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## From the Editor

As the world is slowly digging itself out of the COVID crisis, a return to normalcy is wished for by many, but far from possible. The Russian war against Ukraine, continuing strife in Sudan and emergencies in many other countries make it hard to catch one's breath. This IJCS issue cannot do much about these continuing mega-crises, but what it can do is to introduce smaller projects whose interventions, despite all, aim at making the world a better place, if only by understanding it better.

In particular, this issue deliberates and showcases the ways different kinds of languages contribute to localised understandings of cultural materials and products. Some of these had originally been created for alternate audiences, but are now being (re-)appropriated by new and technology-enabled consumers. Others tell of the fight to retain one's own language in the face of a dominant language (system) trying to eradicate it.

As the field of manga and anime continues to grow, reaching audiences in places far away from its country of origin, Japan, is slowly but surely becoming the norm. The first article, “‘Still Watching Cartoons?’ Infantilization of Young Anime Fans in India: A Critical Discourse Analysis” by Jasdeep Kaur Chandi and Kulveen Trehan, analyses the challenges and opportunities Anime face in India. These range from the infantilisation and invisibilisation of its prosumers to political interventions curbing its supply and access chains.

The second article, “Cultural Identity and Historical Nostalgia in Animated Film”, by Jae-Eun Oh, Yuet Kai Chan and Cedric van Eenoo, discusses a particular locally-produced animation film, the 2001 Hong Kong *My Life as McDull*, directed by Toe Yuen. It examines its local roots and appeal to nostalgia as it addresses issues of shared memory, local culture and sense of identity. It concludes that these effects were created by a specific kind of animated storytelling, making it a cause célèbre in Hong Kong.

Anastasiia Krutiakova also examines anime, and once again the Japanese kind. The focus of her “The Impact of Cultural Code on Communication Promotion of Japanese Animation in the USA” is the United States' reception of the two most popular anime series in recent years, *Attack on Titan* and *Demon Slayer*, both of which were able to get into the record books due to their global reach. In her article, she illustrates the challenges the two series faced in relation to their origins and comes to the conclusion that while both of them were enormously successful, one of them did better than the other in audience comprehension. This success was arguably based on the better preparation of audiences via social media for the cultural particularities considered normal and well known in Japan, but not so in the USA. While this estrangement factor could have been overcome, and, indeed, could have been made a central plank of its marketing, this was not done, to the detriment of consumer satisfaction.

Staying with visual languages, but moving on to real-actor Hollywood films, Hajar Eddarif's “The ‘Innocent’ Other: Hollywood's Post 9/11 Muslim Child and Childhood” interrogates the ways in which Hollywood cinema articulates the exclusion of Muslim children from popular

filmic discourses on childhood and how such exclusions negatively condition the cultural identity of such children. Eddarif shows how such films privilege and continue to mainstream white (US) children's experiences and marginalise those of others.

Lastly, Robert Davis and Elvira Sanatullova-Allison's 'Language, Culture, and Indigeneity: Reflections on their Interplay' round out the discussion of how languages and the way they are created, disseminated and received are never neutral, but, rather, find them always already within a certain dynamic ideological field. Their examples are taken from the linguistic life of indigenous populations in the Unites States and they approach their subject via the topics of language and self-preservation, nonviolent means to communal well-being, student narratives and agency, and the forward gaze of conceptions of "abode" and "sojourn".

Happy Reading!

Holger Briel

Editor-in-Chief, IJCS

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## Notes on Contributors

Article 1:

### **“Still Watching Cartoons?” Infantilization of Young Anime Fans in India: A Critical Discourse Analysis**

#### **Jasdeep Kaur Chandi**

Jasdeep Kaur Chandi is a PhD research scholar at the University School of Mass Communication, Guru Gobind Singh Indraprastha University, New Delhi. Her research areas include East Asian popular culture, online fandoms, digital cultures, and fan studies. She has published research papers and book chapters on K-pop fandoms and their practices in India. She has also presented several research papers on K-pop, anime, and cosplay subcultures in India at international conferences, including ICA, IAMCR and SWPACA.

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#### **Kulveen Trehan**

Kulveen Trehan teaches at University School of Mass Communication, Guru Gobind Singh Indraprastha University, Govt. of NCT of Delhi, with 20 years of experience in media teaching and research. Her research areas are media literacy, sports and popular culture, advertising and advocacy. She is currently involved in international research projects funded by UNICEF & IAMCR on C4D and UCF. She was part of the team that prepared the Global Report on the Olympics and Paralympics in Tokyo 2020, an International Project in collaboration with the University of Texas, USA.

Article 2:

### **Cultural Identity and Historical Nostalgia in Animated Film**

#### **Jae-Eun Oh**

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Article 3:

### **The Impact of Cultural Code on Communication Promotion of Japanese Animation in the USA**

#### **Anastasiia Krutiakova**

Anastasiia Krutiakova studied at the High School of Journalism and Mass Communication of Saint Petersburg State University, a Top-5 university in Russia. She began her career after her

first year at a communications agency, and during her studies, she continued to develop her skills as a marketing specialist. She has also participated in several university and international conferences and, together with a colleague, published a study on the impact of the pandemic on advertising in Russia. She has always been attracted to Japanese animation, with especially *Naruto* being an important influence upon her.

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Article 4:

### **The ‘Innocent’ Other: Hollywood’s Post 9/11 Muslim Child and Childhood**

#### **Hajar Eddarif**

Hajar Eddarif is a Moroccan scholar in the field of English Studies with a Ph.D. degree from Mohamed V University, specializing in cultural studies, postcolonialism, and feminism. Hajar's academic journey has been marked by a deep passion for exploring the intricate dynamics of culture, power, race, religion and gender in media. Her previous works include a scrutiny of popular Disney movies such as *Aladdin*. Her academic background and interdisciplinary approach allow her to offer unique perspectives and insights on both Western and Moroccan cinema. Hajar actively participates in international scholarly events, including conferences in Indonesia and India, where she presented her research. In addition to her professional commitments as a consultant and translator at an IT company in Casablanca, Hajar has also contributed to academia as an educator at the Mohammed V University of Rabat, Morocco.

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Article 5:

### **Language, Culture, and Indigeneity: Reflections on their Interplay**

#### **Robert Davis**

Robert Davis pursued a graduate program in Curriculum Studies at Oklahoma State University-Stillwater and is an Employment Specialist at the National Indian Council on Aging based in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

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#### **Elvira Sanatullova-Allison**

Elvira Sanatullova-Allison received a PhD in Education from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and is a Full Professor at Texas A&M University-Kingsville.

**“Still Watching Cartoons?” Infantilization of Young Anime Fans in India:  
A Critical Discourse Analysis**

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### **Abstract**

Animated content is primarily included in the children's shows category in India. As a result, young adult and adult Indian anime fans are affected by this categorization. To explore their sociocultural experiences in Indian society, fan responses to three questions – posted on Quora, an online question and answer (Q&A) platform – were critically analyzed using Fairclough's three-dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis. The three Quora questions selected for the study were What is it like being an anime fan in India? What is it like to be a manga and anime lover in India? And, why most of the people in India think that anime is for kids? The analysis revealed infantilization of Indian anime fans, mostly young adults or adults. Findings disclosed marginalization of and discrimination against Indian anime fans by the conservative older generation who look at any East Asian popular media from a racially biased lens. Invisibilization, mystification and stereotyping marked the discourse on Indian female anime fans who may not participate extensively in the male-dominated anime fan community on the online fora but consume anime by subversion and negotiated readings.

*Keywords:* anime fans, critical discourse analysis, Indian fans, India-Japan, infantilization, East Asia

In India, the popularity of Japanese animation series, which are generally known as *anime*, is usually studied in the context of children's shows (Jaggi, 2011; Jaggi, 2014). Its growing affinity among young adults and adults is largely ignored and unexplored by Indian academia. Since animated series are categorized under children's media in India, their impact and effect on teens or adults have not been critically examined, although there exists a subculture of anime fandom in India which mostly has young adults and adults as its members (Business World, 2022). It is worth noticing that with anime being promoted by major OTT platforms like Netflix and Amazon prime video, the size of this fandom is slowly but gradually increasing. This study aims to gain insight into the socio-cultural experiences of Indian anime fans in a society where animation is perceived as meant for children.

### **Animated Content on Indian Television – A Brief History**

Liberalization policies in the 1990s resulted in a massive influx of foreign animated content on Indian television screens. In the pre-liberalization era, there were only a few animated shows that aired on Doordarshan (Indian public service broadcaster), which included *Ghayab Aya*-India's own 2D animation series. During the early 1990s, Doordarshan also aired a 3D Indian animation series *Vartamaan* (Kini, 2018). At the same time, privately owned Indian satellite television channels, including Zee TV and Star TV, were launched in India. By the mid-1990s, the duration of foreign animated shows telecasted per week by Doordarshan and privately owned Indian channels was twice and thirteen times the duration of local animated content shown, respectively (Goonasekera, 1998). The foreign animated shows being aired at the time were made in the West, including shows like *He Man*, *Talespin*, *Ducktales*, *Donald Duck*, *Scooby Doo*, *Spider Man* and *Tom & Jerry*. In the late 1990s, cartoon channels like Cartoon Network and Nickelodeon arrived in India and catered to the 'children' segment of the audience. These imported animated shows ruled the Indian market till the late 2000s and many other kids' channels were introduced in India during that time, including Disney Channel, Disney XD, Toonami, Sony Yay, Pogo, Hungama etc. The foreign animated shows, like other media content, came under the scrutiny of Indian content regulatory authorities when the Broadcast Content Complaints Council (BCCC)<sup>1</sup> reportedly received many complaints from the parents regarding "objectionable" content being telecasted on children's exclusive channels; "inappropriate behaviour" in these foreign animated shows like parents smoking near children, young boy misbehaving with a girl, became a cause of concern and these shows weren't considered exactly best for "children" (Jha, 2013; Bhatia, 2013). As a result, since the early 2010s, major animated shows currently on air are made in India and are mostly based on India, Indian fables, and mythological characters; examples include *Chhota Bheem*, *The Little Krishna*, *Motu aur Patlu*, *Roll no. 21*, and so forth. However, the fact remains that most Indian millennials spent their childhood with foreign animated content and are generally more accepting towards foreign content. These grown-ups continued consuming Western animation and became ardent fans once exposed to Japanese anime.

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<sup>1</sup> BCCC is an independent self-regulatory body established by the Indian Broadcasting Federation (IBF). It implements self-regulatory guidelines for entertainment content on television channels.

This paper focuses on the transcultural and transnational fandom of a specific form of animation – Japanese anime – instead of the reception of all animated content in India. The following section provides a brief overview of Japanese anime in India to contextualize the reception of transnational media like Anime amongst Indian youth.

### **Japanese Anime in India – From Past to Present**

#### **Animax India**

India was first introduced to anime in the early 1990s with *The Jungle Book*, which gained immense popularity among young Indian audiences (India Today, 2020). Since the anime was based on Rudyard Kipling's collection of stories set in an Indian forest and was Hindi-dubbed with characters having Indian names, it was difficult for audiences to realize that it was a Japanese animated series. Then came *Doraemon*, *Shinchan* and *Ninja Hattori* in the early 2000s, gaining high TRP ratings in the children's TV shows category (Jaggi, 2011; Jaggi, 2014). When *Animax* launched in 2004 in India, it was the only television channel that aired Japanese anime either English-dubbed or subbed. Animax also provided a platform on its website *Animax India* for Indian fans to interact with each other; this is how its official community forum *Animax India Community* came into existence. As stated earlier, since animated shows are generally categorized as children's media in India, Animax that targeted the age-group 15-25 years faced a significant issue with channel-group listings and mainly was clubbed with channels like Cartoon Network, Pogo, Nick etc (Sharan, 2007). Animax ceased broadcasting on regular television in 2017 possibly because of low viewership and lack of advertisers per fan sites (Mahapatra, 2021). Subsequently, Animax India website shut down and the official forum of Animax India Community ceased to exist.

#### **Anime on OTT Platforms and the Return of Animax**

Netflix officially entered the Indian market in 2016 with an extensive library of US-based series and movies. With the success of its first anime *Blood of Zeus* in 2020, Netflix decided to widen its anime library to cater to Asian audiences (Mint, 2021). Netflix provides over 200 anime titles to Indian viewers (Goyal, 2019). The YouTube channel *Netflix India* has videos in which famous Indian YouTubers are seen reacting to and promoting anime content (Netflix India, 2020; Netflix India, 2021). Major Indian news websites featured articles for anime recommendations (Arora, 2021; Khan, 2019). The arrival of OTTs played a significant role in re-introducing anime to Indian viewers. Netflix has over 5 million subscribers in India, and its major audience belongs to the age group 15-24, which is 44 per cent of the total viewers (MICA, 2020). This data implies that this age group may have the most anime exposure. It also signifies the presence of anime viewers, mostly teens or adults rather than kids, as assumed in past studies (Jaggi, 2011; Jaggi, 2014). The success of anime on Netflix has prompted other OTT platforms like Disney + Hotstar, and Amazon Prime Video to include anime in their libraries. Besides these OTTs, Crunchyroll, a dedicated anime streaming site recently launched in India after recognizing the growing anime fanbase in India (The Economic Times, 2023a),



and Animax also semi-returned in 2023; however, only via a specific television streaming app-JioTV (The Economic Times, 2023b).

### **A Scenario of Fandom in India**

Whether it is the media portrayal of fans (Shivadas, 2020) or academic studies on major fandoms in India, fans are depicted or analyzed in the context of “the pathological model of fan phenomenon” (Chaturvedi, Singh & Singh, 2020, p. 2). Of the few studies which focused on fan cultures of India, the edited volume *Hero and Hero Worship – Fandom in Modern India* (Chaturvedi, Singh & Singh, 2020) is the only compilation of academic papers to date that offers a glimpse of the Indian fandom scene. According to Chaturvedi, Singh & Singh (2020), four key fandoms exist in India, categorized as *Political Fandom*, *Sports Fandom*, *Spiritual Fandom* and *Cinematic Fandom*. Where political fans exhibit a “strong obsession with the rockstar politician” (Chaturvedi, Singh & Singh, 2020, p. 8), spiritual fans are “ignorant” (Chaturvedi, Singh & Singh, 2020, p. 9). Where sports fans reflect “distorted sentimentalism” (Chaturvedi, Singh & Singh, 2020, p. 9), cinematic fandom has a ‘solipsistic and narcissist quality’ (Chaturvedi, Singh & Singh, 2020, p. 10). Since the domain of Indian fandom is densely populated by these fandoms perceived to have pathological qualities, fans of transnational and transcultural popular media forms like anime are mostly overlooked.

### **Anime Fandom in India – A Periphery Fandom?**

By mobilizing the core/periphery paradigm (Wallerstein, 1974 as cited in Botorić 2021), Botorić (2021) introduced a concept of *periphery fandom*. According to Botorić (2021, p. 13), “periphery fandom refers to a sub-ordinated fan community experience where members are deprived of access to their objects of fandom.” The distinction between periphery fandom and core fandom lies in the *accessibility* of and (fandom’s) *visibility* to objects of fandom (Botorić, 2021, p. 7). Compared to other global anime fandoms, Indian anime fans have had difficulty accessing anime for decades. If they have become visible to the producers and distributors of anime, they still need to be examined. In the local “scene”, the position of Indian anime fandom at the periphery is deliberated because fandoms of politics, religion, cinema, and sports take up the core position. Thus, the peripheral position of Indian anime fandom seems to be twofold. This study then intends to find out whether there is a shift to be observed in the position of this fandom with the rise of OTT platforms in India.

### **Literature Review**

The few Indian studies focused on anime were primarily conducted vis-à-vis content, design, and distribution, but anime fandom and fan culture were less explored. Recently, Rawat (2021) examined the anime and manga reception among Indian youth and argued that “Indian fans are continually negotiating their identities as consumers of Japanese popular culture and their position within Indian society” because of constant “mockery” and criticism (p. 235) and that these fans consider Japanese media products “a means of self-assertion and creation” (p. 239). Contrarily, Jaggi (2011, 2014) studied the Japanese animation content vis-à-vis children’s

television in India and found that children “empathize well with the feature characters, themes and plots of anime” (Jaggi, 2014, p. 19) compared to American counterparts and localization of anime through dubbing and marketing strategies “help the young audience identify better with the characters” (Jaggi, 2011, p. 215). In another Indian study, Mayekar & B.S. (2016) designed a pitch for an animated film inspired by Japanese animation style.

Anime fandom outside Japan is explored in terms of fan productivity, social protocols (Lamerichs, 2013), experiences, opinions, values (Chen, 2007), motivations (Armour & Iida, 2016, Reysen et al. 2018), social identification and parasocial relationships (Ramasubramanian & Kornfield, 2012). Like any other fandom, anime fandom is associated with certain stereotypes, for example, fans being socially awkward, lacking social skills, introverted, nerds, and obsessed, among many others (Reysen et al. 2016). Reysen et al. (2016, p. 90) found a “significant discrepancy between non-fan perceptions of anime fans and the actual beliefs and behaviors of anime fans.”

What therefore needs to be examined is whether Indian anime fans also experience the stereotypical stigma associated with anime fandom. This study uses Botorić’s (2021) concept of *periphery fandom* to analyze the social and cultural experiences of Indian anime fans who use online media to access their objects of fandom and a multitude of social media platforms to gain visibility in the Indian as well as global fandom scene. The research question is formulated as follows: What are the social and cultural experiences of young adult and adult Indian anime fans?

## Methodology

Exploratory research design following the constructivist research paradigm was used. The advent of digital media and the rise of social media sites has drastically changed how global fandoms operate. Online media provides numerous opportunities for fans to interact with each other irrespective of their geographical locations. Fans’ accessibility to their objects of fandom has become easier as reflected in the case of Indian fans. Thus, online media is considered the research site for this study. The specific social networking site used for this study was Quora, a community of user-generated questions and answers. Quora is one of the top social networking sites in India, with over 215.8 million monthly visits by Indian users (Sannam S4, 2019); India is the second country that sends the most traffic to the quora.com website (SimilarWeb, 2022) and the two largest age groups that make up the major audience of this site are 18-24 and 25-34 years (SimilarWeb, 2022). Another reason why Quora was selected as a research site was because the purpose of the study was to examine the positional shift of fandom if there were any. For that, an understanding of fans’ past socio-cultural experiences that were not influenced by the present state of anime in India was required.

The responses to the following three questions posted in Quora were analyzed:

1. What is it like being an anime fan in India?
2. What is it like to be a manga and anime lover in India?

### 3. Why most of the people in India think that anime is for kids?

There were two hundred and five (205) responses to this question during 2015-2021 on Quora.

Critical discourse analysis is one of the most widely used methods of analysis to examine online fan discourses on social media platforms while investigating a variety of theoretical concepts like misogyny (Redmond, 2021), homophobia (Martins, 2022), cyber-nationalism (Jin, 2021; Zhuang et al. 2022), nativism (Ncube, 2021), symbolic distancing (Yang, 2015) and male gaze (Peng et al., 2022). The aim of critical discourse analysis is

to systematically explore often opaque relationships of causality and determination between (a) discursive practices, events and texts, and (b) wider social and cultural structures, relations and processes; to investigate how such practices, events and texts arise out of and ideologically shaped by relations of power and struggles over power (Fairclough 1995, p. 132).

Since the aim of the study was to understand the sociocultural experiences of Indian anime fans and their position according to the core/periphery paradigm (Botorić, 2021), which is “ideologically shaped by relations of power”, Fairclough’s (1995) critical discourse analysis (CDA) model was applied to analyze the text. According to this model, any discourse has three dimensions – the object of analysis (text), the process by which the text is produced and the socio-historical conditions that govern these processes (Janks, 1997, p. 329). To analyze each dimension, a different type of analysis is performed on the text – (a) text analysis (description), (b) processing analysis (interpretation) and (c) social analysis (explanation). In the following section, findings from each type of analysis are discussed.

## **Research Findings**

### **Text Analysis – Description of the Text**

As Janks (1997, p. 335) pointed out, “it is difficult to know what aspect of grammar is going to be most fruitful in the analysis of a particular text”; it was preferred by the researchers to analyze all aspects of grammar and the use of lexical devices in each Quora response by Indian anime fans. This was the first phase of the text analysis. In the second phase, a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) – MAXQDA was used to organize the text and visualize the findings from the analysis.

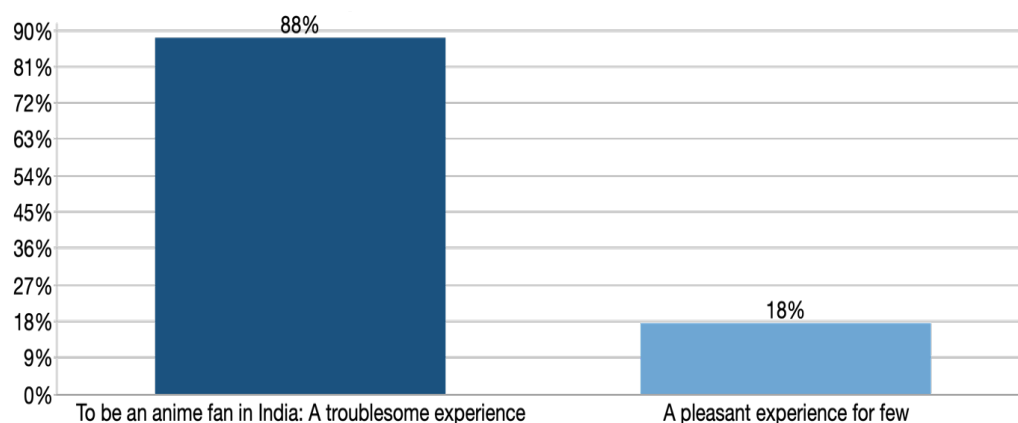
As it is impossible to provide a detailed analysis of all the 205 Quora responses, the researchers limit themselves to briefly illustrating how the text analysis was performed on each Quora response in the Appendix.

