Affective Transformation:

Other-power and the Community of Peers in Works by Kyoto Animation

ARNAB DASGUPTA

Abstract: Kyoto Animation can rightly be called one of the leading studios of Japanese animation, and its works have been at the forefront of anime production in terms of both techniques and aesthetics. However, no significant studies have been conducted on the works of Kyoto Animation from the perspective of the studio as a whole, or even identified consistent themes and patterns across them. This paper aims to rectify that gap by studying four works by the most prolific directors of Kyoto Animation, namelythe *Haruhi Suzumiya* series (2006-2010), *Beyond the Boundary* (2013-15), *A Silent Voice* (2016), and *Miss Kobayashi's Maid Dragon* (2017). This works also argues that the Japanese Buddhist conception of *tariki* (Other-power, redefined here as affective transformation) and the presence of a community of peers to nurture it offers powerful interpretive frameworks through which to understand these four major works by Kyoto Animation, as well as many others by the studio.

Keywords*:* anime, Kyoto Animation, Japanese Buddhism, character development, *nô*

Author Bio: Dr. Arnab Dasgupta is a researcher specializing in Japanese studies, with interests ranging from government policy, especially immigration policy, in the field of Japanese politics and society, to anime and manga studies in the field of language and culture. He has an MA in Japanese language from Jawaharlal Nehru University, India, and a PhD in Japanese studies from the same university. He was a recipient of the 2017-18 Japan Foundation Doctoral Fellowship in Japanese Studies, under which he was attached as a Visiting Researcher to the National Graduate Research Institute for Policy Studies, Tokyo. His work has received several awards and commendations from the Governments of India and Japan.

Introduction

Before the devastating fire that broke out on the morning of July 18, 2019, Kyoto Animation was widely known as one of the most prolific and well-loved animation studios in Japan. Even though their productivity has declined after the 2019 fire, KyoAni, as it is lovingly called by fans, continues to produce works that have earned the studio multiple awards, and are often ranked among the best anime of all time by fans and critics alike.[1] It is therefore natural that works by the studio have come under academic scrutiny as well, though there remain gaps in such study.

The present paper works to analyze Kyoto Animation productions through concepts drawn from Japanese Buddhism. This lens offers critical insights in that, although perhaps not directly associated with anime in the minds of fans or critics, Buddhist tropes run through many of the studio's productions. This paper will argue that *tariki* (other-power), an important concept for Pure Land Buddhism, is the most relevant undercurrent linking several of Kyoto Animation's productions.

The term and concept of *tariki* has a long history within Buddhism. Though the historical Buddha is known to have preached primarily the importance of self-introspection and self-abnegation (translated into Japanese as *jiriki*, self-power) in order to escape the cycle of death and rebirth, several canonical Buddhist texts show that he also may have intended to propose a different way for the masses of people, who had neither the time nor the mental capacity for such practices, to embrace the Eightfold Path.[2] In later texts, the Buddha is said to have remarked positively on the

ecumenical nature of nirvana, where even the 'indolent' would be granted access to enlightenment just by the act of hearing his teachings.[3]

The formation of a schism among the followers of Buddha after the fourth Grand Sangha, coupled with the acceleration of the geographical spread of his gospel, induced changes in worship and doctrine, where the worship of the historical Buddha was supplanted in some cases by the worship of a pantheon of his historical reincarnations as depicted in the central texts of Buddhism. The most prominent among these reincarnations was Amitâbha (*Amida* in Japanese), the Buddha of the Pure Land (i.e., the Buddhist paradise), whose 48 vows to his followers were interpreted as ensuring nirvana to those who would only hear his words.[4] This brand of Buddhism, which promised democratic access to salvation without the rigor required by other Buddhist sub-disciplines, became the most popular form of teaching in China (and later Korea and Japan as well), and the first Chinese interpreters of Mâhayâna Buddhism grasped early on the importance of this ecumenical message for the propagation of this religion. Heian-era devotees such as Genshin (942-1017) and Yôkan (1033-1111) introduced the tenets of Amitâbha (henceforward called Amida) to Japan, and they spread the teachings widely among the elite classes of the late Heian and early Kamakura eras.[5]

