UNDERSTANDING JAPANESE ANIMATION

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Second paperback edition 2008  

 Manufactured in the United States of America  


 Published by Lulu.com  

Edited by Vannapond Suttichujit
Dedicated to family and friends
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Understanding Japanese Animation

Introduction:

Japan is a good case study for development for many reasons, the most important one being that it was the first non-western country to industrialize. In addition to that it rose to economic primacy in Asia becoming the second largest economy in the World after the United States. Japan’s development was fast and arguably more organized than in any of the advanced western countries. The defeat at the hand of the allies in World War II was followed by a smooth reconstruction period and led to the famed developmental state model which was later followed by most of the Newly Industrializing Countries (NICs). This makes Japan not only an advanced economy but also
an innovator as to the means of reaching that point.

This paper intends to connect Japan’s popular culture to its development project. Animation, known as Anime in Japan, was chosen as an appropriate link between the two phenomena. Anime follows the tradition of Kabuki (popular theater) during the Meiji Period in that it represents the “little tradition” and therefore serves as a container for both official ideology and the hopes and dreams of the people, as well as their fears and sorrows.

Some of the themes explored by anime that are directly related to development are the following: lack of natural resources and expansion, economic growth and modernization, pollution and environmental protection, militarism and peace, and finally identity (traditional vs. modern). The way in which Anime presents these themes is a lot more vivid
and elucidating than any government report or historical analysis on the topic could ever be.

The structure to be followed in this paper will be headed by a short overview of the history of Japanese Animation, directly followed by a broad sketch of Japanese post-war history. Then the main problems encountered by Japan during its development process will be discussed and a few specific case studies will be given as examples. Following this general overview of Japan’s development history a more detailed thematic analysis will be given in relation to major representative Anime series and movies. Finally a general discussion on the role of anime as a means of communication for development will be provided.
Background:

A short history of Japanese Animation.

There is no nation more in love with the “kawaii”¹ than Japan. It is the land of Pokemon, of Astroboy, and of Doraemon just to name a few. You can see your favorite anime characters in a Japan Airlines Jumbo Jet displaying a joyful Pikachu² in its tail. People of all ages follow the latest adventures of their favorite series in printed form, in the so called “manga”³ and then they wait for the release of the animated version. It is interesting to note that in contrast to most of the rest of the world the division between media for children and media for adults is not very clear in Japan. People usually follow a series since childhood to late

¹ Cute and childish  
² One of the main Characters in Pokemon, it looks like a yellow bunny.  
³ Comic book
adulthood. This has a direct effect on the contents of the series since the producers know that the audience is diverse they have to include topics that are appealing to a broad and diverse group of people. This accounts for the layered structure of the Japanese anime. The plot can always be understood at different levels, from the simplicity of early childhood, to the cynicism of late adulthood. On the other hand this also accounts for the large content of violence and sex in Japanese anime compared to that produced in the United States and other western countries.

The humble beginnings of Japanese anime can be traced back to the early 1900s. The oldest animated movie fragment produced in Japan was found in Kyoto. It shows a boy in a navy uniform waving. It is made of only 50 frames of film.4 The production of animation was

then discontinued for a relatively long period of time until the Nationalist Pre-war government thought that it could be a useful propaganda tool. The Ministry of the Navy commissioned two movies to Geijutsu Eigasha. The first movie was produced in 1942. *Momotaro’s Sea Eagles* was 35 minutes long and had as its main purpose to raise the fighting spirit of the people. The theme was simple propaganda. “Peach Boy”, a traditional folkloric hero in Japan, headed a naval unit composed of one human and a group of animals. The animals represent the other Asian nations and the unit represented the East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere that Japan was trying to establish at the time. In the short film the unit is shown in an attack to Pearl Harbor in which they battle against demons who represent Britain and the United States.\(^5\) This film was then followed in 1944 by *Momotaro’s Divine Sea*

\(^5\) "Momotaro's Sea Eagles," in *Wikipedia* (2007). Note: The name given to Pearl Harbor in the film is Onigashima. Oni = demon, shima = island
Warriors. This film was a lot longer than its predecessor, 76 minutes, and followed the same theme as the other one. The main difference is that it includes a civilizing aspect. The same naval unit is shown “liberating” Sulawesi Island. This represents Japan’s drive to liberate Asia as a whole. The most important part of the film is a song by the entire unit in which they teach the liberated Asians how to speak. The song is called AIUEO. The movie ends with everyone happily singing this song in unison.

A relatively short period of inactivity in the field was followed by the rise of Osamu Tezuka and his most famous production, Astroboy in 1963. Astroboy deals with the creation of a robot superhero that fights for democracy and peace. Some parts of the plot represent the struggle for democracy during World War II.

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Osamu is credited for introducing the large eye style so characteristic of Japanese animation. The period was marked by another major work, *Hols: Prince of the Sun* which was produced by Toei Studio. This production greatly differed from previous works in that it did not represent mainstream ideas. The story was supposed to take place in a Norse Kingdom but in reality it represented the student movement of the early 1960s and the rise of the Japanese Socialist and Communist movements. The movie made many references to socialist ideals like the importance of farming and communal life. *Hols* proved to be very controversial and was not very successful in the box office. Nevertheless, it achieved a “cult status” among students and set a precedent for the future use of animation for social protest.

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9 Note: The Director was banned from Toei animation due to this film.
Doraemon follows the tradition of Astroboy in its optimism and drive for modernization. The first episode was produced in 1969 and proved to be very successful. The series continued for many years and reached the impressive number of 1,344 episodes. This series is considered to be a symbol of Japanese modernization which was prevalent at the time. Doraemon received the Osamu Tezuka Culture Award in 1997.  

The 1970s marked a change in Japanese development and identity. This period was characterized by the rise of Martial Arts and Sports as important themes in animation. However, from the point of view of development, the most important work of this decade was Tomorrow’s Joe. The struggle of a lower class boxer becomes the symbol of a generation. Ashita no Joe was produced for the first time in

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11 Note: The name of the Award reflects the importance Japan attributes to anime for its culture.
1969 by Asao Takamori.\textsuperscript{12} This series reflected the unintended consequences of modernization. It was one of the first series to reflect the plight of those who were left behind by the modernization project. The importance of this series will be discussed in detail in a later part of this paper.

The 1970s also saw the rise of the Mecca. This genre is characterized by super-robots usually piloted by a human. The most famous members of this group are the mobile-suits in which a human fights using a machine resembling an exoskeleton. This genre is characterized by a central theme, international security and peace. Most series in this category deal with the pain of war and the difficulty in achieving lasting peace. Most tend to be futuristic and hint at Japan’s future and its place in the global order. Arguably the most

representative series in this genre is the *Gundam* Group which covers several series produced by Sunrise. The concept was first introduced in 1979 by Yoshiyuki Tomino. Major series in this group include: *Gundam Wing, Gundam Seed, and Gundam Seed Destiny.*\(^{13}\) The Mecca genre is one of the most successful ones in Japanese animation and maintains its popularity to this day. *Gundam Seed*, produced in 2003, will be discussed in detail in a later section in order to explain the importance of this genre in Japan.\(^{14}\)

The 1980’s presented three main topics. The first topic was that of martial arts represented by *Dragon Ball*. The second topic is that of ecology and pollution represented by *Nausicaa of the Valley of the Wind*. The third topic related to this decade is that of the rise of *Otaku* subculture. This term refers to someone who is

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obsessed with a hobby, usually anime or manga (comics).\textsuperscript{15}

The rise of the environmental genre in anime reflects the problems Japan was facing due to its industrialization and modernization. The two best examples of this genre are \textit{Nausicaa of the Valley} of the \textit{Wind and Princess Mononoke}.

