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ISSUE 6

SPRING 2019



MEDIATISED IMAGES OF JAPAN IN EUROPE:  
THROUGH THE MEDIA KALEIDOSCOPE

MUTUAL IMAGES

ISSUE 6 – SPRING 2019

# MUTUAL IMAGES

## A TRANSCULTURAL RESEARCH JOURNAL

FOUNDED BY

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EDITED BY

MARCO PELLITTERI & CHRISTOPHER J. HAYES

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## A TRANSCULTURAL RESEARCH JOURNAL

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# From *kawaii* to sophisticated beauty ideals: A case study of Shiseidō beauty print advertisements in Europe

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## ABSTRACT

*Having as a starting point one of the stereotypes of Japanese women considered a purveyor of kawaii this paper aims to explore a counterexample to Sanrio's Hello Kitty mania offered by Shiseidō cosmetics through its overseas advertisements created during a long history on the European market. Even though the image of Japan is based mainly on the concept of kawaii Shiseidō tried at first on the local market to make a turn from that fragile, helpless and naive perception of women to a more sophisticated one. Successful advertisements are made to answer a specific target audience's needs, thus in order to go global there was a need to adapt typical Asian beauty standards to European ones. Shiseidō's mission is to keep up with the times without forgetting the roots, the source of power, thus it has constantly worked in developing new strategies in order to thrive on the Western beauty market without setting aside Japanese tradition. Shiseidō corporate through its smaller brands like Majolica Majorca, Pure & Mild, Haku (meaning "white") etc. still promote whitest white skin, a beauty ideal which prevails since the Heian period (794-1185). Considering that Shiseidō has a history of more than 50 years on the European market we propose an analysis on three beauty print advertisements elaborated during 1980-2000 in order to observe the constructed image of Japan through the imaginary of the French artist, Serge Lutens, responsible for the visual identity of the brand in Europe since 1980. The question is if it is a matter of "selling" the exotic to an unfamiliar receiver or a naive reflection of Japaneseness from a European's perspective?*

*Through this case study of beauty print advertisements created for the European market after 1990 we want to mirror the image of Japan in Europe as depicted through the specter of the biggest Japanese beauty conglomerate in the world, Shiseidō.*

## KEYWORDS

Kawaii; Japan; Shiseido; Beauty; Japanese Print Advertisements; Advertising Discourse Construction.

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## Introduction

If we admit that a culture can be defined by the sum of its discourses, then any type of discourse can be seen as a mirror of that society or more generally speaking the conventions adopted guide the specifications of that culture (Williams, 1977: 177). Advertising discourse is a multimodal type of discourse and implies a series of interconnections of social, cultural and economic nature, but most importantly it seeks for maximum effect with minimum effort. It is perhaps one of the most complex types

of discourse because of its capacity to transfer abstract meanings by mixing visual communication with text and motion with audio-video in its most complex forms, but the present article aims to describe the process used in print advertisements. When it comes to defining the term “discourse” the abundance of definitions and traits is overwhelming therefore it should be considered in particular instances. The broad use of the concept allows studies from various subjects which bypass traditional views on discourse analysis, thus this paper aims to reveal socio-cultural and linguistic relationships through the analysis of symbols and does not pretend to give answers to all the facets of advertising discourse. Traditional views on discourse regard only linguistic features such as grammar, lexicology, phonology important, but the analysis of the context of communication can explain the mechanism through which language serves its purpose. Nowadays, we encounter analysis on a wide broad of matters from feminist discourse, political discourse to food and beverage discourse etc. Through its various forms, in common speech the term has become widely used for denoting all elements belonging to a certain area or subject. Advertising discourse is explained and differentiated among others in matters of discourse construction, language use, context, content and so on and in this article I intend to analyze the process through which a facet of Japanese culture is constructed through beauty print advertisements after 1980. The “self-portrait” in this case is created by Shiseidō, the very first Western-style pharmacy (later becoming a cosmetic company) in Japan. Self-representation in advertisements can reveal significant insight in terms of culture and traditions and in the case of Japan, several theories and ideas were promoted on the basis that “each age had its own culture” (Morris Suzuki, 1995: 766) and more importantly considering that culture itself is complex and involves crossing frontiers. I shall focus on these ideas through a socio-cultural semiotics analysis applied on Shiseidō print advertisements for Europe in order to see how the Japanese wish to be perceived on the beauty global market and what are the symbols used for this goal