However, it was not until the two extraordinary figures of Hônen (1133-1212) and Shinran (1173-1263) entered the stage during the early Kamakura period, that the concept of *tariki* became the normative standard for popular Japanese Buddhism as not only a valid, but also as the most desirable, form of religious practice for lay Buddhists. Hônen believed that the chanting of the mantra *Namu Amida Butsu* (the *nenbutsu*) by a devotee was enough to ensure

their rebirth in paradise, while Shinran took this discourse further by completely rejecting any other forms of collecting merit for salvation in favor of chanting the *nenbutsu*, as "radical and absolute faith in Amida's vow was essential for rebirth and this precluded any notion of self-effort".[67] In this formulation, then, only by the intercession of Amida could the devotee attain the paradise of the Pure Land; as later expressed pithily by Daisetz T. Suzuki, "it is all in the working of Amida, and we ordinary people living relative existences are powerless to bring about our birth in the Pure Land, or, in another word, bring about our enlightenment".[8]

While the Buddhist doctrine of *tariki* had a great impact on Japanese religious life, it also influenced the evolution of new cultural forms. Of these, the most relevant is the medieval Japanese dramatic art form known as *nô*, which scholars such as Stevie Suan have shown is a direct precursor to – and primary influence on – anime.[9] Founded in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries CE, the *nô* theatre was "ultimately destined to supersede the earlier…song-dances" of Japanese high art by presenting a dance-drama of long duration that maintained excellent production values, a high degree of aesthetic quality in its scripts, and an extremely systematized set of actions and movements by on-stage actors that lent itself to predictability and standardization.[10] According to James H. Foard, "the…emphasis on Pure Land Buddhism in the plays themselves is beyond dispute," and there is clear indication that the teachings of Hônen and Shinran influenced the scriptwriting directly.[11] One such piece of evidence can be found in what is now understood as a standardized trope of *nô* theatre: the interaction between a spirit and a wandering monk (or Shintô priest, usually played by the primary lead actors), and the pivotal role played by the latter in helping the former achieve freedom from the cycle

of death and rebirth.

Though an extended discussion of them is beyond the scope of this paper, two examples from the classical repertoire of *nô* plays can be discussed briefly. Take, for example, the popular play *Atsumori*, based on a story found in the *Tale of the Heike* (*Heike Monogatari*, c.1330, author unknown).[12] The play revolves around the story of a wandering monk named Rensei (or Rensho), who in a past life was a warrior named Kumagai no Jirô Atsutane, as well as a young man later revealed as the spirit of Taira no Atsumori, cut down by Kumagai when they both fought on opposite sides in the Heike conflict (also called the Genpei war, 1180-1185). After their introduction, Kumagai, now Rensei (or Rensho), realizes that he has yet to atone for the killing of his young opponent, and promises the spirit that he would pray for the latter's soul. In the play's climax, Atsumori enters heaven thanks to the monk's intercession, leaving behind a narration of his deeds until his death at the hands of his old enemy, now his friend and savior. After Atsumori disappears, the monk returns to his wandering, resolved anew in his desire for the salvation of all beings.

In *Sanemori,* also derived from the *Tale of the Heike*, the eponymous old warrior wanders his former battlefield through the ages, his spirit unable to pass away completely.[13] Into this milieu steps the monk Yûgyô Shônin, whose sermons the spirit of Sanemori attends in disguise. As the priest calls on him to speak, Sanemori sheds his disguise and attains his true form, speaking of his actions in the final battle he fought as a commander of the armies of the Heike clan, and his vain attempt to engage the rival commander in hand-to-hand combat, only to be decapitated by a lesser enemy. Upon hearing the story, the monk is moved to compassion, and in line with his vows to help ensure the salvation of all

beings, decides to pray for the soul of Sanemori. In the final act, as the monk's prayers take effect, the ghost of Sanemori slowly fades away, his rebirth in the Pure Land of Amida Buddha assured after a short narration of the manner of his death.

In the context of the *nô* stage, these two chief characters of the monk and the spirit can be interpreted as two halves of a dyadic pair, neither of which can fulfil their mission without the other's power. For example, the spirits of Atsumori and Sanemori are condemned to wander the earth forever, as they cannot let go of their egotistical desires for either revenge (Atsumori) or injustice (Sanemori), while the monks Rensei (Rensho) and Yûgyô Shônin are bound to pray for the repose of their counterparts, either out of a desire to repent and atone for a deed done in a past life (Rensei) or from a duty to fulfil the Buddhist vow of compassion for all beings (Yûgyô Shônin). Only the intervention of the monks enables Atsumori and Sanemori to finally pass away, while the successful salvation of the spirits enables the monks to achieve their respective aims of repentance (Rensei) and of propagating the teachings of Buddhism (Yûgyô Shônin), thus earning merit for themselves in the afterlife. Both halves of the dyad are transformed by the affective impact of the other half, both literally and metaphorically; that is, they achieve *affective transformation*.

