**Title:** Politic Thinking in Japanese Anime in the Post-War Era

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Japanese Anime is well-known for its rich emotional expression. Unlike animations in the U.S., Japanese Anime gives the reader a story and conveys the idea that the producer advocates. As one of the most essential turning points in Japan's history, World War II irrevocably altered the destiny of nearly every Japanese citizen in the 20th century: the devastating impact of war, the subsequent U.S. occupation, rapid economic growth, and fierce social problems corresponded with changes happening in society. Creators during this turbulent period unavoidably cast their thinking into works, making Japanese Anime during that period a unique culture. Famous works created in the late half of the 20th century, such as *Ghibli Anime*, *Mobile Suit Gundam Series*, and *the Ghost in the Shell*, faithfully recorded the scenario of Japan's post-war era.

From a modern point of view, Japan had its golden age in economics after the subsequent occupation by the U.S. In order to prepare for the incoming "Cold War," the U.S. made considerable efforts to reconstruct Japan, making Japan their ally in the Asia-Pacific region. During the 1960s and 1970s, Japan received substantial financial and technical support from America. Unsurprisingly, Japan experienced an unprecedented economic boom, which greatly stimulated domestic industry, transforming Japan into the second most influential industrial and technology leader[[1]](#footnote-1). As a result, the period's accelerated technological advancement provided Anime with a science-fantasy context during this period. For example, *"Akira"* sets its background in near-future Tokyo[[2]](#footnote-2).

However, as the economy skyrocketed, so did the shadows: aggregated development brought Japan not only benefits from development but also suffers from environmental concerns, urbanization, and social corruption. As a result, it is easy to find the metaphors deployed in those stories criticizing the dark side of economic success[[3]](#footnote-3). *Neon Genesis Evangelion,*one of the most famous anime series, drew a picture of the perplexity in Japanese society, captured contemporary anxieties and existential crises, and included topics such as alienation, environmental degradation, and the quest for identity amidst societal upheaval.

In the late 1960s, as a result of the accelerating intensification of social conflicts, combined with the rise of national left-wing ideology and Communism, protests and student movements occurred. Among these movements, "Zenkyōtō" is the most remarkable one, which left a significant mark on Anime and infused the genre with the themes of rebellion and anti-authoritarianism[[4]](#footnote-4). Anime soon became a medium for creators to challenge social norms and express the pursuit of political and personal freedom. During this period, the artistic technique in Anime grew fast; new techniques such as metaphor, symbolism, and narrative were used to challenge traditional authority. Besides, serious political themes like revolution or autonomy started to show in Anime.

Among all the animes mentioned above, *the Mobile Suit Gundam* Series is considered one of the most representative anime series. The creator of the series, Yoshiyuki Tomino, was born in 1941 and began his anime career at the dawn of Japanese Anime[[5]](#footnote-5). Fortunately, he joined Osamu Tenzuka's Mushi production and participated in the production of Astro Boy, the first anime series in Japan[[6]](#footnote-6).

This experience profoundly influenced his later works. In his featured work, *Mobile Suit Gundam 0079*, he transformed the robot anime genre from "Super Robot" mecha into "Real Robot." In the "Real Robot" anime, giant robots are usually discussed in a more complex narrative structure, mobile suits are considered as weapons in the war rather than super hero. Also, like the writing technique George R. R. Martin took in writing Game of Thrones, Yoshiyuki Tomino tends to portray characters from different views, characterizing robots more realistically.

Although Yoshiyuki Tomino did not participate in the movements in the 1960s, the movements during that period still influenced his work. In the interview hosted by the Tokyo Otaku Mode website in 2015, Yoshiyuki Tomino said that reality is the essential motivation for his creation: "Using my feelings toward certain things such as "What's with the present political system and international situation!" as motivation and launch a counterattack against them.[[7]](#footnote-7)" He includes his ideas about politics and wars in his featured works, *Mobile Suit Gundam 0079* , Mobile Suit Gundam: The Origin, and *Mobile Suit Gundam 0080.*

The series, particularly "Mobile Suit Gundam 0079," is set under the context of a war between the Principality of Zeon and the Earth Federation. The story focuses on the cost and the pain of war, ferreting out the hypocrisy and evil of militarism. This is a theme that one could always be awared from Tomino's work. The characters, particularly the young mechanic Amuro Ray, who was lost in the complexities of war, reflecting Tomino's desire to tell a story about the harsh realities of conflict and the human experiences within it.

