Mutual Images

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BETWEEN TEXTS AND IMAGES:
MUTUAL IMAGES OF JAPAN AND EUROPE

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A Transcultural Research Journal

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Mutual Images' field of interest is the analysis and discussion of the ever-changing, multifaceted relations between Europe and Asia, and between specific European countries or regions and specific Asian countries or regions. A privileged area of investigation concerns the mutual cultural influences between Japan and other national or regional contexts, with a special emphasis on visual domains, media studies, the cultural and creative industries, and popular imagination at large.

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Issue 1

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

Marco PELLITTERI | Kōbe University, Japan

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

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[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

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

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[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,

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[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.

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[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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