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# THIS AND THAT

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*In memory of Victoria*

Welcome to the College Journal of Culture and Literature, *This and That* vol. 7, 2021. I was responsible for the editing and formatting work for the previous two editions, vol. 5 and 6. I was also one of the contributors as well. This year, *This and That* vol. 7 embraces diversity and offers six categories of students' work: Hong Kong popular culture, film and moral philosophy, film and culture, language, short stories, and poems. Even though I have already graduated, I am thrilled to be able to return and offer help as a consultant editor this year. During the editing and formatting process with other student editors and also lecturers, I can feel their devotion and enthusiasm in continuing this proud tradition, despite their impossible schedules. We shall carry on celebrating HKBU CIE's writing talent in years to come. I hope you enjoy reading them as much as I do!

— Ng Ho Lun, Ron  
Cultural Studies 2018 - 2020

Each year through the student societies, students from Cultural Studies (CULS) and Professional Communication and English Studies (PENG) form a team to vet and edit student essays and creative work submitted to *This and That*. The Journal celebrates the College of International Education's writing talent. It is headed and produced by lecturers at CIE.

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# Living in a *Mad World* (一念無明, 2016)

*Lee Ka Yan, Esther*

Mood disorder is a common mental condition of urbanites, especially in a fast-paced city like Hong Kong. *Mad World* (2016) is a story about a psychiatric patient and his father, telling how they continue their lives enduring with pain and guilt from the past. The tragedy illustrates the cruelty of society and the public's stigmatisation of mental patients. Everyone is actually suffering from depression. We are living in a compressed and mad city. In this essay, I will examine how the compacted landscape and narrow space in Hong Kong frame the mental disturbance of Hong Kong people. It is worth discussing how Hong Kong cityscape and lifestyle lead to this mental disorder. Many people struggle to live a life in Hong Kong. Nevertheless, people who belong to this city could still build their own sense of belonging.

Known as a “concrete jungle,” Hong Kong has narrow spaces and a crowded living environment where people are not allowed to be a *flâneur* in this city. The term *flâneur* first came from Charles Baudelaire’s book *The Painter of Modern Life* published in 1863, and was explained by Walter Benjamin in describing people who are able to complete their identity through wandering and observing the city. In *Mad World*, most of the scenes are shot in a subdivided flat in Hong Kong. There are five to six, or more, households living in the same flat. Referring to the statistics provided by the Research Office of Legislative Council Secretariat (2018), the median per capita floor area of subdivided flats of accommodation was 5.3 square metres in 2016. “Space... Space... There is no

space here!” one of the dwellers says in the film. There is no room for a psychiatric patient. No room for them to stay away from trouble. There is also no space. No space for them to live their life properly. After returning to society from an institution, Tung (Shawn Yue Man-lok) faces his first depression when he experiences job interview failure and loses his relationship with his fiancée Jenny. His immediate action is to devour chocolates in the supermarket. Following up with a period of keeping to himself, one night he starts running on the street. Tung runs freely and aimlessly into the night. However, his sense of belonging to Hong Kong is not built by being a running *flâneur*. The aims of such actions can be explained as ways to relieve stress and vent. The image of the city would be a feeling or impression that builds in his mind in time. Tung had a high-income job and a higher quality of life before he was diagnosed. Therefore, his sense of belonging is mainly shaped by the global capital.

Tung has never escaped from economic and housing pressure and it is shown by the dual compression in Hong Kong. According to Michelle Huang (2004), dual compression is the major feature in shaping the landscape in Hong Kong. Hong Kong is composed of high-density housing and global glamorous zones such as Central and West Kowloon. In *Mad World*, before Tung was diagnosed with bipolar disorder, he engaged in finances. He rented a flat in a high-end residential area with his fiancée Jenny. Although it was a high-end residence, it was so small and narrow that they could not even have a washing machine. He was eager to earn more money and to be financially capable of buying a flat. After he was diagnosed with bipolar disorder, he lived in a subdivided flat with his father, being unemployed, without ambition or financial ability. According to Huang, “the urban space of Hong Kong embedded within such a narrative of global

progress thus turns out to be a space of fantasy for its walkers (*flâneur*) to inscribe their own desire and dream, a space glossed over by the grand rhetoric of globalisation” (p. 130). Tung was actually getting through two stages and two of the different parallel zones in Hong Kong. The Central Business District (CBD) where commercial and business offices are located, globalised and connected to the world market. And the local housing zone where high-density housing can be found. The two significant landscapes in Hong Kong are similar to the two emotions of mania and depression which Tung has. Both of them are opposite to one another but at the same time coexisting and relating to each other, which shows the life of Hong Kong people being stuck between the global and the local.

On the rooftop, Tung and the little boy create their own space, a secret area for themselves. In the film, the scene of the rooftop has appeared several times. The rooftop of the building where Tung is living and the landscapes of Hong Kong are shown. Tung asks the little boy for help when he decides to build their garden on the roof. Then a secret garden and breathing space are created. Place attachment is formed which comprises affective, cognitive and behavioural objects (Lewicka, 2008). According to Williams et al. (1992), place attachment refers to bonds that people develop with places. The rooftop is given meaning by Tung and the little boy. It is a place where both of them are able to enjoy their moment and organize their thoughts. It also facilitates their interpersonal relationship and increases their sense of belonging. They have built a special connection with the rooftop. In Hong Kong, rooftops are well-used for greening and gathering as they offer a unique view of the city. With limited space in Hong Kong, maybe rooftops could provide the biggest space and freedom for Hong Kong people. In the

film, the boy asks, “why do our flowers wither every time?” Tung answers, “maybe it’s not a suitable place for them to grow. Maybe the environment is not good enough.” The boy says, “Then we make this place suitable for them, make it a better place.” They seem to be talking about the plants on the rooftop. Metaphorically, they are also talking about the people living in Hong Kong. It is possible to change our place to a place that is suitable for everyone to live happily. We can also achieve it by changing our thoughts or creating our own sense of place by discovering meanings behind the city.