This paper seeks to show that this trope of affective transformation, albeit modified, is a key theme running through the works of Kyoto Animation, where it is presented as an antidote to the anomie and alienation often experienced by individuals, especially youth, in postmodern societies.

Methodology, Scope, and Definitions

This paper will focus on four works: the *Haruhi Suzumiya* series (two seasons of a TV series and one film) by director Ishihara Tatsuya, *Miss Kobayashi's Maid Dragon* (one season as of June 2021) by director Takemoto Yasuhiro, *A Silent Voice* (feature film) by director Yamada Naoko, and *Beyond the Boundary* (one season of the TV series, followed by a prequel and sequel film) by director Ishidate Taichi. These works have been selected because their directors represent the four most prolific members on the Kyoto Animation roster (see Table 1, in bold). Thus these works, it is expected, would serve as a representative cross-section of the studio's oeuvre by controlling for the possibility that the theme of affective transformation might be the product of any single director's worldview or belief.

The works themselves, as tabulated in Table 2, have been chosen according to the following criteria:

- popularity among fans of Kyoto Animation, evidenced by their ratings on the site MyAnimeList (MAL);

- temporal distribution (a period between 2006 to 2017 is represented);

- diversity of directors (three men and one woman);

- variety of formats (three TV series and three feature films);

- generic characteristics (high-school adventure, slice of life comedy, social-commentary-driven romance, and action romance, respectively).

This paper is divided into four parts. The introduction has identified the central lens through which the rest of this paper looks at the works in Table 2. The current section lists the specific works to be discussed, as well as the criteria for their selection and some aspects that will not be covered. The following section, divided into two parts, will discuss in more detail the concepts of affective transformation and the community of peers as portrayed in these selected texts. Finally, the conclusion will offer some concluding commentary on the place that these concepts enjoy in Kyoto Animation's oeuvre, as well as to highlight the relevance of these works as tools not only to understand the ubiquity of popular Japanese Buddhist ideas in Japanese discourse, but also for potential social-scientific purposes.

The analysis of these works taken up for discussion will be done on a whole-story basis, such that only arcs or stories apposite to the central argument will be discussed in depth. This approach has been adopted due to the variety of works under discussion, each of which may contain several story arcs.

Table 1. The Directors of Kyoto Animation

Director	Number of credits	Total run-time of credited works (in minutes)
Ishihara Tatsuya[14]	20 (13 TV series, 6 films, 1 OVA)	5208
Takemoto Yasuhiro[15]	13 (7 TV series, 2 films, 2 OVA, 1 ONA)	2610
Yamada Naoko[16]	7 (3 TV series, 4 films)	1625
Kawanami Eisaku[17]	6 (1 TV series, 5 films)	676

Ishidate Taichi[18]	5 (2 TV series, 3 films)	1060
Kigami Yoshiji[19]	4 (1 TV series, 1 film, 2 OVA)	420
Utsumi Hiroko[20]	2 (TV series)	600
Yamamoto Yutaka[21]	1 (TV series)	96

Yamamura Takuya[22]	1 (TV series)	312
Fujita Haruka[23]	1 (film)	91
Ogawa Taichi[24]	1 (film)	110

Table 2. Works cited in this paper

Name of the Work	Year of broadcast	Run-time (combined, in minutes)	Source format	Director	MAL Rating (number of users)	Source of media
The Melancholy of Haruhi Suzumiya (Haruhi Suzumiya no Yûutsu)[25]	2006 (Season 1), 2009 (Season 2)	658	Light novel	Ishihara Tatsuya	7.86 (407,851) (Season 1), 7.23 (255,508) (Season 2)	Netflix[26]
The Disappearance of Haruhi Suzumiya (Haruhi Suzumiya no Shôshitsu)[27]	2010	162	Light novel	Ishihara Tatsuya (chief), Takemoto Yasuhiro	8.64 (260,485)	Netflix[28]
Beyond the Boundary (Kyôkai no Kanata)[29]	2013	288	Light novel	Ishidate Taichi	7.76 (434,857)	Amazon Prime Video[30]
Beyond the Boundary –I'll Be Here- Future (Gekijôban Kyôkai no Kanata: I'll Be Here Mirai-hen)[31]	2015	90	Light novel	Ishidate Taichi	8.19 (103,910)	DVD[32]

