



The Economies of Anime

Anime as a soft power, a cultural product and a (trans)national medium

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Abstract

Japanese animation, from here on referred to as anime, occupy an important and unique position in Japanese contemporary media. In my thesis, I will discuss and explore the following questions and current debates about anime as national Japanese product:

- What is the importance of anime for the Japanese economy?
- Has anime - as part of Japanese popular culture - become a soft power for Japan?
- What is the cultural and national identity of anime?
- Is anime a transnational product?

Anime is the Japanese word for animation (brought to the screen, through series or film). Anime is also the term generally used worldwide to distinguish Japanese animation from Western animation. The term anime is also used to refer to anime as a certain recognisable style, sometimes regardless of its origin. Throughout this thesis the term anime is used specifically to identify Japanese animation, or animation (at least) involving Japanese cooperation. I will discuss anime as an international economic and cultural phenomenon and examine why anime is often more than just the moving images of Japanese pencil drawings. This thesis interrogates the position of anime as a cultural export and as a form of soft power and explores anime's current status within Japan's (cultural) economy and international export markets. I discuss the relation of the Japanese economy to cultural popular products, with anime as a particular focus. My questions are as follows;

- Why do we perceive anime as a Japanese cultural product and a (trans)national medium? On what scale (and is it still)?
- To what extent is anime important as an actual asset for Japan's soft power?
- How does the Japanese government use anime (being a part of popular culture) and how does the economy benefit from it?

Chapter 1. Literature review and methodology

Introduction

The focus of my research is the relation between Japan's cultural economy, the national and cultural identity of anime and anime's role as a form of soft power. The questions asked in my research are as follows:

- What is soft power and what is its usefulness?
- How does Japan use anime as a resource of soft power in practice?
- What is the relation between anime as a cultural export products and Japan's cultural and national Identity?
- What are the national and transnational aspects in the creation of anime and how tangible is the 'Japaneseness' of anime?

There is a substantial amount of existing work on anime and anime-related topics available, such as the debate about the national and transnational and anime as a part of popular culture. Many of these have different approaches, subjects, themes and sub-themes. In this literature review, I examine this existing work by comparing the most important findings from these authors. I am considering how these findings relate to my own research in which I am focussing on the 'economy' of anime; its current status within and outside Japan's export markets and the importance and meaning of anime's (cultural) identity. I have mapped out the major areas of debate, approaches, structured by approach and relevance to my own research. Due to the transnational aspects of anime (or rather, the fact that anime has become a transnational phenomenon), both Japanese and Western authors have focussed on anime as a research topic. Although I have used the work of Japanese authors whose work is available in English, the majority of the authors used in this literature review and this thesis are Western (European or American). Exploring the exact differences

between these authors and findings in a broad perspective is beyond the scope of this research. However, both Western and Japanese authors have made important contributions to understanding anime as a transnational phenomenon.

According to one of these Western authors, Thomas Lamarre in *The Anime Machine* (2009: xxi), live action film has dominated history and theories of the moving image, neglecting animation. However, in other countries too, there is a long tradition of animation. By 1988, already 40 percent of Japanese studio releases were animated (Napier 2005: 16-17). In Japan, anime holds a significant and unique position: it has a powerful hold on Japanese culture, is often a representation of Japanese culture and dominates the film market in Japan, but at the same time is also now the most globally visible form of Japanese cinema. The question is, however, whether anime can represent Japan in the way live action cinema did. In recent years anime has not only become increasingly popular but has also gained a growing scholarly attention in Europe and the USA. The intellectually challenging themes and popularity of, for example, *Princess Mononoke* (*Mononoke-Hime*, dir: Hayao Miyazaki, Japan, 1997), along with other anime films, has stimulated the writing of scholarly articles about these works and about anime in general. By the 1990s, anime gained recognition as a Japanese cultural product that is worthy of intellectual study (Napier 2005: 18).

One of the purposes of this thesis is to research the position of anime as a 'soft power' and its current status within Japan's (cultural) economy. In terms of Gross Domestic Product, Japan is the third largest economy in the world after the United States and China.¹ Even though the economy is no longer growing as rapidly since the economic bubble burst in the late 1980s and early 1990s, it is still growing. According to The Japan Times,

¹ GDP stands for the market value of goods and services within a country. A rising GDP indicates a higher standard of living, the lower the GDP is, the lower the standard of living is in a country.

economists expect a growth of 1.3 percent by March 2020 (published December 18th, 2018). However, industries in Japan such as retailing and agriculture have been facing difficulties. The Japanese media sector is huge and at a somewhat more stable point but was declining in 2013 when it came to sales. The Japanese music industry, for example, is still the second largest music market in the world whilst continuing to be dominated by Japanese artists (Anon. 2018). Anime and manga occupy a strong position in Japan's economy as media export markets and naturally, part of Japan's cultural economy. But even though the economic position of popular Japanese content is big and immensely popular, anime creators in Japan have been struggling with a decline in sales of media due to the increase of free content via video sharing sites. A report from 2017 from *The Association of Japanese Animations* shows that the total value of the anime industry had a market value of 17.5 billion U.S. Dollars in 2016, growing compared to previous years.² These sales have mostly derived from overseas markets which have grown 171.9% since 2013 reaching a record of 7.154 billion dollars in 2016. With numbers like these, it is no surprise that anime seems a logical choice as a form of soft power.

Many scholars have attempted to explain or point out the 'beginning' of anime.³ It seems it is something that is hard to determine. The first Japanese animated film was *Tale of the White Serpent* (*Hakujaden*, dir: Taiji Yabushita, Japan, 1958) that was produced by Tōei animation studios. Some scholars (like myself) mark the true start of anime (or to be more specific, the start of the anime 'hype') with the series of *Astro-boy* (*Tetsuwan Atomu*, dir: Osamu Tezuka, Japan, 1963-1966 [first series]) whilst others look at anime that was already produced from the early 1900s. Rayna Denison points out that 'anime' has not always been the term used and in some cases has been applied retroactively. According to

² See <http://aja.gr.jp/english/japan-anime-data> for the full report.

³ The cultural background of anime shares a common heritage with manga, which often creates a confusion between the two terms. Manga is the Japanese word for comic and thus means the drawing of a story on paper.

Denison, the 'rise' of anime within Japan's animation culture is a demonstration of the power of Japanese anime industries and (sub)cultural gatekeepers around the world, to control how anime is understood (and thus, what we perceive as being anime). She comes to the conclusion that the term anime, as we know it now, is a relatively new term that has often been applied to the whole history of cell animation (Denison 2015: 5). As Denison points out, too, it becomes hard to determine what anime *exactly* is, as there are many different views of what should be considered anime, and what should not: there are a variety of types of media hidden under the rubric anime and (academic) books on anime refer to various sources of media all identified as being anime, too (ibid: 6). It remains unclear whether it is the artistic style that constitutes anime or its Japanese 'roots'. The term anime merely means 'animation' in Japanese, so when does anime become something more specific than just the Japanese word for animation? One might suggest that what we now consider anime in the West can be categorized as a certain style and certain genres and sub-genres within that style, which for a huge part is the result of anime becoming a global brand in the 80s. It is debatable where, how, and when anime was developed, and what precisely 'anime' has come to mean. Looking back at shorts from the 1920s, it is obvious that the style of the cartoons is very different from what we now consider anime. Given the variety of discussions about the origins of anime, it is understandable that some scholars choose to go back centuries,⁴ to the ancient art of Japanese drawing: the Japanese have been telling stories by pictures for centuries, which in modern times translated themselves into manga, Japanese comic books, and anime. Though many scholars look at the history of anime, some in greater detail than others, it is noticeable that a major focus point lies on post-war Japan and contemporary Japan. This suggests that it is more illuminating to focus not on the start of anime as being born as an 'art form', but rather on the cultural identity of

⁴ Such as Tze-yue G Hu in *Frames of Anime: Culture and Image Building* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2010).

anime and why anime as a product is economically important for Japan. Furthermore, anime has become a global phenomenon as a result of international distribution and exhibition markets, but many anime productions are influenced by the Japanese culture and national identity. Taking this into consideration, the majority of existing scholarly research does not (only) focus on the history or artistic scenery of anime, but also on the cultural aspects of anime and the reception of anime in the West. Furthermore, there are scholars who focus on the visual aspects of anime. Brian Ruh (2008: 139-144), for example, has a specific take on Robots in Japanese culture and 'mecha' anime.⁵ Another important point of discussion is how the Japanese government has been attempting to boost the visibility of their cultural identity by using cultural economics and using this as a soft power. In my research, I too will focus on how anime is perceived as a (trans)national medium, but in addition will explore how this positions anime as a global and commercialised product within the Japanese economy and Japan's foreign export markets.

Cultural and national identity

In this thesis I refer to both cultural and national identity. It is therefore illuminating to explain the difference between the two terms. Cultural identity refers to a person's (self-identified) background or 'sense of self' in a broad range: it can consist of someone's national background, but can also consist of (but is not limited to), someone's religion, social

⁵ Robots are an important part of the Japanese culture, not only in how they are represented in anime but also in the Japanese society. With technology in Japan being very developed, it is no wonder that robotics are very much Japanese and have become a part of Japanese culture. When watching a Western based anime such as *Trigun* (Toraigan, dir: Satoshi Nishimura, Japan, 1998) or any other anime on the popular topic of Bounty Hunters, Robots or Mechanica (referred to as Mecha within the anime-genre) are often involved. As Ruh describes, Robots and Japan are often perceived as being linked in mainstream analyses of Japanese popular Culture (2008:144). Ruh describes Astro Boy's popularity as one of the first robot-themed manga's and later on, anime series (Ruh 2008: 139-145).

group, social class, age(group) or ethnicity (Amiot, Doucerain, Zhou & Ryder 2018: 629). These are all ingredients of the self-conception of a person, or, a group of people who share this same background; it is the identity that someone feels represents them as a person (2018: 629). Cultural identity is also an identity that develops and changes. For example, when someone joins a new social group or migrates and over time identifies with this new social group (ibid). National identity refers more specifically to where someone is geographically from, or, the geographical nation or region a person feels it belongs to, regardless of whether or not this person holds a citizenship in that country or region. In other words, it is the specific geographical place people describe themselves to 'come from' (Huddy 2016: 39). Part of this nation, can be a shared culture, shared traditions and a shared language. National 'attachment' can lead to patriotism: having an emotional attachment to national symbols, holding a certain pride, respect, allegiance to- or love for the nation (ibid). It can also lead to nationalism, which is typically defined, in a more negative sense, as the feeling of being superior to- or dominating other nations (2016: 40).

Problem statement

Research on the Japanese economy, recession and the lost decades is widely available. Research in anime studies received scholarly attention at a later stage, but anime too has become the subject of scholarly discussion. Until a few years ago, the subjects have often been treated as two different fields of study; Culture and Media studies and/or Film and TV Studies, and Economics. However, as is the case with, for example, Hollywood, which has been looked at from an economic perspective by many scholars. For example, by David Desser in *Hollywood goes shopping* (2000) and by Aida Hozic in *Hollyworld: Space, Power, and Fantasy in the American Economy* (2001). The developments in the past years have removed these boundaries, and anime and the Japanese economy are now, arguably, one intertwined topic of discussion. Going back to the past, the Japanese government, as well as

scholars and economists, have focussed on the obvious export markets (the automotive industry, technology, agriculture etc.). I argue that approaching the Japanese economy from this perspective only is now outdated as these sectors and industries have long been surpassed by other industries, in which anime plays an important role. The question is, however, whether anime can really surpass these industries on which the Japanese economy once thrived. The economic value of popular culture (and therefore anime) has now been recognised by the Japanese government and the economic changes are being dealt with. With this thesis I am bringing the economic dimension into the discussion of anime, both as part of Japan's popular culture and as a form of soft power.

Over the past years, anime has received a certain status and a large number of Westerners are nowadays familiar with the medium. It is no longer a minority medium that spectators in the west are unfamiliar with, but still isn't as mainstream as other forms of media either: so far, only Studio Ghibli films consistently get theatrical releases in most Western countries. Hayao Miyazaki's work in the 90s, movies such as *Ghost in the Shell* (*Gōsuto in za sheru / Kōkaku kidōtai*, dir: Mamoru Oshii, Japan, 1995) and series such as *Dragonball Z* (*Doragon Bōru Zetto*, dir: Daisuke Nishio, Japan, 1989) contributed greatly towards a growing popularity and interest in anime from the 90s onwards. Anime is a known medium, but on a side note it is true that a lot of anime is still aimed primarily at a Japanese audience, with little emphasis on attracting international audiences. It is in these cases that anime could be misunderstood due to cultural differences or because spectators are unfamiliar with Japanese customs and tradition (and not because they are unfamiliar with anime as a medium), thus I approach this from a cultural and transnational perspective. I focus on the cultural and (trans)national identity of anime and will approach these topics by looking at cultural and (trans)national perspectives, the importance of the cultural and the (trans)national for the Japanese economy and national and international export markets in relation to political relationships and image building.

Existing research

There is a great variety of anime research available focussing on different aspects of anime. For example, scholar Thomas Lamarre mainly focuses on visual aspects of anime and making anime a visually 'understandable' media (Lamarre 2009). Foremost he focuses on the unique technical aspects of anime and the visual identity that makes anime stand out so much from other forms of media. He expands some topics raised in less detail by other scholars, such as the use of technology, colour and image that are all compelling features of anime. Lamarre approaches anime as an art form and very specifically discusses the visual and technological aspects of anime and the production process of anime. One of the topics he discusses is the fact that much anime is still produced as what we now see as limited or low tech animation: often still drawn by hand and therefore according to Lamarre, the feel and look of it is what attracts us to anime and what makes it 'anime' (2009: 11). In a broader sense, I cannot completely agree with Lamarre, as there are various other forms of artistic styles that are considered anime too by spectators as well as scholars. For example, the film *Final Fantasy: The Spirits Within* (Dir. Hironobu Sakaguchi, USA, 2001) and *Final Fantasy VII: Advent Children* (Dir. Tetsuya Nomura, Japan, 2005), both of which are based on the computer games and earlier anime series, are often labelled as being anime as well, even though in a sense, many Western fans might argue they are not 'really' anime because of the 3D computer techniques that have been used. The statement of anime being recognisable and attractive because of 'low tech animation' has become outdated, as many Japanese artists nowadays use the same (computerized) and new techniques as, for example, their American counterparts. However, I would argue that the artistic style of anime shares a common 'racelessness'. Characters share common recognisable 'anime characteristics' or features that we have come to recognise as anime. There is no recognisable ethnic background and characters (though we recognise them as 'humans') do not have recognisable ethnic features that can be compared to any cultural background: big

eyed, smooth faced, all different but more or less similar: these are, in a sense, also unspecific 'features' at the same time, when referring to them as existing human cultural (facial) features. This argument runs counter with Susan Napier's explanation of statelessness in anime (Napier 2001: 24-25). Napier notes that characters in anime do not look Japanese, but rather participate in a 'non-culturally specific anime style' (2001: 24). According to Napier, anime has often been described by Japanese commentators with the word *mukokuseki*, which means "stateless" or without a national identity (ibid). Napier describes the statelessness of anime characters by looking at the *mukokuseki* quality in the non-Japanese depiction of human characters in anime, which is often considered 'anime style' (2001: 25). *Mukokuseki*, or statelessness, in anime can also offer a world that is not necessarily Japanese, but rather a world on its own. Anime can in that sense completely 'diverge from Japanese cultural products' (ibid). However, I argue that even though characters can be stateless, it is still possible for anime (in context, themes and scenery) to be culturally specific. Such as is the case with some specific works of Hayao Miyazaki, as I discuss in this thesis. Napier recognises this point, too, but also point outs that the anime world is a 'realm' that exists in 'counterpoint to the world of modern Japan'. Suggesting that being a 'flexible' and nonconforming medium' is what might enhance anime's attractiveness to the Japanese as well as foreign audiences (2001: 26).

Scholar Tze-Yue G. Hu describes anime as 'one of the most contemporary crystallized ornaments of an ever-visual growing Japan' and compares anime in general to one of its American counterparts, Walt Disney Studios (Hu 2010: 46-47). According to Hu, Disney relies on a European heritage for literary inspiration and graphic representation, whilst the Japanese are often inspired by Shintoism, indigenous Japanese folk symbols, folk systems, Japanese beliefs, customs, thoughts and practices (ibid. 2010). Anime is considered to be just as flexible as any other artistic medium in Japan. Within anime all possible genres can be found, appealing to all age groups (Hoff Kraemer 2004: 1).

A number of scholars have focussed on anime's national and cultural identity, and how Japan as a country 'stands out'. Suzanne Napier, for example, points out that the Japanese society is unique not only due its distinctive culture, but also because as a non-Western society Japan has successfully industrialised their economy (Napier 2001: 27). As a matter of fact, Japan's modern history is unusual in Asia. In the first half of the 20th century, it was the only Asian country to achieve advanced industrial status (Hein 2008: 1). Napier explains:

It (Japan) is also a society that, in ways both positive and negative, is almost larger than life. The positive is deeply impressive. Not only was Japan the first non-Western nation to modernise successfully, but also it succeeded so well that, during the 1960s and 70s, it became a model for other developing nations. [...] the standard of living is high, the citizenry is exceptionally well educated, and 90 percent of Japanese consider themselves "middle class". Its arts [...] are renowned around the world (2001: 27-28).

In a more negative sense, Napier refers to Japan's economic recession, the atomic bombings, the wartime history with America and Japan's relationship with neighbouring Asian Countries, a relationship that is still relevant today (ibid).

As an article in *Foreign Policy* suggest, many aspects of Japan's culture originate from China (Pilling 2014). Such as written scripts, Confucian hierarchy and Buddhism (which arrived in Japan through China, but originated in India). In the 19th century, Japan embraced Western civilisation, and literature and philosophy held a place in Japanese culture, too (ibid). It was also the time when Japan politically exercised nation building and established Japan's credentials as a standalone culture (ibid). Following on from that, Koichi Iwabuchi argues that national identity is never naturally given but is carefully constructed (Iwabuchi 2002: 51). He sees Japan as a hybrid culture but also discusses the discourse of

Nihonjinron, "theory (about the essence) of Japaneseness" which is a set of discourses (or rather, a genre of writing) aimed on affirming Japan's uniqueness and 'Japaneseness' (Ko 2010: 12). The genre in essence aims to explain and explore Japan's 'great' homogeneous cultural and national identity (Burgess 2014). The development of *Nihonjinron* dates back to the Tokugawa Era (Edo period, 1603 - 1868) but flourished again in the post-World War II period (Pilling 2014). However, these text are extremely nationalist in their context. For example, it describes the Japanese as having 'a unique sensitivity to nature, an ability to communicate without language through a sort of social telepathy, and a rarefied artistic awareness' (Pilling 2014). These *Nihonjinron* texts have been multiplied and spread by Japanese (and in some cases Western) authors post-World War II and have served as propaganda for Japan's 'uniqueness', as well as its self perception as a country (ibid).

Iwabuchi's findings (that include seeing Japan as a Hybrid culture (2002: 51), can be compared with and translated into the effect that America has on the West; we are highly influenced by American popular culture and media. Music, film and television series shown and available in many European countries are more likely to be American than European. He presents a similar image of Japan's position in these markets in East and Southeast Asia since the late 1970s and he points out that media globalization offers an opportunity to expand Japanese media productions to other Asian countries, which has recently been the case. Another widely known author on anime, Susan Napier, examines anime and its cultural context and as an art form and researches its role in the United States (Napier 2007). Napier continuously investigates anime's role in the West and compares anime in Japan with how anime is seen by the Western and specifically American audiences. Napier refers to the term 'Japonisme'. Until around the 1870s-1880s, Japan was a private society that did not have much contact with the West. After this period, the Japanese expanded their export markets and the West became an important export market for cultural artefacts. Japanese art and culture became popular in the West: this period is what historians still refer to as the period

of 'Japonisme', the hype of everything Japanese in the West starting in the late 19th century (Napier 2007: 125). Napier argues that along with the growing interest in anime, a new sort of Japonisme has been developed:

By the 1990s, Japan's influence on popular culture worldwide would come in many forms including music, fashion and horror movies.[...] Anime and manga and the fan culture that they engendered have had the most penetrating impact on a global cultural scale (Napier 2007: 125).

Napier points out that one of the most important reasons for the popularity of anime worldwide is the past economic growth of Japan, which stimulated both the appreciation and resentment of Japan by the West (2007: 127-128). The same has been pointed out by scholar Darrel Hamamoto, who states that the acceptance of anime, among other products of popular culture, has been a huge part of the acceptance and appreciation of all things Asian (Hamamoto 2000: 11). In the past this has not always been the case. Since the 1960s Asian films have been confronted by 'anti-yellow' racism as Hamamoto points out. In response, this 'struggle' against white racism has resulted into a central theme that has often been used throughout the past in independent Asian-American film. In current times however, this has taken a positive turn and instead there is a fetishization of Asian popular culture which Hamamoto refers to as 'Asiophilia' (2000: 11). He points out that:

Whilst the 'Orientalist' discourse in cinema once helped mobilize and sustain support for the U.S. and European imperium in the Near East and Asia, Asiophilia is a deceptively benign ideological construct that naturalizes and justifies the systematic appropriation of cultural property and expressive forms created by Yellow people (Hamamoto 2000: 12).

The use of (historical) culture in popular film and media (or, in the 'post industrial' information economy, as Hamamoto suggests) has become economically interesting and has been converted into corporate wealth, (ibid. 2000). Secondly, subjects such as war tragedies, refugees and racism are not ignored but rather used and recognised in modern Asian (and thus Japanese) film (2000: 13). In the case of Japan, economic growth came with the popularity of Japanese products, toys, films, and food, such as Hello Kitty, Pokémon, and sushi. In terms of Napier's 'Japonisme', there is of course more to the Japanese 'invading the West' than just anime and sushi. Japan's economy indeed grew rapidly since the 1960s. And unlike the Japonisme that occurred in the late 1800s, in the present time the Japanese export market offers quality and highly advanced technological products. Napier seeks an explanation as to why we came to accept Japan in terms of an export market and a popular culture. This begs the question of why it is that anime has created a subculture of fandom in the West. As Napier points out (2007: 127-128), the United States in particular has a long tradition of cartoons from giant production companies such as Walt Disney Studios and Warner Brothers. She refers to the growing acceptance of the fantasy genre in the West, a factor that might have also paved the way for anime, but does not discuss further whether the long tradition of American cartoons has also helped anime to be a more accepted genre in the United States (Napier 2007: 128). In closer connection with my own research, Napier discusses the role of Japanese culture within anime and the role of anime itself within the Japanese society and considers whether anime can be seen as a product of national Identity. She sees anime as in some way a 'stateless' art form rather than being influenced by the West or by its own Japanese culture (2007: 128), but at the same time she is mindful of the complexities of researching anime in relation to the context of Japanese cultural identity (2005: 27). Napier describes how the Japanese have competed with America on various assets including anime since the 1990s (2007: 90). She starts with the Japanese technological and automobile industries that

became, and still are, successful in America since the 70s and were even seen as a threat by many Americans. The difference is that we can define (technological) products as 'raceless' whilst anime has set its mark as a recognisable Japanese image. Also, anime has had noticeably more success abroad in recent years than Japanese live action cinema.

The subject of 'racelessness' mentioned earlier is also addressed by Rayna Denison in *Anime: A Critical Introduction* (2015). She points out that the so-called 'Japaneseness' of anime, and the way that scholars such as Iwabuchi, Napier, and Eji Otsuka look at it, has in common a level of concern about the 'right' way for anime to represent Japanese culture abroad. Denison points out that anime, in many discussions, becomes 'burdened' by the weight of national representation even if anime is no longer recognisably Japanese (2016: 10). Anime is considered a Japanese cultural product by many scholars, but most anime productions and the characters involved don't show any physical signs of Japaneseness. On the other hand, as pointed out by Denison, many scholars focus on the cultural contexts of anime by researching the 'deeper' cultural meaning, cultural specificity and nationalism within anime (2015: 11). What is clear is that the cultural identity of anime is not a standalone topic now that anime has been officially recognised as a soft power. Just like Hollywood films, it holds a huge economic weight when it comes to anime as an industry. The Japanese government chooses to push anime as a Japanese cultural product and a welcome card, invitation to visit, cooperate, invest in and especially, appreciate Japan and what it has to offer. Anime is an economic asset, but in a broader sense, it is also a highly influential cultural and transnational product.

