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ATONING FOR SINS BY PROTECTING THE INNOCENT:
ANTI-VIOLENCE IN ANIME

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Abstract

This essay seeks to critically assess the representation of the concept of anti-violence as represented in Japanese popular media. Using several Japanese comic and animated series' as representative examples, it looks into the overall consequences on an individual and existential level that result from the violence of war and conflict. It also assesses the way that these consequences affect the way characters interact with the world and with the concept of innocence, purity, and a brighter future. The symbolism present around this concept will be analyzed from multiple settings and viewpoints; from historical to fantasy, and from Japan to Scandinavia and America. An analysis will be done on whether this trend in Japanese media is related to a general anti-war sentiment in Japanese society in the wake of potentially revising Article 9 of the Japanese constitution. Through a thorough examination, this essay hopes to explore the overall message that these concepts and symbols are expressing to the intended audience of young viewers, thereby potentially influencing their views on the subject of war and violence.

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Introduction

Violence in cartoons and video games is a topic brought up often when adults seek answers to outbursts of violent action in youths (Huesmann). However, the concept of anyone beyond a minor being influenced is often ignored – even in the instance of military-aged youths when viewing war media. The way that someone or something represents war provides a cultural study in how past conflicts are viewed, as well as public opinions of the subject in general (MacWilliams 177-199). At the same time, the way that media represents certain topics send different messages to an increasingly global audience, some of which are impressionable (Silverblatt).

Animation, like any form of movie or television show, is primarily a form of entertainment; it can be funny, action packed, and easy to digest. However, as discussed already, there are also messages in the way that what is happening on screen is portrayed. Topics and actions are shown as positive or negative based on the results or consequences, and even in how other characters react to them. For example, if the hero of a movie is shown to be angry and destructive, but he is rewarded in the movie by women fawning over him, then the audience is being told that those actions are a good way to act. This can be said of any form of media in any country producing it.

In this particular analysis, Japanese animation and comics – hereafter referred to as “anime” and “manga,” respectively – are the focus. Once more of a niche hobby, anime and manga have recently become more prevalent as forms of entertainment to a more general audience, with the wider access on streaming services such as Crunchyroll (“The Global Content Marketplace: Audience Demand for Anime.”). The range of genres and amount of shows being released every season is staggering, and therefore there are a great number of messages being

sent depending on what each viewer prefers. However, overall there seems to be a commonality with a number of notably prevalent shows through the years and seasons: a sentiment among authors, animation studios, and viewers that is anti-war. In this paper, we will examine this trend using several example series and discuss what it means for those watching.

Methods

In order to give this research a wide enough scope, I chose several different series that have been, or are currently being, presented in both a manga and an anime form. The series that were chosen are *Rurouni Kenshin*, *Demon Slayer*, *Golden Kamuy*, *Vinland Saga*, and *Banana Fish*. I have previously watched and am very familiar with all the series chosen, with the exception of *Rurouni Kenshin*. In general, I put more emphasis on the anime adaptations except in the case that I needed to analyze a part of the story that had not been adapted yet. Of the series I chose, only *Rurouni Kenshin* and *Banana Fish* have been completely adapted into anime. Because I am currently learning Japanese, and therefore have at least some grasp of it, I chose to watch all anime with Japanese audio and English subtitles in case the original word choice offered me additional insight into the author's intention. In addition, some Japanese sources were used, especially for dates, as I was able to verify at least that information. All manga, however, had to be read in English due to my still limited grasp on certain vocabulary as well as reading kanji.

Each series was chosen because they share a central theme of anti-violence, but provide different viewpoints and settings. In each series, I looked for how the central characters were affected by war or conflict, as well as how this shaped their actions throughout the series. I also examined how each of the series featured a character that symbolized something significant to

those characters affected by violence, as well as how the series handled these relationships between characters, literally and symbolically.

I also looked into sources that reflect reality in Japan – specifically, how the public seems to generally feel about war and international conflict. I was particularly interested in the public opinion in Japan in regards to the ongoing debate on whether Article 9 of their constitution should be revised to allow the Japanese Self Defense Force to be expanded into a full military.

