

A glimpse in to Japan's history through Makoto Shinkai's *Kimi no nawa* (Your Name)

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Abstract:“Makoto Shinkai could be next big name in anime... a blend of gorgeous, realistic details and emotionally grounded fantasy.” (Schilling, Mark)

Makoto Shinkai's *Kimi no nawa* had broken all the records at box office replacing Hayao Miyazaki's 'Spirited Away' as top grossing animated movie in 2016. The movie is about Taki, city boy and Mitsuha, town girl who switches bodies across the time and facing some practical problems which creates comic scenes and leading to a love story. But in the movie a thicker and deeper story is ongoing between the lines. The writer is inspired by natural disaster which shook Japan in 2011. He tries to invoke this incident and raises question about preserving tradition and history of Japan in the movie.

The main aim of this paper is to have a glance at history of Japan through Shinkai's movie. The paper is divided into two parts, first one consists of brief history of Japan from isolation of Japan to arrival of commodore Matthew Perry, Meiji restoration, triple disaster in 2011 and connecting to current era. In second part linear explanation of movie is presented as movie tosses back and forth in time and from Tokyo to Itomori making it complex and hard to grasp. It then explores how the movie represents history of Japan in a way with which audience can relate and how historical and social evolution took place, how traditional and modern Japan is harmonised to make new Japan with help of instances from *Kimi no na wa*.

Key words: history of Japan, *Kimi no na wa*, relatability, Japanization

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I. HISTORY OF JAPAN

The current era in Japan is *Reiwa* (beautiful harmony) which began on 1st May 2019. Shinzo Abe, Prime Minister of Japan has defined it as, “A culture being born and nurtured by people coming together beautifully”. (Japan names) But if we dive into Japan's history of past 150 years, Japan was an isolated feudal society with little or no contact with outside world. Japan had followed *Sakoku*, isolationist policy for over 22 years enacted by Tokugawa *Shogunate*, *Bakufu* (feudal Japanese military government) under Tokugawa Iemitsu. Ideas like divine right and citizens tied to their lords was common. Arrival of Matthew Perry, U.S. commodore and his Black Ships at Uraga, Edo Bay of Japan changed the fate of Japan in 1853. He intimidated Japanese people with cannons and guns, forcing them to sign convention of Kanagawa. This convention opened up Japan to the world they signed Anglo-Japanese treaty in 1854, signed treaty of Shimoda in 1855 with Russia and signed various treaties with various nations in 1867/68. Thus, ended Tokugawa era and era of *Meiji* restoration started with transferring of capital from Kyoto to Tokyo *Daimyos* (feudal lords) thought shogunate was weak against foreign threat, lords of satsuma and Choshu were of opinion that only emperor can strengthen Japan by centralising the power structure. And so, there were two factions pro-Shogunate and pro-imperial, rift in opinion led to war among them. Pro-imperial camp won with British support leading to completion of *Meiji era*.

Japanese were forced to sign unequal treaty with U.S. and other western countries alike all subjugated countries because of which western countries wielded one-sided advantage socially, economically and legally. *Meiji* Japan was determined to lessen this gap with western powers and therefore drastic reforms were carried out. Feudal lords and *samurais* were abolished. A democratic state was formed where equality to all was core aim. For creating stability in the state *Daimyo* returned their lands to emperor in 1870. Country was slowly westernised industry, ports, railroads, telegraph lines were being build. Textile and steel industry were developed. Whole country was restructured, the education system was reformed after German and French. It was made compulsory and on top of it in 1873, country abolished Japanese itself replacing it with English as national language. Army was modelled after *Prussian* forces and Navy after British. A large business conglomerate was formed under name of *Zaibatsu*. Due to this large expenditure financial crisis were born

which led to reform in currency system and establishment of Bank of Japan in 1880. This intensive westernization, revival of conservation and nationalist feeling took place for about two decades.

