

Hyperculturality, Globalization and Cultural Representation in Japanese Survival Horror

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Abstract :

(English) This article presents the ways in which Japanese survival horror employs video games as a tool for cultural representation. First, it analyses the main differences between American and Japanese horror, and how the historical relationships of competition/collaboration between both has led to a constant exchange of cultural references present in their games. This relationship of domination/submission traces back to the post-war period in which the United States began exercising control over Japan. It is as a result of this period that Japanese terror begins to take shape and take its first steps towards the current J-Horror. Second, it analyses the work of game designer Keiichiro Toyama, namely *Silent Hill* and *Siren*, as a well-known example of the construction of a cultural identity halfway between the devotion to the Other and the respect for tradition. Finally, the article addresses other examples of Japanese survival horror to analyse more deeply which stance Japanese industry takes in this era of cultural globalization, or hyperculturality, which is seriously transforming our conception of culture in digital media.

1 Introduction

Hyperculturality is the effect of globalization on the worldwide consumption of culture. The video game industry, as much or more than any other creative industry, faithfully represents that phenomenon by which culture is uprooted and thrown into a hyperconnected space of overlapping, interconnected and decontextualized cultures from all over the world. Video games, as stated by Šisler (2008), have established themselves as a form of mainstream media that shapes our comprehension and understanding of the world by constructing, conveying and iterating various representations. This construction of a cultural identity through video game audiovisual signifiers is also constrained by the hyperculturation of world consumption. In this context, Japan has for decades

been immersed in the challenge of (re)constructing its national and cultural identity, a process in which both “the United States”, as a reflection of the modern Other, and “Asia”, as a memory of the tradition and the past, actively intervene.

In general terms, the history of video games can be seen as one of complicity and rivalry between the United States and Japan; a history of alliances and competencies, of transnational companies, imported trends and constant efforts to win the rival’s market. Although important actors such as the United Kingdom, France, Germany, and more recently China and South Korea, have played and still play a fundamental role in the industry, this is, as Consalvo (2006) states, “a hybrid encompassing a mixture of Japanese and American businesses and (more importantly) cultures to a degree unseen in other media industries”.

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2 Overview

In *Console Video Games and Global Corporations: Creating a Hybrid Culture*, Consalvo (2006) takes the eclectic *mise en scène* of the world and characters represented in *Final Fantasy X* (Square Co., 2002) as a vivid example of “the global digital games industry, a hybrid composed of mostly Japanese and U.S. firms that carefully intermix Japanese and U.S. culture in their games”. This cultural hybrid, mostly an American and Pan-Asian one, has ended up becoming the standard with which the video game industry is associated. Globalization, in this sense, is translated into an extreme “transculturation” (Ortiz 1983, 86) of the worlds represented in video games, which turns works like *Final Fantasy X* into products of all cultures and none at the same time. Ortiz (1983, 90) called “acculturation” the process of acquiring a different culture, “deculturation” the loss or uprooting of a preceding culture, and “neoculturation” the creation of new cultural phenomena, all within the transitive process of transculturation. Today, however, we are faced with a “hyperculturation” (Han, 2018) of the medium, a web-shaped process encompassing all of the above, turning the video game into an artifact that suffers at the same time from a cultural amnesia, and an excessive anthropophagy capable of devouring all the cultures it touches. Hyperculturation has been defined by Byung-Chul Han simply as “more culture” (2018, 22), a process by which the culture is denatured and liberated both from the blood and the soil, that is, from the biological and land codes. In this global hyperculturation process, of which Japanese industry seems unable to escape, the use of video games as a tool for cultural representation is fundamental.

Diving into this field, the first obstacle that we encounter is a notable absence of bibliography. Race and gender seem to have monopolized the analysis of representation in the medium, reducing the study of culture to a few cases, but which are extremely useful (Iwabuchi, 2002; Consalvo, 2006; Šisler, 2008; Pruett, 2010; Balela and Mundy, 2011; Mukherjee, 2015, 2018; Švelch *et al.*, 2017). Also, we find an industry governed by transnational companies whose works

increasingly escape cultural identification. We have gone beyond the *transcultural*, a process in which the cultural formations surpassed the classic cultural borders *passing* naturally through them (Han, 2018), to the *hypercultural*, a new process that denotes at the same time an excess and a lack of culture. In this context, Consalvo (2006) warns us, any attempt at locating what is genuinely cultural in current video games may never be realized.