To conclude, *Mad World* is a life portrayal of different Hong Kong people from the grassroots to the high-income groups. It also illustrates how Hong Kong people struggle to live under depression. The relationship between the local and the global is also shown in this film. Space and environment in Hong Kong and the mental feeling of the people are interacting. A sense of belonging can be built by creating memories with each other to give life to the place.



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# *King of Comedy* (喜劇之王, 1999)

*She Tsz Yi, Ian*

The entertainment industry is a *jianghu* in Hong Kong. It was supposed to be an important place to exhibit Hong Kong culture and unlimited creativity. The issue is shown in Stephen Chow's *King of Comedy* (1999). We can see that the main character is trying to achieve his dreams in the entertainment industry. I will use his life experience of being treated unfairly and failing many times to point out that Hong Kong's entertainment industry is a cumbersome *jianghu*, the "river and lake," which has complicated unwritten rules that often prevent true talents from being noticed.

First of all, *yiqi* is the most representative element of *jianghu*, especially the gangster underworld as represented in the film. Stephen Chow's Wan Tin-sau is with a criminal underworld boss, Brother Kei, and he accepts Kei's invitation to teach the young how to be a local bully and to get protection fees. According to Chen Pingyuan (1995), *yiqi* implies that "as long as the relationship is friendly, we can help each other regardless of the nature of the incident" (p. 212). At the same time, the protection racket is one of the rules of the river and lake. It means that if the government does not maintain law and order properly, it is possible that private organizations will emerge and manage themselves without being regulated by the government.

Secondly, Wan Tin-sau is a *flâneur*, a person who walks freely in the city to build his own sense of belonging. He always passes through the long hallways at the film set and his own

living space, to find a sense of belonging as an actor. In the film's early stage, the director never gives the impression that the long hallways have exits. The scenes of him walking down long hallways often cut directly to Wan's empty home. The director uses Wan's house as a special place. The place is square in shape, with a window, and does not have anything precious except a book *An Actor Prepares*. Susan Dellinger (2006) said that "a square person is characterized by a love of work, a commitment to doing one's best, and a desire to finish something once it has been started" (p. 78). The director uses "shape psychology" to tell us his perseverance and his love for his career as an actor. Wan's house shows that he just has one dream: to be an actor, which is his only way out. When Wan goes to the middle of the hallway to take a lunchbox after long hours of hard work at the film set, he snatches his lunch and runs home, despite being refused. He never gives up his passion to shuttle between different places in the city to build his sense of identity from his acting profession. The lunchbox is more than just food. For Wan, it is where his sense of belonging comes from.

Thirdly, the entertainment industry is a messy place and has its own *jianghu* rules. Karen Mok's Sister Cuckoo supports a person with no talent at all but because of Cuckoo's huge business value, that is having "rivers and lake status," she can nominate anyone she likes. Cuckoo also manipulates Wan's passion for acting to seduce him. Wan cannot succeed as an actor because he rejects her pursuit. The entertainment industry is not a level playing field where art comes first. To defend his integrity also means that Wan must give up his chance at any commercial success in the industry. To succeed in *jianghu*, one must abide by such unwritten rules.

In conclusion, Wan's failure at the entertainment *jianghu* can

also be understood as an allegory of Hong Kong. The film industry's complicated "unwritten *jianghu* rules" make bridging the international film scene difficult. Such rules are also often so convoluted and power-centric that true talents are often overlooked.

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# *You Don't Know Jack (2010)*

*Chau Shun Yi, Charlotte*

Euthanasia has always been a controversial issue. It is also referred to as mercy killing. It is an act or practice of allowing patients who suffer from an incurable disease to die painlessly (*Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, n.d.). In the film *You Don't Know Jack* (2010), Dr. Jack Kevorkian sets up the euthanasia device and adds drugs into it, then patients will press a button on their own to kill themselves. Jack witnessed how his mother was tortured by terminal illness. Due to such physical and mental torment, he practises euthanasia to help terminal-stage patients escape from the excruciating pain. In the 1990s in the United States, religious believers, particularly Christians, opposed his opinion because they perceived that “life is God’s choice.” Only “God can create and destroy” life (Levinson, 2010). However, when we discuss morality, religion has to be put aside so that discussion can be fair and objective. In this essay, I would apply both utilitarianism and Kantian deontology to Jack's case. Jack's practice of euthanising terminally ill patients is morally right.

First, euthanasia produces the greatest amount of happiness to patients from a utilitarian perspective. When calculating utility, we have to consider three aspects of happiness in particular: duration, fruitfulness and likelihood of the consequences. Jack's purpose of practising euthanasia in the US is to make it possible for patients to get rid of their sufferings, and eventually, they could pass away peacefully with dignity. For instance, the protagonist's last patient, Thomas Youk, has amyotrophic lateral sclerosis. Due to the

disease, he has lost the ability to walk, sit up, breathe, communicate or masticate. All his muscles cannot function properly. Youk's family has to take care of him. However, it causes stress and negative emotions to both the patient and caregivers. They are "trapped" in this painful situation, and only euthanasia could "set them free." To accept injecting potassium chloride is Youk's decision. Although this would bring sadness to other individuals, his happiness would last forever. Besides, this end would possibly lead to more "happy" consequences, such as eliminating the mental and physical pressure and the financial burden of his wife. By providing euthanasia for Youk, he has the opportunity to enjoy pleasure in his late stage of life. Jack's "mercitron" (his euthanasia machine) provides the greatest amount of happiness to final-stage patients. His action is morally right in the utilitarian perspective.