This article is expected to generate a positive contribution in understanding Japanese view of the world through advertising discourse adapted for European audience. Treating advertising as a type of discourse implies more than analyzing certain parts of it, it is a complex process based on the analysis of all elements. It is important to mention that due to the lack of specialization in the marketing field, I do not want to make

academic assumptions on this matter, my field of interest is constructed around cultural and sociosemiotics.

### **A brief history of Japanese advertising**

Discourse construction seen as a common good can offer insights on a specific culture and society, thus through the analysis of advertising discourse one can gain access to existing trends in a certain zone and timeframe. Moreover, this type of discourse can be seen as a footprint marking the evolution of a language, culture and society at a wider scale. In Japan, the first forms considered close to what we call today advertisements appeared early in the Edo period (1603-1868) and were called *hikifuda* (similar to flyers), followed by woodblocks called *nishiki-e* used by merchandisers for advertising. The Meiji Era (1868-1912) set new beginnings for the future industry by developing new lithographic printing technologies called *ebira*, followed by economic growth and continuation of the Westernization process in the Taishō Era (1912-1926). After the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War it was important to regain prosperity and to revitalize the economy (Tungate, 2007: 186-187), thus the advertising industry played an important role in promoting Japanese products internally and overseas. The predominant advertisements at that time in Japan were related to toiletries and cosmetics (Moeran, 1996: 8) creating the perfect environment for a company like Shiseidō to grow.

The year 1964, the year the Olympic Games were hosted in Tokyo, making Japan the first country in Asia to ever organize this sporting event, also marked the peak in the advertising industry. All four forms of communications (newspapers, magazines, radio and TV) were used in order to promote and make Japanese values known to the world (Information Management Resources Association, 2017: 326-327). What is important to notice from this very brief description of the evolution of advertising in Japan is how attitudes and behaviours are influenced and eventually changed through advertisements (Slade, 2002: 157-158). Moreover, during the 1990s the well-defined gender roles were not as strict as before:

Men have become less career-obsessed, more spiritual. And women have become more independent. They have their own money and they spend it more freely. So women in advertising are portrayed as independent, both emotionally and economically (Tungate, 2007: 192).

The entire creative process of advertisements is not done solely internally, but with the help of specialized agencies who follow the company's vision, but the intriguing fact is that Japanese companies are sceptical when it comes to externalizing this process to foreign agencies (Moeran, 1996: 18). The world's largest single advertising agency, Dentsu, has been working on advertisements for Shiseidō (Tungate, 2007: 191), this being a clear statement for the scepticism exposed when it comes to externalizing accounts. Even though at first Asian companies were confronted with problems when it came to being perceived as creative in the European market, during the 90s the situation has radically improved (Tungate, 2007: 251) and the Japanese way was called "mood advertising" because it seemed intuitive, rather than rational, like in the West (Moeran, 1996: 19).

