Developing the Self and Connecting with Others: The Impact of Anime and its Music on the Western World

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Introduction: A World Divided

Our current global climate is filled with xenophobia and distrust. There are currently 65 examples across the continents where countries, such as the United States, Israel, Hungary, Turkey, Kenya, and more have enacted or proposed border barriers, a term used to describe policy that takes initiative in limiting or completely denying entry of citizens from neighboring nations ("World of Walls"). Although this controversy has been recently popularized with President Donald Trump's U.S.-Mexico wall proposal, this is not a uniquely American issue. Our lack of human connectivity is a global crisis that is in need of mending. Mahatma Gandhi once said, "Our ability to reach unity in diversity will be the beauty and the test of our civilization." Considering this, it is important to remember that along with each of our national civilizations, we are also one human race living in a *global* civilization. I have come to think about how my own family is a reflection of global unity. I was born the child of a Christian Lebanese immigrant man and a Jewish American woman with a Puerto Rican father. Sometimes I consider myself to be a byproduct of the goal our country's progressives have had in mind throughout generations: the unity of many different races. I have great respect and honor for my cultural heritage. Throughout my life, I have bonded with my heritage in many ways--including eating mediterranean cuisine with my father, listening to Lebanese music, and cooking paella[1] and pasteles[2] with my grandfather at home. What is interesting, however, is how one of the cultural influences that has impacted me tremendously as an artist and a person is **not** one of my own lineage. Japanese animation has led me on an almost two-decade long journey of self

[1] Paella - A traditional Puerto Rican dish that consists of boiled rice, chicken, chicken stock, peas, shrimp, chorizo, clams, and various spices.
[2] Pasteles - A traditional Puerto Rican dish that consists of plantain paste, tropical pumpkins, diced meat, and yautía.

betterment and cultural awareness. Ultimately, through my writing I will use my own experiences and research to demonstrate how the **intercultural** consumption of specific art forms can develop the individual's mindfulness and also create opportunities for people of different backgrounds to unify.

In order for any subject or phenomenon within the following writing to have a significant effect on any individual (and thus community), the individual must be relatively willing to learn about a topic with which they probably don't already personally and culturally identify. There is a certain level of openness, or seeking of knowledge outside of the self, required for the contents of this paper to have maximum effect. With that said, I would now like to begin telling you about how contemporary Japanese animation (an industry that increasingly struggles to produce sufficient monetization to support its professionals) has changed many lives, including my own.