A Silent Voice (Koe no Katachi)[33]	2016	130	Manga	Yamada Naoko	8.98 (1,061,767)	Netflix[34]
Miss Kobayashi's Dragon Maid (Kobayashi-san chi no Meido Doragon)[35] *Miss Kobayashi's Dragon Maid Episode 14: Valentine's, and Then Hot Springs! -Please Don't Get Your Hopes Up (Kobayashi-san chi no Meido Doragon: Barentain, soshite Onsen! Amari Kitai Shinai de Kudasai)* (Special episode)[36]	2017	312 23 (Special episode)	Manga	Takemoto Yasuhiro	8.00 (497,540) 7.76 (79,382) (Special episode)	Crunchyroll[37]

Run-times are author's own calculations.

Discussion of works

In the present sections, two key motifs will be discussed thematically. The first sub-section will discuss the concept of affective transformation, after which the discussion will pivot to the community of peers and its modalities. For reasons of space, this section exclusively discusses scenes that illustrate the themes under discussion.

Affective transformation in the works of Kyoto Animation

The first thematic characteristic discernible in Kyoto Animation's works, similar to the discussion of the *nô* plays above, is the presence of a pair of lead characters whose dynamic can best be called dyadic. Most commonly, this dyadic lead pair is comprised of individuals of opposite genders, though this is not always the case: in some cases, most notably *Miss Kobayashi's Maid Dragon*, the chief protagonists are of the same gender.

What is more, the lead pair is almost invariably also romantically linked, though there are significant variations within this frame too: in *Beyond the Boundary* and *The Melancholy of Haruhi Suzumiya*, there is a clear power imbalance, while in *Miss Kobayashi's Maid Dragon*, the protagonists are of different species.

More significant, from this paper's perspective, is the method by which these dyads achieve affective transformation. Just as the pairs described above in the discussion of the plays *Sanemori* and *Atsumori*, members of the dyads in each of these Kyoto Animation works discussed below are locked in certain ways of being and belonging, which they find unnecessary or difficult to change. It is only by coming into

contact with the other half of the dyad that the necessary impetus for change is first received and later put into practice. In other words, both sides undergo *affective transformation* in order to achieve stable relationships with their significant other. Therefore, affective transformation in this context may be defined as a renegotiation, and eventually a radical transformation, of the self: motivated not by self-reflection (self-power, or *jiriki*), but by interaction with, and the affective influence of, an external agent, primarily presented as an object of affection, who is both the source of radical change as well as its ultimate destination.

To achieve this, however, the characters must first fall into a crisis where their identity is destabilized in a critical way, and then find themselves in a liminal space where they are completely alienated from themselves and others; from here they must begin, with the help of their dyadic other half, to reconstitute themselves.

This theme will be referred to henceforth as "a descent into Purgatory,", in deference to the importance that the concept of Purgatory holds in eschatological terms, especially in Buddhism and its predecessor Hinduism, as an intermediate stage from which the souls of the deceased achieve either heaven (*moksha* or *nirvana*, freedom from the cycle of rebirth) or hell (punishment for sins committed in life, followed by a return to the transmigratory cycle of death and rebirth). Though this is not always the case (i.e., it shows up in three of the four cases discussed below, not all four), it will be seen that the dialectic relationship of an (ostensibly) stable self plunging into crisis due to an encounter with the Other, only to re-emerge as a fully-fledged and radically-transformed self as part of the dyad, is a core narrative characteristic of Kyoto Animation's oeuvre.

In *The Melancholy of Haruhi Suzumiya*, though Haruhi – as pointed out by the other members of the SOS Brigade – attains affective transformation when Kyon first interacts with her, her dogged insistence on dictating the actions of fellow members in her quest to escape the eponymous melancholy of the title is countered by his determination to instinctively reject her, which is rooted in his fear of her godlike powers activating seemingly at random. This is vividly conveyed to viewers during the famous *Endless Eight* arc of the series, where Kyon and the group realize to their horror that they are living in an eternal summer-vacation time loop created by Haruhi's desire to spend more time with them. Over eight episodes, the characters repeat the same activities over and over again, with only minor differences noticeable only to the viewer thanks to the animators' clear intention to make them so; what is more, according to Nagato, they have been doing so for millions of iterations. This, for all intents and purposes, represents Kyon's descent into Purgatory, as he is trapped in an endless cycle of time during which he must reflect on his actions, and ultimately, attain the "enlightenment" of surrendering to Haruhi's Other-power: by inviting her and the gang over to his house to help him with his homework, Kyon finally fulfills Haruhi's wish, triggering the end of the time loop.

