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Are Miyazaki Hayao's Animations on the Waves of Media Globalization?

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宮崎駿のアニメ映画はメディア・グローバリゼーションの波に乗っているのか

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Abstract

Miyazaki Hayao's animated films have attracted global audiences since his acceptance of the Golden Bear Award (2002) and an Academy Award (2003) for *Spirited Away* (2002). Critic Otsuka Eiji, who discusses Miyazaki's *Princess Mononoke* (1997) within the framework of Joseph Campbell's standardized hero's journey or "monomyth," maintains that *Princess Mononoke* (1997) rode the wave of media globalization mainly due to the collaboration with the Walt Disney Company. He also argues that this is significant because Miyazaki eventually changed his narrative structure to follow the basic pattern of the mythological adventure of a hero of the *Star Wars* / Campbell type: separation-initiation-return. However, *Princess Mononoke* has several structural variants in its narrative, one of which is the pervasive maternal elements.

Seeing the body as a symbol of society, the cultural anthropologist Mary Douglas writes, "the powers and dangers credited to social structure are reproduced in small on the human body." My paper focuses on the representations of the body in Miyazaki's *Princess Mononoke, Spirited Away*, and *Ponyo on the Cliff by the Sea*, and discusses how the various bodies and their womb-like "vessels" that nurture and recreate them represent symbolic social relations.

Significantly, Miyazaki's animations have intertextuality with various pre-texts including a French fairy tale "Beauty and the Beast," Ursula K. Le Guin's Earthsea books, Christian Andersen's "Little Mermaid," "Snow Queen," and a Japanese folk tale "Anchin and Kiyohime," which share a similar plot structure and characters with Miyazaki's films. Additionally, the films are set in familiar Japanese locations that evoke nostalgia in Japanese audience.

Miyazaki's work seems to be globally circulated in Disney's distribution of his films. Is this just for boosting the sales? This paper tackles this question from a post-colonial perspective and examines Miyazaki's contribution to creating the "location of culture" in his animations.

Key words: Miyazaki Hayao, Globalization, Body, Maternal Place, Postcolonialism

要 旨

宮崎駿のアニメ・フィルムは、『千と千尋の神隠し』(2002) で金熊賞(2002) やアカデミー賞(2003) を受賞して以来、グローバルに観客の心を捉えてきた。批評家大塚英二は、『もののけ姫』(1997) を ジョセフ・キャンベルの標準化された英雄の旅(原質神話)の枠内で論じて、この作品がウォルト・ ディズニー・カンパニーとの提携によって、メディア・グローバリゼーションの波に乗ったと主張す る。それは、宮崎が「スター・ウォーズ / キャンベル」タイプの英雄の神話的冒険の基本パターン (離別・イニシエーション・帰還)に従って物語構造を変えてしまったからであると言う。しかし、『も ののけ姫』には、物語構造にいくつかの変型があり、母性的要素が充満していることはその一つであ る。

文化人類学者メアリー・ダグラスは、身体を社会の象徴と見ながら、「社会構造に内在すると信じられている能力や危険が凝縮して人間の肉体に再現されている」と述べている。本稿は、宮崎の『もののけ姫』『千と千尋の神隠し』『崖の上のポニョ』(2008)での豊かな身体的表象に注目し、多様な身体とそれらを養い、再生させる母胎のような容れものが、いかに社会的関係を象徴的に表しているかを検証する。

注目すべきは、宮崎作品が様々な既存テクストーフランスの文芸おとぎ話「美女と野獣」、アーシュ ラ・K・ル=グィンの「ゲド戦記」、クリスチャン・アンデルセンの「人魚姫」「雪の女王」、そして日 本の民話「安珍と清姫」など―と間テクスト性をもつことである。また、宮崎の作品は、日本の観衆 にノスタルジーを喚起する馴染み深い日本的な場所に設定されている。

ディズニー配給による宮崎作品のグローバル的流通は、商品売り上げの増大だけが目的なのだろう か。本稿は、ポストコロニアル視点からこの疑問を取り上げ、宮崎による彼自身の「文化の場所」の 創出について検証する。

キーワード:宮崎駿、グローバリゼーション、身体、母性的場所、ポストコロニアリズム

Introduction

The unique characters and settings in Japanese animator Miyazaki Hayao's films have attracted global audiences since his acceptance of awards such as the Golden Bear Award (2002) and an Academy Award (2003) for *Spirited Away* (2002). According to critic Otsuka Eiji, who discusses Miyazaki's *Princess Mononoke* (1997) within the framework of Joseph Campbell's standardized hero's journey or "monomyth" described in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces, Princess Mononoke* (1997) rode the wave of media globalization mainly due to the collaboration with the Walt Disney Company (*Monogatariron de yomu* 150-54). This is significant, Otsuka maintains, not because of the global distribution of the film, but because Miyazaki eventually changed his narrative structure to follow the basic pattern of the mythological adventure of a hero of the *Star Wars* / Campbell type: separation-initiation-return (*Hero* 30). However, besides being a Campbell type, as Otsuka admits, *Princess Mononoke* has several structural variants in its narrative, one of which is the pervasive maternal elements (155).

