研究ノート
Entertaining Religious Ideas in Animation
through the Study of Religious Elements in Japanese Anime

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Abstract

In recent years, animation has established itself as one of the most important aspects of cultural policies in Islamic republic of Iran due to the recognition of the dominating power of this media toward young generations. The Iran's approach is to produce religiously themed animation in order to convey Islamic and national values to the audiences, particularly since the 1979 Islamic Revolution. But this kind of products has always suffered from the lack of public appeal and as a result, the industry in Iran has come across various problems to develop further. The goal of this study is to explore for utilizing religious ideas in Japanese anime which can be practicable for the animation industry of a religiously oriented country like Iran. Thus, this study tries to explore what options the animation industry of Iran can learn from the Japanese experiences.

Keywords: Animation, Manga, Anime, Religion, Japan, Iran

Introduction

In Japan, drawing illustrated stories as an artistic tradition goes backs to the 12th century. During the past centuries this art form has been vastly popular among different social groups. Manga and anime, which can be considered as modern day descendants of the long-lasting culture of depicting pictorial novels in Japan, primarily act as means for story-telling and entertainment. But, a more precise look at the content and usage of these media has said to reveal that they also comprise an extremely potential capacity which connote proselyte and promote religious ideas.

According to Richard Gardner (2008, 200), manga and anime in Japan has first played a role in distributing specific religious doctrines and thus received much attention, immediately after the 20th March 1995 poisonous gas attack on the Tokyo subway lines committed by the members of the religious group 'Aum Shinrikyo.'[1] Real reasons behind the Aum's act are still a matter of investigation. Yet, some scholars started to discuss about a negative role that fictional media such as manga and anime possibly played in this incident, as the extent of the crimes committed by Aum became clear. They asserted that those kind of media might have led to a mental inability in distinguishing reality from illusion, fantasy, or simulation. The Sarin gas attack, aside from killing twelve people and causing the injury of hundreds of people, led to a nationwide concern about the issue of social problem which can be caused by any religious group that originally appears to be a marginal group.

Contemporary Japan is considered as a nonreligious society. Many Japanese people do not consider themselves as members of a specific religious group. But, a mixture of various religious elements is considered to be embedded in people's mind in a homogeneous way. Major contributors of this religious syncretism are Buddhism, Shinto, and Confucianism, which have shaped a worldview, beliefs and value systems that are currently observable among Japanese people. These concepts and ideas, as Thomas (2012, 9) mentions "are often described as 'common sense' (joshiki) or 'Japaneseness' rather than as anything explicitly religious." While Japanese people are practicing many religious customs in their daily life, they may not be aware of the underlying religious nature of these traditions. In such a society, manga and anime[2] can be used as a media to save and transfer the religious information to the people who do not distinguish religious activities from other aspects of everyday life.[3]

Animation is a media of wide range of audiences, mostly comprising the youth. Consequently, it may play a really pivotal role in the transferring of specific ideas and beliefs to society. In order to evaluate the extent to which this media affects on its audiences precisely, it is necessary to identify the real nature of such transferring. An excessive analysis should be made not only on the goal and intention of the creator or director through the analysis of animation products as well as the evaluation of the products by the viewer but also on the dynamic role of the audience in receiving and interpreting the message of the animation products.

As it was propounded by Stewart Hall with respect to the transfer of messages in media, meaning is not simply fixed or determined by the sender of the message. The message is never transparent and the audience is not a passive recipient of the meaning either (Procter, 2004, 59). Consequently, the meaning of the message is interpreted through the interaction between its producer and the reader, yet is often determined arbitrarily by the reader: "The producer (encoder) framed (or encoded) meaning in a certain way, while the reader (decoder) decodes it differently according to his/her personal background, the various different social situations and frames of interpretation" (McQuail, 1994, 101). The said viewpoint considered, although animation works reflect ideas and beliefs of creators to a great extent, an excessive emphasis on the goal and intention of the creator during the transferring process of the message may lead to an unrealistic understanding of the audience as mere recipients of the message.

In the recent years, animation has established itself as one of the most significant aspects of cultural policies of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution (SCRC), one of the leading agencies being in charge of cultural policies, passed 'Iran's Comprehensive Scientific Plan' in 2010. This plan stated the importance of technology and new media in educating and cultivating the young generations, and emphasized the significance of the advancement of Animation and Computer Games regarding it as a high priority program of the regime. For this purpose, Iran has tried utmost to produce religious animations, which transfer Islamic values and national beliefs to its audiences. However, because of such orientation in the production system, Iranian animation industry has faced a great challenge in development, due to the excessive emphasis on the transferring of religious message through the animation products. Consequently, most of these products do not enjoy required appeal for attracting a wide range of audiences.