Anime as a (trans)national product

With so many different aspects of what anime is and whether or not anime is a cultural phenomenon, it is important to firstly look at what 'transnational' and 'national cinema' exactly mean. Stephen Croft suggests that there are seven different types of national

cinema: two of them are significant varieties in which anime can be distinguished within the field of national cinema. These varieties are firstly, the cinema that completely ignores Hollywood and secondly, national cinemas whose culture and language take their distance from the nation states which enclose them (Crofts 2006: 45). In the case of anime, both situations can be found: anime can often be seen as an homogenous product that does not necessarily conform to 'Hollywood' standards. Furthermore, anime is firstly a product of Japanese origin, often influenced by the Japanese culture and originally spoken in the Japanese language.

Mette Hjort interrogates the term transnationalism in her essay 'On the plurality of cinematic Transnationalism' (Hjort 2010), arguing that it is often used based on certain assumptions (one being that the transnational is always a good thing), rather than explicit definitions (2010: 13). Hjort's most important point is that there are degrees of transnationality and scholars need to be clear about which one they are talking about. For example, Hjort points out that there are stronger and weaker forms of transnationality depending on all the elements involved that make media transnational (such as production, distribution, reception). She also believes that there should be a distinction made between 'marked' and 'unmarked' transnationality; for example, when producers intentionally try to make their product transnational or encourage the audiences to think about the production in a transnational way (2010: 13). There can also be productions that are made with a national audience in mind, but are set in a transnational framework. And of course, a media production can become transnational (for example, when it becomes popular among international spectators and available internationally, after all), even if this was not the original intention for it. (2010: 14).

When looking at anime, various examples of 'marked' and 'unmarked' transnational productions can be found. For example, even if by only looking at Studio Ghibli's work, many

(trans)national intentions can be found, too. Some productions, such as, for example, *Arrietty (Kari-gurashi no Arietti*, dir: Hiromasa Yonebayashi, 2010, Japan) have been produced for an international audience and were meant to be transnational productions, whilst other (early) productions, such as *My Neighbour Totoro (Tonari no Totoro*, dir: Hayao Miyazaki, 1988, Japan),⁶ were originally focussed on a national audience and became transnational at a later stage. I agree with Mette Hjort that the term 'transnational film' has become a term that has been used in multiple contexts by various scholars over the past years. In that context, Hjort states that what is needed is a 'detailed typology' that links the concept of transnationalism to different models of cinematic production (2010: 15). According to Hjort, the more valuable forms of cinematic transnationalism feature two qualities, one being 'a resistance to globalisation as cultural homogenization' and the second being 'a commitment to ensuring that certain economic realities (associated with filmmaking) do not eclipse the pursuit of aesthetic, artistic, social, and political values' (Hjort 2010: 15). With the above in mind, Hjort explains and divides transnationalism into nine types of transnationalism, of which a few are relevant in consideration for own research. For example, according to Hjort, 'Ephiphanic transnationalism' brings the spectator a shared culture that may not be recognized as such by the audience, but in fact may resemble a deep national belonging whilst at the same time it overlaps with the aspects of other national identities - for example, a 'Nordic' production being a Swedish/ Danish cooperation or a 'Benelux' production being a Belgium and Dutch cooperation, and so on. This can result from cooperation for economic and cultural reasons, to pull common resources, to share shared interests, culture, identity, heritage or history, and/ or to make spectators aware of the issue of the transnational (2010: 16-17), which can be the case with international Japanese co-productions. For example, on May 9th, 2018 an agreement was

⁶ As pointed out by Hayao Miyazaki in his book *Starting point, 1979- 1996* (San Francisco: Studio Ghibli Inc., 1996).

signed between China and Japan to “fortify exchange of film-making associations between Japan and China and to expand efforts for co-production of films between them”. Expectations of this agreement are that it will contribute to promoting “mutual understanding between people in Japan and China by providing them with greater opportunities to enjoy jointly-produced films”.⁷ The cross-border film *Wish You Were Here* (dir: Kenneth Bi, 2018, China/Japan) was the first film that was produced after signing the China-Japan film co-production treaty, involving both a Chinese actress and a Japanese actor who in the film are falling in love and experiencing cultural differences and finding out together how to deal with these differences.

‘Affinitive’ transnationalism centres on ‘the tendency to communicate with those similar to us’ (2010: 17). In other words, it can be based on cultural similarities, but can also arise from shared problems or commitments as is the case, too, with *Wish You Were Here*. Relevant in the case of anime and Japan’s ‘Cool Japan’ scheme, which I will talk about in this thesis, is also ‘opportunistic transnationalism’. It involves, according to Hjort, ‘giving priority to economic issues, to the point where monetary factors actually dictate the selection of partners beyond national borders’ and is about ‘responding to available economic opportunities’ (2010: 19). Examples of *opportunistic transnationalism* are anime productions that have been produced in co-production with foreign studios. Often not considered anime, but certainly an early example, is the *Transformers* series running in the 80s and 90s (which were initially produced and often perceived as American, but in fact this already was an early co-production by using Japanese artists). This applied not only to *Transformers* at that time, but also the commonly known 80s series *Dungeons and Dragons* (dir: Bob Richardson/ Karl Geurs, 1983-1985), a co-production between the Japanese Toei Animation studios and the American Marvel Productions. More recently, *Afro Samurai: Resurrection* (dir. Fuminori Kizaki, 2009) has been produced. Targeted at an international

⁷ As described on the METI website (Japanese Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry).

audience it was produced in co-production with (among others) Samuel L. Jackson, by the Japanese Studio Gonzo and originally aired in English on the American television channel Spike. A lesser-known example of a French-Japanese co-production is the French-Canadian produced anime series *Urban* (dir. Joel Dos Reis Viegas, 2014), which has been produced by studio Yapiko Animation, an animation studio that works both in France and Japan, with both French and Japanese animation staff.

'Cosmopolitan transnationalism' applies to many anime productions as well; it is a description of productions that, on some level, reflect the movement of their director and include a mix of national, transnational or sometimes even postcolonial commitments (2010: 21). It can also be referred to as 'accented' cinema - cinema where the cultural background of its director is highly noticeable, which is often the case in, for example, Hayao Miyazaki's and Isao Takahata's work. Therefore, even if anime as a medium is sometimes 'stateless', as has often been discussed by scholars (Denison 2018:10), it can still be 'accented'. According to scholar Hamid Naficy (2010: 11), accented filmmakers are products of a 'postcolonial and post-Soviet displacement and postmodern scatterings'. Naficy explains that as a result of their displacement, they have become subjects in world history by making films that distance themselves from the 'mainstream'. They might not have the same resources as Hollywood productions to begin with, but still manage to become large independently, such as is the case with (early) anime, becoming an 'engine for creating transnational media cultures and national identities'. As Naficy states, accented films and/or filmmakers can become a homogeneous group or movement. He writes:

While their films include these tensions and differences, they are not neatly resolved by familiar narrative or generic schema. Nevertheless, their films do share certain common stylistic attributes in terms of patterns, uses of mise-en-scène, filming, narration, themes, characters and structures of feeling. These common

attributes also contribute to the accent, which signifies de-territorialization at the same time as it serves to re-territorialize them as film-making authors (2010: 11).

Going back to Mette Hjort's essay, as Japan is trying to strengthen economic and cultural relationships by using 'accented cinema', anime and popular media and gaining international recognition for its culture, her term 'Modernizing transnationalism' is also applicable to anime in particular. 'Modernizing transnationalism' refers to a medium that is used for the above purposes. Hjort uses the example of Hong Kong's government who have been attempting (since early 2000s) to boost the visibility, recognition and 'branding' of Hong Kong as a first-class city.. In cinema 'modernizing' transnationalism is a mix of 'cutting edge' cinematic practice, transnational in essence, 'with a concept of culture as a recourse for modernization and recognition' (2010: 25). What is clear is that the term 'transnationalism' is not a term to be 'just' applied to any film production that has been produced beyond its national boundaries or with a strong cultural accent. It is a term to be looked at with more depth and that comes, according to Hjort, in different forms for which the ones mentioned above are a good guideline. When it comes to anime, various types of Hjort's transnationalism can be applicable.

Soft power in relation to anime and Japan's (cultural) economy

In 2002, an article written by Douglas McGray called 'Japan's Gross National Cool' (2002 44-54) was published that had a major impact on the decision to expand Japan's 'soft power'. McGray pointed out that the Japanese cultural sway in 2001 was not like that of American culture abroad. However, he claimed that Japan had been perfecting the art of transmitting certain kinds of mass culture, but suggested that the Japanese government had not fully been looking (at that time) at Japan's cultural potential. The modern Japanese seemed to be interested and more inspired by 'what is foreign'. McGray argued that it was surprising how

little 'Japan' there was in modern Japan and that there was very little interest from foreign audiences in the Japanese culture abroad. It made the Japanese government realise that consumption could be deeply cultural and, in order to gain economic profit from this, the cultural economy needed to be stimulated; a perspective expressed by studies of economists that have examined the opportunities of focussing more on the culturalization of the economy (Kelts 2013). McGray claimed that a cultural superpower needs a healthy economic base, but not necessarily a healthy economy. The cultural industry in Japan was one that even with ongoing economic issues had not been sitting still at the time. As McGray himself argued, 'Japan's growing cultural presence has created a mighty engine of national cool'. He describes 'the national cool' as a soft power, and points out that this national cool can be used to serve political and economic ends'with the cultural reach of a superpower already in place, it's hard to imagine that Japan will be content to remain so much medium and so little message' (2002: 54). It was clearly a message received by the Japanese government, but the stage at which they decided to take definite action might have been rather late as these industries had peaked already. However, politics are now involved in cultural popular content. If Japan's culture will be up-scaled for a foreign audience, can it still be perceived as a truly independent Japanese product? Cultural economy in this case is not only the 'economies' of anime, but also the *politics* of anime. When hard power is no longer today's effective tool, it is soft power that is to be trusted when seeking to gain economic profit and establish political relationships. Japanese popular cultural content was already growing to be a soft power even before the government was involved to make this soft power more powerful. Now that politics are involved, can this development still be seen as a friendly way to get other countries to do what they want them to do, or is it just a desperate strategy to boost Japan's economy? And maybe even a modern form of manipulation?

In 1990 Joseph S. Nye Junior introduced the term and concept of 'soft power'. The term is a response to how, during recent decades, the nature of political and economic

power has been changing. Hard power can, for example, be military or economic actions that can get another country to change their position. Soft power is an indirect way for a country to get what they want, and to get others to want the same thing that they want (Nye 2004: 11). Nye describes soft power as simply an attraction; there are no commands, nor is any force involved, it is a way to create something friendly and attractive that makes others want to be involved. In 2012 Joseph Nye stated in *The Wall Street Journal* that when it comes to soft power, 'the best propaganda is in not propaganda' (Nye, 2012), meaning that working on your credibility as a country is more important. According to Nye, the soft power of a country is dependent on three sources: its culture, its political values and its foreign policies (2004: 11). To understand better what 'soft power' is in an Asian context, it is interesting to first look at an example of where soft power has flourished and has been, and still is, a great economic force. Naturally the first example (compared to Japan) that comes to mind is China. Both Japan and China established foreign and economic policies in order to 'push' their economy to a higher level. According to scholars Hongyi Lai and Yiyi Lu, China became the world's largest exporter in 2009 (2012: 1). Their book *China's Soft Power and International Relations* (2012) gives a thorough explanation about China as a global economic (soft) power. Most academics approach China's soft power from Joseph Nye's perspective. Lai and Lu argue that Chinese soft power mainly has been manifested in two aspects, one being China's foreign policy and international 'behaviour' and the other being the external influence of the Chinese model on the 'developing' world (2012: 21). One of the major tools for China to use its soft power in recent years is the unique Chinese culture. China has been creating opportunities and utilizing platforms for cultural exchange and has been actively promoting programs supporting the visibility of its culture, all with the aim to enhance China's soft power and portray China's 'peaceful' rise. China has been working on its cultural diplomacy and has been polishing its image worldwide. However, China's soft power scheme is still limited by its economic resources and, according to Lai, the defects in

its political system (2012: 83). Some governments (the United States and Japan in particular) are concerned by China's role and rivalry in the Asia Pacific and their negative human rights record. Many countries even see China (and the economic and military force of China) as a threat to the rest of the world: China's soft power is often seen as a 'bad' soft power. China, however, chooses to ease the discomfort by enhancing their image around the world, or as Lai states, the negative lesson also reminded the Chinese elites of the importance of soft power for 'cultivating a favourable image of China'. In the early 2000s China chose to enhance its worldwide image as a 'beautiful, peaceful and harmonious country [...] Demonstrating the virtues of the Chinese path of economic development; expanding its foreign assistance; and developing its own discourse in world affairs' (2012: 84).

How does this compare to Japan? At the moment the Japanese government too is focussing on the Japanese culture and Japanese cultural products as a source of soft power. A big part of that focus lies on anime (and manga), which is the main topic of this thesis. The government is even investing in this specific export market as they believe it is a source of soft power and therefore beneficial to the Japanese economy and for political relationships. The scheme set up by the Japanese government is also a plan to construct Japan's national identity in a beneficial way. Earlier in this literature review, I explained the meaning of *Nihonjinron*, nationalistic literature and texts that focuses on Japan's uniqueness and 'Japaneseness'. Even though *Nihonjinron* has been viewed at from a negative, nationalistic and even right wing perspective by academics, it is still a central and popular genre of writing on national identity in Japan and is deeply rooted in popular discourse (Burgess 2014). However, after Japan's defeat in World War II, nationalism was turned to a sideline and instead, Japan's new pacifist constitution flourished (Shad 2014). The concept of *Nihonjinron* never faded, but was far less popular then it was post World War II (2014). Since *Abenomics*, critics have pointed out that nationalism is making a return

to Japanese politics (ibid). And with that the *Nihonjinron* way of thinking is made its return in current politics as well; by promoting everything that 'makes Japan great and unique'. The difference is that this time instead of Japan being presented as a unique, but closed culture, politicians now choose to present Japan to outsiders as an open and welcoming, but still highly unique culture. Self-proclaimed to 'exceed' other countries on various levels (such as art, culture and therein, anime). Hence, the political slogan of Shinzo Abe is *rei-wa*, which reads in Japanese as 'beautiful Japan'. A slogan Abe also uses to promote his ideas or a constitutional revision (to restore a pre-war Japanese polity based on Emperor-worship) (anon. 2019b). It is also the vision Abe used for his book *Towards a Beautiful Country: My Vision For Japan* (Abe 2007), where he describes his pride for Japan, Japan's history and unique culture (ibid).

On another note, the way that Japan is trying to use soft power is similar to how China has been using soft power for years. Japan too has realised that they need to portray an attractive image of Japan as a valuable economic and political partner and as a culturally interesting country. A huge difference is that - even with Japan's wartime past - overall Japan is seen as more benign than China (by the West, mostly) in the current era, which makes the country better able to deploy its soft power than China to repair its international image (Chen 2014). China still engages in using hard power, too, which might explain why its soft power is viewed with distrust. Furthermore, there is a difference in how culture is being used as a soft power. Whilst Japan is using the Cool Japan scheme with a focus on popular culture, China has no equivalent and often still relies on Orientalism (Said 1978) (being 'the exotic other') and stereotypical Chinese culture such as martial arts or Chinese opera.

Nye argues that popular culture is more likely to attract people and to produce soft power in situations where cultures are similar (2004: 5), which also explains why Japanese

media exporters still see the Asian market as an economic priority and therefore mostly use this soft power to establish good relationships with other Asian countries. Although Japan's soft power involves the rest of the world as well, China and also other Asian countries in general are impressive examples of soft power. China's marketing strategies are successful in Africa and the U.S (Moss 2013), and South Korea's pop-culture is increasingly growing in popularity even outside of Asia; in 2013 South Korea raked in 5 billion dollars from pop-culture export products (Hong 2014). Therefore, it is no surprise that other (smaller) Asian countries closely try to economically follow Japan. According to Nye, Japan's personal income increased from 20% of the U.S. level in 1950 to 75% by the end of the century (2004: 84). Soft power, however, can eventually be an effective but long path to choose for a country whereas hard power offers a more effective and immediate resolution (Vyas 2011). So why does Japan choose the path of soft power? It is difficult to control the outcomes, but if there are any outcomes it is a relatively cheap way of establishing relationships on a friendly basis. A culturally attractive country, as Nye debates, is an important source of soft power (2004: 11). But the courses taken by the Japanese government in the past years do not come without the risk of failing. Taking this into consideration, current strategies might even arise out of desperation. It is important for the Japanese government to strengthen current relationships with other countries. According to Uptal Vyas (2011: 44), in China in 2003 41% of respondents to an internet poll felt few or no feelings of friendship at all towards Japan. The few (20%) that did feel close to Japan said it was because of Japan's fashion, manga and games. So, it seems Japan has an image to rebuild in relation to other Asian countries and using soft power is more a necessity than a commodity as popular culture seems the main thing that makes Japan attractive to other (Asian) countries. As Vyas suggests:

Due to East Asian countries' suspicion of Japan's motives since its attempts before the Second World War to carve out an empire from its neighbours, Japan has had to

be especially sensitive and patient in order to rebuild its image as a trustworthy partner in the region (2011: 59).

It seems that the Japanese government and industries have realised that the long-term effects of soft power are more beneficial for Japan's image and attraction in other countries.

Japanese popular culture is gaining more popularity, hence the fact that 20% of the earlier mentioned poll respondents that felt close to Japan feel that way because they like Japanese popular culture. I would argue that although Japan's popular culture is successful in Asian regions, Japan has also been growing beyond Asian markets. Intentionally or not, the use of soft power does not only involve Asia but over the past decades has been spreading through Europe and the United States as well, stimulating this spread of soft power thus means more economic success. The Japanese government is only now focussing on their cultural economic power, but the Japanese media has been a form of soft power for decades. It is therefore no surprise (rather, it is surprising is that the government had waited for so long) that there is political interest in using cultural popular products as a soft power.

Criticism of the concept of soft power

Nye's concept of soft power is a concept that has received criticism from some scholars. Paul Cammack, for example, argues that there are weaknesses in Nye's theory (Cammack 2008: 4-20). Focusing particularly on Nye's theory of soft power in regard to the United States, Cammack argues that Nye's research is based on assumptions rather than facts. He identifies certain limitations with the concept of soft power and argues that Nye's conclusions do not always apply to leading countries and states. The United States, for example, is seen by many other countries (such as Iraq and Palestine) as a source of the problems of war and financial crisis. Therefore, inspiring trust and using soft power to

rebuild or strengthen relationships with such countries will not work. Furthermore, he argues that 'Nye continues to concern himself with the question of how America should lead, taking it for granted that it must' and argues that the three resources that Nye describes as soft power (culture, political values and foreign policies) are unrealistic perspectives because they do not always apply (ibid: 6).

Cammack's critique of Nye's theory is more applicable to the United States than to other countries. However, Hongyi Lai and Yiyi Lu, who focus on soft power in China, criticize Nye's theory as well, one example being Nye's belief in the importance of improving international bonds and support for a nation's foreign policy, and creating or maintaining a positive image of that nation. This can be in culture, values or how 'appealing' a country is, too. Lai and Lu are of the opinion that Nye's listed 'sources' of attraction are too limited and miss the most important ones when speaking about the United States, but even more so when speaking about China. Arguably, it is likely that China and the USA exert influence not just because of their soft power, but because of their hard power, too. As Lai and Lu point out, 'hard' power is particularly pertinent in East Asia and, though being in lesser form, in South- East Asia (Lai and Lu, 2012: 5). From an economic perspective, American culture is still one of the most influential cultures around the world (considering that it is a culture). Food, media, and music are all successful internationally and are the sources of soft power for the United States.

Cammack's views of course do oversee a broader perspective as he continues to argue that America's demand to lead becomes the central problem, and an obstacle to the development of a constructive international agenda (2008: 15). Therefore, the use of soft power in international relations is something that is not always possible or applicable and the theory that divides soft power and hard power according to Cammack is one that has many flaws. Cammack's critique applies mostly to the 'soft power theory' in regards to the

US, and Lu and Lai's critique of China's soft power, but when looking at the concept of soft power in relation to the 'Cool Japan Fund' set up by the Japanese government to use Japan's soft power as an economic weapon, it is a scheme that is receiving criticism as well. Critics question whether it is really necessary to use tax money and invest in private companies and if eventually these companies will really help Japan to expand their economic power and growth (Rochan 2013). Some artists are criticising the concept, too. For example, artist Takashi Murakami, who is an internationally well-known Japanese painter, designer and director, was already criticising the concept in 2012 and states that he and many other artists have no connection to the Cool Japan Fund whatsoever. Murakami believes that the scheme was only set up to gain profit and that it exploits the work of Japanese artists (Sherman 2012).

Looking at Nye's concept of soft power in relation to Japan, scholars such as Yoshiko Nakano and Anne Allison provide an example of academic critics of the concept. In *Soft Power Superpowers: Cultural and National Assets of Japan and the U.S.*, they debate Nye's concept of soft power in relation to Japan and question whether Japanese cultural products such as anime are indeed representatives of Japan's national identity. They both argue that these cultural products do not map as closely with the government in Japan as soft power does in America and, therefore, Japan's soft power is limited (Allison 2008: 99-110), (Nakano 2008: 111-127)

The representation and international trademark of 'Japaneseness' in popular culture

In world cinema, not only anime but also Japanese live action film has made its mark on an international level and has engaged foreigners with Japan's cultural identity. To make a comparison with the influence of anime in modern times, and its use as a 'soft power', being branded part of Japan's culture, it is worth to first look at the role of Japanese live-action

film and its international influence. Films in the 50s and 60s such as *Seven Samurai* (*Shichinin no samurai*, dir: Akira Kurosawa, Japan, 1954) *Godzilla* (*Gojira*, dir: Ishirō Honda, Japan, 1954) and *Tokyo Story* (*Tōkyō monogatari*, dir: Yasujirō Ozu, 1953) until this day still influence contemporary filmmakers both in Japan and abroad. In his essay 'Consuming Asia: Chinese and Japanese Popular Culture and the American Imaginary' (2003), David Desser also describes how anime and Japanese live action films are not only increasingly widely available in the United States, but are also a source of influence for Hollywood filmmakers. For example, *Gojira* has been tremendously popular since its original release in 1954. It was re-fashioned and Americanized to the film *Godzilla: King of the Monsters!* (dir: Terry Morse, Ishirō Honda, USA/Japan) in 1956, which is when *Gojira* first became *Godzilla*. It has been released to a new Hollywood version in 1998 and in 2014 a new Hollywood remake was released. A new Hollywood Godzilla film, a sequel to the 2014 film, has recently been produced and a further follow-up featuring Godzilla alongside King Kong for 2020 release is currently in the making. The Godzilla movies are in fact the oldest and longest running Japanese film series in film cinema today (Tsutsui 2006: 2). Godzilla is a widely known example of a famous movie (character) that is known as being 'typically Japanese'. The first Godzilla film was directed by one of Kurosawa's protégés Ishirō Honda. It was the first Japanese film that was dubbed into English (Desser 2003: 182) for U.S. distribution. Godzilla The Godzilla movies are a precursor to contemporary soft power and have invaded Western culture, nowadays being a commonly known character and even adopted as a reference in the American (but internationally used) word 'bridezilla'.⁸ Godzilla as a character has been the star of many Japanese film versions as well as American adaptations and remakes of the films. Every couple of years, Godzilla re-occurs again in a new movie, which

⁸ In fact, it has become an accepted English slang used in many situations and most commonly referring to a monstrous, aggressive and overly eager 'something' such as shopzilla, momzilla or promzilla. It can be a suffix to a brand name as well, in which case it is referring to something big, powerful and great (Tsutsui, 2005).

makes Godzilla the most accepted and famous (non- traditional) *yokai* monster (a collective name for monsters and supernatural beings that are known in Japan) of Japan in the world.