Understanding cultural keywords grants permission to cultural insights of a society and, moreover, the results of discourse analysis with focus on affect words (which have the capacity to stir emotions) provide vital information in order to discover existing patterns in discourse construction and thus, to achieve a more comprehensive approach to language and cultural differences. In the case of Japan, *kawaii*, an adjective meaning "cute", "adorable", "vulnerable", or "innocent" (Koma, 2013: 10), has extended its reach rapidly by becoming overwhelmingly present in various shapes and forms in everyday life. The quality of being "cute", "adorable", "lovable" is culturally determined and strongly related to human primary emotions, therefore advertising discourse construction operates with signs which have the capacity to trigger emotions with minimum effort. The concept of *kawaii* was first mentioned in Heian period writings (see Murasaki Shikibu, 'Genji Monogatari'; Sei Shōnagon, 'Makura no sōshi') (Passin, 1980: 32) and did not suffer major changes in content, but its influence over Japanese culture and lifestyle has increased significantly. In these writings *kawaii* was described as: "childish, innocent and pure" ("*kawaii to wa osanakute, muku de, jyunsuina mono*") or reduced to "anything that is small" ("*nandemo, chīsai mono wa, minna kawaii*")<sup>1</sup>. Given its effects over society and its roots, I believe that *kawaii* can be perceived as a counterbalance in a strongly masculine society and as a need to soften the rigid norms. It seems that it has the capacity to induce powerful emotions and to create connections between the individual and the product/service. *Kawaii* style is not limited to clothes, but also influences the design of everything, basically creating a lifestyle, thus it has

also shaped Japanese beauty ideals and this phenomena can be traced and analyzed through specific symbols used in advertisements which “trigger” a feeling, rather than denote a specific thing (Pellitteri, 2018: 4).

As opposed to the European equivalent of “cute” it targets not only children, but adults through the presence of cute characters in daily use services such as banking, shopping and soon becoming a lifestyle (Kinsella, 1995: 226). As Kinsella notes, an interesting fact is that “*kawaii* syndrome” did not start in multi-media (1995: 224), but it was perpetuated by people and a specific conduct. *Kawaii* has shaped the image of women in Japan and the perception of Japanese women overseas through advertisements by promoting beauty ideals in the form of fragility, shyness, obedience etc. and by the early 1980s “cute fashion became a basic style or aesthetics” (Kinsella, 1995: 220).

Many Japanese cosmetic brands have followed the trend, targeting especially teenagers, whilst Shiseidō has followed the European pattern trying to capture the “chic”, Parisian feminine allure through their posters. This new feminine ideal had to detach from its *kawaii*, younger and naive counterpart which was extremely popular in Japan and to embrace the wave of women emancipation promoted in Europe. Why not appeal to *kawaii* symbolism for Shiseidō advertisements abroad considering that after World War II Japan became the world’s pop culture superpower? One explanation might be that Shiseidō was targeting a totally different audience and thus, even in advertisements made for Japanese market, there was different kind of approach, significantly different to that promoted by *kawaii* aesthetics. “Fancy goods” were associated primarily with their lovable nature, while in this case it was more about sexiness and emancipation.

### **Shiseidō: revolutionizing Japanese beauty ideals**

The first attempt to integrate Japanese products into the global market took place around the 1960s and it targeted electronics. The strategy was to “erase” any trace of Japanese origin, a phenomenon known as “*mukokuseki*” in order to fit in global standards (Yano, 2013:16). The same strategy was adopted by Shiseidō, which was visible early from its start in 1916 after establishing the Design Department (the present Advertising Creation Department), in which Shiseidō’s particular style started to take shape through unique combinations of art nouveau, arabesque and art deco. The company’s mission was, and is, to deliver happiness through the fusion of Japanese wisdom and Eastern science (Roll, 2015: 162), and the very first cosmetic line was targeted towards middle-