Despite the fact that Japanese society is religiously deficient, based on the recent studies of scholars in the field of manga and anime, there exists an extremely wide variety of potential religious dispositions in Japanese manga and anime. Since the Islamic revolution of 1979, Iran has broadcasted many Japanese animation products and looks at Japanese animation industry as the most adaptable model of development for Iranian animation industry.

Within this context, this study attempts to answer whether Japanese

manga and anime connote many religious elements as the policy makers in Iran consider. In this regard, the research tries to examine to what extent Japanese manga and anime have displayed and/or connoted religious ideas and how such religious connotation reaches the audience accordingly. It is hoped that this research will lead to inquiring whether the contemporary Iran can use Japanese manga and anime as a model for its own development as an industry, which is beyond the scope of this study yet will provide research perspectives.

1. The Imaginary World Created by Manga and Anime

Manga are a set of visual novels in which a combination of images and texts in multiple frames are put beside each other. Usually, each part of the said visual novels is published in weekly or monthly journals. Then, the entire parts are separately republished in several issues in the form of storybooks on paper of poor quality. Mass publication of relatively low cost is considered as one of the most significant causes for the extensive prevalence of manga across the nation of Japan. On the whole, about 40% of total Japanese publications consist of manga (Napier, 2005, 20).
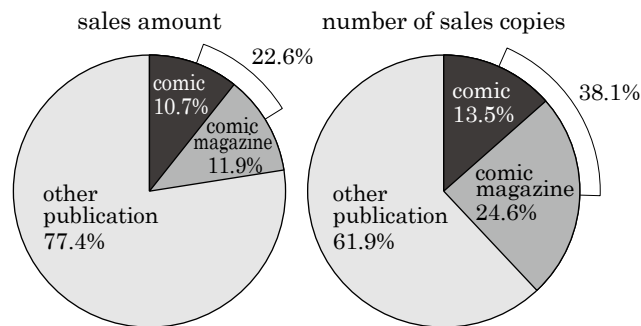

Figure1, Comics and comic magazines rate in all publications as of 2002,
        Source: Shuppan Geppou (monthly publishing), February 2003,
        The Research Institute for Publications

Manga or Japanese comic books comprise a major part of Japanese popular culture. There is a close relation between manga stories and history and culture of the aforesaid country, especially in such areas as politics, economics, family, religion and gender. Thus, the manga stories are not only reflections of present society of Japan but also they reflect myths, beliefs and imaginations of Japanese people about themselves and the world. Although the equivalent of the word

'Manga' is 'Comic' in translation, actually, there are considerable differences between manga and comic. The most distinguished difference between the two is the range of audiences and subjects, which are covered by Japanese manga. Likewise, manga is produced for all social and age groups: from preschool kids to workers of industrial factories. Considering which group of audience is concerned, manga stories visualize the most subtle emotional challenges and the most trivial social problems with concerned groups. As Susan J. Napier, one of the most well-known theoreticians in the field of manga and anime, believes that the extension of themes and the variety of the audience have caused current considerable effect and influence of manga in Japanese society (Napier, 2005, 19).

When a manga series sells best or its story has much potential for the successful marketing in the future, publishers decide to produce an animation series based on the said manga, which is called 'Anime'. Whilst there are a few animation series, which are not based on manga and have been produced in the form of animated images from the beginning, as MacWilliams (2008, 6) suggests, up to 90% of anime series are produced based on manga, which had been published earlier.[4] This fact implies that during changing process of manga to anime, the story's complexity and the number of characters are decreased to a great extent due to financial and time constraints in such a way as the animated copy is created mostly different from the original manga and the said copy can be considered as a fresh product by itself.

Reading manga just like consuming newspapers is a regular part of daily life of Japanese people. MacWilliams (2008, 3), a researcher in the field of manga and anime, considers Susan Sontag's term of 'Image World' as an evidence of present Japanese society where most of the mass media are involved in creating and using images to direct people's expectations about reality in order to replace objective experience by stories. MacWilliams believes that the sources of these stories are in fact animated images of manga and anime. Such entertainments as manga and anime create a great opportunity for audiences to move away from anxieties of their daily life and simultaneously to reflect their wishes, desires and anxieties:

Thus, of the more than 2 billion manga produced each year, the vast majority have a dreamlike quality. They speak to people's hopes, and fears.

They are where stressed-out modern urbanites daily work out their neuroses and frustrations. Viewed in their totality, the phenomenal number of stories produced is like the constant chatter of the collective unconscious, an articulation of a **dream world** (Schodt, 1996, 31).