After *Princess Mononoke*, Miyazaki's other films, *Spirited Away* and *Ponyo on the Cliff by the Sea* (2008), were also distributed by the Walt Disney Company Japan. It seems that the maternal elements that are representative of motherhood and a womb-like magical world continue to appear in both films. Additionally, the maternal places in these three films always work as sites for purifying and regenerating bodies.

In this paper I examine Otsuka's assumption by focusing on abundant representations of bodies in these three films and seeing the body as a symbol of society. As the cultural anthropologist Mary Douglas writes in *Purity and Danger*, "the powers and dangers credited to social structure are reproduced in small on the human body" (142).

The Body in Princess Mononoke

Let us start with *Princess Mononoke*, set in late fifteenth-century Japan, and discuss how bodies are portrayed in relation to Douglas's dirt or contamination. The body of the young male protagonist, Ashitaka, is contaminated when he defends his tribe by killing the Cursed God, a wild boar god who was shot by humans and whose hatred of mankind has transformed him into a monster. The mark of contamination left on Ashitaka's right arm is a sign of a terminal disease, the pollution he now carries. He is forced to embark on a journey to confront his unreasonable fate and learn about his contamination. According to Douglas:

Dirt... is never a unique, isolated event. Where there is dirt there is system. Dirt is the by-product of a systematic ordering and classification of matter, in so far as ordering involves rejecting inappropriate elements. (44)

At the end of his journey, Ashitaka encounters Lady Eboshi and San, who are socially marginalized and similarly possessed by a curse or a hatred of others. Thus, he comes to recognize his social position in the world as one of the cursed, or what Julia Kristeva calls the "abject,"¹⁾ representing those rejected as a danger to society (Kristeva. *Powers of Horror* 4; Douglas. *Purity and Danger* 142).

Significantly, the bodies of Eboshi and San represent ambiguity and the in-between. Eboshi is an efficient career woman who runs an ironworks operation deep in the mountains, violating the taboo of ironworks, originally a male-dominated world. On the one hand, the ironworks are devastating the surrounding environment and manufacturing fire weapons, but on the other Eboshi accepts socially rejected people such as lepers and victimized women as residents. Thus her body is a composite of aggressiveness, violence, the desire to nurture, and compassion for others. Meanwhile, adopted and mothered by the Wolf Goddess, San hates human beings, yet she speaks the humans' language and wears clothes: both symbols of civilization. San's body represents the interface between humans and wildlife or civilization and wilderness.

Reading *Princess Mononoke* in Campbell's fashion, Otsuka argues that the male hero Ashitaka enters the "Belly of the Whale," a place for his regeneration²⁾, in the process of his quest for his purification (150). However, it is not enough to see Eboshi's ironworks as the "Belly of the Whale" from the male hero's viewpoint because her own agency and subjectivity are also described in detail. And this is also the case with the primeval forest where San and the Deer Goddess cohabit. The film is also concerned with how Eboshi, San, and the Deer Goddess hyperactively struggle and eventually regenerate themselves in the forest. Thus, all the major characters including Ashitaka struggle for survival as cursed bodies. As is hinted at by the catchphrase, "Do Survive!" printed on the DVD box of the film, survival is the film's theme.

The Maternal Place

It is significant that the forest is portrayed as a feminine and maternal place pervaded with the ultimate otherness of men. Kristeva calls this otherness "the feminine," or the "mother" that is uncanny and destructive, but also fascinating. It does not mean an innate feminine essence, but rather "an unnamable otherness" that can be faced beyond and through the triangulating function of the paternal prohibition (*Powers of Horror* 58-59). Kristeva also calls this otherness Plato's "chora" in *Timaeus*: "...an ancient, mobile, unstable receptacle, prior to the One, to the father, and even to the syllable, metaphorically suggesting something nourishing and maternal" (*In the Beginning* 5). The forest is filled with abundant images of the Mother: the clean and clear water of the pond heals the wounded, and the owner of the pond, the Deer Goddess, presides over life and death for all the wildlife that live there.

