

Finding *Duende* in the Land of the Rising Sun: Flamenco's Emergence and Popularity in Japan

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Introduction

Flamenco's popularity in Japan might be surprising on a number of fronts due to the fact that Japan is both geographically and culturally distant from Spain. However, Japan has the largest flamenco following outside of Spain.¹ This art form, born in Andalusia, a region of southern Spain, is charged with emotion and stresses the expression of individuality. While many of its characteristics do not seem typically Japanese, it has gained widespread appeal in Japan for various reasons. Some of these reasons imply that interest spurs from a sort of "stranger fetishism" where Japanese people are interested in "consuming" the cultural and exotic "other." I will argue, however, that Japanese interest in flamenco is more dynamic than that - it involves the success, even within Spain, of Japanese dancers, the emergence of flamenco studios within Japan, and most importantly, the fusion of Japanese and Spanish art forms. This fusion creates another new art form rather than merely absorbing flamenco into a foreign culture. This paper will use flamenco in Japan as one case study of what happens to an art form when it crosses national boundaries - by encountering the international, it can become national. Then, as in the case of flamenco, the art form can undergo a dynamic transformation in Japan, which in turn reconfigures its existence in Spain.

The dynamic inter-relation created by flamenco's emergence in Japan affects both nation-states. It can serve to create and reinforce flamenco as a national symbol of Spain. The status of national symbol can also further interest for Japanese people because it is a way to experience one component of Spanish culture. While in the West Japan is seen as a beacon of work ethic and productivity, Japanese people are also consumers and much of this consumption is of Western products and trends. These manifestations of the West within Japan are at once confusing and comforting to Westerners, as they seem unfitting of Japanese culture but are already familiar for Western tourists.² Flamenco is another prime example of the presence of the West within Japan. While consumption of Western products is viewed by those scholars who term Japan "imitator" as a passive

reception of outside cultural forms, I will argue that flamenco in Japan undergoes adaptation rather than mere absorption - a process of "Japanization."³

Regardless of what happens to an art form as it crosses boundaries, its emergence in a new location opens a dialogue between two or more entities that may not have had much previous interaction. This new interaction results in greater diversity within an area while decreasing diversity across areas. The same becomes true of the art form itself—when art forms from various locations can be found within one location as a result of globalization, their distinctiveness in the original location is lost. Thus, a debate arises among scholars over what occurs both within the culture and to the art form itself when it leaves its place of origin. Flamenco in Japan is a specific examination of what the globalization of cultural products means for the culture as well as the art form.

My analysis will examine flamenco within Japan both historically and theoretically in order to better understand what has happened to flamenco during its emergence and success in Japan. I will first develop the theoretical framework for this specific case study in several areas - art forms as national symbols, the "Japanization" of flamenco, and the globalization of cultural products. Then, I will give a brief historical overview of flamenco's emergence on the international stage, followed by a specific examination of its emergence on the Japanese stage. Finally, I will examine flamenco within Japan more deeply in order to assert that flamenco's popularity in Japan is not a mere consumption of the exotic "other" because flamenco is seen as representative of Spain, but rather a "Japanization" where it becomes something new. Thus, the globalization of cultural products, at least in the case of flamenco in Japan, allows all of us to experience a new and valuable art form.

Contextualizing Flamenco: Literature and Theory

While often regarded as a national symbol of Spain, flamenco can only be seen as national when examined in an

¹ Kyoko Shikaze, "Flamenco in Japan: fifteen thousand kilometers around the corner," June 2004, <http://www.flamenco-world.com/magazine/about/japon/japon15062004-1.htm>.

² Joseph Tobin, *Re-Made in Japan: Everyday Life and Consumer Taste in a changing Society* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 1.

³ Rie Karatsu, "Cultural Absorption of Ballroom Dancing in Japan," *The Journal of Popular Culture* 36 (2003): 416.

⁴ Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983).

international context. Furthermore, the international has to be established or encountered in order to establish the nation, a theory supported by Ernest Gellner's concept of nation and nationalism. Culture, a component of the nation, only becomes important to nationalism in the presence of the cultural "other." We can see the manifestation of this when cultures interact with outside cultures as Gellner suggests: "In stable self-contained communities culture is often quite invisible, but when mobility and context-free communication come to be of the essence of social life, the culture in which one has been taught to communicate becomes the core of one's identity."⁴ Because "identity is always constituted in interaction," national identity links itself with the notion of the "other" and the two cannot be separated.⁵ Thus, flamenco becomes national only when it becomes international—when it is used to promote the country through tourism, when it is competing on the international stage, when flamenco studios appear in other nation-states, and so on. Subsequently, flamenco's very status as a Spanish national symbol serves to reinforce international interest of nation-states such as Japan, perhaps due to an interest in experiencing or consuming the exotic "other."

Creating Nationalism and National Symbols

There is extensive literature on nationalism and a wide variety of theories within this literature, thus I have chosen only a very limited selection of nationalist theory that I will apply to my case study of flamenco in Japan. Specifically, I will examine those theories that support the idea that the nation is only established in the presence of other nations. Cultural forms follow this same pattern - it is when they cross boundaries that they become symbolic of the nation. I will then develop how these theories apply to the flamenco case which will aid my subsequent examination of how flamenco, which to the foreigner is symbolic of Spain. Japanese interest is most likely, at least in part, due to an interest in the cultural "other," but it also goes beyond a mere absorption of the "other."