According to Yuki Miyamoto, Godzilla's popularity in Japan was exceptional to begin with (Miyamoto 2016: 1086). Miyamoto states that the original movie Gojira attracted 9,610,000 viewers to the movie theatre whilst the total population of Japan the time was 88,240,000, meaning that over ten percent of the entire population saw the film at the theatre. In 2004, 28 Godzilla movies had already been produced by Japanese production company Tōhō, attracting 99,200,000 viewers in fifty years time (whilst the population of Japan was approximately 105,000,000) making Godzilla, as Miyamoto describes, an international icon (2016: 1986). When placing Godzilla alongside the ways that anime has been portrayed and understood in the West, what they have in common is that, just like 'zilla', the word anime as an abbreviation for Japanese animation has made its mark as a noun for the style of Japanese cartoons. In a wider sense, even though (like Godzilla) being of Japanese origin, anime has become a commonly known and accepted 'product' of Japan stimulating common cross-cultural interests of and co operations of both fans and companies.

Desser points out that in recent years other popular cultures are also growing as a form of soft power (2003: 179-180). Even though other markets are not really rivals of the United States, it is no longer merely the United States that is dominating international export markets with popular cultural products. Within this context Desser describes the influential power of anime, manga and the expanding spread of Japanese media and Japanese cultural products (ibid). Japan's soft power thus is not something new, and is not only to be found within the cultural products that we can identify as being exclusively Japanese. Of particular significance to this debate is the question of 'Japaneseness'. When considering anime (where race and background are not necessarily recognisable but

regardless, anime is being seen as Japanese by worldwide audiences), anime has a separate 'identity' and 'look' from all other forms of media: so, what is 'Japaneseness'? And when does something become or stay 'Japanese'? To explore the topic of 'Japaneseness' in the context of Japanese anime, media and film, one can look at different views and texts on Japanese live action film to begin with. For example, the live action films from the Japanese film director and screenwriter Akira Kurosawa are often a point of discussion when speaking about the topic of 'Japaneseness'. Film scholar Mitsuhiro Yoshimoto explains that one of the 'legacies' of criticism on 1950s and 1960s Japanese cinema is the use of the 'national character' (2000: 10), which has become a 'determinate factor' in analysis and interpretations of Japanese cinema. Yoshimoto explains that it has led to stereotypes of the Japanese national character and culture. Moreover, this view has been used by many journalists and scholars to 'explain' Japanese films in culture, context and backgrounds, or as Yoshimoto puts it; 'Many sweeping statements on Japanese culture are made without any consideration for its relationship to social practices and history' (2000: 11). As with the works of Akira Kurosawa, in many other Japanese live action films as well as (modern) anime, 'Japaneseness' - in this context being a reference to the presence of Japanese tradition, culture and aesthetic - is often simply assumed without, according to Yoshimoto, any critical analysis of that aesthetic (2000: 11).

As Yoshimoto argues, too, it is difficult to determine where exactly the 'image' of the Japanese national character came from. In his chapter 'Japanese Cinema in Search of a Discipline', Yoshimoto explores various scholars (such as *Scott Nygren*) and points out that the danger of using the term 'Japaneseness' is that it can be full of stereotypes and clichés about Japan. He states:

[...]When what is articulated as Japanese "reality" is only a stereotype or cliché constructed by the "Western" reader from the very beginning, how can cross-cultural analysis take place as an event? (Yoshimoto 2000: 11).

One can say that Japaneseness is, on the one hand, the constructed view of what a non-Japanese audience 'think' is typically Japanese, influenced by stereotypes, (popular) culture, hypes, media, history and currently, the Japanese government with 'Cool Japan'.

Conclusion of literature review

As a conclusion to this literature review, I argue that with the rise of anime and the 'use' of anime and anime markets as an economic tool, the Japanization of Asia and the rest of the world have become a political and economic focus point. The course of these recent developments along with the transnational aspects of anime are interesting subjects to research. Japan's way of using soft power is bold (and might be compared to America's soft power but is in many ways significantly different, as I will explain later on in this thesis). Japan's cultural economy is highly dependent on gaining interest from foreigners who are willing to investigate another culture. On top of that, Japan needs to reshape and explore interest from neighbours within Asia too. Neighbours who have more in common, but as economists say, have much more potential as a cultural export market than they have been until now. The government is meddling in what once was seen as an independent market which is also partially what made Japanese cultural content so attractive to foreigners. On that note, scholars such as Amy Shirong Lu still question whether anime indeed (still) is an example of the Japanese cultural and national Identity (Lu 2008: 169-187). Taking these findings into consideration, the following chapters proceed as follows. In chapter 2, 'Anime as a Japanese cultural product and a (trans)national medium'; I explore if and why anime can be seen as a Japanese cultural product and a (trans)national medium. The chapter explores whether and how anime (as a part of Japanese popular culture) is of influence on

economic, political and sociological levels and how the government has been trying to economically stimulate anime and improve international relationships. Chapter 3, 'The cultural and economic influence of Studio Ghibli', explores whether films that are distinctly national can cause a difference in the perception of the films. In this chapter, I explore the meaning behind the Studio Ghibli films of, foremost, director Hayao Miyazaki, and discuss in what way tradition, religion and culture make these transnational films national in their context. This chapter incorporates the theoretical framework of Mjette Hjort, Stephen Crofts and Andrew Higson. As part of this national identity, I have researched the use and influence of Shinto religion and ideology, which includes references to nature and environmentalism. Chapter 4, 'Neo-nationalism and Pacifism in anime', explores how neo-nationalism and pacifism play a role in anime and interrogates the role of anime in contemporary Japan, placing anime in the context of national memories, traumas and ideologies: investigating debates surrounding anime as a subject of public and political debate. Chapter 5, 'Anime fandom and subculture in the West', focuses on the commercialisation of anime by looking at the subcultures that have derived from anime from a Dutch perspective. This chapter explores anime further as a (sub)cultural phenomenon and explains the attractiveness of anime subculture and conventions, and explores until what extent this is a form of soft power. Furthermore, it explores the globalisation of anime as a common international interest.

Chapter 2. Anime as a Japanese cultural product and a (trans)national medium

Andrew Higson argues that national identity is about the experience of belonging to a community; being raised or immersed in the traditions, rituals and the characteristic cultural values of the community (2006: 15-25). I argue that perceived identities (the identity as interpreted and regarded through the eyes of foreigners)⁹ can also become an accepted part of the national (and thus cultural) identity over time.¹⁰ Furthermore, modern culture has become intertwined with Japan's ancient culture and has therefore also become part of Japan's cultural and national identity. This means that both cultural and national identity can be subject to change. The national and cultural symbols in many anime productions make the films national rather than transnational. Anime can be an example of national cinema. Anime often operates on a transnational basis in terms of its distribution and reception. When films travel, there is a likelihood that audiences will receive them in a different cultural context. The meanings that the things that audiences read into a film, according to Higson, are heavily dependent on the cultural context in which they are being viewed (ibid: 19). Distributing anime as 'Japanese cultural product' might, therefore, not necessarily be an accurate introduction or familiarisation with the Japanese culture for a foreign audience. On that note, I argue that not only the *national and cultural* identity but also the *perceived* identity is constantly subject to change.

As also pointed out by scholar Benedict Anderson, nation, nationality and nationalism are all terms that are difficult to define or analyze (2016: 3). Anderson suggests that

⁹ 'Perceived' identity is the identity as interpreted and regarded through the eyes of foreigners, and can over time have been assigned to a community regardless if this is in line with reality.

¹⁰ I refer to the term 'cultural identity' meaning Japan's culture as a whole, describing Japan's collective culture and how foreigners perceive this culture. However, scholarly, economically or politically, there is no definitive meaning attached to the concept of culture and cultural identity.

'nationality' or 'nation-ness', as well as nationalism are cultural artefacts of a particular kind (ibid: 4). In order to understand them, it is important to look at how they have come into historical being and how history has changed these terms over time (ibid: 4). I would also like to add to Anderson's point of view that these terms are also subject to change depending on which nation, culture, region or country they are applied to and how foreigners as well as domestic citizens perceive an identity or culture. Anderson also proposes the term 'imagined' (political) community, meaning that the members of certain nations in most cases will never know or meet each other: yet in their mind, they are alike, share the same image of their community and perceive themselves and their fellow members as one shared community (ibid: 6). There is a deep, horizontal comradeship between its members, these communities are 'imagined' as sovereign, and are distinguished by the style in which they are imagined (ibid: 6-7). Thus, the term imagined community, when looking at modern Japan specifically, is the more appropriate meaning of national identity, as Japan's notion of nationhood is highly depended on political, economic and historical references (regardless of whether this history is correct).

A nation is thus something that has been invented by individuals and can arise in all forms and sizes, having in common that they involve or refer to communities sharing the same cultural and/or historical background. When looking at earlier historical periods, Japan was perceived as 'the exotic other' in the West. Oriental artwork of (East) Asia, Asian food and fashion were a part of the global image of Asia as a whole. In more modern times Japan has become famous for its technological and automotive industry: Orientalism still plays a huge role in the perception of Japan and no longer necessarily refers to Japanese artefacts, cuisine and traditional music or theatre.¹¹

¹¹ Orientalism is a term that scholar Edward Said used as reference when discussing the culture of East Asia (China, Japan, North Korea, South Korea, Mongolia and Taiwan) (Said, Edward, 1978).

Nowadays it is also Japan's popular culture that comes to mind when thinking about Japan. Anime in particular has become an important part and a vessel to portray the national identity of Japan on a global scale.¹² With the international distribution of Osamu Tezuka's *Astro Boy* (*Tetsuwan Atomu*, Japan, 1963) many international audiences were introduced to anime, which became a popular type of entertainment and for many, even the first contact with Japanese culture (Daliot-Bul and Otmazgin 2017: 9). The Japanese government seems to have embraced indigenous popular culture as a part of Japan's cultural and national identity. We perceive products of popular Japanese culture, such as anime, as being directly related to Japan's identity and culture. However, the question is whether these products can indeed be labelled as being 'truly Japanese', or whether they are just representations of how (political) Japan wishes to represent itself internationally, as popular culture has become the most significant part of Japan's major growth strategy. In the process of boosting Japan's image through 'Cool Japan', Japan's Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and technology embraced popular culture and officially recognised anime and manga as a part of their high arts culture, which includes traditional tea ceremonies, sumo wrestling, and Kabuki theatre (Choo 2013: 218). The Japanese government recognises that these products are not only important for their economy but also can improve the international image of Japan (ibid: 219).

What happens when anime travels as a product? Abenomics and Cool Japan

Media such as anime, manga and games are gaining economic profit and are growing in popularity. For many years the Japanese government did not focus on these new developments in popular culture and did not acknowledge or focus on these products as a form of soft power. From the 1990s, anime broadcasting rights were sold around the globe on a large scale, with the United States being one of the largest buyers (Daliot-Bul and

¹² According to scholars, for example Kumiko Saito in the essay 'Regionalism in the Era of Neo-Nationals' (2013).

Otmazgin 2017: xii). Not only does anime travel in the sense of distribution and worldwide markets, but the role of fans and the internet play a huge role as well: the internet has become one of the most important platforms for anime fans around the globe to interact and collaborate with each other. What is also noticeable is that cartoons and animated films nowadays are often influenced by (the Japanese way of drawing) anime characters. Fan gatherings such as anime-cons and comic-cons and sales of merchandise play a huge role in terms of anime as an economic product, and being 'adopted' as a subculture by other countries.

The Japanese economy has faced major challenges and ups and downs in the past decades. The 90s and early 2000s in particular saw an economic downturn and Japan has been facing major economic difficulties. Since the 50s Japan's economy had been rapidly growing. Japan was a massive exporter of products such as consumer electronics which contributed to the economy. From the 70s until the late 80s Japan was economically stable, and its economy was growing (albeit less rapidly than in earlier years) an average 3.9 percent in Gross Domestic Product¹³ (Saxonhouse and Stern 2004: 1-2). In the late 80s Japan was involved in an economic boom referred to as the 'Bubble economy', amongst which cheap capital and financial deregulation contributed to inflation of land and stock prices (Bell and McNeill 1999: 763). This economic bubble lasted from 1986 to 1991. From 1989 onwards, Japan's GDP started to decline dramatically, and Japan's bubble finally came to burst in 1991, leading to recession and slow or even no economic growth (Wood 2006: 5). The Japanese stock market collapsed, and share prices dropped to less than half their value, leading banks, credit unions and estate companies into debt (Bell and McNeill 1999: 763).¹⁴ The economy went into recession from which it is still trying to recover to this day.

¹³ GDP: The market value of goods and services within a country. A rising GDP indicates a higher standard of living, the lower the GDP is, the lower the standard of living is in a country.

¹⁴ The two decades following after that are referred to as the 'lost decades' of Japan.

Arguments about what might have caused the recession involve structural problems: banking sector issues, improper monetary policies, high interest rates and cultural factors (Callen and Ostry 2003). One of the important factors within Japan's economic problems are that its economy was characterized by a broad supply of products but a lack of domestic demand (Koo 2009: 3). Profits had to derive mostly from Japan's foreign export markets and needed to be expanded and successful in order for Japan to be economically stable (2009: 5).

This is exactly where the relation of anime to Japan's current economic status comes in. Anime is no longer just 'animation', it is no longer just a form of media created for the enjoyment of its spectators. Anime has become an economic force, a cultural product and an economic necessity chosen as one of the cultural products to improve Japan's economic status. Now that the Japanese government is aiming to boost the economy in a more unconventional way, the manner in which the economic export markets were once shaped has changed. Auto and electronics industries used to be the main source of economic power for Japan but have become victims of competition and rivalry from industries in other countries (Nagata 2012). Where once the emphasis was on technological industries and investing in the USA as an export market, it now relies more on culture and investing in foreign export markets, which makes the future of the Japanese economy very uncertain. Anime is a major source of income, one of the many reasons for its cultural interest. However, the sales of anime are no longer rapidly growing either. Therefore, the Japanese government attempted to boost the acceptance of, and the familiarity with the Japanese cultural content in other countries. Not only are these attempts focussed on a cultural level where individuals develop an interest in Japan, but they are also focussed on increasing the economic status of Japan. Interest in Japan by individual people means more tourism and more sales of Japanese export products. Furthermore, cultural attractiveness helps in establishing both economic and cultural relationships with Western countries and

corporations (for example, media-corporations that work together to gain profit such as Studio Ghibli and Disney).

Paul du Gay and Michael Pryke discuss the context and meaning of a cultural economy; the relation between cultural and economic outcomes. According to them, an organisation which pays attention to its culture will have employees who will be keener to contribute to the success of the organisation they work for (Du Gay and Pryke 2002: 97-98). On a bigger scale, this is exactly what the Japanese government has been doing: focussing on the Japanese culture as an economic power mobilised by Japanese investors, expecting to have foreign countries be willing to contribute on an economic level too. Koichi Iwabuchi discusses this scenario as well and points out that the spread of Japanese cultural products in the world is reflecting the fact that Japanese media industries and cultural forms are playing a substantial role in global cultural flows (2002: 24). According to an article in *The Japan Times* (Nagata 2012), the main reason for specifically promoting anime as a cultural product is because the global expansion of anime has been scattershot and disorganised, which means that Japan had missed out on merchandising opportunities abroad. It argues:

Even if foreigners find Japan's cultural goods attractive, if they aren't supported by a platform in the target market the business opportunity will go down the drain, just like fashion did in China (Nagata 2012)

Japanese Prime Minister Shinzō Abe's strategy and its third arrow¹⁵ (which involves using popular culture as a soft power), in particular, have been facing a lot of criticism since they have been implemented. The Japanese government is trying to encourage larger companies to invest more in the Japanese economy and the anime industry. But economists argue that

¹⁵ The three arrows are 1) aggressive monetary policy, 2) flexible fiscal policy and 3) growth strategy (According to the report 'Abenomics', published by the Government of Japan in May 2017).

Japan is already investing too much as it is.¹⁶ In the past 20 years Japan has been investing more than any other G5 country,¹⁷ which has led to a slow growth of their Gross Domestic Product and a poor return on capital.¹⁸ Investing even more, economists say, is a plan set out to fail (Smithers 2014). When the economy began to deteriorate in the early '90s, the Japanese government also tried fiscal stimulus in order to boost the economy. The effects of it had been successful at first, but were only temporary and resulted in a large national debt (Koo 2009: 25). Even though fiscal stimulus did prevent Japan's GDP from decreasing even more (which therefore protected the nation's standard of living at the time) (ibid: 26), it is not an ideal solution to truly improve an economy and its industries, on which the economy is dependent. Another point of critique is that 'Abenomics' tackles the symptoms but not the causes of the problems with Japan's economy.¹⁹ For example, and as pointed out by William Pesek (2014: 172-173), if the Japanese government wants to enhance Japan's soft power and improve foreign export markets, they should firstly improve relations with their direct neighbours. Japanese politicians still avoid public acknowledgement of the country's wartime past, partly to remain in good relationships with the United States. Japan's true imperial aggression of the past within Asia is still being ignored and undermined, and has therefore offended neighbouring countries. Japan wishes to form deals to establish more market access for Japan, and therefore seeks free trade accords with major economies as part of their strategy to gain economic growth.²⁰ Trying to stimulate Japan's economy and soft

¹⁶ Such as; Andrew Smithers in his report for the Financial Times. 'Why Japan Invests too much', March 20th, 2014.

¹⁷ United States, United Kingdom, Japan, Germany and France.

¹⁸ Return on capital: a return from investments that are not considered income, so when the investment is paid back, it decreases the value of the investment.

¹⁹ Abenomics is the term commonly used by journalists to refer to the economic policies of Japan's prime minister Shinzō Abe.

²⁰ 'Japan, EU to seek early trade deal, cybersecurity corporation', *The Japan Times*, May 8th, 2014.

power to boost foreign export markets is not a solution if relationships with the countries subjective to the economic growth plan are not improved firstly.

The current status of popular Japanese cultural products

Part of Japan's strategy is to stimulate Japan's soft power in order to grow economically, and therefore the government has formed the 'Cool Japan Fund' and has been trying to financially stimulate Japanese cultural goods as a soft economic power as the anime industry plays a significant role in this scheme. This is a bold choice, because the anime industry has not exactly escaped recession either. Current debates by both economists and anime creators demonstrate the fears and worries one might have about the future perspectives and consequences of the Cool Japan Fund. My question is: why did the Japanese government choose to invest so much in anime when the anime market has seemingly already peaked? The Cool Japan Fund is a huge part of Abe's new growth strategy, aimed to use Japan's popular cultural products as a soft power, entrusting the economy to thrive and rely on international export markets and the growing popularity of Japanese products.

Japanese anime, videogames, music, food and fashion have all been popular Japanese cultural products in the past decades. Not only are these products well received in Asia, but also in Europe and the United States (Iwabuchi 2002: 1). Since the late 1980s Japan's global cultural market started to attract more international academic and media attention (ibid: 23). Japanese media such as anime and computer games rapidly started to grow in popularity and anime became one of the symbols of Japanese culture (Nagata 2013). In 1988 about 80 percent of Japanese studio releases were animated, in 1999 approximately half of all releases from Japanese studio releases were animated (Corliss, 1999: 49). Japan has been known for its cultural products, but due to the growing popularity of anime and video games in the 90s these products especially became part of

international export markets and thus became a significant part of global cultural economy. Anime and video games are examples of how mass-distributed pop culture can become effective tools for the economy (Choo 2013: 213). Even though the economic position of popular Japanese content is big, anime creators in Japan have been struggling. The Japan Times reported in May 2012 that the anime industry was at a peak in overseas sales in 2006 with approximately 161 million dollars, going down to approximately 90 million dollars in 2010 (Nagata 2012). Anime at that time was turning into a less profitable export product, and the future economic status of anime and anime-related products did not look promising (Martin 2009). Even though the anime fan base was increasing, the industry was no longer translating into profits. The anime market was stuck in a so-called 'animation bubble'. Looking at overseas DVD sales in isolation, the anime market merely raised 8.55 billion Yen in 2011, almost half of overseas sales in 2006 (Nagata 2013). Reasons for the decreasing sales in the West include the growing popularity of illegally downloading content online via video sharing sites and growing on-demand services, but are also to be found in a changing audience and a lack of mainstream acceptability combined with expensive title licenses (Martin 2009). Anime creators in recent years have expressed their concerns, with the recession having a negative effect on their industry, resulting in agencies downsizing or even going bankrupt. The quality of anime has been decreasing too with the recession eating away at production fees and new productions in return being focussed on profits and mass production rather than quality (ibid.). When Shinzō Abe announced the Cool Japan Fund, it seemed good news for the anime-industry along with other popular cultural industries such as music, video games and fashion. The government would now be officially investing in the industry to thrive again and to function as one of the economic ambassadors of Japanese culture, boosting Japan's image and to opening up foreign export markets. Fiscally stimulating anime as a part of Japan's cultural export market would, according to Prime Minister Abe, help to increase productions, create jobs and be financially beneficial for

the industry, the people involved and Japan's economy. But will there be any effects of bureaucracy on anime? Now that the government is involved and sees anime a serious economic vessel to enhance international strategies, strengthen bonds and boost the economy, both economists and scholars argue whether or not the government's influence will have an effect on future anime productions and anime related products.²¹ Many initiatives have been conducted by the state and the prime minister's cabinet to boost the sector from organizations such as MOFA, METI, The Japan Foundation and the Agency of Cultural Affairs (Daliot-Bul and Otmazgin 2017: 147). The government supports cultural and media industries on a broad variety of levels such as education, technology, employability and also on sharpening distribution and copy write laws to protect the industry: when Japan's content industries became part of a national economic strategy, the Japanese government also decided to tackle copyright violation. The problem here is that instead of being a helpful solution, this became in fact a discouragement for Japanese anime studios to expand internationally (ibid: 147).

Asian export markets: History related challenges in the distribution of anime

Since the Second World War, Japan's relationship with other Asian countries has been sensitive. Japan was defeated and occupied by Western forces in 1945, and was forced to withdraw from China, Taiwan and Korea. During the cold war, Japan established political and economic relationships with the United States and was discouraged from establishing relationships with communist countries (China and the USSR). As a result of the post-war occupation of Japan by the USA, the USA became their most important trading partner, and Japan did not have diplomatic relationships with China until 1972 (Vyas 2011: 66). History-related issues and Japan's brutal actions towards other Asian countries during the war still play a significant role in Japan's relationship with other Asian countries. In the 1990s

²¹ See, for example Michal Daliot-Bul and Nisum Otmazgin (2017).

Japanese media industries already realised the Asian market was significant and marketing strategies were in order (Iwabuchi 2002: 89). The Asian audiovisual market was booming at the time and created a good platform for Japanese export of music and television programmes.

The influence of Japanese popular culture in East and Southeast Asia in particular cannot be denied. However, when leaders of economically significant countries are not able to discuss past issues that stand in their way, or to come to political and economic agreements, setting up a trade agreement and realising a plan to utilise soft power will be difficult. Even if governments are on good terms, individuals still might be reluctant to buy Japanese products. The younger generation in Asia seems less resistant to Japanese products as the export of Japanese Media products had drastically increased in the 1990s (Japanese media was banned in Taiwan and Korea shortly before that). But the Japanese media industries were discouraged from exporting products to Asian countries due their past legacy of Japanese Imperialism (Iwabuchi 2002: 86). Abe's plans, his so called 'Abenomics' and by extension the Cool Japan Fund, are not only focussed on Western countries but also on improving relationships with Asian countries and expanding Asian export markets. Abe wishes to remove existing boundaries and open up the both Asian and Western export markets. A significant part of that is the Cool Japan fund.