Discussion

Beginning its original run in *Weekly Shonen Jump* magazine on April 25, 1994, *Rurouni Kenshin* tells the story of an assassin in the Bakumatsu period who tries to start a new life as a wandering swordsman in the following Meiji era, making a vow to never take another life (mokugyo). The manga was adapted to an anime in January of 1996, and its 66 episodes aired until September 1998 (ぎゃろっふ作品履歴1999). For the purposes of this discussion, the characters that will be focused on are Himura Kenshin, the titular wandering swordsman, and Kamiya Kaoru, the instructor of the kendo school Kenshin stays in.

The story of *Rurouni Kenshin* deals with the results of the Bakumatsu period as Japan moved into the Meiji Restoration. The Bakumatsu period is a name used for the end of the Edo period in Japan and is defined as from 1853 to 1868 (Takano, 82). During this time, Japan went through significant changes, including reforms in the military, social, political, and economic spheres (Pike). The reforms that came from the Bakumatsu period led to the beginning of the Meiji era, also called the Meiji Restoration in 1868 (“Samurai and Bushido.”). Previously, much of the power in Japan belonged not to the emperor, but to local lords, or shoguns, who were supported by swordsmen, or samurai (“Samurai and Bushido.”). However, with the Meiji

Restoration came the end of this feudal era and by 1876 even wearing a sword was forbidden by new Meiji government, officially ending the official recognition of samurai (“Samurai and Bushido.”). *Rurouni Kenshin* takes place in the Meiji period, before the banning of swords, as Kenshin still carries a sword, making the transition between periods very recent. The significance of setting this series in this particular time period is that Japanese society was significantly changed; shifting from a more turbulent period of conflicts to one that was much more peaceful. The entire caste of samurai was erased, and while many settled into newly created government and military positions, there was suddenly no place for swordsmen. Formerly believing that fighting for their shogun was an honorable position, these swordsmen may have found themselves dealing with similar post-traumatic stress disorders which members of the military go through today as they attempted to find their new place in a world that was entirely different. *Rurouni Kenshin* tells a dramatized story of the life of a mercenary who made a living off of killing whoever he was told to kill as he transitions into this new peaceful life, all while trying to atone for the blood on his hands.

The Kenshin that viewers see in the course of the series is not someone that you would expect to be a former mercenary; an image that he prefers. Even when someone else is using his former mercenary name to terrorize the town, he is easily able to convince others that it could not be him (“The Handsome Swordsman of Legend: A Man who Fights for Love” 3:50). When push comes to shove, and he needs to step in to protect others, however, he reveals himself to be capable as a swordsman and as a former killer (“The Handsome Swordsman of Legend: A Man who Fights for Love” 18:41). Kenshin is shown to be pragmatic about swords and their purpose, and yet he chooses to live with and protect Kaoru, whose dojo and style of swordsmanship holds the motto of “the sword that revitalizes people” (“The Handsome Swordsman of Legend: A Man

who Fights for Love” 8:25). This motto alone is an expression of the present and future reality of swords in Japan at the time of the series. Swords were no longer allowed in Japan as weapons, and wooden swords were thereafter used to learn swordsmanship. Kaoru protects the style of swordsmanship that her father taught because it is the legacy that he left to her (“The Handsome Swordsman of Legend: A Man who Fights for Love” 11:18). While Kenshin does not believe in the motto of Kaoru’s dojo, he still defends her and her way of life, acknowledging that it is sweet



Figure 1 Kenshin acknowledges Kaoru’s flawed ideals, but expresses preference for them.

and naïve, but ultimately not realistic (“The Handsome Swordsman of Legend: A Man who Fights for Love” 17:19). He still defends her and her ideals because he prefers those ideals to the truths that he has always known (“The Handsome Swordsman of Legend: A Man who Fights for Love” 17:32). Kenshin lives with and

supports Kaoru because she represents innocence despite her experience with a sword technique, and also represents hope for a more peaceful future that Kenshin is striving towards.