Shinto (the way of the Gods) is indigenous faith of Japanese people it is deeply rooted in their tradition. *Shinto* has no founders, no scriptures nor any propaganda of preaching it is totally based on essential elements of life, these essential elements are given form of sacred spirits and prayed as *kami*(god). It is believed that humans become *kami* after death, *kami* of extraordinary people are even enshrined such as of the sun goddess *Amaterasu*. *Shinto* has no absolutes regarding right or wrong it is basically very optimistic faith which believes that humans are inherently good and it is evil spirits who spread evil for such reason most of the *Shinto* rituals comprises of purification. *Shinto* shrines are made for worshipping and are treated as home to *kami*. *Matsuri* (festival) is held commonly to show the *kami* outside world. The priests are allowed to marry and are aided by *Miko* during the shrine rituals, *Miko* are unmarried women usually daughter of priest himself. *Shinto* became state religion in *Meiji* period and priest became state officials. Important shrines received funding from government. Along with these due efforts were made to separate *Shinto* from Buddhism. *Shinto* was emphasised and taught along with principles of Confucianism and worshipping of king at educational institutes for fostering national identity.

In pre-war era Japan's westernization attempts co-existed with an attempt at Asianism, emphasising solidarity with fellow Asian countries against western imperialism. Japan aimed at Pan-Asianism in which it would be central in leading Asia and removing Western imperialism through radical solidarity and harmony within civilization. Vision of nation was divided into two fraction one was pro-liberal like British and another was pro-German and anti-liberal during 1910. Japan had two visions, two identity and two corresponding foreign policies. Power had shifted to Oligarchic clique to the parliament and democratic parties by 1912 under reign of emperor Taisho. Japan had totally industrialised by this time. After second world war Japan's economic condition was getting worse day by day and to add salt to an injury Japan was shaken by 'Great Kanto Earthquake' in 1923.

On 1931 Japan occupied Manchuria and because of this had to withdraw from League of Nations as was heavily criticised for her action against China. These was one of the reason Japan was distrusted by both Asian countries and Western ones. While attempting to unify Eastern and Western Civilization and societal practice, westernising to progress and holding pan-Asianism for creating Eastern front the country failed to identify as either one of them.

In 1940 Japan joined Axis power and on 1941 made most fatal mistake in history, attacked pearl harbour. On 27th July, 1945 allied power asked Japan to surrender unconditionally, terms which Japan's military didn't found acceptable. Thus, in answer bombs were dropped on Hiroshima on 6th august and Nagasaki on 9th August. Also, Soviet Union entered into war with Japan on 8th august. On 14th august Emperor decided for the best to surrender unconditionally. Japan was occupied under General MacArthur, U.S. till April 1952. Emperor became puppet ruler, kept as just symbol of state, he had lost all political and military power. *Shinto* and state were separated, *Zaibatsu* dissolved and education and law enforcement were decentralized. In post-war era Japan remained westernized, influenced by American music and movies. But during this time Japan also became influencer. The Kaiju (monster movie), anime, manga and other forms of Japanese culture were spreading across the Europe and America. Japan established its political position by joining United Nations Organisation in 1956 and improve relations with other countries.

The post-war era ended with death of Hirohito, *Showa* emperor on 7th January 1989, which was succeeded by Akihiko as *Heisei* (peace everywhere) era. *Heisei* was marked as lost decade in term of economy. On 11th March 2011 Japan experienced most powerful earthquake in Japan and fourth most powerful in world. This earthquake had triggered powerful tsunami which killed more than 19000 people at Sendai. Then the earthquake moved from Tohoku to Honshu, mainland island of Japan was according to National Police Agency Report 15897 drowned, 2532 missing and 6157 were injured. From 2015's report 228863 people were still living away from their home in either temporary housing or due to permanent relocation. *Heisei* era ended due to abdication of Akihiko's advance age and ill health on 30th April 2019 and was ascended by crown prince Naruhito on 1st July 2019.

II. SUMMARY: KIMI NO NA WA (YOUR NAME)

A meteor crater lake is formed 1200 years ago, and this leads to formation of town of Itomori. Mitsuha, female protagonist lives in this town along with her family. She belongs to family of shrine maiden. Her father Toshiki after her mother's death leaves shrine and pursues his ambition in line of administration which he later achieves by becoming town mayor. Mitsuha roams with her two friends Tessie and Sayaka and is utterly bored of her life and the town.