The forest is the place where San and the Wolf Goddess unite to fight their enemies; Eboshi invades the forest with her men³; Ashitaka struggles with the black snakes of a cursed monster

latent in his disease, and slimy and scorching substances are discharged from the severed body of night-walker Didarabocchi, a nocturnal self of the Deer Goddess. Thereby, the forest comes to serve as the place to discharge each character's abject.

At the end of the story, Ashitaka's disease is almost cured, with only a slight scar left on his palm. Likewise, the forest as the maternal place works as the site of regeneration both for Eboshi and San: Eboshi restarts her ironworks, and San renews her tie with Ashitaka.

Pollution and Survival in Spirited Away

We also find the themes of pollution and survival in Miyazaki's *Spirited Away* because bodies are variously portrayed in relation to pollution that is a target of cleansing in a mystical bathhouse, Yuya. The story opens with ten-year-old Chihiro's family moving to a new town. On their way to their new house, the family accidentally enters a magical world where her parents are turned into pigs by a witch. In order to rescue her parents and go back to the human world, Chihiro learns from a mysterious boy, Haku, that she has to work for the old witch, Yubaba, who oversees the magical bathhouse where deities visit for bathing and cleansing their bodies. Then, Chihiro is named "Sen" by the witch, and thereby she is robbed of her true name and loses her identity. The bathhouse for the Japanese, as cultural anthropologist Scott Clark maintains, represents a place for physical and psychic renewal (*Japan* 147). In this film, watching various types of bodies transform, the audience inevitably comes to be conscious of physical representation.

There are two outstanding episodes that depict unclean and polluted bodies. The first is that of the Stink God, a customer visiting the bathhouse with his polluted and filthy body emitting a terrible stench. Yubaba assigns Chihiro the disgusting task of bathing this most unclean customer on her first day of work. Then it turns out that the Stink God is a river spirit who disappears from the bathhouse, leaving a magical food, a bitter dumpling, in her hand in return for her work.

The second episode is that of a phantom-like creature called No Face, who wears a mask and lacks his own voice. He produces fake gold with which he orders an enormous amount of dishes at a banquet hall. Then his voracious appetite not only makes his body grow gigantic but also makes him go so berserk as to gobble up one attendant after another. Called upon again to take care of an uncontrollable customer, Chihiro shrinks his body by letting him eat the Stink God's bitter dumpling, which causes No Face to vomit what he has gobbled up. Significantly, as critic Shimizu Tadashi maintains, the above scatological episodes show us another representation of "abjection," or the discharging of the "abject" in Kristeva fashion (*Miyazaki Hayao wo yomu* 36). Thus, Chihiro's survival depends upon her helping others go through abjection, not just the Stink God and No Face, but also Haku and Bou, the spoiled boy of Yubaba. In an interview, Miyazaki says that he had specific children in mind when he was making *Spirited Away*, and that he wanted to "celebrate their birth whatever happens in the world" (*Bessatsu Comic Box* 134).

Also in this film, the abjection takes place in a maternal place. The film seems to portray

Chihiro's returning to a mother's womb after going through a tunnel, a symbol of the birth canal, at the very start, and then going down steep and winding stairs into the boiler room, as is pointed out by Shimizu³⁾. There is further symbolic evidence to suggest that the bathhouse is a metaphorical womb. Once Chihiro goes through the tunnel to the magical land, she is separated from the human world by water. The bathhouse is always pervaded by water: shallow water surrounds the whole bathhouse complex and abundant hot water is brimming over many bathtubs for customers. Shimizu points out that it feels like being wrapped up by something nostalgic, a warm and amniotic-like fluid (94).

Matrix for Ponyo's Transformation

The theme of motherhood is even more foregrounded in an Andersen's *Little Mermaid*-like story, *Ponyo on the Cliff by the Sea.* Ponyo / Brünnhilde, a daughter of sea goddess Gran Manmare (Great Mother of the Sea), falls in love with a five-year-old human boy, Sosuke, whose house is on a cliff by the sea, and her body undergoes magical transformation into a human one. Her ardent desire to become human in defiance of her wizard-misanthrope father, Fujimoto, who once was human, unleashes a storm and causes a tsunami in the world. Thus, the hybrid female protagonist disturbs the balance of nature by crossing the borderline between humans and sea creatures.