"Mobile Suit Gundam: The Origin" is the prequel of the 0079 series, providing a more in-depth look into the backstory of the Gundam universe. Although it is not the work from Tomino, the series keep revisits the conflict between the Earth Federation and the Principality of Zeon, adding new layers and perspectives to another main character, Char Aznable, who fights against Amuro in Gundam 0079. Similar with other Gundam series, in *Mobile Suit Gundam: The Origin,* Yoshikazu Yasuhiko made large effort in writing the evil side of the politic in-fighting, and how a military country finally goes onto the way of endless war.

Across these anime series, there is no doubt that Yoshiyuki Tomino's early personal experience had an essential impact on his political views, which is consistently reflects in his works. His focus on the realities of war, like the human stories within grand conflicts, and the moral complexities of combatants on both sides of a warfare. Anime became a showcase that Yoshiyuki could adopt as a medium for giving serious thinking behind stories. The Gundam series, under Tomino's guidance, has become a one of the most significant cultures in Japan[[8]](#footnote-8), transcending its genre to offer profound commentary on war, politics, and the human condition.

Besides Gundam series, Astro Boy that Yoshiyuki Tomino participated in the production in early years, is known in Japan as "Tetsuwan Atom." It is another pioneering anime that contains various political and social critics, and most of the views contain left-wing themes.

One of the notable themes in Astro Boy is its anti-war message. For Example, there is an episode where Astro Boy against the US Air Force to prevent the bombing of innocent Vietnamese villagers, and that is a storyline directly references the Vietnam War. This scene is considered as a strong anti-war sentiment. Moreover, in the manga and anime, Astro Boy always fighting against robot-hating humans, robots gone berserk, and alien invaders. This can also be seen as metaphors for fighting against prejudice, uncontrollable technological advancements, and external threats.

In conclusion, the post-WWII era was one of the most fascinating periods in Japan. Besides the skyrocketing of economics and technology, rapid changes brought societal turbulence. Those keen creators such as Yoshiyuki Tomino capture these changes and express ideas in Anime. During this period, Anime was a medium for entertainment and a tool to comment on social and political issues.

Moreover, the importance of Anime's impact on public discourse or social problems should not be underestimated. Anime like "Neon Genesis Evangelion" and "Astro Boy" offered critiques on environmental pollution and anti-war sentiments. These works reflect the anxieties and hopes that the Japanese had during that time, indicating the struggle of the nation to retrieve its position and rebuild its identity.

Finally, during the post-WWII era, anime was a cultural phenomenon that encapsulated the hopes, fears, and aspirations of people undergoing a dramatic transformation in history. Creators built an imaginative world of Anime that commented on issues and provided thinking toward the new collateral social in post-WWII Japan. The enduring legacy of this Anime is the best citation to their impact on Japan and the world.

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3. Tsurumi, K. (2015). Social change and the individual: Japan before and after defeat in World War II. Princeton University Press. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Sarkady, N. (1970). International Politics and the Left-Wing Student Movement in Japan, 1952-1970. The University of Utah. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Wikipedia contributors. (n.d.). Yoshiyuki Tomino. In Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia. Retrieved from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yoshiyuki\_Tomino [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Xu, J. (2021). Burning Youth: Japanese Anime and the Post-war Leftist Movement. Lijiang Publishing House [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Otaku Mode News. (2015). Interview with Yoshiyuki Tomino, the Creator of Gundam. Retrieved from https://otakumode.com/news/562c41a7a1c66b3f299ecf58/Interview-with-Yoshiyuki-Tomino-the-Creator-of-Gundam?page=1 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Animelisty.com. (n.d.). The Best of the Best: The Top Gundam Anime Series, Ranked. Retrieved from https://www.animelisty.com. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)