**­­­­Spirited Away**

# The start of this document

I remembered vaguely the first time I watched “Spirited Away”, with the image of parent turning to pigs and the red hue of Chihiro’s outfit, and I remembered the thrill of adventuring in an entirely different world. However, first time I saw it on television, I was too small to fathom the messages they contained inside. Nevertheless, as I gradually grew up to a teenage boy, and learnt more, there seems to be an unsolved need of understanding those cute movies with strange animals I have watched. I have watched them, again and again, and partially grasped the messages of “Ponyo”, “My Neighbor’s Totoro” or “Howl’s Moving Castle”. However, the most famous and successfully anime, “Spirited Away” still entirely obscured in my mind. I did enjoy its adventurous journey, and admired Chihiro’s resolution as well as the heartbreakingly beautiful artworks it presented. But something is amiss – its hidden meaning that tie everything together. It did not make sense to me why Chihiro parent were turned to pigs, or why the green cake was so precious, or why Boh didn’t mind being a mouse, etc. Not until I came across an analysis of this movie from SparkNote website that something starts to dawn on me. And I’m going to tell you something not so cool about me, this movie did make me cry. It touched me deeply the way no other art pieces has did before. Hence, I wrote this document, to make it my own personal manual of life. This document was something very private - it is a conscious attempt to organize my subconscious beliefs. If you ever have chance to read this, that mean you are important to me, you have my trust, and I want you to experience the deep joy I had with the movie that lit my soul.

This movie is about the great adventure of a young, spoiled girl accidentally lost in the world of ancient spirits. Through ordeals, she has grown up to become a matured person, transformed people around her and saved her parent. This movie is a powerful testament to the power of love that overrides hatred, the power of friendship that grows in adversity and shed a light on how a person can find his way through a world of corruption, hatred and greed.

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# Analysing storyline of Spirited Away

## Introduction of Chihiro

To deconstruct this character, we must analyze the childish, insecure Chihiro before stepping into the spirited world. At first, Chihiro is introduced as a withdrawn child, disapproves of changes. She lies down on the backseat of the car, and contrasts to her father excitement, Chihiro discontents with her reality. She seem trying to express her upset as a form of protest, a childish hope that her parent might be moved by her downheartedness and revert their decision, which we all know won’t happen. But in the seemingly lousy behaviors, we can see the qualities that existed in this little girl. First of all is her value of friendship, that above all inconvenience, what she held on to most be her farewell bouquet, and the goodbye postcard “We will miss you, Chihiro”. I think there was a subtle comparison of the bouquet with the immature Chihiro, which was lovely and magical, yet fragile, need much of attention and was suffocated by the grip of her guardians. This protective manner that parent exhibited on her, hindered her to realize her hidden quality. Fro example, Chihiro exhibited an instinctive sense of danger, an unadulterated wisdom that has been disappeared in her parent, which we can suggest resulting from the domination of human exerting on their own nature. Her parent, working adults, driving the four-wheel vehicle bouncing through the tortuous hill way is a metaphorical image of the confident, to the point of arrogant attitude human has developed toward the world they are living on. Along the way, Chihiro observed and sensed that this probably not a land for human to intrude, and shakenly protested decision of her parent. Here we can see an inexperienced Chihiro proved powerless in explaining her intuition and convincing her parent to go back. I think it is Hayao Miyazaki’s way of saying that intuition, without the experience and awareness, was weak in the vulgarity of externality, and easy to be swayed. As we can see moment later, Chihiro after all, gives up her judgment to follow the voice of authority.

We can see that Chihiro’s parent is representation of adult’s mindset in real world. They trust in power of materialistic, first in “four-wheel vehicle” and then in “credit card” (which was a higher from of money) which, apparently, is valueless in many situations. Chihiro’s rejection of touching the food once again highlights the wisdom of this young girl. She distrusted in her father solution of using his credit card, and convinced they should go or people will “get mad at us”. She knew these foods are not meant to be eaten by her parent, and this place was creepy. In fact, to usual audience, there was apparent abnormality in the arrangement, where attractive food was present at the middle of nowhere, with nobody around. One who familiar with Asian mythical stories may suggest that this is a magic trap to lure innocent preys. But from the very outside this world has clearly indicate that it does not want to be contaminated by human, and try every way possible to warn human not to enter. And as proceeding further down the film, the spirit world exhibited a contempt attitude toward mankind, consider them “stink” and “always mess up everything”. Hence, we can quite certain that what brought them to this dismay was Chihiro over-confident parent, who believe everything is theirs as long as they have in hand the power of money and technology.

The next few screens depict Chihiro first encounter with the spirited world. The traumatic panic vents out from Chihiro suggested the disconnection of youngsters with the world of mythical gods. The transformation of Chihiro parent from human to pig was a strong and bold criticism Hayao Miyazaki point to the civilization we are building. He makes comparison of human with pigs, who consumes everything in front of them, careless about where or who they’ve taken it from. Chihiro discovery of train seem to foreshadow a journey, and the encounter with Haku at the bridge was the very first help she received. As the sky go dark, the world of gods and ghosts revealing itself. I think the dark was the notion of the prevailing subconscious at night, and the present of gods suggesting that mythical deities was part of human subconscious that seems to be forgotten. Contrast to dirty image of pigs as Chihiro parent (which represent human modern attitude of greed and arrogant), the spirits deliver the feeling of somewhat transcendence, fragile, light and kind, as they observe the screaming child with certain degree of surprise and curious. The first encounter of Chihiro with water then arrives. I think in this movie, water represents for transformation, the born of something new. Chihiro first encounter with water was filled with panic, a very typical reaction when an over-protected child experienced something overwhelming - she is a child refusing to accept the reality and grow up. This rejection of reality was further elaborate by her persuasion to herself “This is just a dream. This is just a dream. Wake up, wake up!”. About the image of Chihiro turned transparent, it means she discards reality, discards herself as part of this world and therefore will be gone. I think that the food Haku gave her was a wake-up call, that in panic, the act of feeling food in her mouth connects her mentality back with her body. And as she felt the existence of her body, she solidified. The spell Haku applied to Chihiro leg “in the name of the wind and water within thee, unbind her” frees her from paralyse and seemingly unleashed her potential strength. As a river god under dragon form, Haku was pretty much the representation of water and wind, probably living inside Chihiro. I think this sentence has the meaning that the connection of human and nature has the power to free human themselves from their own fear, and help them reached their potential.

The slave of boiler, Kamaji and sootballs are the second encounter Chihiro meet. Kamaji, in the form of 6 arms creature, identify himself as the slave of the bathhouse. Kamaji represents for the heavy burden of adult working in industrial society, with his 6 long arms. He was the first resident of bath house that Chihiro has to deal with. This scene highlighted furthermore how Chihiro has been raised as a child, awkward and demanding, but it is also highlight another hidden face of this girl, a girl who treated people equally regardless of their status. She empathy with the seemingly unimportant sootballs, and offer her help to the one that needed it. This scene built up the very basic foundation of escape route for Chihiro, present that her equal kindness and respect for every creature would give her allies. Those sootballs are the first who stand up for Chihiro and probably their bond of friendship has moved Kamaji, the man who seems to forget his humanity in the face of work. This also explains the advice Haku had for Chihiro, Haku probably was aware of the warm heart hidden behind the harsh and blunt outlook of Kamaji, and belief Chihiro would find her support and build up her confidence by confronting this simple men first, before she had to face a much greater challenge - Yubaba. And indeed, Kamaji did risk his life helping this girl, offered bribe to Rin to sneak Chihiro to Yubaba office, forcing this old witch to confront this girl directly, knowing that if Chihiro is persistent, Yubaba will have no choice but to offer Chihiro a place in this world.

Although Chihiro has her undeniable quality as we will observe throughout the movie. This girl was lucky as she faces the challenges incrementally, and receives warm help along the way. With Rin, a person who first appear to be distasteful, do protect this child, and evidently assumed her responsibility as a big sister. The encounter with Radish God was lovely. Although this character involved little in the storyline, he help set the impression of warm and friendly nature of spirited gods despite of their creepy appearance. At the beginning of this film we were known that Yubaba office was at the top, and the fact that our Radish God skip one level appear to be bathtub, to go all his way together with Chihiro to the top level was apparently an act of assurance to little human girl. Although Chihiro had faced a great challenge when she was unexpectedly thrown into an entirely different world, with the mission of saving her parent, she doesn’t have to do it all alone. I think this expresses Hayao Miyazaki’s attitude about education, that adult should act as a supporter and let the children deal with problem as independent individual, rather than cocoon them in a harm-free environment.

