NOSTALGIA IN ANIME: REDEFINING JAPANESE CULTURAL IDENTITY IN GLOBAL MEDIA TEXTS

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ABSTRACT

Anime has become a ubiquitous facet of the transnational global media flow, and continues to serve as a unique and acknowledged example of a non-Western media form that has successfully penetrated the global market. Because of its remarkable popularity abroad and a trend towards invasive localization techniques, there have been observations made by Japanese culture scholars, such as Koichi Iwabuchi, who claim that anime is a stateless medium that is unsuitable for representing any true or authentic depiction of Japanese culture and identity.

In this paper, I will be exploring this notion of statelessness within the anime medium and reveal how unique sociocultural tensions are reflected centrally within anime narratives or at the contextual peripheries, in which the narrative acts as an indirect response to larger societal concerns. In particular, I apply the notions of reflective and restorative nostalgia, as outlined by Svetlana Boym to reveal how modern Japanese identity is recreated and redefined through anime. In this sense, while anime may appeal to a larger global public, it is far from being a culturally stateless medium. In Chapter One, I look into the history of anime, focusing on Tetsuwan Atom and Sazae-san as foundational pieces of modern postwar anime that have shaped two genres distinctive to Japanese animation: mecha and iyashikei. In Chapter Two, I analyze the ways in which
director Shinkai Makoto approaches the mediation of tradition and modernity to sustain a unique sense of Japanese cultural identity within the globally popular anime film, *Kimi no na wa.*
To my family, friends, and mentors who have helped guide me through this extensive process: thank you! Without your advice, love, and tireless support, this project would not have been possible.

Many thanks,

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION ........................................................................................................... 1

CHAPTER 2: CONTEXTUALITIES, NOSTALGIA, AND THE ANIME MEDIUM .................. 4

2.1 Sazae-San, Nostalgia and the Foundations of the Iyashikei Genre .............................. 17

2.2 Miyazaki Hayao, Localization, and the Pseudo-Western ............................................. 29

2.3 A Caveat: Nostalgia and Capitalistic Modes of Strategic Self-Orientalizing ........... 32

CHAPTER 3: TRANSFORMATIVE TRADITIONS IN SHINKAI MAKOTO’S KIMI NO NA WA ................................................................. 37

3.1 Consumption and Self-Orientalization ........................................................................... 41

3.2 Fictional Landscapes, Journeys, and the Significance of Doing .................................. 51

3.3 Necessary Modernity and Fluid Semiotics ..................................................................... 58

3.4 Iyashikei, Distance, Melancholy, and Magic Realism .................................................. 64

CHAPTER IV: CONCLUSION ........................................................................................................ 69

4.1 Revisiting the Global: Anime and its International Popularity .................................... 70

4.2 “Odorful” Mediums ......................................................................................................... 72

BIBLIOGRAPHY ............................................................................................................................ 74
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Tezuka Osamu’s Tetsuwan Atomu .................................................................10

Figure 2: A screenshot of Atom and Uran. Atom reveals an iteration of his internal kokoro. .........................................................................................................................16

Figure 3: An example of a Sazae-san comic strip, created by Hasegawa Machiko .......18

Figure 4: The promotional poster for Kimi no na wa .....................................................38

Figure 5: Screenshots of Mitsuha’s miko garb and making kuchikamizake .................42

Figure 6: Screenshots of Mitsuha’s miko garb and making kuchikamizake .................42

Figure 7: Screenshot of Mitsuha and Taki trying to find one another, connected by Mitsuha’s cord .................................................................................................................47

Figure 8: A screenshot of the location of the Miyamizu spiritual altar and an example of Shinkai’s work with scenery.................................................................56
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Japanese animation, or *anime*, has become a ubiquitous facet of the transnational global media flow, and continues to serve as a unique and acknowledged example of a non-Western media form that has successfully penetrated the global market. Regardless of its cultural particularity, it has been subsumed into large pockets of international, non-Japanese cultures through subcultural fandoms. The earliest iterations of anime aimed at international audiences, such as *Tetsuwan Atomu* (Astro Boy), tried purposely to erase particular symbols that were known to represent Japanese culture — and this objective of having anime transfer neatly from culture to culture was further exercised by nation-specific localization teams. Because of anime’s remarkable popularity abroad, and this movement toward invasive localization techniques, Japanese culture scholars have suggested that anime is a stateless medium that is unsuitable for representing any true or authentic notions of Japanese culture and identity.

Japanese culture scholar Koichi Iwabuchi is perhaps most well known for making the observation that aspects of Japanese popular culture, particular anime and video games, can remain “odorless“ across national and cultural boundaries (Iwabuchi 28). Narratives are scrubbed of cultural particularities and characters are purposely made to look non-Japanese. What remains is an at best sterilized amalgamation of bits and pieces of Japanese culture, the remix of which exudes a pleasing cultural “fragrance,” but does not have any of the heft of an authentic representation of a national culture. In essence, Iwabuchi makes the point that anime reveals only a pleasing stereotype of Japanese culture, one that fits comfortably into the pre-existing paradigm of the East as “other.”
Certainly anime and video games from Japan can be foreign enough for international consumers, but not so foreign that they would find it unappealing.

In this thesis, I ask whether Iwabuchi’s observations are valid, focusing in particular on how anime may or may not represent the contours of Japanese cultural identity. In the first chapter, I look into the history of anime, focusing on *Tetsuwan Atomu* and *Sazae-san* as two foundational pieces of modern postwar anime that have shaped two genres distinctive to Japanese animation: mecha and *iyashikei*. *Tetsuwan Atomu* is perhaps the first real foray into global waters for anime, and has largely shaped the international understanding of anime culture to this day. Comparatively, *Sazae-san* is much more internally facing, and was never made for international consumption. The distinctive ways in which both these anime deal with the overwhelming trauma of war reveals how culture continues to be reflected within anime narratives. In the case of *Sazae-san*, I will apply the concepts of reflective and restorative nostalgia, as defined by Svetlana Boyd, as a means of recreating Japanese identity through anime. The ability to display both reflective and restorative nostalgia effectively, within a single genre, makes *iyashikei* a powerful form in which to explore identity formation as an unstable balance between simultaneous loss and restoration (Boym 49).

In light of these observations, I ask if the tension around cultural identity remains a relevant issue for the Japanese in the present. In order to do this, I analyze the hugely popular anime film, *Kimi no na wa (Your Name)*, directed by Shinkai Makoto in 2016, and explore the overarching themes of fluidity of meaning in regards to traditional practices, the materiality of historical identity, and nostalgia-driven modes of identity creation. The film’s study of the mediation between tradition and modernity reveals that...
the crisis of cultural identity remains a relevant and robust issue for the Japanese public, and that anime remains a particularly poignant medium in which to explore narratives of self-identity, precisely because of its hybrid cultural beginnings as a Western ‘modern’ art form that was adapted by Japanese artists to suit their native public’s tastes.

While it may be tempting to label anime as stylistically non-Japanese because of the stereotypical depiction of doe-eyed humanoid figures with non-natural colored hair and impossible proportions, I suggest that it is impossible for any expressive artistic medium not to be affected by the sociocultural context in which the author is steeped. The zeitgeist of a particular period, will inevitably appear at the peripheries of the narrative, whether it is as explicit as the themes that are explored, as a response to a particular societal need, or as cultural concepts such as *iyashikei* that are expressed subtly. To state that anime is capable of displaying an only sterile iteration Japanese culture is to ignore the nuanced variances within anime’s many genres and the wide breadth of topics that are covered.

In this thesis, I will look to the early anime works of *Tetsuwan Atomu* and *Sazae-san*, and the ways in which they explore the period following World War II. Both series are responses to wartime trauma, but approach the topic through very different narrative methodologies. I will then bring similar observations to bear on how the *iyashikei* genre continues to respond to sociocultural tensions and identity-related conflict in the more recent work of Shinkai Makoto’s *Kimi no na wa* and analyze the ways in which Shinkai explores and represents the conflicts of the present in his critically acclaimed film.
CHAPTER TWO: CONTEXTUALITIES, NOSTALGIA, AND THE ANIME MEDIUM

In *Recentering Globalization: Popular Culture and Japanese Transnationalism*, Koichi Iwabuchi states that Japanese popular culture, particularly media forms such as anime and video games, can be subsumed into the “global media flow” (Castells 2011) due to its *mukokuseki* properties. *Mukokuseki* can loosely be defined as “something or someone lacking any nationality” (Iwabuchi 28), and in essence, refers to both the deliberate and unintentional elimination of cultural particularities. This process is done at the national level, where corporations purposely expunge expressions of Japanese culture and characteristics in order to appeal to a wider global audience, and also at a local level, where anime consumers from different nations exercise various “glocalization”¹ techniques to make foreign texts palatable for their native audiences. In attempting to appeal to a universal audience, cultural exports rely on a “disappearance of any perceptible ‘Japaneseness’” (Iwabuchi 33). From this perspective, it is not so much that anime serves as a prime example of a non-Western media text which has the potential to defy the overwhelming influence of Americanization, but that in aiming for global popularity, anime has had to accommodate for the influence of westernization, which has become a kind of global cultural norm. In this sense, while anime may have strains of specific cultural characteristics that may represent “Japanese” culture, it is cleansed of any potential off-putting “odors” (Iwabuchi 28). Odors are

¹ Glocalization is a term that was first coined in the late 1980’s (in a publication of the *Harvard Business Review*) and is rooted in the Japanese term *dochakuka*, which originally was understood in the context of “adapting farming technique to one’s own local conditions” (Sharma 1). The term has since been adapted to mean the somewhat paradoxical “universalization of particularization and the particularization of universalism” (Robertson 100).
the parts of a culture that outsiders would deem too foreign to seem generically appealing or do not fit conveniently into the preconceived framework of one’s exoticization of another culture. Yet in depriving a cultural artifact of its cultural odors, what creators have expressed through anime can amount to nothing more than an irreversibly altered and sterilized echo of Japanese culture. According to Iwabuchi, the global desire to engage with popular culture, particularly the virtual elements such as Japanese anime and video games, is not a manifestation of a yearning to connect with Japanese culture, but a mere desire to consume “Japan” as a “materialistic consumer commodity” (Iwabuchi 34).

Japanese culture scholar, Azuma Hiroki, presents similar ideas in his research on native otaku2 engagement with anime, as he outlines the complex and transformative dynamics that anime was shaped by, in order to be considered Japanese. He argues that the Japan that is portrayed in anime is, at best, a pseudo-Japan (Azuma 20). This desire to consume an illusion of a national culture is merely an extension of a consumerist subculture that currently represents a larger trend towards global postmodernity. Postmodernism privileges simulacra as equivalent to the authentic and the real, making anime an ideal medium in which to create illusory images of a pseudo-national culture. Anime, and the fan base that supports and spurs its development, is powered exclusively through simulacra, whether in the form of fan-derivative works -- e.g. doujinshi (fan comics), fanart, fanfiction, and so on-- the desire for non-canonical, alternative storylines; or consumerist

2 In the West, otaku is a generally pejorative term for a die-hard anime or manga fan. In East Asia, it remains a pejorative term, but can be extended to mean an obsession of any kind. For example, an individual who is obsessed with trains would be considered a train otaku.
interactions with paraphernalia that are only distantly related to the essence of the anime narrative (Azuma 30). These can include such acts as purchasing household goods or figures based on anime franchises, as a means of trying to get more closely connected to the core of an anime narrative, despite the fact that these acts of consumerism do nothing to enhance the viewer’s relationship with the essence or ideology of the work. In short, both scholars have noted anime’s inability to portray a genuine depiction of the cultural essence of Japan, and in its place is a sterilized copy, devoid of any sense of “grand narrative” which gestures towards a kind of unified ideological paradigm or cultural influence (Azuma 36). Instead, anime narratives are sustained through the capitalistic accumulation of paraphernalia: a web of physical and nonphysical objects connected by images of attractive, nationally non-descript characters emblazoned upon them, and simulacra: derivative works which are often divorced from the canonical narrative (Azuma 37). This web exists only to feed a fan’s desire for more content, often at the expense of quality. In this situation, fans may engage only with, at best, the flimsy depiction of the pseudo-Japan in anime. Anime can sustain its global popularity only by constantly re-orientalizing\(^3\) itself to attract the Western gaze, and by simultaneously easing the tension between being foreign and “other,” through various localization techniques and making the foreign feel at least somewhat familiar.

