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POLITICS, ARTS AND POP CULTURE OF JAPAN IN
LOCAL AND GLOBAL CONTEXTS

MUTUAL IMAGES

ISSUE 5 – AUTUMN 2018

MUTUAL IMAGES

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FOUNDED BY

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POLITICS, ARTS AND POP CULTURE OF JAPAN IN
LOCAL AND GLOBAL CONTEXTS

EDITED BY

MARCO PELLITTERI & HERB L. FONDEVILLA

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A TRANSCULTURAL RESEARCH JOURNAL

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Editorial

Marco PELLITTERI & Herb L. FONDEVILLA | Shanghai International Studies University, China; Aoyama Gakuin University, Japan

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Dear readers, students, fellow scholars,
welcome to this fifth instalment of *Mutual Images*.

This Editorial is composed jointly by Marco Pellitteri, *Mutual Images* journal's Editor-in-chief, and our esteemed colleague Herb L. Fondevilla, who operates from Aoyama Gakuin University in Tōkyō, Japan. Herb and Marco's research paths have crossed figuratively as well as literally on several occasions during the years in which she (for more than ten years now) and he (for more than five) have been living in Japan. Herb was working at the University of Tsukuba until the beginning of 2017—when she obtained her current position in Tōkyō—and Marco was conducting research as a research fellow at Kōbe University from 2013 to 2018. Our many shared academic interests have naturally generated several opportunities to meet at different events, such as when we first met in January 2015 at a well-organised international symposium on the aesthetics and cultural studies of manga and anime at Ateneo de Manila University, in the Philippines, and at subsequent venues held at various Japanese universities.

It is therefore with pleasure that we co-write this Editorial, which is a special collaborative occasion for us both. In May 2017, Herb had invited Marco to collaborate on the scientific and logistic organisation of a two-day symposium, but due to prior engagements he was unable to be directly involved at that point. So instead, Marco suggested Mutual Images Research Association (MIRA) as the perfect partnership opportunity: as a young association, MIRA is full of human energy and enthusiasm, and above all animated by the association's will to expand its network of academic relations and range of initiatives. MIRA editorial board member Matteo Fabbretti helped Herb with the event logistics and paperwork, and later contributed as a keynote speaker for the symposium.

In other words, every symposium is a collaborative effort, none more so than *Japan Pop Goes Global: Japanese Pop Culture on Aesthetics and Creativity*, which finally took

place at Aoyama Gakuin University on 25 November 2017. Observation and conversations between Herb and MIRA's members led to the notion that Japanese popular culture has entered our collective subconscious via the mass media, leading to its continued impact on visual culture construed and extended by artists who have come of age in an era defined by the rapid economic growth of post-World War II Japan and its popular culture. *Japan Pop Goes Global* was neither the first nor the last of the intellectual initiatives focussing on the international and transnational spread of Japan's pop-cultural expressions, but it nevertheless tried to highlight, through specific and—dare we say—useful frameworks, the impact of Japan in many creative fields that surround us every day in the fields of fashion, media entertainment, tourism, art, graphic narratives, and storytelling at large. The impact of Japanese pop culture on creativity is still just beginning to make itself known in many national contexts, both in Asia and in the West(s), from Europe to the Americas.

Further discussion led to the development of the three main themes/sections into which the symposium was organised: Adapting and Transforming Folktales in the Contemporary Period, Cultural Industries Across Borders, and Creating and Re-Creating Meaning. Our aim was to reflect on Japanese pop culture's growing influence on contemporary visual arts, charting its progress as it makes its way across geopolitical barriers and arrives at the crossroads of culture, memory, and technology of the present day. How then does Japanese pop culture reiterate and reinvent itself through the lens of a different time, background, and society? Furthermore, this issue of *Mutual Images* considers how "Japaneseness" translates itself through the lens of media consumers who were born and raised in other cultures. The articles in this issue all revolve around the transmutations of Japanese pop culture and its products as they move through time and across generations of audiences. They also challenge the notion of *mukokuseki*, according to which Japanese products typically lack distinguishing features, and that this cultural vagueness is what has allegedly made them appealing towards global audiences. On the contrary, the perceived and acknowledged Japaneseness of these products, in most cases—markedly in the case of manga, anime, and related forms of entertainment—actually enhances the experience of their consumers by serving as a gateway towards less stereotypical interpretations of Japanese culture.

The possibilities of further discussion on the influence of Japanese popular culture on creativity are very broad and potentially limitless. From the advent of Japanese anime and

the introduction of multimedia products in the early 1970s to Europe, North America, and several parts of East and Southeast Asia, it has grown exponentially and today Millennials regard it as part of their everyday lives. Currently, the more obvious influences can be found in Hollywood's big budget movies such as *Pacific Rim* by Guillermo del Toro and *Isle of Dogs* by Wes Anderson. As more audiences around the world become captivated by the many facets of Japanese popular culture, its influences on visual culture at large will steadily increase and may perhaps lead to a new kind of global aesthetics.

The first section of this issue, then, is devoted to *Japan Pop Goes Global*, a workshop whose main goal was that of looking at the impact of Japanese creative industries such as manga, anime, and gaming on tourism in Japan. The section hosts two papers variously related to *Japan Pop Goes Global*. Two more papers from this workshop will be published in the next issue, due to a variety of little delays which, summed, led us to the decision of splitting the publication of the workshop's contributions in two consecutive issues of the journal.

The first article is by Erika Sumilang-Engracia: it delves into how characters from Japanese folk tales are woven into the famous *Pokémon* franchise. In spite of heavy allusions to traditional Japanese culture, these characters not only enhance audience's enjoyment of the video game, but also serve as a conduit into which Japanese culture is transmitted, re-imagined, and revisited.

The second article addresses a key question in today's Japan: can the allure of Japanese popular culture really make a difference in increasing the number of tourists in the country, and can it impact the way Japan is viewed by potential visitors? Natalie Close investigates the 'Cool Japan' campaign as it takes on the gargantuan task of increasing foreign tourism in the country despite its lack of focus on which aspects of Japanese culture to promote.

For further information on the original deployment of the symposium *Japan Pop Goes Global*, please refer to <https://www.aoyama.ac.jp/info/event/2017/02412/> or <https://www.mutualimages.org>.

Enjoy *Mutual Images*, 5.

Marco PELLITTERI, *Main Editor*

Herb L. FONDEVILLA, *Guest Editor*

Repackaging Japanese culture: The digitalisation of folktales in the *Pokémon* franchise

Erika Ann SUMILANG-ENGRACIA | University of the Philippines, Philippines

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ABSTRACT

The Pokémon franchise is arguably one of the most enduring brands in pop culture. As of March 2014, the Pokémon video game franchise alone has sold more than 260 million games worldwide, while the trading card game shipped more than 21.5 billion cards to 74 countries in 10 languages. It fuses cultural elements in the creation of their individual and unique pocket monsters. Becoming new conduit by which these old folktales are revisited, revised, and ultimately renewed. Looking at how these pocket monsters inhabiting the world of Pokémon were created points to the importance of the folkloric inspirations behind the character designs, giving the franchise a taste of a cultural flavour that makes the experience more enjoyable. This study looks at how the franchise digitalised folktales and how these were incorporated into the Pokémon video game. Specifically, this paper traced the transformation of these folkloric images from the archetypal folktale characters found in Japan's folk literature to pocket monsters (Pokémon).

KEYWORDS

Pokémon; Folktale; Games; Japanese folklore; Handheld console; Digitalisation.

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Introduction

According to John Stephens and Robyn McCalum, the process of retelling is always implicated in the process of cultural formation (1998, xi). People, regardless of location, have an intrinsic capacity to produce beautiful, magical, and sometimes scary stories, spun from unknown hands that have been weaved intimately into the fabric of a populace's imagination. The *Pokémon* franchise on the other hand, is arguably one of the most enduring brands in pop culture. Tracy Lien, in her article posted in the gaming website polygon.com, notes that as of March 2014, the video game franchise alone has sold more than 260 million games worldwide, while the trading card game has reportedly shipped more than 21.5 billion cards to 74 countries in 10 languages.¹ The *Pokémon* series has been the most well-known game that was ever produced and

¹ Officially released figures for up to 2014 only (Bhat 2015).

marketed internationally for Nintendo's Game Boy line of consoles. John Kirriemuir, who wrote extensively on gaming, digital learning and education points out that the considerable revenue from this series and associated spin-offs such as the *Pokémon* trading cards, anime and movies, and the revenues from the Game Boy handheld itself ensures that Nintendo has financial security for the foreseeable future, irrespective of sales of their other gaming consoles like the GameCube (2002, 2).

Authors such as Bainbridge (Bainbridge, 2014) and Foster (2008) note that Pokémon, best exemplified by legendary Pokémon, is in some respect monsters in the *yōkai* tradition. How Pokémon data is organized using the Pokédex is also reminiscent of how *yōkai* has been classified using the *hakubutsugaku* style (Foster, 2008, 214). As an example, some of Pokémon's classifications include Pokémon of the mountain, Pokémon of the prairie, and Pokémon of the forest; this as Foster notes endows the Pokémon world with history and an academic discipline reminiscent of *yōkaigaku*² or monsterology, whose counterpart in the Pokémon world is called Pokémon-gaku or Pokémon-ology (2008, 214).

Legendary Pokémon are very rare and powerful Pokémon that are also mentioned in ancient records and myths of the Pokémon world. They are game content inevitably encountered by players in the game. Some of these legendary Pokémon are believed to have been responsible for creating the Pokémon universe and in governing certain aspects of nature. The opposing game mascots of the paired game titles are often chosen from these new legendary Pokémon whose story arc will be made accessible through the new game cartridge. The author notes that every legendary creature featured as a game mascot are inspired by different folklores. Although not always from Japanese folklore, all of them have very distinguishable lore that ties them to existing myths. A strong example of this is Generation 2's game mascot Ho-Oh for *Pokémon Gold*. Ho-Oh is a direct reference to the Japanese folklore of a phoenix-like bird called with the same name Hō ō. This highlights the importance of folklore as an element used in creating *Pokémon*.

Clues on the inspiration of these characters even litter the *Pokémon* world. This may appear as entries in the Pokédex, information obtained from conversing with the non-playable characters or NPC in the game world, or a reference to the lore similar to it during an anime episode. Often, an exposition through an interview with one of the team

² This is a study of *yōkai* as creatures imagined by humans, it looks at the creation of these fantastical creatures as a cultural phenomenon. As such this is a study of people who have engendered *yōkai* (Komatsu 1944, 435-436).

designers, or holding of events that are connected to the game character's design are also practiced, further strengthening the conjectures of fans on connections of certain folklores and the new Pokémon designed. Information verified through this then becomes official data that are made readily available by fans for fans on a number of Pokémon dedicated websites. Keeping in mind Ken Sugimori's remark on his desire for players to identify what these characters are based on reflects why hints of folkloric inspiration are readily scattered inside the game³.

This study is an examination of the transformation of folklore through the lens of games such as *Pokémon*. It looks at how these motifs are turned into game content and examines the effect of digitalisation on these folkloric themes. More specifically, this study looked at the game content pertaining to creatures that inhabit the Pokémon world to look at how folklore⁴ is integrated in their character makeup through digitalisation in an attempt to answer the following question: How is Japanese folklore digitalised through *Pokémon*, and what are the implications of such digitalisation?⁵

Studies on Gaming and *Pokémon*

According to Koichi Iwabuchi, the global success of *Pokémon* is unprecedented (2004). The popularity of this consumer product is unmatched by any other Japanese anime or computer game character, and its success prompted Japanese scholars to look further into the appeal of *Pokémon* to their consumers. Iwabuchi refers to a US based sociologist, Kamo Yoshinori in his *Asahi Shinbun* article "*Pokémon ga yushutsu shita 'kuru' na nihon to nihonjin*" [Pokémon is disseminating "cool" images of Japan and the Japanese] (January 20, 2000) which looked at American children and their reaction to *Pokémon*. He notes that children who love *Pokémon* believed Japan to be a cool country able to produce such cool products as *Pokémon*. Sakurai Tetsuo's work *Sokudo no naka no bunka* [Culture in the

³ From various interviews and transcripts of Iwata Asks episodes, archived at: <http://iwataasks.nintendo.com/>

⁴ For the purpose of narrowing the scope of the study, only contents pertaining to Japanese folklore were included. While the author acknowledges the proliferation of other folkloric motifs from other cultures, there is not enough space in this paper to extend the discussion to a more in-depth comparative mythology. A comparative analysis of other cultural motifs is planned to be the next installation of this study.

⁵ This paper is an abridged version of a dissertation study that examined all Japanese folklore motifs found in Gen 1 – Gen 6 of the *Pokémon* franchise. Due to the limited volume requirement for this publication, only a select number of motifs are to be discussed in detail. The author's personal website is currently in progress where the full version of the research data will be available online. Copies of the full version can also be found at the Philippine National Library and at the University of the Philippines Library in Diliman, Quezon City, Philippines.

Speed] (2000) also points to the “cool” impact of *Pokémon* to Japan’s image abroad, which surpassed any Japanese literature or film and government’s public relations efforts overseas.⁶ Some works also ascribe the success of Japanese consumer products to their culturally neutral nature –they are not easily recognizable as a Japanese product and are considered as culturally ambiguous. One such example is the success of the Walkman which, according to Colin Hoskins and Rolf Miru is due to its culturally neutral trait: the country where the product originated from has nothing to do with the way the product works. Its name and marketing are culturally ambiguous, and the satisfaction consumers derive from using the product is not directly related to its Japanese origin (1988, 503). But this view as Iwabuchi points out is problematic. He argues that the influence of products of different cultures on everyday life cannot be culturally neutral. Instead, they inevitably carry cultural imprints. Even if these are not recognized as such, they still do carry with them cultural associations with their country of origin (Iwabuchi 2004, 56-57). These cultural features, images and ideas associated with a consumer product, which are closely related with racial and bodily image of a country of origin is what Iwabuchi calls “cultural odour.” Video games, anime and other consumer technologies (VCR, Walkman, karaoke) that contain no influential idea of Japan, (products do not try to sell on the back of a “Japanese way of life”) are what he terms *odourless* products. In Japanese products, these can be tied to the concept of *mukokuseki* (literally stateless), where characters in anime or games do not look Japanese. Perfect examples of these are anime drawings of characters with features and multicolour hair that effectively erases their racial or cultural context. This can also be seen in the creation of the characters and location of the *Pokémon* franchise. Ironically, these odourless cultural presences as he notes have also been increasingly recognized as Japanese.

At the peak of its popularity in the US in 1999 to 2001, there were articles that voiced negative reactions and speculations on how *Pokémon* may impact children who are at the throes of this mania (Elza 2009, 53). Cary Elza notes that at the height of the *Pokémon* craze in the US, there were an increase in differing and very subjective opinions on how parents should look at *Pokémon*: 1. Opposing the craze is the idea that children are being manipulated by advertising that forces parents to spend large amounts of money on the

⁶ As cited in Iwabuchi, K. How Japanese is Pokémon? Dans J. Tobin (Éd.), *Pikachu's Global Adventure: The Rise and Fall of Pokémon*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 34-48; 60-61.

different *Pokémon* merchandise (Elza 2009, 66). 2. Another group criticized the inherent problems of consumption in a capitalist environment through acquisition of *Pokémon* products and the dangers of too much immersion in a fictionalized *Pokémon* universe (Elza 2009, 67). They criticize the world appearing in the *Pokémon* anime as lacking in authority figures, and the real-life negative behaviour of children obsessed with the merchandise such as bullying or theft. This, according to Elza, prompted schools to confiscate cards and later on ban *Pokémon* paraphernalia on school grounds at the threat of expulsion (Elza 2009, 68). On a positive note, 3. *Pokémon* was also lauded for helping children learn (Elza 2009, 69). With parental supervision, the game is noted to aid in boosting language skills, critical thinking, social interaction and math. Elza's study notes that for better or worse, the *Pokémon* world and its utopian society allows for children to free themselves from the burdens of authority but in exchange, burdens them with freedom of choice (Elza 2009, 71).

Anne Allison (2003) in her journal article "Portable Monster and Commodity Cuteness: *Pokémon* as Japan's new global power" points to the significance of the franchise's success in piercing the global children's entertainment industry previously monopolized by the US market. Until recently, she points out, only Hollywood and Disney had the worldwide reach and appeal that the *Pokémon* franchise has reached. The success of *Pokémon* has indeed put them in the running as one of the movers and shakers in the making of a global kids' trend. Although she is quick to caution those that haphazardly claim Japan as the new superpower in the global cultural industry for children, at the very least there is no denying that the rise in popularity and global reach of *Pokémon* and other Japanese children's products is a significant shift in the children's entertainment industry (Allison 2003, 381). Patrick Drazen also mentions that the success of *Pokémon* in the West (US) allowed for other similar Japanese products to be introduced in the market as well (2003, 14). Allison goes to argue that one of the keys to success of the marketability of the *Pokémon* franchise is the media mix platform configuration it pioneered. *Pokémon* has different types of derivative products that are ready for consumption: games, anime, movies, trading cards and so on. It is not a single product but a universe in itself marketed into different forms of play. It may be originally rooted in one medium, which was the game but the aura of *Pokémon* is said to extend outwards, encompassing the player in an entire world that is both imaginary (the *Pokémon* world with its creatures, places and characters) and real (real people connecting and battling together, trading, fans talking about and engaged in

activities together). The *cuteness* (*kawaisa*) that pervades in Japanese products was also a factor that enabled *Pokémon* to sell across genders and age. This idea of cuteness according to Allison involves some sort of attachment in an emotional level to imaginary beings that resonates with one's childhood and Japanese traditional culture. The power to attract older females that do not play the game but do find the *Pokémon* plush toys cute and affordable enough to buy is a demonstrative example of this (Allison 2004, 15). There is something distinctive about the cuteness of "made in Japan" characters according to Allison.

Jason Bainbridge's article (2014) on the other hand explored the different elements of the *Pokémon* franchise' form as objects that functions as social network constructs. Together with the brand, media platforms, the creators and fans, he considered some in-game elements such as the pocket monsters themselves as a part of this network that functioned as a gateway into Japanese culture (Bainbridge 2014, 1). Although the paper argued that Japanese culture is being transmitted through *Pokémon*, it did not look deeply into the robust cultural content inside the game that the gamers or *Pokémon* trainers are heavily exposed to. The *Pokémon* experience is unique in a way that one has an opportunity to revisit and engage with its diverse platform earlier on as children, and later on, as adults making the study of the narrative in the game content all the more important.

On Folklore Studies

A Linda Dégh's study on folklore espouses the idea of oneness of the lore and the folk in scrutinizing the relationship of folk and mass media. Advocating the idea pioneered by German folklorist Rudolf Schenda, she emphasizes that there is no assumption that oral tradition is superior to written text or folklore distributed through mass media and that there is no separation between the folk that produced the lore and the lore itself. Indeed, Schenda was wary of what Dégh comments as "euphoric enthusiasm and worshipful compassion for the folk that is so common in the works of professional folklorists" (Dégh 1994, 1). Using this idea, Dégh does not treat folklore as a rural isolated commodity heralded with preserving national values, but instead, recognizes its hegemonic tendencies, as a collaborative product of negotiations between different social classes, of ongoing historical processes where interaction of literary and oral, professional and nonprofessional, formal and informal, and constructed and improvised creativity takes place (1994, 1).

Dan Ben-Amos, on the other hand, highlighted the organic quality of folklore (1971). Folklore is a phenomenon that is integral in cultural formation and as such, is subject to social context, attitudes, rhetorical situations, and individual aptitude as variables that produce differences in the resulting folklore's structure, text and texture. This holds true regardless whether the product is produced with verbal, musical or tangible form (1971, 4). According to his study, the three basic distinguishable attributes of folklore is that 1.) it is a body of knowledge, 2.) a mode of thought, and 3.) a form of art. Other than that, it is hard to pin down a distinct classification of folklore. Previous attempts have highlighted how such changes in perspective can even bring about definitions of folklore that are in conflict with each other. Thus, he proposes a new way of looking at folklore – as a process, a sphere of interaction in its own right. By considering it as such folklore is lifted from confinement of what he calls “a marginal projection or reflection” of a mirror of culture and is thus elevated to an organic phenomenon that reflects better its hegemonic nature (Ben-Amos 1971, 5).

According to Barre Toelken, there are two qualities of folklore: it is 1.) Conservative—there are themes, beliefs, information, attitudes, etc. that are retained and are passed intact through time and space in all channels of vernacular expression; but at the same time, it is also 2.) Dynamic—there are elements whose function is to be altered. This may be in the form of changed content, meaning, styles and usage, whose changing may take place repeatedly through space and time (1996, 39). The process of telling and retelling is a give and take between retaining certain motifs and elements and renewing others to suit the audience.

To integrate the concepts, this study looked at *Pokémon* as a valid form of folklore where Japanese culture is actively repackaged. Using the conservative and dynamic properties of folklore, the study looked at the description, image and characteristics of the pocket monsters that inhabit the *Pokémon* world and identified the folkloric motifs present. The new form of folklore that is represented by these *Pokémon* creations are looked at as a form of folklore. The elements of continuity observed in the game characters were considered as part of the organic process of generating and proliferating folklore. Using Ben-Amos' idea, this study looked at the *Pokémon* franchise's integration of folkloric motif in its games as a valid organic process where new forms of folklore are created.

Pokémon Data Set

The two sets of data analysed in the study were: (1) texts on Japanese folklore, and (2) official information released by the *Pokémon* franchise in the form of:

- a. Information about the Pokémon available via the Pokédex, which includes text entries and images,
- b. The official creator's write-up about their created Pokémon; and
- c. Company's press releases and blog entries about their creation.

Also included are supplementary content from *Pokémon's* official website, and *Pokémon* dedicated wiki and fan sites⁷, particularly on articles discussing comments of Ken Sugimori, the designer of all Pokémon in Gen 1. Other official creators' thoughts, such as insights on certain Pokémon and the creation of the game world, were specifically taken from Junichi Masuda's company blog (Masadu 2015), as well as transcripts of Iwata Asks episodes, which are interviews conducted by the former Nintendo president and Chief Executive Officer Satoru Iwata with his colleagues (Iwata n.d.).

The official *Pokémon* in-game Pokédex entries were used for comparison with Japanese folklore texts. These entries are viewable via handheld consoles through playing the *Pokémon* game and are also compiled and archived completely per generation in a number of fans run websites such as the ones mentioned in the footnote 7. The official *Pokémon* website, which contains only the latest Pokédex entry of a Pokémon was regularly visited in order to check the latest information for the X and Y (Generation 6) releases.

Toriyama Sekien's (1712-1788) work, most notable of which is the *Gazu Hyakki Yagyō* (*the Illustrated Night Parade of a Hundred Demons*) published in 1776 and Takehara Shunsen's *Ehon Hyakumonogatari* (*Picture Book of a Hundred Stories*) published in 1841 was used in the study. Toriyama Sekien is an eighteenth-century scholar and ukiyo-e artist prominently known for his attempt at cataloguing all species of supernatural beings in his works. His *Gazu Hyakki Yagyō* series, considered as the single most influential monster catalogue produced during the Edo period (Yoda 2013, 1) was the main source for *yōkai* (monster) lore. Their English translations as written and illustrated by Matthew Meyer and more recent works of Shigeru Mizuki on the same subject were used as primary sources of Japanese folkloric motifs.

⁷ Such as www.bulbapedia.com and www.serebii.net.

Yanagita Kunio on the other hand is prominently known as one of the main contributors in the establishment of Japanese folklore studies. His works centred on tales and the voice of the common man, coining the Japanese word *jōmin* to represent the common people such as illiterates, who prominently stood in the centre of his studies (1980, 90-91). His works such as *Tales of Tōno (Tono Monogatari)*,⁸ works of his students such as Keigo Seki and others, as well as English translations of Japanese folklore by Richard Dorson were used as the basis of Japanese folklore motifs such as folktale heroes, fairy tales and folk practices.

Results and Findings

There are 720 Pokémon spanning Generation 1 to Generation 6, 164 of which contained Japanese folklore motifs. This comprises 18.6% of the overall data. Looking at the breakdown of folklore inspired per generation, the number of added Pokémon per game release ranges from 14% to 25%.

Table 1. Category and Motif Count

Folklore Category	Gen 1	Gen 2	Gen 3	Gen 4	Gen 5	Gen 6	Grand Total
Buddhism	1				9		10
Mythical Beasts	2	2	2		2		8
Others	2		3	1		1	7
Shinto	10	5	6	3	9	3	36
Taoism					5	2	7
Yōkai	15	6	19	16	18	10	84
Chinese Classical Novel				4	3		7
Folk Heroes and Villains		1		1		3	5
Grand Total	30	14	30	25	46	19	164

⁸ Some criticisms on his work: Some note how his works are used to feed into the concept of *nihonjinron* and the quest for a Japanese national identity. In his work *Yanagita Kunio and the Folklore Movement* (1990), Ronald Morse suggests that unlike other folklorists who toil in unknown regions with little or no recognition from the state, Yanagita Kunio was acclaimed in his own lifetime and became somewhat a cult figure that symbolizes admirable qualities of Japanese nationalism in his quest for the roots of Japanese culture (p. x). He was a poet, bureaucrat, journalist and a folklorist all rolled into one. His personality and literary style heavily influenced his work, at times adding doubts in the authenticity of the works itself. As Morse points out, Yanagita's training was from a literary standpoint and his works lacked the "purely" academic style demanded by folklore studies that seeks to be considered as a scientific discipline—works were often left unfinished and his terminologies remained vague (p. xvii).

The findings show a significant number of Japanese folklore-infused Pokémon created every time a new game is released. As there is not enough space in this paper to examine the findings in totality, only a number of motifs are discussed in the following section.

Raijū (Thunder Beast)

The Pikachu evolution line, Pikachu and Raichu are based on the thunder god's pet *raijū*. The *raijū* (Figure 1) is a thunder beast that is said to assume the shape of a feline—it can be in the form of a cat, a tiger, a lion, a fox, weasel or a wolf and can transform into a ball of lightning (Roberts 2010, 97).

Pikachu is the iconic Pokémon mascot sporting a black tail that is shaped like a thunder. When Pikachu evolves, it turns into Raichu, a bigger stronger Pokémon that is able to summon stronger thunder. The first part of its name “*rai*” also means thunder in the Japanese language.



Fig. 1. Raijū image from the Illustration of Kaminari by Takehara Shunsen (1841).

Putting this radical as a part of the Pokémon's name looks to be a direct reference to the thunder beast of Japanese mythology. More importantly, Pikachu is the game mascot for the Gen 1 series. Currently, it is the mascot of the entire *Pokémon* franchise and as

such, is the most recognizable character of *Pokémon* worldwide. Pikachu is also considered as the signature Pokémon in the anime. It is a recurring character and serves as the protagonist Ash's main Pokémon that has remained outside the Poké Ball throughout the entire season.

Ryū (Dragon)

Early records of dragons (see Figure 2) can be traced back to Japanese ancient texts like the *Kojiki* or Records of Ancient Matter and *Nihongi* or Chronicles of Japan (De Bary *et al.* 2001). Records of ancient texts state that certain ancestors of the purported first emperor of Japan Emperor Jimmu are actually water gods or water serpents. This narrative is also seen in folkloric stories where the Japanese imperial line is mentioned to have descended from dragons (De Visser 2008, 139). Literature on *Ryūjin* came to Japan from China. In Chinese Taoist astrology, the Azure Dragon of the east together with the Red Phoenix or Hō ō of the south, the White Tiger of the west and the Black Turtle of the north are the guardians of the four cardinal directions. In Japan they are usually referred to as Ryū or Dragon or as the more powerful and respected *Ryūjin* literally translated as Dragon God. It can cause rain, and is a symbol of royalty. It is considered as a being with infinite wisdom that can either act benevolent or malevolent towards people. According to Charles Temple, Asian dragons are drawn with a snake like body, a frowning countenance, long straight horns, scales, a row of rigid dorsal spines, with limbs and claws (see Figure 2) (2008, 28). Legend says that the dragon king rules the seas. He is able to control the tides using two pearls that are in his possession and lives in a beautiful palace in the depths of the sea. A Dragon can be ruthless if angered but benevolent and can grant great boons and assistance if approached the right way (Temple 2008, 179). Shintō folk religion also worships dragons as a *Kami* or Shintō god. According to Iwai Hiroshi, *Ryūjin Shinkō* is a religious thought and practice associated with the worship of dragons as a water deity or *suijin* (2006, par 1). Agricultural rituals such as prayers for rain were performed at rivers, swamp, and deep pools, the believed dwelling of the water god. As a sea god or *umi no kami*, fishermen also prayed to *Ryūjin* for good catch and for protection against the tempestuous sea.



Fig. 2. Ukiyo-e image of Dragon and Tiger by Utagawa Sadahide. Originally printed in Edo era, reprinted in the late 20th century from ukiyo-e.org.

Looking at the centrality of the narrative of the Dragon in Japanese culture, it is no surprise that a large number of Pokémon have been inspired by them. The Gyarados evolution line shows different degrees of association with this motif. In its weakest form, Magikarp is a fish-type Pokémon that can be commonly caught in bodies of water. Although the Pokédex notes that Magikarp's splash can make the Pokémon leap over mountains, it is useless in battle, as this is a non-lethal move that has no damage. The description of leaping over mountains looks to be in reference to a proverb about dragons. This proverb, which was Chinese in origin, tells of an industrious carp that leaps over the dragon gate, which after the ordeal is transformed into a dragon or *koi no taki nobori* [A carp's climb up a waterfall] (Garrison, *et al.* 2002, 345). Colloquially, this is used to refer to the rapid rise of a person's status or a person's smooth ascension up higher ranks.

Its own Pokédex entry makes fun of Magikarp by highlighting its incompetence but also notes its very hardy and tenacious nature. After diligently levelling up to level 20, it evolves into a powerful dragon Pokémon called Gyarados whose mere presence automatically intimidates foes. Different to its pre-evolved harmless stage, Gyarados has a scowling countenance and is extremely aggressive in nature. One of its abilities during a battle is intimidate,

a move that lowers the attack of opponents in the area. Gyarados is a representation of the devastating aspect of the *ryū*. It is widely reputed to possess a fierce temper and a tendency to wreak havoc and destruction in cities unfortunate to be near enough where it is angered.

Kitsune (Fox Demon)

The *kitsune* (fox demon) inspired Pokémon group has one of the most unchanged folkloric motifs in the *Pokémon* franchise. This is seen in the similarity in the Pokémon illustration and popular depictions of the creature in Ukiyo-e artworks (see Figures 3 & 4), the Pokémon naming and the Japanese folkloric name, and lore itself.

The *kitsune* is regarded as a highly intelligent creature. They are one of the few beings with the power to transform (*henge*) into human (Seki 1966, 25). They are very magical in nature and are said to live for centuries. The older and more powerful foxes obtain tails that signify their status and amount of power. The oldest and the most powerful fox is a nine-tailed *kitsune* also called a *kyuubi*, or a celestial fox. Other mythologies also consider the fox as Inari, the goddess of Food and Rice's messenger and aide. A statue of a fox is often seen guarding the temples dedicated to Inari (Dorson 1962, 128). At times, *kitsune* are also depicted as sly and deceitful. They would transform into beautiful women to lure men for devious purposes. Still others tell of a fox transforming into a human and choosing to live with humans that they have fallen in love with (Temple 2008, 41). They are also known to hold deep-seated grudges towards those who have treated them badly (Temple 2008, 42).



Fig. 3. Prince Hanzoku terrorized by a Nine Tailed Fox by Utagawa Kuniyoshi (1855).



Fig. 4. From left to right: Flareon, Vulpix and Ninetails.

Flareon, Vulpix and Ninetails (Figure 4) are from the Eevee evolution tree that evolved with the help of a sunstone. In its final evolution, Ninetails looks to be a fully-grown fox with nine elegant long tails. Even its Japanese name, Kyukon is a combination of the word nine “*kyu*” and the onomatopoeia of a fox’s sound in the Japanese language “*kon*.” This Pokémon’s appearance, name and disposition are also similar to those of the folklore of *kyuubi* or nine tailed fox. Interestingly, like the lore, comparing the number of tails possessed by these three different Pokémon can also be used as an accurate gauge on how strong they are in comparison to each other. Flareon, the Pokémon possessing one tail is the weakest of the three. It can store thermal energy inside its body, expelling it out as a fiery breath can reach up to 3,000 degrees. Vulpix on the other hand possesses only one tail during the time of its birth but has the ability to increase the number of its tails as it grows. As it gains experience, its single white tail gains colour and splits into two, until it reaches its peak growth with six tails. Unlike Flareon, that can only store heat inside its body through its flame sac, Vulpix’s internal flame never burns out, allowing for a wider range of fire manipulation. Its evolved form Ninetails is known to be a highly intelligent and powerful Pokémon that can live for thousands of years. It can understand human speech, and its tails are believed to grant it mysterious powers. The danger level of this Pokémon is also increased compared to the previous cuddlier disposition of Flareon and Vulpix. A Pokédex entry notes that grabbing one of its tails can result in a powerful 1,000-year curse to those foolish enough to try.

According to Noriko Reider in her book *Japanese Demon Lore* (2010), there is an intrinsic relationship between a Japanese god called *Kami* and *yōkai*. While a *kami* is a spirit or supernatural deity worshipped by people, those that are not worshipped are called *yōkai*. If a *kami* is not worshipped enough or become displeased, it may turn into

yōkai and through rituals, may be appeased into turning back into a *kami* (Reider 2010, 1). Looking at it this way, the Mythical Beasts, as well as the *kami* motifs found in *Pokémon* can be thought of to belong to a similar overarching supernatural category. The proliferation of these supernatural motifs in Japanese culture points to a deep entrenchment of the supernatural in Japanese culture. Hideo Nakata, the director of *Ring* (*Ringu*) explains it as “awareness” in Japanese culture of a spiritual world. He notes that in Japan, there is still an inherent spirituality and belief that there is another world beyond the living, one that coexists, yet is unseen (Heinna, 2005, par 5). This mindset affects the kind of fiction and lore produced and the reception and consumption of the audience of these motifs.

