The Power of Religion in Anime

Hayao Miyazaki’s Methods of Persuasion

in My Neighbor Totoro

Religion Thesis
Haverford College Religion Department
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Yuxin Jiang
Bryn Mawr College

Art by Studio Ghibli
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Abstract. Anime, or “cartoon” in Japanese, although considered as a product made solely for children’s entertainment, has influenced people from different ages and has become an essential industry in Japan. In this thesis, I will focus on an animated film called My Neighbor Totoro, a work by internationally famous director Hayao Miyazaki. Although this film has been widely studied by animation lovers, the social impact and the religious elements of the film have not been fully explored and appreciated. This thesis will explore how the director Miyazaki persuades his audience to accept his idea on a new relationship between humanity and nature.

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I. Introduction and Structure

Anime, or “cartoon” in Japanese, although considered as a product made solely for children’s entertainment, has influenced people from different ages and has become an essential industry in Japan. In this thesis, I will focus on an animated film called My Neighbor Totoro, a work by internationally famous director Hayao Miyazaki. Although this film has been widely studied by animation lovers, the social impact and the religious elements of the film have not been fully explored and appreciated. This thesis will explore how the director Miyazaki persuades his audience to accept his idea on a new relationship between humanity and nature.

My Neighbor Totoro is one of the most important films establishing Hayao Miyazaki’s name and reputation in the film industry, both in Japan and worldwide. Besides My Neighbor Totoro, Miyazaki is also famous for writing and directing many Japanese anime classics, such as Kiki’s Delivery Service, Princess Mononoke and Spirited Away. His latest and the last film before retiring The Wind Rises, released in 2013 in Japan and 2014 in cinemas in the United States, was nominated for an Academy Award in the Best Animated Feature Film category in 2014.1

My Neighbor Totoro was first shown in theatres in 1988 in Japan, and was later dubbed in English and re-released by Walt Disney Studios in 2006.2 It generated unexpected success and fortune for the newly established Studio Ghibli, a Japanese animation film studio headed by Miyazaki. The film’s success also proves Miyazaki’s ability

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2 Hayao Miyazaki, My Neighbor Totoro, (Walt Disney Home Entertainment, 2006).
as an animation director. Since its debut, *Totoro* has received praise from all over the world. The film won the “Best Film” award at the Mainich Film Awards and the Anime Grand Prix Prize from Animage in 1998.\(^3\) Empire Magazine ranked it #41 of “The 100 Best Films of World Cinema”\(^4\). Although the film has received recognition in the international film industry, the social impact of the film and the director’s method of persuasion have not been studied.

*My Neighbor Totoro* is about two sisters’ adventure in a magical land where they befriend a mysterious, sweet, and cuddly creature named Totoro. Satsuki, a girl in fourth grade, has moved to the countryside with her father and her four-year-old younger sister Mei. Because the girls’ mother is hospitalized, Satsuki takes on the responsibilities of the “mother” in the family. Occasionally the family takes a trip to visit the girls’ mother in the hospital. One day Mei discovers an entrance to the home of a giant creature called Totoro. Her encounter with Totoro does not seem to be a dream, but the entrance to Totoro’s home is gone when Mei tries to show it to her father and sister. Totoro does not show up again until a rainy day, when Satsuki and Mei are waiting for their father at a bus stop. With a face of disbelief, Satsuki gives Totoro an umbrella. He gives the sisters some magical seeds in return, before boarding a twelve-legged catbus. The sisters plant the seeds in the backyard and wait for them to grow. One night, Totoro and his two little minions come to the backyard and work on a dance ritual. The two sisters join them and their dance helps the seeds to grow up into a gigantic tree in one night. But when they girls wake up the next


morning, they discover that the new tree is gone, and what is left in the field are some sprouted seeds. A few days later, when the girls are excited about their mother’s return, they receive a message from the hospital saying that their mother’s condition has worsened. The sisters are worried and begin to fight due to their panic. Mei runs from home to see their mother by herself, but gets lost on the way. Satsuki finds Totoro and asks him to help find Mei. Totoro tells the catbus to take Satsuki to Mei, and then take the girls to see their mother.5

Although the plot of the film seems childish, the film has created an enormous social impact among adults. The impact of Totoro can be seen not only in its financial and theatrical success, but also in the ecological revolution it brought to Japan. In addition to a wave calling for support in protecting the environment in Japanese society, a natural park on the top of a mountain called “The Homeland of Totoro” was established a few years after the film, and the natural inhabitants of the park have been well preserved since then.6 The founding of this park is not only a sign of fans’ embracing of the film, but also of recognizing the importance of nature and the human-nature relationship due to the influential and persuasive message the film delivers.

What makes this film famous and powerful is not only the magical, mysterious world or the adorable character that Miyazaki creates, but also the film’s persuasive way of delivering an unusual message on the three-layered relationship between humans and nature, which is the main focus in this thesis. The thesis consists of three sections in

5 Toru Hara, My Neighbor Totoro, Directed by Hayao Miyazaki, (1988, Japan: Toho Company), Theatrical.

6 Colin Odell and Michelle Le Blanc, Studio Ghibli, the Films of Hayao Miyazaki and Isao Takahata, (Kamera Books, 2009), 79.
addition to an introduction and a conclusion. The first section discusses how Miyazaki makes his audience feel connected with the characters. It starts with a comparison between Miyazaki’s early childhood and the story of the film. Miyazaki uses his childhood memories and his careful observation of others to create a realistic and believable world. Then, with a selected scene of the girls meeting Susuwatari, a black creature in the old empty house, I want to illustrate that Miyazaki’s use of a familiar fear from many people’s childhood introduces the audience to a magical and unknown world, but also makes the audience feel the world is familiar and acceptable.

The second section emphasizes the Japanese religious elements that are used in the film, especially the sacredness of nature and its relationship with humans. The sacredness of nature is presented through a comparison between Japanese religions and ritual practices and the symbols in the film. This section focuses first on the analysis of selected scenes that depict the sacred qualities of nature: Susuwatari’s flight to the moon after the house is occupied by the family; and Totoro’s home in the mountain that is shown during the family’s visit after Mei’s first encounter with Totoro.