When we speak of national identity, culture, although often intangible and difficult to define, is a central component to both its creation and maintenance. Cultural forms are often not viewed by the nation-states' citizens as symbolic of their national identity, but rather may only serve to define that nation-state for outsiders. Cultural forms that remain completely within the nation-state do not serve as symbols of the nation; it is only when cultural forms contact the "other" and are experienced by it that they become a part of national identity. However, they may continue to go unrecognized by

the citizen until he or she leaves the nation-state. Interaction with others establishes identity in any context, and thus, establishes identity for nations: "the history of each nation is marked by the presence of significant others that have influenced the development of its identity by means of their 'threatening' presence."⁶ Generally, the "significant other" is a cultural and political other.⁷ Thus, it was not until flamenco reached the international stage that it became explicitly symbolic of Spain. In terms of my analysis, national identity is constructed through contact with the outside.

Flamenco emerged on the international stage through a process stimulated both by exterior interest as well as interior promotion. This process resulted from several factors, including the European tourists' interest in Spanish culture as well as the desire of the Spanish government and Spanish artists to perpetuate an image of Spain that differentiated the country from the rest of Europe. On an international level, the Spanish "folk" culture of the Andalusian gitano (Roma) was disseminated as the national culture through flamenco. Flamenco became the visual representation of Spain presented to foreigners through performances both inside and outside of Spain. Due to the mindset of many Europeans during the 19th century that "Africa begins at the Pyrenees," a phrase coined by Victor Hugo, European Romantics could explore their interest in Orientalism by traveling to Andalusia.⁸ Flamenco came to be seen by European intellectuals as the ultimate representation of the España de la Pandereta (Spain of the Tambourine), a generalized and overused image of Spain that has dominated foreigners' perceptions of Spanish culture and society.⁹ Although flamenco varies greatly in each region where it is practiced, it became a national symbol of Spain as a result of increased international interest.

The "Japanization" of Flamenco

The crucial element to my analysis of flamenco in Japan is to examine whether or not flamenco has indeed experienced a "Japanization" or is an example of Ahmed's theory of stranger fetishism due to the fact that, to foreigners, it is a national symbol of Spain. Consequently, the question becomes whether flamenco is merely absorbed into Japanese culture or adapted by it. For my paper, I will define cultural absorption as the taking and using of cultural products, in the vein of Ahmed's stranger fetishism, whereas cultural adaptation is the taking and changing of cultural products, a process of Karatsu's "Japanization" where the cultural product of outside cultures becomes a part of Japanese culture. I argue that flamenco, in fact, is

⁵ Anna Triandafyllidou, "National identity and the 'other,'" *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 21 (1998): 599.

⁶ Triandafyllidou, 600.

⁷ Kjetil Tronvoll, "Borders of Violence—Boundaries of Identity: Demarcating the Eritrean Nation-State," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 22 (1999): 1055.

⁸ Loren Chuse, *The Cantaoaras: Music, Gender, and Identity in Flamenco Song* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 258.

⁹ Chuse, 257.

adapted by the Japanese, most notably through the fusion of styles, and thus undergoes a “Japanization.”

Japan has long been interested in cultural aspects of the “other.” Scholars have charged that Japan is an “imitator” or “assimilator” of other cultures. Joseph Tobin collects a series of articles in his book *Re-Made in Japan: Everyday Life and Consumer Taste in a Changing Society* on the prevalence of cultural absorption in Japanese society. He states in the introduction that the identification of Japanese culture as “imitator” is even used amongst the Japanese.¹⁰ According to Tobin, there are two ways to interpret Japanese cultural absorption - it is either a result of the Japanese as victims of Western domination or a sort of “cultural plagiarism.”¹¹ By utilizing the term plagiarism, Tobin negatively connotes a direct copying of other cultures. However, more than a direct copying he also describes what I have termed cultural adaptation: “[an] ongoing creative synthesis of the exotic with the familiar, the foreign with the domestic, the modern with the traditional, the Western with the Japanese.”¹² In this regard, the absorption and/or adaptation of other cultures are central components of Japanese culture.

Other scholars further the idea of cultural adaptation, saying that the Japanese interest in cultural products is not just a passive absorption, the “cultural plagiarism” of Tobin, but rather is an active adaptation of these products, which transforms them into something Japanese. Rie Karatsu argues, in his case study of Japanese ballroom dancing, that the Japanese do not simply imitate other cultures, but rather incorporate them into their culture while also adapting them, thus creating something new. Elements of outside culture undergo a “sequence of cultural absorption” as they are assimilated into Japanese culture.¹³ He terms this process Japanization: “the process in which practices originating outside the country are transformed and molded into a particular vernacular form.”¹⁴ This is a cultural “Japanization” rather than the “Japanization” of economic theorists used to describe the Japanese economic model that has spread to Western nations such as Great Britain.¹⁵ Karatsu claims that Japanese adaptation of other cultural forms is a dynamic and adaptive process rather than merely imitation.