***(a) Experiences of Indian Anime Fans: Exasperated/Troublesome, Infantilized and Isolated***

In their responses to questions on Quora, most of the fans expressed that their experience was troublesome or even exasperating, articulated by using words such as “difficult”, “hard”, “nightmare”, “exhausting”, “painful”, and “horrible” among others. Of all the respondents, only a few considered their experience pleasant (Figure 1). A detailed analysis of fan experiences is provided in succeeding sub-sections.

**Figure 1**

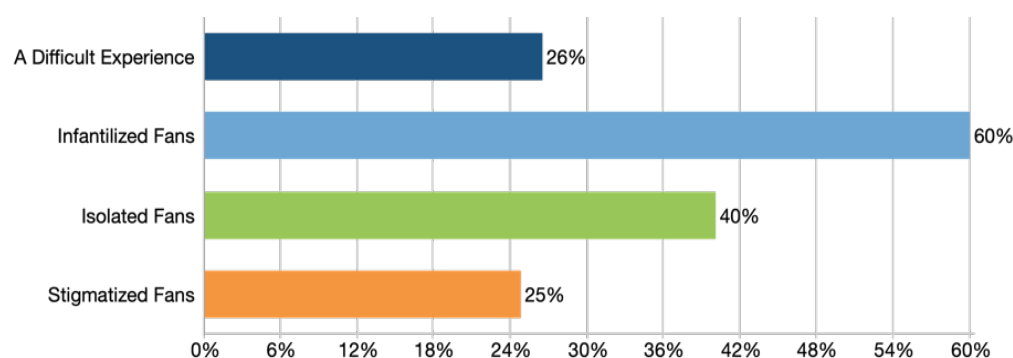
*Graphical Representation of the Theme – Experiences of Indian Anime Fans*



To be an Anime Fan in India: A Troublesome Experience – Indian fans of anime are infantilized, isolated, and stigmatized by society resulting in a challenging experience for fans, specifically for young adults (Figure 2).

**Figure 2**

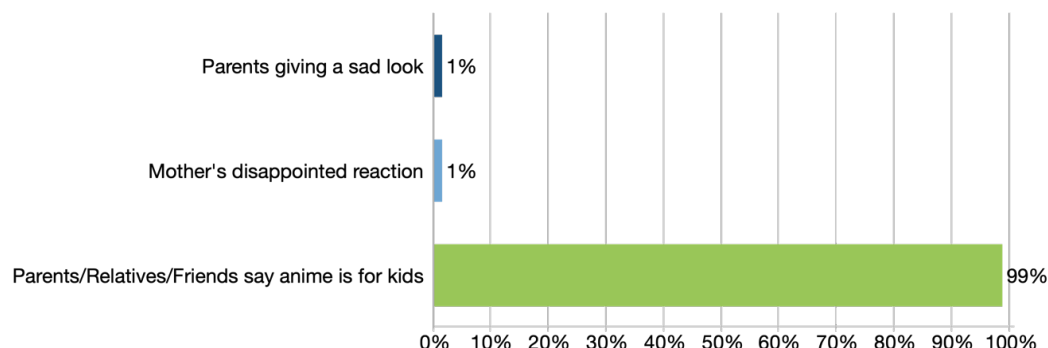
*Graphical Representation for the Sub-Theme – To be an Anime Fan in India: A Troublesome Experience*



The core frustration that Indian anime fans experience is that they are often a target of infantilization by their parents, relatives and even friends. In 99 per cent of the responses, fans specifically stated that they are often ridiculed and asked to “grow up” by their parents and

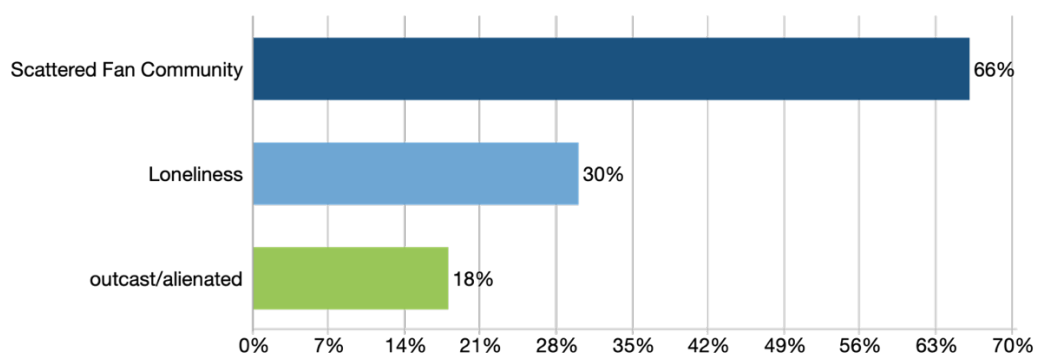
peers because “anime is for kids”, irrespective of the fact that the fans are already adults (Figure 3).

**Figure 3**  
*Infantilized Indian Anime Fans*



In addition to infantilization, anime fans also experience a feeling of isolation. Most responses affirmed a lack of physical fan communities as the fans are scattered throughout the country (Figure 4). The only mode to communicate with fellow fans is the online communities, especially for fans residing in remote areas. Often stereotyped as introverted, deviant and pervert, anime fans in India are often judged, criticized, and humiliated, leading to stigmatization.

**Figure 4**  
*Response Percentage where Indian Fans Mention Feeling of Isolation*



**(b) Lack of Resources to Access Anime**

Another source of frustration for anime fans is the lack of resources to access their object of fandom, that is, anime and manga in this case. The unavailability of anime on television, manga in bookstores and anime merchandise causes fans to move to online streaming and e-commerce platforms to access these resources. Since the internet services lacked speed a few years back, fans had to wait long hours to stream or download just one episode. Moreover, over-expensive anime merchandise on e-commerce platforms put a dent in the life of already frustrated Indian anime fans.

***(c) Anime is Neither Cartoon nor Hentai***

A primary discourse that emerged from the fan responses was how emphatically (using capitalized alphabets to emphasize their statements) they stated that anime is neither a cartoon nor a hentai.<sup>2</sup> The annoyance fans experienced when anime is called a cartoon was extremely apparent in the responses, for example, fans frequently used an internet meme of a facepalm gesture or wrote facepalm with asterisks (\*facepalm\*) to express their disappointment, frustration, embarrassment and at times sarcasm.

Me: Watching Full Metal Alchemist Brotherhood

Dad: “Itna Bada hogya aur abhi bhi cartoon dekh RHA h” (Translation: You are an adult but still watching cartoon)

\*facepalm\*

(Bajaj, 2019)

On the other side, fans expressed that if “non-fans” do not call anime a cartoon, then they call it hentai, which anime fans vehemently disagreed with:

Gosh, my friends were the most irritating people in the world.... they tortured me every day calling anime as cartoon. And the worst part was...they didn't know the difference between HENTAI and Normal ANIME. F###. hentai is porn... .normal animes are animes which normal people watch for their entertainment, relieving their stress, etc. etc...

(Mohapatra, 2016)

My friends think that anime is hentai. This was the biggest facepalm moment for me.

(MR, 2018)

It seems paradoxical that at one end, fans are ridiculed for watching a “cartoon” (which is apparently for kids) and at the other end, they are mocked for watching content that may at times have sexual elements in it. Fans respond to this mockery and criticism by degrading Indian popular media and illustrating their dislike for the native popular culture.

***(d) Fans' Aversion to Indian Popular Media***

Anime fans strongly distended Indian cartoons, Bollywood movies and daily Indian TV soaps. Because anime is constantly being assumed as cartoons by their family and peers and are supposedly for kids, fans describe how Japanese anime is far superior to Indian cartoons. According to fans, Indian cartoons like Chota Bheem and Motu Patlu are “unworthy”, “awful”, “rubbish” and “trash”.

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<sup>2</sup> Hentai is a type of anime with pornographic content, or simply, pornographic animation.

Indians tend to believe that anime are no different from cartoons like Chota Bheem, Motu Patlu (I've never watched that awful show after one episode) or any other Indian-produced animation. They fail to realize that anime is often aimed at a larger demographic and comprises of a lot more than some kid eating a laddoo and becoming Superman Jr.  
(Nair, 2018)

Fans' dislike for Bollywood and TV soaps is manifested when they are ridiculed and infantilized for watching anime. On the contrary, when fans are called perverts for watching anime (which sometimes contains sexual elements or sexualized female bodies), they highlight the hypocrisy imbibed in people for favouring western dramas like Game of Thrones, which also contains nudity and graphic content to a certain extreme.

I get infuriated when they freaking waste their time on Bollywood films like race.  
(Rajoria, 2018)

India is a place where nagging serials are popular, where big boss and roadies are fan favorite. I just hate them.  
(Bhunia, 2018).

It is wrong that we watch one piece which is a little sexual in a way but it is okay for people to watch Game of Thrones which contains total graphic scenes.  
(Shrivastava, 2017).

Fans are often demeaned and subjected to prejudices, leading them to explain the qualities of anime that has socially and emotionally helped them. They further express that anime not only serve to their entertainment needs but also plays an essential role in learning life lessons.

***(e) Social-Emotional Learning from Anime: Socialization and Pro-Social Behaviors Beyond Learning Japanese language and Culture***

CASEL (Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning) (2016) defines social-emotional learning (SEL) as “the process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions.” Anime is not only a source of learning Japanese or Japanese culture but also, a mode through which fans engage in social-emotional learning. Fans shared in their Quora responses, that through anime they learn the importance of relationships, motivation to overcome hurdles in life, manifesting goals, and an understanding of power relations. Case in point is the animation *Naruto*.

One of the finest creations you can learn about **how important friends are, and when you're in darkness the friend who withstand you is yours true friend.**  
(Jain, 2019)

Watching anime for so long actually made me subconsciously adapt many good things from anime. Well I used to admire Naruto for his friendship. I actually thought it's possible for someone like Misaki from Maid Sama and I turned into why only boys can do even girls can do and I defeated many boys in arm wrestling.

(Vaibhavi, 2018)

Watching DEATH NOTE give you an insight of how a person, who is strong enough to become leader of the world, become most successful person of that generation become a strong investigator who has the ability to think out of box and make world free of evil deed by his intelligence, getting extremely harsh and evil power can change that person into a demon of that generation. It is bitter truth that until you do not have power you think why the powerful people do that, but as you become that powerful you become like them. Power is the source of construction but at the same time it is the source of destruction also.

(Tripathi, 2018)

As many past studies have suggested, learning through anime is not a novel concept, especially not for learning the Japanese language and culture (Ruble & Lysne 2010, Fukunaga 2006, Hamada 2007). However, fans' remarks on anime characters' relatability with real-life situations, problems, and issues, suggest social-emotional learning on a deeper level. In fact, when fans highlight that racially biased lens through which anime is looked at, indicates that fans engage with anime emotionally as well as socially.

#### ***(f) Racism against East Asians***

It was observed from responses that the older generation (parents and relatives of fans) show racism against East Asians and related media content. The racist remarks included the use of “ching chong” – an ethnic slur used to insult and mock the Chinese language, people, and culture, and a stereotype that everything East Asian must be Chinese.

Uncle: yeh kya mask mein Chinese likha hai? {disgusted look} (Translation: What is this written in Chinese on this mask? {disgusted look})

Me: Nahi ye Chinese nahi hai yeh Japanese hai (Translation: No, this is not Chinese, this is Japanese)

Uncle: dono ek hi sunai deta hai, sab hi “ching chong” lagta hai (Translation: Both sound same, everything is “ching chong”).

(Saha, 2021)

Older people's lack of awareness about anime as a Japanese popular media was a common grievance in the fan responses.



### ***(g) Fans’ Perceptions of Anime Status in India***

Indian anime fans assert that because of a lack of knowledge about anime and the prejudice against animation in India, it is difficult for anime to achieve mainstream status anytime soon despite the huge number of anime viewers in India. Fans regard non-fans, particularly the older generation, as too opinionated vis-à-vis foreign media resulting in a lack of acceptance of anime. And if anytime soon, TV channels start broadcasting anime, it would have to face censorship issues, and according to fans the “Indian censor board is filled with old people (aka boomers) who are not in touch with the current scenario”. Apart from this, as per fans, Indians tend to be more accepting towards American or other Western shows than popular media from East Asia, as one fan pointed out: “A lot of it has to do with how detached the Indian subcontinent is from the rest of Asia and how we don’t share a lot of culture with them” (Nair, 2018).

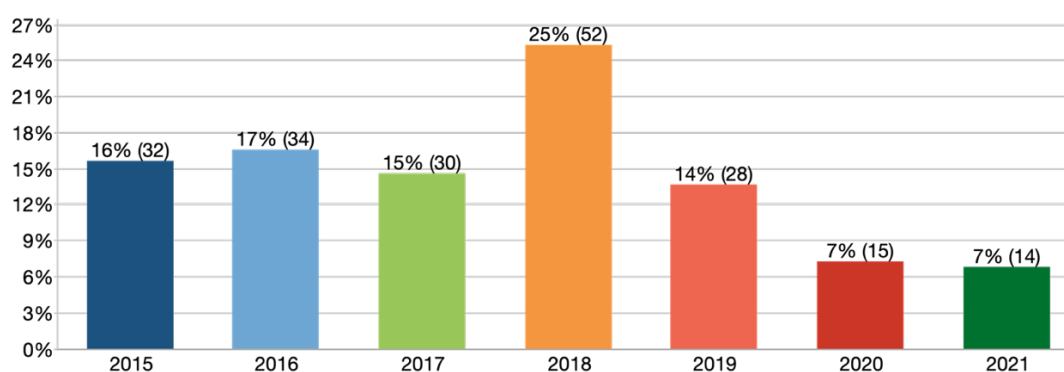
Textual analysis of fan responses on Quora reveals the infantilization of Indian teenagers and adults who watch anime because of the continuous dialogue of “cartoon versus anime” between fans and their parents/relatives/friends. The analysis also reveals that Indian anime fans feel frustrated and marginalized in the broader Indian mediascape where local popular media forms like Bollywood, TV soaps, and sports like Cricket, still own the mainstream fandom space. There also exists a strong presence of anti-China sentiment amongst the older generation (of parents, and relatives) and how they associate it with anime, irrespective that anime is a Japanese-produced popular media form. As a result, Indian anime fans are often a target of discrimination.

### **Processing Analysis – Interpretation**

This text is based on from the years 2015-2021. During 2015-2018, the Quora questions gathered the majority of the responses (about 73 per cent) and saw a decline between 2019-2021 (Figure 5). Some contextual factors that may have led to the production of this text will now be discussed.

#### **Figure 5**

*Percentage of Quora Responses Between 2015-2021*



Between the years 2015 and 2018, fans were mainly concerned about the unavailability of Anime on television satellite channels, the lack of anime-related events, and merchandise apart from the constant infantilization by family and friends. As discussed, at the beginning of the paper, Animax India was the primary source of anime consumption on TV which ceased its operation in 2017, thirteen years after its launch. Although Animax India was completely wiped from local cable and DTH services in 2017, it already faced issues with DTH service providers and censorship authorities in India a few years back. In 2012, all DTH services removed the channel as it could not afford the carrier fees and it was only available on local cable services. Later, AnimaxAsia HD was made available by SonyLiv, an Indian OTT service, but in 2020, it too ceased its operation.

**Figure 6**  
*Word Cloud for Quora Responses During 2015-2018*



The Internet then became the only source for accessing anime; however, that too had its drawbacks at the time. During these years, internet penetration was very low in India, restricted mostly to urban households, with in 2015 only 15 per cent of the population internet subscribers and about 20 per cent in 2018 (ITU 2022). Furthermore, speed of the internet was too slow to stream any audio-visual media content seamlessly. The lack of *accessibility* to anime (both from legal and illegal sources) and *visibility* of Japanese anime production houses were the main sources of fans' frustration and discontentment during this period.

Internet subscribers in India doubled in 2020 (to around 43 per cent of the Indian population (ITU 2022)), and cheap subscriptions offered fans more access to transcultural media like anime, K-pop, K-dramas, and other Asian media content. Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic boosted anime and K-drama consumption among Indian audiences because of lockdown-led binge-watching on OTTs. As a result, Netflix expanded its anime library, and over 200 anime titles are available to Indian fans. A few anime movies like *Your Name*, *Weathering with You*, and *Suzume* were also theatrically released in India. The anime merchandise and manga have become available on e-commerce platforms, and a few local stores; however, the expensive cost remains an issue among fans. Hence, accessibility and visibility are not much discussed as per recently posted Quora responses compared to those posted a few years back.

### Figure 7

*Word Cloud for Quora Responses in 2021*



However, what continued to be discussed is fans’ unceasing infantilization by their parents, relatives, and peers. The text analysis highlighted the “cartoon versus anime”, “anime is not cartoon” and “cartoon is for kids” discourse still prevalent in online Indian anime communities like Quora. According to a recent survey by JetSynthesys, 83 per cent of Indians prefer Japanese anime over other animated content and across different age groups, millennials and Gen Z are the prime consumers of anime (Business World, 2022). In India, all animated content is primarily classified as children’s entertainment, targeted at children between ages 2 and 14 (Rawat, 2021). This classification has resulted in a discourse and belief – a dominant ideology (especially among Gen X and Baby Boomers) – that any kind of animated content, irrespective of theme and genre, is meant for kids. Because of this dominant ideology, the discourse of “cartoon (animation) is for kids” is naturalized in India and as a result, Indian young adult anime fans are infantilized.

Similarly, when fans are not labelled as “kids”, they are stereotyped as perverts. Mostly, this happens because of a genre of anime – hentai, available, for instance, on the Pornhub website. According to their statistics, India is the third largest country to access their site, with the age group 18-44 years as the primary users (Yadav, 2020). It is, then, most likely that Indians who

are “non-anime-fans” know about hentai as pornographic animated content and generalize all anime in the hentai category, further indicating a lack of knowledge about other anime categories – *josei*, *shoujo*, *shounen*, *isekai*, *seinen*, and so forth – with young adults/adults as their target audience.

As discussed earlier, the accessibility of anime and the visibility of Indian anime fans is improved compared to what it was a few years back; however, the discourse that “anime is for kids” and “anime is hentai” persists; the former infantilizes the fans, and the latter stigmatizes them as degenerates. The first case happens because most of the Indian population links anime with children’s content. After all, a few anime that are telecasted in India are aired on cartoon channels as per the Indian government policies, and these channels are meant to broadcast only “child-friendly” content, equating anime with “kid-content”. It is problematic because anime has a broader category of genres that caters to adult audiences and mostly contain adult themes, including violence, horror, sex, depression, and melancholia. The second discourse looks at anime from the lens of pornographic content exclusively. Again, it is problematic for the same reason as above, as hentai is just one category of anime or, rather, a category of porn.

India has strict regulations for broadcasting content; several regulations like *The Cinematograph Act, 1952* (according to which filmmakers need to obtain certification from the Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC), and content is often modified or censored after examination) and *The Cable Television Networks (Regulation) Act, 1995* (which prohibits offensive or obscene content on television channels). With new regulations under *Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules 2021*, OTT platforms and social media content are also regulated. As per these rules, OTT platforms would have to self-classify the content into five age-based categories – U, U/A 7+, U/A 13+, U/A 16+ and A (Adult). For content classified as U/A 13+ or higher, parental locks for content needs to be provided by the OTT platforms. For content classified as A, age verification mechanisms need to be implemented. It is imperative to note that most anime that are being streamed on OTT platforms are classified as U/A 13+, U/A 16+ and A. It is also reported that censored and “sanitized” versions of anime are being shown in India as broadcasters must adhere to Indian regulations (Sayyed, 2023), much to the dissatisfaction of Indian anime fans; only a limited “censored” anime content is available for legal streaming. In summary, Indian anime fans face many problems, including infantilization, stigmatization, limited availability of anime on legal streaming platforms, strict regulations, anime censorship and racism against East Asian popular media forms in India (as discussed in the succeeding section).

### **Social Analysis- Explanation**

Given the collectivist nature of much of Indian society, it is common for young Indian adults to live with their parents and sometimes with extended family, (Chadda & Deb, 2013). According to a recent report, over 80 per cent of young people live with their parents in India (R, 2018). Although recent studies implied that, due to Western influence through movies and pop culture, Indian parents were becoming less controlling and encourage more autonomy in

their children, fan responses on Quora suggest otherwise, that is, parents of these fans continue to show a controlling and less accepting nature towards their childrens' hobbies and activities. The textual analysis reveals that young adult anime fans share an infantilizing relationship with their parents, mainly because of their choice of watching animated content over other activities. The infantilization process occurs when a person is treated like a child, prolonging their infantile state, irrespective of age. Epstein et al. (2022, p.1) defined infantilization as a “form of abuse in which a competent adult or young adult is treated like a child” and suggested fifteen categories of infantilization based on different restrictions posed by parents. The categories of interest here are – Emotional abuse and Restrictions on entertainment. Emotional abuse, in the context of infantilization, occurs when a young adult/adult is often criticized, shouted at, or insulted. Infantilization also happens when restrictions are posed on young adult/adult vis-à-vis their modes of entertainment i.e., limited access to the internet, television, or any media content (Epstein et al., 2022). In Quora responses, fans constantly remarked that parents, relatives (and at times friends as well) ask them to “act their age”, “grow up”, “you are not a kid” or “stop watching cartoons”. It may seem, at first, that parents are not infantilizing these young adults, since they are not treating them as children, instead they are quite conscious that their offspring is a grown-up person. However, in juxtaposition, they are also being criticized, insulted, and humiliated by family and friends, for their choice of entertainment; as a result, being infantilized by them. Numerous studies have suggested that infantilization resulting from psychological or behavioral control has adverse effects on self-esteem (Kakihara et al., 2009), emotional well-being (Wang et al. 2007; Epstein et al., 2022) and formation of personal maturity in youth (Panferov et al., 2021) and that infantilization “generally occurs with populations that lack power” (Epstein et al., 2002, p.1). Anime fans in India lack power and often struggle with power dynamics because, first, they are fans of animated media form, which is stereotyped as children’s media and second, their fan object is transnational, transcultural, and a niche popular media form.

