

Article

# Japan in Spain. Japanese Culture through Spanish Eyes in the Film *Gisaku*

Rosanna Mestre Pérez 

Department of Theory of Languages and Communication Sciences, University of Valencia, 46010 Valencia, Spain; Rosanna.Mestre@uv.es

Received: 7 September 2018; Accepted: 24 November 2018; Published: 28 November 2018



**Abstract:** *Gisaku* (2005), by Baltasar Pedrosa, is a unique Spanish movie that was produced to sell the Spanish country brand to visitors attending the Spanish Pavilion at Expo Aichi 2005. It is a cartoon feature production that builds a fantastic plot combining the Expo's theme, the Spanish institutional objective of showing a good image of the country, and the aim of pleasing the target. This paper focuses on the last issue, more specifically on the narrative and production strategies of transcultural exchange developed to attract the Japanese audience. We analyze the movie from a discursive perspective. It is our hypothesis that *Gisaku* tries to empathize with its target by constructing a certain representation of the Japanese national culture the features of which come from an imagery of Japan negotiated in both traditional and renewed ways from Spain. It is a hybrid anime that deals with transnational representations of the Japanese national identity.

**Keywords:** cartoon movie; Japan and Spain; transnational imagery

## 1. Introduction

*Gisaku* is a unique movie for several reasons. The first of these goes back to the origin of the project that emerged in 2003 when the Spanish Government convened, through the Spanish Society of International Exhibitions (hereinafter, SEEI), the first public contest aimed at Spanish film producers on the occasion of the International Exhibition of Aichi 2005, in Japan. The objective of the First Ideas Contest for an audio-visual production of animation (SEEI 2005a) was the making of an audio-visual animation that would present Spain “in an attractive way for the Japanese family audience” (SEEI 2005a, p. 27), within the contents programmed by the Spanish Pavilion. The company Castelao Productions S.A., of the Filmax group, was the winner of the competition. The final cost of the film, paid for with both public and private financing, amounted to four million euros—1,800,000 of which were contributed by SEEI, while Filmax Productions provided the rest of the money (thanks to the company itself, the sale of the movie to the Spanish television network TVE, Spanish Institute of Audio-Visual Arts and Cinematography (ICAA) and the Galician autonomous government Xunta de Galicia). The production took place in the record time of twenty months, compared to the usual forty or fifty. This forced the creative team to plan strictly and shorten the whole production process. Most of this was carried out in Spain, using Spanish equipment, but some parts had to be farmed out to foreign teams. Twenty-one animation studios from countries like China, Japan, Italy or Korea collaborated with consolidated working teams that the Spanish producers had no time to organize. The film was not distributed in the Japanese film market, but was released in Spain and distributed in some Latin American countries and the Baltic Republics. This was due to the more flexible policies against violence in movie content in these markets, according to the producer of *Gisaku*, Rodríguez (2006).

SEEI established the conditions to which the production destined for the Expo should adhere (SEEI 2003): A cartoon film in three languages (Japanese, Spanish and English) that would accompany a comic-book of the film also entitled *Gisaku* (Pedrosa 2005). The film should include “a journey

through the geography and diversity of Spain,” have “an enormous educational and formative value for the Japanese family audience,” and serve “to deepen the mutual knowledge of the respective countries, discovering the common elements (wider and deeper than what is normally thought) and showing what is clearly ours (virtually unknown) to be especially attractive” (SEEI 2003, p. 2).

The tasks of coordination of the Spanish promotion in the Exhibition were carried out by the Spain Brand platform, constituted in January 2003 by public and private organizations<sup>1</sup>. This platform elaborated an analysis of the existing studies on the image of Spain in the Asia-Pacific area. From them it was inferred (Rodao García 2005; SEEI 2005a; Noya 2002, 2004) in Japan, traits of pre-democratic Spain were attributed to the European country<sup>2</sup>, such as scant technical scientific development, the medieval image of cities, a perception of citizen insecurity, and some important products, such as wine, which were unknown. But other aspects were positively valued, such as the prestige of the Spanish culture and an attraction toward the language. Language and culture aroused great sympathy, perhaps because Spain was perceived as a modern yet antiquated country, Western, but very different from other Western countries. Thus, we see a paradox that seems to be in consonance, according to Noya (2004), with the very combination of modernity and tradition that occurs in current Japanese society, which is Asian, but feels different from the other countries in its environment. These data served to configure the profile of the ideal spectator that *Gisaku* was addressing. Based on them, a list of ten priority objectives was drawn up to disseminate both an updated image of Spain in 2005, a time when the country was in a continuous phase of economic development and was the eighth largest economy in the world, and a plausible image of Japan. As we try to demonstrate with our analysis, the configuration of Japan and what is Japanese in the film derives in part from these objectives. Our analysis attempts to show that the items that make up Japan and the way these are presented on stage derive in part from these objectives and in part from features easily attributable to Japanese culture. Essentially, they are stereotypes of national images represented by their most basic and recognizable traits. Walter Lippmann (Lippmann 1997) defines stereotypes as simple concepts, more false than true, acquired through others rather than through direct experience and strongly resistant to change, a kind of sub-product. On the other hand, stereotypes are not the most creative option to represent *the other*, although they might be the safest in some contexts. It should be remembered that stereotypes are used because they work, and this is because they appeal to widely recognizable features that are partly true in many cases (Durand 2004). Indeed, they are true in so many cases that due to them a pattern has been created. Stereotypes do not look for originality, but for recognition and acceptance. This framework was used to construct a good image of Spain in *Gisaku* (Mestre 2007) and a similar positive portrait of Japan.