Rising to fame during its 2019 anime run, *Demon Slayer: Kimetsu no Yaiba* is the story of Tanjiro Kamado as he becomes a demon slayer in order to turn his recently turned younger sister, Nezuko Kamado, from a demon back into a human (“Story.”). Unlike the previously discussed *Rurouni Kenshin*, *Demon Slayer* takes place in the Taisho period (Moon). Spanning from 1912 to 1926, the Taisho period came immediately after the Meiji era and was

characterized by Japan moving toward a broader representative government and thriving party politics, as well as the continued rise of liberalism and Japan's greater role in international affairs ("Taishō Period."). For the purposes of this analysis, the characters that will be focused on are: Tanjiro Kamado, Nezuko Kamado, and Shinobu Kochou, an experienced demon slayer who cannot bring herself to see demons as anything but evil.

Although *Demon Slayer* is a fantasy series, it takes place in a real historical period and still represents themes applicable to any other war story. The most prominent theme in *Demon Slayer* is sympathy for the enemy; the enemy in this case being the demons that are to be slayed. The story begins with Tanjiro's normal family life. He lives in the mountains with his large family, making and selling charcoal to the town at the base of the mountain. While his father has passed away, he still has his mother and many siblings. However, one day when Tanjiro returns from a trip into town, he finds his family has been killed, with only his oldest sister Nezuko apparently clinging to life. On the way back down to town, Nezuko reveals that she was changed into a demon and attacks Tanjiro. Despite the fact that demons were responsible for taking all that Tanjiro has, his mission is not to destroy all demons; after all, Nezuko is now a demon but seems to retain her love for Tanjiro ("Cruelty" 11:50). Instead, Tanjiro seeks to find a way to change Nezuko back into a human. In addition, when Tanjiro does first find the demon that killed his family and changed Nezuko, he is stopped from getting revenge by killing that demon when he sees that they have a human wife and child ("Muzan Kibutsuji" 19:40).

Tanjiro's belief that the demons are not mindless monsters, but actually still hold at least some semblance of humanity within them, is actually supported by his sister Nezuko. Acting as an example of what Tanjiro means when he says it is possible to save demons, Nezuko is also used as evidence to the other characters that they meet as well as the viewer. While yes, the



Figure 2 Tanjiro (right), initially intending to immediately kill the demon who murdered his family (left), hesitates upon seeing their human child.

antagonists of *Demon Slayer* are also demons that seem to revel in violence despite their tragic backstories, here is one that actively refuses to succumb to the temptation of human blood, a feat considered impossible given that she has never partook in eating humans and should be starving (“Hashira Meeting” 4:50). Not only does Nezuko resist causing harm to humans, she also actively fights to protect them, seeing every human as members of her

family due to a hypnosis technique used on her early on (“Swordsman Accompanying a Demon” 21:00). By using Nezuko as this symbol of an ally to the protagonist and making her extremely likeable to the audience, the author illustrates that no matter how many negative examples of demons you may come across, there is still evidence of good within them that justifies Tanjiro’s ideals of helping demons.

Tanjiro cannot help but sympathize with demons, especially knowing that they were once human. Although he does not hesitate to kill them, he actively shows empathy for them and is shown to demonstrate mercy if possible (“Letting Someone Else Go First” 18:00). This ideology is in direct contrast to another character, Shinobu Kochou. Shinobu is a high-ranking member of the demon slayer corps and clearly holds the same feelings as most demon slayers on demons themselves: they are monsters that must be completely eliminated at all cost. Although Tanjiro

reminds her of the demon slayer who trained her and she looked up to, she cannot bring herself to understand being able to look at the enemy with any sympathy – especially after one killed her beloved sister (“Rehabilitation Training” 19:43). Tanjiro is unique in seeking to find a cure for demons instead of simply trying to exterminate them, and his



Figure 3 Nezuko (top) actively refuses to attack a human, despite being provoked.

ideology is a representation of the author’s own feelings on the larger theme. Although he fights in a war against an “enemy,” and does his duty as he has been trained, he chooses to see those enemies not as faceless monsters, but as other people like himself who were forced into the position they find themselves. The demons were forced to become demons, and kill out of necessity or because they have lost control. The enemy has their own reasons to act as they do, just like members of the demon slayer corps.

