

## The sacred nature of ice skating, stamp rallies and the question of 'religion' (and the 'secular') in contemporary Japan

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At Karatsu in Saga prefecture one can do a '*seichi junrei*' (聖地 or 'sacred place pilgrimage' to places associated with the ice skating anime drama series *ユリ!!! Yuri on Ice* in the fictional town of Hasetu, which is modeled on Karatsu. The Karatsu *seichi junrei* sites are, apart from a local shrine, what might be termed 'secular spaces': a bathhouse, an udon restaurant, an animal hospital, a bridge, the train station and so on. While such *seichi junrei* (also referred to as *anime* and *manga junrei* by fans) may be seen by some as evidence of a revival or reshaping of religious practices, they often focus very little on sites or concepts associated with religion (such as shrines, temples and spirits) and may even present a challenge to traditional religious establishments; recent studies of *seichi junrei* show that they at times displace older pilgrimage activities and practices. At the same time, there has been an increased turn to tourist themes and the prominence of secular agencies in the promotion of famed pilgrimage sites. The Saikoku pilgrimage, for example, is now being depicted by Japan Rail (which has entered into partnership with the Saikoku temples) as a 'stamp rally' *スタンプラリー* ( a term that has secular implications) that seems to include rail stations as well as Buddhist temples.

In outlining why seemingly 'religious' terms can be appropriated by anime fans and tourist offices, and why seemingly 'secular' ideas are adopted by religious establishments I will ask what implications this has for concepts of 'religion' and the 'secular' in contemporary Japan.