The role of consumption and globalization in a cultural industry: 
The case of flamenco

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Abstract

The rise of cultural industries is in part facilitated by the rise of leisure and entertainment in the advanced industrialized economies. This article explores one such example, taking ‘ethnic’ art, flamenco, and examining the role of consumption in shaping flamenco, both as an art form and as an industry. The global reach of the flamenco industry is assessed by focusing on two major markets, Japan and the United States. It suggests the presence of a geographic paradox in contemporary cultural industries, which, on the one hand, points to the need to retain their place-based identity, and on the other hand, indicates the need for regional cultures to establish links to export markets for their survival. It also shows that contemporary cultural change is not a unilateral process of the global invading the local. Rather, it is a process of consumers interpreting, appropriating, and adopting a cultural commodity in their own terms.

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1. A geographical paradox in the age of globalization

While art and culture have been a subject of economic inquiry since the 1960s (Baumol and Bowen, 1993; Kamenman and Martorella, 1983; Heilbrun and Gray, 2001), economic geographers have only recently begun acknowledging the importance of cultural industries as a source of employment in advanced industrialized economies (Pratt, 1997a,b; Scott, 1995, 1996, 1997, 2005; Coe, 2000; Power and Scott, 2004). Production in cultural industries, comprised of learning, display, and sale of literary and visual arts, crafts and music, is largely grounded in uniquely place-specific cultural heritages, and therefore has become viewed as relatively resistant to the perils of off-shoring (see, for example, Aoyama and Izushi, 2003; Izushi and Aoyama, 2006; Gibson and Connell, 2003). Skills in cultural industries are often based on tacit and uncodified knowledge, and as a result, proximity and agglomeration still matters for cultural industries (for example, see Pollard, 2004).

The rise of cultural industries is in part facilitated by the growing popularity of leisure and entertainment activities in the advanced industrialized economies. Cultural industries provide an ‘experience’, a new and growing source of value in the economy, in commodified and un commodified forms. While globalization is frequently viewed as synonymous to cultural homogenization, demand for distinctive cultural experiences is on the rise, through tourism, ‘food tourism’ (visiting local restaurants serving ‘ethnic’ cuisines), as well as consumption of World Music, festivals and cultural performances (Connell and Gibson, 2004; Dunbar-Hall, 2001; Johnson, 2002; Nash, 2000; Waterman, 1998). This further reinforces the need for regional cultures to establish links to export markets for their survival, thereby introducing awkward global–local tensions which are often paradoxical to their place-based identity.

To better understand the contemporary geographic paradox of cultural industries, in this article I will take the case of the flamenco industry from Southern Spain. Flamenco, which typically includes singers, dancers, guitarists and
most recently percussionists, has been referred to an ‘art complex’ and involves a particular form of music, dancing (which includes stomping of the feet), singing and hand clapping (Manuel, 1989). It originated from the most economically and socially marginalized gypsy communities in Andalusian cities of Cadiz, Seville, Granada and Jerez de la Frontera. Its humble origin makes the survival and the growth of this regional culture particularly intriguing. Their humble origin resembles that of blues music in Memphis, USA which, according to Hall (1998, p. 605), represents the birth of a “popular art … created bottom-up”. He further claims that blues shows how “the music of an underclass could literally become the music of the world” (Hall, 1998, p. 602), and that “there is no previous parallel at all in the history of music … for this was a music created by a desperately poor and exploited rural underclass …” (Hall, 1998, p. 602). Flamenco arguably is the parallel to blues that Hall had looked for but did not find. The similarities between the blues and flamenco go beyond their origin to their art form as well, starting with the participation of all those present. Hall (1998, p. 561) characterizes blues as “the competition in singing or playing; the strong dance rhythms; the over- emphatic repeated beat to produce a state of trance; the lyric improvisation and variation; the use of everyday objects like pots and pans and spoons as instruments; the use of call-and-response principle, wavering of pitch, the great complexity of rhythms, rhythmic counterpoint between voices, between instruments, or between voice and instrument” which are all characteristics of flamenco as well.

Research on flamenco has so far been almost exclusively focused on its art form, in areas of music, ethnomusicology, and dance (Manuel, 1989). Also, numerous studies have been conducted on Andalusian identity, the gypsies, and its socio-cultural aspects (Charnon-Deutsch, 2002; Douglass, 1992; Gay y Blasco, 2001; Leblon, 1995; Mulcahy, 1989; Nair, 2002; San Román, 1975; Woors, 1974). Yet, production, consumption, and the survival of the flamenco industry remain largely unexplored. This is particularly perplexing in view of other prominent studies on Jamaican, Brazilian, Balinese, Swedish and Australian aborigine music industries (Gauthier and Yúdice, 2002; Kouzol-Wright et al., 1998; Dunbar-Hall, 2001; Johnson, 2002; Pereone and Dunn, 2002; Power, 2002). International policy makers in various agencies such as UNESCO, UNCTAD, and the World Bank have begun exploring how supporting creative industries would lead to local economic development in both the developed and developing countries (Gibson and Connell, 2003; UNCTAD, 2004; World Bank, 2002; Van den Borg and Russo, 1999).

