

Animals in Anime by Takahata Isao and Oshii Mamoru

In Western culture, images of animals in animation have been shaped and popularized by productions of the Walt Disney Animation Studio, where animals have been humanized or served merely as people's funny helpmates. In Disney's films, the anthropocentric approach is predominant and animal characters are presented as cute pets accompanying people in their doings, indeed, walking and talking like humans. In Japan, however, Takahata Isao and Oshii Mamoru took a different approach in their respective works, creating representations of animals that escape the dominant, anthropocentric and objectified paradigm.

Takahata Isao is known not only for his long collaboration with Miyazaki Hayao as the co-founder of Studio Ghibli, but also for his own anime films, especially *Grave of the Fireflies* (*Hotaru no haka*, 1988). In order to analyze the images of animals in Takahata's films, I have chosen three of his anime: *Panda! Go, Panda!* (*Panda kopanda*, 1972), *Panda! Go, Panda! The Rainy Day Circus* (*Panda kopanda: amefuri sākasu no maki*, 1973) and *Pom Poko* (*Heisei tanuki gassen pompoko*, 1994). The first two anime are short films for children created jointly by Miyazaki (script, layout, and scene design) and Takahata (direction). In *Panda! Go, Panda!*, the protagonists include a giant panda called Papa Panda and his cub Panny who escaped from the zoo. In a bamboo grove, they meet a small girl Mimiko, an orphan living with her grandmother who has gone on a trip. The girl and two pandas create a family; Mimiko serves as Panny's mother and Papa Panda's daughter. They are very happy together and Mimiko writes letters to her grandma in order to make her extend the journey, telling her that she is well taken care of. Unfortunately, the manager of the zoo wants the pandas to come back and eventually Papa Panda does so on his own terms. Then, he and Panny punch the clock at the zoo and come to Mimiko's home every evening. In the following film, *The Rainy Day Circus*, the unconventional family of Mimiko and the two pandas find a small, lost tiger and this meeting leads them to save animals trapped in the flooded circus.

In *Panda! Go, Panda*, the creators' choice of characters is interesting. A red-haired and energetic Mimiko could be in reference to Astrid Lindgren's Pippi

Longstocking. In the early seventies, Takahata and Miyazaki wanted to create an anime series based on Lindgren's novels, yet the author refused to sell them rights to film her books. The first film about Mimiko was created shortly after their return from Sweden, so the small girl doing handstands and taking care of animals, bears a striking resemblance to Pippi. Miyazaki and Takahata's choice of great pandas as animal protagonists is hardly a coincidence either. The film was made in 1972, when Japan was swept by "panda fever": a pair of pandas had just been given to Japan by China and many people were very excited about them.¹ The gift of pandas was a symbol of the diplomatic normalization of bilateral relations between China and Japan, and the process was known as "Panda Diplomacy." In other words, China's practice of gifting and lending giant pandas served the aim of building a strategic friendship between two countries.² In their film, Takahata and Miyazaki also endowed pandas with special meaning, that is to say, the ability of pandas to provide a happy family for a little girl. Mimiko's neighbors are initially surprised that such a small girl is able to live with two pandas, but the audience soon understands that the girl and pandas are "a family" and this makes Mimiko happier than she was with her grandmother. In *Panda! Go, Panda!*, Takahata and Miyazaki created original visions of animals that are able to make humans truly happy not by entertaining or serving them but by living with them as a family.

However, the most groundbreaking representations of animals can be found in *Pom Poko*, directed by Takahata, who wrote the screenplay as well as the original story. In an interview with Nakajima Kyōko from *The Yomiuri Shimbun*, Takahata noted, "the film is not so much fiction as documentary of the destiny of the raccoon dogs as seen through their own eyes."³ The director emphasized the importance of the *tanukis'* point of view and their fate as central motives of his film. *Pom Poko's* plot revolves around various strategies planned by *tanuki* (raccoon dog) in order to sabotage the building site of the Tama New Town at the Western outskirts of Tokyo and to protect their forest from the menace of being deforested. As supernatural creatures, *tanuki* use their magic on the workers and other humans, but in the long run nothing seems to work and the housing estates destroy more and more of their forest. The film's original title, *Heisei tanuki gassen pompoko*, meaning *Heisei-era Raccoon Dog War Pompoko*, expresses the conflict between tradition and modernity, referring to the Japanese legendary *tanuki* war, *Awa tanuki gassen*⁴, which took place in 1837, and the Heisei era dated from

¹ Information available at: <http://www.nausicaa.net/miyazaki/panda/> [Accessed 18 November 2015].