In 1978, China and Japan signed 'The Treaty of Peace and Friendship between Japan and the People's Republic of China', in which all political war time issues were waived (Vyas 2011: 72). But in this ongoing process in which the Japanese government is trying to improve political and economic relationships, Asian leaders are still not eager to discuss past issues (and how these issues still affect the economy). Not discussing these historical events, to other Asian countries, is insulting and similar to Japan not acknowledging what

has happened in the past at all. It is doubtful whether, by continuing this way, Japan will be able to overcome these past economic and political issues towards the rest of Asia.

When one takes China's relative prices of goods and services into account, in principle China has a larger economy than Japan. When comparing Japan's economy with China's in terms of dollars, for a long time Japan was the second largest economy in the world (Vyas 2013: 64). There is, however, a difference between Japanese export markets in Asia and the rest of the world. Firstly, Japanese export markets in other parts of Asia seem less restricted in the understanding of and access to Japanese culture because they include a broader variety of products such as music, TV dramas and fashion (Iwabuchi 2002: 33). Therefore, Japan's cultural presence is more clearly manifested in Asia itself compared to Japanese transnational cultural power in the West. Secondly, when looking at China, for example, a different approach is required in order to establish economic successes in Asia. Japan's past wartime aggression after the Second World War plays a huge role in Japan's cultural and economic image in the rest of Asia. In recent years, the lack of good relations between Japan and China has caused the suspension of official contracts over extended periods of time (Vyas 2013: 5). Japan has rebuilt, and still is rebuilding, an image since the Second World War and even in this day and age on a political level these countries seem suspicious of each other.

Many scholars (such as Iwabuchi, Wood, Koo) focus on the economic side effects of Japan's past aggression against other countries. It is more valuable to look at the shifts, changes and their effects on Asian export markets in recent years. We have to take into consideration that popular culture spreads through East Asian countries (amongst which are South Korea and China) regardless of the wartime aggression in the past (Vyas 2013: 61). Popular culture was a soft power even before Japan's newly established foreign policies (that are focussed on enhancing soft power). An explanation for this might be that the

younger generation is letting go of, or even forgetting about, the past, whilst the older generation still holds certain reservations about accepting Japanese goods. Since popular culture is booming and mainly focussed on the younger generation, a shift in the economy on a more sensible level is inevitable. Both the Japanese government and Japanese private institutions are focussed on building up a well-respected identity and national brands in other parts of Asia, and in recent years has established various organisations to achieve this goal. Examples are the Japan Foundation, which started out as a governmental organisation established to promote Japanese culture and spread Japanese influence worldwide. It was an initiative of, at the time, US President Richard Nixon and the Japanese Prime Minister Eisaku Satō in 1972. The original intentions of the Foundation were to improve the relationship between the USA and Japan - to avoid communication gaps and cultural misunderstandings (2013: 80). Another example is the 'NGO' (a non-governmental organisation which too has been established to promote relations between the two countries) the Japan China Friendship Association in China, which operates on an international level with transnational actors (2013: 130).

So, what has the Japanese government already achieved with its new policy? In the second quarter of 2014 it was reported by the Japanese Finance Ministry that Japan's export markets rose by 10.8% to approximately 70.8 trillion yen (690.5 million dollars) compared to 2013 (The Japan Times 2014). The import of products rose by 17.3%, approximately 84.6 trillion Yen (825 billion dollars). By June 2014, European investors already placed €3.1 billion in Japan-focussed funds within the first three months of that year, following a €13.6 billion investment in 2013 (Marriage 2014). Since the Cool Japan Fund has been established in 2013, it has been reported only one year later that business confidence among large manufactures rose by March 2014 (Anon 2014b). However, other reports on confidence among Japanese citizens and economists in that same 'follow up' year report quite the opposite feeling towards Japan's new growth strategy. How new and promising that strategy

really was, was questionable as it is based on policies that have been implemented before, as William Pesek has also argued:

For all the buzz about status-quo-shaking reforms, bold ideas, and a revolution in competitiveness, Abenomics sure look a lot like what Japan has been doing for 20 years now - just on a bigger scale and with a splashier marketing campaign (2014: 186).

It seems that the economic policies indeed have a positive effect on exports and thus the economy. But in the long term, similar policies in the past did not work as predicted, which means that it is difficult to predict a positive or negative outcome of the policies implemented since Abe's second term as a Prime Minister of Japan.

The Japanese government has been taking various actions to enhance anime's profile. An important decision that has been made in 2000 is that the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT; who administrate the cultural promotion of Japanese products) officially recognised anime and manga as part of Japan's high-art culture (Choo 2013: 218). It is questionable whether this decision has been made with economic profits in mind or if this step has been taken genuinely because the government and MEXT feel that anime can no longer be denied as being part of Japan's national identity and cultural heritage. Furthermore, in recent years METI has launched various projects to put anime in the limelight. The government has invested directly into the industry and launched events and marketing campaigns to boost the popularity of anime overseas. According to Kazuaki Nagata in *The Japan Times*, by 2011 METI in Japan already sponsored 13 Cool Japan projects in the United States, France, China, South Korea, Singapore, Brazil, Italy and India (Nagata 2012). The overall goal of these projects is to promote Japanese creative industries abroad. Although the focus lays on Asia, other countries are surely a huge part of this scheme too. In March 2014 according to *The Japan Times*, a huge B2B event 'Tokyo

Big Sight' took place to bring together domestic and overseas players in the market. And in July 2014 the Japanese government launched a major campaign to prevent illegal downloading and illegal online viewings (mainly in China) of copyrighted anime and manga (Kelts 2014). These are just a few examples among the many efforts the Japanese government is making to make anime an economically attractive product.

With the government's involvement, anime creators express their concerns. For example, anime creator Hayao Miyazaki has expressed his concerns about the future of anime, now that the NHK (Nippon Hoso Kyokai, Japan Broadcasting Corporation) and the government interfere with their work.²² An anonymous veteran Japanese movie producer who spoke to TIME expresses his cynicism too, stating that the investments will only be funnelled away to big advertisement companies but will not reach the actual anime creators (Kelts 2014). In 2018, The Japan Times reported that the anime-industry was in the middle of a boom, attracting new players such as Netflix, on which platform popular anime is now available for streaming (Schley: 2018). Anime production companies are even receiving funding from a foundation set up by Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (Manga Productions). Additionally, many companies (such as Japanese electronic commerce giant DMM (DMM Pictures) are investing in anime and popular culture. According to The Japan Times, several major sectors of the market (including streaming, international and box office) were on their highest peak ever in 2016.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have argued that anime can be seen as a Japanese cultural product and a (trans)national medium. By looking at ideas from Andrew Higson and Benedict Anderson, I have explained that national identity is about the experience of belonging to a community and argued that perceived and 'imagined' identities can also become an accepted part of the

²² In the documentary *The Kingdom of Dreams and Madness*, Studio Ghibli, 2013.

national (and thus cultural) identity over time. Both cultural and national identity can be subject to change.

I have argued that in anime, national and cultural symbols make the films national rather than transnational. Furthermore, the meanings that audiences read into a film are dependent on the cultural context in which they are being viewed. The perception we have of Japan is of great influence on economic, political and sociological levels. At the same time, anime has become a tool for economic profit and over the years has grown in popularity.

After facing an economic downturn in the 90s and early 2000s, with profits deriving mostly from Japan's foreign exports markets and realizing that cultural attractiveness helps in establishing both economic and cultural relationships with Western countries and corporations, the Japanese government decided that anime (as a part of popular culture) should be used as a 'soft power' to improve Japan's economic status. The government has formed the 'Cool Japan Fund' and has been trying to financially stimulate Japanese cultural goods. Japanese Prime Minister Shinzō Abe's strategy has been facing a lot of criticism since, and economists argue that Japan is already investing too much as it is, leading to a slow growth of their Gross Domestic Product and a poor return on capital. Furthermore, it has been argued that Japan should firstly improve relations with their direct neighbours and acknowledge more openly the country's wartime past to remain in good relationships.

I argued that anime has become an example of how mass-distributed pop culture can become an effective tool for the economy. The Japanese government now supports cultural and media industries even in education, technology, employability and also by sharpening distribution and copy write laws, whilst at the same time focussing on the younger generation (who are not as influenced or prejudiced anymore in regards to Japan's wartime-past, compared to their ancestors). I can conclude that, seemingly, the economic

policies have had a positive effect on the Japanese economy, even though they have been facing criticism in previous years. It is still questionable whether the government's involvement and interference in anime will be beneficial for the artistic freedom of anime, and will reach actual anime creators. Even so, the anime industry is currently still attracting new players, streaming services, and (foreign) investors and has been at the highest peak in history in 2016.

Chapter 3. The cultural and economic influence of Studio Ghibli

Ask a random animation fan the first production company that comes to mind when speaking about anime, and they will most likely answer 'Studio Ghibli'. When discussing the economies of anime, it is production company Studio Ghibli that stands out and is commonly known by a wide range of audiences. The films are popular worldwide (the West, but also other countries such as Korea, Brazil and Malaysia). Whilst being known for its productions often representing the cultural and national identity of Japan, at the same time Ghibli is the most commonly known, and therefore arguably the best example of an international and economically successful anime production company. This thesis explores anime as a form of soft power for Japan and I argue here that, for a long time before the Japanese government started to push the animation industry as a soft power, anime, and within the anime industry, Studio Ghibli in particular, has been an individual source of soft power for Japan and within the worldwide animation industry. The aesthetics of Ghibli films have been and are still extremely influential for the animation industry. But, the films of Studio Ghibli did not become popular on their looks and storylines only but are also a perfect example of commercialised transnational anime. As scholar Shiro Yoshioka suggests, the films have been well-promoted, sponsored, and nowadays have budgets of hundreds of millions of yens behind them (Yoshioka 2018: 15).

What makes Studio Ghibli stand out is that, as a company, it distances itself from the ideologies of the 2019 Japanese government. Co-founder Hayao Miyazaki has repeatedly spoken out against the government and, for example, has been denouncing Prime Minister Shinzō Abe's plans to remilitarise Japan or to amend Japan's constitution.²³ That same government is commercialising anime and pushing anime as a soft power. However, even

²³ For example, in the article 'Famed director Miyazaki calls Abe's move to revise Constitution 'despicable'' (Yoshida, Reiji, *The Japan Times*, July 13th 2015).

without the government's interference, Studio Ghibli managed to become a soft power agent on its own. And that, is, arguably, the best example (for the Japanese government, too) of how to turn Japanese popular culture into an internationally profitable and culturally influential product. Or, in short: the popularity of Studio Ghibli productions makes one of the best examples of anime as a form of soft power - even long before the Japanese Government announced their anime industry as such. Furthermore, whilst Ghibli is known worldwide, their films are still 'accented' in the sense that there are culturally specific themes. At the same time, the films are dubbed by famous American actors for their English-language releases. And this even goes further: Ghibli films that are seen as too culturally specific are even dubbed to such an extent that the actual context of the movie has been adapted and changed because of it, as is the case with for example *Princess Mononoke* (*Mononoke-Hime*, dir: Hayao Miyazaki, Japan, 1997) (Pizzuto 2018: 61-62) and *Spirited Away*. I will write about this in more detail in the later discussion of Miyazaki's use of Japanese mythology.

The studio is responsible for a major non-Japanese fan base who engage with Ghibli films in particular. The purpose of this chapter is thus to explore the success and the themes of Studio Ghibli by looking at the works of co-founder and director Hayao Miyazaki. By doing so, I explore Miyazaki's films as examples of a soft power: popular- commercialised cultural products on the one hand, and products that are deeply national in their context (referring to Japanese religion, tradition and as a part of that, environmentalism) on the other. In relation to anime as a soft power, I use Studio Ghibli and Miyazaki's work to explore the broader themes in this thesis (and, in anime in general) that have played a significant role in the worldwide popularization of anime and anime 'branding'. By doing so, I argue that the works of Hayao Miyazaki have paved a way for culturally specific themes to be accepted and welcomed internationally. Stimulating and inspiring international audiences and international production companies to embrace 'exotic' themes. With this reason, I am using a selection

of Miyazaki's films set in Japan, as these films serve as good example of (Japanese) culturally specific themes.²⁴ Furthermore, Studio Ghibli surpasses other anime productions companies by becoming a major corporation. For example, Ghibli is not only playing a role in Japan's animation industry, but by continuously developing new business opportunities and cooperating with international markets, also encourages tourists to visit Japan (and offering them merchandise, a Ghibli museum and a Ghibli theme park from 2022). What was once only a production company has now become a major cultural industry (Rendell and Denison 2018: 9). As a company, Studio Ghibli has managed to successfully push Japanese and to a global market. This, I would like to emphasise again, not only makes them an example of a soft power, but also an, arguably more successful, example of what the Japanese government is trying to accomplish with popular culture as a whole.

Among the founders of Studio Ghibli, Hayao Miyazaki and Isao Takahata are the two best known outside of Japan and are among the most prominent directors within the field of Anime. They created Studio Ghibli together with Yasuyoshi Tokuma and Toshio Suzuki to make artistic animation without being bound by the rules of others. They created this studio out of necessity when other Studios repeatedly refused to produce their films or even look at their scripts for feature animation films.²⁵ Today, Studio Ghibli has become one of the most recognizable animation brands, of which the most famous director Hayao Miyazaki (arguably the biggest director at the moment in worldwide animation industries and the internationally most well-known face of Studio Ghibli) managed to break records in box offices hits exceeding profits of \$100 million (Denison 2015: 117).

²⁴ Also, exploring each Ghibli or Miyazaki film in detail is beyond the scope of this research.

²⁵ Information taken from *The Birth Story of Studio Ghibli*, published as an extra feature on *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* (DVD); Japan (Nibraki- GH, 1984, re- distributed by Studio Ghibli in 2005).

Before Studio Ghibli was founded, Hayao Miyazaki and especially Isao Takahata had been involved in many projects. Some of their pre-Ghibli work was distributed by Tōei Animation studios. They were also involved in short films, contributed to magazines and made commercials. Takahata started to work at Tōei Studios (also known as Tōei Dōga: Dōga means 'Moving Pictures' or 'animated drawings') in 1961 as an assistant director. Hayao Miyazaki started working at Tōei as a temp in 1963. Miyazaki was only 22 at the time and started towards becoming one of the most important figures for the development and worldwide popularity of Japanese animation. The pair started working together on the Tōei Animation series *Wolf Boy Ken* (*Ookami shōnen Ken*, dir: Isao Takahata, 1963). With Miyazaki still as a temp and in-between animator at the time and Takahata as a director. The first feature film Takahata worked on as a director with Tōei Animation was *The Little Norse Prince* (*Taiyō no ōji: Horusu no daibōken*, dir: Isao Takahata, 1968, Japan). It was a film based on Western mythology and literature portrayed through Japanese eyes. Miyazaki was contributing to this film as a key animator and scene designer (Lamarre 2009: 15). Another early project Takahata and Miyazaki made together was the more famous series of *Heidi: Girl of the Alps* (*Arupsu no shōjo Haiije*, dir: Isao Takahata, 1974, Japan). This is an important piece of work to mention because for me and arguably many other people growing up in Europe in the 70s or 80s it was one of the first introductions to anime, without us realising it was anime. Takahata was the director and Miyazaki was responsible for the scene design and layout.

Hayao Miyazaki's first solo debut as a director was with the series *Future Boy Conan* (*Mirai shōnen Konan*, dir: Hayao Miyazaki, Japan, 1978). Takahata and Miyazaki developed Studio Ghibli in 1985. The first official Studio Ghibli film was *Castle in the Sky* (*Tenkū no shiro Rapyuta*, dir: Hayao Miyazaki, Japan, 1986). *Spirited Away* (*Sen to Chihiro no Kamikakushi*, dir: Hayao Miyazaki, Japan, 2002) was the film that cemented the reputation of Studio Ghibli in the West. In Japan itself *Spirited Away* was the biggest box-office hit in a

hundred years of Japanese cinema history (McDonald 2006: 177). For a long time, it was even the most successful anime of all time, until it was surpassed by Makato Shinkai's *Your Name* (*Kimi no na wa*, Japan) in 2016. Before *Spirited Away* was released, Studio Ghibli had already made a deal with Walt Disney Studios in 1997, to distribute and translate their films in the West.

Ghibli influences, cooperation and brand expansion.

A majority of the films of Studio Ghibli are distributed in the West and have become globally recognised as Japanese cinema, but still manage to embrace the national. However, some movies of Studio Ghibli are crossing Japans cultural borders and have been inspired by other animation and by Western tales as well. For example *Arietty* (*Kari-gurashi no Arietti*, dir: Hiromasa Yonebayashi, Japan, 2010) was based on the English children's book *The Borrowers* by Mary Norton, *Tales from the Earthsea* (*Gedo Senki*, dir: Gorō Miyazaki, Japan, 2007) was based on the fantasy novels of American author Ursula K. Le Guin) and *Ponyo* (*Gake no Ue no Ponyo*, dir: Hayao Miyazaki, Japan, 2008) was inspired by the Danish fairy tale of Hans Christian Andersen. Even so, with Studio Ghibli films becoming famous internationally, it was only a matter of time before Ghibli's work influenced Western filmmakers and animators. For example, Pixar Studio's John Lasseter has been influenced by Miyazaki's work on several occasions, as he suggests in the documentary *The Kingdom of Dreams and Madness* (Dir: Mami Sunada, Japan, 2013). *Snow White and the Huntsman* (USA, 2012) from director Evan Daugherty, was also partly inspired by *Princess Mononoke*.²⁶

As a brand, Studio Ghibli has not only been co-operating with other production companies in the distribution of their own movies, but is also attempting to build a bigger international brand by buying and giving opportunities to non-Japanese animators. As Denison suggests, Studio Ghibli's brand is indeed "beginning to echo the practices of USA's

²⁶ As stated on IMBD.

biggest animation conglomerates, buying up what is seen as similar texts and incorporating them under its umbrella to extend its brand meanings" (Denison 2015: 123). In closer connection to my own regions, for example, the film *The Red Turtle* (Dir: Michael Dudok de Wit, Japan/France 2016) was produced by Studio Ghibli in 2016. The film is an example of what Hjort refers to as 'auteurist' transnationalism. In which case, the driving force is an individual director who embraces co-operation between national borders (Hjort 2019: 23). The film was a co-operation between Dutch director, Michael Dudok de Wit, and Studio Ghibli, but was produced a Japanese/French co-production.

The promotion of Studio Ghibli and Ghibli products is an important part of international branding. This includes the production and distribution of Ghibli merchandise, but also, for example, the Studio Ghibli Museum and, as earlier mentioned, the soon-to-be Ghibli theme park, which, according to BBC news.²⁷ will open sometime around 2022. Studio Ghibli fans are eager to collect items and Ghibli experiences (such as visiting the museum) and reinforce a strong brand identity (Rendell 2018: 103). Studio Ghibli's producer Toshio Suzuki is often described by scholars as the man behind the commercial success of Ghibli.²⁸

Studio Ghibli in the context of national cinema

In the discussion of the soft power that Ghibli films hold on a global level, whilst still honouring the Japanese national identity in many of their anime productions, it is important to explore the national and cultural references and unravel the 'deeper meaning' of Studio Ghibli films. It is notable that many of Ghibli's earlier works often represent idealism about living in harmony with nature and the self-destructive behaviour of mankind, using references to Japanese beliefs, such as Shinto and Buddhism, and incorporating Japanese

²⁷ 2 June 2017 'Studio Ghibli to open 'Totoro' theme park in Japan'.

²⁸ For example, in Shiro Yoshioka's essay *Toshio's movie castle: A historical overview of Studio Ghibli's collaboration and promotional strategies (2018)*.

culture and mythology. As discussed earlier, anime plays a significant role in the image we have of Japan and international audiences have embraced anime as a product of Japanese cultural and national Identity. Ghibli films are known by a broad international audience, are amongst the highest grossing films in Japan and have been given prestigious awards on various occasions.²⁹ *Spirited Away* (McDonald 2006: 177) is one of the movies that has become famous on an international level but did not compromise on its Japanese identity (Wright and Clode 2005: 46-51). In an interview in *Screen International* in 2009 Hayao Miyazaki explains:

I think it's important for our films to be shown around the world, but initially we are concerned about how the Japanese audience will receive the films. We don't make them with an awareness of an international audience[...] (Goodridge 2009: 16)

As described in the literature review, Stephen Crofts identifies numerous different types of national cinema, of which one in particular is relevant to the work of Studio Ghibli: National cinemas whose culture and language focus foremost on an domestic audience (Crofts 2006: 45). In Higson's essay 'The Limited Imagination of National Cinema' (2006: 15-25) he explains that 'national identity' is about the experience of belonging to a community, being raised or immersed in the traditions, rituals and the characteristic cultural values of a specific community. The national and cultural symbols in many Studio Ghibli films make the films national rather than transnational, too. However, we might also consider Mette Hjort's 'marked' and 'unmarked' transnationality in relation to Ghibli (2010: 14). In Studio Ghibli films, both can be found: especially earlier films, such as *Spirited Away* and *Princess*

²⁹ A full list of awards can be found on www.IMDb.com. Going as far back as the 80s, Awards include various awards among which are; best animated film awards, audience awards, best director (Miyazaki/ Takahata), and outstanding achievement awards. In 2003, 2006 and 2014 Miyazaki's films won or were nominated for Oscars during the USA Academy Awards for best Animated Feature Film. In 2015 Miyazaki won an honorary award during the US Academy Awards.

Mononoke were made with a domestic audiences in mind, but became transnational in terms of distribution. When referring to 'marked' transnational films, the later works of Studio Ghibli apply: their directors were aware of their international audience and thus made films (that are in some cases still very national in their storyline and reference) whilst knowing that the films were to be produced internationally, encouraging spectators to think of them in a transnational way. Such is the case with, for example, *Arietty*.

By combining forces with international companies such as Walt Disney Studios, Ghibli has paved the way for a broader transnational audience (which Hjort refers to as *opportunistic transnationalism* (2010: 19)). But regardless, many people still might have a different kind of perception of them to that of the Japanese audience. I do acknowledge the fact that there are many viewers who feel the need to explore the meaning of the films more thoroughly and that the films in general can be understood by a non-Japanese audience in the overall storyline. However, my point is that for an older national Japanese audience, in most cases there is simply no need for the spectators to explore the meaning behind the films further or accept a general storyline without understanding the depth of the film. The meaning is apparent in their national identity and is deeply rooted in their culture, but I refer to the 'older' Japanese generation especially because (as is the case with many cultures) the younger generations are often perceived to have lost touch with their 'roots' and might be just as mystified as foreigners. For example, Miyazaki pointed out that the older Japanese generation perceives the film *Spirited Away* as nostalgic. Whilst at the same time, the 'Japaneseness' of the film might be just as unique and new for Japanese children, as it is for foreigners (Osmond 2008: 13). As a matter of fact, traditions in Japan are noticeably fading as the more rural areas are facing de-population, and with that, losing cultural traditions (Fujioka and Cislo 2017). As a result, many cultural events are disappearing rapidly, because the newer generations either do not know how to do certain ceremonies or have no interest in learning about them at all (ibid). For Miyazaki, this is all

the more reason to produce national films, as he explains in his book *Starting Point* (Miyazaki 1996: 355-356).