The third section focuses on how the portrait of a sacred nature further assists Miyazaki in delivering his message about environmental protection. The analysis then turns to the three layers of humans’ relationship with nature. The first of these three layers discusses that humans are dependent on nature, which is depicted in three scenes in *My Neighbor Totoro*: after the girls pray to Jizo to stop the heavy rain, a neighbor boy gives them his umbrella and runs past the Torii at the bottom of the mountain; Satsuki asks Totoro to help find Mei; the Jizo statues behind Mei when she is found by Satsuki. The second layer illustrates that nature does respond to humans and accepts humans’ changes,
a premise analyzed in two scenes: when Totoro borrows Satsuki’s umbrella and returns the favor, and when he uses the umbrella in the tree-growing dance. The third layer suggests the hope for a future of cooperation and friendship between humans and nature, which is proven when Totoro and the girls help the seeds grow into gigantic trees.

II. Miyazaki and My Neighbor Totoro; the shared emotions and memories

To create a persuasive film that is realistic and believable, Miyazaki brings out his own childhood memories. Not only is the setting of the film designed according to everyday life; the experience and emotions of the characters resonate deeply with the audience.

Miyazaki’s childhood was clearly his inspiration for this film. He is quoted as saying: “Totoro is where my consciousness begins.” Hayao Miyazaki was born in 1941 in Bunkyo-ku district of Tokyo. Miyazaki’s mother contracted a long-term sickness soon after the family moved to Tochigi when he was about five years old. Most of Miyazaki’s childhood was filled with the longing for his mother due to her absence. The emptiness of the position of a mother persists in the film also. The non-existence of the mother’s role leads to the growth of children’s independence at a young age. In the film, Satsuki, although only a fourth grader, learns to cook for the family, and takes care of her father and younger sister. Even when Mei gets lost, Satsuki is the one running through fields and dark tunnels and searching for her, instead of her father.

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8 Odell, Studio Ghibli, the Films of Hayao Miyazaki and Isao Takahata, 16.
What makes the emotion so potent in this film is Miyazaki’s portrait of a relatable emotion and experience. Although the mother does not appear often in the film, the quest for her love appears throughout the whole film. From the beginning, when the girls are fighting over the mother’s attention, to later, the children are worried when they are told their mother’s illness is worsening, the portrait of this unsatisfied desire for the mother’s love is so real that members of the audience, especially those who have experienced such emotions, are easily persuaded and moved. Through this realistic portrait of human emotion and the emotional connection that the director builds with the audience, this simple children’s film becomes persuasive, believable and attractive even to adults.

Besides the relatable and powerful emotion, Miyazaki introduces the audience to the girls’ adventure in a magical world, with a touch of the common childhood fear of darkness. One of the characters created in the film is Susuwatari, a black floating creature, or a soot spirit that resides in dark spaces in old and empty houses. It leaves the house when the space is occupied, and always travels in a pack. In the film, an old lady from the neighborhood says that she could see these Susuwatari when she was young, but not anymore.9 The creature Susuwatari has two characteristics; it loves to reside in dark places and prefers to be left alone, and only children can see it. These two characteristics are associated with darkness, a common childhood fear, according to a psychologist, Peter Muris’ study on common childhood fear.

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9 Miyazaki, My Neighbor Totoro
fears. Although Miyazaki presents the film from a child’s perspective, and the scenes and creatures are straight from a child’s imagination, even adult audiences feel the familiarity and can enjoy the film along with children because they are reminded of their childhood.

The introduction of Susuwatari is a well-done transition between the world of reality and the world of magic. It brings the familiar experience into the world of the audience. It also reaffirms the existence of the unknown, and introduces a world of fantasy and spirits. With this first step, the audience is more likely to accept the existence of Totoro, a troll or a nature spirit, than to lose interest in the later part of the film because it is foreign and childish.

Miyazaki’s power in creating a believable film comes from his observation of human activities. He said in an interview: “the most important thing of all, it seems to me, is to have an interest in people, in how they live, and in how they interact with things.” When designing Totoro, Miyazaki uses his memory and his observations of many people’s shared fear from childhood. He creates this believable film by imitating or recreating very similar situations that will touch humans’ delicate emotions, so that the audience will be more likely to accept his overall message.

III. Totoro, the Sacredness of Nature, and the New Relationship between Humans and Nature

The persuasive power of Totoro is not limited to Miyazaki’s use of his childhood memory or his realistic portrait of emotions, his use of religious elements also plays an important part. With these religious elements, nature is elevated to a sacred place, and

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Totoro becomes a god of the forest rather than simply a troll or a raccoon. Thus, the relationship between humanity and nature is upgraded to a relationship between humanity and a higher power, making the film more persuasive and influential.

A. Introduction to Japanese Religion and Religious practice

Before jumping into the analysis of how Miyazaki uses religious elements to make nature sacred and turn Totoro into a god, some background on Japanese religious practice and religious symbols is introduced in the following paragraphs, due to the religious and cultural differences between Japan and other cultures and communities.

Comparing Japanese culture and religion with other major world religions, such as Christianity and Islam, shows that Japanese religion, especially Japanese folk religion, has a more outstanding and intense focus on spirits and energies in nature and daily life. For instance, there are many folk religious spirits, or 妖怪 (Yokai), in Japanese traditional portraits. One of the most famous portraits is 今昔画図続百鬼 (Konjaku Gazu Zoku Hyakki), which means the Illustrated Ghosts/Spirits from the Past and Present, by artist Toriyama Sekien. In these portraits, many of the spirits are created and inspired by everyday objects, animals, and people’s fears; such as 猫又 (Nekomata), a spirit transforms from very old domestic cats, and 垢嘗 (Akaname), a Yokai that resides in dirty bathrooms.

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12 多田克己, 京極夏彦, 妖怪図巻. (国書刊行会, 2000).
and licks the dirt with its tongue, which is possibly inspired by a human fear of going to dark bathrooms at night.\footnote{Hiroko Yoka, \textit{Yokai Attack! The Japanese Monster Survival Guide}, (Tokyo: Kodansha International Ltd., 2008), 82–85.}

Although there are many spirits and beliefs in local gods, in order to make the complicated religious situation in Japan simpler and more straightforward, the religions discussed in this thesis are more recognized Japanese national religions. Japanese religious practices are best represented by Shinto and Buddhism. Shinto is a native religion, and Buddhism is a foreign religion that has taken an essential place in Japanese social life. While these two religions have separate institutions and practices, the religious practice of the masses in Japan is a combination of the intermingled practices of these two traditions.

