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BETWEEN TEXTS AND IMAGES:
MUTUAL IMAGES OF JAPAN AND EUROPE

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A Transcultural Research Journal

Founded by

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BETWEEN TEXTS AND IMAGES:
MUTUAL IMAGES OF JAPAN AND EUROPE

EDITED BY

MARCO PELLITTERI

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Issue 1

Table of contents

Editorial – A few remarks on the notions of Japan and Japanese culture in Europe
Marco Pellitteri (Kōbe University, Japan) ……..1-21

Articles

Blonde is the new Japanese: Transcending race in *shōjo manga*
Olga Antononoka (Kyōto Seika University, Japan) ……..22-46

Making friends the Japanese Way: Exploring *yaoi* manga fans' online practices
Simon Turner (Chulalongkorn University, Thailand) ……..…….. 47-70

Uncertain spaces: The odd and the foreign in Tōei's feature films of the 1960
Marie Pruvost-Delaspre (New Sorbonne University, France) ……..71-94

The European Middle Ages through the prism of contemporary Japanese literature: A study of *Vinland Saga*, *Spice & Wolf*, and *L'Éclipse*
Maxime Danesin (François-Rabelais University, France)…….95-122

The shifting representation of Japan in Belgian comics, in fifteen years after WWII (1945-1960)
Pascal Lefèvre (LUCA School of Arts, Campus Sint-Lukas, Belgium)……..123-153

Scenes of Childhood: Exhibiting childhood as national imagery
Aurore Yamagata-Montoya (University of the West of England, UK) ……..154-171

Editorial – A few remarks on the notions of Japan and Japanese culture in Europe

Marco PELLITTERI | Kōbe University, Japan

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Dear readers, students, fellow scholars,

welcome to this first instalment of *Mutual Images*.

About Mutual Images and its purposes

The philosophy from which the *Mutual Images* was born is that of exploring the reciprocal influences between Japan and Europe, with an emphasis on the visual cultures. It started as a workshop, hosted every year by a different partner university, in Europe and in Japan. The quality of the papers presented and the increased interest and responses of researches over the four years that the Mutual Images workshop has been running has incited us to complement it with this peer-reviewed publication. The first issues are fed by some of the papers presented in the past workshops. However, in the long term, the *Mutual Images* Journal aims at evolving on its own and receiving paper submissions independently from participation in the workshops.

The first two editions of the Mutual Images Workshop began to approach the large family of topics that can be contained in such a wide and fascinating keyword. This was done through the selection of six of the papers presented during the first two workshops (2013 and 2014)[1] plus my

[1] The first one was generously hosted by Kōnan University (Kōbe, Japan), thanks to the precious help of Professors Konishi Yukio and Nakamura Noriko. The second edition was held at François-Rabelais

introductory remarks. In these notes, I will list a series of aspects concerning the concept of "mutual images" applied to the influence between Japan and Europe, with a focus on the importance of youth subcultures in the importation process of the so-called "J-culture" in Europe.

Let us begin from the word *Europe*. There are of course several "Europes". Mediterranean and pelagic Europe, western Europe, northern Europe, central Europe, eastern Europe, are not just geographic indications but in each of these areas they also imply different experiences and self-perceptions of their own cultural position and historical role within this multifaceted geo-political and cultural reality. This also applies to the dimension we are here dealing with, that of the reciprocal influences with this special country and cultural universe, Japan. Therefore, perhaps it is not a fortuity that the European speakers involved in the workshop came from France, United Kingdom, Belgium, and Italy, with ramifications in Germany and Spain; and, of course, from Japan. The mosaic these papers began to compose is at its first tiles, varying from literary to sociological, anthropological, aesthetic, and historical issues.

Let's go to the word *images*. Given the multidisciplinarity of this workshop and of those that will hopefully follow, it appears clear that we are not referring only to iconic, iconographic, visual cultures, but also to the ways general *notions* of a foreign culture and nation are thought of, built, and circulated abroad. There is, for instance, a useful and productive research paradigm, followed especially in continental Europe, called *image studies* or *imagology*, which originates from a long

University (Tours, France) and co-organized with the Research Unit ICD (Cultural and Discursive Interactions). We are especially grateful for the support of ICD's director, Professor Mónica Zapata, and Professor Hélène Maurel-Indart (François-Rabelais University), co-head of this event.

tradition of studies on stereotypes and prejudice, and investigates the way national literary productions, the press, and public opinion, create conceptual representations (in short, "images" indeed) of foreign societies and nations.1 This is a sociological and, in wide terms, political aspect of a process of image-building that we should also take into account in our studies on mutual images. However, we can't forget that the word *image* immediately reminds us of anything connected to the *visual* world. When we are asked to think of *images of a culture*, we see before our eyes paintings and frescos, buildings, churches and temples, streets and squares, theatre plays, films and their actors, comics and animation, artists, musicians and pop stars, fashion, video games and new technologies, politicians and people of public interest. These exercises in trying to visualise the several areas of a national culture, when applied to Japan, let strong and numerous pictures take life in our minds. But this process is also effective in the reverse direction: *mutual images*, as a keyword, implies that Japanese thinkers, artists, writers, and common people have formed along the decades and centuries many images of Europe and European cultures. Hence the bi-directional purpose of these workshops is that of studying the way mutual representations, from Europe to Japan and back, have been formed and what their historical, aesthetic, social outcomes have been.

In the first edition of *Mutual Images* we have explored, thanks to the papers selected, some of the relevant areas of the never ending dialogue between Japanese and European cultures. Being the title of this first workshop "Exporting Young Japan: between Text and Image," the focus was on visual and literary youth cultures in their transitions from and

to Europe and Japan; the domains that have been analysed refer to an example from the importance of facial traits in manga characters, the institutional role of the Japan Foundation in showing images of Japan around the world, and the manga subculture as a social practice among European teen-aged and young adult fans. The second workshop, from which three revised papers are published here, focused on the ideas of perceptions and representations of Japan, a theme that the Mutual Images Workshops deal with regularly. "Portrait of Japan: Myths and Realities of Japan in art" brought together scholars who considered images constructed in Japanese literature, European comics and animation films.

Orientalisms and Occidentalisms

Although the papers published in this double issue are informed by ideas of *Japaneseness*, *ethnicity*, and different cultural practices, I would like to add here another couple of concepts of primary importance: *Orientalisms* and *Occidentalisms*. In fact, it is inevitable to take Orientalisms into account when, from a European perspective, we analyse how Japanese culture and society have been perceived and narrated by European observers, authors, artists, policy makers; likewise, it is inevitable to take Occidentalisms into account when, from a Japanese perspective, we analyse how European cultures and societies have been perceived and narrated by Japanese observers, authors, artists, policy makers. There exist different orientalistic and occidentalistic attitudes and outcomes, which is why I have used the plural form for both terms. Among the outstanding scholars in this area of study I refer to Miyake Toshio, who devoted his recent research

activities to the ways images of "the West" and of Italy in particular are built in Japanese cultural contexts (Miyake 2012 and 2013). As Miyake points it out, "Occidentalism is not limited to a simple reversed or counter-Orientalism, expressed by anti- or pro-Western ideologies, and used strategically for internal nationalism or subversion. Rather, Occidentalism is the condition of Orientalism's very possibility and refers both to self-definition on the Euro-American side as well as to the definition of the other on the non-Euro-American side" (*ibid.*). Miyake also quotes a revealing claim by Sakai Naoki: "What gives the majority of Japanese the characteristic image of Japanese culture, is still its distinction from the so-called West… The loss of the distinction between the West and Japan would result in the loss of Japanese identity in general" (Sakai 2002, 564). Hence a fundamental topic to approach and study will be that of what cultural attitudes and discursive strategies lie beneath Japanese artistic products and works intended to depict European cultures. What I can very quickly suggest here is that, as Miyake notices in his writings, Occidentalisms and Orientalisms work very similarly; for example, in the case of Italy—which obviously is the one I can better relate to—there is a variety of Japanese manga, anime, and literary works which, in displaying Italian narrative sets, situations, and characters, privilege the classic historical dimension of Italy, exalting the exotic fascination for a country whose main characteristic is seen to be lying in a faraway, almost mythological past, like the Roman empire and republic, the Florence of Dante or, of course, the Rinascimento. In this sense, the process is very close to what happens in Orientalisms: the Other is far not only in space but also in time, and its

raison d'etre as a different object is in that it does not share the same "here and now" of the looking subject.

Japan is, in our discourse on mutual images, more an imagined and fantasized place than a real one. This also applies when we limit our discourse to youth cultures, as it has been shown, for instance, in recent research on the connections between the popularity of anime and manga in Europe—namely in France and Italy—and a new kind of cultural tourism towards Japan and the learning of the Japanese idiom, both based on the passion for manga, anime, and their narrative settings (Sabre 2006 and 2007, Pellitteri 2010).

New Japonismes and a "mangaesque" set of influences

We know about the definition, features, and origin of Japonisme in France, England, Germany, and Italy (and other European countries in that neighbourhood) especially between the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century. That was a specific array of fascinations for Japanese arts and culture, but I would like to propose here that there have been two other kinds of Japonisme in the ensuing decades. In the late 1970s and in the 1980s, especially in Italy, Spain and France, the first great arrival of Japanese animated TV series occurred, accompanied by a wide displaying of collateral publications: illustrated books, original and copied manga, related toys and gadgets, licensed products and goods of all sorts. It was the so-called first anime boom in Europe, and it established the first step of a Japanese pop culture for youths in the Old Continent, which I have called "the Dragon phase" (Pellitteri 2010). Sociologist Yui Kiyomitsu has theorised a general scheme of the steps of the progressive acceptance of Japanese pop

cultures abroad. His theory is based on empirical research: it is, in sociological terms, an *ex post* theory, with descriptive and explanatory functions which help us to find some constant dynamics in this process, a phenomenon appearing to follow very similar phases in very different countries. From a first step of refusal and disgust for the aesthetics and contents embedded in anime and manga, we assist with a certain regularity to a process of complete acceptance of the manga/anime culture in the local cultural system, during a time span generally going from 20 to 30 years. The imagination and imagery of millions of European kids changed in those years: the influence of myriads of Japanese anime on television, new anime-inspired toys in the households, illustrated books with anime characters, and soon afterwards manga in kids' magazines, created a new sensibility and aesthetic taste for more than one generation of children, who later would become teen-agers and young adults and would buy, in the 1990s and 2000s, tons of translated manga during the second step of this expansion (which I have called "the Dazzle phase"), when not only European publishers and TV networks asked for manga and anime like in the previous phase, but now also Japanese companies themselves began to strongly promote the exportation of their characters, series, merchandise, in an international combined "push & pull" process.

In the late 1970s and in the 1980s two generations of children, in the aforementioned countries, had already begun to change their personal ways of graphic production: in other words, their drawings dramatically turned towards figurative styles that tended to emulate anime and manga's images, items, and characters (Bertolini and Manini 1988, Pellitteri 1999 and 2010). In the 1990s and 2000s some of those former

children would become either amateur or professional authors of Italian, Spanish, French, Belgian, German comics, and their styles of drawing would be, consciously or not, influenced by manga and anime: settings, division of the pages in panels and their dimensions and shapes, visual codes, body and face morphology of the heroes, even the ways narratives were composed, or the characters' psychologies, and so forth. I have studied this huge set of influences in several writings (Pellitteri 2004a, 2004b, 2007, 2008, 2010, 2011, 2012b), also proposing the concept of *trans-acculturation*, "to point out the dynamics of inclusion of themes, concepts, and Japanese imagination values in the fringes of Italian [and European] fans of Japanese comics and animation" (Pellitteri 2010, 44-5). I believe it is possible to frame these two periods of popularity and deep influence of Japanese pop culture upon European youths as two new kinds of subcultural neo-Japonisme, making of course the opportune distinctions and taking of course into consideration what has been already called "Neo-Japonisme." British anthropologist Sharon Kinsella, in an early 1997 article, spoke of a "Japanization of European youth" and this definition, although a little exaggerated, is not far from truth if we focus our attention onto those fans of J-culture whose cultural taste and even personal expressions in terms of lifestyle, in relation to Japanese pop cultures, fall into that composite category named "mangaesque," by which German scholar Jaqueline Berndt (2007a, 2007b, 2012, 2013) not only indicates a set of styles and attitudes related to manga as literary and graphic texts but also, and above all, a corpus of production and distribution attitudes of cultural products that have an impact on the consumer's and prosumer's

cultures. Today many items, products, behaviours, social, and community practices could be defined "mangaesque" and this converges with my notions of "new kinds of Japonisme" and "transacculturation:" a family of Japanese literary and entertainment forms and products has become in recent years the centre around which growing communities of youths but also of former youths assemble. In other words, we could talk of a process of "manga-ification" of certain intermediality-based processes which involve production and consumption of cultural artefacts, regardless of their link to the world of manga intended as narratives and editorial products.

A last element to be outlined here is that communities of elder fans, who had lived the first phases of the anime and manga's success in their own countries and now are often part of globalised communities formed thanks to the new technologies, still see animation, comics, toys and gadgets coming from Japan as something deeply, typically, absolutely *Japanese*; whereas, now, not a few among the younger members of such communities can be defined "J-culture natives" and do not necessarily see J-culture's products and stylistic features as cool as their elder fellow fans do because of their Japanese origin, or in some cases they do not qualify such items, styles, and narratives as Japanese *at all*. In other words, this culture is not always perceived by young fans as a *foreign* culture, but rather as *their own* culture, stratified, or literally molten, with European ways of expression. And this is one of the expected effects of cultural globalisation: not just the notion of glocal, that is, the local dimension absorbing and melting with the international one, but the very fact that a culture that once was foreign now becomes the native culture of these new fans and they don't even realize that this

process has taken place, for they are young and currently don't care of what happened before their time.

Mediated portraits: Japan and Japanese culture in seven French, German, Italian representative newspapers

I have been conducting, in 2013 and part of 2014,[2] an investigation on the ways Japan is portrayed: an analysis of how events related to this country and its citizens and personalities have been accounted for in the mainstream daily press of three European countries—Italy, France, Germany—in the late twentieth century, *before* and *after* the spreading and success of Japanese animation and Japanese pop culture at large. This research device was used as a filter not only to understand the impact of this expression form and its alleged or real "cultural power" as a gateway to Japanese culture, but also, and especially, to notice differences in attitudes and mind sets between the specialized press on anime and the mainstream daily press in the aforementioned European countries, both in general and in the occasion of some specific traumatic events in the Japanese nation in the recent past.

In the last twenty years a shift has occurred in the news media in the ways of depicting Japan, its society, its culture. Recent studies (Pellitteri 2010 and 2014, Bouissou 2012) show that a considerable part of such shift has been due to the success of J-culture (especially manga, animation, toys). This outcome was evident in France, Germany, Italy, more than elsewhere. The study of the ways news media have been covering relevant facts on Japan and Japanese personalities between 1991 and

[2] This research has been conducted thanks to a one-year research fellowship offered by the Japan Foundation.

2011 has given shape to a diachronic/comparative map of the mediated knowledge on Japan in these three key national contexts.

I have selected five events in the 1991-2011 period which received news coverage:

1) 1991-92: European release of the film *Akira* (1988, by Ōtomo Katsuhiro);[3]

2) 1995/1: the Great Hanshin Earthquake (17 January);

3) 1995/2: the sarin gas attack in the Tōkyō subway (20 March);

4) 2002-05: the worldwide recognition of animation director Miyazaki Hayao;[4]

5) 2011: the Tōhoku tsunami and Fukushima power plant incidents (from 11 March).

The hypothesized parabola in the framing processes (Goffman 1974, Moscovici 1984) of Japan begins in 1991-92, when the animated movie *Akira* is released in Europe, becoming the first big landmark of a new role of J-culture worldwide; continues with the two major crises Japan has to face in 1995; passes through a period in which Japan is seen as a realm of high quality contemporary artistry, thanks to the worldwide recognition of animation director Miyazaki Hayao; and ends in 2011, when the tsunami in Tōhoku and the disasters in Fukushima originate the widest and most prolonged European news media coverage of Japan since WWII.

One pivotal mass medium was selected: daily press. It was chosen over other forms of news for two main reasons. (1) Homogeneity of the researched materials: before the early 2000s the news services on the Internet were not fully developed in some or all of the three considered countries. (2) Cogency for this research's purposes: in printed journalism,

[3] The release of this movie has been one of the most crucial media events that have generated or renovated, in the European countries here considered, the huge popularity of Japanese animation, manga and pop culture at large.

[4] Between 2002 and 2005 Miyazaki Hayao was awarded the Academy Award in Los Angeles for his film *Spirited Away* (2001), the Golden Bear at the Berlin Film Festival for the same movie and the Golden Lion as Lifetime Achievement at the Venice Film Festival. The news coverage on him was unprecedented for a Japanese animation director and generated a wider attention to Japanese culture in the mainstream media.

due to its structure and discursive logics, it is much easier to find ideal data material in terms of representational narratives on Japan; the architecture of the news in the press media makes possible to decrypt more organic tales and rhetorics of depiction than in TV news services.

Two newspapers were selected for each country (but three for Italy), for their spectrum of representativeness in commercial, ideological, cultural terms: *Le Monde* and *Le Figaro* (France); *Süddeutsche Zeitung* and *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (Germany); *Corriere della Sera*, *la Repubblica* and *La Stampa* (Italy). Through them it has been possible to record the attitudes towards Japan of the respective journalistic systems, public opinions, cultural-political establishments, by means of a qualitative content analysis.

Provisional outcomes

National news media in Europe show varied conceptions and adopt several rhetorical narratives on "Japan", here intended as a cultural label and set of mediated notions. These different conceptions are due to the history of the diplomatic relations with Japan, the national cultural/artistic tradition, the critic literature on Japan along the centuries, the degree of awareness of journalism [5] and the level of penetration of a specific phenomenon at work since the early 1980s, that is, the arrival of Japanese pop cultures (mainly anime and manga, and related practices). Therefore, a crucial goal was the study of the ways J-culture played and is currently playing a role upon the attitudes adopted in the news coverage on Japan.

[5] That is, the level of professional maturity of reporters and the positioning of a national news media system towards Japan.

The three following themes gave life to the load-bearing research paths of the portion of the analysis devoted to the news coverage on Japan in the period 1991-2011 and, overall, led to the main results, here accounted in a synthetic and summarized fashion.

• *Framings of otherness*. When Japan is presented in the news, different narratives and priorities are at work in France, Germany, Italy. I have identified the following framings.

— *France.* (1) The France/Japan relations in terms of environment and nuclear energy policies; (2) a French fascination for Japanese traditional/contemporary cultures.

In other words, in the French press the focus and emphasis have more often than not been on the aura of rich and deeply elegant and traditional culture of the Japanese heritage and of the Japanese as a people, and on the cultural relations between France and Japan; as for what concerns the fifth event used as case study (the Tōhoku tsunami and Fukushima disasters), the most highly reported and discussed topic in the French newspapers was, besides the breaking news on the dramatic facts in Japan, France's own nuclear agenda.

— *Germany.* (1) An economic framing: Japan as a top industrial partner and as a financial market; (2) Japan and Germany's nuclear policies; (3) Japan as a place of art.

In other words, in the German press the emphasis has mainly been on the industrial, economic and financial connection and on the joint ventures between the two nations in the Asian scenario, and only secondarily on the purely cultural dimension.

— *Italy.* The dominant framing is that of a *"monstering" of otherness*, falling under the perspectives of European Orientalism and of an exotic perception of Japan at large (Miyake 2012, Pellitteri 2013): Japan as a weird place, the Japanese as weird folks.

One of my initial hypotheses was confirmed: in the Italian press the Japanese people, society and culture have been often represented as "deviant" mainly because of the Japanese perceivably different collective cultural responses to events of life by comparison with an alleged "norm" according to the standards socially shared in Italy. More in general, it has been crucial to the analysis to record how Italy, Germany and France have coped with the 3/11 events in Japan in relation to their own nuclear agendas, the public opinion and the positioning of nuclear energy in their national policies.

• *Tales of trauma.* I could find that—the economic sections and very sporadic articles related to the cultural domains put aside—most news concerning Japan in the European press focus on dramatic events much more often than on current politics. In this research, in particular, attention was granted to the ways depictions of trauma-related media events were dealt with (Mitchell 1986, Alexander *et al.* 2004, Kurasawa 2004, Mitchell and Hansen 2010). In this context, and in tight relation to the previous point, I took into account how the Japanese were perceived and represented, in the selected press media, as "different" in their collective responses to traumatic events (Mōri 2006, LaMarre 2008, Stahl, Williams *et al.* 2010, Pellitteri 2013).

• *J-culture.* J-culture, after the 1980s, influenced the lexicon about Japan and the framings of this country in the news. I have used it as an

intervening variable to understand its alleged or real cultural impact as a new gateway to Japanese culture. It turned out that the media impact of anime on television and manga in the publishing market, not only on the younger generations but in the public discourse at large, has played a not irrelevant role in the definitions of Japan in the news and in the way Japan has been told to the readership. Such role varies according to the country, and one of the fundamental reasons that emerged in the study is the exposure to anime and manga, which was massive in Italy, important in France, mild in Germany. As it has been recorded in the content analysis on the articles retrieved, words like "manga", "anime", "otaku" and other terms related to Japanese pop culture are much more present in the articles of the Italian newspapers, followed by the French ones, and only more rarely do they appear in the articles of the German newspapers.

I am currently carrying out the analysis on the materials I have collected during my previous fellowship with the Japan Foundation and more and more definite results will be released in the close future throughout further articles, papers and finally a book.

Therefore, to use French at least once in this contribution, "à suivre".

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Blonde is the new Japanese: Transcending race in *shōjo* manga

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Abstract

There is not much research available on the issue of race in generic manga. If addressed at all, the focus is on manga as overcoming the confines of race. The assumption that manga representations overcome racial barriers can lean on the fact that characters' supposed race and visual representation frequently do not correspond, creating a character design visually abstracted from any specific race. Furthermore, on a global scale, manga has a racially diverse readership: readers project themselves onto allegedly Caucasian manga characters regardless of their own skin colour. In this paper I will focus specifically on shōjo manga, and will trace how visual racial abstraction transcends specific race, yet remains involved with race-related topics such as alienation and otherness. I will start by analysing possible meanings of race-relevant elements in character design with emphasis on gender. In order to do that, I will begin with investigation of Oshiyama Michiko's analysis of essential gender traits in shōjo manga. Further, I will introduce several discourses of race in manga, such as theory of "speciesism" by Thomas LaMarre's and Terry Kawashima's theory of "selective reading" of racial traits. In the framework of shōjo manga, I will focus specifically on the image of the Westerner, from early shōjo manga elaborated on by Ōgi Fusami and Ishida Minori, and proceeding with analysis of the eroticized image of the foreigner in contemporary women's manga by Nagaike Kazumi. I will introduce theory of "plastic lines" by Thomas LaMarre in order to focus on the construction of "the other" in relation to the visual representation of race via specific lines. I intend to conclude that shōjo manga may transcend visual traits of any specific race, but that it retains the recurring theme of conflict and otherness, which in part is related also to racial issues. Visual abstraction from specific race, however, appears to imply "otherness" as an external feature, placed by society upon the characters' bodies, while the visual representation of their interiority facilitates the impression of sameness, or absence of otherness.

KEYWORDS

Shōjo manga; Race; Japaneseness; Ōgi Fusami; Ishida Minori; Racial representation otherness.

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Race[1] is frequently addressed in the media of comics. In celebrated works such as *Maus* by Art Spiegelman, *Persepolis* by Marjane Satrapi,

[1] Race is a category of population classification based on common ethnic or genetic descent. However, the term is so intricately caught up in national, legal, discursive and scientific history that the use of it is always socially constructed. Further, racial categorisation is routinely assigned on the basis of visible characteristics, especially skin-colour, and so it may be only indirectly connected to biological

American Born Chinese by Gene Luen Yang and others the topic of race is addressed as both a basis for identity construction, and the context of "otherness" and discrimination. Race is thoroughly explored in the comics and these works are in turn analysed by extensive research. However, in case of Japanese mainstream manga, the issue of race is rarely explored. When addressed academically, mostly the focus is placed on manga as overcoming the confines of specific race.[2] In this context, the assumption that manga representations overcome racial barriers appears to lean on the fact that a character's supposed race and physical appearance frequently diverge, creating certain visual abstraction from any specific race. Moreover, contemporary mainstream manga seldom addresses specific racial problems, such as discrimination, neither does it represent race as a basis for identity formation.

Furthermore, on a global scale, manga has multiracial readership: these readers project themselves onto racially abstract, yet in most cases light-skinned, manga characters regardless of their own skin colour.

Of course, character designs which are visually abstract from specific race are not characteristic of all manga. While s*einen manga* (young adult manga)*,* especially *gekiga* genre frequently favour recognisable racial features, *shōnen* (boys') and *shōjo* (girls') manga are famous for flamboyant designs unrelated to a character's race. In this paper I will focus on *shōjo manga*, which has a long history of subversive contents

inheritance. In other words, visible racial markers have entered the realm of the sign, where their biological origins do not determine the way they are used in **ideological** communication, culture, or politics. (Hartley 2011, 220).

[2] In Japanese discourse of manga, this specificity is referred to as "mukokuseki", which literally means, "without a nationality".

and subversive readings. I will focus on the race, and on the gendering of certain race and racial features in the conventions of *shōjo* manga.

Although the generic character design has been diversified since the genre's inception, on a larger scale it still preserves following tendencies: positive (which frequently is synonymous with innocent) characters in shōjo manga generally have big round eyes, blank or light eye and hair colour, which becomes vibrant on the cover illustrations. Beautiful, evil, and sexually aggressive characters are depicted with slanted narrow eyes that rise at the outer corners as a sign of sexual deviousness and insubordination or independence and aloofness. However, interpreting these signs as racially significant would be incorrect, as a diversity of such allegedly racial features appears within one and the same character; respectively, juxtaposition of racial-looking traits in character design renders it visually racially abstract.