Anime’s hybrid Western/Japanese cultural beginnings reflect the fact that the art was initially sustained by Western technology, physically embodying the tension

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\(^3\) Orientalism is a term coined by Edward W. Said in Orientalism (1978), where he shows how the study of Orientals through the gaze of the West is inextricably tied to the power structures borne from imperialist agendas of the past, which continue to exert influence over how the West perceives the East as its diametric Other.
between familiar and the non-familiar. This tension is a primary feature that comes up repetitively in the discourse of postwar Japanese national identity is the assimilation of Western influences to a uniquely Japanese, and to a broader extent, Asian context. Ideologies, such as *wakon-yosai*, translated as “Japanese spirit-Western techniques” (Sato 2007), continued to drive the growing acceptance of Westernization in Japan, while allowing its citizens to take pride in some abstract, yet unchangeable cultural essence. In some sense, these ideologies can be seen as coping mechanisms for the overwhelming influence of Western technologies and ideologies that threatened Japanese tradition, and the consequent tensions in national and cultural identity after the crippling defeat of World War II. By making cultural assimilation a fundamental part of the modern Japanese identity, citizens would be able to maintain a sense of cultural superiority, even in the face of great historical loss and postcolonial influence (Iwabuchi 59). While all nations assimilate Western influences in a manner that suits their own local contexts, it may be a unique feature of Japanese culture to make this process a fundamental part of cultural and national identity. Whether this sense of superiority is justified is irrelevant in the face of national identity formation, as the processes that define the ethos of Japaneseness constantly reflect and are influenced by the specificities of the current socioeconomic and cultural circumstances. For example, in the past, the *wakon-yosai* ideology stemmed from the term *wakon-kansai*, translated as “Japanese spirit, Chinese technology.” This term appears prior to when the Japanese first encounter with the West, and it shows how they transform their ideology to suit the political and sociocultural currents of the time. Postwar Japan’s uniquely liminal
position as both aggressor and victim reflects tensions in how to define one’s global and local identity, and these same struggles are reflected in the narratives of many popular anime films and franchises. From the beginning, anime seemed to absorb these struggles and represent them obliquely, at least in the peripheries of the films/works, both in terms of narrative focus and also through the nature of anime’s advent into Japanese culture and the world.

These struggles come out explicitly in the works of Tezuka Osamu and Hasegawa Machiko, the respective creators of Tetsuwan Atomu and Sazae-San respectively. Considered the god and goddess of postwar Japanese anime, these two creators created the foundations of what would later become two genres characteristic of Japanese anime culture in particular, setting it fundamentally apart from other animation cultures.

_Tetsuwan Atomu or Astro Boy, as it is known in the West, is considered the first Japanese animation series to be exported globally, and it set the precedent for the mecha anime genre, a strain of science fiction that revolves around large robots or machines that influence a societal culture in often traumatic ways. Initially, Japanese animation started as an experimental hybrid text, explicitly reflecting heavy American, German, French and Chinese influences throughout the early twentieth century onward (eg. Disney, Emile Cohl, Kalif Storch, Chinese shadow puppet play, etc.), and was also heavily influenced by the turbulent political currents of that time (Onoda-Power 128). For example, after the first wave of animators rose in 1910 with creators like Shimokawa Oten and Kitayama Seitaro, animation quickly became a tool for World War II propaganda for the Japanese government. During these early iterations,
Japanese animation was not “anime” as we consider it today. From the early 1910s up until the 1960s and 70s, Japanese animation was defined by a native animator’s efforts to compete with their “slicker American and European counterparts” (Onoda-Power, 129). Limited economic resources did not allow for luxuries like sound technology and color, which were included so easily in Western films. Naturally, audiences gravitated towards works like Disney, which at the time seemed far ahead of the game. America was largely considered a symbol of richness and newness, and the appeal of the spectacle was palpable in its market presence. Even Tezuka, who would later be considered the “father of manga,” was influenced and moved by Disney films like Bambi and Snow White, relentlessly (Onoda-Power, 131). Yet their limited budget allowed for Tezuka’s production team to explore innovative new ways to cut costs without compromising quality. Inasmuch as Western entities constantly influenced these forefathers, it would be difficult to think of anime as anything other than a hybrid creation. In fact, even foundational works like *Astro Boy* used funds given by NBC Enterprises in America to increase the quality of its animation (Ruh 211). There are, however, dominant Japanese-centric themes that ultimately allowed Japanese animation to separate from (or at the very least, to undermine) the hegemonic presence of the West within this medium, and begin to be reflective of its own cultural nuances.
The ways in which Osamu cut production costs by changing the animation stylistically often alluded to traditional Japanese arts, such as kabuki, where actors would often stop mid-motion to pose, in order to accentuate an important monologue or emotion” (Onoda-Power 134). Having fewer frames per shot allowed for Osamu to emphasize what was being said on screen, and lower the cost of production. Furthermore, the company that he created, *Mushi* Productions, experimented with narratives that were targeted at adults, as opposed to children -- a feature of anime that remains a dominant source of attraction to fans to this day. Though these works could be clearly considered “adult,” through their exploration of sexuality and bawdy humor, they were also “adult” in the sense that they appealed to adult viewers through the depiction of comparatively more complex emotions, dry humor, and topical subjects, such as politics. He called this
genre “animerama,” combining the thematic elements of animation, drama, and cinema together, again revealing how monumental Tezuka and his production company was in the development of anime as its own, culturally unique medium within the general field of animation (Onoda-Power 137). Animation was no longer merely for children, but for people of all ages. In this sense, animation could explore and address themes of identity, trauma, and loss in a sophisticated manner that responded to the needs of a broader part of the public. This willingness to engage with a broader set of ideas—and to challenge the medium to create nuanced stories that take advantage of the abstracted human form remains one of the most critical differences between Japanese anime and Western cartoons. In this sense, even the subject matter that Japanese animation is willing to portray shows a degree of cultural particularity that keeps anime content from being universally “stateless.”

In a postscript by Tezuka, he states how working on these adult narratives was “cathartic” (Onoda-Power 143), and it is this process of examination and catharsis that made both manga and later, anime, during this period a medium deeply reflective of the traumatic events of the present (eg. the atomic bombing, loss of World War II, Korean War, and the Vietnam War). Since the world was preoccupied with these mass conflicts during the mid-twentieth century, this situation may have created a more receptive environment for manga to hit the international market. In this sense, while anime remains “hybrid” in that it began as a medium that was inspired by the techniques and materials of

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4 In his book, Understanding Comics, Scott McCloud elaborates how the simplification of the human form allows the viewer to "focus on specific details. By stripping down an image to its essential 'meaning,' an artist can amplify that meaning in a way that realistic art can't" (30). There is also a simultaneous "universality of cartoon imagery," which may lower the barrier towards empathy for the character on screen.
the West, it is the contextual particularity in which anime was created that gives it its “statefulness.” Recognizing the historical and socioeconomic context that compelled anime creators to use new methods of animation and new approaches to create sophisticated and nuanced narratives shows that anime was already becoming a unique branch of animation during this period. International recognition of this trend started with the advent of *Astro Boy* on the global stage.

*Astro Boy* was the first anime that acquired a truly substantial market presence abroad. This show first aired in the United States in 1963, on the independent news station, WNEW, on Saturdays at 6:30 p.m., which was originally considered to be an unusual time for cartoons during this time period (Ruh 218). Like many early anime that aired in the West, the content was heavily censored and policed in order to follow American values and broadcast standards. This censorship occurred even within the context of Osamu admitting that he had attempted to frame *Astro Boy* to be as culturally neutral as possible, because of the hope for of international consumption (Schodt 86). In attempting to appeal to the global audience, Osamu often used Western religious motifs, and often avoided Eastern Shinto or Buddhist imagery. In this sense, *Astro Boy* seems to be a prime example of what Koichi Iwabuchi defines as a *mukokuseki* approach to anime media production, purposely gravitating towards universalizing themes and blurring any sense of cultural specificity (Iwabuchi 72). I will go on to suggest, however, Tezuka Osamu’s attempts to blur the cultural particularities of *Astro Boy* largely did not work, and *Astro Boy* had to continue to be localized by the Western broadcasting entities through actions like taking out some of the violence in the film. Even his attempts at purposely exploring Western religion in his narratives were excised by NBC as
inappropriate for American children to be exposed to in a cartoon (Schodt 86). This reveals that even purposeful efforts to make an anime series feel “stateless” were largely unsuccessful and needed to be reworked by localization teams. This once again supports the idea that context cannot be divorced from the content. Cultural particularities will be reflected in the medium, regardless of creator intention.

Another feature that made *Astro Boy* and subsequent anime narratives difficult to localize in the West was the amount of violence that children’s anime depicted (Ruh 219). These cultural standards of what animation can or should portray show how anime had already progressed and developed, at least in some part, as a response to the turbulent post World War II era and viewers’ processes of making sense of chaotic violence, and consequent feelings of loss. For example, characters’ deaths, and portrayals of empathetic humanoid robots being explicitly destroyed, were fairly common throughout the original narrative; however, in the English equivalent, these deaths were often replaced with explanations that the character had “fainted” or were taken out altogether (Schodt 85). While critics such as Tim Hollis label such aesthetics as “mindless mayhem,” animation was actually a means of depicting these violent traumas, many of which resisted explicit verbal expression, through layers of abstraction both in the figures of the characters and in the narratives that were expressed by anime creators during this time (qtd. in Ruh 219). While depicting traumatic violence in figures that are too realistically human would be damaging to the psychological state of the show’s viewers, the portrayal of an innocent humanoid robot boy dealing with difficult situations and learning to differentiate between moral good and evil was an amusing way for children to deal with the technology-related horrors of World War II. These narratives, with their violence and
occasionally grotesque abstractions, would resonate with Japanese viewers, who would have recently suffered the events of World War II, perhaps more so than for American viewers. This once again shows how the cultural specificity of historical context can be reflected at the peripheries of an anime narrative and maintain a kind of cultural “statefulness.”

Far from “mindless mayhem,” the narrative particularities of *Tetsuwan Atomu* emerged as a deeply symbolic iteration of Japanese identity during this period. While Japan was once a victim of horrific technological innovations (e.g. atom bomb), it is also undeniable that Japan benefited from Western technological developments. Of course, this includes the technology behind animation. Tezuka Osamu was attuned to this tension and portrayed a deeply complex narrative that focused on the relationship between humans and technology, encouraging the potential for a positive use for technological, and more specifically atomic, energy through the young titular “Astro Boy,” who is himself a learning, thinking, and feeling robot powered by an atomic core. Given the recent events of World War II, this image was a controversial and daringly hopeful depiction of the future. The non-threatening image of a naïve and malleable boy, as opposed to the more power-focused figure of a full-grown man that is the more common hero in Western hero franchises (e.g. Superman), is at once a reflection of an uncertain future and also Japan’s own position as a not-fully-matured nation after the loss of World War II. Similarly, the impact of military rule during World War II is heavily criticized within the general narrative of *Astro Boy*, in that the robotic figures in the narrative serve as metaphors for humans who were seen as dispensable resources for the war effort.
Seeing robots, who were capable of complex emotions and thought processes be reduced to their utilitarian value is an apt metaphor for the Japanese soldiers in World War II.

Since Japan is a culture that highly regards the benefits of a strong work ethic, revealing the dangers of seeing humans as mere workers or soldiers, instead of holistic beings with *kokoro*, lead to negative consequences time and time again. *Kokoro* is a complex concept that embodies the holistic “heart, sentiment, will or mind” (Sugiyama-Lebra 113), and is a word that remains difficult to translate accurately into English. Beyond the narrative’s close relationship to the historical context that leads to particular production decisions for *Astro Boy*, such as the choice of using atomic energy as the ambivalent power source for his identity, the use of the word “kokoro” is a strong signifier of Astro Boy’s cultural origins. *Kokoro* appears in the English dubbed version of *Astro Boy* as well, reflecting a strain of Japanese cultural ideology which seeks to venerate the non-secular self. *Kokoro* signifies the ability to maintain the inner self and spirit, even in the context of physical and psychological turmoil, and later, within the heavily material-driven consumerist society that postwar Japan exemplified. This complex, and ultimately humanizing, concept could be extended towards even non-human beings in *Astro Boy*, encouraging a pacifistic and humanist vision for the treatment of outside cultures and races. The peace-driven message that Tezuka Osamu was advocating towards different cultures and even different life forms is conspicuous throughout all of the episodic narratives of *Astro Boy*. In regards to the ideological and linguistic preservation of Japanese cultural doctrines, one can see how the origins of postwar anime continued to reflect Osamu’s personal ideologies. Anime does not exist in a cultural vacuum, so it would be difficult to separate the unique Japanese cultural and
historical contexts from the anime narratives themselves, therefore maintaining a kind of cultural specificity that defies Iwabuchi’s original claim that anime is “odorless.”

Figure 2. A screenshot of Atomu revealing an iteration of his internal *kokoro*.

Though early works of anime, like *Astro Boy*, went through extensive localization processes in order to assimilate with the least amount of cultural friction, the word *kokoro* was kept in the re-mastered English dubbed editions because there was no English word that could properly define this concept. The preservation of this word and its symbolic significance shows yet another way in which, regardless of the Western origins of animation technology, many foundational anime creators continued to use this platform to explore the nuances of Japanese cultural identity with transnational linguistic play. They used anime as a platform to react to the sociocultural currents of the time and encourage the Japanese public to adopt certain ideological premises. For example, *Astro Boy* reveals a bold vision in which technology can be used for the betterment of humanity, despite prior trauma. Embracing this ideology has encouraged Japan to become a nation of technological and scientific innovation, despite the obvious tensions
that the nation faces with the societal effects of innovation.\(^5\) The relationship between the word *kokoro* and the purposefully internationalized appearance of the *Astro Boy* franchise reveals of the dynamics of anime as an example of *wakon-yosai* (Japanese spirit-Western technology) ideology. As we have seen, *kokoro* refers to the immutable holistic inner self and spirit, and keeping that phrase Japanese is significant as both a site of cultural particularity and also tension between the Western physical dimensions of anime production and the uniquely Japanese internal ideology. Once again, this gestures towards the fact that anime may not be “stateless,” but reflective of the context in which it is created.