\textbf{a). Shinto}

Shinto or 神道 means the way or path of the gods. These gods are called 神(Kami) in Japanese. Shinto is a religion native to and oriented toward Japan, and it shapes the Japanese national identity. The mythologies and histories, \textit{Kojiki (Record of Ancient Matters)} and \textit{Nihon Shoki (The Chronicles of Japan)}, the first two books in Japanese history, were created and written down in the early 8th century by the royal family.\footnote{Thomas David DuBois, \textit{Religion and the Making of Modern East Asia}, (Cambridge University Press, 2011), 59.} The books recorded the myths of the creation of the Japanese people and the nation. The myths started with the birth of the Japanese Islands and eight gods. Two lower level deities, Izanagi and Izanami, were born after the eight higher gods. These two later created many other Kami, through giving birth and many other methods, such as taking a shower or disrobing. Among these Kami there are the god of the sea, the god of plains, the god of
mountains and the god of fire. Later, when Izanagi was washing his left eye, the most beautiful Kami was created, the sun goddess Amaterasu O-mi-kami 天照大神, which means “the important being who makes heaven shine”. She is the most famous and influential Kami in Japanese culture and in Shinto belief. The sun image on the Japanese flag is a symbol of Amaterasu. It was also believed that the Japanese Emperor was the direct descendant of Amaterasu.” Amaterasu is also one of the most powerful Kami in Shinto mythology. After her birth, her father Izanagi said: “You will go up to heaven and govern the Takama no Hara, the High Plain of Heaven.” The symbol of the sun on the Japanese national flag implies the power and the pride of the Japanese nation, which also reflects how important and influential Shinto is in Japanese culture and tradition.

The Shinto mythology focuses not only on worship of major deities, such as Amaterasu, but also on the belief that spirits reside in everyday things, such as nature and elements. For example, the gods created by Izanami and Izanagi, are all gods that come from nature and represent natural elements. They are Kami not because of their superior morality, but because of their power and birth. This characteristic is similar to the existence of nature, since both cannot be fully controlled by humans, and have existed long before humanity. Like nature, Kami can be dangerous and gracious at the same time, depending on factors as whether humans have devoted their time and wealth to their

worship or not. Besides these Kami created by Izanami and Izanagi, there are hundreds more Kami who protect or affect every aspect of Japanese life. Often, the portraits of Kami are anthropomorphic, not just in appearance, but also in identities, personalities, and their individual relationships with families and communities. These special relationships between local Kami and the community, along Kami’s special powers, are reflected through the economic structure and history of the community. For example, in an area whose economy and production largely based on their agriculture, Inari (literally means grains or rice paddy) is often worshipped, because Inari brings a good harvest. Because the community in Totoro is an agricultural one, the bus stop’s name is 稲荷前, which means in front of rice paddy.

19 DuBois, Religion and the Making of Modern East Asia, 54.
Although Kami have different identities, serve for different purposes, and are worshipped differently in various communities in Japan, the essential Shinto belief is the same: “at every level, pleasing the Kami was understood as vital to the collective fate of the group, the village, clan or nation.” Since Kami are associated with nature and pleasing Kami is tied with the fate of the community, respecting nature and appreciating what nature has done for humans becomes an essential practice in Shinto belief. Thus, in films where Shinto belief is embedded and associated with nature, such as in Totoro, often many Japanese audiences will receive a message of respect for nature, and believe and follow it as a religious message. In a way, viewing My Neighbor Totoro becomes a religious experience for Japanese audiences.

b). Buddhism

Besides Shinto, another religion that shapes modern Japanese life is Buddhism. Although Buddhism did not originate in Japan, its significance in Japanese culture is no less than Shinto’s. Buddhism was brought from China to Korea then to Japan around the 6th century. It soon became a major religious practice due to the strong Chinese political power and influence in the Japanese court. There have been several political power struggles between the Buddhists and the government in Japanese history, in which many Buddhist monks were killed and Buddhist temples’ social and economic power was restricted; however, Buddhism’s role in Japanese culture and politics is significant enough that it maintains to this day.

21 DuBois, Religion and the Making of Modern East Asia, 55.

22 DuBois, Religion and the Making of Modern East Asia, 57.
Compared to Shinto, Buddhism has a very similar respect for nature; however, the reason for such respect originates from a different belief. Shinto’s respect for nature comes from the belief that Kami are from nature. By respecting nature, Kami are respected and worshipped, and hopefully in return, they will bless the community. However, Buddhists’ respect for nature is not because of the sacredness of nature or fear of the power of Kami, but from Buddhist beliefs and their own understanding of the universe. The Buddhists believe that humans and all beings are stuck in the cycle of reincarnation, and the main goal of Buddhist practice is to achieve enlightenment through self-cultivation, in order to escape the reincarnation cycle, instead of simply worshipping a higher power.

This belief and the Buddhist way of life originate from Buddhist mythology. Rather than a mythology of the creation of earth and human race, or an establishment and confirmation of the power of gods over human beings, the Buddhist tale is a monomyth, which features the growth and journey of a person and his search for his own identity and the truth of the universe. The monomyth starts with a prince named Siddhartha Gautama from Lumbini, a kingdom located in southern Nepal today. Through abandoning his luxurious and protected life and intensive training in harsh conditions, Siddhartha realized that the way to enlightenment was through a “Middle Path”, which discards bodily suffering from extreme asceticism such as hunger and deprivation of sleep. After his enlightenment, Siddhartha could see beyond the human perspective. He saw his past lives as a god in heaven and a lowly human being living at the bottom of society. He discovered the impermanence of the world, where every being was suffering because they could not find a way out of the reincarnation cycle, and every being wished the world could be
different than the present.\textsuperscript{23} From that time, Siddhartha was called “Buddha”, which means Awakened One.\textsuperscript{24} Different from God or Christ from Christianity, who created the world and saves the world, as well as from Kami, who bless the community through people’s prayers, the Buddha is the first human who achieves enlightenment and the very secret of the universe; however, the Buddha is not a savior for anyone, but merely a teacher who provides guidance to enlightenment.

Besides Buddha, another important figure in Japanese Buddhism is the Bodhisattva. A Bodhisattva is only a step away from becoming a Buddha, yet he/she decides to stay in the humans’ world. Some people describe Bodhisattva as a boatman, who takes others across the river of obstacles, leading them to Nirvana, or heaven. Because of the progressing focus on religion’s ability to fulfill needs of the followers, such as providing answers to the ultimate questions about life and death and delivering ritual services to people who need, the status of Bodhisattva is perceived as easier to reach. Thus, a Bodhisattva is often seen as a mediator between humans and heaven. Often, Buddhists pray to Bodhisattva instead of Buddha for their requests.

