

*Factions and fictions:
Identity and Identification in the
Historical Video Games
set in Japan*



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Participants:

- Dr. Martin Roth (Ritsumeikan University, Japan)
- Dr. Martin Picard (University of Leipzig, Germany)
- Dr. Antonio Míguez (University of Córdoba, Spain)
- Dr. Marcos Sala (Complutense University of Madrid, Spain)
- Claudia Bonillo (University of Zaragoza [Spain], Kyoto University [Japan])

(*) The conferences should be between 30-40 minutes long, except for the presentation by Drs. Roth and Picard which, being a joint presentation, would be approximately 1 hour long.

First session:

- **Date:** November 9 (Tuesday)
- **Theme:** Medieval Japan
- **Time:** 22:00 (Japan)/ 08:00 (Canada)/ 14:00 (Spain)
- **Speakers:** Dr. Martin Roth & Dr. Martin Picard (joint presentation), Dr. Marcos Sala.

Link: <https://murcia.zoom.us/j/99953076638?pwd=WUS2RVlRSUxSUK9SK3ptbkJ2SkFBdz09>

Second session:

- **Date:** November 10 (Wednesday)
- **Theme:** Modern Japan
- **Time:** 19:00 (Japan)/ 11:00 (Spain)
- **Speakers:** Dr. Claudia Bonillo, Dr. Antonio Míguez

Link: <https://murcia.zoom.us/j/98775197170?pwd=MmoSMmg3YXh1ZCtzWGNSTEd6RzMwQT09>

Gamification. Historical Characters in the Japanese Musō Game Sengoku BASARA

Dr. Martin Picard & Martin Roth

In this presentation, we explore the ways in which videogame characters from popular musō (or hack n slash) series from Japan, like Sengoku BASARA or Sengoku Musō, reinforce ideas of the Japanese nation. Hack n slash games frequently adapt important figures from Japanese history to contemporary aesthetic preferences, distributing them via a wide range of media in so-called media mix strategies to a widespread audience. These characters are further recontextualized in media practice in many ways, from fan-fiction, cosplay or live-action events to government advertisements. Through an analysis of such practices in the player community and beyond, we show that historical characters function as weak and decisively vague references to history, but at the same time provide an entry point to engagements with history on many levels, thus ultimately reinforcing the idea of the nation.

A case in point is the so-called “Rekijo boom”, a phenomenon discussed in the Japanese public around the years of 2009 and 2010. Commentators characterize rekijo as women in their 20s or 30s, who have an interest in history and an emotional connection to at least one bushō (武将, “military commander”) from the Japanese feudal wartime periods. Apart from tv series, novels or manga, games like Sengoku BASARA are also listed as a very prominent trigger for such interest. The notion of the rekijo suggests that for some players, videogames are a starting point for engaging with history - often in a soft but decidedly nationalist framework (Shoji, 2014) - and, thus, the nation.



Kengō: A narrative about the origins of Japanese fencing schools and their legend in the Edo period

Dr. Marcos Andrés Sala Ivars

In terms of martial arts, and specifically in combat with blades, video games usually point in showing the artistic part that this practice, leaving aside historical considerations. However, from time to time, a title challenges this premise. We could already see this in games like *Budokan: The martial spirit* of 1989 for MS DOS / Amiga, and *Bushido Blade* of 1997 for PS1, reaching the highest levels with *Kengō* of 2000 for PS2. Despite not being able to completely avoid the mythology inherent to the samurai world, regarding Japanese fencing, we can consider *Kengō* as a paradigm that to this day has not been surpassed. In this lecture we will analyze the world of Japanese fencing schools, focusing on the Edo period (1603-1868), and answering the question of why *Kengō* is so important in the history of Japanese historicist video games.



Kengo

¿Memories of distant days? The image of the Yakuza in Yu Suzuki's Shenmue

Dr. Antonio Míguez Santa Cruz

Shenmue is one of the most influential video games in history. That ambitious project of the well-known producer Yû Suzuki (Out Run, Virtua Fighter) pursued to be a life simulator or slice of life, apart from including important elements such as the Open World, the Quick Time Event, or the interweaving of genres such as beat`em up and RPG. Unfortunately, the production was so expensive that it did not recover the benefits, being one of the main causes of the premature end of the mythical Sega Dreamcast. However, with the passage of time, Shenmue has become a cult video game, and its quality and influence on the subsequent industry is unquestionable.

Set in 1986, the story focuses on Ryu Hazuki, a young 18-year-old martial artist who witnesses the murder of his father at the hands of Lan di, a Chinese organized crime boss. From then on, he begins a series of investigations to find out who the man was and why he murdered his father. Inevitably, Ryo will have to interact with the underworld of Japan at the time, interacting with both the yakuza and the Chinese triads. In the line of the congress, our objective will be to analyze the way in which the Japanese mafia is portrayed here, a complex and essential group within the culture of that country and that has been reflected in the audiovisual and entertainment universe to the point of being a myth.