While East Asian popular media forms like anime, K-pop and K-drama are gaining wider acceptance among the young generation (Gen Z and millennials) of India, the older generation (Gen X and Baby Boomers) still look at these forms of entertainment through a racially biased lens. Although anime is a Japanese media product and for several decades India has shared a strong relationship with Japan, literacy about Japanese culture and its media forms remains low amongst most Indians. There is a tendency among Indians with low literacy levels to convert multi-cluster East Asia into a single-cluster China. Because of certain ethnic similarities, everything East Asian is (inaccurately) considered Chinese. Since India shares a complex political and economic relationship with China and since 2020 these two countries find themselves in the middle of political tensions, the fans of East Asian popular media are discriminated against, marginalized, and ridiculed, also due to the presence of anti-China sentiment in Indian society.

### **“Where are You All?”– Mystified Indian Female Anime Fan**

A recent study found that since the 1990s, online communities of anime fandom have not been a safe space for women, dominated mostly by male anime fans who, through “negative

networking” established “lasting oppressive online social relationships towards marginalized gender communities in online anime fandom” because of which “women anime fans were ignored, belittled, criticized, harassed, and mystified” (Petit 2022, p.353). In addition to the themes vis-à-vis sociocultural experiences discussed in the preceding sections, a discourse surrounding the “mystification” (Petit, 2022, p. 359) of Indian female anime fans also emerged in this study. It found that whenever a female anime fan commented or responded, other fans were “surprised” as observed from comments like “you won’t believe that one [anime fan] of them was a girl”, “I met a girl...who turned out to be an Otaku or weeb, I was surprised”, “finding girls who see anime is a rarity”, and “if you get a girl who watches Anime in India! (One in a Zillion possibility)”. A similar question was also posted on Quora, titled, ‘Do girls in India watch anime?’ which gathered over 20 responses from female anime fans 18-30 years’ old who kept emphasizing that “they are not extinct”. Although comments addressed at female fans were not malicious, the presence of female anime fans was treated as a “novelty”, and they were “mystified” based on the “belief that if they existed, they were an exception to the hegemonic fan identity” (Petit 2022, p. 359). This discourse highlights that although anime fans are often the target of extensive stereotyping, they themselves stereotype fellow fans based on their gender, as a comment suggests – “Mostly girls are into TV drama serials. Really you are an inspiration to other girls”. An Indian female already struggles with pervasive gender stereotyping and is treated similarly in online spaces, especially spaces of shared interests; unsurprisingly, they want to remain invisible. The image of an anime fan is stereotyped, and the image of a “female anime fan” is doubly stereotyped.

Despite this and the controversies surrounding anime, from the hyper-sexualization of female bodies to fetishizing underage young girls, objectifying women in the name of “fan service” and promoting sex stereotyping (Bresnahan et al., 2006; Brenner 2007; Zanghellini, 2009; Reysen et al., 2017; Brumfield 2022), Indian female anime fans negotiate with anime characters vis-à-vis identity construction by using strong female anime characters as role models; consistent with what previous studies have reported regarding fans and their identification with anime characters (Napier, 2001; Ramasubramanian & Kornfield, 2012; Ting, 2020). As described by Vaibhavi (2018), she draws inspiration from the female anime character Misaki (to provide a context, Misaki is a character from the anime Maid Sama! who is exceptionally strong, is her class’s president and very good at sports) and identify with her leadership attributes. Vaibhavi (2018) incorporated Misaki’s skills in her real life and learned about gender equality. This suggests that despite the shortcomings of anime and seemingly male-dominated anime fandom, Indian female fans enjoy anime through negotiated readings and meanings.

## Conclusion

This study aimed to provide a glimpse into the world of young adult/adult anime fans in India, a phenomenon not considered worth analyzing before. This gap in the literature reflects the disinterest in exploring subcultures which do not have a mainstream position in India. The digital age has given an opportunity and a space to these transcultural fandoms where they can voice out their opinions, share their experiences and find people with shared interests. These

fans are not acknowledged, had troubled experiences over the past years and are often a target of infantilization and stereotyping. Their constant difficult experiences and “uncommon” interest in anime have aroused a strong distaste for native popular culture. They consider other cultures, in the present case, Japanese culture, to be more relevant. Accessibility and visibility are no longer an issue for these fans in their digitalized world. However, what bothers them is the Indian socio-cultural system and the frequent stigmatization they experience. Where Indian female anime fans are concerned, their issues seem to be twofold, as they are not only stereotyped by non-fans but also mystified by male fans; the issue is culturally rooted in India, where women are expected to follow traditional gender roles in a patriarchal society. Because of toxic technocultures in a male-dominated fandom, Indian female fans prefer a limited presence.

Subcultures are one of the key driving forces for any cultural and media product to survive in a competitive globalized world. For a locally produced media form like Japanese anime to survive in India, it is essential to overcome the social, cultural and racial barriers prevalent in Indian society. Indian anime fandom is slowly but consistently changing its position from the periphery to a more central location; however, it is still far from the mainstream. Unless the racial discrimination against East Asian popular media forms vanishes and Indians become more aware of the distinction between Japan, South Korea, China and other East and Southeast Asian regions, Indian anime fans must keep struggling with the social stigma.

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## **Cultural Identity and Historical Nostalgia in Animated Film**

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### **Abstract**

This article examines the aspects and implications of nostalgia and historical nostalgia in animated films, based on the case study of the 2001 Hong Kong animation *My Life As McDull*, directed by Toe Yuen. The investigation includes three components: a discussion around the notion of historical nostalgia, a survey of professional animators with the audience's expectations and its perception of animated films, and an analysis of the mechanisms the movie utilizes to address the concepts of shared memory, local culture and sense of identity. The paper establishes connections between the animation's visual elements, the notion of positive memory, and their socio-cultural implications. The results present data findings, as well as an analysis of the cinematic effects of conceptual and aesthetical processes to induce nostalgia through storytelling, concluding with their cultural and social resonance.

*Keywords:* animation, film, nostalgia, storytelling, culture, identity

This paper examines the elements of nostalgia and historical nostalgia in animated films, with the case study of the Hong Kong animated film *My Life As McDull* (Yuen, 2001). In the movie, the main character, McDull, is an anthropomorphic piglet living in Hong Kong with his mother, Mrs Mak. The characters were created by Hong Kong cartoonists Alice Mak and Brian Tse. McDull's relation to the city of Hong Kong is deeply rooted in the local culture, in several aspects. This study investigates the film's perception by animators and local audiences, as well as the mechanisms the film utilizes to approach the concepts of shared memory, local culture, and sense of identity.

## Background

*My Life As McDull* is a critically acclaimed and popular Hong Kong animated film that won numerous awards, including the Crystal Award at the Annecy International Animation Festival in 2003. Developed from the original cartoon series *McMug* (Tsoi, 2020), the animation *My Life As McDull* depicts Hong Kong people's daily lives, using mixed media techniques, such as cut-outs, hand-drawn techniques, 3D computer graphics, and photography (Hwang, 2003). It became a sensation in Hong Kong, thanks to its appealing, yet imperfect anti-hero characters that can resemble anyone. The movie also encapsulates the uniqueness of Hong Kong's identity by depicting its one-of-a-kind urban landscape (Wu, 2017), and diverse ethnic population. The local audience fell in love with the animation, as it presented the shared emotions, spirit, and sense of identity of Hong Kong people. Additionally, it has touched the audience's heart with specific geographical and cultural references that Hong Kong people can instantly connect to (Tsoi, 2020). When the spectators recognize the well-known locations in the movie, they can feel a sense of familiarity and belonging. Cantonese slang and verbal expressions, jokes and puns, beloved local delicacies – such as fish ball noodles, or egg tarts – and the characters' bittersweet life story – speak to Hong Kong residents in the film, making it popular locally (Ray, 2013).

*My Life As McDull* left a remarkable footprint in the Hong Kong animation industry, because it was one of the few Hong Kong animated feature films since the Computer Generated Imagery feature film *A Chinese Ghost Story* (Tsui, 1997), which mixed elements of animation and live action. The film's creative team collaborated with Japanese, Taiwanese, and mainland China artists, because of their professional knowledge and experience with the production process (Tsoi, 2020). Even with its stable and robust comics market (Ng, 2002), animated features have been rare in Hong Kong (Ng, 2002; Ray, 2013). In its infancy stage, Hong Kong animators learned from the Japanese and American systems (Ng, 2002) to produce their own local animation content. The Japanese market has enjoyed a near hegemony with the development of the specified genres, which has been created to survive the competition with the American animation industry (Ng, 2002). With creativity, persistence and determination, Japan has increasingly gained worldwide recognition and popularity from animation – or anime – fans. It differentiated itself from other countries' animated films by elevating the standard of aesthetics, background story, narrative development, character design, and musical composition. In addition, Japan studios have created various genres of animation with highly refined aesthetics, and a distinctive style, undoubtedly recognizable.

Consequently, *Spirited Away* (Miyazaki, 2001) won the Academy Award for Best Animated Film at the 75th Academy Awards in 2003, becoming one of the most prominent box-office animation hits (Kwan, 2022). Since the 1970s, Japan has positioned itself as a leader in the animation market in Asia. In doing so, it has significantly impacted Hong Kong animation's flourishing industry. In fact, 2003 was a remarkable year for Asian animation, with *Spirited Away* and *My Life As McDull*, as they won against leading global animation studios in major film competitions (Kwan, 2022). In Asia, animation has also become an important cultural product. However, American films have taken the lead in the animation industry with sophisticated production systems. As a response, *My Life As McDull* has significantly contributed to Hong Kong animation's history, and reinforced its identity, both locally and internationally.

*My Life As McDull* showcases Hong Kong's shared culture and emotional characteristics with a nostalgic focus. Hong Kong residents recall personal experiences through the authentic depiction of daily lives in the images of the film. For instance, the non-glamorous-looking inner-city neighborhoods, and the rusty look of the urban landscape are depicted in the typical *Cha Chaan Teng* restaurants, where locals usually hang out and eat. There are also the characteristic traits of mothers like Mrs. Mak, McDull's mother – who care very much about their children's education, and familial closeness (Ray, 2013; Kraicer, 2002). Unlike western animated films, especially Disney's animations (Hu, 2003), McDull's depiction of the city where the action takes place is non-fantastical, and unrefined, drawing extensively from the community and its lifestyle (Hu, 2003). McDull represents the essence of Hong Kong identity (Kraicer, 2002) in a whimsical manner, by placing historical nostalgia as a central notion for strong emotional attachment. The city and its neighborhoods in *My Life As McDull* invoke an immediate bond with the viewer for their imperfection and accurate representation; generating nostalgic feelings (Oh & Kong, 2022). Audiences are drawn to nostalgia in media products because it represents a particular time and place; whether favorable or not, it is part of daily lives when one reimagines the past, present, or future (Niemeyer, 2014). Many scenes from *My Life As McDull* portray the cold realities life might bear, and point to overcoming them, to reach dreams and hopes through the telling of a bitter-sweet historical nostalgia-induced narrative.

### **Nostalgia: Preliminary Statement and Framework**

#### **Nostalgia**

Since the beginning of the modernist period in the late 19th century and early 20th century, animation has played a vital role as social entertainment and cultural content in people's lives, perhaps unconsciously (Buchan, 2013). As one of the modern primary entertaining media, animation has played a pervasive, inseparable, and emotional role in the viewers' lives. Animated films prompt the audience's memory through nostalgia (Oh & Kim, 2020), evoking childhood, and positively recalling past times (Holbrook, 1993). In animation, nostalgia is a powerful stimulus for stirring intimate feelings, immersive experiences, and emotional connections.



Nostalgia has been defined as a symptom of melancholia (McCann, 1941), longing for the past and mourning for the lost time (Walden, 2018), or a yearning for the past (Davis, 1979). The meaning of *nostalgia* is originally from the Greek *notos*, which means a return to the homeland, and *algos* means suffering caused by a longing to return home (Sedikides et al., 2006; Walden, 2018). Johannes Hofer (1688/1934) introduced nostalgia as a medical or neurological disease about the endless longing to return to the place where home is, being anxious, having insomnia, or smothering sensations (McCann, 1941), words, or homesickness. The term was used as a medical condition to diagnose a *disease* of people far from home (Walden, 2018) until the 19th century. Over time, the meaning of nostalgia became the one we use today, and is no longer associated with illness. In the context of this study, nostalgia is referred to as a positive emotion with heightening social connectedness (Zhou et al., 2008), self-regard (Vess, et al., 2012), and improved mood (Batcho, 2013). Greuling defines nostalgia as a term with two different types: *historical nostalgia* and *personal nostalgia* (Natterer, 2015). The former does not necessarily connect to one's experience; it refers to a time that cannot be returned to; it can be related to cultural memory, or shared history that people learn about from past events, including before their birth. The latter translates to a longing for one's olden days, childhood, past experiences associated with emotional life events, or memorable periods of time (Natterer, 2015).

In animation, depending on the theme, content, and narrative, the audience can immerse themselves in historical and personal nostalgia through the animators' intended storytelling method, background, and character design. For the contemporary audience, nostalgic animation is a prevalent, yet effective medium to understand the past, and create fantasy about it (Oh & Kong, 2022). Animation is a medium that can easily connect with the past and revive it in the present thanks to the creation of relatable characters, engaging aesthetics, and distinctive storytelling.

### **Historical Nostalgia**

Historical nostalgia refers to a time that cannot return, a cultural memory, or common history that people learn about from the past, sometimes before they were born, which is shared, and most of the time, not entirely personal. The symptom of romanticizing the past is alluring. It can generate a sense of comfort and familiarity. Walden (2018) also debates that animated characters can cause the viewers' emotions to become emotionally heightened through the context of storytelling and fictional historical events, even when the characters do not have human form. Boym (2008) points out that nostalgia is not only longing for a place, but also yearning for childhood. Hutcheon (2000) theorizes about the term generalization, which Immanuel Kant recognized, and describes how nostalgia is about returning to a particular time, not a place. With historical nostalgia laid out in popular culture, such as movies, music, art, literature, or advertisement (Reynolds, 2011), people experience shared emotions and memories toward narratives, characters, moods, and environment settings. Even if one did not live during the specific era, it is possible to feel nostalgic or associate a symbolic meaning to a character, object, place, or event, despite never having experienced what it presents (Baker & Kennedy, 1994).

According to Reynolds (2011), society has become increasingly obsessed with nostalgia, which is reflected in retro-style symbols, vintage fashion, and old collectable objects. Among cultural products, film, with the use of mise-en-scene and storytelling, provides audiences with a way to romanticize past times that are bygone. Numerous animation directors have adopted shared memories from specific eras or events (Bowyer, 2017), as well as storytelling methods and aesthetics that can generate a wistful feeling in the spectator. This is mainly because the emotional response that results from the experience reinforces the connection with the story, its location, and characters.

### **The role of Nostalgia in Hong Kong Animated Films**

A qualitative study was carried out in 2021 to gain a better understanding of the role of nostalgia in the Hong Kong animation industry. The research team conducted in-depth interviews with thirty-eight stakeholders, including animation creators, spectators, and theme park administrators and marketers. The interviews focused on investigating the three questions below:

Question 1: What are the inspiring elements to create an animated film?

Question 2: What kind of psychological effects could occur when watching a local animated film?

Question 3: What builds the emotional connection between creator and audience?

The interview data were analyzed and interpreted from the individual perspective of each type, as below:

#### **The Creators' Perspective**

The first group of interviewees is composed of local animated film creators who have completed at least one animated film. Their work includes independent animations and commercials. The majority of the animators are young generation directors, from 25 to 35 years old, with bachelor's degrees. The genders are evenly distributed. The interview data provide a clear indication of the background inspiration and concept for local creators to produce animated films.

The creators state that producing an original animated film is their first interest. The primary objective is to express ideas and convey values and messages to others. They feel self-satisfaction when completing a project that can successfully establish a connection with the audience. This connection can come from various sources of resonance. The most mentioned source is "reminding people of the past", especially linking to memories that have been forgotten for a long time, as for example, childhood memories, and local cultural events. The animation creators believe that collective memories can reach the audience's emotions, which can, in turn, create a lasting memory of the animation. For the creators, most of the inspiration appears to come from childhood memories, daily experiences and Japanese anime, such as *Dragon Ball* (Toriyama, 1986) or Hayao Miyazaki's work. The Hong Kong animators mention

a sense of reminiscence when watching these Japanese works. This feeling implies that it may be a way of building resonance with the audience when creating their own animation. It also highlights the importance of the film's origin, and its relation with the audience, despite being foreign. This also suggests that the connection between the audience and the animation does not require being closely familiar with its culture.

As a result of the study, daily experiences and memories appear to be the most significant source of inspiration during the animation creation process. The creators use their own childhood memories as references to design stories and characters as inspiration for storytelling. One respondent explained that:

“There are some vital elements in the content that can attract local audiences and evoke emotions. These elements can remind the audience of collective memories, or old times, such as set decoration, clothing, and food culture, to show a certain sense of retro. For instance, when watching *My Life As McDull* and *Shear Marks* (Ng, 2015), most of the local viewers feel familiar with the story, as they can easily recognize the content, and recall memories from their childhood, such as local stores or restaurants.”

### **The Audience's Perspective**

A successful animation aims to create a certain resonance in the audience. The viewer is a major partaker to consider in the animation creation: it is the spectator that the animators want to connect with. The study surveyed viewers between 20 and 65 years old; the majority of the interviewees being 20 to 25 years old, with genders evenly distributed. The respondents are asked to give one favorite or familiar animation they have watched. *My Life As McDull* is the most mentioned Hong Kong animated film, *Old Master Q* (Wong, 1965) is the second, followed by *Doraemon* (Kaminashi, 1973), and *Professor Panda Says...* (Lin & Fu, 1014). These animated films have been produced and published more than twenty years ago. The interviewees watched the mentioned films when they were young. They considered these animated films to be important in their life, because:

- a. They reminded them of their childhood;
- b. They contain local topics, or stories that local people can understand;
- c. They represent local culture, as it shows the thinking of animators who grew up in the local society; and
- d. These animated films create a sense of belonging and affinity, because they feature local scenes and stories.

Most of the interviewees agree that watching animations was part of their daily life at a young age. Both stories and characters in the animated films provide nostalgic meaning to the audience. The viewers can clearly remember the plots or details of the animated films, for instance, the school song at the kindergarten, some particular dialogs in *My Life As McDull*; and the local streets in *Old Master Q* (Wong, 1965). These elements leave a deep impression on the audience.

When comparing local animations with Disney productions, the main distinction appears to be storytelling. Most of the interviewees regard Disney's animations as targeting audiences from anywhere around the world. It tells universal stories, with strong financial and technical support, while the respondents feel that the aim of Hong Kong animations is to capture the local culture, in a more independent approach. Local animated films show everyday elements in the local environment that provide realistic and identifiable content that can create affinity. The overall impression of local animations is that of a small production effort, which presents a more independent and unconventional art style. The interviewees state that they enjoy watching the mentioned local animations repeatedly, even as adults.

### **The Marketers' Perspective**

In a third aspect of the study, the research team investigated the perception of animation by industry executives and theme park workers. They represent, on one hand, the extension of animation creators, and on the other, the financial resources of the animation industry. From the marketers' perspective, animation is a media form that has value in telling stories and communicating ideas. Animation helps to tell an impactful story in an easy-to-understand manner for all ages. Besides, animation can bring large business opportunities, as the characters usually play a vital part in theme parks, and can generate side products.

The interviewees agree that nostalgia has value in animation. One respondent thinks that the elements of nostalgia in animation and theme parks can be communicated from one generation to the next, stating that:

“Nostalgia is an attribute that every human being can enjoy and value, because memories help us push forward to make our lives better, often reliving past memories, positive experiences, and adjusting for negative [ones].”

Other interviewees believe that nostalgia can produce both emotional and commercial value through sympathetic responses from the spectator.

### **Elements Connecting Animators and the Audience**

When analyzing the current phenomenon of the Hong Kong animation industry, the research team found that most of the respondents in the three categories consider the industry relatively immature. The main reason is the industrial ecosystem that has not been well developed. Animation creators claim that it is challenging for them to gain enough revenue from producing new films, as there is a lack of opportunities and support for publications. This results in low incitement and little productivity. As for the audience, there is limited awareness that there are animated films produced locally. It is because, in their perception, animations or cartoons should be aired on television, while they seldom watch local animations in theaters. Another aspect to consider in this matter is that the audience is mainly provided with foreign animated films, which sidetrack the attention from local animation. Marketers suggest that strong characters such as McDull are needed to facilitate the development of the industry.

The study indicates that elements of nostalgia can be central attributes for building a connection between animation creators, viewers, and market. For this to operate, selected representational elements of nostalgia need to appear in the film, cited as follows:

- a. Story background;
- b. Story plot;
- c. Character design;
- d. Local language;
- e. Food culture; and
- f. Music and sound.