Second, Jack Kevorkian fulfils a physician's obligation to find ways to help patients soothe their pain and die with dignity according to Kantian deontology. As he mentions in the film, "When a patient in agony dies, then a doctor's true calling implies one should do what is best, at the patient's request for human, quick, painless demise" (Levinson, 2010). This quotation demonstrates Jack's passion towards his job and identity. He recommends these people to use the euthanasia service not because he wants to manipulate their lives, but to follow his duty to think of a most suitable method for them to release themselves from experiencing physical and mental pain. As a man whose job is to treat sickness or disability, the protagonist clearly understands the appropriate steps of performing euthanasia. Before assisting to inject the "death" solution for patients, Jack would meticulously evaluate their condition. If there is no chance for the patients to become healthy again, he would ask several times to



confirm their choice before the procedure. He would not suggest they do euthanasia if the disease is possible to be cured. His rationality and self-discipline have led his patients to act ethically. According to Kant's second formulation of categorical imperative, his intent and action are morally correct and valuable. Jack does not act according to desire but lives up to his responsibility as a doctor. He purely judges his patients' condition from a doctor's perspective when he decides whether they are allowed to use the euthanasia machine. Jack respects his patients' wishes and never casually practises euthanasia for patients, which reflect that he strictly follows his code of conduct. He also does not think that he is an exception to such a practice. He is willing to take his practice to court in order to challenge the legal prohibition on euthanasia, which shows that his action is also moral according to Kant's first categorical imperative. He wants every doctor, who should be as knowledgeable, meticulous, and empathic as he is, to practise the same. Hence, his objective and behaviour are morally right according to Kantian deontology.

On the other hand, Jack's practice of euthanasia could prompt organ donation in the US. When patients are performing euthanasia, chemical solutions will cause them to fall into a deep coma, and it will gradually stop their hearts. According to the law of the United States, death only occurs either when a person's circulation and respiration, or brain system including the brain stem ceases to function (Shapiro, 2018). Medical staff are required to follow the Dead Donor Rule when they are collecting organs from deceased donors, in order to assure the body is dead (Shapiro, 2018). As the protagonist said, "By providing your organs to more useful citizens, you will be benefitting society immeasurably." He indirectly helps patients who are waiting for an organ

donation and creates opportunities for them to survive. More and more patients in need could benefit from it.

In conclusion, Jack Kevorkian is a responsible doctor. The intent and the action of implementing assisted suicide are in accordance with his duties as a doctor. He provides an effective method to get rid of both physical and psychological suffering for final-stage patients in the United States. It creates the greatest amount of pleasure for these people. Euthanasia could also encourage organ donation which provides patients in need with a chance to survive. His action is universalisable without contradiction, and has also shown sufficient respect to the patients. Jack's opinion of euthanasia in the film has successfully raised the awareness of the right to die in our world. Only euthanasia can bring relief to such patients.

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# Do unhappy memories mean nothing?

## *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind (2004)*

*Kwan Wing Yan, Yammie*

Many people want to have a utopia where nothing painful or miserable happens in their lives, or simply forget the regrets that they have. However, a film called *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (2004), which is about deleting a former lover's memories, shows that sadness also plays an important part in our lives. This article will focus on the case from this film to discuss the intrinsic value of having pain. Pain and suffering should have intrinsic value because it should help people overcome future barriers while it causes negative emotions only in the short term. This moral issue will be explored in detail through rule utilitarianism and Kantian deontology.

*Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* is about a man called Joel Barish who goes to a clinic to remove memories about his ex-girlfriend, Clementine Kruczynski because she has deleted her memories with Joel when he tries to repair their relationship. During the process of deleting memories with Clementine, Joel regrets deleting the memories as he sees the precious and sweet memories between them, but he fails to stop the process. Then, Joel and Clementine meet again and they want to start their relationship without their memories, but then they receive the testimonial recordings they made for themselves before they used the service at Lacuna, the clinic that helps couples delete their memories. The reason behind this is that one of the employees of Lacuna, Mary, fell in love with the head, Dr. Howard Mierzwiak and she once

deleted memories of having an affair with him. Therefore, she wants others to recall their memories too. After that, Joel and Clementine know that they once had a relationship and listened to each other's dissatisfaction from the recordings. They understand that there are no perfect lovers or relationships and restart their relationship.

To commence with, people will not feel happiness when they do not have displeasure. If people are without unhappiness, they cannot figure out what the standard of happiness is since they do not have a comparison between happiness and unhappiness. According to utilitarianism, if the entire world follows the action of deleting unpleasant moments as a rule, they might lose the precious and beloved moments. In the film, when Joel Barish is deleting his memories with Clementine Kruczynski, he starts to regret and tries hard not to let the memories with Clementine disappear in his life, but finally he fails to stop the process. In this case, not only the unhappiness of being with Clementine is deleted, but also the happiness of staying with her is deleted. When people witness that happiness fades away, they will not be happy. Moreover, as Danaher (2017) points out that people would be skeptical if they found the world is made of fake memories, such as the example that Mary found the recording and Joel found the letter which stated that Clementine has deleted her memories about him. Living in a world with sad memories removed and implanting false memories have no moral difference. Both would upset people. If the system of deleting memories is perfect, people may not find that their memories are removed. However, the company or the system could not access other people's memories when they are associated with the one who deleted the memories. Even if the company could access their memories and delete them, they might lose the memories that they treasure, and hence their happiness is

reduced or removed. The service is rigged with flaws as seen from the film. Lacuna would notify the customers' friends about their erasure of the memories. However, the erasure will be exposed to the consumers due to the careless slip of tongue, or the discovery of the notification card. The customers' privacy might also be exposed as their erasure is told to their friends. They might not want others to know about their actions. As a result, the unhappiness of deleting the remembrances would be greater than the happiness. It is an immoral action in rule utilitarianism.

According to Kantian deontology, erasing bad memories might not have a good motive. According to Kant's first formulation of the categorical imperative, if we will this maxim as a universal law, it would become illogical. In a world where erasing bad memories becomes acceptable, there is no basic respect for history and people's actions since they would be forgotten easily. The word "happiness" is a relative concept. Thus, if unhappiness did not exist, the concept of happiness and unhappiness would disappear. The action would become self-contradicting and illogical, and hence immoral. According to the second formulation of the categorical imperative, the action is also morally unacceptable. When Joel wants to repair the relationship with Clementine, he discovers that Clementine has already deleted his existence from her mind. Joel feels betrayed and takes revenge on her. When one thinks that a particular moment is painful to recall, another one may think that it is pleasurable to have that moment in his/her life. In addition, if that mournful memory is about one making a huge mistake, then the chance for one to make amends would be deprived. Erasing upsetting memories with others does not respect humans' rationality. In short, erasing memories is morally unacceptable according to both rule utilitarianism and

Kantian deontology because people cannot achieve joy without having sadness.