The theme of purgatory returns in the film *The Disappearance of Haruhi Suzumiya,* as Kyon is inserted into an alternate timeline where the Brigade does not exist and Haruhi does not know him. In his alienated and defamiliarized state, he desperately tries to find a way back home. In a climactic scene that occurs at the moment of his escape from the altered timeline, he finally awakens to the realization that his life with the Brigade is an important element of his self-identity. In this

moment of realization, he finally opens himself to Haruhi's Other-power, and decides to reset the timeline back to normal so that he can be with her again. However, he suffers grievous wounds in the process, and wakes up days later in a hospital, where he is greeted by Koizumi. The latter informs him of his situation, and points to his bedside, where he finds Haruhi sleeping; apparently, she has been watching over him throughout his convalescence.

It is instructive to observe Kyon in this scene: in a deeply reverent yet profoundly intimate manner reminiscent of the Renaissance-era motif of the Adoration of the Magi, he gently caresses her mouth and eyes, and brushes the hair from her face until she wakes up.[38] Later, on the roof of the hospital, as Nagato approaches him to confess that she is the culprit behind the altered timeline, the full extent of Kyon's evolution is evident; not only does he assure Nagato that he and Haruhi will protect her from any consequences, but in his internal monologue, he also repeatedly confirms his faith in Haruhi's powers, and the power of both of them together to protect everyone close to them. As he meditates, the perspective shifts to a bird's-eye view, encompassing the hospital roof and the city beyond, drawing the eye upwards until the night sky fills the screen; the entire universe, it seems to say, is now part of the dyad's purview. Kyon's affective transformation is thus completed, as he willingly accepts Haruhi's power over him, even as he grows more confident of his own power to affect her.

The principal dyad of *Beyond the Boundary*, Kuriyama Mirai and Kanbara Akihito, initially come together because of their shared identity as ostracized entities within their respective communities; Kuriyama is an exorcist who can manipulate her own "cursed" blood into weapons, while Akihito is an immortal hybrid with a human

mother and a Shade (as the entities hunted by exorcists are called) father. As the intimacy between them deepens, Kuriyama is enabled, by her induction into the community of peers by Akihito, to overcome the trauma of her childhood, and thereby form new social connections. Akihito, on the other hand, undergoes a more difficult trial, that of learning to re-evaluate the hitherto dichotomized parts of himself. Initially, he fears for Kuriyama's safety and attempts to completely suppress his Shade self. However, as the series approaches its climax with the Shade known as Beyond the Boundary (*Kyôkai no Kanata*) appearing on the horizon, Akihito is compelled to recognize that only when his human and Shade selves are completely integrated can he hope to save Kuriyama and others; in the final episodes, he uses his Shade self to enter the surrealistic world of Beyond the Boundary (which is incidentally revealed to be his father) and provide aid to Kuriyama, who has hitherto been battling the threat alone, by manipulating the space created by the Shade. Eventually they defeat the threat together, but in the final moments, Akihito realizes that Kuriyama has lost her memory of him and everyone else as a cost of overexerting her powers.

The film *I'll Be Here - Future* (a pun derived from Kuriyama's given name Mirai, which also means "the future") takes up the story a year after the events of the series, and vividly demonstrates that narrative's impact on a member of the central dyad of deprivation of their partner's Other-power and the community of peers. An amnesiac Kuriyama is being shut out by Akihito and the other members of her community of peers at his urging, led by his wishes to protect her from the constant pain and fear she experienced as a wielder of "cursed blood." However, his actions have the unintended effect of weakening Kuriyama's emotional state, which attracts the attention of the true

villain of the film, the rogue exorcist Miroku. In an ambush at her apartment, the latter manages to corrupt her with his power, causing her to essentially give in to the worst aspects of her isolation and blame Akihito as the source of it. Kuriyama's descent into Purgatory is complete when she finds herself thrust into a pit of blackness where she is tormented by twisted visions of Akihito and the Nase siblings, who she is made to believe hate and despise her for her "curse." At the end of her nightmare, Kuriyama undergoes a physical transformation, her eyes turning red and her powers unleashed to the maximum. In order to stop her, a repentant Akihito uses Kuriyama's attack to literally penetrate her psyche; among her memories, he recovers a long-forgotten fragment on a sunlit beach, where both of their mothers speak of their hopes for their children and promise to watch over each other's children in case of tragedy. This memory, visually reminiscent of traditional Japanese imaginaries of the Pure Land, forces loose the lost memories of Kuriyama's time with him and the group.[39] In doing so, he makes her whole by helping her reconnect to both her former self and the group. The film ends on an optimistic note, with Kuriyama and Akihito in a romantic relationship.

