**Spirited Away**

# The deceptive simple storyline of Spirited Away

Suddenly I have the urge to analyze the character Chihiro in “Spirited Away”. In my personal opinion, from movies that I have watched, she was the most surreal but complete character I have ever seen in movies. She was a modern example of how a young person should find his way through the turbulence of this new world, to obtain a rich life which brought to himself and also other people their happiness.

What I loved so much about this girl, was that behind the seemingly simple, plain and straightforward appearance, was complicated thoughts and personalities. Chihiro was not complicated in the sense of contradiction like Michael Corleone, in contrast, she was very cohesive in her thought and action, make her very much trustworthy. But her thought and action, seemingly plain at first, after further analysis, they exhibited a great complexity and wisdom, but still retain the innocence of a ten year old kid. This movie was full of harmony mixtures between opposite elements in one entity. Its perfect harmony makes this movie deceptively and masterfully simple, which establish a foundation for conveying profound message in a strong and concise manner.

To analyze this character, we must analyze the childish, insecure Chihiro before stepping into the spirited world. To the beginning of the scene, Chihiro was introduced as a withdrawn child, disapproved of changes. She lies down on the backseat of the car, and contrast to her father excitement, Chihiro appear to be highly discontented 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 sadness and cancel their decision, which we all know won’t happen. But in the seemingly glooming behaviors, we can see the good 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 beautiful and magical, yet fragile, need much of attention and was suffocated by the grip of her guardians. This exact protective manner that parent exhibited on her, hindered her to realize the good in herself. Chihiro also exhibited an instinctive sense of danger, which was a form of unadulterated wisdom which 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 peeled through the tortuous hill way is a metaphorical image which represent 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 violently protested decision of her parent. And here we can see the inexperienced Chihiro proved impotent 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 like a petal wither in the dry wind of externality, and easy to be swayed. As we can see moment later, Chihiro after all, giving 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 believe in power of materialistic, first in “four-wheel vehicle” and then in “credit card” (which was a higher from of money) which, apparently, prove valueless in many situations. Chihiro’s rejection of touching the food once again highlighted 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 were not meant to be eaten by her parent, and this place was creepy. In fact, to usual audience, there was apparent abnormality in the set-up, where attractive food was present at the middle of nowhere, with nobody around. One who familiar with Asian mythical stories may suggest that this was 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”. No, 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 exhibited in Chihiro’s behavior suggested the disconnection of human with the world of mythical gods. The transformation of Chihiro parent from human to pig was a strong and bold criticism the Master point to the civilization we are building. He made comparison of human with pigs, who consume 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 in human being, and the present of gods suggesting that mythical gods was part of human subconscious that seems to be forgotten. Contrast to dirty and solid image of pigs as Chihiro parent (which represent human modern attitude of greed and arrogant), the spirits deliver the feelings 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 arrived. I think in this movie water represented 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, as she was still a child refusing to accept the reality and grow up. This rejection of reality was further elaborate by her convincing herself “This is just a dream. This is just a dream. Wake up, wake up!”. About the image of Chihiro turned transparent, I guessed she discard reality, discard 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 connect her mentality back with her body’s sensory system. And as she felt the existence of her body, she solidified. To this point I’m not sure about the meaning of the spell Haku applied to Chihiro leg “in the name of the wind and water within thee, unbind her” which freed her from her fear and seemingly unleashed her potential strength. But 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 limitation of fear, and help them reached their full 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 represent 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 kindness and respect for even tiniest, lowest creature had would give her allies. Those sootballs was the first who stand up for Chihiro and probably their bond of friendship has moved Kamaji, the man who seemed to forget his humanity in the face of work. This also explained the advice Haku had for Chihiro, Haku probably was aware of the warm heart hidden behind the harsh and blunt outlook of Kamaji, and believe 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 apparently got her luck as she faced the challenges incrementally, and she received warm help along the way. With Rin, a person who also appear to be unpleasant, did her job in protecting this child, and seemingly assumed her responsibility as a big sister. The encountering of radish god was lovely. Although this character involved little in the storyline, we can sense the warm and friendly nature of these spirit 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 thoughtful act of caring and 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 didn’t have to do it all alone. I think this expressed Hayao Miyazaki 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 screen. The extravagance and status of Yubaba was establish crystal clear from her place which occupied the entire top level, to the sophisticated doors, to the flamboyant ornaments she wore. Yubaba establish herself as a very powerful person. Her feature and disproportion head suggest she is a shrewd and foxy witch and a very intimidating figure, each of her words carried power and calculative intention of breaking this small girl. She started 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 as she insisted for a job immediately after her mouth was unzipped, instead of smoking out her helpers to Yubaba. Yubaba changed 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 seemed to reach her border, another 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, consider them an honorable 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 assume the position of a villain, we can see that she is also had 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, did 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 understood 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 very essence, which we will observe later, and that was a very 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 his second appearance, he appeared cold, aloof, and cared nothing about Chihiro situation. He demanded 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 experienced a blow from Haku attitude, and later on childishly ask Ren whether if there were two Haku in this houses. Ren unfriendly attitude toward Haku gave us a clue that the Haku we saw at the bridge was rarely seen, and probably only being 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 or even other movies I have watched.