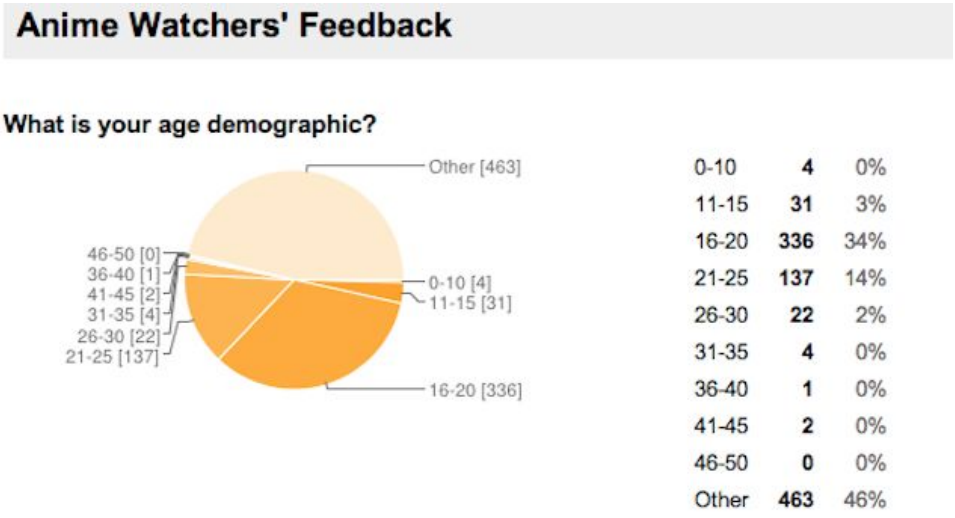
Anime: Developing the Self

As a child, like most, I would come home from school and do my homework before dinner. I remember it vividly--the TV would passively run the latest Cartoon Network shows as I practiced long division and multiplication. However, after I finished my daily school assignments, I would watch Toonami, Cartoon Network's nightly showcase of various Anime. Anime, as consumed in the West, is Japanese animated shows which are either dubbed with English voice overs or captioned with subtitles. Back then, I was simply consuming Anime for the purpose of an entertaining pastime. Like most cartoons, the vibrant visuals and audio FX

were enough to grab my attention. Little did I know, these shows would dramatically influence me in various ways until this day.

It isn't a secret that animation gets a bad rap in America. Leslie Wade's CNN article titled, "Study: Some cartoons are bad for children's brains" reports that a study done by the University of Virginia showed "60 4 year olds a 9-minute chunk of what they call an 'animated kitchen sponge' cartoon [Spongebob Squarepants]. The experts tested the children's memory and thinking skills and compared their scores to another group of kids, who instead had watched a slow-paced educational cartoon or drew with crayons and markers" (Wade). The findings showed that the children who watched Spongebob did worse on the thinking tests than children in the other groups. In this same article, Dr. Dimitri Christakis, professor of Pediatrics, claims that, "When children's brains, which are still developing and are bombarded with too much stimulation, it can interfere with their ability to learn to focus properly" ("Study: Some cartoons"). I'm not going to reject the integrity of this data. In fact, these finding may be true and important to consider in the scope of children's developmental health. However, there are a few important factors to consider before writing all animation off as a definitive hindrance on the development of the child's brain. For one, the University of Virginia study did not allude to any evidence of long-term impairment on the test subjects. Secondly, this article points out that the "pacing" (cutting to different scenes in a given amount of time) of the cartoons seems to be the stimulating issue--not animation as a whole. And while it's true that American cartoons are additionally commonly crude in humor and lacking in moral lessons, the Anime medium is quite different. In fact, across the Anime-consuming demographic, unlike American cartoons, a large

portion of the audience is actually young adults. According to Reddit[3] User, “defan752”, who conducted a demographics survey on Reddit’s r/Anime subforum in 2014, 48% of Anime fandom is actually between the ages of 16 and 25 (“Results from /r/anime demographic survey”). This may be a confusing statistic to some, so I will elaborate. In regard to genre variety, Anime



is more similar to books than cartoons. There are over 20 genres, including action, adventure, comedy, drama, slice of life, fantasy, magic, supernatural, horror, mystery, psychological, romance, and sci-fi (Anime Genre List) . A large portion of these genres are taken up by two: Shounen (which is roughly translated from Japanese to “young boy”) and Seinen (which is roughly translated to “young man”). Shounen Anime are commonly stories about childhood growth and adventure, relating to adolescent children with themes of morality and the power of friendship. Seinen Anime are usually a bit more philosophical, commonly exploring themes of adulthood and/or the transition from child to adult. This thematic range allows for a huge exploration in different concepts that relate to different people in different ways. There are stories like Haikyuu, which tells the story of a High School boys volleyball team, to stories like

[3] Reddit - A forum website which is ranked the 17th most popular site in the world (“Reddit.com Traffic Statistics”).