Regarding Martial Arts anime, its rise reflects the rethinking of Japanese identity and the end, or at least weakening, of the post-war taboo of the traditional. The two best examples of this genre are Dragon Ball and \textit{Rurouni Kenshin}.\textsuperscript{16} The second will be discussed in more detail due to its importance in the martial arts genre and also because of its parallel with Japanese modernization and identity politics.\textsuperscript{17}

\textsuperscript{15}This work comes from a formal pronoun in Japanese, which is rarely used except in very formal occasions. People who are obsessed with anime and manga were observed to use it more frequently than the rest of the people in order to distance themselves and thus Akio Nakamori, a famous novelist, popularized the term.

\textsuperscript{16}Also known as Samurai X.

The 1990s were marked by a very interesting genre in anime. Harem anime saw a huge boom. The reasons of this are not clear but it may have something to do with the rising marriage age, and the sharp decrease in the national fertility rate. In other words, life in Japan was becoming more and more atomistic in that relationships based in love were a rarity and the workplace was mostly made up of men. This gave rise to a generation of men with little to no meaningful interaction with women with full of repressed desires to have some sort of romance. In the case of Japan, a country famous for its male oriented pornography, this desire was partially satisfied by Harem Anime. The theme of this genre is quite simple. There is usually an average male, not too successful and not too good looking, who all of a sudden gets lucky and is surrounded by women competing for his attention. This genre is interesting because it
shows changes in the structure of the average family and a newfound yearning for romance. One of the most famous series in this genre is *Love Hina*. It is interesting to note that the rise of this genre parallels a rising awareness in the aging-population problem as well as to the changing role of women. *Love Hina* will be discussed in greater detail at a later point in order to connect harem anime to development.

The two latest trends in anime are those of space opera and post-modern series. The first tends to be more popular than the second. Nevertheless the present state of the art is more heterogeneous than ever before. There is no single trend dominating the scene anymore and therefore several anime sub-cultures have developed. This trend was magnified by the rise of fan-sub in the West. This provided a means of disseminating anime in a cheap and convenient way. Most series can now be
downloaded for free with subtitles in English, Spanish, and sometimes Chinese. This caused anime-subculture to spread exponentially. The popularity of anime and manga can be seen in most countries of the world. In Thailand manga shops are becoming very common, and it is even possible to witness cosplay events in malls. In the United States, series such as *Yu-Gi-Oh!* and *InuYasha* have been broadcasted by major channels such as Cartoon Network. Anime is a clear case of globalization and shows that the process is a two way transfer of ideas. If Hollywood represents American popular culture then anime represents Japanese culture. This paper will show the striking similarities between Japan’s history and its animation.
Japanese Post-war History, a brief overview:

Even though Japan’s development is usually analyzed starting from the period of reconstruction onwards it is important to note that the process started much earlier. In this respect Japan’s rise to first world status parallels that of the West more than that of its Asian neighbors. Some people even derive similarities between Japan and the United Kingdom. Both are island nations and both went through a period of feudalism based on land not labor.\(^\text{18}\) In addition to this Japan began to industrialize way before any of its neighbors. This process took place during the Meiji Period (1868-1912). Japan had had several contacts

\(^{18}\) It should be noted that in most other Asian countries, such as Thailand, feudalism in the European style did not take place. The reason for this is that land was not scarce while labor was. So the struggle was to control labor not the land itself. In the case of Japan this period was called the Tokugawa Period (1615-1867).

with the West and decided that it was necessary to industrialize in order to resist Western Imperialism. Japan wanted to take its place in the world. Thus Japan started to develop its industry and to establish modern government institutions such as a Parliament (Diet), a centralized military and navy, and a strong business class. This Period is also known for its innovations in the field of education and the rule of law.¹⁹

The drive to industrialize which had started with the arrival of Commodore Mathew Perry in 1853 continued through the Meiji period and then was taken up by the Military in the pre-war period. By the beginning of the Second World War Japan was by all means a modern industrialized nation. It had defeated a European power in war, Russia, and had

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¹⁹ Civil Legal Code finished in 1896, based on the German Model (Olenik, 2005)
conquered other Asian neighbors, Taiwan and Korea.

The pre-war period was one of great expectations for Japan and for the rest of Asia. Japan viewed itself as the protector of the region. It wanted to liberate Asia from Western Influence and to guide it through the formation of an East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere. This sentiment was shown at an earlier time in China, with the construction of the Manchurian Railway.

The early years of World War II were full of successes, Japan successfully overran most of Southeast Asia, Northern China, the Philippines, and other small islands in the area. However the tide started to change due to one important problem, resources. Japan was running out of oil by the time it bombed Pearl Harbor in 1941. Japan was also in need of other raw materials which it extracted from the rest of Asia. As the
war drew to an end, and Japan started to lose control of its sources of raw materials, the military industrial complex came to a halt. Japan was made painfully aware of its main deficiency. As an island nation with very few natural resources it had to find a way to secure a stable supply of them in order to survive. This explains, in part, the quick jump Japan made to an export-oriented economy rather than following the prevalent import-substitution model as a guiding policy.

Japan surrendered unconditionally in September 2, 1945. This is probably the most important date in modern Japanese History since it marked the beginning of a new era. Japan went from a society based on the imperial system to one based on democracy and what later was to be called GNPsm.

Consequent development was guided by the Allied General Headquarters in Tokyo. The first
Allied Commander in Japan was General Douglas McArthur. Among the changes he brought about was the dissolution of the main Industrial Conglomerates. However this process was later discontinued during the “reverse course”.\textsuperscript{20} One of the more successful policies was the land reform. Large landed states were broken up and given to small farmers in order to make them productive. This decreased inequality and increased food production, both needed in the immediate post-war period. In addition to that, McArthur led the process to transform former factories of military supplies into factories of consumer goods and heavy industry. Other policies like education reform, and civic education (in the democratic sense) were not as successful due to the reverse course. McArthur was later removed from his post due to his role in the Korean War. Washington

\textsuperscript{20} Note: The “reverse course” refers to the period when Washington ordered some of the original policies to be discontinued in order to concentrate on strengthening Japan for the fight against communism. This was the beginning of the Cold War.
decided that it was more useful to rule in the British way, indirect rule. Washington used war time networks of business and bureaucrats to re-industrialize Japan as fast as possible in order to check the imminent communist threat. Japan became a supplier for the war effort in Korea starting in 1950. This came as a blessing to the Japanese economy since it provided a market for its growing industrial sector. Thus the economic and military relationship between the United States and Japan which lasts to this day was cemented. This was further strengthened by the Korean War and more recently by the two wars on Iraq and the war in Afghanistan.