Since bygone times, folklore has been used as tools for inculcating values. It is a tool used to pass on cultural practices and other forms of knowledge to the next generation in the guise of entertainment. In this respect, *Pokémon* is no different. The flavour text in the form of Pokédex entries serve as lessons that may give off warning or may impart knowledge about these magical creatures. It lets players see a little glimpse of what these folkloric motifs are about and how they have been altered. At the same time, these characterisations and how players may interact with them are not fixed and static. There is ample wiggle room given as to how the pacing and direction of the player and Pokémon’s relationship may proceed. Resounding with Ben-Amos’ idea of folklore (1971) as a sphere of interaction in its own right, these new folkloric motifs, much like how certain characters and folk beliefs can be expressed in dance, or a form of performance, folklore in *Pokémon* also have a performative nature. Individuals actively consuming folklore found in *Pokémon* are not in a passive and static state of just receiving information. They can direct movement and thought processes of these motifs, at times they can also encounter independent motifs and converse with them. These Japanese folklore characters can be talked to and interacted with inside the virtual playscape. Other in-game features even allow gamers to directly manipulate Pokémon as their character in order to play mini games. These gamers chose what folkloric character to control in order to perform tasks, indirectly giving a chance for the players to display and experience the power they manifest. Outside the virtual world found in the game, in our current reality, paraphernalia are also available in all shapes and sizes that enable the extension of this imaginary interaction into the real world. *Pokémon* has elevated the performative aspect of the folklores it encapsulates. Much like songs orally sung during festivals, or stories told by

elders to their children under the stars, the content and style of the performance changes depending on the participants. As such, interacting with and consuming folklore has become more open ended. The possibilities are as varied as the game makers allow them to be. A virtual meeting with *ryujin*-inspired Dragonaire may be as fleeting as meeting one on the battlefield arena, to purposefully catching one while exploring the seas it inhabits, or to receiving one through an anonymous trade with another gamer across the globe. The growth of this Pokémon and the strength of its bond with its trainer are highly dependent on the individual's preference. The trainer may choose to increase the Pokémon's friendship by giving it items such as candy or berries or by ensuring it does not faint as much as possible during battles, or build a cosy room where Pokémon can play or train. Incidentally, trainers can also decrease their Pokémon's affection by letting it haphazardly faint during a battle, or catch these folkloric characters in order to complete the Pokédex entries and thereafter shelve it in a virtual storage, never to be taken out again.

The path taken towards the completion of the game is fraught with contradictions. On one hand, the players are encouraged to collect Pokémon in the wild in order to increase their knowledge about Pokémon and to deepen relationships between humans and Pokémon, but at the same time, a player's storage space for the number of Pokémon they can carry is limited. As such, the majority of what they will catch will most definitely not be used throughout their journey in completing the game. For the majority of the Pokémon caught, a cursory glance as the Pokédex fills up with their information before shelving it into the players' virtual box is all that is afforded to them. As soon as some Pokémon deemed as weak or useless such as the heart-shaped fish called Luvdisc or the duck-like Farfetch'd are picked up, they are stored away. While Pokémon endowed with more powerful resistances in the form of their unique stats such as typing, overall fighting prowess, and those with functional skills such as HM (hidden machine) slaves⁹, as well as those whose lore or appearances are to the liking of the player, are kept in the trainers' backpack and nurtured diligently through training and battling. As a gamer myself, even some of the legendary Pokémon that I have caught are just stored inside the virtual boxes and are rarely taken out during the whole duration of my gameplay.

⁹ They are Pokémon with move sets learned from objects called HM or hidden machines. These moves are used to clear obstacles set in the games such as plant barriers and boulders. Their function in the party is to use these functional moves that help the player in navigating the game world. An example of this is a Pokémon that can learn cut will be able to help the players cut any vine that is blocking passages into other areas.

Depending on preferences, attitudes, individual aptitudes and situation of the player, the interaction between players and these digitalised folkloric motifs in the form of Pokémon vary. Thus, the interaction between players and folklore are not just unidirectional. The strongest Pokémon are not always picked as starter Pokémon, and strategies on how to counter different types of Pokémon combination in a team abound. The dynamic interaction between the player, Pokémon and the technologies that becomes their go-between is very organic in its give and take. As an example, Pikachu, the mascot of Pokémon, is not a good battle Pokémon, it has a lot of weaknesses easily overcome by a vast range of Pokémon during a confrontation, but despite this, a lot of players still choose to keep Pikachu in their roster, and a wide variety of merchandise are still generated and sold based on Pikachu. If done poorly, or not at all, a player will have a hard time accomplishing certain tasks but the game mechanics is also forgiving and as such, they may still be able to finish the game. But this ineffective use of the system becomes a different thing altogether in the player versus player (PVP) arena. Poorly composed teams and mismanaged stats translate into difficulty in winning battles fought between Pokémon teams controlled by another individual. There is a conflict between game lore and actual battle prowess. Some may be written off as weak but are actually able to fight toe to toe with legendary Pokémon. The cute and timid looking Mawhile, which was inspired by a *futakuchi onna* (two mouthed lady) has been revealed to be a fairy-type Pokémon. Despite fairy type's smallness in stature, they are the bane of any dragon type Pokémon. As such, even the legendary dragon Rayquaza and the powerful Gyarados will have a hard time facing it head on. This shows that although some lore are given more prominence in the form of assigning them to legendary Pokémon who are at the front and centre of the game releases, some Pokémon with rarely heard folkloric motifs are important and strong on their own, too. This process of taking in large amounts of information and filtering it down to one's preferred team inculcates the value of prioritizing functionality over appearance and profoundness of the lore.

Unlike folklore that is only read in texts, or viewed in print and TV, these folkloric beings are fleshed out in the *Pokémon* franchise. They are interactive, they rejoice after winning a battle, and feel overwhelmed when they lose. They are programmed to have a hint of memory, which may be good and bad, which the player can become privy to if they wanted. The player may not be able to know all about their Pokémon's memory, but they can have a glimpse of some of its emotion, and their attitude towards their trainer.

Coupled with this enhanced experience written in on the codes that make up the *Pokémon* world, a sense of involvement and ownership is fostered. This sense of involvement starts with the initial acquisition of the creatures that prompts trainers to name them and increases as the player trains and travels with these Pokémon in order to finish the game. The game emphasizes the bonds between players and their Pokémon in order to achieve success in the game.

Trainers who set out in the *Pokémon* world in search for an encounter and a chance to catch Pokémon elevates the experience of learning about folklore into an immersive, interactive learning experience. Much like the give and take of the performer in the form of grandma and the audience in the form of her boisterous grandchildren, the stories woven become a give and take reciprocal action. The storyteller is the game, the stories are the lore encoded into them and the characters fleshed out through programmed software into *Pokémon*, while the audience is the player, able to influence the flow, pacing and direction of the story. The goal of beating the villains inside the game and succeeding in the quest are laid out as concrete general goals that need to be triggered in the correct order in order for the players to proceed to the finish line, but how these goals may be accomplished are left up to the player. Tools are readily made available but up to a certain degree, how these tools are to be used, and which tools to use to weave in the story are left up to the free will of the players turned Pokémon trainers. Much like how a child can choose what fairytale character to inhabit their daydreams, players can choose a wide variety of Japanese (or other culture's) folkloric creatures to interact with.

As seen in the *Pokémon* character makeup, some aspects were highlighted while some were removed. Cuteness has been amplified, often resulting in a drastic change in the image of previously scary, deadly and evil monsters in order to render them harmless. Although some if not most retain their powerful abilities, such as *kitsune*, *rajū* and *ryū* inspired Pokémon, a lot of them have now been redrawn with an innocent atmosphere. The pairing of deadly lore and a cute countenance to balance out these fearful aspects fully manifests itself in the *yōkai* inspired Pokémon. While Pikachu maintain the fearsome power of thunder, their cute countenance, as well as their adorably choreographed dance moves, defangs them. The boogeyman and such other frightening creatures that scare children at night are now reinvented as a potential friend that a child can reach their hand out to. With enough dedication and hard work, they can even grow together in the pursuit of a unifying goal.

Conclusion

As seen in the previous section, flavour text based on the Pokédex and the official *Pokémon* images point to the use of Japanese folklore as inspiration for some of the new *Pokémon* released. *Pokémon* is a new medium where Japanese folklore has been appropriated and digitalised. In terms of cultural odour, this makes 18.6 percent of the total number of *Pokémon* Japanese in odour.

It is argued that aside from media such as television and movies, games are also twenty-first century conduits by which folklore thrive. Japanese folklore, whether in physical manifestation only, or just the lore itself was used as a backstory and inspiration for 134 out of the 720 *Pokémon* in the Gen 1 to Gen 6 series. Every generation released, more than ten percent of the *Pokémon* newly created has Japanese folklore as inspiration. The author sees this trend continuing for the next batch of *Pokémon* game releases. Indeed, Japanese folklore continues to exist in a digitalised form through *Pokémon*. This points to the *Pokémon* game as an avenue where the process of creating and recreating Japanese folklore takes place. As illustrated in the case of Darmanitan and Rayquaza, some characteristics of certain *Pokémon* even introduce Japanese culture specific terms to the players in the game such as the word *mikado*¹⁰ and *Zen* via flavour text. At times, the Pokédex entries also pointed out similarities of the *Pokémon* to a Japanese folkloric creature, as in the case of Golduck and Froslass, which directly references their similarity to their folkloric counterpart *kappa* and *yuki onna*. Using Iwabuchi's idea of odour, this demonstrates that *Pokémon* is not culturally neutral as per his previous conjecture but actually contains Japanese fragrance. Inevitably, certain aspects were changed and amended in the character design but majority of those that had folklore motif still retained their distinct Japanese character. There were *Pokémon* that were easily discernible as strongly based on Japanese folklore such as the Vulpix evolution line. This was manifested in their overall look that was quite similar to Edo period illustrations of their folklore motif, their powers and name. There was also those whose artworks and power was not much changed from their folklore and those whose Japanese name is a direct reference to their folklore inspiration such as Ho-oh and the Japanese dragon or *ryū* inspired *Pokémon* lineup.

¹⁰ Mikado is an archaic term for the emperor of Japan, which is now replaced as Tennō or "heavenly sovereign" (Asakawa, 1903, 25).

Pokémon is indeed a Japanese cultural product. The push and pull between what the makers design and the fan reception of it in the form of fan analysis of motifs it may have originated from, and the creation of fan terms in an attempt to define and understand these newly constructed folklore can be viewed as a part of the manufacturing and dissemination of folklore in the twenty-first century.

Japanese cultural global appeal has increasingly geared towards what is commonly termed pop cultural products, which Tim Craig terms as “ubiquitous, hot and increasingly influential” (2000, 5). Once routinely derided as a one-dimensional power, a heavyweight in the production and export of the “hard” of automobiles, electronics, and other manufacturer of goods but a nobody in terms of the “soft” of cultural products and influence, Japan now contributes not just to our material lives, but to our everyday cultural lives as well (Craig 2000, 5). William Tsutsui and Michiko Ito in their study of Japanese pop culture notes that in earlier times, the impact of Japanese culture on Western life has generally been limited to what he terms elite art forms. Ukiyo-e prints inspired French Impressionists in the late nineteenth century while the modern day big-city art houses showcased works of Mizoguchi, Kurosawa, and Miyazaki among others. But now cultural exports are not only limited to what is considered as “Japanese high art,” but to those of “Japanese Pop” as well (Tsutsui & Ito 2006, 1). The popularity of these Japanese game brands such as *Pokémon* is a testament to how far has the Japanese children’s consumers market has pierced global consumers, and with its multilayered merchandising strategy, other products and forms of gameplay from this world can be sold and consumed heartily. For those with background in Japanese culture and Japanese folklore more especially, these motifs invoke a sense of nostalgia, a taste of a deeply rooted cultural element that enhances the enjoyment of the product. Outside Japan, where knowledge of these motifs is minimal, some of this cultural information may be glossed over but the impression will definitely linger even after the games have ended. These children will grow familiar with creatures that litter Japanese folklore; to them the image of dragons will largely include serpentine dragons that do not breathe fire but can control water and command storms.

According to Thomas Looser, despite changes in the technology that relegated older forms of transmission of folklore such as oral storytelling as obsolete, this does not mean that the folk and folklore are no longer with us at all (2006, 85). He points out that just as analogic relations continue to be active within, instead of just simply being replaced by a digitalised world, it looks as if the folk still continue to have some role in the creation of an

identity, and ultimately in the manufacturing and repackaging of folklores (Looser 2006, 85). Looking at Japanese folklore and how it is being propagated and digitalised, one can see that there is a repositioning of folklore—the digitalisation of folktales resulted in a turning away from the countryside as source and locating the folk and folklore within the urban setting and in the hands of private institutions. Such repositioning of folklore can be seen in the *Pokémon* franchise. Folklores are now repackaged as part of game lore that are for the most part, created with and marketed in the global urban setting. They are not just relegated to relics of the past fondly perused in beautifully illustrated books but is reinvented and transmitted through different media appropriate for the needs of their time. By looking at folklore as an organic phenomenon, this development is then seen as an intrinsic part of the process that generates and proliferates folklore. More interestingly, privatisation now comes in as these newly digitalised forms of folklore are remade under a patent. But consumers become complicit in the proliferation of the narratives that were created by these companies as they transform, get transmitted into different media and spawn new and alternative narratives all on their own. Despite privatisation of these motifs, these stories and the narrative they carry are circulated around and remade in different forms of media available to consumers, feeding back into the lifeblood of these folklore itself to strengthen their hold into the new generation's consciousness.

Pokémon is not merely a set of objects that can be isolated for critical analysis in the characteristic mode of academic media studies. It might be more appropriate to describe it as a “culture practice” (Buckingham and Sefton-Green 2003, 379). Because of the nature of how the product is consumed, *Pokémon* is not just something one reads or writes about, but something one does. And although the parameters by which the act of “doing” is dictated by structures beyond the participants control —meaning the trading cards sold by the company as well as the video game cartridge and handheld console they buy from the company as well as tools that heavily facilitates their action and immersion in *Pokémon*, the use of these tools for interaction clearly requires active participation (Buckingham and Sefton-Green 2003, 279). In *Pokémon*, folklore has been digitalised by bypassing print text. It has become an interactive character the people can consume in different ways. They can consume it through the game itself, through printed *Pokémon* artworks released by the company and those created by fans, and even through toys and other merchandise available. Games are repository of cultural knowledge. Although marketed globally which sometimes glosses over their local content, it is not culturally neutral. In this case, traces

of similarity between Japanese folklore motifs and Pokémon characters makes the *Pokémon* franchise Japanese in odour.

While some scholars argue the advantage of digitalising folklore for posterity, along with recommendations on how to proceed about it (Blank 2009; Chowdhury *et al.* 2010), I argue that in a way, *Pokémon* has somewhat succeeded in serving as a lasting online digital archive for the folktales that have been used in its creation. By incorporating folklore, the *Pokémon* games from Gen 1 to Gen 6 can then be considered as a new form of folklore created through the organic process of redefining folklore in combination with the new technology where its narrative is disseminated, and through the participative interaction of players or gamers that consume the games. The centrality of the lore in the *Pokémon* video game, which is what is considered as canon by the fans, also points to the importance of information found and released through new content made available for it. This is the lifeblood that feeds into the creation of the different medium where these new forms of folklore are told in the form of movies, manga, anime, fan artworks and merchandise. The addition of how these products can be consumed in the form of movies, manga and the anime, while not included in the study can even add elements that enhances the entrenchment of these newly formed motif in the consumers' minds. The whole franchise is now a digital archive for these fantastical folkloric beings that influenced directly or indirectly their creation. *Pokémon* has fleshed out these folklore motifs and has put them at the front and centre through their games, allowing for players to interact with and bond with them in an ever-expanding virtual space called the *Pokémon* world.

Pokémon as digital products look to be living and breathing beings that inhabit an enchanted world. The folklore here is alive. Digitalisation has breathed in new life to folklore, enabling participative interaction between folklore and the audience, a previous component known to have died once the orality of folklore was reduced to print and media. Pokémon are programmed to exist in a virtual world that people can enter easily. These video games and the software encoded into the cartridge that contains these games are more than machines. These codes weave in a different high-tech powered lore unto itself. And although these creatures at times appear to have some form of personality, their makeup are contrived. These monsters move according to their program and as such are limited by the biases of their creators. They are filtered hegemonic lenses where the worldview of the employees of the *Pokémon* company (most especially prominent Japanese citizens such as Ken Sugimori and Junichiro Matsuda) at the helm is manifested.

More recently, the advent of *Pokémon Go* has put the Gen 1- Gen 4's original *Pokémon* characters at the front and centre of the current height of digital innovation. This new technology allows it to exist as moving figures inside a virtual reality, and more recently, has been able to cross over into our own reality. Using AR (augmented reality) technology, these motifs are made to look as if they appear in the real world and at the same time through smartphone cameras. In an era dominated by smartphones, the reach of folklores that have been imbibed in *Pokémon* have found a captive and participative audience in this century's young generation. Through their camera's lens, people are now able to see and catch Pokémon inside their homes, offices, and other real-life locations. More than sharing experiences and interacting with these motifs, individuals can now see a projected image of these folkloric characters through their phone's camera and take a picture with it not inside the game as a trainer but as their real-world personas. We may see an increase in the proliferation of these new forms of folklore in the future, these versions of the lore will last longer (at least physically through digitalisation) and despite geographical barriers, may reach much further remote locations. These new technologies that are able to digitalise and render folklore into beings that simulate life looks to be at the forefront of preserving and passing on this bit of cultural identity in the form of folklore in our generation. As there are different forms of technology and media wherein they can be made available, they also become more convenient and multidimensional tools for entertainment. The creation of these newly formed folklore is a dynamic interaction between Japanese cultural material, the technology they are coursed through and gameplay as performed by the consumers. Needless to say, these technologies flesh out these characters, giving us a new digitalised lens that we are now able to put on to experience folklore. Compared to other tangible, physical cultural products, these digitalised cultural products travel the wind (metaphorically and literally) around the world, appearing as pristine and detailed as the first day they were rendered by their illustrators and animators.

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Tradition vs. Pop Culture: Attracting tourists with the Cool Japan Campaign

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ABSTRACT

In 2008 the Japanese government set a goal of attracting 20 million foreign tourists by the Olympics in 2020. The country managed to achieve that goal by last year and has since revised their goal to 40 million tourists by 2020. A big part of the drive to increase tourist numbers has been the government led Cool Japan campaign. Attracting foreign tourists remains one of the mainstays of the Cool Japan campaign, as can be seen in the tourist-focused events and advertising witnessed overseas. One of the key aspects of the Cool Japan campaign has been to promote creative cultural industries, in particular businesses associated with anime, manga and gaming. This can be seen in such promotional activities as the closing ceremony for the Rio Olympics and the appointment of anime characters such as Doraemon, Atom Boy and Sailor Moon as ambassadors for Japan.

However, the campaign has been accused of lacking focus as it tries to simultaneously promote aspects of both traditional and modern Japanese culture. This can be seen in the Japan National Tourism Organisation's promotional campaigns featuring more traditional aspects of Japanese culture such as temples and festivals. In addition, there have been accusations that the Cool Japan campaign has done little to understand what foreign visitors are actually interested in and how best to promote the country. This paper investigates the success of the Cool Japan campaign and looks at the extent to which this fractured focus is actually attracting tourists. The research draws on data collected in Japan with those experiencing Japan as part of their vacation and interviews with tourists. The focus of this paper is on how the Cool Japan campaign influences potential tourists, and how effective the use of anime characters to promote Japan actually is.

KEYWORDS

Cool Japan; Tourism; Otaku; Anime; Tōkyō Olympics; Soft power.

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In 2002, the journalist Douglas McGray published a seminal paper entitled *Japan's Gross National Cool*. The article detailed how, rather than becoming obsolete following the economic crash of the late 1990s, Japan had become a “cultural superpower”. McGray argued that, while aspects of Japanese popular culture, including anime and manga characters, films, and art have made inroads into Western culture, little soft power impact was being made due to a reluctance on the part of the Japanese (2002, 53-54). Since then, the country, and more particularly the government, has been focusing on how ‘cool’ cultural aspects of Japan can be utilized to increase Japan’s soft

power. These popular culture aspects can be seen as closely related to otaku culture. Otaku culture includes a myriad of interests not limited to the collecting of anime and gaming figures, *dōjinshi* (fan created manga), gaming, idol group fans and card games (Ito et al 2012). Whilst traditionally viewed as being a counter-culture, and even as far as being thought of as deviant, otaku culture now enjoys a more mainstream appeal (Galbraith 2010). A recent survey found that 70% of young Japanese women self-identified as otaku, showing just how mainstream it has become (Japan Today 2018). The government is hoping to cash in on international interest in Japanese popular culture, and by extension otaku culture through its Cool Japan campaign.

Three main areas have been identified by the Cool Japan campaign for promotion internationally. The first area involves the promotion of Japanese culture overseas in order “to create a Japan boom’ in foreign countries” (Valaskivi 2016, 70). Activities in this category include the endorsement of Japanese culture events held at Japanese embassies overseas, and the promotion of Japanese TV overseas through the creation of sponsored channels. This is supported by the second area of focus, namely the promotion of Japanese goods internationally (Cool Japan Initiative, n.d.). This includes international market testing and support for the expansion of Japanese stores overseas. But it is the final area, that of promoting inbound tourism, that this paper is concerned with. This paper seeks to look at the relationship between the government’s Cool Japan campaign and its desire to increase tourists¹. This will be done by first clarifying what activities have been done under the auspices of the Cool Japan campaign, before moving on to look at some of the specific ventures aimed at attracting more tourists to the country, especially those connected to the forthcoming Tōkyō Olympics in 2020. Drawing on both published data and primary research data collected from interviews with visitors to Japan, this paper will conclude by analysing the efficacy of using otaku culture to attract tourists.

¹ This paper is not suggesting that the Japanese government is focusing entirely on otaku culture in order to attract tourism. Government documents suggest a varied approach, including trying to increase MICE tourism activities and increasing access to historic sites (MLIT 2016). Instead, the aim of this paper is to focus specifically on one part of Japanese culture, namely otaku culture, and the efficacy of using this as part of tourism promotion.

Cool Japan Campaign – Introduction

Throughout this paper I will refer to the Cool Japan campaign, however, this may mistakenly suggest that it is a unified government strategy. In fact, the Cool Japan campaign consists of a number of initiatives spearheaded by different government bodies, sometimes in conjunction but often with no connection to each other. One of the first of these initiatives was the creation and sponsorship in 2005 of the World Cosplay Summit by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA), the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism (MLIT), the Ministry of Economy, and Trade and Industry (METI). Cosplay involves dressing up as characters from popular media, including anime and manga, and participating in social events (Winge 2006, 65; Lamerichs 2013, 167). The participants often pose or act out skits portraying their favourite character in both competitions and private gatherings. In recent years the activity has increased in popularity across the globe, with many cosplay competitions now held internationally (Lamerichs 2013, 169) Ostensibly a contest for enthusiasts of cosplay, the World Cosplay Summit is largely connected to the promotion of tourist sites within the Aichi area. The event brochure features advertisements from pop culture related tourism sites such as Laguna Ten Bosch, which is hosting an exhibition on *One Piece*, a popular anime aired both within Japan and internationally, and a guide to local contents tourism sites across the Aichi region (World Cosplay Summit 2017, n.p.). Internationally there has been a lot of interest in promoting tourism to sites featured in or associated with popular media including books, TV and film. The Japanese government has been increasingly interested in promoting sites featured in popular media, such as anime and manga, under the activity known locally as “kontentsu tsūrizumu (contents tourism)” (Seaton and Yamamura 2015, 2). It could be argued that events such as the World Cosplay Summit make a strong connection between the Cool Japan campaign and tourism.

Other activities include the appointment of Doraemon² as Anime Ambassador in 2008. Supported by MOFA, Doraemon toured embassies around the world promoting the opening of the film *Doraemon The Movie: Nobita's Dinosaur*. In addition to promoting the movie, using Doraemon as an ambassador was heralded as a means by which people could get to know Japan better. This is demonstrated by comments of the then Minister of Foreign Affairs, Kōmura Masahiko who said that he “wished people

² Doraemon, a children's anime that has been running since 1979, was voted as the most popular character in Japan by a recent poll (Japan Times 2018, n.p.)

around the world to know more about the positive side of Japan through Japanese anime that are universally popular” (MOFA 2008, n.p.). This demonstrates one of the subsequent aims of the campaign; to increase knowledge of and interest in Japan. However, very few people outside of Asia know anything about Doraemon (Cooper-Chen 2012, 53), so the efficacy of choosing such a character as an ambassador is questionable at best.

In addition, various Japanese government agencies have been engaged in a plethora of activities aimed at increasing the international awareness of Japanese culture. These activities range from MEXT and JETRO’s involvement in the Cannes Film Market to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Japan Foundation’s sponsorship of a kabuki show in Madrid. In recent years more than eight government agencies have been involved in the promotion of food, traditional culture, media content, fashion and design in more than one hundred and fifty countries across all continents (Cabinet Office, n.d.).

In order to enable the holding of these events the government decided to commit further to the promotion of Japanese culture with the creation of the Cool Japan Fund in 2013. The joint private-public partnership was initially given over sixty billion yen³ to promote Japanese interests overseas (Japan Spotlight 2014, 59). Projects chosen by the Cool Japan Fund receive funding from both the government fund and private enterprises associated with the scheme. Some of the projects they have been engaged in include developing venues for the export of Japanese food in Asia, the Middle East, and Europe, and the creation of a Contents Academy in Taiwan to train young people in anime, gaming and manga arts (Cool Japan Fund 2017, n.p.).

When looking at the projects sponsored by the Cool Japan Fund it is clear that their interests are varied and represent little cohesion in terms of an overarching theme. Perhaps the most important endeavour with regard to this paper is the number of projects aimed at promoting Japanese food. According to a 2017 JNTO survey, 68% of visitors to Japan cited food as being the main reason they were interested in coming to the country (JNTO 2017, n.p.) Although there is little evidence that the promotion of Japanese food internationally is directed at attracting tourists, instead the aim appears to be the advancement of sales of Japanese food internationally. The attraction of tourists would seem to be a happy side effect.

³ \$540 million as of August 2018.

Inbound tourism to Japan

Following a period of tourist stagnation in the 1990s when the average number of tourists stood at approximately 3.8 million, the Japanese government implemented an active campaign to increase the number of foreign visitors to Japan in the early 2000s (Henderson 2017, 90). In 2003, the Japanese government initiated the 'Visit Japan' campaign, with the aim of attracting 10 million visitors to Japan by 2010 (Soshiroda 2005, 1101). According to Henderson (2017), despite failing to achieve that goal due to the global financial crisis in 2008 and the Great East Japan Earthquake in 2011⁴, the government continued with its aim of increasing tourist numbers and set a new goal of achieving 20 million visitors by the Tōkyō Olympics in 2020. This goal was revised again in 2015 to 30 million visitors when Japan achieved the initial target early (Henderson 2017, 91). Since then the government has once again revised their incoming tourist goal to 40 million by 2020 (Japan Times 2016). In addition, the government has particularly identified the US, the UK and Australia as countries they wish to attract tourists from. Attracting tourists from markets such as Europe and North America is important as a reliance on Asian tourists, Japan's current largest market, could pose problematic if they suddenly choose to go elsewhere. Therefore, a diverse source of tourists is preferable for long-term tourism stability and sustainability. (Andonian et al, 2016, 13). With the government specifically trying to attract tourists from the geographically further away countries like the US and the UK, events including the upcoming Rugby World Cup in 2019, the Summer Olympics in 2020 are being seen as a key resource. As these sporting events take place over a longer period of time so visitors from these areas may be more prepared to travel to Japan to witness the events (Kobori 2017, 19). It is also hoped that the foreign visitors will be more inclined to visit different areas of Japan due to the presence of the sporting events (Kobori 2017, 20).

On the face of it, the campaign to increase the number of inbound tourists to Japan has been highly successful. In the fifteen short years since the government pledged to increase tourism, the number of tourists has gone up from 5 million to more than 28 million in 2017 (JNTO, no date a). However independent research has shown that tourism has not been as successful as it could have been. Andonian et al (2016) state that whilst many people are attracted to Japan, not that many are coming. Only 40% of

⁴ The initial goal of 10 million inbound tourists was finally achieved in 2013 (Japan Times 2013, n.p.).

Western tourists who claim they wish to visit the country actually come (Andonian et al 2016, 13). Therefore, the government is at least partially failing to attract tourists from Western countries, something which, as noted above, is a main goal.

International tourism advertising

The advertising produced by the Japan National Tourism Organization (JNTO) has shown an equally varied view of Japan as the Cool Japan campaign, however, the emphasis does not rely so heavily on the promotion of Japanese popular culture. The images used to advertise the country are as diverse as Mt. Fuji with springtime blossom, geisha and Maiko in Kyōto, theme parks and shopping districts. There is a nod towards the government's desire to use Japanese pop culture with a few information sources on contents tourism. For example, the JNTO has created a Japan Anime Guide map, which highlights some of the areas where tourists can take part in an anime pilgrimage. Anime pilgrimage is the act of visiting sites that have been featured in anime, or other areas deemed as important by fans of anime (Okamoto 2015, 21; Seaton and Yamamura 2015, 3). The brochure also explains a little about otaku culture and some places to visit to experience it such as Akihabara (JNTO no date b). In addition, the Anime Tourism Association was established in 2016 to enable the promotion of anime pilgrimage sites to fans of Cool Japan (Anime Tourism Association 2016, n.p.). This organisation solicited votes from anime fans in both English and Japanese to come up with the pilgrimage route of 88 anime sites. These are located across Japan and therefore adhere to the organisation's desire to increase the economic effects of tourism in diverse areas of Japan (Anime Tourism Association 2016, n.p.). Whilst these endeavours to attract tourists through the use of Japan's popular culture are by no means the only method being used by the JNTO and similar organisations, we can see that efforts are being made in this area. However, it must be noted that contents tourism is only a small part of what is being promoted by the JNTO; much of the advertising concentrates on sites of historical, cultural and natural significance.

Promotion of Tōkyō Olympics

One of the issues with attracting tourists to Japan is the contradictory way the country is presented and promoted to the world through campaigns such as Cool Japan and the associated tourism advertising done by organisations such as the Japan

National Tourism Organisation (JNTO). The advertising and promotion campaigns by the different agencies shows a rather fractured image of Japan being presented to the world. A look at the JNTO website reveals that the organisation concentrates on offering a traditional view of Japan, one that, based on my initial research findings, is appreciated and desired by Japan's current tourist market. On the other hand, the various aspects of the Cool Japan campaign aim to attract different people to Japan. However, we must question too much reliance on presenting popular aspects of Japanese culture, focusing in particular on anime, manga, and gaming. For example, events such as the World Cosplay Summit and the Japan International Manga Award, in which international manga artists compete for a chance to come to Japan to travel and meet with publishers, are mainly focused on those who already have an interest in Japan and its popular culture. As such, the events are not overly focused on attracting new demographics to the country. These events have the potential to spread aspects of Japanese culture, however, the tourists attracted will still be those who have an existing interest in certain cultural points such as anime and manga.

This rather limited view of Japan can also be seen in the way Japan is presented in the lead up to the upcoming Tōkyō Olympics in 2020. Starting with the original bid, the promotional events for the Tōkyō Olympics have shown a distinct bias towards Japanese popular culture, far in excess of the way popular culture is utilized in other Cool Japan activities.

The reliance on popular culture figures, especially anime characters, started with the appointment of Doraemon as the official Olympic ambassador in 2013. At this stage Tōkyō was still bidding for the event, however, Doraemon was involved from the start. Doraemon was an interesting choice given his relative obscurity in many countries, however, he was joined by nine other anime stars in 2017. These include more well-known characters such as Goku from *Dragonball*, Astroboy, and Sailormoon.

The dependence on popular culture characters was further reiterated in the closing ceremony of the Rio Olympics in 2016. A video showed Doraemon and Hello Kitty assisting Mario to help get Prime Minister Abe to the Olympics via a tunnel drilled through the Earth. The Prime Minister then appeared out of a game-inspired tube in the middle of the Olympic stadium dressed as Super Mario. The connection between the forthcoming Tōkyō Olympics and popular culture figures was firmly established. The Rio event was generally well received, as was particularly seen with private

enterprises such as Nintendo seeing a three percent rise in its stock price following the media stunt (New York Times 2016). The use of Mario and anime characters such as Doraemon during the Rio event has shown the government's commitment to using icons of Japanese popular culture to promote the country.

In addition, the Tōkyō Olympic committee has suggested that an anime parade will be held to promote the Games. The President of the Tōkyō Organizing Committee of the Olympic and Paralympic Games, former Prime Minister Mori Yoshirō stated that whilst foreigners may not know sumō and kabuki, they do know anime characters and therefore they plan to hold an anime parade. Given that sumō is internationally regarded and known to be a famous Japanese sport, this comment is somewhat confusing. Instead of conducting market research on what people in other countries would respond to best regarding the promotion of cultural icons, the committee has once again relied on anime and gaming figures, but what research or theory this presumption is based on has not been made public. Even the siding at the construction site of the new Tōkyō Olympic stadium features scenes from the anime movie *Akira*.

As seen above, both the Cool Japan campaign and the Tōkyō Organizing Committee of the Olympic and Paralympic Games are heavily focusing on Japanese popular culture, especially anime and otaku culture to bring tourists to Japan. However, while the Olympics has clearly not been held yet, and the Cool Japan campaign is ongoing, it is unknown whether this focus on popular Japanese culture will bear fruit in terms of promoting the games and increasing tourism to non-Olympic sites. However, given the seeming lack of reasoning behind the approach, along with the data presented below, it seems unlikely.

What tourists want

In recent years, there has been a series of commentaries in the newspapers that the Japanese government is not consulting foreigners about why they come to Japan and what they want to see. It has been argued that the Cool Japan campaign has been telling foreign visitors what to see instead of responding to what they actually want to see (Chavez 2017 n.p.; Boas 2016 n.p.). An analysis of data collected from foreign visitors to Japan would appear to support this. The Japan Tourism Agency, a part of the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism has conducted surveys of visitors to Japan as they arrive and leave the country since 2010. An analysis of these figures

reveals interesting patterns regarding Japan’s use of popular culture to attract foreign tourists. The data in Table 1 was taken from the survey carried out by the JTA in 2017. Multiple answers could be chosen in each case:

	What tourists wanted to do before they came to Japan	What tourists did during their trip	What tourists want to do next time
Eat Japanese food	70.6	96.0	55.0
Shopping	58.5	89.3	45.3
Nature/scenery sightseeing	51.2	73.6	43.4
Experience history/culture	17.3	25.8	25.2
Stay in a Japanese inn	21.0	33.6	27.7
Bathe in a hot spring	29.9	38.7	43.0
Visit film/anime settings	4.8	5.2	11.4
Enjoy Japanese pop culture (fashion, anime etc.)	10.0	15.4	15.0

Table 1. *JTA 2017 Survey Data.* Figures represent percentage.
Source: Japan Tourism Agency, 2017.