One possibility is to perceive visual racial abstraction in character design as symbolic representation of universality, which allows multiracial readers to identify better with the characters. Matt Thorn suggests that visual design of manga characters is abstract and dependent on the specific artists' style. Therefore, unless otherwise specified it would appear Japanese to the Japanese reader by default. He suggests that "Caucasian"-like perceptions of manga characters by white readers is based on the fact that US readers expect Asian to be represented with Asian stereotype-features, such as dark hair, slanted eyes etc., and therefore interpret the unspecified stylised characters as Caucasian by default (Thorn 2004). Terry Kawashima (2002), through her analysis of contemporary titles, in a similar vein suggests that while

design is abstract, separate elements may be recognised, conditioning the reader to focus *selectively* on certain visual elements of such juxtaposed character design which they recognise as close to their own racial self-image. In precisely this way, manga is supposedly transcending any *specific* essentialist notion of race. Meanwhile In "Shōjo manga to seiyō – shōjo manga ni okeru "nihon" no fuzai to seiyōteki imeji no hanran ni tsuite" (2004), Ōgi Fusami traces the gradual historical transformation of Caucasian-looking race-relative features into conventions which represent the "universal" qualities of the character, consciously introduced in early shōjo manga of the 1960s, which was not intended for the international reader.

Moreover, in early shōjo manga from the 1970s, such as *Poem of the Wind and the Trees* by Takemiya Keiko or *The Heart of Thomas* by Hagio Moto, race is sometimes addressed directly in the context of "otherness" and discrimination. However, the visual representation of characters was also largely ambiguous. For example, visual elements of race such as darker skin were alluded to with the use of screen-tone only in the introductory page, while later the character was depicted with the same blank skin as other characters.

As a result, there is no visible racial difference in character design. Rather, race is indicated through other conventions, related to verbalisation or sometimes through culturally specific narrative settings.

I will trace in this article how in shōjo manga the elements that could be perceived as racial are disassembled and serve to mark a specific gender rather than a specific race; this culminates in the trope of gendering a certain race. In turn, this produces a dual "otherness" in a

variety of contexts. Consequently, this paper will attempt to critically analyse the possibilities and limitations of racially abstract visualisation and the possibility of manga to transcend and subvert an essentialist reading of race and gender. In the multifaceted media of manga, the visual dimension has proved of great importance as one of the levels of meaning-construction. In this article I will focus on the racially abstract character design, with an emphasis of its role in the construction of gender and vice versa. I will pay special attention to one gendered race trope in shōjo manga: the Westerner.

Selective Reading of Racial Traits: Marked and Unmarked Races

Terry Kawashima in her article "Seeing Faces, Making Races: Challenging Visual Tropes of Racial Difference" (2002) analyses the mechanism of reader-identification in relation to the racially abstract characters of *shōjo manga* in the case of Caucasian readers. She addresses the assumption made by white consumers that multi-coloured character designs are modelled after the Caucasian race. Kawashima acknowledges that certain traits may be perceived as racial features, however she emphasises how the juxtaposition of supposed different racial features derails attempts of discerning any specific race. In order to inspect how racial traits are juxtaposed visually in *shōjo manga* characters, Kawashima focuses on the *Sailor Moon* manga and anime series and the widespread misconception of *Sailor Moon* protagonists appearing white to white readers.

Kawashima suggests that in order to identify with characters better, the white reader focuses *selectively* on certain traits, noticing for example round, light eyes as signs of Caucasian descent, while ignoring

the same character's allegedly Asian small nose, mouth, or flat, round face that present a certain balance of features, characteristic of Asian faces, in her opinion.

Throughout her argument, Kawashima builds up a theory that the visual juxtaposition of different racial traits becomes an invitation for multiracial readers to identify with the respective traits which they recognise as close to their own self-image. The same character may be selectively interpreted as Japanese and as Caucasian, and both Japanese readers and white readers may therefore interpret these abstract depictions as identification anchors. Therefore, the deformation style of *shōjo* manga appears to encompass a variety of signs.

Matt Thorn, in his online article "The Face of the Other" (2004, n.p.), suggests that in general that visual character design in manga does not so much adhere to stereotypes, as they are subjugated to the author's specific style, and racial diversity is omitted even in the stories which are introducing race and racial elements in the narrative setting, in order to maintain the stylistic visual consistency.

He further objects to the assumption that manga character's faces appear Caucasian due to colourful eyes and hair as well as the size of the eyes and their proportion (Thorn 2004, n.p.). Thorn suggests that since manga is primarily targeted at the Japanese consumer, the non-marked visual representation of a human being will be by default read as Japanese. Therefore, the homogeneous visual depiction of both Caucasian characters and Japanese or other Asian characters in manga do not mean that the model for these representations had been initially

Caucasian. Thorn suggests that character design is "unmarked" by stereotypes (Thorn 2004, n.p.).

Readers who have been raised in a symbolic system, that uses Caucasian as default, would expect the markers of Asian to indicate the "Asian" race, and in the absence of such stereotypes, perceives the "unmarked" character as their own default, that is, in Matt Thorn's argument – Caucasian.

Therefore, manga indeed transcends specific race. I would like to suggest, that in precisely this way, manga is engaged with issues of race by deleting the visual distinction and giving a variety of juxtaposed stereotypical features new symbolic significance. Let us consider how certain race-relevant elements are further employed in gender construction. And enquire if through inspecting certain gender-related tropes there is a possibility to trace back the racial context.

Gender and Conventional Character Design

The basic literacy of *shōjo* manga conventions allegedly conditions the reader to interpret the character design, including the race-like features, as indicative of personality and gender rather than race. In Japanese *shōjo* manga criticism, certain visual conventions are usually regarded as signifiers of one specific gender-stereotype, such as innocent character, macho character, femme fatale, etc.

Nevertheless, dismissing the possibility of stereotypical racial traits connoting actual race in certain contexts is also dangerous. Furthermore, manga is not only composed of visual elements, as Ōgi Fusami reminds us, while maintaining visual homogeneity, the race of the characters in

shōjo manga is indicated otherwise verbally, or visually through interaction with background and other means (Ōgi 2004, 545).

Oshiyama Michiko's analysis of gender representation in Ikeda Riyoko's *Rose of Versailles* presents a good example of frequently used essentialist gender tropes in *shōjo manga* which remain relevant for the majority of contemporary titles. Oshiyama assumes that femininity is indicated by light colours and soft curved lines, big blue or green eyes, round faces, and blonde wavy hair. These traits are further amplified by the flowing ribbons, ruffles, flowery elements on the backgrounds and harmonious flow of panels into one another. The epitomes of such femininity are the young Marie Antoinette and Rosalie. In contrast, strong male characters are distinguished by smaller eyes, low-key eyelashes, pronounced noses, and elongated thin faces. Traits we see in Fersen and André. The adapted table below lists essential elements, which Oshiyama analyses in her text (2007, 165-170).

Masculinity	Femininity
Face: Narrow eyes; eyes with outer corners turned up; short eyelashes; long, angular face; prominent high-bridged nose; bigger mouth without lip-contour; emphasized eyebrows. **Hair:** Shorter hair; dark or subdued and cold-hued hair; limited highlights; darker skin tone on color illustrations. **Body:** Bigger body frame in relation to other characters, wide shoulders, broad frame, musculature. **Clothes:** Masculine clothes, suits, uniforms, emphasized masculinity of the body-shape.	**Face:** Wide, round (innocent) eyes; long eyelashes; round (childish) face; small nose; small mouth with lip contour; thin eyebrows. **Hair:** Light (warm hued) hair; long hair; curly hair; highlights showing the glossiness of the hair; elaborate hairstyles. **Body:** Smaller body frame in relation to other characters, narrow shoulders, narrow body, no muscle. **Clothes:** Feminine dress elements, flowing fabrics, frills, lace, patterns, emphasizes the smallness of the frame.

Furthermore, Oshiyama traces how these elements are combined within specific characters, indicating their personality with respect to gender (Oshiyama 2007, 165-170). For example, independent and malicious women are depicted with longer face and slanted eyes. Or certain male characters have bigger eyes and softer features, which are visual indicators of their more passive personalities.

Both male and female features constitute the protagonist Oscar's visual design, who had been born a woman, but raised as a man and a soldier. In the narrative, everyone knows her actual biological sex, but it is her ambiguous gender-role that becomes one of the central problems of the story, in contrast with the excessive femininity of Marie-Antoinette. By analysing eye-shape, length of eyelashes, and in the case of colour illustrations, also shades of hair colour, Oshiyama traces cross-dressing Oscar's gender ambiguity. Narrower, sharper eye-shape may

indicate dominance/subjectivity in a specific situation, for example, when Oscar takes command of men. But similar visual markers are also used when Oscar is presented as a strong counterpart to female leads, such as Marie Antoinette and Rosalie. Or, in reverse, when she attempts to look feminine, and objectifies herself for her unrequited love-interest – Fersen, Oscar's eyes are depicted rounder with much longer eyelashes, while in her romantic scenes with her true love André, their visual similarity fosters the impression of their equality.

Respectively, gendered elements may not just indicate visually the personality of the character, but furthermore they fluctuate in the same character's design, emphasising their various faculties in specific situations, similarly to Oscar's shifting appearance between more feminine and more masculine. Within the same manga work, these traits can fluctuate, visualising narrative context. Specifically, these changes imply a changing power-position (subject/object) and gender nuances.

However, Oshiyama does not touch upon racial and class connotations of visual designs in *Rose of Versailles*. Although *Rose of Versailles* is set in Europe and all characters are Caucasian, we see that a variety of gender traits appear to overlap with certain racially recognisable elements. Furthermore, race-related traits such as darker hair on servants and poor people, contrasted to the overwhelmingly blank-haired elite (most elite characters are depicted without wigs), are bypassed.

In addition, in *shōjo manga* racially-coloured visual traits are mostly blended within the same character. *Shōjo manga* faces combine different racial traits in one and the same character's visual representation, achieving visual abstraction as well as borrowing symbolic meanings

and stereotypes from a variety of sources. This provides spaces for re-contextualisations beyond plot-related contents of the manga.

Speciesism and Plasticity

Another stylistic and narrative trope that comes from early manga is replacing race-specific depictions with another type of visual distinction. In his analysis of pre-war anime such as *Norakuro* (1935), *Momotarō: umi no shinpei* (1945), or in the post-war, Tezuka Osamu's animal-centric franchises such as *Janguru taitei* (1965) Thomas LaMarre in his article "Speciesism, Part I: Translating Races into Animals in Wartime Animation" focusses on anthropomorphic animals as the racially amalgamated ambiguous character designs in relation to the concept of "speciesism". During the war and in the aftermath of it, essential "otherness" had been represented as various animals coexisting in peace or conflict and in a vertical hierarchy. In his example of *Norakuro*, LaMarre demonstrates how in this animal metaphor-based narrative certain animals could be recognised as of a specific race, such as Tiger standing in for Korea, however, he suggests that such an approach not only substitutes animal species for race, but essentialises the "otherness", justifying the ostracising of the "other" who is inherently bad or inferior. He further elaborates on the scenario of *Momotarō Umi no Shinpei*, where animal races coexist peacefully and help human Momotarō. However, in their position as helpers and other species we see a clear hierarchy of superior (Japanese) human and inferior "animals". Furthermore, on the example of Tezuka's "*Janguru Taitei*" franchise, LaMarre demonstrates that while sentient animal "species" are not metaphors of actual races, they epitomise certain differences

and conflicts as they cannot crossbreed, even if they live in harmony and cooperate (LaMarre 2008). Species imply that inherent, essentialist distinction is acknowledged as justification for expelling the "other", however is no longer equivalent to recognizable race or specific incident.

Further I will apply speciesism theory to the unification of race in manga character design. Going back to Terry Kawashima and her example of selective reading of racial traits, we might notice how the villains in Sailor Moon are visually unified with human-characters, however, they are inherently "others", and are demonised and punished, their inhuman origins mark them as inferior and bad. What defines these villains are certain features, such as slanted eyes, thin faces, and sexualised behaviour.

Visual dimension simultaneously with plot-development produces a variety of direct emotional responses from the reader. Therefore, it is legitimate to assume, that specific visual interpretation of racial and gender traits indicates a variety of symbolic layers which are not directly involved in the narrative; however, they may broaden the scope of re-contextualisation. Specific direct impact of visual contents is explored by Thomas LaMarre in his article "Manga Bomb: between the lines of Barefoot Gen", where he introduces the concept of plastic and structural lines (2010b, n.p.). His theory emphasises how visual forms affect the reader beyond the direct comprehension of contents. He differentiates between the lines that are subjugated to signification of the form, and the lines that possess figural force prior to signifying the form; specifically, precise, geometrical structural lines and pliant plastic lines. In this paper, I will particularly focus on the plastic lines. Harking

back to Sergei Eisenstein's analysis of Disney's animated animals, he coins the term "plasticity/plastic line" that signifies the ability of characters to visualise life-force by transcending their own physical barriers as well as the physical barriers of others. Respectively, when being impacted, they spring back, or when their body freely changes shape in visual response to outside factors beyond physical capacity. Ultimately, plasticity implies that the character possesses an immortal body throughout the narrative or in a concrete situation (LaMarre 2010b, 280-282).

I would like to apply these two theories, speciesism and plasticity, further to *shōjo manga*, and to the specific racially distinct character trope which existed from as early as 1960-70s – namely the Westerner. I suggest that in *shōjo manga* we might encounter plastic lines not so much as related to immortality, but to transcending the character's physical shape and visualised merging of physical and internal emotion. The plastic line in *shōjo manga* visually indicates a character's emotional interior; it is another trope to focus on the interior world of the character, as it interacts with external events. Plasticity can be traced in characters as they visually merge with background designs or other characters, transcending the panel frames, and correspondingly transcend the spatial and temporal logic of the page layout. This type of visual depiction provides a physical impact upon the reader beyond the comprehension of the text. Furthermore, this occurs especially in scenes with interior monologue, when the outlines of the character's body merge with the lines of the background, decorative elements, and panel layout, emphasising the emotional response of the character to certain events. Designs in plastic line present more than sequential narrative. In

short, the plastic line in *shōjo manga* visualises interiority and administers a direct physical impact on the reader beyond the sequential comprehension of the plot.

Interrelating LaMarre's "species" and "plastic line", we may ask: What happens, when plastic or structural lines are being read not only in a gendered, but also in a racial context? Does unified visualisation of interiority suggest that "otherness" is a staple applied from outside after all, and having nothing to do with essential, inherent qualities of the character?

Subverted West, Gendered Race

Shōjo manga of the 1960-70s appropriated the Art Nouveau period of quasi-Europe as their favourite setting. Paraphrasing Takemiya Keiko, Ishida Minori observed that the West in *shōjo manga* was a semi-fantastic world which maintained roots in "reality", and that precisely the reiteration of "realistic" details in the setting granted believability to the symbolic characters (Ishida 2008, 144). According to Ōgi Fusami, the Westerner in *shōjo manga* was intended not as the "other", but implied the unification of interiority of *shōjo* and *shōjo* desire across the world (Ōgi 2004, 546-548).

According to Ōgi Fusami, in this period the princess character and her aristocratic lifestyle were at the centre of girls' desires as epitomes of universal *shōjo*. However, the West as a space for *shōjo* dreams did not go hand in hand with a representation of it as domineering or masculine. Gradually shōjo manga subverted the hegemony of the West by objectifying, or in Ōgi's terms, "feminizing" the masculinity of the West.

This was achieved via unifying visual gender conventions of male and female characters respectively, making the male appear more feminine and/or underage (Ōgi 2004, 546-548; Ōgi 2008, 152).

I would like to develop this idea further and suggest that male and female counterparts were equally represented in plastic lines. Thus, the otherness of the West and otherness of the male is reinterpreted through *shōjo* desire.

Such male characters appeared both in heterosexual scenarios and later on in *shōnen ai*/boys' love scenarios (quasi-homosexual male-male stories developed as a sub-genre of *shōjo manga* in the 1970s). In these stories the ideal men frequently looked indeed European, but also underage, and their visual representation was rendered in plastic lines that created soft, infantile, effeminate males, which blended with the decorative backgrounds, trees and flowers just as much as did their female counterparts. Thus, their emotions were visualized and focused on at the same level as *shōjo* protagonists'.

In these stories the ideal men were rendered in plastic lines that visualized their emotions on the same level as that of *shōjo* protagonists. Visualised interiority made them simultaneously identification anchors and the object of the reader's gaze. The combination of race and gender in this type of character became indistinguishable and carried a high erotic charge.

According to Ōgi, through such depictions the West became subservient to *shōjo* subjectivity. It was not only de-masculinised, furthermore, these characters allowed girls to escape the norms of

Japanese femininity. Nevertheless, although *shōjo*'s desires and interests were supposedly universal, these characters were represented as non-Japanese, symbolizing the "otherness" girls felt in themselves as they confronted expectations of Japanese femininity (Ōgi 2004, 548).

But did the West remain "the other" to the readers? Or was "the other" constructed on a different level? Where and how is otherness articulated, if at all?

I would like to pay attention to the narratives about mixed-race characters such as *Poem of the Wind and the Trees* by Takemiya Keiko or Hagio Moto's *The Heart of Thomas*, which address racial discrimination. Incidentally, these and many more titles are from the subgenre of *shōjo* manga, which developed in 1970s, currently referred to as boys' love or *yaoi*. These stories are based on quasi-homosexual romantic relationships between men, however are written by and aimed at young women. This genre started off as an experimental and critical venue and addressed a variety of issues, such as gender, class and race. Nonetheless, despite accentuating the problem of racial discrimination, the only visual indication of race in these manga is darker olive skin, which is hardly represented visually, but is rather alluded to. For example, in *Poem of the Wind and the Trees* protagonist Serge is depicted with darker skin tone only in the introductory panel. Later in a few psychedelic scenes of lovemaking, Serge's darker skin appears in screen tone, to accentuate his grounded nature, his earthly character as contrast to the airy whiteness and transparency of his vulnerable lover Gilbert. Therefore, these racial features acquire symbolic signification beyond racial identity. In Hagio Moto's *The Heart of Thom*as, protagonist

Julismole is introduced as having southern blood in him, and olive skin, but this is never indicated visually through utilisation of tone.

There is no frightening or negative difference, no visual discord in the fabric of the work or in the lines. The discord is introduced verbally, while visual representations remain within the boundaries of overall style.

Ambiguous race gradually became a trope. This type of character would be identified as "the other" by the supporting cast in the plot, while being accepted by the second romantic protagonist as very special.

What Ōgi does not mention is that the ultimate negative "other" to the protagonist, respectively, the antagonists also became rendered in plastic lines. These plastic villains were visually attractive, frequently constructed in accordance with feminine gender conventions combined with conventions of representing the attractive "evil" archetype, such as slanted eyes, contoured lips, and elongated faces.

These villains' interior motives were visualized in scenes of symbolically charged internal monologues. Their flowing hair blew in the wind, their eyes with a sexy slant had stars and highlights in them, and they wore flowing costumes that merged with backgrounds, flowers and other decorative elements. The sexually deviant villains were marked as "other" by their violent sexuality, which was visually represented in their design, their gestures and clothes. Inherent negative otherness of the plastic villain became encoded in specific gender-tropes, which serve as essentialist visual identifiers of their "otherness", much like skin colour would.

Their internal monologues served to demystify them to the reader; presenting a variety of reasons for their being evil. Their weakness is revealed, subverting their power. Despite being villains and quite powerful, these characters, too, were established as objects for the reader's gaze. They, too, became an approachable gender.

According to Ōgi, objectifying characters allowed girls to find their own subjectivity, and escape the norms of Japanese femininity (Ogi 2004). Nevertheless, following Ōgi's logic, it appears, that although *shōjo*'s desires and interests were supposedly universal, these characters were represented as "the other" and as non-Japanese, symbolizing the "otherness" girls felt in themselves as they confronted expectations of Japanese femininity, while growing into their adult bodies and responsibilities. The universal ideal was in conflict with their own race and gender.

Eroticised Racial Stereotypes: Racialised Gender

Ōgi Fusami in her essay "The West in *Shōjo manga*" elaborates on how, in the 1970s, the West was gendered as beautiful and de-masculinised, introducing the first examples in gradual development of gendered race or race-related gender (Ōgi 2004).

Through the examination of 140 periodical boys' love magazine issues published between 2004 and 2008, including "BE-Boy", "Chara", "Ciel" and "Gush", Nagaike Kazumi approaches the issue of race in contemporary manga by applying post-colonial studies (2009, n.p.). She investigates how racial stereotypes are related to a specific gendered and sexual behaviour, showcasing race-relevant character tropes in

contemporary boys' love manga which is a descendant of the early works, such as *The Song of the Wind and the Trees*, and is therefore continuously operating with similar tropes, and generous utilisation of plasticity, specific to shōjo genre. Out of 140 magazines, one hundred featured stories with foreign characters, proving popularity of the trope. In particular, Nagaike is intrigued by the power relationship in these stories. Respectively, Nagaike has traced a tendency in most of these stories of foreigners playing the role of the so-called *seme* characters—that is, penetrating partner in BL relationships; meanwhile *uke* — the penetrated partner—is Japanese. Nagaike specifically focusses on foreign *seme* (*gaijin seme*) character type. These foreign *seme* characters are represented as "superior" and are mostly depicted as Caucasian or Arab men. In Nagaike's words, Japanese female readers show a predilection to consume "superiority" via characters who are marked as non-Japanese. Superior in this case means: noble birth, economic superiority, sexual proclivity, for example, elegant European aristocrats, persistent macho American new rich or somewhat deviant Arab princes with harems and petrodollar wealth (Nagaike 2009, n.p.).

Thus, in certain settings, the race of a character is gendered and sexualised to the point that the gender of the character becomes indivisible from the racial stereotype. This "otherness" has morphed into a sexually titillating element.

It goes without saying that erotic attraction can also belong to an Asian or Japanese character—there are plenty of scenarios featuring noble and rich Japanese *seme* characters. But in the case of *gaijin seme*, the emphasis is clearly placed on "otherness as foreignness", and it is the

foreignness amplified by higher status which facilitates erotic attraction. Furthermore, this plastic foreigner, who also inevitably succumbs to the irresistible charm of Japanese lover, has to repeatedly make sacrifices for the privilege of becoming monogamous with his *uke*.

In these stories too, characters who are supposed to be Western or Arab actually do not look much different from their Japanese lovers, with the exception of occasionally applied screen tone in case of Arabs. Race is indicated through clothes, setting and verbalisation. As with boys' love manga with a mono-racial setting, the equalising visual style facilitates both character types—that is, the active *seme* as well as the receiving *uke*– as equally available for reader identification, and thus provides different power-positions as entries to the same situation. Nonetheless, a strong stereotyping is at play which equals race with a certain gendered stereotype.

Conclusion

The trope of the gendered Westerner/"racial other" which had been conceived in a racially conscious way came to represent the claim of shōjo manga for universal values. Gradually the connection to an actual race had been lost and these characters transformed into approachable gender. Racially abstract characters came to represent on the one hand the "self" as sharing the universal value-system, yet on the other hand "the other" who is not threatening; respectively – the object of the gaze. The crucial quality of this character is the ability to shift between "sameness" and "otherness" and it can be traced back to its racial origins.

As a result, the line between gender and race became very blurred. They transcend one another while simultaneously enforcing stereotypes. Yet at the same time, racial abstraction asks "what are the criteria for recognizing essential differences?". If a visual representation of interiority renders characters homogenous, the "otherness" ascribed to them must have come from outside.

In conclusion, I would like to suggest that the allegedly race-free character design neither necessarily addresses nor negates issues of race, but may indeed showcase these issues from another angle. Racial abstraction culminates in visual sameness of characters' appearance; however, it participates in the discourse of "otherness". By doing so, the question is raised: where exactly is "otherness" articulated?

By avoiding any specific race and any equation of race with phenotype/physical appearances, manga potentially showcases race as social performance. That is to say, through its visual rendering, manga may raise an awareness of the fact that race is a discursive construct, not a biological essence. In addition, we can assume that *shōjo manga* is not just race-free, but transracial. It employs racial traits as markers of gender and social rank, retaining a tension between self and other which can be related to racial issues under certain circumstances.

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Making friends the Japanese way: Exploring *yaoi* manga fans' online practices

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Abstract

Yaoi fans are unified by a common interest in Japan as a country and its culture. This paper suggests that yaoi acts as an available cultural model representing Japaneseness. By attending to yaoi manga fan activities this paper contributes to the relatively new debate regarding the relationships and activities of yaoi fans rather than an exclusive reader-text approach. Gender and sexuality have been a major focus of yaoi manga research but online discussions do not always focus on fans' identifications with sexuality, either the characters' or their own. This paper proposes that Japanese culture is a key element to yaoi fans' community participation. The fans' understanding and interpretation of Japan is presented in a five stage process. Japan and Japanese culture have come into existence through the fans' interpretations and discussions of yaoi manga content as well as wider Japanese culture. As a result, fans filter what they know and trust through stereotypes, their own beliefs, and the information given by others. The fandom's interpretation is on the whole distinct from a reading of Japan as a complex identity or place without any single authentic narrative. Rather Japan is found in a process of interaction and explanation amongst fans. By showing how Japan and Japaneseness can be articulated and understood online this work provides an alternative to the binaries of particularism and universalism when considering broader issues such as community in fandom studies. It demonstrates that there can be a theoretical model situated between the real Japan and the virtual thus successfully transgressing essentialism.

KEYWORDS

Yaoi; Manga; Online fandom; Community; Performativity; Affect; Japaneseness.

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In recent years *yaoi* studies are increasing both within Japan (Nagaike 2003; Suzuki 2013) and outside of Japan (Levi, McHarry, and Pagliassotti 2010; McHarry 2003; McLelland 2001, 2005, McLelland, Nagaike, Suganuma, and Welker 2015). In this article I highlight a hitherto neglected activity of the *yaoi* fans that instigated a current aspect of my research whilst a doctoral student. Examinations of 'what' *yaoi* fans do are often overshadowed by those focusing on 'who' fans are, particularly

in terms of their gender and sexuality. This focus is a result of the nature of *yaoi* manga as a genre of Japanese manga that feature male homoerotic relationships. It is widely commented (McHarry 2003; McLelland 2006; Mizoguchi 2008; Nagaike 2003; Suzuki 1998) that this genre is created by heterosexual females for a heterosexual female audience and as such has raised many questions seeking to understand why heterosexual women would consume texts about homosexual men. In this essay I offer an extra layer of analysis by presenting a brief insight into another aspect of the fandom. In particular, I wish to highlight a part of the international *yaoi* manga fandom that engages with 'Japanese' culture and process of learning about it. Today *yaoi* manga is consumed around the world with fan communities both online and offline emerging in a wide range of different countries. This belongs to a new avenue of *yaoi* research which was recently opened up by key *yaoi* studies scholars Nagaike Kazumi and Aoyama Tomoko in their chapter as part of the edited book *Boys Love Manga and Beyond* (2015).

