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ARTISTS, AESTHETICS, AND ARTWORKS  
FROM, AND IN CONVERSATION WITH, JAPAN  
PART 1 (OF 2)

MUTUAL IMAGES  
ISSUE 8 – SPRING 2020

# MUTUAL IMAGES

## A TRANSCULTURAL RESEARCH JOURNAL

FOUNDED BY

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EDITED BY  
MARCO PELLITTERI & JOSÉ ANDRÉS SANTIAGO IGLESIAS

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# MUTUAL IMAGES

## A TRANSCULTURAL RESEARCH JOURNAL

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# Representations of Europe in Japanese anime: An overview of case studies and theoretical frameworks

Oscar GARCÍA ARANDA | Pompeu Fabra University, Spain

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## ABSTRACT

*Europe, as a cluster of cultural elements related to nations, cities, and historical periods, has experienced different representations and recreations in Japanese animated series and films (anime) in the form of European (or European-like) settings. The following article discusses the creation, aesthetic appeal, and uses of these contents. First, tracing a theoretical retrospective that displays the different concepts and conceptions used to understand these contents, to then focus our study in reviewing the European settings of some of the main anime productions that contain this kind of contents: the 1970s shōjo manga and anime series (comics and tv anime series addressed to girls), the Nippon Animation-originated so-called “Meisaku” group of series, and more “singular” cases, such as Miyazaki Hayao’s films. The review carried out shows the use of different sources and intense fieldwork by Japanese creators to recreate particular visions of European (or European-like) settings and the narrative and communicative strategies or even commercial implications of these settings according to the genre, demographics, and media specificity of each project.*

## KEYWORDS

Anime; Iconography in audio-visual media; Genres; Settings; Manga; Themes in motion pictures; Europe; Miyazaki Hayao; Shōjo; Media pilgrimage.

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This article mainly consists of a literature review of the different academic sources that have discussed and theorised the iconographic representations, settings, and visions of “Europe” in Japanese animated cartoons (anime). Framing “Europe” as a cluster of cultural elements related to nations, cities, and historical periods, this article compiles and discusses a dense field of theories, concepts, and multidisciplinary approaches related to the representation of those contents in anime; theories that, actually, are still in progress and development. Following this aim, a chronological overview of the question has been developed arguing different theoretical frameworks, such as the condition of anime as a transcultural medium, Iwabuchi Kōichi’s (2002) declination of the concept of “mukokuseki”, the “anime pilgrimage” phenomenon, and

different theories regarding the representations of Europe-related contents in relation with the internationalisation of anime's circulation.

Through these approaches, the cultural baggage commonly identified as “European” has been studied as an eclectic source to create fictional imaginaries (settings based on reality-based or fantastic European Middle Ages or in imaginary steampunk Industrial Revolutions, among others), while being a useful resource to develop other narrative meanings and themes in the case of 1970s *shōjo manga* and anime series (comics and tv anime series addressed to girls) and the Nippon Animation-originated so-called “Meisaku” group of series. On the other hand, some other particular cases, such as Miyazaki Hayao's films, show relatively accurate depictions of European settings through intense fieldwork by Studio Ghibli's artists and producers: a case that exemplifies the viability of the “anime pilgrimage” framework for the development of future research meant to deepen in other particular cases and related issues.

To assess and discuss any type of contents and iconographic elements that can be found in anime productions, we have to start from the basis that we are dealing with an artistic and cultural production from Japan, a condition that can enable certain cultural specificities in terms of contents and visual elements among other factors (Napier, 2005: 23-4). Moreover, it is widely known that the Japanese cultural industry locates the Japanese audiences as their main market; as several scholars have noticed, there exists a certain scepticism inside the industry regarding the international success that their productions could have (Kelts, 2006: 73-80, 95; Pellitteri, 2010: 3-8, 389-94; Santiago, 2010: 401). In this sense, there has been a consensus among some researchers in understanding an intrinsic “Japaneseness” of anime, a specific appeal in terms of form and contents, similar in conception to reflections of cultural specificity in the cultural productions of other regions and countries of the world (like, for instance, a “Europeanness” in European comics or an “Americanness” in US cartoons, among other possible examples and media), as one of the main reasons why anime and manga have reached a growing international success in overseas markets during the last decades (Schodt, 2012 [1983]; Napier, 2005: 9-10; Pellitteri, 2010: 417-22).

However, what can surprise us is that we can also find a wide range of series and works, from different media, genres, and demographics, centred on non-Japanese contents and settings, most of which being based on depictions of European (or American) cultures, their historical periods, and their current or former countries. In

this sense, the “European cultural baggage” has enjoyed a remarkable fortune among the Japanese media imaginary, to such an extent that virtually every year we can find one or more newly produced series that use, for example, a fantasy Middle Age setting or that can locate a period drama in a “historicised” European country. Europe, in anime, has been understood by authors as Cobus Van Staden as a “genre”, as a formal and textual tone that defines a variety of anime series (2011: 179-81). But Van Staden himself is aware of the limitations that the label “genre” bears in order to encompass the complex diversity of representations of Europe and its cultures.

For this reason, we would like to suggest that rather than a genre, Europe in anime would be an iconographic content that “plays” among different genres and demographics as well as throughout different media, either anime, manga or even video games. This iconographic (and narrative) content is formally framed as a *setting*, that it is expressed through the depiction of “real” (at various degrees of precision) European cities or countries, historical periods, and national cultural identities. The mechanisms used to represent these settings are the depiction of some specific European location or culture (expressed in city landscapes, monuments, buildings, and other environmental elements) and the specific nationalisation of the characters, supported not only by their design (ranging from some anatomical traits as their hair, skin and eye colour to the aesthetics and cultural or historical identity of their attires)<sup>1</sup> but also by other textual elements, as their narrative profile (origins or nationality of the character) or even its name, that are more related to the series plot and themes.

To better exemplify this notion, in *isekai*<sup>2</sup> series as *Sword Art Online* (2013) or *Danmachi* (2015) the story is set in video game with a fantasy Middle Age setting, but the characters are Japanese (according to the plot) and the settings show a “generic” Middle Age<sup>3</sup> without any explicit allusion to real European countries or monuments.

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<sup>1</sup> As we will further develop in the following sections, there are some formal attributes (like the shape of the eyes, the noses, or the hair colour) or aesthetic tropes (reflected both in the characters and settings, like the Rococonian aesthetics in *Berusayu no Bara* [1972-3]), recurrent conventions from manga and anime’s visual culture, their genres and demographics, that when used in a series set in Europe or a European historical period can subtly reflect and express the ethnic, “national”, and cultural identity of the characters portrayed (see Pellitteri, 2010: 100-5). More on this later on.

<sup>2</sup> *Isekai* (literally ‘different world’) is an anime and manga genre whose plots usually consist in a main character that enters (or is forcibly transported) to a fantasy world, whose setting can combine fantasy Middle Age elements with a science fiction or steampunk appeal. The *isekai* series plots can range from romantic comedy to *mecha* genres or combine a variety of subgenres and registers.

<sup>3</sup> A “generic Middle Age world” is an imaginary setting recreated through the iconic mixture of different Anglo-Saxon and Germanic stereotypes and conventions regarding the period, a vision that is predominant in some of the aforementioned *isekai* series and that is also present in other cultural

On the other hand, in the space opera *Ginga eiyū densetsu* ('The legend of the galactic heroes', 1988-97), Europe does not appear as such, but most of the characters are depicted as Germanic not only through their formal traits and/or clothes, but also by textual elements, such as their names (Reinhard, Kircheis, Reental, etc...) in relation to the series' plot, offering explicit allusions to a specific real European cultural baggage, in this case the Germanic one.

The theoretical construct that we are tracing here is not absolute, and in fact a number of exceptions and specific cases can be found in series such as *Fullmetal Alchemist* (2001), *Berserk* (1989), *Claymore* (2001), *Shingeki no kyōjin* (2009) and even the heroic fantasy comedy *Slayers* (1995), as well as the aforementioned *isekai* series, among others. All these examples would not fit in our study due to their more "fictitious" settings (and in consequence, a more tangential adoption of the European cultural baggage), framed by other factors than the ones that we are going to deal with.<sup>4</sup> However, its establishment will help us to better define and discuss the idiosyncrasy of the European setting in its more explicit, realistic, and iconic representations, some of which are attached to specific genres or trends, such as the 1970s *shōjo* series or the "Meisaku"<sup>5</sup> series that will be analysed and further developed throughout the article.

Selecting this focus, this article attempts to lay out an answer to why we find a variety of manga and anime series based on situations and settings that go beyond any Japan-located setting, focussing on the case of the European setting; and which meanings, connotations, and consequences lie behind these iconographic and

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industries, like Hollywood movies. As we will see in the following sections, there are also different Japanese anime and manga series and films—e.g. in *Moero Arthur: Hakuba no ōji* (1980), and more contemporary cases in the manga and anime series *Vinland Saga*, among others—that offer a more historically (or sometimes literarily) accurate depiction of some European Middle Age settings, usually recurring to literary sources or historical accounts (see Iguchi, 2010; Danesin, 2016).

<sup>4</sup> For example, and as we have briefly introduced in the previous note, the *isekai* series and their settings would perhaps correspond to a devirtualisation of Germanic myths, folks, and other literary sources, which, combined with some cross-medial strategies, especially connected with the RPG video game industry (defined by franchises such as *Dragon Quest* or *Final Fantasy*, among others), could have established a genuinely appeal towards the adoption of these imageries among their Japanese creators. An aspect that is in fact related to some theoretical frameworks that we are going to review is the conception of anime as a transnational cultural production and its transcultural syncretism, developed by Iwabuchi Kōichi, Marco Pellitteri, Manuel Hernández-Pérez, and Maxime Danesin (Iwabuchi, 2007 [2002]; Pellitteri, 2010; Danesin, 2016: 99-101; Hernández-Pérez, 2017a).