² Carmel Buckingham [&] David [&] Jepson 2013: 262.

³ Cavallaro 2006a: 106.

⁴ *Awa tanuki gassen* (阿波狸合戦) or *Awa no tanuki gassen* (阿波の狸合戦) or *Kinchō tanuki gassen* (金長狸合戦) – the Japanese legend from Shikoku about the war between two *tanuki* powers that took place in Awa Province.

1989. Although the era name Heisei is intended to mean “peace everywhere,” the title of the film mentions that there is in fact war between *tanuki* and human. In this film, animals are expressed in symbolic manner and serve as iconographic signs of Japanese traditional culture.

In Japanese mythology and folktales, *tanuki* are depicted as mischievous creatures possessing the magical ability of transformation. Takahata’s film relies heavily on mythological and folkloric depictions of *tanuki*, yet there is also a contemporary twist: living with people made them so comfort-loving and lazy that they forgot how to use magic and have to learn it afresh. Thanks to this plot, the audience can watch how young *tanuki* learn to transform into inanimate things as well as humans and other animate creatures. The first thing they tried to change into was a *chagama*, an iron teakettle, as in the folktale *Bumbuku chagama*. The other creatures *tanuki* turned into during the practice were golden sculptures of *shachihoko* (a mythical animal with a tiger-like head and a carp-like body), stone statues of *bodhisattva jizō* (Buddhist divinity), figurines of *maneki-neko* (beckoning cat), the *daruma* doll, *kitsune* (magical fox), *sanzaru* (three wise monkeys) and finally, statues of *tanuki*. By showing *tanuki*’s transformation into these mythological beings, Takahata emphasizes *tanuki*’s traditional and symbolic images in Japanese culture. What is equally significant is that at the beginning of the film they transform into friendly and protective deities and various creatures. Later, when they fight against humans to protect their forest, they transform into *yōkai* (monsters, spirits and demons), including *noppera-bō* (faceless people) and *onibi* (fen-fires) in order to lure people into a trap.

Takahata almost seamlessly inserts Japanese folktales and legends into the plot of his film. For instance, when *tanuki* elders send two envoys for help, their destinations are the islands of Sado and Shikoku – both known for their legends of *tanuki*. Especially in Shikoku, there are many stories about *tanuki* causing various mysterious occurrences. Not only the famous legend *Awa no tanuki gassen* but also the three legendary *tanuki* masters are from Shikoku. And the latter appear in the film as reinforcements to fight the battle against humans at Tama Hill. One of them is Inugami Gyōbu (the *tanuki* leader in Shikoku), said to have the greatest divine power on the island, which is described in the legend *Matsuyama sōdō happyakuya-tanuki monogatari* (tale of the Matsuyama disturbance and the eight hundred and eight *tanuki*). For years Inugami Gyōbu and his clan protected Matsuyama castle, but after being lured into the rebel side during the insurrection, he started to command his *tanuki* followers to create disturbances in order to support the rebels. The second master from Shikoku is Kinchō Daimyōjin the 6th, the leader of the great *tanuki* war called *Awa tanuki gassen*, which is known as a legend about the great battle between two *tanuki* clans. This war also inspired the scenes of a pitched battle between red *tanuki* troops and blue *tanuki* troops shown at the beginning of the film. The third master from Shikoku – Yashima

no Hage was once saved by Taira no Shigemori and then promised to protect the Taira clan. Yashima no Hage is famous for his transformational skills that made him a supreme commander in Shikoku. In the film, he arranges a *yōkai* and *yūrei* parade to scare the local people and develops *tanuki* in Tama Hill into the art of advanced transformation.