In this paper I will explore the origins and development of flamenco art complex, with a particular emphasis on the role of consumption in shaping this art complex. The objective is to come to a better understanding of how a cultural activity with a particular geographic identity is sustained through links to both the locality and the global markets. I show how the diffusion of a cultural product interacts with contemporary globalization and ends up transforming itself from a regionally embedded art to a viable export commodity through tourism, as well as through the rise of consumerism of the ‘exotic’ products in advanced industrialized society. Cultural characteristics of consumption that pertains to exoticism, which involves aspects of orientalism as well as occidentalism, will also be explored by taking the cases of Japan and the United States. Participant observation of the students of flamenco dance was conducted in Kyoto and Tokyo, Japan in 2002 and in Atlanta and Boston in 1998 and 2003–05.

2. The role of consumption in a cultural industry: from regionally embedded art complex to export commodity

In Cities of Civilization, Hall (1998) refers to the importance of the affluent, new generation of consumers who facilitated the diffusion of Chicago blues. He also claims that “the union of art and technology and commerce is one of the most complex and therefore most difficult in the history of human ingenuity” (Hall, 1998, p. 603). Music is perhaps the most prominent information ‘content’ that emerges out of geographic mobility of people. The diffusion and popularity of music has been reinforced by technologies, starting with the radio waves to recording media to the Internet. Just as in any other industry, for a music genre to gain popularity, it necessitates an expansion to an export market near and far. To successfully move beyond the initially intended target audience, a music genre needs to be carefully packaged and marketed. Consumers seeking leisure and entertainment in the developed world are increasingly oriented toward discovering the unique, distinctive, and sometimes personalized ‘experience’ in return for their time and money, and often as an expression of class and ideology (Bourdieu, 1984; Chan and Goldthorpe, 2005; Katz-Gerro, 1999; Warde et al., 1999). As a result, a bundle of art form which falls into the category of ‘foreign’ and ‘exotic’ are highly sought after today (Haynes, 2005; Kassabian, 2004). The popularity of indie-rock (independent rock’n’ roll bands) among American youth, or the popularity of Korean actors formerly completely unknown among the Japanese audience are contemporary examples. The Internet played a major role in facilitating the rise of popular culture, as well as the counter mass-media and mass-culture in the age of mature consumer capitalism.

While the origin of Flamenco has long been attributed to the Spanish gypsies who arrived in Iberian Peninsula in the 15th Century, its emergence as an art form remains highly

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1 Gypsy is the term used by Europeans as they were misunderstood to be originally Egyptians. They are today increasingly referred to as ‘roma’ or ‘romani’; the word that means people in their language. However the roma population of Spain is often regarded as distinctive from the rest as they long ceased to be nomadic (forced settlement) and lost the language. I will therefore use the term gitano or the Spanish gypsies to address this population and also distinguish them from the recent roma immigrants from Romania to Spain.
contested, and is as elusive as the origin of the gypsies. Flamenco, is a blending of Andalusian, North African, Latin American, and Indian influences (Leblon, 1995). Therefore, flamenco by its very definition is a product of fusion and hybridity across cultures. Flamenco in its modern form emerged only in the latter 19th Century, initially a rather shady art form that existed and practiced informally by gypsies through the patronage of Spanish aristocracy, before moving to a more public arena, such as local cafes and taverns. It is distinguished from other art complexes of Western Europe due to its strong Oriental influences in its music and modes of singing (particularly India, Persia and the Arabic world), as well as its dance form that incorporates movements of hands, which are characteristics of dances from India, Java and Japan.

Just as the emergence of Memphis, which fused “the Afro-American blues of the Mississippi Delta and the white country music of the Appalachian hill country” (Hall, 1998, p. 519), cross-fertilization of cultures in flamenco took place in cities and towns of Andalusia, and initially had a distinct local character, such as those presented by the gypsy community in the caves of Sacro Monte on the hills adjacent to city of Granada, or Triana district, another gypsy community across the river from Seville’s city center. These locales today are still active in flamenco tourism, yet the art complex itself has long departed these places of origin to Madrid, which has become the center of art, music and performing arts in contemporary Spain. To become a famous flamenco dancer, singer, or guitarist today means making one’s name known in Madrid and the rest of the world before returning to these origins. Aspiring flamenco guitarists and dancers in Granada today dream of ‘making it big in Madrid’. Flamenco artists in the United States claim that it is important to “go to Madrid for techniques,” whereas in Andalusia, one learns “the art and soul” of flamenco.”

It should be noted that Flamenco is difficult to acquire, its rhythm is complex with 12 beats divided into 2, 3, or 4. Unlike social and folk dance of some variety which may require only a lesson or two to start participating, flamenco dance requires expert coordination between hands, arms, with fast and rhythmical stomping of feet, combined occasionally with the rhythmical playing of the castanets. Flamenco guitar playing is considered to be one of the most difficult among various guitar music genres. Familiarity alone would not substitute for training exclusively for the purpose of acquiring this art form. Therefore it takes years if not decades to master the art of flamenco. Until mastery, most of the students of flamenco are consumers, few rising to the level of ‘practicing flamenco.’