The encountering with Yubaba was a masterpiece. The extravagance and status of Yubaba was establish crystal clear from her spacious apartment occupies the entire top level, to sophisticated doors and flamboyant ornaments she wore. Yubaba establishes herself as a rich and powerful person. Her disproportional head suggest she is a shrewd and foxy witch and a very intimidating figure, each of her words carried gravity and calculative intention of breaking this small girl. She starts her conversation with Chihiro by insulting her as a spoiled weakling, insulting her parents by comparing them to pigs, and then reprimanded Chihiro’s species as a species who always mess up everything. When seeing that the mere words wouldn’t be enough to break Chihiro, Yubaba changes her tactic to violent intimidation, and we can see that this actually worked on our fragile Chihiro according to her expression. And when our protagonist seems to reach her border, a hero has come to rescue - The Big Boh.

The intervention of Boh served multiple purposes. First, this scene was masterly arranged to release the tension, at the same time, reveal another side of Yubaba as a caring mother. Seemingly evil at first, Yubaba also showed us that she is a woman capable of loving, and especially honoring her words. If we look further to her previous dialog with Chihiro, we can also see that as a businessperson, she take pride in her job, considering it an honourable service of serving “6 million weary gods”. She clearly distasted the way human run their world, which was entirely justify in my point of view. Although from the very beginning Yubaba has assumed the position of a villain, we can see that she also has respect for customers she is serving, and empathy with their damages which was caused by human. The grudge she hold toward Chihiro was probably not personal, but to human as general. The awaken of Boh, although unclear to us whether it was pure coincidence or his deliberately intention of helping Chihiro, does offer her an escape route by revealing Yubaba’s soft spot, and thus foreshadow their incredible friendship later on.

The signing of contract was a yet another profound and strong image. Yubaba indeed impress us by her wisdom. More than anyone else, she understands the power of words, as words offer meaning to life and identity to a person. The act of stripping off Chihiro name, leaving behind only single Kanji character - Sen can be considered as a heavy critic to the industrial economy at Japan, which striped off people identity for the sake of efficiency. But this was also serve as a double-fold image, as by simplify Chihiro name instead of changing it, she brought Chihiro to her essence, which we will observe later, and that establishes foundation for Chihiro transformation. It was interesting to note that “Sen” also mean “One Thousand” in Japanese, which was a clever word-play. Hayao Mizayaki not just stop at criticizing, he went further by shed a light on how people can take advantage of it to free themselves.

In the next scene, Hayao Miyazaki feed in to this line yet another complicated character - Haku. Haku appeared at first as a helper, but as this rendezvous, he appears cold, aloof, and cared nothing about Chihiro’s situation. He demands Chihiro to call him Haku – Sama, as he walked her down the elevator, even tell the protestors of bathhouse to cook her if they feel needed. As we can see, Chihiro really experiences a blow from Haku attitude, and later on childishly ask Ren whether if there were two Haku in this house. Ren unfriendly attitude toward Haku gave us a clue that the Haku we saw at the bridge is rarely seen, and probably only revealed around Sen-Chihiro.

Until this point, we can see very clear the philosophy of building character in this movie. Hayao Miyazaki clearly depicted the dual nature of human being, as a mixture of both good and bad. And our young Chihiro seems to intuitively understand this and willing to accept it, and this personality, as in my belief, was what that set Chihiro apart from anybody in this movie.

Next morning, the good Haku waked Chihiro up and brought her to see her parent. As we can see, the fragile Chihiro was not a perfect hero. She indeed forgot her name as Chihiro, and seems to losing belief in herself. She told her parent “Don’t eat too much or you will be killed” which revealed her innocence, as if her parent as pigs could understand that. It also suggested Sen disbelief in her ability to rescue them. After overwhelming events consecutively hit her, Sen was at her utmost vulnerable. And at midst of difficulty, Haku has one more time offered his assurance and empathy. A small act as giving Sen a small, simple breakfast was enough to make this girl burst into tears. I especially loved Sen’s tears that artistically depicted in this scene. Abnormaly big, watery tears falling down her eyes were extremely expressive. It make Sen looked so small compare to her sadness and impotent. The piece of rice Haku offered was not simply a breakfast, it was an act of deep understanding. And in return, despite of her doubt about this contradict person, Sen-Chihiro decided to trust Haku and devote her undying loyalty to him. And this trust has been the foundation of their escape, as they continuously brought out the best in each other. Haku play a vital role in transforming the dependent and insecure Chihiro to a braver and wiser Sen, and Sen pure kindness and wise innocence in turn reveal a Haku nobody have ever seen.

The tear of Chihiro, now Sen, probably reveals that although incredible, Sen is not a superhuman. The burden of growing up and facing the brutality of industrial work with her guardians being removed is no joke. Hayao Miyazaki empathy with the challenge our young generation has to face. Unlike the previous generation of our Asian parents who had with them years of self-development and strong protection from religion, tradition and ancient wisdom as children. We younger generation of this world don’t have such a luxury, we were exactly like Chihiro who was thrown into the great challenge with empty hands, totally unprepared. At the screen at the beginning of Chihiro’s encounter with spirited world, when observing the panic Chihiro had at mystic deities, we can see how alienate our young generation is with the soul of nature. We fear the very thing that has been supporting us, nurturing us and protecting us for thousands of years since the dawn of mankind. Under the industrialization evolution and the coming waves of technology revolution, we human are on our way to denounce gods and devils, and as a result removing the celestial elements of our existence in this vast and overwhelming universe. Although this movement is inevitable, one cannot deny that by smashing every psychological protection which has been developed for thousands of years, human standing at a great challenge of rebuilding their perception to cope with this new world. We can see many of us had started to give up in this quest, and instead indulging themselves in the chemical substances which was designed to temporary remove the reality from our consciousness.

The first day of working, we can see that our new Sen has tried really hard to catch up with her colleagues but seems to stumble behind. And like this new life wasn’t difficult enough for her, she, later on was handed over to the toughest challenge – cleaning “The Stink Spirit”. This decision also revealed the complexity in Yubaba. At first this seems to be a petty vengeance Yubaba throw at the child who dared to challenge her and actually won. As the stink spirit approach the bathhouse, Yubaba has sense that this is not a normal stink spirit. Although the comer was disguised under a terribly stinky shell, Yubaba shrewd judgment seems to suspect this is not an ordinary guest, who demanded a special service from a special employee. We can see the conflict in this person, her instinct clearly sense something different about this guest, and did personally stand at the entrance to greet him with Sen. At her conversation with the frog man, she want to get rid of this customer as soon as possible, but logically speaking, handing over this customer to a young inexperienced worker will only wreak havoc to her own bathhouse and prolonging this guest staying. This probably revealed her hidden respect for this small girl, but her ego and grudge preventing her from expressing it out or even admitting it. When the stink spirit approached, only she and Chihiro actually stand there greeting him, when other retreated behind curtains. Chihiro standing there involuntary, but Yubaba stands there on her own accord, even reprimands Chihiro for covering her nose, which she deems as a disrespectful gesture. I especially love the way artist at Ghibi draw the horror expression of Yubaba and Chihiro, with their hair stood up and their eye balls protrude. This expression not only derive a strong psychological effect to audience, as we can feel the horrible smell the character have to deal with (which actually turn my skin goose-bumped), it also served as a pivot to strike the balance between the complexity underneath the innocent and childish shell of this movie.

The encountering of Chihiro with The Stink Spirit is interesting. At first, we audience cannot help but wondering how a scrawny and inexperienced Sen can handle this tremendous task. In here I have my first hand witness of Hayao Miyazaki’s art of storytelling using juxtaposition. He fetch wonder to audience mind naturally by designing the stink spirit very much contrast to Sen in term of visual appearance, make him big, dark, thick and old comparing to young, thin, and brightly colored Chihiro, make him too big of an obstacle for innocent Sen to overcome in audience’s eyes. This setting fetched the curiosity to audience naturally and subtly captured their attention. However, if you ever think this introduction of tension is impressive artistically and psychologically, I assure you later part of resolving this tension was even more masterfully delivered.