Furthermore, removing miserable memories will demotivate people from avoiding making mistakes again. As Brazier (2018) stated that bad memories can help humans do right in the future, especially when encountering the same situation. According to rule utilitarianism, if the entire world follows the action as a rule, people will feel relieved after escaping from bearing the responsibility. However, they will be angry with themselves or other people at making mistakes because they do not remember making the same mistakes before and the method of tackling them. In the film, Mary fell in love with Dr. Howard Mierzwiak. Eventually, she knew that she once had an affair with him after recalling the memories in Lacuna, so she quits the job. She did not know that she made the same mistakes until she found the recording tape. Consequently, the unhappiness of making repetitive mistakes is larger than the happiness of forgetting mistakes, so it is immoral in rule utilitarianism. According to the first formulation of the categorical imperative, if the maxim becomes a universal law, the concepts of making right decisions as well as making wrong decisions would no longer remain since all wrong decisions might be removed. When people see themselves as an exception and expect others to think that they are always perfect in making choices, others will also do that. It is an illogical and self-contradicting action, so erasing memories is immoral. According to the second formulation of the categorical imperative, the motive of removing memories is bad. When people remove the memories of making mistakes, their working partners and acquaintances will not forget their mistakes since other people have not removed their memories. People might not be willing to communicate to the ones who forget the

mistakes because they are unreliable and forgetful. This might make them feel sad and tired, but the one who goes to Lacuna would not ask the others first before removing the memories, so colleagues might be forced to tolerate their repetitive mistakes. They cannot decide whether to accept those mistakes again or not. Therefore, removing bad memories violates the respect of humans' right of choice, and thus is immoral.

Deleting sorrowful memories would cause excessive expectations on pursuing a utopia. In the film, Lacuna asks their customers to give all their belongings about their former lover to the company. In fact, the company keeps all of their belongings and memories and uses them inappropriately. For instance, the employee of Lacuna, Patrick, steals all of Joel's belongings and gives the bracelet to Clementine. Considering the issue with rule utilitarianism, if deleting sorrowful memories becomes a universal law, people seem to live in a perfect world. However, they will try to pursue the maximized happiness when they do not gain unhappiness. When they are not satisfied with the amount of happiness they gained, they may feel disappointed in the society. The misuse of the system might also upset people. As a result, the unhappiness people gain for not having the biggest joy and being betrayed is bigger than the happiness they gained for getting rid of suffering. From this point of view, deleting the regretful memories is unethical in rule utilitarianism. In the long term, people will lose the motivation to achieve happiness because they can never fulfill their desire. People might also expect they are living a much more fruitful life than others, and everyone would have the same mindset.

In conclusion, unhappy memories mean something. People may imagine that life would be better without painful

memories, but at the same time they can never really give up the past. Without a doubt, pain and suffering will help people become a better person.

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film  
culture

# A study of motifs, signifiers, and mythology in contemporary film

*Chau Shun Yi, Charlotte*

*Spirited Away* (千與千尋) is a contemporary animated film which was created by Miyazaki Hayao in 2001 (Yama, 2019). The story begins with Chihiro and her parents traveling to their new home. She seems to struggle with moving from a former environment to an unfamiliar place. Meanwhile, her father attempts to make a shortcut yet ends up going in the wrong direction. On the way, the car passes a wooden Shinto, numerous Hokora and a doubled-face stone. These mysterious symbols of the ordinary world signify that the protagonist will experience a hero's journey soon. After they stop at a tunnel-like entrance, the adults decide to walk through the tunnel and explore what is behind it. However, the child is not willing to do so. When the parents are exploring the empty town, Chihiro sees a bathhouse and meets Haku. She runs to her mother and father, and sees that they are turned into pigs after eating in a restaurant. The girl is forced to stay in the unknown world to work, in order to allow her parents to transform back into humans. The film contains Japanese traditional cultural elements, and relates to myths and Japanese folklore (Okuyama, 2015). In this essay, I will examine the motifs and signifiers of *Spirited Away* and explain the purpose of studying mythology in contemporary texts.

First, one of the most significant motifs in myths is food. According to Yoshiko Okuyama, "motifs may produce a theme but being a function as a narrative element that is not necessarily the theme of the film" (Okuyama, 2015). A motif

could be an idea which manifests itself many times through artistic work (Okuyama, 2015). It relates to imagery, language or structural patterns, and is used to inspire characters or to evoke a place (Okuyama, 2015). In *Spirited Away*, the motif demonstrates itself by several variations in different scenes. For instance, at the beginning of the story, Chihiro is finding ways to leave the empty town in the darkness. The protagonist reaches a river, and she sees strange creatures leaving from a ferry while her body is fading away. At this moment, Haku appears again and tells the girl to swallow a piece of food in order to save her life. It produces supernatural power in the underworld which links with the known world. Here the motif (food) symbolises the transformation of growing up as Chihiro has to participate in the hero's journey without her parents' assistance. Another example of motif would be the middle of the film. Haku offers rice balls to the protagonist. She has one bite and then cries instantly. It reflects the power of nurturing and blessing. Kunio Yanagita, the founder of Japanese folklore studies, discovers that in Japanese culture, rice has a symbolic meaning which is associated with local beliefs and rituals in mythology (Okuyama, 2015). Therefore, in this scene, the rice balls symbolically give the strength of survival to Chihiro and awaken her meaning of existence.

Second, signifiers of Shinto are hidden in *Spirited Away*. According to Ronald Barthes, signifiers are "expressed in a physical form" (Okuyama, 2015). It has meaning, which is the signified (Okuyama, 2015). It represents a "material or conceptual thing" (Okuyama, 2015). When a message is delivered from a contemporary text, there would be a literal or nonliteral meaning with one or more meanings (Okuyama, 2015). In the opening scene of the film, Chihiro sees different mysterious symbols near and in the forest. In fact, they are

the signs which signify *kami* - the Japanese spirits of nature (Okuyama, 2015). Moreover, these things are the signal to show the audience that the protagonist is going to enter *ikai* - an area that is uninhabited by humans in ancient Japan (Okuyama, 2015). Such signifiers offer clues to the audience to pursue the mysteries in the film.