The series *Golden Kamuy*, written by Satoru Noda, began its serialization in the magazine *Weekly Young Jump* on August 21, 2014 (“野田サトルの一攫千金サバイバル、YJで始動.”). Still publishing today, it has been adapted into three seasons of anime so far. Viz Media, the officially licensed English publisher of the manga, describes the series as the story of a Russo-Japanese War veteran in the early twentieth century searching the Hokkaido wilderness for a hoard of hidden gold with the help of a cryptic map and a native Ainu girl (“VIZ: The Official Website for Golden Kamuy.”). There are an expansive number of characters in *Golden Kamuy* that are all relatively important to the narrative, but we will focus on only a handful to

help illustrate the way that the series handles its war themes. These characters are: Saichi Sugimoto, the veteran mentioned previously; Asirpa, the Ainu native helping Sugimoto; and Hyakunosuke Ogata, a veteran sniper Russo-Japanese war.

Although the description by Viz Media is not incorrect – the overarching story tying all characters together is centered on the attempts to obtain this gold – it does not necessarily adequately prepare the reader or viewer for the central discussion of the series. Except for the Ainu, most characters that are encountered are veterans of one sort or another, usually from the Russo-Japanese war; therefore, the bulk of the story while pursuing the gold centers on each character’s backstories, motivations, and how war has affected them. Each veteran has been permanently damaged in some way, mentally and physically, and still suffers from what they went through.

The theme of protecting the innocent is very clear in *Golden Kamuy*, particularly because there is a character representing this concept: Asirpa. Asirpa is young and, although she is used to hunting for survival, she has never been exposed to violence between humans. She only knows the Ainu traditional way of life, but her father was half Polish, and Asirpa is referred to as “an Ainu girl for a new era” (“Kamuy Mosir” 19:06). So not only does Asirpa represent innocence, she represents the future as well.

The protagonist of *Golden Kamuy*, Sugimoto, may not be the only perspective we get from the series, but his viewpoint is the overarching message. Sugimoto was a well-known soldier during the Russo-Japanese War, and was even given the nickname “Immortal Sugimoto” for his ability to go on violent rampages against the enemy without dying in the process (“Wenkamuy” 2:11). However, when you meet him in the actual story, he is panning for gold in order to help support the wife of his best friend, who died in the war, as he promised

(“Wenkamuy” 7:56). Sugimoto is pulled into the hunt for the gold for the same reason, and ends up instead fighting for the gold in order to protect Asirpa. Quickly forming a very close bond, Sugimoto and Asirpa are the primary dynamic duo of the series; Asirpa wants to put an end to violence by finding the gold and help the Ainu people, and Sugimoto comes to want the same thing (“To Live” 21:54). Often, we see Sugimoto pine for the days before the Russo-Japanese War, when he would relax with friends and eat dried persimmons (“Inside the Belly” 20:54). While it is impossible for Sugimoto to return to those days, it is not impossible for him to try to create a new peaceful future instead. Therefore, he fights to protect the symbol of this future. Sugimoto not only strives to protect Asirpa from harm, but also fights to prevent her from getting any blood on her hands. While his hands are long soiled, he can still preserve the symbol of hope and innocence.



Figure 4 Sugimoto is confronted with his own internal question (left) by Asirpa after describing persimmons to her, and then remembers and mourns his life before the war (right).

While Sugimoto chooses to sacrifice himself for a symbol of innocence and hope for the future, not all characters treasure this so highly. Later in the anime adaptation, we see our main duo separated, with Asirpa instead in the hands of a group including Ogata. It becomes clear early on in this arrangement that Ogata does not place as much value on Asirpa, and may even