The concept of “stranger fetishism” is a more specific theory of cultural absorption. Sara Ahmed defines stranger fetishism as “fetishism [involving] the displacement of social relations of labour through the transfer of objects into figures.”¹⁶ Stranger fetishism pursues and acknowledges the difference of the other while trying to keep the other in its place - the “other” becomes a figure that represents the exotic and remains distant from the local. The people that pursue the exotic other do so through two methods: consuming and becoming. Anu Laukkanen, in her case study of Oriental dance in Finland, tries to determine whether Finns’ interest in Oriental dance is a result of stranger fetishism. Laukkanen states that whenever we eat or dress like people from another culture, we can be “consuming strangers,” perhaps attempting to become like these strangers.¹⁷ The question is to what extent the local culture is trying to consume or become the exotic culture by practicing its dance forms.

Cultural absorption or adaptation of the other is not a one-way movement, and subsequently, impacts the other culture as much as it impacts the local culture. Savigliano, an Argentine herself, asserts that Argentines make an “epic tale out of the tango’s popularity in Japan” in order to “be reassured that [they] occupy a special place in the globe and deserve recognition.”¹⁸ She continues: “The tango is our symbol of national identity. Japan’s acceptance and valorization of the tango legitimizes our existence as a nation, culture and people.”¹⁹ Thus, when dance becomes a symbol of national identity, it can also be a source of pride for a nation to see its own cultural product succeed in the global market.

Globalization of Cultural Products

As the globalization of culture becomes more prevalent, so does the quantity of literature on the topic. Globalization rather abstractly refers to the current state of “complex connectivity” in our world.²⁰ The globalization of culture occurs through the emergence of cultural products particular to one nation into the international market: “the integration—the networking—of cultural practices and experiences across the world.”²¹ This global culture can be viewed as either an emergence of “the world as a single place”²² or homogenized culture devoid of diversity and value.²³ While some view this process negatively and others see its benefits, cultural globalization both exists and cannot be avoided.

¹⁰ Tobin, 3.

¹¹ Tobin, 3.

¹² Tobin, 3-4.

¹³ Karatsu, 416.

¹⁴ Karatsu, 416.

¹⁵ Stephen J. Wood, “Japanization and/or Toyotaim?” *Work, Employment & Society* 5 (1991): 567.

¹⁶ Sara Ahmed, *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Colonialism* (London: Routledge, 2000), 5-6.

¹⁷ Anu Laukkanen, “Stranger Fetishism and Cultural Responsibility in Transnational Dance Forms,” *Gender and Power in the New Europe*, the 5th European Feminist Research Conference (August 20-24, 2003).

¹⁸ Marta Savigliano, *Tango and the Political Economy of Passion* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1995), 170.

¹⁹ Savigliano, 170.

²⁰ John Tomlinson, *Globalization and Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 32.

²¹ Tomlinson, 32.

²² Kathryn Robinson, *Choosing Contraception: Cultural Change and the Indonesian Family Planning Programme* (Sydney: Oceania Publications, 1989).

²³ C. Rowan, “For the duration only: motherhood and nation in the First World War” in *Formations of Nations and People*, ed. Formations Editorial Collective, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984), 152-70.

²⁴ Ulf Hannerz, “Culture between center and periphery: Toward a Macroanthropology” *Ethnos* 54 (1989): 200-216.

The transnational movement of cultural products, such as dance, is a component of the broader debate on globalization and its implications to society. According to Kellner, “Marxists, world-systems theorist, functionalists, Weberians, and other contemporary theorists are converging on the position that globalization is a distinguishing trend of the present moment.”²⁴ Neo-Marxist theories such as Foucault’s theory of panopticism, state that all social activities are controlled and directed from the top, including globalization which is another example of social domination by those in power because it stifles cultural distinctness.²⁵ Kellner, however, favors a more comprehensive view of globalization: “one should avoid both technological and economic determinism and all one-sided optics of globalization in favor of a view that theorizes globalization as a highly complex, contradictory, and thus ambiguous set of institutions and social relations, as well as one involving flows of goods, services, ideas, technologies, cultural forms, and people.”²⁶ In today’s world, where international exchanges are inevitable, more scholars are examining what globalization means for a culture rather than how to avoid it or why it is occurring.

A tendency to view the globalization of culture in a positive light also exists, both in a cultural as well as an economic sense. In his discussion on Japanese jazz musicians, Timothy J. Craig asserts that ethnicity cannot determine the authenticity of music and that it only “serves to reinforce ideologies of ethnic difference.”²⁷ According to Craig, in regards to the search for “authentic” jazz, “One historical crime—robbing black artists of their rightful profits and credit for creating this music—does not justify another: denying the significance of non-black artists in shaping jazz.”²⁸ Thus, in Craig’s analysis, he asserts that crossing ethnic boundaries does not diminish the value of music, specifically because as an art form, it is not dependent on remaining “authentic.”