Economic development in the 1950s and 1960s resembled that of the 1860s. It is interesting that Japan chose to follow the same path it did during its first period of industrialization. This means that what Olenik
calls that “iron triangle” was going to be the heart of its economic system. The iron triangle refers to the cooperation between the bureaucracy, business, and government.\textsuperscript{21} This later on became the basis of the “developmental state theory” which really dates back to the Meiji period. The state was going to be the guide to economic growth. In addition to that peculiar model Japanese development at the time had two other important anomalies. The first is that it was allowed to close its market completely. This extreme level of protectionism was permitted by the United States mainly because of the Cold War and the need to have a strong ally in Asia. This allowed Japan to create a huge trade surplus and thus become a trading nation. During this period extreme measures were taken by the Japanese government in order to keep people’s savings inside the country for

\textsuperscript{21} Olenik, Japan Its History and Culture.
investment. One good example of this, is that Japanese were not allowed to travel abroad until the mid 60s. The reason for this is simple. The triangle wanted money to stay in the country. Those savings would then be put in Banks which were part of the network and those banks would then lend that money to industries in key sectors. Everything went according to plan, that is, MITI’s plans.22

This led to impressive economic growth in the decades following the War. Living standards rose exponentially. It was the birth of the salary-man with lifetime employment and a simple seniority system of promotion. Corporations were reshaped after the family, with expected devotion from all of its members. This explains the interesting union system Japan has. Unions

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22 MITI: Ministry of International Trade and Industry. Controlled most of the Economy up to the late 1990s.
are not independent they are usually affiliated with the company and are not adversarial.23

There was several income doubling plans during this period which helped keep the general public focused on growth. Most other things were virtually ignored such as the environment, educational reform, gender issues, and arguably democracy.

The late 1960s and 1970s saw some unrest both due to the economic reasons and environmental reasons. Not everyone was enjoying the benefits of the new economy and the gap between urban areas and rural areas was widening.24 In addition to this some parts of the population started to realize that the country was sacrificing democracy and public participation in the name of growth. The Liberal Democratic Party ruled with little real opposition

24 Note: This asymmetry is present to this day. Rural areas are usually subsidized by the cities through a network of clientilism. However rural areas remain in a state of dependence which fosters a lot of internal migration to the cities.
and with very little outside input. On the International front, some Japanese students and left leaning intellectuals did not agree with the renewal of the U.S.-Japan security treaty in 1970. This was passed without the support of the opposition in a show of force by the ruling LDP. Nine days of unrest led to the mobilization of more than 750,000 people.\textsuperscript{25} The main reason for the opposition to the renewal of this treaty was not simple anti-American feeling as some people put it, but rather a manifestation of the new Internationalism engendered in the early stage of the occupation period. In other words, American occupation forces tried to re-educated the Japanese populace as much as possible regarding war. War was made a taboo. People were taught to hate their militarist past and to attribute all of the suffering of WWII to the military and its related ideology. This had a

\textsuperscript{25} Olenik, \textit{Japan Its History and Culture}, Smith, \textit{Japan a Reinterpretation}. 
profound effect on the Japanese subconscious. People wanted to avoid war and anything related to it. Nevertheless, this attitude was not very useful to Washington during the hey day of Cold War diplomacy. Japan wanted a strong ally in a region which was considered to be highly unstable at the time. Domino theory overpowered ideas of peace and neutrality. The government saw the alliance as useful and necessary since it protected Japan and as a prime ally of the United States, it provided a huge market for its products. So the treaty was ratified with a lot of popular unrest and opposition.

The next test to the Japanese developmental state model came during the Oil Shock in the 70s. The model proved to be useful in this case and the crisis was overcome. The 1980s saw the rise of Japan to the pinnacle of economic power. It became the second largest economy in the
world and in addition to that it was one of the most important allies of the number one economy in the world. The Japanese model of production and some managerial techniques were seen as so successful by the West that they were adopted to a certain extend, specially in the auto industry.

By the 1970s Japan had abused its environment to the limit. The coast was polluted with heavy metals such as lead and mercury. This gave rise to diseases such as the Minamata Disease and others also named after the town where they were first spotted. People started to suffer from lung problems and the rivers were in equally bad shape. This led to a growth in environmental awareness, first by civil society and later on by the government. In a truly Japanese way, the iron triangle tackled the problem of the environment and at this point

Japan is one of the most environmentally friendly countries in the world.27

The 1990s were called the lost decade. This is due to the bad performance of the Japanese economy during this period. The system that had worked so well up to that point proved to be out of line with the rapidly globalizing world. The Cold War was over and the West was not willing to allow Japan to continue its unfair protectionist policies. Japan started to move towards neo-liberalism and to abandon the developmental state approach. This trend became even more visible after the Asian Financial Crisis in 1997/98. This marked a sharp turn towards neo-liberalism and Western style management. One of the best examples of this was the take-over of Nissan by Renault.28 A French manager was made the new CEO and

27 Note: Japan became so environmentally aware that it adopted one of the most complicated systems of garbage disposal in the world. In addition to that it even passed a law taxing the disposal of appliances. About $50 have to be paid in order to throw away a microwave.

28 Smith, Japan a Reinterpretation.
started the reform of the company. This change had many positive effects as well as some negatives. On the positive side, it helped improve the Japanese economy by introducing more flexibility and innovation to the system. In addition to this, it helped streamline inefficient companies by getting rid of life-long employment and promotion based on seniority. However, these changes increased the insecurity of the average salary man, specially middle level managers. The major consequences of this change were that more people moved to the informal sector and promotion became more competitive.

This path is still the one being followed by Japan in the beginning of the 21st century. The trend of privatization and deregulation is very strong at the moment and has become a major tenet of the Liberal Democratic Party. This was seen in former Prime Minister Koizumi’s
campaign to privatize the Postal Service. This campaign proved to be successful and Prime Minister Koizumi passed on the leadership of the country to his protégée, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in 2006. The political climate in Japan is a very conservative one. Nationalism is arguably on the rise, most markedly in the generation in power (50-60 year-olds), and the neo-liberal trend is strong.

As this short overview of the History of Japan points out, Japan’s development is a remarkable example of a non-western nation rising to the challenge of industrialization and modernization.

**Main Problems Encountered in Japanese Development:**

As successful as Japan may have been in achieving material development through guided
industrialization, the process has not been a perfect one. As Patrick Smith skillfully argues in his *Japan a Reinterpretation*, the island nation has gone through asymmetrical development. The speed of economic and technological development has not been matched by social development. This asymmetry has led to one of the greatest problems Japan is facing today, the search for an identity. Another important theme in Japanese development is that of dependence on foreign imports and the latent desire for autarchy. The Japanese obsession with economic growth and modernization is also a recurrent theme in development which in turn led to pollution and environmental degradation. This gave rise to more environmental awareness and is considered to be one of the most important topics in present day Japan. Nevertheless, all the previous themes pale in

29 Ibid.
comparison with the most popular theme in present day Japan, militarism and peace. The most heated debates revolve around the revision of the Peace Constitution and Article 9, which renounces the right to wage war. This debate is central to deciding Japan’s role in the region and in the world.