When searching for a methodology solely for the analysis of cultural representation in video games, the results are relatively sparse. “Whilst popular pro-games media tend to focus on game reviews that examine the content and playing styles of games, it is remarkable that little formal, academic research on computer game content exists” (Brand *et al.*, 2003). Šisler (2008), who has devoted much of his research to the analysis of Arab and Muslim cultures in video games, indicates that:

The methodology used for content analysis involves playing the whole game while taking notes and screenshots of relevant visual signifiers, recording the narrative and analysing the structure of gameplay via simplified Petri Net formal description.

He later adds that “other paratextual materials related to the game were analysed (booklets, manuals and websites)” (Šisler, 2008). On the other hand, Balela and Mundy (2011) have developed a theoretical and practical framework exclusively for the formal analysis of what the authors call “heritage artifacts”. Their model offers an anthropological approach to the study of culture as represented in video games. They share a classification of those “visual signifiers” stated by Šisler (2008) in two types: tangible and intangible aspects. Tangible aspects would include music, dance, works of art, artifacts, language, festivities, poetry, ceremonies, knowledge and skills, whereas intangible aspects would include social customs, ethical values, beliefs, traditions, myths and folklore. According to Jokilehto (2005 as cited in Balela and Mundy, 2011), “cultural heritage can be defined as the full range of

symbolic and artistic materials, delivered to each culture from the past to the present. It plays a significant part in confirming and enriching cultural identities”.

This interpretive approach focuses on understanding how the cultural dimensions mentioned above are represented within the context of specific video games. After taking notes of all the cultural aspects present in the work, the authors suggest taking a sample for an in-depth analysis. For this, the researcher must spend time familiarizing themselves with the literature related to the selected artifacts for the final analysis which, according to the authors, “takes the form of a mixture of gameplay to ascertain design features and further textual work to understand how these features relate to their counterparts”. In short, both models suggested by Brand *et al.* (2003) and Balela and Mundy (2011) refer to the classical method of textual analysis proposed by Casetti and Di Chio (2007), which separates the observation process from the work in two large interconnected stages: decomposition and recomposition.

2.1 Research Purpose

This article, based primarily on qualitative research and content analysis of a wide range of Japanese survival horror games from the 1990s and 2000s, aims, taking up the words of Iwabuchi (2002), to analyze how Japan faces the challenge of (re) constructing its national/cultural identity in the era of globalization. The survival horror genre was chosen due to, its popularity in Japan, everything Japanese developers have contributed to the growth of the genre, the oral and audiovisual tradition of Japan regarding horror fiction, and it proving to be one of the best exponents of the cultural duality in the country.

3 Discussion

3.1 Differences between American and Japanese survival horror

Historically, Japan and Europe have been considered the two regions where horror has aroused most interest among video game creators. Although the first and most important example of this genre came

from the American Atari with *Haunted House* (1981), it was not until the arrival of the Japanese *Sweet Home* (Capcom, 1989) that the genre began to delimit its own borders with respect to other styles of play. Since then, it has been Europe, mainly due to some French and British exponents, and Japan, who have been sharing the survival horror cake, at least until the late incursion of the United States based developers in the 2000s, coinciding with the technological supremacy that characterizes the current American industry.

Until then, the role of the United States in the survival horror genre was more of a distribution of Japanese commercial successes in the American and Canadian markets. It is precisely because of this commercial relationship that Japanese hits, such as *Resident Evil* and *Silent Hill*, were designed to meet Western expectations (Pruett 2010), undergoing a cultural localization process that is characteristic of the video game industry. Professor of Media and Cultural Studies Koichi Iwabuchi has called this phenomenon “deodorization” (2002, 33): a process of stripping games of any distinguishing national characteristics in order to be shipped to markets around the world. Jenkins (2006), who has also studied this cultural phenomenon, argues that this assumption was made by both Japanese game designers and American publishers, following the reasoning that a game which felt “too Japanese” would not do well in North American markets. This process of deodorization has been followed by Japanese horror games such as *Resident Evil* (Capcom, 1996), *Silent Hill* (Team Silent, 1999), *Blue Stinger* (Climax Graphics, 1999), *Carrier* (Jaleco Ltd., 2000), *Illbleed* (Crazy Games, 2001), and *Dead Rising* (Capcom, 2006).