This is especially true in Hong Kong, where there are particular cultural scenes that create specific art styles. Every element of the animated film connects the viewer to some form of cultural memory. Once the animation successfully establishes the resonance in the audience's mind and enhances the awareness, the entire industry can begin to evolve.

The investigation into the animation industry and its audience offers more context to the study, positioning the concept of nostalgia in the animated film as particularly influential, and shedding light on the correlation between narrative, memory, and cultural background.

### **Aesthetics, Nostalgia and Storytelling**

The section will focus on an analysis of the aspects of nostalgia and historical nostalgia in the animation *My Life As McDull*, with ingredients of film aesthetics, cultural identity, shared memory, and storytelling mechanisms that can be found in the movie.

#### **Aesthetics and Cultural Identity**

The realistic style of the animation – or “actuality”: authentic film footage or photography (Lam, 2014, p. 88) – represented in a selection of elements, such as backgrounds, buildings and locations, contrasts with the illustrative aesthetics of the characters. This results in a heightened feeling of authenticity and faithfulness to the subject matter. It also serves as an innovative stylistic identity.

Additionally, most characters are anthropomorphic, but some secondary characters are actually human. However, it does not create any incongruity, or antagonism with the logic of the story. Because of its unconventional comedic genre, any absurdities or inconsistencies become part of the tone of the narrative (Wilder, 1983). They are accepted as idiosyncrasies that are nevertheless coherent with the “story world” of the movie, with its own logic, spirit and mood (Bordwell, 2012, p. 90). They become enjoyable, humorous, and a fundamental part of the animation style. Besides, this technique reflects the heterogeneity of the city where the story takes place.

Several elements of the story and the protagonist's personality reflect Hong Kong's identity.

McDull's close relation to his mother represents a strong cultural value, derived from the importance of family in his social background. McDull also displays a resilient personality, which can be found in different aspects of the cultural and historical background of the city. For instance, it can be characterized by the utterance *Gayau*, roughly translated to *add oil* in English: a common local idiomatic expression of encouragement, directly translated from Cantonese, and a part of Hong Kong's popular culture. In addition, the main character, McDull, is affectionately clumsy and naive. These traits make him easily relatable, familiar, and trustworthy. His story is also approached in a derisive manner throughout the film. The touches of humor, absurdity and irony manage to consistently reposition the narrative in a soft light, rendering the nostalgia less conflictual or tormented, but rather engaging, comforting, and entertaining.

The constant presence of visual elements of the city, such as high rise buildings, narrow alleys, street hawkers, recognizable landmarks, and vivid neon signs give a sense of realism (Gornova, 2019). This aspect accentuates the relation to the place and its culture. It is present in the distinctive textured background walls, buildings and commonly small apartments depicted in the animation. The original background design appears realistic, despite contrasting with the animated elements. This technique generates the animation's burlesque, yet innovative aesthetics.

Restaurants, food carts, and tea shops, such as *Cha Chaan Teng* – quintessential Hong Kong-style cafes – reinforce the link that the audience can feel with the place and its personality. For Hongkongers, as confirmed in the survey, this is emblematic of the feeling of home, and the sense of belonging. In this regard, nostalgia is ubiquitous. But it does not interfere with the story; it remains an element of the experience that has implications in the process of identification to the characters, without being a component of the narrative's "confrontation" (Hsien-Yuan & Ta-Long, 2020, p. 128). It is embedded in the images of the film, but is not limited to a purely aesthetic role. The sound work also features a plethora of references to the city and its culture, with buses, busy urban cacophony, and Cantonese language expressions. The rapid pace of the dialogs also emphasizes the city's fast environment, and the interactions between its inhabitants.

The visual and thematic components of the place echo in the social fabric of the city. However, it is not only the audio and visual elements, but the underlying and implicit feeling of belonging, that can be closely associated with the notion of cultural and "social identity" (Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 2002, p. 163). This sense of identity is conveyed by carefully placed ingredients in different scenes; they often relate to childhood memories, and represent common elements of the city's typical representation, linked to every-day life, and shared memories. This aspect is accentuated by McDull's taste for local food and snacks. The relationships between the characters also reflect this notion, with for instance, the communication between McDull's classmates, and their British music teacher's stereotypical personality and appearance.

## Memory and Nostalgia

Boym introduces the two concepts of “restorative nostalgia”, where one attempts to reconstruct or relive past events, and “reflective nostalgia”, prompting an introspective consideration of the past (2001, p. 41). In storytelling, the latter implies glimpses of the former. Memories or flashbacks of old events can trigger a reflective perspective (Turim, 2013). For the audience, it can instigate a cognitive process of finding links between past and present to make sense of the plot development, therefore clarifying fundamental threads of the narrative. From there, the exercise can develop into an interpretation of the overall story, but also, and in parallel, an individual reflection on one’s personal experiences.

Here again, the variety of mechanisms used in *My Life As McDull* conveys the message of cultural identity, shared memory and historical nostalgia: the age of the protagonist, his relation to his mother, the ubiquity of representative elements of the local culture, glimpses of the city’s most iconic landmarks, the sound design that includes recognizable elements of the auditory atmosphere of the place, and the emblematic visual climate constantly reconnect the story to the city. This combination of elements, and the fact that they are operating simultaneously on different layers of the cinematic experience, can trigger memories, and reconnect to a sense of identity that is inherent to the story. The location becomes a character in its own right. These instruments function as time-machines, allowing for travel in time – and space – within the narrative, eventually allowing at the same time potential “restorative nostalgia” and “reflective nostalgia” (Boym, 2008, p. 41).

## Storytelling

### *Nostalgia and Storytelling*

*My Life As McDull* uses a narration-based storytelling method: the main character tells his own story from his perspective. The viewer will follow the protagonist’s voice to be the guide for the narrative experience. This technique can be unreliable and subjective, but also accentuates the emotional aspect of the experience.

The story delivery is nonlinear; flashbacks help understand the plot and the characters. Because the narrator is young and can be innocent, inexperienced, and ingenuous, the story sometimes diverts to unexpected situations and explanations. This technique is used in the narrative to strengthen the closeness with the protagonist, and reposition the reality of the story into the characters’ perspective, as well as the context of the location: the realistic elements of the animation support and emphasize both its authenticity and intimacy.

McDull shares thoughts about his past, present and future, trying to imagine, for instance, what his life can be after graduating from university and how he can make his mother proud. He also describes past events to shed light on aspects of his personality, and repositions them in the story. In doing so, the film introduces the key element of nostalgia. Besides, the original Cantonese version frequently employs double meanings and wordplays with the sounds that

certain expressions can suggest. For example, the word “duck” in English is used as a homonym for “feasible” in Cantonese. McDull and his mother often eat, or discuss eating duck cooked in different recipes. Additionally, the name of the protagonist, McDull, is also a pun, using the secondary meaning of the sound *Dou* in Cantonese, a local colloquialism that can be translated to *charmingly ridiculous*. This strategy distinctively connects the film narrative to Hong Kong culture’s ironic and somewhat bitter sense of humor. Some of the jokes in particular scenes are reminiscent of local childhood’s stories. Locals can identify them immediately, especially when they relate to food, as for example with the recipe of the chicken wrapped in paper. Even if some puns are not necessarily understood by foreign viewers, they do not disrupt the narrative; the singularity of the references situates them in the specifically localized context of the city, and its every-day life, underlining the reference to both place and people. The effect is primarily humorous. It also gives the film its peculiar character.

The movie is initially for children, but anyone can engage with its storytelling because it remains straightforwardly entertaining, yet relevant on different levels of understanding: the character arcs are sophisticated, and the relationships are often touching, even at times, heartwarming. The singular nature of the story is easily accessible because it utilizes universal traits and processes. The connection to the past and childhood is intrinsically intertwined with the notion of nostalgia in the sense that it refers to the perception of one’s identity (Vess, et al., 2012). But the point of reference is not solely time; in the configuration of *My Life As McDull*’s narrative, it can be three elements: time, place, and characters – the fundamental components of the narrative.

The ending of the film presents a surprisingly melancholic conclusion, addressing broken dreams with a touch of melancholy, but also with a smile. This adds to the underlying nostalgic theme of the story, combined with its comedic tone, and reflects its close relation to the place’s customary frame of mind, and its bitter sense of humor.

### ***The Time-Image***

With the concept of the “time-image”, philosopher Deleuze states that a cinematographic image holds connections to other points in the storyline through the use of memory and imagination (1986, p. 17). The way the viewer can travel to these points is contained in each picture and is accessible through its visual components. Some elements call for connections to other images in the storyline. The viewer will notice visual cues, objects, characters, details, colors, textures, and establish a link to a similar component of another image situated at a different point in the storyline. This process functions beyond time, but it operates beyond space as well. It can also link outside of the story itself, connecting to personal memories, individual experiences, and real-life events.

In narrative composition, this theory offers new perspectives, where observation takes a leading role. The viewer can notice and interpret what appears on the screen, and is able to access other dimensions of the story through interpretation and imagination. The narrative becomes malleable. The audience engages in the understanding of the story, and by doing so, becomes



involved in its development and effects. This characteristic of the cinematic experience requires an intellectual and emotional involvement that can be similar to remembering the past, or anticipating the future. The process connects the experience of watching a movie to feeling the emotion of nostalgia, without having the actual memory of the event (Natterer, 2015), but by relating to the emotional significance of the scene in the film, and understanding its resonance in an individual sphere. This concurs with the notion that, “(i)n its purest sense, nostalgia is clearly personal and intimate.” (Salmose, 2019, p. 2).

### ***Shared Memory and Cultural Identity***

Further to the notion of memory, the shared feeling of a group or people’s past can create a common sense of identity for inhabitants of a geographical region, or a community. In *My Life As McDull*, the local culture is present in every detail of the story and its delivery. The city’s distinctive visual identity appears regularly, and does not fade; it is a constant ingredient of the experience, be it cognitive, auditory, or visual. Various elements of food culture are included in segments of the story, in dialogs, but also in the surroundings of virtually every scene. The vernacular is used for comedic purposes, to infuse personality, and to reinforce the connection with the audience. The characters are designed to be representative of local people in different manners through their appearances, voices, behaviors, personalities, and the way they handle relationships. These details serve as reminders to regularly reconnect the identity of the place to the personal memories one can have experienced individually, or understand from the story. This is true even if the viewer does not understand all the references, because they remain so present that they become accepted as a part of the “story world” (Bordwell, 2012, p. 90).

However, nostalgia is a complex notion (Salmose, 2019) that characterizes itself in ambiguous ways most of the time. The response is subtle and very personal. Each memory will be activated by distinct triggers for different individuals. Foreign audiences can still be engaged with the narrative and moved by the scenes, thanks to the appealing personality of the characters and their story. But the factors that prompt connections to the narrative and to personal emotions will be different. Therefore, context remains a key component of the film. Because the images are abundant with details and elements to reflect on, they provide a variety of points in the “time-image” to access other positions in time and place (Deleuze, 1986, p. 104). In this sense, the context presents multiple points of connection, and a broad spectrum of interpretation. Every viewer will connect to elements that appear meaningful to them, or reminds them of a past experience. The mechanism is intangible, but the process is universal. For groups of individuals, the connections will converge and the response will travel to spheres of shared memories, common history, or both at the same time. Through this process, a sense of cultural identity can emerge, and be reinforced. In *My Life As McDull*, it takes the form of contradictions between the different characters, between the personalities and their environment, and between the characters’ aspirations and their life stories. The ironic and sometimes absurd humor also conveys the feeling of identity, despite its incongruity. It reflects the past of the city with its complex history, and intricate ways to cope with the trauma that has been caused. For instance, it can be presenting a tragic event in a humorous light, with derision and even sarcasm. The ending of the film distinctively reflects this formula, by concluding with

a chosen note of fatalism, but that sounds comforting nonetheless.

Ultimately, the inclusion of elements of cultural identity and their access through shared memory and historical nostalgia can bring forward a dynamic of self-recognition for an audience and, to a larger extent, a population. Nostalgia has the ability to generate close connections between the viewer and the story, even without a personal relation with the events and places depicted. These features become intimate in the eye of the viewer through a sense of common familiarity that is generated entirely by the cinematic experience, with the animated film's characters, tone, aesthetics, and storytelling.

### **Conclusion**

*My Life As McDull* is the animated film most mentioned by animators and spectators in Hong Kong. The movie developed into a brand with its own visual identity and represents a role model for the future of Hong Kong animation industry. Hence, its influence on the industry, and on the people of Hong Kong is significant. Beyond the marketing analysis, it stands out as a meaningful representation of a local sense of belonging, and a comforting self-image that can be interpreted as positive for the local population.

The visual components of the film strengthen the identity of the story and the characters in relation to the viewer; they can include urban landmarks, background visuals, food culture, names, language, humor, and character design. In addition, elements of dialogs, sound, music, and double meanings can also strengthen the sense of belonging to a particular community. In this regard, animated films that include elements of culture can reinforce the sense of identity, and to a certain extent, self-esteem for a population. Besides, the structure of the story itself, with the narrative delivery and its different time-related processes, such as non-linearity, highlights the multiple connections with the audience, memories, and shared history.

Moreover, the on-screen elements of the movie influence the link to memory and nostalgia: childhood recollections are evoked by characters who will forever stay young. These ageless characters become cultural symbols, and represent nostalgic connections to those who watched animations in their childhood. Animated films can effectively depict important, but challenging historical events that are difficult to reproduce with live action films (Walden, 2018). The central notion of shared memory is communicated through historical nostalgia, and the open connection to the viewer through relatable, emotional, and memorable storytelling.

From this study, nostalgia in animation emerges as a tool to generate a feeling of belonging, and to potentially help dealing with issues related to identity, by using the processes of “restorative nostalgia” and “reflective nostalgia” (Boym, 2008, p. 41).

Storytelling is an influential medium, and the film visuals can amplify its emotional response, strengthening the connection with the viewer, as well as the effects it can have on the sense of identity.

Nostalgia can serve as a metaphor, and an attempt to heal through memory: it becomes an introspective reflection on the past in an effort to re-contextualize the feeling into the present. Finally, historical nostalgia, embedded in film, can support the co-creation and reinforcement of the sense of cultural identity, and help manage the past.

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## **The Impact of Cultural Code on Communication Promotion of Japanese Animation in the USA**

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## Abstract

For the last eight years, the anime market in the USA has shown record growth rates, which is related to the epistemological relevance of the study. This leads to the fact that the studios are expanding their capabilities and looking for new ways to promote new products, which determines the pragmatic relevance of this study. The purpose of the research is to identify the influence of cultural characteristics on promotional campaigns of Japanese animation in the United States and determine the reasons for their effectiveness. The research was undertaken on the examples of the American promotional campaigns of *Attack on Titan* and *Demon Slayer*. The promotional materials that have been analyzed related to the content from streaming services (Crunchyroll, FUNimation), linear networks (Adult Swim), and anime events both global such as Anime Expo, FunimationCon and organized by the studios. Furthermore, the research was conducted using materials from internet publishers such as CBR, Anime News Network, and supported by data provided by Parrot Analytics. Methods that have been used during the research include synthesis and analysis, ideal-typical reconstruction of social reality, case study, non-formalized content analysis method, and indirect analysis of expert statements. Based on research results, it was inferred that, regardless of the consolidation of the international animation society, it is still crucial to take audience's cultural background into the consideration and thoroughly calculate the promotion strategy when launching new products. This would help minimize the risks and avoid serious losses both in terms of profit and reputation.

*Keywords:* American market, anime, anime promotion, Japanese animation



## The history of Japanese animation in the USA

In the American market, anime is a cultural phenomenon, and its popularity is increasing year-on-year. Annually, dozens of new anime titles are being offered to an American audience. Nowadays, the American market of Japanese animation is vast. According to Grand View Research Inc. (2022), it was estimated at USD 1.7 billion in 2021 and is expected to expand at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 14.9% from 2023 to 2030. Furthermore, The Association of Japanese Animations reported (Anime Industry Report 2020, 2021) that the global anime market has reached record levels for the last eight years and continues to grow. Such big numbers could not help but be impressive, and this despite the fact that anime first time appeared in the USA only in 1961.

In his article “Anime in the US: The Entrepreneurial Dimensions of Globalized Culture” (2014, pp. 53–69) Nissim Otmazgin divides the history of the penetration of Japanese animation into the American market in three stages:

- 1) 1961 – late 80s: the translation of imported anime content that was dubbed in English;
- 2) Late 1980s – late 1990s: anime localization for the American audience;
- 3) Late 1990s – present times: the experimental American-Japanese collaborations in the anime production.

The first anime to be released in the USA was “Shōnen Sarutobi Sasuke” (1959) by Toei Animation released in the theaters by Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer in 1961, and this year can be considered the beginning of the development of the anime industry in the United States. It was one of the first three anime films to premiere in the USA under the title “Panda and the Magic Serpent” along with “Alkizam the Great” (1960) and “The White Snake Enchantress” (1958). The latter was the first colored anime feature film adapted from an ancient Chinese folktale about a boy who owned a pet snake that one day transformed into a princess.

In 1963, the first animated Japanese television series named “Astro Boy” (1952) was released and became enormously popular. It was an anime adaptation of the manga written and illustrated by Osamu Tezuka and is included in the list of best-selling manga series of all time. His animation works were often compared to Bill Hanna and Joe Barbera’s ones: “Astro Boy” established Japanese animation as a product that could be produced quickly and cheaply. At the same time, in the 1960s, anime studios started cooperating with toy companies, music studios, and developing merchandising and licensing for their anime.

In the late 1970s, the first anime events were held in the United States; thus, in 1977 first organized fandom appeared in the USA, created to promote Japanese animation in America. The market continued to grow during the 1980s: imports were on the rise and distributors started offering more content for the audience. The American anime market hit its top in the later 1990s when the anime “Pokemon” (1997) was released in the USA. Ann Allison in her book “Millennial monsters: Japanese toys and the global imagination” named this “the pokemonization of America” (2006, chapter 7).

The years from 1998 to 2008 were named “the Golden age of anime”. That time, the industry experienced a significant economic upturn which peaked in 2003 when the market was estimated at more than USD 4.8 billion. The essential popularity engine of anime in the USA was the Internet. The United States currently hosts more than 200 different otaku-related events each year. The largest of these are Otacon on the East Coast and Anime Expo on the West, which annually gather hundreds of thousands of fans from all around the world.

### **The American Anime Market**

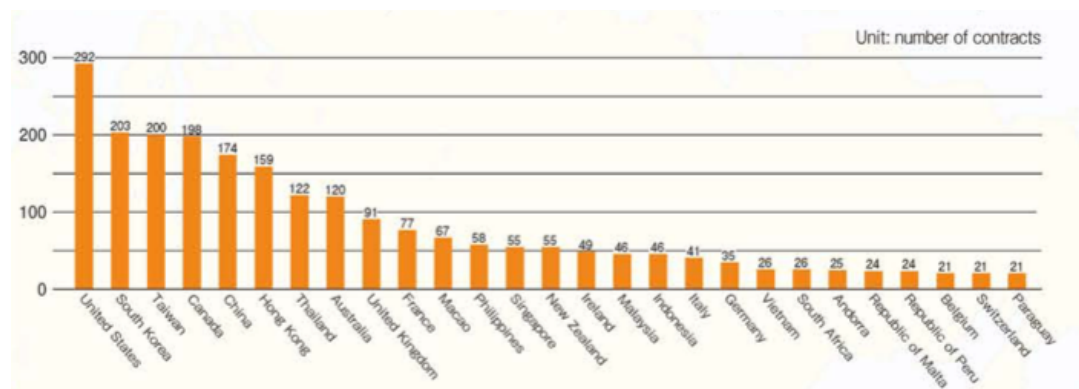
First of all, it is worth mentioning that, originally, anime content was not supposed to be exported abroad. Therefore, it has specific characteristics and features referring to Japanese culture and was often misunderstood by western audiences. In this way, several popular anime projects (of the shōnen genre, in particular) are tightly connected with Japanese mythology: in “Naruto”, for example, some jutsu techniques are named after the Shinto gods Amaterasu, Isanami and Isanagi, and three legendary sannins were named after the characters of the Japanese folktale “The Tale of the Gallant Jiraiya”.

In recent years, the creators of anime have increasingly focused on the general public, so an analysis of this genre should not be limited to too strict a framework. As Reina Denison argues in her book “Anime: A Critical Introduction”, anime is not just a form of animation or a product of exclusively Japanese culture, but it is much broader provenance (2015, pp. 10–15).

After the 2020 Olympics in Tokyo, there was the boost of popularity for anime and manga in the USA. Even in small towns, all comics and related products were sold out. As of August 2021 (when the competition was over), the anime streaming service Crunchyroll had over 120 million registered subscribers and more than 5 million people with a paid subscription. Currently, Crunchyroll is the third most popular streaming service in the world by number of subscribers.