have some malicious intent. However, it is not until the reveal of Ogata's backstory in episode 30 of season three that his feelings on innocence are revealed. Another symbol of innocence is shown in a flashback in the form of the flag bearer of his military unit during the Russo-Japanese war. It was believed that the flag bearer should be someone utterly pure, with no blood on their hands or even sexual experience. Through this purity, the flag bearer was safe from the bullets raining down upon them on the battlefield, and this protection was granted to the soldiers around them ("Bad Sign" 16:40). Being a sniper, and therefore already being soiled, so to speak, Ogata is perturbed by this flag bearer, even believing his purity to be an act, as no one could really be that innocent. Unable to even tempt this pure individual into using a prostitute to shed his virginity in case he does not come out of the war alive, the viewer finds out that Ogata ends up shooting him on the battlefield ("Bad Sign" 17:40). Because Ogata is corrupted, and can never again become pure, then no one else should be able to remain pure either and he seeks to snuff out that light from the world instead of protect it. Through his backstory, we can be sure that



Figure 5 The flag bearer looking back at Ogata after having been shot by him; an image that now haunts Ogata.

Ogata would one day try to do the same to Asirpa, and in episode 35 we almost see him succeed in at least getting blood on her hands when she nearly kills him with a poisoned arrow, albeit on accident ("Sin and Impurity" 17:15). This particular scene encapsulates the protection of the innocent themes for all

three characters involved: Asirpa nearly losing her status as the only one to not have killed another human, Ogata needing to ruin this symbol of innocence even if it comes at the cost of his life, and Sugimoto desperately sucking the poison from the wound and bandaging Ogata up to prevent his death. Even if Sugimoto wanted to kill Ogata himself to protect Asirpa, he cannot allow the sniper to die as a result of Asirpa, and therefore fights to keep him alive for now.

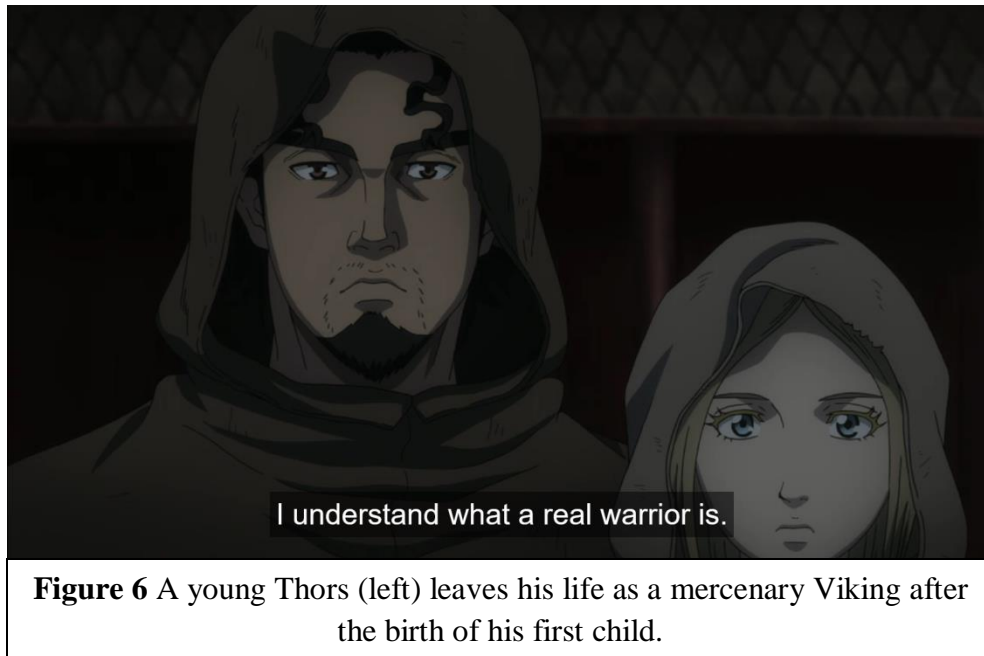
Most of *Golden Kamuy*'s cast is made up of war veterans, all of which are deeply affected one way or another by the things that they did and saw during the Russo-Japanese War. The viewer spends at least some time with most of the characters, slowly revealing motivations for the way they each act as well as what their personal stakes are for finding the gold at the center of the story. Sugimoto was an accomplished killer during the war, even earning the title "Immortal Sugimoto," but out of battle he is tormented by the death of his best friend and yearns for simpler times of peace. Characterized as being loyal and reliable, Sugimoto is an endearing protagonist, and is the direct opposite of Ogata, one of the many antagonists in the story. While still also being a skilled killer, Ogata seems to be unable to empathize with others and therefore may not have been traumatized by the war ("Bad Sign" 6:20). This concept of having empathy or not is the fundamental difference in their approach to whether or not innocence is something to be preserved, and whether a better future is worth protecting.