With regard to the perspective of our textual analysis, we follow the narratological tradition, one of the most consolidated tools with which to study narrative works since Gérard Genette published *Figures III* (Genette 1972), later reviewed in *Nouveau discours du récit* (Genette 1998) and followed by other authors who adapted literary categories for use in film studies (Seymour Chatman; Mieke Bal; André Gaudreault, François Jost). Any narrative discourse is the result of an enunciation or utterance process in which two agents or instances participate: A narrator or enunciator who builds a discourse and a receptor or addressee who reconstructs the text updating its meaning when reading it. The final meaning of the text may match to a greater or lesser extent that initially intended by the author, depending on the closeness of their cultural, ideological and aesthetic codes. Enunciator and addressee are the two main poles around which the six agents of a narrative discourse revolve (Chatman 1978). The most interesting ones for our analysis are the figures of implied author and implied reader, abstract instances built through the prints left by the real author in the discourse during the enunciative process. As Casetti (1986) and Casetti and Chio (1990) assert, the trace can be perceived in the organization

<sup>1</sup> This platform was made up of Asociación de Directivos de Comunicación, Foro de Marcas Renombradas Españolas, Instituto Español de Comercio Exterior, and Real Instituto Elcano de Estudios Internacionales y Estratégicos.

<sup>2</sup> The current democratic system in Spain has been in force since 1978, after the death of dictator Francisco Franco in 1975.

of what is shown, that look that institutes all the audio-visual information present in a movie. It is everything that reminds us that images and sounds are not given by themselves, but by someone who gives them to us. As such, “there are no stories without a storytelling instance” (Gaudreault and Jost 2004, p. 45). When we talk about the implied spectator we are not alluding, therefore, to the human spectator who sits in a theatre watching a movie, but to the presupposed audience, designed by a narration. We are referring to an abstract figure, inscribed in the text. At the same time, it is the real spectator who traces the signs left in the text. He or she must interpret the meaning(s) of the film following the signals. These can be more or less obvious. They are subjected to the, conscious and unconscious, decisions made by the real author. How explicit they are in the enunciation is a matter of style. Thus, what the real author claims that he or she wants to say with his or her movie may help to understand it, but our vision as an audience must focus on the text and the marks left inside it. We will search for these marks and the constructed implied Japanese spectator in the movie *Gisaku*.

At the same time, we will consider the terms in which the image of Japanese national identity is stated in this Spanish production made by Spanish creators for a very specific Japanese audience which is supposed to find a pleasant construction of itself in order to adopt a positive reception attitude to the Spanish national content of the movie. This goal is attained through production, narrative and discursive means in which transcultural exchange plays a key role in many ways. We propose that *Gisaku* can be understood as being transcultural, as MacDougall (1998, p. 245) points out, in relation to ethnographic films, “in the familiar sense of crossing cultural boundaries—indeed the very term implies an awareness and mediation of the unfamiliar—but they are also transcultural in another sense: That of defying such boundaries”. Some of this can be traced in Baltasar Pedrosa’s movie even if we classify it as an opportunistic transnationalism case, according to Hjort (2010) terminology, due to the ideological ambivalence of its obviously promotional mission. It might be also regarded as a weak transnational film because of the low transnational profile of its production, distribution, reception, etc., and it also can be considered an unmarked one since the transnational themes are not very explicit (Hjort 2010). Certainly, *Gisaku* has a rather international dimension that elaborates the concept of national identity in a strong way for both the cultures involved: Spanish and Japanese. But let us point out some of the significant production details that suggest a flexible management of cultural patterns and boundaries. Firstly, the movie has a country brand promotional intention, but it is not advertising: It is a fiction feature film made specifically for this purpose. This trait places the movie in an unconventional, and uncomfortable, terrain because a large amount of promotional content must be diluted in its diegesis without losing its appeal. Secondly, despite its fictional nature, the film market is not the ideal destination for this production. Also, *Gisaku* is intended for a Japanese target, but not for spectators in commercial or mass release cinemas: Small groups of people attending the limited exhibitions at Expo Aichi were the primary audience. Nonetheless, the film had commercial distribution outside Japan too and there was some economic income from the film market, but it was not expected to be a primary source of funding for the production because the Spanish Government had already strongly supported it. Thirdly, the producers chose a foreign kind of cartoon feature production, anime, due to its target, but the movie attempts to be a sort of hybrid animation production (partly anime, partly Spanish/Western animation) more than a *proper* or *pure* anime movie, according to the movie creators. Fourthly, by assuming the exposed position of this no man’s land aesthetic decision, *Gisaku* runs a considerable risk of being misunderstood or rejected, especially among otaku viewers, due to the implicit lack of *authenticity*. Fifthly, the movie focuses on *selling Spain*, but has a title that sounds more Japanese than Spanish in a sort of national mutation towards the destination culture.

Moreover, *Gisaku* also deals with a major transnational challenge on its narrative composition, since Japanese characters and their cultural background are represented by a foreign creative team. As we will justify, that team deals with what is Nipponese in the movie in both traditional and newer ways from a Spanish perspective. It is a film bordering the limits of anime and representing Japanese culture from outside its national boundaries. For this reason, it can be said that Japanese and anime presence in this Spanish movie is more about negotiations and appropriations than about imitations

and influences, employing the terms [Elsaesser \(2005\)](#) uses to refer to the adherence to a reference model in other cinematographic contexts. From “a text-based approach to national cinema” ([Highson 1989](#), p. 36), we explore the creativity that resituates the increasingly decontextualized images of anime ([Denison 2010, 2013](#)) and redefines some cultural and national boundaries. To achieve this goal, we analyze the strategies used in addition to the little details or nuances that make this marketing experiment possible. That is why I approach the movie with a qualitative analysis from a discursive perspective that includes considerations of transnational issues. I look at the story to identify some relevant topics, among which stereotypes play a key role. I also analyze the way in which they are transculturally negotiated through various discursive strategies used in both production and narration. The aim of this paper is to evaluate how *Gisaku*, a movie born in Spain as a unique case of country brand marketing, deals with one of the national identities involved (the Nipponese one) and enhances cultural transferability.

## 2. Japan in *Gisaku*

In our opinion, Japanese national identity is constructed in the film *Gisaku* mainly through two discursive strategies. On the one hand, the film includes long-established elements which are clearly recognized as belonging to Japanese culture, such as the figure of a samurai which is represented in the film by the Yohei character. Samurai are part of traditional Japanese culture and its traditional national image, but are very effective when it comes to signposting this culture on the other hand, Japan is also constructed in a subtler way via Spain, more specifically through the careful selection of features of Spanish culture that can easily connect with the Japanese viewer as it is assumed that, in some way, these features also play a significant role in Japanese referents. An example of this would be the choice of the Jerte Valley and its cherry blossoms as one of the many possible Spanish natural spaces portrayed. The cherry tree is surely more emblematic for Japanese people than for Spaniards because of the special value that its flower has in the Nipponese culture.