Mitsuha's grandmother repeats the tale about how Itomori village was created to Mitsuha and her sister Yotsuha they are knitting yarn into special kind of thread. She further explains how this is connected to red

string of fate, how this thread represents the very flow of time. As Mitsuha is shrine priestess she has to perform shrine rituals too, she and her sister performs *Kagura* dance and makes *Kuchikamizake* which is to be offered to shrine god once formed, it is considered as half of herself as she chews rice and spit to make liquid. Mitsuha is embarrassed when her classmates see her doing so and wishes to be born as Tokyo boy in her next life.

Around this time, she starts to switch body with Tokyo boy Taki Tachibana. At first, she thinks that she is having weird dream but then realises its real. The most important thing is that she doesn't realise she is switching body into 3 years future and not in same timeline. Mitsuha's grandmother takes her to shrine god for offering *kuchikamizake*. They reach a point and grandmother explains beyond this point is *kakuriyo* (underworld). In exchange of for returning person have to leave behind something most important to them. After a while she has fallen in love with Taki and goes Tokyo to meet him but he doesn't recognise her as Taki she meets has still 3 years yet to experience body switching. Taki asks for her name she tells him her name and hands him red thread which binds two of them. This is the first timeline, here during the body switching there is comet passing on day of festival, it splits and a fragment falls on Itomori village annihilating major portion of town leaving just school and shrine unharmed.

Taki, male protagonist lives in Tokyo he is studying and working part-time at restaurant and dreams to become architect one day. He runs into girl named Mitsuha on train and who gives him red thread which he keeps as lucky charm. Next day he hears in news comet's spitting and crashing but has no idea about existence of Itomori village or its inhabitants. After three years of meeting her he starts to switch body with her but without knowing it was very Mitsuha he had met on train three years ago. One fine day switching stops as Itomori village is destroyed and Mitsuha perished along with it. He still has red thread which binds them together. Taki goes looking for Mitsuha, in searching her he reaches at *Miyamizu* shrine where he finds *Kuchikamizake* and drinks it.

From this point on alternate timeline is created, when Taki drinks *Kuchikamizake*, they reach a point where both past and present meets at *KatawareDoki* (twilight). Mitsuha (as Taki) wakes up on the morning when comet crashes. She meets Tessie and Sayaka explains comets splitting and make evacuation plans. Taki (as Mitsuha) wakes up shrine and heads out to see Itomori which is been destroyed. Mitsuha (as Taki) arrives at shrine of *Miyamizu*, they switch back into their original bodies, Taki gives back red thread to Mitsuha and as the twilight ends return to their respective times. The comet strikes, town is annihilated but as everyone was evacuated nobody died this time.

Now eight years have passed for Mitsuha and five for Taki since comet crashed. Mitsuha has moved to Tokyo and movie rewinds to starting scene, they finally see each other from their trains, runs for each other and finally meet. They actually pass by each other without talking as both seems to be awkward but Taki breaks the ice by asking her that have, they met before? To this she replied that she thinks so too. They cry and simultaneously asks for each other's name, "Your name is...?" (*kimina no wa 1:40:43*).

Relatability:

Yojiro Noda, lead songwriter, vocalist and guitarist of rock band Radwimps, which created soundtrack for *kimina no wawa* asked that what is it that made this movie so popular with viewers. His reply to this was, "I think the animation is very high tech and very sharp, but the story itself is universal and fundamental. The current era this film crossed over at a perfect time. People were looking for this kind of story. It's not too far from their lives." (Russel Erica)