Ghibli operates on a transnational basis in terms of the distribution and reception of their films. But when films travel, there is a possibility that audiences will receive them in a different way or in a different cultural context: the meanings an audience reads into a film are heavily dependent on the cultural context in which they are watched. Dubbing or subtitling can also make a difference in the perception of a film (Higson 2006: 19). I will discuss this phenomenon later on in this chapter by looking at *Princess Mononoke* and the character of Haku in *Spirited Away*. Films that are globally distributed introduce unfamiliar or 'exotic' elements to other cultures, in this case the Japanese culture to the Western culture of the USA and Europe. A possibility is that foreign films with unfamiliar elements are interpreted according to what Higson calls an 'indigenous frame of reference' (2006: 19). Spectators apply their own frame of reference and/or experiences which often results in misinterpretations. So, what does this mean when it comes to Studio Ghibli with so many fans and viewers all over the world? Miyazaki's proclaimed lack of awareness of an international audience is what makes the films beautiful; it represents the world from a Japanese perspective and has been an introduction to Japan and anime for many spectators. Mythology, tradition and religion are all significant parts of Japanese culture. The natural world and environment are of great importance within Shintoism, which is one of the major religions in Japan. Even if these films have become known internationally, the context of the films can be read in different ways depending on the context in which they are being watched. For example, the film *Princess Mononoke* has been compared to the story of Christ and the character Ashitaka to Jesus (Hoff Kreamer 2004: 1). However, in Miyazaki's *Starting Point*, a selection of interviews and texts in which Miyazaki describes many of his films in detail, when he describes the story of Ashitaka in detail there is no explanation or suggestion that this was intentional (Miyazaki 1996: 383-339, 390-407).

The representation of Shintoism and environmentalism in Ghibli films

When discussing the national identity of Japan, religion is a part of the Japanese identity that stands out, arguably, in a much deeper sense than we are used to in the Western world. Religion can be found throughout the whole country (for example in ceremonies, tradition,

landscapes and buildings). As this thesis is focussed on the national identity and 'economies' of anime and thus the national identity of Japan, it is important to also explain the portrayal of religion in anime productions to fully understand this topic. Therefore, I also choose to explore the works of Studio Ghibli as an example of films where Shintoism, the Japanese 'supernatural' world and environmentalism are portrayed as part of the national. Secondly, as I argued earlier in this chapter, when films are highly national in their representations of tradition and culture, spectators might not always fully understand them. In the following paragraphs I therefore explain the context and deeper meaning of a few selected Studio Ghibli films as an example of anime where religion - as part of the Japanese national identity - is deeply embedded the films.

The three major beliefs in Japan are Shinto, Buddhism and Japanese Confucian Philosophy. Shinto (*The way of the gods*) is a Japanese religion that is deeply embedded in Japanese culture and has existed for at least 2000 years. Buddhism goes back to sometime around 600 BCE (Geshe 2011: 3). Over time, Buddhism and Shinto have influenced each other and today many Japanese ceremonies are a blend of Shinto and Buddhism. Shinto is one of the few animistic faiths: the concept where souls, gods and spirits not only live in humans and animals, but are omnipresent in all sorts of living or non-living objects such as nature, mountains, landscapes, and even abstract objects such as words. These way of the gods are known as the *Kami no Michi*. The Shinto beliefs and practices revolve around the worship of these supernatural beings (Littleton 2002: 13-19). Ecology is of great importance

within Shinto religion as the environment too is part of the spirit world and is equally blessed and worshipped.

One of many examples of a Ghibli film that contains influences of the Shinto way of thinking is *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* (*Kaze no Tani no Naushika*, dir: Hayao Miyazaki, 1984, Japan). Miyazaki explains that the story was also inspired by his and his colleagues' experiences with pollution, the nearby polluted rivers in particular (Miyazaki 1996: 167). Miyazaki has said that the one event that gave him inspiration for the film was the pollution of the Minamata Bay (Kumamoto Prefecture, Japan) with mercury in the '50s and '60s (1996: 169-170). The situation was so severe that there were health concerns and the people of the town were no longer allowed to fish in the bay. The odd thing about it was that the fish stocks in the area increased rather than decreased, and Miyazaki was surprised that the living creatures were able to survive with so much poison and pollution around them (Wright 2005: 2).

The story of *Nausicaä of the valley of the Wind* takes place 1000 years after the collapse of industrial civilisation. Humans have polluted the earth so much it has caused a toxic swamp that covers the earth and is threatening human survival. This toxic swamp is a result of 'the sea of decay' and is spreading rapidly. The irony of the story is that the sea of decay was originally an artificial eco-system created by humans to cleanse the environment but over time transformed into something harmful to nature. The people have damaged the *Kami*, in the shape of nature, and this has resulted in the development of many giant insects, including giant centipedes and the 'Ohmu' (which means 'King Insect'), creatures that look like giant woodlice. In Buddhism, centipedes are impure, polluted animals that are associated with death (Ashkenazi 2003: 116). In *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* the centipedes among other insects represent the harm humans have done to nature and the death they have caused. They are also a sign that mankind is on the brink of extinction. The

story involves the heroic girl Nausicaä, the princess of the valley of the wind. She seems to be the only one that understands that people are dependent upon the environment, and should engage with nature rather than destroy it (Miyazaki 1996: 251). The character of Nausicaä was inspired by both Japanese and Greek mythology. In Greek mythology Nausicaä is a Phaeacian princess who appears in Homer's *Odyssey*.³⁰ She was a beautiful woman that played the harp and sang. She was also said to be a lover of the hero Odysseus. In Japanese mythology, there is a collection of stories from the 11th century named *Tales from the Tsutsumi Middle Counsellor (Tsutsumi chu-nagon monogatari)*. It involves a princess who lived in Japan's Heian period (794 – 1185) and loved insects and nature. She was found to be odd as she spent so much time playing with insects and was known to be a girl that did however she pleased. When Hayao Miyazaki was encouraged to draw a manga for *Animage* (a Japanese magazine about Anime and Manga established in 1978) he decided to incorporate the stories and to draw his own version of *Nausicaä* (Miyazaki 1996: 283-284), which later on was made into the film *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind*.³¹

The images in *Nausicaä* also seem to be influenced by Aztec-like styles and early European architecture: according to Miyazaki the scenery and setting are partly modelled after the 'Bayeux Tapestry' (Looser 2010: 316), a famous nine century-old embroidered cloth of almost 70 metres, showing the events leading up to the Norman conquest of England. *Nausicaä* is a film that has set the style and themes for which Studio Ghibli now is famous. There is a substantial difference between Miyazaki's and the film's producer

³⁰ One of the famous ancient Greek writings, which is believed to have been composed around 800 BCE. The poem describes the journey of Odysseus.

³¹ The magazine has information about new Manga and Anime releases but also publishes Manga series within the magazine itself. Miyazaki's Manga *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* was published in *Animage* from 1982 to 1994.

Takahata's pre-*Nausicaä* work and their work after *Nausicaä*. The film is more serious and aimed at an older audience, while earlier work contained less serious topics that were more suitable for children. *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* was the first in a line of films that engaged with a Japanese audience and Japanese culture. By creating Studio Ghibli shortly after the film *Nausicaä*, Miyazaki was able to continue making artistically free films that consisted of topics and themes to which felt personally connected to.

After *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* and the first Ghibli release *Laputa: Castle in the Sky* (*Tenkū no Shiro Rapyuta*, dir: Hayao Miyazaki, 1986, Japan), Studio Ghibli produced two films that were more appealing for the younger generation. These were *My Neighbour Totoro* (*Tonari no Totoro*, dir: Hayao Miyazaki, 1988, Japan) and *Kiki's Delivery Service* (*Majo no takkyūbin*, dir: Hayao Miyazaki, 1989, Japan). *My Neighbour Totoro* is about the relationship between the *kami* (gods) and the humans. The original aim of *My Neighbour Totoro* was to be a 'happy and heart-warming film that lets the audience go home with pleasant and glad feelings' (Miyazaki 1996: 255). It is also the film that is responsible for the current brand-identity of Ghibli: the image of Totoro has become part of the Ghibli logo and is the most famous reference to Ghibli; including its own impressive line of widely available merchandise. The story of Totoro purposely takes place in an unspecified period in Japan (Miyazaki has left this open to the spectator's own interpretations) and focuses on how children are losing touch with nature (Miyazaki 1996: 355-377). It is a film that has become incredibly popular in Japan and because of its message even contributed to the preservation of nature in Japan. There is an area that is now called 'The Homeland of Totoro' (Odell and Le Blanc 2009: 54) within the Sayama Hills and is preserved by the 'Totoro no Furaso Foundation',³² a charity that is founded to take care of Japan's nature. There is also a

³² The Sayama Hills are located 40 km (24 miles) from Tokyo and overlap an area of 3500ha (8650 acres) and 11 km (6,9 miles) from North to South. The Foundation has a website with more information that can be found at <http://www.Totoro.or.jp/english.html>.

'Totoro Forest' that was established by the Furaso Foundation in 1991. This makes *Totoro* direct proof of how influential (and thus a soft power, economically or otherwise) anime and the message it is containing can actually be.

In an interview with Hiroaki Ikeda in June 1988, republished in *Starting Point 1979-1996*, Miyazaki explains more about the settings of *My Neighbour Totoro*, stating:

The setting for the story is actually taken from many places. It is a combination of the area near Seijō Sakuragaoka where Nippon Animation is located, the area surrounding the Kandagawa River where I grew up, and the landscape of Tokorozawa where I live now. The art from director Kazuo-san is from Akita in the North (Miyazaki 1996: 350).

Miyazaki used places he is familiar with, his own experiences of Japanese tradition and Shintoism, his childhood and the children around him as an inspiration and hoped that this film would inspire children to explore the world around them (1996: 355-356). The main characters of the film are two young girls who moved to the countryside due their mother's illness (possibly a reference to Miyazaki own childhood, in which his mother suffered from tuberculosis for many years). Whilst exploring their new surroundings they discover 'Totoro' and his friends. Totoro is a woodland kami (a 'forest god'). According to Miyazaki they are the 'Goblins' of the transitional phase when Japan hadn't become entirely modernised (Miyazaki 1996: 355-361). The reason Totoro's forest is dark and that he lives inside a tree is because, as Miyazaki states, when you enter a Japanese forest, it is dark and exciting, 'It feels like an animal might be lurking just out of sight' (Miyazaki 1996: 359). Miyazaki points out that Westerners often think that dark is evil, and light is good. But for the Japanese it is different. Gods are usually in the forests or in the mountains, so that also explains why shrines are often found in those areas. When the youngest girl Mei discovers Totoro, her father decides to bring them to one of these forest shrines to pay their respects to the forest

gods. It is a shrine in form of huge Camphor tree accessible by passing through a *torii*, a sacred gateway. The *torii* marks the boundary between the impure, outer and secular world and the 'sacred confines' of the shrine. The person who passes through it undergoes a symbolic ritual purification of the pollution from the outer world (Littleton 2002: 70). The Camphor tree itself has ritual cords of rice straw and paper streamers wrapped around it, which shows the tree is sacred (McCarthy 2002: 123).

Throughout the film, symbols like these, spirit statues and shrines, are often displayed. These images are very significant as they are familiar for a domestic audience, who are able to recognise the deeper meaning of these symbols in order to understand what will happen, or what is currently happening in the film. However, for those who are not familiar with these references, the film plot is still enjoyable, and the storyline still makes sense. The difference is that they don't get 'a heads up' about what can or might happen. In a sense, the symbols Miyazaki incorporated already give away the direction in which the story is heading before seeing the next scenes. And when one does find out what they mean, the films can be watched from a different perspective. For example, when the girls walk home from school they stop at one of the statues, a *Sae-no-Kami* (Kami of the roads), referred to in Japanese mythology as a *Dosōjin* (Ashkenazi 2003: 241) and ask the god to let the rain stop (see Figure 1). It is a roadside Shinto kami that functions as a protector for travellers and can be found all over Japan.

When the rain doesn't stop, they decide to go to the bus stop, where one of the girls discovers another shrine that's surrounded with statues of foxes (see Figure 2). This is a typical Japanese *Inari* shrine. In Shinto, Fox spirits are said to have the ability to possess a person, and are one of the most feared animal spirits. White foxes, in particular, are said to be the most powerful creatures among them. But the fox spirit is also closely associated with the rice god, Inari, who is a popular and charitable kami. Inari's messenger and

guardian is the fox and therefore images and statues of the fox are always prominent at the god's shrines (Littleton 2002: 26-27). The statues are dressed in red bibs for good fortune, and the Inari shrine is instantly recognisable for Japanese audiences because of the red painted Torii gates, red walls, and of course the fox statues (Ashkenazi 2003: 170).

In another scene, one of the girls gets lost and sits down next to six Buddhist deities that are said to take care of all children (see Figure 3). An audience familiar with the symbolic meaning of the statues knows she will be safe (McCarthy 2002: 122). In Buddhism they are called 'Boddhisattva' (Ashkenazi 2003: 50), one of whose particular concerns is the roadways (and thus lost children) and represent the six Jizō, protecting the six destinies or classes of existence of the living being: the first destiny is that of the many gods that are living together in heaven, the second are the human beings, both good and bad, third are the Shuras, which are a class of spirits, fourth are the animals, both mythological and zoologically existing, the fifth and sixth destinies are those of the hungry ghosts (those who have died too soon or have no one to take care of them in the afterlife) and hell (ibid: 183-184).



Figure 1. Mei and Satsuki pay their respects to a Sae-no-Kami, referred to in Japanese mythology as Dosōjin.



Figure 2. Mei looks at an Inari Shrine.



Figure 3. Mei sits down next to the Buddhist deities.

During one scene (the 'bus stop' scene), Totoro offers the girls a gift of nuts and seeds. The girls decide to plant the seeds and wait until Totoro appears one night and performs a ritual. Within minutes giant trees grow out of the land and Totoro shows the girls the beautiful Japanese landscape, rice fields and forests. However, the next morning the trees are gone but the seeds did indeed sprout. The dream that wasn't a dream was a gift from Totoro;

now the girls know what the effects of preserving nature can eventually accomplish. It is in a way a message: if you take good care of nature, something beautiful will come of it. The representation of Japanese culture, surroundings and traditions within the film has been thought about in every small detail. The trees, flowers and plants in the film are those that actually grow in Japan, Miyazaki states:

I thought that if I tried to depict the plants with the least bit of exaggeration it would no longer seem like Japan (1996:354).

A natural phenomenon that happens from time to time in Japan is typhoons. The scene of a minor typhoon, gushing winds and a creaking house is a scene that all Japanese have experience with and can relate to. The film is very Japanese, not only in Shinto religion and the aspects of nature, but also in tradition; the shrines, sleeping on the ground, bowing for each other, having family baths, the older generation that still wears a kimono, eating with chopsticks and eating traditional Japanese meals. Furthermore, the Japanese scenery such as the rice fields, the farmers working on them with traditional gear and hats, and the Japanese style houses really add up to the cultural identity of this film.

Gods, demons, and spirits: how Hayao Miyazaki depicts Japanese mythology

Regardless of its historical Japanese context, this film too, is a perfect example of how culturally specific anime has become an economic success. However, *Princes Mononoke* is also an example of anime that has been adapted in order to 'remove' these same culturally specific boundaries and make the story plot more appealing to foreign audiences. For example, Daniela Pizzuto describes how *Princess Mononoke's* dubbed versions have been adapted in order to make the context of the film more appealing to foreign audiences (Pizzuto 2018: 61-75). *Princess Mononoke* has been translated in English and included modifications to the original texts. According to Pizzuto, the matter becomes even worse

when those English texts are translated from English, into another language - Italian, in this case (ibid: 63).

Therefore, it is important to explore the true intentions of *Princess Mononoke* and take distance from misconceptions about the film due misinterpretations. Among Miyazaki's work, the film *Princess Mononoke* can be read or understood as a traditional tale influenced by Japanese history, mythology and Shinto. *Princess Mononoke* was heavily influenced by revisionist historical works of Amino Yoshihiko,³³ one of the most influential Japanese historians. Yoshihiko's research especially included the 'underappreciated' groups and tribes of Japanese history. Miyazaki chose to set the film in the Muromachi era (1392-1573), a time when the relationship between the people of Japan and nature was radically changing. Firearms were introduced and the 'Iron Age' was on its way (Wright 2005: 9). It was also a time of high culture in Japan and the time when the Zen aesthetic was developed in its cultural forms such as tea ceremonies and the Noh theatre (Wright 2005: 9). In this film Miyazaki explores the marginals of history. He explains:

It was in this period that people changed their value system from gods to money [...]. This is a film in which few samurai, peasants, or feudal lords appear [...] the main protagonists are those who usually not do not appear on the stage of history. This is a story of the marginals of history (Bigelow 2009: 62).

Miyazaki is referring to the Emishi people, a historical 'non Yamato' (non-Japanese) tribe. In history, they are described as the people who refused to accept the Yamato court rule during the late Nara and early Heian periods between the 7th and 10th century (Miyazaki 2008: 15). In *Princess Mononoke* references to these historical events are made when the characters talk about the history of the Emishi. The Emishi people were seen by both the

³³ Originally published in 1991 and 1993 with the titles *Nihon no rekishi o yominaosu* and *Zoku nihon no rekishi o yominaosu*. Translated in 2012 under the name *Rethinking Japanese History*.

Japanese and the Chinese as an uncivilised race (Varley 2000: 49). However, Miyazaki instead chose to convey the Emishi people as the 'guardians of ancient wisdom of the forest' (Bigelow 2009: 64).³⁴ *Princess Mononoke* begins when a giant boar god, a kami of the forest, has turned into an *Oni* (demon); a reference to Shinto tradition, where one does not believe in absolute good or evil. This kami has become evil because of how humans have mistreated him and his forest. The movie involves Prince Ashitaka, who is infected by the evil poison of the demonic boar god and has to leave his village in order to find the forest kami that can cure him. He has to learn 'Makoto no Kokoro', which means 'to see with eyes unclouded' to be able to lift his curse. In Shinto philosophy the kami can only be experienced if one has a pure heart and mind (Bigelow 2009: 63). Whilst witnessing the horrible invasions of samurais that took place in the Muromachi Era he eventually arrives in 'Iron City', a gigantic fortress that is ruled by Lady Eboshi. She too is an example that *Nothing is pure good or pure evil*. Lady Eboshi on one hand is a kind woman, who tries to help people. She welcomes and provides for all kinds of people, including lepers and female prostitutes. Iron city is a rich city that is established in a holy forest that is protected by the forest gods. In order to make use of the land's iron sources Lady Eboshi tries to bring down the forest, and therefore, knowingly, also brings down the spirits that it is inhabiting.

According to Miyazaki, many places in Japan have forests - or part of forests - that should not be entered. These are places that are usually feared by Japanese citizens, and as Miyazaki states many Japanese people still believe that some places are a world that doesn't exist for humans (Miyazaki, 1996: 359). In *Princess Mononoke* Miyazaki created a forest that should not be entered by humans but was invaded by them after all, causing the balance of

³⁴ Officially, there are no records that the Emishi culture survived; in fact, in the Muromachi era where the story of *Princess Mononoke* takes place, the Emishi people and culture had long been absorbed into the Japanese society. But Miyazaki used his creativity to create a story where a group of Emishi did survive and kept on living according to their traditional and cultural values in a hidden village.

nature to be disturbed. The forest Ashitaka needs to enter is full of *obake* (ghosts), which in this case are small, white creatures. These are *Kodama obake* (Odell and le Blanc 2009: 108). The *Yōkai* (collective name for monsters and supernatural beings that are known in Japan) are invisible spirits that inhabit ancient trees. According to Richard Freeman, cutting down a tree where the kodama live can cause problems for the whole community (Freeman 2010: 191). Like the sacred tree in *My Neighbour Totoro*, a sacred rope or *Shimenawa* is wound around the trunk of such a tree to prevent it from being harmed. The kodama can imitate human voices and in mythology play tricks on passing people (Freeman 2010: 191). Like in the legends, in *Princess Mononoke* the people fear them because it is said they will get you lost and once you go into these parts of the forests, you will never return. In *My Neighbour Totoro* the forest kami and obakes are visible for the girls, and these obake in *Princess Mononoke* can be seen by Ashitaka and the men he brought with him. It shows us that his intentions are pure, and he has a good heart. So, the kodama obake lead him through the heart of the forest instead of getting him lost. When Ashitaka arrives in Iron town he soon learns that this town is the source of all the problems and demonic gods in the forest. He also meets Princess Mononoke (San) and her wolf pack, with whom Lady Eboshi is at war.

Things become critical when Lady Eboshi agrees to behead the most important forest kami, Shishigami, a deer with a human-like face that transforms at night and turns into a 'moonwalker'. It is the one spirit that keeps nature in balance. Shishigami has a lot of similarities to the Kirin, a creature often seen in Japanese Mythological art. Kirin is a mythical animal and a symbol of purity. He only appears to those who are pure at heart (Ashkenazi 2003: 118). Lady Eboshi is interested in wealth and believes that when the Shishigami is dead, her people will have more land, thus more Iron and will become the wealthiest city. Her helpers are after his head for different reasons: their emperor believes that the head of the Shishigami will grant him immortality. The quest succeeds; the

Shishigami's head is indeed chopped off and the forest slowly is infected; Shishigami's blood has now become demonic blood that kills everything it touches. Shishigami keeps looking for his head in distress, causing decay and storms. Eventually, it is decided to return his head and Shishigami restores the balance of nature: the forest will start from the beginning and Iron town is destroyed. It is now covered in land and grass. But by doing so, the Shishigami had to use the last of his strength and eventually dies. It is now up to humankind and the remaining forest spirits to look after the balance of nature. In an interview in 1997, Miyazaki explains:

I think that the Japanese did kill Shishigami around the time of the Muromachi era. And then we stopped being in awe of the forests [...]. From ancient times up to a certain time in the medieval period, there was a boundary beyond which humans should never enter [...] After Shishigami's head was returned, nature regenerated. But it has become a tame, non-frightening forest of the kind we are accustomed to seeing. The Japanese have been remaking the Japanese landscape in this way (Wright 2005: 9).

Princess Mononoke is an environmental film as well as a mythological tale; highly influenced by the most important belief in Shinto that spirits and gods work hand in hand with the natural world. They are a part of nature, and nature is a part of them. Without the kami, human existence will be in jeopardy.

Staying within the theme of mythology and supernaturalism, *Spirited Away* was an introduction to the supernatural side of Japan for many spectators.³⁵ It is also the film that many scholars refer to as a introduction to anime for many new anime fans and a more mainstream public. Even though this film, again is very national in its context, the popularity

³⁵ Japanorama series episode 6: Horror (BBC, Aired on 13 July 2002).

of *Spirited Away* worldwide also has to do with a successful marketing and branding campaign and international cooperation with Walt Disney Studios. By this international branding, *Spirited Away* too has lost some of its original resonances and deeper meaning because of the way the producers choose to adapt and distribute the film in the West. For this, I am borrowing the term 'Disneyfication' from scholar Laz Carter (Carter 2018: 47) as this is in fact the perfect term for what has been done to the original national identity of *Spirited Away*. This starts with the adaptation of the original title. Whereas the English title is simply '*Spirited Away*', the Japanese title of the film explains a little of what the film is about for those who are familiar with Japanese folklore. Of the title *Sen to Chihiro no Kami-kakushi*, '*no Kami Kakushi*' means; 'Something hidden by the Kami'. James W. Boyd and Tetsuya Nishimura explain that there's a Japanese expression *Kami-Kakushi ni au*, which means 'To experience the Kami-Kakushi' (Boyd and Nishimura 2004: 2). It refers to the 'folk designation of incidents' when someone is missing for a certain amount of time and there is no logical explanation. When the person returns (sometimes not remembering where he or she has been) the Japanese say that the person was 'Hidden by the Kami' (2004: 2). This is what happens to the main character, Chihiro and her parents. They become stuck in a spirit world of the kami, but also of many yōkai such as oni (demons) and obake (ghosts).

When it comes to branding, the original movie poster has undergone its own 'Disneyfication' by removing text as well as emphasising the name of Hayao Miyazaki as the director to a larger extent (Carter 2018: 53). Furthermore, the complete layout of the poster has been simplified compared to the Japanese version, which can be seen in the Figure 4 and 5, the Japanese version being on the left;



Figure 4. Japanese poster for *Spirited Away*.



Figure 5. Western poster for *Spirited Away*.

