

The Red Thread of Fate: Representation of Akai Ito in Kimi No Na Wa

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ABSTRACT

Anime is one such medium that has come to play a significant role in storytelling. It is a medium that incorporates various aspects such as visual narration, symbolism, and cultural values. In Japan, one such belief that is often associated with stories that involve romance is *Akai Ito*, which is often referred to as the red thread of fate. This belief is based on the fact that if two people are meant to meet, they are connected by an invisible red thread that unites them in any situation. This investigation aims to explore the representation of *Akai Ito* in Makoto Shinkai's anime, *Kimi no Na wa*, released in 2016. With the use of qualitative descriptive methodology, this investigation will use textual analysis to examine various incidents in the anime. The data for this investigation is based on various significant incidents in the anime that show the connection between the lead characters, Mitsuha Miyamizu and Taki Tachibana, with a focus on incidents in which the red ribbon is featured. From the results obtained in this investigation, it is evident that the red ribbon is one such significant feature in the anime. However, in due course, this red ribbon turns out to be a representation of *Akai Ito*. With various narrative aspects such as body switching, being separated in different timelines, and finally being reunited, *Kimi no Na wa* is a representation of how this cultural belief is viewed in modern times.

Keywords: *Akai Ito, Symbolism, Anime, Kimi no Na wa, Japanese Culture, Japanese Literature*

INTRODUCTION

Anime has developed into a significant medium for storytelling through visual narration, narrative structure, and symbolism. In the modern world, anime is also considered to be a global cultural medium because of how it carries social value, identity, and narrative (Kadafi & Utami, 2021). Such features of anime have made it possible for the medium to pass on messages about culture in different forms to its audiences (Lestari & Andreas, 2022). Like literary works, anime is capable of incorporating complex ideas and values in Japanese culture through its narrative structures such as character representation, plot development, and symbolic representation. In contemporary studies, visual symbols in anime are often used to convey cultural meanings that go beyond their literal form (Wakasone, 2024). Therefore, anime can be considered a visual form of literature that incorporates audiovisual representation in the transmission of ideas and values.

Anime can also be used to understand and analyze the values and ideas associated with Japanese language and communication. It is possible to view anime as a medium that reflects and incorporates values and ideas associated with Japanese language and communication in Japanese society (Febrianty, 2016). Anime can be used as a medium for transmitting Japanese cultural values and norms to its audience (Nurfitri & Rahman, 2024). Through its dialogue

and character representation, anime reflects and incorporates values and ideas associated with Japanese language and communication in real-life situations. According to Permata & Arianingsih (2022), it is possible to view anime as a medium that reflects and incorporates values and ideas associated with Japanese language and communication in Japanese society because anime incorporates narratives that are similar to real-life situations in Japanese society and are designed to resemble human life and social situations in Japan.

One such anime film that has had a significant impact on anime in recent years is *Kimi no Na wa* (2016), directed by Makoto Shinkai. This anime film has gained international acclaim due to the emotional content in its narrative and the use of symbolic imagery in conveying various themes. According to Cavallaro (2009), Makoto Shinkai is known for directing anime films that often involve emotional relationships between people, especially those that are separated by geographical distances or situations. In *Kimi no Na wa*, this theme is represented through the characters Mitsuha Miyamizu and Taki Tachibana, who are high school students and share a phenomenon of body exchange in spite of living in different geographical locations and time periods.

In the anime *Kimi no Na wa*, there are various symbolic images in the narrative that add depth to the overall theme. One such symbolic representation in this anime is the red ribbon that is worn by Mitsuha. This ribbon is first represented in the anime as a means to hold her hair together. However, in due course, this ribbon is also associated with the relationship between Mitsuha and Taki. This ribbon could also be seen as a representation of a symbolic meaning.

The symbolic significance of the red ribbon can be understood in relation to the concept of *Akai Ito*, which refers to a red thread of fate connecting people who are destined to come together. According to Liu (2014), *Akai Ito* refers to the belief that people who are destined to come together are connected by an invisible red thread. This thread symbolizes a predetermined relationship that cannot be separated by time, distance, and social status. Although this thread may stretch and get knotted, it is beyond one's control, and it is this thread that connects people who are destined to come together.