aged women, whilst nowadays it targets a wider range (even millennials). It was designed to impress and to astonish, thus the very first authentic Japanese perfume, Hanatsubaki, was packaged in extravagant bottles with a high-quality cut-glass appearance and had the product's name and flower design emblazoned in gold leaf. In 1963, Shiseidō began its first exports to Europe, in Italy, and five years later established Shiseido Cosmetici (Italia) S.p.A. A clear statement for the desire to enter Western markets was given by bringing in the French artist, Serge Lutens in 1980 as image creator for the company. The artist confesses in an interview for Shiseidō website in 2018: 'to be precise, my first encounter with Shiseido, and with Japan, was in 1971. I was working for Christian Dior at the time and had visited Japan many times on business, and I remember it having a huge impact on me. I did not love travelling to begin with, and I did not have any particular interest in discovering new cultures in new countries' (Shiseidō, 2018). His Frenchness and his previous experience with Dior contributed to creating a prestige aura around Shiseidō products, which it is still visible today. According to Shiseidō's official website, 'after working on the development of makeup products as Christian Dior's art director for 12 years from 1968, he signed a contract with Shiseido in 1980 to work on its image creation when the company made a serious move into the European market at the time. Thereafter, he stayed on for about 20 years, taking charge of Shiseido's global image and visual identity' (Shiseidō, 2018). Anything regarding fashion and beauty industry associated with the French gained immediate prestige.

The first print advertisements made for Europe were stripped of any trace of Japaneseness in order to adapt and to maximize the effects. The only recurrent element in any Shiseidō advertisement is the *hanatsubaki* (Japanese camellia) trademark, which has seen minor changes since 1915. This emptiness of origin and nationality is described by the concept of "*mukokuseki*" (Jap. 無国籍), which works as a tool for adapting and allowing foreign elements to coexist with traditional ones. That is, for Asian companies trying to enter the European market it was important to eliminate any trace leading back to its origin in order to adapt to the new and competitive environment and this was a constant practice in other industries, too. Europeans had an extremely limited knowledge of Japan, thus making it difficult to look like a reliable provider and, moreover, could not conduct any promotional activities in mass media at that time, because of its unknown and yet unreliable background, according to Yutaka Goto, Director General of Shiseidō's Communications Centre for Europe (Japan Society, 2005).



Shiseidō first started to expand in Asia, in Taiwan in 1957 and in 1962 it had already established the company's very first overseas investment in Hawaii, whilst in the following year it started sales in Italy. Through the advertisements made for Italy (its first exports to Europe), France, and the UK, the company wanted to send messages of emancipation and liberation in concordance with European trends dominated by French influence. Parisienne-looking women figures dominated the scene in European advertisements (see Tomei, 2017; Horoszko *et al.*, 2018), so the strategy was quickly applied to Shiseidō Japan for Europe as well, starting the liberation from *kawaii* "dogma" by creating an alternative and targeting Japanese women, not teenagers manipulated by excessive cuteness. In order to have a better perspective on the core values and long-term strategies of European competitors we need to look at a French beauty and fashion giant: Chanel. For example, the supremacy of Chanel No. 5, perceived as the ultimate perfume, was mainly due to its association with movie stars like Marilyn Monroe (1954 interview) and Catherine Deneuve (1971 ad), Nicole Kidman (2004 ad) and this technique (along other strategies) was the key element in creating Chanel's legacy (Marshall and Morreale, 2018: 182). These perfect overlaps between the product (in this case Chanel No. 5) and the sexiness and confidence symbolized by Hollywood actresses perpetuated the idea that Chanel represents the real French fashion, and thus sophisticated glamour. Chanel's strategy was to create a story for the product by appealing to emotions through movie stars symbolizing high standards and luxury (Grainge, 2009: 39). The sex symbol, Hollywood actress and the square shaped perfume bottle Chanel No. 5 become a single entity in a visual narrative: 'Meshing the classical French values of restraint and elegance with a modern ideal of freedom and fun [...] in tune with the idea of a liberated world [...]' (Davis, 2006: 153). On the other hand, in Japan by the '80s beauty advertisements were overwhelmed by *kawaii* characters (Yano, 2013: 61).