The items that put what it is considered Japanese in *Gisaku* have in principle an institutional origin. They come somehow through the Japanese guidelines established for the International Exhibition in terms of theme and subject areas and come more directly through the recommendations collected in the Spain Brand Manual. They are explicit references that *are given* to the creative team. However, the specific way of narrativizing them, their conversion into an attractive and acceptable audio-visual narration for the Japanese audience, is the result of a complex work of transcultural exchange. It emerges from the imagination and creative work of the scriptwriter, the art director, the musical composer, the director, and others, but also from the ideas they have about what a credible representation of Japan can be for the target of the movie. In the following sections we analyze the film studying how enunciation develops the two strategies mentioned.

### 2.1. Japan through Spain

The Aichi Expo had a theme, “Nature’s Wisdom,” and three thematic areas. The Spanish Pavilion chose to focus on the second, “The art of life: Cultures and their coexistence with nature” ([SEEI 2005b](#)). This, in turn, was seen from the framework of the Spain Brand Project Manual ([SEEI 2005b](#)). It was performed as an explicit desire to seek closer relations between the Japanese and Spanish cultures, enhancing the knowledge of common ground (in traditional activities, customs and habits of consumption) to arrive later at the differences. It was intended to activate a “process of fusion between the two cultures, whose relations began in the seventeenth century” ([SEEI 2005b](#), p. 7).

In this film by B. Pedrosa, the historical links between Japan and Spain are easily perceived through the plot. *Gisaku* tells the story of a struggle between Good and Evil in which a heterogeneous group of characters are involved. Some are human, such as Yohei, the brave samurai, and the Spaniards Riki, an orphan boy who lives with his tutor Carmona, and Moira, a young scientist. Others are not human, like Gorkan, the terrible demon who wants to rule the world; Linceto, a mutation of the Iberian lynx humanized by Gorkan; and Gisaku, another devil in Gorkan’s service. In the Spain of 2005,

the group led by Yohei had to collaborate to prevent Gorkan from achieving his goal of invading the world with his demonic hordes. The samurai, who arrived in Spain with the first Japanese expedition to Europe and America promoted by Date Masamune at the beginning of the seventeenth century, had waited almost four hundred years in the country to complete the mission entrusted to him: Protect the fragments of the Izanagi key. The key closes a magical door that communicates worlds of different dimensions and that opens every 385 years. It is composed of 5 fragments distributed in different Spanish populations that endow those who possess them with different types of power: Intelligence, nature, imagination, heart and courage. Yohei and his travel companions must tour the Spanish geography to get the different pieces. Thanks to them Gisaku defeats the evil demon in the final fight.

### 2.1.1. History

From a historical perspective, the links between Japan and Spain go back to the period between 1543 and 1643, called by some European historians “the Iberian century of Japan” because it includes the arrival of Portuguese and Spanish merchants and missionaries to the Asian archipelago (Cabezas 1994). These contacts put “the foundations of a process of transculturation called Nanbanjin culture or barbarians” (in the etymological sense of “foreigners”) (Guillén Selfa 1997, p. 17). For Europeans of that time, access to other geographies opened the possibility of conquest or commercial relations, but both were necessarily linked to processes of Christianization. With this purpose in 1549 the Spanish missionary Francisco de Jaso y Azpillicueta (1506–1552), better known as Francisco Javier<sup>3</sup>, was sent to Japan to create the mission of the Society of Jesus there. Francisco Javier, a key figure in relations between Japan and Spain, was not an explorer driven primarily by commercial ends, but a missionary who served as a translator and intermediary before merchants and rulers from his role as evangelizer. The film alludes to him, but it is striking that the religious motivation of his trips is omitted. You could even say that his figure appears altered when he is mentioned as “the Spanish Marco Polo, the first Westerner to make an effort to understand Japanese culture.” From this is inferred a rather neutral figure that threatens his real missionary status. In our opinion, the reasons for this distortion lie in the belief (possibly more Western than Japanese) that religion is one of those topics that can hurt sensitivities and that should be avoided when facilitating communication.

The Ibero-Japanese contacts were an important element of local culture openness and access to Western technology and socio-political organization, in addition to their first contacts with Christianity. They were possible thanks to the tolerance with which a part of the Japanese rulers welcomed the Westerners, for some time. A key figure in these interactions is the founder of the city of Sendai, daimyo Date Masamune (1567–1636), who became one of the most powerful feudal lords. Date showed sympathy for the European missionaries and was the promoter of the first Japanese expedition to America and Europe. He financed the construction of the ship *San Juan Bautista*, in which, between 1613 and 1620, a group of almost two hundred Japanese, mainly merchants, travelled to the viceroyalty of New Spain in America (Mexico) and Spain, as well as the Vatican. The expedition was led by the samurai Hasekura Rokuemon Tsunenaga (1571–1622) who visited the cities of Seville, Madrid and Barcelona, and was baptized as Felipe Francisco de Fachicura. His embassy is known as the Keicho mission, although it was not as profitable as expected, due to complex political conflicts (Cabezas 1994; Guillén Selfa 1997).

In the movie, Yohei’s character functions as an alter ego of Hasekura. In the dense flashback explaining his origin, Yohei justifies his presence in the Spain of 2005 clarifying that he arrived in 1620 as a member of an expedition of samurai in the service of Date Masamune. This five-year trip is summarized by a voice-over while the ship is shown following the American-European route on a map of that time. Like Hasekura, Yohei is sent to Spain with an important mission. His visit will allow him

---

<sup>3</sup> Francisco de Jaso, lord of Castle of Javier, was a prominent member of the Catholic religious order Compañía de Jesús. He was canonized by Pope Gregory XV in 1622. He was also appointed patron of tourism, in 1952, by Pope Pius XII.



to get to know some of the most emblematic Spanish cities, including the three visited by the historical Hasekura. Thanks to a lethargy of legendary dyes, Yohei remains alive and young in Seville's subsoil for almost four centuries. With this, his character fulfils the function of a bridge between the two temporal periods represented in the narration. In this way, the ideal viewer of the film *visits with* Yohei the times and places represented when he shares with the samurai his fictional adventures.