It is apparent that there are significant similarities in theme between the concept of *Akai Ito* and the story of *Kimi no Na wa*, and thus it can be understood that the red ribbon worn by Mitsuha is a symbol of this concept. This study aims to analyze how the concept of *Akai Ito* is represented in the anime *Kimi no Na wa*, specifically in relation to the symbolic significance of the red ribbon and the story of Mitsuha and Taki.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Concept of *Akai Ito*

The concept of *Akai Ito*, which is referred to as the red thread of fate, is a cultural concept that has been widely recognized in East Asian folklore and has since become a significant symbolic concept in Japanese culture. According to Liu (2014), the cultural concept of the red thread of fate has its roots in Chinese folklore, in which an invisible red rope connects two people destined to meet. In the initial form of the legend, the red rope is tied to the feet of two people by a matchmaking deity, representing a predetermined fate that cannot be avoided.

However, the legend of the red thread of fate has been transformed in various ways since its adoption in Japanese culture. According to Liu (2014), the legend of the red rope, which is a part of Chinese folklore, has evolved to become the legend of the red thread tied to the little finger of two people. In Japanese culture, the legend of the red thread has been used to symbolize emotional ties and promises between people, especially in matters of love. According to the legend, people tied by the red thread are destined to meet, irrespective of the challenges they may face in terms of distance, time, and social circumstances.

The legend of the red thread of fate has been represented in modern popular culture in various ways, including the use of visual symbolism in the form of red strings, ribbons, and other accessories that symbolize the invisible connection between people.

Previous Studies on Symbolism in *Kimi no Na wa*

Previous studies have explored various symbolic elements in the anime *Kimi no Na wa*. For instance, the study by Junita & Ayu (2021) explored the concept of musubi in the anime *Kimi no Na wa* and revealed that the narrative represents the significance of the interrelation between time, relationships, and human experiences. The study revealed

that the concept of musubi represents the idea that human experiences are connected to each other through an invisible bond that affects the flow of events.

Other studies have explored cultural symbolism in the anime *Kimi no Na wa*, focusing on the representation of cultural values related to Japanese traditions in the narrative. For instance, the study by Pufiani & Saifudin (2024) explored cultural values related to Japanese traditions in the anime *Kimi no Na wa*, indicating the presence of cultural symbolism in the narrative.

Other studies have explored the analysis of linguistic signs and contextual meanings in the anime *Kimi no Na wa*. The study by Rohmah & Pratita (2020) analyzed the type of signs used in the anime *Kimi no Na wa* using Peirce's semiotic theory and revealed various linguistic and contextual meanings used in the narrative.

Although it is evident that the anime *Kimi no Na wa* represents a variety of symbolic elements, as revealed in the findings of previous studies, the cultural concept of *Akai Ito* has not been explored as a form of visual symbolism in the narrative. The significance of the red ribbon used by Mitsuha has not been explored as a form of cultural symbolism representing the red thread of destiny. Therefore, this study attempts to fill the gap in the existing body of knowledge by exploring the cultural concept of *Akai Ito* as a form of visual symbolism in the narrative of the anime *Kimi no Na wa*. The study aims to provide a deeper understanding of the significance of cultural values in the narrative of the anime *Kimi no Na wa*.

METHODOLOGY

This research will use a qualitative descriptive method in analyzing the representation of cultural symbolism in the anime *Kimi no Na wa*. This type of analysis is deemed suitable for this research since qualitative analysis is seen as appropriate in interpreting narrative aspects and visual symbols in terms of their cultural context. According to Sulung & Muspawi (2024), qualitative analysis is "a type of research that allows researchers to interpret phenomena by using detailed observation and analysis."

The data for this qualitative analysis will come from scenes from the anime *Kimi no Na wa*, which is directed by Makoto Shinkai and was released in 2016. Scenes from this anime will be analyzed in terms of their representation on the relationship between Mitsuha Miyamizu and Taki Tachibana, particularly those scenes where Mitsuha is depicted wearing a red ribbon. These scenes will be analyzed in terms of their representation on the concept of *Akai Ito*.

Data for this analysis will come from repeated observation of the anime in order to identify relevant scenes that will show the connection between the two characters. These scenes will then be analyzed in terms of their representation on the concept.

DISCUSSION

The research will employ scenes picked out from the film "*Kimi no Na wa*." The selection of the scenes is informed by their relevancy to the discussion of how the red ribbon is represented in relation to the *Akai Ito* concept. The selected data are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Research Data of Selected Scenes in *Kimi no Na wa*.

