



Dialectic of Urban and Rural in Modern Japanese Society Portrayed on *Kimi no Na Wa* (Your Name)

by Makoto Shinkai

Varel Dava Chrisna Widya Putra Pratama¹, Rahayu Puji Haryanti²

^{1,2}Sastra Inggris, FBS Universitas Negeri Semarang

Corresponding E-Mail: vareldc23@students.unnes.ac.id

Received: 2025-06-26 Accepted: 2025-09-02

DOI: 10.24256/ideas.v13i2.7282

Abstract

This study applies cultural materialism to examine the evolving dynamics between urban and rural life in modern Japanese society, as portrayed in Makoto Shinkai's novel *Kimi no Na Wa* (Your Name). Drawing on Marvin Harris' framework highlighting the interplay of infrastructure, structure, and superstructure the research explores how the novel critiques and reimagines these spatial and cultural contrasts. Using a qualitative descriptive analysis, it employs content and thematic analysis of key quotations, dialogues, and symbolic scenes. The findings show that the fictional village of Itomori represents a rural space anchored in spiritual continuity, familial order, and environmental vulnerability, while Tokyo embodies a secular, technologically driven, and emotionally detached urbanity. The novel's symbolic and metaphysical elements expose socio-economic inequalities and cultural erosion, ultimately suggesting a synthesis of rural and urban identities. This research illustrates how Japanese written literature functions as a site of cultural negotiation within materialist and ideological contexts. The findings offer practical insights into how popular literary reflects and critiques Japan's changing socio-cultural landscape.

Keywords: *Cultural Materialism, Urban-Rural Dialectic, Japanese Society, Kimi no Na Wa*

Introduction

The rapid transformation of Japanese society in the modern era has continually been shaped by the dialectic between urban and rural spaces. Life in Japan is marked by both complexity and contrast, as the nation blends a rich, cultural heritage with its post-1950 rise to prominence as a global leader in economic and technological advancement (Toyoda & Latz, 2024). The dialectic gains further significance in light of ongoing demographic and technological shifts. Migration patterns, rural depopulation, and advancements in communication and transportation have reconfigured the relationships between the rural and the urban (Ji, 2024). These changes not only reshape the physical and social landscapes of Japan but also give rise to cultural anxieties and aspirations, as individuals navigate the demands of modernity while seeking continuity with traditional values. Thus, the examination of urban-rural dynamics in contemporary narratives reveals deeper currents of identity construction and cultural negotiation in a society undergoing continual transformation (X. Li & Xiao, 2024).

As Japan transitioned into a global economic power, the tensions between the preservation of rural traditions and the embrace of urban modernity became central to both academic inquiry and artistic expression (J. Li & Huo, 2023). This duality profoundly influenced its cultural imagination and literary production. Contemporary Japanese literature and media frequently engage with these themes, portraying characters and communities negotiating identity, belonging, and meaning within increasingly blurred boundaries of urban and rural life (Kadafi, 2021).

A notable artistic representation of this tension is Makoto Shinkai's *Kimi no Na Wa*, which symbolically unites urban and rural Japan through a fantastical, yet socially grounded, narrative. *Kimi no Na Wa* by Makoto Shinkai (2016) offers a particularly evocative example of how modern Japanese media address this dialectic. The story follows the mysterious connection between Mitsuha, a teenage girl from a rural shrine community, and Taki, a boy from metropolitan Tokyo. Their intertwined lives, marked by supernatural phenomena, serve as an imaginative conduit for exploring the contrasts and unexpected harmonies between their respective environments (Thelen, 2019). Through richly textured depictions of rural Itomori and bustling Tokyo, the narrative underscores how modern Japanese identity is shaped through the tension and fusion of locality and cosmopolitanism, tradition and innovation (Kadafi, 2021).

The cultural relevance of *Kimi no Na Wa* is further amplified by its post-disaster context, resonating with national concerns over community, memory, and the fragility of space. The socio-cultural relevance of *Kimi no Na Wa* is heightened by the historical moment in which it was created and received. In the wake of the 2011 Tohoku triple disaster comprising a devastating earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear crisis Japanese society has been forced to confront the fragility of its built

environment, the value of community, and the symbolic weight of both urban and rural spaces (Thelen, 2019). The novel subtly echoes these concerns, offering a narrative of loss, remembrance, and redemption that resonates with the national psyche. Furthermore, the rise of den-en kaiki (rural return) a trend wherein urban youth seek meaning in depopulated countryside regions highlights the fluid and multifaceted nature of urban-rural dynamics in contemporary Japan (Ji, 2024).