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 probably 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 terribly 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 gods, 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 message here is that life is tough and the child needs help, but never the pampering and full protection.

The first day of working, we can see that our new Sen has tried really hard to catch up with her college 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. While Chihiro standing there entirely involuntary, Yubaba standing there on her own accord, even reprimanded 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 to goose-bumps), 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 struggle 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 restrain 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 psychology, philosophy and artistic 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, and the final drip of contamination liquid was release before the Stink God returned to his pristine shape. 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, there is the potential of corruption lurking around invisibly. As this dramatic persona is too complicated to analyze together with storyline, I will devote a whole section on him later on. However, 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 is also an honorable woman with strong 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 nearly 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 didn’t think twice to stand up and fight for the people she love, who was 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 peeling 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 alone 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 No-Face and Chihiro

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 doesn’t. 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 raise 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 justify the thin border between gratitude and bribing, and straightforwardly rejected it although with slight hesitation. It is also reveal the nature of No-Face, which gained his strength through the immoral desire in surrounding environment. As Sen rejected his offer, No-Face quickly turned transparent and disappeared into a corner. 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 carefully 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 message, 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 express outside 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 desire for acceptance and respect. Here the master Hayao Mizayaki put forward an important teaching, that there are two psychological forces which were incredibly powerful in each of us, the yearning for respect and acceptance, and the caring for well-being of people we loved. These two forces continually influent our actions and transform us.

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 disorganization inside. One cannot ignore the words of Foreman, which suggested 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 childish, 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 witch. Her first reaction to Haku threat was to calling him to fly straight to her place, which invite danger to approach 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 refused to answer Chihiro concern and threw himself to the open window, flied straight to Yubaba office. This reaction, although shockingly cold, didn’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. Later on in the end of this movies, we even see our big Boh, although really fond of Chihiro, selflessly standing up again his mother to help Chihiro obtain her freedom, even though that also means saying good bye to his dearest friend. Although most of matured character in this animation was disappointing, the young protagonists in this movie: Chihiro and Boh emerged as a wise, selfless and valiant fighter. 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 mindfulness 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 vengence (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 three 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. Luckily 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 restraint the impulsiveness of executing punishment, and probably gave 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 dragons 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. But as 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. But this old witch wasn’t entirely convinced, as in the coming dialog, she deliberately tested Chihiro loyalty with Haku. However, in the last sentence of this dialog “All dragons are kind and stupid”, we see an element of empathy Zeniba had developed for Haku, and surely it 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. Haku was probably 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.

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 steer 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 her confidence in 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 feed Haku the herbal cake was exquisitely drawn, to portray the instability of this character. As Chihiro pushed her arm deep into his opened mouth contained 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 philosophical meaning of the herbal cake will be explained later.

After rescuing Haku and facing death, Chihiro found for herself a new friend, Boh. Behind Chihiro and No Face, the participant of Boh is 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 was started off 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. 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 strongly expressed in the image of immature Boh. The loneliness of Boh was probably the general loneliness of single kid in family. The first in deep 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. But Chihiro 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.

The love of Chihiro has indeed conquered not only the impulsive hatred inside wise Zeniba, the anger and greed of the blinded Haku – The Dragon, 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, and move forward to the highest climax of this movie, the confrontation of Chihiro with No Face.

## The power of mindfulness that transformed wicked desires, the power of friendship that conquered fear and the limitation of authority

The confrontation of Chihiro with No Face was a perfect resolve to the build-up tension.

## The train of maturity

This was another masterfully crafted artwork presented in this classic anime, which contain its transcendent aesthetic, as well as 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 purely present 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, violence in its pinnacle climax. Here, our eyes were rewarded with breathtakingly surreal natures and the relaxing 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 water. 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 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 expecting 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 down on paper. So I guess, I will just stop here …

The second purpose of this part was to recapped what happened to our young Chihiro during her time inside the bathtub, which also mean her journey to become a matured person.

# The symbolic meaning 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 mud inside them. It also suggest that for people who are deep in trouble, the first step of transformation started with self-impurity, which involve getting rid of what any things that external world feed inside them. In case of Haku, he need to get rid of the bug that Yubaba plan inside his body and the seal he has stolen form Zeniba. For No Face

# The art of storytelling in this cinematic masterpiece

Juxtaposition, humanize nature, visualize invisible desires through No Face, flexible switch between single and parallel structure, cover the progress of transformation by revealing deeper and deeper aspect like peeling the onion.

# The revolution ideas behind Spirited Away