Third, mythology could enhance our cultural knowledge of modern texts. Mythology is associated with gods and heroes while myth is a belief or assumption that has connection between the society or segment of society (Okuyama, 2015). Oftentimes, characters are deities or supernatural beings, and the story involves the origins of something or the meaning of their experiences (Okuyama, 2015). Besides, the setting is mostly shifting from the known world to the world beyond, then going back to the starting point in the end (Okuyama, 2015).

Films would show ancient symbols or elements in key scenes or dialogues. However, foreign audiences may realise that it is difficult to understand since the screenplay itself rarely provides the background information. It would be unfortunate for them not to know the connotations that are hidden in those idioms throughout the texts (Okuyama, 2015). Mythology could let people get inspiration from or to appreciate the way other nationalities behave and deal with values such as ethics within their community (Okuyama, 2015). More importantly, it helps outsiders to learn about the meanings of behaviour and events in cultural aspects (Okuyama, 2015). Mythology prompts cultural exchange through contemporary texts.

In conclusion, ancient myths are relevant to the contemporary world. It would impact our way of thinking.

The director of *Spirited Away*, Miyazaki Hayao, includes Japanese traditional cultural elements, motifs and signifiers. It is an opportunity to allow the audience to enrich their understanding of myths and folklore, and build a connection between modern society and folklore.

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# *We Married as a Job!* (僱傭妻子, 2016): The status of women in Japan

*Wong Ching Yi, Crystal*

Traditionally, Japan is a country that emphasises hierarchy, especially in terms of gender (Tocco, 2005). Women's fields of employment are restricted. Doing housework is recognised as the duty and obligation of all women, which obliterates women's right to choose or succeed at the workplace. Under such patriarchal ideology, men dominate women in modern society. The heroine of the TV drama series, *We Married as a Job!* (2016), Mikuri Moriyama, is a master's degree graduate but has been unable to find a job. When her father sees this situation, he finds her a job as a domestic helper. However, because her parents are moving to other countries, she cannot do this job anymore. Mikuri Moriyama, who is extremely worried about her future, proposes to Hiramasa Tsuzaki to "get married for employment," so she starts a life of "employment marriage." Different problems and conflicts arise during their "married life." Discussion regarding employment and marriage is the focus of the entire TV series. The series investigates gender stereotypes, labour rights and the division of housework in a Japanese family. My purpose in this essay is to explore society's stereotypes and expectations of women and how women struggle under society's expectations.

First, gender hegemony allows men to control society. Louis Althusser mentions that ideology permeates every corner of our world. Moreover, ideology is produced and reproduced by the ideological state machinery such as the family and media (Storey, 2009). When Mikuri Moriyama proposes

the “marriage contract” to Hiramasa Tsuzaki, her intention is to treat herself as an employee, and Hiramasa Tsuzaki as the employer, which indirectly reveals that she has internalized the patriarchal ideology. Because she regards the male protagonist as an employer, with a higher status and more power, this employment relationship implies the hierarchy between men and women. Ruth Benedict (1989) elaborates on Japan’s Bushido ethical spirit. Japan values the five principles of Confucianism and embodies the Bushido spirit of voluntary sacrifice and class concepts. Women have always been regarded as the lowest level in the family and society. The family comes first. Mikuri Moriyama’s mindset shows that women subconsciously allow men to control them.

Second, women’s status in marriage and family is not equal with that of men. Karl Marx proposes that in a capitalist society, the distribution of labour and economic status is unequal. Analogically, women are the proletariat of the family, and providing care and services in the family does not make money in society. If the family is neglected because of them going out to work, women will likely be criticised by society and get into trouble. Social restrictions on gender are not innate but constructed through cultural values.

Regarding the concept of contractual marriage, Mikuri Moriyama believes that housewives should also be regarded as professionals. She analyses the occupation of housewives rationally. She believes that housewives also have to pay labour and time to take care of the family, then why are they not paid and recognised? The initial controversy in *We Married as a Job!* starts with the non-traditional form of marriage, that is contractual marriage, challenging Japan’s “traditional family concept,” which is to form a nuclear family where “a woman’s place is in the household.” In a traditional



family, women's functions are fixed in housework and parenting. Women's professional abilities and career choices are affected and ignored. Hiramasa Tsuzaki is laid off by his company and cannot afford to pay Mikuri Moriyama's housework salary. Mikuri Moriyama believes that traditional marriage is the "love exploitation" of women. The marriage contract is only a formality. The focus is to examine the views and expectations of both parties on marriage through the contract. This helps establish a healthy and equal relationship between husband and wife, rather than extorting the other half through social or traditional forces to be unconditionally "marriage workers."

Third, society weakens the social value of women. Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1911) mentions that men manage all human activities and exclude women from all categories of creativity. Gender is a classification that shapes the social order, requiring men and women to have certain personalities and characteristics to define gender. However, all these are based on the rules and restrictions established from the perspective of men, and the image of women is constructed through the process of social education to stabilise the social structure and meet the requirements of men. The role of Mikuri Moriyama exposes the plight of contemporary Japanese women. Even with a master's degree, they can only be dispatched employees and cannot become regular employees. The Japanese workplace advocates a lifetime employment system, as long as you become a full-time employee, that means you can work safely until retirement (Yu, 2013). However, modern society in Japan has long discriminated against women and because after women enter the workplace, they will get married and have children and resign after a while, so they cannot take up important corporate positions (Chang, 2009). At the beginning of the TV series, the boss naturally assigns

Mikuri Moriyama to do the work of pouring tea and chores and she is later fired because of a high degree of education. Yuri Tsuchiya is a special presence in the TV series. Yuri Tsuchiya is Mikuri Moriyama's aunt. She works hard as an unmarried woman to earn her own living. In the process, she is aware of other women's gossip. Many colleagues and friends are prejudiced against her being unmarried at 50. The more important issue is that because she is not married, she can achieve a high position in a company.