My own research has focused on an international fan community online, *AarinFantasy*, the largest online English language fan site (http://aarinfantasy.com). This has been a fascinating part of my research as it has involved examining the fans' process of constructing their knowledge of Japan. Often this relies on fans' personal contacts and experiences, as well as one another in a collaborative fan community. I intend for this essay to act as an investigatory piece highlighting the fans' experience of Japanese culture through community participation. By paying attention to how much fans see *yaoi* manga as a Japanese text I wish to bring fan experiences to the forefront of analysis. It is by no

means a conclusive piece and is a topic I continue to work on in relation to transcultural flows of East Asian popular culture throughout the world. However, it does offer new potential gateways into future *yaoi* manga research.

What Is *Yaoi*?

In Japan, the market for manga is highly compartmentalized with different genres segregated by age and sex (Schodt 2014). *Shōjo* [girls'] manga tends to focus on romance and is targeted at young girls, *shōnen* [boys'] manga, on the other hand, details adventure and action targeted at young boys. *Seinen* [adult] manga caters for a mature market and its storylines are more serious, they might include themes of office politics or the average working life of adult men and women. *Yaoi* has been considered part of the *shōjo* genre due to the target audience being young women. The first *shōjo* manga with a narrative that was specifically written with a female audience in mind is believed to be *Princess Knight* published in 1953 by Osamu Tezuka (Welker 2014). The narrative surrounds a cross-dressing princess who, as the only child of the king and queen, must present herself as the prince; she hides her sex from others because, as a female, she cannot inherit the throne. In the end, she marries a 'real' prince and "reclaims her femininity" as her husband becomes the King (Schodt and Tezuka 1983, pp.95-6). It was men who wrote early *shōjo* manga such as *Princess Knight*, but the entrance of female manga artists in the 1960-70s led to changes in themes and characters (Prough 2011). Female artists such as Hagio Moto and Takemiya Keiko fundamentally changed *shōjo* manga by introducing *shōnen-ai* known in English as Boys' Love (abbreviated 'BL')

(McLelland, Nagaike, Suganuma, and Welker 2015). Boys' Love manga may range from romantic to sexually explicit and, like other manga genres, is sold openly and widely in Japan.

The term *Yaoi* is an acronym stands for *Yama nashi, ochi nashi, imi nashi* [no climax, no end, no meaning] (Galbraith 2011). According to John Ingulsrud and Kate Allen (2009) in their book *Reading Japan Cool*, the term was used as a euphemism to distinguish it from more complex narratives found in other genres. It is difficult to give a comprehensive description of *yaoi* manga, such as the types of stories that are popular. However, the focus of the relationship is almost exclusively on that between two male youths who are often referred to as *bishōnen* [beautiful boys]. The relationship is depicted via one of the genres most well-known tropes, that of the *seme* and *uke* relationship. The *seme* ('attacker') is the dominant insertive partner in the relationship whilst the *uke* ('receiver') is, as the title would suggest, the passive receptive partner. These terms have their roots in martial arts and have, according to Mark McLelland, who examines the appeal of *yaoi* manga both within and without Japan (2006), often been applied to intimate relationships in Japan.

The aim of this paper is to demonstrate that *yaoi* is a rich area of study which goes far beyond issues of gender and sexuality. The genre is now a vast media enterprise with original anime and manga surrounded by their supplementary products. *Yaoi* has its own fan conventions that take place worldwide and is thus part of Japanese culture that should not be relegated to the shadows as simply 'porn for girls' (Suzuki 1998).

Yaoi is now consumed on a massive scale, not only by female but also male fans. Hence, questions on female gender and sexuality concerning *yaoi*, whilst still relevant, are no longer the only questions to be asked. By not examining what *yaoi* fans do in an online community we risk cutting off research from understanding the values and meanings that *yaoi* fans create and share in their fandom. If studies on *yaoi* fandom solely continue with the dominant gendered and sexual perspectives, then we block further understanding of how fans engage with one another. This paper is one of only few (Galbraith 2011, 2015) that utilizes fan voices in its approach and therefore acts as an important medium for fans to give their views and opinions on their activities.

I describe a process of the fans learning about Japan and Japanese culture in *AarinFantasy*. First, the examples in this paper describe a specific process in which individuals become fans of *yaoi* then go on to learn about Japan. Their arising interest in Japan is followed by fans exchanging information. Finally, fans judge the accuracy of information. I suggest that fans do not learn a static or objective sense of Japanese identity but are part of an interactional process, ultimately cementing friendship and community. Indeed, by the end of the process, it appears that learning about an 'authentic' Japan is secondary to a goal of fan interaction and community building.

Data Collection

I conducted my research in the before mentioned online *yaoi* fan community, *AarinFantasy*[i]. It is the largest English language *yaoi* fan community online and was founded in November 2004. In the first years

of its existence it supported no community features but has since developed them, which has fostered frequent communication between the fans. The creator of the site, Aarin, is a 30-year-old Malaysian female and the name of the site is a combination of the founder's name and the word 'fantasy', taken from her favourite game series title *Final Fantasy*.

I contacted participants by posting four introductory threads in the 'Community Café' [ii], a discussion board of the site's forum, which described who I was, what I was doing, and my hope to find participants for the study. I collected 79 individual responses of which 25 were willing to conduct in-depth semi-structured interviews with me. The participant responses included in this paper are taken from interviews I conducted textually online via the online messaging service Skype. All fan names reported in this study are the fans' usernames on *AarinFantasy*. I have gained permission to use their usernames and collected information from publicly accessible threads on the website. It is important to notice in this context that simply because online communication is sometimes readily available for the public to access, this does not mean that all members of such online communities see their communication as public. In their own work on conducting ethnographic research, particularly interviews, Nalita James and Hugh Busher (2009) advocate a position of full disclosure and stress how important it is that participants know when and what data will be stored and disseminated, and how their identities will be protected if they wish them to be. Therefore, before using the data in this paper I have contacted the original poster and requested permission to use their

comments in this paper, if permission was refused or if the poster did not reply to my request, data has not been used.

Finally, before I participated officially as a researcher on the website, I contacted the administrator of the group and explained my position and intentions of research in order to gain approval. I then asked if they would take the time to write a short explanatory posting introducing me to the users of the websites. Gaining access through these 'gatekeepers' has been identified as one of the best ways to facilitate ethical access and trusted membership on the sites (López-Rocha, 2010: 295). Also, by making my intentions clear to both administrators and users through forum postings, my method of access to the participants is clear and those who wish to take part in my study will be able to do so in an informed way.

The *AarinFantasy* forum is split into eight different areas: (i) 'Important Updates and News', (ii) 'AF files and Forum Support Center', (iii) 'General', (iv) 'AF Miscellaneous', (v) 'Yaoi Mania', (vi) 'Exhibition Hall', (vii) 'Download Central' (Yaoi/BL), and (viii) 'General Download Central' (Non Yaoi/BL). The existence of these different boards, particularly the 'General', 'AF Miscellaneous', 'Exhibition Hall', and 'General Download Central' demonstrate that *AarinFantasy* is a place where any types of discussions or activities may take place and that these discussions do not necessarily need to be related to *yaoi* manga. This chapter focusses on the 'General' section of the site within which there is a variety of sub-threads. One of these is the 'Fans' Non-Yaoi/BL Interest' which is further divided into: 'General Anime', 'Manga', 'Music

Chat', 'General Drama and Movie', 'General Games', and 'Asian Culture' which is the sub-board that is the focus of this chapter.

Processes of Learning about Japan in *AarinFantasy*

Learning more about *yaoi* and Japan is a recurrent theme that emerged during my time spent on *AarinFantasy* and the fans engage with Japan and Japanese in a variety of ways. As a result, *AarinFantasy* becomes much more than a simple means for fans to find, and discuss *yaoi* manga, but becomes a site for mediated discussions of Japanese culture that extend beyond a simple interest in *yaoi* manga. Exactly how fans learn more about Japan appears to be a straight forward process of fans asking a question or opening a topic of discussion in a new thread in the forum board thread 'Asian Culture'[iii] and then proceeding to communicate with other members of the site.

Some fans I interviewed had an interest in Japanese culture that existed before their *yaoi* fandom developed. For example, in a sub-thread of the 'Asian Culture' board titled 'Been to Japan?', the fan Gloomy Gloo states she is interested in various facets of Japanese culture including architecture:

> "I've always been interested in Japan…even the architecture…and one day I stumbled upon yaoi" (Gloomy Gloo)

For other fans, an interest in Japanese culture is born out of *yaoi* rather than being a precursor to it. This raises the question, how do fans who do not have a prior affiliation to Japan come to have an interest in *yaoi*? In some cases, it is their friends and family whilst for others it was their friends:

> "If I remember well, it was my siblings that introduced me to yaoi" (Solene)

> "I thank my friend for the rough introduction. He always reminds me of the first yaoi every time we go out for coffee" (Namsoon)

For these fans their interest in *yaoi* did not occur from a prior interest in Japanese culture but rather through friends and family. Overall, there appears to be two avenues into *yaoi* fandom for these fans. One is via an interest in Japanese culture. They search for more information about their interests and through sites such as Google or YouTube and their fandom starts. Others are introduced to it by friends and family, highlighting the social aspect of *yaoi* fandom that I will further develop in the subsequent parts of the essay. However, these comments led me to question why fans who take either route make a connection between *yaoi* and Japan or Japanese culture at all. Simply, what is the connection between *yaoi* manga and Japanese culture? It may seem natural that those fans with a prior interest in Japanese culture make a connection to *yaoi* manga but before making generalisations, I would like to pay more attention to how fans establish and maintain the connection.

From my discussions with fans on the sites I wish to introduce three connections: definition, content and art style. Fans often cite that *yaoi* is Japanese by the very definition of the term. For example, some argue that the genre is obviously Japanese because of its origins and that the artists are Japanese:

> "Most of [*yaoi manga*] are by artists who live in Japan who write about…Japan" (Gloomy Gloo)

Connected with this is that other fans reference the fact that the term *yaoi* is an acronym based on a Japanese phrase:

> "[I]n order to be called yaoi, a story, picture or whatever needs to be influenced from where the word yaoi comes from, aka, Japan" (Solene)

Fans also compare *yaoi* texts from Japan to *yaoi* texts that are produced in different countries by non-Japanese artists. These are often known as Original English Language (OEL) sometimes known as 'GloBL, a play on the words 'global' and 'BL', made popular amongst fans by Tina Anderson on her blog *Gus, Guys, and Yaoi* [iv]. Fans emphasise the transnational reach of *yaoi* manga, should not be considered *yaoi* or even manga but Western comics that copied *yaoi* manga:

> "These works [OEL *manga*] are fake yaoi, as in not really yaoi at all. The term yaoi refers to Japanese anime and Japanese *manga*. Anything with the 'yaoi' description must first be Japanese in origin" (Adjani)

> "If it has nothing to do with yaoi then why use the title?" (LadyPhantomHive)

Fans also mention that the printed presentation of *yaoi* makes an explicit connection to Japanese culture. For the fans, a major aspect of this Japanese style is the reading direction. Some feel strongly about keeping the original reading direction:

> "Right to left is more natural for *manga*. I think left to right is more good [sic] for OEL *manga* and *manwha* [Korean manga] for example" (CactusMaid)
> "The thought of flipped art makes me want to die. It should always be right to left" (Sleeplesstown)

Fans have such strong opinions on keeping the original reading direction that attempts to change it can and has been an issue for some manga publishers. Indeed, an American distributer and licensor of anime and manga, TokyoPop originally 'flipped' Japanese manga to read left to right for its English-speaking customers. However, sales immediately dropped and fans complained until the original right to left

reading direction was reinstated at which point sales began to increase, albeit slowly (Goldberg 2010).

For other fans, *yaoi* is Japanese because of what they can see. In particular, the members of *AarinFantasy* talk about the cultural content of *yaoi* such as the setting. For example, in the thread 'Been to Japan' fans discussed whether or not manga is obviously set in Japan[v]:

> "[T]hey might start with a scene where Japan is everywhere such as the signs, or the schools. They're obviously growing up in Japan" (Pweedie)

> "I think the characters are Japanese because they have Japanese names and their daily customs" (Lokeira1).

The question that must be asked is: how, and why, do fans learn, and believe, that what they read in *yaoi* manga is Japanese based on architecture and customs as shown in the aforementioned thread? By citing narrative content, art style, or definitions fans appear to establish their own subjective definition of Japan and Japanese culture. Therefore, it is important to draw attention to the reasons how fans establish what they know to be Japanese. Fans wish to know more about Japan and to learn about *yaoi* manga, to check the validity of what they read, and to learn about wider Japanese culture extern to *yaoi*. Indeed, learning about *yaoi* and Japan is a recurrent theme that came up in interviews but how the fans come to understand Japan is a more complex process.

Firstly, in the 'Been to Japan?' thread on *AarinFantasy*, fans often look to validate narratives and scenes in *yaoi* manga that they read:

> "I have seen in some series that vending machines are everywhere in japan [sic]…is there any validity to this?" (Ziv)

> "Why is there so many *yaoi manga* with high school settings? Also in high-school yaoi, I often see stuff going on at the roof-top, is this just the mangaka's attempt to advance the characters' interaction, or do they have a lot of rooftops in Japan's high-schools?" (Trifoilum)

> "I'm here to ask for your input on Yakuza culture whatever else you want to add to it. Anything you could probably find in Wikipedia, I know them as well…unless you have more to add?" (Applette)

As fans ask whether or not something seen in *yaoi* holds true in Japan, many ask why *yaoi* employs certain techniques or common tropes. They want to know if something that they read holds true, suggesting a motivation to know about Japanese culture on a general level that is not related to any *yaoi* series in particular. Such motivation indicates the types of things that fans are looking for in their information seeking pursuits and indicate that they do have an interest in Japanese culture. They will often come across something that they have seen in a *yaoi* series and then question whether or not something like this actually happens.

This raises a question of expertise: who has control over validations and what do fans' do once they receive an answer? Is it accepted at face value, or must it be further validated? When a fan asks a question on *AarinFantasy* they invariably get an answer from other fans. Rather than focusing on individual answers to individual questions I would like to put emphasis on the sources. The sources of information that I will explore in this section are academic sources (e.g. classes), citations of personal experiences, and referrals to manga and anime as sources of information. The most common examples of formal educational sources are references to learning Japanese in an educational institution such as high school or university (including teachers). In an interview with the fan Shattered, he discusses what they learn from schools and university courses:

> "After taking 2 semesters of Japanese in college, we learned A LOT about how very formal and full of rules Japan is…I was totally not forced to read 3 academic articles on it this year ;)" (Shattered)

By referring to these sources of information Shattered indicates that formal institutions or scholarly works will give, what he believes to be, correct information about Japan. Another instances where this occurs is when fans mention education professionals who teach them:

> "Our teacher… is also a fan of yaoi…[she] explained in our classes…various kinds of *hentai* …from normal *hentai*'s laws …to yaoi" (KarumA)

By creating this sense of connection between information provider and fan, KarumA indicates a belief on the fans' part that others in the community can be trusted. When fans discuss Japanese culture, and when they want to give their opinion, they will at times use personal experiences. Some members of *AarinFantasy* have visited Japan themselves as tourists, foreign exchange students, or because their family moved there. Often, fans would cite this experience to support their opinions:

> "I noticed several "template A1 school buildings" just on the way from home to Tōkyō...On the other hand, schools that don't fit the template won't be identified as such by me, so I'm fairly sure your average fan will only notice the school architecture of *yaoi manga* fame, thus reinforcing the "all schools look the same" idea" (Ato)

What I find most interesting about this statement is that because this fan recognizes himself as not very knowledgeable about Japanese schools. Hence the only buildings he will identify as such will be those that look similar to the ones depicted in *yaoi*. The fan Ato acknowledges his own narrow understanding of an aspect of Japanese culture which, potentially, reveals an awareness that some cultural aspects cannot be

so readily reduced to what can be seen in *yaoi*. Nonetheless, a second common fan experience is related to fans knowing or having contact with Japanese people, suggesting a reliance on Japan as an authenticating source. Knowing a Japanese person gives a sense of authority to their posts. In one example in the 'Been to Japan?' thread a fan had asked about Japanese houses central heating. The reply to this was:

> "Speaking generally, yes. During the summer they don't tend to stay very cool either, I spent a few weeks with my uncle in Tōkyō…and in the summer it becomes ungodly hot. My aunt is Japanese, and believes in many of the Japanese housewife superstitions such as: Air-conditioning is bad for you. She would leave the air conditioning off all day in more than 100-degree heat and only turn it on when my uncle or I got home" (Mit7059)

Mit7059 includes information about Japan's weather and one of the "many…Japanese housewife superstitions" about air-conditioning and adds valuable cultural information about Japan to support his answer. As a result, Mit7059 appears to have legitimized his knowledge of Japan through reliance on his experiences of living in Japan. This suggests that knowledge regarding Japan and Japanese culture does not need to come from Japanese nationals themselves, but can also be acquired from non-Japanese fans who have spent time in Japan.

The last information source fans use is *yaoi* manga itself. Fans will guide others to a particular *yaoi* series to find out further information. For example, in the thread 'Japanese Festivals'[vi] one fan was looking for manga that feature traditional Japanese festivals and in response, the fan Konakaga suggested that they look to a specific type of manga:

> "I'd say you should just look into some Slice of Life series that take place in japan [sic] and interest you somewhat as it's almost inevitable for them to

> feature some Japanese holiday and/or festive sooner or later because the authors are Japanese themselves" (Konakaga)

In this situation Konakaga refers to what fans call 'slice of life' manga which focuses heavily on everyday experiences as opposed to narratives that could be considered unrealistic. This subgenre of *yaoi* manga is presented as an adequate source of information on Japanese culture that fans may use for their own information pursuits or use to inform others based on a belief that this subgenre represents a more accurate representation of daily life in Japan and therefore is likely to be more believable.

The matter of credibility is in fact important and it is at this point that I would like to consider information verification and how fans assess the validity of the information they receive. Do fans question what others tell them in the community or do they trust their fellow members of the fan community? Not all fans have been to Japan nor have they all had contact with Japanese people or experiences of learning about Japan in universities or schools and so their judgments are sometimes based solely on information provided by others. Therefore, when receiving information from other fans in the discussions boards and posts, fans often have to make a judgment on how they are going to trust that other user.

On *AarinFantasy*, there is a system called the *Aarin Buddy System.* In this system fans are paired together: a new inexperienced member introduced to a more experienced member of the site. In this relationship the more experienced member is referred to as the *senpai* whilst the inexperienced member is called the *kōhai.* This is based on Japanese the Japanese words for senior/superior/elder (*senpai*) and

junior, subordinate (*kōhai)*. Two fans involved in my study are in one such *senpai-kōhai* relationship, they are Jaiden and Gloomy Gloo. Jaiden is the *kōhai* and Gloomy Gloo is the *senpai*. Coincidentally, Gloomy Gloo was the creator and instigator of this particular system on the site. Speaking of their relationship Gloomy Gloo mentions:

> "[I] have no trouble taking care of new members and questions they have about thing. I'm just one of the members that…others turn to when they have questions" (Gloomy Gloo)

Jaiden mentions:

> "I can ask Gloomy about anything I don't understand…. I really learnt a lot from her and I trust her completely" (Jaiden)

The existence of this 'buddy' system suggests the possibility that fans, at times, trust other fans regardless of potential inaccuracies in information. This also suggests a system of hierarchy where the *senpai* controls meaning resulting in a group of members, who have been on the site longer, acting as 'gatekeepers' to knowledge and directing any understanding of Japan and Japanese culture. There are also instances where fans judge authenticity of *yaoi* using the manga itself. In some instances, the extent to which *yaoi* is adapted contributes to how fans see it as an accurate source. Fans mention that they prefer texts that are as close to the Japanese original as possible or instances when manga is translated into other languages:

> "Sometimes I have the urge to kill the publishers when the *manga* is wrongly translated" (Jiyutenshi)

> "Often bad translation loses the cultural meanings of most of the jokes… Japanese have a very unique way of expressing themselves and I think it's better expressed in scanlations instead of official translations" (Jaiden)

For fans, the adapted texts no longer contain the original Japanese culture that they desire. This observation critically questions authenticity and who controls it. Fans prefer *manga* that have been translated by other fans often known as a 'scanlation'. This term combines the words 'scan' and 'translate'. It is a reference to the process of fans scanning original manga and using computer software to digitally remove original Japanese text and replacing it with a target language. This trust into other fans, over external companies, is shared by others who believe the stories are "overblown". Indeed, when fans look towards *yaoi* manga for authenticity or accuracy they have a choice in the type of manga they read, either fan produced or officially licensed versions. It is often the case that fans opt for fan, rather than commercial, translations because they believe they are more authentic and trustworthy at explaining Japanese culture. However, another clear possibility of this preference for scanlations of commercially licensed material is that former can be accessed for free online whereas the latter must be purchased. In discussing the popularity of fan produced texts, the ease and relative lack of cost of the materials must be considered. On the other hand, some fans express a sense of caution regarding how much Japanese culture they could understand from manga. Sometimes they discuss objective learning. For example, Milwaen explained to me the benefits and limitations of *yaoi* in terms of learning about Japanese politeness:

> "While yaoi doesn't exactly explain all, it does offer the most important thing of all about Japanese culture, which is the way in which people act every day. All *manga* features some things about which make it wackier than real life. If you can take the craziest stuff with a grain of salt you can learn a lot. For instance, reading yaoi gives you a general idea of just how polite Japanese people can really be" (Milwaen)

Milwaen is apprehensive in developing a complex understanding of Japanese culture but she does believe some aspects are likely to be true, such as Japanese daily customs. During my interview with Milwaen, we discussed whether or not the information or citations of Japaneseness she found online were authentic:

> I think everybody decides it though his/her own "filters". I mean, for example, let's take our little *yaoi manga* community. We accept authentic what we judge that belongs to our vision...it'd be "my Japanese culture" (Milwaen)

Milwaen touches upon two important areas. Firstly, she mentions that information about Japan are part of the community's activities, she further explains that the users of *AarinFantasy* "interpret and acquire everything through [their] own lenses made of [their] own basic community" and that it would be "[her] Japanese culture". She disassociates this Japanese culture with that of a "real Japanese person" and she isn't sure what a Japanese person would think but crucially this is not important as it is "[her] Japanese culture". It is not to be compared to Japan for validation. It is something that she, as well as other fans, has interpreted for the community's benefit. This is also picked up by Alex Dekibo:

> "I usually go into suspended disbelief mode because it's probably not all true but that shouldn't be bad because it's fun for us, you know?" (Alex Dekibo)

Therefore, I suggest that it is better to think of their experiences and understanding as not necessarily authentic, but also, to not let this bear down on their *yaoi* fan community experience as it is not the most important aspect. This is expressed clearly in Sapir Be's comment below:

> "I am aware of all the inaccuracies and idealizations that *yaoi manga* has, but it is perhaps the idealizations that allow me to like yaoi and the community to begin with" (Sapir Be)

For fans the community is more important than the accuracy of the representations of Japan. I would encourage fans to remain engaged with *yaoi* manga and the community despite any inaccuracies. Trusting other fans and maintaining objectivity relate to the fan's relationship with both the *yaoi* manga and one another. There are potentially limitless fan interpretations but part of the process of being a fan is negotiating these interpretations with others, thus showing preference for the community over accuracy.

Conclusion

There is a process through which fans learn about Japan and this is what I have attempted to plot out, albeit briefly, in this essay. Fans first enter the fandom either through a prior interest in Japanese culture or through friends and family. They make a link between *yaoi* and Japanese culture due to their interest in Japan and desire to learn about it. Fans express the things they want to learn and other fans answer citing their experiences. Finally, in this process of learning about Japan fans judge the accuracy of their information. However, potential inaccuracy does not deter the fans from their community. It emerges that community for the fans may be more important than accuracy. I have been able to discover the fans' interest in Japan and the process of how fans extract Japan and Japanese culture from the texts. Community participation is a major part of the fans' activities in this online fan site and it is evident that the fans' consumption of *yaoi* manga does not occur in isolation. Indeed, the fans

involve themselves deeply in communication with one another and draw on each other's knowledge to enhance their *yaoi* fan activities.

Overall, by investigating the aspects that fans like about *yaoi* and what they see when they read *yaoi* in terms of Japan and Japanese culture and paying particular attention to the fan voices, we are now implicated to explore the wider issue of what fans do when they are online in their community in terms of interaction amongst fans, their relationships, and the corresponding fans' interpretations of these relations.

This essay is a condensed, and cursory, glance at an alternative avenue for future *yaoi* research. Gender and sexuality have naturally comprised the primary feature of *yaoi* manga research which is something I also consider largely in my own examinations. However, I am acutely aware that this is not the only aspect of *yaoi* fandom that can be examined. In this essay I have presented a preliminary examination into the transcultural consumption of *yaoi* manga abroad because the issue of Japan and Japanese culture is, in many instances, a part of the fans' attraction to the genre and it is important that we not lose focus of this. In thinking about meaning making, Stuart Hall (1997) refers to the media institutions and those who control them. While he does not refer to fandom, perhaps we can take this into this field and consider how encoding and (re)decoding (Gray 2006) can be applied to fan communities and how meaning also implicates power and hierarchies within them. Therefore, future research in *yaoi* fan communities could, and perhaps should, ask questions regarding the preferred way of reading texts that may be policed within and across communities. For

example, do interpretations differ amongst age, sex, race, or class variables? Do they differ amongst fan types such as length of membership, posting activity, and so on? Therefore, I believe that *yaoi* studies can benefit from the application of wider theories and studies of fandom and I hope this essay can act as inspiration for such future studies.