Given this socio-historical background, the present research applies the lens of cultural materialism to examine how *Kimi no Na Wa* critiques and reconstructs urban-rural relationships. Against this backdrop, the present research investigates how the urban-rural dialectic is constructed and contested in *Kimi no Na Wa* (2016), utilizing the theoretical lens of cultural materialism. To effectively analyze these spatial and cultural dynamics, it is essential to ground the discussion in a framework that connects material realities with cultural studies scope. Cultural studies emphasize the primacy of material conditions such as economic systems, environmental constraints, and technological infrastructures in shaping cultural practices and belief systems (Harris, 1979). This perspective provides a critical counterpoint to purely symbolic readings by grounding cultural expression in its socio-economic realities. By applying this framework, the research aims to uncover how *Kimi no Na Wa* reflects and critiques the material forces underpinning urban and rural life in modern Japan (X. Li & Xiao, 2024).

While numerous Japanese literary works such as Yasunari Kawabata's *Snow Country* and Haruki Murakami's *Kafka on the Shore* address themes of spatial identity, cultural alienation, and rural-urban dislocation, *Kimi no Na Wa* offers a uniquely contemporary and visually driven synthesis of these concerns. Kawabata's *Snow Country* presents the rural setting as a site of poetic decay and introspection but remains confined to a static, male-centric gaze. Though rich in symbolic layering and fragmented space-time, Murakami's *Kafka on the Shore* tends to universalize its metaphysics, making its social critique more abstract. In contrast, *Kimi no Na Wa* fuses metaphysical storytelling with tangible post-disaster realities, creating a dialectical interplay between the spiritual and the material, between Tokyo's modern alienation and Itomori's fading communal traditions.

Unlike literary narratives that often idealize or isolate rural life, *Kimi no Na Wa* positions the countryside and the city in an evolving, reciprocal relationship mediated through body-swapping, symbolic motifs, and temporal collapse. Its narrative and visual style capture material conditions of rural depopulation, memory of environmental catastrophe, and infrastructural fragility, making it exceptionally compatible with cultural materialism as an analytical lens (Teng, 2022; Hill, 2020). Moreover, the novel's accessibility and popularity offer a cultural touchpoint that bridges academic critique and public discourse, which is less easily achieved by abstract or elite literary texts.

Thus, *Kimi no Na Wa* is chosen not only for its artistic merit but because it embodies the complex negotiations of space, memory, and modernity in a way that bridges literary tradition, visual storytelling, and socio-political critique, making it especially suited to a cultural materialist reading in the context of post-disaster Japan. While previous research has examined representations of space, identity, and tradition in Japanese cultural products (Kadafi, 2021), and others have focused on the transformation of worldviews in urbanized contexts (J. Li & Huo, 2023), there remains a need for an integrated approach that foregrounds materialist analysis. Therefore, based on those conditions, this quite interesting topic will be further deepened through analysis using cultural studies.

Furthermore, previous research related to cultural studies can be interpreted through various perspectives depending on their respective theoretical frameworks, including cultural materialism. In this case, cultural materialism adopts the perception that culture is not an isolated phenomenon, but it is the material that influences the occurrence of a culture. Cultural materialism presents a comprehensive approach to understanding how social and spatial factors can be related, such as how infrastructure, structure, and superstructure can form the relationship between cities and villages. By applying this framework, this research aims to see how different social circumstances can relate through the umbrella of material reality and cultural representation. The foundation of this framework enriches the analysis of the novel *Kimi no Na Wa*. It also contributes to deepening the understanding of how social life in Japan can show the dialectic of tradition and modernity.

This research investigates: How does *Kimi no Na Wa* (2016) reflect and critique the urban-rural dialectic in Japanese society through the framework of cultural materialism? The objectives are to (1) identify representation of rural society in the novel, (2) identify representation of urban society in the novel (3) exploring symbolic interconnection and dialectical tension body-swapping as metaphysical link between rural and urban lives. The novelty of this research lies in its integrated application of cultural materialism to Japanese literature, particularly in the context of post-disaster cultural anxiety and rural-urban negotiation. It offers a grounded, socio-economically aware perspective on Japanese identity construction, moving beyond symbolic or aesthetic interpretations to examine the structural realities that shape cultural narratives.

Method

Cultural Materialism

Cultural studies in literature examine how texts are embedded within and reflective of broader cultural, social, and historical contexts. Unlike conventional literary criticism, which often privileges aesthetic form or authorial intent, cultural studies highlight how literature mirrors and shapes dynamics of race, gender, class,

space, and power (Aronson, 2017). Within this field, cultural materialism offers a particularly relevant framework for understanding how economic, environmental, and institutional forces shape cultural expression (Crossman, 2019). The sampling criteria for selecting cultural texts in this study follow a purposive approach, focusing on cultural relevance, socio-historical significance, and the representational dynamics between rural and urban identities, consistent with prior methodologies in critical cultural analysis (Silverman & Patterson, 2021).

