

## Comparative Analysis Between *Carpe Diem* and Japanese *Ma* through Disney and Ghibli's Animated movies

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### Abstract

The Western idea of *Carpe Diem* and the Japanese idea of *ma* as they are portrayed in Disney and Studio Ghibli animated films are compared in this research. The study looks at how cinematic signals and narrative structures create culturally distinctive perceptions of time, action, and moral values using Christian Metz's film semiotics and Zepetneck's comparative literature paradigm. In order to examine *Carpe Diem* as a temporal ideology that sees time as a finite motivating factor propelling urgency, bravery, and quick action, the research focuses on two Disney movies: *The Lion King* (1994) and *Mulan* (1998). On the other hand, an analysis of *Spirited Away* (2001) and *Howl's Moving Castle* (2004) reveals the Japanese notion of *ma*, which emphasizes deliberate delay, patience, and meaning gained from unhurried experience and views time as a natural flow to be experienced rather than chased. The findings demonstrate that these differing constructions of time shape contrasting models of character agency: Disney narratives privilege decisive, action-oriented heroism, while Ghibli films foreground moral growth through stillness, restraint, and temporal openness. This study concludes that animated films function as culturally embedded semiotic systems through which divergent ethical orientations toward time and action are communicated to audiences.

**Keyword:** *Carpe diem*, comparative analysis, film semiotics, Japanese *Ma*

### Introduction

Movies are an effective type of multimodal storytelling because they create immersive stories by skillfully combining visual images, audio components like conversation and soundtracks, textual overlays like subtitles or titles, and kinetic action (Kim, 2016). Movie transforming book narratives into visual storytelling that captivates large audiences and fusing literary complexity with cinematic techniques to impact culture and emotion, film serves as a dynamic type of popular literature (Duarte, 2010). As demonstrated by adaptations that increase interest in original texts or increase book sales, scholarly investigations show how films inherit literary characteristics like story and character while transcending them through visual imagery, inter-textuality, and parody (Boyd, et al, 2010). This interaction establishes film as a powerful medium that, like literature's linguistic power, transmits abstract concepts so iconic, creating cultural resonance across places and periods, rather than just as a derivative. In particular, popular films use narrative frameworks to enthrall audiences, emulating literary storytelling traditions while expanding their audience through emotional and visual appeal (Bettetini, 2018).

Significant differences between Western animation and Japanese anime in terms of narrative organization, character focus, and visual style, Japanese anime, on the other hand, frequently uses the *kishōtenketsu* four-act model introduction (*ki*), development (*shō*), twist (*ten*), and conclusion (*ketsu*) emphasizing ensemble casts or "*nakama*" (group bonds), internal emotional growth, slower pacing, philosophical themes, limited animation techniques like variable frame rates, and symbolic expressions (Oh, 2025). Western storytelling is based

on heroic victory and resolution through "good vs. evil," but anime emphasizes harmony, collectivism, and complex world-building without always needing a defined villain or unchanging hero. These differences reflect cultural foundations (Shah, et al, 2022). As a form of interconnectedness with the nature and harmony of their environment, Japanese movies, especially anime, usually apply "*Ma*," a concept that makes Japanese anime so different from its Western competition. The term "*Ma*" in Japanese animation refers to a significant void or pause in which stillness, silence, and negative space become active components that enhance mood and story rather than being merely pauses in action (Pilgrim, 1986). In Japanese anime, "*Ma*" can also refer to the artistic principle of interval, space, or emptiness, which includes temporal pauses in action or music, physical spaces between objects, and pauses that give stillness deep significance (Boyd, 2011). People might consider the Japanese "*Ma*" concept to be the same as the Western concept "*Carpe Diem*." *Carpe Diem*, which has its roots in Roman humanism, emphasizes seizing the present through intentional action, productivity, and immediate experience, framing time as a finite resource that must be actively utilized before it is lost (Wang, 2020). In contrast, "*Ma*" refers to the meaningful space or interval between events, sounds, movements, or moments, valuing stillness, pause, and absence as essential components of meaning (Yudanto & Setiawan, 2024). Despite this, both *Carpe Diem* and the Japanese concept of "*Ma*" engage with human awareness of time and the present. "*Ma*" urges attention to what happens in stillness and suspension rather than calling for action, letting significance develop organically and without coercion (Akama, 2015). *Ma* respects restraint and reflection, while *Carpe Diem* promotes intensity and involvement with the moment, implying that presence is attained by giving room for awareness to grow rather than by doing more (Salmon, et al, 2020). When taken as a whole, they show the cultural difference between actively appropriating time and receptively inhabiting it.

Disney movies, Such as *The Lion King* (1994) and *Mulan* (1998)"clearly expresses colorful spectacle, exemplify a "*Carpe Diem*" mentality through high-energy scenes, musical numbers, and continuous action that inspire individuals to embrace opportunities and follow ambitions fearlessly. In contrast, Studio Ghibli uses the "*Ma*" concept intentional pauses, silences, and space intervals to foster introspection and emotional depth. This is demonstrated in the silent train ride in *Spirited Away* (2001) and *Howl's Moving Castle* (2004). Those movies used as data to compares the Japanese "*Ma*" concept of meaningful pauses and spatial intervals with the Western "*Carpe Diem*" philosophy of urging instant action and seizing fleeting moments.