Neon Genesis Evangelion, which explores Existential Philosophy[4] and Adolescent Psychology[5] through the invasion of earth by alien-mecha robots called “Angels”. As a multiracial adolescent, I grew up with many questions about my identity and how I could ever relate to my classmates--most of which who were not in the same culturally-jumbled position as I was. I often felt like an outsider, and could not imagine how my inability to assimilate to those around me could be of benefit. My skin was different. My holidays were different. A glance at me was nothing short of an ambiguous confusion. When I was just a child, I was blind to how this was going to affect me. However, as I approached adolescence I became more and more aware of my difference. By middle school, the cafeteria was already mostly segregated by race. As a young teenager, I remember watching an Anime series called “Naruto”, the story of a parentless child ninja who is ridiculed by his village for having a demon fox sealed inside him when he was born. Throughout the series, despite his ailment, Naruto is dedicated to proving his worth to his village--progressively showcasing how he uses his setback to his benefit. He slowly finds ways to manifest his demon fox’s power to protect his friends. Slowly he starts to become acknowledged by his peers for his integrity and passionate will to protect them from the harmful forces of the ninja world. I can confidently say that the countless moral lessons and character development in this Anime changed the way I viewed myself as an individual and also friend. Interestingly enough, while researching the effect that Anime has on minorities I came across some fascinating information.

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[4] Existential Philosophy - A philosophy which “emphasizes individual existence, freedom and choice. It is the view that humans define their own meaning in life, and try to make rational decisions despite living in an irrational universe.” (“Existentialism”)

[5] Adolescent Psychology - The psychology study that “focuses on the issues that are unique to adolescents. Adolescence is a time of fluctuating and rapidly changing interests and desires, high energy, sexual maturation, physical growth, and limited emotional insight.” (“Adolescent Psychology”)

Pictured: Anime - “Naruto”

Anime’s ability to motivate individuals and groups of marginalized people can be seen in cases other than my own. The Kotaku article, “Why Black Men Love Dragon Ball Z[6]”, written by Gita Jackson, discusses how the show drew black anime fans in with flashy over-the-top fights, but in the end helped them mature emotionally. But how can fictional characters with spiky hair and the ability to fly inspire young black men? Jackson references a quote from an interview with Malcolm Jones on the topic, an engineer at Adobe who said, “...the main character was always some sort of underdog… Something about having that underdog, that can, like, raise up and make something happen, I think black men particularly identify themselves with that” (Jackson). Historically in the West, black children and adults have faced systematic discrimination. In this context, it is evermore important to find a *rock*, or a way to muster

[6] Dragon Ball Z - One of the most popular anime shows over the last 20 years. Its height of popularity was reached between the 90s and early 2000s.

strength from within in order to overcome external obstacles. Art is beautiful in this way, as it can inspire individuals simply by coming into contact with it. Famously successful hip-hop producer Rza[7] talks about Dragon Ball Z this way: "Son Goku[8] has super powers and doesn't even realize it--a head injury destroyed his memory, robbed his knowledge of self. Then one day, gets stressed beyond his limits and Hulks out into his alter ego" (Jackson). Sometimes individuals who are placed below or outside of a social setting feel like they have been stripped of their sense of belonging. But sometimes it is *this* very condition that enables the individual to find the strength within their truest self. Because of my own experience with this concept, I had the chance to develop a hobby that I have worked at for so long that those around me consider to be my special talent.

Music: Inspired by Anime

I started to view being different as an opportunity to firestart my expression of self. I began making music using software on my 2008 MacBook laptop. I didn't even know how to play a single instrument. I figured that however good or bad I did, the fact that I was inherently different from the people around me was enough reason to follow through. To me, art, and music being a subcategory of art, is the key to human connectivity. This is mainly due to a key concept: Human beings are created, and eventually become the replicators of their species. In a similar way, Art is created, and eventually becomes the inspiration for its creation. I want to explore why this phenomenon matters in regard to the fulfillment of the self, along with global unity. I believe that this concept, in a similar way to my relationship to anime growing up, applies to

[7] Rza - A famous hip-hop producer for the grammy-nominated 90s collective "Wu-Tang Clan".
[8] Son Goku - The protagonist of the highly successful anime "Dragon Ball Z".

many other millennials in the Western world. In fact, this phenomenon is not only apparent in the context of the Japanese animation medium, but also in the creation of Western music sub-genres.