However, what I am trying to emphasise in this text is the representation of Shintoism and kami spirits that play a very important role in this film. And, with that, the references that became unclear or completely lost because of subbing, dubbing, or an audience being simply unfamiliar with Japanese mythology. To start off with, in the beginning of the film, Chihiro and her parents are driving through the woods and pass a *torii*. It is the same kind of gateway as also seen in *My Neighbour Totoro*. There are also tiny houses which are altars for the gods. The fact that Chihiro asks her mom what they are is an indication she has lost touch with tradition. Chihiro also sees *Dosōjin* in the woods; guardians that are there to protect travellers, and often indicate where the main road ends, as seen in *My Neighbour Totoro*. The family finds a gateway and decides to take a closer look; in front of the gateway there is another *Dosōjin* to indicate that the main road ends here. An audience familiar with these symbols will now know that perhaps this particular *Dosōjin* in front of a gateway indicates the gateway is a passage between the human and the spirit world. The parents decide to see where the gateway will lead them and end up in what they believe is an abandoned theme park. Strangely enough, a feast of delicious fresh food is prepared, and the parents decide to stuff themselves, which turns them into pigs. From that moment on, Chihiro is trapped in a world of the spirits. One of the first kami Chihiro sees wears traditional *Zouman* masks (see Figure 6). These kami are the *Kasuga-sama*, who in folklore

wear traditional clothes and masks. They are the kami of the Kasuga Shrine which is one of the most important shrines in Shinto religion. Ceremonies and rituals at this shrine located in Nara, Japan are often performed in the same traditional clothing and masks (Nakamaki 2005: 68-69).



Figure 6. Kami's in Zouman masks leave their ship in Spirited Away.

After this encounter Chihiro meets the character Haku. Haku is a boy who turns out to be a white dragon Kami. Haku (which means 'white') is a dragon associated with water in Japanese folklore (Boyd and Nishimura 2004). This dragon is called *Ryūjin* (which means dragon person), also referred to as *Ryu-Ō* (dragon king). It is a kami that in Japanese mythology appears in dreams and is said to live in a palace in the sea or lakes. Like Haku in *Spirited Away*, ryūjin in mythology and Shinto have both good and bad sides. A ryūjin is often described as a protector and a hero, but can also be a villain. In one of the mythological stories, Ryūjin steals a jewel and a bell from *Kamatari*, the founder of the Fujiwara clan (Ashkenazi 2003: 240-241). In *Spirited Away*, Haku helps others but also is a villain who steals a seal from Yubāba's sister Zeniba. The character Haku once was a *kawa no kami*, a river god; he was the Kohaku river. The river was closed up by humans and covered with buildings; a reference to how nature has to make place for industrialisation

and how this effects the environment. According to an article written by Lucy Wright and Jerry Clode filling up the rivers is a common practice in Japan. Their article suggests that this is what has led Miyazaki to creating this part of Haku's storyline (Wright and Clode 2005: 51). The film in this way suggests that the river kami, or god Kohaku, had nowhere to go and therefore came to another Spirit world as a dragon who could adapt to a human form, where he forgot his true identity as a river kami; all because of the hands of humans. The character of Haku himself is a character that who a substantial part, can be missed out on by the non-Japanese speaking and the spectators unfamiliar with Japanese folklore. Especially in the English dubbed version, a substantial part of Haku's character will disappear. Haku is a very traditional Japanese character. He is dressed in traditional gear that resembles the Japanese Heian period. According to Boyd and Nishimura (2004) what he wears is similar to a *Hakama*, which is a part of a Shinto priest's formal costume. Haku's speech makes a good example of the risks of losing character and story by dubbing in a different language. In the original Japanese version, Haku's speech is very traditional and formal and reveals the fact that he might be an ancient creature. Boyd and Nishimura noticed that when Haku addresses Chihiro, he uses the ancient term 'Sonata'. Also Haku's full name (which becomes clear near the end) is *Nigihayami Kohaku-Nushi*. His name is a reference in the Kojiki (the oldest extant book in Japanese) to '*Nigi Haya hi no Mikoto*' which is the name of an ancestor to one of the families of high courtly ranks in ancient times (Boyd and Nishimura 2004).

The inspiration and deeper meaning of Yūbaba's actions and creatures involved in *Spirited Away*

In *Spirited Away* Chihiro gets a job in a public bathhouse accessible to all creatures of the spirit world. Public bathhouses are an important part of Japanese culture and making a film set in a bathhouse is something Miyazaki had been thinking about since his childhood when

he, as many Japanese children used to visit the public bathhouse himself (Mes 2002). The owner of the bathhouse is Yubāba, a name that also refers to 'old hot water woman' (Yu= 'hot water', Bāba= old woman) (Boyd and Nishimura 2004). She is a witch and seems like a human-like Yokai with an enormous head. According to Noriko T. Reider in her article 'Spirited Away; Film of the Fantastic and Evolving Japanese Folk Symbols' (2005: 11-14), the character of Yubāba is very similar to the Yokai *Yamauba*, a mountain witch from Japanese Mythology. Like Yamauba, Yubāba also has a very nurturing character towards her baby *Bō*. Yamauba in Japanese folktales is said to have supernatural powers and to give birth to 12 children a year, one for each month of the year. She is evil and cannibalistic on one hand, but a nurturing mother on the other hand. Some of her children have magical powers or poses incredible strength (2005: 13). In one of the legends, Yamauba gives birth to *Kintarō*, a child that possessed great strength and power. The story goes that Kintarō was discovered by a great warrior, after which he changed his name to *Sakata no Kintoki*. Together with the warrior and three of his other newfound guardians they defeated many Yokai demons. In the legends Kintaro is often portrayed wearing a red *harakake* (a bib or apron) with his name's character (the character for 'Kin') printed on it. According to Reider, in other folk tales from the 18th and 19th century Yamauba often expresses herself saying that her son is her only pleasure in life (2005: 11-14). As also described by Reider, like Yamauba's child, *Bō* also wears a red *harakake* with his name's character printed on it. The baby is of incredible strength and size, and Yubāba protects him beyond normal standards. For these characters, the inspiration of the Japanese folktales about Yamauba and her powerful offspring(s) has been used. Yubāba steals the names of her employees to gain power over them. If they lose their name, they slowly forget who they are and will lose their true identity (Miyazaki, 2008: 198). Boyd and Nishimura (2004) explain that *Chi* means '1000' and *Hiro* means 'inquire, fathom, or look for'. They conclude that the meaning of the name *Chihiro* is 'Looking

deeply', or 'inquiring after many things'. When Yubāba gives Chihiro the name *Sen*, it is also an alternate reading for the same written character.

Yūbaba's helpers (see Figure 7) are known in Japanese folklore as the *Mai Kubi* (Freeman 2010: 30). This means 'the dancing heads'. According to Richard Freeman, the myth of the dancing heads goes back to the period of the Kangen Emperor between 1243 and 1247. It was a period where a military government of samurai ruled Japan. One day three wicked samurai met each other, they were Kosanta, Matashige and Akugoro. From the day they met, they absolutely hated each other. They argued and drew their swords; it became a battle in which they all literally lost their heads. They hated each other so much, that even with the heads decapitated from the body, the heads still kept on fighting and arguing. Their heads rolled into the sea, where they still fight until this day. At midnight they come to the surface of the sea, where they dance (or rather bounce) on the water, causing the waves in the sea, while shouting at each other (2010: 209).



Figure 7. Yūbaba's *Mai Kubi* helpers in *Spirited Away*.

In one of the scenes in *Spirited Away*, supposedly, a 'stink god' enters the bathhouse and all characters are disgusted by his dirt and stench. Chihiro gets the order to wash him and discovers a thorn in the stink god's body. It turns out to be the handle of a bike, and when the bike comes loose, all the pollution comes out; old household appliances, scrap metal and other detritus. It turns out the creature was a river god which had been

polluted so much by the humans that this is what he became. During a press conference in Paris in 2001, Miyazaki explains how they came up with this scene.³⁶ Just as *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* was also inspired by the writers and the Ghibli staffs' personal experience with the pollution, Miyazaki says of this particular scene in *Spirited Away*:

It doesn't come from mythology, but from my own experience. There is a river close to where I live in the countryside. When they cleaned the river, we got to see what was at the bottom of it, which was truly putrid. In the river there was bicycle, with its wheel sticking out above the surface of water. So I thought it would be easy to pull out, but it was terribly difficult because it had become so heavy from all the dirt it had collected over the years [...] the smell of what they dug up was really awful. Everyone had just been throwing stuff into that river over the years, so it was an absolute mess (Miyazaki in Paris, 2001).

Another character in *Spirited Away* is the mysterious black figure that goes by the name of Kao Nashi, which means 'no face'.³⁷ The mask Kao Nashi is wearing is a traditional *Noh Okina* mask that is used in traditional Japanese *Noh theatre*. There's a Japanese expression, 'someone is like a Noh mask' (Reider 2005: 20). It means that someone is inscrutable; it is hard to know what the person feels, wants or is thinking. In *Spirited Away* the mask Kao Nashi is wearing symbolises very inscrutable creature that only Chihiro seems to understand.

³⁶ During the animation festival 'Nouvelles images du Japon', Paris.

³⁷ The character does not come from Japanese folklore but was born out of Miyazaki's imagination (Miyazaki 2008:206). Koa Nashi seems to be lonely and tries to connect with Chihiro. He keeps offering her gold, but Chihiro doesn't need it. Meanwhile, others happily accept his gold and the Obake soon becomes an object of interest. Everyone becomes greedy and this greed turns the Obake into something evil. According to Miyazaki, there is a bit of No Face in all of us (2008:212). The greediness becomes the Obake himself, and he turns into a monster: the behaviour of the creatures around him has influenced him.

Conclusion

It is clear that Studio Ghibli is the most famous anime production companies. And whilst being an international soft power, long before anime was seen as such by the Japanese government, is still known for its productions often representing the cultural and national identity of Japan. Within anime, Ghibli created a way for culturally specific themes to be accepted and welcomed internationally. Ghibli films have not become economically successful solely because of the way they were made, but are also a perfect example of commercialised transnational anime that includes huge promotional campaigns and sponsors. Ghibli films fall in the category of 'accented' cinema: the films are highly cultural, but have also been translated in various languages. This has often resulted in changes to the context of the films. In this chapter, I have explored the 'lost' national and cultural symbols that come with engaging to a foreign audience. I have also explored Miyazaki's films as examples of a soft power, products that are internationally commercialised but also deeply national in their context.

With examples, I have shown how the national identity of the films can cause a difference in the perception of the films when they travel. However, the cultural references within the films do not keep a Western audience from enjoying Studio Ghibli's work. The films can be enjoyed by a wide range of audiences, but for an older or culturally engaged Japanese audience there is less need for the spectators to explore the meaning behind the storyline of the films because it is deeply embedded in their culture. Shinto for example, has been part of the Japanese culture for at least 2000 years and its traditions are still practiced by 80% of the Japanese today (Littleton 2011: 13). Although these films are indeed transnational in their reach to a global audience via distribution and exhibition practices, this chapter has argued that the film texts are specifically Japanese and produced for the national audience. The anime of Ghibli and Miyazaki in particular, is deeply national cinema

and my intention was thus to explore the national elements of the films which are often overlooked or misinterpreted by Western audiences.

This chapter incorporated the theoretical framework of Mette Hjort, Stephen Croft and Andrew Higson, which allowed me to show the apparent national and cultural identity of the films and to create a clear overview of the deeper meaning behind the films. Stephen Croft's reconceptualises national cinema and divides the concept of the national into different varieties (2006: 45). The films of Miyazaki are indeed national films that completely ignore Hollywood in their Japanese cultural and national identity. However, many Studio Ghibli films are now distributed by Disney in the West, and original voices are dubbed by star voices for distribution purposes. The original film texts are translated, sometimes adapted in order to engage a foreign audience. Using examples of the character Haku in *Spirited Away*, I have shown that dubbing or subtitling can make a difference in the perception of a film and can contribute to the loss of (cultural) identity. Another variety Crofts mentions is the national cinema whose culture and language take their distance from the nation states which enclose them (2006: 45). This chapter has demonstrated that the cultural and national identity of Miyazaki's films is very much Japanese, with an awareness of a Japanese audience and many references to the Japanese religions, traditions and culture. One of Higson's theories about national cinema is that national identity is about the experience of belonging to a community; all the rituals, practises, and cultural characteristics involved (2006: 16). The community director Hayao Miyazaki comes from is the Japanese one. It is therefore no surprise that Miyazaki incorporates his own cultural identity into his work without an apparent awareness of an international audience. The films are, using Higson's terms, products of Miyazaki's own nationhood, with an authentic identity, references and symbols to the Japanese cultural history and practises.

One of the other subjects discussed in this chapter is the environmental problem that plays a huge role in many Ghibli films. My overall conclusion is that the environmental subjects implemented in the films are influenced by two different points of view. The first one is the personal point of view of the director: Miyazaki's experience with pollution. The films are in a way also a campaign to take better care of the environment. And secondly, there is a spiritual point of view, the Shinto ideology of the relationship between nature and humans. However, referring back to Studio Ghibli's work in the context of national cinema, the subjects of the discussed films go further than just the environmental issues. The creators attempt to look at both the issues and the beauty of their own culture and the history of their nation. The films are an ode to the Shinto and Buddhist way of life and the associated symbols and philosophies are of great influence for the films discussed in this chapter. I can conclude that the discussed films are creations of their directors' mind, but are indeed influenced by a personal national background and are greatly inspired by Shintoism, indigenous Japanese folk symbols and Japanese beliefs, customs, thoughts and practices. The films may attract a broad international audience and certainly are a source of soft power for Japan, but are also still a Japanese phenomenon both nationally and culturally.

Chapter 4. Neo-nationalism and pacifism in anime

The rise of Japanese popular culture, and therein anime, was one that was simultaneous with the economic growth of Japan after years of recession (Saito 2013: 35). As suggested earlier in this thesis, anime has not just become a soft power because the Japanese government decided so; it was a source of soft power long before that. Anime's soft power plays a huge role on an economic level. What I am suggesting in this chapter is that it can also be a medium that inspires discussion and debate (having a 'power' in the sense of getting spectators to think about certain issues or taboos). With the Cool Japan scheme now set in place, I also argue that some anime offer a major contrast to the image that the Japanese government is trying to create globally (and with the help of that same medium: anime).

With major historical events in mind, as well as the aftermath of more recent events (for example, the earthquake and tsunami on the 11th March 2011, causing the nuclear power plant accident in Fukushima), questions have arisen about the critical role of popular media such as anime in contemporary Japanese society (Berndt 2012: 149). Some of the works in anime reflect common beliefs in Japan and anxieties about Japanese national identity; they unite Japan's cultural identity on both a personal and emotional level (2013: 35). In a sense, the rise of Japanese anime and popular culture has reframed the (foreign) perceptions of Japan as well. Anime can be a (political or economic) tool to portray Japan and its uniqueness to foreign markets, and most of all, enhance the 'marketability' of Japanese culture. At the same time, the 'collective' national memories of the Japanese also consists of ideologies about Japan's history. Prime Minister Shinzō Abe himself has been known for his nationalistic, somewhat clichéd and bombastic views of Japanese history, as one can conclude from the various news updates surrounding Abe's policies.³⁸ Abe's denial

³⁸ For example, in *The Japan Times* article 'Identifying the 'liberal' in Japanese politics', Oct. 21, 2017.

of Japanese war crimes in World War II has caused much criticism worldwide and director Miyazaki, for example, has expressed his disapproval. Looking at anime from these points of view, it is important to mention anime that is in contrast to the ideologies of the Japanese government, and the influence in some works of what (according to academics and journalists) can be referred to as neo-nationalism and pacifism. This also leads me to the debate of how influential anime exactly is on a political and social-economic level. As I argue in this chapter, the storylines used in anime can cause major uproar and debate on many platforms: among Japanese citizens, internationally, by political Japan, by artists and by production companies themselves.

The 1990s in particular can be referred to as the years of Japan's neo-nationalism: the resurgence of nationalism by the Liberal Democratic Party, constitutional reforms and legislative calls for re-militarization (Saito 2013: 37). On the other hand, pacifism - more specifically, peace nationalism (where one is devoted to protecting the status and the ideology of a peaceful nation) was a growing trend as well. This translated into two structures to be found in Japan's national identity that are portrayed through mass media (and especially manga and anime): pacifism and militarism (McVeigh: 2004). For a long time, pacifism has been an intrinsic part of Japan's national identity and has distinguished Japan from other countries. After the Cold War, the Japanese government took pride in restraining its military forces more than other countries did (Gustafsson, Hagström and Hanssen 2018: 138). With new policies, presented by the Japanese government as their soft power policies, the Japanese government is currently trying to reaffirm Japan's identity as a peace-loving country by using popular culture (among other strategies). Many scholars describe Japan's Prime Minister Shinzō Abe's character and policies as essentially pacifist, whilst others claim that Japan's pacifism is crumbling (Gustafsson et al 2018: 138). On the other hand, as described by Gustafsson, Hagström and Hanssen:

Abe's attack on Japan's relative pacifism, as both a policy and an identity, has been so forceful and effective that we believe the time has come to declare Japan's pacifism dead (Gustafsson et al 2018: 138).

When looking at anime, Japan's wartime past has been portrayed in various ways, both referring to the recent decades as well as to the much further past (for example in Hayao Miyazaki's *Princess Mononoke*). In a sense, anime productions can be an introduction to Japan's war-time history and can even be seen as a historical text (Mizuno 2007). Referring to a more recent past, for example, is the movie *Grave of the Fireflies* (*Hotaro no Haka*, dir: Isao Takahata, Japan, 1988). *Grave of the Fireflies* is an incredibly tragic film that has been based on the partly autobiographical story of Akiyuki Nosaka, who was separated from his family during the war and left with the care of his stepsister, who eventually passed away due to malnutrition (Goldberg 2009: 39). It is set in the city of Kobe during World War II in 1945. The plot follows the suffering of a young boy and his toddler-sister, who have no parents and have been abandoned by others, trying to survive. This movie was released simultaneously with Miyazaki's *My Neighbour Totoro* but was in many ways very different from the 'happy go lucky' feeling that's left after watching *Totoro*. Instead, *Grave of the Fireflies* leaves a feeling of sadness and emptiness; of witnessing an almost autobiographical event with which the older Japanese generation can still identify.

The anime series *Space Battleship Yamato* (*Uchū senkan Yamato*, dir: Leij Matsumoto, Japan, 1977) is a completely different example of an anime referring to Japan's Cold War and post-Cold War periods and invokes, according to scholar Hiromi Mizuno, 'nostalgia, glory, and an alternative reality by utilizing the image of Yamato', and deals with a fantasy of post-war Japan where the 'pacifist constitution renounces war' (Mizuno 2007: 105). As is the case with *Grave of the Fireflies*, though seemingly very different in scenery and plot, the underlying desire of the anime is survival and stability in a time of war.

In 2013 the last movie of director Hayao Miyazaki, *The Wind Rises* (*Kaze Tachinu*) was released. It was received with praise by audiences, but also faced a lot of criticism (for example, in the article 'Swan Song Too Hawkish for Some' by Brooks Barnes in *The New York Times* [2013]). The film depicts the youth of the 1930s and is a tribute to aircraft designer Jiro Horikoshi (Gunma, Japan, 1903 - 1982) and also, his Italian forerunner Gianni Caproni, who was his inspiration in the film, and also one of Miyazaki's idols. Horikoshi made history with his famous Mitsubishi A6M1, which later became the Navy type 0 carrier fighter. The 'Zero' fighter has left a mark on aviation history. These planes took part in the attack on Pearl Harbor and in kamikaze missions (McCurry 2013). Before this, Horikoshi designed various other fighting planes and carrier attack planes for Mitsubishi. The Zero fighter was used as a warplane from 1940 to 1943. In the film not the war only is a part of the story, but also the great depression in Japan, unemployment, poverty, sickness (tuberculosis), revolutions, fascism, and of course, not having freedom of speech, whilst at the same time modern and (at the time) popular culture was flourishing (Miyazaki 2014: 8). In the film, Horikoshi is devoted to making the best airplane, aware that it will be used for the war regardless of the consequences. Although there is a lot of hesitation and doubt in the main character, he still chooses to set his doubts aside and to pursue his dream of making the best airplane, even though his design was 'captured' by the military. Of course, one can expect to be criticised when romanticising a story about a plane design that has caused so much terror. However, Miyazaki (who loved airplanes since his childhood) stated he just wanted to portray a 'devoted individual who pursued his dreams head on' (Miyazaki 2014: 8). But swaying towards beauty, as Miyazaki states, may come with a price (ibid). In a sense, the underlying message of the film is an anti-military one, brought to the spectator by various events and the main character's doubts in a time of war, the choices he has to make and the challenges he has to cope with (for example, his wife being sick of tuberculosis).

The movie was a box-office hit in Japanese cinemas, grossing \$120 million in ticket sales.. The sensitivity about the theme of the film is, as critics argue, that it has a strong pacifist message and is 'a biopic of Jiro Horikoshi, an aeronautical engineer whose contribution to the world was a killing machine' (Barnes: 2013). Arguably, what is portrayed in the film is - however controversial - a plausible view of the doubt that Horikoshi might have had in a time of war, which has been portrayed very subtly by Miyazaki. It shows that in wartime, values and survival don't always collide. Even so, both the film studios and Miyazaki have been attacked by Japanese pacifists for their 'film tribute' to a war plane designer. Miyazaki, who is openly against the constitutional reform of Japan, was called an 'anti-Japanese' traitor because the movie focussed on 'the nonsense' of the war (McCurry 2013). On top of this, Miyazaki wrote an essay that was published simultaneously with the film's release, condemning Japan's modern-day drift to the right, criticising Abe's plans of to revise Japan's pacifist constitution (McCurry 2013). In South-Korea, the film was not only denounced because of it being a tribute to a 'boogiemer' as one might say, but also because in reality, the airplanes were assembled by forced labourers from the Korean Peninsula, to which Miyazaki responded in 2013: 'He (Horikoshi) was someone who resisted demands from the military [...] I wonder if he should be liable for anything just because he lived in that period.' (McCurry 2013)

Miyazaki's father, in fact, had been one of the assemblers of military airplanes during the war. Arguably, his message in this film is also a message that one's actions are influenced by the situation that surrounds them during a time of war. It is striking that an anime film can lead to so much debate in Japan and surrounding countries. As for film director Hayao Miyazaki, it certainly complicates his public persona.

The responses to *The Wind Rises* are also a result and an example of the alternative versions of historical memory that the Japanese (both in the political landscape as civilians) are dealing with. Many regions in Japan are often cultivating local identities which are based

upon different versions of (local) history. Memories and stories of individuals as well as the portrayal of artefacts in museums and tourist places are built on popularized versions of history and historical recollection or 'historical memory' (Hirano, Saaler and Säbel 2017: 247). This means that the Japanese identity is divided and based on different versions of Japanese history, hence the fact that a film such as *The Wind Rises* can cause so much uproar and tensions between the 'advocates' of different versions of (a wartime) history. Firstly, there is the progressive view which denounces Japanese History up to and including World War Two as an expression of imperialist aggression (Hirano et al 2017: 258-259). Secondly, there is the (neo)liberalist view, which is propagated by conservative circles, who attempt to establish national pride by reinterpreting its modern history (ibid). 'Liberalism' is a collection of concepts deriving from the ideas such as Immanuel Kant in the 17th and 18th centuries. In the 20th century, the current liberalistic view has been developed by idealists such Woodrow Wilson . After the First World War, Wilson (and many other idealists) were determined to change the system so that things like the war would not happen again in the future. Since the end of the Cold War from 1947 to 1991 Neo-Liberalism became a movement within liberalism (Vyas 2011: 20). Liberalism stands for freedom of choice, individualistic freedom (without limiting the freedom of others) and generally, having the feeling of security, with civil rights and limited governmental and state restrictions (2011: 20-26). Within Neo-liberalism the government does not (or, very limited) control or interfere with the economy. The government distances itself from all services that can be provided by the public sector, creating space for free trade, as well as economic and individual freedom and growth. (Neo)liberalists often do not consider military power to be the most important source of power, but also believe in individualism which can reside in individuals, companies and other 'actors' that might be formed by these individuals or companies- and how they pursue their relationships (ibid: 20-22). This also explains Abe's and his party's liberalist views, focusing on popular culture (among other sources) as a main source of soft power.