As Steingress (2002) suggested, flamenco has been interpreted and reinterpreted, and its representation appropriated along with the historical evolution of the Spanish society of the pre-modern and modern era. Depending on the context, various elements have been emphasized or de-emphasized, including: Spanishness for national unity; Andalusian characteristics for the regional identity; gypsy influences as representing subcultural, marginalized, bohemian, or even post-conventional cultural values and resistance to authority and the mainstream. Because of its fundamentally hybrid and multi-cultural roots, multiple meanings were attached to what flamenco represents over the course of history. As a result, it can be argued that flamenco is particularly susceptible to consumer manipulation, and remain appealing to those whose music and artistic preferences runs toward romanticizing the fringes, the alternative, the uniquely trans-cultural, and the marginal. The suggestions of cultural fringe hybridity combined with political marginality serves as a powerful appeal to a particular group of consumers who actively seek out this type of market. It is precisely this foundation of flamenco, which rests on its trans-cultural hybridity, makes it strong and enduring.

Douglas and Isherwood (1979, p. 57) argued that “consumption is the very arena in which culture is fought over and licked into shape.” Flamenco’s popularity is closely associated with the rise of tourism. As Memphis represented migration of the past (beginning with the slave trade), flamenco also represented the migration of the past, of the producers (beginning with the gypsies), the consumers (early French and British tourism, migration of Spaniards in the 1930s onwards) and of the market (export commodities for the US and Japanese markets). The barriers of race, class and geography played a defining role in shaping this art form and the localities where they are based, and from where they are now exported. Largely despised by the local population, the gypsies and its art form was exonerated by early international tourism of the 19th Century, in which flamenco was viewed as exotic aspect of Oriental mysticism, a distinct identity of the region of Andalusia. The French and British romanticism toward Spanish gypsies is evident in a number of references to this population by artists, musicians and writers of the time, and include prominent French writers such as Théophile Gautier (traveled to Spain in 1840) and Alexandre Dumas (in 1846), British travelers including Captain Samuel Widdrington Cook (in 1843) and Richard Ford (1830–33) (Charnon-Deutsch, 2004). A number of artists used Spanish gypsies as themes for their work in the 19th Century, including George Eliot, Lord Byron, and Bizet. As Baltanás (2002, p. 152) suggested, flamenco was “a manifestation of romantic orientalism and its preference for the exotic, which transformed the interpretation of popular songs, stylizing them as much in a sense of the Oriental as in that of the artistic freedom of the interpreter …”. The artistic myth privileged by the relationship between music and mystery, constructed upon the outsiders’ (whether non-gypsy Andalusians or foreigners) view on the romanticized, ‘free-life’ gypsies, therefore facilitated the rise of flamenco art in Andalusia in the 19th Century. In fact, flamenco became partly responsible for the romanticized, deformed,
and often manipulated representations of the Spanish gypsies (Gamella, 2002).

This suggests that in spite of its origin and subsequent formation of the distinctively regionally embedded identity, flamenco was also a product shaped and molded by consumers who were external to the region from the very beginning of its life. To some it represented the exoticism of the gypsy culture, and to others it represented the cry and the protest of the marginalized, nonetheless romanticized in the nostalgia for an aspect of Andalusia of the bygone era (Baltanás, 2002). Identity of gypsies and their art complex was therefore shaped and reshaped even in the 19th Century through the views of the consumers, Spanish and foreign, and through the market that voraciously consumed the exotic and artistic orientalism of the gypsy culture. This suggests that flamenco is in fact not the product of an ethnic group, but of the interplay between the producers and its consumers. In the process, flamenco was gradually transformed from a ‘regional tradition’ to an export commodity, from a cultural heritage of Andalusian suffering to exotic cultural entertainment. Thus, flamenco from its very origin represented hybridization and globalization, long before the emergence of modern cultural tourism.

Tourism continued to play a decisive role in popularizing as well as transforming flamenco art. For example, flamenco was originally centered around singing (cante), yet international tourists without Spanish proficiency provided a growing market for dance (baile), thereby decentering cante and popularizing baile in its contemporary form.3 In the post World War II. Franco promoted flamenco along with tourism as a way to earn foreign currency for otherwise depressed Spanish economy, starting in the late 1950s. Franco’s enduring regime may have contributed to the relatively slow onset of contemporary globalization in Spain, and prevented early dilution, while tourism provided financial support to maintain this art complex. Post-war tourism altered flamenco from a ‘uniquely Andalusian cultural expression’ to a ‘quasi-national performance symbol’ for the entire nation (Malefyt, 1998). By early 1970s, tourism became the leading industry in Spain, with gypsies being one of its key touristic formulae (Quintana, date unknown). Tourism in the post-Franco era positioned southern Spain as a newly opened and affordable destination, which further helped diffuse the knowledge of flamenco. International tours of major flamenco artists have often been supported by the Spanish government, particularly the Ministry of Culture and the Foreign Ministry. A number of music recording studios in Spain emerged that distribute flamenco music locally and globally. In addition to Spanish firms such as Nuevos Medios, Dial Discos (Madrid), Pasarela, Senador, and Fods (Seville and Utrera), it is notable that Madrid-based multinational firms (EMI/Hispavox, Universal Music/Polygram Iberica), as well as a number of French firms (Harmonia Mundi, Auvidis) are involved in duplicating and disseminating flamenco music to the rest of the world.