This fascination towards Europe especially in arts, but also in technology (Dresch, James and Parkin 2000: 159; Honour and Fleming 2005: 562) has shaped Japan's evolution and has constantly nurtured the idea of a brighter future. Japan's long history of copying and mimicry of Western elements (Cox, 2008: 3) constitute a solid argument for 'glocalization' (Robertson, 1992 and 1995) or the need to tailor and adapt global trends to local markets (Robertson, 1995: 28). Furthermore, given the fact that the term is a combination of two separate words, "global" and "local" it is important to mention that, in our opinion 'glocalization' does not lead to the diminishing of the sense of identity,

but on the contrary, it helps to maximize those traits that make one culture unique from another. Japanese society does not accept elements bearing different values and ideologies and does not replace one form with another, thus this can be noticed in the construction of the advertising discourse, too. Cultural differences, religious beliefs, language and other socio-economical-political aspects must be taken into consideration when analyzing any type of discourse. Of course, the plead for 'glocalization' is not exclusively connected to the Japanese society, but the historical background shows that in the case of Japan this phenomenon has a significant role in discourse construction.

Shiseidō advertisements and products were not intended at first to be directly linked to Japan, thus their appeal was very much like typical European ones in order to become notorious and to gain access on the global market. The brand's long-lasting tradition, both on the national market and overseas, proved that this new perception of beauty based on a perfect balance between the East and the West that combines Western science (technology and innovations) with Eastern wisdom (spirituality, harmony, *wa*) is the secret to success and this is notable by observing the construction of the advertisements since the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### **Case study: Shiseidō print advertisements (1980-2000)**

The following examples have been gathered from the online database IADDB and by using search engines. All selected advertisements appeared during 1980-2000 and target European consumers. As stated before, I am interested in understanding how this process of constructing or deconstructing stereotypical images of a society works from the lens of the beneficiary, in this case, Japan. Research on stereotypical representations focus on the recurrent elements used and try to classify them considering several aspects such as gender, role, usage, effect etc. I am particularly interested in the image of Japanese society (Hammond, 1997; Mouer and Sugimoto, 2002; Suvanto, 2008) with reference to media and advertising discourse. In a period in which Japan was more known for its technological prowess and high-quality electronics (e.g. Sony, Canon), but not for beauty products, Shiseidō managed to enter the Western market (both European and North American) due to its marketing strategies and advertisements created around the country's aura of mystique and oriental tradition.

During its long-lasting tradition on the European market, Shiseidō cosmetics had the opportunity to influence views and perceptions over Japanese culture and society through its advertisements. If in the first decades there was a tendency to follow Western trends and to camouflage Asian origins, in later advertisements we encounter an emphasis on Japanese tradition and values. Word choice is of extreme importance in advertising discourse analysis because words have the capacity to trigger emotions and achieve persuasion especially in the case of print advertisements (Tanaka, 1994; Cook, 2001; Handford and Gee, 2013). Cultural differences regarding women's behaviour, gender roles, social roles etc. can impact the effect of an advertisement. Shiseidō has tried to adopt and apply European values promoting an independent, extrovert female figure in a highly masculine society and this trajectory is visible through advertising discourse construction and through its separation from *kawaii* towards *utsukushii* and sophisticated. The idea of strong, intelligent, independent women was taboo in Japan and now even though words like *chisei* (intelligence) and *chiteki* (intelligent) are common in advertisements targeting young women, their use might be just for their cool resonance (Tanaka, 1994: 110). Shiseidō's new and fresh perspective over beauty achieved through a fusion between the East and the West was the key that granted permission to the European market and ensured its success. Only after almost 20 years after entering the European markets Shiseidō decided to customize its products and design advertisements exclusively in order to answer the buyer's needs. The main barrier that slowed down the process was due to the reticence showed towards 'outsiders'. Even though externalizing the creative process is not an easy decision for a Japanese company, considering their particular view over advertising, which was described as "intuitive" and "atmospheric", in order to succeed on the European market an insider's insight was needed (Moeran, 1996: 18). In 1980, Serge Lutens, a French artist was appointed over Shiseidō's overseas business

strategies, thus receiving access to imagining and creating the visual identity of Japan through the filter of beauty products made in Japan for Europe.