<sup>5</sup> "Meisaku" (literally 'masterpiece') is a term coming from the locution *Sekai Meisaku Gekijō*, 'Series of masterpieces from the world's literature', 1974-1997, anime series that appeared since the mid-1970s adapted from different European and North-American novels and tales mainly oriented to young audiences. The term has been adopted to refer to these productions (and will be adopted by us to the same use) that, as we will see in the following, provide a particular conception of the European setting in anime series.

contextual representations. Due to the systemic “media mix” (Steinberg, 2012) condition of Japanese mass media industries (sharing genres, characters, aesthetic topical conventions, and, in this case, settings, through different media and material products), this article would also entail manga despite its main focus on anime productions, both series and films. In this sense, while a greater focus on manga will be necessary to define the European setting in the 1970s shōjo series, the specificity of anime in its industry and dynamics as a transmedial form (one that encompasses the form of a serial TV product and an animated film) will take a predominant role in our analysis of the representations of Europe in the “Meisaku” tv shows or the works of Miyazaki Hayao, among other case studies.

As we will see, we can trace different particularities in how and why anime and manga adapt and recreate a European setting. While narrative and topical scenarios are usually behind the configuration of the European setting and the sources of inspiration used between creators to develop these settings, as we will see, there can be similar, intrinsic differences in the format of production, broadcasting, distribution as also the audiences of each media form also take a role in the configuration of shows (as the “Meisaku” ones) that are specific of the anime media dynamics, being the use and recreation of Europe framed by this media specificity. On the other hand, anime films set in Europe or European-like settings (as those made by Miyazaki) share similar procedures to recreate the setting, emphasising, as we will see and as it happens with the case of the creators of certain manga series, a notion of “authorship” towards the configuration of an European setting, making this medium particularity remarkably valuable to our research.

The development of this research has also entailed a literature review that organises the main theoretical approaches that have been used to study these contents through a number of studies and disciplines. Which varieties of European settings can be identified? Are they related to narrative genres or to the demographics of the intended audiences? Could the European setting have any role in the commercial success of an anime series? To what extent are they the product of one artist’s sources and creativity? Researching these aspects in relation to not only manga and anime but also to other Japanese pop-cultural productions could be an important line of investigation, and an object of interest to better define the cultural identity and representative capacities of anime as a Japanese media form with the (both internal and external)

idiosyncrasies of its industry, and the conceptions regarding the European cultural and historical heritage, that would be reflected in the visual culture and literary sources that some anime makers, *mangaka*, and artists use as a source of inspiration to rebuild European settings and imageries.

### **1. A theoretical retrospective of European settings in anime series and films**

To begin with the study of these iconographic contents, it can be noticed the range of different theories, concepts, and theoretical paradigms as well as a variety of case studies that are remarkably widespread through a number of books, articles, and other academic sources. However, a theoretical starting point to research the “non-Japanese” contents in the making of media content by Japanese creators whose narratives and aesthetics are based on rebuilds of “real” or fantasised” European or European-like setting and characters, can be found in the notion of anime as a transnational and transcultural production. In this sense, the theorisation of *mukokuseki* developed by Iwabuchi Kōichi (2007 [2002]) becomes, being aware of its limitations and weaknesses in the context of anime (and manga), a paradigmatic concept to see how the transnationalism of anime (and manga) is often understood but also to see the possible limits of the concept itself.

As Iwabuchi points out throughout his theory, Japanese popular culture reaches its transnationalism and *mukokuseki* condition through a procedure of “strategic hybridism”. Strategic hybridism is perceptible in many aspects of the current Japanese reality (not only in popular culture and its industries), and consists in an attitude in which Japan imagines, adapts, and domesticates what it receives (and has been receiving) from the “other” nations in terms of technologic innovations and cultural heritage (2007 [2002]: 51-3). In this respect, a historical retrospective of contemporary Japanese history is of crucial relevance, especially regarding the procedures of modernisation and industrialisation that Japan experienced since 1868, starting point of the Meiji Restoration (1868-1912).

The need to match and emulate the European and the American powers and their Industrial Revolution led to a forced modernisation in Japan, where the country started to import and adopt a range of technologic and cultural innovations that would transform its national identity in all aspects of daily life and reality. In fact, and regarding popular culture, this process of modernisation was the one that, by the end of the nineteenth century, would lead to the apparition of the first Japanese comics and



animated works, which were strongly influenced by the arrival of American and European artists and films (Schodt, 2012 [1983]: 38-51; Pellitteri, 2010: 86-9; Santiago, 2010: 16, 54-5; Clements, 2013: 28-32).

In these decades, and especially during the Taishō period (1912-1926), Japan experienced a cosmopolitan and urban transformation based on the latest European trends, aesthetics, and fashion that were already influencing the new Japanese cultural productions (Gravett, 2004 [2006]: 20-1; Chappuis, 2008: 56-60; Hu, 2010: 18, 64). These mutual processes of reciprocal influences have been defined by Cobus Van Staden as “Europhilia”, a growing interest in European culture, fashion, and aesthetics that, starting in the Meiji period, would establish a cultural precedent that will influence the cultural productions of subsequent decades and periods, as will be exemplified with the different eclectic contents of some anime series and films (2009: 24-5, 2011: 178-81).

Once exposed the considerations, it is important to discuss and critically analyse the different approaches regarding the implications of these dynamics in the development of anime contents. According to Iwabuchi, *mukokuseki* is a formal trait that, based on a procedure of “erasure” of a perceived “Japaneseness” applied to different Japanese products, may turn certain anime productions into “denationalised” cultural productions that achieve a greater success in global markets (2007 [2002]: 28-9, 94-5). The concept *mukokuseki* was not introduced by Iwabuchi, and in fact other terms already existed with a similar use and meaning, such as *nihonjin-banare*, theorised by Satō Kenji (1999). The theoretical origins of *mukokuseki* have to be traced back to the mid-1990s in the work of popular culture theoreticians like Ōtsuka Eiji and Ueno Toshiya, as well as anime’s industry personalities such as Oshii Mamoru. In these initial steps of the discussion, *mukokuseki* can be considered as a biased assumption that tries to define anime’s Japaneseness through the adoption of the Greco-Roman, then European, canons of beauty in order to make the anime works more attractive to overseas audiences (Otsuka, 1994; Oshii, Itō and Ueno, 1996 cited in Iwabuchi, 2007 [2002]: 28-33). As we will see in this section through different scholars and in the analysis of our case studies (especially when we will deal with the European reception of the and “Meisaku” series in contrast to other Japanese anime productions), the use of these “formal canons” can indeed play a role in the international success of anime series with European settings, but beyond this hypothetical function they are grounded in the principles of anime and manga’s

visual culture, which makes the *mukokuseki* discourse more arbitrary and problematic than it initially seems to be.

Returning to Iwabuchi's argument, he offers two different definitions to explain what *mukokuseki* is according to him, both of them being, in his discursive strategy, complementary to each other: on the one hand, *mukokuseki* can be understood as the mixture of elements coming from multiple cultural backgrounds, while conversely it can also mean the elimination of any evident ethnic or cultural appeal, both conceptions being arguably findable in the formal constitution of most Japanese anime (2007 [2002]: 71-2). Iwabuchi prefers this second definition of *mukokuseki* and points out that, according to him, "Japanese media industries seem to think that the suppression of Japanese cultural odour is imperative if they are to make inroads into international markets" (2007 [2002]: 94). In this sense, Iwabuchi, basing his statement on the emergent position of Japan as a major global exporter of cultural productions, considers the erasure of the Japanese cultural "odour" a crucial procedure to achieve anime's commercial success in the overseas markets. These procedures, says Iwabuchi, gave anime, manga, and other Japanese mass media a new denationalised odour of its own, in which the ethnic, racial, and original qualities of Japanese culture are erased, making it look neither Japanese nor associated to any specific country or culture (2002 [2007]: 28-9, 94-5).

Sometimes this framework has been applied to the study of anime's character designs. Scholars such as Frederik L. Schodt or Susan Napier, and anime directors such as Oshii Mamoru, believe that such design is based on a "Caucasian" canon of beauty. A "canon" that conforms to what is frequently called "anime style", which in some sense can be already found in Tezuka Osamu's works in recognisable aspects like the "big eyes" (Schodt, 2012 [1983]: 26-7; Oshii, Itō and Ueno, 1996 cited in Iwabuchi, 2007 [2002]: 28-33; Napier, 2005: 27). However, as we have noticed before, despite the initial influence or inspiration from European or American fashion and cultural productions (like Disney animated works) to develop these formal and aesthetic tropes, they have been deeply integrated in the visual language of manga and anime independently of the setting and plot of a particular series or film. This aspect can question the *mukokuseki* discourse and its idea of a real intention of emulating a "Caucasian" "canon of beauty" (in terms of character design) by Japanese creators or using these formal and aesthetic traits to consciously emphasise the integration of Japanese mass media overseas.

In this sense, Marco Pellitteri suggested that the “big eyes” and other conventions of the essentially labelled “anime style” are not only products of an influence from or inspiration in a European canon of beauty (despite the perceived “universal” or “racially neutral” result that they could have in the eyes of many observers), but rather the prevalence of some formal tropes from the Japanese artistic tradition, which has often tended to more symbolic and conceptual non-realistic representations. Moreover, this formal language ensures a visual homogeneity that enables the possibility of displaying different ethnic and national identities in a quite particular and minimalistic form. These visual codes are, according to Pellitteri, always perceptible as a Japanese artistic trait that makes anime not so odourless as Iwabuchi argues, remaining the same aesthetic tropes even in series with Euro-American contents and settings (2010: 100-5).