The devoted fans of manga and anime which are recognized under the term of 'Otaku' estimated to be around 2.4 million in Japan and spend 2.5 billion dollars a year on manga, anime and related products.[5] Such popularity of manga and anime is not only limited to Japan, but also, as Brown (2006, 6) suggests, anime covers about 60% of total animations being broadcasted all over the world. It seems an increasing trend. Combined anime and manga trade in the USA have been calculated in 2010 to be over $400 million. Up to 35% of total annual income of great Japanese animation producing companies such as Toei[6] earn from these foreign trades.[7]

Justifying the huge popularity of Manga and Anime inside and outside Japan, Jaqueline Berndt (2006, 149), a scholar in the field of Manga, propounds that they are low-cost forms of entertainment, which are only for pleasure. Nevertheless, these characteristics do not reduce cultural value of the said products. In Japan, manga and anime belong to mass or popular culture and from this viewpoint, they have been put forth as challenging art forms in academic and scholarly cycles in the recent years.[8]

2. Power of Manga and Anime in Deploying Religious Ideas

After the incident of attacking Tokyo underground using Sarin Gas, observers were searching for probable agents causing the attack, investigating all aspects of present Japanese society. Many of them considered Manga and anime as one of the main agents in formation of 'strange' beliefs and performance of Aum group. Among Japanese religious researchers, Nobutaka Inoue elaborated the concept of 'Virtual Reality' in connection with the effect of visual images[9] resulted from manga and anime media on the youth. He stated that these media may cause disturbance in individual perception in such a way as it will be difficult to differentiate reality from imagination:

Youth seem to feel that everything is like a computer game. Asahara seemed to have said in his childhood that «I want to create a robot kingdom someday». While we may think it ludicrous that they did such things as import a military helicopter from Russia and store up immense supplies of drugs and chemicals in order to survive Armageddon, it might be that they tried to make real their fantasies derived from manga and anime. (Inoue, 1995d, 29 and Gardner, 2008, 214).

Asahara and his group were not only impressed by cataclysmic and catastrophic manga and animes such as *The Space Battleship Yamato (1973)*, *Conan, The Boy of the Future (1978)*, *Nausicaa of the Valley of the Wind (1984)*, but also they themselves were involved in producing such media in order to attract new followers and to strengthen belief and faith of group members in superhuman abilities and Armageddon predictions of the group leader. The artists, who were residing in Aum, have created certain manga and anime to emphasize the Asahara's claim of possessing of supernatural powers. As Thomas (2012, 125) mentions, they used to decrease adventure aspects of stories as much as possible in order to deal with parts, which were allotted to conversion of religion of new followers, achieving metaphysical powers by them, and admiring and praising the religious intellectual leadership of Asahara Shoko as Savior.

Use of manga and anime media in order to attract and convert new adherents by religious groups is a common trend in Japan (Inoue, 1995 and Thomas, 2012). Traditionally, Japanese illustrated stories have been serving religious ideas and beliefs. Through a look at history of illustrated storytelling, it is revealed that different kinds of this art such as Emaki [10], Etoki [11], Kibyoshi [12] and Kamishibai, [13] which can be regarded as antecedents and primary forms of modern manga, in some way have all been at the service of religious propagation. This may be rooted in the value, which is attached to images by Buddhism and it considers the same as powerful means in educating and achieving final salvation and prosperity.

Since receiving and perceiving messages of images do require familiarity with visual grammar and its specific codes, religious illustration in Japan does not rely on images only. Furthermore, it has used marginal text for elaboration of the story of work and also benefited from monks and trained individuals in

order to narrate depicted religious teachings and stories. The art of these monks was to narrate illustrated stories in such a way as the stories could entertain the audience and teach religious and ethical concepts to the audience simultaneously. Lastly, it was the imagination of the audiences, which has played a pivotal role in adapting the story to images, animating the story in their minds.

In modern manga and anime, which have been formed by introducing western comics and film technology to the Japanese society, cinematic techniques and dynamic image processing methods played the role of narrating monks. Precise arrangement and intelligent mingling of still images all together, creates the illusion of movement in the mind of the audience. In fact, such illusions have changed manga and anime to an appropriate media for display of imaginary qualities of religion such as miracle, ascension, spiritual manifestation and intuition. In this regard, Thomas (2012, 56) explains that intentional suspension of disbelief, which forms an inseparable part of imaginative participation on the process of reading manga and watching anime, is the same as voluntary assumption of belief in essence of religion. Preparation for taking part in narrating a story through belief is common both in imagination and religion as such preparation exists for interpretation of painted images as reality.