In conclusion, housework is traditionally regarded as a labour of love, and women's housework is often taken for granted. Women are exploited in the name of love, under the curse of being good wives and mothers. Women are expected to sacrifice for the family. Even if a woman has a high degree of education, or both husband and wife have jobs, the responsibility of taking care of the family still falls on women. Women are often seen struggling between work and family. Discrimination and objectification of women still exist in our society, but Yuri Tsuchiya is proud to be an independent and powerful woman. The protagonists in this TV series are aware of this problem and propose a solution to end the exploitation by seeing a couple as the co-operators of a contract.

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# Characteristics and functions of formal and informal languages

*Wang Ziyue, Ivy*

The way people speak is always adapted to different situations and audiences. In an interview, we tend to be more cautious and serious, while we tend to be more relaxed and conversational when talking to our friends. This phenomenon can also be seen as the most common manifestation of differences in formality. Leech Geoffrey and Svartvik (2002) stated that the formality of that expression should not be viewed simply as a standardized assessment of "yes or no," but rather as a scale that has differences in degree. In other words, there is no "right" formality, but only the most appropriate formality. On the basis of this, formal language is characterized by paying more attention to "form" (Labov, 1972), which means that it is a more "standard" way of expressing oneself in terms of pronunciation, word usage, sentence patterns, and grammar while the informal language is less well-organized or "orthodox." This article is going to analyse the characteristics and influence of the audience of different degrees of formality expression in the same situation by measuring the formality scale of Barack Obama's and Donald Trump's speeches.

To ensure the effectiveness and validity of the comparison, two similar paragraphs of President-elect Victory speech were selected for comparison: Barack Obama (2012) said,

I just spoke with Governor Romney and I congratulated him and Paul Ryan on a hard-fought campaign.

We may have battled fiercely, but it's only because we love this country deeply and we care so strongly about its future.

Obama's expression is at the rather formal language of the scale for the following reasons. First of all, the word choice such as "spoke with" (instead of the less formal "talked to") impressed the audience that the communication between Obama and Romney is solemn. Also, the choice of "battled" instead of "competed" creates a tactful, tentative, and less aggressive tone. At the same time, the structure of sentences is an approach to the written and orthodox language rules. For example, the speaker uses a "may have done" structure in place of simple present perfect; and the continuous use of three adverbs (fiercely, deeply, strongly) contribute to a clear sentence structure that makes the expression sincere and convincing. Last but not the least, formal pragmatic markers also act as an important role to raise the rate of this speech's formality. For instance, "I congratulated him and Paul Ryan on a hard-fought campaign" demonstrated his politeness to the competitor and built up his public image at the same time. Meanwhile, adding "governor" before the name could be seen as a type of honorific that the speaker decides to use after fully evaluating the social and physical contexts.

By contrast, Trump's speech's formality is at the rather informal end of the scale. Donald Trump (2016) said,

I've just received a call from Secretary Clinton. She congratulated us — it's about us — on our victory, and I congratulated her and her family on a very, very hard-fought campaign.

I mean, she — she fought very hard. Hillary has worked very long and very hard over a long period of time, and we owe her a major debt of gratitude for her service to our country.

In the first place, the usage of reduced sound “I’ve” is a rather informal way, compared with the full pronunciation of “I have just” or “I just.” The word choice of “It’s about” is also less formal than “It concerns.” This non-standard way of expression is more common in an informal context. Furthermore, the description of “Received a call” is more figurative than “spoke with” and “talk to.” “Our”, as a person deixis, closes the distance between the speaker and the audience, while the latter “our country” in the text also resonates with the listeners’ emotions. In the latter place, pragmatic markers such as “I mean” as well as “very” have indicated the speaker’s attitude to the listener, and the short, simple sentence structure such as “She-she fought very hard” even consumes the rate of formality.

Both the formal and informal expressions of these two speeches can well reflect the formality of our daily lives. By comparing the “form” factors such as word choice, sentence structure, pragmatic markers, and so on in Barack Obama’s and Donald Trump’s victory speeches, we discover that both formal and informal expressions have their advantages and disadvantages. A formal style is characterized by precision, and objectivity while an informal style of language is much lighter in form, more flexible, direct, as well as involved. Though the formal language style does contribute to the professionalism and reliability of a speaker, it is also a rigidity and cognitive load. In other words, it raises a claim to listeners’ comprehension. Coincidentally, the informal language style is more listener-friendly, whereas the objectivity, exactitude, and informativeness would be limited.

What should be noted is that since the two styles of language have their own strengths and weaknesses, being able to find the right place for the scale is the key to the speaker's proper and effective communication. Generally, factors such as vocabulary choice, syntactic structure, pronunciation, and the use of slang will affect the formality of expression, and these language elements are usually based on the context of the speaking situation, physical and social context, audience size, audience identity, needs of understanding, etc.

The formal language style is usually close to the written language. It is accompanied by precise wording, standardized syntax, more detailed logical associations, and deliberate grammatical structure, which sounds highly accurate and objective. Thus, formal language is easier to gain the trust of listeners and has been widely used in occasions such as interviews, speeches, ceremonies, etc. However, language styles that are alienated from natural communication can also cause difficulties for listeners. The informal language style is closer to traditional oral language habits. It is more direct and simpler in terms of wording, syntax, logical connection, and grammatical structure. This language that sounds very life-like can create a sense of intimacy for the listener in a short time so that it is more likely to get the listener's response to the content of the speech. Most conversations in daily life are biased towards the informal language style (Leech, Geoffrey, & Svartvik, 2002).

However, the weakly-organized style also limits the reliability and trustworthiness of the content. Choosing and combining the suitable linguistic elements to adapt the time, occasion, audience, and purpose of the speech, and finding the most appropriate formality by taking advantage of both styles, are key to effective communication.