Lastly, there is also the 'Shiba' view of history which looks at the positive aspects of the Meiji period (until 1905) when Japan was seen as a progressive country open to social reforms (Hirano et al 2017: 247-277).

Over 30 years ago, the anime film *Akira* (dir: Katsuhiro Otomo, 1988, Japan) was released. It has since been a huge cult hit and one of the most famous anime films ever made (Napier 2007: 40). The film is an apocalyptic and futuristic view of so called 'Neo' Tokyo and portrays the city in a future after World War Three (which in the film takes place in the year 2019). The war was started after what was believed to be a nuclear bomb explosion in Tokyo. However, the explosion was actually caused by a supernatural child called Akira, a boy whose supernatural powers were created by the government's experiments with telekinesis. The streets are roamed by violent gangs of bikers, there is poverty, terror, government oppression and protests. The main character of the movie is Tetsuo, who is part of one of the motorcycle gangs. He grew up in an orphanage and finds out he has telekinetic powers, as well. After Tetsuo discovers his powers, he is captured by the government but manages to escape, after which he decides to use his powers to destroy the military complex in Tokyo (which in the film is responsible for locking up people with 'abilities') and destroying huge parts of 'Neo' Tokyo, including the military force that tries to stop him. As critics suggest, the movie is a reference to the nuclear bombs dropped by the United States during World War II, the character Akira being the metaphorical representation of the bomb and Tetsuo a metaphorical forerunner of calamities that still might happen (Chu, 2018). When *Akira* was released in 1988, Japan had reached its post-war peak of international influence and surrounding countries felt threatened by what they saw as Japan's superpower status (Napier 2007: 40) The government is omnipresent in *Akira*, whilst on the opposite side citizens of 'Neo' Tokyo portray the feeling of powerlessness. At some point, these roles are reversed, and the government can no longer control the destructive telekinetic outbursts of Tetsuo.

Akira does not have a happy ending, but in fact has an open ending where the spectator is left with the completely destroyed sightings of 'Neo' Tokyo and main character Tetsuo vanishing and turning into a white light - or rather, a new existence or entity, and stating 'I am Tetsuo'. Arguably, the statement is referring to Tetsuo's coming to terms with who he now is - and the situation he has created as a god-like creature. The film is grotesque, and scenes are so well-drawn that they are sometimes even difficult to look at when the main character Tetsuo is transforming or morphing into something post-human. Still, I would argue that even though the movie obviously shows a fantastic and over-exaggerated future, it is a representation of a national memory and feelings that are left after the World War II bombing of Hiroshima (on August 6, 1945) and Nagasaki (3 days later), which in Hiroshima wiped out an astonishing 90 percent of the city and killed approximately 80,000 people. In Nagasaki, approximately 40,000 people were killed. Up to this day, the effects of radiation are still noticeable and due to the long-term effects of radiation, many more people have died in the aftermath or are still coping with strange unexplainable health problems and cancers. These bombings were also the reason to announce Japan's surrender to the US only a few days after the horrific events and have left a huge scar on Japanese (and world) history (Yagami 2009: 301-307). *Akira* might be a fictional film, but the terror that is portrayed throughout the film is not even that far from the wartime horrors that happened in reality - and are still an underlying threat in modern times. Mass killing is still commonly used as a war tactic and is - and has been - used by almost all major powers. In a time of war, the government's decision to take thousands of lives is a very realistic one (for example, in an earlier event in March 1945, the United States air forces alone already killed 80,000 to 100,000 civilians in Tokyo (Yagami 2009: 306). An atomic bomb such as in *Akira* or airstrikes such as in *The Wind Rises* at a time of war are 'just' another weapon to use as a force of military power.

Japanese cinema has been representing the trauma of the atomic bombings long before *Akira* or *The Wind Rises*. It has been a theme that has been used since the 1950s, for example in *Godzilla*. As discussed in previous chapters, the Godzilla films have become a precursor to contemporary soft power; a product of Japan that is known and 'adopted' around the globe. Apart from Gojira/ Godzilla being a popular character and a famous subject of merchandise from Japan, the films also are a response to America's wartime aggression and nuclear bombings. The filmmaker's original intentions were thus not only to make a monster action movie- but also to make an anti-war and anti-nuclear film (Miyamoto 2016: 1091). Gojira is a monster, but he is also a victim of radiation exposure from nuclear tests. In that sense, his destructive capabilities are a direct result of human mistakes, and represent the mass destruction of nuclear weapons. On the other hand, Gojira also raises sympathy and stands for the victims of nuclear weapons, as he himself is a victim too, which raises sympathy for the creature (2016: 1091). Furthermore, Gojira also represents the disruption of man and nature, which plays an important role in Japanese culture and in Shintoism, Japan's largest religion (which I discussed in more depth in chapter 3).

What *Godzilla*, *Akira* and *The Wind Rises* have in common is that they all portray an (artistic) interpretation of how citizens might act and feel in a time of war, what can happen to a society and its values, mass destruction and feelings of powerlessness such as many have experienced during the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945. Secondly, I argue that the national background of the directors of the abovementioned works have influenced the storylines and portrayal of history in the films. Arguably, what these films demonstrate is that (as is the case with many Hollywood films, too) Japanese film and/or anime can be a form of (mass) entertainment, but at the same time can be very nationalistic, often falling back on national traumas and memories in.

A similar case is the *Barefoot Gen* series. The manga *Barefoot Gen* (*Hadashi no Gen*, 1973- 1974) was originally created by cartoonist Keiji Nakazawa and was made into three

live action films in 1976, 1977 and 1980. It also became commonly known as an anime film (directed by Mori Masaki in 1983 and a second film by Toshio Hirata in 1986). Original manga artists Keiji Nakazawa based the story plot loosely on his own experiences with the atomic bomb. When Nakazawa was six years old, the atomic bomb was dropped on his hometown, Hiroshima. At the time Nakazawa only lived about a mile from the bombing, and many of his relatives lost their lives both at the time of the bombing and in later years, due to the consequences of radiation. *Barefoot Gen* (the anime, live action films and the original manga) is about living as a child during the wartime in Hiroshima and the events that took place before, during and after the bombing are portrayed in great detail. The story is even used as a recourse in Japan to educate young people about the nuclear war and has been used in school libraries since 1980 (Nakazawa 2001: 124). It also condemns militarist leadership, which makes *Barefoot Gen* a pacifist story, opposed to war, militarism, or violence.

What is striking about *Barefoot Gen* is that it was the first Japanese manga that became internationally known due to the actions of a Japanese-American peace movement (Berndt 2012: 148), who fought for the translation of the *Barefoot Gen* manga series into English due its important message, and succeeded in their quest in 1978. The non-profit organisation 'Project Gen' was formed in 1976 by both Japanese and American citizens living in Tokyo. So far, they have managed to translate the first four volumes of the manga into English, followed by translations in French, German, Swedish, Norwegian, Esperanto, Indonesian, and Tagalog (Nakazawa 2001: 124). However, in the current era, *Barefoot Gen* has not escaped criticism either. Even if it was 'just' a comic, it has been used as a historical reference used to educate the young generation. But since the disaster in Fukushima, critics argue that *Barefoot Gen* in its storyline did not raise enough critical awareness about the dangers of nuclear power plants, and was not suitable as a historical reference (Berndt 2012: 148). This is remarkable, because the manga was never intended for such wider

educational purposes. Placing this responsibility on a manga, arguably, is somewhat ludicrous. However, since the recent debates surrounding *Barefoot Gen* there have been discussions arguing that the Fukushima accident needs to be 'exhaustively understood' before it can be used in manga or anime (2012: 159). This leads me back to the debate of how anime can be of influence on a socio-economic level. On the contrary, scholar Jaqueline Berndt argues:

Contemporary manga (and anime) fans privilege a kind of media consumption that is less about deep meaning which may be unpacked by intellectuals, than about economic, sensory (or even sensual) and cultural impacts. In this connection, manga and anime series are appreciated for the relationalities they trigger (2012: 159).

But even if this is the case, anime can be the subject of public and political debate. Which raises concerns and questions about the future of artistic freedom in Japan, and to what extent the government can influence creative industries and what is produced.

Anime directors and production companies might still choose to portray the 'other' Japan which could, as becomes clear from this chapter, cause friction in the way Japan wishes to portray itself. In addition to these debates, it is important to acknowledge that in January 2012 the Creative Industries Division of METI (Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry) in Japan launched the Cool Japan Strategy, in which the strategy to 'Capitalize on the popularity of 'Cool Japan'' was thoroughly described and aimed to accomplish: 1) unearthing of domestic demand, 2) incorporation of foreign demand, and 3) transformation of industrial structure. The aim of this was, according to the report, to secure new income sources and jobs, leading to regional economic revitalization (METI 2012: 4). The Cool Japan slogan itself has not only been discussed from the points of view of popular culture and creative industries, but also from a point of view of nationalism and nation-building (Valaskivi 2013: 1). Part of the Cool Japan strategy, as described in this publication, is the

'Japan Mother Program' which is aimed towards publicity based on Japan's culture. It also states that the programme was formed to 'edit knowledge' as the source of Cool Japan, collecting stories about the revival of 'the mother country' Japan as the 'Japan knowledge code', 'World knowledge code' and 'Asian knowledge code'- in order to 'record and distribute stories of Japan and re-edit Japan's industry, culture and economy'. (2012: 18). On the other hand, the same report states that freedom of expression and tolerance (along with communication nodes and investors) are essential in order to attract creative human resources, information, and capital (2012: 20).

When looking at Japanese anime, the economic support of Japanese products of soft power resulted in the funding of various productions. However, regardless of whether this is intentional or not, none of them involve sensitive issues such as nuclear bombings, the economy or other subjects that might cause public debate or uproar. For example, in 2012 METI funded Toei Animation's and 20th Century Fox's new *Dragonball Z* film *Battle of Gods* (*Kami to Kami*, Dir: Masahiro Hosoda, 2012, Japan/ USA) with approximately \$636.000 US dollars in order to support the international efforts of Japanese filmmakers (a collaboration with the United States, in this case) (Komatsu 2012). As harmless as the funding of *Dragonball Z* might seem, intended to strengthen international bonds, it seems that critics as well as fans argue about the propaganda of 'pro-active' pacifism in other government funded anime productions (Brummer 2016).³⁹ As stated in 2016 in *The Diplomat* by scholar Matthew Brummer:

To sell the image of a non-threatening Self-Defence Forces (JSDF) at home and abroad [...] Tokyo has and will continue to utilize a web of affective cultural and entertainment resources – the Creative Industrial Complex (CIC) – to influence perceptions of Japan's military establishment. The alignment between the CIC and

³⁹ For example, it has been discussed forums such as *Reddit* and *Anime News Network*.

the JSDF is nuanced, storied, and important for understanding both how Japan sees its own defence identity and how the international community sees Japan's military (Brummer 2016).

One of the popular anime (and manga) series that has been funded by CIC, is the fantasy series *Gate* (*Gate: Jieitai Kano Chi nite, Kaku Tatakaer*, dir: Takumi Yanai, 2006-2009, Japan). The series is not only funded, but also completely produced and designed according to how the JSDF (Japanese Self Defence Forces) wishes to portray themselves and is in line with certain guidelines, portraying a perfect and heroic image of Japan. The plot involves a group of JSDF soldiers who are protecting Japan from 'alien' invasion by using Japan's modern and state of the art defence technologies. According to critics, the story represents contemporary Japanese security-related issues, normalizing and familiarizing the audiences with Japan's armed forces (2016).

However, (military) nationalism in anime is not something new and certainly not something unusual either. When it comes to portraying the power of military forces and romanticising self defence forces, Hollywood, such as briefly compared earlier in this text with *Gojira*, has a history of films that involve certain forms of military propaganda too. For example, when taking a closer look at the films and comics of the Marvel Universe or films based on the heroes of DC Comics, one might come to the same conclusion. The important difference is that in Japan's case, certain productions such as *Gate* are (openly) influenced, restricted by certain guidelines and funded by the government, which makes spectators and critics wary and sceptical of how much artistic freedom these projects actually really have - and of course, on how much the government is in control of what is published in order to influence the public.

Conclusion

In this chapter I focussed on the rise of anime and explored how neo-nationalism and pacifism play a role in anime. Secondly, I examined the role of anime in the contemporary Japanese society as well as for the Japanese economy and political perspectives. With examples, I have shown that the collective national memories of the Japanese also consist of ideologies about Japan's history, which causes not only political and public debate, but also causes discussions about anime and media productions that might each portray their own versions of Japanese history. Anime has not only become an important economic product, but has also become important on a political and social-economic level. In Japan, both pacifism and militarism are portrayed through mass-media.

Anime is often an introduction to Japan's wartime history, but can face a lot of criticism, as I have shown by looking in more depth at Miyazaki's *The Wind Rises*, for example. By using examples of anime productions, I have shown that the Japanese identity is divided and based on different versions of Japanese history; a progressive view as well as a (neo)liberal view. Through exploring productions such as *Akira*, *Gojira* and *Barefoot Gen*, I have shown examples of anime and popular media that contain a metaphorical representation of the national memory and traumas after the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945, proving that anime can have a deeper meaning and can be the subject of public and political debate. In the context of the 'Cool Japan strategies', I have identified the challenges and issues that arise from governmental interference of popular media: the strategy was set up to capitalize on the popularity of 'Cool Japan'. However, as becomes clear in this chapter, the government simultaneously is using popular media to portray nationalism and nation-building and, more importantly, edit the national as well as international knowledge about Japan. Economic support of Japanese products of soft power resulted in the funding of various productions, which has led to debates in regard to artistic freedom and propaganda in government funded anime productions.

Chapter 5. International anime fandom and subculture

In contrast with earlier chapters, which are focused on the political and economic status of anime and the cultural identity of anime, this chapter focuses on the commercialisation of anime by looking at international markets and the subcultures that have derived from anime: Comic-cons, otaku subculture,⁴⁰ and global anime fandom. Having established some parameters for understanding what cultural and national identity is with regards to anime as a product, this chapter explores anime further as a (sub)cultural phenomenon. This chapter shows that anime culture is, indeed, a form of soft power on its own: anime culture has become a 'business card' for Japan, making Japan and Japanese products more attractive and more popular worldwide.

The rise of anime from a Dutch perspective

Whilst growing up in the Netherlands (which therefore will be my starting point), I was first introduced to anime as a child in the 80s and early 90s. Back then, anime was not labelled as such or even as Japanese - they were just cartoons. Therefore, not being aware of what anime or 'otaku' culture was, Dutch children from the 80s grew up with the translated reruns of, for example, Isao Takahata's and Hayao Miyazaki's (among others) *Heidi, Girl of the Alps* (Arupusu no Shōjo Haiji, dir: Isao Takahata, Japan, 1974) and many of us were fans of the sad stories of *Demetan Croaker, The Boy Frog* (Kerokko Demetan, dir: Hiroshi Sasagawa, Japan, 1973). In later years, children in the Netherlands became more aware that many of the cartoons on Dutch children's television were made in Japan. I remember

⁴⁰ In Japan, the word 'Otaku' means a young person who is obsessed by Japanese popular culture or- what we in the West refer to as a 'nerd' or 'geek'. The word has been adopted by anime fans all over the world and is commonly used a reference to anime fans. Many anime fans choose to refer to themselves as otaku, to emphasise how much they love the anime and the subculture that has derived from anime. The first generation of otaku fans were those who were born between 1955 and 1965 (Lamarre 2009:146).

being somewhat confused at first as to which term should be used to refer to 'Japanese cartoons'. Anime was called 'manga cartoons' by many Dutch children in the 80s and 90s, which was slowly replaced by the commonly used term 'anime'. With the introduction of *Dragon Ball* (*Doragon Bōru*, dir: Daisuke Nishio, Japan, 1986-1989) and *Dragon Ball Z* (*Doragon Bōru Zetto*, dir: Daisuke Nishio, Japan, 1989-1996), the first signs of early anime-fandom were noticeable in the Netherlands. *Dragonball* was unlike any other cartoon we had experienced, and almost immediately after it was broadcast for the first time, became a huge hit. Many children (both younger and older) became fans of the series. The success of *Dragonball* in the Netherlands has been an introduction for many to anime in the 90s and might have been the start of modern anime subculture, not only in the Netherlands, but also on a global level as series like *Dragonball* were slowly but surely introduced in the West.

After anime became commonly known and broadcast on television, the commercialisation of anime fan culture was only a matter of time. The first anime convention in the Netherlands was called *AnimeCon* and was organised in 1999. It has been organised each year since. Starting off with about 300 visitors in a small venue in '99, these days *AnimeCon* is already attracting about 18,000 visitors and growing by an additional 2000 visitors each year. In fact, *AnimeCon* is becoming so big in the Netherlands that no other city other than Rotterdam wants to host the event due to the logistic measures that have to be taken for the event.⁴¹ The demand of anime and fan gatherings of popular culture is still growing, hence the fact that an additional event *Dutch ComicCon* has been organised since 2015, attracting about 25,000 visitors during the first edition in 2015 and approximately 32,000 in 2018.⁴²

⁴¹ As stated in Dutch Newspaper *Algemeen Dagblad* on 15 June 2018 titled '*AnimeCon is to big for The Hague*'.

⁴² As stated on Dutch Newswebsite *Nu.nl* in 2015 and 2018.

What is so attractive about anime that it has created a wide range of fans and even a subculture of fans dressing up as their favourite characters (cosplay), attending gatherings and communicating with each other via online anime forums? The globalisation of anime and anime subculture has in a way created a new, global (and autonomous) identity crossing cultural borders and prevailing existing cultural identities. The identity anime-fans identify themselves with is not a fixed identity, but a created one. As Chris Barker suggests, television (and thus also film) is a major and proliferating resource for the construction of cultural identity as it spreads across the globe. It provides a resource and 'material' to be further worked on (1999: 7). In the case of anime fandom, the sub-culture that has emerged from anime represents a common interest, and has developed a shared, global representation of customs associated with anime. As Susan Napier suggests, Japan's soft power plays a role here. But anime sub-culture is also highly depended on fan input and involvement (2007: 150). Secondly, another element that gives meaning to anime sub-culture is what Napier refers to as 'subcultural capital':

[...] the knowledge and expertise that one gains about the object of one's enthusiasm that allows one not only to feel comfortable with other like-minded fans, but also to gain status among fellow enthusiasts. Often it is this subcultural capital that truly animates and sustains fandom. [...] Subcultural capital is also related to the experiences of pleasure and mastery, [...] in themselves highly active forms of involvement (ibid: 150).

Fan gatherings have grown into massive and professionally organised conventions. The availability of anime merchandise has grown almost simultaneously too: with the rise of anime sub-culture commercialisations of everything anime-related is inevitable. Fandom, however, is a multicultural territory (Chen 2007: 14) and my experience of growing up in with anime in the Netherlands - although anime has possibly made its entrance in a different

pace or timeframe - is similar to the experiences of adolescents in other regions such as the United States or even Asia. For example, scholar Jin-Shiow Chen describes fan culture in Taiwan from a different, but at the same time similar, perspective. Different, on the one hand, because as Chen suggests, anime was once an unaccepted and 'small' undercurrent of society (2007: 15). Similar, on the other hand, because nowadays, just like in the Netherlands, anime has a huge range of fans who are participating in socio-cultural activities and spending money on anime and anime-related products. In that sense, fan culture does not necessarily differ solely on the basis of country, but also between the fans themselves. The anime fan culture is often described as a 'complete package'; fans read manga, watch anime, go to fan gatherings and comic-cons, take part in cosplay events, and so on. However, my experience is that, arguably, more than in any other fan- or subculture, there are different breakdowns or 'scenes' within the anime subculture. For example, one might be a fan of watching anime, but not necessarily enjoy going to comic-cons. Or, one might enjoy comic-cons, but not be into cosplay at all.

When it comes to anime and comic-cons, Taiwan's first comic con was organised in 1997, only two years before the convention culture (commonly referred to as Con culture) made it to the Netherlands. In the United States, the first comic-con conventions already date back to the 60s. The first convention that was specifically focussed on Japanese cartoons and manga was held in 1983 in Dallas, Texas (Brooker 2014). These massive fan gatherings (anime-cons as well as comic-cons, of which anime has become an important part) are now held all over the globe, attracting millions of fans each year and cashing in on tickets, merchandise, food, and everything else that visitors can relate (even in the slightest) to the con-experience and to anime culture.

It has become a tradition for many to experience and share interests with fellow fans and to find the latest or unique products, hear the latest news from the anime industry and perhaps even to meet their favourite characters, directors and/or anime creators. Animecons

are often a representation of what visitors perceive as the latest trends in Japanese popular culture. There is Japanese food, Japanese pop-bands, 'Kawaii' products. Often traditional Japanese culture can be experienced, such as tea ceremonies, sumo wrestling (but with fat suits), martial arts workshops, kanji writing workshops, and so on. Napier discusses her experiences with comic-cons in the United States, where, as she describes, comic-cons can be seen as acting as cultural ambassadors of the Japanese culture (2007: 152), or at least are a taste of the Japanese culture. Cons can be an introduction to Japanese culture but at the same time are not an 'ideal' representation of what Japanese culture truly is. They are in a way a (temporary) cultural phenomenon on their own mixing Japanese traditions with Japanese pop-culture and above all, the expectations of anime fans. A place to not only meet old friends but also to make new friends, and to enjoy and experience a temporary anime world for as long as they are there.

In youth culture, it is no surprise that something so unique as an anime (or comic) convention attracts teenagers and young adults, each developing their own personality and at an age where 'belonging' to a community is an important part of growing up. All the more interesting is the foreign and estranged attraction not only of anime but also of the Japanese culture. In the essay 'The Japan Fad in Global Youth Culture' (2006), Ann Allison explains this feeling of feeling estranged (but also intrigued) by comparing the movie *Lost in Translation* (2003) (where two American travellers find each other in Japan because of its perceived 'strangeness') to Western youth culture and Japan-oriented fandom. As Allison describes, the strangers in the movie are lost in a culture that is both quirky and beautiful, very foreign and outside of translations (2006: 11). In a way, this is also what is so appealing to anime- and comic-cons. But instead of feeling lost, visitors enjoy embracing this feeling of strangeness and quirkiness. What attracts anime fans is 'the feeling of being in a place between the phantasmal and real, the foreign and familiar, the strange and every

day' (Allison 2006: 16). A place where they have a feeling of being in a fantasy world that is both enjoyable and both a subculture they strive to master when it comes to knowledge.

Anime fandom in China

Globally, China holds the largest fan community of anime (Fung et al. 2019: 125). Anime plays a huge role in Chinese popular culture and is of major influence on the Chinese youth, which is striking, since the Chinese government, too, has attempted to create and 'push' their own creative industries on domestic markets, but, according to Fung et al. remained unsuccessful in the majority of their attempts (ibid: 125). Anime is so big in China that by 2017 it had already surpassed the Japanese market: sales of anime and anime-related products are now higher in China than in Japan (Kodaka and Cho 2017). This too is surprising, because in the past years the Chinese government has also attempted to ban Japanese content from Chinese television and online sources - often because of the content being too extreme for Chinese 'standards'. According to an article in *The Japan Times*, the Chinese government claims that some anime series are a threat to the 'healthy development of youth' and encourage criminal activity and violence (anon. 2015).⁴³ For example, as is the case with the popular series *Attack on Titan* (*Shingeki no Kyojin*, Dir: Tetsurō Araki and Masashi Koizuka, Japan, 2013-present) along with 37 other anime productions that were banned in 2015 (ibid. 2015). But again, until now this ban has no success either: fans still manage to use 'hidden' online sources to access Japanese media instead (Kodaka and Cho 2017). What is striking is that something that seems so 'innocent' as anime has become a subject of political discussion between China and Japan. Whereas Prime Minister Shinzō Abe is pushing anime as a soft power, Chinese President Xi Jinping has been the frontrunner in China when it comes to banning 'inappropriate' anime from Japan. Not only were these 38

⁴³ "China bans 'Attack on Titan,' other popular Japanese anime from Web", *The Japan Times* (Kyodo), June 9th, 2015.

productions banned under his wing, Xi even goes to the extent where he asks Chinese media and citizens to reject Japanese vulgarity and promote Chinese artwork instead (*The Japan Times*, 2015).