Religion in Japan encompasses a mixed history consisting of nature-based religion of Shinto and primary forms of Chinese Buddhism together with ethical-social teachings of Confucianism. Contrary to most countries where different religions are completely separated from each other, in Japan, all of the mentioned traditions are mingled as an amalgam of customs, ideals and social behaviors. On the other hand, cultural and religious history of Japan are merged in such a way as even in today's Japanese society, there is no sensible difference between religion and other cultural areas of daily life of Japanese people. Thus, religious traditions are involved in all aspects of Japanese people life as in most of the times, an individual is not aware about religious roots of many of his activities and it may be said that most of the public prefer to note these activities as tradition not religion. Although statistics reveal low percentage of belief in religion by Japanese people,[14] such deep interlinked religious and cultural values within Japanese society reinforces this thought that actually Japanese people must have an extremely religious nature.[15]

In such society, as much as the proselytizers are interested in manga and anime to represent the authenticity of their religious beliefs and to promote religious and moral values, authors, artists, and directors too, may utilize the capabilities and capacities of religious concepts and imagery to enhance the visual attractiveness and to make sense of the narrative of their works. Meanwhile, manga and anime enable their creators to preserve the fading religious traditions in their artworks and to convey them to the audiences. However, this does not mean downplaying the role of the audience as a passive consumer of imposed thoughts by creators of manga and directors of anime either. In fact, illustrating religious ideas in Japanese manga and anime embraces dynamic and various arenas, providing the possibility of different readings for their audience as well.

3. Representation of Religious Ideas in Manga and Anime

As Stewart M. Hoover (2002, 147) has propounded regarding representation of religion in television programs, religious approach in visual media is of two types: One is respective programs, specifically addressing religious subjects and concepts. These programs usually have only a particular group of audience. The other is presence of religious concepts and thoughts which exists in experience of watching a visual medium, which is exposed to all groups of the audiences. When it is generally spoken about representation of religion in film and animation, the former approach is usually concerned at first. Religious program development is often considered in the direction of ethical beliefs and values while religion may cover more extensive and entertaining areas simultaneously.

3-1. What Is Religion?

According to a minimal definition of religion, presented by Edward Burnett Tylor, Religion is associated with "belief in supernatural beings." Elaborating the said subject, David Chidester propounds that religion deals with metaphysics, which can't be traced or proved by using natural senses or scientific experiments (Chidester, 2005,16). In Islam also belief in 'Unseen' is considered as one of the first characteristics of faith. Explaining about the phrase: "(Muslims are) Those who believe in the unseen" (Verse Three of Koran Al-Baqare Surah), Ostad Motahari stated that "the unseen means that a human admits to the fact that

there are certain realities in this universe, which he is not able to perceive through his body and his senses, even if they exist in this universe". He further added that "all in which humans should believe, has been expressed by the Holy Koran by 'the unseen'; belief in the fact that there are realities, which are beyond human's senses" (Motahari, 1991, 146-147).

Considering this viewpoint, the glossary of religious concepts and symbols are one of the richest references for storytelling and attracting various audiences. Biography of the most religious leaders and saints, superhuman characters, miracles, metaphysical phenomena, astonishing or divine events, mysterious allegories and experiences, invisible worlds and ghosts, evils and angels, jinn, and horror stories, which are told in connection with each item mentioned above, all lie within the area of religious beliefs, which comics and animation imagery is noticeably able to visualize them.

The dilemma that faces this area is concerned about the border existing between religion and superstitions. As it has been put forth by the well-known linguist, Emil Benevist, the application of religion has been strongly a differentiating indicator, especially against 'Superstition.' On this subject Chidester (2005, 39) explains that in ancient Roman discourse, the word 'religio' was used mostly referred to noble human activities, against 'superstitio' that meant "non-original," strange or something contrary to human activities, which have apparently been based on asininity, fear or deception. In fact, application of the word "religion" was in such a way as people used this word in connection with their day-to-day actual and tangible experiences, giving meaning to their daily activities (cause and effect relation). Consequently, religion is considered something which acts for integrating the three factors of experience, identity and meaning in daily life (Hoover, 2002, 147).

3-2. Visualizing Religion in Manga and Anime

In order to solve the abovementioned dilemma, Thomas (2012, 13-14) analyzes the religious aspects of Japanese manga and anime by hiring the word "Vernacular Religion", indicating daily function of religion. Vernacular religion is the improved form of the words "Popular Religion" and "folk religion," which is exclusively referred to interpretation and translation of a specific religious practice or concept into local languages and worldviews (which may be educated or illiterate). Moreover, vernacular religion means inserting official religious

ideas in daily activities. Thomas believes that both religious leaders and artists are involved in creating a certain type of language, which may easily be understood by the audience of any type or group. Consequently, the result of efforts taken by both groups is familiarization of public with religious words, concepts and images. Over the centuries this process has occurred in different cultures. The result of the process is to form a storehouse of religious concepts, which has helped different artists to create attractive and conceiving stories.

Thus, producers and creators of manga and anime may utilize this storehouse of religious beliefs and concepts in two different ways:

- Religious organizations or missioners may use animation as a powerful media to present the religious ideas. In this case, artists who are hired for creating the intended product may use the storehouse of religious concepts to create the product within the frameworks imposed by the message, which has been determined by the contractors.
- Authors and producers of an animation product may use the religious concepts and ideas as a way to create an entertaining story. In this case, the primary goal of the creator of a work, which may be an artistic creativity, earning money, entertaining a group of audience or educating, shall impress selected religious concepts and thoughts.