### 2.1.2. Nature

In addition to the historical connections, another way established by the SEEI to develop the thematic area "The art of life: Cultures and their coexistence with nature" was to convey the idea that the protection of the environment is important in Spain. This can be detected in the prominent role of fictional natural spaces. But in turn it connects with the importance that nature has in Japanese culture. Let us recall that the ancestral roots of Nipponese history have a key reference of a mythical-religious character in the *Kojiki*, the oldest surviving book about the history of the country. In it the origins of the country are narrated from a legendary perspective, from the creation of the world by two kami or divinities, Izanagi (god of life associated with the creation of the world) and Izanami (goddess of death). According to this Shinto symbology, kami are mysterious and undefined entities related to "numerous forces of nature (fountains, mountains, waterfalls, rivers, special locations)" (Sullivan 2008, p. 22). "The meaning of life, solidarity with the natural world and with society as a whole" (ibid., p. 36) depend on kami.

Regarding *Gisaku*, it is evident that nature is not represented in a spiritual, mythological or religious way, but rather by more functional and realistic references, as well as promotional ones to spread an internationally unknown aspect of Spanish landscape. We see, for example, vineyards linked to a wine cellar in a famous wine producing area (La Rioja). However, there are several highly relevant spaces that are engaging, due to their attractiveness, but above all because of the unusual selection criteria, since they do not usually function as dominant tourist claims of Spain. They also seem to differ significantly from the tourist iconography of Spain usually seen in Japan (Centeno Martín 2017a).

Surely the most outstanding element in this category is the representation of the Jerte Valley (Extremadura), with the spring beauty of its fields of cherry blossoms, green hills, and crystalline waterfalls. The cherry tree is a very important tree in this region, valued mainly for its fruit (these cherries have a Designation of Origin<sup>4</sup>), and the area is a well-known rural destination for Spanish tourism. But the cherry tree would not be one of the most striking or typical trees of Spanish flora, nor the Extremaduran Valley one of the most popular natural enclaves. In Japan, on the other hand, the cherry blossom is perceived as a metaphor for the ephemeral character of life. This charismatic flower for many Japanese people is a cause for celebration, in the traditional Hanami<sup>5</sup> festival, as well as for poetic or legendary creation. No wonder that Yohei feels that "It's like being back home".

Similarly, it is striking that the animal component of Linceto does not correspond to that of a particularly popular animal in Spain, nor is it frequent in legendary tales. The Iberian lynx (*Lynx pardinus*) is a species known because it is in danger of extinction, and therefore protected by authorities. In addition, Linceto is linked to a very specific environment, the Doñana National Park (Andalusia), an area known in Europe since the nineteenth century mainly for its relevance to migratory birds. Ultimately, the final fight between Gorkan and Gisaku takes place on an uninhabited island that evokes Dragonera Island (Balearic Islands), a place used for defensive purposes in previous centuries and also declared a protected space four decades ago.

This selection of rare natural references to represent Spain in the movie and its close connection with the plot suggest the textual construction of an implicit spectator whose *captatio benevolentiae*

<sup>4</sup> *Denominación de Origen* or *Denominación de Origen Protegida (DO/DOP)* is part of a regulatory classification system of quality and geographical origin used primarily for Spanish wines, but also for other kinds of food.

<sup>5</sup> The Hanami festival literally means "go see the flowers" and it is celebrated in spring. Numerous people congregate under the cherry blossoms to enjoy the beauty of the environment, drink and sing.

is intended to be achieved by showing a version of reality that can easily connect with him on an emotional level. It infers, thus, a viewer more interested in natural unmodified landscapes than in those transformed by man, sensitive to the protection of endangered species and the ludic-poetic potential of the fields of cherry blossoms, more inclined by the explosion of spring life in inland landscapes than by summer beach and sun. It would be, in short, a spectator who is not only educated in nature's respect and care, but who also is particularly receptive to the presence of natural heritage because he or she is capable of attributing to it a value that includes, but also transcends, its topographic and aesthetic dimension.

### 2.1.3. Cultural Connections

A third link between both countries that follows what was prescribed by the Spain Brand Project manual would correspond with the identification of certain Japan-Spain cultural connections, among which gastronomy and art occupy a prominent place. It is true that both manifest themselves differently in each culture. At the same time, they are very important in both Spanish and Japanese cultures (Abad Zardoya 2011; González-López 2018). The film shows a great effort to present these themes in different ways, including a latent message of cultural fusion.

The references to Spanish gastronomy are neat in *Gisaku*, even excessive in some scenes. The scriptwriter of the film Angel E. Pariente has affirmed that: "( . . . ) in my opinion there are eight minutes of film that are too much . . . Perhaps the clearest example is the scene of the wines and the food" (Pariente 2006). There are also evident references to some elements of coincidence between both countries, such as the high consumption of fish, with Japan being the country that leads the international ranking in this regard. Another element of union is the reference to a well-known Japanese culinary technique, the tempura<sup>6</sup>, similar to fried fish which is typical in the region where the protagonist child lives. Apart from these explicit mentions, there is also an implicit reference to the Japanese culture through the Spanish one. This is seen in the prominent place occupied by the gastronomic and hospitality protocols the guest Yohei seems to enjoy as much as Riki and Carmona. The rituals, the dishes and the surroundings are shown following the conventions of the host country, and a very great deal of trouble has been taken with the details of the sequence. Furthermore, an unspoken message is transmitted: The idea that when sitting around a table, which products are served are as important as the way and place where they are consumed, not to forget certain courtesy and hospitality rules towards the guests. If any doubt about the extent to which the interest in gastronomy is shared in both cultures could remain, the final sequence dissolves it definitively. When Yohei decides to stay with his new Spanish friends in Seville, he opens a tavern called "The Japanese." From there he honours his clients with Japanese hospitality, adopting the role of host in a foreign country. The film closes, then, with an exemplary scene of cultural transnationalities although the transformational arc of this character is weakly profiled.