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# Slangs in society

*Noor Syed*

Slang is a subset of a language that includes unconventional words or phrases that are very informal and are used more commonly in spoken language rather than written one. Slangs are used to convey a new thing or an existing thing but in a new way. They can be an abbreviation for words, new meanings for existing words or brand new words. According to Maurer (1998), the word “slang” has first been actively used in the English language during the 18th century, when it appeared in the printed press, usually to describe the speech of the criminal classes in London. Although the word first appeared in the 18th century, the concept of slang has been dated much further back in time. Back then, slang was commonly associated with people from low-socioeconomic backgrounds, but nowadays, slangs are so common in everyday language that everyone, regardless of their age, gender, or socioeconomic background can be heard using slangs in their conversations. To be specific, young people are the most prominent users of slang and are usually very innovative in creating new slang that relates to the newest trends. Slangs can be found in almost every language and usually originates within the subcultures of society. In this essay, I will focus mainly on slang in the English language.

Slangs play various roles in the English language. The first major function of slang is to build a group identity of people with a common interest. The influence of slang is far reaching and it includes a variety of users. This includes groups such as drug users, the military, college students, prisoners, the

underworld, and countless other groups of users.

Slangs play a major role in making particular groups of people set themselves apart from others, and express themselves in a unique way that is different from popular culture in society. This helps them create an identity that is closed off to the common people, and in turn keeping secrets from being known by other people, especially for people such as drug users and the underworld. These types of users benefit from using slang as a means to stay under the radar from authorities and establish a common bond. For example, a marijuana user is commonly referred to as a “stoner” and the stoners share various terms and phrases that are popular among themselves. An extreme example of this would be the slang for marijuana. The slang for marijuana is so extensive that there are over 1000 slangs that refer to marijuana, which includes grass, pot, ganja, herb, just to name a few. According to Steinmetz (2017), Jonathan Green refers to drugs as one of the best sellers for slang. This is because slang and “things-you’re-not-supposed-to-mention-in-polite-society” go hand in hand with each other. Therefore coinage of terms like these are necessary to stay under the radar and whenever authorities are familiar with one term, another term is created to replace the older term. Practical usage of this term would be when a marijuana user is buying drugs from a dealer on the street. The marijuana user would usually go and say to the dealer “Can I get some grass”, or “Can I get some of that good sh\*t?” The purpose of this slang is to avoid attention from other people in public, usually from authorities. Therefore, this acts as beneficial usage for the group of people to avoid telling their secrets to the common people and make their terms stay among themselves only.

Beside being used among users of common interest, slang acts as a linguistics laboratory for the English language. According

to Maurer (1998), new words and forms can be tested out through slang, which can later be either abandoned or incorporated into the regular language. Slang can be a trial period for new words and if there is consensus among the general population on the usage of that word, then that word can be upgraded to be included in the standard language. An example of this would be the words such as “pub” or “phone” in the English language. These words were once slang versions of the word public house and telephone, but later were used by the general population and soon incorporated into the standard language. However, slang does not enter the language quickly. Slangs usually have to be in circulation in society for a period of time before they are regarded to be a part of the standard language. While slang plays a role in the word-formation process, the words that are picked are very selectively chosen and most of the words die out before entering the standard language. Slang plays a hidden role in the word-formation process of some of the words in the English language.

There are various linguistic processes for forming slang. According to Maurer (1998), this includes metaphor, simile, borrowings from foreign languages, folk etymology, distortion of sounds in words, the use of acronyms, elevation and degeneration, metonymy, synecdoche, hyperbole, generalization, specialization, clipping, and the play of euphemism against taboo. An example of one of the processes would be clipping. The word “grass” is clipped from the word “laughing grass” and is meant to refer to marijuana. Another example of the process would be the word “trip.” This word has undergone both the processes of generalization and specialization. The first step involved becoming specialized to mean having a psychedelic experience that results from LSD. The word was then generalized to mean having any experience on any drug.

These types of processes are just some of the few ones that are involved in making new slangs. The context of the slangs is usually inferred from the creation of the slangs. The word “grass” from “laughing grass” is the term that refers to cannabis, where laughing grass is the descriptive physical nature of the high cannabis. Cannabis is green in colour and looks like dried-up grass. Therefore, the context of the slang usually depends on the process of the word-formation.

In conclusion, slang plays an integral role in the English language. While slangs were looked down upon in the past, nowadays slangs are very common and frequently used in daily conversations by all sorts of people. This forces us to reconsider our ancient views toward slang and to consider them as an important part of the language. There are many benefits of slang that are used by a user in our society. This includes being away for a particular group of people to bond over their common interests, such as drugs and college students. They can use slang as a way to benefit from the hidden nature of it and to keep their secrets from the common people in society. Another benefit is that slangs act as a linguistics laboratory for new words. Slangs are a way for common people to popularize a term and eventually bring it into the standard language. Therefore, the usage of slang in society is very extensive and should be regarded as a prominent part of the language.

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# The sacrifice

*Aisha Naseem*

“We need to turn off this lamp, right now!” and he moves to remove the adaptor from its switch.

“But what are we going to use to move around though?”

“Just use the candles, okay? You need to start doing things on your own now, and for god's sake, how many times have I told you to whisper?”

“Sorry Dad, Audrey is going to get up soon, she will be hungry, do we at least have milk?”

“Milk! That is on your priority list? She won't die if she doesn't drink milk one time!”

“I, but...”

“I told you this before, it's your job to send a message to the neighbours for her things! Not mine! I am not doing anything for her, not anymore.”

“It was not her fault!” I whisper under my breath.

It really wasn't her fault, I can still hear my mom and dad shouting, “she is just a baby, please don't do this to us.” Her scream completely shattered the town's silence, when the sacrifice was made, her screams were taken over by his. We weren't even spared a moment to say goodbye, but one thing stuck by, “You need to promise to take care of our daughters.” She was met with silence due to the soldiers pointing a gun at us, and the promise was never made or fulfilled.

“What did you just say! Huh!” And just like that I am back to this bitter reality.

“Nothing! I am going to send them a message, is there anything else we need?”

“YES, ask them for a few cans of tomato soup, and bread, the money is on the table.”