However, Iwabuchi maintains that the producers and creators of anime, manga, or video games are aware that their character designs, with an alleged “denationalised” aesthetic appeal often based on non-Japanese facial traits, play a crucial role to the exportation of their productions (2007 [2002]: 28-9, 94-5). By framing *mukokuseki* as an aesthetic pattern—whether one agrees or not with the point of “denationalisation”—we can better understand Japanese pop culture’s transnationalism as a condition that, focussing on the case of culture, transcends national and cultural boundaries by offering an artistic representation that cannot be related to a single place or cultural background but also participates in the consolidation of a new contemporary Japaneseness (Iwabuchi, 2007 [2002]: 51-3). A new Japaneseness that, as scholars as Pellitteri have better defined, would correspond to a “transcultural syncretism” of a hybrid nature that contains familiar and universal forms, as well as a different and “exotic” appeal reflected in Japanese creativity, both based on formal and topical aspects (2010: 12-3).

However, the relevance of these theories and concepts for our research lies on their conception of different procedures (as the *mukokuseki* aesthetics, which as we have seen, can be considered a biased assumption regarding some iconic formal and aesthetic traits of anime’s visual culture, or the condition of strategic hybridism) that enabled Japanese anime to contain non-strictly “Japanese” contents, iconographic elements, and other cultural representations. In fact, as some scholars have pointed out, these historical factors and aesthetic aspects made Japanese anime a product of cross-cultural creativity that characterises the essence of contemporary postmodern Japan, in which different cultural identities flow and are represented through the audio-visual mechanisms and

techniques of the anime medium (Schodt, 2012 [1983]: 88-93; Azuma, 2009 [2001]: 7-14; Brophy, 2005: 2-5; Napier, 2005: 293-4; Denison, 2010: 1-3; Pellitteri, 2010: 12-3).

In this sense, Napier and Schodt suggested that Japanese popular culture, with their manga or anime “style”, offers to Japanese society “another world”, a balm that seeks to be apart from contemporary Japanese reality, whose creative flexibility is what also creates its success in Japan (Schodt, 2012 [1983]: 26-7; Napier, 2005: 27). Japanese media create a space where consumers can see their fantasies come true without directly referring to neither a “Japanese” cultural background nor a “western” one (Schodt, 2012 [1983]: 26-7). These transcultural and cross-media capabilities are what Napier labelled as “fantasyscape”, a mode of cultural flows based on action and setting, forming a “world of simulacra”, a term that Napier introduces as an attribute of her “fantasyscape” concept, which (complementary to other notions of *simulacra* as the one theorised by Jean Baudrillard [1981]) defines a world of entertainment where the audiences can take part in the represented fantasies without participating in anything concretely real (2005: 293-4).

In relation to this theoretical framework, framed by the conception of anime as a transnational production, there are different theories that studied the representations of “western” contents in anime and how they are expressed. Some of them understand these “transcultural” contents and aesthetics as a mechanism to improve the internationalisation of manga, anime, and other Japanese media among overseas audiences and markets. This is for example the case of Amy Shirong Lu, who, following the *mukokuseki* framework and borrowing Satō’s *nihonjin-banare* term, categorises the contents of anime series according to different procedures through which anime supposedly attain an “internationalisation” (Sato, 1999; Lu, 2008). Regarding the European or European-like contents and settings, they are located in two of the three “policies of internationalisation” that Lu theorises in her research: a “depoliticised internationalisation” and a “westernised internationalisation”.

The first policy understands the “western” and perceivedly “denationalised” settings as a mechanism that improves the internationalisation of anime and its integration in global markets, adopting, according to Lu, a “universal narrative mode” that is participant of the global world and its values. This mode, Lu argues, is expressed with the representation of foreign elements, either in the depiction of explicit locations or taking and adapting European/American literature works as a pretext to include fantasy Middle Age settings

or Greco-Roman myths (Lu, 2008: 171-6). By contrast, this positioning on the “universal narrative mode” can be understood contrary to the consensus of many scholars that defend the stylistic and narrative specificities of anime and manga as what make them distinctive media, being Lu’s approach strongly located in the line of the *mukokuseki* discourse and its “denationalised” assumption towards anime’s cultural identity.

On the other hand, the “westernised internationalisation” is theorised with a negative connotation, taking the role of a counterpart of Orientalism introducing strictly “western” elements with a demonised depiction of “the West”. Lu exemplifies this policy by analysing the antagonistic role that many Caucasian blond characters develop in many anime series, being, according to her, an allegory of a US-American soldier (2008: 176-9). This latter perspective is remarkably interesting, and in fact some authors, namely Tze-Yue Hu, suggest that the representation of European/American contents and settings in anime are a product of a cultural imperialism (2010: 156-8). We are not going to deepen further into these assumptions, but they could be located as remarkably logic and realistic explanations to the presence of “western” contents in anime series. As Azuma Hiroki pointed out, not only were cinema, comics, and animation created in Europe, but also cultural industries were, and more importantly, the hegemonic trends of global popular culture have been traditionally established by European (later also, then mainly US-American) cultural and structural constructs, which, to some extent, influenced the Japanese cultural industries (2009 [2001]: 7-14).

On the other hand, Marco Pellitteri has discussed in depth the syncretic and transcultural nature of the European/American contents in anime. According to his study, during the “Dragon Phase” (1975 to 1995) some series that adapted European/American literary works and folklore were benefited by their foreign settings and characters to enjoy a better integration in those very markets.<sup>6</sup> However, he stresses the idea that anime shows are not as odourless as Iwabuchi claims, and emphasises instead the value of Japanese creativity, expressed in their art, themes, and topics: the factors that have defined anime’s cultural specificity and hold a commercial appeal among overseas audiences.

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<sup>6</sup> The “Dragon phase” is one of the two phases of exportation and reception of Japanese cultural products in Europe and other regions theorised by Marco Pellitteri in his work (2010). According to Pellitteri, the Dragon phase is the one framed by the arrival of the first anime series in the European markets during the 1970s until the 1990s. Being mainly produced for Japanese audiences, the arrival of Japanese narrative media products in that phase was supported by foreign distributors and TV channels, establishing a first generation of anime consumers in Europe that developed their own reception and subcultures towards these series as well as a range of licensed and unlicensed products (Pellitteri, 2010: 389-94).

Under these parameters, the non-Japanese contents and settings are iconographic elements that take different forms and uses, establishing the syncretic and transnational essence of anime (Pellitteri, 2010: 117-9, 300-1).

Pellitteri's argument could be in dialogue with Manuel Hernández-Pérez's position, which deepens Lu's theories offering new considerations regarding the study of non-Japanese contents in anime series and also reviewing some assumptions of the *mukokuseki* discourse. On the one hand, Hernández-Pérez suggests that rather than a denationalisation of the medium, defined by an absence of allusions to specific cultural backgrounds, we are in front of a "westernisation" of the narrative, where the cultural hybridisation between the "West" and the "East" (manifested in visual elements such as the character designs, the settings, and other contents) is extracted from specific easily recognisable cultural sources (such as real historical periods or literary works, among others) that can be easily recognised and known by the viewers. This "westernisation" of the narrative is what Hernández-Pérez has labelled "Analogy adaptation", respecting certain iconic components that are relevant enough for viewers to establish a minimum connection with the work or element that is being adapted inside the intrinsic dynamics of the creative process and its particular visual language (2017a: 46-8, 113-5).

According to Hernández-Pérez, the "western" contents that we can find both in the character designs and in the hybridisation of themes and settings (which would encompass the representation of historical periods and the adaptation of literature works and myths, among many others) corresponds to an aim of representing the foreign cultures with an "exotic appeal". These depictions are usually shaped by purely aesthetic or creative criteria, siding in what other scholars like Rayna Denison coined as a "positive Occidentalism"<sup>7</sup> regarding the representation of the non-Japanese cultures in anime series. However, the non-Japanese contents can also be connected to other factors, like a commercial strategy, introducing the possibility of a success of the product overseas through the representation of "universal"—or better, culturally diverse—contents from different geo-cultural sources (Denison, 2010: 6-12; Hernández, 2017a: 49-51).

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<sup>7</sup> Contrary to Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) and his critical deconstruction of "Western" essentialised stereotypes and conceptions regarding a different, understood as inferior, "other" (Asian, Muslim, African, or Latin American civilisations), Occidentalism is a critical discourse appeared in the 1990s that analyses the negative and imperialistic stereotypes regarding the "Western world" (Europe and North America) constructed by Asians or Africans (Chen, 1995: 3-12). Therefore, when Denison is referring to "positive Occidentalism"—an idea that she borrows from Creighton [1995]—she is pointing out the "positive" appeal and tone of the representations of the "West" in anime works through a creative process that mixes elements from multiple cultural origins (2010: 226).

On the other hand, and without being a part of this theoretical field, in our research we would like to compile and consider an alternative, “new” rising approach and methodology. Theoretically undefined as such by the academic literature on the issue, we are going to defend this perspective as one that also deals with the study of Euro-American and non-Japanese contents in anime but regarding the analysis of more empirical sources and elements. This perspective is the one that aims to understand the western (and then European) settings as products of a *specific* artist or anime director (along with their project staff or even an anime studio, among other authors) also through the sources or particular interests employed during their creative process. This procedure entails the analysis and study of the author’s personal experiences (like trips carried out to the countries where the anime will be set) as also the use of different literary sources, from history books, films and novels, to tourism guides, and a whole visual culture in other media (both Japanese and foreign) hosting or displaying the stereotyped constructs that exist in Japan regarding other countries and their native cultures.

