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Japanese Film 001

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*Your Name: An Understanding of Anime Tourism*

Films and TV shows have a way of garnering attention to certain aspects of life. There is a form of social rapport when it comes to friends, family, or social groups catered towards discussing films and televisions. Of these mediums, animations, and by association anime, can create a tightly bound group of individuals. Anime has been seen to rise in popularity over the past several years, and with this Japanese tourism. Within anime communities around America, it has been common to romanticize places in Japan thanks to anime's often fantastical portrayal of the nation. It is often these communities would travel to locations that have been featured within an anime, known as anime tourism. Anime tourism is typically done by otakus. Otaku can be described as people or a community who delve into a certain genre (typically anime) and have disregard to common social senses (Patrick 5). One such example is the anime movie *Your Name*, 君の名は, *Kimi no Na wa*, by Shinkai Makoto. Released in 2016, *Your Name* received critical acclaim internationally and won many awards. This sentiment is mirrored within anime communities. Shinkai Makoto promotes anime tourism within his film *Your Name* using the stunning presentation of real-world locations which enhances viewer's experience and encourages travel and cultural exchange.

Anime tourism is the act of visiting locations that can be seen from anime. This is prevalent within otaku culture or within anime fan groups. Fans of a show or film may want to

visit locations that their favorite characters have interacted with to feel closer to them. Whether it be the story, characters, or the world, these aspects drive fans to visit said locations. This cultural shift has become more prevalent in western audiences. Places that appear in anime or films receive an increase in tourism due to its relationship to shows. For example, Akihabara, Tokyo is featured within many anime such as *Steins; Gate*, showing off predominant locations. Akihabara is well known for being the anime capital of Japan offering many restaurants, stores, and themed locations for people who enjoy anime. With the influx of people, the area exploded in tourism and is commonly placed on listings to go to if you enjoy anime. This act of want or need to venture forth to Japan to see their favorite sceneries that remind them of their favorite characters help promote and stimulate the need for tourism.

With the act of anime tourism, there is also the idea of anime pilgrimage that can further enhance the topic. Anime pilgrimage is the idea of fans or otaku visiting sites that are depicted in anime. It is almost an act of pilgrimage for anime fans to visit the locations that they see on their screens. These typically bring in a large proportion of fans to areas because they want to experience what they saw on their screens. They want to recreate the experience their characters have went through or to see what it is like in the area that is being portrayed in the anime or film. Anime pilgrimage can serve as a catalyst for increase interaction between foreign countries and Japan when it comes to attempting to bring in new ways to approach tourism. With the fans wanting to visit locations that they have found within in their favorite animes, they can spend more time and money at said locations to further drive the impact of anime related places (Okamoto, 2014). There is a demand within anime and otaku communities to see the places that some shows or films are based on and are willing to reach certain extent to see them. Thus,

anime pilgrimages can be a vital asset for tourism companies or communities to exploit in order to bring in attention to their areas.

Otaku communities can also be vital to exploring anime tourism with their rapid consumption of anime or anime adjacent merchandise. These mediums can be anime, video games, films, characters, worlds, or any other myriad of what we define as nerdy or unorthodox. Otaku is a rising subculture of people who enjoy these types of genres and are willing to pursue interacting with their favorite content (Liu et al., 2020). As such, it is not uncommon to see an influx of otaku from foreign countries traveling to anime conventions, themed restaurants, or even to Japan. As mentioned before, Akihabara is one of the main areas that garner to otaku culture and deals with everything anime, video games, or computer related activities. With the influx of otaku culture and people that enjoy anime, locations that promote anime and manga related materials can see an increase in tourism and profit due to increase spending. Some places, such as the Studio Ghibli Museum, use their cultural influence to make visiting their locations a much more appealing endeavor than if it was not anime adjacent. These group of people can bring in tourism as they are willing to travel and spend money on their defined “cultures”.

Media mix is also relevant topic when ascertaining the concept of anime tourism and its relationship to *Your Name*. The definition of media mix is the multiple uses of media to share or advertise it that all contribute to a singular entity (Steinberg 139). *Your Name* is an interesting case regarding media mix as it a film first, conceptually, with a light novel and manga being released before the premier of the film in 2016. Not only are these different forms of media that help bring about the interaction between fan and content, visiting locations can also be a form of media mix. Traveling to locations that are present within the film helps bring about a connection

between fans and media. With traveling to the fictional and real-world counterparts, it offers a unique experience for fans of film to further bond and grow closer to the fiction.

Anime tourism can be relevant to the discussion as we can see how the film promotes its settings within either purposefully or as a byproduct of the film. *Your Name* takes place in a fictional town called Itomori, Japan and within Tokyo. Even though Itomori is a fictional location, it borrows heavily from the real location of the prefecture Gifu. Mitsuha Miyamizu, the female protagonist of the film, lives here in the rural countryside contrasted by the male protagonist, Taki Tachibana. Mitsuha spends her time enjoying her school life with her friends until being ousted into the main plot of the movie. The sceneries of the film showcase a beautiful small town with grounded traditions such as festivities and local activities. Not only do these romanticize the location that it is be portrayed, but Shinkai also makes these scenes a display of colors that bring out the backgrounds. The world is animated such that it brings out the best qualities of every scene. Vivid details are given to the background, lighting, and surroundings that it adds this sense of pop to it. Shinkai makes use of his techniques to accentuate the background and give it a sense of glamor to it to promote the location it is based on.