Gypsies, who traditionally self-employed themselves in activities such as metal working, horse trading, and fortune telling, opportunistically exploited the economic potential offered by flamenco art and actively trained their children at early ages to develop this expertise (Quintana and Floyd, 1972). Whereas gradual shrinking of the informal sector in the Spanish economy and technological progress have eliminated many of the traditional occupations of the Spanish gypsies, careers as flamenco artist-entrepreneurs offered an important alternative to otherwise progressive proletarianization of their community. In fact, cultural industries are among the few left in the developed world context that offer independence and relatively informal markets, which are consistent with the gypsy tradition and their way of life. As flamenco flourished, however, the connection between gypsies and the flamenco art complex has become increasingly ambiguous as the art became professionalized. Today a significant share of dancers, singers and guitarists are non-gypsies (payos).

In sum, the origin and evolution of flamenco shows close interactions between the producers and the consumers in shaping, reshaping, and appropriating cultural contents that may have regional origins to suit prevailing market demand, in this case supported largely by tourism. Demand for cultural commodities that involve an aesthetic of exoticism combines two types of distances; one of nostalgia of the distant past, and another of romanticism of the culture that has a perceived distance from one’s own. The demand for flamenco has indeed been sustained by the preference toward the exotic prevalent in contemporary consumer capitalism. In the following section, I will explore how this regionally embedded art becomes interpreted, reinterpreted and adopted in overseas markets.

3. Consumption of flamenco in export markets

Today, there are more foreign than local students enrolled when classes are offered at the Centro Andaluz de Flamenco in the Andalusian city of Jerez de la Frontera. This may represent a process of an art complex experiencing revitalization from its geographic periphery. Popularity and the global reach of the flamenco industry in distant markets such as Japan and the United States suggests the presence of a geographic paradox in contemporary cultural industries, which, on the one hand, points to the need to retain their place-based identity, and on the other hand, indicates the need for regional cultures to establish links to export markets for their survival. I briefly trace the history of flamenco in Japan and the United States, and provide explanations for its popularity in these markets. Because hard data are scarce on the consumption that specifically identify flamenco, I have relied on participant observation, my own interpretation and analysis of media reports.
3.1. Flamenco in Japan: a parallel universe of the orient and the occident

According to FujiTV (2004), Japan’s major TV broadcasting station, Japan’s flamenco population is the second only to Spain, surpassing those in the United States and Germany. Andalusian regional government, Junta de Andalucia (2005), recently alleged that there were 1 million Japanese studying flamenco, while the Japanese source counted over 100,000 flamenco dance students, and over 400,000 spectators of flamenco in Japan (FujiTV, 2004). According to the Japanese language website of flamencoworld.com, there are 650 flamenco classes in Japan today.4 Japan’s enthusiasm toward flamenco is widely regarded as at least ‘perplexing,’ at best ‘out of the ordinary.’ According to a survey conducted by Gallup in the summer of 2003 on the images of Spain in Japan, flamenco came in second only after bull-fights.5 In 2003, a quarter million Japanese tourists visited Spain, while only 15,000 Spanish tourists visited Japan. Yet, as illustrated by the author’s 2005 visit to a cave in Sacro Monte, where a Gitano dancer professed to be performing Japan in a few months, the link between Japan and the Andalusian hearth of flamenco underscored the importance of export markets for this art complex today.6 Another group from Sacro Monte has already performed in Japan earlier in the year as part of the Spanish expedition to the Aichi Expo held in Nagoya, Japan.

Flamenco arrived in Japan in late 1920s (Mediavilla, 2005b). La Argentinita, a prominent female dancer at the time, performed in Japan in February, 1929, and in the 1930s flamenco music records began being sold for the Japanese audience. Today, few prominent flamenco artists have yet to visit Japan. Japan’s first tablao “El Flamenco” opened in Tokyo in 1967, and over 800 Spanish artists performed in the venue so far. In 1984, a monthly magazine exclusively devoted to flamenco, “El Paseo” emerged in Tokyo. In 1990, Associacion Nipponia de Flamenco (ANIF) was established in Tokyo to better coordinate efforts to popularize this art form. Today ANIF publishes books and brochures on flamenco, sponsors annual competition among young musicians, singers and dancers, and hold workshops and performances. Two prominent Japanese-born flamenco dancers, Shoji Kojima (b. 1939) and Yoko Komatsubara (b. 1930s), were instrumental in popularizing the art of flamenco to the Japanese audience. Both traveled to Spain in the 1960s to study with local artists, and subsequently returned to Japan and opened flamenco dance schools. According to Hosokawa (1999a), Japan’s large urban market and its relatively homogenous ethnic makeup created an environment for local artists to successfully cultivate an ethnicity-driven niche market. Flamenco classes also are concentrated in urban areas, with Tokyo area being the largest concentration. With the absence of Spanish émigré in Japan, most of the instructors and performers are locally trained by local instructors before traveling to Spain.