It can also be noticed that there is an appreciable effort to establish literary connections, both real and fictitious, that may awake interest in the implicit audience. The recognition by Yohei that the symbol embedded in an old cane from Carmona will lead them to share information about *Don Quixote* (1605), by Miguel de Cervantes, as well as about Spanish Maecenas that Yohei personally knew in the 17th century. In addition, the work contains a connection with Gorkan through a fictitious secret code inserted in the original, *The Da Vinci Code* style. It is not happenchance that Carmona's profession is that of an antiquarian, which justifies that his house is full of works of art that are shown in several scenes; nor that he appears managing by telephone pictorial collections of important Spanish painters in the final sequence. The plot still goes a step further towards favoring East-West links by showing Carmona sharing this painting business with Drela. Thus, she also ends up integrating herself into everyday Spanish life by contributing her skills to the local artistic field.

---

<sup>6</sup> Tempura has been attributed by some historians to the influence of the Portuguese-Spanish missionaries (Guillén Selfa 1997).

Finally, another aspect that is not very frequent in Spanish cinematography, but that appears repeatedly in *Gisaku* is the presence of the Spanish forces of order. Its hypervisibility is of questionable narrative usefulness, because although they appear in several cities (Valencia, Santiago, Seville and Barcelona) arriving with alacrity at the altercations provoked by Gorkan, we do not see that they manage to solve the problems. Its function seems to be more discursive than narrative. The aim is to transmit an image of tranquillity in terms of citizen security that directly addresses Japanese viewers, specifically those who expressed concern about the subject in the opinion study on the image of Spain carried out by the SEEI.

## 2.2. Japan through Japan

The other strategy of approaching the Japanese audience derives from the representation of elements that evoke Japan in a more direct way. We will try to explain how the Spanish creative team looks at *the other*-Japanese-culture to select some *national* items accessed through certain channels of interaction, and then handles them in its own way to send them back to the Nipponese target of the movie in a sort of two-round transcultural movement.

### 2.2.1. Anime Animation

As we pointed out above, an obvious, a priori, stamp of national agency is the type of animation chosen. *Gisaku* was promoted as the first Spanish anime film, given that this was a form of animation practically unexplored so far by European industry. It can be inferred that this was intended to facilitate the acceptance of the film by Japanese spectators, apparently great fans of its own animation, since anime “is a truly mainstream pop culture phenomenon” (Napier 2008, p. 7), especially among young people. Working for the first time with anime conventions was not easy for the Spanish art team. Art director Carlos Ruano explained, for example, that

The truth is that the animators did have a hard time at first with not forcing a movement, or leaving the character fixed while speaking, but little by little we got it right. Leaving poses in a plane implies that the pose is very studied and very aesthetic, otherwise it would not hold on screen so long. We had to sacrifice action of movement for composition and visual effect (Ruano 2006).

However, *Gisaku* is not completely an anime movie. Rather, it is an experiment built with a mixture of production styles and techniques that hinder its classification and eventually its acceptance. The film was exhibited in Spanish cinemas as a regular fiction anime movie in 2006, which probably raised high expectations among Spanish *otaku* who maybe dreamt of a sort of Spanish *Akira* (1988), by Katsuhiro Otomo. The lack of information about the promotional aims of *Gisaku* probably favored some misunderstandings and disappointments about the movie<sup>7</sup>. More than following anime according to commonly agreed conventions (Denison 2013; Macwilliams 2008; Napier 2008), it is a Western-style animation<sup>8</sup> with a careful design of the backgrounds, Western character features and, at the same time, obvious winks at anime: Big-eyed characters, fight scenes, time suspension, thematic samurai, conflicts of the Shonen genre (for teenagers), etc. In the words of the film director B. Pedrosa:

<sup>7</sup> The main negative comments spread through the internet (blogs, forums, and so forth) pointed to the fact that it was not an actual anime film, it was for children and the promotional contents were too obvious. Those who were aware of the actual nature of the film highlighted the risk of the project, the *authenticity* of the fight scenes, and the quality of the images, and regretted the pressure (in terms of short production time and institutional control) that impeded a more accurate final product. See, for example, comments on FilmAffinity, <https://www.filmaffinity.com/es/film820786.html>; the post “Gisaku, dull katana” and its comments on <http://elsenordeloschupetes.blogspot.com/2005/12/gisaku-katana-sin-brillo.html>; or “Gisaku’: [S]amurai in Spain or the Cervantes code” on <https://www.espinof.com/estrenos/agisakua-samurais-en-espana-o-el-codigo-cervantes>.

<sup>8</sup> Spanish characters in the movie look like some American cartoons. For instance, Moira reminds us of TV series, such as *Disney’s Kim Possible* (2002); Riki evokes the boys in *The Mummy: The Animated Series* (2001) produced by Universal Cartoon Studios.



We obviously decided to maintain anime aesthetics, use its freedom in terms of narrative resources and cinematographic language but, without it seeming like a copy of Japanese anime. We wanted to contribute something of our own, something more Latin, more European. We wanted to enjoy the work and make that appear in the film. Technically, the film is the fusion between Eastern and Western forms of work, fulfilling one of the initial premises in the idea of the project, the approach of cultures. Finding that balance on the part of the team was the main technical difficulty to overcome, as well as the pressure exerted by the production time that did not permit many tests or improvisations (Pedrosa 2006).

C. Ruano refers similarly to the intended (non) agency of anime conventions:

The first thing we had to take into account was anime aesthetics: Big eyes, shine in the hair, its figurative style . . . and of course, its characteristic animation. At the same time, it also has Western or Spanish contributions, some sought after and others that came unintentionally. In many cases the animation moves away from anime and approaches western codes. Some characters' traits, like Gisaku's himself, are quite "Disney style" (Ruano 2006).

The film was not released in the impenetrable Japanese commercial market, so it is impossible to have data on an eventual reception of the movie in its cinemas. Yet, there are some indicators taken from the opinion poll conducted by Sendai's International Relations and City Promotion Section among the viewers who watched the film at the Aichi Expo<sup>9</sup>. It is noteworthy that its stylistic *impurity* or its promotional nature was not perceived as a lack or deficiency. On the contrary, the reception was generally positive<sup>10</sup>. In some cases, even surprise was expressed by the presence of references to the history of Japan in the plot of a foreign film and the high quality of the little-known Spanish animation (SEEI 2005a). Ruano (2006) also tells the anecdote that "It is true that we were told that they [some spectators] saw Riki as being very Japanese and they expected him to have more Spanish features." And he adds an interesting interpretation regarding transnational exchange: "This struck us quite a lot. I think they have adopted the aesthetic of big eyes as their own, and they really see themselves that way".