This classification indicates that the type of art work noticeably determines the area of action and freedom of an artist in using religious notions, whether the artist is hired for producing a religious work or the artist himself, based on the requirements of the project liberally picks the religious concepts. Meanwhile, this implicitly reveals the fact that during the creation of an art work, deploying religious images and concepts by the artist does not necessarily reveal the belief and commitment of the artist in presented religious notions on the art work. Artists may use evils, angels and/or holy places in their products with no religious motivation, only aiming at making their work become more entertaining while this may lead to religious interpretation by the audience.

4. The Utilization of Religious Elements in Manga and Anime

'Religious manga and anime' are not commonly classified as one genre, and often discussed separately. But, earlier studies made by scholars such as Yamanaka Hiroshi (1996), Yumiyama Tatsuya (2005) and the detailed work of

Jolyon Thomas (2010) have already maintained the idea that the 'religious manga and anime' is regarded as a genre which itself is divided into various subgenres. In fact, using religious ideas and concepts in manga and anime comprise various patterns. They may lie in a range of 'pedagogical-instructional' types to certain models, which are only used for 'ornamental-aesthetic' purposes. In order to introduce religious-ethical concepts to their audience, creators of educational products use educational or advising method and style. Although the primary goal of this group of producers is to educate, however, during this process they may also provide suitable grounds for entertaining the audience too. Instead, producers of esoteric or cosmetically religious manga and anime use religious illustrations and concepts to make their products appealing. The primary goal of this group is to hire religious concepts, characters and images for entertaining the audience although during the said process they may stimulate religious emotions or at least create sense of religious curiosity among their audiences. Adventure stories associated with saints and angels, stories of ghosts, and mysterious and horror stories are classified in this group as well.

4-1. Pedagogical Manga and Anime

This group of works by telling an imaginary or realistic story, actually acts as a text or preliminary booklet about religious or historical principles of a certain sect. These works are mostly produced through financial sponsorship of a religious group or sect, which has propagated for the ideas of the said work. When pedagogical manga or anime are directly produced by religious sects, they become 'Didactic'. The aim of leaders of religious sects of producing didactic manga and anime is to educate certain customs to their followers and to stimulate emotions of their fans, promoting their beliefs and gravitating them toward their own ideas and norms. Meanwhile, they try utmost to propagate their ideas in a conceiving and attractive form by the help of manga and anime media so that they will be able to attract new followers. However, as Thomas (2012, 81) mentions, since these works have concentrated on a specific religious doctrine, they mostly enjoy predictable and prejudiced structure. At the same time, the artists who are commissioned to produce the work may not be particularly inspired by the material, resulting in weak products in aspects of the story and artistic quality. Consequently, these groups of works may not be able to attract a wide range of audiences.

Among these types of works, one may point out the anime named *Laws of Eternity (2006).* This anime is one of several kinds of manga and anime, which have been produced by the Buddhist sect of 'Kofuku no Kagaku' (Happy Science) in order to elaborate and to propagate the religious doctrine of the group. This animation narrates the story of spiritual journey of a young boy and his friends, who travel to paradise and hell and eventually they achieve true reality of the world of ghosts and reincarnation. This Anime was produced in 2006 by benefiting from the highest standards of production and using the most popular Japanese voice actors. However, despite the fact that this work has benefited from extensive advertising in the media, it could not attract a great number of audiences inside or outside Japan: "Like other didactic films, the laws of eternity waxes pedantic, and it may therefore invite boredom or apathy easily as curiosity or belief. The usage of anime medium alone does not guarantee narrative success, nor attracts new adherents to a religion. Nevertheless, the superb technical execution of this film reflects the group's investment in the film and its message" (Thomas, 2012, page 83).

However, the above mentioned problems have not led to the fact that religious groups give up producing manga and anime in order to achieve wider range of audiences, especially the youth. In pedagogical manga and anime, it is tried utmost to transfer religious concepts to the youth while in most cases, not enough attention is paid to entertaining aspects of the products either.

4-2. Moralistic Manga and Anime

Instead, there is a group of manga and anime, which have created equilibrium between both religious and entertaining aspects. These types of products are mostly concerned about moralistic issues as their main theme. Instead of encouraging audience to strengthen faith and religiosity, they try to make the audience think and contemplate. Moralistic manga and anime are mostly reflections of thoughts of their authors and reveal his thoughts about nature of human, main goal of living, and after-life world. The creators of such works may be concerned about national, environmental, social or political issues, which have been reviewed by the author in the view of his ethical value system and presented to public in a simple and understandable language. Whereas these types of works, do not project too much prejudice compared to involved thoughts and ideas, they usually enjoy the ability to create a dynamic

dialogue with the audience.