Bryan Caplan and Tyler Cowen also describe globalization positively but in an economic sense, stating, “We will suggest that market competition across cultures is desirable and favors relevant notions of diversity.”²⁹ They argue that trade and globalization can “support and extend cultural distinctiveness” because while distinctiveness across cultures will decrease, distinctiveness within cultures will increase.³⁰ Whereas a tribe closed off to all other cultures may have highly distinct forms of music, dance, art, etc., they will never be aware of any other cultural forms and thus, diversity will be low. They conclude their argument with the far-

reaching statement, “No great culture has arisen in isolation; all owe their existence to the international economy.”³¹

Historical Background

Flamenco on the International Stage

Flamenco owes its status as a national symbol of Spain largely to the international market—although culture is rooted in place, it can gain strength when it leaves that place. Flamenco as a symbol of Spanish national identity depends on how outside groups view Spain. Yuko Aoyama, geography professor and student of flamenco dance, stresses the fact that culture and its expressive forms—dance, art and craft, music, cuisine, apparel and language—distinguish one geographic region from another and that “traditionally, culture and cultural products have been intimately connected to geographical location.”³² With economic globalization, where businesses’ ability to market products all over the globe increases, this is no longer the case—a person does not have to travel to Spain to experience a flamenco performance. In the following section, I will discuss first the emergence of flamenco into the international market as a whole and subsequently, its emergence in Japan.

International interest in flamenco on a wide scale developed in the 1840s, partly in response to European Romanticism, which stressed the importance of strong emotion as well as folk art; flamenco was a source of both, making it appealing to the Romantics. The Romantic interest in flamenco also influenced its aesthetic and even some of the ways that the artists began to present their performances; for example, artists began to emphasize flamenco as “folk art.” According to both Mitchell and Chuse, the “myth of exotic Spain” in which flamenco plays an important role, was a slow process: “it represents the cumulative efforts of many generations of European tourists and intellectuals in collusion with key elements of Spanish society.”³³ Thus, I reinforce once more the interplay between the international stage and the nation itself in creating national symbols. On an international level, flamenco is symbolic of “Spanishness.” Due to the progression over time of increased international interest in flamenco dance, the events which occurred throughout this process are numerous and varied. I will cover only a few of the factors: the development of Romanticism and its interest in Orientalism; the flamenco dancer La Argentina; and the development of tourist flamenco during the Franco dictatorship.

²⁴ Douglas Kellner, “Theorizing Globalization,” *Sociological Theory* 20 (2002): 285.

²⁵ Michel Foucault, *Surveiller et punir. Naissance de la prison* (Paris: Gallimard, 1975), 244.

²⁶ Kellner, 286.

²⁷ Timothy J. Craig, *Japan Pop! Inside the World of Japanese Pop Culture* (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 2000), 54.

²⁸ Craig, 54.

²⁹ Bryan Caplan and Tyler Cowen, “Do We Underestimate the Benefits of Cultural Competition?” *The American Economic Review* 94 (2004): 402-407.

³⁰ Caplan and Cowen, 402-403.

³¹ Caplan and Cowen, 406.

³² Yuko Aoyama, “Flamenco Fever: When Local Culture Goes Global,” (Clark University: Active Learning and Research, 2000) <http://www.clarku.edu/activelearning/departments/geography/aoyamaD.cfm>.

³³ Chuse, 257.

Spain was seen, especially among French Romantics, as the “gateway to the Orient,” resulting in increased European travel to Spain as well as a growth of literature on Spain during the 19th century.³⁴ This time period saw more than eight hundred travel narratives written about Spain, most of them focusing on Andalusia, the birthplace of flamenco. European Romantics were able to experience the exotic that they were seeking without having to leave the continent; “Andalusia was a place where one could see the Middle East without leaving the West.”³⁵ Spain, as well as most of Europe, viewed itself as separate from the rest of the continent and sought “a non-Western approach to social behavior and artistic creation that, though long gone, still continues to influence southern Spain today.”³⁶ In terms of flamenco, novellas such as *Carmen* (1845) depicted the stereotypical Andalusian woman as an exotic, primitive race.³⁷ The Orientalism of the French Romantics as well as self-orientalism resulted in international interest in flamenco dance—seeking out the exotic is something that continues to be a distinguishing factor of international interest in flamenco although perhaps not necessarily the only factor of Japanese interest in flamenco.

La Argentina, one of the most renowned flamenco dancers during the 19th century and called “the greatest Spanish concert artist the world has ever seen,” played a key role in stimulating international interest in flamenco through her performances abroad.³⁸ She transformed flamenco into a modern art while simultaneously drawing upon Roma and Spanish peasant culture, reinforcing the exotic aspects sought by European Romantics. She, like other artists such as Picasso, found inspiration in the primitive: “Folk culture...which might be molded and reconstructed became one of the most significant tools...to express the modernism of the moment.”³⁹ Thus, with her combination of primitive and modern, as well as national and European, flamenco appealed more and more to the international masses. La Argentina made flamenco public, modern, and exotic yet accessible, and thus, flamenco was seen and adored on an international level.