The first theme to be discussed is that of Japan’s search for an identity. Japan is a country that has borrowed many things throughout its history. Originally it took China as its main source of knowledge and technology. This is evident in the use of Chinese characters in present day Japan. Nevertheless, Japan adopted deeper elements of Chinese culture such as Confucianism, Mahayana Buddhism, and a patriarchal structure. Ancient Japanese society was considered to be matriarchal, with women playing a central role. This is evident in that the first Emperor was supposed to be the son of the
Sun Goddess. This high regard for women continued for some time until Japan was slowly influenced by the mainland. There was suddenly a sharp shift from a society based on agriculture and with women at the center of the family, to one based on warfare and men having the central role. As important as Chinese culture was to the development of Japan, it should be noted that as it was adapted and mixed with local culture and the final result was a culture that was not Chinese and arguably not originally Japanese.

Another compelling argument dealing with identity in Japan is that of the search for individuality. According to most scholars on the subject, Japanese people are collectivists and feel comfortable about sacrificing the self for the community.\textsuperscript{30} This is the mainstream view of Japan. Nevertheless, Patrick Smith has argued

\textsuperscript{30} Note: See Olenik (2005) and Reinschauer
that this suppression of the self was not something that happened voluntarily. It came about due to the influence of Confucianism and later on became institutionalized in the philosophy of *Bushido*.\(^{31}\) This philosophy came about as a means to control the warrior class and instill loyalty and devotion. The philosophy of the ruling class was then imposed on the rest of the population during the Meiji Period and the Taisho Democracy. This trend continued and was combined with elements of nationalism and emperor worship. A short period of occupation interrupted the trend while the “reverse course” of the later years of the occupation permitted this philosophy to resurface. Japan’s modern Bushido was useful in controlling and guiding the army of salary-man who were to fight Japan’s economic battles and lead the country to economic glory. Therefore, this ancient

\(^{31}\) Bushido: Way of the warrior. Honor code of the samurai
philosophy permeates daily life in Japan and creates a huge contradiction. One of the most technologically advanced nations in the world is following a philosophy that was originally intended for warriors in the pre-feudal era of Japan. This brings us back to the theme of searching for an identity. Japanese people have mixed feelings about their past and are trying to decide who they really are before moving to the future. A philosophy that has forced the individual to hide himself behind a mask for hundreds of years is currently crumbling as the younger generations decide to opt out of the system and lead a carefree life without the burdensome rules set up by the system. They do not see themselves as subjects of the emperor and see themselves as citizens of the world. This generalization is just an example of the deep divide between generations in Japan. The generation gap is rather striking in Japan with
the older generations favoring the status quo and the Japanese work ethic. One of the most interesting things about Japanese society is that it is one of extremes. Those who are modernized tend to be internationalists and are partly cut-off from mainstream society while those who remain highly traditional in customs as well as in philosophy also tend to be cut off and treated as reactionary. The irony of this, is that those who are considered to be mainstream Japanese are in the middle and have a feeling of incongruity. There is a search for something that makes them truly Japanese. They do not know what it is yet but they are looking for it. They do not want to go back to an idealized past which never actually existed such as the traditionalists do, but they don’t want to remove the insider-outsider border either. This means that for most Japanese, identity is highly unstable and constantly in flux. The issue of identity is
summed up effectively by the famous Japanese writer Soseki Natsume in the following excerpt. “Japan can't get along without borrowing from the West. But it poses as a first-class power. And it's straining to join the ranks of the first-class powers. That's why, in every direction, it puts up the facade of a first-class power and cheats on what's behind. - Soseki Natsume, And Then, 1909.\textsuperscript{32}

The issue of economic growth, also known as GNPism, is one of the central concerns of the Japanese public. There are few societies as dedicated to economic growth as Japan and probably none others have followed this goal to such an extreme. The discipline of the Japanese was eagerly applied to economic growth and the philosophy that made the imperial army great was applied to the corporate world. Salary-men, as executives came to be called, were

\textsuperscript{32} Smith, Japan a Reinterpretation. P. 159
indoctrinated with bushido (the way of the warrior) and transformed into corporate warriors. This philosophy served as the basis of the Japanese corporate world based on the model of the family, a patriarchal structure. Employees were supposed to have loyalty for their company and to sacrifice for the well-being of this extended family. Unions became in-house unions in close cooperation with the mother company. This reduced frictions and served to promote harmony. The new corporate warriors were overworked in exchange for this protective environment. The eight-hour day is constantly ignored in Japan and employees are expected to stay way beyond normal hours in order to finish their work. Overtime is not supposed to be declared and is thus not paid. All of these informal rules are enforced formally and informally. The positive consequences of this system are well known and they include a
secure job, promotion based on seniority, and the positive effects in production for the entire economy. What is not so well known are the negative effects for the individual corporate warrior and for his family. Death from overwork, also known as *karoshi*, has become alarmingly common in Japan. The symptoms are not very clear but most medical doctors point out to the following: drowsiness, loss of concentration, and sometimes a bad temper. The rising number of cases of *karoshi* led to the establishment of National Defense Council for Victims of Karoshi in 1988.33 Notwithstanding all the cases of this social malaise, the Japanese government has proved highly reluctant to recognize the true extend of the problem. Instead the government has opted to pass laws in order to deflect criticism and pay some compensation for the families of the victims. It should be noted that

33 Ibid. p. 114
legislation passed in order to control karoshi has proven to be ineffective due to the informal system of control used by companies and also due to the implications it would have for the economy as a whole to abolish the practice. In other words, the government or more accurately in this case the state, is willing to overlook this negative externality for the good of the country. This is a clear example of Confucianism and Buddhism at work. The following quote from a diary of an actual karoshi victim depicts the degree of abuse found in this system. "Let's think about slavery, then and now. In the past, slaves were loaded onto slave ships and carried off to the new world. But in some way, aren't our daily commuter trains packed to overflowing even more inhumane? And can't it be said that today's armies of corporate workers are in fact slaves in almost every sense of the word? They are bought for
money. Their worth is measured in working hours. They are powerless to defy their superiors. They have little to say in the way their wages are decided. And these corporate slaves of today don't even share the simplest of pleasures that those forced laborers of ages past enjoyed; the right to sit down at their dinner table with their families." Toshitsugu Yagi34 The significant thing about this quote is that this is the point of view of an insider and thus reflects the degree of despair found among salary-men.

Another important aspect about GNPism is that it did not lead to an even distribution of development. Japan was divided between a developed, frontal Japan, and an underdeveloped, the back of Japan. This can be clearly seen when traveling to the Japanese countryside. The perfectly built roads and neatly set up signs hide the simple fact that the rural

34 Ibid. p. 116
areas are not self-sufficient and are heavily subsidized by the city. This subsidy process is done by a system of clientilism and has the negative effect of keeping the countryside traditional and underdeveloped. This point is succinctly made by Smith. "But when you see modern Japan pay for unmodern Japan so that it will remain as it is, you recognize the cruelty of such an act, because it turns the countryside into a museum and its people into exhibits intended to give others the illusion that they can still claim to be what they once were."35 This summarizes another important theme in Japan which is the gap between the rural and urban, and the traditional and the modern. So in a way, this connects GNPism and industrialization to the search for an identity by the Japanese.