As I return to the living room back to my seat near the TV, I see my father's reflection reading a newspaper from 4 years ago, January 30, 1938. It was a time when everything was rainbows and sunshine, I would ride my bicycle down this very street all day long laughing and screaming until my throat started drying up. My mom used to love the sound of mine and my friends' laughter as it echoed behind the sounds of our bicycle riding away. Right at 6:30 p.m., my mom used to call us out for dinner, any one of my friends was welcomed to join us for dinner, she always made enough to feed an entire family. Oh how much I would do to have another taste of her homemade food? How much would Audrey Have loved her food?

“Audrey” I whisper into her ears,  
“I know you are not old enough to eat yet, but you will love the food that mom prepares. By the time you can eat, we will rescue mom and we will be together.”

A dreaded silence engulfs the entire town, it is so quiet you could hear a pin drop. When all of a sudden, Audrey starts fumbling on the sofa, I pick her up to calm her down, but the hunger gets to her and she starts crying on top of her lungs with big fat tears rolling down her cheeks, completely disrupting the silence we try so hard to keep.

“Shhh shhh, oh come on. You need to stop crying.”  
“ASHLEY! Make her shut up, or I am not responsible for what happens afterward” and that loud noise makes it even worse for her.

My father's shouting is probably louder than hers, but who can ever stand up against him?



“I’m so sorry dad, but you know that she needs milk, and it’s hard for her without mom.” I mutter quietly.

“MOM! MOM! She needs her MOM?” His whisper voice grows louder.

“She is the reason why she was taken away from us, and oh my goodness if she doesn’t shut up now.”

“Okay! okay!” I interrupt trying to calm him down.

As we try to quiet her down frantically, the fear of what could happen engulfs my entire body.

“Oh god! Please make sure that they are not outside right now, Please!”

Right until Knock! Knock! Knock! we hear the three dreaded knocks. I can feel my heart pounding out of my chest.

“Dad! Dad! Please don’t open the door.”

“You know I can’t do that, You know they will break down this door if needed!”

Every second that my father takes to open the door, I wish I could stop time right there.

As they enter the house, they leave heavy boot imprints on the floor and stand tall in their uniforms, giving no indication of any emotion on their faces.

“Who will be sacrificed today?”

Fingers are once again pointed, and sacrifices made.

# The estranged daughter

*Ishah Mahmood*

It's been 4 years now! Since I was dumped into this hellhole, I must admit that! It helped keep my head straight. I no longer craved for things that might harm me, since I fought this battle alone. My father, who I expected to be there, was too engrossed in his grief to look after me. And it's okay, it really is, I should understand that right? Because today is the day I will see him again, and we will be a family again.

As I cross this hallway one last time, I see a bright light on the opposite side of those doors right at the end of the hallway, the sun shining bright on my face, the fresh air breeze slowly hitting my face, and the only person I want to see right now. There he is standing near his car wearing a blue suit, one that he knows I love most. It's weird that there's no smile on his face but rather a smirk which I've never seen before, but I still run towards him, and jumps into his arms as he holds me tight against his body.

“Hi baby girl, how are you?”

“I'm good and happy!”

As we stand there, he moves his hand slowly around my back, around my body hugging me tighter, almost hugging the life out of me.

“Uhhhhh dad, I'm losing circulation!” Yet he doesn't stop moving his hands around.

“Dad, come on, let’s go home now!” He leaves me with a kiss on my cheek.

Around the corner I see my 2-storey house as it stands tall and bright. It is all pink and white, the same boring brown tiled houses all done by my mom. Amelia R Philips, a loving mother and wife now lies rest in peace, “Live Life to the fullest” was engraved on her grave 4 years ago with thousands of daisies. I then see the big oak tree, my safe haven from where I saw the funeral, clutching them tightly in my hands trying to resist yet it won over and that was it for me.

“Woah, what the heck happened here? What happened to the photos from our annual family trip? Wait! Why aren't there mom’s photos? Why did you take those out too!”

“I’ve ordered Chinese food for dinner.”

“I thought you would be cooking tonight, today’s Sunday, right? You always cook for us on Sundays. We always spent the day out on the patio listening to yours and mom’s sappy old love stories. I thought we could have a nice homemade dinner today.”

“Not today, you should go freshen up!”

“But...”

“Go now...”

As I walk up to my room, I see a bottle of Blue Girl peeking out from his room. That's weird!

At the dinner table, Dad takes out the food and starts mixing medicine into my food. I can’t chew it anymore.

“Hey, dad, what is this blue tablet?...”

“Uhh, it's just a new prescription the doctor gave.”

We eat our dinner in silence, and I help clean up afterward, but the dishes keep slipping from my hands.

“Go sleep, hun! I’ll finish up.”

“Hun? You used to call Mom that!”

“It’s just me and you now hun, good night.”

As I lay on my bed, my eyelids start drooping, I see my dad enter. He just stands there smiling down at me with a bottle of Blue Girl and a weird look on his face. Instead of the once warmth and concern, I see it being engulfed with something evil...

Before I could say or think about anything, I feel my eyelids falling close.





poet  
-ry

# Self therapy

*Atif Khan*

The single mom,  
Tired, drained with sunken eyes.  
Pondering as if she was “The Thinker”  
A hand under her chin, holding her head,  
And her heavy heart.

She is the silver lining of my life.

Heavy workload makes her really exhausted.  
Deprived of sleep, she is afraid.  
Afraid that she may one day sleep forever.

She looked at me with a burdened heart  
and asked me to play her part  
When will the darkness fade, and let the light lift my sorrows?  
She asked  
Perhaps when you find a better half.

# Stained black

*Lai Ming Lok, Rain*

The beating of her heart,  
The shuddering in her breath.  
Fills the silent empty room.  
She closes her eyes, yet her head screams for her to wake,  
As tears fall once again down her porcelain face,  
Till the demons talking in her head slowly ceased,

Pain woke her from her short adjournment,  
Her mind polluted with darkness  
Her heart, tormented,  
And her fears, endless.  
A glimpse of release she did soon see  
An escape from all this dread,  
Her heart was gushing with black  
Like a stain, that someone had left.