On the surface, enthusiasm for flamenco in Japan, and particularly among Japanese women toward flamenco dance, can be interpreted as a gross transgressing of geographic and cultural boundaries. However, such geo-cultural transgression that takes place in Japan is not unique to flamenco. For example, Japanese musicians have domesticated rumba by incorporating the rhythm in mainstream popular songs as far back as the 1930s (Hosokawa, 1999a). According to Hosokawa (1999b, p. 524), such borrowing is ‘intrinsic to the Japanese sense of self’ as their approach toward aesthetic authenticity, even for their own culture and art form, is oriented toward technical perfection and mimicry. Taking the case of a wildly popular all-Japanese salsa band, Orquesta de la Luz, Hosokawa (1999b) demonstrates how aesthetic expression can be divorced from geographically rooted cultural identity. Such divorce represents what Hosokawa calls “fictionality and elusiveness in Japanese identity’ Hosokawa (1999b, p. 526) or what Tobin calls a ‘parallel capacity of self-occidentalization and self-orientalization’ (Tobin, 1992, p. 30). The elusiveness and the parallel capacity have been nurtured ever since the country’s experience in dramatically shifting from over two centuries of isolationism to active international engagement in the 19th Century. Specifically, in postwar Japan, the legacy of its imperialistic aspiration and its collapse has positioned its contemporary culture amid an awkward tension between the Orient and the Occident, with an unconditional surrender to the Occident (and the aspiration of Japan to be part of the West) and the complete rejection of the Orient (with the exception of ancient China as the ancient origin of Japan’s culture). Japan’s educational system epitomizes this awkward tension, as students learn intellectual traditions of the Occident while never formally learning the tradition of the Orient, on which social relations and their life experiences are unequivocally based. The recent popularity among young Japanese women of ‘Asian handicrafts’ as exotic cultural commodities, particularly those from Vietnam (Nakatani, 2003; Carruthers, 2004) is indicative to the effect that, to the contemporary Japanese, the Orient is at least as exotic as the Occidental, if not more. As Savigliano (1995) suggests, such ‘double-exoticism’ has served as the foundation of the popularity of ‘exotic’ art form in Japan, as demonstrated by the case of tango, which gained popularity as a form of ballroom dancing in Japan in the 1950s and 1960s.

The Japanese audience of flamenco art therefore challenges the conventional racialized assumption which often comes with regionally embedded art complex. Cultural

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4 Associacion Nipponia de Flamenco (ANIF) publishes a directory of instructors, which is by no means comprehensive as it lists self-reported classes of their affiliate members only. The directory in 2005 listed 286 locations in Japan where classes are being taught, 60% of which are in Tokyo Prefecture.

5 The survey was sponsored by the Royal Elcano Institute, ICEX Foreign Trade Institute, SEEI International Exhibition Agency, and the Cervantes Institute and interviewed 1200 Japanese and conducted two focus groups. For more information on the survey see http://www.expo-int.com/.

6 Interview by author, Granada, Spain, September 11, 2005.
traits represented in flamenco and those in Japan seem on the surface to be at opposite ends of the spectrum, in terms of expressiveness of emotions as well as the mood created by their physical movements. The Japanese women are presumably using flamenco as a means of expressing otherwise suppressed desire, anger, and sensuality, and of experiencing emancipation from their daily social oppression. A deeper look at the attraction of flamenco in Japan reveals that there may be stronger element of cultural affinity than cultural distance. Just like their own culture, flamenco combines the Occident and the Orient while being neither. Flamenco therefore represents the cultural ambiguity that lies between orientalism and occidentalism.

Japan’s flamenco dance instructors also attribute the popularity of flamenco among Japanese women to their physical and cultural suitability. Morita in Tokyo and Lina in Kyoto, both flamenco dance performers and instructors, suggested that attention to details of the movements and composure are important aspects of Japan’s cultural tradition, particularly among women. Complexion and petite physique also work in favor of Japanese women. Furthermore, contrary to the popular image of flamenco as being ‘passionate’ and ‘expressive’, both instructors maintained that flamenco dance in fact requires a performer to withhold as much as express emotions, to highlight contrasts and punctuate occasional outbursts. According to Lina, “it’s not difficult for Japanese women to understand the torment of concealing emotions.” (Interview by author, 2002). Morita corroborates this by stating, “flamenco is actually as much about holding it in as letting go. Energy comes from holding it within, and that fits well with the Japanese psyche.” (Yamaguchi, 2005). In fact, flamenco dance rarely displays the warmth, direct flirtation, as well as physical contact involved in other ‘exotic’ dance forms. Instead, dance experts characterize flamenco being marked with symbols of rejection, coldness, and resistance, than of ardor (Sachs, 1963).