The essential teaching of Buddhism is that Buddha is not the only one who was able to achieve enlightenment, but every living being on earth has the capacity to achieve it. The only special quality about the Buddha is that he was the first one to achieve this stage, but the title “Buddha” is not limited to one person.


The path to achieve enlightenment is through doing good work and donating to the temples and monks to gain better karma, in order to go to a better realm in the next life and hopefully to achieve enlightenment at the end. Because of the Buddhist belief in reincarnation and the desire to gain better karma for a better afterlife, respecting nature and all living things becomes a part of Buddhist practice. A better karma comes not only from doing good work or following the moral code of society, but also from eliminating practices that can damage one’s Karma. Buddhists believe there are six realms of reincarnation, which are organized as a hierarchy, and the realm a person or a being goes to is based on the person’s karma in previous lives. Among these six realms, the realms of animals, hungry ghosts and hell are worse than the realm of human. Instead of regarding animals and other living things as lower beings than humans, Buddhists believe the reason these beings are not in a better realm is that they did not have a karma that is good enough for the realm of human. Instead of leaving these beings alone or treating them poorly, helping them to achieve a better Karma or at least respecting them becomes a way to maintain or even elevate that person’s karma, because doing so is considered to be moral and good. Thinking from a different angle, if a person goes to a worse realm in the next life, he would also hope someone else from a better realm would help him and relieve him from his sufferings. In addition, the Buddha did not leave behind his followers, but taught them lessons and gave them directions to practice so that more people would achieve enlightenment. Following the example of the Buddha, Buddhists regard helping other beings as the righteous and dutiful thing to do. Because of Buddhists’ belief in reincarnation and the importance of good karma, and because of the Buddha’s teachings and examples, Buddhists recognize the importance of every being. This regard for other
beings transforms to an action, such as Buddhists’ respect towards the animals and other beings from nature.

Japanese religious culture in general is mostly a mixture of Shinto and Buddhism. Both religions have a common respect towards nature. Shinto followers believe that their gods of worship, Kami, represent nature and come from nature; while Buddhists believe that respecting nature and other living beings is a rightful thing to do in gaining better Karma. Thus, many Japanese people already have a sense of respect for nature embedded in them through their cultural and religious education. As a result of religious beliefs, a film like *My Neighbor Totoro* that takes advantage of this can easily deliver its of respect for nature.

**B. The Common Religious symbols in Japanese Religion in the Film**

**a). The Sacredness of Nature**

The Japanese audience already holds respect for nature, which feeds into the persuasive style of the film. The film director Miyazaki capitalizes on this religious culture to persuade the audience that nature is sacred. He further points out the necessity of establishing or reinforcing a friendly relationship between human beings and nature. The sacredness of nature will be explained through selected scenes from the film in a chronological order. The first scene depicts Susuwatari leaving the house at night. The second scene is the gate, Torii, at the bottom of the mountain where Totoro lives. The third scene is an image of the big tree that Totoro lives underneath, and a shrine, a stone lantern, and a tablet carved with words next to it.

**Scene 1. Susutawari Leaving the House at Night**
Susutawari is a soot spirit that resides in the dark corners of abandoned or old houses. This scene takes place when the Kusakabe family is taking a bath, and the girls are scared of the strange sound the old house makes under the heavy wind. The father starts laughing loudly and says: “if you laugh loudly, the scary spirits will leave.”

Maybe because of hearing the laughter of the family, or realizing that the house is occupied, Susuwa-tari leaves the house and flies towards a big camphor tree, and the moon, to find a new home.

The moon is a religious symbol, and its appearance in the scene symbolizes the inclusiveness of nature even to the lowest and little creatures like Susuwa-tari. The religious meaning of the moon is from Kojiki. The moon is called Tsukiyomi no Mikoto, meaning the moon god. The moon god is one of the younger brothers of the sun goddess Amaterasu, and he was born from his father Izanagi’s right eye. He was given the power to rule the night, as opposed to Amaterasu, who governs the day. Because of the status and power Tsukiyomi possesses in Shinto, the appearance of the moon in this scene is significant. The moon god Tsukiyomi also borrows the power of Amaterasu, because the moon reflects light from the sun, while the sun goddess Amaterasu rules the world and

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25 Miyazaki, My Neighbor Totoro.
26 Suzuki Miekichi, Kojiki Tales
heaven. The light of the moon in the dark night makes nature in the darkness sacred. Although feared by humans, when Susuwatari leaves the house, Tsukiyomi welcomes it into the kingdom of nature. The acceptance of Susutawari implies the inclusive character of nature, and clears people's misconception about this dark creature. The acceptance of Susuwatari in the moonlight purifies it. It clears out the impurities it have gained in the humans’ world, so it may join the world of the sacred.

**Scene 2. Torii at the Bottom of Totoro’s Mountain**

This scene is presented when the father and the girls go to thank Totoro for taking care of Mei. This is a picture of the foot of the mountain, where Totoro resides on top. Hidden among the trees, a white stone gate frame stands at the bottom of the stone stairs that lead to the top of the mountain. Just like its shape as a door, this stone gate serves as the gate to Totoro’s house.

This gate is religiously important and symbolic in Asian cultures. This gate is called Torii. Torii, 鳥居 in Japanese, literally means the place where birds live. Torii is a gate that marks the transition and the separation from the profane to the sacred in East Asian belief.27 Torii is a universal feature in East Asian religions, and appears right in front of or

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up to a few hundred yards away from almost all religious institutions and temples, which include Shinto shrines, Buddhist temples, Confucian temples and Daoist temples. In front of the Torii is the human world where all impurities take place, and behind the Torii is where the higher power resides, which cannot be polluted by the profane. Today Torii may not carry the same religious significance as before, since we see Torii in front of Chinatowns and many other Asian related but non-religious places in the United States. However, the religious aspect of Torii in Asian countries should still be regarded as it was in the traditional religious practices.

The appearance of Torii at the bottom of the mountain implies the religious importance and the sacredness of the mountain. Because Torii separates the profane and the sacred, by entering the mountain through this Torii, the family leaves the humans’ world behind and joins the world of the spirits. Considering that Shinto Kami are often from nature and represent natural elements, the Torii symbolizes the presence of possible Kami in the mountain. Especially since there is a Kami in Shinto called Yama-no-Kami, meaning the Kami of mountains; maybe the mountain itself is the kami.