Rooted in Marxist traditions and developed further by Marvin Harris, cultural materialism emphasizes that material conditions such as infrastructure, technology, and ecological constraints drive social structures and ideological formations (Harris, 1979). His tripartite model infrastructure, structure, and superstructure enables systematic analysis of how social systems shape and how cultural products like literature and media reflect them. Although Harris primarily applied the model to anthropological contexts, literary scholars have adapted it to examine how narratives encode tensions between dominant ideologies and emergent or residual cultural forms (Parvini, 2017; Selvam & Mukherjee, 2021). To ensure reliability, the current study integrates intercoder agreement during thematic categorization and follows established coding procedures aligned with grounded theory techniques (Kathy Charmaz, 2014).

In post-disaster Japan, cultural materialism becomes especially useful for analyzing texts like *Kimi no Na Wa (Your Name)*, where environmental trauma, technological modernity, and traditional belief systems collide. As recent scholars argue, anime and other visual media are increasingly used to negotiate material anxieties, from rural depopulation to disaster recovery (Teng, 2022; Karatsu, 2021). The specific edition of *Kimi no Na Wa* used in this study is the official English translation of the novel by Makoto Shinkai and the CoMix Wave Films anime version released in 2016 with subtitles approved by Toho Studios. Clarifying this edition helps maintain analytic consistency across translated cultural signifiers. Cultural materialism allows for a reading beyond symbolism, revealing how these narratives reflect real tensions embedded in Japan's socio-economic landscape. Its applicability lies in grounding literary analysis in the concrete social and material conditions that give rise to cultural meaning.

Qualitative Descriptive

This research uses qualitative descriptive methodology to analyze the dialectical relationship between urban and rural society and space in *Kimi no Na Wa*. The research involves textual and contextual analysis, focusing on several story fragments and passages that describe the experiences of the two protagonists in contrasting environments. The story fragments are selected based on their thematic significance and contextual ability to reveal the depth of meaning related to material life, social relations, and ideological values under the framework of cultural materialism discovered by Marvin Harris (Harris, 1979). The qualitative

approach is particularly effective in this context, as it allows for an in-depth examination of complex psychological and cultural elements. Because literary works often contain complex psychological dimensions, qualitative methods are the most appropriate to uncover these aspects that may be overlooked by quantitative methods (Cresswell, 2017, et. al).

Selected narrative fragments from *Kimi no Na Wa* comprise the study's sample population. The main characters' experiences, Mitsuha and Taki, in their respective rural and urban settings, are depicted in these fragments through crucial scenes, character dialogues, setting descriptions, and symbolic moments. The scenes were purposefully chosen because of its thematic significance to the dialectic between rural and urban life and their capacity to represent material, social, and ideological structures. A coding framework was developed based on pre-identified themes including spatial alienation, memory continuity, infrastructural symbolism, and socio-economic displacement, and applied iteratively following Braun & Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis protocol.

Data were collected through reading, identifying, classifying, and interpreting selected narratives from the novel. The data were then analyzed using content and thematic analysis to categorize aspects of material survival, social hierarchy, and cultural belief systems. To enhance the validity and trustworthiness of findings, the analysis was peer-reviewed by two independent coders and triangulated with secondary ethnographic literature (Baker, 1992). The wayfinding method, a narrative mapping technique, was used to track character movement, spatial transitions, and symbolic alignments across plot segments. This clarified the characters' navigation through psychological and geographical landscapes and ensured analytic thoroughness (Ingold, 2021). In addition, it strengthens the narrative logic of how characters encounter shifting cultural terrains.

The study used the wayfinding method, a narrative mapping technique that tracks character development, spatial shifts, and plot progression, to further assure analytical depth and credibility. This approach helps to shed light on how changes between urban and rural settings impact identity, memory, and belonging. In order to place the results within the larger sociocultural debates in modern Japan, the analysis also included secondary data, such as academic publications from journals in cultural studies and anthropology (Hyttén, 2006).

This research not only explains the symbolic content of *Kimi no Na Wa* but also exposes the material power structures and cultural tensions that influence contemporary Japanese life by fusing cultural materialism with in-depth textual analysis. Using literary and cinematic expression as a lens, this methodological approach allows for a grounded interpretation of how identity, tradition, and modernity are negotiated through narrative, providing insight into Japan's broader socio-cultural evolution.

Results & Discussion

This chapter provides a comprehensive thematic interpretation of *Kimi no Na Wa* using the theory of cultural materialism. In the context of contemporary Japan, it examines how the story constructs and contrasts rural and urban identities using Marvin Harris' triadic model of infrastructure, structure, and superstructure. In particular, *Kimi no Na Wa* presents a dialectical narrative in which material conditions, social order, and ideology are intertwined and shape the characters' experiences.