The internet, today, is the brainchild of international cultures that are destined for collision. Social and multi media websites such as SoundCloud, Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube represent this to the fullest. Everyday millions of ideas are exchanged through statuses, tweets, instant messenger platforms, photos, videos, and online forums. Through the online cultivation and gathering of individuals with a mix of mutual and separate interests, ideas are sent from one country to another, one continent to another, and one hemisphere to another--progressively snowballing in the cyberworld until big enough to be collectively titled by its constituents. As an Arts Management student, lifelong musician, and Eastern culture advocate, my core interests and passion for my senior project research lies within the crossroads of these subjects. As I explore many different genres, subcultures, and movements, I am eager to construct a cohesive journey which guides you through my exploration of the ping-ponged exchange of contemporary artistic and educational influences between the United States and Asia, along with why this matters in the larger scheme of global unity.

I have spent a long time on streaming platforms--digging through my favorite libraries and finding new music that inspires me as a artist and person. I spent quite a while exploring the rabbit-hole algorhythms of SoundCloud and YouTube in the last few years, and eventually came across the futuristic disco-sampling genre of *Vaporwave*. This is a subgenre of music that adopts aesthetic influence from Japanese art. Vaporwave emerged in the early 2010s, beginning when electronic music artist Daniel Lopatin released his *Eccojams Vol. 1* project. “All of the tracks were backboned by pitch-shifted samples of popular ‘80s” music Sean Francis Han explains in

his “Vaporwave: subversive dream music for the post-Internet age” article. This album and its aesthetics, while created as a simple stylistic switch-up for Lopatin, would spark an undeniable resonance with millennials, which grew to become the “bedrock for a new discerning style of music” (Han). Since its emergence, Vaporwave has undergone many waves of style and popularity. Artists like British vaporwave producer “Hong Kong Express”’s production “drew heavily from elements of Wong Kar Wai films and Japanese culture” (Han). Han mentions an HKE collaboration with an artist named, “t e l e p a t h テレパシー能力者” called “2 8 1 4”, which she notes to be one of the most monumental projects in the genre. Both of these artists are popular in the vaporwave community for, while not being ethnically Japanese, still utilizing Japanese visual aesthetics, which are presented in the form of album art and music visuals. 2814’s music video for their song “恢复” (Birth of a New Day), depicts the story of a woman traveling the urban terrain in an unnamed Japanese city. However, vaporwave artists don’t just stick to organic Japanese influence for their visual concepts. Artists like Yung Bae commonly use image stills and gifs from Anime from the 90s to compliment music releases. Yung Bae is famous in the vaporwave community for sampling Japanese 80s music and flipping it with a modern, punchy spin. His track “Sailor Babe” boldly samples Anri’s funky 1983 single, “Lady Sunshine”. Anri, a Japanese singer/songwriter, is credited as the creator of the “Cat’s Eye” theme song. Cat’s Eye is a 1985 anime, and Anri’s record was one of the first J-Pop records used for an Anime opening theme. Justin Sevakis of the Anime News Network notes, “Anime openings and endings [theme song music] have been promotions for music for decades...It’s such a natural fit that even back before companies were actively trying to promote pop acts, the theme songs themselves became pop music” (Sevakis). It is this dance between art and pop culture that

perfectly describes how Anime, as an artform, exists as a cultural exchange between the East and West. This has been the case since the 80s, and still holds true today.

In the 2000s, rock bands like Asian Kung-fu Generation would become the face of popular anime theme songs. Some of the most popular shounen Anime to date; Naruto, Bleach, and Fullmetal Alchemist have used numerous tracks from the band's catalogue for episode openings (check songs "Haruka Kanata", "Rewrite", and "After Dark"). These shows were all hits in the U.S. for *years*, airing on the most popular animation networks: Cartoon Network's Toonami and the streaming service/application Crunchyroll. The boom in popularity that these opportunities gave this band has allowed them the opportunity to tour *globally.* Last year, Asian Kung-fu Generation performed in California, Mexico, Brazil, France, London, the UK, Germany, and many more countries ("Asian Kung-fu Generation"). Anime fandom is strong in both the East and West, and this band's success even roughly ten years after their anime licensing deals is evident of this.