Aside from cultural parallels and musical affinities, it is important to recognize pragmatic dimensions to the consumption of flamenco in contemporary Japan. Observations of classes in inner-city and suburban Tokyo suggests that students of flamenco in Japan are divided into two groups, single, working women in the 20s dominate evening classes, and morning and afternoon classes are populated by housewives in their 40s and 50s. Both groups chose flamenco out of an array of ‘cultural’ and hobby classes offered by local community centers, which typically include cooking, martial arts, yoga, conversational English, photography, and Japanese calligraphy classes. As one Japanese blogger and a flamenco aficionado confessed, “I chose flamenco because age and the shape of your body didn’t seem to matter.” Otherwise intensely self-conscious and critical of their body, Japanese women feel at ease with flamenco which does not call for a particular body shape. Most importantly, however, the fact that flamenco is typically a performance dance, rather than a partner dance, makes it easier to choose flamenco over other forms of dance such as ballroom, tango or salsa dancing. One aspect of its popularity may therefore also be founded on the convenience, as well as on the independence and freedom Japanese women are seeking for in their entertainment/cultural activities.

3.2. Flamenco in the United States: transnational communities and diversifying cultural tastes

Unlike the case of Japan, Flamenco was introduced to the United States with Spanish émigrés in the 1930s fleeing the Spanish Civil War and subsequent dictatorship by General Franco. For example, La Argentinita lived in exile in New York City in the 1930s and 1940s. Sabicas, a notable flamenco guitarist, emigrated to New York and never returned (Mediavilla, 2005a). Hollywood films featuring Carmen Amaya, the legendary flamenco dancer, also helped popularize the art form in the 1940s. In spite of the early introduction and the presence of authentic Spanish musicians and dancers, flamenco in the United States had a limited audience until the 1990s, and the public, even in the most urbanized areas such as the New York City, remained unfamiliar to its art form. The representation of flamenco in Time Magazine in late 1986 shows the reaction of the Broadway audience as being “astonished as much as entertained” (Clarke, 1986). The flamenco show at Mark Hellinger Theater betrayed the expectations of the New York audience by having “no sets, and the production opens, a bit unpromisingly, on what seems to be a family gathering...”. Flamenco cante sounded like “a bagpipe full of gravel wailing into a nor’easter”*, which is “easier to appreciate than enjoy”. Performers were “a largely middle-age troupe that, by show-biz logic, should cause audiences to snooze in their seats” but were surprisingly “exhilarating and, yes, sexy.” Flamenco’s future in the US at the time was at best uncertain, and the report shared that flamenco’s appeal even in Spain was limited “mostly to aficionados.”

Much has changed today. In 1992, the National Flamenco Institute was established at the University of New

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7 See, for example, a typical representation in the media that emphasize emancipation in Agence France Presse (2004).

8 It is interesting to note that the version of tango popularized in Japan exhibit similar characteristics. Tango practiced in Japan is a largely sanitized version of its otherwise scandalous roots; introduced by British dance instructors in the 1930s as form of social dance of the West (Savigliano, 1995). The British-tamed version of tango, a far more sophisticated and controlled version of Tango Argentino, is one that also became popular in Western Europe and North America. As one of Savigliano’s Japanese interviewee claimed, “Tango does not require a physical expression of passion. The passionate feelings can be kept inside.” (Savigliano, 1995, pp. 181–183). Nonetheless, Savigliano’s interviews also show ‘sentimental affinities’ and ‘spiritual kinships’ expressed by the Japanese followers of tango.

9 A colloquial term used for a winter storm along the US eastern seaboard region.
Mexico in Albuquerque. Flamenco magazine “Flamenco Connection” began circulation in 1994. In 2001, Flamenco Festival USA was launched in 6 eastern cities with 11 shows and 40 artists, and drew 14,000 spectators. Almost two decades after the Time article, the flamenco festival in New York in 2005 was reported by the New York Times as “one of New York area’s favorite dance forms” and “one of the year’s biggest dance events in New York City” (Dunning, 2005). By 2004, the Flamenco Festival USA featured 30 shows and 115 artists with 55,000 spectators (Flamenco Festival New York, 2004). Even the organizers of this event, the World Music Institute (WMI), were surprised by its popularity. WMI sponsors an eclectic array of indigenous art forms from various parts of the world, and had not expected a line around the block and scalpers charging $200 a ticket for any of their shows.

