

# The Hugot that is *Kimi No Nawa*: A Review of and Reflection on the Success of *Your Name* (2016) in the Philippines

Nef T. Luczon

*“Yori hatsu matte, hatachi o tsukute. Nichi hitte kara matte...  
toki niwa o totte...natatsu nagatte; Sore ga Musubi. Sore ga jikan.”*  
(Shinkai, 2016)

[They converge and take shape. They twist, tangle... sometimes  
unravel then connect again... That is musubi. That is time]

Much has been said about Makoto Shinkai's anime film, *Kimi No Nawa* [Your Name] (Kawaguchi, Kawamura & Shinkai, 2016), from word-of-mouth of anime fans, casual viewers to reviews made by film critics and scholars. And like TV series and films that made their way to various transmedia cultural phenomena among multiple audience groups (Dena, 2009), conversations about the film can continue long after its release date. This makes the anime film an instant classic in this decade, and a memento to the millennials' romantic episodes of Asian modern youths. In Japan alone, the film set a record for its diverse audiences as almost half of its viewers' demographics are 30-year-olds and above. Based on the report by NHK, in a sample of 53 male and female mature audiences, 36 shared that they were fascinated with the film because it depicted their encounters as

youngsters (“Audience interview on *Kimi No Nawa*,” 2016). Months after the original release in Japan, it made a hit worldwide, especially among anime fans (Gibbons, 2016).

The film, which is an adaptation of a novel of the same title authored by Shinkai (2016), deals with the life of the characters Taki and Mitsuha. The film begins by immediately bringing us to the middle of a looming crisis—the scene where they have begun exchanging personas through a cosmic body-swap. This moment remains a mystery as the protagonists think that this is only a dream. Audiences who have not read the novel are provided with a clue of what this film is all about through the film’s opening credits (which functions in the same way as anime TV series’ starting sequences).

The first quarter of the film allows viewers to see the contrasting lifestyle and residential backdrops of the main characters: Mitsuha, from a laid-back yet scenic fictional town of Itomori, and Taki, living in the urban capital of Tokyo. Both struggle to adjust to their respective bodies until they discover that the unexplainable phenomenon of body-switching is real and they are living each other’s personal lives. The two exchange notes and diaries through their cellular phones to chronicle their activities, and to remain consistent in taking each other’s roles without arousing too much attention from the people around them, especially their friends and families.

The layer of romance in the film starts when Mitsuha (who is inside Taki’s body and living his world) happens to cross paths with Miki Okudera (a workmate in an Italian restaurant with whom the real Taki is infatuated) along with his other male workmates. Mitsuha is able to help Taki get a lead in the competition by sewing Miki’s damaged skirt. From then on, we see that over the course of their body and soul swapping, Mitsuha manages to get Taki a date with Miki, eventually hinting that she grows fond of the male protagonist when she sheds tears while looking at a mirror when she is brought back to her own body.

The soundtracks used in the film are noteworthy to musicality-dedicated young audiences. It is also used to fast forward events in a short period of reel time, between Taki and Mitsuha’s getting used to swapping bodies and lifestyles, as well as the growing attachments of both Mitsuha and Miki toward Taki, that subtly suggests a brewing

love triangle. However, the fast-track sequences as the film guides audiences with soundtracks might have left out an important story narrative; that is how Mitsuha (or Taki) formed romantic feelings with each other. Had this been explored, or emphasized in the film scenes, then it can explain some reasons why it took time for both main characters to resolve the experience of the body-switching phenomenon.

In the context of the Philippines, the premise of the film's story alone might have already captured both anime fans and regular moviegoers, as reflected by numerous feedback via social media and other online discussion platforms (personal communication, 2017). More importantly, Filipino young adults might have been attracted to the film because they see the narrative as a *hugot* phenomenon. Hugot is a term describing a sentiment or emotion that is often associated with romance not only found in romantic films but also in multimedia platforms. The term implicitly evokes a bittersweet, love or pain resulting from a broken heart, a theme which is often found in most locally produced media materials (Dayrit & Ting, 2015). Most often, lines from a romantic film scene are highlighted, and the more "painful" or "hopeless romantic" these lines sound, the better they are quoted as hugot materials (Bayan, 2016). In *Kimi No Nawa*, Mitsuha's narration can be a strong contender for a *hugot* [bittersweet feeling] line (in English translation):

There's no way we could meet. But one thing is certain.  
If we see each other, we'll know. That you were the one  
who was inside me. That I was the one who was inside  
you. (Shinkai, 2016, 1:13:50)

This kind of narrative is heartwarming and at the same time brings some painful feelings which can fit into the hugot sentimental framework of the Filipino audience. The pain comes before achieving any relief or a silver lining, which is reflected in the fate of the two characters at the end of the story.