Shenmue

The Shōgun vs. The Emperor? Choosing sides in the Meiji Period Through Total War Shōgun 2: The Fall of the Samurai

Claudia Bonillo Fernández

Total War is one of the most outstanding franchises of strategy computer games and a great success with audiences and critics. Developed by the British company Creative Assembly and distributed by the Japanese company Sega, it offers players the opportunity to take on the role of conquerors in different periods of history by combining meticulous gameplay with a high degree of immersion, achieved thanks to its historical accuracy. In fact, Total War: Shogun 2 (2011) enjoys special recognition, something shared by the 2012-released extension Total War: Shogun 2 Fall of the Samurai, which in 2019 was re-released as a standalone instalment as part of the Total War Saga series. Set during the Boshin War (1868-1869) that preceded the westernisation of the archipelago in the Meiji period (1868-1912), players have the option to choose which clan to manage during the conflict, to which four downloadable factions were added in its latest remastering. Therefore, in this presentation we will determine what vision of this conflict the developers want to publicise by analysing the particularities of each of the factions available to the player.



Fall of the Samurai



Dr. Martin Picard

Martin Picard is a research associate in Japanese Studies at Leipzig University. His teaching and research interests cover Japanese popular culture and cinema, as well as video game history and aesthetics. His publications consist of articles in journals such as *Game Studies* and chapters in anthologies such as *The Routledge Companion to Video Game Studies* (Routledge, 2014), *Encyclopedia of Video Games: The Culture, Technology, and Art of Gaming* (ABC-CLIO, 2012), and *The Video Game Theory Reader 2* (Routledge, 2009). He is also the co-founder of the *Kinephanos* journal and a member of the Chair committee of *Replaying Japan*.





Dr. Martin Roth

Martin Roth is an associate professor at Ritsumeikan University and research fellow at Stuttgart Media University. He works on video games, digital media, digital technologies, and political philosophy. Martin founded the Japanese Videogames Research Initiative (<http://home.uni-leipzig.de/jgames/en/>) and the [j]Games Lab at Leipzig University. He is the review editor for *Asiascape: Digital Asia*. His first monograph, *Thought-Provoking Play: Political Philosophies in Science Fictional Videogame Spaces from Japan*, was recently published in open access by the ETC Press.





Dr. Marcos Andrés Sala Ivars

Marcos A. Sala Ivars is doctor and degree in Art History from Complutense University of Madrid. Honorary Collaborator of the Department of Art History of this university and Secretary of the Asia Research Group, focusing his research on Japanese weapons and the art history linked to samurai. His PhD is a pioneering study in Spanish language on Japanese sword fittings, receiving the qualification “Suma Cum laude”. Published around thirty informative entries and a dozen scientific publications. He has given courses and conferences in 9 Spanish universities, 3 South American and 1 in Hungary, and collaborates regularly with the Embassy of Japan and the Japan Foundation. Also, is assessor of two scientific research magazines and member of Spanish associations of Japanese studies. His academic profile is complemented by a martial study of ancient Japanese traditions, being a representative for Spain of some of them, as well as a Spanish pioneer in carrying out demonstrations in some important Japanese shrines.





Dr. Antonio Míguez Santa Cruz

Antonio Míguez Santa Cruz is a member of the research group Grupo de Frontera Global of the University of Alcalá de Henares since 2014 and member of the Imagen y Memoria, at the University of Cadiz since 2019. He received the Extraordinary PhD Award in Humanities back in 2016, after reading the thesis *The ghost in post-war Japanese cinema: from folkloric feature to feminist icon*. In addition, he has several Master's degrees, including one oriented towards cultural intervention and another focused on pure and simple cinematography. As for his publications, his first great achievement occurred in 2009 with the book *Los Moriscos de Palma. History of a Minority (1570-1610)*. On the other hand, he has produced three other single-authored books, coordinated up to five collective works, and participated in more than fifty written publications. The latest of these is called *Kaidan, Tradition of Terror in Japan*, published by Berenice Publishing Group this very year of 2021.





Claudia Bonillo Fernández

Claudia Bonillo graduated in Computer Engineering, graduated with honours from the Postgraduate Course in Japanese Studies and the Master's Degree in Art History from Zaragoza University. Currently, she is a PhD student at the University of Zaragoza and a researcher at Kyoto University with the Japanese Government (MEXT) Scholarship. Her research focuses on the transmission of the Sengoku period in Japanese popular culture, paying special attention to video games. Member of the Research Groups Japan and Spain: Relations through Art at the University of Zaragoza and Digital Humanities: History and Video Games at the University of Murcia, she has published in the journals *Mirai*, *Japanese Studies*, *Neuróptica*, *Con A de Animación*, *Ecós de Asia* and *e-tramas*, being a member of the editorial board in the last two.



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