Immediately after our stink god immersed himself in the bathtub, he immediately turns the entire surrounding to mud. I believe this image exhibited certain influence from Buddhism philosophy in Japanese culture, that in order for the beautiful lotus to blossom, stinky mud must be present to nurture its ground. And in here we see a small, fragile beautiful lotus struggling in the mud, working her way to personal transformation. In parallel, we also see the limitation of powerful Yubaba, which foreshadow her later impotent in restraining an even tougher guest – the adaptive No-Face. Her laugh toward Sen’s suffering reveal her grudges and urge of petty vengeance, which in turn blind her from the beautiful transformation about to happen. While the flow of herbal water was falling down from wooden rack, a signal of transformation started emerging. This transformation started with the mythic god. Thanks to Sen attentive and equal respect for all creatures, she started to see that this god needed help. When being brought close to him, Sen immediately realize the cause of his pain was the protrude stuff out of his body, and her innocence perceived it as a thorn. But Yubaba, who has long experience with this world and the consequence of human act, immediate waked up to realize that the problem was much bigger. She immediately set aside her grudge toward Sen to help her, and as thus served a much more important goal.

And behold yourself! Because the next scene, in my humble opinion, was a masterfully combination of psychological satisfaction, strong condemnation, philosophically enlightenment and further complex the characters of this movie, which was a perfect setting in term of for what comes next.

First, analyzing the emotional satisfying of this screen, we have to look at the way the whole bathtub act like an orchestra under the direction of Yubaba, leading by Chihiro, pulling out all the garbage inside our Stink God. It was deeply satisfying to see our God releasing all of the stinky burden he carry within himself, especially through the final pull, the sound “Phuutt” when the final knob was pulling out of his body, pouring out contamination liquid. The pristine form of River Spirit had been exquisitely drawn and voiced to delivered the ancient yet lightness feeling, the pure sense of transparent cleanliness that exist as the essence of river. And finally, the sudden and powerful thrust of Ancient River God to the sky in the rain, in the cheering of all spirits was a wonderful conclusion to this heroic effort that Sen played as central role.

However, as pleasing as this scene is, it also delivered a strong punch into human crime with nature. Hayao Mizayaki condemned human irresponsible acts that poison the very nature they lived in, turned a powerful, fresh and nurturing river into a polluted, lifeless flow of industrial trash. He humanized the nature as an entity with its own pain and feeling, to criticize the cruelty act of mankind and deeply touch every single audience regardless of their perception level. He made no attempt to hide this intention, as he pointed the camera directly to the stinky heap of dung that has been pulled out of River God. It was a crying-out-loud call of his own conscience to awake his fellow human being of the ugliness they have created in pursuing materialistic well-being.

We also cannot ignore the symbolic and philosophical element of this scene. First, by caring about the well-being of the Stink Spirit rather than quickly finish her job, Sen has seen something nobody has been able to see - the root of the pain of this spirit. This establish an important belief reflected in Buddhism, that all mishap was caused by wrong perception, and the first step of correcting wrong perception started with paying attention – the basic principle of Buddhism mindfulness. But as we can see, Sen’s attentive alone is not enough, she also needed life’s experience and leadership of Yubaba, and the loyalty friendship of Rin and Kamaji. This may serve as a message to all young people out there, who see the ugly and want to make change, that they don’t have to and should not do it all alone by themselves. As this is much bigger than just one individual, and in order to succeed he is going to need his loyalty friends, and experience from older generation. The water again served as the symbolic medium of transformation. And at the end, while giving people gold, Ancient Spirit dedicated a green dumpling to Chihiro. We can instantly realize this must be an extremely valuable gift, which compare to it, gold seems like dirt underground. Later on we learn that this dumpling was extremely bitter, but also the savior of two close friends of Chihiro, which eventually lead Chihiro to rescue herself and her parent. At this point, I think we can simply think that it means a simple act of kindness goes a long way, although the benefit of doing that may not be apparent at first.

To prepare for the next waves, and also the climax of this movie, Hayao Miyazaki has subtly plan the invisible presence of No-Face. After Sen’s refusal of accepting his gift, he is still lurking around in this bathtub, watching people hushing for the gold River Spirit left behind. Here the director wanted us to take caution, as at the midst of triumph lying the potential of corruption. As this dramatic persona is too complicated to analyze together with storyline, I will devote a whole section on him later on. As River Spirit unleashed his richness to reward everyone, we see yet a Yubaba as an impressive businessperson. After observing Sen’s heroic act, she immediately dropped all of her prejudices about Chihiro and viewed her as an exemplify figure of the bathhouse that everyone should follow. In here we can see the core motivation of this complicated figure – profit. Everything in her life was calculated as a balance sheet, she was extremely flexible, and willing to abandon anything – her grudge, prejudice, urge of vengeance if she saw a benefit in it. Hayao Miyazaki has revealed a deeper aspect of this important figure, Yubaba was a shrewd and profit-driven businessperson, a maestro running an incredible efficient enterprise, a sly manipulative witch but she was also an honorable woman with principles and ethnic. But her laugh at Chihiro misery also serve as a set up for what will be revealed next – her limitation and unfulfilling life. And last but not least, this scene was served as an important mark for Chihiro transformation from a weak girl to a mature and confident young woman. Although this transformation was underneath and was depict so smooth that it is impossible for us to actually pin down at which stage it actually happened inside Chihiro, we can say that this scene was perhaps her most significant development until this point of storyline. This was Chihiro first accomplishment in this world, which served as a vital pivot for her confidence and her trust in intuition. By comparing her with a lotus flourish under adversity (her clothes was pink), together with strong image of water’s flow, Hayao Mizayaki signaled a silent but massive transformation within Chihiro’s mentality. We can see that after this event, Chihiro started to emerge as a true hero, who does not think twice to stand up for the people she love, who is capable of not just saving, but radically transforming people around her. This is where we see Hayao Mizayaki pragmatism that he is no dreamer who believed in instant change in one person, no matter how impressive they are. Chihiro changes are not instant and out of thin air, it is incremental as a natural adaption to her situation, bit by bit, but firm and consistent.

After a dramatic day, the night scene with the calm blue sky and the vast sea of crystal clear water served as a smoother to calm audience down, and at the same time, pampering them for the next ambush. The scenery was breathtakingly beautiful, as the entire town emerged in a stratosphere of sky touching the ocean of water. The image of the single train cutting through thin layer of water is somewhat heartbreakingly lonely. It was perhaps the internal feeling of Chihiro; she is seeing her journey of growing up as a lonesome journey and the heavy burden she has to carry make her feel small.

The next turn of this movies introduce an even greater tension, which was so complicated that Hayao Miyazaki switch his style of story-telling that he has stick to from the very beginning. So far what we have seen, this story was told in a chronological order, with the third point of view strictly follow Chihiro. The image of No-Face has play it mild role at first, but incrementally become important throughout Chihiro journey, from her first encounter with at bathhouse, to her visit to her parent, and later on involve directly in Chihiro first accomplishment. But from this point, our master and his artists decided to separate their journeys, and told them in a parallel structure to build up the tension between these two individuals. And later on, they merged these 2 storyline into one, and resolved the tension in an exquisite and dramatic style.

First, we should see what happen with poor No-Face.

## The special relationship between Chihiro and No Face

In order to understand this figure, we need to come back to the first time Chihiro crossing the bridge and entering the bathhouse. There was one individual who stand out of the crowd with his transparent and black body, with a mask, covering by a sad smile and ominous red stoke across his eyes. Although seems harmless at first, this was the only individual that immune with the influence of Haku’s magic and actually paying attention to Chihiro. Eventually, one may asked why this is the only creature who is capable of suspecting our young protagonist? And why our young protagonist was the only one that seems capable of seeing this creature?

I believe that No-Face was a symbolic representation of all instinctive desires which existed within human being. In a very traditional and antique setting of this movie, other gods seems to be the representation of old perceptions and values that traditional Japanese had built throughout thousands of years. And as from perception of Chihiro, a young Asian who was raised under a blending culture of western and eastern, there might be a hole in the philosophy of this old belief system. Which is that this system suppressed, even denounced the very existence of any human desires it deems inappropriate. And that was why other gods seems to willfully ignore the existence of this creature. But Chihiro was different, she did aware of this. To further criticize the willfully blindness of this tradition, Ghibi’s artist has design this character very distinctively and starkly contrast to other spirit. While other gods seems to be quite solid, cover in luxury garment, always come in flocks and was colored in a bright tones, this exiled creature has a dark and transparent body, was alone and sad, always carefully observing the surrounding. I do not think that Hayao Miyazaki wanted to criticize the old way of living, as it has served its purpose of holding Asian society together for thousands years. But with the generation of young Asian nowadays, represented by spoiled Chihiro, things have changed. The old system of suppression and denunciation has proved to be impotent in keeping harmful desires away from youth, as the powerful waves of western media have emerged in, flooded young fragile minds with sexual themes, luxury lifestyle and the glamour of fame. While other old gods successfully ignore No-Face, young Chihiro who accustomed to Western media does not. And No-Face immediately realizes this vulnerability of Chihiro as his chance to obtain what he has yearning for, the attention and acceptation of other spirits. Chihiro awareness of No-Face was further clear to him as she greeting him while on her way to see her parent.