2.1 *Sazae-San*, Nostalgia and the Foundations of the *Iyashikei* Genre

While *Astro Boy* was the foundational franchise that paved the way for the future of global anime consumption and the mecha genre, another franchise played an equally significant role in developing the distinguishable characteristics of anime as a unique cultural phenomenon within Japan. The development of the culturally unique genre of *iyashikei* shows how anime continues to be reflective of the sociocultural tensions and currents of Japanese society. It also reveals how certain genres are developed in response to the needs of the native public, further emphasizing how context deeply affects how anime narratives are presented.

The *yonkoma* (4 panel) manga-turned-anime *Sazae-San* was created by the forward-thinking Hasegawa Machiko and began to air on October 1969 on Fuji

\(^5\) One particularly revealing example of this tension is the public’s perception of die-hard anime fans or *otaku*. As stated before, in Japan, *otaku* can be extended to mean a person who is obsessed with any particular topic or paraphernalia. However, the term is most closely associated with anime fans or fans of technology. The largely negative association with this word shows how a deep engagement and obsession with technology continues to be suspect even today.
Television, and continues to be broadcast to this day, making it the longest running animated and non-soap opera scripted television series in history. It broadcasts on Sunday evenings, at 6:30PM to 7:00PM and consists of three short slice-of-life vignettes revolving around the titular character Sazae-san and her traditional style three-generational household. At the end of each episode, the viewers have an opportunity to interact with the Sazae-san by playing *janken* or rock-paper-scissors with the character on screen. The viewership has fluctuated throughout the decades that *Sazae-san* has been broadcast, but at its highest, approximately 40 percent of the Japanese population was watching in 1979\(^6\).

\[\text{Figure 3. An example of a *Sazae-san* comic strip, created by Hasegawa Machiko.}\]

\[^6\text{http://www.fujitv.co.jp/en/a_12_05.html}\]
While the charms of this anime series are many, one of the primary selling points of the show for its massive viewership is depiction of a warm and loving, “ideal family.” *Sazae-san* as a manga began to be published in *Fukunichi Shinbun* (Fukunichi newspaper) in April 1946, immediately after the end of World War II (Booker 241). The normalcy and warm-hearted nature of the family-oriented narrative likely served as a healing mechanism for the traumatized Japanese populace, as many families were separated during this turbulent period, both as a result of the military draft, as well as the separation of children and parents, when the more vulnerable members of society were relocated to safer areas in Japan. In this sense, not only would media texts like *Sazae-san* act as a tool for healing, they would also provide a charming and lighthearted rulebook for how to once again bring together a family under the guise of normalcy after the enormously traumatic events of the war. Throughout *Sazae-san*, we see the family interacting with culturally specific seasonal items, activities, and more, often cuing its viewership what they should be engaging in during the period in which they would watch the show (Lee 193). For example, around the Christmas holiday period, an episode which consists of Sazae-san and her younger sister, Wakame, making a Japanese-style Christmas cake is shown on television. During the summer, a season known for neighborhood *matsuri*, or festivals, there will be an episode that shows Sazae-san going to a festival wearing a *yukata*. In this sense, *Sazae-san* was reflective of the everyday dynamics of Japanese culture and reinforced these ideas through the particularities of context-laden symbols within each episode. This shows how not only did anime have the ability to demonstrate how Japanese people live to a certain extent, but also reinforce

7 Japanese summer traditional wear.
specific cultural practices by reminding its viewers to engage with common national customs.

Beyond the cultural reinforcement of a routine everyday life, *Sazae-san* also reflects the cultural transformation of women’s roles in Japan after the postwar period. While Sazae-san plays the role of the warm, home-building housewife, her attitudes in regards to women’s societal and political treatment (Lee 187) are representative of the general women’s liberation movement that was evolving in the postwar period. The flawed, yet resourceful *Sazae-san* often undermines the dominant ideology of exclusive masculinity, and is shown to declare that “men too must strive for women’s liberation” (Lee 187). The rise of feminism as a transnational movement has been well-documented, shown by infamous Japanese feminists like Hiratsuka Raicho, who took inspiration from Swedish feminists like Ellen Key and playwright Henrik Ibsen (Lowy 2007). But *Sazae-san*, like Hiratsuka, takes the ideologies of a Japanese strain of feminism and portrays her thoughts throughout the anime. Evidence of this is that there is still a strong focus on preserving community, an internal focus on family life and finding dignity in one’s position and role within the family. Rarely do the female characters of *Sazae-san* blatantly engage in the linguistic rhetoric of postwar feminism, though there have been episodes in which the subject has been engaged, as shown in the case of Sazae-san speaking up at her women’s liberation group. *Sazae-san’s* approach to portraying feminist ideologies is often more roundabout and discreet, showing the eponymous character Sazae gaining the upper hand on male characters by showing a deftness when it comes to both maintaining the household and engaging other people in the public sphere. For example, throughout the series, readers regularly see Sazae gently reprimanding her
husband for not being able to do simple household tasks or overpowering a male character in a self-defense class (episode 2). This series draws heavily from referential material regarding the geopolitical and sociocultural climate of the time. Far from being stateless, works like Sazae-san that looked inwardly to deal with the fragile and liminal state of Japanese national and cultural identity after the war built another foundational aspect of modern day anime, namely the genre of iyashikei. This once again reinforces the idea that far from being a culturally sterile medium, the development of anime has been deeply rooted in the historical context that inevitably affected its creators. This does not necessarily mean that its cultural specificity translates into problems of transnational dissemination, however. Viewers can find meaning and develop their own readings of these international texts, with or without the help of localization teams. The claim that Iwabuchi makes -- namely, that the global appeal of anime comes primarily from its ability to divorce itself from the cultural specificity of Japan -- seems unfounded when we consider how certain strains of feminist ideologies that are relevant at the time continue to make appearances in shows as popular as Sazae-san. This show, and entire genres like iyashikei, are developed to respond to the unique social needs of a Japanese postwar society.

As a uniquely well-defined genre that is difficult to find in other cultures, iyashikei is loosely defined as “healing” in Japanese, and often refers to a descriptive genre of narratives that focus on soothing stories which display little to no conflict and, instead, focus on a nostalgic and occasionally melancholic sense of fulfillment and harmony. In short, they are narratives that encourage a spiritual sense of healing, away from the painful realities of everyday life. Sazae-san, both in its comic and anime forms,
was a foundational predecessor of this narrative style, in that it was an apparent healing medium for its suffering postwar viewership. The show’s focus on personal, spiritual development, fostering genuine relationships among characters, with narratives focusing on the smaller pleasures and mysteries of life, remains fundamental to the iyashikei genre today. The phenomenally high viewership of Sazae-san is evidence in itself of how much the show spoke to the needs of the public. Unlike the science fiction-inspired genre of mecha, which focuses on the spectacle and violence of often techno-dystopian landscapes and narratives, iyashikei encourages mutual empathy, and in many ways, a rejection of orientalizing and alienating characteristics. The focus of many iyashikei genre narratives tends to revolve around topics that most cultures can relate to, at least on a surface level, such as family, personal relationships, and self-discovery.

This does not mean that the creators purposefully excise symbolic representations of “Japaneseness” in their narratives. After all, stereotypical depictions of “Japaneseness” (e.g. geisha, ninjas, Mt. Fuji, cherry blossoms) still remain unique facets of Japanese culture, though these symbols have been largely globalized for international consumption and represent Eastern exoticism. The strength of the iyashikei genre comes from the ways in which these symbols are framed to have an affective appeal towards ambient mood regulation, focusing on the consoling and pacification of the viewer (Roquet 88). The scenes in which the symbols above are portrayed often are accompanied by soothing background music and foley, pale and unobtrusive color palettes, and the use of peaceful scenic background shots, all of which gesture towards vague feelings of affective nostalgia and lower the barrier to empathy for the characters. The fostering of empathy for characters and for other sociocultural contexts within iyashikei simply allows for the
existence of these symbols to pass through the narrative, with an overriding message of humanism through their emphasis on the typical, yet never banal, depiction of everyday life and common existential dilemmas -- such as finding spiritual fulfillment and a raison d’etre apart from physical and economic survival. While creators occasionally break from these archetypal characteristics of the *iyashikei* genre, the characteristics first exhibited by *Sazae-san* largely continue to hold great appeal for the Japanese viewership, as indicated by the “healing boom” that began in the mid-1990s within Japan (Roquet 89). *Sazae-san*’s continued, conspicuous success to the present day indicates broader appeal, beyond its capacity for soothing viewers who have been the victims of traumatic historical upheavals. This continual addressing of specific social needs through anime shows how the medium in itself is not stateless in context.

The fact that the rise of the *iyashikei* movement coincided with the devastating events of the Kobe earthquake and the Aum Shinrikyo attacks is unsurprising, since both events reinforced the uncertainty of both social order and modern identity in a relatively short amount of time. Yet the need to create narrative spaces in which a calm affect encourages healing and gradual reintegration into reality has made *iyashikei* a prime genre for the rebuilding of identity, through a kind of social redemption in which viewers can emerge from these narratives as passive witnesses of current events with the resilience to face conflicts and contradictions of contemporary identity. Effective

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8 In Yumiko Iida’s essay, “Between the Technique of Living an Endless Routine and the Madness of Absolute Degree Zero: Japanese Identity and the Crisis of Modernity in the 1990,” she speaks of economic stagnation of the 1990s, which led to “a multiple breakdown of political, economic, and sociocultural orders and induced a visible shift in the mood of society reflecting an end to a glorious age of Japanese economic success on a global stage” (Iida 424).
iyashikei genre works encourage a feeling of “decentered subjectivity,” in which viewers “dissolve discrete identities into moods of open-ended affective exploration, free from the usual demands of their social and discursive selves” (Roquet 103). In this sense, iyashikei serves as an ideal backdrop for both cultural liberation and redefinition, particularly in the case of anime, because of its exploration of sociocultural issues, like the case of Sazae-san, and possibilities for change, as shown in Astro Boy. The dissolution of bound identities gives rise to the potential for new or altered definitions of group identities and a means to continue to find new modes of reconstructing the national self. Instead of statelessness, anime can be one cultural medium in which we can recreate different “stateful” modes that define a national culture.

Today, Sazae-san and other iyashikei series that have come afterwards seek to create ambient spaces through the use of purposeful soothing aesthetics and heavy-handed nostalgia. In The Future of Nostalgia, Svetlana Boym claims that there are two strains of nostalgia that encourage the formation of nationalism: restorative nostalgia and reflective nostalgia. While restorative nostalgia refers to the process of “rebuild[ing] the lost home and patch[ing] up the memory gaps,” reflective nostalgia focuses on the “longing and loss, the imperfect process of remembrance” (Boym 41). The iyashikei genre is effective in sustaining the tensions of Japanese identity because it exemplifies an ability to represent both restorative nostalgia and reflective nostalgia simultaneously. By revolving around depictions of nostalgic imagery and themes, iyashikei tends to focus on narratives that provide a reminder of things that have been lost, and a simultaneous solution of how things can be remade, though never in an unaltered state. Examples of
such narratives will be discussed more deeply later in Chapter Two, focusing primarily on the work of Shinkai Makoto’s *Kimi no Na Wa*, translated as *Your Name.*

In the case of *Sazae-san*, the show’s repetitive iterations of an episodic structure, revolving around vignettes about traditional family life and a moment of interaction with the titular character at the end of each episode, cement the viewer’s relationship with the fictional nostalgia-ridden narrative. This structure shows the way in which *Sazae-san* can be a restoratively nostalgic work. While its episodic narratives remind viewers of traditional customs and of provincial lifestyles of the past, it also serves as a reminder of what kind of activities one should engage in, depending on the seasons, as well as what foods one should eat and how to look for a comparatively humbler kind of happiness through familial relationships. *Sazae-san* is incredibly effective in the formation of Japaneseness in anime, because not only does it remind viewers what has been lost in the postwar era, but, through repetitive patterns, also reveals how to sustain the motions of that everyday Japaneseness and the consequent healing nostalgia. However, in representing these nostalgic social customs and traditional three-generation family structures, the show also acts as a work of reflectively nostalgic work, because it serves as a constant reminder of what has been lost.9 This tension between reflective nostalgia and restorative nostalgia permeates the work of *Sazae-san*. While the show gives the implied message that we can never return to that exact time period, it also encourages the notion that one can *rebuild* an iterative version of this period through embodied and repetitive practice, and find happiness and a sense of collective home in that process. In

9 In William Lee’s article, “From Sazae-san to Crayon Shin-chan: Family Anime, Social Change, and Nostalgia in Japan,” he outlines the decline in three-generation familial households in Japan and how this transition has been reflected in all-ages family anime like *Sazae-san*. 
this sense, one can continue to rebuild and reiterate this nostalgic strain of Japaneseness through anime, even in the face of overwhelming Western influence. Once again, contrary to Iwabuchi’s claim that anime is stateless and odorless, this shows that anime remains a medium which can recreate a kind of cultural “statefulness” through its interactions with its viewers.