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[iii] http://aarinfantasy.com/forum/f305/ [Last Accessed 6th July 2016]
[iv] http://web.archive.org/web/20120425235639/http://ggymeta.wordpress.com/2007/09/17/globl-previews-and-other-stuff/ [Last Accessed 6th July 2016]
[v] http://aarinfantasy.com/forum/f305/t138760-been-to-japan.html [Last Accessed 6th July 2016]
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Uncertain spaces: The odd and the foreign in Tōei's feature films of the 1960

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Abstract

American animation, after a long period of faithful adaptation of fairy tales and youth stories, seems to have gradually leaned towards a clearer geography, going from the abstract realm of Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs *to the very real New Orleans of* The Princess and the Frog*, a modification that induces a reflection on the use of localisation in these films. This attention seems all the more important when it comes to treating feature films produced by Tōei Doga, the "Disney of the East" in the 1960s, to the extent that these films are both the trace of a first phase of internationalisation of the Japanese production, and the beginnings of a diversification at Tōei, as the studio goes around 1965 from adapting Asian literature and folk tales to the transposition of European youth stories like the Tales of Andersen. Focusing on an aesthetic analysis of the filmic text, centred around two films produced by Tōei,* Gulliver's Space Travels *(1965) and* The Tales of Andersen *(1968), this article intends to question the spatial and symbolic representation Europe as an "uncertain space".*

KEYWORDS

Animation; Orientalism; Children literature; Fantasy; Adaptation.

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1. Introduction

The animation studio Tōei Dōga, identified by its first president Ōkawa Hiroshi as "the Disney of the East" (Hu 2010, 82), has had since its creation in 1956 an intricate relationship with European culture and traditions. Whereas their first animated features were adapted from oriental folk tales and stories like *Hakujaden* (*The Legend of the White Snake*), *Sanshō Daiyū* (*Sanshō the Bailiff*) or *A Thousand and One Nights*, a sudden turn occurred in 1965 with *Galibā no uchū ryokō* (*Gulliver's Travels Beyond the Moon*), followed by *Andersen monogatari* (*The World*

of Hans Christian Andersen) in 1968, *Nagagutsu haita neko* (*Puss in Boots*) in 1969, and *Dōbutsu takarajima* (*Animal Treasure Island*) in 1971. All adaptations of famous stories taken from European classic children's literature of the 18th, 19th and early 20th centuries, these films present a peculiar vision of the Western world and seem to represent an imaginary Europe, somewhere between the fantasized Dutch village of Huis Ten Bosch in Nagasaki and exotic illustrations found in children books. These representations seem different from Miyazaki Hayao's precisely documented and relatively relevant images of Europe, such as *Kurenai no buta*'s 1930's Italian setting (*Porco Rosso*, 1992) or Stockholm's old town in *Majo no Takkyūbin* (*Kiki's Delivery Service,* 1989) for example and therefore need to be questioned in the light of the context of Japanese animation production in the 1960's and Tōei's own history.

By analysing how those narrative spaces are enclosed in a set of political, aesthetic and social questions at play, I would like to highlight the image-building process allowed by the animation medium through the depiction of Europe in *Galibā no uchū ryokō* (directed by Kuroda Yoshio) and *Andersen monogatari* (by Yabuki Kimio). Indeed, both films showcase in their description of the foreign land of fiction a contradictory will to integrate and to keep otherness at a distance. Those uncertain spaces, supposedly European but never clearly presented as such, offer a blatant example of how the odd and the foreign in an alien culture can be used to underline national identity through indirect resistance. Thus, those literary adaptations of Jonathan Swift and Hans Christian Andersen act as a foil, in the way they picture Europe as, at the same time, desirable and repelling, usual and odd, close

and foreign — resembling closely the contradictory reception of Western culture in Japan itself.

By sorting out in the original text elements that are consistent with the recipient's culture from totally foreign ones, the process of adaptation has often served political purposes. Therefore, a formal analysis of the texts provides significant information on what is perceived as foreign and odd, highlighting in return what is considered as conforming to national identity – to put it more directly, the spaces represented in *Galibā no uchū ryokō* and *Andersen monogatari* have little to do with Europe, but have a lot to say about how 19th century Europe is perceived by the filmmakers, set designers and animators of the Tōei Dōga studios. Underlined by Romain Chappuis in his study of adaptations of Western narratives in manga and anime as an appropriation of a transnational culture, this translation has a strong ideological impact: "This "Other" is integrated by exacerbating some of its features: The West is presented in Japanese works as conveyor of an excessive, unjust and potentially dangerous world, as the manifestation of Cartesianism taken to the extreme" (Chappuis 2008, 72). In *Frames of Anime*, Tze-yue Hu goes even further back in time to explain such mixed feelings, evoking the history of the Japanese writing system or the Meiji period Modernisation program. For her, this contradictory relationship with westernisation has a lot to do with the animation medium himself, since "a constant national desire to seek a referential space for self-understanding, self-projection and self-expression […] has led to the discovery and application of a new medium in the twentieth century. This new medium has the flexible capability to embody all kinds of images" (Hu 2010, 18).

Using a set of concepts forged to tackle those relationships, from a reflection on orientalism to the more recent idea of "invented tradition", I will try to offer, using Tōei's animation feature films as the main object, an aesthetical point of view using film analysis to provide an in-depth vision of the adaptation process at work in these feature length animation films, and the generic repositioning commonly used in Japanese adaptations of Western sources, thus tackling an issue of genre that also seems relevant to the question, alongside the general problem of the depiction of the West and the construction of national identity.

2. Image-building in Japanese animation: an aesthetical point of view

Hobsbawm and Ranger's *The Invention of Tradition* (1983) assessed that the process of formalisation and ritualisation of new traditions served as the base for the establishment of social cohesion, the legitimation of institutions and the socialisation of beliefs and value systems. Applied to the Japanese field, it proved quite relevant, since it allowed to the study of the supposed "westernisation" of Japan, from Meiji imports to contemporary practices, no longer as a mere imitation process but as a complex discourse constructing a whole cultural identity. Such attempts as Stephen Vlastos in *Mirrors of Modernity: Invented Traditions in Modern Japan* (1998) further allowed the exploration of the invention of tradition as a myth-making and identity-building practice central to the development of a new discourse on national identity. For example, Jennifer Robertson's chapter, "It takes a village: Internationalisation and Nostalgia in Postwar Japan", clearly highlights how Native place-making projects conducted by localities reinforce opposition between Tōkyō and the rest of Japan. Taking the

example of the Dutch village theme park Village Huis Ten Bosch in Nagasaki Province as a starting point, she writes:

> The assimilation and containment of multicultural differences and the incorporation of global phenomena into local place-making projects are central to the on-going processes of socio-psychological security, national cultural-identity formation, and capitalist market development in Japan. (Robertson 1998, 115).

Huis Ten Bosch, because of its link to the Netherlands and its general significance in the context of Nagasaki, has a great implication in this context. It is a place conceived as a Japanese recreation of the foreign, which therefore does not need to be seen anymore, replacing an actual trip to the Netherlands — thus giving us a clue about the depiction of Europe in anime, not so much as an actual place of possible travels but as an uncertain space of imagination and recreation. Huis Ten Bosch also echoes, because of its nature, another important place of hybridity between a fantasized West and contemporary Japan, Tōkyō Disneyland. As stressed by Mary Yoko Brannen, the amusement park was meant to be quite close to its American counterpart, even though it ended up featuring specificities that make it totally different from it:

> What is remarkable about Tōkyō Disneyland is that the Japanese owners wanted an exact copy, even though they have in fact adapted the Anaheim Disneyland to suit the tastes of Japanese consumers. Ultimately, it is the Japanese, not the Americans, who have defined Tōkyō Disneyland. That is to say, it is the importation of the artefact rather than its exportation that begs to be analyzed. (Brannen 1992, 217)

As Brannen suggests through the idea of replacing exportation by importation, we have to reverse our point of view to see in those texts

what was conceived and created by the Japanese[1], and not only what was copied or suppressed from the original model, since the origins matter less than why and how they were adapted. To take an example closer to our field of study, this is also relevant to cultural products such as Mickey Mouse, which was, according to Ōtsuka Eiji in his article "Disarming Atom: Tezuka Osamu's Manga at War and Peace", the main source of inspiration for Japanese cartoons of the 1930; he writes that, though "it is not impossible to see manga in terms of a lineage that goes back to ukiyo-e of the Edo period or comic animal art of the medieval period, […] such a view of history ignores the 'invented traditions' prevalent in so many of the introductory books on manga published in the late 1920s and early 1930s" (Ōtsuka 2008, 116).

This epistemological ploy has allowed us to draw a path and explain the analytic glaze used here. One of the main advantages of the notion of "invented traditions" is that theological historical lineages have been set aside, replaced by a vision that embraces different kinds of cultural, political, religious, economical relationships. In that sense, it could be linked to a new trend that appeared in French History in the 1980s, defined by its creators as focusing on "cultural transfers", that is to say the reciprocity and plurality of cultural exchanges on a larger scale. Indeed,

> Works on cultural transfers do not insist on the importation but rather on the stakes hidden in importation, the strategies that account for it and the rivalries it arouses. The methodology is based on two axes: the analysis of the context of export and reception, and the analysis of the vectors of the transfer. (Joyeux-Prunel 2002, 153)

[1] The park is the property of the Japanese company Oriental Land Company since its creation in 1983.

Even though the reciprocity of the transfer will only become visible at the end of the 1970s, when Japanese popular culture begins its entry into the European market, the question of the "vector" of the transfer resonated with our own concerns as Europeans. In the context of French History, "vectors" were meant to be travellers, writers, merchants, politicians or academics, recalling the first encounters of the Japanese people with European culture, through Jesuits or Dutch merchants. In the context of Tōei Dōga feature films, the vectors seem to be members of the studio themselves, rather than official or institutional vehicles. Indeed, the studio artists accessed their Western material, especially Hollywood films and European animation, mainly through the mediation of Anidō, an association founded in 1967 by several members of Tōei Dōga, followed by directors, animators and technicians of several other Tokyo animation studios, such as Mushi Pro or A Pro. The activity of the group, currently presided by Takashi Namiki, who used to work in the animation industry, focuses nowadays on the publication of illustration and art books and the popularisation of anime history through exhibitions and events[2]. However, in the 1960s and 1970s, the group focused on the organisation of public or semi-public screenings, allowing artists of the growing Tokyoite animation industry to discover European animation and American cartoons, as well as older Japanese productions, like Masaoka Kenzō's films. The films shown were also discussed during meetings and evoked in Anidō's information letter, *Anime Daiyori*. Their effect was huge on the artistic teams, as proven by the example of Paul Grimault's *Le Roi et l'oiseau* (*The King and the*

[2] Anidō has been publishing a lot of information on its past and present activities on its website, with a notable effort to translate some of it into English: http://www.anido.com/about?lang=ja.

mockingbird, 1953-1977[3]) which was screened several times by the association after its Japanese release in 1955 and will leave a long-lasting impression on several members of the studio, such as Takahata Isao and Ōtsuka Yasuo. As stressed in Joyeux-Prunel's text, the physical exchanges and travels are also very significant in that matter, and it is important to stress here that several members of the studio were invited to visit foreign institutions, especially Disney Studios Burbank premises. Indeed, Ōtsuka Yasuo recalls a trip made by Tōei director Yabushita Taiji to the American studio to learn from their techniques and production organisation in the 1950s, especially the books and Preston Blair's animation manual he brought back (Kano 2008, 8).

Even though those screenings and travels had a great impact on Tōei's teams, I will refrain from using such notions like that of influences, bearing in mind that, since the work of Gérard Genette, or on a literary side since *Ficciones* (*Fictions*, 1944) written by Jorge Luis Borges, inspiration can go both ways and influences involve a dominant (and often teleological) point of view on art history. In the Japanese context, the notion of intertextuality often appears to be a useful surrogate, as Stevie Suan explains:

> Within Japanese artistic production there has been a long tradition of intertextuality, and the Japanese traditional theatre is well versed in this practice. Intertextual references have been used for centuries to the joy of spectators, with excerpts from external literary and poetic pieces, current events and legends, and even references from within the theatre world itself. (Suan 2013, 92)

[3] Grimault's film went through many stages of production, and the first version, screened in 1953, did not receive his approval and, after several years of struggle, he managed to win back the rights and produce a new version of the story, completed in 1977. Nevertheless, it was the first version, called *La Bergère et le ramoneur* (*The Shepherdess and the Chimney sweeper*), that the Japanese public had access to, at its official release in 1955. See Jean-Pierre Pagliano (2012), *« Le Roi et l'oiseau » : voyage au cœur du chef-d'œuvre de Prévert et Grimault*, Paris, Belin, 192 p.

Keeping in mind this frame of reference, what I intend to do here differs slightly in the sense that, because my own background stems from cinema aesthetics, I wish to look into the body of the films, and not only stay on the contextual level, to describe how they seize the historical and technical aspects of cinema on an aesthetical level.

3. Depiction of the West in Toei's films: Otherness as a country

If settings have been of a great value in Hollywood cinema, one could say that background art in animation might bear the same significance. The topic of this article was inspired by a very simple observation: in all Tōei Dōga feature films of the 1960s supposedly taking place in Europe, such as *Andersen monogatari* (1968) or *Nagagutsu haita neko* (1969), one could hardly find any details in the depiction of places crossed by the characters, as if space had no real existence in those narratives — an exact opposite to studio Ghibli's productions set in the West, which use actual places and references. Taking a closer look at the films, it became obvious that what first seemed like a vacuum was the tracer of a deeper problem, involving the representation of otherness, a concept already described by Susan Napier as central to the understanding of anime (Napier, 2001). Indeed, those empty places bore the mark of a contradictory tension to both represent and hide the European origins of the narratives, especially in background art, composing a series of uncertain spaces that do not seem to belong to any recognizable geography.

The introduction of *Galibā no uchū ryokō* (1965) gives a beautiful illustration to this idea of uncertainty in the backgrounds. Indeed, after a sequence in a movie theatre featuring a short illusionary trick of story

in the story — we see a man trying to survive to the wreckage of his ship, but the next shot allows the spectator to understand those images as taken from a movie, "Gulliver's Travell" (*sic*) — the character is thrown out of the theatre to find himself in a dark, desolated back street in half ruins, the despair of the character echoed by the contrast between the black walls and the glowing sunset [ill. 1]. The next sequence, showing the credits, is composed of a series of static shots of different backgrounds, a closed shop's front window, a gloomy archway, etc. Those background shots, even though they do bear some trace of the European setting, such as the sign "hotel" on one of the buildings, have no real depth and totally escape naturalist depiction. They are a hybrid mixture of the decoration of an Italian restaurant — close to the "defamiliarising past and present" (Osmond 2008, 60) of Aburaya in Miyazaki's *Sen to Chihiro no kamikakushi* (*Spirited Away*, 2001) — and illustration books on European cities and architecture, like it was fantasized outside the West, a vision of Europe "perceived through the sketches found in imported books" (Lucken 2001, 8). Actually, illustration books are known to have been a great source of inspiration for animation artists, a fact not limited to Tōei Dōga but also frequently cited in the creative process of Disney studios' background artists, such as the influence of Sir John Tenniel's engravings for *Alice in Wonderland* (1951) described by Michael Barrier (Barrier 2008, 148). Nevertheless, *Galibā no uchū ryokō*'s introductory sequence backgrounds seem to differ from this stance, because of their abstract and sparse nature: they do not aim at identifying a precise place, but give a general sensation of space; not a specific country, but foreignness in itself, otherness *as* a country. In that sense, they somehow resemble the backgrounds of the

short film *Aru machi kado no monogatari* (*Tale of a street corner*, 1962) by Osamu Tezuka, who used abstract locations to convey a sense of universality.

Along the same line, the city pictured in *Wan wan chūshingura* (1963) represents a nameless "modern" town impossible to locate in space or time, precisely because it offers no specific detail or object that would work as a synecdoche for a whole culture, the exact opposite of Cavallaro's definition of anime background value as a "sign" for space:

> A meticulous approach to product design ensures that settings are consistently populated by correspondingly convincing props and accessories. At the adaptational level, an original's transposition to the anime screen is often individualized precisely by the depiction of objects intended to allude metonymically to entire cultures and lifestyles. (Cavallaro 2010, 15)

Because they do not "allude" to any precise foreign place, the backgrounds of *Gulliver's Space Travels* leave the spectator with no other choice than to accept the narrative space as a fictional world, an interpretation reinforced by the narrative structure itself, since like Alice at the end of her adventures, Ted wakes up from a dream only to go back to the monotony of daily life.

Yet, the un-located foreign country found in *Galibā no uchū ryokō*, if it does not bear any resemblance with any actual Western landscape, might have a more cinematic origin, for the sets clearly recall the background art of the French animated feature *Le Roi et l'oiseau* by Paul Grimault, itself located in the imaginary kingdom of Takicardia. In the introductory sequence, a shot of a poor salesman with a carriage [ill. 2] directly evokes the dark and shabby Lower City where the two lovers the shepherdess and the chimney sweep find shelter, and Ted's moth-

eaten clothes look like an allusion to the "poor but happy" moral of Grimault's film. As the title suggests, *Galibā no uchū ryokō* sends the hero Ted and an aging Gulliver on yet another travel, this time into space; this new development might allude to Ward Kimball's series *Man in Space* (1954), broadcast in the TV show *Disneyland*, or the general fondness for space discovery, as proven by the success of the film *Moon Pilot* directed by James Neilson in 1962. Such an interest, at least for Japanese producers, in space discovery can also be seen in Masumura Yasuzo's 1958 *Kyojin to gangu* (*Giants and Toys*). Another interesting aspect of the topic may be found in Hergé's 1953 *Tintin's Adventures* album *Objectif Lune* (*Destination Moon*), adapted for television by the studio Belvision in 1959. Directed by Ray Goossens, the animated series was broadcasted in black and white under the Japanese title *Chinchin no bōken* by Fuji-TV in 1964-65. The space rocket take-off sequence of *Galibā no uchū ryokō* shows many similarities with *Destination Moon*, starting with the rocket and the launching ramp design [ill. 3].

This observation leads us to the concept of "Hollywood mediation", elaborated by Daisuke Miyao in an article on Noburō Ōfuji's animated film *Bagudajō no tōzoku (The Thief of Baguda Castle,* 1924). In fact, Ōfuji's film was based on Raoul Walsh's *The Thief of Bagdad*, featuring Douglas Fairbanks, riding the waves of 1920's Hollywood oriental style, but completely adapted to fit a Japanese setting. What seemed of great interest in Miyao's theory, along with a reflection on "translocal" networks of exchanges between Japan and the United States, was the place given to the cinematic process of mise-en-scene in that respect. He writes:

> On the levels of its styles and its generic configuration, in particular, the representation of Japan in *The Thief of Baguda Castle* could be regarded as being mediated by Hollywood cinema. Stylistically, despite its form as an animated film with *chiyogami, The Thief of Baguda Castle* fully utilizes various cinematic techniques that had been effectively used in Hollywood films, including multiple shot sizes, camera movements, point-of-view shots, deep-space compositions, crosscutting, and intertitles. (Miyao 2007, 90)

Such an example also occurs in *Galibā no uchū ryokō*: Ted, in the company of a street dog and a toy soldier, has trespassed on an amusement park at night, and is chased by three policemen. To escape, he climbs on a rocket and lands further away in a deep forest. Frightened by the animals' noises, the group starts to run through the forest, until they come to a tunnel leading to Gulliver's forsaken cottage, where their adventure will start. This sequence, of great narrative significance since it marks the entrance into the realm of fiction and dream where Ted will meet the hero of "Gulliver's Travell" (*sic*), is shot in a very unusual way for Japanese animation of the time. Indeed, trying to convey the sense of the characters plunging into the bushiest part of the forest, it relies on a shooting technique known at Disney's studios as the multiplane camera.[4]

The multiplane was a device that allowed, thanks to several levels added to the traditional animation stand, to reproduce the main optical principles of the cinematic apparatus, especially the depth of field, which mattered a lot to Walt Disney for he saw it as one of the weaknesses of animation compared to cinema. Though the Fleischer brothers or Ub Iwerks created similar apparatus in their own studios, the most famous early example of the use of the multiplane remains the first shot of *The Old Mill* (Wilfred Jackson, 1937), where the camera

[4] On the multiplane camera technique, see Telotte, J., (2008), *The Mouse Machine: Disney and Technology*. Champaign: University of Illinois Press.

seems to enter the landscape and slowly comes closer to the birds nest at the centre of the attention. Such a mise-en-scene will reoccur in most of Disney studios feature films, as it was thought to be the proof of great technical and artistic achievement.

The sequence in *Gulliver's Space Travels* clearly mimics the technique and is probably relying on *Bambi*'s opening scene also set in a thick forest, but appears to reverse the process. Thus, instead of giving the sensation of a gentle tracking shot taking us inside the setting — a feature Walt Disney and his directors thought necessary for the public to accept the non-realism of the animation medium — the backgrounds of the Tōei film are quickly sliding toward the edge of the frame in a totally unnatural manner, as if the trees were stepping out of the way for the character to move forward. Here we can imagine that, since Japanese art has developed a different representation of perspective points (Screech 2012, 103-109), the operator has probably interpreted the role of the multiplane apparatus according to his own vision, and somehow in the opposite direction of the Disney style. This is an interesting example of how Hollywood mediation can be adapted and claimed in a different context since, as Thomas Lamarre highlighted using different examples in *The Anime Machine* (2009), the multiplane apparatus is being used in the context of Tōei's production system to stress horizontality and artificially, where it served to underline depth of field and realism in Disney's production.[5]

[5] For further consideration of the topic, see Pruvost-Delaspre M. (2014).

4. From intertextuality to images migration: beyond adaptation

We have seen that, from what seems like a foreign and unknown narrative space, a very precise network of references could be drawn, woven together to form a new kind of setting, abstract and universal, conveying an idealized vision of the West as seen through cultural products like Hollywood movies. Nevertheless, restraining this network of signs to the adaptation material seems limiting, since adaptation itself calls for more intertextuality, according to Dudley Andrew's adaptation typology (Andrew 2000, 30).

As an example, Tōei's adaptations would fall into Andrew's third modality of adaptation, "transforming", distinct from "borrowing" and "intersecting" in the way that it chooses to radically differentiate itself from the original source. *Andersen monogatari* provides a perfect illustration of this tendency: instead of adapting one of the best known fairy tales of the author, as the studio will do later with *The Little Mermaid*, the film is based on *The Fairy Tale of My Life*, Andersen's autobiography written in 1847. Adaptation as seen by Tōei's screenwriters at that time was leaning toward free rewriting, rather than mere translation from text to screen. Later on, the studio's versions of *Puss in Boots* and *Treasure Island* would introduce many distortions, decentring the original text's genre, tone, and even moral. For instance, the main character, Pierre, is depicted in *Nagagutsu haita neko* (1969) as a growing hero, changing from a frightened weakling to a brave warrior who confesses to the princess that he concealed his real identity, thus modifying the meaning of Perrault's *Puss in Boots* on lying and relying on appearances.

In *The Tales of Andersen*, the main focus is not so much on the life of Andersen himself, or on the consistency of the tales, but rather a game of "domestication" of European narratives. Forged by Joseph Tobin to avoid the derogatory connotation of terms like "imitation" or "borrowing", the notion of domestication can be used to describe the "unsettling combination of familiar and exotic" at play in certain Japanese works (Tobin 1992, 5). One interesting remark lies in Tobin's description of the "circulation" process that allows foreign elements to enter Japan and be integrated:

> There is an intern circulation of cultural and material capital in Japan: the West most often enters Japan through Tōkyō, is domesticated there (made appropriately and uniquely Japanese), and is then repackaged for export to the provincial periphery. (Tobin 1992, 16)

Besides the direct question of centre/periphery dialectic dealt by Tobin here, the notion of circulation as one of the main processes of domestication gives us a clue on the nature of the functioning of adaptation. To go further in this reflection, I would like to introduce a new concept, forged by French cinema theorist Jacques Aumont, that of "images migration" (Aumont 1995). Aumont first used the expression as a way to seize the importance of a presence of painting in cinema that would not merely be a quotation or a tribute to an inspirational model, but the transfer of a whole set of iconographic elements from a painting to a film. Later on, he expanded the concept to the transfer of representational models, focusing on the Annunciation theme in Pasolini and Godard's films (Aumont 2002). What "images migration" helps to highlight is how mise-en-scene can also be the place of appearance of intertextuality.

Even though Aumont first intended the concept as a tool to explore the relationship of cinema with other art forms, "images migration" is well suited to describe the interconnection of the foreign and the familiar in Tōei's animated films. Indeed, as we have seen, Hollywood was the first and foremost medium to provide images for Japanese cinema to digest and interpret. Nevertheless, the role of this mediation can be expanded further, to different types of texts, not necessarily pertaining to American popular culture but also coming from the margins, such as Russian animation.

While it appears to be well known now that Hayao Miyazaki greatly admires the Soviet animation feature *Snezhnaya Koroleva* (*The Snow Queen*, 1957) by Lev Atamanov (Miyazaki 2009, 71), the impact of Russian and East European animation on anime as a whole remains in the shadows. Yet, its evocative power for young animators of the 1950s and 1960s was very strong, and can explain how some themes and motifs appeared in their films. A salient example would be the figure of the sandman in *Andersen monogatari*, who helps and guides the young hero on his path to the fulfilment of his future as a writer. The character, named Ole in the Japanese version, coming from the sky with an umbrella and living in the church tower, serves as Hans' good fairy, providing advice and comfort to the insecure youngster, and as a narrator for the story at the same time. Thus, he combines the distinctive features of two characters, the little elf Ole Lukøje who appears in Andersen's eponym tale and brings stories into the dreams of sleeping children — an echo to Hans' vocation — and *Snezhnaya Koroleva*'s character Old Dreamy, the narrator of the story in the Soviet version.