Moralistic manga and anime may express their viewpoints in consideration of criticism and satire. Although such works as described above do not directly deal with religious subjects, the critical approach of this group of works inevitably relates these works to religious and ethical subjects. This critical approach concerns the nature of religious sects, opportunistic and deceitful identity of their leaders, brainwashing of their followers, and the resulting social violence. Some of these manga and anime have proceeded to the extent that instead of addressing given and imaginary religious sects, they directly deal with illustrating greed of some of Buddhist monks which has been narrated in public literature.[16] In these types of works, good forces, to the same extent as leaders of deceiver religious sects, enjoy metaphysical and superhuman powers, which help them overcome devil forces and finally save people from a apocalyptic disaster.

Many scholars[17] have discussed the existence of strong religious motifs in the works of famous and Oscar-winner Japanese director, Hayao Miyazaki. Almost all of the anime of Miyazaki designate moralistic values, especially in connection with praising traditions and environmental protection through a critical approach toward human's mistakes. "Despite his professed antipathy to religion, many of Miyazaki's movies are moralistic, and he has made some of them with the explicit intention of inculcating certain values that can be reasonably described as religion" (Thomas, 2012, 104). In order to prove the aforesaid claim, Thomas refers to the anime, *Nausicaa of the Valley of the Wind (1984)*. This animation is the story of saving the world and human by a girl named 'Nausicaa', who enjoys messianic characteristics of a 'Savior'. She dies for saving the people, who have destroyed their environment, however, she revives at the end. Although Miyazaki, as the author of manga and then, the producer of the anime of *Nausicaa*, rejects his religious influence and motivation in producing this work, religious elements such as final resurrection of the protagonist are clearly prove the otherwise. That is why Yamanaka Hiroshi, in his classification of religious Manga, classifies *Nausicaa* as "Manga, that acts as a religious text." On the whole, "this Manga provides the same structure as a religious text like Bible" (Yamanaka, 2009- 144 and Thomas, 2012, 112).

Nausicaa is among the best animation works in Japan. Immediately after this anime has screened, it was highly appreciated by both ordinary audiences

and critics. The box office of this anime was about 740 million Yen. This amount provided the required capital for the establishment of Ghibli Studio by Miyazaki (Osmond, 1998). Justifying the brilliant success of *Nausicaa* and other works of Miyazaki, Thomas identifies that Miyazaki's works present religious thoughts but Miyazaki does not impose. Although religious thoughts are thus found obviousely in his works, his film making style focouses on the entertainment aspect. Thomas stated as follows:

> Miyazaki's moviemaking, therefore, simultaneously reflects his personal take on religion and his audience's evident desire for certain types of contents. Simultaneously, it reflects his basic desire to entertain and the audiences desire to be entertained. (Thomas 2012, 110).

By attaching a great emphasis on the concept of entertaining the audience, educational messages and teachings of the author generally become hidden and seem free from moralistic preaching. Consequently, although moralistic manga and anime undoubtedly comprise an intellectual worldview and philosophy of the artist, who is creator of the work simultaneously, the audience does not feel that the author's values are imposed on him.

4-3. Occult and Horror Manga and Anime

From a perspective that manga and anime dealing with unseen themes, of which wisdom and science are not able to justify, disguise their dominant atmosphere, mysterious and frightening characteristics constitute a classification of 'occult and horror manga and anime'. Occult and horror manga and anime, which are about issues such as metaphysical powers, ghosts, Jinn, and other fearful creatures and events, usually illustrate, in an entertaining manner, inability of human beings to encounter such phenomena. In this type of works, fictional and entraining aspects proceed educational one. Artists, who create such works freely use religious ideas and concepts and create entertaining adventures, which may include no educational or ethical message. However, such use of religious themes, may lead to the rise of sense of curiosity and inclination for asking more questions among the audiences or at least, unconsciously provides suitable grounds for the familiarity of the audience with religious concepts and ideas.

Rajyashree Pandy (2008, 221), a manga researcher, considers belief and aesthetic aspects of Japanese Buddhism as root and base of horror manga. He puts forth that intellectual and ethical fundamentals of manga is identified in their attitude toward such subjects as human's life and death, the relationship between human and inhuman and the relationship between an individual and his own body. The Buddhism thoughts provide suitable intellectual and belief ground for expansion of the thoughts, apparently superstitious, in the texture of modern Japanese life Pandy believes that horror Manga is the product of a kind of "modern" sensitiveness and it enjoys a great closeness to western horror movies as well. He claims that there is a fundamental difference between this genre and horror illustrations during medieval, which had more warning aims and completely intertwined with religious subjects and concepts. Japanese medieval hell scroll paintings (jigoku zoshi) were allotted to illustrating tortures waiting for sinners. In this type of works, fear of hell was hired in order to make life and pleasures of this world be useless and to guide the audience toward intuition and salvation. While in modern manga, fear is transferred through such subjects as being captured by the ghosts and evils, metamorphosis of man into the beasts and destructive creatures, which are generated by corrupted technology.