Japan on one hand and the United States on the other both represent two “creative schools” differentiated in terms of gameplay and cultural representation. Japan in turn has suffered a split between games aimed at a Western audience and games aimed at a Japanese audience. Whereas the former tend to hide their identity marks and embrace Western sociocultural codes and values, the latter maintain their Japanese identity through the representation of folkloric, religious or historic topics. In return, these exponents of “genuine”

Japanese games are more likely to have problems finding a publisher in Western markets, making it difficult for many players to access a large part of the genre due to language and hardware barriers. Studies by Iwabuchi (2002) show that Japan is usually represented and represents itself through the operation of a strategic binary opposition between two imaginary cultural entities, “Japan” and “the West”. This internal cultural duality of Japan reveals one of the most interesting topics in the study of the survival horror genre.

The first thing we must take into account when analyzing games coming from either Japan or the United States is that a large part of the horror game production in the former is clearly targeted at a Western audience. The needs to adapt game design to the tastes of American —and to a lesser extent European— players determine the perception of a Japanese-style survival horror as a separate and distinct genre. For example, we can consider *Nanashi no Geemu* (Epics, 2008), a horror adventure for Nintendo DS that has never reached Western markets because, according to producer Takashi Tokita, a poll conducted in a focus group concluded that the game should not launch in the United States due to the absence of shooting mechanics (Spencer 2011). When reviewing the most popular American horror games from the past fifteen years, a common feature will come to light: the importance of a set of skills inherited from the shooter genre. *Clive Barker's Undying*, *Dead Space*, *Doom 3*, *F.E.A.R.: First Encounter Assault Recon*, *The Suffering*, *Left 4 Dead*, *Dementium: The Ward*, and their sequels, all religiously follow a similar model of challenges based on players' motor skills rather than cognitive abilities. Pruet (2005) has interestingly divided games in general into two very basic types: those in which the player is challenged to find out what to do next, and those in which, knowing what to do, they are challenged to do so. He calls the former Type 1 and the latter Type 2. Regarding the archetypical Japanese survival horror game, he states that:

RE is a mix of Type 1 and Type 2 challenges, and it's expertly done. First and foremost, we've got

challenges that involve traversal of the mansion. We need to find keys, unlock doors, solve puzzles, and collect items (...) At the same time, we've constantly got to deal with the zombies. Killing or avoiding the zombies while maintaining scarce health and ammo is a Type 2 challenge (...) the best *Resident Evil* games give you both types of challenges in equal amounts (Pruett 2005).

According to this classification, while the aforementioned American games would have a greater presence of these Type 2 challenges, J-Horror games would opt for the Type 1 challenge model or for a balance between the two. For this reason, players often describe Western horror games as more action-oriented. Regarding the making of *Calling* (Hudson, 2010), game director Kazufumi Shimizu stated that “Western horrors tend to put their focus on portraying graphic images or expressing horrible acts, whereas the direction that we're aiming for is the scare factor built much more on tapping the senses and psychology and the imagination of the individual” (gamezplay 2010). Regarding the development of *Fatal Frame*, game director Makoto Shibata has stated that:

In Japanese horror, fear is not simply generated through surprise; the silence and suspense in-between the action is important too. This silence makes the player's fear build in his or her mind. Japanese horror is always designed this way (Shibata n.d. as cited in Stuart 2006).

3.2 J-Horror after World War II: Reconstruction of Japanese national/cultural identity

Japanese people's fascination for what Pruet (2005) calls Type 1 horror games comes from a long tradition of horror folk tales, whose grammar was affected during the U.S. invasion of Japan after World War II. The interest of the Japanese for a kind of horror called *kishōtenketsu* (Barrett 2014), which often features a clear lack of goals in its characters and an absence of conflicts in its structure, lays the foundations for the J-Horror genre. This solid basis was affected by the tremendous influence of American

popular culture on Japanese soil after the war. It is from this “indigenization and domestication of foreign (Western) culture” (Iwabuchi 2002, 9) that a new hybrid composed of American and Japanese horror emerges. We will examine, for this purpose, the historical context in which J-Horror begins to be exposed to the main features of Western horror, and the subsequent reactions of admiration/hostility in response to its search for a new post-war cultural identity.

Following its defeat, Japan faced a historic break with its national identity. This identity, Iwabuchi states (2002, 7), has always been imagined in an asymmetrical totalizing triad between “Asia”, “the West”, and “Japan”. During the forced modernization Japan experienced, the West played the role of the modern Other, while “Asia”, as a geographical unit to which the country is inalienably connected, was cast as the image of Japan’s past. U.S. military occupation undoubtedly put Japan in this difficult situation where it was becoming “modern while simultaneously shedding the objectivistic category of Oriental and yet not lose an identity” (Tanaka 1993, 3).