To add to the idea of anime tourism, *Your Name* uses locations that often idolized by anime and otaku communities. These locations draw fans from around the world to visit these locations such as Suga Shrine within Yotsuya, Japan. Located in Shinjuku, Suga Shrine is a prominent location within the film. After saving the people of Itomori, both Taki and Mitsuha live out their lives unable to remember each other. They see each other across the train platforms and recognize each other attempting to meet. After was prolonged session of attempting to reach each other, they pass one another on a set of staircases before turning to each other and asking for their names. The culmination of emotions that led up to this point as well as the lingering

question of if they will remember one another sets this scene up to become the ultimate ending of the film. Due to its significance within the film, people have come to recognize these set of stairs as the one near Suga Shrine. There, people make the voyage to see the stairs that may have had an impact on their emotions or simply due to recognition. This set of stairs is a normal set of stairs for the locals, or they may even realize that it has become a destination of sorts for anime fans or fans of the film. Many pictures online can be seen of these stairs in the same camera position as the one that is set from the anime as if to mimic the film's actions. Anime fans have come to recognize locations from the film and make it a point to travel to said locations because of their association with the film.

The film also highlights environmental aspects of the stairs at Suga Shrine using his animation style to promote the location that is being portrayed. Shinkai's animation style mixes several techniques to create the frames within the film. The film paints the setting of the stairs with heightened lighting and the elevation of the camera allows us to see the entire city. This incredible view makes the viewer want to witness this sight with their own eyes rather than just through a screen. However, the real location of the stairs is not as fantastical as the animation. The actual place where the stairs are is not as bright or colorful as the film because the anime highlights the scene to bring out the emotional connection of the characters. Shinkai makes sure the scene is drawn in such a way to make the area attractive. There is a montage of the area showing off the different aspects of where Taki and Mitsuha are meeting. The shadows emanate over the area with bits of sunlight bleeding through. The way that Shinkai paints this scene makes the viewer romanticize this area. The depiction of the staircase and the scenery makes the idea of traveling to the Suga Shrine staircase much more appealing and creates a sense of longing to traveling to said location.

The location of Itomori can be looked at to see how a fictional location that borrows from real world aspects can shape our view on the real-world counterparts. Mitsuha's town of Itomori is based on the real-world prefecture of Gifu, more notable the town Hida. Even though Itomori does not exist, there is a real inspiration that be visited and explored that mimics the movie. The town is also shown, much like Suga Shrine, to be a stunning location set near the lake and cliffs. The location of Itomori, even though fictional, is painted in such a manner that shows a tightly knit community of people. People who viewed the film may wish to visit Hida and learn about what makes this location the featured hometown for Mitsuha. With this, fans of the film can travel to Hida and surround themselves with the locations that are like the ones shown in the film. With the increase of travelers to Gifu, they can stimulate the local economy with fans wishing to partake in local goods or delicacies. With the perception of an immaculate place, fans will want to travel to such area and become engrossed in the locals and commodities.

Anime tourism can also bring about an increase in tourism in other, less notable areas of Japan due to fans of the anime as well as otaku culture. As discussed earlier, *Your Name* brought the public's attention to Suga Shrine as well as Gifu prefecture in Japan because it became a well renowned film. Because of the want of these communities to look at areas that are based on their shows, they make the pilgrimage to these places to relive their favorite characters, worlds, or recreate the story that engrossed them. As such, this increases tourism within the area and can help stimulate the economy in the local area. Akihabara, for example, garners many visitors from foreign countries and areas and attracts them with their anime centric shops. Shibuya is also a common place for foreigners to gather as the famous crossroad can be seen in many shows such as *Jujutsu Kaisen*. These garner attraction from anime lovers who attempt to commit to a pilgrimage to visit their desired locations.

With the rise of anime tourism, we can also see how people who travel to places due to animations and anime can exchange culture and even expose fans to the culture's customs and traditions. Japanese culture is prevalent within anime and within *Your Name*. In the case of the film, we see Mitsuha partake in a traditional dance and enjoy the festivities as they near the Autumn Festival. People who are fans of the film or are engrossed in otaku culture as well will come to be introduced to different Japanese traditions or festivities from the film. As such, the appeal of an unknown but somewhat familiar tradition or dance seems appealing. These fans will take the initiative to travel and experience a culture that they learned through the anime and will have some familiarity with it. This allows them to better learn and understand a different culture. In doing so, they also have the opportunity to share their own experiences, traditions, or festivities and both can cooperate with a mutual cultural exchange. The use of anime and film can be an important part in cross cultural exchange and promotes to fans the idea of other cultures that may or may not be familiar to them.