But not all musicians necessarily land an anime licensing deal for their music *post*-release. The famously underground Hip-hop producer Nujabes (famous for instrumental, sampled-based soul music) was recruited by anime director Shinichiro Watanabe to help produce a completely new and original soundtrack for the soon-to-be hit "Samurai Champloo". Champloo tells the story of two samurai who are sentenced for execution, but miraculously saved by a clumsy waitress. The three then embark on a journey to find a samurai who "smells of sunflowers" ("Samurai Champloo"). I spoke to James Hadfield, a writer for the Japanese Times news publication, who wrote an article on Nujabes back in 2015. We spoke about Nujabes' origins, along with the legacy he left following his death in a tragic car accident in 2006. "...The

environment in Kamakura, where Nujabes lived, influenced his music" (Hadfield). Although set in Edo-era Japan, Nujabes seamlessly scored Samurai Champloo with upbeat, soulful Hip-Hop. The juxtaposition of the show's traditional setting with this modern groove creates a unique and powerful aura that anime fans praise to this day. Samurai Champloo, as listed on MyAnimeList (a popular U.S. website where users track and review Anime series they watch), is rated an 8.5/10. Nujabes' contributions to the show's score total up to two full length albums: "Departure" and "Impression", are still praised years after the show's completion--totalling millions of streams and downloads across the internet. In fact, right now as I am writing this paper in a Westchester coffee shop, one of Nujabes' songs, "World's End Rhapsody", just came on the speakers. While he was never a *celebrity* in neither the east nor west, as Hadfield puts it, "..he was about as popular as it's possible for an underground artist to get". His soulful-sampling legacy opened the gate to a generation of a whole new genre: "Chillhop".

Chillhop/Lofi is a post-Nujabes genre that involves the sampling of quality degraded, old jazz piano riffs under punchy, swung Hip-hop drum samples (Kilkenny). Some of the other most notable influencers of the genre are J Dilla and Flying Lotus, two American artists that are closely associated with the style and influence Nujabes brought to contemporary music. Dilla was active during the same timespan as Nujabes, and also died young in 2006. Through listening to both of their work, it is undeniable that the two drew influence from one another. Chillhop is one of the most popular post-internet genres to date. There are tons of public playlist across streaming services like Spotify and SoundCloud which collect millions of streams in total (Spotify). Popular chillhop artists include "Aso." and "Knxwledge", who have made serious noise in the grassroots, independent music industry throughout the past few years. I write about

these genres and artists because their creation and influence are pieces of fuel for the fire that is my and many others' inspiration for art. It is easy to see how Japanese animation and music has held heavy influence in genres and niches in the West, even some that I am not so much involved with directly. These fanbases and subcultures are growing every year. Concerts are held across the country--venues are packed with vaporwave and chillhop fans wishing to experience their favorite music live, in front of artists they had previously only known of digitally. According to the article, "Largest North American Anime Conventions of 2017", events like as Anime Expo in LA and Anime Matsuri in Houston host up to one hundred thousand people every year (Delahanty). At the conventions, anime fans join together dressed up in costume or, "cosplay", as their favorite characters and spend the day taking pictures, shopping, and watching upcoming release trailers from their favorite anime studios and licensing networks. For anime fandom, conventions are essentially their own little holidays. Last November I attended one of these conventions for the first time--the Crunchyroll backed "Anime NYC" hosted in the Jacob Javits Center. Being able to feel the bonding energy amongst a couple thousand of strangers was fascinating. The unity that an art form such as Anime can provide for communities felt almost religious. People of all different ages and races were brought together under one roof. This is why the unity of people under art is so important. It gives us a reminder of our unity as a species.