The fundamental structure of *Sazae-san* has not changed since the beginning of its broadcast run and continues to this day. In its repetitive structure and the restorative nostalgia that it advocates (thus redefining Japaneseness), *Sazae-san* has been raised to the level of modern myth, in the sense that the various symbols represented in the franchise “presuppose a signifying consciousness, that one can reason about them [the symbols] while discounting their substance” (Barthes 108). More significantly, the iterations of Japaneseness that are represented in *Sazae-san* and later *iyashikei* works are rife with symbols of Japanese cultural identity that do “not trouble about contradictions” (Barthes 58). Japanese identity can retain both tradition and modernity, transience and permanence, and both Eastern and Western cultures. Perhaps most significantly, it can represent all of these dichotomies without nullifying the other. This may be because of the premise that Japanese modern identity is still at least grounded in the assimilation of “contradictory” foreign influences, at least in the public national imagination (Iwabuchi 60). To be able to bring Western influences into Japanese culture, and temper them in a manner that is appealing to the Japanese public, remains a foundational principle of modern Japanese cultural ideology. Within this ideology is a fundamental kind of contradiction that nevertheless strengthens the sense of Japaneseness in hybrid cultural mediums like anime.
Unlike *Astro Boy*, which was made in some part with the hope that it would be eligible for international consumption, *Sazae-san* was never exported to the West for global consumption. If we recall that it has become a phenomenon that has spanned decades, and has become a tradition in its own right, *Sazae-san* is an example of anime that cannot be considered “stateless” by any means. Inasmuch as there are traditional symbols of Japanese culture sprinkled throughout the series (as there are for most anime series), *Sazae-san* shows how, through their narrative platform, shows can *recreate* what constitutes Japaneseness, in the face of traumatic historical and sociocultural realities through encouraging the adoption of contemporary ideologies and social practices. This re-creation demonstrates how Japaneseness, like most kinds of cultural ethos, is never a static, immutable core, but something that evolves in the context of the current era. If this is the case, we cannot view anime as a form devoid of any kind of Japaneseness, even if creators were purposefully trying to excise cultural particularities out of the narrative. This is precisely because anime, and any art form for that matter, does not develop in a cultural vacuum. Inevitably, facets of the culture’s traditions and current anxieties will filter into how a narrative is told and presented to the public. Simply divorcing the narrative content from its cultural particularities is not something that can occur because of a creator’s desire to do so, and reductively claiming that anime is uniformly “stateless” is dangerous when applied to such a diverse platform that supports genres that are as different from one another as *mecha* and *iyashikei*. As we see in the foundational anime works of *Astro Boy* and *Sazae-san*, creators continue to struggle over the definition and formation of Japanese identity through the medium of anime.
While struggles to establish a Japanese identity through the animation medium in terms of style, narrative, and physical form were a source of anxiety for early Japanese animators, whether these conflicts of national and cultural identity are still relevant to the postmodern present must still be analyzed. Anime culture scholar Susan Napier has suggested that anime represents a liminal space where viewers and fans can participate in forming a kind of “postethnic” identity, where Western features and Japanese features can be combined seamlessly and encourage a mode of identity exploration that is simply not possible in other entertainment media forms (Napier 27). The doe-eyed, bright haired humanoid anime figures might be considered to resemble the Japanese standard features poorly; however, this point seems largely irrelevant, as animation rarely seems to be constrained by the look of actual human beings. Additionally, the work of original anime series -- with its unique language characteristics such as regional accents, and widespread cultural assumptions -- makes it difficult to divorce the national origins of a piece from the content that is presented. For example, in Japanese Cinema in the Digital Age, Mitsuyo Wada-Marciano analyzes the transnational qualities of the film “Hotel Venus,” which was produced in Japan, but had all of its characters speak Korean and is set in modern day Korea. Wada-Marciano points out that despite the fact that the work takes place in Korea, there are certain cultural assumptions about Japan’s view of the Korean people, its own ambivalent imperialist relationship, and consequent gaze on the subjected Korean community that are unique to Japan’s sociocultural and historical context (Wada-Marciano 111). These assumptions and depictions of the Korean “Other” cannot be ignored simply because the work happens to be in the Korean language or take place in Seoul. In this sense, anime is much the same inside or outside of Japan, in that even
though it may portray characters who do not “look Japanese,” or take place in fantastical worlds and backdrops that do not resemble Japan, the way the work constructs a particular narrative, or presents a certain character, will inevitably gesture towards the culture that it came from. Even when a work is trying to be culturally “stateless” or retain a different culture’s contextual “statefulness,” we see how the particularities of the narrative and its representation of characters gesture towards its native context. The viewer may or may not be aware of these cultural textures and contours due to his or her own lack of foreign cultural literacy; however, this does not mean that these differences have been excised.

2.2 Miyazaki Hayao, Localization, and the Pseudo-Western

Regardless of the globalizing influences that anime is subjected to by both Japanese and international consumers (alike through localization initiatives), cultural differences continue to remain evident. In order to support this claim, I will consider the scholarship revolving around the works of Miyazaki Hayao, who is arguably the anime film director known best in the West. Extensive work has already been done on the cultural differences between the historical particularities of Miyazaki Hayao’s works and the differences between Japanese and English versions of his films (Eriko Ogihara-Schuck 2014, Shiro Yoshioka 2014). Ogihara-Schuck stresses the influences and continuing evidence of Japanese religion, and in particular, animism in Miyazaki’s works, showing how features like the lack of a firmly defined good/evil binary, the abundance of spirits that represent inanimate or abstract objects, and the reluctance to infantilize these abstract entities is apparent in the verbal and visual script of Miyazaki’s
narrative, as well as in the paratext\(^\text{10}\) of his films. In contrast, Ogihara-Schuck compares the localized American versions of his films -- which reinforce the existence of good/evil in a manner that resonates with America’s Christian ideals -- and also market his works as more cheerful, child-friendly through their promotional content (Ogihara-Schuck 69). Further, in the American versions, spirits are made more diminutive, and this is expressed in the language that the human characters use. The primary purpose of these spirits is to exoticize an imaginary past or future (Ogihara-Schuck 78). She goes on to describe the extensive processes that go into the localization process, showing that the act of excising certain Japanese cultural characteristics is far from simple, implying that there is a kind of Japaneseness in the films that Miyazaki creates, regardless of its global popularity.

Yoshioka Shiro takes a historiographical approach to how Japaneseness is represented in Miyazaki’s works and how the focus on traditional depictions of Japanese culture, such as “samurai, classic aristocratic literature, or Zen temple architecture,” in defining the Japanese cultural ethos was criticized by Miyazaki (Yoshioka 260). Instead, Miyazaki focuses on the existence of the “pseudo-Western,” a kind of Western façade with a recreated Japanese aesthetic that, in today’s society, is as “Japanese” as the more traditional symbols mentioned above. Here again, Japanese tradition and culture is not static, but a dynamic and fluid force that is constantly changing. In an interview about the aesthetic choices for his critically acclaimed movie, *Spirited Away*, Miyazaki Hayao states that he gained great inspiration from the Edo Tokyo Open Air Architectural Museum, which acts like an open museum for Taisho and Meiji period buildings. He says, “I like the pseudo-Western style buildings from that period [Meiji and Taisho].

\(^{10}\) In this context, paratext involves movie posters, promotional videos, franchise-related souvenirs and paraphernalia.
There [Edo Tokyo Open Air Architectural Museum], I somehow feel really nostalgic” (qtd. in Yoshioka 260). Like the use of hybrid cultural Meiji-style buildings that stir up nostalgia for the past in film, the use of restorative and reflective nostalgia in anime shows the semiotic fluidity of history and culture. In being able both to lament and recreate the past, Miyazaki uses nostalgia within the context of a dynamic “Japaneseness” and in doing so, continues to reinforce not only interpretations of the past, but its relationship to the present as well (Yoshisoka 261). Through nostalgia (as seen with the example of *Sazae-san*), not only the past, but also the present, can be reshaped and re-narrated, sometimes quite explicitly through the medium of anime. From this perspective, Japanese culture is resilient in the face of Western domination, and has the flexibility to absorb it in a manner that suits the *wakon-yosai* (Japanese spirit-Western technology) ideology. In being able to do so, it represents a facet of Japan, perhaps even more so because of this “pseudo-Western” element. Miyazaki Hayao remains one of the most prominent animators globally, and his work has performed phenomenally well in a multitude of cultures. This does not mean that his works are stateless or odorless, but that despite these films’ retention of symbols and explorations of Japanese identity, the global viewership can continue to engage with the international elements of the text.

While these are only two scholars of many who have focused on how elements of Japanese identity continue to be disputed in anime, and the methods by which glocalization processes may influence this representation, our discussion reveals how this issue continues to exist on the periphery of Japanese popular culture and the related scholarship. One recent anime film that deals with the complex dialectical contours of Japanese identity is Shinkai Makoto’s *Kimi no na wa*, translated as *Your Name*. This
film’s remarkable popularity, which displaced Miyazaki’s critically acclaimed works (like *Princess Mononoke*, and *Totoro*) from the top of the box office, reflects how its exploration of Japanese cultural identity and its relationship to nostalgia and ideologies of hybridity continue to be a theme relevant to the anxieties and dilemmas of postmodern identity. In the following chapter, I will be exploring the various thematic narrative elements of *Kimi no na wa* that explore these tensions.

### 2.3 A Caveat: Nostalgia and Capitalistic Modes of Strategic Self-Orientalizing

A critical perspective that continues to arise in Japanese popular culture scholarship is the issue regarding strategic self-Orientalizing on the part of Japanese anime creators, in order to appeal to a wider global audience and play to the expectations of the West in a manner that appeals to Orientalist sensibilities. Otaku culture scholar Azuma Hiroki observes how fans of anime culture’s obsession with Japanese imagery is, in fact, a manifestation of a desire to create a “pseudo-Japan” with the materials that were given to Japanese creators by the West (Azuma 20). In his view, this pseudo-Japan is the only option for current viewers to engage with a native cultural identity, and “we [the Japanese] can only construct an image of the Japanese cityscape by picturing family restaurants, convenience stores and ‘love hotels.’ And it is within this impoverished premise that we have long exercised our distorted imaginary” (Azuma 20). Within this view, Japanese identity can never be divorced from the West: Miyazaki’s “pseudo-West” is reflected in the otaku’s “pseudo-Japan,” and what is left is merely a series of simulacra, infinitely malleable and without an essential core beyond the consumption and domestication of outside forces. In short, Said’s initial observations of Orientalism as an authoritative and the modern strategy of the West in order to dominate the Orient has
taken a dialectical turn in which Japanese identity is never able to exist on its own in the national imaginary, without the mediating presence of the West. As much as the West fetishizes and essentializes the East, the same is done to the West from the Eastern perspective, and these tendencies come out frequently in anime as creators juxtapose modernity and tradition together and use that tension to recreate new definitions of Japanese identity. Self-orientalization, both in media and in the national tendency to find imaginary features that define cultural uniqueness, creates spaces where alternative identity formations can develop, and while this does not necessarily dissolve the unbalanced power relationship between the “orient” and the “occident,” it undermines the unilateral dynamic of orient as solely a victim, constantly subjected to the Occidental imaginary (Lu 178). In short, as much as the West may practice forms of orientalism in order to make sense of the East, Eastern cultures also practice their own form of Occidentalism in order to make sense of the West, and apply their own imaginary and cultural logic.

This awareness of the global appeal of Japaneseness as depictions of traditional stereotypes and overworked tropes, and the ability of producers to make conscientious use of restorative nostalgia for the international community of viewers shows the flexibility of the medium. This restoration occurs when those same narratives are able to simultaneously display a kind of hybrid reflective and restorative nostalgia for its own native viewers, which creates a complex tension that allows viewers to try to engage with the dynamics of understanding loss. Reflective nostalgia emphasizes the influences of an imperfect memory and relationship to the past, while restorative nostalgia invites the rebuilding or reinvention of tradition. As shown before, anime becomes a fertile
environment for opportunities to rebuild a cultural identity through strategic hybridism. This is especially the case with the *iyashikei* genre, which thrives on feelings of atmospheric nostalgia. As we saw in our discussion of with *Sazae-san*, part of the show’s remarkable appeal seems to stem from not only its pleasant displays of nostalgia for a time-long-past, but in its ability to be a kind of how-to manual to go through the motions of Japanese daily life and recreate normalcy and identity in the face of postwar national trauma. Such is the appeal of genres like *iyashikei*. For international viewers, the imagery of quaint, modern Japanese lifestyles (i.e. *Sazae-san*), samurai, geisha, and even the consumption of a dystopian imaginary, usually in the form of wasted technological landscapes (e.g. *Akira*, *Neon Genesis Evangelion*) can only be restorative, because they largely did not experience the fragmentation that comes with collective national trauma. All they can see is the holistic efforts of a restorative nostalgia, which seeks to alter and rebuild historical narrativity; while this is appealing in its own right, it perhaps loses the immediate poignancy of those who are also seeing it simultaneously from the lens of reflective nostalgia. In this sense, international audiences do not have an immediate desire to restore lost cultures, because they have not experienced the loss that is perhaps foundational to understanding anime’s ability to represent reflective nostalgia.