Obviously, the study of these ontological elements is present in the *mukokuseki* discourse, in the theoretical framework of anime as a transnational cultural production, and in other paradigms or approaches regarding Japanese popular culture. In fact, the comparison of the images from tourism discourses with the construction of some settings in anime series does not move away from the theoretical framework of global transnationalism and cross-media narratives. However, the development of this approach could be notably complex due to the necessity of accessing primary sources (which in some cases could be available in some of the own artist’s publications, e.g. interviews in magazines and art books, among others); and this means that we should have to limit the research to case studies, that is, specific series, genres, or artists.

In fact, this tendency to focus and delimit the study is what has happened with the academic articles and works that have addressed our question following these interests and methodologies. An example of this trend is found in the publications developed around the figure of Miyazaki Hayao and Studio Ghibli, such as the ones written by Helen McCarthy (2002 [1999]) or Pau Serracant (2017), and more recently the case of the historical manga-anime series *Vinland Saga* (2005), where Maxime Danesin (2016, 2017) has analysed how Yukimura Makoto adapted different Norse narratives and European Middle Age history in order to offer a particular depiction of the Vikings’ era. Moreover, research as those carried out by Marie Pruvost-Delaspre and Manuel

Hernández-Pérez have applied some concepts like “domestication” (Tobin, 1992) and “fictionality” (Gjerlevsen 2016; Zhao 2011) to define the concretion of cultural stereotypes and imagined constructs in Japan regarding foreign countries, an aspect that can be found not only in anime and manga series but also in the *gaikoku mura*<sup>8</sup> or other thematic parks, like Tokyo Disneyland (Pruvost-Delaspre, 2016: 75, 85-7; Hernández-Pérez, 2017b: 44-54).

Both studies, being based on the analysis of novels, literary sources, and travel guides employed by the authors of specific productions, take into account the appeal that the European countries (as either realistic faithful depictions or stereotyped cultural *pastiches*) hold among the Japanese audiences in their imagination and as real “dreamland” places to travel to (Pruvost-Delaspre, 2016: 74, 85-87; Hernández-Pérez, 2017b: 44-51). This nexus between media and tourism discourses could relate this approach to what we are trying to delimit and develop within the “media pilgrimage”<sup>9</sup> studies, a phenomenon that in the case of manga and anime series has been discussed regarding the appeal that some Japanese monuments and iconic places represented in anime exert among European and American audiences, who aim to visit Japan in order to experience such an attractive culture (see for example Okamoto, 2015; Sabre, 2016). However, in our field of interest the media pilgrimage discourse could be reversed to the analysis of how the depictions or a recurrent interest regarding European cultures has encouraged Japanese audiences to visit European countries, like the aforementioned studies demonstrate in the analysis of the sources and experiences of some Japanese anime creators, such as Miyazaki Hayao.

Constructing this theoretical corpus, the representations of non-Japanese settings in anime series can be understood as a product of different transnational and transcultural procedures framed by historical, commercial and even political realities. Shaped by these factors and conditions, the different theories and approaches that we have compiled and

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<sup>8</sup> Japanese theme parks focussed on recreating specific countries and their cultures (Hernández-Pérez, 2017b: 47-51).

<sup>9</sup> Media pilgrimage is a term used to define those trips and visits, made by audiences and fans, to all those places that have become especially iconic and popular (globally, regionally, or in specific countries) due to their presence in certain mass media, such as successful film franchises, comics or TV series, among others. Once fascinated by the contents of these works, the audiences develop the interest in visiting the places and settings that appear represented in that media product in order to recreate or recall some of the most iconic moments of their favourite series or films (Sabre, 2016: 8-9). In the framework of Japanese popular culture, the media pilgrimage phenomenon has taken the form of “anime pilgrimage”, a sub-category that consist in visiting places depicted in anime, manga or video games, taking part in what Okamoto labels as “otaku tourism” (2015: 21-4).



analysed thus far have been used to understand the variety of hybrid and eclectic non-Japanese settings and characters in different plot constructs and genres, most of which built through elements from the European/American cultural baggages and their historical periods. Having this framework in mind, there exist a range of studies focussed on the analysis of the Middle Ages' settings and their, fantasised, presumably "gothic" imaginary, typical of the fantasy and *isekai* genres (see for example Chappuis, 2008; Griffith, 2009; Iguchi, 2010; Danesin, 2016, 2017), which also present representations of an either vague or more precise Christianity with its iconography, or other religions (see Drazen, 2003, 2017; Suter, 2009; Barkman, 2010; Mousavi, 2014); or on the subgenre of vampires, as a result of a re-interpretation of the horror genre (see Browning and Wayne, 2008; Denison, 2010: 155-63); and, at a lesser extent, works that analyse the adaptations of classical Greco-Roman myths or history and the ancient world in anime series (see Chappuis, 2008; Bryce, 2012: 377-94).

## **2. Europe in anime series and films:**

### **A setting negotiated between being an iconic depiction or an idealised place**

In the previous section we have carried out a retrospective account of a theoretical discussion that starts from the conception of Japanese popular culture as a transnational cultural production which, through a transcultural creativity, attracts audiences in both a local and a global scenario. Besides such conceptions, we should also take into consideration Japanese contemporary history and its development (defined first by the Meiji restoration and later in the WWII postwar period), which have transformed and defined the Japanese cultural industries and their conceptions regarding "western" countries. To study the representations of Europe in anime series, we are going to apply these theoretical discourses and methodological approaches to the analysis of different demographics, industrial trends, and genres where, through the analysis of different paradigmatic examples, we can categorise and define different types of European settings, each one with its own formal, contingent, and meaningful idiosyncrasies.

These types of setting can be roughly divided into three branches of anime productions: the *shōjo* series made in the 1970s (intended as original manga series, as anime adaptations transposed from the manga series, and as original anime series without a previous manga series), the "Meisaku" group of series, and more recent anime works, a latter category that would range from the 1980s to our days. These groupings are based

on different industrial, historical, and creative factors. As we will see, the European settings of the first two categories will be framed by a specific audience target and genre that at the same time participate of different industrial and historical dynamics as well as media specificities, reproducing a setting that can be defined and grouped by sharing topical and aesthetic conventions. By contrast, in the group of the more recent anime we are going to comprehend a wide range of anime series, genres, and trends whose European settings have a more eclectic and heterogenous nature that cannot be easily identified in “formulas” as the ones of the shōjo series or the “Meisaku” series.

Despite the ambitious scope of this latter category, whose case studies could well be the objects of further research, an interesting argument to support our position and explain this creative status would lay in the notion of “postmodernity” developed by philosopher Azuma Hiroki. According to Azuma, the diversity and cultural eclecticism of anime and manga’s contents are based on a breakdown of the Japanese cultural, traditional, and national roots in favour of the representation of these same aspects (and other from different cultural backgrounds) within a capitalist model of consumption imported from the United States (2009 [2001]: 7-14). Such a condition is also behind the European contents of the shōjo and “Meisaku” series, whose historicised depictions of the European continent or of the Americas cannot be understood without assessing the postmodern condition of contemporary Japanese culture; as is also the theoretical construct that we have developed in the previous block, in aspects such as the procedures of domestication (Tobin, 1992; Pruvost-Delaspre, 2016: 75, 85-7) and the idea of a “new Japaneseness” theorised by Iwabuchi (2007 [2002]: 51-3) and Pellitteri (2010: 12-3). However, Azuma introduces this assumption of postmodernity in the framework of the transformations that the otaku subculture and the anime industry experienced throughout the 1980s and 1990s, which expanded the popularity, demographic range, and creative scope of different genres and narrative tropes such as science fiction or fantasy (2009 [2001]: 7-14). As we will see, taking into account the European setting of these more contemporary productions will help us to refine and complete our framework by finding different functions and creative possibilities, among which the notion of “authorship”, inspirational resources as well as the popularity of different cities and settings, according to certain temporary factors regarding the production and distribution/consumption of a manga or anime series.

### 2.1. *Shōjo series of the 1970s: Local sensibilities through foreign dramas*

Our first category are the 1970s shōjo series, a group of manga and anime series that made a recurrent use of European settings and depictions of European cultures, which are remarkably frequent in the framework of anime productions both in the form of anime adaptations from original manga or in influencing the production of original anime works. In fact, the European settings of these series are widely known an aspect by fans and specialists of Japanese popular culture, as an iconic trait that defined the shōjo-oriented series from that decade and the classics of the “genre” at large (see Schodt, 2012 [1983]: 88-93; Berndt, 1996: 93-4, Shamoan, 2007, 2008; Van Staden, 2011: 179, among others).