Yoshimi and Buist (2003) have divided the American Occupation of Japan into three periods, from the immediate postwar period to the 1970s. The first period, from 1945 to 1960, is called the ‘Period of Love/Hate towards America’. A feeling of political sympathy with the anti-base protests coexisted with an incipient desire to adopt the American way of life. Uneasiness towards the United States slowly turned into devotion towards its cultural products such as jazz music, Disney films and *Popeye* comic strips. The second period, the 1960s, is called the ‘Period of American Penetration’. It is a decade of strengthening of the American lifestyle thanks to brands like Coca-Cola and cultural products such as the hippie movement, jeans, supermarkets and folk music. Finally, the 1970s marked an interesting change in the mentality of Japanese people. According to Ishikawa *et al.* (1981), America ceased so much to be an object of desire, and instead became a source of information about the latest world trends. “During the course of postwar history”, Yoshimi and Buist conclude (2003, 434), “Japanese people reconstructed their own sense of

national identity through the medium of desire and antipathy towards ‘America’”.

The identity resulting from this invasion is that of a nation whose feelings of aversion and admiration are intermingled with an emotional emptiness caused by the humiliating defeat of the country. After the war, Japan was in no position to determine its own future without negotiating with the enemy. America presented itself as a friend and foe at the same time. “It was an ever-present force intervening in people’s daily lives, whose word could not be challenged” (Yoshimi, and Buist 2003, 436). Then, with the intensification of the Cold War and Mao Zedong’s Cultural Revolution in China, the United States plans for Japan changed. A process of demilitarization of the country towards Okinawa prefecture began. The purpose was to stimulate the country’s economy to become the first Asian power and initiate business relationships within Southeast Asia. Concentrating the bases in Okinawa, the big cities were cleared and ready to kickstart the celebrated Japanese economic miracle. This process consolidated the formation of the two images of the United States for Japanese people:

On the one hand, there was an ‘America’ that was an object of consumption, whether through material goods or as media images. This ‘America’ had gradually lost its associations with military violence, despite having been born on the American bases and in the military recreation facilities. On the other hand, there was also an ‘America’ that was literally embodied in violence, and became the object of anti-base protest. These were nevertheless different aspects of the same ‘America’ (Yoshimi, and Buist 2003, 441).

This duality of feelings towards the West has also influenced the Japanese approach towards horror stories. Some authors struggle to fill this post-war vacuum with the remnants of a millenary culture, while others yield to the unstoppable process of transculturation, a term coined by Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortiz in 1947 to describe the phenomenon of merging and converging cultures. According to Balmain (2008 as

cited in Alfieroni 2009), Japanese horror often depicts the rejection of the social transformation suffered by Japan after the Second World War. It may have had, along with the imposed modernization of the country, a devastating effect on the society and its national identity. Therefore, “horror provides one of the most appropriate mechanisms to express the apprehension and concern about the changing nature of Japanese society” (Balmain 2008 as cited in Alfieroni 2009).

3.3 Cultural representations in the work of Keiichiro Toyama: *Silent Hill* and *Siren*

So far, we have introduced the topic of how, as stated by Iwabuchi (2002, 9), “Japan’s defeat in World War II and the subsequent American occupation drastically changed, even curtailed (...) Japan’s cultural relation with “the West,” and especially the United States as Japan’s most significant cultural Other, against which Japanese national identity” was constructed. As we anticipated, both Japan and the United States represent two “creative schools” differentiated in terms of gameplay and cultural representation. Now, focusing on the latter, we observe that J-Horror provides an excellent example of the struggles of the Japanese people to face the challenges of modernity, to find their place between the cultural return to Asia and the indigenization of Western values. To better understand the effects of this cultural dilemma, we will focus on the work of Keiichiro Toyama, author of *Silent Hill* and *Siren*, two notable exponents of the phenomenon we are studying.

Silent Hill (Team Silent, 1999) is considered a breakthrough video game in terms of scholarly dissemination, being one of the most recognized examples of games as art, as well as being a countercurrent work in many aspects: its corrosive and lascivious visuals, manifestly unsuitable for all audiences; its mature narrative approach through a plot full of childhood traumas and dabbling in the afterlife; its bet for a main character that breaks away from the super soldier and classic hero canons; its attempts to translate the experience of the novel, based in the psychology of the character and the inner conflict, to an interactive language still in development; and, of

course, its soundtrack, whose author, Akira Yamaoka, deserves as much accreditation as Keiichiro Toyama.