This analysis uses a qualitative descriptive method focusing on specific scenes and fragments from the novel. The research places each piece of evidence into a specific category based on relevant themes related to one of the three analytical parts. In this way, a nuanced reading connects cultural representations with their material counterparts, thus addressing the semiotic and structural aspects of the urban-rural dichotomy.

The analysis is divided into three parts. The first part portrays rural society through Itomori, a fictional village marked by intergenerational cultures, isolated geographical locations, and strong spiritual traditions. The second section examines Tokyo as a center of modernity, symbolized by its advanced technological infrastructure, high social mobility, and the secular ideologies that continue to dominate everyday life. The final subsection examines the symbolic interconnections and dialectical tensions between these two environments, highlighting how motifs of bodily exchange, temporal disruption, and emotional transformation reveal more profound reflections on cultural memory, social divisions, and identity formation. It illustrates how *Kimi no Na Wa* is a cultural artifact that critically engages with the material and symbolic phenomena transforming contemporary Japan. Through its narrative form and metaphysical techniques, it also demonstrates the interdependence of location, memory, and collective consciousness in a society characterized by stability interwoven with change.

Representation of Rural Society in The Novel (Itomori)

In *Kimi no Na Wa*, rural life is vividly depicted through the fictional town of Itomori, which offers a microcosmic view of traditional Japanese society. Through the lens of cultural materialism, the depiction of Itomori reveals the embeddedness of rural values, environmental constraints, and communal life in shaping individual and collective identities. This representation is structured around Marvin Harris' three-dimensional framework: infrastructure, structure, and superstructure.

The physical geography and limited modernization characteristics of many rural Japanese communities shape the infrastructure in Itomori. The lack of essential services in the town, such as bookstores, medical facilities, and a comprehensive transportation system, underscores the underdevelopment of the infrastructure depicted in "*This town doesn't have a bookstore or a dentist. There's one train every two hours,*" (Shinkai, 2016, p. 21). These infrastructural deficits

reflect broader socio-economic conditions found in peripheral Japan, where demographic decline and reduced public investment have led to shrinking services and depopulation (Marzluff, 2006). The lifestyle of its inhabitants is closely related to the natural environment. The vivid images in the narrative of narrow hillside paths, stone steps, and the iconic Itomori Lake show a landscape that determines spatial navigation, movement patterns, and daily interactions: “*Traveling down the narrow-paved path that runs along the hillside and descending several stonewalled stairways...*” (Shinkai, 2016, p. 14). These limitations are not only logistical but also shape rural life's tempo, rhythm, and habits, making it a sign of being introspective and culturally grounded. “*Twice a day, morning and evening, this disaster prevention radio broadcast plays through.*” (Shinkai, 2016, p. 13) this quote shows that the disaster prevention radio goes off twice a day, symbolizing not only the limitations of technology but also the close-knit community that relies on a collective system for safety and communication.

In addition, the story indirectly discusses the state of economic stagnation in Itomori. The limited employment opportunities and commercial activities in the city are indicative of a broader pattern of rural decline in post-industrial Japan, as shown in the following quote: “There’s no work, no girls come here to find husbands, and the daylight hours are short” (Shinkai, 2016, p. 21). Here, labor scarcity and outmigration are tied directly to broader structural trends in Japanese rural economies, which have been increasingly marginalized in the shift to urban-industrial capital accumulation (Feldhoff, 2013). The economic disparities between urban Tokyo and rural Itomori also reinforce a bifurcation in material opportunities and cultural expression.

The absence of popular food chains, limited technological infrastructure, and the near-static pace of life in Itomori expose a material condition that reinforces conservative cultural reproduction. Youth aspirations are stifled by the scarcity of material mobility, driving a longing for the hyper-modern, globalized promise represented by urban centers. In this regard, cultural materialism exposes how economic stagnation in rural areas fuels ideological tensions, particularly in shaping the consciousness and emotional life of young people whose futures feel territorially constrained.

Rural communities tend to pass down the customs and traditions in family relationships and hierarchies. Miniature of the social structure in Itomori that is depicted in Mitsuha's home proves that in the dynamics of the story, Mitsuha's father, a former major, symbolizes political authority. In contrast, her grandmother, a Shinto priestess, symbolizes the spiritual and cultural leadership of the community. “...in this tiny little town, do I have to have a father who's the mayor and a grandmother who's the chief Shinto priestess at the shrine?” (Shinkai, 2016, p. 20). These overlapping roles demonstrate that civic and religious institutions could work together in the patriarchal system to uphold authority. This quotation

also illustrates that rural communities often pass down leadership through generations rather than electing it, which limits the roles of ordinary people (Manthwa & Ntsoane, 2024). Within the framework of cultural materialism, this generational authority also reflects a socio-political economy where symbolic and institutional power is maintained not through democratic access but through inherited obligation a feature common to structurally static rural economies (Aronson, 2017).