GNPism has made Japan great but at the same time it has had many negative

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35 Ibid. p. 167
consequences like the loss of family life, death from overwork, and pollution. Environmental awareness has a peculiar history in Japan. The zealous application of GNPism during the 50s and 60s took its toll on the environment. People started to suffer respiratory diseases, poisoning, and even genetic disorders due to the reckless pace of industrialization the government imposed. This point is not that peculiar, the interesting and to a certain extend, unique characteristic about Japanese environmentalism is that it developed from the bottom up. Women were the ones to first raise their voices about this problem. The 1970s saw grassroots protests on this issue and led to the passing of the first environmental law in Japan in 1970. The “pollution Diet” passed a law making the disposal of materials harmful to the human
health illegal and punishable with three years in prison.\textsuperscript{36}

The last two major themes that will be discussed are inextricably connected not only historically but also in the present. Militarism and Peace have historically been connected to a lack of natural resources and expansion. Japan does not possess many natural resources and the exponential demographic growth of the post-war period put even more stress on the already scarce natural resources. This led to the Pacific War which can be seen as a war for resources. Japan intended to take raw materials from the rest of Asia in order to feed its growing industry. This was originally pursued by means of the military. Some historical examples of this are the invasion of Southeast Asia and Manchuria. Most people would tend to think that Japan left behind this problem at the end of the war but the truth is

that it did not. Japan continues to import most of its raw materials from the rest of Asia and in turn export the finished products to those same countries. This neo-mercantilism has greatly benefited Japan but has currently come under attack by the rise of the NICs. Now Japan has to compete against other Asian countries for the same markets. In addition to that, Japan has the disadvantage that it does not have many natural resources and thus has to import them from abroad. Adding to this problem is the loss of competitiveness of Japanese labor to cheaper well-trained countries such as South Korea and the Republic of China. The previously mentioned natural resource problem is a source of conflict in the region and has led to a competition for control of resources in Southeast Asia by Japan and its competitors.

The conflict for the islands in the South China Sea is a good case in point of this struggle
for resources. Six countries claim sovereignty over them, and their only true value is the resources they are believed to have.\textsuperscript{37} Japan has also been forced to fish farther away from its territorial waters due to a decrease in the supply of fish and an increase in the demand for it. This has also increased tensions in the region due to the increasingly adventurous behavior of Japanese fishing boats.

It should be noted that Japan is going through a transitional stage in the field of militarism and peace. Japan went through a well known period of extreme militarism in the first half of the twentieth century. Some of the reasons for this were ideological but most were practical. The post-war period was marked by extreme pacifism fostered by a sense of historical guilt and supported by the United States. This pacifism is also unique in that it

was strengthened by the experience of the two atomic bombs dropped in Hiroshima and Nagasaki at the end of World War II.\textsuperscript{38} As the only country to have suffered a nuclear attack, Japan feels the moral responsibility to stop such a thing from ever happening again. A combination of historical guilt and sincere pacifism became Japan’s brand of internationalism. Nevertheless, the changing market conditions of the late 1990s and the increased competition imposed by globalization have started to awaken Japan to the realities of the new world order. Japan realized that its growth rate was leveling down and that several unfriendly neighbors such as North Korea and China were increasing their military spending. The rise of China and its growing influence in the region is considered to be a threat to Japan’s all-important sources of raw materials. This in

\footnote{\textsuperscript{38}“Hiroshima, Nagasaki Bombings ”Crime”: Japan Lawmaker,” in \textit{Reuters} (2006).}
turned ensued in a battle for bilateral free trade agreements. Japan uses its economic might as its business card, while China uses a combination of military bluff and economic incentives. The unstable conditions of the region added to the War on Terror led by the United States has placed a lot of pressure on Japan to take a more active role in international affairs.

The previously mentioned forces have led to the reopening of a very controversial debate in Japan, that of the Peace Constitution. This debate is not new but what is new is that for the first time in decades there is a real possibility of changing article 9 which renounces the right to wage war as a diplomatic tool. Japan has gotten around this restriction by means of reinterpreting the article to allow Japan to deploy self-defense forces to Iraq and to Cambodia.39 The incongruities between the law

and reality are becoming so evident that the Liberal Democratic Party is promoting a revision of the constitution in order to reflect Japan’s role in the international community.\footnote{“History of Animation.”}

A more detailed description of the debate surrounding the Peace Constitution is beyond the scope of this study but it is important to point out that it centers on the issue of historical guilt and international pressure to take a more active role in international affairs.

The themes described in this section are central topics in Japan’s popular consciousness and therefore appear frequently in literature, films, and the news. The next section will try to connect the previously mentioned themes to specific anime series so as to show the importance of the “little tradition” of anime in communicating the will of the people.
Anime as an integral part of Japan’s Public Sphere:

In Japan, anime is a very important means of communication. It is considered to be one of the most innovative and responsive sectors of the media. Since the media is considered to be an integral part of the public sphere and as Agnes S. Ku argues in her article about the role of media in the debate over the return of Hong Kong to China in 1997, it serves at the same time as an interface for discussion and helps in negotiating the boundaries of the public sphere.41 According to Habermas the Public Sphere can be defined as “a network for communicating information and points of view”.42 By using this definition anime can be considered to be serving as the interface for the network or as a part of the network itself. It is

42 “Public Sphere,” in Wikipedia (2007).
not important to make a distinction between these two functions at this point since Anime can serve both roles at different times. The important thing to note is that Anime explores controversial topics a lot more candidly than other sectors of the media. This is due in part to its nature, since it is not considered to be a very serious art expression such as painting or poetry it is not restricted by the conventions of “high culture”. This relative freedom allows anime to explore topics such as war in a very open way combining actual events with fantasy and also integrating the full range of human emotions ranging from sorrow to bliss. The nature of the animation industry in Japan is also very decentralized and thus presents a more horizontal structure which allows more innovation and responsiveness to the demands of the public. Usually series are first written as manga, comic books, by semi-independent
writers of all ages and varied backgrounds. Then a successful manga is turned into an anime series. The production of anime is usually subcontracted to small studios and then marketed by bigger media corporations. This leads to a wide range of genres and to the creation of a subculture which treasures anime as an effective means of expression and to a certain extent as a policy advocacy tool. Critics point out the high degree of self-censorship observed in anime series broadcasted in the main television stations but this ignores the fact that those same series are then released in DVD versions without any censorship. Some studios have proven so reluctant to self-censorship that they have gone bankrupt in order to produce what they intended to since the beginning. In Japan, manga writers and animation artists are known for their excentricity and avant garde inclinations. They are considered to be the voice
of youth. They say what everyone knows but is afraid to say out loud. This is the main role of anime in modern Japan. It is the space in which contesting discourses meet and alternative options are explored. Is there any other forum in which space colonization has been explored as a long term solution for human survival? Probably not. The complexity of politics in Japanese animation reflects the growing concern with the field of international relations. Sometimes it is shocking to compare the level of abstraction and education required to understand the plot of some series such as Gundam Wing compared to the Lion King for instance. This obvious asymmetry between Japanese and American animation serves to point out two main differences. The first is that the intended audiences differ greatly. Animation in the United States and in most of the Western World is considered to be for children under 12 years of
age. Animation in Japan is not restricted to any age group and a single anime series can be viewed by people ranging from 10 to 50 years of age. This difference has a direct effect on the content of the animation itself. American animation is centered on education. Disney and other major studios simply want to entertain and instill positive values on middle class western children. The ideas and values found in Western anime tend to be uniform and mainstream. This is not the case with Japanese animation. The themes are constantly contested. Usually no clear values or answers are given. The values represent everything from those in the most extreme fringes to the ultra conservatives. The relative difference in roles and contents between Japanese and Western anime is clear.