Apart from Japanese companies exporting anime content to the western market, there are also American local companies and streaming services broadcasting and purchasing licenses for anime display, such as Sentai Filmworks, FUNimation, Aniplex of America, Crunchyroll and others. Anime projects are becoming so successful in the West that in 2019, Netflix signed a contract with the Sublimation, Anima and David Production animation studios for anime production and exclusive broadcast rights on it (Netflix Originals). The United States ranked first in the world outside the Pacific region in terms of the number of contracts awarded for the production and distribution of anime content, according to the 2020 AJA report (Anime Industry Report 2020, 2021):

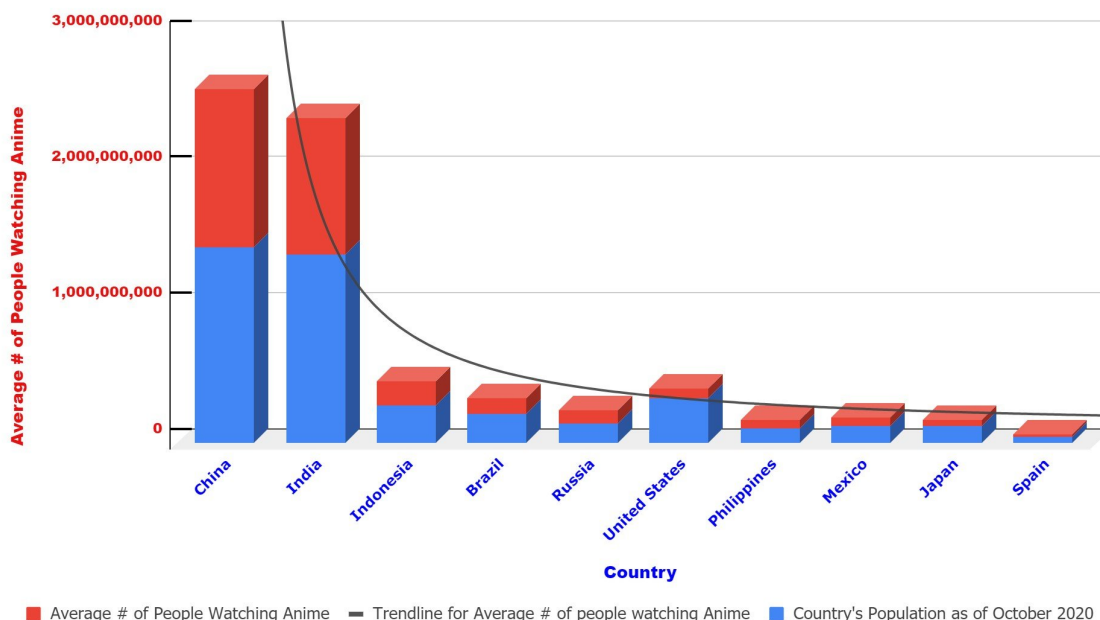
**Figure 1**  
*Number of Contracts on a Country Basis Based on Anime Industry Survey Questionnaire*



Moreover, Japanese creators draw inspiration from products of western culture that makes their products more understandable for the American audience and also attract new viewers. Thus, in 2020, Studio Pierrot, together with Too Kyo Games and Kazutaka Kodaka, released a cyberpunk anime “Akudama drive” inspired by Quentin Tarantino’s “Reservoir Dogs”.

According to statistics, nearly 74 million Americans (25% of the population) are acquainted with the anime genre or watched some titles (Gulati, 2020): See Figure 2.

**Figure 2**  
*Top 10 Countries where Anime is Most Popular*



At present, in the US market for Japanese animation, there is a predominance of demand over supply (Autumn Write, 2020). Despite the huge number of anime studios (there are about 623

animation studios in Japan that develop animated content), they do not have the time to meet the needs of the audience. In this regard, there is a shortage of qualified personnel (animators, artists, etc.), so the studios organize short courses to improve the skills of their employees. However, only well-known, large studios with a large number of staff and stable funding can take the initiative, while small and medium-sized studios cannot implement such measures.

### **Anime Promotion in the United States**

The main channel of Japanese animation distribution in the USA is the Internet, therefore announcements of new series or titles and other advertisements are posted there. In addition, advertisement is placed in points of sale of manga, *merch* (merchandise) and other goods related to anime, as well as in specialized print media and magazines. Thus, the following channels of advertising can be identified:

- YouTube;
- Social networks;
- Specialized media;
- Otaku shops;
- Anime events;
- Outdoor advertising (posters in theaters and otaku shops).

Before releasing new episodes of anime series, companies release trailers which usually are posted on YouTube. More recently, due to the development of new foreign markets and the popularity of streaming services, they are also posted on the official channels of these platforms, such as the anime trailer for “Jujutsu kaisen” which also appeared on the Crunchyroll channel (Crunchyroll Collection, 2020). Full-length movie trailers (such “Demon Slayer: Mugen Train”) are broadcast in theaters and at anime events. Due to the increase in the audience of social networks, studios started promoting their projects with this tool. Thus, many popular titles have official Twitter and Facebook accounts (for example, “Attack on Titan” (2022)) with millions of followers. Anime advertisements and announces usually are also placed in otaku magazines, such as Animation Magazine, Otaku USA Magazine, Animerica and on specialized Internet portals about comics and animation like Anime news network, CBR and others. Printed media are not as popular in the USA as in Japan, and that is why such types of goods are mainly collectible there.

In the United States, otaku shops are also widely popular: in Los Angeles alone, there are several dozens of them. They sell manga, collectible anime DVD, official merch, and cosplay clothing. In addition to offline shops, there are also online shops in America where you can buy otaku products such as Atsuko, Crunchyroll store, OtakuStore and others. The anime community on social media and WOM (word of mouth) also play an important role in promoting the anime. These types of communication should not be overlooked, as the exchange of views within the community and the advice of friends and acquaintances have important importance for representatives of otaku culture in deciding which anime to choose to watch.

This is supported by a 2018 study examining the impact of WOM (Ameri, Honka & Xie, 2018) (in two ways: friends and community) on users' opinions about the anime.

Anime events are also one of the most effective and evolving communication tools that occupy an important niche in the promotion of Japanese animation in the United States. The number of event visitors and fans watching various events online (for example, the Anime Expo Lite, which takes place in an online format), grows annually, giving the organizers more opportunities to attract new sponsors, and studios to better promote their projects to a wide audience. That is why studios most often participate in anime events to promote their projects.

### **The Most Popular Anime Projects - Analysis Criteria**

Of course, promotion campaigns for new titles are aimed at the appropriate audience. However, while planning and implementing a communication strategy, the audience's cultural background is not always taken into account, possibly having serious repercussions for a project's success.

While analyzing cases of promotion campaigns in the American market, it would make sense to split them into two groups by product type and examine them separately, considering the differences in features that result from them. During the analysis, various methods have been used, such as those connected with analysis, synthesis, ideal-typical reconstruction of social reality, case study, the non-formalized content analysis method, and indirect analysis of expert statements. Using these methods, campaigns have been reviewed in terms of promotion on the Internet, as well as the studios' work, merchandising, and participation in anime events.

The analysis is based on the examples of such popular anime projects as “Attack on Titan” and “Demon Slayer” (“Shingeki no Kyojin” and “Kimetsu no Yaiba” respectively). Both were a great success in the USA and are included among the most popular anime in the world in 2022. According to Anime Corner, which interviewed fans about their favorite title, “Attack on Titan” and “Demon Slayer” were ranked 1st and 2nd, respectively (Anime Corner, 2022). These two anime projects have definite similarities: they are both *shōnens*, belonging to the genre of dark fantasy and target the same audience. Moreover, both are still ongoing (in October 2022), unlike their manga originals. On USA TV and streaming services, they are rated 16+ because of violence. Besides, there are similar plot details present in both from which fans and experts draw parallels (Rufnarine, 2022). However, these titles differ significantly by the criterion of compliance/incompliance of the audiences' stereotypes and expectations due cultural differences between the USA and Japan and fans' diverse cultural codes and backgrounds.

### **The Promotion of “Attack on Titan”**

“Attack on Titan” was a Japanese manga series created by Hajime Isayama, published in *Bassatsu Shonen Magazine* from October 2009 to April 2021. Its anime adaptation includes 4 seasons and began serialization on April 7, 2013 by Wit Studio. The series was streamed on Crunchyroll and since 2014 on FUNimation. The 1st episode, voiced by FUNimation, was

aired in the USA at the Anime Boston anime event. Moreover, Cartoon Network announced that beginning on May 3, 2014, it would be included in Adult Swim's Toonami (as all the next seasons would be). Also, in 2014, FUNimation started producing a series of DVD and Blu-ray disk which is still ongoing.

The second dubbed season was streamed on Crunchyroll and FUNimation. In July, FUNimation announced that it had licensed the live-action movie "Attack on Titan" for domestic distribution in South and North America. The movie premiered on July 14, 2015, at the Egyptian Theatre in Los Angeles. The premiere was attended by the director, Shinji Higuchi, along with Haruma Miura and Kiko Mizuhara, who portrayed the main characters Eren and Mikasa. Besides, Shinji Higuchi participated in an autograph session at the FUNimation stand at Comic-Con the same year.

The world premiere of the third season took place at Anime Expo on July 8, 2018, in Los Angeles. This time, FUNimation Entertainment announced that on July 10-11, 130 theaters in the United States and Canada would premiere the 3rd season's first episode. The event also included a screening of the movie "Attack on Titan: The Roar of Awakening", the summary of the 2nd season. Furthermore, during FUNimationCon2020, which was held online, FUNimation announced licensing the movie-recap of all three seasons, "Attack on Titan: Chronicle".

In 2019, after the second part of the third season had premiered, the manga "Attack on Titan" had passed 100 million copies sold and it was celebrated with a giant mural by Kodansha at New York Madison Square Garden (Anime News Network, 2019). On March 29, 2020, it was announced that the fourth and final season would be produced by MAPPA studio. The season was divided into three parts, two of which were released in December 2020 and January 2022 respectively. After the release of the last episode of the third season's second part, it was revealed on the show's official Twitter account that the third part with the final episodes of the anime would be released in 2023, alongside with a teaser.

That announcement was a great disappointment for fans who felt the ending dragged on for too long. The show's creators had not met their expectations twice already, declaring the first and the second parts of the season 4 as final and keeping everybody on edge until the end of credits to announce the next part to be released the following years (2022 and 2023, respectively). The 4th season's production was truly protracted – it began in 2020 and continued in 2021, the second part was released in 2022 and the third is scheduled to premiere in 2023.

It follows that the studio creates a lot of tension and excitement around the project without warning in advance in which format the series would be released, and it causes discontent of the franchise fans. On the one hand, this uncertainty made them doubt the "accuracy" of the ending, but on the other hand, it caused a lot of emotions and provoked stormy reactions. For many viewers who did not read manga, the ending of the 4th season's second part was a total shock – they expected the 87th episode to end with an epic battle between Eren and the other

titans. But instead, it ended with a return to the end of the season 3: a momentous day which would further appear to be the reason of the Eren’s final decision.

The last and 139th chapter of manga was released on April 8, 2021. In mid-November 2018, Hajime Isayama revealed the final panel of the manga but fans had no choice but to guess how the story would end. After its official release, the fandom split into two camps: those who considered the ending to be correct and natural, and those whose expectations were not met. Many fans shared their disappointment on social medias stating that they felt frustrated and not satisfied with the manga ending. A popular YouTube blogger and anime commentator ForneverWorld said this in his review: “I’d be lying if I said that I was fulfilled by that. It felt like Eren died for nothing... Fam, I’ll be honest with you, I am disappointed” (ForneverWorld, 2021).

What caused the biggest fans’ disappointment was certainly the final episode. Fans were blaming the author for cynicism, justification of great evil in the name of the highest good, and incitement of imperialist sentiment. Besides, the depressing and grim outcome was presented to the fans without any fanservice that usually accompanies a shōnen ending. This caused fans’ conviction and drawing up of a Change.org petition demanding to change the ending in the anime. Considering the fact that the anime adaptation is as close to the manga as possible, it is highly unlikely that their hopes will be fulfilled.

The reason of fans’ frustration regarding the manga’s ending was their won unpreparedness for such a project as “Attack on Titan”. And there are two main reasons for it. The first has to do with different approaches and traditions in work creation. “Attack on Titan” was created within the traditional system of Asian classic drama *kishōtenketsu*. According to this system, a work is divided into four main parts:

1. ki – an introduction;
2. shō – describing happenings that are necessary for an understanding of the plot;
3. ten – an unexpected plot-twist that changes the perception of the whole work dramatically;
4. ketsu – a conclusion in which the author provides inferring and which connects the third part with two previous ones.

The main features of *kishōtenketsu* are an open final and lack of the central conflict that is replaced with the plot-twist. The central object in *kishōtenketsu* work is not a character, it is the viewers themselves because the impact of the climax, the third part according of this schema, targets their perception and consciousnesses. Meanwhile, the character does not undergo any significant changes. What changes is the viewer’s opinion about the work. It can be inferred from this that the idea of “Attack on Titan” was not originally meant to be the kind of project that has a happy ending, because this would contradict the rules of the *kishōtenketsu* genre itself.

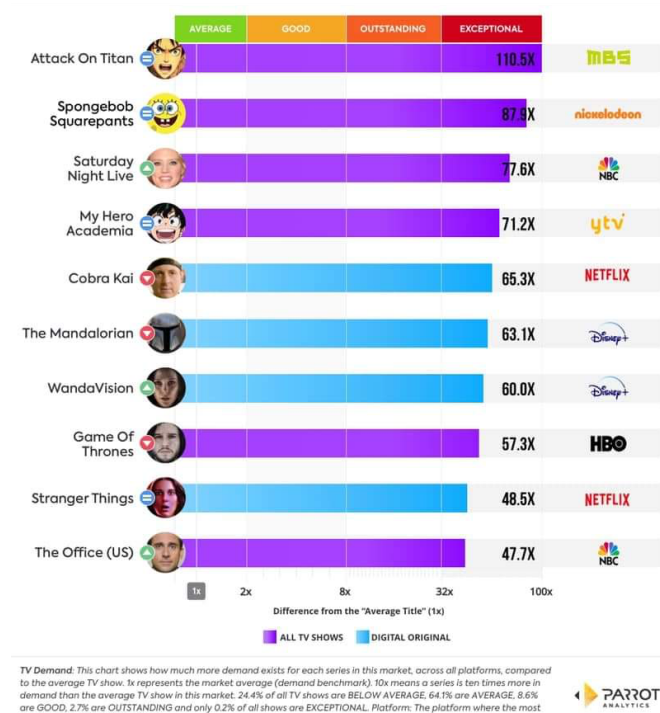
Moreover, due to the lack of conflict in its plot, the open-ended final, and the conclusions that was not directly voiced by the author, the audience had to draw their own conclusions and

guess what the main idea of the work was. This did not satisfy the American audience which is accustomed to the unambiguity and finality of film projects and TV series. It is also worth mentioning that works based on kishōtenketsu are not an absolute novelty for western audiences. For instance, the movie “Parasites” directed by Pon Jun Ho which won four Oscars in 2020, has also been created according to the kishōtenketsu rules.

The uniqueness of “Attack on Titan” is that, in addition to the fact that the four seasons of the anime resemble the four components of the kishōtenketsu structure, the story pattern is repeated several times during the individual seasons. The prime example is the first one which can be conditionally divided into two parts, each again based on the four-act system. Also, according to CBR author Andrew Tefft, the viewers were unfamiliar with such twists as presented in “Attack on Titan”. Due to cultural differences and different cultural backgrounds, the American audience was shocked and frustrated with this outcome since they expected an exciting ending à la classic Hollywood superheroes movies. The second reason is rooted in the first and lies in a communicative strategy unsuited for promotion to an American audience.

The first three anime’s seasons garnered an enormous success, and most likely therefore, the final season’s creators considered its future success guaranteed. Indeed, the project, regardless a four-year gap between the first and the second seasons, had reached such a level of international popularity very few franchises can achieve. It is proven by its collaboration with Marvel (crossover to “Attack on Avengers”), live action movies, series of popular video games and the fact that, according to Parrot Analytics (Peters, 2021), it had become the most popular TV show in the USA (Figure 3).

**Figure 3**  
*US TV Demand versus Market Average (31 Jan. – 6 Feb. 2021)*





Furthermore, the demand for the anime “Attack on Titan” was 50 times greater comparing to average rates of demand for series in the USA and 48% higher than in its country of origin (Parrot Analytics, 2022). Only 0.2% of all the series in the American market receive this level of demand. As for its communicative support, it included announcements on the project’s official Twitter account and participation in huge anime events. For instance, in 2018 during “Attack on Titan” third season premiere at Anime Expo, there was a fan meeting with Eren’s Japanese and English voice actors – Yuki Kaji and Bryce Papenbrook.

The project also receives a great support from streaming services. In February 2020, “Attack on Titan” murals from Crunchyroll appeared on the streets of New York and Los Angeles. In addition, before launching a new season, video promos were released on TV and YouTube. The creators also kept in touch with the fandom via social medias: after the 4th season second part opening had surpassed 10 million views on YouTube, on the project’s official Twitter appeared a statement of gratitude to the viewers in five languages (@anime\_shingeki, 2022). Additionally, in the USA, a merchandise collection with a wide range and a limited-edition book collection from MAPPA Studio have been released, along with novellas, DVDs, and video games.

Before a new season’s release, the fans’ excitement was very high as corroborated by their posts on social medias after the official trailer’s release for the final season and the fact that during its first episode premiere, Crunchyroll and FUNimation’s websites crashed – likely due to the sheer number of viewers attempting to access them. After the final chapter of the manga was revealed, the interest in the second part grew even more due to the increased hype around the ending, sparking much discussions. Many fans, and especially those who had read the manga, were aware of what would happen in the end, but this did not diminish the interest in the upcoming premiere even one bit. On the contrary, Crunchyroll and FUNimation went down yet again.

This could be explained in two ways. Firstly, the fans were certain that it would be the last part of the final season and even those who were frustrated with the ending, wanted to watch the anime to the end to appraise the manga’s anime adaptation. Secondly, some fans hoped for another ending, different from the one in the manga. Concern about the last part of the final season, however, by then had begun to decline significantly. First of all, the main reason was the length of the final season. As mentioned before, the fans did not expect that they would have to wait until 2023 in order to watch the ending, because the second part of the 4<sup>th</sup> season had been announced before as the very last one. This caused some risks for the third part’s success, since some fans may refuse watching the end of the series due to their serious dissatisfaction with the studio’s policy.

In order to avoid fans’ frustration, MAPPA should have announced their plans about the third part before the second part ended. Instead, their demeanor induced a great resentment among the fans that found the studio’s strategy disrespectful. As for the disappointment of a significant part of the audience, the studio should have increased their awareness about cultural features that the concept of “Attack on Titan” bases on. Probably, if the fans’ expectations had not been

so opposed to the actual manga’s ending, the project could have avoided such serious risks and negative reviews. Nevertheless, the project did enjoy great communicative support, and until the third part premiere, the studio had an opportunity to fix its strategy and create a more positive perception of the final.

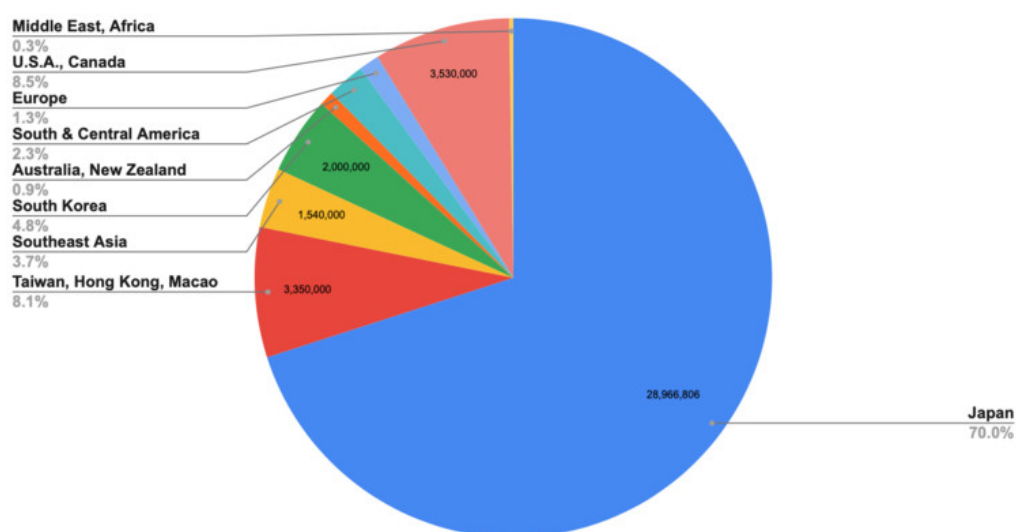
### The Promotion of “Demon Slayer”

“Demon Slayer” is a manga written and illustrated by Koyoharu Gotouge. It was serialized in *Weekly Shonen Jump* from February 15, 2016 until May 18, 2020. The anime series was created by Ufotable studio in the spring of 2019 and is still ongoing. Before its first five episodes were run on TV, they had been shown in cinemas. In the USA, the anime was licensed by Aniplex; the movie-recap of the first five episodes premiered at the Aratani theatre on March 31, 2019, and the anime premiere was held on April 6 on Crunchyroll, FUNimation, and Hulu. In addition, in July, Aniplex announced “Demon Slayer” to premiere on Toonami for October 31, 2019.

The project was a great success among the audience, as evidenced by the manga’s rapid sales growth. In 2019, it became the globally best-selling manga and surpassed the legendary “One Piece” manga series (Valdez, 2019). After the 26th episode had been released in September, the studio announced the premieres of the 2nd season and the full-length movie *Demon Slayer: Kimetsu no Yaiba the Movie: Mugen Train*, a recap of the first seven episodes of the anime series. It also was a huge success, the first non-Hollywood and non-American movie to top the yearly box office worldwide since the very beginning of cinema. The film is now the number two highest-earning anime film ever at the U.S. box office after “Pokemon: The First Movie” (1998). The movie has sold over 41 million tickets worldwide and surpassed Hayao Miyazaki’s “Spirited Away” (2002), its last rival for all-time highest earnings in Japanese box office history. Furthermore, North America was the second most sold region in the world (Pineda, 2021):

**Figure 4**

“*Demon Slayer: Mugen Train*”: Tickets Sold by Region



Source: Anime News Network, Aniplex as of May 24, 2021

This is an impressive figure for a film that is not a stand-alone story. Unlike other full-length anime movies that have TV analogues, *Demon Slayer: Kimetsu no Yaiba the Movie: Mugen Train* is not a spin-off or a side story with its own canons and storylines, created to be more accessible to audiences who may be unfamiliar with the series. The movie is also a part of a series which is what makes it unique. Its huge success demonstrates that its release was a positive commercial move. Its narrative arc includes breathtaking action scenes, but, at the same time, is not devoid of sentimentality and psychologism, which attracted people of different ages and diverse audiences.