The link between the three texts appears to be reinforced in a clear manner by the use and re-use of the same iconography: while, at the beginning of *Snezhnaya Koroleva*, the camera moves away from Old Dreamy to reveal a bust of Hans Christian Andersen standing on a mantelpiece, *The Tales of Andersen* comes to a close with a drawn representation of the statue of Hans Christian Andersen standing in The Kings Garden at Rosenborg Castle, Denmark [ill. 4]. The inscription is a simplified translation of the first paragraph of Andersen's autobiography, where he writes that his life was "a lovely story, happy and full of incidents".

The same kind of triangle migration reoccurs later, when it comes to the treatment of the background representing the city where Andersen was born. Indeed, the European town of *Andersen monogatari* draw on different literary sources, even if it does resemble Andersen hometown of Odense as seen on ancient pictures. For example, the wooden bridge that connects together Hans' and his sweetheart Elisa's windows across the street, beautifully decorated with flowers [ill. 5], is directly borrowed from *Snezhnaya Koroleva* — especially since Andersen's tale only mentions crates of herbs that allowed the two children to sit across each other next to the roof. It is interesting that we find the same kind of mise-en-scene in Jiří Trnka's (1912-1969) version of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (*Sen noci svatojánské*, 1959) when the two lovers secretly meet at Hermia's balcony. Trnka was gaining a wide international audience at that time, and we can only suppose that his work, including his illustrations, had an impact on Japanese animators. In the illustrated book *Zahrada* (*The Garden*, 1962), one can find depictions of villages of

wooden houses buried under the snow that bring to mind the traditional city of Tōei's adaptation [ill. 6].

Indeed, illustration has always been a great source for material and inspiration to animation artists, from Gustave Doré's (1832-1883) fairy tale illustrations, to the books of Ivan Iakovlevitch Bilibine (1876-1942), such as *Vassilissa Prekrasnaïa* (*Vassilisa the Beautiful*, 1899), published in Japanese by the Ghibli Museum Library, and has been of great significance in the "domestication" of European imagery in anime. The existence of this network of quotation taken from various literary and artistic materials underlines the diversity of the studio's artists' inspiration, acknowledging at the same time the possibility for an image or a representation to "migrate" from one territory to another, but also the profound intertextual richness of Tōei's films dealing with European settings. A few years later, at the beginning of the 1970s, the studio will begin to change its policy, based until then on a model of literary adaptations made into feature length animation films, to produce mainly for television. Ironically, whereas those 1950-60s films never gained real recognition outside Japan, Tōei's animated TV series will be broadcasted widely, offering to many local viewers their first peak at anime. Nevertheless, the rich intertextuality this article tried to underline is still present in the studio's television production, allowing a more subtle approach to its most popular animated series.

5. Conclusion

The concepts of domestication and images migration helped us to figure how the image of Europe as perceived by Japanese animators was mediated by Western culture, especially American and Russian cinema.

A deeper analysis of graphic sources, such as illustration books and reference materials, would help foster a greater understanding of how anime inform a vision of the West. Animation, as illustration, can be considered as a privileged medium since, as Tze-yue Hu suggests in *Frames of anime* (Hu 2010, 18), since its malleability, its "plasmaticity" to use a term created by Soviet filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein to describe the appeal, the attraction he felt towards the omnipresence of metamorphosis in Disney Studios 1930s cartoons (Eisenstien, 1991), allows it to develop a variety of forms of expressions and animation techniques. This process comes along with a reflection on cultural identity, since Tōei's animators, often taught in the *Yōga* tradition (Japanese western-style painting), blend a practice learned from the West to local artistic practices. Interestingly, this question is still at stake in contemporary anime, especially studio Ghibli's films; even though Takahata Isao and Miyazaki Hayao always tried to keep away from Tōei's "manga eiga" model, some similarities can be found in the studio's fantasied depiction of Europe. Miyazaki discussed[6] this issue with the French artist and illustrator Jean Giraud/Mœbius, evoking his quest of a reunion between Japanese and European techniques and inspiration in *Sen to Chihiro no kamikakushi* (*Spirited Away*, 2001):

> - Mœbius: Something I have always enjoyed is the fact that Mr Miyazaki has drawn his inspiration, for most of his fantasy films, from Europe. It's a perception of Europe one can feel as distant, idealised, and passionate. But I also felt that films like *Totoro*, *Mononoke* and *Chihiro* [sic] represent a very moving return home.
> - Miyazaki: The perception of a fictional universe and the production technique are inseparable. On a graphic level, we learned drawing and three-

[6] This recorded dialogue, dating back to the Miyazaki/Mœbius exhibition in Paris in 2004-5, can be found at the end of Yves Montmayeur's documentary *Ghibli et le mystère Miyazaki* (*Ghibli and the Miyazaki mystery*, 2004).

> dimensions space construction from Europe. For a public bath scene, the setting has to be typically Japanese. But I did not see how to draw a typical Japanese background using European techniques. My team had concealed a special gift they had: their traditional sensitivity. In the end, it was amazing to see how the scenes combined European techniques with their own sensitivity. Those two different schools of thought found their place in the film and I feel like the finish is a success.

Perhaps the whole idea of identifying foreign and local elements in Japanese films leads to a fallacious approach as, according to Isamu Kurita in *The Revival of Japanese Tradition*, sometimes it is the traditional that begins to look foreign, and the exotic that becomes familiar:

> The very international-ness of the life-style makes the traditional Japanese arts appear quite alien and exotic. We look at our tradition the way a foreigner does, and we are beginning to love it. It is the product of a search of something more advanced and more modish than what we have found in our century-long quest for a new culture. (Robertson 1998, 110)

The same things could probably be said of Disney studios 1950s animation films which, in their search for classic narratives, very often turned to European folktales and children literature and depicted those stories with a high degree of fantasy, recalling in many ways Tōei's vision of Europe.

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ILLUSTRATIONS

Ill. 1. *Gulliver Space Travels* © Tōei.

Ill. 2. *Gulliver Space Travels* © Tōei.

Ill. 3. *Gulliver Space Travels* © Tōei.

Ill. 4. *The Tales of Andersen* © Tōei.

Ill. 5. *The Tales of Andersen* © Tōei.

Ill.6. *The Tales of Andersen* © Tōei.

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The European Middle Ages through the prism of contemporary Japanese literature: A study of *Vinland Saga*, *Spice & Wolf*, and *L'Éclipse*

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Abstract

Since the past few decades, the European Middle Ages have started to become a recurrent motif in Japan. Either depicted in historical works, appearing in a roundabout way, or even implied through archetypal backgrounds and characters in Medieval Fantasy, it has become a source of inspiration for Japanese authors and screenwriters, even taking a firm root in the video game industry—Dragon Quest *and* Final Fantasy *series acting as relevant touchstones. Regarding the field of Literature at large, countless manga are based upon its settings (*Berserk, Akagami no Shirayukihime*), as well as several light novels (*Slayers, The Record of Lodoss War*) and "pure" literary works—among them, the Akutagawa Prize's winner in 1998,* L'Éclipse *by Hirano Keiichirō. Besides offering the elation of exotic stories and re-enchanting our world, this foreign exploration of The Middle Ages creates a new approach of its realities and myths, sometimes reorganizing them to the point of syncretism with Japanese values. Thus, from folktales to civilisations features, those transcultural medieval elements affect the perception of Europe in contemporary Japan. In this article, in order to highlight the interaction between this part of the European culture and Japanese literature, I study three examples of literary works representing The European Middle Ages: the historical manga* Vinland Saga *(Yukimura Makoto), set during the Vikings Era and using the literary features of the Icelandic sagas; the light novel* Spice & Wolf *(Hasekura Isuna), a unique tale depicting the medieval merchant world; and the novel* L'Éclipse *(Hirano Keiichirō), portraying a young Dominican in the fifteenth century thrown into the world of alchemy and metaphysics. I argue that they are not only transcultural works, but that they also offer new perspectives on understanding how European realities and myths are being adapted in Japan.*

KEYWORDS

Japanese literature; European Middle Ages; Transculture; Intertextuality; *Vinland Saga*; *Spice & Wolf*; *L'Éclipse*; Yukimura Makoto; Hirano Keiichirō; Neo-Medievalism.

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The Middle Ages & Us

We constantly refer to the Middle Ages as it sheds light on what we are, claimed Paul Zumthor (Zumthor 1980, 17).[1] I would argue that the

[1] My translation. Unless otherwise indicated, all of the translations are my own.

past few decades have proven him right with the massive increase in cultural productions related to this era. Through new translated versions, medieval masterpieces have been rendered accessible to a larger audience (Amalvi 1996, 259–260), even to a young one, thus giving the opportunity to children's literature authors to rewrite and revitalise those texts (Cazanave & Houssais 2011). Reaching beyond the representations born from Romanticism, Neo-Medievalism[2] has taken deep roots in contemporary literature ever since the success of Umberto Eco's novel *The Name of the Rose*, in 1982 (Amalvi 1996, 61–62 & 261). Not to mention that, following in J.R.R. Tolkien's or C.S. Lewis's footsteps, an enormous quantity of fantasy works has arisen, nursing the imagination of both teenagers and adults, and even crossing boundaries by entering the mass media entertainment industry. Becoming both a local and global phenomenon, it has attained worldwide success, from Peter Jackson's screen adaptation of *The Lord of the Rings* to the Massively Multiplayer Online Game *World of Warcraft,* which involves millions of people. Moreover, in the same way, the Nouvelle Histoire ('New History') movement initiated by Jacques Le Goff and Pierre Nora has changed the academic perception of Medieval Europe (Amalvi 1996, 242–255); the development of the field of Cultural Studies has allowed researchers and critics to take into consideration the impact of the images of the Middle Ages that new media and subcultures convey. Nowadays, this gives life to a rising enthusiasm and a well-deserved respect for these productions (Cazanave & Houssais 2011b, 8–9). Daily

[2] Based on Alice Chandler's definition of "Medievalism" (1971, 7), I define it here as "a response to historic change and to the problems raised by the various revolutions and transformations of the [end of the 20th and start of the 21st centuries]". This neologism was first coined by Umberto Eco (1986) in his essay "Dreaming the Middle Ages" (in *Travels in Hyperreality*, New York, Harcourt Brace).

life in the start of the 21st century bears the renewed signs of our attachment to this era and its imagination.

This intense presence of Medieval Europe can also be attested on the other side of Earth. Japanese scholar Iguchi Atsushi notes in a recent article that "any casual browser [of] Japan's book shops will never fail to notice that they are full of images of the European Middle Ages" (Iguchi 2010, 65), and I, myself, have had the chance to witness this directly. I argue that this situation is related to the postmodern and *glocalisation* movements analysed by sociologist Yui Kiyomitsu, from the fragmentation of time and space to the de-differentiation of borders between high-culture and low-culture (Yui 2010, 46). According to Talcott Parsons's view of culture as a symbolic system, Yui concludes that "[its] most 'globalisation-friendly' aspects […] would be, first, the affective-expressive one and second, the cognitive one". He adds that "the evaluation aspect [which represents "religious, moral or ideological orientation"], comes last to be globalised" (Yui 2010, 44–45).

Thus, we might ask ourselves: to what extent have medieval cultural elements penetrated in Japan? Therefore, I attempt to first answer this question by determining, through a broad panorama, how it affects contemporary Japanese literature.[3] I then turn my attention to three works of different literary types that offer new perspectives on how the Middle Ages are being adapted in Japan: the historical manga *Vinland*

[3] In this paper, I aim at a broader notion of Literature. My choice is motivated not only by the fact that, whether it is children's or entertainment, they convey cultural images of Europe; but also, because, as contemporary works, they meet the postmodern condition of de-differentiation of borders between high and low cultures. Thus, they need to be taken into consideration.

Saga by Yukimura Makoto,[4] the medieval fantasy light novel *Spice & Wolf* by Hasekura Isuna,[5] and Hirano Keiichirō's prized masterpiece *L'Éclipse*.[6] I argue that this corpus, chosen for both the variety and the originality of its medieval elements, highlights the extent and the impact of the presence of the Middle Ages in Japan.

The presence of the European Middle Ages in Japan

I must first mention the existence of Japanese research on the European Middle Ages, despite the ongoing major problem of circulation of those works in western countries. Deploring this situation, the scholar Kido Takeshi urges his fellow researchers to try to take advantage of "the fact that [Japanese authors] may be able to view medieval history of Europe from a different angle from Europeans or Americans" (Kido 1995, 96). Some might even argue that the Japanese refer to Medieval Europe because of important historical similarities between both Middle Ages. This comparison was quite popular among legal historians from Japan and Europe, up until the mid-20th century, in order to differentiate the Land of the Rising Sun and the rest of Asia (Souyri 2013, 419–421). However, the research of Pierre-François Souyri on Medieval Japan shows that, ever since the 1970s and according to new historical approaches (Souyri 2013, 423–432), "the divergences [seem] now to widely prevail on the similarities" (Souyri 2013, 432). Nonetheless, despite no longer seeing the West as a united block but as a plurality of contexts with regional specificities, Japan is

[4] Unless otherwise indicated, I refer primarily to the French translation in this paper.
[5] Unless otherwise indicated, I refer primarily to the English translation in this paper – since the French's one by Ofelbe Edition has only just started in March 2015.
[6] Unless otherwise indicated, I refer primarily to the French translation in this paper.

still using it as a reference system, mixing realities and myths together. Karoline Postel-Vinay reminds us that "Europe as an international reality coexists in the Japanese mind with its perception as an imaginary zone, a bucolic place where stone castles and unchanging landscapes can be found" (Postel-Vinay 1994, 21). Thus, Europeans and Japanese are still far apart and grow closer at the same time.

In the past few decades of this age of globalisation, the accelerating rate of intercultural exchanges has modified the content of Japan's libraries, and the European Middle Ages has become a renewed area of exploration for writers, offering them unprecedented intertextual possibilities. Mainly coming from the gigantic manga industry, contemporary works in Japan that set their plots in a historical or fictional Medieval Europe might be seen as purely commercial and/or escapist, as they are often fantasy – a genre that still suffers from a marginalised status in academic institutions and countries such as France (Besson 2007, 9). Although it would be naïve to deny this aspect, the cultural phenomenon in Japan of the "ubiquity" of the European Middle Ages – this "intimately alien" – is far more complex (Iguchi 2010, 65). Iguchi claims that its reception can be explained by the nature of the Middle Ages itself. He reminds us that "[r]egardless of continuity [with the European past], [it] is employed everywhere in the world, in its myriad disguises and transformations brought about by cultural specificity and diversity" (Iguchi 2010, 65). And it has taken root in every level of Japanese cultural production, from animations to novels to manga.

According to the critic Enomoto Aki, the first step was the influence of the Japanese translations of C.S. Lewis (1966), J.R.R. Tolkien (1972) and Ursula K. Le Guin (1976) on local authors of Youth Literature (Enomoto 2008, 14). Then the medieval fantasy boom started in the 1980-90s. Triggered by the success of Japanese video games, such as *Dragon Quest* and *Final Fantasy*, that use it as a background (Enomoto 2008, 18–20), it spread quickly to other cultural media, even playing an important role in the creation of a new literary genre, the *light novel* – a special entertainment novel in Japan that mainly targets junior and high school students (Enomoto 2008, 9).[7] Enomoto remarks that one of the first most famous and influential light novels, *Slayers* by Kanzaka Hajime,[8] depicts a heroic fantasy world inspired by Japanese role-playing games rather than the original Middle Ages, since it is easier for local young readers to understand and accept (Enomoto 2008, 84). For much of the 1990s this became a typical representation of medieval fantasy in Japan, with archetypal characters and places quite similar in a way to the ones described by Cécile Boulaire's concept of "Middle Ages as a country" in French Children's literature (Boulaire 2002). The difference is that the bones are western, but the flesh is Japanese, an expression first coined by the translator Niwa Gorō (Wakabayashi 2008, 242). These popular literary works are often mostly adding to Japanese values some stereotyped medieval elements, such as the social's structure, knights, stone castles and its bestiary, regardless of their original complexity or even temporality.

[7] The Japanese critic argues in his book that the definition of those novels is particularly difficult and takes notices of the growing interest by the older population of university students (Enomoto 2008, 50).

[8] Kanzaka, H. (1990–2000) *Slayers*, Vols I-XV. Illustrations by Araizumi Rui. Tōkyō: Kadokawa, Fujimi Shobō.

A recent trend is to immerse these medieval fantasy stories directly in virtual realities, in contemporary Japan. A good example is the success of the recent acclaimed light novel *Sword Art Online* by Kawahara Reki,[9] which narrates how players of an MMORPG get trapped in a virtual reality and have to beat the game to recover their freedom. I argue that the link created by these medieval fantasy works and Japanese video games may be following the same pattern, described by Karoline Postel-Vinay, of western elements in Japanese daily life. She states that what we perceive as a "manifestation of Japan's westernisation […] will be apprehended by [the Japanese] as an inherent element of their modern society's reality" (Postel-Vinay 1994, 32). Thus, I would argue that European medieval fantasy elements may already be seen as a part of the reality and imagination of the contemporary Japanese.

The Vikings coming from the Land of the Rising Sun

The past decade has brought new forms of intertextual creations through transcultural elements and syncretism involving medieval imagination, such as a womanised King Arthur fighting for the Holy Grail in a fictional modern town of Kōbe.[10] Not only are these works now countless, but they show a clear diversification in their use of Neo-Medievalism, in attaining various forms, genres and qualities. The manga industry is still the main vessel for this literary movement, and

[9] Kawahara, R. (2009-2014, Ongoing) *Sword Art Online*, Vols I-XIV. Tōkyō: ASCII Media Works, Dengeki Bunko.

[10] Type-Moon (Dev.) (2004) *Fate/stay night* [Visual Novel Vers.]. Tōkyō: Type-Moon; Nishiwaki, D.,Type-Moon (2006–2012) *Fate/stay night*, Vols I-XX [Manga Vers.]. Tōkyō: Kadokawa Shoten. It has been also adapted in anime (2011–2012). Some of the similarities between Kōbe and the fictional Fuyuki city where the action takes place can be seen photographed in this internet blog (Articles: 19 & 31/10/2009, accessed: 08/05/2014):
Punyari.wordpress.com/2009/10/31/real-life-fate-stay-night-locations-in-kobe
Punyari.wordpress.com/2010/10/19/unlimited-blade-works-anime-pilgrimage.

one could easily find what one likes in it, from the romantic tale of *Akagami no Shirayukihime* to tragedies, whether it is the successful *Shingeki no Kyōjin* or the dark fantasy *Übel Blatt*.[11]

Among them, we can also witness a growing interest in historical representations. Some of these portray free interpretations of various heroic figures – such as Joan of Arc. Others use detailed academic research, for instance Sōryō Fuyumi's manga *Cesare*, dedicated to the rise of Pope Alexander VI's elder son.[12] Here, I will turn my attention to an unusual work by Makoto Yukimura: *Vinland Saga*. Its serialisation starting in 2005 and still ongoing, this manga portrays the Danish conquest of England at the start of the 11th century and the life of the famous Icelander Thorfinn Karlsefni, who followed Leif Erikson's route to explore of the mythical Vinland.[13] In the early chapters, readers follow the main character's life as a Viking, under the authority of Askeladd – who killed his father. A series of events lead him witnessing the rise of the Danish King Canute, losing his life's purpose, and ending up as a slave. After entering a path of redemption and regaining his freedom, Thorfinn leaves behind his warrior past and confronts Canute, vouching to establish an ideal country for those who cannot live in this world engulfed in the flames of conquest. He then proceeds to prepare for his departure to Vinland, following his first dream as a child: accompanying Leif Erikson.

[11] Akizuki, S. (2007–2014, Ongoing) *Akagami no Shirayukihime*, Vols I-XI. Tōkyō: Hakusensha; Isayama, H. (2010–2014, Ongoing) *Shingeki no Kyojin*, Vols I-XIV. Tōkyō: Kōdansha; Shiono, E. (2005–2014, Ongoing) *Übel Blatt*, Vols I-XV. Tōkyō: Square Enix.
[12] Sōryō, F. (2006–2013, Ongoing) *Cesare*, *Hakai no Sōsōsha*, Vols I-X. Tōkyō: Kōdansha.
[13] Vinland would be somewhere between the current Canadian regions Newfoundland and Labrador (Boyer 1995, 224–227).

Ill. 1 – Thorfinn Karlsefni (Vol. I, Cover).
Vinland Saga © Yukimura Makoto/Kōdansha.

This is, of course, just a brief summary, since up until now there has been more than one hundred chapters in this ongoing manga. The author uses three elements as a base for his story: Norse literature, mainly the *Saga of the Greenlanders* and the *Saga of Eric the Red* (Boyer 1987), the history of the Vikings, and the theme of Homecoming (Iguchi 2010, 66–67). The last one is well described in Iguchi Atsushi's article, the only one that I know of dedicated to this manga, and is quite similar to my own approach to *Spice & Wolf* (Danesin 2010–2011, 61–63). I will only briefly refer to this theory before expanding my analysis. Iguchi points out that the characters in the manga, especially Thorfinn Karlsefni, Askeladd and Canute, are trying to achieve their homecoming in different ways, despite being "tossed around in their endless odysseys of ruthless violence, search for identity, the will to power and the questioning of faith" (Iguchi 2010, 67). They strive for a "utopia of which they can never lay a hold" (Iguchi 2010, 68). Reminding us that our contemporary days can be seen as the "New Middle Ages" (Iguchi 2010, 67), Iguchi Atsushi concludes that the representation of this harsh medieval life "powerfully resonates with

those who desperately struggle to find their homelands in the 21st century 'medieval' Japan" (Iguchi 2010, 68). Therefore, the European Middle Ages, which Jacques Le Goff considers as "the best suited to grasp ourselves in our roots and our breaks" (Le Goff 1977, 11), serves as a mirror for the deconstructed self of postmodern readers, even on the other side of the world.

The Vikings have been subjected to various interpretations throughout history, even becoming an archetype of Romanticism. As the historian Régis Boyer observes, despite better archaeological understanding their myths and realities have intertwined in our literature, deformed and spread in our imagination (Boyer 2008, 83–272). Thus, their reception in Japan is intriguing. It would be naïve to think that *Vinland Saga* strives to – or ought to – achieve perfect historical accuracy. That is neither its goal nor its ambition. There are plenty of scenes to satisfy readers' thirst for mythical images, especially during fights.

Ill. 2 – Thorkell the Tall's colossal strength (Vol. III, Ch. 19, 71).
Vinland Saga © Yukimura Makoto/Kōdansha/Kurokawa (French Ed.).

The author takes some liberties with historical events, such as the youth of King Canute, his relationship with Thorkell the Tall or even his rather feminine and frail figure – up until the sixth volume. One might also be surprised to see, among others, Askeladd beheading the Danish King Sweyn Forkbeard.[14] Casting Askeladd as the character who commits regicide provides a fictional link between the Vikings' history, the Icelandic sagas and the Arthurian legend. In addition to Yukimura Makoto portraying Wales as the last refuge of the Romano-British descendants,[15] in the manga the real identity of the half-Welsh half-Dane Askeladd is Lucius Artorius Castus, King Arthur's heir.[16] His name is based on a Roman knight from the 2nd century who incorrectly became one of the potential historical origins for the Arthurian legend (Gautier 2013, 128-129)– while his nickname, signifying 'The Ash Lad', is taken from a famous Norwegian folktale protagonist. Lastly, I should mention the presence of Japanese elements, such as the fundamental and recurrent question, "What is a true warrior?", which can be seen as clearly originating from the Samurai's code *Bushidō,* even appearing at the core of the representation of Valhalla in Thorfinn's nightmare.[17]

However, it would be wrong to portray *Vinland Saga* as a popular work that only tries to expose the Japanese to the exotic figures of the Vikings. Far from presenting the story of muscle-head barbarians only interested in dying in battle to reach Valhalla, Yukimura Makoto indulges in refined drawings and detailed research in order to represent

[14] Yukimura, M., *Vinland Saga*, Vol. VIII, Chapter 52, pp. 76–77.
[15] *Ibid.*, Vol. IV, Chapters 23-26, pp. 39-150.
[16] *Ibid.*, Vol. VIII, Chapter 52, p. 74.
[17] *Ibid.*, Vol. X, Chapter 71, pp. 183–222.

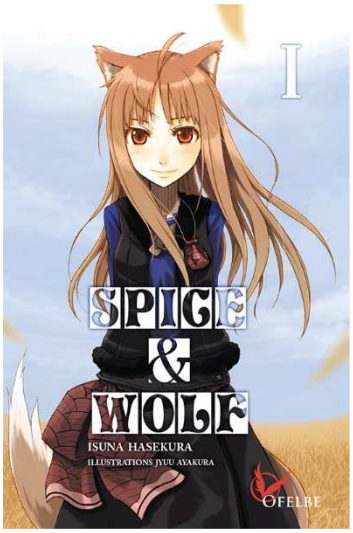
the Norsemen's social system and his characters' depth and appearance. The author depicts without embellishment the life of the medieval farmer, the harsh reality of slavery and the terror inflicted by the Vikings' assaults in England. Gradually, the veil is lifted from his main character's backgrounds and reveals that Yukimura Makoto has paid particular attention to their psychology. A good example would be his Shakespearian kind of touch shown in his depiction of the madness borne from wearing the Danish Crown.[18] As the title of his manga suggests, the Japanese artist relies on the Sagas and their way of taking historical liberties (Boyer 2008, 763–771). Realistic elements are combined with mythical ones, whether it is the colossal strength of Thorkell the Tall at the Battle of London in 1013[19] or the legendary and disciplined Jomsvikings mercenaries – to which the main character's father belonged.[20] Along with the rise of Canute and the intrigue behind Askeladd's kinship with King Arthur, Yukimura uses the absence of details of Thorfinn Karlsefni's youth in both *The Greenlanders* and *Eric the Red* sagas to embellish upon his past and motivation for his expedition to Vinland. Lastly, describing the Viking as "a man, like us, with circumstances that pushed him towards adventures, […] a man who loved life, as we do", Régis Boyer reminds us that Sagas, "keeps focusing on the individual with his pains and joys, his weakness and greatness, his dreams and tenacious efforts to master his destiny which always end up triumphing, of him and us" (Boyer 2008, 262). The struggle of the characters as shown by the Homecoming theme, their time as slaves or even the fateful fall of the North Sea Empire, are clearly

[18] *Ibid.*, Vol. XI, Chapter 72, pp. 5–34.
[19] *Ibid.*, Vol. III, Chapters 18–19, pp. 49–129.
[20] *Ibid.*, Vol. VI, Chapters 39–40, pp. 107–114.

in accordance with this approach. Therefore, in addition to the elation of adventure, through its transcultural and postmodern nature *Vinland Saga* not only appears as both a historical and fictional rewriting of the original Norse story, but it also revitalises the Vikings' reality and myths as a prism through which contemporary Japanese readers can ponder on their own situation.