In Buddhism school, the world is divided into six universes of gods, humans, asura, animals, hungry ghosts and the creatures of hell, which have located in a hierarchical system. Based on their acts, humans may be born repeatedly in each of these universes until they reach perfectness and achieve enlightenment. Moving among different worlds is the result of Buddhist worldview, which has provided suitable grounds for acceptance of evil and mesmerized creatures beside humans in Japanese thought. Pandy (2008, 224) believes that Japanese manner of thinking suggests that there is a fluid relation between human and other creatures. This reduces the intensity of aggressive positions against evil creatures as "other".

In fact, extensive presence of robots, cyborgs and android creatures in Japanese imaginary stories may conform to religious philosophy of this country: "Buddhist and Shinto appreciation for being human makes humanoid robots more appealing than the often negative response to the human condition in Western traditions. The Japanese enjoy the presence of robots in their midst thanks in part to the Shinto perspective that the world is full of kami, sacred

entities" (Geraci, 2006, 2). This means that sacred nature of the world include all creatures and eventually robots. This innate holiness makes them to natural partners of human beings.

Relying on the above statements, one may perceive that the pivot of creating fear in horror manga and anime lies in the uncertainty of where human beings actually stand in the universe. That is, the world view in which human is not in the center of the universe. The authors of these works hire such techniques as suspension and surprise to create exciting and unpredictable stories, which their main motive is to create sense of horror and anxiety among the audience. However, horror manga and anime are like rich encyclopedia references, which do preserve and keep the religious vocabulary and elements, which are being forgotten.

4-4. Ornamental Religious Manga and Anime

In these works, religious contents and images are used merely for beautification and space decoration. The contents of these works may include social, emotional and epic subjects in which religious elements are used without any clear relation with theological themes and only for the purpose of environmental design or character development. Manga and anime that illustrate temples, religious statues and ceremonies in the backgrounds or use saints and religious characters with new and abnormal characteristics as their protagonists are put in this category.

Artists who use religious ideas only for ornamental-aesthetic purposes may use combinations of different traditions based on the necessities of stories in such a manner that the used religious elements and images get a meaning quite different from their common meaning. For example, common use of crucifixion in manga and anime may be referred to as one of the methods of complete defeat of the competitor. In most of these cases, crucifixion has no direct relation with the Christ story or death and by illustrating the Christian content of crucifixion, Japanese artists only intend to show a catastrophic and unexpected death. As Brenner (2007, 102) has propounded by depicting crucifixion in their works the artists neither intend to show that a character has characteristics like Christ nor to refer to the crucifixion of Christ. However, despite such manipulations in the main meaning of religious contents, mere use of religious elements in manga and anime provides a suitable ground for the audience to become familiar with

religious traditions. In this way, such media create a spiritual environment that impedes disconnection of the audience from religious illustrations and ideas in the routine life.

Conclusion

Various methods for the representation of religious concepts in Japanese manga and anime have provided the ground for familiarity of Japanese people from different age groups and social communities with a wide range of religious concepts and terms and have avoided forgetting several belief and ethical traditions in a secular community. Use of media such as manga and anime as representatives of pop culture in Japan in order to transfer and keep religious thoughts have resulted in the shaping and the growth of an effective connection with the representation of religious views and storytelling and entertainment. The field of religious concepts and imagery is a vast treasury that includes different subjects from belief and ethical issues to the stories of ghosts and metaphysics. As shown by the models used in manga and anime, such subject variation has provided both religious missionaries and leaders, and producers of entertainment industry with several resources and capabilities for storytelling and attracting audiences.

Although these works can be divided in a general classification into certain groups such as pedagogical, moralistic, horror and ornamental groups based on the level of loyalty to the principle of religious contents, these ideas and concepts can be interpreted much differently by different audiences. Such variety of interpretations often produces different allocations to these works in the characterization mentioned above. Politicians, clergymen, artists, producers and the audiences may each have a different impression and understanding of a single work. As a result, a work may simultaneously be described as entertaining by one group and as religious by another.