Moving away from the setting of Japan, *Vinland Saga* is a series written by Makoto Yukimura that was first published in *Weekly Shonen Magazine* on April 13, 2005 ("Vinland Saga."). This story features Vikings in Dane-controlled England at the start of the eleventh century, and focuses on the great Viking Thors, his son Thorfinn, the Viking general Thorkell, the Danish prince Canute, as well as the mercenary Askeladd as they each seek what it truly means to be a great warrior (Eisenbeis).

The events of *Vinland Saga* are dramatizations of actual historical events and Viking legends. Many prominent characters are based on real historical figures or are from legends as well. Even Leif Eirikson, who is well-known as being the first European to actually land in the Americas, is a side character. The plot of most of what has been adapted into an anime thus far follows a dramatization of the story of Canute the Great's ascension to the throne. While the events that the author depicts in *Vinland Saga* are centered on Viking history instead of Japanese history, the themes and messages that are being communicated are the same or similar to those seen in the other series being discussed. The characters are raised and surrounded on a day-to-day basis by the cultural expectation that the highest station a man can achieve is to be a great warrior. The beginning of the anime shows Thorfinn growing up in a small village in Iceland, playing war with the other young children and hearing stories of great Vikings of the past ("Somewhere Not Here" 9:05). By showing us Thorfinn's experience, the viewer understands the attitudes on war young boys are raised with in this particular culture.

We also see an opposing view from Thorfinn's father, Thors. Thors was once considered a fierce warrior and member of the Jomsvikings, a renowned band of Viking mercenaries. However, by the time the viewer meets him, he is a gentle leader of his small village and content, loving husband and father. He is interested in menial, everyday tasks and discourages his son from becoming too violent, even during play ("Sword" 16:23). Despite Thors actively distancing himself from the life of a warrior, there is something in Thors that almost every other character is drawn to but which they don't understand: what it means to be a true warrior. This question is what drives Askeladd and Thorkell, two of the primary Viking leaders through most of the anime's run. It is obvious to them, and even to Thorfinn who struggles with the same question, that Thors had found the answer, but they cannot find it within themselves to understand

(“United Front” 7:24). Through his life of constant battle and death, Thors did not understand what it meant to be a true warrior; until he had his first child. At that point, he understood that a true warrior does not live for the battlefield; peace is the true path that one should strive for.



The author’s choice to set *Vinland Saga* in a historically-based setting that is not Japanese is significant in that it communicates certain messages to a wide audience using context clues that non-Japanese audiences might be familiar with. While it’s likely that he was looking for something more interesting than a typical samurai story, Vikings are a relatively well-known culture. At least according to what is common and stereotypical knowledge for an average American, the Vikings reveled in battle, looting, and pillaging, believing that only death in battle would be rewarded with a place in the paradise that is Valhalla after death. This is demonstrated to be the beliefs of at least the common warriors of *Vinland Saga* as well. Young children believe that tales of war are the only ones worth listening to, and even the legendary Viking mercenaries seek death in battle for the sake of their afterlives (“A Gamble” 5:29). However, the main

characters that the viewer follows all must grapple with the concept that these beliefs are all incorrect, and that the path they actually want to follow may not lead to battle at all.



Viewers of *Vinland Saga* are not necessarily grappling with the question of whether or not a glorious death in battle is the true path of a warrior. However, the core messages of the series are more universal than that: the glorified idea of what an upstanding member of society looks like may not always be right; revenge will only lead you along a cycle of destruction and further violence – not only for yourself but for those you hurt along the way; war and violence only lead to greater ruin and disaster, while peaceful resolution is the only way to bring lasting peace. The author used a different setting, but he still told a story with messages that are common to, and relate to, Japanese culture.