No	Scene Description	Context in Story	Visual Object	Analytical Focus
1	Mitsuha wears the red ribbon	Daily life scene in Itomori	Red ribbon	Identification of object as personal accessory
2	Mitsuha gives the ribbon to Taki	Meeting scene in Tokyo	Red ribbon	Object transfer and beginning of connection

3	Taki wears the ribbon as a bracelet	After Mitsuha disappears	Red ribbon	Representation of memory and invisible bond
4	Mitsuha and Taki meet again	Final reunion scene	No physical ribbon	Representation of destiny and <i>Akai Ito</i> concept

As shown in Table 1, the selected scenes illustrate how the red ribbon develops from a simple personal object into a symbol of connection and destiny. These scenes form the basis of the analysis discussed in the following sections.

1) Concept of *Akai Ito* in Japanese Culture

The concept of *Akai Ito*, which means the red thread of fate, refers to the cultural belief that two people who are meant to meet are linked by an invisible red thread. The cultural belief that two people who are destined to meet are linked by an invisible red thread has its roots in ancient folklore, especially in East Asia, and has since been incorporated into Japanese cultural stories. According to Liu (2014), the cultural belief of *Akai Ito* originated in Chinese folklore, where the Chinese believed that two people who are destined to be in a relationship are linked by a red rope. The Chinese believed that the link was made by a supernatural being who linked two people who are meant to be in a relationship.

As the cultural belief of *Akai Ito* spread to Japanese culture, the cultural meaning of the red rope has undergone some changes. According to Liu (2014), the cultural meaning of the Chinese folklore of two people being linked by a red rope has been modified to mean that two people are linked by a red thread tied around the little finger of two people. In Japanese culture, the cultural meaning of the red thread refers to the emotional link, promise, and destiny between two people. The cultural belief of *Akai Ito* holds that two people who are linked by the red thread are bound to meet, regardless of the obstacles that may be on the way, whether they are related to time, location, or other obstacles.

However, over the course of time, the concept of *Akai Ito* has been included in various forms of modern media, including literature, films, and anime. This reflects how anime has developed as a cultural medium that conveys symbolic meanings and traditional beliefs to a wider audience (Liang, 2025). In modern media, the concept of the invisible thread of fate has been depicted in the form of physical objects, including red strings, ribbons, and other accessories. These objects have enabled the depiction of the abstract cultural concept in the form of a narrative structure in the story.

The concept of *Akai Ito* has been depicted in the form of a red ribbon in the anime film *Kimi no Na wa*, directed by Makoto Shinkai. In the film, the concept of *Akai Ito* can be interpreted in the form of the red ribbon that is associated with the character of Mitsuha Miyamizu. Throughout the film, the red ribbon gradually becomes associated with the relationship between Mitsuha and Taki.

2) Red Ribbon as a Visual Representation of *Akai Ito*

In the beginning, the object of the red ribbon appears as part of the personal appearance of the character Mitsuha. At this point, the object is primarily used as an accessory that ties the hair of the character. At this time, the object has not yet developed any form of symbolism within the story. However, the repetition of the object within the story establishes its importance as part of the visual appearance of the character.



Figure 1. Mitsuha Miyamizu wearing the red ribbon.

Figure 1 shows the character of Mitsuha wearing the red ribbon as part of her appearance. The object of the ribbon can be identified by its bright red color and braided form, which make it visually distinctive as part of the story. Although the object appears to be merely an accessory of the character, its repetition within the story establishes its association with the character of Mitsuha.

This phase of the story is significant because it introduces the object of the ribbon as an identifiable object within the story. The repetition of the object as part of the appearance of the character establishes its association with the character of Mitsuha, who appears within the story of the anime film. However, this object would eventually take on greater symbolism as it relates to the relationship between the characters of Mitsuha and Taki.

3) The Transfer of the Ribbon as a Symbolic Moment

The symbolic significance of the red ribbon can be understood if we look at the scene in which Mitsuha travels to Tokyo, seeking to meet Taki. In this scene, Mitsuha gives the ribbon to Taki before leaving. This scene can be seen as a significant turning point in the plot, as it transforms the ribbon, which was originally an object used by Mitsuha, into an object shared by the two characters.



Figure 2. Mitsuha giving the red ribbon to Taki during their encounter in Tokyo.

Figure 2 depicts the incident when Mitsuha hands the ribbon to Taki. Even though Taki has no idea about the importance of the ribbon, the ribbon holds its own importance since it reminds him of Mitsuha. Giving away the ribbon can be considered an important event for the plot since it signifies the formation of a bond between the two characters. In addition to this, this particular event can be analyzed from the perspective of the symbolism in films, especially since personal objects tend to convey the emotions between characters (Kim & Sintas, 2021).