I believe that producers are deeply aware of the appeal of this kind of restorative nostalgia for the international viewership, and continue to go through processes of localization and re-self-orientalization in order to appeal to both native and international tastes. Anime creators continue to cater to the desires of their native public, because that is where the bulk of their economic support comes from. As economic scholar H.K. Lee notes, the international market for anime continues to be “much smaller than the domestic
one” (Lee 12); however, there is an awareness that anime has a huge global following and they must negotiate with this audience as well. Thus practices of self-orientalization or, on the opposite side of the spectrum, broad “Occidentalizing internationalization,” may impact the methods in which “Japaneseness” is portrayed and transmitted on the screen (Lu 176). Whether these strategies to mediate global influence and native identity, which anime seeks to maintain is a sign of oriental subjugation to the West or a new kind of power remains unclear. Can the existence of a deliberately decontextualized form of cultural identity that is consumed by a global audience be rich enough to create “a conceptual vernacular that would unite the diverse cultural constituencies” (Jensen 1997) of both its global viewership and its native audience without compromising one or the other? The analysis that I provide above about the role of nostalgia in the (re)creation of identity through popular culture forms suggests that one can. Certainly, self-

Orientalization is happening and articulates parts of Japanese identity both through anime and other popular culture mediums, yet it is no longer the case that this kind of discursive orientalism is necessarily Eurocentric. Its continued existence is centered on the Japanese self, and if cultural ethos exists as a form of fluid essentialism, and not a static core, then it can be the case that even modes of self-orientalization can bring about an empowering mode of identity re-creation -- particularly in the context of Orientalism/Occidentalism as an ongoing dialectic.

This analysis seeks to look more closely at the relationship between nostalgia, the iyashikei genre, and the study of identity in highly popular films like Kimi no na wa, as examples of a “crucial nexus of unease about culture itself and its transmission and stability” (Ivy 10). Japanese culture scholar Marilyn Ivy gestures towards the possibility
that consumer cultures, in which anime is an undeniable force, may exist to provide a
“loss of nostalgia-that is, the loss of the desire to long for what is lost because one has
*found* the lost object” (Ivy 10). Ivy goes on to claim that perhaps, this loss of nostalgia
through consumer culture may be far worse than the existence of the original elegiac
nostalgia that constantly reminds one that something indeed has been lost. Instead, the
“consuming and consumable pleasures of nostalgia as an ambivalent longing to erase the
temporal difference between subject and object of desire, shot through the impossibility
but also the ultimate unwillingness to reinstate what was lost” (Ivy 10). While this largely
does not seem to be the case for *Kimi no na wa* on the surface, nor in the larger scope of
Shinkai Makoto’s approach to film-making, I will analyze *Kimi no na wa* through Ivy’s
possible claim and see whether the film seeks to be a work that can be ambiguously
categorized as *iyashikei*, with the purpose of eliminating or numbing the audience to the
overarching awareness of loss.
CHAPTER 3: TRANSFORMATIVE TRADITIONS IN SHINKAI MAKOTO’S
KIMI NO NA WA

*Kimi no Na Wa* is an anime film that was released in Japan on August 26, 2016, and was directed by Shinkai Makoto. Based on a novel that Shinkai wrote, which was released a month prior to the film, the story revolves around a young high school boy and girl who mysteriously swap bodies on a regular basis, for a period of about a couple months. The boy, Taki, lives in the urban sprawl of central Tokyo, where he regularly attends high school, goes to his part-time job at an Italian restaurant, and aspires to be an architect. In contrast, the girl, Mitsuha, lives in the countryside town of Itomori in Gifu Prefecture’s mountainous Hida region. Mitsuha is the daughter of the town mayor and comes from a family that is heavily tied to the traditions of the Miyamizu Shrine, which serves the town’s local deity. Throughout the film, we see Mitsuha performing her duties to the shrine as a *miko* (shrine maiden), making *kuchikamizake* (a traditional sake made by chewing on rice and using the saliva to ferment the contents), and going on pilgrimages to make offerings to the god of Miyamizu Shrine. In the background, there is news of Comet Tiamat, which will be making its way across the sky of Japan within a few days. This comet eventually becomes a source of great beauty and great destruction for the village of Itomori, as a piece of the comet crashes into the small village, decimating both its surroundings and the Itomori population. In order to change the course of history and manipulate time, Taki and Mitsuha take advantage of their body-swapping experience to try to create another thread of history in which nobody in Itomori would die. During the time that these two characters continue to body-swap, they become aware of the difficulties and nuances of one another’s lives,
encouraging a kind of understanding and empathy for one another that would likely be impossible if such an occult phenomenon had not happened. In being able to walk in each other’s shoes, they learn not to simplify or fetishize the experience of living as the other.

Figure 4. The promotional poster for *Kimi no na wa*.

In experiencing the curious phenomenon of body-swapping, both Mitsuha and Taki are able to experience life in each other’s shoes, so that they become in
diametric opposites to one another: boy/girl, urban/rural, modernity/traditions, and more. Despite the fairly modern sensibilities of Mitsuha’s lifestyle (one can find girls’ fashion magazines, vending machines, and all kinds of modern technological symbols strewn across the countryside backdrop), Mitsuha nevertheless becomes an embodiment of furusato (hometown): of pre-modern traditions that consist of communal intimacy, folkloric practices, the pre-rational and occult pagan belief systems. This community still revolves around rituals that transcends into a system of symbols, which connects the spiritual and immaterial to the physical. This can be seen in the practice of weaving cords that is among the most critical of Mitsuha’s shrine traditions and the way this cord becomes a means of connecting Taki to Mitsuha’s timeline. The cord becomes the physical manifestation of the immaterial concept historical time. At one point in the film, the matriarchal grandmother of the family says that “one thousand years of history is etched into our braided cords.” She goes on to narrate how a devastating fire in their village destroyed the shrine and all of the documents that outlined the significance and meaning behind their practices and festivals. Yet even as the words and the meanings of rituals disappear with the burning of those documents or are altered through the passage of time, the grandmother states that,

“Two hundred years ago, scandal maker Mayugoro’s bathroom caught on fire and burned down this whole area. The shrine and old documents were destroyed and this is known as The Great Fire of Mayugoro. So the meaning of our festivals became unknown and only the form lived on. But even if words are lost, tradition should be handed down and that is the important task we at Miyamizu Shrine have.”
What is implied is that it is not so much the exact meaning or the words behind these traditions that must be preserved, but that there is inherent importance in “going through the motions” behind them. Through these motions, one is able to build and maintain communal identity, regardless of whether the historical significance these events may have held in the past is remembered or not. While the grandmother shows regret over the loss of original meaning, she recognizes that the absence of rigid coded systems allows for reinterpretation and rediscovery of origins. This is a direct example of Svetlana Boym’s concept of restorative nostalgia, where she states that “what drives restorative nostalgia is not the sentiment of distance and longing, but rather the anxiety of those who draw attention to historical incongruities between past and present, and thus question the wholeness and continuity of the restored tradition” (Boym 44-45). The unstable semiotics of nostalgia continue to give meaning to their activities, even in the face of apocalyptic destruction, as described by the Great Miyagoro Fire, or encroaching political agendas, as is seen in the figure of Mitsuha’s father, who has let go of the shrine’s originary traditions and roots in order to pursue a political career. Even as the meanings behind these activities change, there is a sense that there is a

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11 In this context, I am referring to nostalgia as that which consists of “reflective nostalgia” and “restorative nostalgia.” These are the same terms discussed in my first chapter. Reflective nostalgia emphasizes “in algia, in longing and loss, the imperfect process of remembrance” (Boym 41). Restorative nostalgia emphasizes “nostos and proposes to rebuild the lost home and patch up the memory gaps” (Boym 41). Essentially, reflective nostalgia focuses on the individual loss and am aware of the “gap between identity and remembrance” (Boym 50). whereas restorative nostalgia drives “national and nationalist revivals all over the world, which engage in anti-modern myth-making of history by means of a return to national symbols and myths” (Boym 41).
continuum of embedded significance of tradition, as long as one continues to go through the motions of the practice.

3.1 Consumption and Self-Orientalization

Mitsuha’s obvious discomfort with her position as a representation of archaic traditions stems from not only her desire to escape her drab and mundane rural lifestyle, but from her ongoing existence as as an example of self-orientalization. As stated in the first chapter, orientalization in this context refers to Edward Said’s original concept, in which there is a consistent focus on the spectacle of difference from a Eurocentric perspective. What results is an often essentialist depiction of non-Western cultures, so that traditional practices, customs, and paraphernalia gravitate toward the most fetishized features within Orientalist visions and discourse. At one point in the film, viewers see Mitsuha dressed in full traditional miko (shrine priestess) garb, performing a public dance. Later, she makes kuchikamizake in front of her communal audience by chewing on pieces of rice and spitting the rice back out, which disgusts some of her classmates as an act that appears perverse and unclean. In making her traditional practices largely a public affair, her existence continues to inform and act as a point of orientalization of past practices for the citizens of Itomori themselves. During her performance, Mitsuha’s friend Tessie informs the audience (both those who are viewing Mitsuha in the narrative, as well as the audience who is viewing the film) of the significance of kuchikamizake as an offering to the gods, and the process in how it’s made. The kuchikamizake, which is an embodiment of tradition as defined by Itomori citizens, and of ties to an unknowable past, is later referred to as “half of her [Mitsuha].” This
“half” of Mitsuha does not refer singularly to the kuchikamizake, but also to this constant exemplification of orientalization of traditions to the village people, which is shown to be her duty throughout the film. She constantly reminds the village people and outsiders, like Taki, of the importance of the local, and in turn, reminds them of a half of their self-identity.

Figure 5-6. Screen shots of Mitsuha’s miko garb and making kuchikamizake.

Self-orientalization problematizes the sanctity of past traditions, and, at least in the world that Shinkai Makoto portrays in Kimi No Na Wa, is also a critical part of discovering and redefining a complete Japanese self-identity. The term “Orientalism” already connotes an inherent relationship to the Occident, in which
identity is developed not in an independent and self-fulfilling mode of creation and recreation, but in conjunction with an unequal relationship to the West. It emphasizes difference, and foregoes any possibility of similarity or independence from the Western ideologies that have been instilled in both the medium and the message. Certainly, on the one hand, self-orientalization reveals how purposeful depictions of one’s traditions can undermine the unilateral power dynamics of the universal West and the peripheral, compromised East in a manner that encourages desire for and consumption of Eastern cultures by the West. Occidentalization, which seems to go hand-in-hand with self-orientalization also serves as a mode in which Asian traditions can use the West in similar sites of exoticism and comparison. For example, within the film, we see Taki working at a posh Italian restaurant and we also see Mitsuha fetishize the elegance of Western-style desserts and cafes, all of which provide a stark comparison to Mitsuha’s lifestyle in Itomori. As stated in the first chapter, while the West fetishizes the Orient in its national imaginary, the same is done by the East. However, it does not change the essential paradigm of a binary in which the West continues to act as a site of dominance and of universality. Even as self-orientalization serves as an undermining, it can only be achieved by admitting to one’s own peripheral, local status.

In the small town of Itomori, we see a kind of battle between the desires of the global (represented by a urban Tokyo lifestyle) and the local (symbolized by the rural Itomori), and the process of self-orientalization on the part of Mitsuha constantly gestures towards that tension. This tension is what allows both nostalgia and self-orientalization to thrive, even in the remote peripheries of Japan, and these
tensions are what make the story so appealing to both Japanese and international
viewers alike. The struggle between the local and the global is a universal one at this
point, particularly for nations that feel like they have been compromised by Western
influences. Yet what is perhaps unique about *Kimi No Na Wa*'s presentation of this
battle and of its formation of nostalgia as a tension between the local and the global
is that it shows how consumption, in some ways, does aid in creating genuine ties to
tradition. Persistent self-orientalization and modes of nostalgia encourage the
consumption of products to create physical ties to tradition, and while the danger of
this is apparent in promoting a sanitized and ultimately false vision of the illusory
past, Shinkai still seems to pose the following question: what is history or the
passage of time at all?

Throughout his film, the concept of time is malleable: it ravels and unravels
like the cords that Mitsuha weaves, and it is something that can be manipulated. One
can go back in time and change the course of devastating historical events. The
question is posed in the narrative, whether the historical past in which Itomori is
devastated by the meteor impact is any less legitimate or true than one in which
Itomori is spared. Of course, there is no conclusive answer that is provided;
however, Shinkai gestures towards the redemptive potential of two disparate
sociocultural entities (symbolized by Taki and Mitsuha) who are able to engage in
genuine empathy with one another through the complex imaginings of each other’s
lives. Through these empathetic processes, both the global and local can be spared.

Whether it is possible for two disparate entities to engage in genuine
empathy for the other remains questionable beyond the scope of the film. For
example, Taki and Mitsuha have been privileged (or cursed) to experience one another's lives in a very direct and literal manner. Taki, in particular, is able to use the cord that Mitsuha made in order to engage very explicitly and intimately with her history from birth to death. Through this experience, he is able to engage with not only Mitsuha’s personal history, but also all that she comes to represent in the film, in regards to the traditional. Mitsuha and her cord acts as an umbilical cord to a historical past that Taki would otherwise have never been able to experience.