Franco’s dictatorship (1940—1975) utilized a watered-down version of flamenco as a tourist commodity, which, like other regional cultural expressions, was a means to achieve his goal of a mystically unified Spain.⁴⁰ This theatrical

version was exported during the 1950s and 1960s to encourage tourism, and it continues to be the only sort of flamenco that many “outsiders” know and experience. Spanish dance companies such as that led by José Greco toured Europe and the United States during this time; the New York World’s Fair in 1963 included a flamenco performance in the Spanish Pavilion, for example. This time period also saw the development of more public venues for flamenco including the *peñas* and *tablaos*. *Peñas* (private flamenco settings) were the focus of local flamenco activity and were utilized by those aficionados and scholars attempting to rescue flamenco from Franco’s *Nacionalflamenquismo* and to rediscover its legitimacy.⁴¹ So although Franco’s version smothered much of flamenco’s originality and vibrancy, it also spurred retaliation by flamenco artists and enthusiasts to maintain and reinvent flamenco as an art form. *Tablaos*, which began as tourist venues under Franco’s generic version of flamenco, transformed themselves from an “instrument of the regime” into a “lucrative venue for performing professionals.”⁴² *Tablaos* continue to be the site where most foreigners view flamenco as well as the best site for performers to earn a living. The increased number of touring flamenco companies coupled with more public venues resulted in an increased amount of literature devoted to flamenco from international scholars and aficionados.⁴³ By the end of Franco’s regime in 1975, flamenco had earned its place on the international stage as a national symbol of Spain, a mesmerizing source of entertainment, and a subject worthy of scholarly literature.

Japanese Interest in Flamenco

Although most people are shocked to hear the words flamenco and Japan in the same sentence, Japan’s flamenco following is greater than any other nation outside of Spain.⁴⁴ While most of the interest remained within the artists’ circle at first, recently, it has gained a more widespread appeal. Although Spain and Japan are both geographically and culturally distant, flamenco is becoming a part of Japanese culture: “The fifteen thousand kilometers that separate the land of the rising sun from Andalusian soil are no barrier at all to the thousands of Japanese who’ve fallen in love with the flamenco arts.”⁴⁵ This love of flamenco is a result of flamenco artists’ performances in Japan as well as characteristics of the dancing style—the discipline and body awareness it requires as well as the display of emotions it permits—which appeal to Japanese people in general and specifically, to women.

³⁴ Ninotchka Devorah Bennahum, *Antonia Mercé “La Argentina”: Flamenco and the Spanish Avante Garde* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 2000), 12.

³⁵ Chuse, 258.

³⁶ Bennahum, 13.

³⁷ Chuse, 258.

³⁸ Bennahum, 77.

³⁹ Bennahum, 16.

⁴⁰ William Washabaugh, *Flamenco: Passion, Politics and Popular Culture* (Oxford: Berg, 1996), 103.

⁴¹ Chuse, 269.

⁴² Chuse, 270.

⁴³ Chuse, 46.

⁴⁴ Shikaze, flamenco-world.com.

⁴⁵ Shikaze, flamenco-world.com.

Flamenco was first brought to Japan in the 1920s by Americans who had previously experienced the art form. They were soon followed by Spanish flamenco artists. Japan gained prestige as a flamenco venue as a result of La Argentina's performance there in 1929. After her performance in Japan and the end of World War II, other flamenco artists traveled to Japan, such as bailaoras (dancers) Manolo Vargas and Roberto Ximénez, and cantaor (singer) Rafael Romero.

After the success of performances on Japanese soil, Japan began to open its own performance venues. While these often began as an addition to already existing Spanish restaurants, Japanese people flocked to these venues to watch the show rather than to eat the food. This phenomenon spurred the creation of tablaos (venues for tourist-orientated flamenco shows) such as Tokyo's El Flamenco, which opened in 1967.⁴⁶ Flamenco was now fully exposed to the Japanese public eye as well as an excellent source of revenue for Spanish artists.

The mere interest in flamenco of the Japanese may be astonishing, but the numerous dance studios created for Japanese women who train to become both professional and non-professional dancers is perhaps even more perplexing from a Western perspective which stereotypically sees Japanese culture as reserved. The increase in the number of dance studios and widespread appeal of flamenco did not occur until the 1980s in reaction to two events: the development of Paseo-Flamenco in 1984, a magazine specifically devoted to flamenco which now sells fifteen thousand copies monthly, and the performance in 1986 of Carmen by the Antonio Gades Company.⁴⁷ The performance was such a success and so many people were exposed to flamenco through the magazine that student enrollment in flamenco studios soared.

Japanese women in particular latch on to flamenco as an art form and means of expression. The reasons for a woman to study a dance form of an outside culture are varied and hard to measure—it can be a means to access another culture, a form of exercise, an expression of sexuality. Although the dance component of flamenco was last to develop, after the singer and guitarist, and flamenco within Spain was traditionally a male domain, for the foreigner, flamenco generally pertains to women. For many foreigners who have only a very limited knowledge of flamenco, the male flamenco dancer is never considered when visualizing flamenco. In the traditionally male-dominated culture of Spain, flamenco became a means for women to express their sexuality as well as a method of further male subversion. The public performances of flamenco relied on women, and specifically, on an

idealized version of the gitana. Ferias (flamenco festivals) were several days of the year when women can leave the seclusion of their domestic lives, “comporting themselves in such a manner as to challenge a man's power and to control passions gone wild...a woman's performance is a catharsis that plays out, momentarily at least, the contradictions of social life.”⁴⁸ These festivals would be transformed into the tablaos of modern flamenco and so the public expression of flamenco is what reached the tourist. Thus, foreigners view flamenco as the embodiment of female passion which makes it difficult to understand the popularity of flamenco with Japanese women, who are not generally encouraged to show emotions in public. However, the ability to show passion through flamenco can also serve to make it easier to understand the interest of Japanese women—flamenco provides a stage where women are given an acceptable form to break social rules.