The appearance of Chihiro in this bathhouse has brought a hole in Yubaba security system. With her old, non-human employee, there is no way they would even be able to see No-Face while he is outside the bathhouse. But with Chihiro inside, all No-Face needed was to invoke her empathy and waited for her invitation. While Chihiro pouring the cleaning water outside, No-Face deliberately showed up in a very empathetic situation, which strike into Chihiro kindness of seeing all individual with equal respect. She invited No-Face in, which probably broke the spell Yubaba has set up to prevent intruder. This innocent error of Chihiro appear to be a bad decision at first, however, later on as we can see, this exact imperfection is what make Chihiro special, and raises her above everybody else in the movie. This also expressed the hope this animation master invested in young generation of Asian, that with correct guidance they can rise above their ancient generation in term of wisdom and leadership.

Once No-Face had crept in to the bathhouse, he immediately looked for Chihiro and offered her bribe. First, while young Chihiro was unable to convince the petty foreman to give her what she needed to do her job, No-Face has appeared to help. This first gift could be seen purely as an gratitude No-Face has for the kindness of Chihiro, and Chihiro accept this thank as a polite and well-educated young woman in the clothes of servant. But later on as the gift coming at second time, Chihiro was immediately realized this act has crossed the border of gratitude. She justify it as more than she deserved, and politely turn it down, saying she don’t need them that much (while indeed she did). The focus of camera on the generous gifts No-Face gave to Chihiro did a psychological impact in invoking the greed of audience. We, at first glance, cannot help but feeling sorry for Chihiro who turned down those cards she desperately needed, and experienced unease feeling to see all of those expensive cards falling down the ground. But here we were startled to see an impressive self-controlled and intelligent Sen, who capable of justifying the thin border between gratitude and bribing, and straightforwardly rejected it although with slight hesitation. It also revealed the nature of No-Face, which gained his strength if his desires were satisfied by surrounding environment. As Sen rejected his offer, No-Face quickly faded away. But he was still there observing people acts, finding a way to earn his place in this society. The event of freeing the Unnamed River God seems to be a bright scene at first, but as other bathhouse workers immediately forget their image and pour over the ground to collect gold, there were three characters that stand out in this situation. First was Yubaba who still manage to kept her dignity, and reminded her employees of the presence of their guest which yet to leave, second was young Chihiro who have no difficulty ignoring the gold, receiving the greatest gift from River God, and the third character – No Face, invisible to people both inside and outside the film, standing there watching people act. This was a foundation for No Face plan of obtaining people attention toward him. Seeing The River God quickly obtain the respect from everybody by throwing gold to ground, his plan of doing exactly the same proved to be disastrous later on.

Right after the peaceful, eye-watering scenery of Chihiro loneliness was the ominous start of another disaster. As from his careful observation at River God, No Face believes the first thing he need was a voice to communicate his demand with people. And thus he lures the greedy talking frog by gold and quickly ate this poor creature to obtain the voice of the frog. Here we see a different side of No Face, the violent and cruelty side contrast to his mellow and introvert personality outside the bathtub. By introducing the mellow side of this individual first, Hayao Mizayaki wanted to stress on the fact that No Face was not a villain in his nature. His anger and aggressiveness was a mirror that reflect the anger and aggressiveness hidden under obedient workers inside a bathtub, a result of Yubaba’s manipulative and exploitative way of treating her employee as slaves. The image of No Face is yet another strong punch into the industrialization society of Japanese, and carried within itself a profound philosophy, serve as the foundation for the enlighten quality of this anime. Even though the frog he ate was small and seems diminutive, what contain inside this frog was significantly transform No Face figure, from a lone figure with hidden hands and legs, now assume long hands and long legs with disproportional large tummy. This massive transformation suggested the enormous discontent and greed suppressed inside this small frog. Similar to Chihiro, the transformation of No Face was incremental, but in no way slow and underneath. From a transparent figure with no hand and no mouth, he transformed into the figure with hands after it arrival at bathtub as Chihiro’s acceptance of its first gift. And when the frog accepted its gold, a monstrous frog mouth appeared. And when the mouth appeared, the violent nature started to emerge, starting by eating the poor frog. The development of No Face was exquisitely overlapping with the development of Chihiro, with similar intensity, put together with a juxtaposition streamline of actions. While the development of No Face was expressed out to his appearance, the development of Chihiro was a silent process. And while the quality of Chihiro was unleased when she attempted to save Haku’s life, the quality of No Face was unleased under the influence of external world like the greed of bathtub workers. And as the story developed, audience experienced a strikingly contrast result leading by this two transformations. This transformation made both Chihiro and No Face become very powerful individuals, however, despite their mellow nature at first, the transformation of Chihiro, which origin from her caring for Haku, leaded to a very different result comparing to the transformation of No Face, which origin from his yearning to satisfy his own desire. Here the master Hayao Mizayaki put forward an important teaching, that there are two psychological forces, which were incredibly powerful in each of us. They are the urge of fulfilling personal desire, and the caring for well-being of people we loved. These two forces continually influent our actions and transform us, and in order to live a rich life we need to constantly make hard choice to follow the second route.

The vulgarity at the bathtub was immediately followed by Chihiro’s dream. Once again we see the exploitation of juxtaposition in Hayao Miyazaki’s art of storytelling. He followed the previous dark screen with the pure, innocent dream of rescuing parent of Sen, to further contrasted the present state of this girl. The first thing Sen realized in her wake-up was that everybody has gone, and the second thing came to her mind was her parent. This showed the determination of young Sen, who under the acceptance of new environment, still didn’t forget her purpose. Following by Sen’s determination was the true discrepancy of service industry, which was disguised by sugar words and pretentious respect. Immediately follow the peaceful scenery of outside the bathtub is the turbulence inside. One cannot ignore the words of Foreman, which suggests his subordinates to serve even the leftover food to new coming guest. Rin has approach Sen and share with her the gold new guest gave everyone, and try to pull Sen with her, but as we can see the only concern of Sen had was to save her parent, by telling Rin she will come down to Kamaji place. Her expression of caring was childlike, and yet deep and loyalty.

The next scene of Haku attack carried on by paper bird revealing the caring Chihiro had for this tragical young soceress. Her first reaction to Haku threat was to calling him to fly straight to her place, which invite danger to her directly. This is a subtle reveal of transformation to young Chihiro as she really put Haku life above her own. The reaction of Haku afterward truly shocked us, as his grumbling and hateful look toward the person who just risked her life to save him. Haku refuses to answer Chihiro’s concern and throws himself to the open window, flies straight to Yubaba’s office. This reaction, although shockingly cold, doesn’t surprise Chihiro. As opposed to Haku naive belief that Yubaba powerful magic will save him, Chihiro astute judgment immediately realize Haku was leading his way to death. The dragon form of Haku revealed his aggressive and greedy side, his thirst for power, his anger of a lost person and his over-confidence in power of magic and protection of Yubaba, and as a result he refused Chihiro’s help to seek his way to his master. Chihiro, probably aware of exploitative nature of Yubaba and ugly side of Haku, didn’t surprise at his reaction and knew that only death are waiting for him at the Yubaba place.

And here come the second encounter of Chihiro with No Face inside bathhouse. Here we have the second chance of witnessing Chihiro’s impressive wisdom and calmness while she frantically find a way to save Haku. Immediately realize the new status of No Face, Sen proactively approached him, showing her respect and hoping for help. But after observing the violence in this spirit, together with his lavish offer of gold, Sen quickly understand this person will be unable to help, and turn down the gold without hesitation. We can’t help but compare her with previous Chihiro, who denied the herbal cards reluctantly, and understand how much she has matured.