Likewise, Mitsuha is able to also exist with the embodied knowledge of experiencing modernity through Taki’s life, but she no longer sees his life from the fetishistic and essentializing perspective of just wanting to become “a handsome boy in Tokyo.” Through her experiences, she learns to view another entity in a deeply empathetic manner, despite the fact that he exists as her diametric opposite.

In the end, both Taki and Mitsuha are doomed to forget the names of the other who affected them so greatly in their youth and with whom they exchanged the gifts of both modernity and tradition, which reveals a somewhat fatalistic tone for those who are able to foster empathy with one another, regardless of processes of self-orientalization or westernization. Yet Shinkai also shows how the ones who are able to change the course of devastating historical events are the individuals who have successfully consumed both global modernities and the artificially constructed traditional pasts alike, and learned by mediating them both within the self. If physical and metaphysical consumption aids in this mediation, Shinkai seems to support it, as we see examples in which Taki engages with traditions by drinking Mitsuha's *kuchikamizake* or Mitsuha engages with “modernity” by consuming
Western sweets. Before engaging more deeply with the role of consumption in regards to mediating nostalgia in the film, I will first illustrate the significance of Mitsuha’s cord weaving practices as a mode of connecting to the past and the flashback scenes in which Taki engages directly with Mitsuha’s personal history.

After Taki comes to the realization that the town of Itomori no longer exists, due to the devastation of the Tiamet comet, he goes to the shrine that is up in the Hida Mountains in order to look for clues to the mystery of his body-swapping experience. Inside the shrine, he finds the *kuchikamizake* that Mitsuha has offered to the Miyamizu god and proceeds to drink it, stating that the wine itself is “half of Mitsuha.” When he drinks it, he is plunged into a series of flashbacks from Mitsuha’s timeline in which the red cord that Mitsuha wove for him becomes a guiding tether in which to navigate Mitsuha’s past from birth to death. Reflective of Mitsuha’s status as a symbol of Japan’s past, the first image we see is an abstraction of the Tiamet Comet hurling towards Japan, only for it to be transformed to become the fetus of Mitsuha. The cord, which helps keep Taki tethered to his own time, is also transformed to represent an umbilical cord, connecting Mitsuha to her mother. This emphasis on the female figure as a conduit for history and tradition extends towards Mitsuha’s mother as well. Mitsuha’s mother was the figure that kept her father connected to Itomori’s traditional past, yet after Mitsuha’s mother passes away, we see Mitsuha’s father (the mayor of Itomori) abandon Miyamizu Shrine, and with it, tradition. Without a female figure being a constant physical manifestation of tradition, modernity (which is once again represented by the male figure of Mitsuha’s father) becomes detached, creating grief for future generations, as
represented by Mitsuha weeping as a child. Mitsuha’s father creates a convenient foil for Taki’s character in this scene: for whereas we see that Taki’s father abandons what he perceives to be backwards traditions after the trauma of losing his wife, Taki runs towards Itomori, the shrine, and consequently, tradition, to try to understand and save Mitsuha. Later, we see that it is Mitsuha’s father’s adamant refusal to engage with the knowledge that is gained through the occult body swapping (the prediction of the comet), that hinders the saving of Itomori. The fluid symbol of the comet, turned cord, turned umbilical cord in this scene, represents a physical means by which Taki can return to and accept the originary narrative of Mitsuha’s life. With the cord, he is able to reconnect with tradition. Within this beautifully animated series of scenes, in order to construct a better future for Mitsuha, one in which she survives, Taki drinks the *kuchikamizake* that Mitsuha made in the past, effectively consuming tradition and thus becoming immersed in her timeline. By consuming the past, he is able to get another chance at changing the future. Through the act of consumption, he is able to connect with the pieces of the tradition that Mitsuha embodies and is able to, quite literally, save her life.

![Figure 7. Screenshot of Mitsuha and Taki trying to find one another, connected by Mitsuha’s cord.](image)
As stated before, Mitsuha is a figure that symbolizes a historical past, both in the personal sense for Taki, but also to the larger public, as she is representative of tradition in the historical town that she lives in. She reflects these traditions through her practices and responsibilities for the Miyamizu Shrine. She is the diametric opposite of the jaded urbanite, and in her ability to enact change through vague occult means (as she is the one who seems to have initiated the body-swapping by her wish to the gods), she also becomes a figure of the pre-modern aural tradition. It is significant that all of the written, alphabetic data both on Taki’s cellphone, as well as the names and messages that they write on each other’s hands, are not enough to trigger remembrance of and relationship to the past. It is not until Taki meets the grown Mitsuha at the end of the film and asks for her name orally that we can assume that a legitimate transition from being subjected to an imaginary past that cannot be recalled to a more hopeful present and future has occurred. Throughout the film, we see how the written word is not enough to trigger a relationship to the past, and in fact, it is Mitsuha’s practice of making cords, of making kuchikamizake, and of recounting tales of the past verbally, like the one of her grandmother reminding her of the Great Fire of Mayugoro engages with the past meaningfully. It is significant that that the consumption of the kuchikamizake, which means mouth-chewing sake, is the medium by which Taki is able to engage with Mitsuha’s own past, and not a literary platform, such as a diary. This once again places Mitsuha in the position of the pre-modern and the aural. Taki’s active consumption, both in the physical and metaphysical act, triggers these historical epiphanies about the self and for brief moments, allows the temporal and spatial displacement between himself
and Mitsuha to be closed ever so slightly. This act of consumption would and should immediately seem suspect to those who are critical of capitalism as a means of convincing those who are longing for the past to find a semblance of it through consuming products. Yet in this case, Taki’s engaging with Mitsuha’s kuchikamizake and tying her cord around his wrist seems divorced from the capitalistic disillusionment of most acts of commodity consumption. At one point in the film, Mitsuha’s little sister jokes that they should sell kuchikamizake on the market, strike it rich, and use the money to go to Tokyo. By gesturing towards the possibility of commodifying this tradition, Shinkai seems well aware of the role of the market in solidifying nostalgic resonances, and suggest the possibility of cheapening the sake that has become “half of Mitsuha,” by tainting it with capitalist motivations.

By engaging with historical artifacts, individuals are able to indulge in what Arjun Appadurai has called “ersatz nostalgia.” This is defined as a kind of “nostalgia without lived experience or collective historical memory” (Appadurai 78). In short, it is a kind of fictional nostalgia, in which “transience itself is commodified in passing” (Boym 38). Market consumption is the mode in which ersatz nostalgia thrives, and it is largely a manufactured condition that encourages universalized souvenirs not only from other nations but from one’s own nation as well. The same is applicable to cultural and artistic narratives that seek to construct this sense of nostalgia. In order to feed the need for an ersatz nostalgia, one creates “ersatz” sacred spaces through popular culture narratives, tours framed to emphasize a certain cultural ethos, creating ideologies like wakon yosai (Japanese spirit, western techniques) or constant relocalization. Anime is particularly interesting from this
perspective, because it is doubly illusory, simply in the fact that it is illustrated. Anime does not even begin to convince the viewer that this could be a situation or place grounded in reality with “real” human actants and “real” places. It is abstracted human forms and abstracted places, and anime films (Kimi no na wa included) show no desire to hide their artifice. Despite Shinkai’s incredibly detailed approach to animation, it can never shed its “falseness,” or its simulacrum-like context. Nor do anime creators seem to desire that to even happen. The narratives that come from anime, particularly for stories like Kimi no na wa, which contains heavy strains of the iyashikei (healing, soothing) genre mentioned in the last chapter, are culturally and materially mediated, and unapologetically so. Yet perhaps in the drive to search for these sacred spaces that have the ability to embody and contain an all-encompassing ersatz nostalgia, viewers and consumers have no choice but to turn to the fictional spaces and times in the form of anime. Animation remains one of the very few mediums that can portray the reality of nonlinear time in a convincing manner, and is able to maintain a restorative nostalgia without having to necessarily deal with the physical deterioration of passing time at all. It is artificial and fictional, certainly, but not necessarily unrealistic. Nostalgia for the imaginary past places most viewers of the film in the same position as Taki: one who continues to search for an elusive something or someone to complete a sense of cohesive identity. In this sense, our ability to relate to Taki and Mitsuha, as figures constantly struggling with the tensions of modernity and tradition, is incredibly convincing regarding the narrative of the national self for Japanese viewers, regardless of its fictionality. Scholar Thomas Pavel states that “the
space of myths are distant, even inaccessible, but at the same time so familiarly true, so eminently visible” (Pavel 86). His observations on the fictional realm and the porous boundaries of myth-like narratives seem remarkably relevant to the role of nostalgia and fictionality in the formation and representation of national Japaneseness in *Kimi no na wa*.

**3.2 Fictional Landscapes, Journeys, and the Significance of Doing**

The journey that the viewer takes with Taki, both in the form of his pilgrimage back to the altar of Miyamizu’s god, as well as his metaphorical journey through Mitsuha’s past by connecting with the materiality of the cord and the wine, is reminiscent of the manner in which postmodern individuals today engage with their historical past. This relationship between consumption as mode of connecting and relating to the imaginary past informs many industries in postwar Japan, of which anime is merely one example. In her *Discourses of the Vanishing: Modernity, Phantasm, and Japan*, Marilyn Ivy recounts how the tourism advertising agency in the 1970s encouraged and framed national travel as a mode of departure from a “home.” Through these travels, the wanderer is encouraged to find an essential lack in his or her cultural identity and, consequently, is stirred to want to rediscover the “true Japanese self” by “(re) discovering its authenticity by moving through originary landscapes” (Ivy 41). At its heart, this movement was about creating a consumable version of the authentic national self, a materialistic sense of relocation that cannot escape from global advanced capitalistic trends, but makes the separation between modernity and tradition bearable. Skeptics would see these trends and gestures towards advertisers as insidious manipulators of the
public; however, there is something to be said for the benefits of the physical practice of passing through landscapes and going on pilgrimages to find the authentic self, albeit one that is partially manipulated by capitalistic desire.

Like the grandmother in the film says, there is something to be said for going through the motions of tradition, regardless of whether the originary meaning of these practices have remained intact or not. The tradition of traveling/wandering or tabi existed before the Tokugawa period, when religious figures practiced going on pilgrimages as religious practice (Ivy 32). The marginalized in society (e.g., peddlers, beggars, artists) also practiced tabi, though it seems rarely by choice. Wandering became an existential condition for those who lived outside mainstream society, and these marginalized groups used their wandering to create folkloric art (Ivy 37). In this sense, even the practice of tabi in the modern day seems at least superficially connected, dealing with the existential conditions of finding the “authentic national self.” In the recursive doing of the practice, there may be an opportunity for modern-day Japanese people to find a sense of connection to a lost past, powered by the ever-present strains of reflective and restorative nostalgia. Within the Shinkai Makoto’s film, it is inferred that there have been people before Taki who have pilgrimaged to Itomori and to the Hida Mountains, in order to discover the nostalgic past. One point of the film shows Taki and his friend, Okudera going to a photo exhibition, aptly named “Nostalgia.” The exhibition consists of photographs of Itomori and the surrounding Hida Mountains. In a deeply introspective moment, as Taki is looking at these photographs, the viewer only sees a slow panning close-up to Taki’s face, as he realizes that other people have travelled, discovered, and
documented this nostalgia-laden location. Seeing this exhibition and the fact that the mysterious body-swapping incidents have suddenly stopped prompt him to once again, travel to Itomori on his own accord, with his own body. Through this pilgrimage, he has an epiphany that Itomori has been entirely destroyed by the impact of the Tiamet comet. Without his travels, he would not have been able to come to this realization.

In an interview, Toni Morrison recounts the importance of ritual and of repetitive doing, in order to go through the steps of “preparation to enter a space that I [Toni Morrison] can only call nonsecular” (Interview by Elissa Schappell, Toni Morisson). She outlines her daily ritual to prepare to write by saying that in order to get into the ideal state,

“I always get up and make a coffee while it is still dark –it must be dark- and then I drink the coffee and watch the light come on… writers all devise ways to approach that place where they expect to make the contact, where they become the conduit, or when they engage in this mysterious process” (Morrison 1993).

By the physical act of doing this ritual, she becomes a kind of conduit for the inspiration that drove her writings. Haruki Murakami echoes similar sentiments about the importance of repetitive physical rituals in order to reach a state of mesmerism, where he could engage in a “deeper state of mind” (interview by John Wray with Haruki Murakami). He outlines his own ritual process, saying,

“When I’m in writing mode for a novel, I get up at four a.m. and work for five to six hours. In the afternoon, I run for ten kilometers or swim for fifteen hundred meters (or do both), then I read a bit and listen to some music. I go to bed at nine p.m. I keep to this routine every day without variation. The repetition itself becomes...
the important thing; it is a form of mesmerism. I mesmerize myself to reach a deeper state of mind” (Murakami 2004).

While both authors refer to this process in order to mediate their creative processes of writing, similar observations could be made for the practice of folkloric traditions, though instead of becoming a conduit for a literary muse, one becomes a conduit for the historic past. Whether this historical narrative is imaginary or not does not seem particularly relevant, in that one can argue that all history is only manifested through historical retelling and these retellings are narrated by voices of those in power. Instead, it is significant that practice opens the door for a feeling of relating back to originary narratives.