In addition, the act of giving the ribbon can be seen as an illustration of the significance of objects in plot development. Through the action of giving the ribbon, the ribbon represents a medium for the two characters, as they are connected by the ribbon even when they are separated by time and space. The ribbon can therefore be seen as an object representing the invisible thread, as described in the concept of *Akai Ito*.

4) The Ribbon as a Representation of the Invisible Bond

However, even after Mitsuha has given the ribbon to Taki, the object continues to appear in the narrative and serves as a reminder of the connection that has been established. Taki later wears the ribbon as a bracelet, which serves to enhance the symbolism associated with the object. There is a change in the function of the object in the narrative, and this change is demonstrated in the transformation of the ribbon from a hair accessory to a bracelet.



Figure 3. Taki wearing Mitsuha's red ribbon as a bracelet

Figure 3 illustrates Taki wearing the red ribbon around his wrist. In this part of the narrative, the object has evolved to become more than just a physical object. Instead, the ribbon has become a symbolic object that serves to remind Taki of Mitsuha. Furthermore, the object serves to illustrate the connection that has been established between the two characters. Although Taki has no memory of the encounter with Mitsuha, the object continues to exist in the narrative and serves to illustrate the connection that has been established. In relation to the concept of *Akai Ito*, the object can be seen to serve as a visible representation of the red thread that has been established between the two characters.

5) The Persistence of Destiny in the Final Reunion

The storylines presented in anime are characterized by the use of symbolism, which enables individuals to establish an emotional connection to meanings and relations outside the storyline (Zheng et al., 2025). Destiny as a theme is evident in the later stages of the story as Mitsuha and Taki get to meet each other despite forgetting everything that they did before. Though they forget everything, they feel familiar with each other upon meeting.



Figure 4. The reunion of Mitsuha and Taki in the final scene of *Kimi no Na wa*.

Figure 4 illustrates the final meeting of Mitsuha and Taki. In this part of the narrative, one can see that the connection between the two characters has not been broken. Although they no longer remember anything, the connection that they have with one another is still strong enough to help them meet one another again.

This can be seen most prominently in the theme of *Akai Ito*, which tells people that no matter what obstacles may separate them, they are still destined to meet one another. With the help of the narrative resolution, one can see that the connection that Mitsuha and Taki have with one another is not just coincidental, but is instead something that is destined to happen.

By utilizing the narrative and the symbolism, one can see that *Kimi no Na wa* has used traditional cultural beliefs and incorporated them in the form of modern anime.

Compared to previous studies, this research offers a more specific focus on the representation of the cultural concept of *Akai Ito* through visual symbolism in *Kimi no Na wa*. Earlier studies, such as those by Junita and Ayu (2021), primarily examined the concept of *musubi* as a broader form of interconnectedness in the narrative, while Rohmah and Pratita (2020) focused on linguistic and semiotic signs within the film. In contrast, this study concentrates specifically on the red ribbon as a visual symbol that represents the concept of *Akai Ito*. The difference lies in the analytical focus, where this research emphasizes how a single object develops symbolic meaning through narrative progression. This approach allows for a more detailed interpretation of how cultural beliefs are visually represented in modern anime. Therefore, this study contributes to existing research by highlighting the role of specific visual objects as representations of traditional cultural concepts, rather than analyzing symbolism in a broader or more general sense.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This paper aimed at investigating the role of the concept of *Akai Ito* in the narrative of the anime *Kimi no Na wa*. The results of the study reveal the importance of the symbolism of the red ribbon. Initially, it is presented as a common accessory used by Mitsuha. Nonetheless, later, it gains new meanings for the protagonists who have been connected with each other beyond space and time. Particularly, the moment when Mitsuha gives the ribbon to Taki makes it the symbol of the invisible connection between the two characters. Furthermore, it can be seen that in the end of the film the protagonists' meeting can be viewed as a final proof of their destiny-related connection. Thus, the red ribbon symbolizes the concept of *Akai Ito* throughout the movie's narrative.

It can be suggested that in the future other symbolic objects from the anime may be studied in detail in regard to their connection to *Akai Ito* and the theme of destiny in general. For instance, the researchers may consider the role of a meteor, the importance of the sacred shrine, and also the concept of *musubi*, which also relates to the theme under discussion. It is possible to use different types of analyses of the movie in order to reveal symbolic meanings in more depth. Initially, the red ribbon served a mundane purpose, functioning as a decorative accessory for Mitsuha's hair. At this juncture in the story, the ribbon functioned as a mere extension of Mitsuha's self, lacking any specific symbolic meaning. Nevertheless, as the narrative unfolded, the ribbon's significance underwent a transformation.

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