Silent Hill unfolds as a re-creation of the urban landscapes contained in twentieth-century American horror novels and films, which were the main source of inspiration for Team Silent. It is a Japanese product aimed at a Western audience, a reasonable maneuver considering the hegemony of Hollywood over horror cinema since the 1960s. As suggested by Ozawa (2006, 1), “Hollywood horror films also have been a product of globalization, being aligned with cultural capitalism; (...) they had been monopolizing the market of the genre in Japan until the Asian horror boom”. In addition to this, she points out, since the birth of the genre, horror films have mirrored what American people fear, which is entangled with their cultural identity, not that of the rest of the world. Balmain (2008 as cited in Alfieroni 2009) has also addressed this issue, stressing that the American horror film is based above all on the fear of the otherness, usually embodied in the figure of the monster, to such an extent that it is built on a double process of repulsion towards the unknown and desire for knowledge. This distinction between American horror, a genre born of the importation of European Gothic literature and its combination with a sense of spectacle and an eagerness to show the action instead of suggesting it, and the notion of Japanese horror, which rests on ambiguity, inference, silence, the significance of atmosphere and psychological fear (Ozawa 2006), is of vital importance to understand *Silent Hill* as the result of a cultural marriage.

When Harry, the main character, arrives in *Silent Hill* following the track of his missing daughter Cheryl, he stumbles upon a desolate urban landscape, a ghost town whose inhabitants vanished long ago, leaving all their belongings behind, barring doors and windows, and closing stores. Evil invades *Silent Hill* just as the little village of Bridgton, Maine is enveloped in an unnatural mist in the homonymous novel by Stephen King (1980). The American writer is just one of Team Silent’s many influences and references, but undoubtedly one of the most influential. The essence of Stephen King’s horror novel is also that of the game: a normal man, not a hero or a warrior, confronted with

the supernatural. The richest parallelism is established between the first installment of the series and *The Mist*. In both stories, the fog brings the fright. Also, this fog is in both works a portal between dimensions, or rather, a door to hell.

Both *Silent Hill* and *The Mist* share a main character: a father willing to do anything to save his child, even sacrifice them in order to save their soul. It is easy to recognize some of the creatures that appear in *Silent Hill*, particularly the flying ones, in *The Mist* (2007), Frank Darabont's movie adaptation of Stephen King's story. There is evidence that the work of Stephen King has influenced Team Silent's work beyond these manifest links with *The Mist*. The town itself is decorated with references to the novelist from Maine, as the *Carrie* poster in the building in front of the antique shop, and the word "redrum" painted in blood in the metal fence of Bloch Street are blatant references to *The Shining* (1977). King's name also appears, like other sci-fi and horror writers, on street signs in Silent Hill: there we can find (Richard) Bachman Road, (Ray) Bradbury Street, (Dean) Koontz Street, and (Michael) Crichton Street.

H. P. Lovecraft is another of the game's most fundamental literary references. Whereas the location and setting resemble the urban landscapes of King's work, some sense of predestination and relentless determinism establish the mood of the game's story. Also sharing it with Lovecraft's work, *Silent Hill* features a taste for physically ill-equipped protagonists, closer to the ordinary man than to a classic hero. If we look up one of Lovecraft's usual essays on supernatural horror, we can get a glimpse of the frequent connections between his work and Team Silent's:

The true weird tale has something more than secret murder, bloody bones, or a sheeted form clanking chains according to rule. A certain atmosphere of breathless and unexplainable dread of outer, unknown forces must be present; and there must be a hint, expressed with a seriousness and portentousness becoming its subject, of that most terrible conception of the human brain—a malign and particular suspension or defeat of

those fixed laws of Nature which are our only safeguard against the assaults of chaos and the daemons of unplumbed space (Lovecraft 1973, 15).

While the origin of the monstrous threat in H. P. Lovecraft refers to ancient forces that had inhabited the Earth long before mankind, *Silent Hill* flirts more with a notion of horror in a religious sense, with allusions to the devil, black magic and occultism. Still, there are parallelisms between both scenarios. Both suggest that forbidden knowledge can destroy the human race and that there are supernatural forces, beyond the limits of our understanding, which can only be submitted to in order to survive. These forces, untamed and ignored for centuries, are both terrifying and fascinating. The key, in the end, lies in the fact that in both scenarios, the heroes are facing a world inhabited by horrors whose condition they can not discern. This is the main difference between this type of horror and that of *Resident Evil*, where the emergence of monsters hides a logical and scientific root, an usual trope that can be traced back to the 1950s creature-feature legacy, movies partially inspired by the excesses of rationalism and science—radiation, contamination and destruction caused by scientists—.