In the film, one of the most significant traditional practices that Mitsuha engages in regularly is the weaving of cords with thread. The cord symbolizes Taki and Mitsuha’s relationship between present, future, and past: the raveling and unraveling of time and history. By continuously weaving the threads as a regular practice, Mitsuha enters a state of mind not unlike the kind of “unsecular” mesmerism that both Murakami and Morrison delineate. In that state of mind, she becomes a conduit for her traditional past-self to connect with her modern present self. The symbolic significance of the thread comes from its ability to connect the modern, as symbolized by the male character, Taki, and the pre-modern, symbolized by the female character, Mitsuha, together. By following her threads, Taki is able to rediscover an imaginary historical past through Mitsuha.

In a similar sense, the physical act of traveling from place to place, and becoming a conduit for these places to pass through a traveller, may create similar
sites of connection between past and present, regardless of the capitalist motivations of tourism agencies. The psychological facets of the “Discover Japan”12 tourism movements, as outlined by Ivy, seem deeply connected to Shinkai Makoto’s stylistic approach to filmmaking. Shinkai Makoto is known for his incorporation of detailed and luscious background scenes, which sweep across the screen and seek to awe his viewers through accurate depictions of scenic “reality,” juxtaposed with well-researched imaginary landscapes of imaginary towns like Itomori. In many senses of the word, and particularly in the case of Kimi No Na Wa, Shinkai seeks to take his viewers on a virtual "pilgrimage,” not unlike those advertised in the 1970s by tourism agencies. He oscillates between the frenetic urban sprawl of Tokyo -- and the relative calm and ultimately ephemeral existence of the imaginary Itomori and the Hida mountains that surround the small town. The imaginary non-existence of Itomori is also significant, both in the sense that this film is a work of fiction, as well as Taki’s own sense of the town’s elusive ephemerality as he goes on his own kind of journey to rediscover it. The way in which Itomori disappears, quite literally after the devastation of the Tiamet comet, creates a poignant allegory of the national struggle to reconnect with past imaginary roots. As one tries to engage with the historical past, there is no immutable essence that keeps it from changing. The irretrievable past seeks to alter itself as soon as one makes contact, making it impossible truly to connect with it. Nevertheless, in the end, by drinking Mitsuha’s

12 The “Discover Japan” movement was a campaign started by the Japanese National Railway company in the 1970s, which promoted internal travel, focusing on individualized micro-narratives that revolved around rediscovery of obscure and less-known areas of Japan (Ivy 34). These spaces would come to signify a more “authentic” and personal vision of Japan. This advertising campaign became the most successful in Japanese history (Ivy 34).
wine and using the cord as a means of reversing time, he is able to get a second chance at rewriting a history in which tradition can be preserved.

Figure 8. A screenshot of the location of the Miyamizu spiritual altar and an example of Shinkai’s work with scenery.

Through the viewing and consequent consumption of Taki’s sacred virtual pilgrimage, viewers are able to experience a similar kind of connection with a nostalgic imaginary past that can lead to a reconstruction of an authentic cultural identity, by sharing this common narrative with other community members. The uncanny realism that is shown throughout the film, in regards to its background and Shinkai’s ability to make familiar the imaginary, makes *Kimi no na wa* a remarkably effective film in mediating fictional, but not necessarily unreal narratives, mythos, and topographies into the grand narrative\(^{13}\) of one’s national identity. At various

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\(^{13}\) This was a term coined by Jean-Francois Lyotard in his work, *The Postmodern Condition: A report on Knowledge*. The grand narrative is a comprehensive metadiscourse which when allows people to gain a sense of validity and legitimation when grappling with ideas of meaning-making, identity, different forms of
points in the film, Mitsuha’s grandmother witnesses Taki’s internal self, even though he appears to be Mitsuha externally. During these times, the grandmother says, “Oh, you are not Mitsuha, right?…I also remember seeing strange dreams when I was a young girl…Treasure the experience. Dreams fade away after you wake up.” This dialogue suggests that that this curious phenomenon of body-swapping, and consequent forgetting of memories established when in interaction with another’s life, is an experience that is passed down a familial line. Yet, even as dreams imply a kind of un-reality, Taki immediately sees the broader implications of this level of engagement with these dreamlike experiences. He states that perhaps these experiences of pseudo-reality all gesture towards the prediction of the cataclysmic Tiamet Comet incident, and through these experiences, he can try to stop the tragedy and create alternative histories through the knowledge that he has gained from dreams. Within this dialogue between the grandmother and Taki, via Mitsuha, Shinkai makes a powerful case for the telling and retelling of historical memory through fiction. Through the making and de-making of historical threads, the fictional and the pseudo-real becomes a means of feeding back into the reality of the external world. While the relationship that Mitsuha and Taki share -- exchanging modernity and tradition simultaneously with one another -- seems to exist within the realm of dreams, they nevertheless have great impact on the timeline of the external world as well. The existence of multiple layers of the present is reflected in the fact that both Taki and Mitsuha live in each other’s lives thinking that they are on the same timeline, even though Taki exists in a time that is three years in the knowledge, justice and truth (Lyotard XXIII). Examples of such metanarratives may include originary myths, religious narratives, and legends.
future of Mitsuha’s time. The multiplicity of presents also reveals how despite the fact that there is a constant exploration of the traditional and the modern, the historical past and the uncertain future -- *Kimi no na wa* follows approaches stylistically similar ground as Shinkai’s earlier works with regards to time. Gavin Walker states that in Shinkai’s earlier works, such as *The Place Promised in Our Early Days*, instead of a separation between past and future, there is truly only an “‘eternal now’ that is stretched, elongated, and retracted through its imbrication with other parallel presents” (Walker 11).

### 3.3 Necessary Modernity and Fluid Semiotics

When Taki leaves Tokyo, a city perhaps most representative of a hybridized, “Westernized” nature, he goes to look for Itomori, only to find that it has been devastated by the falling Comet Tiamet. The only thing that remains is a giant crater made by the impact of the meteor. During this journey, Taki has the epiphany that Mitsuha was living three years in the past and that the evening that Comet Tiamet fell was the day Mitsuha passed away. Soon after, he tries to research the mysterious relationship between himself and Mitsuha, only to find that all traces of their history together, as well as his own wavering memory, has become lost.

Towards the end of the movie, we see Taki as a full-fledged adult, and he has lost the ability to recall Mitsuha’s name and his body-swapping experience. He remembers only that at one point in his life in high school, he was illogically obsessed with the town of Itomori and the traumatic encounter with the comet that devastated the historical town. While we see him continue to go through the motions of his daily life in a manner that constitutes well-adjusted adulthood, we nevertheless are able
to observe that he feels like he has lost something incredibly precious and integral to his selfhood. In an inner monologue, he states at the end, “I always feel like I’ve been searching for something, for someone.”

While these disparate experiences of both Taki and Mitsuha result in all kinds of amusing hijinks, the unstable and fluctuating nature of identity continues to mediate the lives of these two characters, as their senses of selfhood continuously becomes more and more bound to one another. The relationship that Mitsuha and Taki share with one another is not unlike an allegory for the modern Japanese identity: a blending of contradictions and diametric opposites, which nevertheless configures itself into an unstable and self-defining whole. The issue of personal identity, and its relationship with larger sociocultural and national frameworks continues to be a recursive theme throughout the narrative. Temporal dissonance and displacement in the subject’s understanding of history, and the unraveling of both time and historical narrative make both Mitsuha and Taki uniformly liminal figures --primarily because they explicitly lived through the experience of temporal disruptions -- not simply as an abstract concept, but as experiential truths.

While Shinkai places great value on the precarious nature of one’s relationship to nostalgia and tradition, he does not discount the necessity of modernity, as seen in the critical role that Taki plays in rewriting a future in which Mitsuha and her village can survive. Though Taki’s experience of living through Mitsuha’s life and engaging with the traditions of Itomori has enriched his cultural experience, and has allowed him to recognize that part of the nostalgic longing that has plagued him comes from absence of engagement with tradition, there is no dire
sense that he would not be able to survive at all without his experiences of Mitsuha’s lifestyle. This sense lies in contrast to Mitsuha, who would be killed without the knowledge that modernity (in the form of Taki) brings from the future. Shinkai suggests that modernity is necessary to sustain tradition, even as interaction with tradition may be necessary to sustain a complete Japanese cultural identity.

Likewise, near the end of the film, when Taki (who currently resides in Mitsuha’s body) tries to move the inhabitants of Itomori to a safer area, he must interact with modern technology, such as the citywide intercom, to engage with the citizens. On the one hand, we see how technology fails to aid us directly in the preservation of Taki’s traditional self, as exemplified by the cellphone memos which glitch and disappear. However, in seeking to preserve a tradition in which materiality can sustain a variety of meanings, as shown by the significance of cord weaving in Itomori, modernity can preserve and be subsumed into the precariousness of meaning behind the action and materiality of traditional practices. Tradition and modernity become less dichotomous, and instead feed into one another to create new meanings. As Taki and Mitsuha’s relationship shows, tradition and modernity must sustain one another in order to define a cohesive identity that does not feel the inherent lack of “something or someone.” Kimi no na wa gives an optimistic view that while ever-changing in meaning and significance, native tradition is more resilient than is often represented in the face of Western hegemonic presence. Even within modern spaces that are rife with Italian restaurants and Western style cafes, the urbane masses can help to sustain and be sustained by more rural spaces, where inhabitants make kuchikamizake and make
pilgrimages to local shrines. The precariouslyness of boundaries between modernity and tradition becomes the zeitgeist of the film's overarching message of cultural identity formation. Even as we see Taki grow into an adult and go into the job market as an architect, he states how his purpose for going into this particular field is due to his desire to rebuild devastated landscapes and cities. He makes the astute observation that even Tokyo may be destroyed one day, either by natural phenomena or through historical conflict, and he would like to continue to sustain landscapes that can “leave heartwarming memories.” This desire to sustain memory and history stands in direct opposition to the fact that both Taki and Mitsuha cannot seem to retain memories of one another, despite the enormous impact they have had on one another’s lives.

This tension reflects the ways in which Shinkai Makoto utilizes both reflective nostalgia and restorative nostalgia in his films to alter one's relationship to the past. Like Taki, who feels the simultaneous loss and obsessive drive to preserve memory and nostalgia through his work, Shinkai also uses the medium of animation and fictional landscapes to recreate spaces of memory and nostalgia. His work is a brilliant meta-commentary on how one can preserve iterations of history through the creative and re-creative artistic processes of making. For Taki, he tries to recreate and restore nostalgic spaces through architecture and for Mitsuha it is through her cord braiding and her traditional dancing. Certainly for Shinkai, it is his engagement with animated narratives and the detailed landscapes that he portrays to depict different kinds of journeys and identities. While it may be impossible to capture the essence of the elusive “authentic” past without the mediation of material
objects and fictional narratives and spaces, Shinkai shows that there are inherent values in the interaction of these creative processes, since objects like the Mitsuha’s cord, her *kuchikamizake* and Taki’s sketches continue to be objects of metonymic remembrance of the other. Nostalgic desire becomes physically existent in the external world through these objects, and provides the potential for direct interaction with an otherwise inexpressible desire. By constantly engaging with these objects and the creation of them, the characters demonstrate the possibility of transforming their significances. It is also through these objects that Taki is also able to turn back time and rewrite a tragic history in which all has been lost for Itomori.

Similarly, as I have stated in the first chapter, anime is often a contested site of cultural representation, because the materiality of the medium was so heavily inspired by Western technologies and techniques. Yet, in *Kimi no na wa*, Shinkai continues to explore how materials can retain separate and almost paradoxical meanings simultaneously. We see this in the analysis of the scene in which Taki uses Mitsuha’s cord to see into her past. In that scene, the cord successfully transforms into the devastating comet, to a sperm cell, to a life-giving umbilical cord, to a lifeline that connects the masculine figure to the female Miyamizu lineage. In this case, the masculine figure is Taki, but similar observations can also be related back to Mitsuha’s father. After following the cord, Taki is taken back to a place in time before the comet has fallen. The comet represents the exterior world beyond the intimacy that Taki and Mitsuha have sustained by sharing one another’s identities. It is a reminder of the larger world outside their relationship, which threatens to destroy the wholeness of their collective identities that they find in on another. Yet,
in this scene, even the comet becomes subsumed into the symbol of the cord, and becomes the means by which Mitsuha and Taki finally meet one another. The cord is something at once deeply personal and intimate to Mitsuha and Taki, but simultaneously flexible enough to take in the exterior world and its influences and allow it to exist within the contours of their intimacy.

