.

embodied by manga and anime characters are imaginably a prime factor in what elevates them to the status of cultural heroes or heroines becoming objects of adoration to the contemporary generation of manga and anime fans.[19] This in turn leads to fans creating traditions such as the continued dedication of *ema* at Azabu Hikawa Shrine.

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[19] Interestingly, McCloud unveils the concept of iconic representation where "the iconic hero thus takes on more persuasive power than the photorealistic hero, because it allows for a higher level of reader identification with the protagonist" (as cited in Thomas, 2012, pg. 46).

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