Spice & Wolf, an encounter between Europe and Japan

Among the category of light novels, the seventeen-volume series *Spice & Wolf*, written by Isuna Hasekura and published from 2006 to 2011, has caught audience and critics' attention for its unique tale and atmosphere. Set in a medieval fantasy background, this story relates the encounter of Kraft Lawrence, a travelling merchant, and Holo the goddess of harvests, a wolf in human form. As the goddess wishes to return to her northern homeland, they make an agreement to journey together until they reach her destination. The readers follow this strange pair on their voyage and romance, as they go through mercantile cases, cross lands and slowly break the barriers between race and age, fairies and humans, legends and society's realities.



Ill. 3 – Holo the Wise Wolf (Vol. I, Cover).
Spice & Wolf © Isuna Hasekura/Illustration: Ayakura Jū/Kadokawa Corporation/ASCII Media Works.

Enomoto Aki highlights clearly that the main originality of this work is its way of depicting an economical theme in a realistic analogy of European Middle Ages, rather than the usual swords and magic (Enomoto 2008, 168). Hasekura used, along with other historical sources, the French historian Jean Favier's work, *Gold & Spices: The Rise of Commerce in the Middle Ages* (1998), [21] to provide a detailed merchant's universe as the core of his novels and, coincidentally maybe, even its title. Through financial crises that serve as the main events, readers are introduced to the complex matters of mercantilism and trade tricks. The intrigue of the very first volume portrays a case of massive-scale short-term speculation on the purity of silver currency – similar to a smaller-scale one described by Jean Favier, which happened in Florence during the 14th century (Favier 1998, 135). This allowed the Japanese author to explain the medieval currency system, from the

[21] Hasekura mentions some of his sources on his internet blog (article: 17/08/2006, Accessed: 08/05/2016): http://ameblo.jp/hasekura2/archive-200608.html

trust's value in the coins to its geopolitical power,[22] even including the important role of money changers, which is also described in Favier's work (1998, 134), through the character of Lawrence's friend, the cambist Weiz[23]. Introducing this socio-economical evaluative aspect of the Middle Ages to Japanese readers, Hasekura uses the intrigues, as well as Holo and Lawrence's discussions, to create the chance to teach basic macro- and microeconomics in the same way detective fictions would present criminology's theoretical explanations. In addition, by introducing a new character,[24] the young and intelligent Col, who becomes the protagonist's student, the master/apprentice relationship enhances readers' learning experience and discovery of the Middle Ages' commerce.

Ill. 4 – [Manga Vers.] On the left, a lesson on the medieval currency system. On the right, one of the many detailed medieval settings (Vol. I, Ch. 5, 132; Ch.6, 155). *Spice & Wolf* © Isuna Hasekura/Koume Keito/Originally published in Japan in 2008 by Media Works Inc., Tōkyō.

[22] Hasekura, I., *Spice & Wolf*, Vol. I, pp. 100-101.
[23] *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 104.
[24] *Ibid.*, Vol. VI, p. 49.

Focusing on economy, European medieval elements are in every corner of this light novel. Lawrence being the main character, *Spice & Wolf* portrays the harsh life of a travelling merchant.[25] Besides the trade system, readers learn of the dangers and taxes waiting for on the roads[26], which are well-known to historians (Le Goff 2006, 11–12). Additionally, the light novel depicts the relationship between foreigners and locals, and the difficulties of settling down[27] – both historical elements are also detailed by Jean Favier (Favier 1998, 109–124). Another example among essential European factors in Hasekura's series is the presence and influence of merchant guilds, starting with the central role of the Milone and the Medio companies in the first volume. They remind us of famous historical ones, from the House of Medici to the Florentine corporations *Arte della Lana* and *Arte di Calimala* (Favier 1998, 95). Moreover, the tenth volume portrays an evident analogy to the Hanseatic League, the Ruvik Alliance, described as the "single most powerful economic alliance in the world" and a "nation-sized opponent" whose "home territory is the whole of the Northlands".[28] Lawrence – a travelling merchant through and through who was given the role of protagonist – and the European medieval economy – used as the main framework and not as an ephemeral background element – are definitely uncommon literary elements and original ones in Japanese literature. Furthermore, Hasekura did not disregard medieval social life, devoting an interested attention to the successive inns, alimentation and its medicinal use, the impact of monasticism, even the confrontation

[25] *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 137.
[26] *Ibid.*, Vol. I, pp. 19, 67–68.
[27] *Ibid.*, Vol. I, pp. 15 & 137.
[28] *Ibid.*, Vol. X, pp. 26 & 31.

between pagans and an analogue of Christians.[29] Lastly, by making his main character an anti-hero, a common human far from the idealised knight, a stubborn yet skilled merchant, Hasekura put his final touch to what seems to be a realistic story, if it were not for the centuries-old Holo. Although the complexity of the medieval economy might appear unappealing to some readers, the light novel characteristics – easy reading pace, focus on dialogues, catchy characters, junior and high school students being targeted (Enomoto 2008, 86) – makes up for it. Combined with the main themes being universal – trade, romance, travelling –, this allows *Spice & Wolf* to be understood and enjoyed whether it be by Japanese or Europeans.

One might easily simplify the parallels with the real world by saying that the merchant plays the European part and Holo the Japanese one. Indeed, Holo conveys local feminine elements and characteristics, whether it is her cunningness typical of the Shintō fox spirit – *kitsune* – or her way of speaking which is based on the *kuruwa kotoba* language, used by high-class prostitutes from the Edo period, the *Oiran* (Danesin 2010-2011, 28–29; Maynard Senko K. 2012, 32 & 83). Even her personality is linked to the concept of *Wabi-Sabi*, the Japanese ideal of beauty (Davies & Osamu 2002, 223–232). Nonetheless, in a medieval background, the wolf literary motif resonates whether you are Japanese or European. As Brett L. Walker's research on wolves in Japan shows, her character's depth and taboo romance with Kraft Lawrence is no stranger to the Japanese and Ainu folklore, nor is her protection over the

[29] *Ibid.*, Vol. VII, pp. 179–182; Ludo J.R. Milis' work (1992) is mentioned, among others, as a source on this matter by Hasekura on his blog article (see link above),

harvest (Walker 2005, 85 & 9). On the other hand, she possesses European elements, such as her gigantic true form,[30] reminding us of Fenrir's myth, and the way she appears as a dangerous and fascinating pagan fairy, despised and chased by the Church. Likewise, Holo's pronounced passion for apples and her way of tempting and playing with Lawrence can appear both as an obvious reference to the biblical episode of Adam and Eve,[31] or as a part of the playful side of the Japanese *kitsune* literary figure. I should also mention that, by sharing similarities with the *Irui-kon* Japanese folktales (Davies & Osamu 2002, 173–174),[32] *Spice & Wolf* also resonates with the Melusinian tales known by European readers.

Finally, as I pointed out earlier, in my first essay on *Spice & Wolf* I argued the importance of the homecoming theme, and my opinion has been reinforced by Iguchi Atsushi's research. In this light novel, based on the *topos* of the journey, the already 25-year-old Lawrence struggles to find his place and settle down, as he is trying to achieve his dreams of owning a shop.[33] Holo, a member of an endangered species in this monotheist age, tired and saddened by the villagers' behaviour, wishes to return to her homeland, which seems to have been destroyed. Both of them suffer from loneliness and travel for the sake of homecoming, in order to find a place to belong. The very start of the series portrays this situation, as it is said that Holo "no longer had a place here"[34] and that

[30] *Ibid.*, Vol. I, pp. 209–215.
[31] *Ibid.*, Vol. I, pp. 75–78.
[32] *Irui-kon* is a type of folktales where "a person marries an animal that has transformed itself in a human being" (Davies & Osamu 2002, 262).
[33] Hasekura, I., *Spice & Wolf*, Vol. I, p. 140.
[34] *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 4.

Lawrence "longed for company more and more frequently".[35] The first sentence of *Spice & Wolf*, "So that's the last, then?",[36] appears as the trigger, and the last sentence of the first volume definitely puts the journey's literary *topos* at the core of the novel.[37] As Lawrence helps Holo, even researching old tales for her, he revitalises her legend, becomes a part of it and re-enchants his merchant life and the readers' world. The story applies well to contemporary Japan, since the syncretism between the encounter of Otherness, the trader's profession and ancient folktales can resonate with both Japanese society's realities and traditional Shintō beliefs. This way, *Spice & Wolf* adheres completely to the Neo-Medievalism movement.

Thus, the combination of transcultural elements in this paragon of syncretism allows readers to enjoy a unique fantasy, to experience the encounter between European Middle Ages and Japan, while receiving a real lesson on the merchants' universe, ancient folklore, and medieval economy. This way, characterised as a light novel *d'auteur*[38]*, Spice & Wolf*'s characteristics can appeal to the older population of university students, rather than just young readers, making it even more singular in Japanese literature.

[35] *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 16.
[36] *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 7.
[37] *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 230.
[38] Enomoto Aki (2008), pp. 166–168. Enomoto mentioned *Spice & Wolf* as a light novel among the category of original authors, of whom it can be said that they have a personal style. I strongly agree with this vision and I argue that this particularity enhanced the literary value of this work. However, this is not the place to discuss this point.

The literary and cultural Alchemy of *L'Éclipse*

Among Japanese authors who have been inspired by Europe, rare are the ones who portray our Middle Ages in the "pure literature" field defined by literary critics (Ozaki 2012). Following the huge success of his novella *L'Éclipse*, the talented Hirano Keiichirō, self-proclaimed disciple of both Mishima Yukio and Mircea Eliade, has ranked top of this list. In 1998, he won the prestigious Akutagawa Prize, equivalent to the Goncourt in France, with his fake medieval memoirs portraying Nicolas, a young Dominican in a French village of the ending 15th century, immersed in the mysteries of alchemy and metaphysics. This work deserves and requires a thorough study, which has yet to be done,[39] covering its every aspect, such as his exceptional use of Japanese language – a sensitive topic that Hirano himself chose to explain in his collection of essays *Monologues* (Hirano 2007, 304–308). However, in order not to stray from the path of this article, I will only mention and concentrate on the European medieval atmosphere and motifs depicted in this novella.

One of his most original features is its very beginning, which can be framed as an autobiographical pact. Bringing in the readers from the first step, it stimulates and immerses them throughout the whole text:

> "J'ai voulu consigner dans les pages qui suivent certains souvenirs personnels. […] je dirai la nue vérité sans jamais falsifier rien."[40]

[39] A thorough study of his work and its European influences is in process and will be developed in my thesis.

[40] Hirano, K., *L'Éclipse*, p. 7. ('I have wished to record in the following pages some personal memories. […] I will speak the naked truth without ever falsify anything').

At the same time the narrator swears his oath, he recognises that his testimony is not one to have faith in, leaving the role of judge solely to God.[41] This odd pledge is immediately followed by Nicolas's description of his initial circumstances as a university scholar in 1482, along with several references to alchemy and theological elements.[42] Setting the story's medieval and esoteric tone, the protagonist's pledge and background immediately create the spark that breaches the walls between reality and metaphysics, leaving the readers to their doubts, as they wonder what can possibly justify such a mysterious introduction.

Hirano Keiichirō enhances the Neo-Medievalism of his novella by putting into motion a realistic and metaphysical atmosphere. On the one hand, as an important part of the story's core, he depicts Christian elements, portraying various clergy's members, from the University of Paris scholars to the Dominican preacher Jacques Michaëlis. Along with the Inquisition and Heresies, neither theological arguments[43] nor illustrious literary references[44] are forgotten; even the very end mentions the growing Lutheran movement.[45] On the other hand, Hirano describes the sordid and harsh life conditions of villagers who face the aftermath of the Black Death[46] and a poor harvest.[47] However, what has to be highlighted is how well the Japanese author brings and confines his readers to a sordid ambiance. The remote village which serves as the

[41] *Ibid.*, pp. 7–8.
[42] *Ibid.*, pp. 9–13.
[43] *Ibid.*, pp. 37–45.
[44] *Ibid.*, p. 73.
[45] *Ibid.*, p. 211.
[46] *Ibid.*, pp. 29–31.
[47] *Ibid.*, pp. 107–108.

story's stage appears as a place inclined to deleterious behaviours[48] and rumours, such as Guillaume's wife's infidelity,[49] or the local Priest Justus's unorthodox behaviour[50] and the hidden food in his office.[51] On top of this background, Hirano creates a mystical and dark atmosphere with local superstitions, strengthened by both the madness born from a mysterious disease and Jacques Michaëlis's sermons[52] – leading to the condemnation of the alchemist Pierre Dufay by the Inquisition. Combined with the strangeness of the young Jean, the isolation of the village and the autobiographical pact, it instils in the readers a mystical feeling of suffocation and anxiety that reaches its paroxysm during the scene of the Androgynous being's execution. In this fashion, Hirano achieves in *L'Éclipse* a dark and theological European medieval atmosphere that enhances the core of his work: the alchemy myth of the *Magnus Opus*.

Constructed almost like a detective fiction story, nothing is left to chance in this novella. Every element's description serves its purpose, whether it is the alchemist Pierre Dufay's house[53] or Nicolas discovering the geometrical disposition of the village and the meaning behind it.[54] Through the prism of the main character's mind, the readers experience theological and metaphysical reflexions, and share his growing fascination with the alchemy myth. Hirano has put this art at the core of his novel: every part of the narration is dedicated to an extended metaphor that meticulously leads to the *Magnus Opus*, the philosopher's stone – of which the principles are exposed by Umberto Eco (2010, 85–

[48] *Ibid.*, p. 92.
[49] *Ibid.*, pp. 85–88.
[50] *Ibid.*, pp. 109–111.
[51] *Ibid.*, pp. 49–50.
[52] *Ibid.*, pp. 143–147.
[53] *Ibid.*, pp. 71–81.
[54] *Ibid.*, pp. 55–60.

107). The opening step of this process, *negredo,* was already done when Nicolas met the alchemist. It was the first image of the village, and it can be seen in the recent graves of the cemetery due to the Black Death and the rotten corpse story.[55] The second step, *albedo*, is witnessed by the main character as he follows Pierre Dufay into a deep cavern, where lies the *Rebis*, the androgynous being born from the fusion of the sulphur and mercury, trapped in the rocks.[56] *Citrinas*, the third stage, is disregarded by the old alchemist[57] but can still be seen in lunar presence of the solar eclipse.[58] Finally, this phenomenon and the death of this creature, burned at the stake, serves as the final act of the process, the *Rubedo*, and from its cadaver, the golden stone is created, despite turning soon into dust.[59] Through Nicolas's spiritual enlightenment, the readers experience the alchemy quest and the incarnation of the Christ, commonly associated with the *Magnus Opus* (Eco 2010, 94).

Using the European Middle Ages as the story's backbone, the Japanese novella *L'Éclipse* appears to be quite a unique prism for a Japanese author to use, as Hirano exposes in an impressive way the alchemic and theologic's parts of the evaluative aspect of our medieval civilisation. In order to do it, he conscientiously based his work on Mircea Eliade's theories of the secret art, despite this scholar being quite controversial (Dubuisson 2008). His influence can be seen throughout the novella, such as in the blacksmith's crucial role or in the cavern figure, two elements that can be tracked down in Eliade's essay *Forgerons et*

[55] *Ibid.*, pp. 29–31.
[56] *Ibid.*, pp. 131-41.
[57] *Ibid.*, p. 77.
[58] *Ibid.*, p. 184.
[59] *Ibid.*, pp. 184–196.

Alchimistes (Eliade 1956). Finally, I would like to briefly mention the presence of several elements of intertextuality with Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose* and Marguerite Yourcenar's *L'Œuvre au Noir*. Among others, I can name the introduction of the novel as a testimony, the narration in the first person, and the theological discourse appearing quite close to the Italian author's work, and the extended metaphor of the *Magnus Opus* in the French author's masterpiece.

Conclusion

It can be inferred from this depiction of the European Middle Ages in Japan that contemporary Japanese authors and readers look at it through three prisms: their own historical knowledge, cultural perception and personal imagination. This renders the study of these materials even more complex and interesting, as it raises a lot of multidisciplinary questions. As seen throughout this article, we might say that for the Japanese, Neo-Medievalist literary works do not come down to only escapism, but also act as a way to understand themselves. They might feel attracted to it not only because of a controversial presumption of proximity between each other's Middle Ages, but also through their postmodern condition, starting from the fragmentation of time and space. On the other hand, we can ask ourselves how these reorganised medieval elements on the other side of the world can affect our own perception of our identity, now that they entered daily Europeans readers' lives. Including the manga boom (Bouissou 2012, 12), the acceleration of Japanese literary translations in France (Sakai 2012, 233–243) requires that we renew our insight, especially with works that send back to us modified cultural images of our own civilisation.

To conclude this article, which will be further developed in my thesis, I would like to borrow Marco Pellitteri's words as I believe that these transcultural works that convey Japanese and Medieval European elements can "mould the *sense of wonder* and the emotional and cultural sensibility" (Pellitteri 2004, 19) of the new generations in Europe and Japan, drawing closer their imagination, thus creating a strong *glocal* common ground in the future.

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The shifting representation of Japan in Belgian comics, in fifteen years after WWII (1945-1960)

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Abstract

This paper focuses on how Japan was represented in the most popular Belgian comics at a particular period in time, right after the Second World War and just before the image of Japan as an economic superpower (that exported many commodities to Europe or the USA) became widespread from the 1960s on. Within the field of European comics, Belgian comics played a crucial role in the decades after the war with major artists such as Hergé, Franquin, Jacobs, Vandersteen and many others. Moreover, the Belgian comics industry attracted many artists from other countries and exported her products to various countries (especially France). The comics published in dailies, journals and albums formed at that time an important means of entertainment for the youngsters (television started only in the 1950s in Belgium). Furthermore, the Belgian comics culture is interesting since it involves two different traditions: a French language one and a Dutch language one.

In various stories, published between 1945 and 1960, we find representations of Japan. On the whole, two basic approaches of the Japanese Otherness stand out:

- *the "Yellow Peril", strongly referring to the last World War (for instance Jacobs* Blake et Mortimer*,* Le Secret de l'espadon*,* Hubinon & Troisfontaines*, Charlier* Buck Danny*,* Les Japs attaquent*). Usually these comics were drawn in a more realistic style.*
- *the "touristic ancient or exotic Japan" without any reference to WWII (for instance Vandersteen* Suske en Wiske*,* De Stemmenrover*, Will & Rosy* Tif et Tondu*,* Le Fantôme du samouraï*). Usually comics of this approach combine adventure and humour.*

The first kind of comics is typically for the comics produced in the first years after war, while the second kind is rather typical for the late 1950s. So, even in this brief period of 15 years already an important shift of the image of Japan is noticeable, from a belligerent enemy to an exotic and touristically interesting culture. The paper will offer a more detailed analysis of some examples and formulates some possible explanations for this shift.

KEYWORDS

Yellow Peril; Exoticism; World War II; Caricatures; Belgium; Japan; Post-war; Belgian Comics; Bandes dessinées.

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Introduction

There is clearly a growing interest in "Yellow Peril" studies (see Mayer 2013, Tchen & Yeats 2014, Greene 2014), which is only a subdivision of

the larger research domain of racial-ethnic stereotyping. These academic studies on Asian stereotypes however do not take into account the popular culture of smaller countries like Belgium.[1] Therefore this paper will focus on how a particular Asian country, Japan, in a particular period (between 1945 and 1960) was represented in Belgian comics. The chosen period is a crucial one in the history of international relations between Japan and the rest of the world: it commences when Japan was seen as the defeated enemy and it ends 15 years later, when Japan was still preparing to become an economic superpower (that exported from the 1960s on many commodities to Europe and the USA). During the post-war years the perception of Japan changed in a relatively brief period, from a treacherous war enemy to a trustful business partner.

The approach here will take the Grounded Theory-approach, which does not start with a preconceived theory in mind, but with the data themselves. As proponents of this approach (Strauss and Corbin 1998, 12) advocate: "*Theory derived from data is more likely to resemble the "reality" than is theory derived by putting together a series of concepts based on experience or solely through speculation (how one thinks things ought to work)".* But there is a crucial problem regarding data, as mass communication studies informs us:

> "the physical text of the message in print, sound or pictorial image is what we can directly observe and is in a sense 'fixed', while the meanings which are embedded in the texts or perceived to be present by their producers or eventual audiences are largely unobservable and not fixed. Such meanings are both diverse and often ambiguous." (McQuail 1994, 235).

[1] An exception is Rheault (2013) but his article did not delve deeply into the period that is of interest of this paper. Moreover, Rheault considers only the Francophone productions of Belgium, while we take into account also the Dutch language production.

In our case the 'text" is a graphic narrative that offers a complex interplay of words and static drawn images, with multiple references to reality and to other 'texts' (be it comics, films, novels, paintings, etc.). A complicating difficulty is that images are fundamentally different from language: while verbal language is coded, images are to a certain degree analogous representation. Moreover, each drawing delivers through its graphic style a specific view on reality, implying a visual ontology, *"the definition of the real in visual terms."* (Rawson 1987, 19). Whatever the causes the final result of drawing, it is through this picture that the viewer perceives a created world and is thus confronted with the object-in-the-picture from the point of view (including graphic choices, framing, type of colouring…) that the picture / artist offers (Lefèvre 2016, 69). When we try to make a description or analysis of an image, we should try to transpose both elements: the degree of analogy and of expression.

Our analysis will first make a quantitative estimate of the proportion of Belgian comics dealing with Japan. Secondly and more importantly, the representations will also be analysed in qualitative manner to deduce their main stance towards Japan. The central research questions are to what extent and in what manner was Japan present in Belgian comics of the chosen period.

Unfortunately, there is no academic consensus on the modalities of the effects of cultural representations. Various theories in the social field (Raudsepp 2005, Jodelet 1989, Barker 2002, Morris-Suziki 2005) claim that representations influence the way people perceive reality, but empirically testing a causal relation is still hazardous, because it remains extremely difficult to isolate only one factor and test

empirically its possible effects. [2] Recent experimental aesthetics research emphasizes that the sensory, perceptual, and cognitive processes that underlie experiences with art works are *"driven by a complex interaction among characteristics of the art object, the viewer, and the physical, social, and historical contexts in which the experience takes place."* (Locher 2011, 697).

Historical and Medial Context

Before starting our analysis some contextual information may help to clarify what the situation of Belgian comics was in the chosen period. Within the field of European comics, Belgian comics played a crucial artistic and economic role in the decades after the war with major publishers such as Dupuis and Lombard, and mayor artists such as Hergé, Franquin, Jacobs and Vandersteen. Moreover, the Belgian comics industry attracted many artists from other countries and exported its products to various countries (especially France). [3] The comics published in dailies, weeklies and albums formed at that time an important means of entertainment for the children of primary school age (television started only in the 1950s in Belgium) (Lefèvre 2000 & 2007a). While the French-language comics in the first post-war decades flourished mainly in specialized weeklies such as *Spirou* and *Tintin*, the Flemish strip thrived foremost in the Flemish daily papers and their children's supplements. This difference in publication format had far-reaching consequences for the production, form, and content of the

[2] Effect studies of stereotyping of Asian people by media (as Zhang's 2010 & 2015) are still quite exceptional.

[3] In the fifteen years after the war, for example, the French Jacques Martin, René Goscinny, and Jean Graton moved to Belgium, Dino Attanasio came from Italy.

comics (Lefèvre 2013, 255-269): for instance, comics published in dailies were only published in black and white, while comics in specialized weeklies could be published also in full colour. Nevertheless, these differences in the years after WWII most Belgian comics were published as a series of various stories (like *Buck Danny* or *Suske en Wiske*), one-shots (an independent narrative not part of a series) such as *Tarawa atoll sanglant* were at that time rather the exception than the rule. Since Belgian comic culture combines two different traditions, a French language one and a Dutch language one, it might be interesting to study the possible differences in their representation of Japan.

Regarding the focus of our research it is important to remember that already in 1934 an important Belgian comic made explicit references to the aggressive politics of the Imperial Japan, namely the fifth *Tintin* adventure *Le Lotus Bleu*, which was published in *Le Petit Vingtième* between 1934 and 1935. In that story Hergé related how the Japanese staged the Mukden Incident to occupy Manchuria. The Belgian hero, Tintin, sides with the Chinese, against both the European occupiers and the Japanese invaders. Hergé let Tintin explicitly criticize the European stereotypes of the Asian (by showing a Fu Manchu like character). Tintin tells his Chinese fried how wrongly a lot of Europeans view the Chinese: "*A lot of Europeans believe that the Chinese are cunning and cruel men, (…) who spend their time inventing tortures*".[4] Hergé was, as is known, heavily influenced by his contacts with a Chinese arts student in Brussels (Peeters 2002, 120-121). Given Hergé's crucial role in the development of the comics publishing industry in Belgium, it might be

[4] My translation of the original French text of the first edition : *" beaucoup d'Européens s'imaginent que… tous les chinois sont des hommes fourbes et cruels, qui (…) passent leur temps à inventer des supplices. "*(Hergé 1979,227).

interesting to see to what extent Hergé's representation of Japan was influential in the immediate postwar period.

Corpus and Quantitative Analysis

To compile our corpus all comics published in Belgium (of a considerable length, namely more than 20 pages) with a more or less clear reference to Japan were at first identified by various means.[5] As a "more or less clear reference" were seen not only comics that made verbally explicit references to Japan or parts of Japanese culture (like samurai), but also comics that offered characters, locations, scenes, etc. that could have been interpreted by contemporary readers as referring to Japan in one way or another.