As critic Kiridoshi Risaku points out, her transformations take place in three stages: a baby gold fish with a human face; a half-fish-human girl with chicken-like limbs; and a five-year-old human girl (*Miyazaki Hayao no sekai* 562). The story unfolds drawing the audience's concern about whether or not Ponyo will successfully cross the borderline and survive with Sosuke in the town submerged by the storm and tsunami. In an interview on TV while he was still at work on the film in 2008, Miyazaki said, "The film celebrates the birth of these children who feel regret for being born into this world" ("Professional Special").

We should also note that Ponyo's crossing the borderline or the transformation of her body takes place in maternal places: at the bottom of her mother's sea, on the crest of waves, and in a womb-like tunnel. All of these places are closely connected with her mother, Gran Manmare, whose body sometimes looks like normal-sized, and sometimes looks gigantic, appearing only on moonlit nights going over the Seven Seas.

Symbolic Meaning of the Polluted Body

In our above discussion of three of Miyazaki's films, we find that female/male protagonists set out on a journey in Campbell fashion, undergo a supreme ordeal and either witness or themselves experience physical transformations in maternal places. Now questions arise: "Why is Miyazaki obsessed with the Mother?" "Why has he been creating these maternal places for the protagonists' regeneration?" To answer these questions, we need to return to the catchphrases Miyazaki consistently has put in the advertisement for his films. "Do survive!" "I would celebrate your birth, whatever happens in the world."

We can look at the polluted bodies in the films as representations of catastrophic incidents surrounding children in particular socio-cultural-historical contexts. Let us start with the case of Princess Mononoke. Miyazaki worked on the film for nearly seventeen years and finally completed it in 1997. Three unforgettable and symbolic incidents that occurred in Japan in the 1980s and 1990s may provide clues about how to understand the meaning of the major characters' abjected bodies. First, the death of Emperor Showa (Hirohito) in 1989. In his discussion of masculinity, sociologist Ito Kimio maintains that the death of the Emperor who lived through two wars during his reign, World War II and the postwar "economic war," marked the end of the "age of men" in Japan ("Otokorashisa" no yukue 4). Second, the cult terrorist attack on a Tokyo subway in 1995 shocked the whole of Japan, leading many to recognize the fragility of the Japanese system and become disillusioned with the myth of the safety of Japanese society. Third, the Equal Employment Opportunity Law for Men and Women was first enforced in 1986, and thoroughly revised in 1997 in order to rectify gender gaps and disparity between the sexes. However, during this period, in reality Japanese working women were still struggling to secure equal employment and childcare leave, while fighting against sexual harassments in their workplaces. Therefore, the law had to be revised again in 2007. The female characters' struggle in the film reminds us of this law on its way to the third revision.

In the case of *Spirited Away*, the meaning of the polluted body is more self-evident. The polluted body of the Stink God is the result of the degraded and exploited natural environment; the bloated body of No Face is caused by his voracious appetite, a greed that represents the materialism and mass consumption during the bubble economy in Japan (1986- 1991). In his interview Miyazaki criticizes Japan for the above problems not just during the period of the bubble economy but also that of the "economic war" after World War II (*Premier 72*).

Additionally, the term "spirited away" seems to hint at the decade called the "lost ten years" after the collapse of Japan's economic bubble in 1991, a development followed by rising unemployment and suicide rates. Chihiro's loss of her identity is symbolic of the economic stagnation or the "lost ten years."

In the case of *Ponyo on the Cliff*, Ponyo's abjected body does not represent any socio-cultural issues. Instead what we see in Ponyo's body is a determined subject who aspires to become human by crossing the borderline. The female protagonist is literally born into a catastrophic world that strongly reminds us of the 3.11 disaster in 2011: the quake, tsunami, and nuclear power plant accident. It is surprising that *Ponyo* was produced in 2008, three years before these disasters.

The Mother Cures Them All

How can the cursed body be cured and survive? To answer this question, Miyazaki probably needs to explore the maternal forest. The forest as Mother in *Princess Mononoke* reflects Miyazaki's

nostalgic fascination with the primeval forest that used to cover half of the Japanese archipelago. He writes that his self-hatred as a Japanese because of the war crimes against China, Korea, and South East Asian countries during World War II, was eased by the conviction that he is a descendant of the prehistoric Japanese who had been mothered and nurtured by a primeval forest ("Jubakukarano kaihou" 94-95). He also admits that he has an imaginary picture of a place of purity in a deep mountain, as well as a murky place deep in his heart that reason cannot properly control ("Hikisakarenagara ikiteiju" 45-46). In this regard, the Japanese primeval forest is an uncanny and fascinating symbol of the Mother that invites him to return for purification and regeneration.