Derek Thompson, staff writer at Atlantic times writes that relatability is practically God particle of theatre, and it has been for long time. He further mentions Harold Bloom, literary critic who says that what makes Shakespeare great is that his plays relate to their audience timelessly. Writers offers mirror image of reality in their work. Their work contains numerous details of everyday life, characters who have problems just like ordinary folks faces in real world and through them ideology and moral code of the time is represented. For instance, female protagonist Mitsuha invokes *Shinto* and traditional Japan. Mitsuha resides in Itomori region, in Gifu prefecture, she belongs to *Miyamizu* shrine and thus being a *Miko* has to perform shrine rituals like perform traditional dance and prepare *kuchikamizake* on festival. She goes to local School and has friends who are also her neighbours because of close knit society of small town. Mitsuha cuts her hair to noticeable length when Taki goes on date, in Japanese culture girls cut their hair to noticeable length when they break up with their lover. Even though she wasn't dating Taki, it was just a gesture it adds meaning to her feeling for Japanese audience. In same manner Taki, male protagonist lives in Tokyo where he goes to high-school, which is huge and has many facilities. Family bond is weak he and his father share a few words at breakfast table representing a stereo typical example of white-collar man, his social space is occupied with school and work. He has part-time job at Italian restaurant to survive in metropolitan city.

Locations and places are showed in a way which common people can identify with. Here in this movie most of location and places are based on real life locations itself. During the opening scenes location shown is of Shinomachi, NTT Docomo Yoyogi building, Tokyo. The scene in the end where Taki calls Mitsuha is of pedestrian bridge, Shinomachi, Tokyo. The National Art Centre place where Taki takes Miki on date is located

at Roppongi, Tokyo. The restaurant Taki works is 'Brasserie Paul Bocuse Le Musee' is on third floor in Tokyo. Aogashima island at south of Hachijojima are model for Itomori village and Lake of Itomori is based on Suwa lake at Nagano.

Relatability and identification with audience is most important thing and movie covers that portion very efficiently. For example, the striking of comet which is exterior entity which forces the change in same way it was external entity, Commodore Perry and his black ships forced Japan to change or as the director of the movie said in an interview about one of the themes of movie i.e. meeting stranger who changes your life. "I think that's universal theme, you know, we don't know who we're going to meet tomorrow. And that person might change your life entirely. There's always that possibility" (Ewens Hannah) Meeting commodore Perry changed entire fate of Japan.

By positioning Taki and Mitsuha, diametric opposites identity crisis is created in film. "Taki: the dream... must have had... can never recall. Mitsuha: but... the sensation that I have lost something. Taki: ... lingers for a long time after I wake up. I am always searching for something..." (*kimina no wa 0:54*) Their body swipe not just gender based but registers of boys and girls are also different, Taki (as Mitsuha) speaks *watashi* which is feminine and seems to have dialect. Traditions they follow, like Taki (as Mitsuha) sitting on two legs while eating which Tokyo kids don't practice. Location and dialect along with it and lastly the time period in which both are situated, the word *kawataredoki* is used as *katawaredoki* in the part of Itomori as explained by Yukari Yukino teacher of Mitsuha. If we go through Japan's history, the country has gone through an identity crisis multiple time. The *Boshin war* between pro-shogunate and pro-imperial fraction. Japan didn't want to be lumped with Asian countries as west saw them as backward, uncivilized and weak and therefore they distanced themselves from Asia. At the same time Japan wanted to oppose superiority of western nation and tried to have pan-Asianism. Japan also had two foreign policies.

Events depicted in the work are as such that might have actually occurred which makes work relatable with not just cotemporary readers of that time but to modern readers too. In the beginning of the movie Mitsuha's father is standing next to his financial supporters from local construction company asking for votes, "Restoring the town's fiscal wealth to continue its revitalization project." (*kimina no wa 7:48*) And the comments locals pass, "Mayor's kid and his contractors kid get along too", "he'll be re-elected anyway" or "I heard he's dissing out the fork." (*kimina no wa 8:02*) Shows corruption in local politics with which people of Japan can relate with as their politician making empty promises regarding rural revitalization, since 1980s the central government has town(home) building in their agenda. When Taki gives up his memories of Mitsuha at *Miyamizu* shrine to alter the timeline and save her in same way to become powerful and competitive Japan had westernised.