The protagonists of the film *A Silent Voice*, however, do not attain affective transformation until they are provided catharsis. Ishida Shôya, as a former bully and later victim of bullying, suffers from deep social anxiety and suicidal tendencies; this is his Purgatory, expressed movingly in scenes where everyone around him has a big black X marked over their face, indicating not only that he feels alienated from them, but also that they have shut him out in turn. Nishimiya Shôko, a former victim of Shôya's, expresses suicidal ideation in her youth (expressed in a moving flashback where she signs to her sister Yuzuru that she wants to kill herself) and generalized passivity later on. Though the two reconnect and grow closer to each other, their past

relation as victim and victimizer continues to deny them a meaningful relationship. Shôya's breakdown in the midpoint climax of the film, followed by Shôko's suicide attempt from the balcony of her family apartment, moves matters to a resolution. In attempting to save Shôko, Shôya sacrifices his footing, and in a scene pregnant with meaning, tumbles down into the river below while pulling her back over the parapet to safety, mirroring exactly an initial scene where he attempts to jump into the same river in order to kill himself. By contrast to the selfish desire for self-extinction in that earlier scene, Shôya displays true selflessness by his act of sacrifice here, even at the cost of his own annihilation.

For Shôko, this moment marks a turning point, as she realizes the self-centered nature of her passivity; in the aftermath, as Shôya lies in a coma, we see her desperately attempt to make amends, to the point of being physically attacked by Naoka, who takes issue with that self-same passivity. Later, however, a just-awakened Shôya tells Shôko that he does not hold her responsible, and that he wants her to "help him live," essentially – and powerfully – expressing an implicit trust in Shôko's Other-power to help him overcome his failings. Shôko is awakened by Shôya's admission to the power of being needed by him, of needing to care for him, and thus discovers her own *raison d'étre*. In the final moments of the film, we see a newly confident Shôko helping Shôya overcome his perceived inadequacies, and thereby reaffirm his intrinsic value to the people around him; the Xs on people's faces drop away, and he is moved to tears by his rehabilitation.

In *Miss Kobayashi's Maid Dragon*, affective transformation occurs on an inter-species level, and creates a relationship for its co-gendered central dyad that verges on

the erotic. Kobayashi, initially depicted as a straitlaced but somewhat idiosyncratic *salaryman*, is enabled by her cohabitation with Tohru – and Kanna – to create for herself an ideal nuclear family unit, where she takes on the role of "husband," with Tohru as a (hopelessly infatuated and eagerly subservient) "wife" and Kanna as a (deeply attached) "child," thereby alleviating both her loneliness as well as societal expectations. Tohru, the maid dragon of the title, in turn is able to shed her anthropophobia as she begins to reside with Kobayashi, even to the point of having a wide range of human acquaintances among neighbors, local residents, business owners, and even fans of fantasy roleplay, in a particularly hilarious episode set in the Comic Market (*Comiket*) convention held biannually in Tokyo. As the story progresses, we see the effects of this transformation unfold: Tohru defends humankind – and Kobayashi – against her father, the chief of a group of warring dragons, while Kobayashi is gradually socialized by Tohru and Kanna into balancing work and life more adroitly as a "spouse" and "parent," such as maintaining a better balance between home and work and attending school events.

The community of peers in the works of Kyoto Animation

In order to accomplish affective transformation, these works by Kyoto Animation consistently emphasize the value of a safe and understanding environment. This environment is provided by the other thematic characteristic discussed in this paper, particularly the presence of a community of peers, in which the central dyad is ensconced and that provides the necessary social and emotional support to alleviate the traumatic aspects of radical change.

This community of peers finds many expressions, from school clubs such as the

SOS Brigade of *The Melancholy of Haruhi Suzumiya* to the lovingly-nicknamed "Chorogons" of *Miss Kobayashi's Maid Dragon*. What is common to these communities, however, is their composition: non-consanguineous colleagues/friends/compatriots who willingly associate with the central characters because of affective ties with them. These ties motivate them to assist the central characters in achieving the affective transformation that the narrative demands of them, even though not many of these supporting characters achieve such transformation themselves.