In the process of producing their products, artists and producers of animation progress toward statement of their ideas and beliefs. These ideas and beliefs naturally encompass the author's beliefs and worldview. Thus, an artist's viewpoint is inevitably reflected in his/her work as the work is the product of the artist's manipulation and dictation of specific values he or she attaches. However, the author's intention does not always match with the

audience's interpretation. Facing the work, the audience actively generates meanings from the contents based on his or her cultural background and social experiences in life and finally, and thus the meanings can be produced as the result of the audience interaction with the text. Analyzing the methods for the representation of religious concepts in Japanese manga and anime indicates that the anticipation of the events of the story and the message of the work become easier, as the statement of religious views in these works takes a more pedagogical and didactic approach. As a result, the entertainment aspect of the story can be considerably reduced. The purpose of comprehensive use of media such as comic books and animation considered, the mass production system in particular is merely designed to entertain the audience and to provide them with peace of mind. Thus, lack of such properties would naturally lead to the work that cannot attract the audience much.

Therefore, as the analysis of the moralistic manga and anime showed, works that have been produced with the goal of entertainment and have provided a suitable ground in this way for transfer of religious and moralistic values, have been successful to make a balance between the author's intention for education and the audience's demand for entertainment. Yet, a question remains how the author can strike a balance between the fulfillment of the audience's expectation and what messages the author needs to transmit by using manga and anime as a tool for a sort of pedagogical discourse. A further study is necessary to examine this aspect, which will be done in the context of the analysis of the contemporary Iran's animation industry.

Although Japan and Iran both can be considered as traditional societies, extensive cultural differences between them impedes an exact modeling from Japanese methods of representation of religious concepts in animation by the Iranian animation industry. Paying attention to the entertainment dimension of products by the use of storehouse of religious ideas can provide several ways to attracting the audience. This is because this storehouse of religious ideas can pave the foundation for animation directors inside a religious-oriented production system like Iran, to make use of the native and daily religious customs instead of official religion, and also enjoy the mysterious and metaphysical dimensions of religion and religious-ornamental illustrations in non-religious works.

Endnotes

1. Aum Shinrikyo is a Japanese cult terrorist group, which was founded by Shoko Asahara in 1984. Aum Shinrikyo is a syncretic belief system that incorporates Asahara's view of Christianity with idiosyncratic interpretations of Yoga, and the writings of Nostradamus. In 1992 Asahara declared himself 'Christ' and announced that his mission is to take upon himself the sins of the world. He claimed that he could transfer to his followers spiritual power and ultimately take away their sins and bad works. He was convicted of planning the 1995 sarin gas attack on the Tokyo subway.

2. The word 'anime' is based on the Japanese pronunciation of the word 'animation.' In this article the word 'animation' refers to the general category of hand drawn or computer-generated motion pictures, while whenever the word 'anime' has mentioned it deals with the concept of japan made animation.

3. Various scholars such as Napier (2005) and MacWilliams (2008) have suggested that anime often evolves from manga and anime is usually, the animated version of popular manga. In this regard, there is a common trend in Japanese animation studies to analyze manga and anime products side by side.

4. Sometimes the case is otherwise for example, the popular anime series Neon Genesis Evangelion, was turned into a manga series after its serialization on television.

5. MacWilliams, 2008, page. 4.

6. Toei Animation Company, is one of the most established Japanese animation studios. The company is known for producing popular series such as Dragon Ball, One Piece and Digimon.

7. According to the report of Japan External Trade Organization (JETRO): http://www.jetro.go.jp/usa/japanus/animemanga/

8. Susan Napier (2005, 36), Thomas Lamarre (2009), and Jolyon Thomas(2012, 6) and many other manga and anime researchers, by referring to numerous resources, believe that increasing body of researches approach these media from various sociocultural angles and critical viewpoints, which indicates the growing importance of manga and anime as a subject of academic studies.

9. Visual Image is a a mental image that is similar to a visual perception.

10. Emaki, 絵巻物（えまきもの）, also called Emakimono, are Japanese illustrated narrative picture scrolls. Emaki were often used to advertise religious contents and proselyte in temples. The earliest extant example of emaki was painted in 735. Emakimono were common illustrated narrative forms during the 11th to 16th centuries.

11. Etoki, 絵解・絵解き（えとき）, was a Japanese Buddhist practice in temples which stories of emakis's pictures or picture halls were described and narrated by Buddhist monks in order to explain the principles of Buddhism religion.

12. Kibyoshi, 黄表紙（きびょうし）, was the popular illustrated fiction of the Edo period.

13. Kamishibai, 紙芝居（かみしばい）, are oral performances of stories that are accompanied by pictures. Regarding this subject, the studies done by Ishiyama Yukihiro (2008), and Kang Jun (2007) provide a thorough overview of the linkages between manga and Kamishibai.

14. According to the study conducted by Cambridge University (Zuckerman, 2007), on contemporary rate of atheism across the world, 65% of Japanese people do not believe in God.

15. Asserted by Japanese manga artist, Yoshinori Kobayashi (Thomas, 2012, 85).

16. Among this type of works one may point out *20th Century Boys (1999-2007).*

17. James W. Boyd (2004), Tetsuya Nishimura (2004) and Yamanaka Hiroshi (2008).

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