As can be seen, while Japanese food is the most popular reason for coming and returning to Japan, there is a high interest in Japanese nature and culture experiences. This interest is high before tourists visit the country and raises once they have visited. This is especially true of visiting hot springs, which saw nearly a 13% rise in interest before and after visiting Japan. Otaku culture, however, shows a different story. The interest in Japanese popular culture prior to visiting Japan is very low but rises dramatically once tourists have visited Japan. This intimates that the advertising promoted overseas is not achieving the aim of attracting foreign tourists. Nevertheless, the interest in this kind of culture is still fairly low even after the tourists have been to Japan.

Field Research: Tourist data obtained from interviews

From the autumn of 2016 to spring 2018, semi-structured interviews were carried out with 63 foreign tourists in Akihabara, Japan. Data was collected using purposeful sampling techniques; participants were selected based on the location they were visiting and the activities they were doing. Akihabara has been described as the physical manifestation for a community of interest focusing on otaku culture (Morikawa 2008, 125), and therefore is of interest to those wanting to experience

Japanese popular culture⁵. 21 of the participants (33.3%) were traveling around Japan independently, and 42 people (66.7%) were taking small group tours of the Akihabara area lead by myself. Since 2016, I have been engaged in conducting walking tours of the Akihabara area in which multiple aspects of otaku culture, including anime, manga and gaming, are discussed. Akihabara is seen as the hub for otaku culture as many enthusiasts gather to buy goods and exchange cultural knowledge. Approximately 80% of the tour group participants came from the US, with a few from the UK, Australia and France. Participants' ages ranged from 28 to 66, but approximately 40% were aged between 55 and 65, and 30% were between 30 and 35 years old. Due to the expensive nature of the tour, most participants were working professionals who had travelled quite extensively. I also approached 21 other foreign tourists in the area who had no guide. The age range of this group was lower than the tour group with a minimum of 27 and a maximum of 37 (mean = 33). 16 people (76%) from this group were from the United States, and 5 (24%) were from Australia. Interview and discussion questions mainly centred around what brought the visitors to Japan, and what their impression was of Japan both before they came and once they had had spent some time in the country (see appendix A for interview protocol). The participants were separated into three categories based on their pre-existing knowledge of Japanese otaku culture; those with no knowledge of otaku culture and no guide, those with no knowledge but who were taking a guided tour, and those who were enthusiastic consumers of anime, manga, gaming etc. and taking a tour. These three groups of tourists all had vastly different experiences and opinions depending on the circumstances of their visit.

Data discussion

The qualitative findings of the interviews conducted for this research seem to confirm the findings presented in the quantitative JTA data discussed in Table 1 above. In addition, the qualitative data gained from interviews adds new insights into the possible importance of Japanese popular culture in attracting foreign visitors to Japan⁶. The results can be best

⁵ The data collection location was chosen because it would likely provide participants most relevant to this study: foreign tourists who have some level of interest in otaku culture. As Akihabara is known as the 'home' of otaku culture, interviewing participants in this location was more likely to provide data regarding the impact and importance of popular Japanese culture in attracting foreign tourists to Japan.

⁶ It should be noted that due to the small sample size, this data is not claiming to be representative of the views of all tourists coming to Japan. It is instead a qualitative exploratory investigation into what factors have influenced the decision of some tourists to visit Japan, especially those who have some interest in

understood by dividing the participants into different categories depending on their level of interest and knowledge of Japanese otaku and popular cultures.

The first category of visitors was made up of 15 tourists who were visiting Akihabara by themselves (not taking any tours), but who had no or little knowledge of or interest in Japanese pop culture products. When asked about why they were visiting the area, just under 85% professed to not really knowing. They stated the main reason they came was just because Akihabara was listed in their guidebooks and was famous as a place to go. Two people (7%) stated that they came after seeing it mentioned in movies or travel shows, and one person stated that they knew Japan was famous for anime and therefore wanted to experience the culture. This data shows that participants in the first group had little knowledge of anime and most had not actually watched any, but their image was that Akihabara was a place associated with the industry. However, the tourists in question had little idea what they should be looking at or experiencing. Some commented that the area just seemed to be full of shops. Most walked around the streets but without knowing specifically which buildings to go into were left just taking photos of the large billboards sporting young girls from anime shows. Many aspects of the culture the tourists want to experience are abstract, for example, anime is to be watched but has little physical form, and therefore as a tourist destination anime is a difficult concept. If we discount anime pilgrimage there is little 'place' associated with the media, and for those not interested in purchasing anime, Akihabara has little to offer in terms of this kind of culture. Overall, based on analysis of the interview data, the general level of satisfaction with Akihabara in this group was quite low, and many were left feeling confused or put off by otaku culture.

The second group consisted of 42 people who, like the first group, had little knowledge or interest in anime, manga and gaming. However, participants in this group were all partaking in a guided tour of the Akihabara area. The tours included a potted history of the area and the development of the otaku sub-culture. The guided groups visited various stores, where they could learn about the different kinds of Japanese otaku interests. In addition, the tourists had the opportunity to visit a maid

otaku culture given they were visiting or taking a tour of a famous otaku area (Akihabara). This research aims to provide some qualitative data regarding the JTA quantitative data presented in Table 1. More rigorous quantitative data would need to be gathered in order to bolster the preliminary findings shown in this paper. The descriptive statistical data offered here is only intended to ease comprehension.

café⁷. Maid cafes represent one of the few activities that tourists can engage in as the area of Akihabara is largely focused around shopping. When questioned, the second group reacted somewhat differently. Whilst they had nothing further to add when it came to their motivations for coming to the area, their ultimate satisfaction levels were significantly higher. Based on the interview data, it seems that the higher knowledge of the Japanese culture they were experiencing led to higher levels of interest and satisfaction among the tourists. Whilst they may have had little initial knowledge almost all of the interviewees (95%) expressed interest in the culture once it was explained. However, it must be noted that most also left with an aversion to, or at least a somewhat negative view of otaku culture, particularly regarding the collecting of goods featuring obviously very young anime characters. Typical responses indicated a bewilderment with collectable products such as figures that presented a sexualized portrayal of woman, particularly the sexualisation of young girls. For many visitors, seeing these types of products for the first time, along with the images portrayed in the manga on display in the shops, lead to a wider discussion on the state of equality and women's role in society in Japan.

The third category consisted of six independent travellers who had prior knowledge of Japanese pop culture and had come to Akihabara specifically to engage with the culture. Most of these tourists had come to the area to buy goods related to their favourite anime or game, and to soak up the atmosphere of the place they had heard so much about. However, when questioned further, none of these tourists had come to Japan for the primary purpose of visiting Akihabara or engaging with pop culture. They were happy to spend an afternoon shopping for their pop culture goods, and some even knew about the Anime pilgrimage site at the Kanda Myogen shrine steps that was featured in the anime *Love Live*. But an afternoon was all the time they were going to spend there. The rest of their trip was to be spent doing similar activities to the rest of the tourists, *i.e.* visiting Kyōto and Ōsaka. In fact, their behaviour seemed in no way different to that of the tourists with no or little interest in Japanese pop culture, and they spent a similar amount of time indulging in the area. Their general levels of

⁷ "In these cafe's, waitresses costumed as maids serve food, pose for pictures and play table top games with customers. When not filling orders, the waitresses, called "maids" (meido), wander around the cafe' and engage customers in conversation." (Galbraith 2013, 1).

satisfaction were high, but once they left Akihabara, they were going to follow the same tourist path as the groups with no interest in pop culture.

The comments by the various foreign tourists interviewed reflect one of the main problems with using pop culture to try and attract tourists to Japan. Much of Japanese pop culture is intangible; anime and manga characters have little physical presence short of buying products, therefore it is difficult for tourists to actually experience anime, manga and gaming. Those with little interest will not want to buy the products, and as there is little else to do in places of pop culture such as Akihabara, the tourists end up being disappointed. This pattern is supported by other research;

[...] Korea, the United Kingdom, and the United States were the three groups most disappointed after visiting Akihabara. In 2007, Akihabara was the fifteenth most recommended place but the eighth most disappointing for visitors (Galbraith 2010, 225)

Even those who are enthusiastic about Japanese pop culture will only spend a short amount of time and money engaging with the culture. After an afternoon in Akihabara they proceed to follow the same tourist route as everyone else, concentrating on Japan's natural and historical sites. In fact, those with an interest in anime and manga don't spend any more time with pop culture, but they do perhaps receive a higher level of satisfaction from visiting Akihabara. Those tourists who had no prior knowledge, but who through the use of a guide could gain a greater understanding, may not have left disappointed, but the viewpoint they left with might not have the desired effect the government was looking for. Many merely confirmed their existing view of Japan being strange, weird or sexually disturbing. One British couple interviewed had come to Japan because of their interest in Japanese pop culture as presented in the media. They mentioned some of the popular images of Japan as having strange or disturbing cultural aspects, such as high school girl's underwear for sale in vending machines, and pornographic anime. Rather than their visit to Japan changing this opinion, their experiences in Akihabara merely confirmed it.

Conclusion

It can be argued that the Cool Japan campaign in general is succeeding in attracting interest in Japan. The varied nature of the activities appeals to many demographics potentially attracting a greater number of tourists. However, despite the variety of

projects supported much of the media attention focuses on the promotion of anime, manga and gaming, or so-called otaku culture. This is especially true for the advertising of the Tōkyō Olympics. The choice of anime characters, such as Goku from *Dragon Ball*, and Luffy from *One Piece* as Olympic ambassadors, coupled with various events featuring anime characters shows the Organizing Committee's bias towards otaku-related culture. The question must be asked as to whether this is the best way to represent Japan and the Tōkyō Olympics, especially given the fact that Japan is trying to increase tourist numbers in the run up to the event.

An analysis of the motivations behind a small sample of tourists coming to Japan reveals little impact from anime and manga. For most visitors interviewed, Japanese food, historical sites and areas of natural beauty are the main reasons for visiting Japan. Even those who have an interest in Japanese popular culture, come primarily for the three areas mentioned before. Very few came to Japan solely to engage in contents tourism and therefore, the data collected in this research suggests we have to question the efficacy of pushing otaku-related culture to such an extent. Even the tourists who confessed to an enthusiasm for otaku culture only intended to spend an afternoon in Akihabara, the home of otaku culture, during their entire trip to Japan. In addition, few if any had any intention on visiting other otaku sights around Japan, and none planned on engaging in activities such as anime tours.

Given international visitor's interest in traditional culture, it is surprising that so little of this has been utilised by the Tōkyō Olympic Committee. Advertising for the 2019 Rugby World Cup features aspects of traditional culture and nature. Posters featuring a stylised Mt. Fuji and traditional indigo prints are appealing to foreign tourists, and cater to their desires to visit places of natural and cultural significance whilst in Japan. It could be argued that Japan is trying to project a certain image with the promotion of anime figures. The creative director behind the Rio Olympics closing ceremony, Sasaki Hiroshi stated that in using anime and gaming characters in the event would present Japan as a fun peace-loving country (nippon.com 2017). However, in terms of tourism there is little evidence that otaku culture is attracting tourists and therefore the Tōkyō Olympics Organising Committee might be better spending their efforts elsewhere.

APPENDIX A: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

1. Have you been to Japan before?
2. Why did you choose to come to Japan (please provide as many reasons as necessary)?
3. How long are you staying?
4. Why did you come to Akihabara/Why did you choose to take this tour?
5. What did you know about Japan before you came?
6. Have you heard of the Cool Japan campaign?
7. What do you know about otaku culture?
8. What was your image of Japan before you arrived?
9. Has this image changed since you have been here?
10. After visiting Akihabara, what are your impressions of otaku culture?

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Special section editorial

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This issue of *Mutual Images* Journal presents, in this special section, a collection of essays centred around the theme of “Japanese Arts and Politics”. The articles within this section focus on the relations between Japanese art and political themes.

This section of the journal is, in part, the output of a workshop and research project designed by Eriko Tomizawa-Kay—a lecturer at the University of East Anglia (UEA)—and titled *Reflective Transitions of Politics in the Arts: Examining the Atomisation of Japanese Socio-political Milieus through Art*. The workshop was held at UEA, in Norwich, on 24 August 2017, bringing together scholars to investigate how Japanese arts have been shaped by political forces in the “neoliberal” world order, as an analytical dimension to study and comment on the process of atomisation of society as it can be perceived in the arts. The workshop’s papers presented empirical examples of internalised art productions and art currents in Japan, in juxtaposition to, or contrast with, art expressing national or regional politics. The contributors focused on the presence of political notions and messages in Japanese fine arts, popular visual media, visual entertainment forms, and visual arts at large, and on the possible intersections among “western” arts and artistic representations of political themes concerning the Japanese context.

As a collaborative endeavour that expands interdisciplinary research contributing to a growing literature, this project attempts to break new ground in the study of the intersections between art history and politics. It combines a cross-collaborative research agenda among colleagues within the UEA and the fostering of new links with external partners, as well as re-confirming a number of valuable existing links in Japan.

We—Tomizawa-Kay as the main designer and organiser, together with Marco Pellitteri as her main collaborator on the workshop’s scientific design—believe that the workshop achieved its objectives in terms of engagement in a promising new subject area, creating multiple new international connections among both Japanese and UK-

based scholars, and Japanese Studies scholars within multiple institutions in or beyond the United Kingdom. Moreover, both the project and the workshop attracted interest from a wider audience as well as funding from different sources. In fact, the project is currently conducted, and the workshop was organised, thanks to the economic support of the Japan Foundation and the Sainsbury Institute for Japanese Arts and Cultures as well as the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science (JSPS). Namely, in the latter's case, support was provided through the London branch. In particular, part of the research and logistics related to the workshop's organisation were financially supported by a "Collaboration Prize" from the JSPS that Pellitteri was granted to fund collaboration in Tomizawa-Kay's project.

The workshop and project are, therefore, particularly significant because they successfully unite a collaborative set of scholarly activities that encourage interdisciplinary research on Japan within and outside of the UK. All the workshop's sessions were very well-attended and progressed into lively open debates, revolving around political notions circulated in Japanese fine arts, popular cultures (such as comics and animated cartoons made in Japan, known as manga and anime respectively) and visual arts more broadly. The day of study in Norwich also covered the relationships between "western" arts, representations of Japanese politics, and the politicisation of art. In so doing, it brought together a diverse selection of academics and practitioners from as far afield as Tōkyō, Okinawa, Kōbe, Hong Kong, and the United Kingdom, to identify political processes in the atomisation of society through the study of a variety of art forms. The contexts of the art forms under scrutiny included their relationships with local, national, and international politics; to this end, the workshop was articulated into three panel sessions: "The Politics of Art in Japan: Expressions of Regional, National and International Issues"; "Popular Culture and Political Art in Japan: Expressions of Atomisation and Internalisation"; and "Political Processes in Japanese Art: Expressions of Continuity and Change".

The initial outcomes of the project conducted by Eriko Tomizawa-Kay included this successful workshop event and bringing together the scholars noted above in a new collaborative environment, which we expect to expand into further research and publications. Having invited approximately 50 participants from the UK, Japan, and elsewhere overseas, our final registered attendance (based on the count from our dedicated project website) was a total of 43 attendees, although this was actually

slightly exceeded on the day. Based on almost entirely positive participant feedback, we believe that the immediate impact has been substantial, as confirmed by many more indirect participants (e.g. via our direct networks and university social media links).

Below, we present the programme of the workshop.¹ The programme is followed by summary introductory comments on the section's articles.

- ✎ Keynote speaker: Atsushi Miura (Professor, The Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, University of Tōkyō). *The Politics of Contemporary Japanese Paintings: From the History Paintings of Former "Number 1 High School" to the War Paintings of Tsuguharu Fujita.*
- ✎ Session 1: *Politics of Art in Japan: Expressions of Regional, National and International Issues.* This panel examined empirical case studies of how wartime art in Japan has been integral to the expression of political ideas related to national identity, regional struggle, and reflective othering. The aim was to explore linkages and disconnects between these issues and their socio-political framings.
 - Minjong Shin (University of Tōkyō). *The Politics of Colonial Painting: The Travels of Japanese Painters in Korea.*
 - Eriko Tomizawa-Kay (University of East Anglia). *The Dynamics of the Concept of Modern Regional Japanese Art: The Message of Okinawan Arts in Regional Struggle and Politics.*
 - Marie Yasunaga (University of Tōkyō / University of Amsterdam). *Politics and Identity in the (Re)presentation of Japanese Art in Modern and Contemporary Museums.*
- ✎ Session 2: *Popular Culture and Political Art in Japan: Expressions of Atomisation and Internalisation.* This panel discussed how contemporary Japanese arts have been interpreted in East Asian and European contexts. It focused on how Japanese art has been shaped by political forces in the contemporary "neoliberal" world order, the resulting processes of atomisation in society, and the internalisation of political issues through Japanese art forms.

¹ The academic affiliations of the participants reported in the workshop's programme are based on the affiliations held at the time of the workshop in late August 2017. There may have been changes in the academic position of some of the participants since then.

- Marco Pellitteri (Kōbe University / Ca' Foscari University of Venice). *Hints of Politics from Animated Giant Robots in the 1970s: Reading "UFO Robo Grendizer" in the Japanese and Italian Contexts.*
- Rayna Denison (University of East Anglia). *Nationalism in a Superflat World: Anime, Art and the National Representations in Mamoru Hosoda's "Summer Wars".*
- Manuel Hernández-Pérez (University of Hull). *American Politics as a Transnational Popular Narrative: Narratological Structures of Shōnen Manga and Their Cross-Cultural Readings in Kaiji Kawaguchi's "Eagle" (1997-2001).*

☞ Session 3: *Political Processes in Japanese Art: Expressions of Continuity and Change.* This panel reflected on the processes underlying the changing currents of contemporary art in Japan's diverse social milieus: from early 20th century Modernism, pre-war nationalism and post-war Keynesianism, to neoliberal and neo-nationalist turns. It traced a diverse range of literature and artworks that intersect political and personal lives, examining the shifting messages emerging from a broad range of Japanese art forms, including their regional significance, the role of art in Japan's international relations, and the political expression of Japanese art through various media forms.

- Speakers: Ra Mason (UEA). *Political Art in Contemporary Japan: A Cursory Glance into Internalisation, Neoliberalisation, and Atomisation.*
- Yoshimasa Kamiya (Formerly of Itoman City Office). *Peace Promotion through Art in Itoman City.*
- Zhiyuan Pan (University of Cambridge). *Tintin in the Advent of the Sino-Japanese War: The Story of "The Blue Lotus" and Zhang Chongren.*

This section of this issue is given shape and substance by the articles by Rayna Denison, Hope B. Steiner, Eriko Tomizawa-Kay, and Ewa Machotka.

Of these articles, two are products of the original workshop, those by Denison and Tomizawa-Kay; the other participants, due to a variety of constraints, were unable to submit an article for this issue. As such, we have added two more essays that were submitted to the journal through the CFP for the workshop, and were therefore specially chosen for this section due to their focus on the workshop's themes.

As a last remark, there are—understandably—some changes in the structure or wording of the articles' titles compared to those of the original papers presented at the workshop: the articles published here are re-elaborations of workshop talks and have evolved from drafts for an oral presentation into fully-fledged papers for this issue.

Eriko Tomizawa-Kay's article focuses on a very peculiar topic in the history of contemporary Japan and contemporary Japanese art: The Battle of Okinawa during the Pacific War, and its artistic representations. After a thorough literature review and the explanation of how the historic battle was depicted in several art forms and contexts, the author mainly focuses on Okinawa-born artist Gima Hiroshi (1923-2017), a particularly revealing and special case, because the artist portrayed the event through a variety of art forms and techniques, adopting an approach that the article's author suggests to be transmedial. The essay is very rich in that it puts Gima's work in the wider context of the general artistic production in Japan on this particular episode, and also studies the artistic production of other relevant artists such as Maruki Toshi and Maruki Iri, taking care not to neglect forms of popular entertainment such as manga, along with more "canonical" art forms, such as oil painting on canvas or woodblock prints. In this sense, the study expands to other relevant creators, such as a manga artist of the current generation, Kyō Machiko (b. 1980). The article therefore offers a new perspective on how war, its political reasons, and its social impact are depicted in Japanese art; a perspective, in other words, that goes beyond the numerous analyses that recently have, perhaps too often and perhaps somewhat ineffectually, focused on the same—however important and relevant—cases of the manga *Hadashi no Gen* by the late Nakazawa Keiji or the war manga semi-biographies by the late Mizuki Shigeru.

Hope B. Steiner's essay is an in-depth monograph on the wartime works of Matsumoto Shunsuke (1912-1948); that is, his works of art produced during the Fifteen-Year War (1931-45). Steiner frames Matsumoto's art production as "quiet resistance" to the officially approved and encouraged form of art during wartime, the *sensō-ga* or war paintings, and proves how this artist's production overtly, but peacefully, defied such military pressure or imposition. In fact, Matsumoto produced in those years a variety of landscape paintings, in sharp contrast with the spirit of that time. Steiner reconstructs Matsumoto's career and artistic spirit, contextualising his marginal position in Japanese wartime society due to his physical handicap (deafness). The essay is a useful and detailed study of a subject that is less analysed in art criticism

and Japanese studies than it should be, and also in this case—as well as in the article by Eriko Tomizawa-Kay—*Mutual Images* Journal is happy to display a number of pictures that illustrate Matsumoto’s work, not only from the point of view of its cultural importance in a period of turmoil and pain for Japan, but also from that of a stylistic and aesthetic analysis of his artwork, which draws from several art traditions, including the theme of urban-industrial landscapes that in those same years were a *tòpos* and a political-stylistic trend in European and American painting. In his own way, Matsumoto, the author argues, “waged a quiet battle of his own [...] through his art. Though he died young, it was Matsumoto who emerged victorious in the end”.

Ewa Machotka’s essay virtuously blends academic scholarship on fine arts and propaedeutic explanations on its very subject. It delves into the geopolitics of “ecological art”, developing an analysis on examples of art works from Japan and South Korea. It is a study on how art can be and in many instances is a carrier of ecological meanings in its making and in its final messages. The author explains the concept of *ecoaesthetics* through a comprehensive review of recent art produced under the inspiration of eco-friendly, political-cultural purposes of sensibilisation both of the public and of the system of the arts at large: visual arts, art installations, architecture, landscape art and “nature art”. *Mutual Images* Journal is particularly proud to host this article, which incorporates a wealth of photography on ecological artworks.

Rayna Denison’s article is an original contribution, examining how recent Japanese animation displays notions of Japan in a direction that could be at least partially framed as “nationalistic”, as the author argues using a case study of one of the films by Hosoda Mamoru, the award-winning *Summer Wars* (2009). Hosoda is considered in Japan and by many film critics a new Hayao Miyazaki of sorts, together with other directors of the new generation such as Makoto Shinkai; therefore, an analysis of his work is particularly cogent in that area where film studies and area studies converge. It could be argued, in general, that every Japanese animation director show, directly or indirectly, some degree of presentation of Japanese society and culture; although whether such presentation can be labelled as “nationalism” is subject to debate. Denison’s essay especially focuses on the way Hosoda, in particular, arguably presents and emphasises in *Summer Wars* several aspects of Japanese society under a positive light and in contrast to alternative models of social organisation and national culture. Before tackling the specific case of this beautiful movie (which has probably inspired, directly or indirectly, at least two

Hollywood blockbusters: *Inception* by C. Nolan, 2010 and *Ready Player One* by S. Spielberg, 2018), Denison offers a well-articulated explanation of the meaning of “nationalism in Japanese animation” within the proposed framework.

The topic of “nationalism” in Japanese animation is also discussed in the book review presented in this same issue of *Mutual Images*.

To avoid any conflict of interest, *Mutual Image*' main editor Marco Pellitteri has not published his workshop paper in this issue. (His written contributions to this journal include editorials, book reviews and, in forthcoming issues, research materials. More on these “research materials” in the editorial of the next issue of *Mutual Images*). As a curious anecdote and a final light remark, Pellitteri's was not able to participate physically in the Norwich workshop, as originally planned, but rather virtually via video conference. In fact, his flights were delayed due to severe adverse weather conditions, and his entire trip to England had to be cancelled! In the end, he gave his presentation from a hotel room in Hong Kong, where he had been forced to stopover for three days (due to a level-10 typhoon!) before flying back to his original departure airport in Ōsaka. Just some of the unexpected events that may happen when attempting intercontinental trips to international workshops!

Have a pleasant read of this special section of *Mutual Images*.

Eriko TOMIZAWA-KAY, *Guest Editor*

Marco PELLITTERI, *Main Editor*

Art and Remembrance: Gima Hiroshi, the Marukis, and the representations of the Battle of Okinawa

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ABSTRACT

The battle of Okinawa in 1945 was one of the bloodiest battles of the Asia Pacific War: nearly a quarter of the Okinawan civil population perished. Yet whilst the battle itself has been exhaustively researched, the relatively few artistic representations of the subject have been largely passed over in silence. Okinawan artists themselves, keen to avoid conflict with the U.S. authorities once the region had fallen under the control of the U.S. administration in 1945, were reluctant to address the subject head-on. Their reticence was only compounded by Japan's own failure to acknowledge its complicity in the 1945 massacre of Okinawan citizens. Thus, through the insidious mechanisms of self-censorship, an event that had decimated the region's population and left an indelible scar on its landscape, remained almost invisible in contemporary cultural production.

It was only in the decades following the battle that artists began to develop idioms that allowed them to express, through the brutalized landscape or female anguish, the suffering of the Okinawan people. These works served as powerful expressions of communal trauma. They also contested the gradual objectification of Okinawa in the mainland imaginary. Within two decades of the war, the region had been newly identified as a tourist destination, marketed in visual media as an exotic paradise. For Okinawans themselves, the conscious branding of their land carried the painful consequence of erasing the memory of loss and destruction that fundamentally informed their experience of it. Art, that is, became a means of rectification: of countering the power of silence and the myth of the exotic with the trauma of history.

This paper focuses on visual descriptions of the Battle of Okinawa both as (semi-covert) expressions of communal trauma and as a means of communicating to mainland Japanese audiences the pain, the suffering, and the struggle of its recent history. A key figure in this discussion is the artist Gima Hiroshi (1923–2017), an Okinawan born on Tinian Island who subsequently moved to Ōsaka, who over a period of three decades used a combination of media – oil painting, woodblock prints, albums, children's books and collaborations with Okinawan poets – to bring into the open an event that defined the lives of the Okinawan people. These works played a crucial role in recasting Okinawa in the mainland imaginary, of retrieving its pain from the margins of nation and history.

KEYWORDS

Battle of Okinawa; Gima Hiroshi; Maruki Toshi; Maruki Iri; Kyō Machiko; Censorship; Remembrance; Okinawan modern art.

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Introduction

It was not until almost thirty years after the Battle of Okinawa in 1945 that artists began to wrestle with the problem of how to convey, in images, the slaughter and the devastation of war. Yet representations of war – celebrations of martial valour and dare 'n' do – had been an enduring part of the Japanese artistic tradition since at least the late 13th century.

Painted screens and hand scrolls of the Genpei civil war, which rent the land in the late twelfth century, had served to reinforce for mediaeval audiences models of loyalty and courage.¹ During the long peace of the early modern period, Genpei heroes, now tokens of a fantasy world of martial valour, would populate illustrated books for children and single sheet prints. The same celebration of daredevil courage would inform contemporary prints of the Satsuma rebellion in the early years of Meiji; whilst over the next thirty years, lavishly-coloured woodblock prints of military feats would rally a people behind Japanese offensives in both East Asia and Russia.² During the Pacific War of 1941–1945, western style painting (*yōga*) artists such as Fujita Tsuguharu (1886–1968) and Tsuruta Gorō (1890–1960) would once more use their craft to embellish the war effort: Fujita's *Battle of Nomohan* (1941) would celebrate the slaughter of American troops at the hand of the Japanese, whilst Tsuruta's *Divine Soldiers Descend on Palembang* (1942) depicted a mass of Japanese parachutes descending from the sky like plum blossom. For centuries, that is, audiences had been deliberately beguiled by the glamour of war (Ikeda 2009).

It was only in the aftermath of Japan's defeat in the Second World War that artists would begin to express, through images of death and destruction not the glamour of war but the wreckage and trauma. Representations of the Battle of Okinawa – the only ground battle fought on Japanese soil – would provide some of the most compelling accounts of its tragedy. Yet during the twenty-seven years of U.S. military occupation that followed, visual depictions of the battle were silently foreclosed through a process of tacit yet nonetheless effective censorship. Within Japan itself, reluctance to take responsibility for the betrayal of Okinawans during the battle, combined with intense sensitivities to defeat, similarly discouraged representations of the realities of war. The most egregious example of Japanese censorship has been the refusal to rewrite the history of the Battle of Okinawa to include accounts of Okinawan citizens forced to commit group-suicide rather than surrender (Ikeda 2009, 20). Efforts to recast Okinawa as a tourist paradise, moreover, had the pernicious effect of erasing from memory the trauma that had fundamentally defined the lives of generations of Okinawans.

It is against this background of censorship and erasure that the present paper will attempt to reconsider not just the complexity but the seminal significance of Okinawan

¹ See, for example, Suntory Museum of Art (2002) *Genpei no bigaku: Heike monogatari no jidai*. Tōkyō: Suntory Museum of Art.

² The Sin- Japanese war took place in 1894–1895 and the Russo-Japanese War in 1904–1905.

war imagery. Through a visual analysis of the small corpus of existing paintings of the battle, together with the testimonies of war artists, it will argue that the visual arts have been at the vanguard of efforts to overturn the silence in which the battle has been shrouded. It will further argue that it is through the visual arts that we can still, today, understand the legacy of devastation and trauma that irrevocably altered the lives of the whole Okinawan community. The works discussed are the only works dealing with the battle that I have been able to discover thus far. They include the painting of the Battle of Okinawa by Yamada Shinzan, currently the only recognised work by an Okinawan who witnessed the battle in 1945; and the works of Gima Hiroshi and the Marukis, which remain rarely discussed in Japanese Art History.

The Battle of Okinawa and its legacy

During three months of ground battles (1 April 1945 – 22 June 1945) the Battle of Okinawa devastated the island and decimated the Okinawan population (Maehira 2013, 17). Following the victory of the United States, the U.S. military occupation swiftly demonstrated territorial control by requisitioning land from Okinawans for bases that would form a frontline for subsequent hostilities in Southeast and East Asia, notably the Korean (1950–1953) and Vietnam wars (1955–1975). It was not until 1972 that Okinawa reverted (*henkan*) to full Japanese sovereignty, yet despite its re-integration into Japan as an independent prefecture, significant social and economic discrepancies between Okinawa and mainland Japan continue to drive a wedge between the two (Hook and Siddle 2002; Mason 2016).

Despite Okinawa's troubled history, ever since its assimilation in 1879 by Japan under the Meiji government, the island has become for many Japanese little more than a popular holiday destination, a package of exotic beaches, beautiful landscapes, traditional architecture, and local foods.³ As a result, whilst under the U.S. administration (1945–1972), and the subsequent reversion, Okinawans became trapped between two subordinate identities, defined on the one hand by the demands of the Japanese tourist

³ From as early as 1923, the Ōsaka Commercial Ship Company (*Ōsaka Shōsen*) launched a route from Ōsaka to Naha that would transform Okinawa into a popular tourist destination. This boom was predicted by the Okinawan Tourist Bureau which expected to dramatically enhance the economic situation in Okinawa (The National Museum of Modern Art, Tōkyō 2008, 32). Also, refer to Tomizawa-Kay (forthcoming 2019).

economy and on the other by the U.S. military strategy (Hook and Siddle 2002, 7).⁴ These twin poles of subordination fail lamentably to embrace Okinawans' own experience of their history, their home, and their culture. This paper will argue that it is in this context of contested identity that visual depictions of the Battle of Okinawa and its aftermath play a crucial role in articulating the complexity of Okinawans' experience of war, loss, occupation, and, through tourism, objectification.

Subordination has been a constant factor in Okinawa's history. The largest of a group of islands collectively known as the Ryūkyū Islands, it became part of the Ryūkyū kingdom (itself a Chinese tributary state) in the early fifteenth century. In 1609, following an invasion by forces of the Japanese feudal domain of Satsuma (present-day Kagoshima Prefecture) the kingdom came under the joint suzerainty of Japan and would remain under dual subjugation until its annexation by the Japanese Meiji government in 1879. Yet Japan's subsequent aggressive assimilation policy – which included the prohibition of local languages, the compulsory adoption of Japanese culture and social systems, together with financial exploitation (including the so-called 'Palm Tree Hell' (*sotestu jigoku*) which barred the populace from picking fruit from any tree but the poisonous palm) – proved the most systematic assault on Okinawan identity yet; to the extent that since 2008, the United Nations has repeatedly classified Okinawa as a Japanese colony (Matsushima 2012, 153).

Okinawa remained under Japanese control until the end of the Second World War when, in April 1945, as part of a final offensive on Japan, U.S. forces launched on the island in what was the largest amphibious attack of the Pacific War. The next three months would witness one of the bloodiest battles in the Pacific, resulting in a total of some 200,656 dead. Of these, 188,136 were Japanese, of whom a massive 122,228 were Okinawans – nearly quarter of the pre-war local population – who were either killed, committed suicide, or went missing (Okinawa prefectural Peace Memorial Museum 2018). Following the fall of Okinawa three months later in June 1945, the U.S. established a military occupation and began the process of extricating Okinawa from Japanese authority, a move it justified on grounds that Okinawa, historically part of the Ryūkyū Kingdom, had been illegally colonised by Japan.

⁴ Today, over 70 percent of U.S. military bases in Japan are located in Okinawa. (Okinawa Prefecture 2017, 32).

The Battle of Okinawa: its indirect depiction by Okinawans based in Okinawa

The U.S. would subsequently enact a number of soft measures aimed at recreating the distinctive Okinawan cultural identity that decades of Japanese assimilation had sought to erase, in an effort to drive a deep ethnic wedge between the island and the mainland. These measures, aimed at assisting the establishment of democratic government in Okinawa, included societies for the promotion of cultural activities and for the protection of the island's artistic heritage (Office of the Chief of Naval Operations Navy Department 1944; Ogawa 2014). In 1946, the Okinawa Civilian Administration established a Department of Art and Culture that employed in its Art Division a number of Okinawan artists who were tasked with organising art exhibitions. Yet the art division would serve on the one hand as a mechanism of censorship, and on the other as a propaganda machine. For whilst it provided a source of income for Okinawan artists, it foreclosed the possibility of works that addressed the war or were in any other way critical of America. Meanwhile, the same year that it was founded, Okinawan artists were tasked with the production of 20,000 Christmas cards depicting the beauties of the Okinawan landscape for U.S. military personnel to send home. They were similarly employed to paint portraits of American soldiers and to provide souvenir paintings for sale in gift shops (Kawashima 2015, 7–8).