Chihiro confrontation with Boh was yet another important scene. In the roomy setting of Boh place, the wall was covered in garment, the toys was tossed around carelessly and as we see later on, the artificial setting to mimic the nature was an expressive illustration of over-protective attitude of Yubaba toward her son as well and spoiled personality of Boh. However, as Chihiro, Boh also possessed his good quality that, in my opinion, outshone his mother. The first thing we observed about this excessively big child was his loneliness. He aggressively threatened Chihiro just to keep her company. Chihiro, in contrast, have no time to pamper the need of Boh. We can see the way Chihiro dealt with Boh will eventually build up to the way she dealt with No Face. Secondly, in this character, we see a suppressed courage which only shines under the threat of losing what he love. Chihiro rejection offer the first real threat to Boh’s life in two ways: for the first time of his life, Boh has fail in demanding something he wanted, which also a first lesson he has learnt that there are things he had to fight in order to gain. Secondly, Chihiro was his first chance of having a company, something he desperately need. Exactly this desperation for friendship is what pull him out of his bedroom, push him to overcome the fear Yubaba has imposed upon his entire life and embrace on an incredible journey with Chihiro, which later on was symbolized as the journey of growing up. Boh was yet another impressive figure who rose at the midst of adversity instead of giving up and getting lost, a comparable companion to Chihiro. Although most of matured character in this animation was disappointing, the young protagonists in this movie: Chihiro and Boh emerged as wise, selfless and valiant fighters. I guess Hayao Miyazaki want to put his hope in the youngsters, believing that their new awareness of the dark side in human nature will eventually pave a new way to a more completed wisdom, where people stop ignoring anything unfit to doctrines, and start to embracing darkness as ally. He belief this is the most completed way of reconciling the internal conflict that has wrecked generations of mankind.

Despite the perfection of its previous sections, the climax of this masterpiece, divided into three stages even pushed everything to an entirely different level. In term of visual, it expressed the intensity of violence and powerful conflict through blood, cannibal scenes, and extravagant greed together with the filthy of pure black mud. However, after conflict was resolved, Hayao Miyazaki masterfully unleashed what has been his signature, the holistic beauty of nature that was simply heartbreakingly beautiful, far exceeding its previous. In term of philosophy, it was much deeper than the previous part, it not just depicted the most powerful conflict of human being - it offered young people a way to reconcile it. In term of humanity, it was a testament to the power of love that transformed hatred, the power of caring that transformed wicked desires, and finally, it praised the enduring power of friendship that help people overcoming fear and brought audience on Chihiro’s journey of growing up.

## The power of love that override hatred

What comes next was a strong testament to the power of love that overridden the power of hatred and save life. This was when we encounter a new character, Zeniba. This person, at the first glance, was indistinguishable from her twin sister, from her powerful magic, to her reaction to vengeance (demanding Chihiro to hand over the dragon). Observing from previous scene, according to the way the paper bird attacked Haku in dragon form, we can see a clear intention of killing this poor creature. However, in few short minutes, the love and wisdom of Chihiro didn’t just save Haku once, but actually four times.

The first save come from the selfless act of Chihiro calling Haku to her room. By doing that, Chihiro pull the danger to her but then offer Haku a chance to live. Fortunately as it’s turned out, the paper bird quickly lost its aggressiveness and power once it entered inside the premise of bath house. Her love has temporary restrained the impulsiveness of executing punishment, and probably given Zeniba some slack to rethink her action.

The second save come from her in time arrival, after getting rid of Boh. Chihiro rushed directly toward Yubaba’s minions to protect the dragon from being thrown down to a bottomless dark pit, where Haku probably deserved after his long period of crimes. And while Chihiro struggle in defending Haku’s life at the face of aggressive minions, we started to see an important milestone, that provide the first hand power of love that capable of overriding hatred: the transformation of Zeniba.

As we can see from the beginning of this scene, Zeniba have a clear intention of ending Haku’s life as a punishment for the crime he committed. However, after observing the pure and selfless love of Chihiro for Haku, something started to change in her perception while she is under the form of paper bird. The first evidence of this change was her decision to involve directly in this scene. If she just ignored what happened, we can clearly see that young fragile Chihiro won’t be able to save Haku under the continuous attacks from Yubaba minions and the coming threat from lonely and demanding Boh. Haku will surely die, and probably pulling Chihiro with him. But the bravery in Chihiro had somewhat moved Zeniba, and she decided to offer her help by turned all Yubaba’s minions and Boh into a harmless form and restraint their violence. Nevertheless, this old witch was not entirely convinced, as in the coming dialog, she deliberately tested Chihiro loyalty with Haku. However, in the last sentence of her dialog - “All dragons are kind and stupid”, we saw an element of empathy that Zeniba had developed for Haku. And surely this was resulted from the way Chihiro put her trust in him despite the fact that “He is going to die anyway”, the fact that Haku was a thief and his previous ungrateful reaction to Chihiro selfless act. Hake probably would be saved by Zeniba, if his next action which resulted from fear, anger and hatred, broke Zeniba spell and push life of his allies – Chihiro and Boh, to grave danger.

By saving Haku and facing death, Chihiro has found for herself a new friend, Boh. Behind Chihiro and No Face, the participant of Boh was of next importance to the later part of this story. Boh are yet another impressive learner and a valiant, loyalty friend. Just like Chihiro, Boh started as a spoiled, selfish child who suffered from the over-protection of his parent. Unlike Chihiro who appeared to be quite normal at first, Boh has a figured of an over-sized baby, at first cannot even walk on his own feet, continuously crying for petty reasons. Image of spoiled Boh was a strong criticizes to parenting method in Asian modern society. The adults of modern Asian have experienced a period of war and extreme poverty as a child, but when they grew up, they was a part of industrialization process in entire Asia, which suddenly brought prosperity and raising living standard dramatically. As a form of childhood fulfilling, they tried to provide their kids the life they wished they had, by protecting them from any possible harm (result from the constant danger of war they faced as a child) or providing their kids with abundant of foods and toys (to compensate their childhood poverty). This intoxicated attitude in turn weakens their children, which was powerfully expressed in the image of immature Boh. The loneliness of Boh was probably the general loneliness of single kid in family. The first in-depth look at Boh revealed him hiding inside a pile of pillows, which was a way of saying the caring Yubaba had for her child was suffocating. The conversation between Boh and Chihiro revealed the way Yubaba poisoned her son’s innocent view about the world to keep him inside. Without Chihiro accidental visit to Boh’s world, he probably stayed forever that way. However, Chihiro’s different opinion about the world had invited doubt to this youngster’s mind. For the first time of his life, he experienced a differ view about the world outside rather than his mother own words. And that was perhaps the first motivation for Boh to take action.

The second motivation of this character was his loneliness. He longing for friend to play with, and selfishly intimidate Chihiro to stay back, giving absolutely no care about what she felt. Later on as we go, we discovered this is not Boh’s nature, it’s just a character that he developed as a response to the false education of Yubaba. This two forces together finally push Boh to do something he has been longing to do, walking out of her mother protection, to discover the world on his own.

The scene of heavy Boh walking out of his prison was yet another highly sophisticated scene, the perspective of Zeniba, Haku and Chihiro was analyzed previously, so here we only need to focus on this character to complete the picture.

We can see that here Boh encountered an entirely different scene. Contrasting to his warm, harm-free cub, the first view he had at the outside world was full of blood, hatred and violence. This is also where we first-hand experienced Boh’s courage. We can clearly see how much he scared blood seeing his watery eyes, but his bravery, curiosity and longing for companion was stronger. These three elements had dramatically transformed him from an oversized baby scared of almost everything, to a person that dared to confront violence and hatred, and together with Chihiro embrace on a journey of growing up and saving people.

Here audience experienced the thrilling of gravity as this entire heroic crew falling down to the dark pit. The accidental act of Chihiro, holding dragon’s horns, revoked a memory in both of them about their relationship. The horn was the representative of Haku’s aggressiveness and violence, and the act of Chihiro holding his horns was a subtle implication that this girl has took control of this dragon hot-head. This indeed resulted in the wake up of Haku, as he steered his body to Kamaji place, the herbal master of this house.

The next scene revealed that Chihiro was even not entirely sure Haku is the dragon, yet still threw herself in danger to save him, which amplify further the greatness of her love and loyalty, as well as confidence in her instinct. We can see that under dragon form, Haku seems to be an animal rather than a human being, completely lacking of control. The scene where Chihiro feeding Haku the herbal cake was exquisitely drawn, to portray the instability, animalistic of this character, contrasted to the warmness, caring of Chihiro, which indeed triumphed as she successfully shut his mouth. As Chihiro pushed her arm deep into his opened mouth containing sharp, menacing teeth, we audience cannot help but being anxious for the fate of that fragile arm, but yet this girl did it, without hesitation or fear, further elaborate her bravery and her undying trust in the good of Haku.