Taking into consideration the different nature of Japanese and Western anime it may
be concluded that their role is also different. Japanese anime is a contested field in which a range of discourses present their views. Western anime tends to be a one-way means of spreading 1950s white-anglosaxon-protestant-middle class views and values. It is characterized by its lack of responsiveness to the demands of the public and by its virtually complete insulation from reality. On the other hand Japanese animation is constantly in flux and serves as one of the last free sectors of the media that can truly serve as both an interface of public policy and as an active actor of it.
**Rurouni Kenshin: Martial Arts and Identity**

This animated series was created by Nobuhiro Watsuki and was aired for the first time in 1996.\(^{43}\) It can be described as a Meiji Swordsman Romantic story but this may be misleading regarding the true importance of the series. This series known in English as Samurai X, takes place between the late Tokugawa Period and the early Meiji Period. The main character is a former Samurai who had helped bring about the Meiji restoration. Himura Kenshin, the main character, is filled with feelings of guilt and regret for all the people he killed in his youth and after the restoration decides never to kill again. Instead of this he uses the back of his sword to fight for the good of the weak. While he is wandering around the country he meets a woman in distress, Kamiya Kaoru, who owns a

\(^{43}\)“Rurouni Kenshin.”
The story then continues with the adventures of the two of them and concentrates on their interactions with the society of the time.

There are significant points about this animated series. The period chosen was one of great turmoil and transition. It was the shift from feudalism to the modern nation-state. In addition to that it was also a period in which Japan was searching for a new identity. This is depicted in the series by having a samurai, and thus a member of the ancient regime, becoming obsolete in the new regime. Swords were outlawed by the Meiji government and thus samurai were persecuted if seen with their swords in public. This is aptly shown in the series by having an instrumental member of the Meiji restoration discriminated and persecuted later on by the regime he helped bring to power. The series also touches on other themes related

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44 Note: kendo: Japanese sport of sword fighting with wooden swords. Dojo: training school
to identity such as the treatment of martial arts. The decline in public support for martial arts was seen after the Meiji restoration and then again in the post-war period. This is shown in the series by Kamiya Kaoru, who leads a training school with only one student. The same thing happened after World War II, when martial arts were considered to be part of the militarized past. Thus this series shows a central conflict in modern Japan. The search for a new identity which is both in peace with the past and open to the future, is not something new in Japanese history. The series also shows the central values of the 1880s which have been frequently compared to those of the 1960s and the period of GNPsm.

It should be noted that the intended audience is aware of the previously mentioned historical similarities. They can relate to the issues presented in the story. In many ways the
unemployed salary-men of the late 1990s are wandering samurai. They are victimized by the system they helped to bring about. When children ask to join a baseball team instead of taking Karate lesson parents also wonder why? Is being too Japanese something to be ashamed of? Why don’t my children want to practice any Japanese martial arts? This shows some of the possible ways in which a Japanese member of the audience may react to the issues presented by this series. The central question presented by this animated series which significantly was released in 1996 and continued until 1998, is that of the role of the wandering samurai. Who is the wandering samurai? The obsolete corporate warrior? The older generations? Or Japan itself? These are some of the questions presented by this seemingly simple and innocuous animated series.
Love Hina: Harem anime, identity, and modernization.

Love Hina is part of the harem genre. The main theme of this genre is of an average young-man who is the center of attention of a group of women. As shallow as the theme may sound it presents several important topics of modern Japan. The first is that of the aging population and the rising age of marriage. It also brings up the lack of romanticism in Japanese culture and the interaction between Western influences with traditional Japanese customs. It should be noted that Japan is known for arranged marriages and even though now there is a larger degree of freedom to choose a suitable couple there is no parallel tradition of courtship. In other words, Japanese males do not know how to interaction with the opposite sex. The theme is further complicated by the introduction of gender issues
such as the role women should play in a relationship and also includes an important identity component of which model should be followed that of the ideal western family or that of the traditional Japanese home with a strong male bias. The answer that is usually given is an uneasy mix between the two models which moves in a continuum from an egalitarian western one to that of an idealized traditional Japanese home.

Ken Akamatsu is the author of the original manga series that was released in its animated version in 2002. Love Hina was chosen as the example of this genre due to its originally intended audience. This series was released mainly for college students. The effect of this is that it covers a range of topics affecting the new generation of young people about to join the workforce. The plot is relatively simple and is centered around the dream of a 20 year-old man
called Keitaro Urashima. The story is based around the following dialogue:

“Have you heard? It's said that if two people in love go to Toudai, they'll find happiness!

If it really works, let's go to Toudai together, okay?

When we grow up, we'll definitely meet at Toudai again!

It's a promise!”

This is a conversation the main character had when he was a young boy. He considers the girl with whom he had this conversation the love of his life but does not remember her name. The story then continues to show Keitaro as a 20 year-old man living with his parents. They complain about him being rejected for admission at Tokyo University for the second time and ask

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him to either get a part-time job or to go to another university. Keitaro does not want to give up on his dream so he continues to study for the admission exam. One day his grandmother calls him and asks him to go visit her at her onsen. Keitaro is offered to become the manager of the Inn while his grandmother travels around the country visiting hot springs. The onsen, called Hinata Apartments or House, is located in Kanagawa Prefecture. Keitaro is then surprised to find out that Hinata Apartments is now an all-female dorm. Then the story continues showing Keitaro’s interaction with the girls who live there. He likes one of the girls called Narusegawa and the story then centers around that relationship.

There are several interesting topics explored by this series related to the development field. The first is that of the struggle to succeed in the

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46 Onse: hot spring that usually includes a ryokan or traditional hotel.
system. *Love Hina* shows the plight undergone by high school students to get into the college of their choice. It should be noted that it is considered to be the single best road to success to get into one of the ten former Imperial Universities, Tokyo University being the most famous one. This puts a lot of pressure on high school students to prepare for entrance exams. Failure to pass them gives the person two options. One option is to attend a lower ranking university, another option is to keep trying to get in. Exams usually take place only once a year so this explains why Keitaro is 20 years old and still preparing to take the entrance examination.

Another important topic is that of the coexistence of the traditional and the modern in Japan. The series stresses the fact that entering the grounds of Hinata House is travelling to traditional Japan while what lies outside of it is modern Japan. This is one of the reasons for the
choice of setting for the series, Hinata House is not too far from Tokyo but far enough for it to have its own personality and traditional style.\textsuperscript{47} Love Hina shows this theme in other ways such as the celebration of imported holidays like Christmas. In Japan Christmas is mostly celebrated by young people and it is very similar to Valentine’s day in the West. Christmas in Japan is centered around dating and shopping. The religious aspect is completely absent which shows that Japan has only borrowed the superficial aspects of the holiday and adapted them to its own needs. \textit{Love Hina} clearly shows this in a full episode about Christmas in which the peculiarities of Japanese Christmas are shown. The other characters in the story represent different kinds of people in modern Japan. They range form the very traditional, Motoko from a very traditional martial arts

\footnote{Note: Patrick Smith elaborates on this topic with respect to housing in central Tokyo and the difference between main streets and secondary ones. The traditional is hidden behind the modern. P. 161}
family, to Sara an adopted american girl. In a sense Hinata House was intended to represent a miniature of Japan.