Plate 1 is the very first poster created by Serge Lutens in 1980 for promoting Shiseidō's values on the global market with Europe as a starting point. Very simple in construction, using dark, bold shadows which serve as a perfect background for the perfect red circle, a clear link to Japan, the land of the Rising Sun, while still being far enough from the nationalist symbolism of the 'Hinomaru', the poster embeds an abstract meaning based on two major aesthetic principles, *wabi-sabi*. This pair is the embodiment of the Japanese view of the world by describing its transiency, admiration towards imperfections, simplicity and austerity. The idea of expressing more by using less, eliminating excessive beautification and revealing, not constructing, beauty is the true essence. After the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War, many European theoreticians were interested in discovering the Japanese culture described by Okakura Kakuzō at the beginning of the twentieth century in terms of rituals and spirituality encompassed by the traditional tea ceremony, *chadō* (Frentiu, 2010: 22).

Following this idea, in 1970 Roland Barthes developed his own structure in understanding the Japanese way: the empty circle. In *Empire of Signs*, the French theorist finds a recurrent element which has the capacity to answer, or at least explain, the perception of the world held by the Japanese (Frentiu, 2010: 23). Also, there is also the theory of the Hollow-Center-Balanced Model, which coordinates and sustains the Japanese way of life (Kawai and Hori, 1986: 76), similar to the view of the "Void", the empty circle. By extrapolating and applying this cultural semiotic theory of the "Void" to the poster



**Plate 1:** A generic image, 1980, Serge Lutens.  
Source: <https://www.shiseidogroup.com/advertising/talk/12.html#p.6>.

created by Serge Lutens in 1980 we can find a reflection of the same idea elaborated by Barthes, but applied at a smaller scale. In this case, the Void (or the "empty circle") is found in the red circle, 'the system of the imaginary [...] spread circularly [...]' (Barthes, 1982: 32).

This poster encompasses the perception of the world held by the Japanese and manages to seduce the European audience through powerful signals, without any embellishments, specific to the West. This new perspective, born from the fusion of Western knowledge represented by the French artist and Eastern wisdom (as per Shiseidō's motto), is a starting point towards changing the way in which the Japanese are perceived in the world. Art and beauty are regarded inseparable in Shiseidō's vision and that is why all advertisements have a scent of poetry in them. This poster (Plate 1) draws attention at first to the red circle located in the central point, but almost simultaneously we are seduced by a fragile female figure resting on the "rising sun." The nationalistic white of the '*Hinomaru*' (Japanese flag) representing international peace and development (Smith, 2018: 99) is replaced with a black tone suggesting a more sensual and dreamy atmosphere. Through the aesthetic of this advertisement, Europeans have contact not only with Japanese beauty ideals (long black hair, smooth skin and feminine allure), but with Japanese art manifested through simplicity, lack of embellishments and artificiality. The symbolism is extraordinary, and it marks the first direct contact for Shiseidō through advertising for European eyes.

The brand logo in the top centre and the *hanatsubaki* trademark opens and ends the vertical invisible line of the poster marking the central piece, the red circle, symbolism of Japan. As Yutaka Goto states '[...] the design was Japanese to French eyes while it was French to Japanese eyes' (Japan Society, 2005). This discrepancy in perception probably arose from the atypical pose of the seductive silhouette, making it too exposed to the eyes of the viewer. It creates a dreamy atmosphere, almost theatrical of a geisha surprised in her final pose. This symbolic image remained iconic for Shiseidō's overseas business.

Serge Luten's artistic work for Shiseidō was concentrated in creating unpredictable content for the European audience and even though in the first decades there was a tendency to omit the brand's Japanese origin or to send rather ambiguous signals in this sense, later works moved towards explicitly connecting the products to Japanese roots. The French artist created a series of posters in the same manner, using the red circle as a recurrent element (see Plate 2).