In Takahata's film three *tanuki* masters are summoned from Shikoku to help fight humans in Tama with their transformation skills. *Tanuki* live peacefully in Shikoku, untroubled by people, because those three masters coordinate regular scaring attacks on the island's people and transform into scary creatures. Their plan is to apply the same method to save Tama Hill forest. They orchestrate a stunning parade of Japanese *yōkai*, *yūrei* and other magical creatures for people already living in Tama to scare them off, yet the credits for their show are stolen by the greedy boss of the local amusement park advised by a cunning *kitsune* (fox) transformed into human form. The fate of the *tanuki* from Tama Hills remains unresolved. They have to adapt to new conditions by permanently transforming into people in order to live among them, but some animals are unable to do so and they choose to sail on a magical ship heading to Fudaraku. This is a journey towards death: "It's based on the beliefs of Fudaraku, one of the oldest Buddhist cults. The Fudaraku cult believed that the island of Fudaraku exists on the Western sea, and by boarding a ship, you can leave your pain and suffering behind, and get to Nirvana. The ship itself was modeled after *takara-bune* (treasure ship). It's a ship on which the Seven Lucky Gods rode, with many treasures."⁵

The story of *tanuki* fighting against the process of urbanization is a part of a greater conflict between tradition and modernity. In *Pom Poko*, Takahata showed this long-lasting conflict without recourse to clichés, because he presented it from the point of view of animals rather than people: "We have been invited to empathize with their predicament and to regard the situation from their perspective."⁶ The entire film is narrated by *tanuki*. The voice-over belongs to *tanuki*; the animals even have their own calendar system. At the beginning of the film, the *tanuki* narrator says: "In the 31st year of Pom Poko..." with the sound "Pom Poko" made by beating their tummies. The audience of Takahata's film must identify with *tanuki* because their perspective is the only one presented in the film. From the narrative point of view, *tanuki* are also positive protagonists of the film, while humans serve as antagonists –their actions have negative impact on *tanuki*, and all animals' predicaments are deteriorating because of them. People are mentioned frequently in *Pom Poko*, but always in a negative way, with their food being the only positive quality for *tanuki*: "While some raccoons aim for as nonviolent a confrontation as possible, the extremist fractions are determined to drive the humans out by the

⁵ Available at: [http://www.nausicaa.net/wiki/Pom_Poko_\(FAQ\)](http://www.nausicaa.net/wiki/Pom_Poko_(FAQ)) [Accessed 18 November 2015].

⁶ Cavallaro 2006a: 111.

most drastic and brutal means at their disposal. These radical members of the *tanuki* community are temporarily reined in by their partiality to food that would become totally unavailable if no humans were spared. From an ethical point perspective, this constitutes an especially interesting strand of *Pom Poko*'s overall narrative. In attributing the more zealous raccoons' avoidance of the untempered ferocity of which they are no doubt capable to gluttony rather than some lofty notion of tolerance or clemency, Takahata steers clear of moralistic idealizations of the type often found, regrettably, in Disney-based Western animation."⁷

The director's task, to tell the story from the *tanuki*'s point of view and make people identify and even sympathize with them, was a difficult one. To achieve that Takahata used three different designs of *tanuki*: realistic, humanized and simplified. The first one is the "realistic" version of *tanuki*, who look like this when they are interacting with humans. This design is truly photorealistic, as if animals were filmed with a traditional camera. Takahata perfectly captured the movements and behavior of real *tanuki*: "If animals standing on their hind legs and wearing human clothes appeared in front of humans and spoke, it would have looked like a Disney family movie, and considering the serious nature of the issues the film deals with, that wouldn't have worked."⁸ Especially in the final parts of the film, when *tanuki* suffer because of humans, the filmmakers' decision to show them realistically is very significant: "The raccoons are indeed shot, run over, caught in the vicious metal traps which they vainly struggle to bite their way out of: this is one of the entire film's most heart-wrenching images and is made no more palatable by the presentation of the trapped animal as a realistically depicted raccoon rather than its obviously fictitious anthropomorphic counterpart. This stylistic decision on Takahata's part heightens our sense of the reality of the species' suffering without presuming to sublimate it by means of cartoony transposition, which would feasibly serve to dilute both its actuality and its horror."⁹