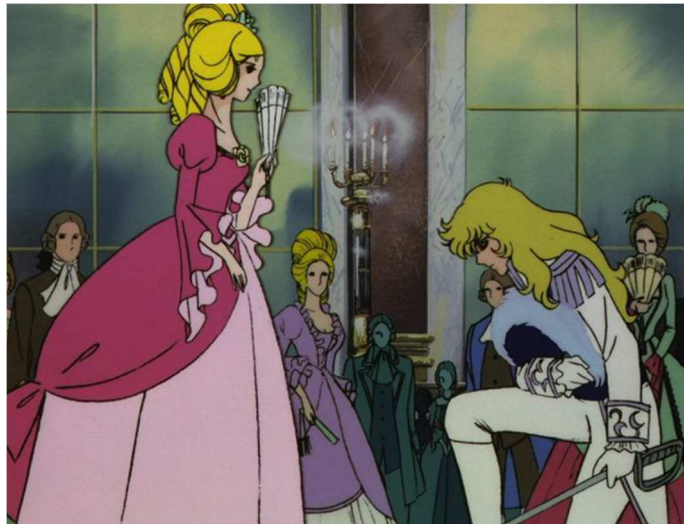
The predilection for European settings and its cultural background can be already found, according to a range of scholars, in the tastes of young Japanese girls from previous decades, who were attracted to—and advertised about—European fashion and aesthetics since the Meiji period. This phenomenon (which could remind us of what Van Staden coined as Europhilia) has been labelled *shōjo bunka*: it was reflected in a range of aspects of Japanese daily life and culture, from girls magazines, dresses, and furniture, to pictorial genres (such as the *jōjo-ga*, developed by artists such as Fukiya Kōji or Nakahara Jun’ichi) and theatre troupes like the Takarazuka Revue, which was a crucial reference for Tezuka Osamu (author of *Ribon no kishi*, 1953, usually—but not entirely correctly—considered the “first shōjo series”) and has been always related to shōjo manga’s tropes and evolution (Schodt, 2012 [1983]: 88-93, 2011 [1996]: 253-6; Tezuka, 1987 cited in Hikari: 300-1; Natsume, 1998: 33 cited in Hikari, 2013: 300-1; Shamoan, 2008: 138-9; Takahashi, 2008: 122, 132; Van Staden, 2009: 24; Kalovics, 2016: 10-8).

In the 1970s, the shōjo manga series from that decade and their narrative styles and modes were defined by the outstanding works of some female authors who were named the “The group of flowers of the year 24” (*Hana no 24 Nengumi*), among which Ikeda Riyoko’s *Berusayu no Bara* (‘The rose of Versailles’, 1972-3), adapted in 1979 into an anime series directed by Nagahama Tadao and Dezaki Osamu; Takemiya Keiko’s *Kaze to Ki no Uta* (‘The Ballad of Wind and Trees’, 1976-84), or Hagio Moto’s *Poe no Ichizoku* (‘The Poe Clan’, 1972-6), but also more “mainstream” series by other authors, such as Mizuki Kyōko and Igarashi Yumiko’s *Candy Candy* (1976), Izawa Man and Igarashi Yumiko’s *Georgie!* (1982-4), or Akaishi Michiyo’s *Alpen Rose* (1983-6), among others. These latter cases, remarkably influenced by the works of the Year 24 Group, are better

known *via* the popularity of their anime adaptations (especially in some European markets) and also contain the idea of the foreign setting being partially set in European locations and countries.

According to Frederik Schodt, Jaqueline Berndt, and Deborah Shamoon, the European settings, depicted in the 1970s *shōjo* series took the role of a remote idealised elsewhere with a strong exotic appeal, radically different from Japanese society and reality, where the recurrent conventions of the *shōjo* narratives were developed. Some of these themes, like the deconstruction of the feminine subject and the development of transgressive romantic stories (which contain incests, infidelities, idyllic and allusive sexual scenes or homosexual relationships), were hard to conceive in the Japanese society of that moment, which enabled the European setting with a range of creative possibilities due to the depiction of foreign cultures (Schodt, 2012 [1983]: 88-93; Berndt, 1996: 93-4, Shamoon, 2007, 2008). Such a use and depiction of Europe fits with what Pellitteri has coined as the “mimecultural” scenario of anime, a mode of representation present in those anime series that adopt contents, settings, and other visual elements from different cultural backgrounds to develop their original narratives and plots (2010: 396).

These aspects are present in the paradigmatic case of *Berusayu no bara* (Fig. 1), where the European setting is defined by the selection of an iconic place (the court of Versailles), historical period (the Rococonian aesthetics of eighteenth century France prior the ignition of the French Revolution), and the depiction of real historical personalities such as Marie Antoinette, which served to develop a historical fiction framed by the transgressive themes and conventions of the *shōjo* series. For example, the deconstruction of the female subject is expressed through the character of Oscar, protagonist of the series, who is the daughter of a French general but is raised as a boy, a condition that has strongly framed Oscar’s social identity, gendered role, and relationships towards other characters.



**Figure 1.** *Berusayu no bara's* anime adaptation (1979) © Ikeda Riyoko / TMS Entertainment.

Jaqueline Berndt has pointed out that these circumstances reinforced the freedom of speech of the series' plot and its characters, endowing the court of Versailles with a hypocritical community of aristocrats and developing some socially endearing romantic stories, such as the tragic romance between Oscar and André, which introduces a class conflict between nobility (Oscar) and rising bourgeoisie (André) and can also simulate a homosexual relationship, using Oscar's androgynous design as "always playing with the sexual ambivalence of the homoerotic sexual fantasies" among the interests of the adult female readers and audiences (Berndt 1996: 104). Moreover, the use of a setting framed by the French Revolution allowed Ikeda to imbue her work with a "revolutionary" spirit towards political sensibilities and other public issues that surrounded Japanese society during those decades (Berndt, 1996: 101-6). Some of these aspects are further developed, also adding new dimensions and details, in the animated adaptation by Nagahama Tadao and Dezaki Osamu, especially through the last quarter (episodes 30 to 40, which were mainly directed by Dezaki) of the anime series. These episodes encompass the enrolment of Oscar and André in the French army after a dramatic heartbreak between them, developing the evolution of the characters in their personal dilemmas and love story parallel to development of the French Revolution in its different social movements, classes, and secondary characters (like the subplots of Alain or Oscar's father). These scenarios, which in sum expand the dimensions of Revolutionary France's setting in the anime of *Berusayu no bara*, also reflect the impact that certain anime products, as a medium and in their industrial dynamics of production and distribution (sometimes involving the

elongation of the adapted manga or franchise through new episodes) could have in the recreation, creative capabilities, and development of a European setting.

On the other hand, we can further dig into the discussion of this way to use the European setting by applying, for example, concepts such as domestication, in the sense of how the Rococonian aesthetics and historical aspects are redefined to emphasise the otherness and exotic appeal of the European (here, French) cultures and countries. As we can see in the case of *Berusayu no bara*, its setting represents an idealised, historicised, and, as Ogi Fusami suggested, feminised depiction of France's history that serves to better expressing the themes and issues that shōjo series at large aim to transmit (Ogi, 2001, 2004 cited in Antononoka, 2016: 36-43).

However, the European setting in shōjo series goes beyond this narrative function and is also framed by some political factors regarding Japan's postwar context. To better sustain this point, Takemiya Keiko, in an exceptional interview carried out by Ogi Fusami, points out how the notion of "Asia" was a taboo entity during postwar Japan, which implies a political and historical condition that favoured the predilection for American-European settings in a context that, borrowing Hu's considerations, could denote a situation of cultural imperialism (Takemiya in Ogi, 2008: 152-6; Hu, 2010: 156-8).

Takemiya also states the relevance of girl magazines from previous decades, and their aesthetics based on European fashion, as a heritage that located the European settings as a convention of shōjo series, encouraging her to visit Paris in order to improve her depictions of the continent (Takemiya in Ogi, 2008: 152-6; Hu, 2010: 156-8). However, Takemiya's testimony about the political connotations of some contents and settings is also remarkably relevant to better understand the wide presence of European settings in some anime series and genres. With this statement, we can suggest that the European setting in the 1970s shōjo series goes beyond the role of a narrative mechanism and is also favoured by other socio-cultural factors, related to the political and historical context of Japan.

## *2.2. The "Meisaku" series: Adaptations of European literary classics*

The second trend where we can find European settings is in the "Meisaku" series, a group of works that were made especially during the 1970s and 1980s and basically consisted of anime series drawn from European and (mainly North-) American novels, novellas, and folk tales. This group of series was mainly oriented to young audiences and,

as Marco Pellitteri discusses, they share some conventions and narrative tropes with the shōjo series due to their novelistic component, an aspect that will also be reflected in the depictions of their European settings (2006: 63). In contrast to the shōjo series, the “Meisaku” ones were mainly defined by the dynamics of the anime industry with its patterns of production and broadcasting, and most of them consisted of weekly tv anime productions ranging from about 40 to 52 episodes (an annual programming coverage), which, along with other related films or tv specials, were developed by some anime studios that would specialise in the production of such series, as was the paradigmatic case of Nippon Animation.

The starting point of the “genre” is to be located in 1974, with the release of *Arupusu no shōjo Heidi* (produced by Zuiyo Eizō, directed by Takahata Isao and drawn from Johanna Spyri’s novel *Heidi*), whose global success enabled the creation of Nippon Animation studio and the now well-known franchise of the many *Sekai Meisaku Gekijō* series (‘Series of masterpieces from world’s literature’, 1975-1996): more than 20 tv anime series, adaptation from mainly European and North-American novels, novellas, folk tales, and other literary formats. More concretely, thirteen of them were adaptations of European novels, including *Furandusu no Inu* (‘The Dog of Flanders’, 1975), *Ie naki ko* (‘Boy without a family’, 1978, from Hector Malot’s *Sans famille*), or *Princess Sara* (1985, from F. Hodgson Burnett’s *Sara Crewe*), and many more. Moreover, some of them, such as *Haha wo tazunete sanzenri* (‘Three thousand miles in search of mother’, 1975, from the short story *Dagli Appennini alle Ande* contained in Edmondo De Amicis’s *Cuore*) and *Akage no Anne* (‘Red-haired Anne’, 1979 from *Anne of Green Gables* by Lucy Maud Montgomery, who to be fair was Canadian, not European), and more, were productions of high quality in which masters of Japanese animation, such as aforementioned Miyazaki Hayao, Takahata Isao, and Dezaki Osamu, would be involved either in the direction or design during the first decades of their careers (Miyazaki, 1996; Clements, 2013: 149-51). On the other hand, some early Japanese animation films from the 1950s and 1960s, such as the ones produced by Tōei Dōga, as well as the series directed by Dezaki such as *Takarajima* (‘The Treasure Island’, 1978) in the late 1970s, can also fit the “Meisaku” group due to their plots, themes, and settings. Even some Euro-Japanese co-productions, like *Chiisana Vickie Viking* (‘Little Viking Vickie’, 1974), *Wanwan Sanjūshi* (‘The Three Muskehounds’, 1981) or *Meitantei Holmes* (‘Detective Holmes’, 1984) contain European settings following some narrative and visual tropes of the “Meisaku” category.