**Scene 3. Totoro’s house, the Tree and a Shrine.**

The third scene takes place at the top of the mountain when the family reaches the Totoro’s home. Tororo lives underneath a gigantic camphor tree, which is shown in the picture. Next to the camphor tree is a little shrine. Next to these, there is a lantern and a
stone tablet scattered on the ground.

A place of worship is presented in this scene, given that all the objects presented are either religious symbols or contain religious elements. The stone lantern, which is called Toro or 石灯籠 in Japanese, is a traditional Buddhist symbol that usually stands at the entrance to a temple or a pagoda. When a lantern is lit, it is regarded as an offering to the Buddha. Later, the use of this type of lantern spread to Shinto. In this scene, the stone lantern stands right at the end of the stairs at the very top of the mountain. Its location reminds the visitors that this is the house of a higher being, and they are about to step into the world of the sacred.

The tablet scattered on the other side of the ground from the stone lantern is also a mark of the presence of a practiced religion. The tablet has a word carved on the surface. The word is 奉納, which means “giving an offering”. This word is often seen on boxes that collect offerings or tablets right in front of the Buddha or shrine. Buddhist temples and Shinto shrines often rely on the donation of lay people to survive; lay people will make an offering to the Buddha or Kami when they say a prayer or their prayer is answered. The carved word 奉納 on the tablet is a clear indication that this place is or used to be a functioning religious site.

The third religious element in this scene is the shrine. There are

three reasons that this is a shrine instead of a regular house. Because both the stone lantern and the tablet are indications of the presence of a higher being at this place, this little wood dwelling is more likely to be a shrine than a normal house. Further more, this house is slightly bigger than Mei, a four-year-old, this means it is too small for any normal sized adult to live in. Last but not least, this shelter resembles a Shinto shrine in structure and design. Comparing this shrine with a photo of a Shinto shrine, they both have wooden structures with a sliding roof, along with a rope hanging down from the ceiling, which is used in Shinto prayers.

Not only does this dwelling look like a shrine architecturally, but it also serves a religious purpose as a shrine. Shrines are the home of the Kami, and behind the doors there is often 神座 a seat of the kami, or 神体 the object of worship. This shrine can be identified as 祠 Hokora, which is a smaller shrine that enshrines a folk kami or a minor deity; or it may be a full sized shrine without 本殿 Honden, the main sanctuary. The whole mountain is a sacred space to be worshipped, so the shrine on the top of the mountain becomes a sacred building that is a part of the sacred space and is where Kami resides.

In addition to the shrine, the rope on the tree with white paper stripes tied on is another indication that Totoro's home is sacred. The same kind of rope is hung between the two pillars at the gate of the Shinto shrine shown in the photo. This kind of rope is

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called Shimenawa, and it is made with twisted rice straws. The rope imitates clouds and the white zigzag paper takes the shape of thunder. The combination of clouds and thunder symbolizes rain,\(^\text{30}\) and rain in an agriculturally based area means harvest. By hanging it up around natural objects and religious buildings, worshippers use Shimenawa as a prayer asking for blessings on the agricultural production.

Besides serving as a prayer for good harvest, Shimenawa also functions as a symbol of purification and a marking of the sacredness of the area\(^\text{31}\). Because of Shimenawa, the gigantic camphor tree is no longer simply a hundreds of years old tree that grows in the wild. The gigantic camphor tree is a religious element serves as an evidence of the presence of Kami, functions as a contract between the community and Kami that binds Kami to this mountain, and works as a witness for humans' dependence and love for Kami.

In addition to its religious importance, the tree may be a spirit in this sacred nature. The Shimenawa on the tree symbolizes the possibility of having a Kami in the area, or even in the tree itself. Because in Shinto mythology many Kami are from nature, and since nature has existed long before the human race and before the Japanese community, a tree this big and old is very likely to contain some spirits or even have a soul itself because of the energy it absorbs from the sun goddess Amaterasu and Mother Nature that creates many Kami. There is also a possibility that Miyazaki decides to use a camphor tree in the film based on a real camphor tree in Kagoshima prefecture that is measured as the biggest


\(^\text{31}\) Thomas P. Kasulis,. *Shinto: The Way Home*. (University of Hawaii Press. 2004), 17-23
That tree also has exposed roots and looks very similar to this camphor tree in *Totoro*. There is also a myth about a gigantic camphor tree, but it is not certain whether the legend is about that particular tree in Kagoshima or not. In this legend, a gigantic camphor tree absorbed the soul of the guardian of the tree after he killed himself, because he thought it was his negligence that caused the tree to begin dying. The camphor tree revived and survived difficulties and aging, and became a spirit because of the soul it took. This spirit makes the tree come to life and have the ability to think for itself and to take actions when needed. The living and spiritual tree’s ability to feel and act may explain how and why the entrance in the roots of the tree disappears when Mei wants to show her family Totoro’s home.

**Conclusion on the Sacredness of Mountain and Nature**

With a depiction of all these religious symbols: the stone Torii/gate at the bottom of the mountain and the stone lantern, the tablet with the word 奉納 which means offering, the little shrine and the camphor tree with Shimenawa on the top of the mountain, along with little Susuwatari coming to the big camphor tree and seeking Tsukiyomi, the moon god for shelter, Miyazaki tries to tell us that this mountain may have Kami residing in it and also that nature is sacred and spiritual. Combining all these symbols together, a complete Shinto worship emerges. From the entrance to the main building of worship, it is clear that this mountain becomes a major place to worship Kami for prosperity and hope for the

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future of the community. This is a place believed to be blessed and a residence of the higher being, where even little creatures seek protection from it. Because of its religious purposes and spiritual importance to the local community, this mountain becomes sacred and the sacredness of nature is emphasized again.

b). The Identity of Totoro

Our star of the film, Totoro is a mysterious, but also sweet and cuddly creature whose charm attracts many fans to the film. He is so popular that he eventually became the icon of Studio Ghibli. Interestingly, Totoro is not the name of the creature, but Mei’s mispronunciation of Tororu, which means troll in Japanese.34 (Nobody knows the actual name of this creature.) Totoro is not simply a creature with some special power, but a spirit or even a Kami who resides in the mountain and blesses the community.

Totoro may be mistaken as a Tanuki or a raccoon. Physically, Totoro resembles a Tanuki. Tanuki is a 妖怪 Yaokai from Japanese folk religion, which is a spirit, a monster, a creature or animal that has obtained certain super powers.