The second design, the "humanized" version of *tanuki*, was created so that the audience could stronger identify with the *tanuki*. In *Pom Poko*, *tanuki* are supposed to live in that form whenever humans are not watching, standing on their hind legs and wearing clothes. And this is very ironic because humans – the film audience – are in fact watching. "The third graphic design, the «simplified» version of *tanuki*, is from Shigeru Sugiura's manga. Hayao Miyazaki loves the work of this old manga writer. When he first thought about making a movie about *tanuki*, he had Sugiura's *808 Tanukis* (1957) in his mind. Takahata had other ideas for his *tanuki* movie, but still wanted to use Sugiura's design. Since it is a simpler and more cartoon-like design, Takahata used it when the *Tanukis* feel «down» or get distracted,

⁷ Cavallaro 2006a: 107.

⁸ Available at: [http://www.nausicaa.net/wiki/Pom_Poko_\(FAQ\)](http://www.nausicaa.net/wiki/Pom_Poko_(FAQ)) [Accessed 18 November 2015].

⁹ Cavallaro 2006a: 110.

for example when beaten by others, or partying, and couldn't retain their «full form».¹⁰ Out of all three *tanuki* designs in the film, this one is the closest to the 'cute animals' from Disney films. Yet, the ironic context in which the simplified, cartoon-like *tanuki* appear, helps them avoid actual resemblance to the sweet animals in Disney animation.

In Takahata's film, *tanuki* are presented in a very traditional way: "While the environmental motif makes the film's sociopolitical relevance universal, it should also be noted that both the plot and the visuals insistently hark back to specifically Japanese songs, ritual dances, references to lore, mythology and religion and art, as well as to related animistic beliefs."¹¹ Yet the context of *Pom Poko* and its setting are contemporary. The filmmaker contemporizes the mythological image of *tanuki* by placing them in modern scenery of built-up sites and suburban areas that endanger their habitat. In Takahata's film, *tanuki* symbolize the world of nature and tradition that passes away to give way to modernity. Although some *tanuki* survive, they need to change into humans permanently, so as *tanuki* they literally disappear. The fate of the *tanuki* as the collective protagonist of the film illustrates the actual result of the contemporary conflict between tradition and modernity.

Oshii Mamoru, who portrays the world of the near future filled with technology, presents another face of modernity in anime films. Most of Oshii's films have cyborg protagonists, yet in the future world there is also a place for animals. In those films, animal creatures do not resist modernity, they watch it closely and more profoundly than humans: "Animals are crucial to Oshii's symbolic inventory. Dogs are repeatedly brought into play as unprejudiced witnesses, capable of observing human behavior with impartiality or candor."¹² In his films, Oshii frequently employs the point of view of animals – a bird's-eye view or a dog's-eye view – to provide his audience with a different perspective. Moreover, animals always see and perceive more than people: "According to Oshii, people are still not waking up to reality. His use of dogs (...) highlights this statement."¹³ Oshii's fondness of dogs is actually well known among anime fans, he even called himself a stray dog: "Dogs, especially Oshii's beloved basset hounds, appear in a number of his later films and represent the director himself. Oshii does not call himself «a stray dog» as a mere metaphor. His love of and identification with animals is legendary; he has even drawn caricatures of himself as a dog."¹⁴

Oshii Mamoru used to own a basset hound called Gabriel and the dog is shown in many of his films: live-action *Avalon* (2001) and animations: *Patlabor 2* (*Kidō*

¹⁰ Available at: [http://www.nausicaa.net/wiki/Pom_Poko_\(FAQ\)](http://www.nausicaa.net/wiki/Pom_Poko_(FAQ)) [Accessed 18 November 2015].

¹¹ Cavallaro 2006a: 107.

¹² Cavallaro 2006b: 25-26.

¹³ Ruh 2004: 112-113.