According to Marco Pellitteri, the “Meisaku” anime series are remarkably indebted to the *Bildungsroman* literary genre and its narrative tropes. The *Bildungsroman* (‘Coming-of-age’) literature originated in Europe during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and consisted of personal growth narratives, usually starring young characters who evolve from their childhood to confront the adulthood throughout the story, developing a pedagogical use for the readers, who were mainly children and students. Works such as *David Copperfield* (1850) or *Oliver Twist* (1839), written by Charles Dickens, are paradigmatic examples of this narrative genre (Pellitteri, 2006: 57-9).

In the case of the anime adaptations, the tragic, lyric, and dramatic component of these stories is emphasised, offering a “Japanese” version of these European literary works according to the values of Japanese society. Pellitteri shows that these aspects are exemplified in the figure of the orphan, usually the main character of these series, who displays an alternative shape of what Pellitteri defines as one of the various representational and recurrent tropes of anime, the “infant” (usually associated with *kawaii* aesthetics). Through these characters, a cathartic dialogue develops between the freedom of Japanese children and how they face the normativeness of adult society. The Japanese cultural specificity of these adaptations, combined with the European settings and characters, generate a syncretism in which the series contain moral messages mainly oriented to a Japanese audience but that can participate in a global strategy that reaches foreign children transculturally (Pellitteri, 2006: 60-4, 2010: 120-1, 208-12, 218-9).

These anime series, as well as the *Bildungsroman* literature, took the role of a pedagogical literature aimed to young audiences, where Japanese viewers can enjoy a vision of the world’s multiculturalism and cosmopolitanism, also displayed *via* the exotic appeal that these foreign imaginaries arouse in them (Pellitteri, 2006: 60-4). Moreover, these aims match the involvement of Miyazaki Hayao and Takahata Isao in some of their productions and their particular ideology regarding what anime and its industry is, or is supposed to be. In some interviews and other media, Miyazaki pointed out that with series such as *Haha wo tazunete sanzenri* Takahata and him sought to offer to the children a product that was not frivolous (as were most of the successful productions of the moment), creating series with real pedagogical values regarding the problems of real society (Miyazaki, 2009 [1996]; Clements, 2013: 149-50, Serracant, 2017: 126-7).



The European settings and contents that the “Meisaku” series deploy would pertain to what Pellitteri defined as the “exocultural scenario” of anime settings, which encompass those series that adapt a foreign narrative combined with different values and messages from Japanese cultural environment according to the Japanese public, the main and direct audience of anime at large (2010: 396).

In a more formal and aesthetic approach, Van Staden has analysed the setting of series like *Heidi* concluding that the Alpine landscape is conceived as a remote and ancestral paradise, modified, fictive, and away from reality, understanding the European cultural heritage as a dramatic and emotional resource for these works. According to his position, *Heidi*’s Alpine setting shows an idealised representation of Europe in a similar trope to the one that we can find in the 1970s shōjo manga series (2009: 24). On the other hand, scholars who have studied Euro-Japanese co-productions, such as Jose Andrés Santiago Iglesias, have also theorised about the plots and contents of these series. Being these productions financed by European distributors and mainly oriented to European audiences, Santiago suggests that the aim to adapt European literary works, as well as set the stories in European settings and historical periods with Caucasian characters, was encouraged and legitimated in order to trace a link with the audiences, as it could be exemplified with cases such as aforementioned *Wanwan Sanjūshi* (1982) or *El Cid no bōken* (‘The adventures of El Cid’, 1984) (2018: 6-7).

These considerations can be reflected in *Romeo no aoi sora* (‘The blue skies of Romeo’, 1995), an adaptation of the Swiss novel *The Black Brothers* (1949) written by Lisa Tetzner and one of the later (and shortest) anime works of the “Meisaku” set (Fig. 2). The series tells the story of Romeo, a boy who is kidnapped and forced to work in Milan as a chimney cleaner. Along the series we can see Romeo’s growth as a person and how he meets the values of friendship, sympathy, and love while overcoming different problems, tragedies, and deaths. This *Bildungsroman*’s plot and its narrative tropes are developed in a historicised European setting, nineteenth century industrial Milan, which is easily recognised *via* iconic symbols like its gothic Cathedral, but also includes some crude and “dark” depictions of the rising European industrial and capitalist societies.



Figure 2. *Romeo's Blue Skies* (1995) © Nippon Animation.

This is an aspect reviewed by Thomas Lamarre regarding *Fushigi no umi no Nadia* ('Nadia of the mysterious sea', 1989), a steampunk anime and freely inspired adaptation of Jules Verne's *Vingt mille lieues sous les mers* (1870), in which we can also identify the depiction of some crude aspects of nineteenth century European society like racism, western imperialism, or industrial pollution (2009: 155-65). In the case of *Romeo*, these symbolisms can be reflected in the depiction of nineteenth century Milan as an industrial and hostile environment that surrounds the characters' growth, emphasising their problems and tragedies but also their belief in a better future. Like in the 1970s shōjo manga series, a historicised and sometimes idealised depiction of Europe serves as a narrative mechanism that emphasises the genre's themes and conventions, which in the case of the "Meisaku" series are a pedagogical finality to the young audiences.

In a more historiographical and industrial sense, it has been widely argued how not only the "Meisaku" anime series, but also some of the 1970s shōjo manga/anime series, were part of a "first round" of anime productions broadcast in Euro-American countries (especially in the European continent) during the 1970s and 1980s; a period that could be also labelled as the "Dragon phase", using Pellitteri's terms. The arrival of these series marked a precedent in the establishment of a first generation of anime fans, while, in most European markets, more general audiences did not even know that they were facing Japanese animation works (see Schodt, 2011 [1996]: 59-62; Moliné, 2002: 58-9, 68; Van Staden, 2009: 24; Hu, 2010: 122; Pellitteri, 2010: 69-74, 389-94). In this sense, if we analyse the European setting of the "Meisaku" series through the *mukokuseki* theoretical framework (standing a critical positioning towards this concept as we have noticed

previously) in a comparative and historical dialogue with some of the anime industry's trends, we can obtain new assumptions directly implying the potential role that their European setting could develop in the commercial success of these series in overseas markets, especially in Europe. Moreover, these considerations that we are going to develop are also framed by some intrinsic aspects of anime as a medium, more concretely its dynamics of production, distribution, and broadcasting, that gave place to specific tv anime productions as the "Meisaku" series.

According to Jonathan Clements, Ishiguro Noboru, and Ohara Noriko, the "Meisaku" shows and the shōjo series were part of an "alternative field" of Japanese anime productions more oriented to family and young audiences due to their focus on romantic stories, dramas, and the adaptation of literature classics. Why were both types of anime productions an "alternative" in the anime market? Because the "mainstream" trend of the anime industry in the 1970s and 1980s (and its main evolution path during the following decades) were science fiction anime, as can be seen in space opera series such as *Uchū senkan Yamato* ('Space battleship Yamato', 1974) or *mecha* franchises such as *Kidō senshi Gundam* ('Mobile troop Gundam', 1979), mainly oriented to male audiences and crucial to the establishment of the *otaku* subculture (Ishiguro and Ohara, 1980 cited in Clements, 2013: 148, 150; Kinsella, 1998, 1999; Pellitteri, 2010: 151-6, 165-73; Clements, 2013: 148-50).

Both trends of anime series played a crucial role in the distribution, popularity, and reception of anime productions in Europe during the 1970s-1980s, an aspect emphasised by the "tv show" media condition of these series. However, analysing the European context of the "Dragon phase" (especially the subperiod between the 1970s and the end of the 1980s), we can identify how the division between the two trends is stressed, the "different" appeal of the "Meisaku" and shōjo series emerging as an alternative type of anime works in contrast with the science fiction ones. This difference could be identified because the two types of anime series enjoyed different reception among European audiences, a phenomenon that can be understood as different compartments in the exportation of Japanese creativity and culture.

To better support this point, Marco Pellitteri's study regarding the different phases and strategies of the arrival of Japanese anime in Europe becomes an essential resource. According to his research, science fiction *mecha* series such as *Mazinger Z* or *Ufo Robo Grendizer* exemplified the essence of the "Dragon phase". These series were produced

strictly for Japanese audiences, therefore they showed in Europe something completely new in terms of art, aesthetics, and plots, never seen before on European screens, once they were distributed there (Pellitteri, 2010: 296-324). However, in that phase a number of “Meisaku” anime and shōjo series (some of them analysed throughout this article) were also distributed, hence it can be argued that they had a different appeal among European audiences, attaining part of their commercial success and popularity based on establishing a visual integration with them thanks to their European settings, characters, and plots.