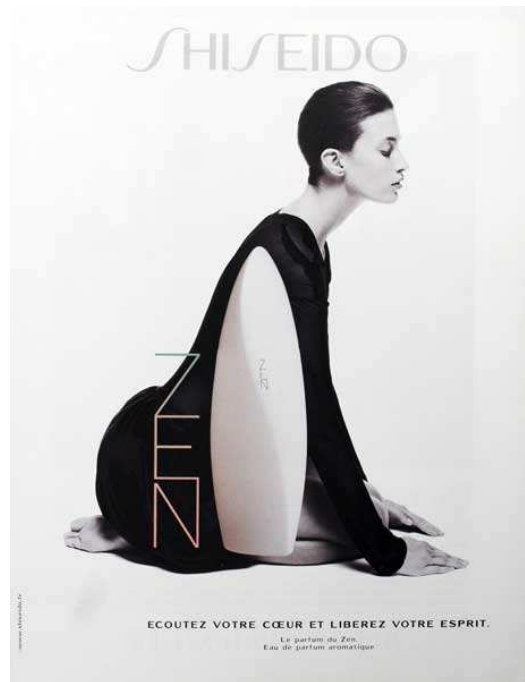


**Plate 2:** Eclat Futur par Serge Lutens, 1991, Serge Lutens. Source: <http://ergallais.tumblr.com/post/125335137796/%C3%A9clat-futur-by-serge-lutens-shiseido-1991>

Plate 2, a poster created in 1991 was constructed around a futuristic aura in order to emphasize the brand’s high goals and newest technology. Considering that perceptions on beauty ideals differ worldwide, Shiseidō’s strategy was to adapt to the local trends, but not to create typical and predictable ads. This poster, also created by Serge Lutens, links Japanese unique heritage and prowess to technology in order to appeal to the European audience. Based on the company’s core philosophy, blending Eastern aesthetics with Western science, this poster has a Parisian scent in terms of discourse construction. In contrast to the previous analyzed poster, in Plate 2 the caption comes to support the visual message, whilst in Plate 1 the text played a mere informing

role. The caption “Eclat Futur par Serge Lutens” positioned in the lower left part of the poster along with the name of the brand written diagonally opposite make a very precise reference to the connecting of Shiseidō cosmetics to the newest and future developments, and tries to differentiate it from other brands via Japan’s openness towards the new. Through this poster Japanese culture and society is presented as a visionary one while adding subtle nuances of tradition. The overall look of the model links Japan’s beauty ideals described by long black hair, whitest white skin tone and red lips associated with geisha. It consolidates how the West stereotypes Japanese women’s looks while adding Japan’s openness towards innovation.

The “ability of language to refer to particular worlds, to invoke certain areas of ‘reality’ besides carrying a direct message, clearly gives it the capacity for uniting several meanings in one” (Williamson, 1983: 86). Created a decade after the poster represented in Plate 2, the next poster (Plate 3) shows the transition from implicit to explicit symbolism in terms of advertising discourse construction. The idea elaborated by Serge Lutens comes from the need to maximize the results of the Japanese brand on the French market by drawing attention to the origin, which was somewhat in the shadow in previous campaigns, as the artist declared in an interview with Hiroshi Wakui, Shiseidō EMEA. The content, entirely in French, ‘Ecoutez votre coeur et liberez votre esprit’ (which can be translated as: Listen to your heart and free your spirit) is in contrast with the visual message which represents a short-haired woman in *seiza*, a traditional formal way of sitting in Japan, which denotes respect towards the other, one of Shiseidō’s basic principles. By appealing to this precise pose an instant connection is made between the advertised product and oriental culture. Moreover, the model’s facial features suggest a typical European beauty, considerably different from the portrait in Plate 2. In this case there is a mix between Japanese traditional aesthetics marked by simplicity and solitude (*wabi-sabi*) with French elements. The colour pallet is also meant to suggest simplicity and serenity, thus a Zen way of life by using only black and white tones. Black is often associated with Parisian elegance and simplicity, referring to the classical “little black dress”, but incorporated in Japanese Zen aesthetics. Overall it creates the association with a Zen garden designed to stimulate meditation.