¹⁴ Ruh 2004: 8.

keisatsu patoreibā the movie 2, 1993), both parts of *Ghost in the Shell* (*Kōkaku kidōtai*, 1995; *Kōkaku kidōtai inosensu*, 2004) and *The Sky Crawlers* (*Sukai kurora*, 2008). In each of these films the basset plays a slightly different, but equally important part: “*Patlabor 2* is the first anime where Oshii uses the basset hound, which would become one of his trademarks in anime, and film in general. The dog is on a small boat and is the first living creature to notice that helicopters are emerging from their crates. This recognition imbues the dog with special meaning – while people may be misled about what is going on in the world, animals like dogs are more willing to receive the truth.”¹⁵ It is also noteworthy that in Japanese mythology dogs are immune to magical tricks, they always see the true image. In *Patlabor 2*, when Tokyo is attacked with yellow gas, dogs are the first to notice that the gas is in fact non-toxic. People are wearing protective gas masks so they are unable to feel that the gas is neutral, only after seeing the dogs’ reaction to gas, soldiers take the masks off.

“Oshii’s use of the image of the dog as a recursive trope also calls attention to the symbolic significance of this animal in Japanese culture”¹⁶ as the embodiment of loyalty and fidelity. In fact, this is a common trait in all cultures, because the dog is the oldest domesticated animal and has accompanied people for more than ten thousand years. The dog became the symbol of fidelity quite early because this trait has always been very important in its relations with humans. In Oshii’s anime, “the dog motif reaches crowning achievement in *Ghost in the Shell: Innocence*, where the basset Gabriel is a genuinely pivotal character. The director has commented on his fascination with dogs: “the dog is the greatest mystery in my view, if I can figure out this mystery, I might direct an actual movie about dogs.”¹⁷ In another interview Oshii claimed his beloved basset hound Gabriel to be the most important creative influence on *Ghost in the Shell: Innocence*, and the film is about him and his dog. This statement is not merely an emotional declaration, but it also has deep philosophical roots in the film.

The film’s protagonist Batou is a cyborg known from the previous installment. He is a member of the police force, and apart from his work he lives a solitary life. His only companion is a basset hound called Gabriel, a cloned dog, because in the world of technological near future original dogs are rare and expensive. Almost all characters in this film are nonhuman: cyborgs, dolls and A.I.s, all of them can be described as the Others. The same thing can be said about the basset Gabriel. Firstly, dogs can be considered human creations, since they have been artificially crossbred over the centuries. Their specific traits were selected; others declined to create a perfect animal for a particular purpose. Secondly, the cloned dog is even

¹⁵ Ruh 2004: 112-113.

¹⁶ Cavallaro 2006b: 180.

¹⁷ Cavallaro 2006b: 25-26.

more artificial because it was created by humans and machines in a laboratory. The same thing can be said about cyborgs and this makes Batou and his pet ontologically equal as they are both nonhuman, so they understand each other and their profound connection is wordless. This is a very anti-anthropocentric approach, because the relation between Batou and his dog is the only optimistic element in the gloomy and dark world of *Ghost in the Shell: Innocence*.

The basset hound provides the solitary cyborg with ordinary, domestic life. Their daily routine is meticulously presented onscreen and represents the deep emotional bond between Batou and his dog. In Oshii's film, the cyborg prepares a warm meal for his pet; he buys only the brand of food that the dog likes best, he has a music-box in his apartment shaped like the basset Gabriel, and a ball with a holographic fish for his pet to play. The dog is presented in a very detailed and realistic manner: it is very friendly, outgoing and playful – these are common traits of basset hounds. When Batou is wounded, his colleagues bring the dog to the hospital to cheer him up. The image of the cyborg holding the basset in his arms is also the last frame in the film. The filmmaker commented on the importance of animals in a highly technological society: “Since people are all starting to lose part of or all of their bodies, they need to associate themselves with something else to identify themselves. It could be dogs, like myself, or it could be cats or other animals. (...) That's how you find your lost «bodies».”¹⁸