Not surprisingly, strains began to emerge between the U.S. administration and Okinawan artists, and in spring 1948, the Department of Art and Culture was closed down. It was quickly replaced, however, by an artists' colony in Nishimui village. Set up independently by artists, the colony retained some financial support from the administration (which funded the construction of studios, etc.); it would also produce paintings for U.S. military officers for whom it would provide art education. It succeeded in attracting a number of young *yōga* painters, such as Adaniya Masayoshi (1921–1969), Ashimine Kanemasa (1916–1993), and Tamanaha Seikichi (1918–1984), all of whom would subsequently become professors at the University of the Ryūkyūs founded by the U.S. administration in 1950, the first university in Okinawa. These artists would play a defining role in formulating a 'new' Okinawan art that explored historical, social and cultural issues central to the construction of Okinawan identity.

Unofficially charged with constructing an 'Okinawan' idiom that cast the U.S. administration in a flattering light, however, artists grappled with the private need to express their own experience as witnesses of a war that had destroyed their homeland. Self- or internalized-censorship – the need to avoid critical allusions to the U.S. or Japan

– became an integral factor in their works. There is little or no trace of the mechanisms of this censorship, although the U.S. introduced a number of constraints on newspapers and on the publication of literary works.⁵ The fact that it was only after the reversion of the islands to Japan that artists began in earnest to openly depict the battle is nonetheless telling. Moreover, there were a handful of moving exceptions. One powerful example is an image from Adaniya Masayoshi's 1958 series 'Tower', which depicts the tall vertical form of a tower in a U.S. base built on bulldozed farm land requisitioned from Okinawans. On the one hand this was a documentation of U.S. presence; on the other, a trenchant symbol of the loss of Okinawan cultural heritage, the forced seizure of land, and the brutalisation of the native landscape (Tomizawa–Kay forthcoming 2019).

In a similar vein, Ashimine Kanemasa's early oil painting *I'm tired* (1950) depicts a female figure, her red lipstick indicating a sex-worker servicing the U.S. military: a powerful criticism of U.S. sexual abuse of Okinawan women both during the battle and after, and an iconic symbol of Okinawan suffering under a foreign régime. Another artist, Tamanaha Seikichi depicted traditional funerary urns – symbols of Okinawan culture, and at the same time metaphors of loss – and dark red–brown abstract paintings of shipwrecks in Okinawan waters, powerful statements of the bloodying of the sea. He subsequently replaced the dark red–brown background with deep ultramarine blue, which critics have read as an invocation of the Okinawan spiritual world and a requiem for the souls of the victims of the battles in Okinawa (Okinawa Prefectural Museum and Art Museum 2015, 68). Tacitly barred from making references to Okinawa's troubled past and the slaughter of so many at the hands of the U.S. army, artists developed carefully 'nuanced strategies' (Ikeda 2018, 2) that rendered their meaning available to the intended viewer yet largely invisible to the U.S. authorities. Rhetorical strategies, such as the depiction of a brutalized landscape, or mourning women, allowed them to indirectly reference their experience of war. These paintings were displayed publicly at exhibitions in Okinawa, such as the Five People exhibition (*gonin-ten*) organised by young painters such as Adaniya Masayoshi, Tamanaha Seikichi, Ashimine Kanemasa, Gushiken Itoku, and Kinjō Yasutarō (Tomizawa–Kay forthcoming 2019).

⁵ There is no clear evidence of censorship of the visual arts under U.S. occupation, although it is known that there was censorship of other media such as newspapers, film, theatre plays, and photography (Yoshimoto 2015, 247).

Not all Okinawan artists were able, in their works, to revisit issues relating to the massacre of war: those, in particular, who had taken part in the fighting were often incapable of treating the theme. One exception is Yamada Shinzan (1885–1977), an acclaimed Okinawan *nihonga* (Japanese-style) painter who had studied at the Tōkyō School of the Arts under both the renowned sculptor Takamura Kōun (1852–1934) and the pro-war *nihonga* painter Kobori Tomoto (1864–1931).⁶ In many ways, Yamada embodied the conflicting political demands under which Okinawan artists struggled. In 1924, twenty years before the U.S. occupation, he had produced a painting entitled *The Establishment of the Ryūkyū Domain*, depicting the 1872 abolition of the Ryūkyū Kingdom by the new Meiji government and its (brief) integration as a feudal domain within the Japanese nation state.⁷ The work was made as part of a series of paintings designed as a mural for the Shōtoku Meiji Shrine Memorial Art Museum in Tōkyō, in honour of the Meiji Emperor and Empress. This was the first of Yamada’s works to take up an Okinawan theme; yet at this moment, far from advocating Okinawan independence, it shows him complicit in Japanese annexation of the island. His political allegiance lay squarely with the mainland.

Twenty years later, however, his *Battle of Okinawa* (1947) would be the earliest known work to chart the devastation of the battle (Figure 1). A long line of figures occupies the centre of the picture plane: these are civilians being evacuated from their homes, their faces distorted through suffering. In the background, a hill is being bombed; in the foreground a half-naked mother flees the battlefield carrying a baby on her back and holding the hands of two children. The work represented the suffering of a people. But at the same time, it was a powerful expression of Yamada’s own grief, for he lost both of his sons in the battle.

A decade later, in 1959, the artist dedicated a Peace Prayer Statue, cast in the traditional lacquer technique known as *tsuikin*, to the Okinawa Peace Memorial Hall (*Heiwa Kinendo*) (Kobayashi 2018, 104). The statue clearly represented a prayer for those who died in the Battle of Okinawa.

⁶ Yamada Shinzan came from Yaeyama Islands. When he was 14, he met mainland carpenter Ono Hanjirō who persuaded him to go to the mainland to develop his art. Ono would subsequently adopt Shinzan (Kobayashi 2018, 18). For Kobori Tomoto see Emi (2009, 29–62).

⁷ In 1879 its status would change once again, to become the prefecture of Okinawa.



Fig. 1. Photograph by Shimazaki Ken of Yamada Shinzan's *Battle of Okinawa* (1947). **Courtesy of the Okinawa Prefectural Museum and Art Museum. Published in *The Passion* (Okinawa Prefectural Museum and Art Museum, 2008), p. 13.**

Yamada's painting was never publicly displayed, and it is assumed to have been destroyed. The only testament to its existence is a photograph taken by the artist's friend, Shimazaki Ken, at the time an interpreter for the U.S. military on Okinawa. Shimazaki subsequently wrote that it would have been impossible for Yamada to have survived as a painter in Okinawa (at the time he was working in the U.S. Okinawa Advisory Council and Art Division) if he had insisted on making the painting public (Okinawan Prefectural Museum and Art Museum 2008, 12).⁸ Shimazaki's statement is a rare allusion to the censorship under which the artist laboured. Nor were Shimazaki's photographs published, and their enduring sensitivity is amply demonstrated by the fact that they were displayed, for the first time, at the Okinawa Prefectural Museum, only in 2008.

Nearly all major Okinawan artists under the U.S. administration worked in U.S.-sponsored academic institutions and like Yamada, they were obliged to exclude from their public art any mention of the battle. Yet the battle not only defined contemporary Okinawans' understanding of themselves; it stood as the bloody event on which U.S.

⁸ The original painting is missing, but a photocopy was displayed at the exhibition, *Jōnetsu to Sensō no hazamade* [The Passion: Mugon-kan, Okinawa, Artists] at the Okinawan Prefectural Museum and Art Museum in 2008.

occupation was premised. In a cruel irony, much of Yamada's career would be spent creating illustrations to accompany discussions of Okinawan history and customs in an English-language newspaper, the *Daily Okinawa* (Kobayashi 2018, 104), produced for the U.S. troops. Unable to discuss the present, artists were often forced to express their sense of identity and belonging by turning to a distant, if ambivalent, past.

The Battle of Okinawa by Diaspora Artists: Gima Hiroshi (1923-2017)

Okinawan artists were often forced to express their criticism of the régime through functional ambiguity (such as through the landscape, or portraits of women) or abstraction, those living in mainland Japan had more freedom to express their thoughts. Gima Hiroshi was one such artist. Born in 1923 in Kume village – an area largely populated by Chinese immigrants within Naha city (Gima 1982, 26), he left Okinawa in 1940 at the age of 17 against the wishes of his father (who deplored his son's decision to occupy himself with art during the wartime emergency) in objection to the colonising policies of Imperial Japan.⁹ Resettling on Tinian Island, Gima studied art briefly under the influential sculptor Sugiura Sasuke (1897–1944) (Okaya 2008, 11), whose works would exert a profound influence on his own art. He also began working at the local theatre on the nearby Mariana Islands.¹⁰ This experience was seminal in triggering his interest in Okinawan folk culture.

In 1943, Gima left Tinian for the Japanese mainland, on the urging of his teacher, who feared, correctly, that Tinian would shortly become a battlefield. Unable to return to Okinawa during the war, he served in the Japanese Navy in Yokosuka, in the present Kanagawa Prefecture; still unable to return following Japan's defeat and the subsequent U.S. military occupation, he eventually settled in Ōsaka where he began to study oil painting under the influential Suda Kunitarō (1891–1961) and woodblock printing under Ueno Makoto (1909–1980) at Ōsaka City Art Institute (Tomiyama 2008, 139).¹¹ It was only after his first return visit to Okinawa in 1956 that Gima began to focus seriously on Okinawa's political plight. He was shocked at both the ravaged landscape and the

⁹ Gima's abandonment of Okinawa was part of a larger exodus post 1879 when the island became a Japanese prefecture. This was triggered by lack of employment opportunities and poverty (Tanji 2012, 107).

¹⁰ The islands of Saipan, Tinian, Palau, and the Yapp Islands in Micronesia—collectively referred to as the South Sea Islands—were occupied by Japan immediately after the outbreak of the First World War, and were recognised by the League of Nations as coming under Japanese mandatory administration. These islands later became the centre for severe battles during the Second World War.

¹¹ This was part of the Ōsaka City Museum of Art from 1946 to 1952.

economic situation of the Okinawan people. Severe economic restrictions imposed by the U.S. military administration, combined with little or no aid from the mainland, had left Okinawans deeply impoverished. During this two-month visit, he created what would become some of his most iconic works, based both on his own research and on the testimony of those who had witnessed the battle (Gima 1982, 11).

Tsuboya (Pottery Workshop) (1957) (Figure 2) is representative of his oil paintings during this period. It depicts a masculine-looking Okinawan woman with sturdy legs and large feet, her imposing presence intended as a symbol of a new class of women left after the battle as the sole support of families whose men had been lost during the war.



Fig. 2. Gima Hiroshi, *Tsuboya* (Pottery Workshop), 1957. Oil on canvas, 128.0 × 94.7 cm.
© Okinawa Prefectural Museum and Art Museum.

Here, the figure is placed poignantly in front of a traditional cobalt blue palace-shaped funerary urn (*udun-gata zushi*). The elaborately designed form of its lid depicts a Ryūkyūan *shachihoko*, an imaginary creature with the head of a tiger and body of a fish believed to ward off evil. The creature's mouth is open as if in a scream, its prominent fangs suggesting the impotent anger of the dead. The vessel on the one hand

gestures to traditional ritual wares. On the other, it represents the silent scream of the dead and the enduring agony of the present.

Stylistically, the work – executed in dark brown and ochre hues with strong black lines that evoke the grain of the wood block print – may have been intended as a homage to the Micronesian-inspired wooden sculptures of his early master Sugiura Sasuke. Yet it seems likely there were other influences. It was over these years that the artist would come into contact with the Mexican masters Diego Rivera (1886–1957), David Alfaro Siqueiros (1896–1974), and José Clemente Orozco (1883–1944), whose works were represented at the International Exhibition held in Tōkyō around 1960. It was from Rivera that Gima learned the use of monumental figures and the raw energy to be harnessed from indigenous art forms; from Siqueiros he learned the revolutionary power of art. These encounters would spur him to explore indigenous Okinawan motifs not as a celebration of tradition but as an innately powerful medium for the expression of political criticism (Gima 1982, 63). The artist would return repeatedly to the depiction of monumental Okinawan women, and the widow would become a powerful icon of the loss that informed the reality of post-war Okinawa. Yet, the monumentality of these figures was also intended as a celebration of a ‘strong Okinawa which stands up again and again like a weed’ through decades of political suffering (Gima 1982, 12).

Depicting the Battle of Okinawa

In May 1956, Gima organised a solo painting exhibition at the Daiichi Sōgō Ginkō Bank hall in Okinawa. At this point, the island was still in its ‘dark’ post-war period, struggling under tight U.S. military control and increasing political turmoil. The exhibition, consisting of twelve paintings and ten sheets of decorated paper (*shikishi*) depicting not just traditional Okinawan costumes but also the new landscape of occupation, was a major success. In particular, the artist’s visual expression of his concern for Okinawa, evidenced in his depiction of U.S. bases, and the lives of local people spent in the shadows of the bases, was seen as ground-breaking by university students – themselves striving to find a medium to express their social and political realities. The poet and journalist Arakawa Akira, then a student, recalled that it was following the exhibition that he and his friends would begin publishing political essays in the coterie magazine *Literature of the University of Ryūkyūs* (Arakawa 1994, 6) and embark seriously on study of the history of the battle

itself. It was at this time, moreover, that Gima himself would first read the battle records compiled in the *Okinawa Prefectural History* and his subsequent treatment of Okinawan themes would go on to be deeply informed by close research.¹² Arakawa later wrote that Gima understood his own works both as prayers for those killed in the battle and anger at the war itself (Arakawa 2018, 4).

It was only following the 1972 reversion of Okinawa to Japanese rule that Gima would be able to openly engage with the Battle of Okinawa and its aftermath: notably, many of these works would be in print. This was a conscious decision. ‘Oil painting’, Gima wrote, ‘is only seen at exhibitions and galleries, or sold to collectors. I was dissatisfied with this, and found that since print was cheaper, it could be disseminated more easily and effectively. It was my intention to reveal the realities of Okinawan life by publishing picture and poetry books, which I produced at my own expense’ (Gima 1982, 86). Three works in particular, the product of careful study of accounts of the battle together with interviews with survivors, stand out. Published between 1979 and 1995, they would subsequently be regarded as a trilogy. The first, ‘The War came to Okinawa: Prints on the Battle of Okinawa’ (*Sensō ga yattekita – Okinawasen hanga shū*) was an album of images accompanying a text written by the Okinawa-born poet and cultural activist Nakayama Yoshihiko, published in 1979. The second, ‘Okinawan Lament’ (*Okinawa no hikoku*), an illustrated album with poems by the Okinawan poet Makiminato Tokuzō, was published in 1982; the third, ‘Battle of Okinawa: Korean Military Labour and Comfort Women’ (*Okinawa sen – Chōsen gunpu to jūgun ianfu*), an album with pictures and letters by Gima, was published in 1995.

The significance of these works needs to be placed in context. More than thirty years after the war, there was no memorial, no statue, not even a public painting of the Battle of Okinawa. The event was shrouded in silence. Gima’s works were the very first step toward commemorating the dead. The artist himself noted that the first book, ‘The War came to Okinawa: Prints on the Battle of Okinawa’, published by the prestigious Tōkyō Shūeisha, was a huge publishing success. A vindication of Gima’s decision to shift from the medium of painting, with its relatively restricted audience, to print, suggested at the same time a readiness on the part of the reading public to come to terms with the significance of the battle (Gima 1982, 87).

¹² See Okinawa kyōiku iinkai, (Ed.) (1973). *Okinawa kenshi. dai 10 kan, kakuron hen 9, Okinawa sen kiroku* 2. Naha: Okinawa kyōiku iinkai (digital collection, the National Diet Library).

Gima also published four children's books with the battle as their theme: 'Ryūko's White Flag' (*Ryūko no shiroi hata*) – illustrations by Gima to a letter by Arakawa (1985); 'Tsuru and Takeshi in Miyako Island' (*Tsuru to Takeshi*) (2005); 'Ishigaki Island and the Struggles of the Minokasa Brigade' (*Minokasa-tai funtō-ki*) (2006); and 'Tinian Island at a Glance: War Stories in the Southern Island' (*Nanyō ikusa monogatari – Tenian no hitomi*) (2008). Once again, this was a demonstration of Gima's determination to educate even young audiences on the brutal war that had devastated a people: an effort to compel those who came later to carry the mantle of remembrance.

It was following the reversion of Okinawa that Gima would also produce some of the first and most powerful evocations of the battle. The 1979 *Mō takusan da* (It's too much) (Figure 3), a single sheet woodblock print, depicts the head and shoulders of a woman weeping, her hand held to her face in a gesture of despair.



Fig. 3. Gima Hiroshi, *Mō takusan da* (It's Too Much), 1979. Woodblock print, 53.8 x 171.3 cm.
© Kyōto Museum for World Peace, Ritsumeikan University.

Behind her to the right and occupying the full height of the picture space is a pile of dead bodies and skeletons. These are the unburied dead: compressed into the narrow space of the image, they stand as a metaphor – thirty years after the massacre – of a community denied the right to honour its dead and to mourn. The image was a moving representation of the repressed trauma of a whole people, its powerful momentum from right to left charting a landscape of death and its legacy – in the weeping woman – of despair.



Fig. 4. Gima Hiroshi, *Tombo* (Dragonfly), 1979. Woodblock Print, 63.8 x 96.4 cm.
© Okinawa Prefectural Museum and Art Museum.

A piece from the same period, *Tombo* (Dragonfly) (Figure 4) depicts not the legacy but the terror of war. The conflagration of the air raid is suggested in the harsh palette of red and yellow: a man, a woman with a child on her back, and another child – the civilian community – flee before a monstrous dragonfly that follows in inexorable pursuit. The cropped forms suggest the figures are trapped by the confines of the picture space itself. The child to the left looks out beseechingly towards the viewer: there is literally no way out. The dragonfly clearly symbolises a fighter plane (literal depictions of other planes can be seen in the sky behind it). Yet the image leaves it unclear whether it is a U.S. or a Japanese plane, all the more so because the ‘land of the dragonfly’ (*Akizushima*) was an ancient term dating back to the eighth century *Kojiki* (Records of Ancient Matters) for Japan itself.¹³

This ambiguity permits an allusion to one of the most contentious issues of the war: the loss of Okinawan life at the hands of the Japanese themselves. The poet Makiminato Kōzō, who had collaborated with Gima on ‘Okinawan Lament’ (*Okinawa no hikoku*), would describe the Battle of Okinawa as ‘the war [that] was neither the Pacific War,

¹³ *Akitsu* is an archaic term for ‘*tombo*’, dragonfly, found in ancient texts such as the *Kojiki*, the *Nihonshoki* and the *Man’yōshū*.

nor even the Second World War: it was simply the Battle of Okinawa'. He continued: 'The Battle of Okinawa was a battle with multiple enemies: U.S. troops, Japanese troops, starvation, especially among the elderly and infants: it was the fight to retain our lives, our culture, and our traditions' (Gima and Makiminato 1982, 108–111).

Art and controversy

Gima's implicit criticism of Japan in works such as *Tombo* – whose visceral monstrosity gestured powerfully to the betrayal of Okinawans by their own country – appears to have provoked a backlash amongst certain Japanese. The artist maintained that his work, documenting both Japanese and U.S. attacks on civilian Okinawans, was based on historical fact (Gima 1982, 91). He would repeatedly insist on portraying the war from the point of view of the citizen, giving voice to decades of silent suffering that a régime of implicit censorship – from both the U.S. and Japan – had sought to conceal. 'My work documents exclusively the experience of Okinawan civilians', he wrote, 'The war from the view of the Okinawan people. The Americans could be brutal; they could also be humane. The same for the Japanese' (Gima 1982, 91). Gima would deal graphically with the murder of Okinawans at the hands of U.S. soldiers, he would also vehemently criticise the Japanese betrayal of Okinawans. A moving image from *Sensō ga yattekita – Okinawasen hanga shū* entitled 'Come Out! Come Out!' (*Dete koi, dete koi*) – shows the huddled figures of civilians hiding from the conflict in caves, their hands pressing against the picture plane in an effort to escape. The title is a reference to U.S. soldiers who, repeatedly, called to refugees to come out from the caves following the end of the battle. Japanese soldiers, by contrast, had urged them to commit group-suicide rather than surrender. Gima would in fact prove a relentless critic of Japanese atrocities during the battle. 'In an effort to save their own lives', he wrote, 'Japanese soldiers chased civilians from their hiding places behind the gravestones and mounds of their ancestors and killed them. They sacrificed the lives of people they were meant to protect: for whom were they fighting? Was it the civilians that were now their enemy?' (Gima 1982, 91) He would go further, laying the blame for the behaviour of Japanese soldiers squarely with the emperor (Hirohito) himself. 'Yet this', he wrote, 'is a matter extremely hard to express in paint' (Gima 1982, 91).¹⁴

¹⁴ There is still a sense of taboo about using images of the Japanese emperor, in particular Hirohito, in connection with WWII and Article Nine (Okinawa kenritsu bijutsukan ken'etsu kōgi no kai, 2011).

These were not the only controversial issues that Gima sought to bring finally into the light. His third battle book, 'The Battle of Okinawa: Korean Military labour and Comfort Women' (*Okinawa sen: Chōsen gunpu to jūgun ianfu*) – the product of a series of posters he created for the documentary film *Song of Arirang* (1991) (Figure 5) – dealt with the highly sensitive subject of the use of Korean forced labour and comfort women, housed in buildings specifically constructed in Japanese military bases on the island, by both Japan and the U.S. The eponymous Arirang is the name of a Korean folk song. The image depicts a young Korean woman calling out to the heavens, her cry seemingly blocked by a ragged band of red, the only colour in the image. But the eloquence of the image lies in the design of her clothes, which depict on the bodice a screaming face, below that and taking up almost the whole of the garment, a U.S. soldier forcefully abducting a Korean woman, and in the background an image of a forced Korean labourer.



Fig. 5. Gima Hiroshi, *Ariran no uta* (Song of Arirang), 1991. Woodblock print, 97.4x 62.0 cm.
© Okinawa Prefectural Museum and Art Museum.

The horrific discrimination against Koreans was not just at the hands of the Japanese. Gima was shocked to hear from a Korean woman that 'Koreans initially had sympathy

for the Okinawans, since like us, they have been oppressed by the Japanese. We felt a sense of fellowship. But some of them were abusive and treated us as filth, just as the Japanese treated them as worms.' 'Okinawa', Gima wrote, 'was both victim and assailant. Whenever we discuss the Pacific War and reflect on Japan's conduct during the war, we should acknowledge our own remorse toward other East Asian countries involved in the war, and accept that we Okinawans too are also guilty of the abuse of those labourers and comfort women. In the absence of this, we can never grasp the true horror of the war' (Gima 1995, 32).

The relationship between Gima Hiroshi and Okinawan artists

Okinawan discrimination toward other ethnicities – even toward those from remoter 'secondary' islands of the archipelago – was a subject of intense sensitivity in Okinawa. A sense of inferiority toward mainland Japan was mirrored, ironically, by a sense of superiority toward Taiwanese and Koreans subject to Japanese colonisation. These internalised ethnic hierarchies were further complicated by firm class divisions – determined largely by family lineage – within Okinawa itself (Matsumura 2015). A further wedge in this fractured sense of communal identity was the war, whether or not someone had actually experienced the Battle of Okinawa or been subject to the trauma of its consequences. It was on these grounds that Gima's artistic interventions were increasingly challenged by Okinawan artists who had remained on the island and both witnessed and experienced first-hand – rather than through objective research – the battle and its impact, both historic and present on islanders.

In fact, Gima repeatedly took Okinawan artists to task for failing to address important issues in their works. Objecting to his suggestion that Okinawan painters simply patted each other on the back without taking a political stand, the Okinawan *yōga* painter Adaniya Masayoshi responded by casting doubt on whether Gima – as an outsider now living in Ōsaka – was entitled to judge those who continued to experience the Okinawan socio-political situation first-hand. Other Okinawan artists were similarly dismayed by Gima's criticisms. Yet Adaniya seemed to accept that Okinawan artists shied away from overt criticism not simply of U.S. and Japanese atrocities committed during the Battle of Okinawa, but also of the continued U.S. occupation and Japan's failure to provide much-needed financial assistance to the islands (Adaniya 2011, 164). Gima defended himself on grounds that he could 'perhaps see something that Okinawans cannot see objectively. I know what

mainlanders do not know and what they want to know. By keeping a distance from Okinawa, I don't have to depict something that only Okinawans can understand. Because I am on the mainland, I can be a bridge between the mainland and Okinawa' (Gima 1982, 40). He was not trying to appropriate the experience of Okinawans but to cast an objective mirror to the damaged history of Okinawa through the twentieth century. To do this, he would often turn to the most accessible of media – children's books and mass-produced woodblock prints. Writing in 1994, the novelist Ōe Kenzaburō (b. 1935) would describe Gima as a 'genuine Okinawan painter and relentless advocate of Okinawan resistance to the U.S. occupation'. For Gima, he wrote, 'Okinawa was not a U.S. outpost: it was a country at war, one that had perpetually contested the U.S. occupation ever since the Battle of Okinawa' (Ōe 1994, 93). Gima, he suggested, had done for Okinawa what its own artists had been unable to do.

Representations of the Battle of Okinawa by Maruki Iri and Maruki Toshi

Over the course of the twentieth century, few non-Okinawans turned to the difficult subject of the Battle of Okinawa. Concern over whether or not they were entitled to engage with a subject that they had not experienced at first hand – to appropriate through art another's grief (Young 2010) – or whether as mainlanders they were unwittingly complicit in Japan's colonisation of the island, deterred many from representing what nonetheless remains one of the most traumatic events of the war. Meanwhile, for Okinawan artists who had experienced the trauma of the battle and its legacy themselves, the subject typically remained too painful to engage with artistically.

As political sensitivities eased, however, a number of contemporary artists, regardless of ethnicity, began to engage rigorously with anti-war campaigns and other socio-political issues. A case in point is a collaborative work of Maruki Iri (1901–1995) and his wife Maruki Toshi (1912–2000) entitled *Battle of Okinawa* (1983–1987), a series of 14 canvases (measuring up to 400 x 850 cm each) executed in *sumi* ink and colour on paper (Figure 6). Like Gima's, the work was the product of rigorous research (the Marukis read over 160 books on the subject) and numerous interviews with eye witnesses and survivors. This was the first work to directly engage with the enduring responsibility of the Japanese people to acknowledge culpability for the war. Its seminal importance for Okinawans was demonstrated by the fact that in 1994, after negotiations with both Japanese and U.S. authorities, Sakima Michio (a friend of the Marukis) raised funds to

build a museum on a piece of land that had belonged to his family for generations right next to the Futenma U.S. military base (Sakima 2014) to house the series.



Fig. 6. Maruki Iri and Toshi, *Okinawa sen no zu (Battle of Okinawa)*. Colour on paper, 400 x 850 cm. 1984. © Sakima Art Museum.

The Marukis' series effectively transformed the Battle of Okinawa into a powerful protest against war everywhere, creating a space where people, regardless of ethnicity, can witness the horror of war and come together to mourn the horrific cost to human life and the devastation of a people and their land. But more than this, it was also a powerful acknowledgement of Japanese complicity in the war, and a condemnation of the silence that had subsequently sought to erase it. 'The Battle of Okinawa' represented not only an emotional engagement with the battle itself but, perhaps most importantly, an attempt to apologise for the atrocities (Eubanks 2009, 1623).

It was a gesture of atonement: in some respects, a profoundly religious work (both Marukis belonged to the Pure Land Buddhism or *jōdo shinshū* sect). Maruki Iri in fact told Sakima, 'I will go to hell after I die because I was already an adult at the time [of the Battle] and I could not stop the war. I must go to hell for my sin' (Sakima 2014, 32). The Marukis' willingness to accept their own involuntary complicity in the war that had devastated the lives of so many Okinawans led to the work's acceptance by Okinawans both as a monument to their communal loss and as a profound protest against war.

The Marukis' 'Battle of Okinawa' was structured around a series of collages assembled in a narrative sequence representing the war exclusively from the point of

view of the victim. Scenes included people hiding in *gama* caves together with the dead and dying, the brutal murder of civilians, and forced group-suicides. The artists told Sakima that the reason why they had depicted the Battle of Okinawa was that,

since the Meiji era, Japan has repeatedly aggressed other nations. The destruction of Tokyo by the U.S. in the Second World War in a relentless series of air raids was in some ways retribution for its actions. Yet, as a result of this experience, the Japanese have come to understand war only as victims of bombardment by a hostile nation: they still fail to acknowledge the horrific acts of their own soldiers and they know nothing of the gruesome reality of war on the ground. As long as it is unprepared to acknowledge its own responsibilities, Japan is capable of starting a war again. It is crucial that the Japanese people be made aware of the suffering of those who experienced the Battle of Okinawa, the only ground battle of World War II to be fought on the Japanese archipelago: and it is for this reason that we painted the Battle of Okinawa series. (Sakima 2014, 33)

When a survivor asked how a mainlander could presume to depict the battle, Sakima Michio replied that the work, crucially, demonstrated the artists' objectivity: the fact that they could 'neither fake nor beautify it' (Sakima Art Museum 2006, 27).

The Marukis produced a number of paintings that dealt with the victims both of war (in particular the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki) and of environmental pollution, such as the mercury poisoning disaster Minamata (Ozawa and Ogura 2011, 291). Between 1950 and 1970, they produced a number of seminal anti-war works, detailing both Japanese (the Nanking Massacre) and Western atrocities. The 1950 'Hiroshima Panels', depicting the dropping of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima, were intended in part as a protest against U.S. censorship of references to nuclear war during the Occupation (Ozawa and Ogura 2011, 288). U.S. dismay at the work would be demonstrated by the fact that when the panels were displayed in Okinawa, a group of students who organised a seminar to discuss the work were kicked out of University of the Ryūkyūs (Ozawa and Ogura 2011, 292). Like Gima, the Marukis also used popular media such as children's picture books to convey their anti-war and pro-peace messages. The 1980 'Atomic Bomb in Hiroshima' (*Hiroshima no pika*) and the 1984 'Voice of Okinawa' (*Okinawa no koe*) are two examples. They also produced a number of documentary films recording not only the artistic processes behind their works, but also performances, rallies and other events by anti-war activists and symposia. Some critics would accuse them of creating a platform for anti-war activists. This was something the Marukis both accepted and promoted: their aim, they said, was to create a forum in which the 'experience of war' could, somehow, be shared (Ozawa 2011, 288–289).

Manga as war art: Kyō Machiko (b. 1980)

Even amongst artists born after the 1972 reversion of Okinawa to Japan, there are some who continue to grapple both with the wounds left by the battle and the continued presence of U.S. bases in Okinawa. One post-reversion artist is Yamashiro Chikako (b. 1976), a photographer and video artist whose works document the civilian casualties of the Second World War and the ongoing conflicts surrounding the U.S. military presence in Okinawa. In her video, *'Your voice came out through my throat'* (2009), we see the face of a man who survived the 1944 Battle of Saipan overlapped with the artist's own face, and speaking through her voice, a visual metaphor of both the need to pass on the experience of war and the difficulties it entails to subsequent generations. Like other artists, Yamashiro's work is intended to recreate the horror of war in order to provide a forum where audiences can experience at a bodily level both the terror and the revulsion of its violence. Despite efforts on the part of these artists, younger generations demonstrate both a lack of knowledge of, and interest in, the Okinawan war. Unwilling or unable to discuss the ongoing consequences of the war, they have also shed feelings of their shared (Japanese) culpability. It is in the face of this apathy that manga artists have begun to turn to the Battle of Okinawa in an effort to keep alive its memory amongst younger generations. Already from the 1970s, the manga artist Mizuki Shigeru (1922–2015) – who lost his left arm in the Pacific War– was producing works such as *'Fallen Petals of Okinawa: an Elegy for the Himeyuri Girls Brigade'* (*Okinawa ni chiru – Himeyuri butai aika*). Re-issued in 2017, the work depicted the tragic death of the Himeyuri (Princess Lily) Girls Brigade,¹⁵ a group of high school girls and their teachers who were drafted as a nursing unit for the Japanese Army. By the end of the three-month battle many were living in caves with injured and dead soldiers: approximately 80% of the girls and their teachers perished, some committing suicide to avoid rape by U.S. soldiers.

Mizuki's work would form the inspiration for Kyō Machiko's work *Cocoon* (2010). Kyō, who has become known as a war manga artist (*sensō manga-ka*) frequently uses her works to examine the fate of women and particularly girls caught in war. *Cocoon* itself is a circular work in which a girl, having read about the battle in the postscript to a (fictional) manga entitled *Cocoon*, subsequently dreams of the Himeyuri Brigade (Kyō 2010). This

¹⁵ This *manga* was originally published on 25 August 1971 by Shukan Asahi zōkan. It was reprinted in 2013 in *Muzuki Shigeru Manga Zenshū: Senki tanpenshū, Yūrei Kanchō hoka*. Tōkyō: Kōdansha.

was Kyō's first war-themed *manga* – up until then she had avoided the subject on account of her lack of personal experience – and it came about in response to an impassioned request from one of her female editors in Okinawa, to write about the Himeyuri brigade from the girls' point of view (Kyō 2013, 57). As a result, the fictional characters are deliberately portrayed in terms such as romance, friendships, and fashion, with which young readers can easily identify, allowing them to become emotionally invested in the girls' fate. Kyō has said that, in this respect, she was inspired by Mizuki Shigeru's ability to express the reality of war both through personal experience, and the humanity and humour of his protagonists. (Kyō 2017). Her girls, for example, are not heroines but normal adolescents, sometimes selfish, sometimes rude, sometimes unkind, a far cry from the idealised figures of innocent teenage girls devoted to nursing Japanese soldiers, and later committing suicide, as portrayed in Imai Tadashi's 1953 propaganda film and box-office hit *Tower of Princess Lilies (Himeyuri no Tō)*, which in-turn was based on a 1949 novel by Ishino Keiichirō.

For Kyō, it was important that the readers 'understand the story as their own story, identify with the lives of the Okinawan girls as women'. 'I want to convey, through manga, the message that girls in the past also lived and died with the same preoccupations as girls today. They worried about the same types of things, they laughed at the same types of things. I wanted to convey the sense that there are no clear cut-offs between past and present' (Kyō 2017).

One of the most striking features of *Cocoon* is the almost oneiric depiction of the brutalities of war. Soldiers are depicted like white shadows; in a moment of tragic irony the main protagonist Mayu tells her friend San that men are only white shadows; she has nothing to fear.¹⁶ It is these white shadows, projections of what Kyō has suggested to be an innate female fear of men, which came to destroy the girls. In a postscript to *Cocoon* she noted that the reason she depicted soldiers as white shadows came from her childhood when a phobia toward men led her to pretend that there were no men in the world (Kyō 2010, 209). Similarly, the caves where the girls live together with dead and dying soldiers are depicted as phantom-like forms which, rather than dramatising the war, present it as

¹⁶ Kyō explained in the postscript of *Cocoon* that the reason she depicted all soldiers as white shadows came from her childhood memory, when she had pretended that there were no men in the world because of her fastidiousness and a phobia toward men (Kyō 2010, 209).

a silent, shapeless terror: a metaphor of the trauma of the past that had informed Okinawan lives for decades.