Miyazaki's concern with the maternal forest is transfigured into the bathhouse and the Great Mother of the Sea in the films. According to a TV documentary on *Ponyo on the Cliff*, it took Miyazaki many days to finally complete one particular scene in which protagonist Sosuke meets Granma Toki after the tsunami. Sosuke's reunion with her is a metaphorical representation of Miyazaki's reconciliation with his own deceased mother, who could not hold him tight owing to her sickness in his early boyhood (*Professional Special*). Therefore, rather than following Campbell's "monomyth" to globalize his narrative, Miyazaki seems to have been creating maternal places, "inbetween-places" or places not here not there, where his abjected characters can transcend borders, and regenerate themselves at times of unprecedented crisis.

Creating the "Location of Culture"

How does Miyazaki create the "in-between" spaces? The key word is intertextuality: his works textually interact with other stories that have a similar theme or narrative structure. Take *Princess Mononoke* for example. While Miyazaki was planning and producing the film, he published two picture books that influenced the narrative of the film: *Shuna's Journey* (1983), which is an adaptation of a Tibetan folk tale, *The Prince Who Became a Dog*, and *Princess Mononoke* (1993), an adaptation of the French literary fairy tale "Beauty and Beast." In both picture books the protagonists set out on a journey for their survival: a prince, Shuna, starts on a journey to bring golden wheat back to his kingdom where poor people are starving, and a princess, San-no-hime, consents to marry a beast, Mononoke, in order to save her father. Since the story is set in the sixteenth-century Warring States period in Japan, San-no-hime probably marries the beast not simply out of self-sacrifice or love for her father but also for their own survival. As already mentioned, when Miyazaki was producing the film *Princess Mononoke*, the theme of survival was deep in his mind.

Spirited Away has intertextuality with the Japanese fantasy novel for children, Kashiwaba Sachiko's *The Marvelous Village Veiled in Mist* (1975), in which female protagonist Lina, after arriving at Misty Valley, is ordered by a witchy old lady to work for the residents to help them solve their problems. Also, Chihiro's uncertain entity connected with eating reminds us of another girl's

unstable identity connected with foods and drinks: Alice in Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865). Critic Otsuka also points out a similarity between Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Tombs of Atuan* and Miyazaki's *Spirited Away*, in that the female protagonists, whose true names are robbed of, eventually regain them in the process of their quest for their identities (*Monogatariron* 161).

Ponyo on the Cliff reminds us of Andersen's Little Mermaids, Snow Queen, and the Japanese folktale Anchin Kiyohime, in which strong-minded female protagonists achieve difficult quests to acquire love. Especially, Miyazaki admits in an interview that the 1957 animated film, Snow Queen directed by Lev Atamanov, deeply influenced his film making and the creation of a strong-willed heroine who quests for her beloved just like the Japanese heroine, Kiyohime, who falls in love with a young monk in Anchin Kiyohime ("Animationga yaruniataisuru shigoto" 7-8). In pursuing the monk who has rejected her, she eventually transforms into a gigantic serpent out of rage, and drives him into a huge temple bell under which he hides, and then she kills him with a belch of raging fire.

Conclusion

Let us go back to the question, "Are Miyazaki's films on the waves of media globalization?" The answer is "Yes," and "No." The films ride a wave of media globalization in the sense that Miyazaki creates cross-cultural stories, not in the sense that he has been following the standardized pattern of a hero's journey, that of the *Star Wars* / Campbell type. In our era of media globalization, Miyazaki goes beyond the boundaries of both Japanese and Western narratives and creates maternal "in-between" spaces where cursed, polluted, and confused bodies can be regenerated. Post-colonialist critic Homi Bhabha writes, "It is the trope of our times to locate the question of culture in the realm of the *beyond*" (*The Location of Culture* 1). These "in-between" spaces where cultural differences are articulated provide Miyazaki with the ground for elaborating and negotiating his artistic strategies closely connected with his identity as a Japanese animator.

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Notes

- Susan Napier maintains that *Princess Mononoke* presents "the abjected outsiders of Japanese history such as nature spirits, women, and racial others" as "embodiments of resistance against a homogenizing master narrative," whereas in *Spirited Away* "the repressed past returns in the form of a fantastic array of spirits who occupy the bathhouse" (292).
- 2) Joseph Campbell writes, "The idea that the passage of the magical threshold is a transit into a sphere of

rebirth is symbolized in the worldwide womb image of the belly of the whale" (90).

 Murase Hiromi names them the "mother-daughter union" and "the mother of the Tatara Ba community" (64).

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