The result of an online search engine in 2005 showed an interesting contrast between English and Japanese language websites on the popularity of various World Music genres. In the general English language world (excluding those with .uk domain names) Latin Salsa and Argentinean Tango were far more popular than flamenco in the English language world (see Chart 1). Flamenco had roughly the same amount of web presence as Brazilian Bossa Nova and Samba, as well as Mexican Mariachi, but had more web-presence than Caribbean Rumba, Portuguese Fado and Indonesian Gamelan.10 In contrast, the case of Japan shows (see Chart 2) that while flamenco did not have more web-presence than Latin American music which became popular in Japan (such as Brazilian Samba, Argentinean Tango, and Brazilian Bossa Nova), it had a greater web presence than some other genre (such as Latin Salsa, Caribbean Rumba, and American Tap Dance).11

Overall, the popularity of flamenco in the US is far less prominent than that in Japan. As an indicator of its popularity, the number of flamenco classes offered in the US is far lower than those in Japan; there is estimated one flamenco instructor per 1.7 million people in the United States, whereas in Japan the same estimate ranges between one instructor per 440,000 (low estimate) to 200,000 people (high estimate).12 Also, one notable aspect of the consumers of flamenco in the United States is the large presence of expatriate Japanese women. Some began taking classes in Japan, while others began only after arriving in the United States. In a typical class in Boston, they constitute as much as one-third of the class. Another notable aspect is the large presence of Hispanic women, constituting as much as another one-third of the class in a typical class in Boston. The rest are women with diverse international backgrounds (from the Netherlands, Russia to India) and/or highly educated American women who have turned into aficionados through their exposures to other cultures via tourism, study

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10 Search conducted on google.com in English (music and ...) on August 8, 2005.
11 Search conducted on google.co.jp on August 2, 2005.
12 Flamenco USA’s website publishes a directory of classes in the United States. The list is by no means comprehensive, but covers major locations of flamenco instruction. According to this list, there are 151 instructors offering classes in 26 states. Major concentrations are observed in key metropolitan areas, such as New York City, Greater Los Angeles/Orange County, San Francisco Bay Area, Washington, DC and Chicago area, but also mid-size cities in a warmer climate favored by artists as their place of residence, such as Florida (particularly Greater Miami/Ft. Lauderdale), Texas (particularly Houston) and New Mexico (Albuquerque-Santa Fe).
abroad, and cultural activities. Consumption of flamenco in the US is depended upon these groups.

The growth of flamenco aficionados in the United States is therefore supported by first, the increasing share of the consumers who have links to the Hispanic culture, either geographically, linguistically, or culturally; second, by the general increase in the consumption of cultural products, and a particular interest in ‘variety’. Research published by the National Endowment for the Arts (2003), National Endowment for the Arts (2004) showed that consumer spending on performing arts in the United States has grown from $5.4 to $12.1 billion in the 1991–2002 period, and surpassed consumer spending on movies and spectator sports. In 2002, 12.1 million Americans participated in some kind of live performances of dance (excluding ballet). In addition, an emergence of ‘cultural omnivores’, who practice the pursuit of variety in their consumption activities, is likely at the foundation of an increasing acceptance of art complexes such as flamenco in the United States. Cultural omnivores are most frequently the privileged, i.e., high income, highly educated population in white-collar occupations (Gronau and Hamermesh, 2001; Warde et al., 1999).

The American consumers since the 1990s, particularly those in urban areas, have begun to appreciate arts and cultural activities that incorporate diversity and global dimensions, and experience the world locally through attending performing arts and engaging in ‘food tourism’ and ‘music tourism’. The rise of World Music, which allegedly made the mainstream formally by Paul Simon’s album Graceland in 1986, is one such prominent example. Connell and Gibson (2004) argue that eclecticism, hybridity and diversity represented in World Music derive from ‘a world of much greater mobility, transience, urbanization and rapid technological change’ (p. 351). In World Music, deterritorialization and transnationalism co-exist with images of particular places which, in the context of Anglo-American World Music market, often represent those of ‘off the beaten track’, isolated from capitalist market development. This corresponds with the ideological stance and the patterns of consumption of urban educated class in the United States, and represents a particular segment of American consumers who values an exposure to diverse multi-cultural experiences.

While exoticism may draw the American consumers to flamenco, perhaps the strongest attraction of flamenco is in its emotional dimension. Flamenco is multi-dimensional, not only in its activities but also in its expression. The physical aspects of performance are complemented with its ‘soulful’ dimension, or its emotional aspects. Few other dance form so successfully incorporates a range of emotions, such as anger, anguish, and aggression by female dancers. As an American student of flamenco has once expressed, “I can’t think of other dances I can learn, one that allows you to express anger. In that sense flamenco is unique.” Accordingly, the emotional dimensions of flamenco have strong commonalities to American blues, which originated from the Mississippi Delta, and has been referred to as the ‘blues of Spain’ (Saal, 1987).

13 Unfortunately, published data from the National Endowment for the Arts do not break down the category of ‘dance’ into any further details. Katz-Gerro (1999) conducted a survey on musical tastes among Americans, which identified preferences by 18 genres of music, but did not include a category for flamenco.