The dialog with Kamaji further unwrapped the mystery of Haku’s complexity in a deeper level. He shed light on the origin of his crimes, explaining that Haku was started as a benevolent but lost person. He slowly drifted off this good nature to become the current person because of Yubaba, Kamaji noticed his eye has changed, which was indication of the soul he slowly lost. Haku was yet another victim of industrialization economy and Yubaba management scheme, which treated employees as slaves to maximize profit. But even in dragon form, the drawing of this character still express hope. We saw that fours Haku: good Haku that help Chihiro, Haku-sama the servant of Yubaba, Haku the dragon and the true Haku – Kohaku river god; although vastly different in forms and attitude, all share one thing in common – the green color of his iris, representation of the innermost part of Haku’s soul that was indomitable. Unlike Kamaji, Chihiro saw it through and decided that Haku was worth saving. This intuition, later on, turn out to be her escape route.

The love of Chihiro has indeed conquered not only the impulsive hatred inside wise Zeniba, the anger and greed of the blinded Haku, but also transformed the spoiled Boh into a brave and adventurous young man. After spitting out the seal and peeping bug, Haku turned back to his human form, which released tension of this stage, to move forward to the highest climax of this movie, the confrontation of Chihiro with No Face.

## The power of caring that transformed wicked desires

The confrontation of Chihiro with No Face was a perfect resolve to the build-up tension. This scene, which was in my opinion, was this masterpiece’s pinnacle of storytelling supported by superb animation technique to delivered powerful philosophies and condemnation. This climax has lived up to its previous counterparts, made this anime unforgettable, hauntingly obsessive and profoundly touching.

**No-Face:** [offering a bowl of food] Try this. It's delicious. Want some gold? I'm not giving it to anybody else!

[approaching her]

**No-Face:** Come closer, Sen. What would you like? Just name it.

**Chihiro:** I would like to leave, sir; there's some place I need to go to right away, please. You should go back to where you came from. Yubaba doesn't want you in the bath house any longer. Where is your home? Don't you have any friends or family?

**No-Face:** [sulking] No... no... I'm lonely... I'm lonely.

**Chihiro:** [backing away] What is it that you want?

**No-Face:** I want Sen... I want Sen...

[shoving a handful of gold in front of her]

**No-Face:** Take the gold! Take it!

**Chihiro:** Are you going to eat me?

**No-Face:** Take it!

[Boh bites him]

**No-Face:** Huh? Ow.

[attempts to swat Boh, but misses]

**Chihiro:** If you want to eat me, eat this first. I was going to save it for my parents, but I think you'd better have it.

[feeds No-Face the medicine. No-Face starts to vomit everywhere]

**No-Face:** ...Sen! Sen, what did you do to me?

First, let us look at the storytelling aspect of this scene, using juxtaposition. Here there are three important aspects need to be delivered, first was the cowardice and greed that paralyze Yubaba and her subordinates (Rin was out of this scene), second was the horrible frightening monster No Face has turned into, and third was Chihiro bravery and wisdom. Henceforth, these artists have subtly introduced the chaos and terror of bathhouse’s workers before letting Chihiro, with remarkable composure, walking into viewer’s perspective. The next step was to introduce to this screen two-faced Yubaba, which is representation of corruption in this bathhouse. Her sugar words and fake respects for customer were immediately exposed by her consecutive rage with Chihiro. It further unveiled how she saw Chihiro, a gold squeezer, which indeed explained her previous praise for her valiant service for River God. Next, despite of all her experience with magic, she failed to realize her own son, which even cut deeper into the corruption of this businessperson - gold has overridden her maternal instinct, made her forget what was truly important. As this condemnation was not strong enough, Hayao Mizayaki even pushed it one-step further, by depicting Yubaba pushing Chihiro, together with her own son to confront No Face alone, while herself retreated outside and reprimanded anybody who show concern for Sen’s safety. Contrasting to the rest, Chihiro, and her friend Boh, faced this challenge with remarkable calm. It was noteworthy to mentioned that, just minutes ago, Boh was still a crying baby afraid of everything, but now, his courage has precede his mother. While his mother, with all of her experience and powerful magic, step back, Boh who was reduced to a small vulnerable mouse was proceeding in with no hesitation.

After completing a perfect set up, here we are, at the while angle view of Chihiro and No Face. The juxtaposition was again masterfully exploited in this screen. No Face, who was a monstrous black spirit, confronted small Chihiro, quietly sit down, showing no sight of fear. Here we see the final convergent of Chihiro and No Face development inside the bathhouse. While Chihiro maturity was depicts through her posture and her silence, No Face development was smashing into audience face with his disfigured, his devilish voice and his mammoth size. Despite the huge size and menacing aura of No Face, audience can see that it was Chihiro who dominated the room. When the conversation started, was when the tension revealed its nature. First, No Face continuously offering Chihiro bribe, this time with food. Then seeing Chihiro silence, it puzzled, and ask whatever she likes, it can give to her. Here we see another side of No Face he has learnt, the arrogant and over-confidence in money. Like Chihiro’s parent, it believes money can solve all problems in the world. It is Chihiro who teach him that, there are things money cannot satisfy. This strikes directly to No Face’s growing dissatisfaction inside the bathhouse, although all of his demand was satisfied, he still feels hungry more than ever. I think here Chihiro started to sense his agony, and what to alleviated it, thus she instinctively look for the root of his pain, as her next question was “Where is your home? Don't you have any friends or family?”.

This question had a strong impact on No Face, touching his greatest pain as an exiled, lost spirit who deserted of love and caring. His mask retreated to his body, indicated he would want to run away from these questions. His pain was so great, that he immediately attempt to suppress it the way he did, throwing gold to people and consuming mindless luxury. This image strikingly reminds us of the way we deal with our pain. Instead of trying to understand it, we distract ourselves by falling into other feelings, the thrill of alcohol and speed, the fake respect created by service industry and the temporary romance of one-night-stand. We try to use the power we have to take control of the outside, to compensate the impotent inside. And when we find out it doesn’t work, we piss off, we anxious, without even knowing why.

“Where is your home? Don't you have any friends or family?” is another way of dealing with the rage within ourselves. Chihiro treated the negative emotion as a baby needs caring and attention, but not pampering. When No Face admitted to her that he had no parent or no home, Sen deeply synchronized with his grieving, and decided to rescue him first instead of her parent. She gave him the cake she saved for them, and led him out of the toxic environment that turned him into a monster. The tension was push to highest, when No Face attacked Chihiro. Here we have our chance to savor a merry chase of movement and light around bathhouse. However, after vomiting out all of the greed he had consumed, his soul was purified and he slowly came back to his mellow nature. In the end, Chihiro turned a monster everybody terrifies into a faithful friend by caring about his pain and pruning all of external poison inside him, instead of pampering his desire to run away from it.

In between there are two details that worth mentioning:

First was the courage of Boh, while No Face is wrapping it hand around Chihiro neck, preparing to throw her into his mouth, Boh had a valiant act. He bites the monster with his tiny tooth. Of course with his diminutive strength, he cannot do harm to a mammoth monster, but by risking his life he does distract it, and gives Chihiro some slack to plan her escape route. Here we see from a Boh who afraid of everything, he has become a valiant protector who dare to attack the very thing his mother frighten although he has absolute no chance of winning. By observing Chihiro save Haku and kill the bug, Boh has his first lesson about putting others’ welfare above himself. The short screen where Boh-mouse mimicked Chihiro act of stepping on the peeping bug, confirm his observation and learning and his willingness to save other people.

Second was the screen where Yubaba made her first attempt in restraining the monster. When confronting No Face running, she stand down and shout out “Not on my premise”, which was an act of declaring her authority inside the bathhouse. Her unleash of magic ball can be considered as the releasing of authority power she imposed on No Face. However, this scene was strong sarcasm to anybody who relies in power of authority to suppress instinctive desires in human’s being. The spell, as we know, fired back on Yubaba and covered her in the dung of corruption and greed. This is Hayao Miyazaki’s way of saying authority has its limitation, that to deal with inner problems, the strength of authority will only backfired.

In term of visual effect, you can see the merry chasing of Chihiro and No Face expressed the highest details in portraying gravity, human’s movements and effect of light on character’s body. It was unbelievable to me that all the sophistication in movement and light was hand-drawn, from the stumbling of No Face to the lighting on Yubaba’s wrinkles. This animation, to my perception, was even more alive than majority of motion films.

## The train of maturity

This was another masterfully crafted artwork presented in this classic anime, which contain its transcendent aesthetic, as well as deep philosophical and humanistic values.

The first thing noteworthy here is the meaning of this train. This train was often interpreted as the train of maturity, which probably correct. However, strictly speaking, the progress of maturity in Chihiro happened inside the bathhouse, and span across her entire time there. Therefore, it may be confused to explain this train as a journey of growing up. Actually, after much turbulence, intensity and highly sophisticated actions and reactions, this scene was deployed here at this point to serve three purposes.