Tanuki is often described as a mischievous creature who plays

34 My Neighbor Totoro, IMDB.
tricks on people but does not do serious damage. It also has the power of changing its appearance and the geographic features of places. When I was researching information about Tanuki, I came across a type of Tanuki called 傘差狸 Kasasashi-tanuki, which means Tanuki holding an umbrella, a character who resembles Totoro physically, since Totoro also has an umbrella (given to him by Satsuki). This Kasasashi-tanuki often offers passengers to share the umbrella on a rainy day, but if the passengers accept the offer, they will be taken to an unknown land.

While Totoro resembles Tanuki physically, he is not a Tanuki who has a mischievous mind. He has the power to create an unknown world, which is his home, and to make his home disappear and appear again when needed. However, Kasasashi-tanuki and other Yaokai Tanuki seem to be mysterious and even dangerous because of their power in alluring and misguiding passengers, while Totoro does not have this dangerous or mischievous side of him. He is sweet and kind, in that he returns the favor after receiving the umbrella from Satsuki. Totoro’s quality makes him better than a Yaokai Tanuki, even though Miyazaki could have taken inspiration from a Yaokai Tanuki when he created Totoro.

Instead of a Yaokai, Totoro is the local Kami who resides in the mountain underneath that camphor tree. One of the characteristics Kami Totoro has is a role of protector for the community. We see this in a scene when Mei accidentally arrives at Totoro’s home and falls asleep on his belly, Totoro takes care of Mei and returns her home.

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safely. In addition, he helps Mei and Satsuki to grow the seeds he gives them into big trees. Finally, he helps Satsuki find Mei when Mei is lost. Totoro helps these two girls many times, not for anything in return, but because of his responsibility to the community.

Totoro is the local Kami and not a Tanuki because of the religious symbols and elements at his home, symbols a Tanuki would not have. In the mountain where he lives, there is a fully established Shinto worship area, where a Torii separates the mundane and the sacred; a stone lantern marks the entrance to the shrine; a stone tablet reminds visitors to make offerings; a camphor tree with Shimenawa rope serves as a contract between the community and the Kami; and a shrine that represents the residency of Kami. All these symbols point directly at the special and religious position of the owner of the house, Totoro, as a Kami who resides here.

IV. The Three-layered Relationship between Humans and Nature

Since Totoro is not simply a spirit, a troll or a raccoon, but a Kami who lives in the sacred mountain and under the giant camphor tree, and is worshipped by the community, the relationship between Totoro and the two girls is no longer a simple friendship. For viewers, the girls become the representatives of the community and even the entire human race, and Totoro represents nature, which makes nature personified with emotions and reactions to humans' actions. Thus, the friendship turns to a representation of the relationship between humans and nature. Through analyzing the interactions between Totoro and the girls, the relationship between humans and nature that Miyazaki depicts becomes clear also.
Different from many environmental films that only focus on criticizing the destructive nature of human race, Miyazaki presents a three-layered relationship between humans and nature. The first of these three layers shows that humans are dependent on nature, which is depicted in selected scenes in *My Neighbor Totoro*: After the girls pray to Jizo to stop the heavy rain, a boy from the neighborhood gives them his umbrella and runs past the Torii at the bottom of the mountain; Satsuki asks Totoro’s help to find Mei; the Jizo statues behind Mei when she is found by Satsuki. The second layer illustrates that nature does respond to humans and accepts humans’ change on it, which is analyzed in two scenes: Totoro borrows Satsuki’s umbrella and returns the favor, and then he uses the umbrella in the tree-growing dance. The third layer suggests the hope for a future of cooperation and friendship between humanity and nature, which is proven in the scene in which Totoro and the girls help the seeds grow into a gigantic tree.

**Layer 1: Humans’ Dependence on Nature**

The first essential layer of the relationship between nature and humans is humans’ dependence on nature. This relationship is not only about humans’ need and dependence on nature for its resources, but also humans’ respect for nature and the protection and help nature offers. This dependence includes nature protecting humans and answering humans’ prayers and requests. The scenes that illustrate this relationship are not limited to Totoro’s interaction with the girls, but also other religious powers and figures who protect the girls.

**Scene 1. Answer to Satsuki’s Prayer; A Boy Offers the Girls His Umbrella**

After Satsuki prays to a Buddhist statue to stop the heavy rain while taking shelter in a little shrine at the side of the street, a boy from the neighborhood passes by and gives
Satsuki and Mei his umbrella. The boy runs away quickly because he is shy. Nevertheless, he is also happy because he has helped the girls. He jumps and almost dances on the way back home and passes the Torii that stands at the bottom of Totoro’s mountain.

The Torii becomes a significant sign that Totoro is the one answering Satsuki’s prayer. The interesting thing about the scene is that Miyazaki deliberately shows the boy passing that Torii after he finishes his good work. This shows that this scene does not have to exist, but is created because Miyazaki wants to show the presence of the power of nature. Although the Buddhist statue (which may be Jizo) is the one that Satsuki prays to, and she is not yet aware of the existence of Totoro, the scene with the boy passing Totoro’s Torii suggests that Totoro is the one who tells the boy to fulfill Satsuki’s prayer. Because Totoro is a Kami and represents nature, by adding this scene to the film, Miyazaki illustrates that nature does care about people and understands people’s needs.

Scene 2. Satsuki asks Totoro’s help to find Mei
After Mei leaves home for the hospital by herself, the villagers search for Mei for hours but cannot find her. When everyone is frustrated and the day is getting dark, Satsuki looks towards Totoro’s tree and runs through a dark tunnel to his house and asks for help. Totoro smiles and calls the catbus to take Satsuki to Mei. When the catbus finds Mei, he watches the two girls hugging and grins in the background.

This scene is very similar to scene 1, yet is more obvious and straightforward that Totoro is helping the girls. Totoro answers Satsuki’s requests and helps her to find her sister. Since Totoro is Kami who comes from nature and represents nature, this scene again reinforces how nature responds to humans’ needs and requests.

However, this scene not only shows that nature responds to humans, but also presents that nature is not constituted of parts and pieces but a complete entity with interacting parts. When Totoro answers Satsuki’s request, he calls the catbus to find Mei instead of going with Satsuki on her search. Totoro not going on this search implies that there is no need for him to deliver the service as other parts of nature have already received Satsuki’s request. This connection between Totoro, the catbus and other parts of nature shows that nature itself is a uniform, living organism in which one part can influence other parts and communication is instant.