The following table gives all the selected titles of comics with references to Japan, put in chronological order of their first publication in a periodical:

Year	Series title, story title	Author(s)	First publication in periodical (w=weekly, d=daily)	First album publication
1946	*Blake et Mortimer, Le Secret de l'Espadon*	Jacobs	Tintin (w), 26 Sep 1946 - 8 Sep 1949	1950 (part 1) 1953 (part 2) Lombard
1947	*Buck Danny, Les Japs attaquent*	Hubinon & Charlier	Spirou (w), N° 455-505	1948 Dupuis
	Buck Danny, Les mystères de Midway	Hubinon & Charlier	Spirou (w), N°506-548	1948 Dupuis
	Nero, Het geheim van Matsuoka	Sleen	De Nieuwe Gids (d), 2 Oct 1947 – 8 Jan 1948	1948 De Gids
1948	*Tarawa atoll sanglant*	Hubinon & Charlier	Le Moustique (w) (till 1949)	1951 Dupuis

[5] The list is based on my recollection of particular stories, on checking comics titles on the site <http://www.bdoubliees.com/> for typical references to Japan, and on Paul Herman (2009). Data of the publications are based on several sources like Béra *et al.* (1996), Matla (1993), Kerremans and Lefèvre (1997) and the website BDthèque <http://www.bdtheque.com/>.

	Nero, Het B-gevaar	Sleen	De Nieuwe Gids (d), 10 Jan - 18 May 1948	1948 De Gids
	Nero, Het Zeespook	Sleen	De Nieuwe Gids (d), 19 May – 6 Sep 1948	1962 Het Volk
	Buck Danny, La revanche des fils du ciel	Hubinon & Charlier	Spirou (w), N°548-604	1950 Dupuis
1949	*Buck Danny, Les tigres volants*	Hubinon & Charlier	Spirou (w), N°605-635	1951 Dupuis
1950	*Buck Danny, Dans les griffes du dragon noir*	Hubinon & Charlier	Spirou (w), N°636-659	1951 Dupuis
	Buck Danny, Attaque en Birmanie	Hubinon & Charlier	Spirou (w), N°660-683	1952 Dupuis
1956	*Valhardi contre le soleil noir*	Jijé	Spirou (w), N°967-988	1958 Dupuis
1957	*Suske en Wiske, De Stemmenrover*	Vandersteen	De Standaard (d), 21 Jan – 30 May 1957	1957 Standaard Boekhandel
1958	*Tif et Tondu, Le Fantôme du samouraï*	Will & Rosy	Spirou (w), N° 1033-1044	1986 Dupuis
1960	*Suske en Wiske, De Gouden Cirkel*	Vandersteen	De Standaard (d), 4 Jan – 11 May 1960	1960 Standaard Boekhandel

It was customary that comics were first serialized in a weekly or daily before they got an album publication. Usually the album publication would follow rather quickly after the end of the serialisation in the press.[6]

Already at first sight, it becomes clear that during the first five years after the war (1946-1950) various comics were produced in Belgium with references to Japan. But in the following 5 years (1951-1955) Japan seems to have disappeared almost completely from the Belgian comics' pages, before re-emerging from 1956 on (though in lesser quantities than the first period after the war). This first impression, however,

[6] Of the selected titles only one story did not receive an album publication in the immediate years after the serialisation: Tif and Tondu story, *Le Fantôme du samouraï* was published only three decades later.

needs however some nuances: the higher number of selected comics in the first period is largely due to the same authors. Artist Hubinon and scriptwriter Charlier were responsible for the majority of the selected titles (the one-shot *Tarawa atoll sanglant* and the 6 *Buck Danny* issue); their work repeatedly contains references to the war in the Pacific, mostly from the perspective of members of the American army. All in all, the number of selected titles is rather limited. We can assume that in this period in Belgium between 100 and 200 different albums were published every year (De Vries 2012, 88). We can infer that Japan was, proportionally speaking, not a major theme or motif in Belgian comics, but, it was nevertheless present.

Since some series were quite popular we have to take into account also the various re-publications in the selected period (1945-1960):

Year	**Series title, story title**	**First album publication**	**Republication album 1946-1960**
1946	*Blake et Mortimer, Le Secret de l'Espadon*	1950 (part 1) 1953 (part 2)	1955, 1957 (part 1) 1954, 1955, 1957, 1960 (part 2)
1947	*Buck Danny, Les Japs attaquent*	1948	1952
	Buck Danny, Les mystères de Midway	1948	1952
	Nero, Het geheim van Matsuoka	1948	
1948	*Tarawa atoll sanglant*	1951	1952
	Nero, Het B-gevaar	1948	
	Nero, Het Zeespook	1962	
	Buck Danny, La revanche des fils du ciel	1950	1953
1949	*Buck Danny, Les tigres volants*	1951	1953
1950	*Buck Danny, Dans les griffes du dragon noir*	1951	1953

	Buck Danny, Attaque en Birmanie	1952	1953
1956	*Valhardi contre le soleil noir*	1958	
1957	*Suske en Wiske, De Stemmenrover*	1957	1958
1958	*Le Fantôme du samouraï*	1986	
1960	*Suske en Wiske, De Gouden Cirkel*	1960	

Clearly the majority of the titles was reprinted, moreover the two volumes of the *Blake and Mortimer* series were reprinted more than once. Reprints are thus important, but their weight needs to be balanced accordingly to their circulation figure. Circulation figures may vary strongly from edition to edition. An essential factor is the way the album was published: with soft or hard cover, black and white print versus full colour, etc. Generally, the more the production for a first print run is costly, the lower the circulation figure (Lefèvre 2007a, 115-117). Of course, the more copies are sold over various years, the longer certain representations keep circulating. In addition, it was habitual that readers did not throw away their acquired albums, but kept them and also other members of the family or friends had access to them. Thus, the real readership is much higher than the circulation figures.

A problem here is that we do not know those historical circulation figures of the album publication. Also, the circulation figures of the weeklies, *Tintin* and *Spirou* vary according the source, but by the late 1950s in France alone *Tintin* sold more than 200,000 copies, and *Spirou* about 150,000 (Lesage 2014, 205). Given the smaller population of French readers in Belgium, it is reasonable to assume that the Belgian circulation would not surpass that of France. Furthermore, in the late 1940s the circulation figures for both weeklies were much lower, below 100,000

copies. These originally Francophone magazines were also translated into Dutch, for the Dutch speaking readers of Belgium, but the circulation figures of the Dutch versions were lower than the French editions.

All in all, the readership of the weeklies or dailies was much more extensive than that of the album publications.[7] A complicating factor is that such weeklies offered various series in each copy and one it remains unsure to which extent a contemporary reader actually read the whole issue.

Qualitative Content Analysis

The qualitative analysis of the way Japan was represented, both in text and in pictures, tries to describe mainly the general idea or feeling that a comic or certain excerpts are expressing or suggesting. Of course, we cannot be sure how the contemporary reader, often a child, would have interpreted or experienced these stories. The only thing we can do is trying to objectively read the comics and not deform them through some prior ideological stance or theoretical framework. Some particular fragments from the comics will be used to illustrate their rather general stance.

Analysing the representation of the Japan in all these comics it became evident that there was a difference between comics from various sub-periods in our demarcated time frame 1945-1960. This paper will argue for two main takes in two different periods, one immediate after the war (the late 1940s) and one in the late 1950s. The first approach, in the comics of 1946-1950, is still clearly marked by the Yellow Peril view from before World War II. The second model, historically situated in the years 1957-1960, could be called 'touristic'.

[7] For instance, the albums of the Flemish series *Suske en Wiske* were at that time printed at 30,000 copies (Lefèvre 2007a, 117)

In between lay a short period of non-interest in Japan and a short period of transition (1956) that combines elements of the models of the earlier and the later periods.

The Yellow Peril (1946-1950)

In the first period, 1946-1950, the majority of the titles made explicit references to the Second World War. The comics by Hubinon and Charlier (*Tarawa atoll sanglant* and the 6 *Buck Danny* stories) refer explicitly to the war in the Pacific, they intertwine historical events (like battles) and fictive acts by fictive heroes. By contrast in the first *Blake et Mortimer* story*, Le secret de l'espadon*, (1946-49) by Jacobs, a fictive third World War is represented, whereby an Asian superpower conquers all the other countries of the World. The national identity of the Asian enemy is not clearly stated in this story, but in the representation of this enemy both Chinese and Japanese references are combined, probably because by 1946 the communist army of Mao was perceived as posing a threat to the interests of Western countries. Strangely, but quite spectacular, the capital of this Asian empire is located in the mountains of the Himalaya (at the time the comic was published Tibet was, however, still independent, as only in 1950 did Mao's Chinese army invade that country). In the war stories by Hubinon and Charlier the Japanese soldiers are represented as fanatic and ruthless warriors with blades between their teeth, willing to kill themselves, and so on (see Fig. 1).

While all these Francophone comics refer explicitly to the recent war, in the humoristic Flemish series *Nero* the war does not directly play a crucial role: it features only an Asian figure, Matsuoka (see Fig. 2),

dressed up as a traditional Chinese but having a typical Japanese name (based on Yōsuke Matsuoka, the former Japanese diplomat and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Empire of Japan during the early stages of World War II, 1940-41). The Matsuoka character plays the role of the bad guy, a mysterious inventor that tries to manipulate people in Belgium by various means (a beer that drives people mad, or a swivel chair that can change the age of people or produce clones of them). This Asian character is a clearly Fu Manchu-like figure, as will be explained further.

What all these comics of the first period have in common is that they underscore the much older stereotype of the Yellow Peril, which finds its roots in medieval fears of Genghis Khan and Mongolian invasions in Europe. Gina Marchetti contends that:

> "the yellow peril combines racist terror of alien cultures, sexual anxieties, and the belief that the West will be overpowered and enveloped by the irresistible, dark, occult forces of the East." (Marchetti 1993, 2).

A military powerful Asia was seen as a threat to 'Christian Civilisation' in the West.[8] According to Gary Hoppenstand the stereotype developed further when Chinese emigrants came to the US. The white labour forces became resentful of the efficient migrant labour group from China. Hoppenstand explains further that the first entertainment mass medium in America to adopt the yellow peril stereotype was the dime novel:

> "The most-often encountered villain of the Western dime novel was the savage Indian, but just as the Western was being replaced in popularity by the detective dime novel (from 1880 to 1900), the savage Indian was being supplanted by the yellow peril stereotype." (Hoppenstand 1992, 283).

[8] Authors such as Hoppenstand have traced back the development of the yellow peril stereotype to the initial contacts between the European and Chinese cultures: *"As Europeans began to trade with China, they realized that Chinese craftmanship was superior to theirs, and as Europeans began to estimate the "wealth" of the Orient, they became jealous of it. This jealousy manifested itself in religious terms. To the medieval and Renaissance European Christian, China was a land of heathen barbarians."* – Gary Hoppenstand (1992, 281).

Moreover, the Boxer Rebellion (1899-1901) in China fostered the impression in Western media that the Chinese *"would become aggressive and expansionist and seek to invade or otherwise gain control of the West"* (Pagello *et al.* 2010, 252).

From the early decades of the 20th century onwards many stories have been published in the US about imagined future wars in which Asians, armed with superior technologies, invade the US. The short story *The Unparalleled Invasion* (Jack London, 1910) was a direct response to the Russo-Japanese war (1905-06) where Japan surprisingly defeated a much bigger nation. According to Sharp it reinforced a stereotype of Japanese as *"inhuman, mindless drones who slavishly serve their emperor"* (Sharp 2000, 437). In Philip Nowlan's short story *Armageddon 2419 A.D.* (published in *Amazing Stories*, August 1928) the 'Mongols' invade America; it was later adapted into the famous newspaper strip *The Adventures of Buck Rogers in the 25th Century.* Next to these 'Yellow invasion' stories, it was especially Sax Rohmer's writings that had a profound effect on popular entertainment media, Hoppenstand explains:

> "Rohmer's unique addition to the stereotype was the creation of the evil Oriental mastermind – a brilliant, powerful character who plots the destruction of Western civilization, who commands the resources of Western science and Eastern magic, and who governs an army of devoted assassins." (Hoppenstand 1992, 283).

The Oriental mastermind had many incarnations in various media, especially in cinema and in comics, such as Ming the Merciless, Emperor of the Universe in the *Flash Gordon*-comic strip series by Alex Raymond.[9]

[9] The Sax Rohmer character Fu Manchu also received various cinematic adaptations, starting with a 15 episodes serial, *Mystery of Dr. Fu Manchu* in 1923, followed in 1929 by Paramount's *The*

Remarkably, while the 1930s *"began with a series of films about the "Yellow Peril incarnate," by the end of the decade images of Fu Manchu had virtually vanished from the screen"*; China had become a *"country of ordinary, believable, and immensely sympathetic people."* (Greene 2014, 57).

Such Anglo-Saxon popular culture products circulated to a certain extent also in the Low Countries: for instance, films like *The Yellow Mask* (Lachman 1931) and *The Mask of Fu Manchu* (Brabin & Vidor 1932) were distributed, as local film posters of that period testify.[10] Rohmer's Fu Manchu-stories reached *"an enduring international success, begin vastly translated in other languages and adapted on other media"* (Pagello *et al.* 2010, 253). In the late 1930s the comic strip *Flash Gordon* was translated into French and Dutch in the Belgian weekly *Bravo* (which was published in both languages). With this background we can understand that the Belgian post-war comics were actually continuing more or less the pre-war Anglophone tradition of stereotypes of Asian people. The Asian figure in the *Nero* series bears too much substantial similarity with the Fu Manchu figure of the pre-war American or British movies to be purely accidental. By contrast, in the war stories of *Buck Danny* there is not a real Fu Manchu figure, but from the outset a suspect Asian is presented, who is immediately unmasked as a spy of Japan. The Japanese enemy in *Tarawa atoll sanglant* is indicated by offensive expressions such as "vermine jaune" (yellow vermin) (Hubinon & Charlier 1993, 8 & 17), and in all the selected Hubinon & Charlier war

Mysterious Dr. Fu Manchu, in 1932 MGM's *The Mask of Fu Manchu*, and in 1940 another serial of 15 episodes *The Drums of Fu Manchu*.

[10] The collection of film posters of the Leuven film theatres contains a 1933 poster of *Le Masque Jaune* [*The Yellow Mask*] (http://www.cinemaleuven.be/collectie/le-masque-jaune). The Dutch site *Delpher* <www.delpher.nl> for old newspaper clips has various paperclips mentioning screenings of *De Terugkeer van Fu Manchu* (*The Mask of Fu Manchu*) in Dutch movie theatres.

stories the skin of the Asians was coloured in rather yellow tones, quite contrasting to the skin tones used for the American characters. Various scholars have already analysed the representation of the enemy in the *Buck Danny* stories, this essay will therefore not consider this issue in detail (Paymans 1976, 219-229; Leguèbe 1977; Malcorps & Tyrions 1984; Rehault 2013, 383-394). In summary, from 1945 till 1950 the image of the Yellow Peril, often related to Japan, is thus quite persistent, but after 1950 for five years no more new stories with such representations were made – though many albums of the late 1940s were reprinted in the 1950s and later. The "Yellow Peril" stereotype endured somewhat by these reprints. Nevertheless, the idea of the Yellow Peril shifts from Japan to China. The new post-war situation whereby Japan was incorporated in the Western influence sphere (at first through the occupation by the US army) and China developed into another large communist country, opposing Western interests, may be an explanation.[11]

Resurgence and Extinction of the Yellow Peril in Belgian Comics (1956)

In 1956 there was an almost unexpected but brief resurgence of the image of Japanese military threat in Belgian comics. In the Francophone comic *Valhardi contre le soleil noir* by Jijé, published in the weekly *Spirou*, a group of Japanese conspirators is trying to raise on an island a new

[11] For instance, in a 1958 *Spirou* story *Le prisonnier du Bouddha* (by Franquin, Jidéhem, Greg), the enemy is the Chinese army (precisely at a time when Japan was represented as a touristic country). Some Belgian comics series feature a recurring enemy with Chinese roots: think of Tsaï Tsou Ming, leader of the Shin Than gang of the *Bob Morane* stories (since 1959), or Le Leader in the *Michel Vaillant* stories (since 1967), who was instructed by Tibetian monk. Even in the imagined distant future of *Le Piège diabolique* (Jacobs, 1960), when the civilisations of the earth are scattered by nuclear and bacteriological wars, a new dictator rises at the heart of Asia and reorganises the world with an iron fist on the model of an anthill *("Cependant, au cœur de l'Asie où avait survécu par miracle un noyau de civilisation, surgit un chef énergique qui, d'une poigne de fer, entreprit de reorganiser l'humanité sur le modèle de la fourmilière.")* E.P. (Jacobs 2013, 38).

army that should conquer, first Asia, and later the rest of the world (see Fig. 3). The French hero, Valhardi is able to counteract this dangerous conspiracy and in the end the leader of the conspirators comes to admit the futility of their enterprise:

> "Our organization has lost its reason to exist… The developments on a global scale and new alliances have completely transformed our problems… The "Black Sun" belongs henceforth to the past."[12]

The development to which he is alluding was probably the Cold War, where former enemies like Japan and the Federal Republic of Germany became important allies against the big communist countries like the USSR and China. This scene marks, in an explicit way, also the provisional end of the representation of Japan as a warlike nation in Belgian comics. The comics that would be published in later years offered a quite different image of Japan, an image that I qualify as 'touristic', because that is the dominant perspective of this new generation of Belgian comics on Japan.

The Touristic (1957-1960)

From 1957 on, three comics were published with a new, far more positive perspective on Japan: one francophone story published in the weekly *Spirou* and two issues of the most popular Flemish comic strips series published in the dailies, *Suske en Wiske*. Except for the *Tif et Tondu* story that was only published in 1986 as an album, the Flemish stories were also quickly put on the market in album format, and later many times reprinted, so they reached quite a large audience. A new perspective did not necessarily mean that stereotypical representations

[12] My translation of the French balloon : *" Notre organisation avait d'ailleurs perdu ses raisons d'être… L'évolution mondiale et les nouvelles alliances ont complètement transformé nos problèmes…Le « Soleil Noir » appartient désormais au passé… "* (Jijé 1993, 103).

belonged completely to the past, just that the stereotype of the Yellow Peril was largely interchanged for some other stereotypes.[13]

The first Belgian comic that really featured the country Japan as a background for a story was Willy Vandersteens' *Suske en Wiske, De Stemmenrover* (The Voice Robber) (see Fig. 4). Already from the start of the narrative Japan is referred to by one of titular heroes as a beautiful country. The boy Suske flicking through a book about Japan says to the girl Wiske: *"Look, a book about Japan. That has to be a magnificent country".*[14] This explicit evaluation is followed by an illustration from the (fictitious) book figuring a beautiful landscape with a typical curved bridge and a snow-capped mountain, and a female figure in a kimono. The author was thus clearly not so much interested in contemporary Japan - only a few scenes are located in the rebuilt Tōkyō - but rather in a fictive medieval era Japan, that is assumed, in the diegetic universe of the story, to prevail somewhere on the main island, behind some 'wild mountains', where a princess and samurai warriors are living. This is not an extraordinary approach for this comic strip series, because the use of a fictional past in contemporary times was also used in various other adventures of *Suske en Wiske*.[15] In general, one can see that such a fictionalized past offers arguably a more exotic and imaginative backdrop than a contemporary setting could offer to a young audience (but the series aimed, with references to the contemporary society, at

[13] An exception is a comic made by French author Bielsa, who tells in *Soleil levant contre aigle noir* (1956), which was published in de Belgian weekly *Spirou*, about the Russian-Japanese war of 1904. In this story the Japanese army is portrayed negatively. But this comic made it never into an album, so its importance is rather minimal.

[14] My translation of the Dutch balloon: *"Kijk, het is een boek over Japan! Dat moet een prachtig land zijn, hé!"* (Vandersteen 1997, 2).

[15] The very first story of *Suske en Wiske, Het eiland Amoras* offers a medieval age Flanders on a yet undiscovered island somewhere in the ocean.

an adult reader as well – see Lefèvre 2013). But as time went by, the author, Willy Vandersteen, began to incorporate increasingly contemporary locations and only three years after *De Stemmenrover*, in 1960, he let his heroes travel again to Japan (*De Gouden Cirkel*, The Golden Circle), but this time it was contemporary Japan, and more precisely Tōkyō, which served as the backdrop including views of the Tōkyō tower, airport, the parliament, and night life. These new views of Japan are arguably the consequence of a first trip by the author to Japan. While the characters in the Vandersteen stories were always more or less obliged by the circumstances (like helping a friend in danger) to travel to Japan to solve a problem, in the 1958 story, *Le Fantôme du samouraï* (The Phantom of the Samouraï) of the *Tif et Tondu* series (by Willy Maltaite and Rosy), the two protagonists are from the very start of the story already in Japan. They are there for purely touristic reasons, as the caption in the very first panel states (*"Tif and Tondu had decided the location of their holidays. They are now in Japan.")*.[16] The protagonists are placed in a beautiful and typical landscape (see Fig. 5). Quite similar views were already well known through Japanese art, which was circulating in Europe already since the 1860s: the so-called *Ukiyo-e* printmakers like Hokusai or Hiroshige drew from the beauty of the Japanese landscape (Flynn 2016). In our example the protagonists of the comic, Tif and Tondu admire the sight. Tif exclaims: *"Really, I've never seen something that beautiful. How calm, how serene!"*; and his friend confirms: *"Splendid country!".* [17] Just as the opening of the *Suske en Wiske*

[16] My translation of the French text box: *"Tif et Tondu ont décidé du lieu de leurs vacances. Ils se trouvent actuellement au Japon."* (Will & Rosy 2009, 37).

[17] My translation of the French balloons: *"Vraiment, je n'ai jamais rien vu d'aussi beau. Quel calme, quelle sérénité!"* and *"Pays splendide!".* (Will & Rosy 2009, 37)

story, the emphasis is no longer about armies of yellow faces that threaten the West, but now it concerns westerners enjoying themselves in the Japanese landscape. Later in the story, there are a few visual remains of the American occupation, like an old American military camp with a discarded jeep. Furthermore, the characters also have to experience another side of Japanese nature, a ruthless earthquake destroys a city and causes many casualties (see Fig. 6). As with Vandersteen in his first Japan story, the French scriptwriter Rosy was not able to resist refraining from using the samurai elements and in the contemporary setting a story is told about a samurai ghost.[18] As in the *Suske en Wiske* story, in the *Tif et Tondu* story the Japanese characters can be differentiated on the basis of how they stand towards the Belgian protagonists. The reader is presented with two opposing groups: those on the side of the protagonists are presented as the 'good Japanese', the others are antagonistic and thus – in the logic of the story – 'bad Japanese'. The bad Japanese are, moreover, mainly criminals. The Belgian heroes, aided by their Japanese friends (mostly authority figures: princes, police), have to fight against a gang of robbers. This was a typical dualistic approach of these humoristic adventure series, wherein scriptwriters assumed that such crime fighting or Manichean conflicts were interesting for their young readers. Good and bad were usually clearly differentiated. Readers were assumed to identify with the heroes and with the values they stood for. Especially in a fierce struggle with characters that were being identified with morally despicable values, the heroes could show how good always won against

[18] In France in a weekly children's publication *Bayard* in 1956 was also a story about samourai published: *Les 7 samouraï*, Pierre Forget & Mérou, [Accessed on May 21, 2014], from the URL: http://www.bdoubliees.com/bayard/annees/1956.htm.

bad. In a way the good could not shine strongly without the active presence of the bad. We have to remember that a decade earlier there was not even such a differentiation among the Japanese group of characters: all the Japanese characters were fighting the American or European characters. In retrospect, it is however supposable that readers, actually, enjoyed in these comics of the 1950s the presence of bad guys, who are often more colourful than the eponymous heroes themselves. The deterministic theory of educators and critics alike, at that time, that morally admirable heroes would help to impart good values in the young reader, is arguably too simplistic (Tilley 2012, Konijn and Hoorn 2005); because the bad characters are in their own way quite attractive. Konijn and Hoord (2005, 136) found in their effect study that their participants made a crucial difference between real life and fiction: *"In fiction, higher degrees of artificiality allow moral boundaries to be flexible."*

Nevertheless, the explicit moral of these comics stories remains that Good will prevail over Evil in the end. In the two analysed comics the titular heroes win at the end: in *Suske en Wiske* thanks to the superior strength of a kind of superhero friend and the shrewdness of the children (they outsmart the cunning Japanese conspirator), in *Tif et Tondu* mostly thanks to a Japanese man who has dressed up as a samurai ghost. Thus, only in the *Tif et Tondu* story can the Japanese themselves act decisively in setting things straight.

It is possible to argue that this new approach paved the way for the later main Japanese protagonists in francophone Belgian comics. After American, French, British and Roman heroes in Belgian comics, the very first Japanese title character was a comic figure, the myopic soldier *Taka*

Takata (1965) and five years later, the adventurous female engineer *Yoko Tsuno* (1970), raised in Japan but living in Europe. Both titles were first introduced in a weekly comic (*Tintin* and *Spirou respectively*) and became quite popular series, which were also published in album format: *Taka Takata* 13 albums (1969-2004) *Yoko Tsuno* 27 albums (since 1972). Later a samurai series as *Kogaratsu* (since 1983, Michetz & Bosse, 13 albums) would also become somewhat popular. Outside Belgium, the belligerent image of the Japanese did not evaporate completely in other European comics, because from the early 1960s in countries such as Spain or France, various comics, including series, about the war in the Pacific continued to be published.[19]

Possible Explanations

It is not easy to determine just one reason for this remarkable change in the late 1950s; it is likely to be the result of the interaction of many different factors, related to the comics themselves or to the broader historical context.