14 Interview by author, Massachusetts, October 2005.
However, there are pragmatic dimensions to the American adoption of flamenco dance as well. Today, American consumers choose to practice flamenco typically among the wide array of dance classes available to them, including ballet, modern dance, tap, salsa, samba, belly-dance, Jazz, Afro-Jazz, African, Afro-Haitian, Afro-Cuban, ballroom dance, and hip-hop. For a segment of American consumers then, flamenco is an option for their exercise regimen, rather than a cultural experience. It is not uncommon for students to have replaced flamenco classes with gym membership, for example. While Japanese consumers focus on the positive effect of dance to their postures, the US consumers regard most dance classes as stress releasing opportunity.Perhaps accordingly, another notable dimension of the consumption of flamenco in the United States, as revealed through participant observation, is the strong recreational component. Unlike classes in Japan, where hierarchy between advanced and beginner students are established and unquestioned, and where instructors have an absolute control over classes and force students to endure long repetitive drills and practices, flamenco classes in the United States are far more consumer-driven, oriented toward customer satisfaction than mastery of skills and techniques through grueling, occasionally humiliating process. Most classes can be taken on a ‘drop-in’ basis, and neither regular attendance nor commitment to a particular instructor is expected from students. The elements of ‘fun’ and ‘instantaneous gratification’ are the necessary component of popular classes, and students expect to get ‘what you pay for’ in a 90 min class. Instructors from Spain often need to make a great adjustment to their teaching style for the US students, and cultural frictions between Spanish instructors and American students are not uncommon, whereas Japanese students inherently understand the feudalistic teacher–student relations.

4. Conclusions

This study of the flamenco industry aimed at showing how a cultural industry is shaped and reshaped by demands of consumers near and far, with varying rationales for their choices of cultural products. Today, affluent consumers abroad who seek out the distinctive and the exotic, may be critical for the survival and flourishing of regionally embedded cultural complexes. This article showed that, first, regional-embeddedness of art complexes is in itself a myth, a product of romanticism. As the origin of flamenco showed, early tourism in Andalusia spurred the nascent gypsy art form to solidify its local market. Subsequently, with the support of the government, flamenco survived and thrived with the expansion of tourism in Spain. Second, the rise of international markets as locations of consumption provided an essential avenue for this regionally embedded art complex to survive and thrive in the contemporary period. Finally, the American and Japanese consumers of flamenco re-appropriate the meaning of flamenco to suit their unique demand, which may range from the desire for the exotic to an exercise regimen. Their interpretations may wildly differ from the view of flamenco from inside Spain, may even be based on a cultural misunderstanding, yet provide an essential source of income for performers and record companies alike. Thus, the case of flamenco highlights resilience of regional culture in the age of global cultural convergence, on the one hand, and the importance on global markets for sustaining regional culture, on the other. It represents a case of how production and consumption of culture occurs at the nexus of multiple layers of geographic and cultural distances.

In fact, cultural products are often the outcomes of geographic and cultural transgressions, which are shaped by consumer demand early in its inception as well as its development. Evidence from Japan showed that what on the surface appears as geographical and cultural transgressions in fact may better be explained as cultural affinity of sorts, through the particular historical experiences of the consumer. Consumption of flamenco in the United States, in contrast, showed how the resilience of regional culture hinges upon the presence of transnational communities and cultural omnivores. Thus, a regionally embedded culture today can in fact prosper, rather than suffer, under the tensions of geographical paradox. These tensions may very well be the source of dynamism and creativity for a cultural industry to survive and thrive today.

Some critiques that flamenco has been transformed as it evolved into an important export commodity and entertainment that complements tourism and global consumption. Within Spain and in Andalusia, flamenco is undergoing a tension between the public and the private, as well as between the wave of commercialism and anti-commercialism (Malefyt, 1998). While the public consumption is at times associated with the tendency for the art form to become increasingly superficial, debased, and deceptive, private consumption survives separately in exclusive clubs (peña) in neighborhood/family settings. The commercialized flamenco promotes the faster-paced, festive rhythms of certain types of flamenco (such as tangos and bulerias) whereas the deep songs (cante jondo) with themes of oppression and suffering such as siguiriyas and soleas are being de-emphasized. The commercialization exacerbates the importance of the art form as export commodity, justifies its value as a form of entertainment, and is viewed as an integral aspect of Andalusian tourism, while the movement toward anti-commercialization emphasizes its value as a tradition and a cultural heritage, as an important vehicle of communication of cultural goals and understandings that generate a shared sense of history.

The question remains, to what extent these forces can result in a complementary or paradoxical process to the survival of a regional art complex such as flamenco. Cultural products such as flamenco provide not only entertainment, but offer cultural diversity as essence of globalization. Important agenda for future research includes an indepth look at flamenco’s geographic expansion and its impacts on the production and consumption of this art form, the role
of the music industry intermediary at local and global levels, and the question of who benefits, how it changes, and what these changes suggest to regionally embedded cultural complex. Results can illuminate the potential and limits of regionally embedded art complexes and associated cultural industry-driven regional economic development strategies.

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