In this sense, it is important to underline again that these series *too* were mainly intended for a Japanese audience, and that they also held a “Japanese odour”, not only in their character designs but also in the values and messages behind the plots, offering another instalment or variant of the “infant” model (Pellitteri, 2010: 120-1, 208-12, 218-9). However, Pellitteri suggests that the producers of the “Meisaku” series, like *Heidi* or the aforementioned Euro-Japanese co-productions like *Chiisana Vickie Viking* or *Wanwan Sanjūshi*, also had in mind the idea of exporting them to Europe due to the increasing introduction of Japanese anime in Asia, an aspect that was supported and stressed with the subsequent development of other “Meisaku” series in the context of Euro-Japanese co-productions (2010: 300-1).

Then, despite not having the same “appeal” as series such as *Ufo Robo Grendizer* in the inroads of Japanese anime in Europe, we can argue that the “Meisaku” and shōjo series also established their “strategy” to support their own incursion among the European audiences. This different approach is what we would call an unintended (or more correctly, “passive”) redefinition of *mukokuseki*, which can be based on the other definition given by Iwabuchi that understands *mukokuseki* phenomena as the mixture of elements coming from multiple cultural backgrounds, alluding to specific cultural sources like the European one, rather than being a denationalised product. In fact, Iwabuchi’s considerations have already been further theorised—or counter-theorised, as we have pointed out previously—by other scholars, for example the already cited idea of anime’s transcultural syncretism pointed out by Pellitteri or Hernández-Pérez’s theory of the “Analogy adaptation” (Iwabuchi, 2007 [2002]: 71-2; Pellitteri, 2010: 12-3, 117-9; Hernández-Pérez, 2017a: 46-8, 113-5).

Science fiction series also contained *mukokuseki* aesthetics (or more concretely, subject of the *mukokuseki* assumption), in the sense that, due to some formal traits in their designs, the characters could not seem Japanese to a more general audience (that is, inside their

“Orientalist” bias, according to which they would expect that the characters would look Japanese) thanks to the transnational appeal of the Japanese visual conventions. As we have discussed in previous sections focussed on the *mukokuseki* discourse, Pellitteri has argued how these Japanese visual codes and modes of representation remain the same in series with western settings and characters, maintaining a recognisable Japanese “odour” while endowing a syncretic mix of elements from different cultural backgrounds (2010: 100-5). Complementary to this statement, we would like to suggest that thanks to this same transcultural syncretism combined with the typical formal and aesthetic tropes of anime’s visual language, in the case of the *shōjo* and “Meisaku” series these artistic tropes are redefined with an explicit nationalisation of the characters, which, combined with a reciprocal reinforcement with sometimes the adaptation of literary works (which often entailed the depiction of a real setting or historical period, in this case the European ones), enabled a potential better integration of these particular series in overseas markets such as in Europe. However, this transnational reaching is (most of the times) an unintended consequence (at least by the Japanese creators) of the combination of the transcultural syncretism of contents with the visual language of the medium, shaping what we have labelled as “passive *mukokuseki*”.

In fact, to reinforce this idea of passive *mukokuseki* (at least from the perspective of the Japanese creators) we have evidence of the procedures of localisation, adaptation, and even censorship that some series received once they arrived *via* European distributors, in order to better suit—according to the producers’ assumptions—the local audiences of each country; an aspect that has been further researched by Pellitteri (2010: 395-412). Focussing on the analysis of these two cases (the *shōjo* series and “Meisaku” genres), framed by different topical and contextual factors as also the specificities of the medium, its industry and distribution, we can identify another dimension (or a more concretely complementary and potential function, whether intentional or not) of the European setting as a mechanism that could enable a greater commercial success of anime among overseas audiences and, in sum, a more accomplished internationalisation of the medium, as Lu pointed out (2008).

### *2.3. Contemporary anime: Between transcultural syncretism and transnational pilgrimage*

So far, in the previous cases, we have seen that the European setting had a wide presence in both anime productions mainly oriented to young girls and series that

adapted European literary works and folks. The European contents of these two trends are formally and conceptually shaped mainly by narrative and topical factors that usually exploit the exotic appeal of European cultural heritage in order to offer historical and/or idealised depictions of the continent. However, as we have stated previously, these representations of Europe are defined and limited not only by specific narrative genres or demographics (understanding demography as the main “target” of audience aimed by the series) but also by the dynamics and trends of the manga and anime industries in given moments of their development.

The European setting, both allegorically and explicitly, is still a recurrent convention in contemporary tv anime series and films after the creative expansion and transformations that the industry experienced during the 1980s and 1990s (Azuma, 2009 [2001]: 7-14, 27-9; Clements, 2013: 157-76), becoming contents that do not strictly adhere to specific genres, conventions, or trends as in the previous decades.<sup>10</sup> As we will see in this last section with different cases, we can find visions of cities, countries, or other European locations covered through different genres, from science fiction and the aforementioned *isekai* fantasy series to historical dramas and even steampunk subgenres. In iconographic and aesthetic terms, these settings could probably be defined with the concept “Europe in a blender” coined by Cobus Van Staden, which, through a meaning similar to Hernández-Pérez’s “Analogy adaptation”, alludes to the eclectic mixture of different European landscapes and elements in a single hybridised setting (Van Staden, 2011: 180-1; Hernández-Pérez, 2017a: 46-8, 113-5). Pellitteri has pointed out that these settings would pertain to a “hypocultural scenario”: anime series with a high blending and mixture of contents from different cultural backgrounds that clearly reflect the syncretic nature of anime contents and the universal appeal that they can exert (2010: 398-9).

However, we will see that in some cases the depictions of Europe go beyond these notions, containing settings that explicitly (and sometimes photorealistically) allude to specific countries and cities, depicting a European setting remarkably different from the historicised and idealised one from the *shōjo* and “Meisaku” series. In this sense, to better understand these more eclectic representations of Europe, researching the role of the

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<sup>10</sup> Moreover, these industrial dynamics can be comprehended inside what Pellitteri has labelled the “Dazzle phase”. The “Dazzle phase” is the period going from the second half of the 1990s to the late 2010s. In contrast with the Dragon phase, the Dazzle phase is defined by the awareness of anime’s appeal in overseas markets by the actors of the Japanese cultural industry, who now develop different strategies (such as the “Cool Japan”) to promote and sell their popular culture among foreign audiences (2010: 417-22).

creators' (producers or directors) interests and the sources they avail themselves of (usually framed *via* stereotyped constructs) during their creative process becomes crucial: this creative and productive process is shaped by personal experiences or concerns rather than by arguing about the suitability of a setting to a specific genre or theme. One of the most paradigmatic (and researched) cases is that of Miyazaki Hayao and his films for Studio Ghibli, widely analysed by scholars such as Helen McCarthy, Susan Napier or Pau Serracant, and reviewed by Miyazaki himself in some interviews, from which we can know that the depiction of European sceneries in some of his films as *Majo no takkyūbin* (1989), *Howl no ugoku shiro* (2004) or *Kurenai no buta* (1992), and even "Meisaku" anime such as *Heidi* contain direct allusions to some real cities and European countries, with a special predilection towards building a fictional nineteenth century (Miyazaki, 1996; McCarthy, 1999; Napier, 2005, Serracant, 2017).

According to some scholars, in order to trace these European imaginaries, we have to track the various work trips carried out by Miyazaki and other animators to some European countries. During the 1970s, they travelled to Sweden (1972), Switzerland (1973), and Italy (1975) in the context of the production of *Heidi*, *Marco*, and *Nagakutsushita no Pippi* ('Pippi Longstocking', a cancelled anime series project). Later on, Miyazaki would visit Wales, Stockholm, Visby, and Germany for projects like *Tenkū no shiro Laputa* (1985), *Howl no ugoku shiro* and *Majo no takkyūbin*, taking pictures and notes from all these places and being supported by travel guides and photo books. On the other hand, such a fascination with Europe and its countries and cultures is indebted to Miyazaki's closeness to European literature and novels (including *Bildungsroman*) since his childhood (McCarthy, 2002 [1999]: 38-42, 95-7; Serracant, 2017: 48-9, 86-7).

Focussing on the case of *Majo no takkyūbin*, McCarthy suggests, analysing Miyazaki's comments, that the location in which the film is set is a hybrid construct of different European cities, such as Paris, Amsterdam, and Naples, having Stockholm as the main iconographic axis, creating a space that combines the Baltic and the Mediterranean seas (Miyazaki cited by McCarthy, 2002 [1999]: 144). These eclectic amalgams of real places and iconic landscapes have been defined by Miyazaki under the expression "Akogare no Paris" (literally the 'yearned Paris') (Fig. 3), which encompasses the lyric, historicised, and oneiric depictions of Miyazaki regarding European cultures (Miyazaki cited in McCarthy, 2002 [1999]: 55, 65; Napier, 2005: 153). Moreover, according to Hu and Lamarre, these works and settings have—at least partly, and surely in the eyes of many foreign

observers—defined Miyazaki’s own “authorship” and appeal towards animation, shaping the identity of his studio and its productions under a “Ghibli brand” that combines a fascination with different cultures and distant futures (Lamarre, 2009: 87-8, 97-9; Hu, 2010: 132-3). As we have briefly introduced in previous sections, this idea of “authorship” and its implications on the recreation of specific contents and settings (in this case European-like ones) is remarkably interesting to understand the European setting in more “singular” anime productions, like Miyazaki’s movies and, by extension, Studio Ghibli’s), were the European-like settings can be seen as a trait of this “Ghibli brand”.