One final theme that should be mentioned is that of marriage. It is no mystery that Japan’s population is aging and the country’s fertility rate is declining. There are both economic and social reasons for this. The authors’ view is that on the social side it is a combination of an increased freedom of women to work and pursue their own careers, and specially a decrease in the traditional forms of marriage. Arranged marriages have declined exponentionally but at the same time other forms of marriage have not increased at the same rate. In other words, the Japanese are learning how to establish a family based on love and not on the bushido.48 This is not an easy process but Japan has found some innovative ways of facilitating the transition. The

48 Note: See Patrick Smith for a more detailed explanation of marriage patters and the feminist movement in Japan. P. 139
three main ways are shown in *Love Hina*. The first is traditionally Japanese and it is called White Day. This is a day in which guys show their appreciation to women by giving them a gift. Originally the meaning of the gift was far from that of love in the romantic sense but was rather a sign of appreciation for their effort. Nevertheless this has gradually shifted towards a more romantic meaning. This is an opportunity for a man to show that he is interested in a woman. A second method is that introduced by Valentine’s day. The interesting peculiarity about Japanese Valentine’s is that it is a day in which mostly women are expected to take the initiative. Women are supposed to give chocolates or another small gift to the men they like. This is slightly different from the West in which males are expected to take the initiative and buy the chocolates not the women, even though this is changing too. Finally, the third
opportunity is Christmas. Since this is a foreign holiday it is not celebrated as a family. Young people have adapted it as a second more serious Valentine’s day. This is the day in which actual dating takes place not only presenting gifts like in White and Valentine’s day, but it unequivocally involves dating in the romantic sense. *Love Hina* follows this process by showing Keitaro’s relationship with Narusegawa and ends when they finally get married. Interestingly enough they get married at an unusually young age for Japanese standards, 20 and 21. In the author’s opinion this is a clear message from Harem Anime telling younger generations that delaying marriage to such an extend is unnatural and that it is necessary for them to make the transition from arranged marriages to marriages based on love rather than staying in the present limbo. The connection of Japanese dating patterns and development may seem
weak yet it is the basis of population policy. Harem anime is clearly advocating a change in the reproductive pattern of modern Japanese.

In summary, Love Hina, shows the hopes and dreams of a generation as well as their problems. A search for an identity, traditional vs. modern, the tremendous stress built into the system (admission exams), and most importantly the debate over Japan’s population policy (marriage patterns).

Modernization and those it left behind: Doraemon and Ashita no Joe.

Doraemon and Ashita no Joe represent two important points of view on modernization. The first shows the positive side while the second shows the negative aspects of the process (or project). Both animation series came out at around the same time, during the late 1960s
and early 1970s and represent the height of the drive for modernization in Japan.

A robotic cat that traveled back in time to help a school boy in the 22nd century is the beginning of the story in *Doraemon*. The production of this series has already been discussed in a previous section of this paper and therefore this section will concentrate on the thematic analysis of its content rather than on the technical aspects of its production. A good way to summarize the significance of *Doraemon* would be the following: “Doraemon's formulaic plotlines typified the "wish fulfilment" mentality of 1970s Japan, where the electronics revolution glamorized the idea that one could solve their problems with machines and gadgets rather than hard work or individual intelligence.”\(^{49}\) Says Takashi Murasaki. This shows the complete faith held by some on the marvels of

\(^{49}\) *Doraemon* ([cited].)
technology as a way to solve all human problems. In the animated series *Doraemon*, the robotic cat, is always trying to help Nobita, a fourth grade boy. *Doraemon* is characterized for his clumsiness and for its lack of judgment in choosing tools from his fourth-dimensional pocket. Success is determined by the choice of gadget and failure is blamed on the choice too. In other words, technology is viewed as positive by itself and success is determined by using the appropriate tool for the problem in question. Those tools are called *dogu* in the story and they include everything from a personal helicopter to an air cannon.\(^5^0\) *Doreamon* is similar to the *Jetsons* in America and they both embody the faith of the time in modernization and its tools, technology.

Needless to say modernization did not improve everyone’s lives equally in Japan. Some

\(^{50}\) Ibid.([cited).
were left behind and others started to feel alienated by the entire concept. This is the case of students, socialists, communists, as well as common Japanese who were not able to adapt to the new way of life imposed by modernization and GNPsm. Those feelings were expressed indirectly by an animated series called Tomorrow’s Joe (Ashita no Joe). The story is about an orphan who runs away from the orphanage and ends up living in the slums. He then meets a retired boxing trainer and decides to become a boxer. The anime series follows his career in which he ends up killing by mistake one of his opponents and finally manages to fight the world champion, Jose Mendoza.\textsuperscript{51} The fight ends with Joe losing and bruised sitting on a chair but with a look of satisfaction in his face. Joe was knocked down many times but refused to give up during the fight. The 12 rounds ended

\textsuperscript{51} "Tomorrow's Joe."
and Joe lost by points. The fight took so much energy and effort form Joe that his hair started to turn gray after the fight. The significant part is that Joe was happy because he gave his best effort and that made him a winner regardless of the actual result of the fight. This series was taken up by the student movement as a symbol of the struggle of the lower classes for survival. Joe was a tragic hero who represented the will of the lower classes in their struggle for survival.52

Doraemon and Ashita no Joe are significant for their representation of modernization. They both discuss important aspects of the modernization project and most importantly reflect two distinct views of it. Another way to put this would be to say that they represent opposing interests trying to present their views in the public sphere. Doraemon was obviously more successful than Ashita no Joe from an

52 Note: Ashita no Joe is very similar to Rocky, the American movie.
economic perspective and is still one of the most famous animated characters in Japan. *Ashita no Joe* represents the fringes; the voice of the marginalized, of those left behind, and became a cult icon for those opposed to modernization such as the student movement in the late 1960s.

**Environmental Issues: *Nausicaa of the Valley of the Wind* and *Mononoke Hime***.

The modernization period as well as the early period of GNPsm took a heavy toll on Japan’s environment. Pollution started to become a problem giving rise to diseases and environmental degradation such as respiratory problems (asthma), poisoning (Minamata disease), and a polluted coast-line. The first to bring this topic to the public sphere were women who organized grass-roots groups to protest and
raise environmental awareness. The environmental movement in Japan was truly a bottom-up effort. The spirit of this increased environmental awareness is the rise of the environmental genre in animation. The two most famous examples of this genre are *Nausicaa of the Valley of the Wind* and *Mononoke Hime*. The first represents the outcome of a nuclear disaster and the necessity to respect nature, and the second shows the early struggle between Japan’s original peaceful coexistence with nature embodied by traditional beliefs such as Shinto and animism and the challenge to this symbiotic relationship brought about by early industrialization and an anthropocentric view of the world.
Mononoke Hime: Man as part of nature or man as ruler of nature.