The last of the examples not only does not take place in Japan, but also does not take place in the same general war-like setting of the other series that have been examined. *Banana Fish* is a series written by Akimi Yoshida from May of 1985 to April of 1994 which was originally published in *Bessatsu Shoujo Comic* (デジタル大辞泉プラス). In 2018, an anime

adaptation of the series was created, with the setting being moved to modern day New York as opposed to the 1980s, as the manga originally depicted (Ressler). According to Amazon Prime, the official site to watch the North American release of the anime, *Banana Fish* tells the story of 17-year-old Ash Lynx. A boss of one of the street gangs of New York City, one day Ash witnesses the murder of a man who gives him an address and the phrase “Banana Fish” – the same phrase his brother has been muttering since returning nearly comatose from Iraq. Once Ash meets Eiji Okumura, a kind Japanese boy visiting New York as a cameraman’s assistant, they team up to discover what exactly Banana Fish is (“Banana Fish.”). The main characters that will be focused on for this particular analysis will be Ash Lynx, Eiji Okumura, as well as Lee Yut-Lung, the youngest son of the most prominent Chinese crime family.

The themes present in *Banana Fish* are a return to what was discussed for *Golden Kamuy*, it simply takes place in a different setting. Once again, there is a symbol of innocence, a character desperate to protect that innocence both physically and conceptually, and a character driven out of spite to smother that innocence in one way or another. In *Banana Fish*, Eiji is the symbol of innocence. A Japanese athlete that had given up on himself, Eiji was brought to New York City by a family friend to be his assistant while he took photographs for an article on street gang youths as a way of getting his mind off of things (“From Death to Morning” 12:35). Upon meeting Ash for the first time, Eiji becomes excited to see Ash’s revolver and asks excitedly if he could touch it, since he had never seen one before. Much to everyone’s surprise, Ash agrees, despite it being established that the last person to touch Ash’s gun had his fingers cut off for it (“A Perfect Day for Bananafish” 19:01). It is obvious, especially as the series goes on, that Ash had no problem allowing Eiji to handle the gun because he knew immediately that there was no ulterior motive; Eiji meant exactly what he said. This immediate trust in, and even affection for,

Eiji as a person is shared by every member of Ash's gang as they sequentially meet him, with each one taking a liking to how genuine he is as well as feeling a deep desire to protect him. Because Ash and the other gang members have always been surrounded by others who have been damaged and shaped by the same lifestyle as they have, they recognize instantly that Eiji is completely untouched by any corruption thus far. For Ash and those that he trusts, Eiji is something that can still be saved, and they risk their lives many times to ensure that he remains that way.

Unlike Sugimoto in *Golden Kamuy*, the protagonist of *Banana Fish* is no war veteran; however, Ash still carries enough baggage and trauma that he is comparable. Ash is seventeen years old, but grew up with an overwhelming amount of abuse, much of it sexual. By the time the viewer meets him, Ash is the leader of a street gang, as well as considered an underling of the local crime lord. His major defining feature is that he seems to be actively working against that crime lord, and seems to care greatly for those he allows close to him ("A Perfect Day for Bananafish" 21:25). Despite the damages that Ash has collected over time, he remains resolute in his purpose: to protect others who have not yet been hurt like he has and prevent the possibility of what he went through happening to them. Due to Ash constantly being exposed to corruption, he is shown to judge people immediately on whether they are a threat or not, and acts notably different depending on who he is speaking to. It is notable that Ash dramatically changes the way he speaks, even becoming affectionate, when talking to one person in particular: Eiji, the embodiment of innocence ("The Beautiful and the Damned" 3:28).

The last of our *Banana Fish* characters for the purpose of this analysis is Lee Yut-Lung. Despite being from one of the major influential groups in the story, Yut-Lung is the youngest son in his family, as well as the son of his father's mistress. While he did not go through the same



Figure 8 Ash storming the mansion of the corrupt main villain (left), versus Ash relaxing and interacting with innocent Eiji (right).

type or severity of abuse that Ash went through, Yut-Lung did go through essentially being a useful tool for his older brothers while growing up. Acting as a foil for Ash, Yut-Lung has an opposite reaction when confronted by something in this world that remains innocent; he was unable to retain his innocence, and so no one else should either. Instead of feeling the need to protect Eiji, as Ash and his gang are inclined to do, Yut-Lung feels an intense need to soil and destroy him, especially knowing that other people are so protective of him (“Save Me The Waltz” 9:11).