As the *Los Angeles Times* reported (Brown, 2021), its success was also connected with the absence of competition from Hollywood that postponed the majority of its premieres due to the fact that American cinemas remained closed during the pandemic. The audience, weary of the restrictions, tried to make up for the lack of entertainment and was eager to get acquainted with new movies, as evidenced by the high ticket sales figures. Thus, it was not only the animation, the story, and meaning that made the film such a resounding success, but also the timing of its release. Not only did this knowingly ensure the success of the second season of the anime series, but it also attracted more attention to anime as a genre as a whole from the audience. In this regard, it is likely the viewers will see more anime movies created by studios. This demonstrates that animation projects' profits are comparable to those of huge blockbusters, for instance overtaking Christopher Nolan's *Tenet* (2020) at the box office. Despite of its commercial success, though, the movie was not nominated for Oscar in 2021, contrary to the predictions of film critics and reviewers.

In addition to the main anime adaptation, Ufotable released several specials. In February 2021, the studio announced the release of four short films specially for Valentine's Day. All four shorts were streamed on the FUNimation YouTube channel on February 14. Moreover, four days later, FUNimation began streaming three special anime episodes which were recompilations of the first season: "Demon Slayer: Kimetsu no Yaiba Sibling's Bond", "Demon Slayer: Kimetsu no Yaiba Mt. Natagumo Arc", and "Demon Slayer: Kimetsu no Yaiba °– The Hashira Meeting Arc". In October 2021, the videogame "Demon Slayer Hinokami Chronicles" was released. It surpassed 1 million copies sold only a few days after its official release (Dunia Games, 2021).

Its second season ended in February 2022 and was met with an enthusiastic reaction from the audience, also contributing to the success of the movie. Fans shared their glowing reviews of the season saying that "11 weeks were worth it" (this is how long its second arc, "Entertainment District" ran) and that they were so impressed by its ending. It can be inferred from this that the audience's expectations about the third season, whose premiere date has not been announced yet, are also high. In April 2022, Ufotable, together with Crunchyroll, released the trailer of the new season named "Demon Slayer: Kimetsu no Yaiba Swordsmith Village Arc", an adaptation of the corresponding arc of the manga.

The manga "Demon Slayer" has already finished. Its final, 205th chapter was published on May 17, 2020. However, unlike the *Attack on Titan's* final chapter, it elicited far more positive

than negative feedback from the audience. This is because the story had an unambiguous, happy finale that fully met the fans' expectations. According to a CBR author Erik Kozura, "while nailing an unanimously loved ending is difficult for any series to do, 'Demon Slayer's hopeful conclusion is a testament to the sacrifices made for a brighter future'" (2021). In addition, the project was also accompanied by much fanservice which was likely needed in order to balance the huge amount of battle scenes and characters' deaths. Jokes included relieve the tension, weaken the gloomy atmosphere of the anime, and give the viewers some kind of break between furious battle scenes. Nevertheless, some fans pointed out that few scenes with Zenitsu are too emotionally charged and that female characters' appearances offer some sexualized aspects (Barton, 2022). Moreover, some fanservice moments (for example, with Mitsuri) are considered unnecessary. Fortunately, these circumstances do not harm the popularity of this series, as confirmed by its high audience ratings.

It is worth mentioning that "Demon Slayer" also has powerful public relations support, primarily due to associated events. At its premiere during Anime Expo in July, a special event by Aniplex took place where participants could receive exclusive gifts and become more familiar with the project. On January 18, 2020, Ufotable, together with Abema, held an online event for fans during which they announced the plans for the next year and the anime creators showed the second season's review (its release had not ended by that time). This event was attended by *seiyuu* (Japanese voice actor) Natsuki Hanae, who voiced Tanjiro, and Yuma Takahashi, a producer at Aniplex. Moreover, on the 15th and 16th April, there were two big events dedicated to the third anniversary of its premiere, called "Kimetsu Party". They were livestreamed worldwide and both events included live readings of the anime's cast: Natsuki Hanae (Tanjiro Kamado), Akari Kito (Nezuko Kamado), Hiro Shimono (Zenitsu Agatsuma), Yoshitsugu Matsuoka (Inosuke Hashibira). Moreover, Katsuyuki Konishi, who voiced fan-favorite Uzui Tengen, exclusively appeared at the second event dedicated to the "Entertainment District" arc. Before new seasons of the anime and the movie were premiered, the studio released promo videos and trailers that were shown in the theatres and posted on social medias and YouTube, where they gained tens of millions of views. Theaters also displayed posters announcing the movie's release.

Consequently, the main reason for this franchise's success among the fans is caused by a properly built communication and PR strategy and this applies above all to the communication with the audience, such as the special online event that took place in January 2022. Its key feature was that at the event the creators shared their plans for the coming years and announced the release dates of several projects, instead of keeping the audience in the dark until the very end, which would cause irritation and displeasure in viewers. The manga's happy ending, of course, also played a role in how the fans tuned in to the movie and the anime's second season, as not all members of the audience had read the manga or were familiar with its contents. For many people, it is the anime that is the primary source for their familiarity with the product and the main means of acquaintance with the story of the franchise.

## Conclusion

Summarizing the results of the comparative analysis, the communication promotions of “Attack on Titan” and “Demon Slayer” were based on approximately the same scheme, which involved special events, anime events, and promotion in social medias. However, the ambivalent reaction of the audience shows that there existed different approaches of their compliance/non-compliance with the audiences’ expectations. In the case of “Attack on Titan”, the interest for this project decreased due to the fans’ frustration caused by its prolonged and “weird” ending and the studio’s hands-off behavior. Organizing focus group research and developing a strategy of action for a time of crisis would have helped. The “Attack on Titan” experience shows that while promoting projects that do not match an audience’s “cultural code”, it is worth to be more careful and thorough, working on the “weak spots” of the product and its triggers to avoid negative feedback.

After seeing the success of “Demon Slayer: Kimetsu no Yaiba the Movie: Mugen Train” and “Jujutsu Kaisen 0: The Movie”, both created by MAPPA, many “Attack on Titan” fans expected a movie of this franchise to be released too. Unfortunately, their expectations do not seem to have been met yet (Casale, 2022). Full-length movies, as part of the anime series, are a commercially efficient way to raise sales. Perhaps, if MAPPA had released the movie based on the “Attack on Titan” plot, but with different story lines, this would have helped to smooth over the situation and offset their reputation loss. “Demon Slayer” did not have more chances to get a positive reaction from the fans than Titan did. According to the IMDb rating website, in 2021 “Attack on Titan” was the fourth most popular TV series (Anime Galaxy, 2022) and the most in-demand TV series (Anime Galaxy, 2022) in the world. Thanks to this achievement, the project became the only anime on the Top 10 releases list, and the second anime on the list (not surprisingly, “Demon Slayer”) was only in 29th place.

Both projects are globally successful and popular franchises that were created by recognized authors. Both mangaka have been honored with the Noma Publishing Culture Award from Kodansha publisher: Koyoharu Gotouge received it in 2020, and Hajime Isayama in 2021. But the key difference between their successes (or lack thereof) in the American market was that the audience was not prepared well to engage with Isayama’s work, as, due to the differing cultural code upon which it was based, it required much more preparation than the more mainstream *Demon Slayer* franchise, preparation it did not receive.

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## **The “Innocent” Other: Hollywood’s Post 9/11 Muslim Child and Childhood**

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### **Abstract**

The present article interrogates the ways in which Hollywood cinema articulates the exclusion of the Muslim child from popular discourses of childhood and how such exclusion continues to condition the cultural identity of children and most importantly how it defines the notion of childhood. This paper opts for a textual and discursive analysis of Hollywood's post-9/11 film through a cultural and postcolonial studies' lens. The main purpose behind this is to scrutinize Hollywood's cultural conceptualization of children, how it represents different childhoods, in what way it categorizes children and who is perceived as a child.

*Keywords:* Arab, children, Hollywood, innocence, Islam, popular culture, postcolonial theory, race, Orientalism, 9/11

## Introduction

Popular culture is a significant social agent, able to reach and influence community perceptions. Popular culture categories specifically film have a powerful impact on minority groups who are subjected to exclusionary policies due to their categorization as “different” simply because they do not hold the same values and ethos of the mainstream culture. For many decades, Western cinematic discourse about Muslims and Arabs has been promulgating biased stereotypes and promoting a polarized representation splitting the world into the dichotomies of Occident (West) versus Orient (East). Hollywood film industry in particular has proved itself potent in normalizing such representations and familiarizing the masses with the Orientalist discourse. Thanks to Hollywood’s worldwide reach and due to unfortunate events such as September 11, aggressive campaigns were waged against Arabs in and outside America. Ultimately, in most Hollywood products, Arabs and Muslims became synonymous with terrorism, violence, fundamentalism, and extremism. Arab children are no exception.

While people turn to Hollywood movies for entertainment purposes, they engage in more than a simple, fun visual experience since the images and ideas those films present, allow them to generate thought and opinions about different social, political and ideological issues. The ideas the audience is left with after this fun journey is conditioned by what Hollywood represents and how it is (mis)represented. Indeed, a falsified depiction has the power to make up the mind of the audience into believing that this is the only truth and take the screened stereotypical images as the unquestionable reality. This demonstrates the power of misrepresentation and stereotypes and their role in framing/distorting reality. Stereotypes are vehicles of power and a discursive practice that lays out the relationships of inequality and domination. To use the Foucauldian understanding of discourse and power, discourse is the means of those who hold the power to control the rest. In this sense, those who have the power, generate and control the “truth” through a system of “inclusions” and “exclusions” (Foucault, 1981, p. 54). They decide what is to be considered as truth and what should be excluded, not only by promoting what serves their interests, but also through silencing any other versions while speaking for the powerless. This practice was harshly criticized by a number of postcolonial theorists such as Edward Said, who denounced the prevailing practice of speaking on behalf of Islam even among Western academics and experts. Those experts according to him know little about the different facets and depths of Islam and allow themselves to bring about shallow generalizations about a whole people and religion. In this sense, representation is merely a play of power relations. In Dyer’s words: “how social groups are treated in cultural representation is part and parcel of how they are treated in life, (...) how we are seen determines in part how we are treated; how we treat others is based on how we see them; such seeing comes from representation” (Dyer, 2002, p. 1). Hence, promoting falsified ideas is powerful in the sense that it conditions and frames our understanding of the world around us and push us to make sense, attribute meaning and finally reach a verdict. In most cases, the judgment of the masses is framed by what the popular culture has been spoon-feeding them for ages. As Shaheen explains, even movie directors are conditioned to perpetuate stereotypical images about certain people because this is what they’ve found their predecessors doing so, they unconsciously

screen what they have always watched because they simply do not know any better (Shaheen, 2001, p. 174).

Hollywood's longstanding history of misrepresentations and its legacy of generating misleading and falsified stereotypes about specific cultures and peoples cannot be denied. However, among all the represented minority groups, Muslims tend to be at the crux of misrepresentation. This practice is often marked by a dominant antagonistic view which results into anti-Muslims sentiments. The Muslim community has over a billion people, and it stretches across six continents, bringing together a variety of cultures, traditions, ethnicities and languages. It would be then not only simplistic, but misleading to downsize all of these to a singular prototype. In effect, the events of September 11 play the role of a catalyst and deeply influences the West's perception about Muslims. In American film industry, Islam as such is constantly linked to orthodox ideals, terrorism, Jihad and bloodshed.

Similarly, to literary discourses, popular culture and cinema per se has the tendency to position childhood and innocence into socio-political, economic, historical and more importantly cultural realms that are "white" par excellence. "Childhood innocence" as such is a recent notion, since children have been historically considered as smaller version of humans filled with original sin and in constant need for correction and even harsher punishment. It wasn't until the eighteenth century that this shift in defining and attributing childhood to innocence occurred. However, in *Imperial Eyes*, Mary Louise Pratt contends that along with the discourses about childhood purity and innocence emerged the need to implement racial hierarchies (Pratt, 2008, pp. 32–33). It was at this particular point in history and primarily due to the scientific classification of humans that differences in innocence surfaced.

In discussing Hollywood's history of racial exclusion, it is important to refer to the black children and their systematic absence within American mainstream cinema. Black children were often portrayed as animals, non-human, normalizing their non-childhood attributions and therefore criminality. This discrimination against non-white children resulted in the absence of children of color from the discourse of childhood. This idea of their brutality was effectively transmitted by the media that it developed emotions of fear, hostility and aggression as defining mechanisms while dealing with children of color. In this way, acts of prejudice and intolerance towards those children and unsurprisingly acts of violence towards them were encouraged. Although slavery is no longer active, the life of black children is threatened and their freedom gets to be questioned in the American society, where hate crimes against black people increased during the past few years, either by individuals or even the police; which initial role should be the protection of those kids.

The discrimination against black children starts with their absence from the discourse of childhood. Instead, black children can be referred to as "childish" but rarely considered part and parcel of "childness". The difference is that the term "childish" refers to specific actions or behaviors that mimic cultural notions of the way children behave, childness refer to the essence of being a child or being perceived as having the characteristics of a child mentally,

emotionally, or physically (Olson, 2017, p. 3). In this vein, they cannot be fully considered as genuine children and they lack the needed characteristics to be perceived as such.

This partially reveals the discursive nature of cinematic images about non-white children that place them the furthest from the Western ideal of childhood innocence and perfection. In this sense, modern media conglomerates, namely Hollywood, nurture a universal tendency of defamatory depictions disclosing a pattern of misrepresentations concerning non-white children. Those children are generally represented as fractured non-children, “perverted from (childhood’s) “natural” course of innocence, fragility, and purity” (Denov 2012, p. 282). At the age of the war on terror, the Arab child substitutes the black child. They occupy different places than the normal euro American child would. Similar to the black children, you will rarely see them pictured in a school, playground, nursery, play room, library or all these normal places for children, as those spaces are exclusively reserved for “the white kids” (Olson, 2017, p. 33). As the black/ African child would be generally visualized in the labor within a workspace, the Arab child would be introduced in a warfare zone, helping with or carrying terrorist acts. This connects the physical spaces of childhood with whiteness on the one hand and denies access to Arab children, casting them as unworthy to occupy such spaces. Almost inexistent are representations of Arab children in a normal fashion and atmosphere.

This image of the hateful terrorist child is elaborated in a number of American films such as *the Kingdom* (2007) where a father teaches his son about the plan to kill Americans during a softball game at an American oil company housing compound in Riyadh. A close-up to his eyes shows how he seems to enjoy the idea of killing and terrorizing others. It is inescapable for the spectator to draw a comparison between the Arab child and the American children who are peacefully playing with their families.

Although they are labelled as the enemy, Muslim children cannot be omitted from this space, as their presence is highly significant for the presence of the self. This is what Morrison calls “Africanist presence” in her playing in the dark, in which she argues that

Just as the formation of the nation necessitated coded language and purposeful restriction to deal with racial disingenuousness, so too did literature, whose founding characteristic extend into the twentieth century film, reproduce the necessity for codes and restriction.... One can see that the real or fabricated Africanist presence was crucial to their sense of Americanness. (Morrison, 1990, p. 18).

In simpler terms, it is the difference and the interplay between the two that gives meaning to the self and the other. This recognition qua exclusion of the existence of other childhoods is an assertion of the presence of the Self as it allows it to exist. In the same fashion, the Muslim/Arab child in Hollywood cinema functions as the “Africanist presence” that normalizes white childhood. It is the presence of the culturally and racially “inferior” Muslim child, which grants the white American child their superiority. In this sense, the difference between Arab and American children is racially grounded, as race is the main characteristic that differentiates between the two. Further, once you belong to the category “the other” signifies that you carry

all the meanings attributed to that category with little room left for difference, diversity or uniqueness. Generally, Muslims are believed to belong to a single ethnic group. However, it is noteworthy that Muslims as a community of faith are not a race that comes from one culture. That is, not all Arabs are Muslims and not all Muslims are Arabs. Indonesia, which probably has the biggest Muslim population, is not an Arab country. Still, the dominant representation of Muslims is a singular Orientalist image that has been perpetuated since the ages of colonialism and continues its proliferation until the date with magazines, television, newspapers, and film leaving no room for new perspectives. Mostly, in American films, Arab children are referred to as some Arab, an Arab boy or girl. They are rarely given a name. The fact is, in movies such as *The Kingdom* (2007), *Zero Dark Thirty* (2012), *American Sniper* (2013) all Arab children are nameless. This indicates the homogeneousness of all Arab children and suggests they lack an individual identity, humanity or visibility. “Some Muslim child” is any “Muslim child” as they are all one and the same. Films as such, are influenced by transnational flow of historically racist imagery. Those films reveal consistent racial discourses that place the Muslim child as the Other and represent the tools to reaffirm and shape the masses’ minds about concepts of race in relation to childhood.

In Hollywood’s *The Kingdom* (2007) for instance, Abu-Hamza’s grandson is portrayed in a rather serious manner, which does not typically suit a child’s nature. Unlike Kevin (the son of agent Fleury), He is not given a name and he is often presented in the company of terrorists. This raises questions about the colonial discursive patterns that ascribe to the cultural Other namelessness and invisibility. In this way, the American subject is often given a name, profession and status, while his Arab counterpart is nameless, jobless and without any defined status. Hence, Kevin is introduced in a child friendly milieu (his school), engaging in school activities surrounded by his family and children friends (see figure 1). When special agent Fleury tells his son, he has to leave for work and more specifically to Saudi Arabia, Kevin answers: “Too many bad people out there”. It is an establishing idea that “this Arab country” his father is travelling to is home to “too many bad people” and that his father is going after them. Following this line of thought, it has been established since the beginning of the movie that Arabs are the bad guys and until the end of the film they maintained this position. The film emphasizes also that the new Arab generations are far from changing this fact; On the opposite, they will continue the acts of terror. Indeed, timelessness, ahistoricity and cultural immutability are recursive tropes that colonial/imperial discourses capitalize on.

### Figure 1

*Agent Fleury’s Son in School – Screenshot from “The Kingdom” (2007)*



Further, the biased depictions of space are constructive in nature as it pushes the audience to make assumptions and define different spaces and not only who should inhabit them, but more importantly, who should be radically excluded from those given places. Similarly, *The Kingdom (2007)*, reinforces the idea that the space inhabited by the Arab children cannot be considered as a place in which innocence and childhood can exist since it is a world of childhood otherness. This reflects how the masses imagine children and childhood and whom we see as worthy of that “title” as well as whom are not entitled to be considered as such. In *The Kingdom (2007)* an American compound is the subject of a hostile terrorist attack due to which a number of children are badly injured or killed. As spectators, we learn that first, these are American children occupying a children’s space, which is the playground. Second, they embody both whiteness and innocence, which suddenly was attacked by terrorists. As such, these fragile and powerless children are in serious need of protection and any violent act towards the predators is solely accomplished in order to protect the vulnerable innocent little ones. All that comes after this pattern of “white victim in need of white protection” is legitimized. Duane contends that “the vulnerable and victimized child emerged as an essential element in structuring “natural” ways of thinking and feeling about the often violent process of nation-making” (Duane, 2011, p. 3).

While the focus is on the white children as the signifier of all children, other childhoods are denied the basic right of innocence simply because they are culturally, religiously, racially different. Ultimately, Hollywood’s historically maintained answer for the difference is to reject, marginalize and throw out of the box. It adopts a singular approach in representing children. This approach, which foregrounds the white, middle or upper class, bourgeois child as the naturally innocent and idealized child, making all other nuances of childhood as not worthy or not child enough and alienating all childhoods with the Western child.

Although the American black child is mostly marginalized, and cast as not a true American child, Agent Fleury’s child in the kingdom makes an exception. In a simple comparison between the American black child and the Arab/Muslim one the American seems to win the right to a dignified portrayal in which the historically attributions chasing him out of the American mainstream cultural, historical and socio economical realms fade away. John Fleury’s son exemplifies a wistful idealization of the child. When put in the same balance as the Arab Muslim child, he becomes the signifier of the American child and the carrier of all the meanings that should be attributed to a “true” child.

Hollywood’s denial of diversity in the levels of ethnicity, race, religion, culture while portraying children is a founding ground on which colonial based discourses build up. It is a pattern of discourse, which reduces all childhoods to a homogeneous entity. This narrow discourse and deliberate omission of the non-white children continues to naturalize the assumptions about the uniformity of the child subject setting the white child as the standard-bearer for all children. It should be noted that even when Arab kids are introduced as “innocent” this act does not level them up of make them equal to Western children. Specifically, the amalgam of innocence and savagery is far from asserting that Arab children can be similar or equivalent to western children. It just follows the western tradition of seeing non westerns as

innocent savages who will remain so even as grownups since their innocence is not an age bound characteristic, but rather a racial attribution that is synonymous to stupidity, ignorance and dependency that are foregrounded by the lack of knowledge of western manners and norms.