Even after the huge success of the work, Kyō continued to feel a responsibility for it. Not being native to Okinawa, and having never experienced the war, she felt open to accusations that she had appropriated the grief of others (Natsume 2013, 73). Yet, unlike Gima, whose attempts to portray the battle objectively had been so heavily criticised, Kyō avoided much of the backlash on account of the work's fictionality, and perhaps more importantly, the fact that its ultimate message – much like the Marukis' – was that those who have not experienced war are responsible for not forgetting it: the cocoon of remembrance. Using this most popular of media, Kyō was endeavouring to re-animate memories of the war not simply as a part of Okinawa's troubled history but as a part of Japan's).

Conclusion

For many Okinawans, the Battle of Okinawa has become a token of communal identity, yet its representation remains a source of contention. The sheer difficulty of giving visual expression to the battle has been overwhelming. For decades following the surrender of Japanese forces, the bloody trauma of the war silenced Okinawan artists still unable to face up to its horror. Attempts that were made – such as those of Adaniya Masayoshi and Yamada Shinzan – were crushed by an unspoken yet insidious U.S. censorship that denied Okinawans their past. In the face of this silence, artists based on the mainland such as Gima Hiroshi, who were not subject to U.S. censorship, took on the mantle of protest, exposing not simply U.S. aggression toward Okinawans during the battle, but Japanese aggression toward its own people. Works such as *Tombo* (Dragonfly), which gestured to the slaughter of Okinawan citizens by Japanese fighter planes, forcing Japanese audiences to confront their own culpability in the war were, not surprisingly, sometimes criticised by segments of the Japanese population (Gima 1982, 91). Yet, at the same time, Gima's works were resented by Okinawan audiences for what was perceived to be an appropriation, by an outsider, of their experience (Tomiya 2018, 15). Controversially, Gima would go on to disrupt common perceptions of the polarity of the war by exploring Okinawans' own culpability as aggressors toward what were perceived as secondary communities, in particular Korean comfort women.

Subsequent artists, like the Marukis, would radically transform the significance of the battle. On the one hand, by representing the atrocities of war, they created a space where viewers could come together to mourn victims of war everywhere. On the other, they also used their work to openly acknowledge Japan's culpability in the war. Thus, while Gima's work was often rejected by Okinawan audiences, the Marukis work, an expression not just of Okinawan suffering but of the enduring complicity of the Japanese in this suffering, came to represent, for Okinawans, an act of remorse. Now housed in the Sakima Art Museum, it offers a space not just for communal grief, but an acknowledgement of that grief.

One of the most distinctive aspects of representations of the battle is the use of children's books, posters, and other widely disseminated media to bring the horrors of war to the attention of wider audiences. Children's books, have in fact been a powerful medium for promoting the anti-war message, particularly amongst younger generations who have had no first-hand experience of war. In this regard, the battle of Okinawa – the only ground-battle to be fought on Japanese soil – has become a compelling reminder of its horrors. It is in the face of growing apathy toward issues of war that manga artists such as Kyō Machiko have begun to use their works to educate the young: to remind them, at the very least, of their responsibility not to forget. By creating characters with which younger audiences can identify, and through their powerful visual rhetoric, it is manga that today may enable young audiences to at least imagine the horrors of a war that decimated a population. In the midst of silence, it is visual art that has assumed the duty of remembrance.

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Master of Silence: Matsumoto Shunsuke's *Muon no fūkei* and his quiet resistance to *Sensōga* during the Fifteen-Year War

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ABSTRACT

This article is focused on the wartime works of Japanese artist Matsumoto Shunsuke (1912-1948). In particular, it examines his *Muon no fūkei* (silent landscapes) series from 1941-1945 and the artist's motivations behind choosing to depict everyday street scenes in Japan during the Fifteen-Year War (1931-1945).

The war was a difficult time for most artists; they were either forced to conform to social and governmental pressures to paint *sensōga* (war paintings), or they had to virtually stop production rather than run the risk of being arrested. Matsumoto Shunsuke was one of the few painters to focus on individual expression and everyday life scenes during this period. He spent much of Japan's war wandering the streets, sketching and taking photographs that would later become the templates for his landscapes.

The study of wartime art in Japan is still a relatively new topic, but much speculation has been given to Matsumoto's works as symbols of anti-war resistance. However, the artist's motivations were far more complex. This paper will explore Matsumoto's alienation from Japanese society due to his deafness and artistic principles and how these factors, along with his political disagreements with the government and other artists, led him away from *sensōga* and instead towards the silent landscapes that have today become some of the most popular paintings from the era.

KEYWORDS

Matsumoto Shunsuke; World War II; *Sensōga*; Censorship; War art; Propaganda.

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Introduction

Clouded by dark hues of blue and green and with a deep, embedded sense of isolation, Matsumoto Shunsuke's 1942 *Landscape with the Diet Building* is hardly the image of Tōkyō one might have expected to be made in Japan in the early 1940s, a time when nationalism was at an all-time high and patriotic war paintings sponsored by the government called *sensōga* were being viewed by millions throughout the country. Indeed, *Landscape with the Diet Building* was created by Matsumoto barely a month after the Japanese surprise attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941, one of the country's greatest military victories during the course of the Fifteen-Year war (1931-1945). Yet

symbols of patriotism or strong Japanese soldiers which became standard elements of Japanese wartime art are conspicuously absent in Matsumoto's work. Instead, he shows a lone shadow struggling to drag a cart through an empty street and away from the darkened National Diet Building.



Fig. 1. Matsumoto Shunsuke, 1942. *Landscape with the Diet Building* [oil on canvas]. © Iwate Museum of Art, Morioka [online]. Available from: <http://www.ima.or.jp/en/collection/search-shiryo/> [Accessed 23 August 2018]

The trees lining the street are black and stripped bare of any leaves or flowers. In the background, seas of grey factory buildings are overshadowed by a singular towering chimney stack, which rises cold and grim at the apex of the work. The painting depicts Tōkyō, a bustling capital at the height of its empire's war campaign, but devoid of life except for the single figure who seems immobilized within the silent scene. Matsumoto was only thirty years old when he painted *Landscape with the Diet Building*. Why, one must ask, would a young artist create such a painting while the vast majority of his contemporaries were celebrating the victories of Japan through their art?

Matsumoto Shunsuke (1912-1948) was one of only a few artists who produced artworks during Japan's era of military expansionism that does not fall under the categories of *nihonga* (traditional Japanese-style painting) or *sensōga* (war paintings that were supported and commissioned by the government of Japan). He was also one of barely a handful of artists who openly spoke out against painting the war. Instead, Matsumoto focused his efforts on images of streets, canals, railroads, and isolated

figures within empty cities. These works, dubbed by later critics the *Muon no fūkei* (silent landscapes), are the antithesis of popular artistic standards during the Fifteen-Year War, which saw the Japanese government take strict hold of the art world and artists' production through the consolidation of various artistic institutions and the systematic arrest of dissidents.

As the war progressed it became next to impossible for artists who were not sponsored by the government to exhibit their work or even to get basic painting supplies. A critic of *sensōga*, Matsumoto worried that the government-mandated form was reductive and would hamper Japan's cultural advancement. His refusal to paint the war meant that his own work was largely ignored by the public and fellow artists during the war period. This led to a deep conflict within the artist, who felt shunned by the country he loved and even by his fellow artists. This sense of alienation was compounded by the fact that Matsumoto was deaf and exempt from serving in the army, a disability which may have allowed him to escape more severe governmental censorship, but which put him at odds with the image of a strong able-bodied soldier that was being dissimilated through the media and *sensōga*.

As he struggled to reconcile his place in Japan during the war and still express himself artistically within the political purview given to him, Matsumoto settled upon the empty streets and industrial buildings as a means of expressing his own predicament. These usually overlooked areas of Japan had been the key building blocks of Japanese modernisation, brought into the country during the Meiji Restoration by the government in order to make Japan compatible with the West. While his contemporaries like Fujita Tsuguharu (1886-1968) also seized upon Japan's modern industrialism, lionizing its new tanks and planes, *sensōga* artists were much more focused on using these elements as examples of how Japan had taken Western technologies and was now using them in a more skilful manner against their enemies to become the dominant power in Asia. Matsumoto, by contrast, examines the factories and train tracks as continuing elements of Japanese achievement that were being disregarded in favour of flashy tanks, much like how the advancements in contemporary art that he believed were necessary to Japan's status in Asia were being tossed aside for the filtered viewing of war art.

This article will discuss how Matsumoto Shunsuke's depiction of Japan's railways, canals, and waste sites in the *Muon no fūkei* as disregarded yet vital foundations of the

country's success in forming a unified Asia, defines how he refused to agree with the government's position that avant-garde art and disabled individuals such as himself were irrelevant to the country's success. As Masumoto laid out in the opening pages of his famed 1941 article "The Living Artist,"

I am merely a humble young painter. I am committing my life to discovering one general concept of beauty, but based on the opposition of the government, and the realities of this country, and the actions of our leaders, it would appear that I am just one of the foolish and extremely weak masses who do not know anything about the present state of the government of this country. It may be extremely insolent...but I don't believe silence is wise at this time (Matsumoto 1941, 477).

Even while limited in what he could paint, say, or write, Matsumoto was still able to publicly through a canvas make his case against the homogenisation of art into popularized visions of victory.

Sensōga remains a highly controversial topic in Japan, and as such research on the works and those artists who opposed their production has only recently begun. While there has been research focusing on the effect of governmental censorship on artists and Matsumoto Shunsuke's refusal to paint the war, most notable in the 2013 *Art and War in Japan and Its Empire 1931-1960* (ed. Ikeda, A., McDonald, A.L., and Tiampo, M.), an exceptional compilation of essays on art produced during the war, and by Maki Kaneko in her 2014 *Mirroring the Japanese Empire: The Male Figure in Yōga Painting, 1930-1950*, the first publication to seriously address Matsumoto's deafness in relation to his life as an artist, this essay mark the first time that Matsumoto Shunsuke's *Muon no fūkei* will be evaluated as a collection and in comparison to *sensōga* works of the time.

Examining these works and their place in Japanese wartime art history will comprise of an exploration of the time period and the limitations artists faced during wartime, followed by a visual analysis of the *Muon no Fūkei* with a focus on Matsumoto's critical *Bridge in Y-City* series (1941-1946) and his self-portrait, *Standing Figure* (1942). Finally, this paper will analyse the importance Matsumoto put on these everyday street scenes in relation to himself, and his status as a nonconformist within an increasingly regulated country.

Japan goes to war: Military censorship and the rise of *Sensōga*

The environment in which Matsumoto Shunsuke created his *Muon no fūkei* series was unique in that not only was Japan engaged in a state of total war, but it was the first time in the nation's history that the government achieved systematic control of artists and art groups. Imperialism had been on the rise in Japan since the end of the Russo-Japanese War in 1905 when Japan's surprise victory spurred new nationalistic sentiments and altered the nation's relationships with foreign powers (Shichor 2007, 201). In large part, expanding liberalism had been able to function within this environment; however, in 1931 the Kwantung Army, a section of the Imperial Japanese Army, staged an explosion at a railway line near Mukden and blamed the blast on Chinese soldiers (Ikeda *et al.* 2013, 14). Japan used the false sabotage, now known as the Manchurian Incident, as an excuse to launch the full invasion of Manchuria and establish a puppet state within the region. Most of this was unbeknownst to the Japanese at home. Newspapers and media, under the guidance of the military, positioned the annexation as a heroic act of liberation (Dower 2012, 37). The events set the stage for the Second Sino-Japanese War beginning in October of 1937, and the island nation's era of expansionism (Akihisa 2013, 27). Still, most Japanese citizens were largely unaffected by the war until 1938, when the National Mobilisation Law (*Kokka sōdōinhō sensō*) came into effect and the government methodically instigated an extensive propaganda campaign and 'spiritual mobilisation' (*Seishin sōdōin*), which focused on uniting the Japanese people through education, media, and entertainment in order to raise support for the war (Shillony 1981, 5). The theory was that the creation of Japan's New Order in Asia could only be achieved through the unification of mind and body, resulting in the need for the Japanese government to wield near total control over print media, speech, and art.

This was not the first time the government had sought to exert control over Japanese artists; a previous reorganisation of the Imperial Fine Art's Exhibition (*Teiten*), was attempted in 1935 by the Minister of Education Matsuda Genji (1875-1936). The effort largely failed when both new and seasoned artists decided to leave the Academy or boycotted the exhibition (Sandler 1996, 75). But with the National Mobilisation Law in place and the entire nation now turned towards the war effort, the second attempt at consolidation was a success. A similar effort was launched in regard to art magazines. In October of 1940 the three largest magazines, *Atorie*, *Mizue*, and *Zōkei geijutsu* all issued edicts for artists to comply with the new national order and demonstrate their support for

the government (Hirayama 2013, 50). Then, in July 1941, all art magazines were forced to reorganize and combine into eight publications (Rimer 1996, 58). While these magazines managed to sustain partial independence from the government, they were consolidated once again in September, and finally merged into just one publication under the title of *Bijitsu* (Art) in 1944 (Akihisa 2013, 31).

At the same time, detractors of government mandates were being systematically arrested and ‘reeducated.’ From 1928 to 1934, arrests were centred on proletariat and avant-garde artists such as the founder of the radical Mavo group, Murayama Tomoyoshi, who was detained in both May of 1930 and April of 1932 (Lucken 2013, 80). The primary goal of arresting critics of the Japanese government was not eradication or long-term incarceration, but rather to police the populace for ‘thought criminals’ and subject them to *tenkō*, a reorientation process by which they might rejoin the populace in service to the government. This effective strategy was used by the military to turn their critics into public assets. For example, Fukuzawa Ichirō (1898-1992), an art critic and leader of the avant-garde group The Art and Culture Association (*Bijutsu bunka kyokai*), was detained for over a year starting from 1941. Upon being released, he reversed course on his earlier criticisms and painted the *Annihilation of the Americans and British* for the military (Cook and Cook 1992, 254).

As the country entered its state of total war in 1937, the government gained the ability to largely control what supplies artists received and could limit their ability to create work if they did not fall in line. According to married painters Maruki Iri and Maruki Toshi, there were “no art supplies. [Only] those who drew war pictures received money, paints, and brushes” (Cook and Cook 1992, 253). The establishment of the Artist’s Federation in 1942 ensured that supplies were regulated via a ration card system through which only government-approved artists could receive materials (Cook and Cook 1992, 253). Even if artists were not arrested or drafted into the military, they were repeatedly threatened. The Marukis, who resisted painting for the government, recalled intimidating visits to their home from the military, urging them to fulfil their patriotic duty through the creation of *sensōga* (Sandler 2001, 191). By 1943 the government exercised vast control over artists, dictating what they read and how they painted. Japan’s censorship and reeducation tactics were so successful that there was no true opposing force within the country during the entire course of the Fifteen-Year War.

The birth of *Sensōga*

As it sought to stymie independent groups, the government publicly supported the newly emerged genre of *sensōga*, or literally ‘war paintings.’ War art is a difficult category to define, as it often falls into several classifications ranging from landscape art to historical paintings (Hariu 2007, 153). *Sensōga*, however, is a specific term referring only to those images produced during Japan’s military campaign from 1931-1945, with depictions that supported the government’s ideology, such as military victories or heroic deaths. Standard *sensōga* works were done as ‘monumental paintings’ in the size of around 190.0 x 260.0 cm, the dimensions deemed appropriate for the genre by the government in the 1940s (Tsuruya 2013, 71). The beginnings of *sensōga* came not with the military, but with artists themselves. In June of 1938 a few dozen artists gathered to form the Greater Japan Army Embedded Painters Association (*Dainippon rikugun jūgun gaka kyōkai*), and by 1939 they had been absorbed into the Army Art Association (*Rikugun bijitsu kyōkai*), having grown their numbers to over 200 members (Akihisa 2013, 28). The Army Ministry’s Information Division officially embarked on its *sensōga* project in 1940, unveiling sixteen works in 1941 with the intent to further increase the production of war art and present them to the Imperial Palace’s Storehouse for preservation as records of Japanese military achievements (Akihisa 2013, 29).

Sensōga functioned not only as historical record paintings, but as powerful propaganda tools to inspire support at home for the Japanese military. Miyamoto Saburō (1905-1974) received the Imperial Academy Fine Arts Prize for his 1942 painting, *The Meeting of General Yamato and General Percival*, with the judges exalting the work for its depiction of a white Englishman surrendering to an Asian general (Akihisa 2013, 33). The extraordinary work eschews the bloody battle scenes that make up a large part of *sensōga*, such as Fujita Tsuguharu’s violence-laden *The Fall of Singapore (Bukit Timah)* from the same year, but instead highlights the moment when Singapore was officially surrendered to Japan, showing General Yamato as an imposing, broad-chested figure opposite the smaller Percival, who hunches over the table. While perhaps quieter in its display of military power than the aforementioned *Fall of Singapore*, Miyamoto’s painting shows an Asian man clearly in a position of strength over his white counterpart, refuting the idea that the Japanese race was ‘weaker,’ as it was often depicted by Western countries (Tolischus 1945, 78).

Sensōga was done in Western style, as the military had deemed that the realism inherent in *yōga* would more effectively convey soldiers' suffering to the Japanese people (Tsuruya 2013, 74). But the paintings focused heavily on Japanese bodies in their composition, thus asserting claim over European techniques and moulding them into a purely Japanese art form that many, like Fujita, believed finally allowed them to overtake Western art. As the government had strongly directed against the continuation of other Western-influenced genres such as abstraction and surrealism, *sensōga* became a way for contemporaries to experiment within their art and still retain the mobility to show to a national audience.

Matsumoto Shunsuke

Though *sensōga* presented many opportunities for artists within Japan, giving them a national platform to display their work and government-backed support, there were still those that remained in direct opposition to the new policies and censorship. Matsumoto Shunsuke was born Sato Shunsuke in Tōkyō in 1912, but his father's work took the family North to Iwate Prefecture when Matsumoto was two years old (Hamabuchi 2012, 16). It was during this time that Matsumoto became ill with cerebrospinal meningitis. Though he survived the disease, Matsumoto lost his hearing in 1925 (Sandler 1996, 78). As he struggled to adjust to his deafness, Matsumoto's older brother, who was living in Tōkyō at the time, sent him a set of oil paints in hopes of lifting his brother's spirits (Hamabuchi 2012, 16). The effect was immediate, and Matsumoto quickly shifted his focus to art. His earliest paintings, such as *In Early Autumn* from 1928, come from his childhood city of Morioka and show an immediate attraction to the genre of landscape. But they also fall much into the category of Japanese artists who were copying the style of European masters. These early works are full of bright colour and wide brush strokes and are fairly literal representations of the landscapes with very little reinvention on the artist's part. Matsumoto himself expressed this concern at an early age, seemingly realizing a need to find his own style rather than simply copying those of others (Hamabuchi 2012, 16). Thus, in a desire to push himself to find his own unique voice as an artist, Matsumoto moved to Tōkyō and attended the Taihei Yōgakai Institute.

As a young artist in Tōkyō, Matsumoto's style continued to evolve as he experimented with brushstrokes and pigment. He was deeply enamoured with Tōkyō itself, and it would soon become the main focal point of his paintings. While he had many friends such as Ai-

Mitsu (1907-1946) and Masao Tsuruoka (1907-1979) amongst the growing Dadaist and Surrealist population of Tōkyō in the 1930s, Matsumoto never formally entered any mainstream avant-garde group.

Prior to *sensōga* becoming the government backed art form of contemporary Japan, Matsumoto's style leaned towards abstraction. As seen in his 1939 *Prelude*, Matsumoto was focused on creating non-realistic dream-world settings in which figures and buildings overlapped one another to create the crowded atmosphere of a city. This is a fascinating effect that Matsumoto may well have developed due to his deafness, as the confusing collage of images in *Prelude* seem to act as visual representations of noise. Within the painting, urban women and men transverse the city landscape, which pushes the roughly outlined buildings and people together into a flat composition. The artist manages to eloquently capture the feeling and vibrations of the boisterous city into a single scene.



Fig. 2. Matsumoto Shunsuke, 1939. *Prelude* [oil on canvas]. © Iwate Museum of Art, Morioka [online]. Available from: <http://www.ima.or.jp/en/collection/search-shiryo/> [Accessed 23 August 2018]

From the beginning, Matsumoto never expressed any desire to paint the war in his own art. His opinions about the fighting itself were complex, but as Michael Lucken observes:

[Matsumoto] retained a meditative and reflective position. On a political level, he was never an opponent to the war, and even believed in the idea of Japan civilizing Asia...Yet he could not bring himself to be part of what he saw as artistic mediocrity imposed by the propaganda department (Lucken 1998, 12).

Matsumoto's career had been just starting to take off when Japan entered a state of total war; he had his first one-man show at the Nichido Gallery, the first gallery in Japan to specialize in western-style paintings, in 1940 and was exhibiting regularly in the Nika Society exhibitions (Lucken 1998, 27). But the era of *sensōga* was no place for Matsumoto's abstract cities. His frustration with the governmental suppression and worship of *sensōga* that had gradually made it impossible to exhibit his art in Tōkyō became public in 1941 when he published his article "The Living Artist" in *Mizue*, a monthly magazine. The article was a direct response to a previous publication in *Mizue* entitled "The National Defense State and the Fine Arts: What Should Artists Do" (*Kokubōkokka to bijutsu: gaka wa nani o nasubekika*), which detailed a debate over an artist's place in wartime Japan.

Within this round-table discussion, three military art officers and art critic Araki Hideo had stressed the importance of art as a part of Japan's ideological warfare and lampooned any artist that followed the ideas of Western individualism and freedom, which they declared to be self-serving aspirations (Tsuruya 2007, 90). Matsumoto heavily disagreed with the article, attacking not only the credentials of the participants in the debate but also insisting that a diverse art world was needed for Japan to become a leader in Asia (Matsumoto 1941, 477). Instead, he advocated for a continuation of humanism in addition to showing national and ethnic characteristics, and cautioned the government against cutting short the progress Japanese art had made by restricting avant-garde practices (Matsumoto 1941, 478).

This was not the first time an artist had disagreed with the government's intrusion into the art scene; Takiguchi Shūzō (1903-1979) was arrested in early 1941 after expressing irritation with the government and the dismissal of individual artistic development (Clark 1993, 181). Given this, it is rather remarkable that Matsumoto was never arrested himself. Unlike Takiguchi, who was being monitored even before his publication, there is no evidence to suggest that Matsumoto was ever in real danger of facing criminal charges, despite several instances of censorship on exhibitions and groups he joined. This is perhaps due to the artist's deafness and the police not considering him a threat, or because of the fact that Matsumoto's "The Living Artist" actually gained little support from his fellow painters. Clearly, at the time, he was not seen as an individual with a particularly wide influence.

The Muon no fūkei (Silent Landscapes):

Matsumoto Shunsuke as an outsider in his own country

A critical factor in Matsumoto Shunsuke's work that is often not given the study it requires is the fact that the painter had been deaf since the age of thirteen. This had a profound effect on Matsumoto, as it led him to art, but it also posed significant challenges to his status in Japan that he rarely spoke of. Anti-discrimination laws for Japanese citizens with disabilities only began to come into effect in 1946 as part of the postwar Japanese Constitution (Stevens 2013, 68). Prior to this, in the 1920s and 1930s when Matsumoto was growing up, there were little safeguards for the disabled. In the case of deaf children, most were kept at home and out of school until 1948, when compulsory education for the deaf was put into law (Nakamura 2003, 211). This means that many individuals who were born deaf from Matsumoto's generation never received proper schooling and were illiterate. Sign language was also an impairment as it did not become standardized until the postwar years. Before this, many deaf children only learned local signs, if any, and would have had trouble communicating with deaf individuals from other areas (Nakamura 2003, 217). Matsumoto avoided some of these issues due to the fact that he was not born deaf and had been in school until he lost his hearing. But he could not have escaped the social stigma that came with being disabled, particularly during the war when individuals with physical disabilities were labelled as 'deviants' along with Communists and homosexuals (Kaneko 2014, 91). Whereas Fujita Tsuguharu discarded his famous Parisian haircut and flamboyant clothing when he returned to Japan from Paris at the start of the war to better fit the image of a straight-laced Japanese man, Matsumoto could not so simply shed his disability (Winther-Tamaki 2012, 135).

In his early paintings like *Prelude* Matsumoto's deafness had materialized in a visual and abstract pastiche of a noise-filled city, but during the war this colourful vibrancy dissipated into morose and soundless landscapes. The focus on Japan's urban elements, however, remained. Urbanisation rose drastically in Japan before and during its wartime era. This was propelled by the government, which saw the appropriation of Western styles and architecture as a key means of avoiding colonisation and rivalling foreign powers (Guth 1996, 17). By the late 1920s trains, airplanes, automobiles, and engines were proud symbols of Japan's modern achievements (Dower 2012, 30). This production fit into the narrative that Japan was leading Asia to modernize as a whole, and the

symbols of industrial modernity quickly became important metaphors for Japan's power and successful self-production.

It is no coincidence therefore, that Matsumoto relies on the industrial landscape for his series. Matsumoto was well known to have loved the city landscape, remarking that:

During my early life from infancy to youth, there was nothing dirty in the physical nature around me or in my family life...When I think about that time while smelling the gasoline fumes of the city, it seems like something on a screen.

When I began living in Tokyo again 6 years ago, the nervous lines of the town had a fresh feeling. Even the smell of gasoline was appealing. And yet I got a headache and couldn't walk around town for even an hour. But now I walk through the crowds of the city with the same feeling as walking through the fields.

The nature in my reveries probably cannot be found anywhere today. Tin roofs and gasoline have spread to the farthest corners of the countryside.

I do not search for nature. I always have it. I love the city as I love the country. Both are the same to me now. And I am not at a loss without either of them. However, everything today is becoming urbanized. The city of today must seem suffocating even to the person used to living in cities. In my heart, which has learned to walk through the crowds of the city with the same feeling as walking through the fields, I find something like the creation of life. (Motoe 1986, 25).

The *Muon no fūkei* series relies heavily on this evolving urban background of Japan. Brightly coloured trees, streams, and hills, the usual hallmarks of Western landscapes that Matsumoto had begun his painting career with, are absent. Rather, the silent landscapes illustrate smoky scenes of back alleys and public toilets. No painting from this time period is more illustrative of the *Muon no fūkei* than Matsumoto's 1943 work, *Bridge in Y-City*. The canvas belongs to a longer series of works that stretched from 1941 to 1946, all of which depict the same scene; the titular bridge and its evolving surroundings as the war progressed. This key bridge depicted in the series is identifiable as Tsukimi Bridge, most likely first encountered during Matsumoto's sojourns across Tōkyō as he looked for new material for his work (Nagato 2012, 182). The area was a familiar one to Matsumoto, particularly in the later years of the war. After a series of Allied bombings in 1944, the company Matsumoto was working for relocated his position to an office in Kanagawa, a four-hour commute that took him via train past the Tsukimi Bridge each day (Nagato 2012, 182). The first painting in this series, *Bridge in Y-City* from 1942, shows the Tsukimi Bridge, painted in a pale white colour that might meld into the similar backdrop of sky if not for the dark river that runs underneath it and the thick black columns from a railway overpass that make up much of the middle ground.



Fig. 3. Matsumoto Shunsuke, 1942. *Bridge in Y-City* [oil on canvas]. © Iwate Museum of Art, Morioka [online]. Available from: <http://www.ima.or.jp/en/collection/search-shiryo/> [Accessed 23 August 2018]

In this work, the bridge is shifted to the right of the scene's composition, as opposed to being in the centre as Matsumoto would later reposition it. A factory is seen in the middle ground on the right with two short chimneys, but appears to be some distance away from the viewer. The work is completely devoid of any people or action.

With the next set of drawings and paintings that began in 1943, Matsumoto altered this original composition to put more of a focus on the factory and canal. *Bridge in Y-City* from 1943, is Matsumoto's most acclaimed work from the series. Here, the viewer is pushed back from the scene so that more of the concrete canal wall can be seen.



Fig. 4. Matsumoto Shunsuke, 1943. *Bridge in Y-City* [oil on canvas].
 © The National Museum of Art, Tōkyō. Photo Credit: Marendo Müller

The bridge is smaller, less of a focal point as opposed to the factory and canal wall. The lines of the bridge's railing and the scaffolding are thinner, more delicate, and the framework for the overpass ceases to dominate the painting. Instead, the factory now rises higher and is clearly closer to the bridge than in the 1942 iteration. The two small chimneys are joined by a tall smokestack, a sure sign that construction has taken place. Whereas the factory was previously a background piece to the bridge, it now dominates the landscape. A drastic evolution has taken place, wherein the new technology that will spur Japan forward in its war effort has begun to overwhelm the once familiar area. In fact, there is hardly a piece of the painting besides the sky and water that is not taken up by concrete and machinery.

Existing within these elements, yet distinctly separated from them, are three shadowy figures that are barely perceptible against the darkened landscape. These shadow forms appear in many of the *Muon no fūkei*, such as the one who pulls the cart in *Landscape with the Diet Building*. The shadow figures of Matsumoto's landscapes are nondescript and lack any sense of individualism. They wander the deserted streets as if lost and overwhelmed by the scenery. In *Bridge in Y-City* 1943, the telephone lines and buildings tower over them, reducing them to afterthoughts. This is a great departure for Matsumoto from *Prelude*, where the colourful figures intermingle with each other and

Tōkyō's buildings in a much more harmonic manner. But through the *Muon no fūkei*, Matsumoto's people become so nondescript that they nearly disappear. The ordinary citizens of Japan are shoved aside within the country's push to proclaim itself the most dominant modern power in Asia.

While the factories loom large and the human figures fade into the background, Matsumoto makes a fascinating insertion to the scene. First visible in *Scene in Yokohama* from 1941 and reappearing in the 1943 *Bridge in Y-City*, is a bright white cross-shaped structure in the lower right hand of the paintings. This has been identified as an outdoor bathroom in Yokohama that Matsumoto saw and incorporated into the landscape (Motoe 1986, 29). This is not the only series in which Matsumoto incorporated illusions to public waste. He made several sketches and cartoons focused on public bathrooms, such as with *Public Latrine, Shinjuku* from 1941. His 1942 work, *Landscape*, focuses on a set of figures seen pulling a cart along a road. The image of the cart in fact came from a picture Matsumoto took himself during his walks around Tōkyō, while the figures are indicated to be those of garbage men heading towards a dump (Kano 2012, 152). These same figures and cart act as the backdrop to Matsumoto's famed self-portrait, *Standing Figure*, a remarkable work in which the artist blended himself into one of his silent scenes.

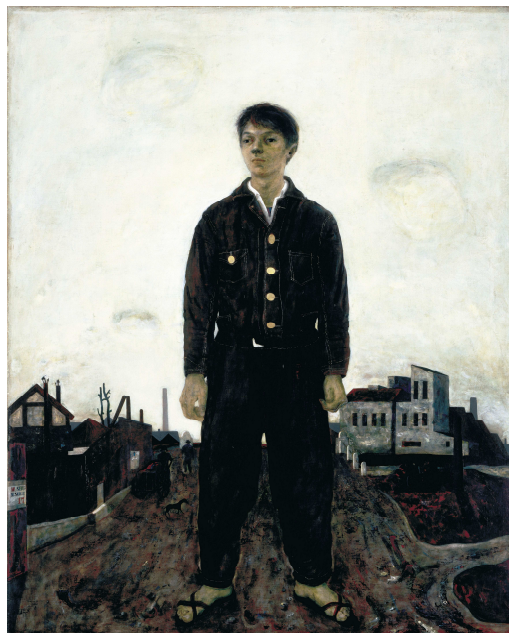


Fig. 5. Matsumoto Shunsuke, 1942. *Standing Figure* [oil on canvas]. © The Museum of Modern Art, Kamakura & Hayama [online]. Available from: http://www.moma.pref.kanagawa.jp/webmuseum_en/detail?cls=atkn&pkey=421&dicCls=author&dicDataId=1041&detailnkIdx=0 [Accessed 30 August 2018]

In this case, the buildings, figures, and street are pushed to the background to make way for Matsumoto's physiognomy to dominate the central focus of the work. The only other signs of life, besides Matsumoto, are the garbage men heading towards a disposal site. The insertion of the cart and garbage men is without a doubt carefully planned. They are not seen in his first sketches but were instead injected afterward in preparation for the full paintings.

This deliberate insertion of waste sites and garbagemen alongside the dominating presence of factories and wartime production demonstrates that Matsumoto was not simply celebrating the industrial achievements of the country, but specifically highlighting overlooked and underappreciated aspects of life that were usually deemed too 'unclean' for public discussion or artistic representation, but which were vital to the country's survival and modern status. He takes this idea a step farther in *Standing Figure*, painted just months after his publication of "The Living Artist" and his public feud with the government's attitude towards artists such as himself who refused to paint *sensōga*. Within the painting, Matsumoto has depicted himself, a disabled man rejected by the war effort, as taller than any building in the scene. In no other work from the *Muon no fūkei* does a human figure stand higher than a building. Yet here, the chimney stacks and roadway bend to make way for Matsumoto's imposing stance, and he becomes the axis for the work, forcing the landscape to rotate around him. He is a crucial and undeniable piece of Japan that cannot be erased or forgotten from this landscape, and the placement of himself directly in front of the waste disposal site and far larger than the garbagemen repudiates the idea that his deafness and refusal to paint *sensōga* makes him a worthless member of society, as "The National Defense State and the Fine Arts" article had named him. The *Muon no Fūkei* echoes this ethos, and underlines how even with his dispute over the importance of diversity of the arts Matsumoto clearly loved his country and believed that his words and paintings were necessary for Japan's advancement, even if they broke protocol.

Conclusion

In his short postwar career, Matsumoto reverted almost immediately back to abstract figures and even ventured into Cubism. Like many other artists, he was determined to move on from the war, returning to his vocal insistence of the need for individuality and experimentation. Ironically, the war seems to have intensified these beliefs despite the

government's attempts to quash them. Matsumoto became an early leader in unifying young artists towards rebuilding the Japanese avant-garde art scene that had been put on hold at the beginning of the war by arrests and government censorship, and it is a true loss to postwar Japanese art that Matsumoto passed away from health complications in 1948.