Language: Learning Japanese

The great American inventor Thomas Jefferson once said, "Do you want to know who you are? Don't ask. Act. Action will delineate and define you" (Philosiblog). In my own experience, the most beautiful part of interacting with new cultures and experiences is the opportunity to manifest the insight into new life journeys. Because of the way Japanese art has so

evidently influenced me, about a half a year ago I became motivated to start learning the Japanese language. Not only would this be paying homage to the culture that has gifted me with so much passion in my life, but it would also be a healthy challenge of growth. Over time, this venture became a bit of an independent study that has opened my mind up to a *completely* different language construction. Before I discussed with you how the internet serves as a medium for Japanese anime and music to travel over to the West. However, I would also like to note that it enabled me to start learning the Japanese language from scratch. I stress that I had not learned a **single** word of Japanese from a fluent speaker before watching anime or deciding to actively learn the language. In her article, "The Internet as a tool to learn a second language in a technical environment", María Carrío Pastor[9] writes: "if we integrate technology in the methodology we use when teaching a second language and students can practise with international partners, the results can be surprising. Chats, scanning texts, games, filling forms, etc. are just some of the activities our students can do" (Pastor). In my personal experience, this is nothing but accurate. Programs like the iPhone App "HelloTalk" allow people from two countries to practices each other's language through text and voice chat. However, I would also emphasize that those who are interested in learning another language don't *need* to chat directly to get started. YouTube contains hundreds of free, quality videos on introductory language lessons; which is how I began learning Japanese.

Many people, including my family, friends, and academics have asked me the question: *"Why Japanese?"*. This question makes sense from the perspective of individuals without the same experience as my own. To be quite frank, it probably could have been any culture or any

[9] María Carrío Pastor - Professor of English Language at the Universidad Politécnica de Valencia, Spain

language. I figure that when you are a young spirit, you are subconsciously absorbing information from which you learn about the world. It just so happened that the right conditions were met by this specific culture's artistic mediums to attract a young mind's curiosity. This seems to be the case for tons of Westerners.

Growing up, the United States' mainstream portrayal of Japan's culture and people left me with a perspective that was distorted through appropriation and chliché misrepresentation. Some of the most famous american movies, like "Kill Bill", portray modern Japanese people as Edo era samurais and Yakuza gangsters. Sushi and asian fusion restaurants all over New York cover their walls with dragons and other asian mythology. I did not want my lens to be distorted by this strange romanticism: somehow it did not feel right.

As I began learning the Japanese language, I grew more and more curious about Japan in general. I began to wonder things like: "What are the Japanese people really like?", "What kinds of foods do Japanese people really eat?", "What is it like to live in a mountainous island with beaches, forests, and cities scattered throughout?". These questions fascinated my imagination. My friends and family knew about my interest as well, as I would often talk about my progress in learning the language, along with my passionate curiosity for the country. At the end of last May, my mother surprised me with a ticket to Japan, along with a semi-structured itinerary. I was in awe. At the end of August, my passions were actually going to be manifested into a real life experience. But apart from fulfilling my cultural curiosity, why would traveling to Japan become so important in the long run?

Travel: Connecting with Others

Matthew J. Stone and James F. Patrick's, "The Educational Benefits of Travel Experiences: A Literature Review" descriptively discusses the multidisciplinary study of the effect that travel has on the individual. "Independent travel has been explored more recently. Inkson and Myers (2003) interviewed 50 New Zealanders who had spent at least six months overseas, and revealed that a majority mentioned gaining interpersonal, communication, self-confidence, and cross- cultural skills. These benefits echo those of study abroad and suggest that a formal learning component is not a necessity to glean the educative benefits of travel" (Stone and Patrick). Although my trip had only lasted two weeks, the concepts Stone and Patrick discuss were more than prevalent in my own short experience.