Finally, director David Lynch has also been recognized multiple times as a source of direct inspiration, even by the team members themselves. For Akihiro Imamura, game system programmer, Lynch is such a popular name for non-Japanese audiences that it works as a cultural connection for American and European audiences (Sato 2001 as cited in Perron 2012). Team Silent, like Lynch, understand the external reality as a reflection of our souls, an extension of the inner life of the characters, diving into the idea that truth is always relative and that the limits between life and death, sanity and madness, are difficult if not impossible to define.

Always motivated by the eagerness to create new playable experiences, Toyama left Team Silent in spite of the series optimistic prospects, and joined SCE Japan, Sony's first-party video game production arm. Toyama, screenwriter Naoko Sato and art director Isao

Takahashi worked hand in hand, leading the new team Project Siren and its first game, *Siren* (2003). Toyama's second horror game is, essentially, a *kaidan* or ghost story that relies heavily on Japanese folklore. Its mythology revolves around the idea of *Yomotsu Hegui*.

According to game character Yoriko Anno, the student who accompanies anthropology professor Tamon Takeuchi, those who eat food cooked in the otherworld or *Yomi* will never be able to return to the world of the living. This legend, known as *Yomotsu Hegui*, is explained in a cutscene called *Datatsushi*: In the year 684, the region of Hanuda suffered a terrible famine suffocated thanks to the sudden appearance of an unknown creature. This creature was interpreted by the locals as a fallen angel sent by the gods to feed them. Because the locals had been saying prayers for a solution to their despair, they decided they should eat its flesh. And so they did, making them cursed forever. Among the locals was the young *kyudoushi* or priestess Hisako Yao, one of the main characters of the game, who was "blessed" with eternal life. Hisako thus became the ancestor of the Kajiro clan, a religious cult that plans to resurrect the god *Datatsushi* with human sacrifices. Incidentally, something memorable happened in 684 in real-life Japan: 684 was the year of the Great Hakuho Earthquake, the first recorded earthquake in Japan, whose 8.0 magnitude plus tremors triggered a large tsunami (Demetriou 2011). The presence of the earthquake in *Siren*, along with the civil defense siren and the water dyed red, is a usual sign that announces the transformation of Hanuda into a cursed town, where its soulless inhabitants are condemned to roam forever.

The place where the *Datatsushi* was found, called the Mana Stone, gives name to the fictional religion of Hanuda. This cult coexists in the region with other actual religions, such as Buddhism or Shintoism. During one of the levels where we play as old Akira Shimura, we come across a Shinto altar that "is used to pray for the safety of the miners". In addition to these altars, the cult of Mana coexists with other real features of Shintoism, such as the existence of the deity Hiruko, whose background, however, is modified to serve the game's premise. According to the *Kojiki*, the oldest

chronicle concerning the origin of Japan, Hiruko was the imperfect son of the central deities or *kami* Izanagi and Izanami, a sort of Adam and Eve. Due to his deformity—he was born boneless—he was abandoned by his parents on a raft of reeds and driven away from the island of Onogoro, where he was conceived. However in *Siren*, Hiruko is depicted as a triton that appeared in a spring and blessed the village of Hanuda. Due to his deformity—in this respect he resembles the "official" Hiruko—he is nicknamed by the villains as the "leech child". The most relevant thing about Hiruko is his connection with water and the sea. In Japan, he is recognized under the name of Ebisu, the Japanese god of fishermen and luck, and one of the Seven Gods of Fortune. When the character Tamon Takeuchi finds a small cave with relics taken from the Mana River, it's very likely that it is a worship center to Hiruko. The place remains practically untouched, with the exception of the sacred spring, Mizuhiruko, whose waters, now dyed red, contain the power to turn any person who drinks from them into a *shibito*.