Sensōga and wartime art in Japan is still a developing field in academia. All known surviving *sensōga*, which number around 150 paintings, are held in the National Museum of Modern Art, Tōkyō. In 1977, shortly after they were returned to Japan by the United States, which had confiscated them in 1951, an exhibition was planned to display fifty of the works together but was cancelled due to controversy (Ikeda 2009, 21). The images, which were once intended to be preserved as glorious renditions of Japanese victory and resilience, are now largely removed from public eye. War art remains a difficult subject to discuss, as it forces viewers and museums to address the issue of Japanese war guilt, a still heated conversation.

This modern discomfort with *sensōga*, particularly the bloodier works from the later part of the war when artists turned to making images of heroic sacrifice as it became clear Japan was nearing defeat, has allowed Matsumoto Shunsuke's paintings to come back into the light. The landscapes and factory settings can easily be read in a non-political context or even as antiwar, making them much easier for institutions to showcase as examples on wartime art. But this idea belies the true nature of the works, which were Matsumoto's expression of both disagreement and support for Japan. In "The Living Artist," Matsumoto contends that as people from Asia had for decades now gone to Europe and America to learn different styles of painting and for education, rather than to Japan, any greater unification of the continent under Japanese rule could not be done through military force alone, and would require cultural dominance that put Japanese art on par with the famed Paris Salon (Matsumoto 1941, 479). While the collective was the key to success for Japan's military aims and the government believed the same could be true for art, Matsumoto did not see a path forward with *sensōga*. Therefore, in 1941 with the publication of "The National Defense State" and the arrests of his colleagues, Matsumoto Shunsuke found himself in a position where he was decried for being unable to meet both artistic and physical ideals. He was soundly rejected from both art and society.

The *Muon no fūkei* was Matsumoto's answer on how to make art during this time that would not land him in trouble with the government, and yet would convey his belief in the need for artists such as himself. As seen against popular *sensōga* of the time such as

Miyamoto's *The Meeting of General Yamashita and General Percival*, Matsumoto was specifically focused on an internal examination of Japan and national identity rather than on glory and power. Rather than constantly compare the East and West in their struggle for dominance, Shunsuke was far more concerned with the internal struggle of Japan and its non-conformists, pieces. The industrial focus of his landscape paintings from the time creates an image of Tōkyō that emphasizes overlooked and forgotten elements of the city. This hints at how, like a concrete bridge or canal, Matsumoto believed himself a product of Japan's Western-style modernism that was necessary in the creation of new industrial Japan. Meanwhile, the artist replaced his noisy city montages with images of empty roads populated only by solitary silhouettes in order to give a physical representation of his own feelings of entrapment and suppression. Intimacy with his surroundings disappears in the *Muon no fūkei*, and Matsumoto seems to more relate to pieces of overlooked waste and concrete. He becomes, quite literally, a shadow within Japan, the stigma of his deafness and desire for individualism making him unseen in the grand scheme of the country's all-encompassing war.

Physically, Matsumoto Shunsuke could not join his compatriots at the front lines. But he waged a quiet battle of his own during Japan's Fifteen-Year War through his art. Though he died young, it was Matsumoto who emerged victorious in the end. His position as a prolific non-*sensōga* painter has drawn him the posthumous fame and exhibitions that his disability and individualism cost him during the war.

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The Geopolitics of Ecological Art: Contemporary art projects in Japan and South Korea

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ABSTRACT

The notion of 'affinity with nature' functions as a powerful political concept employed in the national identification of different cultural regions of East Asia including Japan and South Korea. Both countries have much in common. They share the myths of a 'love of nature' and a comparable history of post-war economic miracles followed by an ecological crisis and the subsequent development of environmentalism. They also host highly recognised contemporary art events guided by an environmentalist agenda: the Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennale (ETAT), established in the depopulated countryside of Niigata Prefecture in 2000 by the Art Front Gallery, a commercial gallery from Tōkyō; and the Geumgang Nature Art Biennale, initiated by the Korean Nature Art Association (Yatoo), sponsored by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, and first held in 2004 in Gongju, South Chungcheong Province.

Guided by ecological thought, both art events aim to induce harmonious interaction between human and non-human realms, while questioning established modes of artistic interaction with 'nature' related to modern Western art discourses. Satoyama (lit. village mountain), an agricultural site based on harmonious human-nature interactions, the foundational concept of the ETAT, challenges the notion of gaze that defines the modern Western notion of landscape and its relationships with power. The 'nature art' practiced in Gongju, which involves simple interventions in the environment that are spontaneous and impermanent, questions the paradigms of Land Art. While responding to concrete environmental issues pertinent to the operation of social-ecological systems, the Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennale and the Geumgang Nature Art Biennale both attempt to create localised alternatives to dominant epistemologies associated with global (Western) art discourses. But the question is if these practices are capable of challenging the established geopolitics of ecological art and conventional hierarchies of power between the local and the global embodied by the institutional framework of the eco-art biennale.

KEYWORDS

Ecological art; Japan; South Korea; *Satoyama*; Nature art; Biennial culture; Socially engaged art; Ethno-commodity; Boutique multiculturalism.

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Ecoaesthetics

In recent years, the human impact on the environment has led scientists to label the current geological period 'the Anthropocene' or 'the Age of Man'. The gravity, urgency and magnitude of the problem has prompted calls for integration of knowledge coming from both the sustainability sciences (Gunderson and Holling 2002) and the humanities (Latour 2017). It is not surprising that sustainability has also become the staple of the

global art discourse. However, the definition of ecological art or eco-art remains extremely elusive, especially given that art historical discourse on eco-art is still nascent. The field of ecocriticism, which studies the arts' engagement with environmental concerns and the relationship between humans and the environment, so far has expressed little interest in visual arts (Zapf 2016). Suzaan Boettger observes: "(...) those writing about such work under the banner of 'ecocriticism' are a micro-minority" (2016, 665). The pioneering study of eco-art, which surveyed rather than interrogated the field, was only recently published by Linda Weintraub in 2012. The issue is further complicated by the confusion between eco-art and land art (also known as Earth art or environmental art) that emerged in the 1960s and the 1970s. However, land art was not primarily guided by ecological concerns (Boettger 2003), but rather expanded the boundaries of art through its material engagement with the environment. On the other hand, ecological art (eco-art) is generally understood as an artistic practice that aims to "ensure the well-being of future generations of the diversity of life forms inhabiting the planet" (Wallen 2012, 242). Rasheed Araeen (2009, 684), in his article "Ecoaesthetics: A Manifesto for the Twenty-First Century" published in 2008, in *Third Text* observes: "The world today is facing enormous violence and this will increase in the twenty-first century as the Earth's resources shrink due to the stupidity of the life humans have been pursuing. Art can and should strive for an alternative that is not only aesthetically affirmative and productive but also beneficial to all forms of life on our planet". Araeen also urges artists to "abandon their studios and stop making objects" (2009, 684). He calls: "What the world needs is rivers and lakes of clean water, collective farms and the planting of trees all over the world. An artistic imagination can in fact help achieve all these objectives; and it should (...) lay the foundation for a radical manifesto of art for the twenty-first century" (Araeen 2009, 683).

Many artists and critics share Araeen's sense of urgency and believe that art is one of the methods to save the world from the ecological and social apocalypse (Weintraub 2012). Others challenge the assumption about the functionality of artistic, political, and ecological imperatives encoded in the concept of environmentally and socially engaged art (Bishop 2012). But the goal of this study is not to debate the general functions of art but rather look at ecological art from the perspective of the geopolitics of contemporary art and the tensions between the local and the global.

The discourse on globalisation and the notions of the local and the global has intensified in recent years, transforming into a large, multidisciplinary field guided by different approaches and cultural perspectives (Minisalle 2007). These debates have also resurfaced in art studies, which among others advance the concepts of world art history (Onians 1996; Zijlmans and van Damme 2012). The richness and diversity of this discourse calls for critical attention. As comprehensive perspective is not only impossible but also counterproductive, this study takes a specific limited scope, which will address larger questions about the geopolitics of contemporary art. It will focus on the art biennale as a particular institutional setting guided by geopolitical ambition. Hou Hanru argues that biennials “seek to be nationally and even internationally significant, by putting forward particular and supposedly incomparable local characteristics, what we might call ‘locality’” (2005, 57). The challenging part of these negotiations between the global and the local is to transcend the established power relationships between locales and related epistemologies. The goal is to avoid the trap of conformist regionalism and instead produce new ‘localities’ (Appadurai 1996).

Hence, this study is located at a cross-section of art history and sustainability studies and will investigate the concept of the eco-art biennale/triennale, a particular institutional format associated with the politics of globalisation, where the global is supposed to meet the local. As the tensions between the two positions are intensified by the event’s environmentalist agenda prioritising local focus, which in turn is crucial to achieve global sustainability (Sandhu et al 2014), the eco-art biennale/triennale provides a promising topic for the inquiry.

An interesting entry point for these explorations may be provided by the study of two recurrent art events held in Japan and South Korea. Both countries share similar myths of a pre-modern ‘love of nature’ and a comparable history of post-war economic miracles followed by an ecological crisis and the subsequent development of environmentalism. They also host highly recognised contemporary art events guided by an environmentalist agenda: the Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennale (ETAT), established in the depopulated countryside of Niigata Prefecture in 2000 in Japan and the Geumgang Nature Art Biennale, initiated in 2004 by the Korean Nature Art Association, in Gongju, South Chungcheong Province in South Korea. Likewise guided by ecological thought, both art events aim to induce harmonious interaction between human and non-human realms, while questioning Eurocentric modes of artistic interaction ‘with nature’ and decolonising the

imaginary. Interestingly, although they both execute this in strikingly different ways, they both face the same pressures of the geopolitics of the contemporary art world.

The *tsumari* approach

The Echigo-Tsumari Art Field (ETAF) was established in 2000 by Kitagawa Fram (b. 1946) and the Art Front Gallery, a commercial gallery from Tōkyō.¹ Since then it has hosted a highly popular Triennale which boasts approximately 160 participating artists and draws hundreds of thousands of visitors to the remote areas of Niigata Prefecture (pre-modern Echigo Province) in the northwestern region of Japan. The success of this art project has recently been confirmed by the selection of the ETAF as one of the 2018 ‘Good Design Best 100’. In 2018 the project was granted the prestigious G Mark², an award established by the Japan Institute of Design Promotion in 1957, in recognition of the ETAF’s role as “a pioneer of the project which has discovered an alternative value of the region beyond conventional set of measurements such as size or efficiency”.³ An important role in generating this success was due to a particular philosophy, the so-called *tsumari* approach, which guided the festival. It is explained in the mission statement on the ETAF’s website. The statement begins with the heading ‘Humans are part of nature’ (*ningen wa shizen ni naihō sareru*), and reads: “As our civilisation reaches a critical juncture, the rich nature of the *satoyama* existence in Echigo-Tsumari can impel us to review our attitude to the environment, calling into question the modern paradigm which has caused such environmental destruction. This is the origin of the concept ‘humans are part of nature’, which has become the overarching concept for every program taking place in the Echigo-Tsumari Art Field”.⁴ This statement brings into focus the concept of *satoyama* (lit. village-mountain) or ‘livable mountain’, a type of socio-ecological production landscape that has become the new buzzword in environmental activism worldwide.⁵ Since its growth in popularity in the 1980s and 1990s, *satoyama* has been advocated by publications, conferences, forums, research, and more than five hundred active non-profit organisations and governmental policies promoting sustainable agriculture and the protection of the environment and its biodiversity.

¹ <http://www.echigo-tsumari.jp/eng/> [Accessed 12 October 2018].

² <http://www.g-mark.org/award/describe/48282>.

³ http://www.echigo-tsumari.jp/eng/news/2018/10/news_20181005_E [Accessed 12 October 2018].

⁴ <http://www.echigo-tsumari.jp/eng/about/> [Accessed 12 October 2018].

⁵ <http://satoyama-initiative.org/en/about/> [Accessed 12 October 2018].

Satoyama encompasses the pre-modern notion of “the woods close to the village, which was a source of such resources as fuel-wood and edible wild plants, and with which people traditionally had a high level of interaction” (Knight 2010, 422). The idea of ‘interaction’ between human and non-human elements is the key to its understanding. This agenda is clearly observable in Takeda Naoki’s (b.1961) project “SATOYAMA renaissance Enterprise – part I and part II” produced in 2009.



Fig. 1. SATOYAMA renaissance enterprise – Part I and part II [mixed media]. © The Echigo-Tsumari Art Field [online]. Available from: http://www.echigo-tsumari.jp/eng/artwork/satoyama_renaissance_enterprise_parti_and_partii [Accessed 12 October 2018]

The project featured cultivation of plants from the Matsunoyama area. The entire process of seed collection and cultivation was carried out with the help of local villagers. Each plant was numbered, signed by the artist and was offered for sale. The money was returned to the village. Takeda’s engagement with the agricultural cycle puts an emphasis on the human-nature interactions encoded in the concept of *satoyama*. It is possible to say that the artist followed the brief and created a successful work that builds on the *tsumari* approach.



Fig. 2. Utsumi Akiko (2006). For lots of lost windows [metal, textile].
 © The Echigo-Tsumari Art Field [Online]. Available from: http://www.echigo-tsumari.jp/eng/artwork/for_lots_of_lost_windows [Accessed 12 October 2018]

On the other hand, Utsumi Akiko (b. 1979) approached *satoyama* differently. Her work “For lots of lost windows”, installed in Kikyōbara village in 2006, featured a metal window-like frame with curtains through which the viewer is supposed to appreciate the beauty of *satoyama*. The artist explains: “The view seen from a window of a room becomes ‘my view’ [*watashi no fūkei*], a window for rediscovering the scenery of Echigo-Tsumari spreading outside”.⁶ However, rather than *satoyama*, Utsumi’s work refers to modern Western art discourse and its paradigmatic concept of landscape or *fūkei*. Importantly, modern artistic conventions such as linear perspective and realism located the subjective viewer of a landscape outside of the picture. At the same time, they gave the observer the power to control the landscape from an omnipotent, central position and to observe with scientific objectivity. The concept of ‘the gazing eye’ encoded in *fūkei* obviously imposes unequal relationships of power on the human and the non-human realms. It seems that Utsumi’s work relies on the romantic ideal of picturesque beauty rather than the harmonious coexistence of humans and nature based on mutual respect and the sustainable use of resources represented by *satoyama*.

⁶ http://www.echigo-tsumari.jp/eng/artwork/for_lots_of_lost_windows [Accessed 12.10.2018].

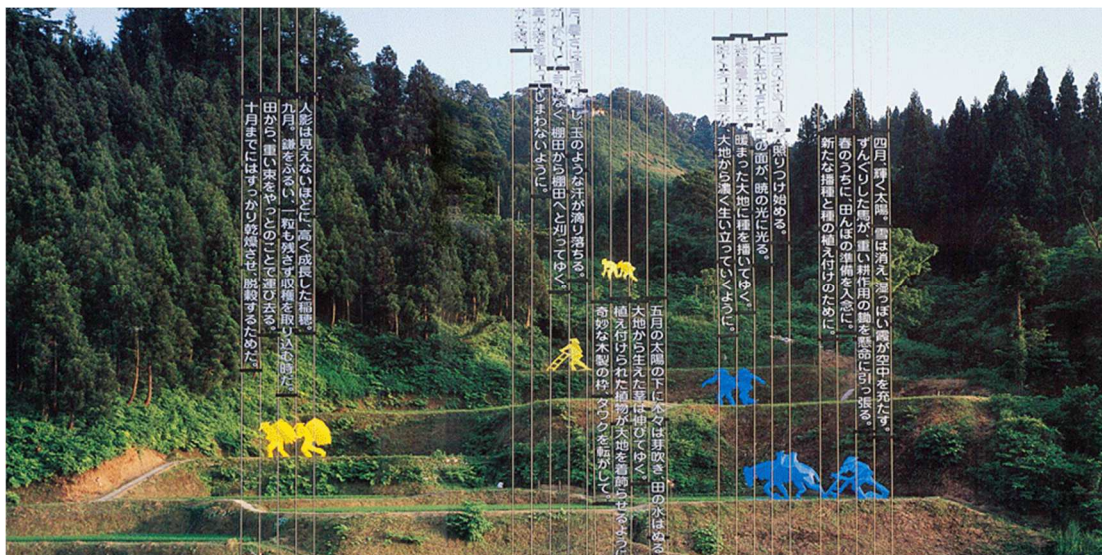


Fig. 3. Illia & Emilia Kabakov (2000). The rice field [mixed media].

© The Echigo-Tsumari Art Field [Online]. Available from: http://www.echigo-tsumari.jp/eng/artwork/the_rice_field [Accessed 12 October 2018]

Similar problems are also observable in Illia (b.1933) & Emilia Kabakov's (b.1945) "The rice field", installed in 2000 in Matsudai village. This work involves poetry on Japanese agriculture, rice paddies and sculpture depicting rice farmers. But, as already pointed out by Susanne Klein (2010), the sculptures represent European, not local agriculture and the work failed to engage with the local community. What is more, the project's description states, "Seen from the viewing platform in NO BUTAI text and sculpture seem to form a single painting".⁷ In the context of *satoyama* this 'painterly' aspect of the project is at least problematic. The installation emphasises the act of observation from a distance and as such perpetuates the concept of *fūkei*. There is also a question of whether the Kabakovs' installation can be successful outside this context. But the work is one of the most popular objects installed at the ETAF given its picturesque qualities as well as the iconic status of the Kabakovs in the history of post-war art. In fact, the Kabakovs are only two of many celebrities that contributed their works to ETAF, among others: Marina Abramovic, James Turrell, Joseph Kosuth, Yayoi Kusama and Cai Guo Qiang. Also, over two-thirds of the projects are commissioned on a permanent basis. The ETAF also boasts a permanent art museum, the Echigo-Tsumari Satoyama Museum of Contemporary Art (Kinare), designed by renowned architect

⁷ http://www.echigo-tsumari.jp/eng/artwork/the_rice_field [Accessed 12 October 2018].

Hiroshi Hara (b. 1936) and established in 2003. So, instead of deconstructing the objecthood of art as advocated by Araeen, it is clear that the objects are vital to the operation of the ETAF and they endow the area with an important cultural and economic legacy. In his contribution to the catalogue celebrating the 5th Triennale, held in the summer of 2012, Kitagawa Fram observes, “Today, activities in the Echigo-Tsumari Art Field are being linked to various government measures related to education, culture, welfare, tourism, the local economy, employment, agriculture and infrastructure” (2013, 8). Also, Sekiguchi Yoshifumi, the mayor of Tokamachi City and chairman of the Echigo-Tsumari Executive Committee, stated, “The aim of our festival is to reinvigorate the local community” (2013, 4). Paradoxically, although it owes its existence to art, the role and operation of the ETAF as an art event is consciously played down in these statements. Instead, they recognise its positive social impact. The event has been hugely successful in monetary terms due to the development of cultural capital as well as heritage- and eco-tourism that is currently booming. The ETAF differentiates itself from mass tourism and offers visitors a complex web of experiences, including participating in a hip international art festival, reviving the agricultural past of Japan, being close to nature, and travelling slowly. This strategy has been hugely successful. For example, in 2012 half a million of visitors came to see it (Sakai *et al.* 2012). However, the interactions with *satoyama* seem to rely largely on ‘visiting’ the festival and ‘gazing’ at *satoyama* and as such they resemble the operation of the concept of landscape in the institutional framework of an art gallery, even if this gallery is not necessarily a standard ‘white cube’.

It is noteworthy that the contemporary pro-ecological and post-developmental concept of *satoyama*, developed through the reference to the idea of pre-modern idyllic Japanese rural life, has successfully served as a conceptual reference for artists and visitors from Japan and abroad. But the ETAT has responded to a number of different and often contradictory agendas of various groups including, among others, local communities, local governments, art establishments, and the growing number of urbanites who visit the festival. In effect, the so-called *tsumari* approach based on the pre-modern native notion of *satoyama* has been distorted in the process of its adaptation to a wide array of these demands, not least contemporary global art discourse and the institutional framework of the international biennial.

“Thrown into the Field”

The Geumgang Nature Art Biennale was initiated more than 30 years ago (precisely in 1981) by Yattoo, a group of artists active in Gongju located 150 km South-west of Seoul. *Yattoo*, translated as “thrown into the field”, describes their artistic practices, which involve spontaneously created ephemeral installations emerging through their bodily interactions with nature. In time, these activities came to be known as ‘Nature Art’ and the group was renamed as the Korean Nature Art Association (KNAA). The Association organises a number of activities including the YATOO International Residence Program and a web-based project Yattoo-I, the YATOO International Project, and the Global Nomadic Art Project.⁸

The Yattoo-I website defines the concept of ‘Nature Art’ as follows: “Nature is not just utilised as a place or used as mere materials for erecting and making artworks, but Nature plays an active participation in becoming an active component of an artwork. Nature itself becomes the artwork. YATOO’s works are expressed by simple installations or performances interacting with Nature and doesn’t leave artworks behind”.⁹ Ko Seung-hyun, one of the founders and the spokesmen of the Yattoo, confesses: “Nature is my mother, my teacher and my friend [...]”.¹⁰ The Yattoo differentiates between ‘nature art’ and Land Art, commonly associated with Richard Long (1945-) or Robert Smithson’s (1938-) monumental landscape projects of the 1960s and 1970s, which have been criticised for its irresponsible interventions in nature and misuse of resources.

In contrast to this, South Korean artists describe their methodology and goals: “Simple actions such as piling, connecting, drawing, inserting, and throwing, are often the norm. As such, these works are often visually humble in nature, and reveal a stark contrast from overtly materialistic work. [...] This methodology shows the possibility of an artistic practice devoid of political and capitalistic elements which so easily become infused with other artistic movements.”¹¹ When located in the historical context, these endeavours can be seen as a critical response to the socio-political situation in South Korea in the 1980s, marked by industrialisation and internal political tensions. Through their actions, initially not considered ‘ecological art’, Yattoo artists intended to distance themselves from the mainstream art trends and institutions. Needless to say, the concept of nature used by

⁸ <http://www.natureartbiennale.org/en/> [Accessed 12 October 2018].

⁹ <http://www.yattoo.com/yattoo?ckattempt=1> [Accessed 12 October 2018].

¹⁰ http://www.natureartbiennale.org/en/bbs/board.php?bo_table=exhibition&wr_id=864&sca=2015&page=2 [Accessed 12 October 2018].

¹¹ <http://www.yattoo.com/yattoo?ckattempt=1> [Accessed 12 October 2018].

Yatoo artists is different from the Euro-American modern understanding of the term as explained by Lee Sang-don on the Biennale website: “[...] the nature as discussed in the East, especially in Taoism, never refers to the natural world. Neither are all human actions denied. Nature can be defined as the maintenance of the natural development and evolvement of things and the denial of all external coercions and violent interventions.” As such, nature includes, but is not limited to, the natural world. It rather refers to a certain state of everything in the world.



Fig. 4. Kang Hee-joon (2011). Rope marks [mixed media]. © Geumgang Nature Art Biennale [Online]. Available from: <http://yatooi.com/1269?ckattempt=1>

For example, Kang Hee-joon (b. 1958), born in Gongju and a 2018 participant in the ETAT, has been a central member of the ‘Nature Art’ scene since the 1980s. His humorous conceptual art often relies on the unexpected forms generated by his own body as he interacts with the landscape. He ‘hides’ in tall grass, drags collaborators across beaches or hillsides, leaving marks in the earth, and hangs brushes outdoors in the wind to generate drawings. “Rope marks”, a work created in 2011, is a good example of this artistic

practice.¹² Kang Hee-joon confesses, “I am strongly interested in small delicate objects from nature which are not recognised by people normally. I find a divine poetry in it. By observing the order of natural objects I adapt the microscopic changes and follow these structures. Substances of nature becomes the motive of my work”.¹³



Fig. 5. Ko Hyun-hie (2010). *Between* [mixed media]. © Geumgang Nature Art Biennale [Online].
Available from:
http://www.natureartbiennale.org/bbs/board.php?bo_table=exhibition&wr_id=553&sca=2010

A similar concern also guides the work by Ko Hyun-hie, one of the few female artists in the group, who has been part of the Yattoo since the 1980s. In her work “Between”, created in 2010, she filled the gaps between large boulders. An important aspect of her work is the contrast between the old boulders and the young twigs. In effect, her intervention is hardly visible and stresses nonviolent interactions between humans and nature.

¹² http://greenmuseum.org/content/artist_content/ct_id-291_artist_id-143.html [Accessed 12 October 2018].

¹³ http://greenmuseum.org/content/artist_content/ct_id-291_artist_id-143.html [Accessed 12 October 2018].



Fig. 6. Donald Buglass (2010). Cell [mixed media]. © Geumgang Nature Art Biennale [Online]. Available from: http://www.natureartbiennale.org/bbs/board.php?bo_table=exhibition&wr_id=554&sca=2010

The Geumgang Nature Art Biennale also features foreign artists as seen in “Cell”, a work by a New Zealand artist Donald Buglass (b. 1962), executed in 2010. Cut sections of tree trunk support each other and create a wooden hemisphere. They may demonstrate a link between the constructive tendencies of humans and the environment. “Cell” may also display the beauty and balance of nature as the structure holds itself.

All these works demonstrate that the Geumgang Nature Art Biennale favours art that involves very simple actions, limited intervention in nature and sees the world as social-ecological systems. However, this profile may have to change very soon. In 2011, Koh Seunghyun, one of the fathers of ‘Nature Art’, comments on its recent transformations: “As we [KNAA] have worked like an organisation of the Geumgang Biennale, it was inevitable for us to be institutionalised like mainstream art is. It has become a little bit stiff. ... We see that some ecological artists’ works are not visually attractive enough to exhibit their works in the Biennale. I understand that their works are valuable and meaningful, but from the standpoint of a coordinator for the biennale, we [KNAA] need to consider the perspectives of audiences. Those kinds of artworks are too difficult for the public to understand as an artwork. So we consider the artworks’ visual attractiveness when we organise the biennale. It is inevitable” (2013, 115-16). 2016 saw the change of method of selecting artists for the Geumgang Nature Art Biennale. The open public application was replaced by nominations by the GNAB’s Planning Committee.

The Geumgang Nature Art Biennale has been growing quickly both when it comes to infrastructure and the number and status of participating artists and visitors. For example, the Geumgang International Nature Art Centre at the Yeonmisan Nature Art Park opened in 2009. In 2010, the 4th Biennale attracted more than 40,000 visitors. The Korean Nature Art Association also started to diversify its activities. For example, it began a joint research effort with the Ulsan National Institute of Science and Technology

(UNIST). This project combines scientific research designed to reflect the ecological cycles of living ecosystems with artistic visions of nature. An obvious sign of recognition is the fact that the materials related to Yattoo's activities will be permanently stored in the National Archives of Korea. A vital role in these developments was played by the support of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, the South Chungcheong Province and Gongju City that began sponsoring it in 2004. The Association tries to maintain its original conceptual foundations, although it is clear that sooner or later the event may undergo significant conceptual transformations as the authorities and public demand more spectacular works that are more capable of attracting tourists and also boosting the international visibility of Korean culture.

Boutique multiculturalism

There is little doubt that the Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennale and the Geumgang Nature Art Biennale demonstrate a clearly discernible interest in 'delinking' from the Eurocentric art and knowledge systems. The respective conceptual frameworks of *satoyama* and *yattoo* challenge Eurocentric practices and concepts of art involving the environment as related to the notion of the picturesque, landscape or Land Art. Instead they advance different artistic approaches to environment and human-nature relationships. These approaches are presented as indigenous to their respective national/cultural context but remain open to the processes of global artistic flows. However, it is clear that it is very difficult to maintain a conceptual profile structured around cultural difference within the institutional structure of the international art biennial, which attracts artists generally operating on the global art scene. Significantly, the Biennial Foundation lists approximately 200 biennials and triennials held currently around the world that in a variety of ways revive the blueprint of the Venice Biennale established in 1895 with all its political and economic agendas.¹⁴

In 2012, in relation to these tendencies, David Joselit (2012, n.p.) recommended that "the scale of our response to globalisation should be more targeted, more socially engaged, even more intimate". The biennial or triennial is usually considered a unique platform of cross-cultural artistic exchange where transnational standards are imposed on local art scenes while the local culture can insert its own discourses into the transnational

¹⁴ <http://www.biennialfoundation.org/home/biennial-map/> [Accessed 12 October 2018].

conversation. In fact, rather than fostering understanding between the local and the foreign it frequently produces a 'biennial culture' (Jones 2010) created by 'global curators', 'global artists' and 'global audiences'. Biennials are a driving force behind cities' political positionings and their gentrification as they contribute to the cultural capital of the city. The 'biennial boom' began in the 1990s, and coincided with the decentralisation of the art world and the 'discovery' of non-Euroamerican contemporary art. These developments gave momentum to the global art history debate between assimilating or connecting non-Euro-American art exclusively to its cultural background on the one hand; and assimilating or integrating it into the existing Western knowledge systems and its subsequent homogenisation on the other hand (Zijlmans 2013). But Joselit observes: "I find that in the large Biennials, on the other hand, cultural difference is generally expressed as a relatively simplistic sound-bite" (2013, n.p.). And he advocates that a "global project could focus on a very specific place, by emphasizing its connectivity to a wider world". When seen from this perspective, it seems that both Japanese and Korean events successfully realised this goal as they combined the local knowledge systems (the concepts of *satoyama* and *yattoo*) with the frameworks of the international art world (biennale/triennale). Nevertheless, it seems that framing contemporary art objects within the local knowledge systems is not entirely successful. The emphasis on cultural difference may result in transforming art objects into 'ethno-commodities' that facilitate 'consumption of authentic otherness' (Comaroff & Comaroff 2009). Importantly, the pro-ecological agenda legitimises the conventional hierarchies of power between the local and the global. Sandwiched between the pressures of assimilation and alienation, *satoyama* and *yattoo* art seem to transform into ethno-commodities produced and consumed within the global 'biennial culture', which serves local social-economical and political agendas. These agendas respond to current social issues such as the depopulation of the countryside, the ageing population, and unsustainable development. Hence, *satoyama* and *yattoo* art can be seen as socially engaged art practices.

Araeen's manifesto of ecoaesthetics resonates with the recent 'ethical turn' in the humanities that is commonly perceived as a critical response to the passive consumption of art, which is perpetuated by 'the society of the spectacle' formed by repressive capitalism (Debord 1994). However, as pointed out by Jacques Rancière (2008, 7), participatory art is not a privileged political medium. This kind of 'pedagogy' fails in the face of the inherent performativity of art that is fluid and cannot function as a fixed

container of meanings. Consequently, in her critique of the social turn in art, Claire Bishop advocates the need to return to an analysis of the conceptual and affective complexity of artwork. Clearly, ecological art cannot be perceived as a ready-made solution to the environmental catastrophe (2012, 8). The institutionalisation of the non-Eurocentric discourses does not guarantee their successful de-provincialisation either.

But does this mean that nothing can change the established geopolitics of contemporary art? It is important to note that even if cultural objects can transform into 'ethno-commodities', this state is not permanent. Appadurai observes that due to the endless possibilities of commodity pathway diversion an object may move in and out of the 'commodity state' over the course of its social life (1986, 17). An object can be removed from its commodity pathway and can be replaced on it. This 'aesthetics of decontextualisation' transforms the ontological status of an object (Kopytoff 1986, 64). The operation of the Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennale and the Geumgang Nature Art Biennale, guided by a multiplex programme that includes art, ecology, economy and social agenda, exposes these intricacies.

It is also necessary to take into account the role of subjectivity and human agency in these processes. In this context, art is political in the sense that it is an agent in the shaping of the public imaginary. And it is clear that the complex conceptual roots, frameworks, and diverse agendas shaping the Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennale and the Geumgang Nature Art Biennale do not produce an entirely new alternative epistemology capable of challenging Eurocentric art discourse, but rather indicate the operation of 'boutique multiculturalism' as characterised by its superficial and cosmetic relationship to the objects of its affection (Fish 1997). Paradoxically, it remains an open question which cultural values and concepts are considered as 'other' and which ones are defined as the 'self' in the geopolitics of ecological art.

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Anime and Nationalism: The politics of representing Japan in *Summer Wars* (Hosoda Mamoru, 2009)

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ABSTRACT

Anime has a long and varied history of engagement with the national. This article investigates how different forms of nationalism inflected Hosoda Mamoru's Summer Wars (2009). Rather than focusing on extreme representations of nationalism such as propaganda, this article demonstrates how everyday or banal forms of nationalism also work to construct the nation. The release of Summer Wars coincided with a notable moment of turmoil within Japan's political firmament, and so the film's engagement with nationalism is examined in order to understand how Japanese media negotiate such political upheavals, and the role that nationalism plays in such negotiations. The article considers a range of representations, from the film's uses of Japanese history through to its discourse on online technologies in order to better understand how anime contains and refracts nationalism.

KEYWORDS

Anime; *Summer Wars*; Hosoda Mamoru; Nationalism.

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Japanese animation has long-standing links to nationalism. For example, anime historian and commentator Jonathan Clements quotes Japanese sources suggesting that animation was used to promote national sentiment in Japan even before anime itself came into being. Clements argues that an animated short called *Kokka Kimigayo* (*The National Anthem: His Majesty's Reign*, 1931), made by Ōfuji Noburō, was used to promote the singing of Japan's national anthem before film screenings and was 'hence liable to have been one of the most widely seen pieces of domestic animation in the 1930s' (2013, 47). Expanding upon this early link between Japanese animation and nationalism, World War II saw cinematic animated films used as propaganda in Japan, as they were elsewhere in the world (Cohen, 1997). In this period, Japanese animation's links to nationalism developed hand-in-hand with developments in animation form, with wartime propaganda like the *Momotarō* films (Seo Mitsuyo, 1945 and 1947) acting as first attempts at feature-length cel animation production in Japan. From such beginnings,

anime has matured into a medium with a complex history of national representation that ranges from nationalism to statelessness (Napier 2005).

In the most sustained academic engagement with anime and nationalism to date, media philosopher and historian Thomas Lamarre argues across a series of articles that Japanese wartime animation was not simply nationalistic, but also racist and speciesist. Analysing *Momotarō: Umi no shinpei* (*Momotarō's Divine Army*, Seo Mitsuyo 1945) and Tagawa Suihō's *Norakuro* manga and anime, Lamarre argues that 'Speciesism is a displacement of race and racism (relations between humans as imagined in racial terms) onto relations between humans and animals' (Lamarre 2008, 76). Elsewhere, Lamarre has problematised this equivalency between races and representations of nation(alism) in Japanese wartime animation by utilising Sakai Naoki's critiques of Japanese cultural nationalism and particularity (1997, 2000) to argue that such easy equivalencies 'completely ignore the process of mediation at work in the animations' (2010a, 87). Such semi-covert depictions of warring nations as different animal species within Japan's World War II animation subtended state discourses about enemies and a planned Co-Prosperity Sphere in Asia. In Lamarre's accounts, therefore, even before the anime industry had fully developed, Japanese animation displayed a nuanced and variable engagement with nationalism and performed key roles in disseminating nationalistic government policies.