Back in the U.S., I remember being extremely nervous to practice my baby-level Japanese with native speakers. However, throughout my experiences--whether it was walking the streets of Shinjuku, shopping around Shibuya, or eating the world's freshest sushi at Tsukiji Fish Market--I gained progressive comfort in my ability to approach native speakers and engage in dialogue. In moments when I was lost in Tokyo's train stations, or when I needed to return my portable wifi device at the post office, I took out my Japanese dictionary and learned new phrases that I can still utilize to this day. This extremely first-hand educational experience allowed me to

Pictured - Shinjuku, Tokyo

associate phrase-learning with *real life* moments. Ontologically, this has been the most effective period of language learning I have ever experienced. As Inkson and Myers point out, "Overall, academic, career, and personal growth have been identified as benefits of short-term study abroad, but some believe longer study is better" (Stone and Patrick). I can only imagine the increase in language proficiency I would gain if I would have stayed in Japan for the same duration as the Inkson and Myers study. It is important to mention that apart from my linguistic skill development, my trip in Japan allowed me to interact with other travelers and native speakers altogether. The ability to relate the mutual experiential astonishment as a tourist to

Pictured - Shinjuku, Tokyo

others one moment and then express that feeling to natives the next was a surreal juxtaposition. I made friends with natives when shopping around Kyoto, some of which I still talk to on an occasional basis. I recall meeting Matsu, a nineteen year old retail worker at a streetwear[10] store. We introduced ourselves in Japanese and spoke minimal English (mostly because he had only really practiced English in school and wasn't too comfortable using it in conversation). He told me he worked another job in Kyoto Tower and asked that I stop by before leaving Japan. The day before my departure date, we met up and had lunch--exchanging life goals and interests. Luckily for the more complicated subject matter, there was a ton of help from Google Translator.

Throughout my nine day long trip to Japan, my Western biases about the country were eradicated. I can confidently say that the people of Tokyo and Kyoto are some of the kindest strangers I have ever met in my entire life. Police officers, store clerks, and even common citizens are all willing to lend a guiding hand to those who have made the effort to basic Japanese and travel to their country. A moment that really stuck with me was when I asked a lady in Kyoto Tower for directions to the food court. Upon thanking her for her help, she thanked me in return for *"being so much like a Japanese and not so much like a foreigner"*. In all honesty, I can not recall anything about my demeanor that was especially deserving of such a compliment. All I had done was show basic manners and gratitude. Being in a country where this standard is selectively appreciated woke me up. I realized how important it is to extend kindness and appreciation, even in the smallest moments. This is a morale that I brought back with me to the United States. I have noticed that since my trip to Japan, I have been more open and conversational with complete strangers. This is a special growth that I am extremely grateful for.

[10] Streetwear - A style of clothing associated with urban and hip-hop culture.

Language (Part 2)

I coincidentally came into contact with Japanese animation as a child and it led me on a journey with explorative turns. The explosive impact of a single genre of an art form can change a person's life and allow for the connection of people from two different hemispheres. As a musician, my goal is to incorporate the lessons and energy I have acquired on this journey, and spread them to as many people as I can; understanding and speaking to others in another language is just one step closer to this goal. Since coming back to the U.S., I have incorporated the Japanese language into my songwriting--allowing me to express my ideas in new ways and connect to a whole new audience. It is my hope that this will allow my art to resonate with thousands, and maybe millions of more people. At the very least, knowing another language allows me the opportunity of interacting with a large percentage of people I could not have otherwise. Since my beginning to learn Japanese, I have become more interested in learning additional languages such as Chinese and Korean. I have noticed that learning these languages is easier than my first time learning a secondary language (Japanese). The academic journal, "Bilinguals find it easier to learn a third language" by the University of Haifa discusses this phenomenon by referencing their study:

"For this study, two groups of 6th grade students in Israel were chosen to represent a sample of students studying English as a foreign language. The first group comprised 40 students, immigrants from the FSU whose mother tongue is Russian and who speak fluent Hebrew as a second language. The second group comprised 42 native Hebrew-speaking students with no

fluency in another language, besides the English being studied in school as a foreign language" (Haifa)