Furthermore, Mitsuha's inner difficulties with the tasks assigned and expected of her, such as the tradition of making kuchikamizake or her role as a traditional dance leader at a shrine's harvest festival, reveal deeper tensions with personal agency, gender expectations, and inherited traditional roles, "Yotsuha and I have the misfortune of being the stars of the show" (Shinkai, 2016, p. 25). These expectations, are binding and coercive on Mitsuha's peers and the wider community. For example, remarks about how the women in Saya's family continue to serve as the village broadcast announcers and the assignment of roles indirectly intended for women show how gendered responsibilities are silently passed down and normalized, "My mom and my sisters have all been in charge of the town broadcasts, one after another." (Shinkai, 2016, p. 21). These examples reinforce Harris' "structure" category, the patterning of domestic and social roles shaped by the infrastructure, and show how the material limitations of economic stagnation make it more challenging to contest these rigid traditional roles. Here, gender roles become both a cultural form and a survival strategy within a closed and economically stagnant community (Takahashi, 2019).

Shinto beliefs, spiritual rituals, and cultural memory directly shape the superstructure in Itomori. These elements are present in rural life, where people honor their ancestors and seek meaning in the unseen. At the heart of this worldview is musubi, a spiritual concept that ties together time, fate, and human connection. Throughout the narrative, musubi symbolizes the guiding beliefs influencing how the townspeople live, connect, and make sense of their place in the world, as shown in "A mountain in autumn. The sound of a brook. The smell of water. The taste of sweet barley tea. "That's musubi—"" (Shinkai, 2016, p. 95). The sacred rituals at the Miyamizu Shrine, especially the making of kuchikamizake that express a worldview where the human body becomes an active vessel in divine processes, blurring the line between the physical and the spiritual. "...mixing it with saliva, then just let it sit, it ferments and turns into alcohol. Then it's offered to the gods" (Shinkai, 2016, p. 26).

Folklore and oral tradition bring the cultural landscape of Itomori to life. The previous generations pass down stories from generation to generation continuously. Therefore, as one of the relics, the braided cords hold a very deep symbolic meaning. The harvest festival also reflects an environment influenced by the repetition of time and the termination of tradition, "Our braided cords hold a thousand years of Itomori's history." (Shinkai, 2016, p. 23). This quotation

contrasts sharply with Tokyo's fast-paced, time-honored culture, demonstrating how different belief systems can affect how people perceive time, identity, and destiny. Through these superstructural elements, Itomori stands out as a place where memory and tradition are embedded in people's everyday lives. However, this embedding is not ideologically neutral and operates as part of a broader cultural reproduction mechanism tied to economic marginalization. In this way, *Kimi no Na Wa* reveals how the superstructure in rural life, while spiritually rich, ultimately reproduces material constraints by encoding them as cultural continuity, a dynamic central to cultural materialist critique.

Representation of Urban Society in The Novel (Tokyo)

In contrast, Tokyo emerges as a fast-moving urban landscape dominated by modern infrastructure, secular values, and socially fragmented relationships. For many rural youths, Mitsuha included, the city represents a beacon of opportunity and transformation, where one might escape the rigid traditions and social surveillance of small-town life. However, beneath its dazzling skyline and hyper-efficient infrastructure lies a deeper undercurrent of alienation, economic inequality, and emotional isolation. Tokyo becomes not just a place, but a system one whose very structure can disconnect as much as it enables.

Tokyo's infrastructure reflects rapid technological progress and deep economic integration. Taki navigates a world filled with smartphones, bullet trains, towering skyscrapers, and seamless communication networks that define the city's fast-paced rhythm and modern lifestyle, "In front of me... Tokyo's cityscape, which I've finally gotten accustomed to, spreads out before me..." (Shinkai, 2016, p. 4). While these features facilitate ease of life, they also generate a sensory overload and a disconnection from others and the self. Unlike the measured rhythm of Itomori, where time is bound to nature and ritual, Tokyo pulses with a relentless, impersonal tempo. At first, the city seems like a magical place full of promise for Mitsuha, like a never-ending "festival" where anything can happen. "*I was just enjoyin' myself a little. Tokyo's kinda like a festival. Real lively.*" (Shinkai, 2016, p. 39). However, this perception gradually shifts as she confronts the cost of urban living, economic disparity, and emotional distance.