In the *Haruhi Suzumiya* series, the SOS Brigade – composed of the time traveler Asahina Mikuru, the alien android Nagato Yuki, and the empath Koizumi Itsuki – forms the community of peers for Kyon and Haruhi. Initially intended to observe Haruhi's powers at the behest of larger entities, the group gradually coheres into a supportive role, helping Kyon and Haruhi form a tighter dyad. Each contributes to this mission in their own way: the bumbling Asahina not only serves (unwillingly) as Haruhi's plaything, but also helps Kyon when the crisis of the day requires him to time-travel; meanwhile Koizumi serves as an interpreter of Haruhi's moods and intentions, as well as the mediator in their conflicts. Arguably the most important role, however, is played by Nagato, who not only manipulates space-time to help Kyon and the others out of major crises, but also serves as the record-keeper of the group, a role played to great effect during the *Endless Eight* arc. Even more significantly, it is she who triggers the events of the film by rewriting reality around Kyon, causing him to attain the final realization that leads him to embrace Haruhi's Other-power entirely.

The community of peers in *Beyond the Boundary* is comprised of the members

of the Literary Club, the Nase siblings Hiroomi and Mitsuki, who are also scions of a pre-eminent family of exorcists, along with their associates within the exorcist community. Primarily tasked with protecting (and minding) Akihito, the siblings eventually come to view themselves as Kuriyama's protectors as well. They perform the characteristic functions of the community of peers: Mitsuki is pivotal in accepting Kuriyama into the group and helps her understand the roots of Akihito's behavior; later on, she helps Akihito realize that in order to protect Kuriyama, he has to accept himself completely, including the Shade part. In the film, she and Hiroomi (unwillingly) comply with Akihito's wishes and keep their distance from Kuriyama, but also urge him to rethink his stance. As Kuriyama is turned by Miroku, the siblings help Akihito contain her, so that he can enter her psyche and remove Miroku's corrupting influence.

The community of peers in *A Silent Voice* is *sui generis* in this enumeration, as they actually initially perform a negative role in the central dyad's affective transformation. Several of them are compromised figures: as we note in the film's initial part, Sahara and Kawai abandon their attempts to help Shôko when they are targeted for bullying, while Naoka actively aids Shôya and friends in harassing her. This is why we see, later on, that in Shôya's mindscape all three have crossed-out faces when he encounters them again, and their refusal for most of the film to accept their role in that formative incident traps Shôya in Purgatory and prevents his rehabilitation, leading to Shôya's breakdown and Shôko's suicide attempt. Mashiba enters the group with a rigidity in his attitude toward bullies that leads him to make a sweeping judgment of Shôya, which also contributes to Shôya's self-loathing. Yuzuru, Shôko's sister, initially judges Shôya harshly too, though she learns to re-evaluate him as he undergoes his

transformation.

It is Nagatsuka alone who is presented in the film as a clean slate, and it is his acceptance of Shôya's past and present that points the way to a transformation in the whole group. This is evident in his presence by Shôko's side as she attempts to mend the rupture caused by Shôya's breakdown, as well as in his later monologue to Shôya, where he states that he values Shôya's present, not his past. He thus performs the critical role of a catalyst in simultaneously breaking through Shôya's negative attitude toward himself as well as supporting Shôko in her struggle to shed her passivity and finally take charge of her life.

The episodic nature of *Miss Kobayashi's Maid Dragon*, not to mention the demands of its genre, implies that membership of the community of peers is the primary function of the peripheral characters, but also, since they mainly exist as comedic subjects, they are less crucial to the story in terms of development. The dragons in the group (Alma, Lucoa, and Fafnir) serve primarily as sources of information throughout the show, enabling Kobayashi to understand the mindset of dragons (as well as means of transport when the situation requires it), while the humans (Takiya, Saikawa and Shôta) serve to acclimatize the dragons to the human world, usually to hilarious effect. Yet only Fafnir can be said to attain a radical transformation of the self through his co-residence with Takiya and his indulgence in the joys of internet games, though this transformation seems to be comically unstable, and perpetually threatens to go off the rails given the slightest opportunity, lending the whole thing a parodic aura.

Conclusion

This paper has analyzed four works by Kyoto Animation in order to trace how the Buddhist concept of *tariki* is relevant to their narratives in the form of affective transformation. Though the number of works discussed here was limited due to space constraints, in reality a much wider part of the studio's oeuvre also partakes of the themes of affective transformation and the community of peers: enough to offer strong proof of the hypothesis that Kyoto Animation does indeed have a specific penchant for producing such works.