The noticeable difference between the comics that were first published in the 1940s and those of the late 1950s can be partly explained by the difference in genre. Except for three comics (the *Nero*-stories) of the first period all the other comics belong to a more realistic genre (like SF or war stories partly based on real events): the various stories of *Buck Danny* are rendered in a more naturalistic style, in contrast to the loose, caricatural style of Marc Sleen. On the contrary, the three comics of the late 1950s belong rather to the crossover genre of

[19] Think of 171 *Tora* monthlies (Impéria, 1972-1986), and of the series *Les Tigres Volants* (6 albums in the 1990s, Nolane-Molinari), and the short-lived series of three albums *Le Dernier Kamikaze* (Mitton-Molinari, 2006-2009).

humoristic adventure (Lefèvre 2013), with a somewhat less naturalistic style and less detailed backgrounds. On the whole the style has less naturalistic pretentions.

Secondly the broader historical background can also offer some insight in the particular shift we have observed in the Belgian comics. It is likely that the Belgian population years after the liberation longed for something other than the recent war experiences.[20] Furthermore, since Belgium did not have any colonies in the Far East that were occupied by the Japanese army, this country did not completely share the experiences of Great Britain, France or Holland, whose fellow citizens had been suffering in the Japanese concentration camps. The Belgian authorities fully approved the US policy of reconciliation with Japan (De Coomon 2005, 271). Furthermore, the Japanese Imperial family and the Belgian Royal Family were keeping close ties: the first personal contacts between the Belgian royal family and the Japanese imperial family dated back to 1921, when the then Crown Prince Hirohito visited Belgium as part of his European tour. The friendly relationship continued to the next generation as Akihito and Michiko stayed several times in the royal palace as private guests of King Baudouin in the 1950s.[21] Moreover in 1958 at the World Exhibition, Expo 58 in Brussels there was a Japan pavilion. A year later, on 20 June 1959, the Air Transport Agreement between Belgium and Japan was signed (De Coomon 2005, 173).

[20] In an earlier study I found that after a boom of resistance heroes comics and some Buck Danny stories, in the years after WWII, for more than three decades Belgian comics seldom referred again directly to the war. (Lefèvre 2007b, 296-310).

[21] Site of Embassy of Belgium in Japan 'Diplomatic relations' [Accessed on May 21, 2014], http://countries.diplomatie.belgium.be/en/japan/relationship_belgium_japan/diplomatic_relations/

Another aspect of the broader political background that we have to take into consideration is the changing position of both Japan and China in the postwar period. In 1952 the Allied occupation of Japan ended with the Treaty of San Francisco and in 1956 Japan was granted membership in the United Nations in 1956. The communists of China became the enemies of the western countries: think of Cold War conflicts such as the Korean War (1950-1953) and the first two Indochina Wars (1946-1954 and 1956-1975).

General Conclusion

The image of Japan in Belgian comics as a belligerent enemy, which was strongly present in the aftermath of the war, was relatively quickly forgotten (within 10 years of the end of the war) and interchanged in the late 1950s for a quite different representation: Japan as an exotic place and culture of interest to tourists. The late 1950s marked a crucial turning point, since the outbreak of the war the Japanese were not represented in a favourable light, first in *The Blue Lotus* (1934-1935) by Hergé, and later, after the ending of the war, in the war narrative in particular (both the historically based ones by Hubinon and Charlier, as the futurist stories by Jacobs). It is clear that not only did the Second World War play a decisive role in the perception of Japan, but also the longstanding tradition in the West of the Yellow Peril continued to circulate (see the humoristic adventures of *Nero*). While in the Francophone production of Belgium the focus lay on the second and a possible third world war, in the three Flemish *Nero* albums it was rather a Fu Manchu-like character, with an ambivalent nationality (identified as Chinese, but having a typical Japanese name). Also, in the Blake and

Mortimer story, the Yellow Peril was a mixture of Chinese communist and Japanese imperial army elements.

However, a decade later, some new comics offered a different perspective, that can be labelled as touristic; because there was suddenly more interest in some exotic aspects (especially of Japan's past) and, on the other hand, for the first time in Belgian comics, the European title characters made a trip to Japan, in the case of Tif and Tondu explicitly as tourists. These comics started with an explicit admiration by the title heroes of the magnificent beauty of the country. It is, however, important to remember that the stories of the late 1940s were also reprinted in the 1950s and that readers collected these albums. Consequently, the older representation of Japan also continued circulating in the late 1950s and it is quite probable that readers at that time thus were confronted with quite contrasting representations of Japan.

Finally, it is remarkable that the new image of Japan in the Belgian comics took shape already before Japan was widely regarded as exporting country for many modern commodities such as cars and electronic devices. I have proposed various possible explanations for this cultural shift in Belgium such as the changing geostrategic context of the Cold War.

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FIGURES

Fig.1. Hubinon & Charlier (2011) *Buck Danny L'intégrale 2*. Dupuis, 61.

Fig.2. Sleen (1998) Nero, *De Klassieke avonturen van Nero, 1, Het geheim van Matsuoka*. Standaard Uitgeverij, no page number.

Fig.3. Jijé (1993) *Tout Jijé 1956-1957*. Dupuis, 80.

Fig.4. Vandersteen (1997) *De avonturen van Suske en Wiske, 34, De Stemmenrover*. Antwerpen: Standaard Uitgeverij, 2.

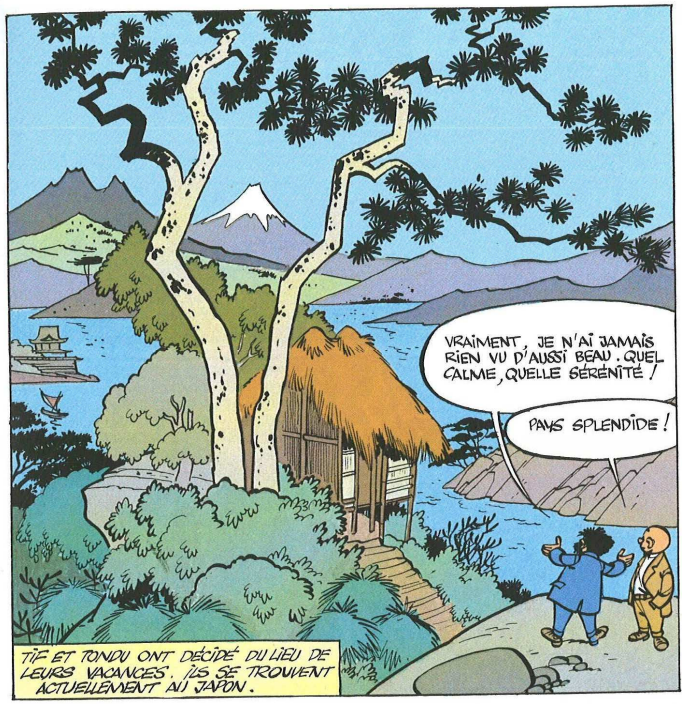

Fig.5. Will & Rosy (2009) *Tif et Tondu, Intégrale 6, Horizons lointains*. Dupuis, 37.

Fig.6. Will & Rosy (2009) *Tif et Tondu, Intégrale 6, Horizons lointains*. Dupuis, 47.

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Scenes of Childhood:
Exhibiting childhood as national imagery

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Abstract

Japan, March 2006. After four months of high attendance, the exhibition Nihon no Kodomo: 60 Nen *organized by the Japan Professional Photographers Society ends with a huge success. Just six months later, the exhibition was remodelled by the Japan Foundation for what would be a five-year-long world-touring exhibition, under the new name* Scenes of Childhood: Sixty Years of Postwar Japan*. The tour started in Jordan and toured 20 countries in North and South America, Africa, Europe, and the Middle East, before closing in Cuba in September 2011. Within its Arts and Cultural Exchanges section, the Japan Foundation has developed a Traveling Exhibitions Program to 'introduce Japanese arts and culture to overseas' (Japan Foundation, 2016, n.p.) that runs about twenty exhibitions every year.* Scenes of Childhood *has been one of the most largely displayed and successful photographic exhibitions of the Japan Foundation in those last five years, following an interest for childhood and youth. I focus on this specific exhibition to analyse how a cultural institution like the Japan Foundation produces and exports a national self-representation using photographs of children. The photographs are exported not only as cultural objects, but also as testimonies of Japanese history and culture. Looking at them helps us consider what self-image Japan sends to the rest of the world. What does the exhibition say about Japan? What place does childhood occupy in the national imagery? I refer to both Western (Higonnet 1998) and Japanese (Jones 2010) models of childhood to consider how childhood is integrated within the national history and imagery. I focus especially on the assumed "innocence" of children to show how a national imagery is created. I argue that* Scenes of Childhood *promulgates an image of Japan that is that of a harmless, pacific and victim nation.*

KEYWORDS

Scenes of Childhood; Photography; Exhibition; Family of Man; Childhood.

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Introduction: Exporting Photographs of Children

In March 2006, after four months of high attendance, the exhibition *Nihon no Kodomo: 60 Nen* [*Children of Japan: 60 years*] organized by the Japan Professional Photographers Society in Tokyo closes with success. Just six months later, it was remodelled by the Japan Foundation as a

touring exhibition, and renamed *Scenes of Childhood: Sixty Years of Postwar Japan*. The tour started in Jordan and toured 20 countries in North and South America, Africa, Europe, and the Middle East, before closing in Cuba in September 2011.

It displayed a hundred photographs of Japanese children taken during the second half of the twentieth century. A hundred 'Scenes of Childhood' that put together formed the 'Japanese Child' [*nihon no kodomo*] of the original exhibition. Beyond a general interest for childhood that developed in the nineteenth century (Higonnet 1998), exposing the young bodies in this context raises several questions. Who is this 'Japanese child'? What place does childhood occupy in the national imagery? How are "official" representations of Japan created? Those are the main questions that I attempt to address in this paper. In order to do so, I first identify the historical context of the nineteenth century when the exportation of a nation's image became institutionalised and briefly retrace the development and goals of the Japan Foundation. I then turn my attention to the structure of the exhibition and consider how the original one was adapted. This leads to the third and last point, the choice of self-representation through childhood and its implications.

A Tradition of Displaying the Nation Abroad

The Japan Foundation emerged in 1972 from a century-long tradition of cultural exportation. Showings of Japanese art and artifacts abroad developed during the second half of the nineteenth century. In 1862 the first substantial exhibition about Japan took place. At the World Fair held in London, about six hundred Japanese articles were displayed

through the initiative of Sir Rutherford Alcock, British Minister to Japan, who collected the items while he was posted there (Mitsukuni, Iko and Tsune 1984, 86).

In 1867, France invited Japan to participate in its World Fair. The *Bakufu* government accepted and delegated a mission to Paris, led by Tokugawa Akitate. But conflicts between government and individual enterprises arose with the submission of items by the Saga and Satsuma domains (Mitsukuni, Iko and Tsune 1984, 87), who had a long tradition of opposition to the central government, as exemplified in the Satsuma Rebellion (1877). It was in 1873, at the Vienna World Fair that Japan was first represented as a unified nation. The Japanese exhibits were coordinated from then on under the sole control of the Meiji government (Conant 2006, 258). It gave Japan an opportunity to present the country to the rest of the world and define itself as a modern, industrial and "civilized" nation at a time when the Meiji government struggled to position itself among the Western nations and renegotiate the Unequal Treaties of 1858. As Ellen Conant said:

> 'during the latter half of the nineteenth century, international expositions became a virtually mandatory form of public relations for the major powers, notwithstanding their enormous cost. In those days, world's fairs were natural expressions of national pride, evidence that a country had crossed the divide between the developed and the non-developed, primarily through the excellence of its arts and manufactures' (2006, 255-6).

The World Fairs, in all of which Japan participated from 1878, offered a perfect opportunity for self-representation. Its official participation gave the government control over Japan's international image.

In the twentieth century, following a wider trend relating to war propaganda (Nye 2004, 100), this cultural exportation was institutionalized and was increasingly initiated by the Japanese government itself. In 1934, the *Kokusai Bunka Shinkōkai* (International Cultural Relations Society) aimed to promote Japanese culture in the areas it occupied (Vyas 2008, n.p.). In 1972, the Japan Foundation replaced the *Kokusai Bunka Shinkōkai* with an increased emphasis on the notion of 'promoting international understanding through cultural exchange' (Japan Foundation, 2016, n.p.), to erase the imperialistic connotations of its predecessor. Its emergence coincides with a period of growth in the national confidence of the country (Goodman 2001, 181). The 1970s were also a period in which the oil shock and the United States pressures pushed Japan into diversifying its diplomatic and economic contacts, especially through the 'Official Development Assistance' consisting of concessional loans and technical assistance that Japan had already instituted in Asia to facilitate trade and investments (Mochizuki 2007, 3). This expansion has also opened up the possibility of new cultural exchanges. The geographical travel of *Scenes of Childhood* can be interpreted meaningfully in the light of this broadening of Japan's 'geographic horizons' (Mochizuki 2007, 3). We have to be conscious that practical details such as costs, dates and interest in the theme proposed, as well as the Japan Foundation public relations, play a role in the construction of the itinerary. Nonetheless, it seems meaningful that it toured mainly countries with recent (post-war) relationships. The traditional political, economic and cultural relationships with other countries of Asia and, increasingly since the nineteenth century, of Europe and America (to be understood as North

America) seem to have turned towards the building of a new cultural network, including the Middle East, Africa and South America.

The Japan Foundation focuses on three main goals divided into three sections within the institution: the artistic and cultural exchange, the promotion of Japanese language, and the encouragement of collaborative research in the field of Japanese Studies. *Scenes of Childhood* belongs to the 'Arts and Cultural Exchanges' section, within which a 'Traveling Exhibitions Program' has been developed. It aims to 'introduce Japanese arts and culture to overseas', running about twenty projects every year. Their field of interests ranges from traditional arts and crafts to more contemporary practices in art, photography, architecture or designs. Whilst the exhibitions are conceived by the Japan Foundation, their organisational aspect is shared between this organisation and diplomatic missions abroad. The host institutions have varied from museums to cultural centres, from universities to embassies or city halls. This list includes both sites of knowledge and sites of political power. Although they lack the sacralised aspect of the museum, the spaces confer to the exhibit an aura of authority and institutional recognition.

First supervised by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as a 'special agency' (*tokushuhōjin*), since 2003 the Japan Foundation is an independent administrative corporation (*dokuritsu gyōsei hōjin*). However, despite this administrative change, it strictly follows the government policies and remains in Vyas's terms 'a state-level government agency' (2008, n.p.). As such, it presents a specific vision of Japanese society and history, as I develop below.

Documenting childhood

To understand how the image of Japan is constructed through *Scenes of Childhood*, we need to look at the format and structure of the project itself. *Scenes of Childhood* is not as much a creation as a re-creation. It is an adaption for a foreign audience of an original Japanese exhibition, which offered a framework from which to compose the new project. The theme and timeframe of 60 years were kept. The exhibit needed, for practical reasons, to have fewer items, so a selection was made, reducing the number of photographs, hence facilitating the transport and installation.

Through a hundred pictures, the exhibition documents not only childhood, but Japanese culture and society in general. The exhibition *Scenes of childhood* points at a historical perspective that highlights the social changes in Japan since the post-war period, as not only its title says, but also the inclusion of the socio-historical aspect in the catalogue and flyers I could access. From the perspective of the Japan Foundation, photographs act more as a historical document than a piece of art, as evidenced by the 2005 Annual Report: 'The Arts and Culture Group of the Japan Foundation is committed to furthering mutual understanding by introducing the country's fine arts, architecture, music, theatre, dance, cinema, TV programs, literature, and sports, as well as by shedding light on the historical and social background that gave birth to them—a perspective that is often overlooked when cultural products are transmitted commercially' (2005, n.p.). The Japan Foundation bases its cultural politics on a belief of shared existential values that overcome frontiers: 'arts and culture has (*sic*) the power to break through barriers

of language or cultural difference and speak to our common humanity' (Japan Foundation 2009, 6).

The importance of the photographs as historical documents has also been expressed in the specific context of *Scenes of Childhood*. The Japan Foundation website affirms: 'The 100 works in this exhibition act as a document of the children themselves and simultaneously depict them in specific times and spaces throughout Japan, from the past to the present' (Japan Foundation 2016, n.p.). In another promotional page of the website we can read in a similar wording:

> 'in addition to serving as a testimony of the photographers' views of children, the works in this exhibition act to document the lives of the children themselves and depict them in specific times and places throughout Japan, from the past through the present. By observing these carefully selected works, we hope that audiences will become more aware of the changes that Japan has undergone over the past 60 years and thus enable to develop a deeper understanding of the country and its people' (Japan Foundation 2016, n.p.).

This idea is reused and developed by the host institutions. The Japan Information and Culture Center, Embassy of Japan in Washington, D.C. (U.S.A) writes in its leaflet: 'From scenes of a country recovering from the ravages of war, to those of a nation catapulted to industrial growth and material abundance, *Scenes of Childhood* is a visual postwar history, not only of Japanese children, but of the times and places in which they lived. Each image illuminates the immense change Japan had undergone over the past 60 years, instilling a deeper understanding of the country and its people' (Japanese Embassy 2009). In other words, the photographs are not of value for their intrinsic artistic value, but for the documentary aspect.

In the case of this exhibition, childhood is not represented *per se,* but as a vehicle of national memory and identity. Other exhibitions of photographs of children that took place in the years 2000s and 2010s also validate the centrality of images of childhood to the idea of Japanese national identity in the post-war period. Among them, is the exhibition *Kodomotachi* (2012) which was held at the Ken Domon Museum of Photography (Sakata); or *Photographs of children* (2011)*,* a series of three subsequent exhibitions at the Metropolitan Museum of Photography (Tōkyō). Along with the Japan Foundation's exhibition, those two exhibits opened the way for exhibitions of photographs of children based on social consideration of childhood rather than on artistic values, as was the case with the earlier exhibitions on childhood held in Japan. On the website of the exhibition *Go-Betweens: The World Seen Through Children*, it is affirmed that it 'turns its gaze on politics, culture, family and other aspects of the environment surrounding children, and the problems they face' (2014, n.p.).

Toshiharu Nakamura pointed out how worldwide, during the 2000s, several exhibitions about home, the family and children were curated (2014, 1). In Japan three main exhibitions popularized these themes, *Wonder and Joy: Children in Japanese art* at the Tōkyō National Museum in 2001; *Milkmaid by Vermeer and Dutch Genre Painting- Masterworks from the Rijksmuseum Amsterdam,* at the National Art Centre in Tōkyō in 2007; and *L'enfant dans les collections du musée du Louvre* organized by the National Art Centre, one year later (Nakamura 2014, 2). Whereas the latter two exhibits displayed foreign art, the former one focused on Japanese art exclusively. Nakamura argued that it was curated to celebrate the pregnancy of the Imperial princess and critics highlighted

the lack of questioning about the symbolism of childhood (Nakamura 2014, 4). What happened in those early exhibitions, or other international exhibitions, such as *When They Were Young: A Photographic Retrospective of Childhood* at the Library of Congress (United States of America), is an acknowledgement of images of childhood already present in the collections of the museums. Those images acquired a new visibility in the light of the social environment. Social concerns surrounding the child gave him/her a newfound acknowledgement. It is interesting to note that childhood entered museums through images valued for their artistic aspect, the visual pleasure, rather than the social awareness of the latter exhibitions of photographs. With the first exhibitions, childhood was affirmed as a legitimate field of museum display. Together, they show that childhood was present in different times and places. Individually, each showed the sensibilities of representing childhood, through images focusing on ideals of beauty and love.

Images of childhood

How has childhood become part of the national imagery? The Japanese child is visible in the cultural exports of Japan. Just to name a few: the figure of the schoolgirl (Ashcraft and Ueda 2010), the many children of Miyazaki's films, anime characters like Shin-chan or Son Goku junior. There are a multitude of Japanese children in European minds, a multitude of perceptions of Japanese culture from different epochs, more or less realistic and all attractive to an international audience (Pellitteri 2012). The Japan Foundation exhibition brings a different perspective in medium and breadth. Together it offers an

image of childhood, one that is widely present in Japan through the works of famous and less known photographers. The bookshops' shelves are full of photo-books filled with images of children and families. From Ken Domon's post-war children to the sales success *Mirai-Chan* by Kotori Kawashima (2011), photographs of children document the everyday life of Japanese people. The hundred photographs selected by the Japan Foundation shifts the representation of childhood from the commercial to the historical field, and from fiction to the reality of documentary photography, following a tradition established by Ken Domon with series such as *Hiroshima* (1958), *Chikuhō no kodomotachi [Children of Chikuhō*] (1960) or *Rumie-chan wa Otoosan ga Shinda. Zoku Chikuho no Kodomotachi [Rumie's Father is Dead. The Children of Chikuhō Continues*] (1960).

Childhood is an easy window into another culture. It is a universal experience with certain immovable aspects over time and place, as Peter Stearns has pointed out (2005 and 2011). Biologically, children are submitted to physical growth and intellectual maturation. Culturally, play is a consistent element, visually identifiable for members of another culture. Those universal aspects allow the audience to cling on to a known meaning or sentiment. They understand that the child is playing even though they might not know the game; they acknowledge his/her cries as pain or sadness even though they might not know what or who caused it. By putting forward the cuteness and games, the exhibition follows the Western ideal of the innocent or romantic child (Higonnet 1998). Not only does it facilitate the understanding and identification of the audience with the scenes represented, but as Joseph Nye pointed out

'[w]hen a country's culture includes universal values and its policies promotes values and interests that others share, it increases the probability of obtaining its desired outcomes because of the relationships of attraction and duty that it creates' (Nye 2004, 11). Japan inscribes itself within the (dominant) Western set of values while at the same time it erases its own specific "scenes of childhood" that could bring a disapproval gaze.

In the exhibition, I identified the lack of such a view of childhood. The model of the 'little citizen' (*Shōkokumin)* of the early twentieth century was developed by Mark Jones (2010). However, the pre-war image of childhood is today still relevant. It is debatable whether they remain as dominant or residual cultural models (Williams 1977). Nonetheless, its importance in our understanding of past and contemporary childhood is essential.

The little citizen of the pre-war period, led to the excesses of the child-soldier's imagery in the 1930s-40s. Not only has this period been mainly excluded from the timeframe, but the photographs are constructed in opposition (Montoya 2013). The standing military-style posture is replaced by children running and crouching. The visual power of the organized group leave space for the individual freedom within the crowd, and (boys) uniforms are replaced by Western-style civilian clothes. The militarism disappears and is replaced by the image of the innocent child playing freely. *Scenes of Childhood*, like other photography exhibitions of the Japan Foundation, *Gazing at the Contemporary World- Japanese Photography from the 1970s to the*

Present (2007-2011) or *The Metamorphosis of Japan After the War* (2012) have excluded the pre and wartime periods. Those three projects show the reconstruction of the country under different lights. This can be explained by the Japan Foundation's role to spread the image of the nation; thus, the touring exhibitions should avoid possible diplomatic tensions. (Re) presenting the militaristic time will not only bring back a past identity that Japan fought against but might revive the "historical problem", based on different perceptions of the past (Berger 2007, 181). The militaristic and ultra-nationalistic years are thus kept away from the viewers' eyes.

After the Second World War, Japan had to rebuild the country not only materially, but had to reconstruct an image that could legitimize it in worldwide power relations. Politically, Japan rebuilt the country on a new constitution based on Western models (Sirota Gordon 1997) that forbade it to have an army, and hence renounce any belligerent actions and the pre-war expansionist politics. However, the building of the image of a pacifist nation has to be accompanied by cultural exchanges that will create a new popular image of Japan in the mind of foreigners. The Japan Foundation fills this role and promotes the image of an artistically productive and innovative nation.

Moreover, Japan has rebuilt its image as a pacifist nation, building up its post-war identity as a victim. *Scenes of Childhood* carried on the idea of victimhood that developed in the nation's collective memory (Berger 2007, 186) and in literature and film: 'children play an indispensable role (…) as the archetype of pure victimhood' (Orr 2001, 110).

Chronologically, the first pictures shown are of the survivors of the atomic bombs. This curatorial choice calls for the empathy of the audience. Moreover, the popular assumption of childhood's innocence increases the child's status as victim.

Though adults occasionally appear in Domon's photographs, children remain the main subject. When present, adults are defined in relation to their relationship with the children: as parents or carers, as amusers, as teachers or salespersons. The adult remains a background presence in the lives of those children. Is it not exactly the absence that Domon documented in his series *Rumie-chan*? He documents the capacity of those children to face life on their own, orphans and abandoned children. Symbolically the damaged child of Domon's photographs can represent post-war Japan, surviving surrounded by death. Patricia Holland defines this absence of adults as characteristic of the images of victimized children in undeveloped countries (2004, 148). They are abandoned or orphaned children, left without protectors. This imagery allows the viewer to make abstractions of past militaristic events and see the "new Japan" as a pacific and harmless nation.

Conclusion: Childhood as national imagery

Each photograph is a "scene of (Japanese) childhood". Each one of them tells what it means to be a Japanese child after the war, growing up during the reconstruction of the country, living through the Japanese economic miracle or through the crisis years. Each one of those images is essentially Japanese. Each one is the reflection of an epoch. I believe that the plural of 'scenes' in the title is less important than the singular

of 'childhood'. The different 'scenes' construct a vision of life in Japan, and depicts the (stereo-) typical child of each successive period since the mid-1940s. The social changes linked to a period matter less than the continuity of a post-war national identity. The differences in photographic techniques are also part of the historical changes. Industrial progress and aesthetic evolutions are not so much the choices of individual photographers as the norm of the time. The official descriptions of the exhibition highlight the importance of children, not only as social actors, but as representatives of the whole Japan: '*Scenes of Childhood* is a visual postwar history, not only of Japanese children, but of the times and places in which they lived' (Japanese Embassy 2009). The narration uses it as a synecdoche in which the part represents the totality, childhood stands for the whole of society. The description provided by the Japan Foundation makes clear the curatorial process. The main characteristic of the children photographed, above their differences, is their Japanese nationality.

The analysis of the Japan Foundation's exhibition is just one example of how childhood is used and integrated within the national imagery. The "naturalness" of childhood, the "unquestionable" innocence allows to present this exhibition as truthful. At the same time, it (re)created an image of a pacific and harmless nation. It also puts Japanese children on the same level as children "world-wide", in order to forget the opposition during the war and the militarisation of the younger generation as is visible in the (hidden) photographs of the time.

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