This infrastructure does more than support physical mobility; it shapes social mobility and class experiences. Access to urban amenities, social capital, and economic opportunity is unevenly distributed. Taki's comfortable navigation of Tokyo contrasts with Mitsuha's initial awe—and later discomfort—as she confronts how wealth structures everyday experience. The stark difference in cost of living and consumer behavior becomes a critique of urban capitalist excess: "...! I—I could live for a month on how much these pancakes cost!" (Shinkai, 2016, p. 40). This exclamation underscores the economic gap between urban elites and rural communities, revealing not just financial disparity but also divergent value

systems. Consumerism becomes a marker of belonging and status, excluding those who cannot keep up.

Tokyo's class structure is subtly embedded in its infrastructure. Subway lines connect financial hubs while leaving peripheral areas underserved, skyscrapers tower over cramped housing, and lifestyle choices often mirror economic brackets. The built environment privileges those who can afford speed, convenience, and access, while simultaneously marginalizing others. This spatial stratification intensifies emotional distance. The systems designed to connect fast trains, social media, and automation paradoxically reduce the depth of human connection. People pass each other on crowded commutes without acknowledgement, each absorbed in their trajectory, their identity reduced to productivity metrics or digital profiles.

This environment fosters a form of structural alienation. Individuals are encouraged to be self-reliant, competitive, and constantly in motion, "...Agh! What'll I do? It says I'm late for work! Somebody who's probably my boss is mad at me!" (Shinkai, 2016, p. 41). The panic in Taki's voice underscores how the infrastructure of Tokyo is intertwined with systems of discipline and surveillance. Punctuality, efficiency, and composure are not just values. They are enforced through architectural and technological mechanisms. These expectations are tied to a meritocratic ideal where worth is equated with output, making emotional, professional, or financial failures feel deeply personal and isolating.

Tokyo promotes emotional distance and self-control, even though it allows people greater freedom regarding personal agency. Taki's transformation, especially when he experiences life in Mitsuha's body, challenges the strict standards of urban masculinity. Through this experience, Taki begins to engage with values deeply rooted in rural life, such as compassion, emotional transparency, and close interpersonal relationships. This change highlights how urban life can suppress these qualities despite its claims of supporting individual freedom, "But you're always tight with your money... You're really goin' that far?" Huh? She is? But she burned through my money like crazy!" (Shinkai, 2016, p. 114). In addition to challenging strict gender binary thinking, this structural interaction demonstrates that social roles are shaped by context and embodiment rather than being fixed.

Tokyo's impressive urban landscape starkly contrasts with the spiritual depth of Itomori. The largely secular city provides a minimal reference to ritual, ancestry, or mythology. Instead, modern aspirations, efficiency, and consumerism drive the superstructural aspects of Tokyo. As a result, people often find themselves trying to make sense of their experiences in fragmented ways due to the lack of overt spiritual practices. However, as Mitsuha begins to appreciate the richness and unity offered by her cultural heritage, her fascination with Tokyo starts to fade.

In Tokyo, the prevailing belief is about progress, wealth, and personal success. However, something important is slipping away, community bonds, shared memories, and traditions that once connected people also mark this

superstructure. In the bustling city, many walks by each other without so much a glance, highlighting a more profound feeling of loneliness and emptiness. Through this context, the narrative critiques how urban ideologies often neglect emotional fulfillment and cultural continuity. Their story reveals how the relentless chase for success can often overshadow the richness of emotional connections and the importance of our cultural roots.

Symbolic Interconnection and Dialectical Tension Body-Swapping as Metaphysical Link Between Rural and Urban Lives

Although *Kimi no Na Wa* (Your Name) presents contrasting infrastructures, social structures, and belief systems to differentiate rural and urban life, it does not position them as binary opposites. Instead, the narrative weaves a complex dialectical relationship between these spaces, where urbanity and tradition, technology and ritual, modernity and memory constantly interplay. This relationship is enacted and embodied through the supernatural exchanges between Mitsuha and Taki, whose gendered and geographic dislocations allow them to traverse and experience each other's lives. Their bodies become vessels of cultural transmission and transformation at once metaphorical, metaphysical, and materially grounded.

Through the supernatural phenomenon of body-swapping, the protagonists begin to absorb values, sensations, and emotional truths foreign to their original worlds. Mitsuha, once constrained by the weight of familial expectations and local tradition,

"Why, oh why, in this tiny little town, do I have to have a father who's the mayor and a grandmother who's the chief Shinto priestess at the shrine?" (Shinkai, 2016, p. 20).

"Aaagh... I wanna hurry up and graduate and go to Tokyo. This town is too cramped and too tight!" (Shinkai, 2016, p. 21),

discovers in Tokyo a sense of agency and autonomy. But as she settles into urban rhythms, she also encounters the emotional cost of anonymity and *hyperindividualism*. Taki, meanwhile, immersed in the close-knit fabric of Itomori, learns to value relationality, memory, and community obligation. The character's growing awareness is not abstract but embodied through time, labor, and sensory memory, challenging static notions of identity and belonging.