In this vein, the US film industry forms a new type of cultural hegemony; through which the ideologies of the dominant-self prevail. In movies tackling the war in Iraq, for instance, the constant tendency is to stress the “humanness” “innocence” and the “good will” of the American government in waging war against the “terrorist” Muslims. Meanwhile, the repeatedly promoted image of Muslims is that of dangerous and demonic beings who should be extracted, to the very last one of them. This uniformed and monochromatic portrayal narrows down the world’s perception about Arabs and reduces a whole people to a single, biased version despite its complexity and plurality. As Said contends:

Media are profit- seeking corporations and therefore, quite understandably, have an interest in promoting some images of reality rather than others. They do so within a political context made active and effective by an unconscious ideology, which the media disseminate without serious reservations of oppositions. (Said, 1994, p. 49)

Indeed, the tendency to favor certain ideas and views on behalf of others shows that American filmmakers have failed to fulfill their responsibility in presenting objective spectacle. Instead, they align with their government policies and vehicle their agendas towards Muslim countries through “collecting information on the outside world inside a framework dominated by government policy” (Said 1997, p. 50). The fact is, US media, including films connected the views of the Bush administration in deploying spectacles of 9/11 terror to promoting specific political agendas (Kellner 2007, p. 104). It is “propaganda disguised as entertainment” (Shaheen 2007, p. 187). Further, the thirst behind knowing and discovering the Orient is not a culturalist act as it has been promoted for centuries, it is rather a way to ensure the control and power over its people and land. In this sense, knowledge and power are intimately tied since the drive of acquiring knowledge about the Muslim world is grounded on political and economic interests impinge upon knowledge production. In Said’s words “the negative images of Islam continue to be much more prevalent than any others (...) such images correspond not to what Islam ‘is’ (...) but to what prominent sectors of a particular society take it to be” (Said, 1997, p. 144).

Whereas the white children are established as angels, violence and terrorism is set up and stressed as being the natural/normal state of being for Muslim children. In a warfare milieu, the Muslim child tends to be an unfeeling, harmful, wicked and a particularly non innocent being that even adult soldiers who are equipped with the latest most sophisticated weapons should be highly cautious about. This is not simply degrading to the Muslim child, but it significantly acts as permission to anyone out there to be hostile and violent towards these children. Ultimately, generating distorted portrayals about Arabs gave and continues to grant the Western world the justification and legitimization to colonize, exploit, and oppress the



orient. Therefore, any military aggression against the Arabo-Muslim world is sustained and any legitimate defense of a violated Muslim land is overruled.

Although other forms of popular culture have been harshly criticized when the representation of children does not comply with the universal rules and regulation and ignores the sensitivity of this age group, Hollywood's depiction of non-white children is unquestionably accepted. Many theorists continue to argue that children's representation should be tackled in a responsible and sensitive manner, especially by the news and the films, which introduce children in a warfare situation. The representation of underage individuals needs "to comply with the standards, regulations, laws and guidelines that regulate the media activity regarding the persons who are very vulnerable mainly from the psychological point of view. Persons who must get a more efficient protection from all the institutions that are meant to watch over them" (Vlad, 2017, p. 116). Indeed, in theory the UNICEF and Media Monitoring Project recommends that high precaution should be taken while representing children and minors in general, since

Children are often associated with innocence, purity and vulnerability but may also be vulnerable to poor treatment and human rights violations. Such events are newsworthy and should be covered by the media, yet this coverage has a potential to expose child victims to secondary trauma. (Vlad, 2017, p. 116).

Clearly, screening a Muslim child as less of a child will affect the world's perception and attitude towards that child. Yet, what is more critical is that it can have destructive effects on the Muslim child psychology. The process of identifying with the child on screen has the potential to deeply mingle with their personality building, psyche, sentiments of belonging and their self-esteem. A number of illustrations confirm the deep impact media has on children and teenagers. One of the most controversial ones is the case of Netflix series *13 reasons why* that led to the rise of suicide among children aged ten to seventeen.

The complexity of media representation of all children cannot be denied, but the present paper aims to draw further attention to the fact that the effect of media representation on children cannot be considered the same, especially when there is a malfunction in the way children from different backgrounds, races, religions and spaces are defined. Simply put, although the human rights of all children are affected by certain representations, a comparison between the way a white and a non-white child are presented to the world is far from being objected to the same standards since the latter is already stereotyped as the enemy. UNICEF cited a 2004 survey by Mori for Young People Now magazine that states how young people were increasingly presented in the media as "problems". Yet, in the case of Hollywood Media representation of Arabo-Muslim children, the young fellows are stuck with a more dangerous label than simply problems as they are depicted as "Jihadists" or "terrorists". In this sense, the discourse of childhood becomes politically fueled. Michel Foucault argues that childhood and threats to the notion of innocent childhood, became a

Theme of political operations, economic interventions... and ideological campaigns for raising standards of morality and responsibility. The white upper class childhood serves here as a weapon for those in power to stress a “society’s strength, revealing both its political energy and its biological vigor (p.146).

The fact that these movies fail to describe the multiple forms of abuse and ill-treatments Arab/Muslim children face at the time of war and conflict is highly significant. The negation of Muslim children and their systematic exclusion as equal victims of war or other forms of abuse emphasizes the impression that those acts are normal once they are carried towards non White children. It evokes the feeling that child abuse is not only common but legitimate. It only becomes abuse if the subject is a white western child. Thus, in the war scene, atrocities committed against children are considered tortures only when they happen to Western white children. Palestinian children who are beaten, tortured, killed and undignified every day are rarely seen as victims of war or subjects of torture, even though these acts are repeatedly carried under the watchful eyes of the entire world, its humanitarian committee and peace organizations.

Movies very rarely give a normal portrayal of Arab children depicting them as joyful kids who care about playing, having fun, going to school, engaging in children activities or even celebrating birthdays. Even when they are struggling to survive under occupation, in Palestine for instance, American films fail to convey their sufferings and refuses to depict them as victims. On the other hand, you will rarely see on screen American soldiers and settlers hurting, gunning and persecuting children or women. Altogether, the Arab children who are repeatedly presented as the “dangerous” “hostile” others are stripped from the basic attribution of a child which is innocence. This archaic mode of representing the black or non-white in general is according to Franz Fanon (1967) how the West’s literature and imagery are “put together by white men for little white men ... savages are always symbolized by Negroes of Indians” (Fanon, 1967, p. 146). Similarly, Arab children are dehumanized, as they take the roles of savages in Hollywood films, situated and presented to the world in areas that are often troublesome not innocent nor pure and decidedly they have become, naturally, constituents of the war and chaos décor. In most Hollywood films, Arab children are framed in a war milieu in a miserable state, but closer to being predators to being victims.

Over and above, the image of the black soldier boys becomes the terrorist boy in the case of Arab children. They are introduced as terrorists by nature. This terrorism discourse seems to negate empathy and compassion of the other as it prompts fear and horror. Such Orientalist portrayals go hand-in-hand with the perceptions that views childhood innocence as symbiotic with whiteness. One of the ways visual imagery reinforces white child innocence is through the depictions of non-white male children in wholly non-childlike roles. The Arab militant child is just an image that contradicts everything the West believes childhood is and what it should look like. The image of the Arab child in a war zone combatting American soldiers is linked to Historical Western consumptions that all Arab children as inherently savage and unredeemable. Further, those films often set the Arab male child in a dangerous space in which he has access to weapons on the one hand and the logistics’ aspect of terrorist acts. This idea

is recurrent in *American Sniper* (2013) where an Arab child who is just passing by finds a weapon on the streets and tries to use it. (see figure 2).

## Figure 2

*Screenshot of Arab Child picking up a Weapon in “American Sniper” (2013)*



This scene is very telling, because first, it expresses the child’s fear from the Western soldiers, a fear that has been inherent in the West/East dichotomy due to the residues of the military colonization of the Eastern lands; which lead to the killing of millions of natives. Second, it demonstrates hesitation on the part of the American Sniper and his relief once the child throws away the weapon. Again, this tells the audience that the American soldiers are humane and fair, who only shoot children and women to protect themselves. It reassures the audience that the killings committed in the Arabo-Muslim countries such as Iraq, are an obligation rather than a choice; whereas the facts tell another story. Indeed, the same movie opens with a child and his mother trying to throw a bomb on American soldiers. The mother hands the kid a grenade and he immediately starts running towards the American convoy. Once the sniper shoots him, the mother runs towards him shouting and to the audience’s surprise, she does not pick up her son but the grenade; which she throws at the soldiers. This suggests that not only the “other” children are terrorists by instinct, but that the Arab/Muslim child is encouraged to learn from an early age about killing and hating foreigners. Over and above, Hollywood stresses the custodian trait of culture and that the self/other conflict is endemic and everlastingly generational. In this way, cultural activism is perpetuated as a trait that is carried over generations. As for mothers, they merely have any loving motherhood feelings and could not care less for their children whom they send to war scenes. Arab mothers are, hence, ruthless and unloving mothers who use their children as tools/weapons and puppet them to commit terrorist acts and die all along. The fact is, even when he shoots dead a mother and her child, American sniper Chris is depicted as a hero who saves his colleagues from terrorists. A simple scroll on YouTube comments on this scene confirms the success of Hollywood’s attribution of heroic status to the sniper on the one hand and demonic characteristics to the Arab child on the other.

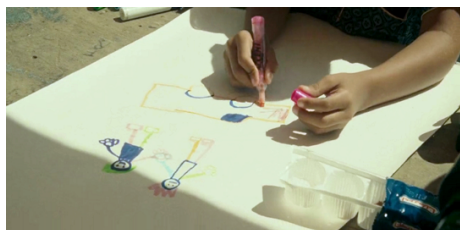
As such, representation of the Muslim child terrorist in Hollywood movies strips these children from any kind of innocence and labels them as primitive, immoral and threatening. This serves to elide the Muslim child status as an innocent victim and put them instead alongside the adults’ terrorists as equally culpable. (Olson 2017, p. 182) Eventually, the violent trait of Muslim children is a fundamental point of difference between Muslim and Western children that puts the former in the position of remorseful perpetrators and reaffirms that the concept of childhood as such is exclusive to the white Western world and cannot be found anywhere else. In this

sense, the discussed movies deny the possibility that the social, political and economic conditions and the Western interference being the cause of the socio-political unrest in the Middle East and the Arab World at large. On the other hand, it demonstrates that complete disorder, terror and chaos are “natural” characteristics of this space. Similarly, the Western hegemonic hands are introduced as humanitarian, peacemakers with the sole purpose of lifting, taming and civilizing the Other.

In effect, even children’s activities such as drawing and playing are considered suspicious and intolerable when performed by Arab children. An obvious illustration of this is the scene in which Abu Hamza’s grandson, in *The Kingdom* (2007), is drawing a sketch of the bombarding of an American compound in Jaddadh (see Figure 3). This sequence connotes that drawing which is a natural pastime for children is not used as it should be by Arab children since every single activity they engage with is linked to “Jihad” and bloodshed. Similarly, *Babel’s* (2006) storyline thrives on a couple of Arab siblings playing with their father’s rifle and end up shooting an American tourist. The Moroccan child in this movie is portrayed as ruthless and cruel. Even when the police come to arrest them, the Arab child tries to shoot the police officers and only gives up when his brother is shot. This demonstrates the brutality of Arab childhood and confirms the perpetuated ideology that labels Arab children as unworthy of the title of “children”.

### Figure 3

*Abu Hamza’s Son Drawing the Bombing in “The Kingdom” (2007)*



It cannot be denied that after 9/11 the most common characteristic perpetuated by Hollywood in the representation of Arabs and Islam is “terror”. Today, Islam is considered by many as a religion of fanaticism and fundamentalism that encourages war and bloodshed. Likewise, Muslim children are mostly introduced in warfare milieu and often look familiar and naturally belonging to that space. Further, Arabic and Islamic terms, namely “Jihad” continue to be hegemonically misdefined to serve the propaganda and convey the ideologies of the powerful. In fact, Jihad is one of the most discussed and represented issues by the American media. Yet, it is generally misconstrued and referred to as “the holy war”. This is the impression most of the moviegoers are left with after watching almost any Hollywood movie about Islam. Islam is interchangeably used as Jihad and vice versa this conceptualization is recurrent in the kingdom (2007) where Muslims are constantly carrying out terrorist acts against Americans. In it, the impression the viewers are left with is that Islam equals jihad equals terrorism. Doing so, the movie makers claim understanding of a very complex notion that is Jihad and give themselves the right to showcase the Islamic religion and speak on behalf of a whole people

about a specific and intricate concept. In fact, the very concept of “jihad” carries multiple connotations linguistically and religiously, for instance actions like fasting, abstinence, giving money to the needy, defending the weak, not following one whims are all considered “Jihad”. However, much of the American news and film industry intentionally opts for a violent ferocious depiction of Jihad, linking it to terrorism, and considering it as a holy war waged against the West.

As a result, many places in the world reached the point where no other meaning could be associated with jihad, but this misconception became inculcated in the general public’s mind. This reductionist interpretation of this broad term has definitely generated hatred and facilitated the Western infiltration and military intervention in Arab countries such as Iraq under the pretext of disarming the country of weapons of mass destruction. The sentiment of fear that has been created through interpretations of jihad and its created connection with terrorism has given permission and rationale to the United States to perform cruel acts against Iraqi people, women and children included. The same fear gifted the United States with support not only from international organizations such as the UN, which fundamental role is to avoid war and maintain peace, but more importantly from the common man.

This is not to diminish the horror and cruelty of terrorist acts committed against civilians, but rather to question how the deeds of a minority group of fundamentalists and extremists, who are condemned by Muslims themselves, can define a whole people, exacerbate their situation, demonize their true nature and distort their identity. This demonization of Islam and Muslims did not even spare children who are considered as evil as the “rest of them”. It has also resulted in many aggressions against Muslims such as the occupation of Palestine, the ethnic cleansing of Bosnian Muslims by Serbians, the torture of Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar, Russian aggression against Muslims in Chechnya, and war in countries like Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Yemen. In all those cases, the world turns a blind eye to the wickedness, atrocities and war crimes that are committed every day against innocent Muslim civilians, and especially children.

Additionally, Hollywood does not stop only at stripping the Arab child from all kinds of innocence, but asserts in many ways that this child is the continuity and safeguarding of terrorism as a cultural attribute pinned on the Arab race. They represent the future generations of fanatics, the tomorrow’s leaders of terror and the hateful “Others” who threatens the “Self’s” reign. In a number of post 9/11 movies the Arab/Muslim child became a symbol of a “bad” seed that will grow to become a terrorist because it runs in their genes. The ending of *The Kingdom* (2007) reflects this idea. The grandchild of Abu-Hamza (the terrorist killed by Americans) is asked in Arabic by his aunt: “What did your grandfather say, before they killed him?” The boy replied in a serious and angry tone: “He told me: don’t worry son, we’ll kill them all”. This sequence affirms that although American soldiers succeeded in killing Abu-Hamza, they can never radically eliminate terrorism, since it is a legacy that Arabs/Muslims pass down from a generation to another.

## Conclusion

Judging by the aforesaid, we have come full circle in the portrayals of Muslim children in post-9/11 American cinema. First, Muslim children are stripped of their innocence, then Hollywood attributes to them traits like untrustworthiness and savagery, and, eventually, they are associated with terrorist acts to establish that they are not children or at least they are not like the “white” children. They are portrayed as fanatic, fundamentalist, anti-democratic and terrorist “children”. We departed from the “orientalized” images “ignorant” or “primitive” who know nothing about Western regulations and norms, to reach the state in which Arab children become equally culpable in terrorism as do their “terrorist” communities. Hence, the identity of Muslim/Arab children is distorted as they are denied diversity and plurality. Instead, Hollywood demonstrates that the new Arab child, as imagined in the modern white mind and depicted on the screen, is demonized and stripped from their own “innocent” nature to take up the cruel role of “the jihadist” and “terrorist”. Many American films as such often presents a pro-war and anti-Muslim/Arab view and support the preferred American government outlook, erasing Arab children from the landscape of childhood and innocence. In doing so, the US film industry allows for a conscious dismissal of any positive image that these children could be given and lets triumph the western model of children of which all other childhoods supposedly fall short. Such depictions, originally descendants of colonial imagery, continue to further the notion of Arab childhood as Other and inherently non-innocent, impure, violent and terrorist.

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## **Language, Culture, and Indigeneity: Reflections on their Interplay**

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### **Abstract**

Language encultures the speaker as subject and provides access to an identity that is grounded in frames of knowing and being. This paper gives an overview of Indigeneity in relation to language and culture from four different pathways: 1) language and self-preservation, 2) nonviolent means to communal well-being, 3) student narratives and agency, and 4) the forward gaze of conceptions of “abode” and “sojourn.” A reflection on the value of Indigenous ways of knowing, remembering, and performing in Native culture, as well as in the dominant, broader society, intersect in these pages.

*Keywords:* agency, culture, indigenous peoples, language

From time immemorial, humans have interacted in groups both cooperatively and competitively. This intermingling has been marked by differing levels of affiliation, affirmation and/or aggression. Societies have functioned and evolved with structures of power, control, and influence generated by certain natural and nurtured drives and ambitions. Societies, to greater or lesser degrees, have promoted the security and well-being of its members, or have subjugated and/or exploited those deemed weaker, more precarious, less recognizable and less grievable, (Butler, 2006) casting certain members as “others.” *Fraternité* all too often becomes *adversaire*. As human groups divide and coalesce around divergent ambitions and tasks for survival and empowerment, culture with its systems of knowing and ways of reproducing norms and morays becomes epistemological, ontological, and axiological. Whose knowing and what is worth knowing becomes both remembrance and performance. Power structures ask whose remembering and whose performing is both essential and lauded as the standard for a grouping of people. Language is essential to the remembrance and performance of culture. As language fills this role, it seeks a communicative means to relay essential understandings in a culture.

Pai, Adler, and Shadiow (2006) define culture as the patterns of “knowledge, skills, behaviors, attitudes, and beliefs, as well as material artifacts, produced by human society and transmitted from one generation to another” (p. 19). They assert that culture also includes the whole of humanity’s endeavors in the collective areas of “intellectual, social, technological, political, economic, moral, religious, and aesthetic accomplishments” (p. 19). Culturally relevant education would then explain, reinforce, critique, and convey these patterns and collections in critical yet affirming ways, without explicitly or implicitly privileging any certain ways of knowing over other forms of knowledge. This standard of education is a challenging one, but one a society must seek to attain. Indeed, culture can be thought to consist of “standards and control mechanisms with which members of a society assign meanings, values, and significance to things, events, and behaviors” (p. 20). When a culture is considered “normal” it is being reified at the expense of all broader and conflicting ideals of culture. The normal becomes superior and that culture or society, which is different, is all too often relegated to an inferior status. Such was the case in the United States in relation to its Indigenous peoples.

A case in point is the historical attempt via boarding schools to enculturate Indigenous tribal members into a “superior” European “civilized” society, which has arguably left a huge blight on Native peoples through decades upon decades. Many tribal members feel the sting of this educative process largely framed by Captain Richard H. Pratt in the late 1800s. His words painted a debilitating, problematic, and condescending view of the Native born peoples of the Americas.

A great general has said that the only good Indian is a dead one, and that high sanction of his destruction has been an enormous factor in promoting Indian massacres. In a sense, I agree with the sentiment, but only in this: that all the Indian there is in the race should be dead. Kill the Indian in him, and save the man. (1892/1973)

Pratt, who would become infamous for the words often shortened to “Kill the Indian, save the man,” advocated the assimilation of American Indians into society much as the Germans had been assimilated on US soil. In Pratt’s way of thinking, the immersion into white civilization would benefit the “savage.”

It is a great mistake to think that the Indian is born an inevitable savage. He is born a blank, like all the rest of us. Left in the surroundings of savagery, he grows to possess a savage language, superstition, and life. We, left in the surroundings of civilization, grow to possess a civilized language, life, and purpose. Transfer the infant white to the savage surroundings, he will grow to possess a savage language, superstition, and habit. Transfer the savage-born infant to the surroundings of civilization, and he will grow to possess a civilized language and habit. These results have been established over and over again beyond all question; and it is also well established that those advanced in life, even to maturity, of either class, lose already acquired qualities belonging to the side of their birth, and gradually take on those of the side to which they have been transferred. (1892/1973)

To Pratt and his contemporaries, it was expedient that the answer to problems concerning the Indians of the West was to assimilate them through boarding schools into the “civilization” of the white as a blank to be filled with the possession of a “civilized language and habit” (1892/1973). This audacious goal would disrupt and destroy the culture and society of large groups of Native Americans for generation after generation, arguably the effects being felt in families and communities still today. Language, knowledge systems, and culture were all largely dislocated, and they have struggled to have an affirmed functioning in tribes today, including in educational systems.

The questions of whose knowing, whose remembering, and whose performing as a result of passing on culture are critical and foundational to a society, both for survival and cultural propagation. In considering Native American epistemologies, one should ask, how a society might learn and retain the knowledge of Indigeneity. What if we spent more time and money creating cultural forms and spaces for creativity expression, nonviolent affirmations, and liberating productivity instead of forcing the assimilation into the broader demographic of society as was done in the boarding schools?

Such an inquiry seems to speak to the condition in which we find today’s Indigenous populations following centuries of colonization and decades of boarding schools and other detrimental learning conditions and processes. This can leave Native students in the position where they experience both contradiction and hope regarding their culture and experiences of learning in their Native tongues (Lomawaima & McCarty, 2006, p. 148). On the one hand, Native students may have felt the sting of deficit ideologies levied at their language and heritage in the form of “linguistic repression and the residue of ideological ambiguity” (p. 148). Yet, they might also feel a hope that connections to culture and the expression of language (as valuing heritage language is central to identities) may help facilitate learning and contribute to cultural relevancy. In the following, addressing links between language,

culture, and education, this paper will provide an overview of significant “spaces” in which culturally relevant education intersects four pathways: 1) language and self-preservation, 2) nonviolent means to communal well-being, 3) student narratives and agency, and 4) the forward gaze of “abode” and “sojourn.”