Professor Salim Abu-Rabia and Ekaterina Sanitsky found that the bilingual children had an easier time learning English: "After comparing and merging the results of these tests, the researchers were able to conclude that those students whose mother tongue was Russian demonstrated higher proficiency not only in the new language, English, but also in Hebrew. They found that the total average between the tests of the two groups was above 13% in the Russian-speakers' favor." If this phenomenon holds true, then learning Chinese will be an expedited experience compared to earning my secondary language. Another interesting fact is that Japanese adopts many characters from the Chinese alphabet called "Kanji". I have noticed that because I know the meaning of a few Kanji in Japanese, I am able to recognize those characters in Chinese and know their meaning without yet knowing the pronunciation. It goes without saying that learning Japanese has enabled me a multitude of educational and resourceful benefits.

Cultural Appropriation

In America's recent social climate, the term "cultural appropriation" has been a controversial and popular criticism of the manner in which certain groups of people seem to exploit other cultures for selfish purposes, such as monetary gain. In his well articulated essay, "Cultural Appropriation Without Cultural Essentialism?", Erich Matthes gives writes: "The actions of pop music artists such as Miley Cyrus and Iggy Azalea have also helped to usher the language of cultural appropriation into the popular lexicon." These are two caucasian Pop acts

who have dabbled into Hip-hop and African American culture--wearing cornrows and making efforts to ride the wave of Hip-hop sound trends, all while not having any roots in the culture itself. Cultural appropriation is the aftershadow of systematic oppression--rewarding groups of people who have historically disenfranchised from those whom they gain. Further examples of cultural appropriation include the dressing up as pre-colonized Native Americans on Halloween, or the selling of flower and bamboo-printed jackets and calling them "kimonos". So what separates the content I have discussed throughout this paper from the immorality and apathy of cultural appropriation? I believe that when interacting with another nation's culture, it is important to consider the *intention* behind the person who is leaving the interaction with a piece of that culture. In the case of Miley Cyrus and Iggy Azalea, we are begged to ask what they left black culture with when drawing influence from it: Record sales, merchandise, branding, and exploitation come to mind. There is no back and forth exchange between two previously unacquainted audiences or cultural groups. You have an imitation of authenticity. This is completely different from the dance between Japanese and western culture that I have discussed--in that there is always a "give and take" between the references I have made. Reciprocity is key in developing healthy communities.

Conclusion / Unity

As SUNY Purchase's Professor of Economics Sanford Ikeda said in his Cities, Cultures, and Economy lecture, "Through weak ties, you have new information come in… This is the way we do it, how do you? Trade and competition excellerates the diffusion of knowledge." Weak ties, Ikeda describes, are connections between two individuals from separated or unlikely

backgrounds. The fact that these art mediums joining together from two hemispheres can unite people from all different backgrounds is a beautiful example of global unity. It is important that we, as a world, financially and socially support institutions that promote this unity. The problem is that so many of these institutions are at risk of collapsing--for various reasons. The National Endowment for the Arts, which is the biggest source of public arts funding in America, has progressively had its funds depleted since the 80s (Reidy). The Anime industry is dying in Japan--studios like Production IMS are filing for bankruptcy, as they are not making the profit from licensing deals, DVDs, and merchandise like they used to (Sherman). The Music Industry in Japan is living off those who still purchase CDs and attend live shows, and in the U.S. musicians are struggling to make money from streaming service royalty payouts. Each of these issues are different cases which need methods of repair, but the one thing they all have in common is that they are essential in the unity of many communities across the world. We must protect the Arts from bankruptcy and defunding, because as we have seen, they are nothing short of **necessary** in uniting the global community. Art transcends our individuality, and it is the key to our unity. It is important that members of these communities be vocally and financially expressive of their support. If we took a moment to reflect upon how these art forms have developed us as individuals, we would certainly want the same growth for our future generations. I am confident that with grassroot support, these industries can be uplifted and restructured so that creators and executives alike are incentivized to keep these art forms thriving in the future.

Thank You.

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