The theme of memory and temporal distortion is central to the novel's metaphysical inquiry. Memory in *Kimi no Na Wa* is not simply cognitive recall; it is tactile, emotional, and deeply spatial. It acts as a trans-temporal bridge: linking people not only across time, but across the divides of culture, class, and place. Taki

and Mitsuha's memories of each other blur, shift, and eventually fade, yet their emotional imprint remains. This forgetting is not loss, but transformation, suggesting that memory's role is not always to preserve but to reorient, much like the braided cords that symbolize the Shinto concept of musubi, a weaving together of time, place, and relationships, "'That's musubi—' The scene bursts into my mind. The body of the god on top of the mountain." (Shinkai, 2016, p. 95). Musubi becomes the ontological core of the story, affirming interconnectedness across temporal and spatial planes.

The story's emotional and philosophical climax is shaped by the comet disaster—a sudden rupture that literalizes the stakes of forgetting and disconnection. The destruction of Itomori by a celestial event marks a turning point in the narrative, grounding it in real-world anxieties over vulnerability, particularly post-2011 Tōhoku disaster. "The town happened to be holding its autumn festival that day. The collision occurred at 8:42 PM." (Shinkai, 2016, p. 85). The fusion of sacred time (festival day) and disaster time symbolizes the collapse of ordinary life and reasserts the importance of collective memory. The comet is not just an act of fate but a symbol of how quickly places, cultures, and people can vanish if not remembered and preserved.

Through the material destruction of a town and the subsequent efforts to alter the timeline, the novel asks urgent questions about the role of memory in shaping social action. Taki's drawings of Itomori, made from fragmented recollections, serve as attempts to rebuild memory from ruins, even as they slip from his conscious mind. This act echoes larger cultural efforts in post-disaster Japan to reconstruct damaged historical memory, particularly in marginal rural areas facing depopulation and neglect. The physical loss of Itomori is thus more than a tragedy; it becomes a metonym for cultural disappearance in an era of accelerated urbanization.

This temporal and memory-based narrative structure is also a critique of linear modernity. While Tokyo is organized around speed, schedules, and efficiency, Itomori and its associated rituals suggest cyclical time, deeply embedded in seasonality, ancestry, and communal life. The braided cord, passed between Mitsuha and Taki, is not only a symbol of emotional connection but also of non-linear temporality, where past, present, and future are interwoven. Time in the story bends, loops, and rewinds to prevent catastrophe, reclaim forgotten relations, and rewrite lost futures. This non-linear temporality resists the disposability that capitalist modernity often imposes on people and places.

Cultural materialism is woven into *Kimi no Na Wa's* narrative and more profound message. It demonstrates how the shifting forces of social structure, infrastructure, and cultural beliefs constantly shape people's lives and the collective consciousness. The story turns into a poetic suggestion as well as a nuanced critique. This means that in a time of fast change and fragmentation, it comes from accepting the tension between tradition and modernity or recognizing

the profound connections between rural and urban life rather than choosing between them.

Conclusion

This study finds that *Kimi no Na Wa* portrays the relationship between rural and urban Japan not as a rigid dichotomy but as a dynamic and reciprocal interplay. Using Marvin Harris's cultural materialist framework comprising infrastructure, structure, and superstructure. The analysis reveals how Tokyo and Itomori function as materially grounded yet ideologically divergent spaces. Tokyo symbolizes technological progress, capitalist individualism, and emotional detachment, while Itomori embodies spiritual continuity and patriarchal structure within environmental vulnerability.

Through the protagonists' body-swapping and the symbolic motifs of the comet and musubi, the novel underscores how place, memory, and identity remain entangled even amid disaster and displacement. These elements position the narrative within Japan's post-disaster cultural discourse, offering a subtle critique of socio-cultural fragmentation and affirming cultural resilience.

While this research contributes to anime scholarship by demonstrating the utility of cultural materialism in uncovering the ideological and material tensions embedded in narrative media, it is not without limitations. The study focuses on a single novel and applies one theoretical framework, which may constrain the generalizability of its findings. Additionally, interpretation is inherently subjective and may reflect the researcher's positionality.

Future research should include comparative analyses across multiple Japanese literary works or other genres of Japanese media, exploring whether similar materialist patterns emerge. Investigating audience reception or incorporating ethnographic methods could also enrich our understanding of how readers interpret cultural narratives.

This research offers insights for educators, literary analysts, and cultural policymakers by demonstrating how popular literature can function as a lens for examining societal tensions, cultural identity, and ideological negotiation. It encourages the integration of anime into educational settings as a tool for cultural literacy and critical thinking.