Not only is nature a living entity, it also feels people’s emotions and becomes satisfied when people rejoice over a fulfilled request. Another detail about this scene is the catbus’ grin in the background when he sees the two girls reunite. On one hand, the catbus grins because he is happy for being helpful; on the other hand, this grin presents the feeling of nature when it helps people. Both Totoro and the catbus are excited to help the humans and they both gain so much satisfaction from their good work. Through this scene,
Miyazaki presents to the audience a friendly and kindhearted image of nature that provides unconditional help and resources to humans. It further suggests that although humans do request many things from nature, and nature is always willing to give away its resources for the humans needs, humans still need to have an appreciation to nature for its good work.

**Scene 3. Jizo and Mei**

Humans’ dependence on nature is not only presented through nature’s answer to people’s prayers but also its protection of human beings. The best scene to illustrate this point is taken when Satsuki finds Mei. The day is getting dark; Mei is sitting at the side of the road, tired and sad. Behind her are six Buddhist statues. These statues are of Jizo. Jizo is a Bodhisattva who protects children. Jizo is one of the most famous Bodhisattvas in Japanese Buddhism. There are various types of Jizo statues, sitting or

![Image of Jizo and Mei](image-url)
standing, meditating or being active. Below is a general description of Jizo that I found.

Lafcadio Hearn gives a vivid and poetry-like description of Jizo's face:

More sweet, assuredly... this dream in white stone of the playfellow of dead children, like a beautiful young boy, with gracious eyelids half closed, and face made heavenly by such a smile as only Buddhist art could have imagined, the smile of infinite lovingness and supremest gentleness. Indeed, so charming the ideal of Jizo is that in the speech of the people a beautiful face is always likened to his—'Jizo-kao,' as the face of Jizo.37

There are some traces of the peaceful and delightful characteristics in Totoro’s Jizo statues, which are similar to Hearn’s description. Their eyes are closed, their heads are super round, they look like young boys or teenagers, and they are carved out of white stones. Compared to the photo of a statue of Jizo, the shapes and figures of these statues from the film are very similar as the statue from real life. In addition to their appearance, the presence of Jizo statues makes the whole scene seem tranquil and calm, despite that Mei is lost and everyone is worried about her.

In addition to looking like Jizo, these statues also take Jizo’s responsibility in Buddhist beliefs. Jizo is known and beloved for his role as a child protector. Jizo is a Bodhisattva. Like other Bodhisattva, Jizo is a guide who brings people across the river to the land of Nirvana, and also deals with the dead; yet the most significant distinguishing feature between Jizo and other Bodhisattvas is that Jizo takes care of the children, especially the children who die early such as aborted fetuses. Because they have not lived a full life, they do not have the chance to reincarnate to a better realm38. Because Mei is a little child, the Buddhist statues sitting behind her are more likely to be the Buddha/


38 It is like Limbo in Catholicism. Children’s “hell” is where children build pagodas or stone pillars for their parents as a prayer, but these pagodas are often knocked down by monsters.
Bodhisattva who is associated with children, which leads to my conclusion that these Buddhist statues are likely to be Jizo.

Although her sister and all the villagers are worried, from Jizo standing in the background, the Japanese audience knows that Mei is safe. First, Jizo is standing behind Mei. The back is one of the most vulnerable parts of the human body, because humans cannot see what takes place behind them, and also the spine is one of the essential pieces of the body due to its function in transmitting signals from the brain to other parts of the body. By standing behind Mei, Jizo protects the vulnerable part of her body. Secondly, the sun is going down and the darkness is coming. Jizo statues face the opposite side of the sunset, since many children fear the darkness; Jizo(s) are making sure the dark side of the world is shielded from scaring Mei.

The mixed representations of nature may make nature seem complicated. However, the truth is that nature is one body, but is presented in different forms from different religious traditions. Although Jizo is from Buddhist traditions and Totoro is identified as a Shinto Kami, this difference does not affect how we see that nature interacts with humans. It is similar to Scene 1, in which Satsuki prays to the Buddhist statue and Totoro answers the prayer. Jizo can be a representation of Totoro in protecting Mei, but he can also be a part of the whole nature that protects Mei. Nature is a complete entity whose every part communicates with each other and functions together, so which part is presented does not affect the fact that nature is the one doing the work. Thus in this scene, Mei is protected by nature, even when she is lost in the wilderness. Mei has not asked nature to protect her actively, but Jizo stands behind her and protects her regardless of her request. This scene
further implies that nature is always taking care of human needs, physical and psychological, whether humans ask for it or not.

**Conclusion of Layer-1 Humans’ Dependence on Nature**

The first layer is the most straightforward one. Because nature satisfies humans’ needs, humans often ask nature for help and blessings. This idea is strongly reflected through Shinto practice, such as Kami and shrines that sit at the side of the streets that bless the community and the travelers’ safety. Through these three scenes, nature not only answers humans’ requests, but also reveals its way of responding. Nature is a complete entity, in which one part is always communicating and functioning with other parts. Whether if it is a Shinto Kami or a Buddha or Bodhisattva who takes the request, it is nature that acts as one entity to fulfill people’s need. Another characteristic of nature is its volunteering care for humans, physical and psychological. Through these scenes, Miyazaki gives nature a different personality than the traditional environmental films do. Nature is present not only in the wilderness, but also in religious figures that humans build. Nature is also a selfless being that takes care of humans. Thus, humans should not take what they receive from nature for granted, even though they are blessed with no need to repay this care.

**Layer 2. Nature accepts humans’ help and changes**

Different from the previous layer that discusses humans’ dependence on nature, this layer is from an angle of natures’ dependence on humans, and concentrates on how nature accepts humans’ help and changes itself gradually. The analysis focuses on the stories that take place after Satsuki gives the umbrella to Totoro. I also call it “the umbrella layer”,
because all the scenes are related to the umbrella Totoro takes. The two selected scenes are Satsuki and Totoro’s first encounter in rain, and Totoro using the umbrella to grow the trees.

**Scene 1: Satsuki and Totoro’s First Encounter in Rain**

When Satsuki and Mei are waiting at the bus stop for their father, through the limited view below the umbrella, Satsuki sees a gigantic and fluffy creature arrive. This creature is Totoro. With a lotus leaf on his head as an umbrella, Totoro does not seem to be excited about the rain either. Satsuki offers Totoro her father’s umbrella and teaches Totoro how to use it. Totoro is amazed by the sound the collected raindrops make when falling from the trees on the umbrella. In return, Totoro gives the girls a small leaf-wrapped package with seeds inside.