The Japanization of Flamenco

Spanish Flamenco Artists in Japan

La Argentina is generally regarded to be the first flamenco artist to travel to Japan, followed by Carlos Montoya in 1932. Since the time that these artists first exposed the art of flamenco to Japan, numerous artists have traveled from Spain to Japan to perform especially during the 1950s and 60s. Spanish artists continue to perform in Japan today, including at an annual festival in the city of Tateyama.⁴⁹ The 2005 International Exposition of Aichi (a region of Japan) featured an entire pavilion dedicated to Spain in which flamenco was a central component. The exposition featured flamenco performances that ranged from el flamenco puro (pure/authentic flamenco) to the most modern conceptions of flamenco.⁵⁰ The festival included more traditional bailaoras (dancers) such as Rocío Molina, Carlos Rodríguez, Rafaela Carrasco, Carmen Cortés, and Merche Esmeralda, and guitarists El Güito y Gerardo Núñez as well as the Spanish musical group Ojos de Brujo whose style is a unique blend of traditional flamenco music with other traditional and modern sounds. Due to flamenco's overwhelming success in Spain's pavilion at the 2005 Expo Aichi, the Administrator of Culture in Spain, Rosa Torres, hopes to plan an exposition in Japan specifically devoted to flamenco in 2007.⁵¹ From the first performance of flamenco in Japan to today, Spanish flamenco artists are hugely successful within Japan. According to Maruja Palacios, a teacher in Madrid, “There are more tablaos [in Japan] than here, so there is more work, even for Spanish artists.”⁵²

⁴⁶ Shikaze, flamenco-world.com.

⁴⁷ Shikaze, flamenco-world.com.

⁴⁸ William Washabaugh, “Flamenco Music and Documentary,” *Ethnomusicology* 41 (1997): 52.

⁴⁹ Alicia Rodríguez Mediavilla, “Flamenco in Japan: from La Argentinita to the present,” <http://www.esflamenco.com/scripts/news/ennews.asp?frmIdPagina=315>.

⁵⁰ Expo 2005 Aichi: Spanish Pavilion: Sharing the Art of Life. Sociedad Estatal para Exposiciones Internacional, <http://www.expoaichi2005.com>.

⁵¹ “La Junta quiere crear un festival de flamenco en Japón en 2007,” April 12, 2007, <http://www.elpais.com>.

⁵² Mediavilla, esflamenco.com.

Japanese Flamenco Artists

Performances by Spanish artists left a mesmerized Japanese audience, resulting in an emergence of Japanese flamenco artists. While Japanese flamenco artists generally have more success within Japan, there are several artists who are respected and successful within Spain such as: Yoko Komatsubara, Keiko Suzuki, Pepe Shimada, Eiko Takahashi, Enrique Sakai, La Gitana Japonesa, and Ami.⁵³ These artists all left Japan to study in Spain and most returned to Japan after their studies in renowned flamenco studios such as Madrid's Amor de Dios. Yoko Komatsubara, formerly a student of classical ballet and theater, began studying flamenco in the 1960s, making her one of the first of the Japanese to disseminate flamenco within Japan. After her studies with renowned Spanish flamenco artists and work with a Spanish dance company, she returned to Tokyo where she opened her own tablao.⁵⁴ Most of these artists, due to their studies in Spain, utilize either a traditional flamenco style or draw upon the more modern flamenco trends currently employed by other Spanish artists, such as fusion with other modern dance or modern music styles.

Japanese/Spanish Flamenco Fusion

There exists, in addition to Spanish artists within Japan and Japanese artists imitating Spanish artists, a new musical trend which fuses flamenco music and Japanese musical traditions. International and Japanese artists alike combine flamenco and traditional Japanese music to create something new—not quite Spanish, not quite Japanese. Pedro Diciervo, an Argentine flamenco guitarist, is one such artist who combines the music of Japan with flamenco. Originally from Argentina, during his time in Japan he performed a concert that included the Koto (a type of zither used as one of the main chamber instruments of Japanese traditional style), resulting in the fusion of two distinct cultures.⁵⁵

The performance by the Japanese flamenco company Mami and Hiro of Sonezaki Shinzu goes beyond the mere fusion of Japanese musical styles with flamenco. Through the language of flamenco this piece of work portrays a play from the classical Japanese theater that is sometimes called the Japanese Romeo and Juliet through the language of flamenco. The work is a fusion of Japanese and flamenco elements in the choreography and music, including flamenco singing in Japanese. For Mayumi Kagita and Hiroki Sato, the directors of Sonezaki Shinzu, flamenco is perfect for the story of the two lovers, Tobukeh and Ohatsu. As they stated in an interview, “flamenco turns out to be indispensable to narrate their story.”⁵⁶ This sort of fusion creates something that does not pertain specifically to Spanish or Japanese culture but rather brings together the two and creates a new art

form. The fusion of the two art forms led to the work's success not only in Japan but also in Spain. Sonezaki enjoyed success in the 2004 Festival de Jerez, an annual flamenco festival held in Spain. By portraying a classic work of Japanese theater through flamenco, Sonezaki is no longer solely Japanese. Although the struggle for love is universal theme and an archetype of literature and art, the fusion of cultural forms also fuses a wider audience, making the work perhaps even more universal.