Mononoke Hime or Princess Mononoke, is one of the most famous films produced by Hayo Miyazaki. The film was first released in 1997 and instantly became an international success. The setting of the movie is in the Muromachi Period (1336-1573). This was a period of nation building or unification of the empire. The main character is a young man from the Emishi, Ashitaka. The story centers around two main themes, the place of man regarding nature, and war. The former theme is the dominant one and is expressed in the film by the growth of a place called Iron Town. This town is located in the middle of a forest and has as its main activity the production of weapons (rifles). The plot

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55 Olenik, Japan Its History and Culture. P.306
56 Emishi: Northern tribe which was later on conquered by the Yamato people.
describes the process of taming nature in order to build and maintain Iron Town and at the same time it shows the pernicious effects this has on the forest. The world depicted in the film is one filled with supernatural beings. Shinto is the central philosophy in that nature is said to possess a spirit. In the film several spirits are shown, such as the spirit of the forest, wolf spirits, boar spirits, and the spirits of the trees. The battle is between the forces of nature against that of humanity.

Ashitaka represents humanity in that he is the mediator between two extremes. One extreme is represented by Princess Mononoke, who fights for nature and identifies herself with the forest and its spirits. The other extreme is centered around Lady Eboshi who is the ruler of Iron Town and has as her driving ideal to protect humanity and take care of the sick. Ashitaka finally decides to side with the humans while at
the same time trying to prevent conflict if possible. Conflict escalates until the Spirit of the Forest (Shishigami) is killed.

The ending of the story is significant in that it represents the apparent triumph of humanity over nature and the end of an era in which humanity was part of it. The movie is full of nostalgic references to an idealized past and shows the yearning to regain some part of that past, a past in which nature was respected and worshiped. Another interesting point to note is that the ending shows a tempered realism that characterizes Japanese environmentalism. In other words, it is an environmentalism that aims to protect nature but realizes that a return to nature’s bosom is not possible.
**Nausicaa of the Valley of the Wind: Pollution and War.**

*Nausicaa of the Valley of the Wind* was produced in 1984 by the same person as Princess Mononoke, Hayao Miyazaki. This film was internationally recognized as an environmentalist masterpiece and was even presented by the World Wide Fund for Nature. The setting of the story is 1,000 years after a great war had ended. According to the story huge biochemical weapons were used in that war and the result was a complete disruption of the ecosystem. The consequent pollution led to the creation of a “sea of decay” which was inhabited by fungus and giant insects. This area was uninhabitable for humans. The few survivors of the “seven days of fire”, the name given to the Great War, lived in scattered villages around the previously mentioned “sea of decay”.
The plot of the film centers around the Princess of the Valley of the Wind, Nausicaa. The qualities of the princess are important in giving meaning to the film. She is described as having empathy for all living creatures including the huge insects. She plays an important role in the war that breaks out for control of one of the old God Warriors (biochemical ship) used in the “seven days of fire”. Two other nations battle for control of the ship until the conflict spreads to Nausicaa’s Valley of the Wind. The significant part of the story is not the battle itself but Nausicaa’s reaction to it. During the conflict she shows compassion and empathy towards all of those in need as if she were trying to fight for life itself. The movie also shows the importance of the “sea of decay” in that it had become the center of the new ecosystem and thus it had a purpose.
The main message of the film is that every living creature is an integral part of the environment and therefore any action taken against the environment will affect everyone. The movie also reflects the feelings of the Japanese regarding the changes to their own environment. It was a realization that they had altered it beyond repair and that the important thing at that point was to protect the new environment in order not to make the same mistakes again. The film can also be interpreted to be a warning to the possible outcome of a nuclear war.

**Gundam Seed: Militarism vs. Pacifism**

*Gundam Seed* is the latest in a long family of Mobile Suit series. It is also the first one to have been released after the September 11 attacks. *Gundam Seed* was produced by Sunrise and had
a run of 50 episodes. The plot revolves around the conflict between “naturals” and “coordinators”. “Coordinators” are humans with genetic modifications while “naturals” are unaltered humans. Most “coordinators” tend to live in the colonies, in space colonies, while most naturals remain on earth. This causes a split between the Earth Alliance and ZAFT (Zodiac Alliance of Freedom Treaty). The main character of the story is Kira Yamato who pilots a magnificent mobile suit called Strike Gundam. The story then leads to the beginning of a full scale war and the irony of having Kira, a coordinator fighting, for the Earth Alliance. The main theme of the series is the horror of war and how it simply lacks any logic. The series shows suffering on both sides and focuses on the hidden reasons for war such as greed. The plot makes several allusions to the Iraq War by

58 Gundam Seed Web ([cited).
showing some episodes in which poor desert people have to fight a superior army. This shows how sometimes civilians are forced to defend their families by fighting wars which are otherwise completely unrelated to them.

The general tone of the series is one of deep pacifism. Even the main character has frequent psychological breakdowns due to the pain he feels from killing. The moral of the story is quite clear, war is destructive to both sides and thus should be avoided at all cost. The significant points to note about this series is that it was released after the September 11 attacks and includes a theme related to intolerance and ethnocentrism, the “naturals” vs. “coordinators” conflict. In addition to that it shows the complexity of war in that civilians get involved in the fighting in order to protect their families. One especially important episode deals with a historically peaceful neutral nation which is
pressed by both sides to join the war, an island nation. This is a clear allusion to Japan’s role in conflict resolution such as sending Self Defense Troops to overseas missions. This parallels the heated debate going on over the possible revision of Japan’s Peace Constitution and more concretely that of Article 9 which renounces the right to wage war. It seems as if this series is trying to persuade the audience to remember the horrors of war, of all war, be it conventional or the present violent Grey Area Phenomena. The tone of this series is a clear response to the attempts by the conservative Liberal Democratic Party currently in power to promote the legalization of the armed forces and clearly shows that the field of animation has become an extended battlefield of the public sphere.
Conclusion:

This paper has tried to show the connection between popular culture, animation, and the process of development. In order to this, it was first necessary to trace the history of animation in Japan. This history in turn was followed by a short overview of Japan’s development history. By tracing the two histories separately the reader could identify trends and similarities. The main themes found in Japan’s development history were then identified and explained in order to highlight the most important debates. This was in turn followed by an explanation of how anime is an integral part of the public sphere and how public opinion is influence by it and in turn influences it. In order to provide a more convincing argument it was necessary to provide more in depth analysis of individual animated series dealing with the main themes.
previously identified. Several themes were found in the animated series which were analyzed ranging from a search for an identity, to pacifism. It was therefore proven that there is an important link between development and a means of communication such as animation. This new form of the “little tradition” serves as an escape valve for the sorrows and concerns of the general public. The interaction between animation and the Japanese public includes a flow of ideas not only from animation to the public but also includes an informal feedback system which sends information from the public to those in charge of producing animation.

While this paper is not an exhaustive study on the subject it establishes an important link between to fields usually considered unrelated and may serve as the basis for more in depth studies in the future including empirical research. Some of the studies which could be
carried out in order to complement this study would involve the mapping of the actually feedback system found in animation studios. A study on self-censorship and other constraints in the animation industry would also help elucidate the limitations of this field.

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Gundam Seed Web. 2007. In,
http://www.gundam-seed.net/.