Firstly, it served as a smoother, to calm and relax audience after ambushing them with strong images of gores in its pinnacle climax. Here, our eyes were rewarded with breathtakingly surreal natures and touching background music. It was important to pay attention to sound in this scene, where the sound of water was purposefully amplified, and we can help but feel our soul was washed under the crystal clear waves. In the scene Chihiro waving her goodbye to Rin, you can help but get awed at the blue sky touching flat surface of water. As the train moving forward, we saw a house, then single silhouette standing at the crossway, then a distant town, then the train station where all other heavy, darkly transparent passengers unloaded their luggage, seemingly unaware of the little girl standing there, looking for something. Even without a face, we can feel her gaze searching for something inside the train, but it was impossible though, to know whether she looking at Chihiro or searching for something she can’t find. The artistic paintings were revealed slowly to give audience some slack to contemplate the loneliness and get the feeling of colors and images it tried to convey. And honestly speaking, the beauty of those scenes was beyond my ability to describe in words, I truly admired its marvelous, but genuinely powerless in expressing its heartbreakingly effect on myself. So I guess, I will just stop here. Just go and watch it, you will know what I meant.

The second purpose of this part was to recap what happened to our young Chihiro from her childhood until now, which also mean a summary of her journey to become a matured person. The first stop was a lonely house floating on an oasis. We can assume this was the house that Chihiro was born and grew up. At the second screen, a lone figure standing at the crossway, was represent for her loneliness when family’s protection was removed from her, and the heavy burden of saving them she had to carry. The third screen related to her first accomplishment in the bathhouse. This accomplishment helped her seeing the nobility aspect of her job, bringing her joy in laboring. This is when the burden of working was no longer a part of her journey, and so the dark figures remove their heavy luggage and leave the train. Nevertheless, at that stop, Chihiro had left her innocence behind, represented by the small kid standing at the station. Then we see the train passing through a series of glamour billboards. These were the glamour and luxury of life that she has walked through, which was signified in the encountering with No Face. The loud sound of train and the first person view telling audience that they are inside Chihiro’s mind. It was not until dark that the whole crew reached Swamp Bottom, the destination of old age wisdom. The train continue forward, make us wondering what life had for us at next stops and whether if it ever end.

Thirdly, the lone, dark, transparent figures scattering across the railway is also an accusation of working industry, which robs people their identity, joy and thus life force. They turn human beings into the shadow of themselves, who have nothing left but responsibility and emptiness. The modern society of Asian not just ruined adult’s life, they ruined kid’s childhood also. We cannot help but feel that the kid at that train station just waits for her parent to come home, who is probably late from work. Connecting back to Boh’s life, we feel like Asian parents seem to abandon their kids for the chasing of mindless luxury.

## The consultation with old age wisdom

This was the final stage in Chihiro transformation.

## The final conquer of violence and anger

While on their way back, Chihiro has remembered the first time they meet. The next dialog was the final genius that revealed everything about this character. It is the strongest condemnation to human violation, and pave us a way to conquer the violence and anger in our heart.

[**Chihiro**](http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0383708/?ref_=tt_trv_qu): Listen, Haku. I don't remember it, but my mom told me... Once, when I was little, I fell into a river. She said they'd drained it and built things on top. But I've just remembered. The river was called... Its name was the Kohaku River. Your real name is Kohaku.

[Haku slowly changes into a boy again, permanently shedding away his white dragon skin. The two are falling from the sky, holding each other's hands]

[**Haku**](http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0997115/?ref_=tt_trv_qu): Chihiro, thank you. My real name is Nigihayami Kohaku Nushi.

[**Chihiro**](http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0383708/?ref_=tt_trv_qu): Nigihayami?

[**Haku**](http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0997115/?ref_=tt_trv_qu): Nigihayami Kohaku Nushi.

[**Chihiro**](http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0383708/?ref_=tt_trv_qu): [starts to cry] What a name. Sounds like a god.

[**Haku**](http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0997115/?ref_=tt_trv_qu): I remember too, how you fell into me as a child. You had dropped your shoe.

[**Chihiro**](http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0383708/?ref_=tt_trv_qu): Yes, you carried me to shallow water, Kohaku.

[they put their faces close together]

[**Chihiro**](http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0383708/?ref_=tt_trv_qu): I knew you were good!

In these few seconds everything fall together, Haku nature was revealed, which explained all the conflicts. It is important to recall that throughout his various forms and identities, both good and bad, the only thing that was always remained in him was his green iris, which hinted at his identity as a god of nature and a benevolent spirit. From other nature god’s appearance, it is possible that only after human had invaded his home that he assumed his human form. His greed, violence and thirst for power, which eventually pushed him to Yubaba, was probably resulted from human act of draining all the fresh water from him and fill in his river with their greedy projects. His feeling for Chihiro was complex as Chihiro was a reminder of his good side and his initial love and caring for human, something belong to his essence that Yubaba‘s magic can’t repress. However, he had an instinctive hatred and distrusted for human, especially when he is under dragon form, for what they have done to him. Although he already forgot his past, the feeling of being betrayed was still there, causing conflicts every time he see Chihiro, and so he repeatedly refuse her help, and thus putting his life and her life in danger. The worst part was that he could not understand why he hate and angry, which drowned him further into crimes. However, as Chihiro explained to him the source of his hatred and reclaimed his previous identity, his internal struggle was resolved, and he was finally free from control of Yubaba. His dissolving into human form implied that he is ready to leave the past behind, and build a new life around his newly found wisdom.

We can now see that Haku was a victim of human cruelty act to the very thing that nurtured them. Ghibi’s artists did it once when they portray the Unnamed River God under the shell of stink spirit, but by illustrating Haku as a human being and introducing his conflict throughout the movie, they deepen this pain much further. His suffering now was the suffering of human being, even bitterer, suffering of a juvenile child that had his home destroyed, had his blood shed and almost lost his life for stealing.

About Chihiro’s tears, these were tears of bliss. She has agonized about Haku’s true motives and character since the moment she met him, and she now remembers that he saved her from drowning when she was very young. Suddenly, all of her decisions are justified, and her doubts about her abilities disappeared. She has trusted her instincts, and her instincts have proved trustworthy. That explained her final whisper “I knew you were good”.

Throughout the movie, Sen has doubts about Haku, but she nonetheless stands by him. Her loyalty reveals her understanding that a person’s character is multi-layered and that appearances can be deceiving. Although both Haku and Rin initially treat her gruffly, they quickly become her biggest allies. While the rest of the bathhouse workers seem to hold fast to the first impressions they have of their customers, Sen treats everyone equally and finds out what’s beneath the surface. Sen gave people and spirits a chance to prove their goodness even if that goodness is hidden, and her acceptance helps to free her.

Philosophically, this screen delivered a sagacious advice to handle violence, hatred and anger: in order to deal with them, you have to understand its root, and in order to dissect its root, you have to take a deep look into yourself and accept help from others. The moment you realize its cause was the moment of self-actualization and freedom, self-actualization in the sense that you now know who you really are, and freedom in the sense that you are now master of your own actions.

## The return of heroes

After this heroic crew landing, Boh immediately return to his original form to meet his mother. His sentence to her “If you make Sen cry, I won’t like you anymore” was a wonderful conclusion to his transformation.

At first, it appeared to be another childish demand of Boh. But analyzing deeper, we saw profundity in it. First, it implied that, after all the lies his mother poured in to imprison Boh, and her failure to recognize him, thus push him to grave danger, Boh still loved her mom. However, it is also his way of saying enough is enough. That he can forgive her for what she had done to him, but he will not forgive her wrongdoings if she hurt his friend. Boh had=s learnt much about the world when he was transformed into the Boh-mouse. His more manageable size enables him to accompany Sen on the greatest adventure of his life, and Sen showed him there is more to life than mindless luxury. He observed how she rejects greed for good deeds and sees how her devotion and honor affect those around her. He finds joy in making something for a friend and participating in the real world, as opposed to the virtual reality in which his mother imprisons him. He eventually respects Sen so much that he stood up against his mother for what is right, even though it means Sen will become Chihiro again and leave him behind. Boh was the representation of loyal friendship that strengthens through ordeals, and a sounding example of Chihiro’s power in bringing out the best in people.