The mixing of styles so common to modern flamenco interpretations is not entirely new to the Japanese interpretation of flamenco. Since the 1980s, when flamenco first gained widespread appeal in Japan, Japanese flamenco artists have created something new through a fusion of flamenco and Japanese cultural products. Yasuko Nagamine delighted in the mixing of styles throughout her career—in 1982, she combined Kabuki (a form of traditional Japanese theater) with flamenco. Her mixing of styles was not restricted to Japan—several of her performances combined flamenco with African styles, modern dance, and even rock-and-roll. In a New York Times article on Nagamine, Jack Anderson describes one of her most surprising and controversial works, Mandara, which included fifty-eight Japanese Buddhist monks intoning traditional chants, the solemnity of traditional Japanese no theater, the emotional fervor of modern Western dance, and flamenco elements.⁵⁷ Nagamine said that the goal was “to reflect the wisdom of Buddhism in dance form.” Thus, with her training as a flamenco dancer, flamenco was the natural choice for the medium. Nagamine said that she realized that although she can dance flamenco, she can never be Spanish, but flamenco emphasizes originality and thus, the blending of styles makes her flamenco original. Nagamine says, “My originality as a flamenco dancer lies in the fact that I am Japanese.” The blending of cultural art forms is present across many cultures, but the repetition of this blending within Japan perhaps represents Japan's ability to take products of outside cultures, such as flamenco, and make these cultural products their own through a process of “Japanization.”

Japanese Women and Flamenco

With an estimated 500 flamenco academies within Japan and approximately 50,000 students, mostly women, flamenco in Japan goes far beyond professional dancers. Numerous reasons can explain flamenco's success among Japanese women—the ability to express emotions that are generally suppressed in Japanese society, the discipline and body awareness required by the dance, the similarity in syllable usage between the Japanese and Spanish language which makes it possible for Japanese people to understand

⁵³ Mediavilla, esflamenco.com.

⁵⁴ Mediavilla, esflamenco.com.

⁵⁵ According to the personal web page of Pedro Diciervo, <http://www.pedrodiciervo.com>.

⁵⁶ Mediavilla, esflamenco.com.

⁵⁷ Jack Anderson “Japanese Dancer Mixes Flamenco and Buddhism,” *New York Times*, October 2, 1984.

and pronounce the lyrics, and among its many influences, those from the Far East give the meter some Oriental characteristics.⁵⁸ However, there are several difficulties to understanding why a group of people decides to study an outside cultural form; in the case of Japanese women and flamenco, each woman will have her own personal reasons for taking classes. Additionally, there is a danger in generalizing to the whole. It is useful to give several personal reflections from Japanese women and flamenco instructors on why flamenco is so attractive to Japanese women. While individual perspectives may not be true of every Japanese woman, they serve to provide some insight into the reasons behind the interest without merely re-stating generalized Western perspectives on Japanese culture.

Kae Waki was first exposed to flamenco through a performance of a flamenco student at a friend's wedding reception; after feeling mesmerized by this performance, she began taking lessons. Waki couples flamenco with the tango, saying that both are popular among Japanese because of the discipline required: "The rhythm, the footwork, coordination of hand movement, and the guitar – it is simply the right fit for Japanese people despite the fact that flamenco did not originate in Japan."⁵⁹ Waki also stresses the importance for Japanese women of expressing passions through flamenco, the stereotypical image outsiders have of flamenco. While Japanese are not generally encouraged to show their emotions and passions in public, flamenco offers an outlet for such an expression of emotions. The stage for emotions offered by flamenco is one reason that Waki and other women are attracted to the dance. Waki says flamenco has helped her understand how to express her emotions through dance.

Japanese students are also present in the dance studios within Spain; Madrid's famous flamenco school, Amor de Dios, sees numerous Japanese students within its walls. Just as most of Japan's professional flamenco artists spent time in Spain, non-professional students travel to Spain to learn guitar, dance, and even flamenco song. A professional Japanese bailaora says, "When there is a famous teacher of flamenco in Seville, 80-90% of her students will be Japanese. The Japanese love passion when they see it. It comes from the daily life here and is not artificial."⁶⁰ Some Spanish flamenco instructors even view foreigners as the ones who truly value flamenco. As instructor Maruja Palacios says, "Here, flamenco is not valued, whereas outside of Spain it is very highly valued. They truly come to dance, not to let some time pass, or to do some exercise."⁶¹ This may be more true of those Japanese students who are passionate enough about flamenco to choose to leave behind

their jobs and lives in Japan.

The seriousness that Japanese students bring to the dance is perhaps the element of flamenco most typical of Japanese culture. Japanese work ethic reaches so deep that approximately 10,000 Japanese die of overwork, called *karoshi*, every year. A *karoshi* day and support groups now exist to try to help Japanese manage the stress of the common long work days and high-pressure work environments. Flamenco provides an outlet for emotion while also requiring a strong work ethic, perhaps the perfect combination to avoid *karoshi*.