### **Language Preservation as a Means to Self-Preservation**

In Oklahoma, the preservation of Native languages is a priority to many of the 39 federally recognized tribes and is tantamount to self-preservation as a nation and a people. In interviewing James Parrish (personal communication, April 7, 2015), a major participant in the preservation of the language for the Oklahoma Chahtas, one comes to understand the circle that connects language, culture, identity, and agency. Parrish, as the Executive Education Director for School Programs of the Choctaw (Chahta) Nation in Oklahoma, has seen 38 schools in the ten and a half counties in Southeast Oklahoma that comprise tribal land gain Chahta language classes with five more that started in 2015 or soon after. Parrish is a third-generation educator with 34 years of experience, whose family lineage has seen many teachers and school administrators. He declares that the heart of Chahta language education is its first speakers. Parrish asserts that these first speakers will lead in the revitalization of the tribal language and make a lasting impact on the future of Chahta people. For him, the language, narrative, stories, and identity are all inextricably linked: “Language hits to the core of who a person is!”

Language means identity for tribal members. A primary key to cultural preservation and vital existence is the overall effort of promoting and preserving language. This is accomplished by the Chahtas of Oklahoma through developing programs for those who want to learn their Native tongue. Incidentally, the name Oklahoma, *Oklahumma*, is Chahta for “red people,” and so the state of Oklahoma means the “state belonging to Red People” (Parrish, 2015). The United States, as well as the individual states, “need to be on the side of language, so it does not disappear,” Parrish asserts (2015). Parrish and the Chahta Nation had to learn how to deliver the language education. OK HB 2921 (Oklahoma House Bill 2921) supporting Native language was signed into law by the Oklahoma Governor on April 7, 2014 (Oklahoma State House, 2014). The legislation became a pathway to teach Chahta in Oklahoma schools (Parrish, 2015).

An important area of inquiry pointed out by Lomawaima and McCarty (2006) is the perception of Native youth toward their heritage language. These attitudes likely run a spectrum of opinions from those living remotely from tribal land and those living on tribal nation land. How would these perceptions influence language choice, promote cultural heritage, and affect agency? For purpose of inquiry, Paulo Freire in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* makes the connection that people must name their world and have a true reading of the world (1970/2010). This critical theory idea of human liberation interconnects well with the idea of language preservation and self-preservation for it conscientizes the human as subject (1970/2010). Language can thus be thought of as enculturating a people, in this case Chahtas in their own heritage and dialectic.

Critique of how a national cultural structure either serves the authentic interests of all citizens or fails to represent those ideals that contribute to the well-being, even its citizen most distant from the foci of the culture at large, involves knowing, remembering, and performing. Language, being the primary tool to delineate, perpetuate, and authenticate all three of these expressions of cultural functioning, is essential. However, it can be lost in the role as a subaltern. Spivak (2010) addresses this thought with much questioning, referencing Foucault and Said, and determines from them that the subaltern needs “permission to narrate” (p. 258). Having the voice of “subject” is the privilege of those who own their language.

The dichotomy that presents itself is whether to approach education from emphasizing strengths or from accenting deficits. Confronting the huge tragedies and the destructive forces to which so many tribes were subjected, it seems that often Native students feel rage, disillusion, and hopelessness at the horror of that history. Our interest is in knowing how leaders and teachers can help Native students use those narratives and stories for positive transformation and empowerment as opposed to anger and self-sabotage. This seems to characterize under-resourced and minority students of color in a similar way, as subalterns.

One anonymous teacher of Native language remarked with frustration about the students’ overall lack of motivation and the educational system’s seemingly defunct processes for educating Indigenous students successfully in Native languages. “OUTSIDE of that [conventional state] system I have much more freedom to really teach like I want to and to really target my efforts on to people who will take what I have to offer and run with it,” she states (B. Anonymous, personal communication, May 3, 2015). With the evident wringing of hands, this educator expressed duly the combination of concerns for systemic shortcomings and for students having missed cultural opportunities.

The teacher continues: “We need an immersion school with properly trained second language teachers who know the grammar of Chahta. And, we need to be teaching little kids in ONLY Chahta – with English grammar courses [added later] in their curriculum in order for them to be competitive in an English-speaking society. But I aint holdin my breath.” (personal communication, May 3, 2015). This interest in bilingual education with Indigenous language taught first to fluency is becoming more politically expedient. Lomawaima & McCarty (2006) outline success found by three language immersion schools: one in Hawaii – Anuenue School teaching the Native Hawaiian language, one in New Mexico – Cochita and Acoma Pueblo schools teaching Keres, and another in Arizona – Window Rock public schools teaching Navajo. They document these three successful Native language immersion schools, where students perform generally as well or better on assessments. They state: “A key strategy for reasserting Indigenous rights to heritage and community languages has been heritage/community-language immersion, instruction that provides all or most content in the tribal language” (p. 137) usually in early elementary years. Learning is better accomplished at least by a certain group on Indigenous land making the most of their traditional language knowledge forms early in life. Other older tribal members and allies may not be as quick to absorb content. However, when they do absorb the language concepts, it turns out to be considerably invigorating. As the anonymous Chahta teacher remarks: “I draw spiritual

satisfaction from the select few that I work with who actually retain my teachings and are approaching some kind of real fluency” (personal communication, May 3, 2015).

### **Agency Depends on Intention and Reflection of Narrative**

Agency in the perspective of some Native cultures might be thought of in terms of relational renewal. In the Blackfoot First Nation of Canada ways of knowing a story-place, *aoksisowaato’p*, is the ethical act of visiting a place to understand the relations and life-giving and life-sustaining renewal actively located there (Blood, Chambers, Donald, Hasebe-Ludt, & Big Head, 2012). Stories as narratives, and the place they occupy physically and intellectually, build a sense of meaning and belonging. They build meaningful culture into meaning bearing societies. As Dwayne Donald (2012) suggests in referencing Leroy Little Bear, “you know you have an identity problem when the land doesn’t recognize you” (p. 56). For Native societies driven away from their traditional lands the spatial detachment leads to a “gradual forgetting of the teachings that come from the land” (2012).

In the Spring of 2015 the U.S. Department of Education conducted a listening tour, which culminated in bringing 15 Native American students to Washington, D.C. to meet with then Secretary Arne Duncan. In the Student Voices Session meeting the students of a range of ages recounted their stories and perceptions concerning learning. “When Native students have a space for cultural continuity in an educational setting, they are tremendously more successful,” commented Laree, a Lakota and Oglala undergraduate student from Wisconsin (Ryan, 2015). This continuity can be shown in various ways but includes cultural sensitivity and spaces for both traditional practices and Native language use. A Native student at Rose State College echoed converse but similarly felt ideas concerning her educational pursuits. Robin, who is Seneca-Cayuga, remarks: “I have that thought of ‘can I make it’ every two weeks. I have felt disadvantaged on campus as a result of being American Indian. I felt like one professor wanted to keep me from becoming a success because I am Native American. I seek out my support, and I cry. When I get deflated, I find you” (personal communication, February, 24, 2014). For Robin, an affirming narrative from a culturally reinforcing and friendly educator on campus goes a long way to remind her of her ability to succeed because of, not in spite, her heritage.

In speaking with Sarah Adams-Cornell (personal communication, April 26, 2015) on the intersection of Native culture and language in education, she, a Chahta tribal member and a board member for the Oklahoma City Choctaw Tribal Alliance, expresses tirelessly the need to correct issues of oppression and to give hope to Indigenous people in Oklahoma and elsewhere. She is a principal organizer of the Idle No More of Central Oklahoma activist group in Oklahoma City. Sarah has a vested interest in educational services for her two daughters, Bella (age 14) and Gabby (age 8), both of whom attend Oklahoma City Public Schools. She, along with Dr. Star Yellowfish, have a pilot curriculum alternative to Land Run reenactments in Oklahoma third grade classes. She comments:

126 years ago, the most famous of the Oklahoma Land Runs took place. Since that time, every year, celebrations and reenactments have been happening to celebrate this event that broke apart Native families, left thousands homeless, glorified genocide, legalized theft and broken treaties. [Five] 5 years ago, I began working to end Land Run reenactments in our school.

Adams-Cornell suggests that educational efforts that promote agency in Native students must forsake the colonizing narratives and become historically comprehensive and encompassing. “To know that [our greeting] “halite” doesn’t simply mean “hello” but is a shortened phrase to express a sentiment that a person recognizes and sees the worth and light in you, can be transformative” she explains (personal communication, May 5, 2015). She elaborates in a hopeful tone: “This flows into the youth, as they recognize they are a part of this beautiful people and are inherently part of something bigger than themselves.” Reflection on this positive narrative is vital. Language knowledge and attainment builds positively on this need to identify with culture. Adams-Cornell concludes:

Learning and using their Native tongue gives them a sense of grounding and belonging. This is especially important during their formative years as they make decisions about who they are and what is important to them. Language learning programs offer them a place to direct their energy and a positive place to be. When a youth UNDERSTANDS the meaning behind the words in their language, they can experience a whole new love and appreciation for their culture.

These words from an *Oklahumma Chahta* are congruous with the efforts that happened in the Spring of 2015 in Montana.

Governor Bullock signed a bill aimed at preserving Native languages in May 2015. Sponsored by Sen. Jonathan Windy Boy, D-Box Elder, and Rep. George Kipp, D-Heart Butte, this legislation has as its focus “encouraging schools to develop American Indian language immersion programs and preserving Indian languages” (Baumann, 2015). The Governor promoted immersion classes stating: “Tribal languages are more than just a collection of words and phrases tied together. They represent the culture and history of not only Native Americans in our state, but in fact, they represent the culture and history of our entire state” (Baumann, 2015). Baumann reported that the \$45,000 earmarked for half-day immersion classes adds to efforts already made by Montana Indian educators:

The state [of Montana] has already made substantial efforts toward preserving Indian languages with Kipp’s bill and will extend the Montana Indian Language Preservation program, which was started in the 2013 legislative session after Windy Boy sponsored that bill. Under the measure, \$1.5 million will go to support the efforts of Montana tribes to preserve Indian languages in the form of spoken, written word or sign language over the next two years. (2015)



This extension of respect and support made by the state represents a pluralistic and inclusive valuing of Native heritage and culture through a positive recognition of Indigenous linguistic civil rights.

### **Nonviolence Essentiality in Tribal and Individual Wellbeing**

*“Until the philosophy which holds one race superior and another inferior is finally and permanently, discredited and abandoned, WAR.”* Bob Marley

A lesson that is derived from aboriginal stories, stories that recount the saving and guiding song of the magpie, *iinisskimm*, the spirit(s) of creation of *Naapi*, and the disappearance of the buffalo, *iinii*, is posited in the wisdom, “all human beings survive on the good graces of other beings” (Chambers, 2012, p. 53). While the signifier of the warrior in American Indian culture is a strong sign of manhood, there is a powerful connection and cooperative bond within tribes and allies. This largely emanates from the common personhood emphasized among Indigenous peoples of all societies. In Chahta the greeting “Halito” has the literal meaning “I recognize the light in you.” Or, a longer greeting, “Holitopa chia-hoke,” meaning “you are very beloved” (Chahta Nation School, 2015). This understanding of the value of the other is critical to self- and communal care. It is an example of the adaptation to nonviolence and cooperative practices. Praxis and curriculum for teaching language skills with respect toward cultural practices have the capacity to promote social well-being. When a person or group of people are consumed with the thoughts and fears of violence, they cannot effect the best future for themselves and their posterity.

John Mohawk asserts just this in his explanation concerning the *Origins of Iroquois Political Thought* when he muses: “The Peacemaker laid forth a promise of a hopeful future, a future in which there would be no wars, a future in which human beings would gather together to use their minds to create peace” (Mohawk1986/2001, p. 95). People cannot think and act clearly Mohawk suggests “in an environment dominated by revenge and death, fear and hatred” (p. 95). He alludes to the idea that agency in individuals and societies flourishes in spirits of collective identity, which “believe they have the potential to do what must be done in order to reach that future” (p. 95), and people living in fear cannot apply the best thinking processes to solve problems. A stable society requires a safe environment for “our children seven generations into the future” (p. 95). Therefore, it is important in the Mohawk culture to understand that the narrative includes the Peacemaker who brought a process of clear thinking to that reality of violence, to impart long-term change and well-being.

Violence toward any group, such as that instituted upon Indigenous peoples through physical warfare, forced relocation, or language disruption through boarding schools, is a system of the oppressor to dehumanize others iterates Paulo Freire (1970/2010). He states that the response of the oppressed to this violence is “grounded in the desire to pursue the right to be human.” Adams-Cornell advocates the humanizing affect often lost in the dominant contemporary society, the value of elders teaching children. Language courses often make this effective connection. She states: “Native languages are usually taught by elders which also instills generational learning and values. A great many things other than language are taught and passed on through this traditional relationship” (personal communication May 5,

2015). A strong humanizing connection in Indigenous culture is the affirming relationships fostered through relationships between the young and the old.

Lomawaima and McCarty (2006) draw conclusions that the positive views of language acquisition is often tempered by feelings of shame, thoughts that it is irrelevant or past oriented, and stigmas of being uneducated, dirty, or backward with no concept of the broader world. The nonviolent answer may be to create “new Indigenous-language safety zones” (p. 148), places where the positive perspective of language development is affirmed among young people and not perceived as a deficit. Lomawaima and McCarty assert that despite these deficit perception challenges concerning traditional Indigenous languages, “many Native youth continue to value the heritage language, view it as central to their identities, want adults to teach it to them, and employ it as a strategic tool to facilitate their learning in school” (p. 149). Many can look at the bilingual identities as a privilege and resource, one that fosters nonviolence and well-being.

### **Adopting a Forward Gaze Related to Culture and Society**

*“There is a sense in which we are all each other’s consequence.” Wallace Stegner*

In the training classes, where Bob (one of the authors), instructs single moms on welfare, he builds an abode for them as sojourners. He makes them laugh, teases them, tells them stories, asks them to relate their stories, makes himself vulnerable to their critique and inquiries, encourages their best efforts, interrogates good naturedly their shortcomings, engages them in their less effective labors, responds with goodwill to their teasing, expresses vulnerability and openness, and always, nearly always (as best a finite person can), respects their humanness and their journey of liberation. This is to create the affirming abode where sojourning souls can thrive.

In the forward to *Contemporary Studies in Environmental and Indigenous Pedagogies* (2013) Dwayne Donald asks the most relevant of questions: “How best to live well in the world and honour those entities that give life?” (p. viii). He lauds those authors who assist educators to “actually engage with the spirit and intent imagined in the Treaties” (p. viii). Donald implies that these agreements call on us to work together in mutual benefit, learning from the wisdom of multiple perspectives, and cooperating in a spirit of good relationality.

Abode and sojourn connect in this section as two ideas that demonstrate Pinar’s use of *currere* (Latin for “running, moving, traveling”), as referenced by Doll (2012), as a curriculum “that is infused with, indeed is permeated with, spirit. Such a curriculum is alive, vital, and dynamic” (p. 167). The education narrative/space as an abode and sojourn is relational, reciprocal, respectful, and mindful of place and story. These two ideas point toward a sense of living in place with that which is on a journey through the commons. Pinar (2012) echoes Chambers in stressing that the idea of ULUKHARTOKMIUT “*countenance of the commons* lives on in the language, stories, dances and songs...that dwelling and wayfinding within *nunakput* is impossible without the commons, without the collective

wisdom of those who had come before, without the smarts and the skills to live in this place” (p. 231). This Indigenous wisdom calls us to a curriculum of language and knowledge that both indicates an active existence, but one that is dependent on the experience of living in whatever harmony one can extrapolate in common lived experiences among others. It is in the dwelling of abode and the wayfaring of a sojourn that teachers invoke the commons of learning and praxis to gaze forward beyond oppression to a new cooperative of knowledge and identity.

When a person or society experiences a crisis in identity it leads to deficit ideologies and the internalization of oppression forming personal narratives embodied by stereotype threats (Gorski, 2010). Scornful gazing replaces a clear pluralistic and inclusive vision for the future. Adams-Cornell discusses how curriculum and practice in Indigenous language and education might help students formulate a more secure, confident identity and narrative, allowing for greater agency and educational outcomes, including the formation of language and cultural understanding and appreciation (personal communication, April 20, 2015). To help students be proud of being traditionally Chahta, Adams-Cornell suggests a future where Chahta youth come to a “knowing that the language is much deeper, and it values you as an individual and as a collective and part of a wonderful people.” Finding an abode in one’s heritage language and making a sojourn in that space can, “give you a feeling of peace, strength and pride. These feelings impact how you view and interact with the outside world and give you confidence. Success and, more importantly, happiness can be more attainable with this foundation,” states Adams-Cornell. She further explains: “A Native youth’s understanding of their tribal language is of great benefit to their overall success and happiness in many ways. Learning and using their Native tongue gives them a sense of grounding and belonging” (personal communication, May 5, 2015).

### **Concluding Thoughts**

The overview of this paper allows for a reconceptualization of society, culture, and language relevant to Indigenous education, but told from an outsider position. As ones who view from a distance, we seek to “*Bok awanvbli*,” cross that river to walk in another’s footsteps and to see and hear with similar eyes and ears. We do not pretend to know, but we do hope to learn and understand the value of Native peoples revitalizing language and learning. When each one in a society at large succeeds in achieving goals, dreams, and happiness, we are all benefitting. Will we finally as a whole society realize – we are all better off when we are all better off? Is it not time for white citizens to discuss racism as a system of disadvantage based on race rather than as individual acts, which they themselves rarely commit? We feel strongly that reality exists in continua, not binaries. There is a continuum of racist acts running from lynching or Indian genocide on one end of the range to ignorance and complicity on the other. There is also a continuum of disadvantage stretching from utter and abject “poverty” on one end through the gamut to a holistic synergy of equality and equity on the other.

The answers to these questions lie, in our opinion, in best-regarding and reciprocally engaging American Indian societies, their ways of knowing, and their knowledge-makers. American society would do well to apply Indigenous “truth” by honoring all treaty agreements and all people groups and their cultures. In this act of honoring and connecting with Indian Nations, one must “cross the river” as James Parrish encourages non-Native individuals (personal communication April 2015). The dominant cultural group and other Americans would do well to put themselves in the position of the Native person, to walk a mile in their moccasins as the old adage goes. Any research with Native nations in Oklahoma or elsewhere would need to be community and Native driven and follow the four Rs of Critical Indigenous Research: Relationality, Responsibility, Respect, and Reciprocity (Brayboy, Gough, Leonard, Roehl II, & Solyom, 2012). This pattern is reciprocal and would claim for all the wisdom of centuries of cooperative and sustainable living.

Many states could soon follow the example of Montana and begin to see the need for immersion schools for Native languages to protect both language rights and culture. While Carrie Iron Shirt missed out on having Native Blackfeet spoken in her home due to her father’s tragic experiences at boarding schools, Carrie strove to have this be different for her daughter. Iron Shirt enrolled her daughter, Jade, into a private school educating through immersion in the Blackfeet language. Her daughter can now speak the language fluently with her grandparents, which gratefully ties the generations together. Jade remarks: “‘You learn about your culture more, and that’s what’s more important, you know? ‘Cause our culture is dying’” (Martin, 2015). Legislation in the state of Montana provides subsidies for American Indian language immersion programs in schools that teach at least a half day in the Native tongue. These types of efforts are reversing generations of assimilation attempts at removing the Indian from the person. We would all do well to move forward with a conscientious view of the past and a humble embrace and engagement of both linguistic heritage in remembrance and future performance through abode and then co-sojourn.

### **A Tangible Beacon of Hope**

According to the National Congress of American Indians (2023), there are approximately 644,000 American Indian and Alaska Native students in the U.S. K-12 system, representing about 1.2% of public school students nationally. 90% of Native students attend public schools, while 8% attend schools administered by the Bureau of Indian Education.

Oklahoma is a home to 39 tribal nations (Oklahoma Council for Indian Education, 2023) and has more than 156,000 Indigenous public school students statewide (Krehbiel-Burton, 2023), who comprise 19% of the total student population in the state, second only to Alaska with 27% (National Congress of American Indians, 2023).

The data compiled by the Oklahoma Advisory Council on Indian Education, through the end of the 2021-2022 school year, show that the number of Oklahoma public school students taking an Indigenous language for a world language credit has increased by almost 1,000 pupils over the last two school years. It does not include students learning Indigenous

languages in private schools, through supplemental offerings, or in courses listed with the Oklahoma State Department of Education (OSDE) under other disciplines. This information is provided by Krehbiel-Burton (2023) in the recent Tulsa World article.

Krehbiel-Burton (2023) further shares that during the 2021-2022 school year, nine tribal languages – Cherokee, Cheyenne, Chickasaw, Choctaw, Comanche, Muscogee, Osage, Pawnee, and Potawatomi – could be taken for a world language credit through at least one Oklahoma charter school or public school district. The Oklahoma State Department of Education also has codes in place for Seminole and Sauk, should a school district choose to offer them for academic credit, and is in conversations with the language departments at three additional tribes about credit codes available as soon as the 2023-2024 school year. In addition to the new programs, the state’s two tribally operated charter schools are each undergoing expansion.

It is expected that the number of offered Indigenous languages and the number of public school students taking them will both continue to increase. As the OSDE World Languages Department Director, Cathleen Skinner, states: “Research has shown time and again that when an American Indian student has access to their Native language, even if they’re minimal speakers, they have that stronger connection to their culture” (Krehbiel-Burton, 2023).

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