**Figure 3.** Details from *Howl no ugoku shiro* (2004) and *Kiki's Majo no takkyūbin* (1989). © Studio Ghibli.

The analysis of Miyazaki’s experiences, interests, and sources are factors that had a crucial role in the depictions and symbolisms of the European imaginaries from his works. It is from these methodologies that, for example, representations of the Victorian Industrial London or nineteenth century Paris have been analysed in the steampunk genre, adopted as a potential aesthetic and thematic element, or the recreation of historical events and periods such as the Middle Ages in *Vinland Saga* (see for example Lamarre, 2009: 47-59; Iguchi, 2010; Danesin, 2016, among others). From Miyazaki’s films like *Laputa, Kurenai no buta*, and *Howl*, Ōtomo Katsuhiro’s works such as *Steamboy* (2004) or some scenes from Kawasaki Hirotsugu’s *Spriggan* (1998), to tv anime series such as *Fushigi umi no Nadia*, nineteenth century Europe is taken as a scenario to develop stories that reflect the rise of technological modernity and militarism in order to transmit a critique regarding misuse of the human progress and the fatal consequences that these actions could cause (Lamarre, 2009: 47-59; Serracant, 2017: 54-7, 90-2, 104-7). Regarding the recreation of historical periods such as the Middle Ages, Maxime Danesin and Iguchi



Atsushi both refer to *Vinland Saga*, which exemplifies the use of both a deep historical reading (in terms of documentation and Norse literature) and trips to Iceland by the creator, in order to offer a fictional but also refined depiction of Nordic cultures, their accounts and costumes, which can exert an appeal among Japanese audiences (Iguchi, 2010: 65-70; Danesin, 2016: 101-7, 2017: 205-10).

On the other hand, there are contemporary anime works that reproduce and depict specific national cultures and places, sometimes following certain stereotyping conventions. An outstanding case is Spanish culture, which Manuel Hernández-Pérez has analysed through his focus on some episodes of *Crayon Shin-chan* (1992), the film *Andarushia no natsu* (2003) and the anime series *So - ra - no - wo - to* (2010) as his case studies. According to his research, the representations of Spanish cities and culture oscillate between the construction of stereotyped and romantic images of Spain in a hybrid *pastiche* of clichés (strongly indebted of the constructed images from travelling guides, cinema, and other mass media), and the “iconic”, that is, pictographically faithful depiction of specific landscapes. Hernández-Pérez develops this latter aspect regarding *So - ra - no - wo - to*, whose creators were directly inspired by the city of Cuenca after a tour carried out in 2009, in which the staff were fascinated by the “hanging houses” and other elements typical of that town’s aesthetics (Hernández-Pérez, 2017b: 44-53, 60-62).

Similar readings and considerations can be applied to the representations of other European cities and countries, sometimes combining this accurate depiction of some real monuments with their reconfiguration and framed according to narrative interests. For example, in *Jojo no kimyō na bōken Part 5: Ōgon no kaze* (1995-99), Italy and some of its cities and monuments are the setting of the most epic moments and battles of the series. According to Araki Hirohiko, author and creator of the series, when he develops a setting in which to locate his story and characters, it is necessary for him to visit these places in order to grasp new realities of the location, its history and culture, that cannot be perceived through photos, books or guides (Araki, 2015: 151-64). On the other hand, narrative finalities are also present in the depiction of Spanish culture in *One Piece* (1997). In this later case, Ōda Eii’chirō found the exotic appeal of Spanish culture suitable for the personality of Donquixote Doflamingo, villain of the Dressrosa narrative arc, whose island setting is based both on cultural stereotypes regarding Spanish culture (like *flamenco* music, Spanish flora or some local dishes, like *paella*) but also in the depiction of some

iconic Spanish monuments, like modernist buildings from Barcelona, bridges, Roman aqueducts, or bullrings (Ōda, 2014: 146).

Combined with narrative necessities and authorship-related interests, we need to also take a crucial variant into consideration: the temporary and sociocultural framework within which the creative process of the series is developed, shaped by the cultural trends of that specific temporary context and the audiences that will enjoy the product. This aspect can be identified in some sport series whose events and competitions enable the representation of European countries and certain cities. An outstanding case is Barcelona, whose 1992 Olympic Games not only broadened the global interest regarding the city but also coincided with the publication period of some sport series like *Yawara!* (1986), created by Urasawa Naoki. *Yawara!* tells the story of Inokuma Yawara, a girl who has been constantly trained in judo by her grandfather Jigorō with the objective of winning a gold medal at the Olympic Games. Published in 1986-93, the development of such a narrative trope and setting, with Yawara aiming to compete in the 1992 Barcelona Olympic Games, supposed a logical outcome by the author regarding the sociocultural context of the moment in which the series was being published and its contemporaneity, in which Barcelona was a scenario of global trend.

A similar case can be found with the more recent series *Yuri on Ice!* (2016), where Yuri and Victor, the main characters, visit Barcelona during episode 10 to attend the Grand Prix Final, an international figure skating competition that was celebrated in Barcelona in 2014 and 2015 (Fig. 4). In this case we can identify again how a specific conception of a European setting, formally based on the most iconic places of the city (which in some sense participate in the stereotyping domestication of touristic images and discourses), establishes an analogy with the real time frame in which the series was produced and broadcast, also entailing a process of documentation by its creators regarding the latest trends or conventions of the main theme of the series, which in this case is figure skating.



**Figure 4.** *Yuri on Ice!* (2016) © MAPPA.

From trips, travel guides, and personal experiences to history books, novels, or movies, or even the temporary framework and cultural background in which some anime series are produced and broadcast, the analysis of these factors and sources in relation to a specific anime and its creators are the ones that could better define the study of not only European but also “non-Japanese” contents at large in a wide variety of recent and new anime. In our review, we have traced this approach as the one that deals with the topical constructions and iconic images present in tourism’s visual discourses or other media such as cinema or literature (aspects that are sometimes connected with the media pilgrimage discourses) and finds influences from sources that shape the production of some anime series and their settings.

### **Conclusions**

European settings in anime series are an iconographic content whose meanings and formal shape are the product of an arbitrary condition. This situation is defined by the mutual relationships among different factors, both internal (the creative procedures related to production), sociocultural (which are present in the production of an anime work), and “external”, reflected in the different potential roles and functions that the series’ setting develops once the product has been broadcast, released, and even distributed overseas. Playing between these scenarios of production and reception, the messages and the functions that the European settings develop are also defined by their transcultural nature. This condition, framed by the use or depiction of foreign cultures and countries by Japanese artists and creators, shapes in fact the appeal of the European setting in contrast with other settings and contents that can be found in other series.

In some cases, the European contents and settings take the role of a narrative mechanism, becoming a convention of a specific genre or trend (see the *shōjo* and “Meisaku” series) in order to emphasise the appeal of the themes to transmit. This “pragmatic” function of the European setting is always combined with different iconic images, literary and visual sources, or even personal experiences (like trips or memories) that influenced the artist(s)’s creative process during the development of the series and its settings. Geopolitical factors also took a crucial role in the choice of some historical periods for some productions, where a matter of cultural imperialism could legitimate the European contents as an alleged “neutral universalism”, while at the same time it could serve to express some themes and ideas that were/are taboo in Japanese society. From this, we can conclude that the narrative uses of European settings is to some extent related to the depiction of foreign cultures, countries, and historical periods, that are seen as completely different to the Japanese cultural background.

On the other hand, and as we have argued before, the European settings can also highlight new connotations and meanings once the series are consumed by the audiences and the public sphere of other countries, participating in a more commercial and transnational dimension. In this sense, the European contents become potential subjects, intentionally or unintentionally, of procedures that could improve anime’s commercial success in overseas markets (especially in Europe and the Americas). While certain Japanese cultural specificities of manga and anime have probably been among the main elements that boosted a growing popularity of these media overseas, the European settings, especially in certain “phases” of the industry (let us think again of the “Meisaku” series) had the potential trait of developing an alternative path to international recognition of these anime series, based on the appeal and “closeness” that these settings, along with their characters and plots, developed with European audiences especially.

Moreover, it must be taken into account that these factors and conditions are always participating in a sociocultural context that is defined within a time span or period. The time periods of our societies enable one or another vision of Europe, shaping the visual culture that would influence the creative process of a series or film, in the sense that its creators and artists would make contents that will be familiar, in the same time frame, to the audiences who will consume the anime.

Formally and aesthetically, the representations of Europe can be distinguished and generally understood, on the one hand, in idealised and historicised constructs of Europe

(a convention of the shōjo and “Meisaku” series, among other trends) through the stereotyping conception of specific historical periods, their aesthetics, and their exotic appeal. On the other hand, some anime offer explicit depictions of European cities, along with their national cultural identities and monuments, which are shaped through the influence of the iconic images and visual culture that can be found in touristic guides, cinema, and other media. Based on this dichotomy, we can conclude that both in the idealised constructs of the continent offered by the shōjo and “Meisaku” series, and the explicit and pseudo-photorealistic depiction of globally known cities and monuments found in other cases, the European setting in manga and anime is represented in a more iconic and realistic aesthetic result than other “non-Japanese” contents like the Middle Age-fantasy imageries of some *isekai* series, among other possible examples.

Finally, we cannot ignore the transnational and transcultural framework that, located in the relevance of contemporary Japanese history and its cultural interactions with Europe, is always behind the series/films that contain and represent contents referring to overseas sceneries or figures. These historical and transcultural processes have established a particular cultural heritage of Europe in Japan, shaping the stereotyped idealisations and constructs of Europe and its countries as well as the interests regarding specific European cities or countries in Japanese arts, media, and culture, which, to some extent, reinforced different expressions of European contents in mass media productions.

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