Although Boh lacks of understanding about the rules govern this world and still somewhat over-confident in his mother’s power, Chihiro does not. She understands Yubaba as a person doing her job, and do respect her for her well of knowledge and wisdom, which explain why she called her “Granny”. She knew that there were set of rules that even Yubaba cannot break, and take on the challenge to complete her transformation from a hesitant little girl to a confident young woman. She has no hesitation in her voice when she answers Yubaba’s question. She trusts her instincts once again and tells Yubaba that her parents are not among the pigs before her, thus freeing herself and her parents from their slavery.

# The symbolic images used throughout the movie

**The green herbal cake**: as a prize for Chihiro’s service, the Unnamed River God reward her a green dumpling. As we can see, this was an unusual gift, a food of extremely horrible taste, that cause the consumer to spit out anything in their stomach. This herbal cake, in my opinion, was a symbolic representation of self-impurity, which was difficult, bitter but in return help people getting rid of the poisonous elements inside them. It was the first step in transformation of character who was consumed by greed, arrogance and hatred.

**Water:** water in this movie was an implication of transformation. It also has the effected of washing all the dirt and mud in one’s soul.

**Mud:** Mud appeared twice in this movie. First, it was produced by Unnamed River God, which has brown color of dirt, is a symbol of adversity. It has the effect of nurturing growth if the individual learned to embrace it, and that was why Hayao Mizayaki let Chihiro stumbling in it. The second kind of mud was produced by No Face after absorbing all the corruption of bathhouse’s workers, is a visual representation of corruption itself. This was the kind of mud that covers Yubaba wholly, but never once touched Chihiro.

**The small bird that carried Boh:** This small bird was probably the representation of Yubaba’s love for her son, which always carried Boh on his journey of growing up.

**Radish God:** Radish God assumed the figure of a giant radish, wearing a hat that look like a ramen bowl. This hat was probably the representation of human oppression that he had to suffered, as they continuously harvested him for food. But despite that oppression, Radish God still hold no grudge against young Chihiro, and actually empathy with her situation. It revealed the endearing caring of nature for human being, although they have wrecked their world mercilessly.

**Zeniba:** Zeniba was representation of old age wisdom, which has its perfection and imperfection. Zeniba seemed to have a strong sense of justice, that the thief needed to be punished. She had a well of knowledge of about world and the nature of human being. She was a wise and powerful witch just like her sister, but chose to live far away from the industrialization bathhouse her sister is running. However, although as powerful as she is, she lacks the leadership that Chihiro had, which prevented her from influencing her knowledge to change this world for good. It is the same with today landscape, where old age wisdom no longer involve in politics and businesses.

**Rin:** Rin was a big sister that taking care of Chihiro since day one. Although appeared at first to be harsh and selfish, she later revealed that she was a brave and warm person. From her instant affection to Chihiro and her feature, we can vaguely guess that she was once human too. But she has lost her identity to Yubaba and can’t free herself from the bath house.

**Car & credit card:** Card represent for the power of technology and credit card represent for the power of money, both are primary tools for human to obtain their domination in this planet. Humankind trusted on this kind of power, and believed it was the way to obtain everything. Apparently, this movie warned human about the invisible forces that they couldn’t control.

**Transparent figures at the train:** these transparent, lifeless and faceless figures on the train were represented for the burden of growing up, including responsibility with family, and the working environment that steal people their life force and their identity.

# The artistic merits in this cinematic masterpiece

This movie had frequently use juxtaposition to contrast and compare opposite concepts, and then resolving the conflicts by merging these two concepts together. Ghibi’s artist build a set of characters that neither good nor bad but rather the mixture of both, even our young Chihiro at her finest is not perfect, and Yubaba at her worst still demonstrate quality. Normal approach of cinematic was to separate good guys from bad guys, so it will be easy to introduce the conflict and resolving it clearly. However, “Spirited Away” takes a more complex approach, it continuously dissects characters into good and bad components, and masterfully arranges them and later on merge them together. By conventional wisdom, this approach will introduce complexity to the storyline and puzzle audience, but Ghibi’s artist has masterfully compressed them in metaphors, makes this story natural and deceptively simple on the surface.

The transformation of each character in this story was perfectly smooth. In case of Chihiro, it is even impossible to tell when her changes started to take place. This movie covers the progress of transformation by revealing deeper and deeper layers of each character like peeling the onion, while retain the outer most layer to ensure their coherent identity. Excepting for No Face, everybody’s transformation in this movie was internal, and thus makes this anime so close to reality.

This movie also touches the highest level of expression through its ability to visualize the invisible. We all know movies do not smell, but this one does. We can actually feel the horrible smell of the the Stink Spirit through intricating expressions. We all know movies can’t spit and caress, but yet as No Face chase after Chihiro I actually felt the mud splash on my face, and as the train skims through thin layer of water, my ears and eyes were washed. We know desires don’t have shape, yet in this movies it does. And although through our naked eye, nature don’t have feelings, in this movie, their agony were deep and heartbreaking, even more real than human emotions played by actors. Finally, the drawings that depicted the light, the human movement and the loneliness of nature just made me simply speechless! This masterpiece was so adored among animators partly because of its attention for detail. Unlike motion picture, in animated film, everything has to be created, from a gust of wind to a drop of water. And therefore, traditionally, to reduce works animation movies often omit the detail of background, and the feature of object was symplifying to hide the sophisicated effect of lighting. However, we see no such compromise in this masterpiece, as lighting was exquisitely depicts in each movement of characters, to build not a story, but a real world of fantasy. Even under untrained eyes, we can see every single dimunitive details were taken care of, the way Chihiro put her shoes on, the way lightning caress on Yubaba’s wrinkle and the way the lighting take effect on No Face body across the merry chase.

Many people might argue that this is not a children movie, but in my opinion, every stroke in this movie dedicated to kids. It was true that the multi-layer nature of this movie was too complex for small children, but this movie does not mean to be watched once. It simplicity and adorableness carries innocent minds onto the great adventure of Chihiro, but it hidden complexity also fetches wonders into their subconscious. Thus, as they grow up, they were compelled to watch it again, and realized a new perspective. From my own experience, this movie was not designed to be watched just once; it was designed to grow up with its audience, to nurture their imagination, and to inspired courage, honor and loyalty in them. Most importantly, it gives them hope in ordeals, by saying “Yeah, this endeavor is difficult, but it is worth it, and it is ultimately joyful!”

# The visionary ideas of Spirited Away

Firstly, this movie represents a revolutionary ideas I never saw in other pictures. It tackles the most destructive element of human nature – their instinctive desire. Through thousand of years, the ancient wisdom had developed a tight system to denounce its existence from human perception. But with modern movement of liberalism, these desires were explored freely, and so frequently exploited for marketing and political purpose. It leads human astray, and creates an economy built on greed, luxury and egotism. However, this development has its undeniable perks, as it bought human a well-being never before seen in mankind history, and it was part of an inevitable route. Mythical stories told by religions was no longer served it purpose in helping people understand the world, old wisdom no longer suitable with human new found’s knowledge and power. Now social media triumphs, and images provoking human instinctive desire dominated young fragile minds. Hayao Miyazaki was no dreamer to believe there is a coming back to old wisdom, like the train now only run in one way. Instead, he trusted that by aware of their own dark side, young people can ultimately found away to live with them in harmony. By seeing them as a baby that has its own need of attention, you care about them just as much as you care about other parts of yourself. Eventually, it can become your ally on the journey of growing up. However, like a wise parent, you can’t pamper this child, satisfy all it demand and let it run free, you need to purify its from external influence, and leave it beside the watch of old age wisdom.

This movie structure was also tightly connect one part to another, created an unavoidable chain of events that seems to be coincident at first. Every action in this movies has its causual effects, which was a close description of destiny. That although we could not know that there is a predefined route planned for us, what we do know it that what happened in the past influence present, and your action in present influence the future. That ordeal is ultimately fun and educational. That one act of kindness will go a long way. That honor, loyalty and selflessness are the foundation of enduring relationships. And that the road to freedom, starts with awareness of yourself, and daring to get help from others.

This movie also moon into the stereotypes of heros, with masculine body and destructive weapons. Here we see a srawny girl that make most of Hollywood heros look like a giant baby hoping around with his new shiny toys. Here we see a ten year old kid that save her parent, not the usual way around. Here we see a savior that transform people from their inside, which is ten thousand time harder than kill them. Here we see a human being with imperpection, and yet was more completed than any fictional character I have ever seen.

Finally, this movie put a hope in young generation who were born at midst of a great transition in mankind history. This movie build a role model, that was a perfect blending of the old with the new, a kind of person that capable of resolving the inner conflict within themselves, and the outer conflict between human and nature.