Through these three characters, the theme of anti-violence is once again expressed. Eiji represents innocence and hope, and is made to be likeable not only through his genuine characterization, but also by making the protagonist and those made to be the “good guys” of the story protective over him. Ash has many moments where he commits acts of extreme violence and gains the audience’s respect through his brave and awe inspiring actions, but his priorities are always made clear: only go after those that have done heinous things, and protect those that can still be saved (“My Lost City” 16:53). Yut-Lung, being the foil to Ash, is very similar to him, but his opinion on whether or not innocence deserves to be preserved is the polar opposite. Instead of being framed as someone the audience should imitate, however, Yut-Lung is



Figure 9 Yut-Lung’s hands coming out from the shadows to envelope Ash’s right-hand man, Shorter Wong, in the opening, foreshadowing him being a villain.

consistently shown to not be trusted. He is often associated with being suspicious, as Ash mentions almost immediately upon meeting him for the first time, and coming out of the shadows as a corrupting force as shown in the series’ first opening animation (“In Another Country” 3:19). In a nutshell, working towards ending future violence to protect

innocence and hope for the future is good, and trying to destroy that innocence and prolong violence due to being previously wronged is bad.

Although anime and manga are primarily forms of entertainment, the messages that they communicate to those that consume them can have significant effects on opinions and viewpoints. As a matter of fact, manga has already been used as a propaganda tool in the past (Inouye, 21). As far back as the 1920s, its potential to sway the opinions and feelings of the masses was being pondered by the artists drawing it (Inouye, 22). In today’s world, it is important to note what sorts of messages are being taught in media that is consumed, and even aimed at, younger audiences. Only one series discussed here, *Vinland Saga*, is not aimed at young men or women, but even then it can and is consumed by the same audience as the other four, with demographics largely ending up classified based on where it ends up being published.

After World War II, Japan was tasked with creating a new constitution by the United States as a way of allowing the people to reform the country, which resulted in taking some of the power away from the government. Part of the constitution that resulted included Article 9 –

the famous “no-war” clause that prohibits Japan from having a standing military. However, throughout the years since, there has been a push to revise the constitution, with the most emphasis being on either changing or repealing Article 9 altogether. Most of this push seems to be coming from the government, with many citizens having strong preferences for things remaining as they are; which is made worse by the government choosing to send the self-defense forces they do have to assist with military conflicts in the Middle East without the necessary support of the citizens (Junkerman and Tetsujiro). The potential upcoming changes that could have a global impact if Japan were to eventually repeal Article 9 and begin rearming is one of the reasons that it is important to analyze the relationship that the Japanese people have with the concept of war – even if the subject being drawn or animated is not inherently one centered in Japanese history or culture.

While the setting of Japan and its culture are more familiar to Japanese viewers, shifting to different places and times can help to bring more attention to the series, as well as potential provide a broader appeal. Anime is progressively becoming a more common form of entertainment, no longer restricted to a specific, small group of fans in countries outside of Japan (“The Global Content Marketplace: Audience Demand for Anime.”). It also does not necessarily matter what the setting is, since the messages in a story are more general and universal. All of the series discussed in this analysis have a central message of war being a destructive force, as well as the future and those who remain innocent being something worth protecting. Many of them deal with peaceful means being both a better way to live, as well as a better way of ending conflict. In general, those on the side of peace and acting as protectors of the innocent are the protagonists of the story, clearly being someone the viewer is meant to root for, while the antagonists seek to destroy those ideals primarily for the principle of the matter. While there will

always be plenty of series meant purely for action-packed entertainment, there are also many out there with profound messages at their center. It just so happens that a prominent thread moving through a number of these stories in anime and manga is that of anti-war sentiments.

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