### 2.2.2. Religion

The movie also contains elements that evoke the Japanese Shinto religion and culture as well as Japanese Buddhism through its free representation by manga and anime (Macwilliams 2008; Sullivan 2008). We see fantastic characters, headed by the great demon that gives title to the film and whose name also suggests clearly oriental connotations. Gisaku, who joined Yohei after facing him in the seventeenth century, remains in Spain asleep inside a stone sculpture close to a Christian church, protected by the peaceful environment of the Jerte Valley. It appears as an animal resembling a cross between a lion and a dog that evokes Japanese Shinto komainus. As lions do in the Buddhist tradition, komainus are wards that protect from some evils and are usually placed in pairs. In fact, there is another ice sculpture of Gisaku at the very end of the movie, in the mysterious epilogue that finishes the narration with an open ending. When Yohei needs his help, he approaches the surroundings of the sacred place and, with a technique that evokes oriental purification rituals (burning some sticks of incense), the figure reverts to its animate state and becomes a small lion's cub, the size of a dog. On the other hand, Gorkan also has the capacity to transform himself, although in his case the change is to human form. His assistant Drela is an attractive woman with Asian features who serves him loyally

<sup>9</sup> There were 250 spectators who watched the movie of whom 118 formed a focus group to answer questions about the movie. Most of them were adults, including 53 women.

<sup>10</sup> This positive reception of an advertising anime fiction story might be similar to the surprise and positive comments that the short Japanese anime movie *Xi Avant* (2011), by Kenji Kamiyama, got when Spanish spectators recognized Barcelona and the Sagrada Familia Cathedral in it. See, for example, comments on this blog: <http://laarcadiadeurias.com/anime/xi-avant/>.

until his evilness is neutralized thanks to the amulet given by Yohei to Carmona and the Japanese magic words “Mukashi, mukashi” (meaning “Once upon a time”), showing the power of fairy tales.

This way, *Gisaku* includes divine entities, such as Gorkan and Gisaku, linked to life and death (like Izanagi and Izanami); beings that can adopt animal forms, either alive or as komainus, as well as anthropomorphic ones; a living being can have more than one form of existence and superhuman powers, just as kami can; there are magical objects (fragments of the Izanagi key) capable of transmitting powers, such as valor, to the world of the living; Divinity can be invoked through sacred rituals; there are stones and magic words that protect against evil beings; there are magic doors that manage temporality from a non-linear dimension . . .

### 2.2.3. Samurai

Another *obvious* Japanese element is the character of the samurai. Icons of traditional Japanese culture, these warriors and their code of ethics or bushido are part of the historical past, while they have become a cultural legacy through values such as honour, hierarchy, loyalty, and discipline, that remains through time (Barlés Báguena and Emeterio 2011; Rodríguez Navarro 2011). It is also the central element in manga, anime and video games of samurai matter (Rodríguez Navarro 2011; Macwilliams 2008); and it has been present in Spanish imagery about Japan for a long time. The image of Japan in Spain has been subject to major changes throughout history depending mainly on the existence of conflicts or political interests between the governments of both countries at critical times (Rodao García 2002), and the strength of cultural and art ties such as international exhibitions (Almazán Tomás 2006), among others. There is a curious historic connection with two topics dealt with in the film, samurai and technology, that goes back to the first years of the Franco dictatorship in Spain. At the beginning of his dictatorship and for a short period of time, Japan had a positive image in Spain. For political reasons, the Nipponese culture was considered as different to other Asian ones, according to Florentino Rodao García (2002). Japanese *otherness* was based “on the growing domain of modern technology along with the bushido code of military values that seemed to be a parallel of the traditionalist and fascist-modernist hybridity of the Franco regime” (Payne 2002, p. 6). The Japanese Empire was regarded as the alter ego of Spanish nationalists, which should continue the *crusade* against communism in Asia (Centeno Martín 2017b). In spite of the enormous temporal and cultural distance that separates the production conditions of *Gisaku* from the Franco era and its changing imaginary about Japan, it is nevertheless striking that the film evokes precisely those same traits. The message sent by the film maintains the connection with the idea of tradition. However, the fascist connotation is completely absent and is replaced by a positive idea of innovation and progress.

The simplest versions of the complex universe of samurai seem to have inspired the creative team of *Gisaku*, mainly because of the simplicity of the character’s psychology. Although Yohei is brave and responsible in fulfilling his mission, Gorkan’s great power transcends his skills. His unawareness of the Spanish geography and the technological resources necessary to find the Izanagi key force the samurai to work in a group. Yohei receives the help and admiration of Riki when he joins him. Yohei helps Riki to trust in himself, to realize that he does not need Izanagi’s piece to face difficulties with courage. Something similar happens with Moira and Linceto. Teamwork implies the acceptance of the peculiarities of each individual and the support of the group, which is not only effective against Gorkan, but favors attitudes of honesty and commitment among the characters. By transmitting positive values, such as teamwork and mutual respect, the film satisfies one of the recommendations of the Spain Brand Project manual. But it also gets another unwritten goal, which is to approach the type of conflicts and messages of the anime genre Shonen (Napier 2008; Macwilliams 2008). However, the samurai is a rather flat character because there is no internal struggle of forces that confers psychological complexity. A character with differentiating features and conflicts, as round characters, may be potentially more interesting, but may also provoke rejection more easily. In contrast, a flat character is very easy to identify, although it may be less attractive. Given that creating a foreign character who must be welcome by its native audience is a sensitive responsibility for an author,

especially when representing a culture without any real first-hand knowledge, it is our guess that the shortest route would be to choose the stereotype. Maybe that is why Yohei is shown as a friendly person who has everything a samurai needs: His bushido skills and a goal to fulfil.