Due to rapid urbanization Japan faces same issues which all economically developed nations face difference in rural and urban population, rural population migrating towards urban, which in case of Japan is much more severe. There are town with more than half residents above age of 65 year, this situation is known as *genkaishuraku* (settlement on edge). This is also evidently shown with character of grandmother who invokes traditional Japan and younger generation who wants to move away to modern Japan. For instance, when Mitsuha and Sayaka complain about café in town (bench next to vending machine) and about town's condition because of which they wish to go to Tokyo city. "only one train in 2 hours, convenience store closes at 9 pm, no bookstores, no dentist, 2 pubs (for middle-aged man), no jobs, young women don't come here (to marry local men)." (*kimina no wa 10:42*) So, the vulnerability of traditional Japan is shown with this instance of but there's a line in movie which reveals that there is no guarantee of safety anywhere invoking natural calamities of 2011. "There's a line in the film – "You never know when Tokyo will go" that reveals the safety that can never be taken for granted in a place where the threat of natural disaster is constant." (Ewens, Hannah)

The two comets hitting the town is reference to two great natural calamities faced by Japan. When Tessie asks, "Do you know how lake Itomori was formed? A meteor crater lake was formed 1200 years ago" (*kimina no wa 1:08:14*) is reference to 'Great Kanto earthquake' experienced by people of Japan in 1923. The second instance where 'Comet Tiamat with orbital period of 1200 years.... 'Itomori', the town that vanished made a close approach to earth 3 years ago in October. Nobody predicted that its nucleus would split at its perigee... 'Meteor strikes, wipes out town.' We observe there is rubble everywhere, train smashed and all the people killed... 'Town annihilated'. A fragment of the comet became a meteor that struck Japan. 500 people died 1/3 of town's population, and nobody lives in Itomori anymore...." (*kimina no wa 51:36*) This is reference to 2011's earthquake known as triple disaster. In March 2011, Tohoku region experienced worst earthquake in history of Japan, accompanied by Tsunami and nuclear meltdown.

Lastly story is shown under concept of Everett multiverse given by quantum physicist Hugh Everett which uses multiple world interpretation. Here people of Itomori village are saved due to alternative time line this whole concept serves as nostalgia and reconciliation of some short to Japanese people who have gone through painful experience of triple disaster.

Image of nation:

Homi Bhabha in his *Nation and narration* explains that the two cultures must co-exist peacefully to promote their development and growth. Nation is defined by cultural and actual social life and many different ways of living, rather than the study of organised government. He adds to the model of Michael Oakeshott who tells nation as equivocal i.e. its product of different ideas, represented as societies. And being product of multiple societies, it opposes single idea of nation with common purpose. There is multiple interpretation of very same idea like comments of Tessie and other classmates during *kuchikamizake*. Bhabha sees nation as product of different cultures, a series of competing stories i.e. narratives. So, according to him if we want to understand a nation, we need to understand various sub-stories that have played a role in making of society and how these societies interact with each other making a small image of nation.

This theory can be incorporated into the movie as it shows Japan's social and historical evolution, its progress through traditional to westernisation and *Japanization*. "As the film swings back and forth between mountain shrines and Shinjuku station, it elegantly expresses not only teen confusion but also the tension between old and new Japan." (Stables) One of the major themes of the movie is carrying on old tradition as reference to old Japan setting against lifestyle of Tokyo which represents modern Japan. Another major theme is represented by showing stark difference between rural and urban Japan. Itomori is represented as traditional, old Japan with its landscape, tradition and in belief. For instance, Mitsuha performing traditional dance and making *Kuchikamizake* (mouth chewed sake) where *Miko* of the shrine chews up rice and spitting it into a container as part of local tradition and then offering it to shrine god. During pilgrimage to shrine grandmother tells about 'Musubi' to Mitsuha and Yotsuha. She says *Mubushi* is "the old way of calling local guardian god, tying thread is *Mubushi*, connecting people is *Mubushi*, the flow of time is *Mubushi*..." this is reference to *Shinto* religion which is as old as Japan itself. *Kami* is worshipped, here it is shown as '*Mubushi*', festivals are held in their honour and offerings are made. Also, the mention of *Kakuriyo* (underworld) another traditional belief of old Japan where it is said that if you visit it only way to return is leaving something behind what is most important to you. The habit of saying "we are going now" (*kimina no wa 6:40*) before leaving the house by Mitsuha and her sister.