The connection between animals and technologically altered humans is also present in another of Oshii's anime, *The Sky Crawlers*. The film introduces a mystery involving characters called Kildren, who are clones genetically engineered to live eternally in adolescence. Kildren are fighter pilots engaging in aerial combat against the pilots from a competing corporation. Kildren's lives are short so there's no point of them growing up. The sole purpose of their existence is to be killed in a battle. In his films, “Oshii persistently draws attention to the anthropocentric thrust inherent in the human urge to replicate themselves, intimating the desire to fill the world with humanoid entities.”¹⁹ Kildren live in an air base with plane mechanics. One of them, a woman called Sasakura, is the closest person they have to a mother; she takes care of their planes, sees them off and greets them when they land. She also rescues or collects them when they crash. Sasakura's companion is a basset hound, which is always the first one to hear the incoming plane. The dog always waits for the pilots on the airstrip: it is the first creature they see after landing or before take-off. When one of the pilots is missing in action, the basset is the last one to give up waiting on the airfield. Just like in *Ghost in the Shell: Innocence*, the basset hound in *The Sky Crawlers* is the warmest and the friendliest character in an otherwise depressing world: “Where Hollywood cartoons tend to

¹⁸ Cavallaro 2006b: 209.

¹⁹ Cavallaro 2006b: 222.

foster the doctrine of anthropocentrism by insistently capitalizing on the charm of creatures such as cute animals, living toys and dancing tableware (...) Oshii's movies take their audience into alternative realities that are patently dominated by neither humans nor humanism. At times, Oshii seemingly invests nonhuman figures with human-like faculties and proclivities. Thus we encounter (...) deeply sensitive basset hounds."²⁰ What is also notable in the film is that all the pilot nicknames written on their aviator hats represent different kinds of the terrier breed.

Works by both Japanese filmmakers feature animals presented accordingly to their symbolic meaning in Japanese culture, but they also provide a meaningful expression of the changing times. When Takahata presents animals in *Pom Poko*, he begins with traditional imagery from folktales, after which he introduces realistic images, and then he fictionalizes them with manga-like graphic design, thereby covering the entire route from mythological to contemporary cultural mode of representation. In his rendering of animals, Oshii relies heavily on the achievements of contemporary animation techniques to create very realistic and kinetic image of dogs and other animals to show their true nature onscreen: "Animals play a crucial part in several of Oshii's most memorable sequences, and exhaustively attest to the director's devotion to the achievement of a seamless fusion of reality and fantasy. (...) Oshii's animals work convincingly, precisely because of his painstaking grasp of kinesiology – the discipline devoted to the study of movement. (...) animal motion in Oshii's films bears witness to a thorough understanding of each body's structural pivots. Furthermore, meticulous attention is paid to each animal's specificity (...) and cause its movements to be just as they are."²¹ Anime created by both filmmakers feature animals who are not just a function of humans, but they have their own way of life and their own significance. They are also able to provide family life for technologically altered humans in films by Oshii Mamoru or for a little orphaned girl in Takahata's *Panda kopanda*. Each director begins with traditional Japanese symbolic representation of animals to ultimately place them in a contemporary setting. This modern aspect is truly thought-provoking and makes us consider how long-established emblems of animals evolved and reflect changes in our society.

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²⁰ Cavallaro 2006b: 222-223.

²¹ Cavallaro 2006b: 33.

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English Summary of the Article

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In the anime works by Takahata Isao and Oshii Mamoru, representations of animals oppose the dominant, anthropocentric or objectified paradigm. Each director begins with the traditional meaning of animals in Japanese culture and places them in a contemporary setting. This modern aspect is far more important than the traditional one and it is used to present the conflict of tradition and modernity wherein animals symbolize the fading world of nature. In the discussed works by two Japanese filmmakers, animals possess a unique ability to provide humans, or the technologically altered avatars, with a family life.

Key words: anime, *tanuki*, panda, dog, basset hound, cyborg, Oshii Mamoru, Takahata Isao.

論文概要

「高畑勲と押井守のアニメ作品における動物」

高畑勲と押井守のアニメ作品において、動物達は支配者や人間中心主義、物として扱われるパラダイムに対抗する。どちらの監督も日本文化における動物達の伝統的な意味を踏まえた上で、彼らを現代の状況下に置く。この現代的側面は伝統的側面よりもより重要視され、伝統と現代化の衝突を浮かび上がらせ、その中で動物達は消えゆく自然界を象徴する。本論で考察される二人の監督の作品において、動物達は人間あるいはテクノロジーによって改変されたアバターに家族生活をもたらすという特殊な能力を持った存在として描かれている。

キーワード : アニメ、狸、パンダ、犬、バセットハウンド、サイボーグ、押井守、高畑勲