References

- Aronson, B. A. (2017). The White Savior Industrial Complex: A Cultural Studies Analysis of a Teacher Educator, Savior Film, and Future Teachers. *Journal of Critical Thought and Praxis*, 6(3), 36–54. Retrieved from <http://lib.dr.iastate.edu/jctp/vol6/iss3/>
- Baker, A. S. (1992). Fourth generation evaluation. In *Journal of Professional Nursing* (Vol. 8). Sage. [https://doi.org/10.1016/8755-7223\(92\)90119-j](https://doi.org/10.1016/8755-7223(92)90119-j)
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101.
- Cresswell, D., & Cresswell, W. J. (2017). *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*. Sage Publications.
- Crossman, A. (2019, October 15). Definition of Cultural Materialism.
- Feldhoff, T. (2013). Shrinking communities in Japan: Community ownership of assets as a development potential for rural Japan? *Urban Design International*, 18, 99–109.
- Harris, M. (1979). Cultural Materialism: The Struggle for a Science of Culture. In *Leonardo* (Vol. 16). Rowman Altamira. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1575060>
- Hill, M. C. (2020). *Japan's 2D Trauma Culture: Defining Crisis Cinema in Post-3/11 Japan*. University of South Carolina.
- Hytten, K. (2006). Education for social justice: Provocations and challenges. *Educational Theory*, 56(2), 221–236.
- Ingold, T. (2021). *The perception of the environment: essays on livelihood, dwelling and skill*. routledge.
- Ji, N. Y. (2024). Return to the countryside: An ethnographic study of young urbanites in Japan's shrinking regions. *Journal of Rural Studies*. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2024.103254>
- Kadafi, M. (2021). *Locality in Makoto Shinkai's Kimi no Na Wa: Negotiating Japanese Youth Identity*.
- Karatsu, R. (2021). Rewriting 3.11 and feminization of the countryside: national discourses in Shinkai Makoto's Your name (2016). *Japanese Studies*, 41(3), 273–284.
- Kathy Charmaz. (2014). Constructing Grounded Theory research. *NLN Publications*, (15–2233), 33–59.
- Li, J., & Huo, S. (2023). Literature and Modern Japanese Urbanism: Features of the Traditional Worldview in a Modern Space. *Journal of Psycholinguistic Research*, 52, 2339–2355. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10936-023-10004-1>
- Li, X., & Xiao, X. (2024). Reflection of the Japanese Consciousness and Worldview in the Context of Globalization in the Novels of Haruki Murakami. *Journal of Psycholinguistic Research*, 53 2, 25. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10936-024-10043-2>
- Manthwa, A., & Ntsoane, L. (2024). The Interplay between Hereditary Traditional Leaders, Democratically Elected Leaders and Succession: A Case Study from

- Makapanstad, North West Province, South Africa. *Journal of African Law*, 68(2), 203–214. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021855323000347>
- Marzluff, J. (2006). Waiting for Wolves in Japan: An Anthropological Study of People-Wildlife Relations. In *Journal of Ecological Anthropology* (Vol. 10). Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.5038/2162-4593.10.1.8>
- Parvini, N. (2017). New historicism and cultural materialism. *Companion to Literary Theory*, 238–249. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118958933.ch19>
- Selvam, M., & Mukherjee, S. (2021). CULTURAL MATERIALIST READING: VISUALIZING DOMINANT IDEOLOGIES AND DISSIDENT DISCOURSES IN THE CREATIVE GRAPHIC PANELS OF MUNNU: A BOY FROM KASHMIR. *Vilnius Tech*, 16(2), 624–636. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.3846/cs.2023.14785>
- Shinkai, M. (2016). *Kimi no Na Wa (Your Name)*. New York: Yen Press, LLC.
- Silverman, R. M., & Patterson, K. (2021). *Qualitative research methods for community development*. Routledge.
- Takahashi, K. (2019). *Producing Japaneseness in Everyday Life: Gendered biographies, locality and community-making among Japanese women in southeast London*. Goldsmiths, University of London.
- Taylor, S. J., Bogdan, R., DeVault, M. L. (2015). *Introduction to qualitative research methods: A guidebook and resource*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Teng, T. S.-H. (2022). Time, disaster, new media: Your Name as a mind-game film. *New Review of Film and Television Studies*, 20(4), 459–488.
- Thelen, T. (2019). Disaster and Salvation in the Japanese Periphery. “The Rural” in Shinkai Makoto’s *Kimi no Na Wa (Your Name)*. *Ffk Journal*, (4), 215–230. <https://doi.org/10.25969/mediarep/3697>
- Toyoda, T., & Latz, G. (2024). Japan - Culture, Traditions, Etiquette. *Britannica*.