Lamarre also notes that this nationalistic speciesism has been adaptive, living well beyond World War II:

speciesism has today expanded beyond its initial emphasis on racial difference to embrace all manner of cultural difference—racial, national, ethnic, subcultural, generational, and so on. It has become a stupendous translation machine that shuttles every difference it touches into biopolitical difference, introducing life into politics at every turn (Lamarre 2010b, 76).

It is to this politics of anime that I wish to turn. In this article, I expand on Lamarre's discussions of anime's wartime (bio)politics to investigate how nationalism manifests in varied ways in anime director Hosoda Mamoru's *Samā Wōzu* (*Summer Wars*, 2009). In doing so, I argue that – reflective of the way Yoshino Kosaku attests to the fragmentation of nationalism in Japan (1992)– there are now myriad nationalisms evident in anime, ranging from racism and speciesism to far more banal forms of pro-Japanese representation. Taking an approach similar to Sakai's calls for discursively constructed accounts of materialist forms of nationalism, I examine both the text of

Hosoda's *Summer Wars* and the way it was discursively constructed through its promotional surround (Klinger 1997). In this, I build not only on Sakai's work, but on that of New Film History, in which textual analysis is conducted in relation to the way films are discursively constructed and received (Street, 2000; Chapman *et al.*, 2007).

Nationalism and Anime

Summer Wars has been selected for this analysis because its release coincided with a moment of heightened political turmoil in Japan. The Liberal Democrat Party (LDP), which had been in power ever since 1955, lost its hold on government in 2009. According to Arthur Stockwin and Kweku Ampiah, this marked the beginning of Japanese politics' swing to the right. They note that:

Even though it appeared to re-establish its dominance in the late 2000s, it [the LDP] faltered and was replaced in office by the largest of the opposition parties in 2009, being confined to the opposition benches until winning back power in December 2012 (2017, 3).

In response, Stockwin and Ampiah argue that the LDP

evolved into a far more monolithic organization, whose center of gravity lay with the most right-wing section of the old party, determined to assert the primacy of national identity, to revise the constitution, roll back crucial elements of the occupation settlement, bear down on human rights guarantees and important elements of democratic process, remove restrictions on freedom of action of the Self-Defense Forces and establish Japan as what it called a "Normal State" (Stockwin and Ampiah 2017, 9).

The right-wing turn in contemporary Japanese politics mirrors that seen in many parts of the world, and this shift has been facilitated by internal as well as global issues in Japan. In light of these local and global issues, this article seeks to question what kinds of nationalism are at work in contemporaneous Japanese animation. *Summer Wars* provides a useful way into these debates because the film provides representations of both the local and the global.

Nationalism in Japan is a highly contested area of scholarship, not least in relation to film. Inoguchi Takashi, for example, provides a basic definition and critique of nationalism in Japan in which

nationalism is defined as a political principle holding that the political and national unit should be congruent, as a sentiment about that principle, and as a theory of political legitimacy requiring that ethnic boundaries should not cut across political ones (Inoguchi 2015, 216).

In this statement we can see postwar *Nihonjinron* (discourse of the Japanese) refracted; a discourse that situates Japan as ethnically homogeneous and unified, though in different ways in different periods of postwar Japanese history. Kosaku Yoshino, using a sociological approach, defines *Nihonjinron* as a form of cultural nationalism that ‘aims to regenerate national community in creating, preserving or strengthening a people’s cultural identity when it is felt to be lacking, inadequate or threatened’ (1992, 1). Film historian Ko Mika relates that it has taken a variety of forms but that ‘*Nihonjinron* legitimises certain political and social situations desired by the ruling group by linking these situations with the myth of an unbroken imperial line’ (Ko 2010, 18). *Nihonjinron*, therefore, retains a significant place in the politics of representation and in debates about nationalism in Japanese culture and cinema. Consequently, *Nihonjinron* has tended to operate as the other against which many scholars undertake their studies of nationalism in Japan (and its cinema).

However, academic studies of nationalism in contemporary Japan have tended to try to unpick the monolithic mythos of previous *Nihonjinron* accounts. For example, philosopher Sakai’s analysis of *Nihonjinron*, most notably through a critique of *Nihonjinron*’s ‘founding father’ Watsuji Tetsurō (1997, 115), provides a counter-narrative to *Nihonjinron*. He seeks to understand and unpack the binaries constructed around concepts such as Japanese particularism versus American universalism, which Sakai argues have underpinned such cultural nationalism debates (1997). By contrast, Yoshino outlines two valences along which we might see the development of cultural nationalism: temporal and spatial. He argues that these paths have generated divergent strands of nationalism based on the way ‘different social groups and different individuals have different perceptions of and attitudes towards the ways in which Japanese national identity and solidarity should be reaffirmed and reconstructed’ (1992, 223). Rather than entirely leaving *Nihonjinron* behind, both authors complicate and nuance the debates around *Nihonjinron*, seeing it as one manifestation among many.

Concurring with both authors, historian Tessa Morris-Suzuki has also argued that the Japanese nation has never been as unified as it first appears. Morris-Suzuki argues

that a pluralist understanding of Japan is necessary, one that takes in differing traditions of the nation and nationalism. 'By "traditions," I mean words, phrases, and bodies of thought which are passed on from one generation to the next and are in the process of constantly being reinterpreted, reworked, and interwoven' (Morris-Suzuki 1998, 11). Morris-Suzuki's concern with "traditions" and generations of nationalism chimes with the broader work of social psychologist Michael Billig who, though entirely focused on what he dubs 'the West', argues that studies of nationalism should move away from extreme cases, in order to attend to what he calls banal nationalism:

The term banal nationalism is introduced to cover the ideological habits which enable the established nations of the West to be reproduced. It is argued that these habits are not removed from everyday life, as some observers have supposed. Daily, the nation is indicated, or "flagged", in the lives of its citizenry. Nationalism, far from being an intermittent mood in established nations, is the endemic condition (Billig 1995, 12-13).

Here, Billig suggests it is the everyday practices of nationalism, which often pass unnoticed as common sense, which we should focus on. Just as anime has continued to incorporate and adapt cultural difference into its representational schema as Lamarre argues, I contend that anime has also continued to expand its relationship to nationalism as part of its endemic lexicography.

Alexandra Hambleton's study of Japanese television further complicates the picture of banal nationalism in Japan by building on Yoshino's cultural nationalism (1992) to examine how such representations manifest in Japanese media. She argues that:

Cultural nationalism is a process of regenerating a national community or identity when it is perceived to be under threat, and can be seen in behaviour as simple as displaying the national flag, or in more complicated performances' (Hambleton 2011, 42).

This fracturing of nationalism into a variety of more and less overt nationalisms has led Shimazu Naoko to question whether, 'instead of "nationalism in Japan", should we be closer to the complex reality if we were encouraged to think more in terms of the plural, that is, "nationalisms in Japan"' (Shimazu 2006, 181). In recognition of this complexity, I build on the work of Hambleton, Ko, Lamarre and Morris-Suzuki who all seek to analyse

texts and their contexts of production in search of potential nationalistic meanings, rather than seeking a single framework for nationalism in anime.

Alexandra Hambleton has argued that ‘the media plays a great role in the formation of Japanese perceptions of non-Japanese even within Japan. The media’s role in creating image of worlds that viewers have no opportunity to experience firsthand cannot be disregarded’ (Hambleton 2011, 33). Consequently, the Japanese media’s role in filtering the world for Japanese citizens adds frisson to the extant tensions in representations of self and other in those same media texts. These tensions are present everywhere from state campaigns that promote and exploit Japanese media, such as the ‘Cool Japan’ strategy (Abel 2011), to the piecemeal and myriad messages about Japan disseminated through its media texts. This makes it vital for us to refocus attention on contemporary nationalisms in all of their forms, and to think about how nationalism is manifesting along a spectrum from racism to the banal “flagging” of national identity.

This article therefore aims to examine how the national is represented in one specific case study – Hosoda’s *Summer Wars* – in order to consider how splintering nationalisms might be filtered through Japanese media, and how Japanese media producers might be responding to a specific contemporary moment of heightened political tension in Japan. By examining *Summer Wars* for signs of nationalism – in essence, by examining statements by the filmmakers and analysing the film itself for evidence of nationalistic references to traditional Japanese culture, for racism, for explicit references to the state and for comparisons to other countries in other parts of the world – I hope to be able to reveal the way Hosoda’s *Summer Wars* negotiates representing the Japanese nation at a recent turning point in Japanese history.

Family, Nationalism and *Summer Wars*

Following the assertions of Billig and others, it would be easy to read *Summer Wars* as a recuperative text that reasserts the stability of Japanese national identity in the face of this political upheaval. However, as Ko Mika attests, this period was marked not just by a political swing to the right and rising nationalism, but also by a rising discourse of multiculturalism. As Ko argues, this created an at least ‘cosmetic’ engagement with globalising representational strategies within Japanese film (Ko 2010). Linked to attempts

to use and promote Japan's 'soft power' abroad across the 2000s (McGray 2009), Ko argues that:

Since the late 1980s, Japan has been characterized by the coexistence of seemingly conflicting social and political practices. On the one hand, there has been a resurgence of right-wing nationalism, encouraging a reinforcement of traditional notions of 'Japaneseness' and of calls for a strong and united nation-state. On the other hand, there has also been an increasing propagation of discourses of *kokusai-ka*, or internationalisation, and of multiculturalism (Ko 2010, 1).

Summer Wars, therefore, came at a moment when the tension between national and multi- or transnational forces in Japan were particularly apparent. My question is to what extent can we see those forces at play in the film's production and in the film itself.

Summer Wars presents two internal worlds that mirror these tensions: an online world called OZ and a 'real' world that tells the story of a traditional large Japanese family called the Jinnouchis, whose family home is near Ueda city in Nagano prefecture. It is the second of these worlds that Hosoda is most consistent about across the promotion of *Summer Wars*, saying in interview that: '*Summer Wars* is about the vitality of a Japanese rural family.' (*Summer Wars* DVD). Promotional materials released in Japan took this a step further, appealing to national audiences:

a traditional Japanese extended family fights against a high-tech world crisis. [...] these 'relatives' are tied together by a cord across all the generations, from a baby to a great-grandmother, and even though it is the oldest in humanity, here is the strongest 'network!' (*Summer Wars* Film Partners 2009a)

In the hyperbolic promotion for *Summer Wars*, two things are revealed. First, that the film's producers were heavily signalling the importance of 'local' and 'traditional' Japanese identity to the meanings and pleasures to be found within *Summer Wars*. The discussion of the 'extended' family harks back to what Yoshino sees as a hallmark of 'secondary' nationalism's attempts to reassert traditional cultural bases, in this case the *ie* (home or family) and *mura* (village) systems linked to Shintō religion and emperor-worship that traditionally underpinned Japanese society (Yoshino 1992). Second, that the traditional Japanese family network is also viewed as preferable to the kinds of community generated online. Through the central family of protagonists in *Summer Wars* the traditional is framed as strong and multi-generational, making

traditional forms of the nation preferable to online 'networks'. The focus on the rural, the local and the traditional thereby situates the extended family in *Summer Wars* as something admirable and preferable within contemporary Japanese culture.

The extended family in *Summer Wars* is similarly heralded as something that Japan should return to, in ways that refract historical forms of nationalism in Japan. Morris-Suzuki has explained how the metaphor of the *ie* system in Japan has been linked to that of the emperor as father of the national family, wherein:

the emphasis was on vertical relationships between parents and children; where the power of the male household head was paramount; and where the maintenance of the household name was more important than biological blood ties (so that the adoption of heirs, whose take on the family surname, was a common practice) (Morris-Suzuki 1998, 78).

She goes on to indicate that this system is crucial to understanding modern Japanese nationalism, because the *ie* system 'was transformed into the central image of Japanese nationalist ideology from the late nineteenth century onward' (Morris-Suzuki 1998, 78). By representing the Jinnouchi household as an *ie*-style extended family at the heart of the narrative, the 'real' world depicted in *Summer Wars* ties the film to an overtly nationalist set of familial metaphors.

However, Hosoda's nationalist discourse is not straightforwardly presented in *Summer Wars*. Hosoda promoted the film by linking his own status within his family's *ie* system – and that of his wife's and his collaborators' families – to the genesis of representations of the traditional Japanese family in *Summer Wars*. In interview, the director remembers his character design retreat with Sadamoto Yoshiyuki and their discussions of family, saying that the intra-familial tensions in *Summer Wars* were a product of comparing his and Sadamoto's experiences of their *ie*. 'Sadamoto comes from a head family, while I'm from a branch family... and members of head families don't get along with members of branch families as a general rule. (laughs)' (Hosoda 2013, 125). The collaborative nature of the construction of the Jinnouchi family indicates what the director sees as a comparability of familial experience in Japan. The Jinnouchi family thereby becomes an amalgam of the national, or at least generalised Japanese, experience.

Journalist Anthony Carew notes that this comparison between familial experiences is part of the narrative of *Summer Wars*. Carew reports that Hosoda included a

“meet the family” story that was inspired [...] by his marriage, and meeting his new in-laws: “All these people who were total strangers before, were suddenly my family,” Hosoda says. “Your family suddenly doubles in size [...] I wanted to put that into a film” (Carew 2017).

Hosoda has elsewhere claimed that he included this theme because of what he perceived as a decline in the traditional *ie* system in Japan:

big families mean constant chaos, and that feeling of being bowled over every second with a new relationship was important. Families in Japan these days tend to stay pretty small, so I guess a family that big would seem even more bewildering (Sevakis 2009).

While it may be a conglomeration of Hosoda and his collaborators’ experiences of family, far from seeing the *ie* system as a norm, in *Summer Wars* Hosoda presents the extended Jinnouchi family almost as a throwback. The *ie* system is presented in clear contrast to the loner status of his protagonist, Koiso Kenji, whose family is small and fragmented, leaving Kenji largely isolated before his encounter with the Jinnouchis. Hosoda suggests that Kenji’s situation should be read as normative within contemporary Japan, and therefore that the extensive family of Jinnouchis, whom Kenji meets through his upper-classmate and love interest, Shinohara Natsuki, should be read as an exceptional other in the narrative. Kenji’s gradual acceptance into the Jinnouchi family can be read as a conservative narrative thread in which the protagonist is embraced and seemingly adopted into the traditional family structure of Japan in a manner that echoes *ie*-centred nationalism.

However, this core nationalist-familial ideology is further complicated by a range of twists that Hosoda applies to the logic of his nationalist familial discourse. Perhaps most obviously, the male head of the household in the traditional *ie* system is replaced by matriarch Jinnouchi Sakae, the family’s great-grandmother. Sakae’s status is overtly referred to by her family, when her daughter Jinnouchi Mariko says that ‘the head of the family’ adopted Wabisuke, who was the love child of Sakae’s husband. Later in the film, Hosoda shows a young Wabisuke being collected by Sakae and taken to the family home in Nagano, hints that it may have been Sakae, and not her husband, who adopted Wabisuke. At another moment in the film, a male family member declares that the women of the Jinnouchi clan tend to be stronger than the men, reinforcing Hosoda’s

inversion of the *ie* system's gender ideology. By placing Sakae at the head of the family, therefore, *Summer Wars* employs an obvious set of nationalist paradigms, but reworks and complicates their meanings so that they re-present the *ie* system as a potential challenge to patriarchal nationalism in Japan, all the while celebrating the *ie* system itself as a fundamentally nationalist concept, and one that – in this film at least – saves the world.

This impression is compounded by the uses of history and setting in *Summer Wars*. In the former case, the Jinnouchi family's history is used in the film to emphasise the past cultural significance of the clan, while at the same time, historical stories about the family are also used to suggest the family's outsider status within national history. History, therefore, is used to add a further layer of nationalistic representation by suggesting that the Jinnouchis have had a long history of involving themselves in state affairs, but the nationalism of these representations is undercut by the non-conformist ways in which the family has acted in relation to the state. This is a recuperative set of narrative threads that works to rehabilitate the nationalism seemingly inherent to the *ie* system within *Summer Wars*. For example, Jinnouchi Mansuke, Sakae's son, tells stories about the Jinnouchi family history at important moments within the narrative of *Summer Wars*. Initially, he tells Kenji that the family settled in Ueda to 'protect the land' and that, as part of the 'great Takeda Clan' their army won the first Battle of Ueda against the Tokugawa in 1586. Subsequently, Mansuke tells another historical story that the family uses as a strategy to fight against an Artificial Intelligence (AI) that has taken over parts of the online world of OZ, a global system that controls everything from infrastructure to shopping and gambling in the film's narrative.

In his journalistic article on *Summer Wars* Jonathan Clements quotes Hosoda admitting that he borrowed the Jinnouchi family stories from the real-world history of Ueda. Hosoda notes that Ueda 'was once ruled by the Sanada clan, and I'd learned that it was a historical fact that the local forces had twice defeated Tokugawa Hidetada' (Hosoda, in Clements n.d.). According to Hosoda's account, these battles in Ueda remain intrinsic to a sense of local pride and identity in the real world. Their use in *Summer Wars* creates another layer of appeal to Japanese audiences, one that runs beneath and alongside nationalism: the invocation of a sense of local pride. Given that the Tokugawa would become the eventual unifiers of the Japanese nation, Mansuke's stories position the Jinnouchi clan as historical rebels. The careful conflation of the real and represented in this example allows us to see the way animation mediates and collapses

the borders between the fictional and the real, allowing localism and nationalism to be exaggerated, or at least emphasised within anime.

The Jinnouchis' family history is underscored in *Summer Wars* by the associative editing that connects Sakae with a suit of samurai armour sitting prominently in an alcove in the family's main living space. Before she is introduced, a series of close-ups of the armour are shown while one of the characters describes Sakae. This conflates Sakae's non-traditional matriarchal role with those of past heads of the Jinnouchi family, and associates both with traditional martial forms of Japanese feudalism. In these ways, the history of the Jinnouchi family is paralleled to that of the founding of the feudal Japanese state, which helps to explain why Sakae has the cultural capital to mobilise a nationwide and powerful network of contacts in the later portions of the film. This connection between family history and the state, however, also suggests that the Jinnouchi clan should be read as past rebels who are now firmly entrenched within the hierarchies of Japanese political and social power, reinforcing the *ie* system's connections to that state, and through that connection, to Japanese nationalism.

The echoes of real history and the details of local culture displayed in *Summer Wars* were significant in and beyond the film. On the film's release in 2009, for example, the producers created a tourist map that audiences could use to explore the 'real' settings and locations seen in *Summer Wars* (Summer Wars Film Partners 2009b). The map provides images and descriptions from the film that can be found in the real world in the city of Ueda. Part of a wider 'contents tourism' boom in Japan (Seaton *et al.* 2017), this map focuses attention on the local instead of the national, but also partakes of a wider shift towards emphasising the real in anime for touristic purposes. The map is presented in the film's marketing colours, features the film's poster, includes avatars from OZ and commingles these with screenshots featuring animated versions of real-world locations and descriptions of their use in *Summer Wars*. In particular, the map highlights moments from the film that feature travel to Ueda, as well as some of the city's more obvious tourist attractions, such as the Ueda castle park, local shrines and festivals. These highly detailed, slice-of-life representations of Ueda are used promotionally, in order to ground the more outlandish aspects of the Jinnouchi storyline, but they also play to wider forms of banal nationalism, especially in the ways that infrastructure, sports and seasonal food are repeatedly emphasised in the film, and then again on the map. By focusing on the everyday, and on representations of real

places, *Summer Wars* offers a fictionalised version of cultural nationalism in which the banal and everyday are used to offset representations of externalised threat coming from OZ. By promoting tourism to Ueda, moreover, the filmmakers connect to a rising tide of domestic and regional tourism in which the fictional and the real of the Japanese nation are being brought into closer proximity with one another (Seaton *et al.* 2017).

From the central family to the representations and uses of history and settings, *Summer Wars* makes Japan central to its concerns. However, as the marketing catch phrase in Japan – ‘A large Japanese family saves the world!’ – implies, there are some perhaps unexpected aspects to these depictions of the traditional and national in *Summer Wars*. From a newly feminised version of the *ie* system through to a focus on Japan’s rural geographic north, the Japan of *Summer Wars* is often coded as alternative, even as it adheres to the kinds of nationalistic representation seen elsewhere in Japanese media.

OZ and Multicultural Japanese Nationalism

If the Jinnouchi storyline presents a bespoke local and domestic variation on banal Japanese nationalism in *Summer Wars*, then the depictions of the online world of OZ reframe the narrative in more global dimensions. Hosoda has explicitly said that OZ is intended to throw the nationalist representations of the Jinnouchi family into relief in *Summer Wars*, claiming that he focused on:

“How the minutiae of our daily life are [sic.] entwined inextricably with globalism. [...] I wasn’t being political, just contrasting domestic and global issues, and the convergence of problems within the family. I mean, if our ‘family’ can’t deal with the problems it already has, how can it deal with the problems of the world around it?” (Hosoda, in Clements, n.d.)

The director’s denial of politics seems disingenuous in a film that divides its concerns between the cultural capital held by traditional Japanese families and an overtly globalised online space. This division is reflected in the film’s dual animation aesthetics too, with the ‘real’ world of the Jinnouchis presented in what might be thought of as ‘traditional’ cel anime style, while the online world of OZ is created in 3-dimensional computer animation. By dividing the worlds in this way, the global issues raised in the film are linked to a form of animation more popular outside Japan than

within it (three-dimensional computer-generated animation is seen most commonly in video games in Japan), while the aesthetics of the local are emphatically tied to 'traditional' cel anime style, and even to Golden Age live action filmmakers like Ozu Yasujiro (Clements n.d.). Even more tellingly, Hosoda's invocation of the Japanese 'family' – meaning nation – needing to solve its problems, belies his claim about political disinterest.

The online world of OZ offers aesthetic and storytelling possibilities that are largely distinct from the portions of the film set in the 'real' world, with its more classically 'anime' aesthetic. OZ offers another 'other' space in which Hosoda is able to play with different forms and styles of representation. This connection between globalisation and OZ is perhaps most obvious in the ways sound and written languages are created for the online world. The film begins with an aural palimpsest. In the Japanese language version of *Summer Wars*, the female voiceover that welcomes viewers to OZ in Japanese is echoed by a simultaneous American-accented English language variant low in the soundtrack mix. From the opening onwards, therefore, OZ is presented to audiences as a multilingual space, and, as the voiceover narration informs viewers, the space is inherently transnational, something enabled by OZ's ability to provide simultaneous translations, turning user statements into any desired language.

These claims to multiculturalism are replicated throughout the portions of *Summer Wars* set in OZ. For example, as the initial voiceover tells us about OZ, an avatar bounces around bookshelves featuring famous world sites like the Colosseum and the Statue of Liberty. A few moments later, the same voiceover introduces audiences to the translation software in OZ, and we are shown avatars with text bubbles above their heads that rapidly shift from one language to another. OZ becomes a linguistically global space that is translated into Japanese language, placing Japan at the centre of the film's linguistic world. However, this translation is not always consistent. The two most significant instances of translingual communication in *Summer Wars* take place when Natsuki's young cousin, Kazuma, fights the film's antagonist AI using his avatar King Kazma. As King Kazma's challenge to the AI 'goes global', the screen fills with messages in a wide variety of scripts and languages. These multilingual message sequences repeat throughout the film thereafter, as the users of OZ cry out for help, or seek to support the film's main characters. In a contrasting example that emphasises transnational and translingual communication, the speech bubble motif is repeated when Natsuki later

battles to save OZ from the AI interloper. When she momentarily hesitates and loses most of her supporters, a young German boy types his offer of support, and the language shifts automatically between German to Japanese onscreen. However, during other battle sequences, and especially when a crowd shouts-types their encouragement for one of the film's central characters, original languages are often retained, creating a seemingly endless proliferation of messages in different languages.

These collages of text bubbles scatter across the screen in an echo of the kinds of anime 'superplanarity' discussed by Thomas Lamarre. Lamarre cites artist Murakami Takashi as having recognised anime's superplanarity, in which the animation 'flattens the image's multiple planes in order to force multiplicity to emerge at another level, that of information' (Lamarre 2006, 139). By having the speech bubbles proliferating across the screen, the designers of OZ create a similar flattening effect, hybridising two-dimensional objects within a three-dimensional world. This in turn, Marc Steinberg has argued, creates a 'mobility of the gaze' (Steinberg 2004, 450) that helps to reduce the importance of perspective and forces the viewer to seek out points of interest within the shot. Both Lamarre and Steinberg have discussed these techniques as connected to Murakami's Superflat art. Murakami created Superflat with reference to anime, and the reciprocal influences are perhaps not surprising given that Murakami hired Hosoda to direct his animated television commercials for fashion house Louis Vuitton, early in Hosoda's career when he was still working at Tōei Animation. The first of these commercials, titled *Superflat Monogram* (2003) and a sequel, *Superflat First Love* (2009), were produced in a computer animated 'superflat' world in which superplanarity is generated by focusing on characters in circular spaces, minimising background environments (Surman 2018).

Whether for commercial or artistic reasons, however, the connections between Superflat and OZ have been rejected by the filmmaker. Hosoda says that:

I had a great time working on *Superflat Monogram*, and of course I have great reverence for Murakami and his work. However, the look of those scenes [in OZ] isn't really something I made with his style in mind. Simply, it's a very clear, uncluttered look – there's virtually no backgrounds, just layering and compositing effects – and that visual simplicity appeals to me. (Sevakis 2009)

This rejection is important because Superflat art has its own connections to nationalism. Koh Dong-Yeoh explains that

Murakami's notions of 'Superflat' and 'Little Boy' are close to New Nationalists' interpretation of Japanese society in late modernity; his emphasis on history, traditional Edo-style painting, and otaku [manga and anime fans] is also repeated by the New Nationalists' nostalgic writings on Japan's wholesome nationhood before the American occupation and, most recently, before the post-bubble period of the 1990s (Koh 2010, 399).

The overlaps between the aesthetics of Hosoda's work with Murakami and the design of OZ suggest at least some replication of aspects of Superflat in *Summer Wars*, despite the director's protestations, and with it, the same kinds of potential for nationalism.

Three examples may help to demonstrate these connections. First, the rounded spaces into which protagonist Aya travels in *Superflat Monogram* are similar to the circular design of OZ, which has halos of 'bookshelves' circling around a central totem pole-style pillar. This means that OZ presents a dynamic space in which characters rarely travel in straight lines and in which there is little sense of edges or backgrounds, helping to emphasise surface layers of the animation. Second, the central totem pole features an ovoid, flattened cat's head, which, when it is graffitied by the AI, closely resembles Murakami's four-screen panel painting *Tan Tan Bo Puking* (also called *Gero Tan*, 2002). The deformation of this central pillar chimes with Koh's claims that *Tan Tan Bo Puking* represents the ultimate deformation of Murakami's DOB character (short for *dobijite*, meaning 'why'), which normally is described as a monkey that has ears like Mickey Mouse (Koh 2010, 398). Thirdly, there are a plethora of OZ avatars that can be conceptually linked to either DOB or *Superflat Monogram*.

The speciesism of these avatars – the anthropomorphic adoption of animal avatars by the human characters in *Summer Wars* – is redolent with multiculturalism, and some overt nationalism. The Jinnouchis who work for the state or infrastructure companies in Japan, for instance, adopt avatars related to those professions, while other characters have avatars more closely connected to Superflat art. For example, there are at least three panda-based characters similar to the LV Panda of the Louis Vuitton commercials. There are, in addition, multiple characters linked to Murakami's DOB and the wider Superflat oeuvre, which can be seen in the multiple OZ avatars with Mickey Mouse ears. Most notable amongst these characters is Kenji's original avatar, which takes the shape

of a teenager with black Mickey Mouse-style ears. When it gets taken over by the evil AI, it transforms into an evilly grinning version of the original avatar. In these aesthetic choices, there are points of overlap between the concerns of Murakami's Superflat art and Hosoda's *Summer Wars*. In the repetitions and allusions, *Summer Wars* becomes suggestively connected to the politics and ideologies of Superflat's nationalism, with *Summer Wars* sharing Superflat's critiques of commercialism, its precariously positive representations of multiculturalism and its use of aspects of traditional Japanese art to do so. In *Summer Wars*, regardless of the director's claims to the contrary, Superflat art itself is recycled into a palimpsest that opens up space for nationalism to creep in through the film's critiques of the fallibility of online, commercialised global spaces.

There are two important facets to the way a Superflat-inspired nationalism is evoked in *OZ*. First, and most overtly, there is an anti-American, pro-Japanese nationalism evident in Hosoda's depiction of the AI that inveigles its way into *OZ*. Known as Love Machine (after a song by Japanese girl group Morning Musume), the AI is created by the Jinnouchi family's estranged adoptee, Wabisuke, in an attempt to impress Sakae. Working in American academia, before selling his 'hacking' AI to the US Army, Wabisuke's avariciousness is linked to the lingering presence of the American military within Japan and therefore he and his creation are presented as the film's ostensible villains. But, more so than Wabisuke, the US Army is blamed for carelessly loosing Love Machine on the unexpected denizens of *OZ*. Hosoda thereby tries to spread the blame, and to create a multicultural sense of villainy. However, the fact that the protagonists all belong to a traditional Japanese family makes the US Army appear all-the-more culpable by comparison. In addition, with Sakae and her family taking responsibility for putting an end to Love Machine, the filmmakers suggest that the self-sacrificing Japanese family can recuperate Wabisuke's (and through him, Japan's) culpability in this global crisis. The allegory here between Japanese post-war history and the swing towards right wing nationalist rewritings of history is apparent, and this is perhaps the most overtly nationalist and culturally conservative aspect of *Summer Wars*.

On the flip side of this coin is heroine Natsuki's *hanafuda* card game battle with Love Machine in *OZ*. This traditional Japanese card game is often cited by the Nintendo games company as their starting point, although the film presents *hanafuda* as traditional and obscure enough that Natsuki's life-long experience of playing it gives her an advantage over the vastly more powerful AI. In *OZ*, the game is situated in a

casino environment full of neon Western gambling machines, into which the tradition *hanafuda* game is digitised and inserted, with the rounded backgrounds taking on the look of traditional Japanese art, while cards fly across the screen as Love Machine and Natsuki play for control over OZ's avatars. All of this makes for a complex, cluttered and transcultural mise-en-scene that reinforces the connections between *Summer Wars* and the precepts of Murakami's Superflat art, whilst also running contrary to Hosoda's proclaimed desire for simplicity. The game and casino environment also connect the traditions of the Jinnouchi household with the rest of the world. As Natsuki receives 'gifted' avatar support from people across the world, they begin to use the language of this culturally specific card game (shouting '*Koi koi!*' at key moments), and immediately understand its rules. Through this representational strategy, Hosoda suggests that Japanese cultural exports, such as games, have a global following that can be aligned with Japanese 'soft power' in nationalism debates (McGray 2009).

Conclusion

Summer Wars does, therefore, contain a wide spectrum of nationalisms. Most are focused on banal reproductions of the nation that reinforce national identity in the late 2000s, at a moment of political upheaval in Japan. The fact that the Japanese government only starts to fight back against Love Machine at the behest of phone calls from Sakae hints at Hosoda's ambivalence about the contemporary political situation in Japan. By returning to the traditional extended family system, with all of its nationalistic baggage, as the solution to the problem of a rampant AI threatening to destroy the world, Hosoda also suggests a conservative vision of Japanese culture.

Hosoda's challenge to this conservative conceptualising of Japanese identity is to position women, most notably Sakae and Natsuki, as the agents most capable of solving national problems. As a kind of gentle probing of banal nationalisms of late 2000s Japan, therefore, *Summer Wars* presents a complex view of banal nationalisms that acknowledges the problems Japan has been facing and sees their solution in a revisionist inversion of the gendering of traditional Japanese ideologies. However, these inversions are still underpinned by relatively clichéd conservative forms of femininity. Sakae can be read as the ultimate self-sacrificing heroine, and Natsuki's elevation to winged angel avatar within OZ is similarly suggestive of a retention of long-standing conservative gendered representational schema in *Summer Wars*.

The schema of pro-Japanese nationalisms that runs through *Summer Wars* is all the more important because of the twists that Hosoda makes. From the overtly anti-US military sentiment undergirding the film's narrative, to the far subtler declarations about Japanese media's soft power, to the uses of the *ie* system as an answer to Japan's contemporary political problems, *Summer Wars* is riddled with nationalism. Importantly, however, it is not riddled with a single kind of nationalism. Nor does the film or its filmmaker reach for particular nationalistic extremes. The US military is gently chided, with news reporting seen in *Summer Wars* arguing that the army had no idea that Love Machine would be able to run riot through global infrastructural systems when they began running their tests. In the soft critiques of politics, nations and Japanese nationalism itself, then, *Summer Wars* demonstrates the importance of attending to the variety in cultural nationalisms at times of heightened tension.

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Japanese Animation: East Asian Perspectives – **Yokota Masao & Hu Tze-Yue G. (Eds)**

Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2013, 325 p., softcover, in-text b/w pictures, with index

Review by Marco PELLITTERI | Shanghai International Studies University, China

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In the capacity of general editor for this journal, I have supervised a few book reviews by fellow scholars and have written two myself: this one and another for the next issue (*Teaching Japanese Popular Culture*, edited by D. Shamoan and C. McMorran, AAS 2016). Through these experiences, I realised even more now than ever before how scholars share certain ways of thinking about edited books. A considerable number of academics, myself included, who have reviewed edited books—e.g. the reviews in this and in the upcoming issue—implicitly divide collections into two overarching groups: those which have an organically, *ex ante* designed structure, and those which are put together *ex post* (there are also “hybrid” cases). In the first, *ex ante* group are collective works organised around a theme proposed by the editor(s), which can be based either on an open but very specific CFP, or on *ad personam* invitations to contribute on the basis of a project designed *a priori* by the editor. The latter composition strategy is by far the best to follow for an edited book. It is also the criterion used for so-called “handbooks”, reference texts with a somewhat encyclopaedic organisation but which are far beyond the classic idea of knowledge listed in alphabetical order and, on the contrary, possess a certain agility, transversality, and scholarly dynamism in the display of their contents. In the second, *ex post* group we find, for the most part, collections stemming from conferences and symposia. It is not per se that collections based on this criterion are *ipso facto* worse than or inferior to the *ex ante* structure. The distinguishing trait is not quality; there are organically edited works in the *ex ante* group whose chapters oscillate from mediocrity to greatness, and miscellaneous collections in the *ex post* group whose chapters, however detached from each other, are all of good-to-outstanding value. But in my experience as a reader and a scholar, it is much

harder for unorganised collections to reach the same standard and orderly structure compared to the collections of the ex ante group.

