

## Searching for the Titans' Home: Imagination of Place and Transnational Comic Fan Tourism

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In the last three decades, media-induced tourism has become a new trend in tourist traveling worldwide (e.g., Beeton 2005, Yamamura 2015). Model locations of popular media content (e.g., *Braveheart* / Scotland, *Lord of the Rings* / New Zealand, *Winter Sonata* / Korea) experience a sudden influx of visiting fans, whose “tourist gaze” (Urry & Larsen 2011) projects the narratives of media content on the landscape, transforming them into “places of the imagination” (Reijnders 2014). In addition to this trend, social media like Instagram or Facebook not only makes it much easier for fans to discover the model locations of their favorite media content, but also created new border-crossing fan communities sharing their travel stories.

This work-in-progress research investigates the case of fan tourists traveling to Nördlingen Town in Germany—the model location of the dark fantasy comic (manga) series “Attack on Titan” (*Shingeki no kyojin*, 2009—) by Isayama Hajime. The series gained huge popularity thanks to its media mix strategy (animation series, videogames, live-action movie, etc.). The story is set in a fictional Germany-like world signified by e.g. German character names or fascist Germany-like symbols. Although there is no official hint for Nördlingen Town as a model location, its reputation as the series’ “real” place spread through the Internet in the early 2010s, e.g. by videos of German cosplayers reenacting scenes of the comic there. Since then, the rural town in Bavaria experienced a considerable increase of tourists, in particular Japanese. I will employ an interdisciplinary approach to investigate this phenomenon: first, I will analyze the comic series’ narrative elements referring to Germany and their potential to evoke fans’ imagination of Germany; second, I will look at how fan pilgrimage to Nördlingen Town has emerged and thus how the town has become commonly recognized as the series’ model location.

### Biography:

Timo Thelen has studied Japanese Studies in Düsseldorf, Tokyo, Kanazawa, and Okinawa. After working for five years as research assistant (WHK/WiMi) at the Department of Modern Japanese Studies, Düsseldorf University, and completing his Ph.D. there, he currently works as Lecturer for German language education at the School of International Studies, Kanazawa University, Japan. His research focuses on media tourism, popular culture, and rural revitalization. In co-authorship with Elisabeth Scherer, he has published several articles on film tourism induced by Japanese morning drama series, e.g. “On countryside roads to national identity: Japanese morning drama series (asadora) and contents tourism” (*Japan Forum Online Exclusive*, 2017).