Japan is not exempt from urban legends that tell the existence of fantastic creatures never caught by man, such as the Sasquatch, the Chupacabras or the Loch Ness Monster. One of the most famous is the *tsuchinoko*, described in-game as a short and thick snake that jumps, talks, drinks alcohol and often bites its own tail to form a circle—as in the millenary *ouroboros*, an emblem that symbolizes eternity—. This being appears in *Siren* as a recurring mythological resource throughout the story. For example, it is the reason why the character of Naoko Mihama, presenter of a television program about paranormal events, travels to Hanuda with the intent of gathering information about the mysteries of the village and the existence of the *tsuchinoko*. Also, when characters Kyoya and Miyako drain the water from the sink in the abandoned house of Tabori, the leech-shaped animal—perhaps a new allusion to Hiruko?—that appears is nothing more nor less than a *tsuchinoko*. This creature has been seen in other Japanese games such as *Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater* (Konami, 2004).

3.4 Westernization and “Japaneseness” in Japanese survival horror

Examining the genre beyond the two cited works of Keiichiro Toyama, we can find numerous exponents of the deodorization process followed by *Silent Hill*. But also, many games that, like *Siren*, have chosen to keep their cultural traits alive so that what is genuinely Japanese does not end up “lost in translation”. In this section, we will examine more examples like the previous ones to see to what extent Japanese survival horror reflects the simultaneous look of the country towards its most significant cultural Other, the United States, and a new modernized post-war Asia, to which Japan still feels culturally attached.

In the first group, we can include games such as *Blue Stinger* (Climax Graphics, 1999), an adventure starring Eliot G. Ballade, an elite member of the ESER (Emergency Sea Evacuation and Rescue) forces. His goal is to enter Dinosaur Island, an area located in the Yucatan Peninsula that was taken eighteen years ago by a biotechnology corporation. With the arrival of this game to the western markets, Activision demanded the *Resident Evil*-style fixed camera angle be changed to a *Tomb Raider*-style third person camera, losing part of the dramatic force of the Japanese version (Hardcore Gaming 101 2017).

Japanese games that have been subjected to this Westernization process often depict American characters inhabiting American spaces —high schools, rural areas, shopping malls, military bases— and dealing with situations concerning American anxieties —terrorism, kidnapping, biological catastrophes, serial killers—. They draw inspiration from a wide range of pop culture references, such as *Twin Peaks —Mizzurna Falls* (Human Entertainment, 1998), *Deadly Premonition* (Access Games, 2010)—, B-Horror movies —*Illbleed* (Crazy Games, 2001), *Dead Rising* (Capcom, 2006)—, H. P. Lovecraft —*Echo Night* (FromSoftware, 1998)—, or *Alien* movies —*Enemy Zero* (Warp Inc., 1996)—.

In the second group, we can include games such as *Fatal Frame* (Tecmo, 2002), a *yūrei* or ghost story influenced by the new wave of Japanese horror movies of the early 2000s. *Fatal Frame*'s director Makoto

Shibata is inspired by some of the oldest figures of Japanese folklore, such as the concept of *onnen* —the idea that some human emotions are so strong that their power can extend beyond the grave (Pruett 2011)—, *reikon* —analogous to the Christian soul or spirit—, or *onryō* —dangerous and hateful ghosts, like *Ringu*'s Sadako (Koji Suzuki, 1991)—. The game narrative also relies heavily on traditional legends and folk tales such as *Banchō Sarayashiki*, a ghost story from the Edo period. Other games that have successfully captured part of the “essence” of the Japanese culture, sometimes becoming too unfamiliar to Western audiences, deal with situations concerning cursed places imbued by bad omens and evil presence. These cursed locations can be abandoned houses, such as the ones in *Fatal Frame* —directly inspired by one of the most haunted locations in all of Japan, the Himuro Mansion—, *Ikenie no Yoru* (Marvelous Entertainment, 2011) and *The Jusou* (EDGES LLC., 2014), but also Japanese high schools, as in *...Iru!* (Soft Machine, 1998) and *Corpse Party* (5pb. Inc., Team GrisGris, 2010).

Cultism has also been in the spotlight of the genre. Concerns about threats to public safety are common in a country considered non-religious or *mushūkyō* by religious scholar Toshimaro Ama (2004). After World War II, the General Headquarters (GHQ) of the Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers took steps to remove the religious and ideological influences that supposedly had led the Japanese into the war. Although the State Shintō machinery was essentially dismantled, given that Shintō was not a religion but a Japanese folk custom, active efforts were made to reinforce the ties between the imperial family and Shrine Shintō and to enhance Shintō's national role (Shimazono 2014). However, Japan now enjoys a freedom of religion that, for authors such as Sassa (2015), can lead to a dangerous rise of cultism:

The Law of Religious Legal Persons was devised in the postwar period by General MacArthur's Administration, totally ignoring the way of legislating in Japan (...) the law defines the concept of religion in an ambiguous way, omitting the objectives of what is considered religion, and

limiting itself to recognizing its freedom. For this reason, anyone in Japan can constitute a religious organism: as long as it has a doctrine, a founder, a place for worship and believers, it is recognized as a religion. It is, therefore, thanks to the Law of Religious Legal Persons, that there are currently around 200,000 religious groups in Japan (...) although not necessarily all of them are sects, there are hidden groups of a very varied nature.