**Plate 3:** Zen perfume campaign, 2000, Serge Lutens. Source: <http://www.parfumdepub.com/fr/p=333>

The global meaning of the poster links spirituality, discovering the inner self with the Japanese way, without explicitly stating so. The overall image resembles a Zen garden, a reference to the advertised perfume and its long-lasting tradition on the market. In his latest works for Shiseidō in the 1990s, the French artist and his team (both French and Japanese) emphasize on returning to the roots, where the essence resides with focus on

aesthetics, rather than on the product itself as seen in Plate 2. This mechanism is common for other companies as well, not only for Shiseidō, see for example Dior, Lancome, Revlon and other prestigious beauty brands (Evans and Hall, 1999; Mirzoeff, 1998) because there is a tendency to move from an explicit to a more implicit meaning. Through this poster created in 2001 Japan, via Shiseidō products, is presented to the French as a country highly bonded with its traditions, whilst still embracing what the future has to offer. The product itself, a perfume called “Zen” immediately refers to Asian culture, drawing attention towards the most important Japanese concept, “*Wa*” (harmony). Japan is associated with ‘peacefulness’ via some brand personality factors that are culture specific (Hofstede & Mooji 2010, 92). The slogan of the poster is an adapted version of the Japanese “*Wa*” for the French audience, a piece of advice to embrace your inner self and achieving freedom. Words like “*coeur*” (heart), “*libérez*” (free) and “*esprit*” (spirit) inspire tranquillity and freedom in the heart of the receiver, the main principles of “*Wa*”, but in the Japanese traditional sense words like “group harmony”, “homogeneity” and other expressions of belonging often describe this concept. In my opinion this is a technique through which cultural concepts are easily transposed from one culture to another by appealing to the existing (quasi) equivalents of that concept.

### Conclusions

Beauty ideals are social and cultural constructs, and therefore a clear-cut definition of this concept would be impossible. Shiseidō, Japan’s first Western-style pharmaceutical company as adapted to the new values it has encountered and revolutionized the local industry while continuously working towards fitting the outside world’s norms. The posters analyzed above are significant in terms of revealing the process that influenced the way in which Japan was perceived in Europe through the media lens between 1980-2000. As revealed through the analysis of the above posters, Shiseidō’s vision in Europe was overall created by a French artist who followed the company’s value and constructed through beauty advertisements a bridge between Europe and the Land of the Rising Sun. Starting with being viewed with sceptical eyes in the beauty branch because of the fear of the unknown, through advertisements Shiseidō’s image and implicitly Japan’s beauty products overall have gone from being perceived exotic and “alien” to trusted and wanted (Swanson, 2012: n.p.). Thus, through the use of the iconic red circle as a symbolic image of Japan, Serge Lutens “sold”



Japan to the Europeans by betting on its exotic allure and by gradually integrating more cultural elements in the advertisements. Advertising discourse can be one of the most challenging types of discourse due to its capacity to seduce and persuade by means of reshaping the reality, or sometimes by being a mirror of the society.

Through the analysis of these three beauty print advertisements created a decade apart from one another we have described the phases through which Europeans have perceived Japanese culture and society. The chic and aristocratic allure encountered in all these posters both at linguistic and visual levels are proof of “outside intervention” from the French artist who managed through advertising to beautifully “wrap and adapt” the mystical and exoticism of Japan in order to fit European standards. Shiseidō’s strategy in this sense was to appeal to high class and exclusivity and to seduce through quality and respect, without imposing. Therefore, in the first phase we have an abstract vision over Japan symbolized only by the red circle, followed by emphasizing the company’s and implicitly the country’s futuristic views at the beginning of the ‘90s and lastly the 21<sup>st</sup> century comes with a series of posters through which the European viewer is connected to Japan’s traditional forms of arts and etiquette.

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