#### 2.2.4. Technology

One noteworthy aspect of the film is the treatment of the scientific-technological matter, another institutional objective selected to show contemporary Spain, but probably something else. Japan's current link with technology is a recurrent element in the Western imagination of the country, inside and outside the universe of anime. Furthermore, it was also promoted as a Japanese feature among Spaniards in pre-democratic decades, as described above, but with very different meanings. In the movie, the Spanish administration records its little known scientific and technological advances (space technology, scientific research centre in Antarctica, wind energy, Nobel prizes), shown also through the gadgets that help to defeat Gorkan (a balloon that works with biogas, a boat that works with solar energy, etc.). By doing this, it not only makes a proud display of its heritage in front of native viewers in a country that is a global leader in technology, but it also tries to make a positive impression on them. Along with the amiable version of the technological issues, the film also dares to reveal its dark side by staging unorthodox devices to keep control over citizens. The fact that the character being monitored is evil Gorkan does not make it any less worrisome.

#### 2.2.5. Tourists

Finally, it is worth quoting a scene that can be seen to be a nice joke about Japan. Both countries share common interests in tourism, Japan being both attractive to foreign tourists and the origin of an appreciable flow of visitors to other countries. These potential travellers to Spain are the actual target audience of the movie, although they are briefly represented. At the beginning of the film, the samurai meets some Japanese tourists who, like him, discover Seville in 2005. Surprised and happy to discover his compatriots who quickly take a picture of him, Yohei asks them which clan they are from and if any of them are from Sendai. With a friendly allusion to the stereotype about the omnipresence of Japanese tourists in the West and their traditional interest in photographic captures, Riki says that they belong to the "clan of tourists".

### 3. Conclusions

*Gisaku* (2005), by Baltasar Pedrosa, is a unique Spanish cartoon movie produced to sell Spain's country brand to the visitors attending the Spanish Pavilion at Expo Aichi 2005. It builds a fantastic plot combining information coming from the theme of the Expo, focused on nature and Spain's institutional mission of showing a good image of Spain, which includes the aim of pleasing the target audience by portraying an acceptable picture of Japan. This little-known film may be considered an opportunistic, weak and unmarked transnational film, but it still shows very interesting and renewed forms of transnational exchange. Given the fact that very little information about the audience is available, the movie is analyzed from a narratological perspective in order to trace the narrative strategies used to construct the implied spectator and the terms in which his or her national identity is constructed. This approach shows that there are two main frameworks that guide this engagement with the Japanese audience. They appear in the story, and both narrative and production discourse. Firstly, the movie offers a representation of Spain's national identity by using some singular features of Spanish culture that can be particularly attractive to Japanese spectators, thus shaping *Spanishness* from an *otherness* for marketing reasons. Although it does not show a false or implausible image of Spanish culture, it is modelled using both common and uncommon features and modes of representation. It looks like an interesting case of national self-representation shaped to suit a foreign audience of potential tourists. The historical presence of Japanese visitors in Spain in the 17th century, cherry blossoms in the Jerte Valley or the importance of art and gastronomy might be some good examples. Secondly, there are some elements that are easily recognizable as Japanese icons from a Western perspective

and which have been appropriated in novel ways. The most obvious detail is a title that sounds Japanese, but one of the most remarkable features is the hybrid identity of the anime animation in the film (using partly anime and partly Western/Spanish codes). This is not free from serious risks, especially among those who might regard this *impurity* as failure or negligence. Moreover, the story contains the character of a samurai with bushido skills who in the last scene puts fighting aside to open a Japanese tavern in Seville. He is an uncomplicated character built from friendly stereotypes probably to facilitate acceptance by the target audience. But unexpectedly and unjustifiably, he also breaks the mold of the classic samurai to accommodate the changing times in a foreign country right before the movie ends. In this way *Gisaku* shows a particular appropriation of a strong icon related to traditional Japan, but also permeable to the power of the tourism industry in the twenty-first century. Samurai, along with technology, are stereotypical features of Japanese culture that are shown in positive terms of progress in *Gisaku*. Some Shinto traditions filtered through the anime universe are also present in the movie. It is recognizable in non-human characters, such as Gisaku who can be a fearsome evil, a cross between a lion and a dog, or adopt a komainu appearance when no fight is required. This is an unknown aesthetic territory in Spanish animation productions that expand them towards unexplored borders. At the same time, it can be said that Japanese national identity reaches Spain through some exported/imported features and goes back to Japan as an expanded national imagery. This transnational exchange is negotiated within the framework of both old and renewed modes of representation of images and stereotypes by Spanish creators. No doubt *Gisaku* rewrites the boundaries of film animation and representation of nationhood regarding the two national identities involved in the movie.

**Funding:** This research received no external funding.

**Acknowledgments:** The author thanks SEEI for the helpful documentation provided for the research on the film. She also thanks the movie's director, producer, scriptwriter and art director for kindly agreeing to be interviewed in personal communications.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The author declares no conflict of interest.

## References

- Abad Zardoya, Carmen. 2011. El japonismo en la cultura gastronómica occidental. Historia de una seducción. In *Japón y el Mundo Actual*. Edited by Elena Barlés Báguena and V. David Almazán Tomás. Zaragoza: Prensas Universitarias de Zaragoza, pp. 1051–64.
- Almazán Tomás, V. David. 2006. Las exposiciones universales y la fascinación por el arte de Extremo Oriente en España. Japón y China. *Artigrama* 21: 85–104.
- Barlés Báguena, Elena, and Aurora San Emeterio. 2011. Algunas notas sobre la imagen del Japón tradicional a través de los videojuegos. In *Japón y el Mundo Actual*. Edited by Elena Barlés Báguena and V. David Almazán Tomás. Zaragoza: Prensas Universitarias de Zaragoza, pp. 767–820.
- Cabezas, Antonio. 1994. *El siglo ibérico de Japón. La presencia hispano-portuguesa en Japón (1543–1643)*. Valladolid: Universidad de Valladolid.
- Casetti, Francesco. 1986. *Dentro lo sguardo. Il film e il suo spettatore*. Milano: Bompiani.
- Casetti, Francesco, and Federico Di Chio. 1990. *Analisi del film*. Milano: Bompiani.
- Centeno Martín, Marcos. 2017a. Del Viaje del Turista Al Viaje del Héroe. Mímesis Cinematográfica del Discurso Turístico Japonés Sobre España. El Caso de Andarushia (2011). *Mirai. Estudios Japoneses* 1: 89–107. Available online: <https://revistas.ucm.es/index.php/MIRA/issue/current> (accessed on 7 September 2018). [CrossRef]
- Centeno Martín, Marcos. 2017b. Transnational Circulation of Images of the Pacific War (1941–1945). The Japanese Empire Seen Through Spanish Newsreels. *The Irish Journal of Asian Studies* 3: 1–17. Available online: [https://irishjournalofasianstudies.files.wordpress.com/2018/01/ijas3\\_centeno4.pdf](https://irishjournalofasianstudies.files.wordpress.com/2018/01/ijas3_centeno4.pdf) (accessed on 7 September 2018).
- Chatman, Seymour. 1978. *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press.