The fluidity of meaning that the cord takes in this scene can also be applied to the material basis of the anime genre itself. Despite the Western origins of the material and technique, and the wide variety of narratives that anime specializes in -- from the technological spectacle and violence of mecha to the more introspective and self-healing iyashikei-- both can be equally representative of Japanese cultural ideologies and national identity-related tensions. Even if the influence and effects of Western cultural hegemony, as exercised in the animation medium, are felt and witnessed in anime, this does not mean that anime can only be representative of Western culture or Japanese culture. To admit that Western influences are at play within anime does not mean that Japanese identity is not expressed or discounted, but that, like Mitsuha’s cord, the significance and meaning of the medium and the object can be fluid and withstand contradiction and paradox without breaking grand historical narratives. As the cord leads Taki to both futures in which Mitsuha is saved and in which Mitsuha is killed by the comet’s impact, the fluidity of both cultural memory and time can be expressed through Shinkai’s depictions of imaginary nostalgic landscapes and his exploration of the porous boundaries between tradition and modernity, through the body-swapping experiences of Mitsuha and Taki.
3.4 Iyashikei, Distance, Melancholy, and Magic Realism

As we saw in the first chapter, the creation of the iyashikei genre was inspired by the need to heal or soothe the psychologically distressing effects of postwar traumas. This ailment eventually transformed from postwar trauma to the need for “a break from all of the other affective appeals encountered daily in contemporary Japanese media” (Roquet 88). Essentially, it serves as a means of coping with the confusion and the liminal nature of the postmodern contemporary. For many contemporary works of iyashikei, and Kimi no na wa falls under this umbrella, there is a sense of melancholic fatalism within the narrative. Unlike the predecessor of the iyashikei genre, Sazae-san, the tone and mood of present-day iyashikei narratives are not so much a riling cry to overcome societal issues or the tensions of contemporary cultural identity, as much as it is a mechanism that helps in allowing the viewers to quietly accept and make peace with the existing paradigmatic structures that govern and exert psychological violence upon them.

For example, in Kimi no na wa, as is characteristic with many of Shinkai’s films, there is a deep sense of melancholy that stems from the temporal and psychological distance that cannot be traversed between the characters. Even as they try to preserve the memory of the other or sustain the significance of what the other has done for their wellbeing and development, they keep forgetting the other’s respective name and face. Only briefly, with the help of providence and Mitsuha’s cord, are they able to meet on the same timeline for an instant, but soon, they return to each other’s respective place in the timeline continuum, and are suspended there for several years. While melancholic however, Kimi no Na Wa is neither nihilistic,
nor uniformly pessimistic. It would be difficult to sustain the soothing iyashikei tone if the subject matter turned altogether hopeless. At the very end, Taki and Mitsuha are able to meet on a outdoor stairway in Tokyo, both older and more dispirited due to the constant feeling of having lost something fundamental to their being. It is uncertain whether Taki and Mitsuha will recall one another, or even if they do, whether their relationship can remain intact after the brunt of time and fleeting historical memory. However, the movie ends on a tempered optimistic note, because they are finally able to face one another in the same timeline, with the temporal distance closed. The ending is neither entirely optimistic nor pessimistic. The psychological conflict borne from temporal and identity-related disjunctions result in both characters suffering from recurring melancholia, and this struggle is never resolved, at least within the scope of the canonical film. However, in addressing the issue and providing the rather hopeful message that histories and memories can be reworked and redefined, there is space for fulfillment.

The rejection on the part of Shinkai to resolve these complex issues neatly is reflected in the manner in which he uses magic realism throughout the narrative. For the most part, the narrative consists of two young teenagers learning to come to terms with their identities. On the surface, this is hardly a narrative that is culturally specific to Japan or any other nation. The unique quality that Shinkai injects into this conventional narrative which gestures towards perhaps a kind of cultural uniqueness is the suspension and irresolution that comes from the encounter with the occult or magical realist dimension of the film. In this particular context, it is Mitsuha and Taki’s body-swapping experience and the consequent time leaping that
results. In this context, I will use the term magic realism as defined by Matthew Strecher in his essay on “Magical Realism and the Search for Identity in the Fiction of Murakami Haruki.” Strecher sets the parameters of the magical realism genre as “a realistic narrative setting is created, then disrupted, sometimes mildly, sometimes violently by the bizarre or the magical” (Strecher 267). This definition purposely removes the often-political implications of involving magic realism into a narrative as an allegory of external invasion into local lands, and seeks to depoliticize it. While political implications can certainly be coded into the narrative, the lack of resolution in *Kimi no na wa*’s narrative seems to gesture towards a less political mode of using magic realism as a means of pursuing “the quest for identity...[and] is not the least bit involved with the assertion of identity” (Strecher 269). While this quote is aimed towards the work of contemporary Japanese author, Murakami Haruki, it is also remarkably relevant to *Kimi no na wa*. Though I have previously separated the local and the global into a binary, like all thematic bifurcations that the film explores, the boundary between the two motifs is porous. Shinkai does not seem to be taking a distinct political stance between the values of Western modernity or Japanese traditions, but instead, seeks to explore how both cultural paradigms reflect on the emerging identities of both characters as they interact with another. While there can be conflict and tension among these dichotomous concepts, as is the case for most *iyashikei* productions, the conflict is usually heavily internalized and the emergence of occult phenomenon exists to draw those tensions outward. For example, the strain of magic realism found in *Kimi no na wa*, is primarily focused on how it can be used to construct the self in relation
to the other and how to mediate the porous binary of modernity and tradition. In addition, for Taki and Mitsuha, there are also more basic separations of man/woman, urban/rural, and the tenuous past/future, which continue to become more and more dubious as they exist within one another. The fundamental instability of meaning as is symbolized throughout the film by woven cords, festivals of tenuous purpose, and shrine practices are also what mediates the supernatural forces within the narrative. It is no coincidence that it is these myth-laden paraphernalia and activities which continues to break down the boundaries of the binaries stated above, and show the reality of identity formation, both in the historical sense as well as the cultural, as something that is constantly fluid and re writable.

While Shinkai shows how the narrative of historical memory and identity is formed and rewritten, effectively undermining the essential verisimilitude of the current present, he makes a strong case for the preservation of cultural memory through perpetual re-creation. At once, fatalistic and optimistic, these tensions drive both iterations of restrictive and restorative nostalgia throughout the narrative, and in a meta-commentary about the effectiveness of “doing” or “creating” tradition through materiality, Shinkai shows how one can continue to engage with the fluidity of tradition and memory in a concrete manner.

*Kimi no na wa* was hugely successful in the box office, rising above nearly all of Hayao Miyazaki’s works in terms of highest grossing films. Its remarkable performance in the box office gestures towards the sustained relevance of Shinkai’s thematic exploration of memory and cultural identity. As implied in the first
chapter, anime continues to be a powerful medium in which to explore Japanese cultural identity, and far from being odorless medium that Iwabuchi claims.
CHAPTER 4: CONCLUSION

In *Kimi no Na Wa*, we see the potentiality for multiple interpretations of the role of historicity, and the malleability of the ever-extending and multilayered present. The foundations of what passes for reality are in constant flux, and time ravels and unravels in a manner that redefines the causal understanding of history, which in turn challenges the dichotomy between modernity and tradition. In *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man*, Marshall McLuhan, borrowing from George Poulet’s *Studies in Human Time*, explores this sense of nonlinear time in relation to how one perceives the self and one's contextual identity. He states,

> “The self is obliged, such is the discontinuity of these typographic moments, ‘each time to forget itself in order to re-invent itself, to reinvent itself in order to regain interest in itself, in short, to effect a mocking simulacrum of continued creation, thanks to which it believes it will escape the authentication of its nothingness, and out of its nothingness, refashion a reality’” (Poulet 87, qtd in McLuhan 249).

The “nothingness” that both Poulet and McLuhan gesture towards seems particularly apt to describe the absence of an unchanging cultural essence. Instead, communities constantly reinvent and recreate new definitions of tradition and of modernity, in a manner that destroys the dichotomous relationship that one would believe this binary to maintain. Within *Kimi No Na Wa*, time is nonlinear. The present collapses into the past and into the future simultaneously, and Taki's pilgrimage both through Shinkai’s imaginary landscapes, as well as through the contours of Mitsuha’s life, illustrates the multilayered quality of time poignantly. Mitsuha’s grandmother’s ideas also parallel the “mocking simulacrum of continued
creation” that Poulet describes, when she reiterates the significance of passing dreams and the need to constantly practice the motions of tradition, regardless of shifting values and meanings behind those actions14. She recognizes that in the creating and doing of tradition, new significances underlying practice based on present contextual particulars will emerge. We see this happen when the traditional practice of braiding cords becomes the means by which Taki and Mitsuha are able to save the citizens of Itomori. Anime, as a medium that embraces its artifice and its simulacra-driven art form, in conjunction with the medium's convincing ability to skip and rewind temporality in a manner that rejects linearity, is an ideal mode to experiment with historical time in relation to identity formation. The fluidity and abstractions of artistic styles that Shinkai experiments with makes this work a critical study of how symbols of Japanese identity can be a mode of self-orientalization, but a simultaneous space for reinvention.

4.1 Revisiting the Global: Anime and its International Popularity

For Japanese culture scholars such as Koichi Iwabuchi and Otsuka Eiji, the global popularity of anime stems from “the ‘odorless’ nature of animation.... and that if it is indeed the case that the Japaneseness of Japanese animation derives, consciously or unconsciously, from its erasure of physical signs of Japaneseness” (Iwabuchi 33), then the Japan that is shown on the screen across the world is a “raceless and cultureless” one (Iwabuchi 33). As the present analysis has suggested,

14 As quoted before, the grandmother states, “Two hundred years ago, scandal maker Mayugoro’s bathroom caught on fire and burned down this whole area. The shrine and old documents were destroyed and this is known as The Great Fire of Mayugoro. So the meaning of our festivals became unknown and only the form lived on. But even if words are lost, tradition should be handed down and that is the important task we at Miyamizu Shrine have.”
however, I don’t believe that this not is the case. Of course, anime’s global popularity may stem in part because of the focus on the universal themes that it explores, such as self-discovery and development. I believe however, that anime’s global popularity has more to do with its willingness and remarkable ability to depict subtly the effects of pain, trauma, and existential melancholy in a manner that brings out the central issues of identity-related instability in the postmodern age. Perhaps the manner in which Japanese culture tends to prioritize the blending and harmonizing of disparate themes and ideas, instead of trying to raise boundaries between them is a powerful approach to storytelling that is particularly relevant in a globalized age.

Trauma may differ, depending on the personal and national tragedies inflicted on an individual and nation, but this observation also begs the question whether the particular nuances of pain can be adequately expressed. In her *Body in Pain*, Elaine Scarry explains that “pain, more than any other phenomenon, resists the objectification in language” (Scarry 5). Pain can only be expressed with abstractions and allegories, and is ultimately unshareable, because pain and suffering actively resists expression through language. Therefore, it may be the case that in the face of global trauma and pain, nuance and expression of such concepts through language become null and void. Pain, and more specifically apocalyptic and identity-voiding pain, simply exists as global white noise, regardless of physical and ideological boundaries, and is a fundamental building block for a globalized culture. In regards to new, global-spanning media, animation has become a potent medium in representing abstractions and spectacle, which makes it all the more convincing in expressing ideas that refuse to be put into words. Combined with the willingness to
explore a provocative array of thematic elements, and widely-appealing visual and cinematic styles, it may be the ability to portray human suffering and emotion earnestly that has allowed anime to spread globally. In this sense, it is not so much that creators purposely gravitate towards only global themes or a universal depiction of pain or trauma that is not specific to the Japanese experience, but that the nature of pain and trauma, and the inherent difficulty to express it explicitly, leaves only the potential for abstractions. But within the spaces of abstraction, there remains a potential for genuine empathy for the figures on screen, regardless of the foreign cultural particularities that are being expressed.

4.2 “Odorful” Mediums

While it has been my primary objective to explore whether anime is indeed a medium of mukokuseki or suspended statelessness, I would also like to ask a consequent question: if anime and video games remain “odorless,” what constitutes an “odorful” medium? What artistic form or tradition retains such a heavy and pure sense of true “Japaneseness” that it exudes the kind of cultural odor that is “closely associated with racial and bodily images of a country of origin” (Iwabuchi 28). In his Recentering Globalization: Popular Culture and Japanese Transnationalism, Iwabuchi briefly goes into Japanese dramas and pop music as other modes of soft power, because they may have more of an “odor” by nature of having Japanese individuals on screen (Iwabuchi 34). However, this analysis also seems to argue that the influence of the West is deeply embedded in those forms as well.

Even if we remove ourselves from the popular cultures of the present and consider more traditional artistic forms and entertainment, is that where “odorful”
 mediums are found, or do they also become culturally discounted by outside cultures that may directly or indirectly influence Japan? Perhaps in the past, it was not America, but China, as the *wakon-yosai* (Japanese spirit, Western techniques) ideology stemmed from the earlier *wakon-kansai* (Japanese spirit, Chinese technology) (Sato 2007). In this sense, perhaps the traditional arts and scholarship of the past, which is often heavily inspired by Chinese culture, also robs of “Japaneseness” to some extent.

In short, while posing the question of whether the cultural arts can be truly representative of Japanese culture is an important and valid one to make, the existence of other global influences may not necessarily discount the “Japaneseness” of the works. As I have suggested, the medium and the narratives that come from these authors and artists cannot be divorced from the cultural context and times which influence them. Rather than being “stateless,” perhaps these works find a “statefulness,” -- if not at the center of the narrative, then at the peripheries. Looking at earlier works of anime, such as *Tetsuwan Atom* and *Sazae-san*, and how these foundational works inspired some of the most well-known and characteristic genres of anime today, I believe that questions of Japanese identity, history and representation still remain at the center of many anime narratives today. In this sense, perhaps anime has the potential to be more “odorful” than its exteriority presents.