I shall explain this further later on, but first let us talk about *Japanese Animation*.

Japanese Animation: East Asian Perspectives was put together by Masao Yokota, a professor at Nihon University in Tōkyō who is a prominent clinical psychologist and the current president of the Japanese Psychological Association, with a long experience in the psychological dimensions of animation, and Tze-yue Hu, a California-based educator and researcher with a remarkable experience in the historical study of animation in Asia (cf. Hu's website at <https://tyghu.webs.com>). Hu has also authored an appreciable monograph, *Frames of Anime: Culture and Image-Building* (Hong Kong UP 2010). *Japanese Animation* partly stems from a panel held at the 2008 European Association of Japanese Studies (EAJS) conference, but from the number of chapters it is evident that for the most part the collection consists of essays added at a later stage.

The two introductions by the volume's curators are a nice entry point into the book's spirit, in that they set some epistemological hallmarks and synthetically explain the sense and position of this collection, especially the fact that it deliberately includes only Asian scholars. Hu's introductory essay incorporates representative literature on Japanese animation and clearly explains to a potentially heterogeneous readership the actual nature of Japanese animation (animated cinema created and produced by Japanese artists, crews, studios, etc.). She distinguishes (and theoretically/operationally defines) so-called *anime* from the rest of the diverse range of animated cinema made in Japan. Hu contextualises the emergence of Japanese animated cartoons from the model and inspiration of Chinese animation before and between the two world wars, explains the relevance and relative positions of each of the book's essays, and underlines the disciplinary perspective of each contributor.

The main goal of this volume is to provide a historic overview and multinational Asian perspectives on the scholarship on Japanese animation. It is therefore a partial shortcoming, in my view, that Hu and the other authors in the volume only refer to a very few *animation* theorists. It has to be underlined, though, that among the most relevant theorists of animation in general, and also of Japanese animation in Japan, there are not only Japanese scholars but also European scholars; in both cases, North American animation theorists seldom take those authors into consideration in the development of their visions on Japanese animation. Therefore, there is a strange asymmetry to this book,

which intends to raise awareness of Asian scholarship and Japanese animation but uses as its main theoretical hallmarks the perspectives of North American (US and Canadian) scholars, who in their work show little to no knowledge of some of the most important cinema and animation theorists from Japan and Europe, and present ideas on Japanese animation that are at times blatantly Orientalist or aesthetically ill-informed. In all this, what becomes clear is that none of these scholars (both those who contributed directly to this book and those who are cited as references) appears to have a wide knowledge of the scholarship on animation produced worldwide, but only of that from a specific region of the English-speaking world.

Yokota's introduction, in its more specific goal of explaining the history of animation studies by Japanese scholars, provides concise and precise coordinates on the generations of researchers who have engaged in this field in Japan. These include the contributors to this volume, some of whom are among the *crème de la crème* of Japanese research or work on (Japanese) animation under various disciplines.

The book is divided into six sections, from whose structure and length one can infer how difficult it was to organise the heterogeneous range of writings collected: two sections consist of only two chapters, and one section includes just *one* chapter. The longest section is the first, titled "Animation Studies and Animation History in Japan". Its opening chapter, titled "A Bipolar Approach to Understanding the History of Japanese Animation" by Nobuyuki Tsugata, is a quick and informative summary of the development of animation in Japan. This development is defined as "bipolar" due to the two main areas of animation made in Japan: commercial animation made in the 2D animated cartoon technique, which later came to be called *anime*, and all the rest—that is, independent, auteur animation. However, in further chapters another "pole" emerges, that of animated cartoons made before, during, and just after the wars. These can be defined as neither anime nor independent animation; they were propaganda cartoons financed by the government (the Japanese experience is in this sense similar to that of several other countries and their wartime animated productions, such as the United Kingdom, Italy, France, and the United States), as well as animation using techniques other than the animated cartoon. The latter cannot be framed as auteur works, since they were productions made within film studios, namely for advertising purposes in the form of TV commercials. A dimension of Japanese animation that is rarely analysed outside of Japan is in fact that these productions for advertising, in the postwar period—before the

resurgence of the animation industry through the foundation of Tōei Dōga—kept an agonising form of expression alive through the emergence of the television medium and the investment of growing capitals into it. This and related topics, such as the synergy between art and industry in Japanese animation during and after World War II, are explained in chapters distributed across the first and second sections, the latter titled “Pioneers of Japanese Animation”. In particular, Yasushi Watanabe’s chapter “The Japanese Walt Disney”, which focuses on Kenzō Masaoka, and Hu’s chapter “Animating for ‘Whom’ in the Aftermath of a World War” discuss the rich dialogue between artistic aims, industrial needs, and government commissions in Japanese animation between the early 1930s and late 1940s, while also conducting art-centred analyses on the overall value of these productions and the biographies of their creators.

Hu also authors another chapter in the first section: “Reflections on the Wan Brothers’ Letter to Japan”, which outlines the historical background and contextualises the deep influence of Chinese animation on Japanese cartoon productions of the 1930s and 1940s (and beyond). This and the other chapters in the book devoted to the Japanese animated productions and productive/creative criteria predating the advent of anime are particularly useful to that ample category of Japanese animation scholars who concentrate their attentions on contemporary anime from the standpoints of fandom studies, aesthetics, or societal issues, without details on the actual production, creative, formal, and originating cultural features of Japanese animation.

Japanese Animation: East Asian Perspectives, however, does not only talk of the history and current developments of Japanese animation, but also of how a tradition of studies on this field has struggled to emerge in Japan. The chapters “On the Establishment and the History of the Japan Society of Animation Studies” (by Masashi Koide) and its complementary “More on the History of the Japan Society of Animation Studies” (by Hiroshi Ikeda) reveal the human and intellectual dimensions behind the birth of animation studies in Japan. These insights into the intricate vicissitudes of this association and other competing research groups on animation in the Japanese context are a precious tool for international scholars to understand how difficult is to formalise the organised study of an emerging subject like animation in universities. As noted, the two chapters are complementary, in two senses. One is written by an academic researcher and the current president of the association (Koide), and the other by a renowned filmmaker and outstanding pioneer of modern Japanese animation in the

making and transmission of its techniques to new generations of animators through teaching (Ikeda). Moreover, having the two perspectives on the same subject—in this sense, this diptych of chapters fully reflects the title and intent of the collection—offers great insight into the contradictions and obstacles, as well as the dedication of researchers and artists in Japan, in its endeavour to create a structured, solid, institutionally legitimate interest for animation.

In the second section, in addition to the chapters already mentioned, Akiko Sano presents a study titled “*Chiyogami, Cartoon, Silhouette*”, dedicated to master Noburō Ōfuji. This and the two aforementioned chapters in the section offer a clever and historically documented explanation of how and why Japanese animation of the 1930s–1940s owes so much of their techniques, styles, and general structure to US cartoons. This section also examines how and why Japanese animation nonetheless kept a steady focus on Asian-centred themes and poetic attitudes, strongly influenced by Chinese animation, as Hu’s chapter on the Wan brothers argues in the first section.

The third section, titled “Popular Culture, East-West Expressions, and Tezuka Osamu”, is the least compelling. Its topics are too divergent, and the three chapters comprising the section are hinted at in the very wording of the section’s. The first chapter, “Tezuka and Takarazuka” (by Makiko Yamanashi), reconstructs the deep relationship between manga and animation master Osamu Tezuka, with the town where he spent his whole youth represented by renowned theatre company of actresses, the Takarazuka Revue. Yamanashi explains that many of the styles characteristic of *shōjo* manga (Japanese comics intended for girls) originated from Tezuka’s fascination for the Takarazuka Revue. The chapter presents an interesting historical outlook, but it contains some factual and historical mistakes, from which one can infer that the author is not a specialist of manga or animation. For example, she claims that the *shōjo* manga genre was established by Tezuka. This is not true, as manga scholar Rachel Matt Thorne has shown; Yamanashi’s explanation that the reasons for the ample cartoonish eyes of Tezuka’s manga derive from his admiration for the rich on-stage eye make-up of Takarazuka Revue’s actresses is incomplete, given that there are many more technical-historical reasons for this visual device in manga and anime. While the chapter is well-documented and an interesting read, it hardly touches on animation. Instead, it is a study on Tezuka as a manga creator and the influence of Takarazuka (both the town and the women’s revue) on his sensibility as a manga creator and a man, rather than a study on

animation. Furthermore, the chapter makes a problematic, ungrounded reference to the so-called *mukokuseki* concept, which is a highly disputable notion when it comes to anime and the physiognomy of anime characters. Yamanashi assumes that certain features of Tezuka's characters were deliberately ethnically ambiguous, and she falls into the same misunderstanding into which many scholars have tumbled. *Mukokuseki* and "odourless" cultural products do exist, and Kōichi Iwabuchi's presents sound arguments on this notion in his book *Recentering Globalization* (2002), where he discusses certain industrial commodities made in Japan. The notion has no empirical grounding when applied to the visual features of Japanese anime characters and the actual expressive, aesthetic, technical, taste-driven, and/or production-related reasons for certain visual choices in the making of manga series or anime shows. I have demonstrated the inconsistency of the notion of *mukokuseki* in the case of anime and manga in my book *The Dragon and the Dazzle* (2010) and a few more recent publications. *Mukokuseki* will be further discussed in Joon Yang Kim's essay.

The following chapter, "Growing Up with *Astro Boy* and *Mazinger Z*" by Korean scholar Dong-Yeon Koh, focuses on the success that Japanese televised animated children's series gained in South Korea despite the Korean government's long political and cultural ban on Japanese cultural imports. The Korean case has, of course, its specificities, as does every other country in which Japanese animation has arrived either officially or unofficially. However, in the wake of the perspectives promised in the book's title, it may have been advisable to link in some way the Korean case to other (at least Asian) stories, such as the arrival and success of anime in the Philippines or mainland China. There are huge parallels in the experiences of Italy, Spain, and France with Japanese animation, which share many features with the Korean case, in terms of the general dynamics of broadcasting and love/hate for this foreign cultural product, and in the very nature of the anime series imported. *Mazinger Z*, *Tetsuwan Atom*, and other franchises cited by the author, such as *UFO Robo Grendizer*, were and are ubiquitously celebrated in the aforementioned countries. This chapter offers an outstanding depth of analysis and originality of its approach: the survey on how Japanese animation—namely, science-fiction anime—"have changed Korea" delves into anime's cultural and technical relationship with science and mechanical technologies, its organised industry taken as a reference and inspiration for techniques and narrative genres (exemplified in the great success of a Korean pseudo-Mazinger, *Taekwon V*), the styles and visual strategies of its

pop culture and advertising, and certain trajectories of the contemporary art produced in the receiving country. The section of the chapter devoted to Korean pop-artists who drew inspiration from Japanese cartoons, while not unique in the world, is a profoundly revealing analysis of the Japanese pop culture's penetrative power in national and political environments which, officially, are overtly hostile towards engage in such cultural dialogue.

Kenny K. N. Chow, in "From Haiku and Handscroll to Tezuka", gets technical and explains the content and goal of one of his animation courses at the Hong Kong Polytechnic University. It is one of the chapters in this collection with outright theoretical (as well as hands-on) content on the substance of animation as an art and craft; it shows a knowledge of animation theory deeper than those provided in many of the other chapters, whose approaches are rather historical and descriptive or exploratory, or theoretical in regards to other topics while animation is just a means to other ends. By positing a contradiction in Asian and western animation approaches, Chow demonstrates how the former focuses more on the representation of space and time, whereas the latter focuses on characters' performance. Upon this premise, the author explains how he encourages his students to engage in the making of animation in which space and time are to be prioritised, establishing, moreover, subtle relations with other art forms such as Japanese poetry, Chinese handscroll painting, and manga and anime. The rich theoretical and intellectual pedestal of this short and dense chapter is reflected in its references, which include Arnheim, Deleuze, Eco, Lakoff, Johnson, and Wells. Animation theory should in fact engage in dialogue with wider sources in the fields of philosophy, semiotics, art criticism, and film theory. Although, it would have been satisfying to see more Asian cultural or film theorists cited besides Masako Hiraga.

The fourth section, "Female Characteristics and Transnational Identities", starts with a chapter by Akiko Sugawa-Shimada titled "Grotesque Cuteness of *Shōjo*", which focuses on the representations of the *Goth-Loli* subculture and fashion aesthetics in some Japanese contemporary TV anime. Her chapter is a beautiful study on gender issues in the representations of a certain composite subculture in anime. However, the standpoint and focus of this chapter feel like a stand-alone element in the context of this book's general scope and intention. There is little in this chapter that is actually connected to Japanese animation as such; anime is instead used as a medium, interchangeable with other forms of entertainment, such as live-action cinema, or light novels, or video games, in which there

is no lack of *Goth-Loli* characters. In terms of approach to the substance of animation as such, there is no reference to *who* made the animations cited in the chapter (*Death Note*, *Rozen Maiden*, and others), the objective production conditions of these series, why the studios decided to use characters dressed in *Goth-Loli* fashion, or whether the script writers and producers (men? women?) shared any interest in the postfeminist problematics outlined by the author. A cultural anthropology of subcultures and gender issues conducted through the analysis of a material cultural product (anime series) should not exclude *agency* as a key dimension: that is, why and how the actual creators of a visual narrative—first a manga, then an anime, in this case—decide to engage in certain aesthetic and thematic choices. Otherwise, the analysis will suggest an immanence of the theme itself, as if it had originated abstractly and not from specific people for concrete (cultural, fashion-related, market-driven, current trend-sensitive) reasons. To be clear, the chapter is a pleasant and dense reading, particularly the first part on the contextualisation of gender issues in Japanese society long before the emergence of the *Goth-Loli* subculture. The freedom accorded to all the contributors for the composition of their chapters is commendable in that it bypasses many of the (sometimes too stiff) constraints at play in the editorial process of many academic journals. But too much freedom in the scope, focus, and framework may create a feeling of disconnect with respect to the supposed goals of a collection, as seems to be the case with this chapter.

The following chapter by Korean scholar Joon Yang Kim is again linked to the theme of the feminine in anime, but tackles it from a completely different angle: the recurrent presence, in several films and series from a certain period in anime's history, of a romance between a Japanese man and a non-Japanese woman. Kim presents case studies of three famous science-fiction franchises: *Cyborg 009* (the original feature film and the first series, all from the 1960s), the first series and first two films of *Uchū senkan Yamato* (1974–1977), and the series *Chōjīkū yōsai Macross* (1982). Since it is true that when one reads a book there is always some topic that gets into better resonance with his interests, I cannot deny that this is the chapter of *Japanese Animation: East Asian Perspectives* I enjoyed the most. Not not only for the topic, its development, and the elegance of its arguments, but also because this kind of approach is useful to those fans—amateurs of Japanese animation, and western scholars especially—who *think* they know everything (or the important things) about the strategies and tactics of visual design of characters in anime, but they actually do not fully understand them to say the least, because of their powerful

perceptual and cultural biases—and because they sometimes don't do their homework. Many anime scholars have actually watched very few anime series and films, especially those that have defined the medium (1963–1984). Kim is a refined expert and theorist of animation and Japanese animation. He leaves nothing to chance in explaining the how and why of the aesthetic and narrational aspects he deals with. In so doing, he posits an educated doubt about the way the concept of *mukokuseki* has been used to address anime, whereas a more correct term could perhaps be *kokusaika* or internationalism, used by Hu (2010) in her own monograph. In effect, the anime films or TV shows that deploy casts of characters of diverse ethnicities and origins could not correctly be called *mukokuseki*, in that we are introduced to both characters that are narratively indicated as Japanese and characters that are indicated as non-Japanese. Above all, such characters are aesthetically and physiognomically codified using precise visual markers of ethnicity or national/regional origin. These markers vary: more or less pronounced eyelashes, the shape of the chin, nose size, and hair colour, among others. Kim focuses on this latter feature more than on the others, because the female characters who in the aforementioned anime films/series engage in romance with Japanese male characters often have blond hair. This trait indicates, as the author argues, an Other who may symbolise Russia, or the United States, or a more ambiguous European ethnicity; while the Japanese man has brown/black hair, a Japanese name, and those other features which—within the aesthetic standards, stylistic *routines*, and narrational ecosystem of anime—indicate a Japanese person. Kim pays much attention to the historical contextualisation of cultural stratifications in Japanese society and the self-representations of ethnicity and politically forced homogenisation of Japaneseness around the constructed and imposed idea of “*Yamato*”, which erased other forms of Japaneseness related to other areas of Japan outside the main island of Honshū (Okinawa, Hokkaidō, etc.).

The elegant discourse conducted, however, at times comes against the same limitations observed in other chapters in this and other books: there is no reference to the names and life experiences of those creators and producers. For instance, adding to the discussion considerations on the cultural milieu and nationalistic/nostalgic political ideas of Yoshinobu Nishizaki (the main creator and producer of *Uchū senkan Yamato*, as opposed to the more liberal and universalistic views of the other creative developer of the franchise, manga master Leiji Matsumoto) would have led the chapter to more complete explanations on the composite and at times contradictory messages and visual

strategies of these animated movies and series. The same mechanism applies to *Macross*. The creators of this space opera are generationally more attached to and influenced by US cinematography and science fiction than the previous generation of anime creators. The older creators' cultural background is, in fact, more refined and philosophically driven thanks to a higher and deeper knowledge of European and Japanese/Chinese thought and art. *Macross's* authors, following the inspiration of Hollywood and a specific sensibility, deployed a visual appeal that was meant to be explicitly globalist and universalist, but certainly not confusing or stateless (quite the opposite), as can be seen in the presence of characters who are visually explicitly Japanese, Chinese, of African origin, and of European name and appearance.

There is much beauty in Kim's essay, for instance in the remarks on why the *Uchū senkan Yamato* story features blond tall and skinny alien women who remind one, in their appearance and names, of Russia, and the historical allusions to a past that linked Japan and the Czars' Russia; or the superimposition of references to the technology of automata, literature, music, theatre, and ballet in the character of Françoise from *Cyborg 009*. But at times, perhaps because of a lack of a more detached viewpoint on the cultural inspirations of anime creators (tightly connected to the historical period in which they lived), some points are missing. For instance, it may be obvious enough that in an anime from 1964 such as *Cyborg 009*, the author of the original manga, Shōtarō Ishinomori, might have been inspired, to create a character that is a beautiful and curvy French woman, by Brigitte Bardot, the French actress who in those years was at the apex of her career and surrounded by a mythology purporting her to be the most beautiful diva to have ever walked on earth (not including Italian actress Sophia Loren). This would be a *boutade* if it were not for the fact that inspirations of this kind are the rule in anime and manga, not exceptions. The attitudes of anime creators toward foreign cultures and contemporary myths are a powerful fuel used to make certain characters fashionable, and the cultural knowledge of manga creators and animators in Japan is usually very refined, as we know from the literary and cinematographic inspirations declared and clearly deployed by authors such as Monkey Punch (*Lupin III*), Tetsuo Hara (*Hokuto no Ken*), Sampei Shirato (*Ninja Bugeichō*), etc. Furthermore, Kim is a little too insistent that there is a single explanation for the display of Japaneseness and other nationalities in anime, seeing such display as necessarily "nationalistic", whereas simpler or at least alternative explanations may have been found. Here, again, a more down-to-earth approach comprised of

interviews with the creators and producers, whose answers are often counterintuitive and help reorient researchers, may have been of great assistance. Regardless, this chapter is a great example of scholarship and I hope it will raise awareness about the “iconographic and iconological study of characters portrayed in the field of animation” (239).

The fifth section of the book, “Artistic Animation and Expression in Japan”, is composed of two chapters that are not connected by a particular subject or theme, but are two singular, valuable contributions to the collection. The creative duo Ikif (formed by animators Tokumitsu Kifune and Sonoko Ishida) authored the chapter “3-D Computer Graphics”, a short treatise and “board journal” on the technical solutions used for the realisation of a quantity of animated sequences for the movie *Ghost in the Shell 2: Innocence* (2004) and the CGI films on *Doraemon* (2004–2008). The high value of this chapter is in its unveiling, through accessible language, at least some of the technicalities characterising work on complex animated sequences in computer graphics, all by respecting the visual ambients and logics of anime. This is one of those rare occasions when international readers—scholars, fans, and students alike—can hear the voice of actual animators speak about the way they deal with their technical work. This gives us access, at least in part, to the mind of animators and to the fact that every visuo-narrative choice in animation is for the most part the outcome of technical procedures and not of the abstract spreading of immanent forces. Behind every single animation sequence is authors who have struggled to create what audiences see on the screen, and that result is often a compromise of several concrete factors such as technical ability, time, money, and negotiations between the animators and the director. The chapter is also an interesting reflection on the uncertain fate of Japanese 2D animated cartoon in the age of computer graphics; the artistic duo sheds a ray of hope through their own work, which, however deeply embedded in the industry of commercial animation, enjoys a wide range of styles and aesthetic results, as can be seen in the various visual solutions applied to specific scenes (songs, main titles, etc.) of the *Doraemon* feature films, in which traditional animation and computer-aided techniques were harmoniously blended.

“Animation and Psychology” is the title and topic of Masao Yokota’s chapter, a psychological analysis of the work of late Kihachirō Kawamoto, the animation talent who, in a midlife crisis at 38 years of age, decided to quit the Shiba animation studio, temporarily stop his activity on commercial animation, to focus on perfecting the art of animating puppets (this technique is called frame-by-frame or stop-motion animation)

with the sole purpose of doing artistic animation. Thus, he spent a period of training with stop-motion genius Jiří Trnka in Czechoslovakia in 1963–1966. Yokota’s specific expertise, and his first-hand contact and interview with Kawamoto, allowed him to conduct a subtle analysis of the artist’s films within a purely psychological framework, shedding light on an aspect of animation as only a trained psychologist *and* a refined animation scholar can do. Again, this study is valuable not only for actual scholars of animation but also for those who use anime as a means to pursue their own research agenda, even when it is only tangentially related to animation as such. In fact, the core of Yokota’s chapter is not psychology, it is the animator Kawamoto as a man and his animation as his human, artistic, emotional, and aesthetic offspring. This approach to the psychology of an animator may look perfectly meaningful in the case of a single, outstanding auteur (and it is); however, it can also be a great tool of knowledge for other, lesser known figures who have worked or currently work in industrial animation. The inner, sometimes well-hidden meanings of serial/commercial children’s animation are no less important for the comprehension of Japanese animation’s success among international audiences. To this end, Yokota’s chapter could serve as a model to follow perhaps for other psychologists who are fond of animation, and/or animation scholars turned—up to a point—psychologists.

The title of the sixth and final part of the book is “Japan’s First Commercial Animation Studio after the Second World War: Tōei”, and includes Hiroshi Ikeda’s second contribution to the book (“The Background of the Making of *Flying Phantom Ship*”) and three short appendixes: two samples of Kenny K. N. Chow’s class assignments for his students from his 2008 course “Principles of Visual Design” and a set of explanatory notes that contextualise some details of Ikeda’s second chapter. Ikeda’s essay focuses on the film *Soratobu Yūreisen* (lit. ‘The flying ship’, 1969), based on another manga by aforementioned Shōtarō Ishinomori, produced by Tōei Dōga, and directed precisely by Ikeda himself. Ikeda shares his memories on the production and the cultural milieu that generated as a result. The amount of information on the historical situation in which he and the studio’s crew found themselves provides readers with a dive into the actual making of animated cinema in Japan in the 1960s and the factors that played into it: namely, the influences from live-action cinema (directors, techniques, themes) and the relevance of social and political changes and crises during years to the topics chosen for this and other animated films. Ikeda lists a series of historical facts and then concludes that all the “incidents, events, and

developments influenced the film directors' filmmaking as they were no longer able to remain indifferent to the social situation and circumstances of that time" (290). The reading of this chapter is therefore educational at multiple levels, one of which is the inevitable extension of Ikeda's story and sentiments to those of many more Japanese animators, directors, and scriptwriters who, in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, created their animated series or movies while keeping one or both eyes on current international or local affairs, turning their "industrial" products—with the support of their producers, or sometimes in spite of them—into multi-layered narratives, even more valuable because their audience was comprised of children, and in disguise of colourful stories meant to sell toys. Moreover, Ikeda displays refined cinematographic and literary cultural knowledge, and in this he is no exception among Japanese directors and animators of his generation. For example, his wide knowledge of Italian Neorealism and European cinema at large, Japanese history, and science fiction novel, all converged to form a solid cultural background for the making of a film that was both visual entertainment and clean fuel for the young minds. This chapter can therefore be seen as a wonderful "special content", like a Director's Commentary segment in a DVD, if you will, but in the form of a beautiful testimony, at once both scholarship and literature.

As I wrote at the beginning of this review, this volume stems partly from a panel on Japanese animation held at a conference, but for the most part is comprised of essays that were not presented at that venue. Thus, the collection falls into the "hybrid" case I made reference to in the preamble of this review. It is not a rare case in publishing; rather, it is quite normal and understandable: the nucleus of an idea is developed thanks to further contributions. What is important in this process, however, is to keep focus on the main topics and goals, and justify the possible thematic ramifications. Unfortunately, there is no such focus in this book. The "perspectives" the title announces are all there, but they are not alternative views on a compact topic or set of topics. They are rather, for the most part, isolated approaches to very diverse areas and themes of Japanese animation. In this sense, I can reassure the reader that each chapter of the book, taken individually, is a highly informative read to say the least, and in several instances a valuable, articulate study as well. But the collection could well be a journal's special issue based on a vague CFP on "Japanese animation, accepting applications from East Asian scholars only". I insist on this point because, from this shortcoming as in a chain effect, other problems arise. From the standpoint of thematic organisation, there are too many

trajectories, and some of the chapters are thematically very distant from others. From the point of view of the general quality, the severe peer-reviewing process of any international academic journal would have ensured a stricter academic filtering process to avoid the ample heterogeneity in the approaches and methodologies of the chapters, as well as the very different ways in which theory, concepts, and references were dealt with by one author compared to another. The essays do not engage in any real conversation or dialogue, the occasional cross-references between chapters having been discreetly pointed out by the editors in some endnotes. There are several conceptual and factual errors that expert peer-reviewers would have spotted and reported to the authors. From the point of view of editorial organisation, another aspect that should have been avoided is that each chapter has its own references; there is no general bibliography. This encourages the reader to frame the volume as a miscellanea of independent essays, each of which could be considered autonomous.

This review first reached readers in 2019, but the work reviewed is from 2013. This gives us a bit of “perspective”, to use the keyword in the book’s title. First of all, it must be emphasised that it is rare—to my knowledge, it was the first case when the book came out—for a collection of essays on Japanese animation all written by Asian scholars to be published in English. Publication in English, by a US publisher, is an important sign of recognition of the general significance of making essays written by Asian researchers available to an audience that largely cannot read Japanese or other East Asian languages. In the intellectual framework of mutual understanding and acknowledgment of the ideas of authors coming from different backgrounds, milieus, and therefore intellectual mindsets, using the English language as a “neutral”, vehicular medium of communication is a choice for which we should praise the University Press of Mississippi. Besides and notwithstanding the possible commercial potential of this book, its cultural mission is highly commendable. However, it should be noted, even just *en passant*, that this English as a lingua franca has not been perfectly proofread in several chapters of the book. This is not a major problem, especially for readers like me, that is, those who are non-native English speakers. For those of “us”, the English language is simply a means to communicate ideas, as stated above. As my mindset is not Anglophone, there must be a certain degree of socio-linguistic negotiation and tolerance for differences in linguistic backgrounds. As literary perfection is not chief among the parameters of assessment, international scholars do not and should not usually engage in mental musings on typos, syntactical stiffness, or

other eccentricities. Native speakers, however, might disagree; in this sense, this slight criticism of mine is not addressed to the book's editors and contributors but to the publisher's proofreaders and copy-editors, who should have polished the typescript more carefully. There are imperfections dealing with Japanese long vowels and the original titles of the works cited, which are too often reported in italics and in English only (even when there is no edition in English!). Another problem that is the publisher's responsibility: the poor quality of the images featured and the inelegant way they are paginated. Any book on a visual art should be, if not artistic, at least visual. This issue is not uncommon among academic publishers.

In the end, *Japanese Animation: East Asian Perspectives* is an important collection. It offers essays and, as the title accurately announces, different standpoints on Japanese animation by East Asian scholars and professionals of the field. It is a must-read for the following categories of readers: (1) scholars of Japanese studies in the fields of humanities and arts; (2) animation historians and scholars of the moving image at large, with particular interest in the East Asian (not only Japanese) contexts; (3) American and European film scholars who perhaps specialise in Asian/Japanese cinema, but have seldom had the opportunity to read about Japanese animation; and (4) students and scholars of Japanese popular culture who are fond of that area of Japanese animation called anime, and which is but one among many fields of the animation cinema made in Japan by Japanese creators. In fact, a vast, potential audience of anime fans can find in this book a way to widen their often too narrow and poorly informed understanding about Japanese animated cinema. To give even more value to the book and put it into greater perspective, in the recent news I was informed by the editors that a "sequel", that is, a new volume on similar themes, is to be published in 2019 by the same University Press. I don't know about you, dear reader, but I cannot wait to have the new installment of this scholarly endeavour on the study of Japanese animation in my hands.

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Paris' Japan Expo 2018 as way to understand what Japanese animation is going to face in Europe and Italy

Exhibition at Parc des Expositions, Paris (France), 5-8 July 2018

Review by Marco PELLITTERI | Shanghai International Studies University, China)

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Yesterday's leftist critics did not understand Japanese cartoons and today anime are getting their comeuppance, even without television.

PARIS, 8 July 2018 — I've just got back from the last, intense day of the *Japan Expo*, the Japanese pop culture *kermesse* held every July – this year from July 5th to July 8th – in Paris's Parc des Expositions. Attracting hundreds of thousands of Frenchmen, largely between 15 and 25 years of age, its immense pavilions are capable of housing an army of life-sized Gundams and were teeming with fans. Thomas Sirdey, one of the Expo's three founders, reports that fans usually spend around 200 euros to buy manga, DVDs, gadgets, accessories and Japanese culinary delicacies.

In writing these paragraphs, I begin by noting a series of hard facts, which is why I had to start with the French context: both Italy and Japan are losing a great chance to revive once more what was the great success of Japanese animation and comic books within Italy, much more deeply rooted and wide-reaching than in any other European country, which I documented and analysed from a sociological perspective in the monographs, *The Dragon and the Dazzle* (Tunué 2008, 650 pp.) and *Mazinga Nostalgia* (1999, 2018). Italy's system of media and creative industries seems incapable of mobilising sizeable capital in regard to Japanese animation products. One example is the disappearance of animated series coming from the land of the Rising Sun via Italian free-to-air channels; simultaneously, Japanese companies are sceptical about investing resources in Italy and have also raised their licensing fees, in turn lowering Italian companies' enthusiasm about licensing series which many years ago cost a third or a fourth than US products and now

command roughly the same amount. It is not a coincidence that the European branch of Tōei Animation (the animation studio behind *Grendizer*, *Candy Candy* and *Dragon Ball*) has been set up in Paris, although the amount of Japanese franchises (both animated products and comic books) licensed in Italy from 1978 to 2005 were three times those licensed in France. Since 2005, however, the number of manga titles published annually in France has surpassed the number of manga published annually in Italy, while the gap in terms of number of anime series and films released on television, in theatres, and for the home-video is still much higher in Italy (but we don't know for how long it will be so).

The mainstream popularity of Japanese TV animation, so transversal and inter-classist (the view share of Japanese animation broadcast on Italian State TV and private broadcasters reached every children, ranging from those with holes in their shoes to those whose shoes had brand holes by design), has been subjected to years of indifference, lost in a constellation of nostalgic niche groups of now forty-year-old fans, all gathered in a subculture which feeds on revival concerts and DVD/gadgets collections of old series such as *Kōtetsu Jeeg* but unable to overthrow the stigma which identified *anime* and *manga* as ugly, dangerous, immoral and iconoclastic products when they were in fact the exact opposite, as shown in my research and in Luca Raffaelli's illuminating booklet *Le anime diseguate* (1994, 2019).

Italy's normalisation and partial acceptance of this subculture is not without its merits: first and foremost, the exodus of anime series from TV to internet-based platforms such as Netflix and other similar subscription-based services. This new web-based format, however, is still struggling. The European leader in anime digital delivery, Wakanim, is present all over the continent but not in Italy, where – as reported by Wakanim's founder Olivier Cervantès – local platform VVVVID dominates, albeit with inferior results compared to France or Germany. All in all, the transition from general TV broadcasting to web-based viewing and binge-watching (high-volume audiovisual consumption, typically characterised by watching three, five and even ten episodes back-to-back in a single night) is happening everywhere and is *also* working in the case of Japanese animation. This transition could lead to a new surge in the popularity of old and new Japanese animated series, all thanks to this new mode of consumption. There is also a possible unknown: today's forty-year-olds are galvanised when they see images or jingles from series they first encountered on TV during their childhood. Nowadays, the first contact with anime comes during viewers' adolescence or young

adulthood: thanks for the effort of then-channel director Carlo Freccero, RAI 4 broadcast many quality series in late night slots and built an audience well outside of the age group of children. Will introducing this entertainment product to a different age group produce an audience just as faithful and involved fifteen years from now? Judging from the crowds gathering and the many conventions throughout Italy, such as *Lucca Comics & Games*, we should be able confidently answer “yes”; but we shall see.

In the meantime, a few heroes have been elevated to national-popular status (in the original sense introduced by Antonio Gramsci). They are Japanese, but also hold Italian citizenship. Chief among them is *UFO Robot Grendizer* (*UFO Robot Goldrake* in Italy): libelled by the left-leaning press since 1978 on both sides of the Alps, it is the product of a misunderstanding born out of superficiality. Michele Serra, a journalist from leftist newspaper *L'Unità*, condemned Grendizer in favour of Mickey Mouse in a 1981 article ('Caro, vecchio Topolino fai ancora un Figurone', [My dear old Mickey, you're still looking great]). This inversion, which favoured a US product, was ironically humorous: to criticise the perceived ugliness of Japanese-style industrial entertainment, Serra deployed a symbol of America's slightly bigoted cultural imperialism as his virtuous example.

Today we can safely archive that kind of blasé and prejudiced critique. The paladin of inter-ethnic and interstellar resistance, the pacifist king-philosopher Duke Fleed at the helm of his majestic and arcane UFO-robot – which celebrates its forty years of unending success in the hearts of a generation, the one I have christened the “Grendizer-generation” – is still alive even if he does not fight with us. Instead, he has become a classic, rather like Italo Calvino would suggest: he needs to be re-discovered, as his singular, deeply educational content still has something to teach us.

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