- Denison, Rayna. 2010. Transcultural creativity in anime: Hybrid identities in the production, distribution, text and fandom of Japanese anime. *Creative Industries Journal* 3: 221–35. [CrossRef]
- Denison, Rayna. 2013. *Anime, a Critical Introduction*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Durand, Gilbert. 2004. *Las Estructuras Antropológicas del Imaginario*. México City: Fondo de Cultura Económica.
- Elsaesser, Thomas. 2005. *European Cinema. Face to Face with Hollywood*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.
- Gaudreault, André, and François Jost. 2004. Enunciation and Narration. In *A Companion to Film Theory*. Edited by Toby Miller and Robert Stam. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., pp. 45–63. First published 1999.
- Genette, Gérard. 1998. *Nouveau Discours du Récit*. Paris: Editions du Seuil. First published 1983.
- Genette, Gérard. 1972. *Figures III*. Paris: Editions du Seuil.
- González-López, Irene. 2018. In Search of the Authentic Japanese Taste: *Solitary Gourmet* and Cultural Tourism. *Mirai. Estudios Japoneses* 2: 49–66. Available online: <https://revistas.ucm.es/index.php/MIRA/article/view/60495> (accessed on 7 September 2018).
- Guillén Selfa, José. 1997. *La Primera Embajada de Japón a Europa y en Murcia (1582–1590)*. Murcia: Editora Regional de Murcia.
- Highson, Andrew. 1989. The Concept of National Cinema. *Screen* 30: 36–47. [CrossRef]
- Hjort, Mette. 2010. On the plurality of cinematic transnationalism. In *World Cinemas, Transnational Perspectives*. Edited by Kathleen Newman and Natasa Durovicova. New York: Routledge Editors, pp. 12–33.
- Lippmann, Walter. 1997. *Public Opinion*. New York: Routledge. First published 1922.
- MacDougall, David. 1998. *Transcultural Cinema*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- MacWilliams, Mark Wheeler. 2008. *Japanese Visual Culture: Explorations in the Workd of Manga and Anime*. New York: M. E. Sharpe.
- Mestre, Rosanna. 2007. *Anime español para otaku japoneses*. In *Cine, imaginario y turismo. Estrategias de seducción*. Valencia: Tirant lo Blanch, pp. 211–41.
- Napier, Susan J. 2008. *From Impressionism to Anime: Japan as Fantasy and Fan Cult in the Mind of the West*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Noya, Javier. 2002. *La imagen de España en el exterior. Estado de la cuestión*. Madrid: Real Instituto Elcano.
- Noya, Javier. 2004. *La imagen de España en Japón*. Madrid: Real Instituto Elcano.
- Pariante, Ángel E., and *Gisaku* Film Scriptwriter, Spain. 2006. Personal communication.
- Payne, Stanley G. 2002. Prólogo. In *Franco y el imperio japonés. Imágenes y propaganda en tiempos de guerra*. Edited by Florentino Rodao. Madrid: Plaza y Janés.
- Pedrosa, Baltasar. 2005. *Gisaku. Cómic-libro de la película*. Barcelona: Filmax-SEEI.
- Pedrosa, Baltasar, and *Gisaku* Film Director, Spain. 2006. Personal communication.
- Rodao García, Florentino. 2002. *Franco y el imperio japonés. Imágenes y propaganda en tiempos de guerra*. Madrid: Plaza y Janés.
- Rodao García, Florentino. 2005. *La Imagen de España en Asia-Pacífico*. Madrid: Real Instituto Elcano, Available online: [http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/wps/portal/rielcano\\_es/publicacion?WCM\\_GLOBAL\\_CONTEXT=/elcano/elcano\\_es/publicaciones/la+imagen+de+espa\\_a+en+jap\\_n](http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/wps/portal/rielcano_es/publicacion?WCM_GLOBAL_CONTEXT=/elcano/elcano_es/publicaciones/la+imagen+de+espa_a+en+jap_n) (accessed on 7 September 2018).
- Rodríguez, Paco, and *Gisaku* Producer, Spain. 2006. Personal communication.
- Rodríguez Navarro, María Teresa. 2011. La presencia del Bushido en el Japón actual. In *Japón y el mundo actual*. Edited by Elena Barlés Báguena and V. David Almazán Tomás. Zaragoza: Prensas Universitarias de Zaragoza, pp. 237–60.
- Ruano, Carlos, and *Gisaku* Art Director, Spain. 2006. Personal communication.
- Sociedad Española de Exposiciones Internacionales (SEEI). 2003. *Selección de Empresas para Concurso de Primeras Ideas, producción audiovisual de animación*, nº de referencia 2105/01. Unpublished document accessed by author with SEEI permission. Unpublished Work.
- Sociedad Española de Exposiciones Internacionales (SEEI). 2005a. *Informe Preliminar. Pabellón de España Expo 2005 Aichi*, Unpublished document accessed by author with SEEI permission. Unpublished Work.



Sociedad Española de Exposiciones Internacionales (SEEI). 2005b. *El Proyecto Marca España en la Exposición Universal Aichi 2005. Manual Proyecto Marca España-Japón*. Madrid: Proyecto Marca España.

Sullivan, Lawrence E. 2008. *Naturaleza y rito en el sintoísmo*. Donostia-San Sebastián: Editorial Nerea.



© 2018 by the author. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).