Old fashioned houses with sliding wooden door, oceanic view, mountain roads, both Mitsuha and Yotsuha go to school walking, lastly the belief like being possessed and needs to be exorcised, Tessie asking Mitsuha after first day of body swap, "yeah, did your grandma exorcise you, you were totally possessed!" (*kimina no wa 7:30*) On the other hand, Tokyo is set as modern Japan, tall buildings, hoardings and road flooded with cars. The difference in old and modern Japan is shown with character placement itself, Mitsuha lives in literally three years past and Taki lives in present Japan. Tokyo life is shown as busy metropolitan life where Taki has to do part time job along with school. Grandmother of Mitsuha says "Listen 200 years ago... sandal 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 festival became unknown and only form lived on. But even if words are lost, tradition should be handed down." (*kimina no wa 12:48*) Which may represent how in modern Japan the history and meaning of tradition is lost and festivals now are carried on only form based. Taki lives in apartment, house has shelves, study table, there is miso soup on table, bathroom has toilet paper and hand drying machine, big display screens on road and metro lines. There is café with timber-work, cost of items is very high.

The movie has not only shown traditional and western, rural and urban Japan but also *Japanization* too. As Bhabha has said image of nation can only be created when there is harmony between two cultures, when nation has consumed both the cultures, best example being Taki consuming *Kuchikamizake* and Mitsuha consuming western sweets. There are numerous occasions where such harmony is visible. Mitsuha performing shrine dance with help of radio. The idea Yotsuha gives to Mitsuha about branding and selling *kuchikamizake*, merging tradition with business "why not sell lots of *kuchikamizake* and use money to go to Tokyo? ... sell them with photos and videos, name it 'shrine Maiden's sake'." (*kimina no wa 16:28*) Like change brought in each other's life by body swapping Taki (as Mitsuha) becoming popular with his crush Okumura by stitching her skirt with cute embroidery, Mitsuha (as Taki) chops the timber with Tessie and created a look alike café.

Makoto Shinkai, director and writer of the movie in one interview stated "The script took six months to write down and began with *waka poem*, a classical type of Japanese poetry by Ono no Komachi. 'I met someone in my dreams, and had I known it was dream, I would have stayed there...' so I thought, 'right, dreams can work here.' Its during night, when asleep that the two characters body swipes and later dreams and life becomes entangled until you're not sure what's real and what's not." (Ewens, Hannah) This idea is been incorporated in all songs of the movie like in song Sparkle- *Madoromi no naka de namanuruikoorani* (during my nap, I dreamt of someplace not here) (*Noda, Yojiro*), Or in Zenzenzen- *Yatto me wo samashita kai* (did you finally wake up...). (*Noda, Yojiro*) These songs are written and performed in pop punk form by Radwimps rock band. This form of song is essentially American and British in nature, Japan was highly influenced by this genre and formed songs in this form with lyrics almost in English initially and latter more in Japanese. The form is made

indigenous to Japan creating cultural and political Japanese punk scene known as Jpunk. Thus, when the difference in old and modern Japan is shown through switching from mountain region of Hida to busy streets of Tokyo accompanied with pop punk songs in background it is not just comparison of traditional and modern Japan in terms of landscape but also about fusion of traditional ideas of Japanese *waka* poetry with American pop punk.

III. CONCLUSION

In the beginning of movie itself it is shown that Taki and Mitsuha feel incomplete without each other, and it is *Ummei no akaiito* (red thread of life) which keeps them connected and kept them bounded to each other. At first both are annoyed and were angry at each other due to body-swipe which they were experiencing but then little by little they came to understand each other and eventually fall in love. In same way Japan was traditional at first, rich in culture but weak in technology and military power, then had westernized gained power but was incomplete without cultural background and its tradition i.e. *Shinto*. Japan was too divided at first but then slowly gradually started to create harmony between old and new Japan, urban and rural Japan becoming one of the world's most literate and technically advanced nation. The era of successful *Reiwa* (beautiful harmony) can be created only through *Japanization* i.e. blending of ancient tradition with western life.

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