By transitioning from using a lotus leaf to a real umbrella, Totoro embraces the human creation and technology. He discovers a new beauty in the forest, the loud raindrops on the umbrella. This acceptance and embrace of the umbrella symbolizes how nature accepts human inventions. Yet, rather than simply taking in human inventions, nature uses human creations to create new things; the invention becomes a new part of nature, just as Totoro discovers a new sound made by raindrops.

This umbrella symbolizes humans’ purest feelings towards nature of contributing to nature without seeking anything in return. If the first layer of the relationship between humans and nature is about humans’ need for nature’s protection and blessings, this second layer is about how humans give back to nature selflessly. This layer is new and unusual. Often humans see nature as an unlimited resource that can be exploited for thousands of years, and take nature for granted. Miyazaki’s different use of the friendship
between Totoro and the girls to illustrates a brand new relationship between humans and nature. In this relationship, nature is no longer in a passive role but is reacting to the humans’ care with gratitude and appreciation.

**Scene 2. Totoro Using the Umbrella in a Dance Ritual**

The girls plant the seeds that Totoro gave them, and wait for them to grow. With the umbrella, Totoro shows up in the girls’ backyard at midnight with two of his minions, and does a dance ritual. Upon seeing Totoro, the girls rush out from bed and join the dance. By jumping side-to-side and holding the umbrella up and down, they make the seeds sprout and grow into a gigantic tree in a few minutes.

The ritualistic use of the umbrella underscores how Totoro feels about humans’ inventions. This is not only an appreciation, but also a full acceptance of human inventions into the most important part of nature. If nature is seen as sacred and as a religious entity, and creating life is one of the characteristics and powers of nature, having the umbrella in the ritual that creates life implies that this human invention has become an essential part of nature.

The ritual dance that is performed in this scene is a bridge that brings human inventions and nature together. The dance can be seen as a religious ritual because it may be an imitation of a Shinto ritual called Kagura 神楽, meaning music offered to the gods or
godly music. Kagura dates from Amaterasu’s time in Shinto mythology. Originally, it was meant to entertain Amaterasu and to bring her out from her cave; now this practice is seen as an entertainment for Kami. Through this religious dance ritual, although there is still a contrast between human invention and nature, religion harmonizes this contrast, and unites them.

**Conclusion on Layer 2**

The second layer further explores the relationship between humans and nature. Not only do humans depend on nature, but nature also appreciates the inventions and changes that humans bring. Miyazaki personifies nature, and creates Totoro as a representative of nature. Totoro’s love for the umbrella is Miyazaki’s way of telling the audience that nature also embraces humanity. The religious dance ritual implies that religion is the bridge that can bring nature and human technology together. Combining layer 1 and layer 2, this film shows human and nature should have a friendship in which both sides enjoy and need each other’s company.

**Layer 3. A Dream in which Humans and Nature Cooperate Together**

The relationship between humans and nature in the third layer is a combination and elevation of the first two layers. Humans depend on nature and nature appreciates humans’ inventions. By further combining these two relationships, it leads to the cooperation between humans and nature. In this layer, Miyazaki illustrates a scene in which the girls

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and Totoro work together to create a new life, and describes a dream of a beautiful and hopeful future, in which humans and nature work side by side.

The scene that illustrates this layer is the same as scene 2 from the last layer. Two girls work with Totoro in the dance ritual to help the seeds grow into a gigantic tree in one night. However, the new tree is not there anymore the next morning. What is left in the field are the sprouted seeds. The girls dance around the field excitedly, yelling, “This (growing the tree with Totoro) is a dream, but does not feel like a dream.”

This scene emphasizes the collaboration between humans and nature, and further describes a dream and a wish for such a future. The tree growing process could have involved only Totoro doing the ritual dance while the two girls stand at the side, watching him, yet the girls join in the process. Miyazaki’s design in the girls’ participation in the ritual implies his message of promoting the collaboration between humans and nature. The tree growing is a creation of new life, which is one of nature’s powers. Although nature has the ability to do so by itself, the girls’ intervention in the process is a way of showing that nature shares its divine power with humans. By collaboration, humans can experience the same exciting and powerful emotion that nature experiences in creating a life. Because humans are created in nature and cared for by nature, when humans can participate in the process of creation, humans are elevated to a higher level. Humans are not merely a creation of nature, but also are creators of life.

However, this idea of humans becoming a creator of life with nature is still a dream. This is one of the confusing parts of the film. Miyazaki could have left the new tree in the backyard. However, by making it as new sprouts again, he emphasizes that this tree is only

40 Miyazaki, My Neighbor Totoro.
a dream and a beautiful wish. This unfulfilled dream symbolizes a beautiful hope that humans have. It is the human desire to become the creator of life. This emphasis on the dream is to remind humans that they cannot function alone in the world, and cannot become so proud that they disregard the existence of nature. On the other hand, this scene also points out that although this dream of collaboration has not come true, when it does, the future will become wonderful.

V. Conclusion

My Neighbor Totoro is a powerful film. It not only has helped Studio Ghibli and director Hayao Miyazaki to establish their reputations and fame, but also has led a movement for environmental protection. Instead of showing all the possible dangers that humans may face if they ignore nature's existence and needs like many other environmental films, Miyazaki presents the audience an ideal world from the eyes of two little girls, where only happiness and hope exist. To deliver the message of creating a new relationship between humans and nature, Miyazaki first uses his childhood and common childhood experiences to create an emotional connection with the audience. He further capitalizes on the Japanese audience’s religious education on Shinto and Buddhist traditions to illustrate that nature is a sacred, united, and complete entity but is presented in different forms from both Shinto and Buddhism. He personalizes nature with emotions from a fluffy and sweet creature and a Shinto Kami called Totoro. By developing a friendship between the two girls and Totoro, Miyazaki illustrates an innovative three-layered relationship between humans and nature. Humans depend on nature for help and blessings, while nature appreciates and embraces humans’ change on it. At last, Miyazaki
gives the audience a beautiful and hopeful dream of collaboration between humans and nature, which has not yet come true. The message the film delivers is enjoyable and persuasive yet also motivating. It gives the audience hope, while also encouraging the audience to follow the girls in creating a friendship with nature. A successful film is just so, leaving audience joy and something more to look forward to in their own lives.
Bibliography