Apart from the hugot element, there is more to this film that Filipino anime fans like. Although Shinkai himself acknowledged that the finished material was not close to perfect, that it could have been created better (Gibbons, 2016), and that newer audience to the

anime genre might experience confusion because of the narrative's complexities (Keough, 2017), the film still made the cut among most cineastes in the Philippines because of Shinkai's prowess to harmonize the film's seemingly shattered or dislocated story arcs through the *kumihimo*—a traditional braided cord made from strands of silk and cotton. This object can be seen as the film's central theme, as it is an omnipresent feature throughout the story. In the film itself, it represents Taki and Mitsuha's connection despite the dimensional gap of time and distance.

Audiences are informed about *kumihimo* and how the braided cord is made when Mitsuha, together with her younger sister and grandmother, recall the story of the "Great Fire of Mayugoro, which destroyed the written record that explained the meaning of the *kumihimo* ritual.." (Shinkai, 2016, 13:06). The fire functions as a foreshadow, as the story progresses to its climax of another disaster; that, is the fall of a comet's fragment that destroyed Mitsuha's town once again (and also killing her). The grandmother explains that the creation of the *kumihimo* requires patience as one needs to weave the delicate strands of materials to create a lengthy and sturdy thread.

As the *kumihimo* was being made, Shinkai managed to weave together various strands of story arcs embedded within the main characters as well as the subliminal sociocultural reflections that the film subtly portrays. One of the strands is the aspiration of Mitsuha, who yearns to go to the capital city, Tokyo, and escape the boring provincial life in order to experience dining in a café or coffee shops. The added storyline is something with which many Filipino audiences can partly relate. Among Filipino youths, there is also the enticement of migrating to "greener pastures" whether locally toward other urban cities or overseas. However, unlike in Mitsuha's case, Filipino migration is due to economic and labor reasons (Rodriguez & Tiongson, 2001).

Another sociocultural strand could be seen through the character of Taki who flunked the first and only date with Miki and decided to remain single. This appears to be a gentle reminder of Japan's society's unwritten practice where young men and women would rather not engage in dating, even in sexual relations, thus causing the decline of their population, as the study of Wilford (2017) suggested. It is also interesting to note that by focusing on Taki's character, we would

come to realize that the film explored Mitsuha's character more—her motivations and reasons for reaching out to Taki. We could not say the same for Taki, who appears to be only a living host to Mitsuha's ambition to live in a highly urbanized city. Apart from being mixed-up with Mitsuha's body, his character has no sense of purpose as to why he has to be the person hosting Mitsuha.

One interesting strand in the film is the concept of androgynous gender identity, or “gender bender” as some call it today, which highlights the absence of any gender biases (Davidson, 2009). The film shows that when Mitsuha swaps with Taki's body and becomes effeminate and soft, people around him would only notice that he acts weird without judging him as gay. Had Taki been a Filipino, and with his action or behavior under Mitsuha's influence, he would likely be judged as a homosexual, especially that the Filipino concept of manhood or masculinity is judged by how “tough” a man walks, talks, and behaves (Rubio & Green, 2011). Meanwhile, Mitsuha's body being controlled by Taki would appear to be a boyish girl without being referred to as a lesbian. It is thought that in the world of *Kimi No Nawa*, there is a utopia in gender identity and choice.

Meanwhile, the actual strand of kumihimo that Shinkai presents through the act of Mitsuha's grandmother weaving can be regarded as a musubi. The grandmother nicely explained in the film that (based on English translation):

Connecting people is musubi. The flow of time is musubi. So the braided cords that we make are (from) the gods, (who) represent the flow of time itself. They converge and take shape. They twist, tangle, sometimes unravel, then connect again. (Shinkai, 2016, 34:30 mins.)

In the last scene, we see for the last time Taki and Mitsuha finally getting to meet each other on a staircase, trying to ignore one another. Yet, Taki could not waste time anymore, and reaches out to Mitsuha by asking her name. Mitsuha is partly speechless but could not hold the tears from falling down her cheeks. The abrupt ending might cause an emotional vacuum among audiences, as they have witnessed and carried the burden of Taki struggling for eight

years to meet Mitsuha. This may especially be the case for Filipinos, who are part of the film culture that urges audiences to scream out of longingness, and release any held back tension of permanently losing a loved one through the movie. Shinkai was able to make Filipino audiences feel that way, as evident in the reactions of 19- to 21-year-old respondents, when asked for feedback (see online poll reaction samples below).

The writer conducted an online poll asking Filipino viewers their thoughts on the film. Fifty-one responded. Around 41 percent of the respondents said that they only watch anime by chance. However, after watching the film, around 37 percent said that *Kimi No Nawa* aroused their interest in the anime genre and mentioned the possibility of becoming anime fans. Most of the respondents were from Cagayan de Oro City.