When discussing anime tourism, we can also introduce the different types of interactions between fans and their favorite media or characters that can relate to *Your Name*. These interactions can be a basis for fans and their interaction with media. The interactions are as follows: affective interaction, cognitive interaction, and behavioral interactions. Affective interaction is how viewers identify with their favorite characters and locations. Cognitive interaction is how viewers retain thoughts and how they keep paying attention to the media that is being consumed. Behavioral interaction is how people talk about the media to other groups such as friends, family members, or communities (Kirillova et al., 2018). The use of studying interactions can help bridge the understanding for the phenomenon that is anime tourism. We use these behaviors as a point of reference when trying to understand how anime fans and otakus

interact with their favorite media. These different types of interactions can be used to discuss the film and learn about the way it affects anime tourism.

Affective interactions can be understood in the context of *Your Name* to better understand how fans of the film interact with this media and locations that it partakes in. Fans of the film can understand and recognize areas of interest and are willing to seek out said areas. As noted, Suga Shrine and Gifu are areas of note that fans have come to idolize and seek out to interact with. Another location that has received popularity due to the heightened emotions is the train station scene near the end of the film as well. They seek out to consume more of their favorite media whether it be rewatching the film, reading the manga version of the anime, consuming merchandise and goods related to characters or story, or physically engrossing themselves in the areas that are located within the real world. Visitors of Suga Shrine or even Yotsuya Station may find guides online or in person of directions to find the scenes that were in the film. This sort of interaction that bridge the real world and fictional media based on the real-world help provide an interactive experience. This interaction between fans and the media creates a draw towards reaching out to new experiences such as traveling. It creates a more intimate experience between media and fans that allows them to interact with in various forms of media or in a term media mix.

Anime tourism retains a sense of awe that relates to cognitive interactions with relations to *Your Name*. Traveling to areas that pertain to the film leave everlasting experiences for the fans that made the effort to do such a thing. There is the want of fans to visit locations and experience what the characters felt or perceived in that moment. Thus, this creates a feeling of longing to recreate these experiences but through the lens of the real-world vision. With the thought in mind, this can make fans decide to travel to said locations and dabble in different



environments and cultures. The experience lingers on the fans' mind and thus keeps them enthralled in the content and are willing to engage with the media. This form of recognition and lingering builds a rapport between fan and media that keeps them bounded to the form of content. This relates back to the media mixing with how real-world locations can inadvertently promote the film it is based on. Fans make these connections and with the use of traveling to these locations from the film, it creates an experience unlike any other.

*Your Name* has ascertained a following that allows fans to create groups for discussion that defines behavioral interactions. Fans of the film can talk and discuss the movie as well as locations present within the film. Online, there are resources when attempting to find the location of where some of the movie takes place. These discussions of looking form a community that can allow people to engage and explore the film. With anime tourism, this inherent engagement from fan and film allows people to share their experiences with like-minded individuals or introduce new people to the culture and thus create more fans. With more fans who choose to discuss the film, locations, experience, etc., they engage in these communities. Traveling and visiting places like Suga Shrine creates meaningful memories. This causes them consume anime or films on a regular basis. With this constant consumption, it may even promote traveling more since many animes, *Your Name* included, borrow from real inspiration and locations to create their fictional worlds. These groups and communities that fans create to discuss their favorite worlds and characters are forms of behavioral interactions and can contribute to anime tourism through the want of traveling to form memories or experiences or even engage with their favorite content and shows.

These interactions all work together to aid in anime tourism. With the constant engagement of fans and their media, there is a promotion to travel inadvertently within the film

due to its depictions of the locations. It makes the fans want to travel and experience what their characters have seen and felt. It makes them feel engaged when they do travel and learn about the culture that their favorite film partakes in. With otaku culture on the rise, these interactions will continue to grow as anime tourism grows as well. Anime tourism in coordination with these interactions can create promotions for traveling and exploration.

With the different methods that has been discussed, it can be used to fully understand how *Your Name* uses anime tourism with its medium to encourage travel. With Suga Shrine, Yotsuya Station, and Gifu being important aspects of the film, these locations received attention due to its connection to the film. Fans recognize these places and try to travel to them in order to feel as if they were a part of the story or recreate experiences from the show. There is an increase in tourism and thus an increase in local economies due to tourist wanting to spend and become acquainted with the surrounding areas from the film. With this want also comes a mutual exchange of culture that can deepen relationships between fan and film. These different factors and engagement options are examples of different interactions we can see from otakus and their media of choice. The film makes an example of using multiple forms of media, mainly through the film and real-world locations, to promote anime tourism even though it may only be just a byproduct of the film itself. It creates a sense of longing for fans to experience the locations and build off their established understanding from the film. As such, *Your Name* can be used as a way of understanding anime tourism and how fans are willing to travel, as if it were a pilgrimage.

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