While the expression of emotions flamenco requires is attractive to Japanese, it is also the most difficult aspect for any foreigner to achieve fully. Akemi Sugimoto is a 40-year-old student of Amor de Dios who now teaches flamenco in Japan, but consistently returns to Amor de Dios to learn more from teachers such as El Güito, Ciro, Merche Esmeralda, Manolete, and Antonio Reyes.⁶² Akemi has only a limited knowledge of the Spanish language; counting the meter from one to twelve is about all she knows: "The meter is the only thing that I understand, I don't get a word of the rest of the things they tell me, but I watch and I do it."⁶³ Akemi says she comes to Madrid to "feel" flamenco—to try to emulate the emotion and passion flamenco requires, the *desahogo* (release of inner emotions) that is the most difficult for foreigners to grasp. It is only within Spain that Akemi believes she can truly experience this release of emotions in order to emulate it herself. Thus, Japanese professional and non-professional dancers such as Akemi travel to Spain, Spanish dancers travel to Japan to perform, new flamenco studios continue to emerge, artists continue to fuse Japanese and Spanish styles and as a result of all of this, the dialogue between Japan and Spain grows alongside the evolution of flamenco.

Conclusion

This paper traced the development of Japanese interest in flamenco in a historical sense—beginning with international interest as a whole, mostly within the European context, and then moving to specific factors which brought flamenco to Japan. Ideological movements as well as specific events such as world tours of flamenco during the beginning of the 19th century played an important role in developing an international flamenco following. Japan developed an especially large flamenco following and Spanish flamenco artists continue to have success in Japan. In addition, many Japanese artists study and perform in both Spain and Japan, often resulting in a fusion of Japanese and Spanish art styles. Flamenco's emergence in Japan was a process which resulted from many factors: Spanish flamenco performances which

⁵⁸ Mediavilla, esflamenco.com.

⁵⁹ Kae Waki, "Popularity of Flamenco: Japanese Women Simply Love Flamenco," <http://www.mynippon.com/dreamland/fukulove7htm>.

⁶⁰ Mediavilla, esflamenco.com.

⁶¹ Mediavilla, esflamenco.com.

⁶² Mediavilla, esflamenco.com.

reached Japan early and often; the opening of flamenco venues within Japan; and Japanese flamenco dancers who began to study in Spain and return to Japan to open their own studios, thus providing a place for the larger population, especially women, to learn flamenco. In a cultural sense, it may be difficult to see why flamenco is so popular in Japan. However, there are numerous sources of Japanese interest, some of them implying more of a “stranger fetishism” while others suggest that flamenco actually fits with Japanese culture: the expression of emotions generally suppressed by Japanese people; the similarities in Japanese and Spanish languages; Oriental characteristics of the meter; and the discipline and body awareness which flamenco requires.

It is clear that the “other” is important in creating and maintaining the idea of nation, and that the two are inextricably linked, but what exactly this link means remains unclear. The “other’s” role can vary from merely theoretical to, as is the case with Japanese interest in flamenco, quite tangible. The question persists as to whether flamenco in Japan remains symbolic of Spain or has been transformed into something Japanese. Does Japanese interest in flamenco result from a seeking out of the cultural “other” in a sort of “stranger fetishism”? Or, is Japanese interest in flamenco more dynamic—a desire to transform the “other” into something Japanese? I would argue for the latter, mostly due to the dynamic transformation flamenco undergoes in its fusion with Japanese art forms. While flamenco symbolizes Spain to the foreigner, it is also an important part of Japanese flamenco artists’ and flamenco enthusiasts’ own identity who stress that flamenco does, in fact, have its place in Japan.

The exportation of cultural products is inherently paradoxical—while the international market is necessary for flamenco to become symbolic of Spain, it also changes flamenco and, to some, de-authenticates flamenco puro. While it may be said that globalization causes cultural products to lose their value, it also serves to create value. Japan has long been accused of merely imitating other cultures but perhaps this reinforces the value of the cultural product, in this case flamenco, both within Japan as well as within Spain. As I discussed, many Spanish flamenco teachers are both astonished and motivated by Japanese women’s interest and dedication to flamenco. Furthermore, I would stress that flamenco in Japan has undergone a cultural adaptation, a “Japanization” of the art rather than a mere cultural absorption. Due to the fusion of flamenco with Japanese styles, flamenco in Japan is not “stranger fetishism” where interest is solely based on the idea of flamenco as a representation of the exotic. Rather, it is dynamically drawn into Japanese culture through the fusion of styles.

The Japanization of flamenco is one example of flamenco’s changing face. It will not and cannot remain exactly as it

was during its birth with the gitanos in Andalusia. Art is inherently dynamic and fluid—it constantly draws upon past forms to create modern forms, thus creating a dialogue with past and present in order to become something new and even more valuable. Interaction with other cultures through globalization only furthers this dialogue. It is nothing new either—just as Picasso looked to Africa to create his art, flamenco can look outwards to create new forms. Art forms such as dance should not be constrained to remain exactly as they began in order to retain their value and interest. Rather, it is just the opposite—flamenco will only become more valuable both inside and outside of Spain if it is allowed to evolve while constantly drawing upon its Andalusian roots.

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