This problem has been addressed by games such as the aforementioned *Fatal Frame* or *Hellnight* (Dennou Eizo Seisakusho Ltd., 1998), a stealth horror game set in a futuristic Tokyo threatened by a mysterious cult named Dark Messiah.

4 Conclusions

Over the course of this study of J-Horror from a cultural perspective, we have seen how traditional features of the genre were transformed with Japan's new modernization process. A thorough analysis of video games as cultural artifacts can help us better understand the society in which they originate as effectively as other means of cultural diffusion, such as cinema or literature. Some Japanese games, like the previously mentioned *Silent Hill*, *Resident Evil*, *Deadly Premonition*, or *Dead Rising*, clearly reflect what Iwabuchi (2002) understands as an absorption of North American popular culture for its later diffusion through Asia, and again through the West, resulting in a cultural mishmash that becomes a new "Japaneseness". Other games, however, prefer to see in Asian tradition and folklore the answer to the search for that process of national/cultural (re)identification brought by the fall of the Japanese Empire and the opening of the country to the new modernity after World War II.

Therefore, as a general observation, Japanese horror games oscillate between: 1) a need to "westernize" to win North American and European audiences over, and 2) a way to spread local folklore through their landscapes, stories and legends. Japanese content has always been characterized by a desire to be hypercultural. It is far from being a new process.

However, within this fierce hyperconsumption of cultural contents in which we live, there are still reactions that try to recover that weak connection between the culture and the land. Japan is a very special case in this sense: it is able to generate some of the most transcultural contents of the global market, at the same time that it reinforces its tradition and local folklore, getting genuinely Japanese products to be enjoyed all over the globe. In this sense, we agree with Kohler (2006 as cited in Jenkins 2006), for whom the cultural identity is far deeper than the audiovisual surface of the product. A video game is not Japanese just because it represents certain cultural motifs, although this is undoubtedly a fundamental tool of cultural transmission —perhaps the most important one, considering people relate the cultural with the audiovisual more easily than with "abstract" layers of the product, such as the design of rules—. It is not, therefore, safe to say that current video games can not be "faithful models of a culture" (McLuhan 1994), although everything seems to indicate that we are on the way to talking about faithful models of a maze of cultures.

Nevertheless, American pop culture's influence seems to be superior to others in the fields of media, culture and creative industries, and this applies to survival horror as well. A larger in-depth analysis of the cultural influence exchanges in the survival horror genre would reveal how common it is to find Japanese games inspired by Western culture, rather than vice versa. The scope of authors such as H. P. Lovecraft, Stephen King or David Lynch —all of which are gathered in the same game, *Silent Hill*— knows no limits. It affects equally authors from the West and Japan, which places the United States in a privileged position of cultural influence. It could be said that the United States remains, today, the model to be imitated in terms of the construction of horror fictions, without neglecting the pressure exerted by Japan as the second great power in this regard. Japanese folklore remains one of the most usual sources of inspiration for J-Horror developers. Thus, it is observed that despite the undeniable pressure of Western culture on Japan, this country continues to use its own mythology —and

often European mythologies as well— to contextualize horror games, revealing a deep interest in oral and written cultural traditions aside from those from the United States.

This article has presented the ways in which globalization, hyperculturization and U.S. control over Japan influences Japanese game developers. We have examined two significantly different ways in which Japanese horror game designers approach cultural representation: turning to the Western —mainly American— imagery on the one hand, or going back to the roots of folklore and local mythologies on the other. Despite hyperculturization, there are still cases of searching for the culture of tradition through digital media. How strong the local culture is against the onslaught of transnational cultures is something that requires more time and space to analyze in depth. Quite simply, we can not be tempted to think that the incoming culture is always in a position to impose itself on the local, as the cases analyzed in this article demonstrate. Constant and methodical academic reflections on the cultural representation in video games are needed and, in the future, it will be necessary to go beyond the audiovisual aspects and start talking about game designs that act as faithful models of a culture. That should be the next big step in this study object.

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