When looking at anime from an economic perspective, there are more factors that make the Chinese market different from Western markets. One of them is that China on one hand is one of the most important export markets for Japanese popular culture and on the other, China has created a huge market of rip-offs and copies of Japanese anime as well. For example, the Chinese animation series *Astro Plan* (*Taikong Lixianji*, Dir: Xing Yuan, China, 2010) has a striking resemblance to *Space Battleship Yamato* (*Uchū Senkan Yamato*, Dir: Leiji Matsumoto, Japan, 1974-1975) and *Mobile Suit Gundam 00* (*Kidō Senshi Gandamu Daburu Ō*, Dir: Seiichi Mizushima, Japan, 2007- 2009). However, these copies are often seen as mediocre rip-offs by Chinese anime fans who, as studies from Fung et. al. suggest, prefer to watch authentic Japanese animation (ibid: 129). Important to note is that it is not just the Chinese animation industry that is trying to cash in on 'rip offs' of existing Japanese anime. For example, the Korean animation series *Super Kid* (Dir: Yi Yong Umhas, 1994) has a striking resemblance to the popular Japanese anime *Dragonball* (see figure 8 and 9):

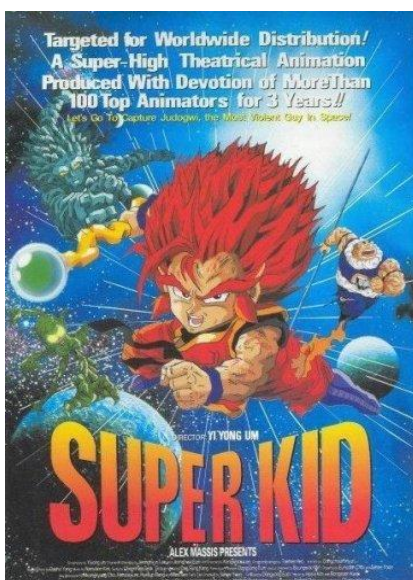


Figure 8,
A poster for the Korean movie *Superkid*.



Figure 9,
A poster for the Japanese series *Dragonball Z*.

And of course (although in most cases not plagiarised but with legally bought rights) Hollywood has been copying anime and foreign productions for a long time, too. These are just a few of the many examples, but show that the growth of anime fandom in China (and other surrounding countries) can lead to widespread copying, influencing and plagiarism of production companies in order to make more profits. But there are also more positive sides to the success of anime in China. It has opened new business opportunities and collaborations between Chinese and Japanese businesses and production companies. For example, the cross-border film production *Legend of the Demon Cat* (also known as 'Kukai') (*Yāo Māo Zhuàn*, Dir: Chen Kaige, 2017) is a collaboration between China, Hong Kong and Japan (Kodaka and Cho 2017). Furthermore, Chinese anime fandom also results in more tourism from China. Research from Kirillova et al. (2018: 268) shows that China is the most important market for Japan when it comes to tourism. Anime and otaku subculture is one of the most important motivations for Chinese tourists to visit Japan. Building further on the research of Kirillova et al., what is even more striking, is that the number of tourists travelling from China to Japan has grown almost simultaneously with the growth of anime fandom in China. This has even resulted in the rise of Japanese travel agencies that are specifically focussing on Chinese anime tourism, offering anime-related tours and sightseeing (ibid: 269).

It is clear that anime fandom in China is of major importance to the Japanese economy. However, with China playing such a big role in the 'boom' of anime, Japan heavily depends on China for reaching its fiscal goals of a striking 150% more profits in 2020 (Nikkei 2017). The political ties between Japan and China still remain fragile, which makes the economic goals the Japanese government has in mind for its Chinese markets fragile, too. Any political decision or disagreement between the two countries, can result in a more aggressive backlash from China in banning Japanese media more or even completely (ibid. 2017). This would mean that fans would simply have no access to their favourite Japanese

products (which of course, is already the case with current censorship policies for some anime productions, as discussed in the beginning of this section, but until now fans are still able to find a way around this through 'pirate' websites). For example, as a result of political tensions in 2012 (when there were massive protests in China against the Japanese government buying the Diaoyu Islands) Japanese products were boycotted in China (Yang and Xu 2016: 168). Remarkably, everything was boycotted from cars, electrical supplies to books, TV drama's and TV shows, but anime and manga still remained available via online sources (ibid. 2016). Another recent example from 2019 is the trade war between China and the United States: After Trump decided to increase the import tariffs with 10% on Chinese goods, China announced to take significant countermeasures. The economy of both countries is directly affected by these decisions.

Political tensions between Japan and China are not the only thing that makes the Chinese market fragile for Japan, but also what distinguishes Chinese from Western fandom. Arguably, Chinese fans are more extreme in expressing their fandom than those from Western countries. At the same time, Chinese fans often have to deal with criticism from family and friends as to why they would even like a product of the 'evil' Japan. As a result of Japan's and China's wartime past and political relationship, being a fan of Japanese products is still somewhat controversial for the older Chinese generation (Yang and Xu 2016: 168)). Even with this being the case, cosplay culture, a subculture that has derived from anime, games, comic and sci-fi fandom, is taken to such a serious level in China that it surpasses all other cosplay gatherings around the globe. Cosplay is an art form in itself: fans dress up as their favourite character and create the most spectacular outfits. These outfits can be bought, but in many cases are created from scratch by the fans themselves. In 2015, about one in every ten high school students in China was actively engaged in cosplay (Mackay 2015). The growth and popularity of the cosplay culture in China has led to the development

of the *China Cosplay Super Show (CCSS)*, which is now the largest cosplay competition in China.

Originally international cosplayers were brought together in a large setting for the first time during the World Cosplay Summit which has been held annually in Nagoya, Japan, since 2003. The Japanese event consists of photography events and the international World Cosplay Championship (WCC). However, the WCC has been facing negativity from fans in Japan because of its governmental interference and commercialism (Ruan 2018: 208). Furthermore, cosplay competition is generally disliked by many Japanese cosplay fans. The way they prefer to participate in cosplay is not to compete with each other, but to bond with each other and make photos (2018: 208). Directly deriving from the WCC, various other cosplay competitions are now held around the globe, including the *China Cosplay Super Show*. The main difference is that none of them is as strict as the CCSS, where competitors are judged on the tiniest details and accuracy (Mackay 2015). Furthermore, both the festival that is hosting the competition (the China International Cartoon and Animation Festival, CICAFA) and CCSS itself are attracting a wide range of international visitors and competitors each year. CICAFA was organised for the 15th time in 2019 and has become one of the largest cartoon and animation festivals in the world (Ruowei 2019). And therefore, it has become a serious competitor for the World Cosplay Summit Japan. Not only is the festival welcoming worldwide fans, but it also became a place for new international business opportunities, including pre-arranged business meetings and discussions for the most important international players (ibid. 2019).

When it comes to the cosplay show, this is where the line is drawn between amateur cosplay and professional cosplay. It might not seem that way with all the *kawaii* (cute) outfits and broad smiles, but the CCSS a very serious event for competitors. This brings me to how important it is to note that there is a major difference between amateur and professional cosplay, especially and foremost in China. For many cosplay fans, participating

in cosplay is about the 'fun' and 'play' elements of it (Scott 2015: 146). However, since cosplay has been professionalised in China and has become a commercial and competitive industry as well, professional competitors often spend loads of money and months of training and preparation into their outfits and performance. In that sense, cosplay competitions in China have taken on a rather close resemblance to professional top sports. Chinese cosplay acts often consist of a large group of staff and team members, in most cases employing between 40 and 100 people (ibid. 2019). Each team member plays an important role in the success of the performance. There is professional coaching just like in a sports team, there are team members that are behind the designs and make-up, those who promote the team and of course the team members who are actually performing (Fung and Pung 2016: 86). The performance itself is no less than 20 minutes, whereas during the WCC in Japan (and most other cosplay competitions outside of China) performances are only allowed to be about two and a half minutes long. Another difference is that before being allowed on stage in China, a pre-recorded performance has been carefully monitored and checked beforehand by government officials (Jacobs 2013: 27). The most famous cosplayers have professional marketing campaigns behind them, sell merchandise and have a broad range of fans supporting them. Some Chinese cosplayers have become so well known that they even have their own range of international fans and are starring in films and TV dramas in China and Japan (ibid. 2016). Whilst cosplay is becoming more mainstream in Japan, it is certainly taken to a whole new level in China, where achievement and success seem to play a larger role in cosplaying than in its originating country Japan. In fact, the Chinese cosplay industry has become something entirely different from the Japanese and other international cosplay industries, as scholar Li Ruan argues as well:

Cosplay in China has developed into something strikingly different from both its Japanese origins and its counterparts in other countries and regions. In China, cosplay communities comprise local and university-based cosplay groups or circles.

They enjoy both the photographic and stage performance elements of cosplay and function at a highly professionalized, commercialized, industrialized, and competitive level. ACG (Anime Comic and Game) fans usually join a cosplay circle if they want to participate in cosplay. In cosplay circles, there is a division of labour according to each cosplayer's preference and, more importantly, their expertise (Ruan 2018: 210).

Another interesting observance of cosplay and especially professional cosplay in China, is the amount of 'genderless' characters. The most famous Chinese cosplayers are often praised for their androgynous looks and ability to transform into any desired character, regardless if the character is an man, woman, or other (Jacobs 2013: 37-38). This genderlessness in cosplay might be less of an issue in Western regions of the world, but in China, it is remarkable to see that androgyny in cosplay is becoming a trend whilst China on the other hand is still commonly known as being conservative on matters of gender (2013: 26). Queerness in domestic China is still seen as being socially unacceptable and whilst cosplay events are supported by the government, that same government is homophobic (until 2001, homosexuality was even officially seen as a mental illness in China). Of course, I am not trying to suggest in any way that cosplay events have anything to do with sexual orientation (and neither do I suggest that exploring gender identity does, either). But with boundaries such as these, it is arguably no surprise that Chinese youth is pushing the limits within their cultural norms when it comes to expressing themselves in cosplay. Cosplay might be the only accepted way for Chinese youth to experience genderlessness, whilst feeling comfortable and accepted in their outfits of desire in a non- binary way,⁴⁴ as scholar Katrien Jacobs points out as well:

⁴⁴ Not bound to a gender identity, regardless of sexual orientation.

[...] Cosplayers have found ways to comfortably claim and manifest their youth fashions as temporary and tentative outlets that supposedly can be discarded and do not have to lead to a fully queer adulthood (Jacobs 2013: 32).

Something surprising seems to be going on in China, because whilst China's government has been turning more conservative since 2012 (when Xi Jinping became China's leader) (Anon. 2019)⁴⁵ gender fluid idols and performers seem to thrive more than ever. As suggested before, the Chinese government has been trying to ban any kind of art form and anime that does not fit Chinese cultural standards. This includes cross-dressing or any other kind of art that challenges conventional gender roles, as suggested by *The Economist* in 2012. But not only does the government support the China Cosplay Super Show, 'regular' cross-dressing shows are also becoming commonly more accepted and are more successful than ever, as long as they are politically correct. Which basically means that cross-dressing men are allowed to perform, as long as they are dressed like traditional Chinese opera stars - and all performances are government controlled (ibid. 2012).

Conclusion

In previous chapters, I explained the meaning of soft power and how the Japanese government is using popular culture as a soft power. Having examined the attractiveness of anime-cons, cosplay gatherings and competitions, and the scale in which these gatherings have flourished internationally, it is clear that anime-cons, as well as cosplay, can be seen as a form of soft power. It might even sound 'silly' that something like a convention can be an *economic force* for a country. But these conventions are an introduction and a business card for Japan: it makes consumers all the more interested in Japan as a country, attracted into buying more Japanese products, consuming Japanese foods. The next step is visiting Japan

⁴⁵ According to the article: "Dolled up for the party. Politically correct cross-dressing in China: Drag artists are tolerated if they look like Chinese opera stars", *The Economist*, July 18th, 2019.

as a tourist: making a 'pilgrimage' to the Studio Ghibli museum or to Akihabara, the famous Japanese district for electronic and 'otaku' products (Kirillova et al. (2018: 268-279) In the long run, it may even attract more youth to study in Japan (a variety of organisations promoting studying and/ or travelling in Japan are already often to be found at conventions), opening new opportunities for business and (academic) co-operations in the future.

I would like to note that, throughout this chapter as well as this thesis, I refer to anime as being a subculture. Building on existing research, news items and media, 'subculture' is what is commonly used as the term to describe anime culture. However, it is evident that anime in Japan and the Western world is becoming more and more common. Yet there will always be a difference between anime as a subculture in Japan, and anime subculture in the rest of the world. Whereas in Japan this subculture has the potential to become more mainstream rather than a subculture due its domestic origins, in the West it will always be a subcultural phenomenon. What also becomes clear in this chapter, is that anime fandom has been evolving from a 'collective' subculture to a scene in which other relatively self-contained subcultures have emerged. Anime subculture has become common for a more casual audience in Western regions. Hence, for these regions, arguably, it can be best described as a 'mainstream cult'. It is shifting from its subcultural 'cult status' to being more mainstream - but is also unable to ever completely become mainstream. According to scholar Matt Hills, in situations like these, the 'mainstream' versus the 'cult' seems to be intertwined (Hills 2010: 71). According to Hills, the 'mainstream' holds all the aspects of widespread distribution, (cultural) reach and popularity, whilst 'cult' is more often perceived to be authentic and to have 'hardcore fans' that have created their own subculture (ibid.).

The demand of anime and fan gatherings of popular culture is international, and the globalisation of anime and anime subculture crossed borders, too. Anime fans share an identity, regardless of their cultural or economic background. Thus, the subculture that has

emerged from anime represents a common interest all over the globe, but does play a somewhat different role in China, where anime 'piracy' (which is in itself a rebellious act against the government) is often the only option to watch ones favourite series due governmental restrictions. Furthermore, anime subculture in China and therein cosplay especially, has become a way to challenge governmental rules, limitations and old-fashioned (but dominant) ideologies both of the older generation as the government.

At the same time, due to this common worldwide interest, Japan's popular culture is shared and represented globally, which makes anime fan culture an interesting economic target. This is not only the case for its originating country Japan, but for other countries too, such as is also the case with the conventions and cosplay competitions that are organised in China, which are attracting a broad range of international visitors each year and are boosting the extremely commercial Chinese animation (and cosplay) industry at the same time. In the West it is foremost an introduction or a first 'taste' of Japan, resulting in more interest from especially the younger generation in Japan as a whole. In the long run, it can stimulate more international students coming to Japan, more tourism and of course, more money spent on everything anime related - even in the slightest.

Con culture is an important part of this: anime and comic-cons are attracting millions of fans each year, representing not only the latest trends in Japanese popular culture, but also function as an introduction to Japanese culture and tradition. China holds the largest fan community of anime in the world, which makes China the most interesting market for Japan in economic terms. Anime fandom has resulted in plagiarism but has also opened up a broad range of business opportunities for Japan. However, the political relationship between China and Japan still remains fragile, which is a risk for Japan. If there is a Chinese backlash against Japan, this will have a major economic effect on the animation industry (and automatically, will affect all the industries that are directly linked to it, such as anime tourism, merchandise etc.) and thus, Japan's fiscal goals, which are possible but ambitious

and highly depended on unchanged economic and political relationships. When it comes to Chinese anime fandom, it is still somewhat controversial for the older generation. This is striking, because at the same time anime and cosplay are immensely popular among Chinese youth. Professional cosplay competition plays a very important role in anime fandom and is taken extremely seriously. In China it has developed into to something strikingly different from both its Japanese origins and its counterparts in other countries and regions. Whilst politically China is becoming more conservative, current youth is doing quite the opposite. More teenagers than in any other country are engaging in cosplay. At the same time cosplay in China has become a 'safe' way to explore the boundaries of gender identity. Arguably, Japanese popular culture has opened a door for Chinese youth to feel more free and more able to express themselves, which possibly is the reason why cosplaying in China became so popular in the first place.

Chapter 6. Final conclusions

Whilst writing this thesis, it was almost impossible to keep up with the pace in which Japan worked their way economically through expanding their new 'business model' of cultivating popular culture as a soft power. Starting off in 2012, the Cool Japan strategy became a political phenomenon. Only a year later, the strategy received governmental funding, which led to public as well as political debate, and, as discussed in this thesis, various reports on the prospective outcomes by economists and scholars. Since 2015, the scheme led to the official governmental funding of anime both on a national and international level. However, reports in 2017 state that the strategy lacked discipline, and many projects were failing in delivering results (Saito 2017). On top of that, whereas the government is claiming the Cool Japan fund to be a 'neutral' party focussed on the growth of Japanese culture, critics argue that there is no proof, nor are there any kind of safeguards involved in the funding process to assure independence (ibid). Various investments have been made in order to push anime as a soft power and to expand overseas anime markets. One of the most recent investments in August 2019, according to a Cool Japan Fund Press release (August 2019), was \$30 million U.S. Dollars in the North American Sentai Holdings, an international licensor of Japanese anime.

Simultaneously, the anime world is one that has not been standing still. International co-operations, government funded productions, the yet still-growing anime fan and con-culture, all are assets of a market that is so globally loved, and yet at the same time, so commercial and now also explicitly political. As I write this conclusion, the 10th anniversary of Dutch AnimeCon has just been held in Rotterdam, receiving, according to the website, more than 15,000 visitors; the event is still growing tremendously each year. This example might be from a Dutch perspective, but does tie in to other international markets where anime and Japanese popular culture is a growing trend as well. What becomes clear from this research is that, yes, anime can be used as an economic tool and yes, anime is a form

of soft power. In fact, what becomes clear as well, is that it has been a soft power for a long time before the government took political and economic interest in anime. Arguably, anime might have been more effective as a 'silent' soft power before the government pushed it as such. It certainly did not help to maintain the image of anime being an independent art form. 'Japanization' is a fact, and the Japanese economy is benefiting from the eagerness of international markets to want more of its popular culture, more productions, bigger events, more culture: Japan is 'in', even to such an extent that the popular culture of Japan has become a subculture in the West. And within that subculture, other subcultures can be found, too.

At the start of this thesis I stated that Japanese culture is very different from Western cultures and therefore is more difficult to access than, for example, American culture. However, Japan is succeeding in gaining interest from international countries and individuals who are willing to put an effort into learning more about Japan and are bedazzled, if not obsessed, by the uniqueness of the Japanese culture and, more importantly in this day and age, Japan's popular culture. Youth culture plays a huge role as well, as adolescents are at an age where adopting a subculture comes naturally (Allison 2006: 11). They are the future, and the Japanese government knows very well that investing in the younger generation now will benefit the economy in the long run. When it comes to the anime market in China, China's youth and young adults have adopted anime (and therein cosplay) as a 'mainstream' cult (which, according to scholar Matt Hills happens when the 'mainstream' and the 'cult' status regenerate). With governmental restrictions this 'mainstream' cult has become even bigger than in its domestic Japan and plays a somewhat different role in China when compared to Japan and the rest of the world. It makes China one of the most flourishing and economically attractive anime markets for Japan, but at the same time, also the most fragile one due political instability between Japan and China.

What has become clear, too, is that the Japanese government is mingling in the commercial anime market, trying not only to make Japan as culturally attractive as possible to foreign markets, but also promoting 'domestic nationalism'. Thus, what this thesis also has interrogated is the difference between how the Japanese government wishes to represent Japan as a country through 'Cool Japan', and how some anime productions represent Japan from an entirely different perspective. For example, in chapter 4 of this thesis I have explored the role of neo-nationalism and pacifism in anime, which does not always run counter to Japan's political perspectives and ideologies. Anime can be an introduction or a metaphorical representation of Japan's wartime past, but at the same time, this history exists in different versions in the collective memories of Japanese citizens as well as politicians. Therefore, when anime became an official soft power, the government also started using popular media to portray nationalism and nation-building. Anime, although often national in its content, is not always an accurate representation of the Japanese culture. Production companies in Japan have artistic freedom, however, the debate about how much of that artistic freedom is still used in some of the government-funded anime is still ongoing. When looking at some of the government-funded anime productions, I can state that the topic is still questionable. It is a fact that the government is funding international co-operations and by doing so, strengthening international economic bonds and markets. But it is also a fact that governmental schemes are funding anime productions that are produced according to governmental guidelines, glorifying Japan and promoting idealism of Japanese history or the military. On the other hand, independent films which might not necessarily be beneficial for Japan's identity (or to be correct, the identity they wish to portray) are still being produced, too.

During this thesis I have referred to Japanese popular culture as an 'imagined' identity. This term, which I am borrowing from scholar Benedict Anderson, characterises national identity as an 'imagined' sense of belonging. While exploring fan culture as well as

the Japanese identity, trauma and national memory, I have proven that 'imagined' identities can indeed become an accepted part of the national and cultural identity. National identity, therefore, is not a fixed identity, but can change depending on foreign perceptions as well as domestic perceptions, and can be influenced by various sources, such as the government, mass media, (international) news and subcultures. National, as well as cultural, identity is constantly subject to change. Japan has been - and still is - represented as a culturally exclusive and unique culture. However, the subjects that make Japan so unique have expanded and shifted immensely with the rise of popular culture, for example, the way Japanese culture was seen by foreigners in the 50s and 60s was first and foremost when tradition, arts and ceremonies were the main 'known' cultural identity of Japan. In the 80s, in addition, Japan was known for its high-end technology and automotive industry. And now, it is popular culture that first comes to mind when one thinks or speaks about Japan. Anime, manga, cosplay and 'kawaii' culture, are all very different from, for example, tea ceremonies, sumo wrestling, or Japanese art. Yet, these perceptions of popular culture have become a part of the Japanese culture, just as much as the 'traditional' Japanese references are a part of that culture, too.

The government has formed the 'Cool Japan Fund' and has been trying to financially stimulate Japanese cultural goods. Simultaneously, critics have argued that Japan should improve their international relationships with other countries in order to grow economically. Regardless of the past, Japan still managed to strengthen international bonds with the use of popular culture. Arguably, unlike any other country ever did before. The younger generation in surrounding Asian countries is more receptive and also more 'forgiving' than older generations; they have seemed to embrace Japan's popular culture, regardless of the past.

When discussing the national identity of anime, Shintoism is a huge part of this. The religion plays an important role in Japanese culture, landscapes, nature cultivation and

national ceremonies. Other important topics are the national memories of history, war and the traumas that have derived from the war and the atomic bomb attacks. All these themes have been, and still are, popular subjects in anime, but can cause both national and international debate: on a scholarly level, among critics, between fans and among other spectators. Furthermore, regardless if anime films are transnational (in terms of distribution) their context can still be very national. However, this does not keep international spectators from viewing (and enjoying) anime productions. On the contrary, it has caused a common interest among fans to explore the topics further, discuss topics and themes with other fans- and has inspired, like myself, many scholars to research anime in more depth.

The attractiveness of anime makes it a very realistic product to use a soft power. It is, indeed, *an economic force* that attracts worldwide consumers to spend more on Japanese goods and become more interested in Japan - in, so it seems - a friendly and positive way. Whether pushing popular culture (and therein anime) as a major part of a broader, economic scheme is enough to shape an economically stable future for Japan remains debatable. At least what becomes clear is that anime is not only a moving image, an art form, a piece of entertainment, but has also taken on a whole different meaning and formed a new layer in Japan's economic history. Anime as an economic weapon and a soft power that creates international and commercial opportunities for Japan - and simultaneously, helps spreading a more inviting image of Japan as a country.

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