A more germane question concerns the motive behind Kyoto Animation's strong emphasis on producing works so similar in thematic terms. A definitive answer cannot be offered here, but it can be argued, in line with Jolyon Baraka Thomas' conceptualization of anime as a "representational technique designed to trigger visceral responses, elicit emotional reactions, and prompt intellectual reorientations," that they seem to be pointing towards the possibility of radical behavioral change in response to human connection, as well as the importance of a permissive social environment for such change to occur.[40] Since many of the works discussed in this paper concern young people of school-going age, especially those on the cusp of adulthood, this interpretation attains greater significance, as it conforms to the general understanding of this period of human development as crucial for identity formation and stabilization.[41][41]

The championing of connection and community has a secondary importance. The works presented here universally privilege "real" (i.e., physical) connections between the central dyad, as well as the physical proximity of the community of peers, as integral components of the story, thus valorizing a non-mediated form of

connection as key to achieving the radical transformation necessary for an adolescent's

metamorphosis into an adult. Treated as such, these texts can be said to propose an

antidote to the age of social media-induced alienation, where people are prone to

interact with their peers more via tools of digital communication, and are often

influenced by trends and statements posted by strangers half a world away. These texts

thus have value not only as artistic output, but also as didactic vehicles depicting an

alternative to post-modern societal malaise such as social isolation and anomie. As a

result, they offer rich spaces not only to scholars wishing to trace the permeation of

popular Buddhist ideology into popular culture, but also potentially as therapeutic

tools, an ancillary use to which they may be gainfully applied.

Notes

1 See, for example, Yusuke-s. '30 Best Anime of All Time (2021).' Accessed 23 May 2021. https://jw-webmagazine.com/best-anime/.

2 Takami Inoue, "A Genealogy of Other-Power Faith: From Śâkyamuni to Shinran," in Hamar and Inoue,
Faith in Buddhism, 129.

3 Inoue, 'A Genealogy of Other-Power Faith', 130.

4 For the 48 vows, see Humanistic Buddhism Centre. "The Forty-Eight Vows of Amitabha Buddha." Accessed 26 May 2021. https://www.fgsitc.org/the-forty-eight-vows-of-amitabha-buddha/.

5 James L. Ford, "Jôkei and the Rhetoric of "Other-Power" and "Easy-Practice" in Medieval Japanese Buddhism," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 29, nos. 1-2 (2002): 71.

6 Ford, "Jôkei and "Other-Power"", 73.

7 Ford, "Jôkei and "Other-Power"", 75.

8 Daisetz T. Suzuki, "Shin Buddhism: Part III," *The Eastern Buddhist*, *New Series* 23, no. 1 (1990): 1

9 Stevie Suan, *The Anime Paradox: Patterns and Practices Through the Lens of Traditional Japanese Theater* (Leiden and Boston: Global Oriental, 2013).

10 Nippon Gakujutsu Shinkôkai, *The Noh Drama: Ten Plays from the Japanese* (Tokyo and Rutland, VT: Charles E. Tuttle Company, 1955 [1985]), 14.

11 James H. Foard, "*Seiganji*: The Buddhist Orientation of a Noh Play," *Monumenta Nipponica* 35, no. 4 (1980): 437. However, cf. Royall Tyler, "Buddhism in Noh," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 14, no. 1 (1987), where he argues that Pure Land Buddhism was only one strain of inspiration for Zeami's plays.

12 The-NOH.com, "Noh Plays Database: Atsumori: Synopsis and Highlight", Accessed 31 May 2021. https://www.the-noh.com/en/plays/data/program_008.html.

13 Nippon Gakujutsu Shinkokai, *The Noh Drama*, 75-99.

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40 Jolyon B. Thomas, "Manga, Anime and Religion in Contemporary Japan," *Dharma World* 46 (2019): 4.

41 For example, see Theo A. Klimstra, William W. Hale III, Quinten A.W. Raaijmakers, Susan J.T. Branje and Wim H.J. Meeus, "Identity Formation in Adolescence: Change or Stability?" *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* 39, no. 2 (2010); Lotte van Doeselaar, Kate C. McLean, Wim Meeus, Jaap J.A. Denissen and Theo A. Klimstra, "Adolescents' Identity Formation: Linking the Narrative and the Dual-Cycle Approach," *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* 49, no. 4 (2020).

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