The majority of respondents commented that the beauty in the film comes from the story itself and the “plot twist,” including the moment when Taki decides to meet Mitsuha in person. The following are excerpts culled *en toto* from the respondents:

I find [that] the part that makes the story great is when they're really thinking that the changing of their body is just a dream but gradually they find [out] that it was really real [through] their friends and some happenings that they were really unaware of [at first] and they were just so surprised knowing it from other people. (Respondent 1, personal communication, January 7, 2018)

\*\*\*

The story was very interesting because from the beginning of the story everything was so blurry to understand. [T]hat is why people like me tend to watch how [things] happened and make deductions in my mind of how everything started and how could it be ended. The story was full of twist[s] and turns and some of my predictions weren't spot on but how the story goes was still very awesome and it could catch anyone's

attention. (Respondent 2, personal communication, January 7, 2018)

\*\*\*

When the story twist[s], Taki decided to find the town where Mitsuha lived, and he found out that town was destroyed by a comet fragment 3 years ago, which killed 500 people and Mitsuha is one of them. [Yet] he didn't surrender and he tried to save Mitsuha. The other part is when their connection [is] lost. [H]owever, they meet and recognize each other again; it shows that even if you live in a foolish life there's still hope. (Respondent 3, personal communication, January 7, 2018)

Despite its limited screening schedules and venues in the Philippines, *Kimi No Nawa* was hugely successful, at least in those segments of society that patronize anime films and those curious enough to see the film from word-of-mouth recommendations. This review reflects on the reasons, from the appreciation of the unique turns of the storytelling, the viability of the film's hugot elements, to various sociocultural elements. It would be interesting to follow the growth of Japanese anime fans in the Philippines in years to come.

## References

- Audience interview on *Kimi No Nawa* [Special TV program segment]. (2016 December). NHK Japan. Retrieved: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gTsafIFkxTs>
- Bayan, A. (2016, August). The Filipino hugot culture: Why do we feel so much? *CandyMagazine*. Retrieved from <https://www.candymag.com/features/the-philipino-hugot-culture-a312-20160831>
- Davidson, S. M. (2009). Mouths wide shut: Gender-quiet teenage males on gender-bending, gender-passing and masculinities. *International Review of Education*, 55(5-6), 615-631.
- Dayrit, M., & J. Ting. (2015, June). #Hugot. *The Guidon*. Retrieved from [theguidon.com/1112/main/2015/06/hugot](http://theguidon.com/1112/main/2015/06/hugot)
- Dena, C. (2009). *Transmedia practice: Theorising the practice of expressing a fictional world across distinct media and environments*. [Unpublished Dissertation] School of Letters, Art and Media Department of Media and Communications Digital Cultures Program, University of Sydney.
- Gibbons, F. (2016, December). Please don't see my animated blockbuster, says Japan's "new Miyazaki," Makoto Shinkai. *Japan Times*. Retrieved from [japantimes.co.jp/culture/2016/12/27/films/please-dont-see-animated-blockbuster-says-japans-new-miyazaki-makoto-shinkai/#.Wav657lJHIV](http://japantimes.co.jp/culture/2016/12/27/films/please-dont-see-animated-blockbuster-says-japans-new-miyazaki-makoto-shinkai/#.Wav657lJHIV)
- Kawaguchi, N., & Kawamura, G.. [Producers] & Shinkai, M. [Director]. (2016). *Kimi no na wa* [Anime Film]. Japan: CoMix Wave Films.
- Keough, P. (2017, April). 'Your Name' is pretty but too complicated. *Boston Globe*. Retrieved from <https://www.bostonglobe.com/arts/movies/2017/04/05/your-name-pretty-but-too-complicated/syEVfdeF0xbBuVy4e2JxGN/story.html>
- NHK Japan. (2016 December). Audience interview on *Kimi No Nawa* [Special TV program segment]. Japan. Retrieved: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gTsafIFkxTs>
- Rodriguez, E. R., & Tiongson, E. R. (2001). Temporary migration overseas and household labor supply: evidence from urban Philippines. *International Migration Review*, 35(3), 709-725.
- Rubio, R. J., & Green, R. J. (2011). Filipino men's roles and their correlates development of the Filipino adherence to masculinity expectations Scale. *Culture, Society and Masculinities*, 3(2), 77-102.
- Shinkai, M. (2016). *Kimi No Na Wa*. Kadokawa. Japan.
- Wilford, G. (2017, July 08). Young Japanese people are not having sex. *Independent*. Retrieved from <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/asia/japan-sex-problem-demographic-time-bomb-birth-rates-sex-robots-fertility-crisis-virgins-romance-porn-a7831041.html>

**NEF T. LUCZON** is a freelance filmmaker, and the Cagayan de Oro Bureau Chief of Philippine News Agency. He is a part-time professor of the Department of Technology Communication Management in the University of Science and Technology in Southern Philippines, and Communication and Social Sciences departments of Liceo de Cagayan University, Cagayan de Oro City. (Corresponding author: [nefluczon@gmail.com](mailto:nefluczon@gmail.com)).