### Theory and Method

This study, "Comparative Analysis Between "*Carpe Diem*" and Japanese "*Ma*" through Disney and Ghibli's Animated Movies," uses Christian Metz's semiotics of film, specifically the *grande syntagmatique*, to interpret narrative sequences that represent Western urgency in Disney's movies versus reflective moments in Ghibli's movies. It also uses comparative literature theories to explain cultural rhythmic differences. A Comparative literature studies literary works from many languages, cultures, countries, genres, and historical eras. It frequently draws inspiration from philosophy, history, film, and other artistic mediums. By contrasting texts from various traditions, colonial and postcolonial narratives, it highlights "literature without borders," allowing academics to examine common themes, influences, and cultural exchanges (De Zepetnek, 1998). By using structural linguistics specifically, Ferdinand de Saussure's ideas of signifier and signified to examine film as a system of signs rather than a direct language, Metz invented film semiotics. the "Grand Syntagmatique," a model that divides narrative films into eight independent segments, such as the alternating syntagma or descriptive syntagma, to show how sequences create meaning through

paradigmatic substitutions (vertical choices) and syntagmatic relations (horizontal combinations) (Metz's, 2011). By analyzing these disparate temporal aesthetics, the study highlights cultural narrative differences and connects philosophy and film studies to show how Ghibli welcomes peaceful stillness while Disney promotes urgency. This perspective enhances comprehension of the rhythmic impacts on international animation

### Findings and Discussion

There are notable philosophical differences and similarities in animated storytelling between the Japanese concept of "Ma," the profound art of interval and negative space reflected in Studio Ghibli's contemplative masterpieces like *Spirited Away* and *Howl's Moving Castle* meanwhile the "Carpe Diem a Western imperative to seize fleeting moments, as embodied in Disney's vibrant, action-driven narratives like *The Lion King* and *Mulan* In literary, philosophical, and psychological research, the idea of carpe diem which comes from Horace's Odes has been thoroughly studied as an ethical command to cherish the present in the face of future uncertainty (Lill,1997). Carpe diem is interpreted in modern research articles and scholarly journals as a contemplative attitude that stresses existential responsibility, temporal awareness, and mindful engagement rather than just hedonistic immediacy. Philosophical and literary studies present carpe diem as a reaction to human frailty, urging people to take meaningful action within a finite amount of time instead of giving in to fatalism (Lill,1997). Carpe diem is a subtle call to intentional living that encourages people to take advantage of current opportunities while maintaining an ethical and intellectual awareness of human vulnerability, consequence, and purpose. Meanwhile what actually the Japanese idea of "Ma", is frequently translated as "interval," "gap," "pause," or "negative space," denotes a dynamic interplay of space, time, and absence that permeates philosophy, architecture, aesthetics, and everyday life. It emphasizes a charged void that is full of potential and relational meaning rather than just emptiness (Goda,2011). Comparing Carpe Diem and Ma in the study of Western and Japanese animated films, especially in film studies, cultural studies, visual semiotics, and cross-cultural film esthetics, is highly relevant academically.

Carpe Diem, which has its roots in Western tradition (especially Rome), highlights the importance of time, personal decision-making, and proactive action in the face of life's fleeting nature. Narrative arcs focused on character choices, conflict, and dramatic momentum such as when a character is motivated to "act now" before an opportunity is lost reflect this idea in film (Krznaric, 2017). On the other hand, in Japanese animated movies, Ma is used as a narrative and aesthetic device to introduce significant silences, pauses, and empty spaces. Ma slows down cinematic time to allow the audience to experience moments, emotions, and atmosphere rather than pushing for faster action (Goda, 2011). Without the need for dialogue or action, Ma functions as a medium for promoting existential awareness, human-nature relationships, and introspection in the context of Japanese animation, especially Studio Ghibli's productions.

#### Force Vs Pause

Disney's high-energy animated films like *The Lion King*, *Mulan* and *Moana*, which give the spirit of carpe diem expressed through stories that value audacious momentum, decisive action, and the urgency of self-realization, Time is portrayed in these movies as a finite and urgent force that forces protagonists to face fear, accept responsibility, and take action before the opportunity passes. One way to conceptualize carpe diem is as a temporal force in a movie story that forces characters to take decisive action after hesitating (Guinness,2019). in compare with Studio Ghibli's contemplative works like *My Neighbor Totoro* *Howl's Moving Castle* and *Spirited Away*, where "Ma" embodies the profound interaction of time and space, especially as a purposeful pause that gives moments rhythm and meaning. This temporal

pause goes beyond simple silence, functioning as an active void that permits surrounding elements to resonate more deeply between actions, sounds, or thoughts much like the breath between musical notes or the hesitation in speech (Goda, 2011). "Ma" is a time-pause that promotes harmony by preventing overload, encouraging contemplation, and emphasizing the beauty of what is unsaid or undone. It has its roots in Zen philosophy and is evident in arts like theater, ikebana, and architecture not to mention movie (Har, 2025). The idea of Carpe Diem where time acts as a catalyst for proactive action is demonstrated throughout Simba's journey in Disney animation *The Lion King* (1994), as he is continually reminded to fulfill his moral obligations. Following the escape and denial phase denoted by the motto "*Hakuna Matata*," the storyline of the movie creates temporal tension as *Simba's* past, present, and future collide with *Rafiki*, *Nala*, and *Mufasa's* vision. These instances demonstrate that time cannot be stopped or avoided; rather, it necessitates quick decisions and tangible actions. The phrase "Remember who you are" acts as a catalyst for *Simba's* insight that delaying action would only make the moral imbalance in the Pride Lands worse, thus he must act now, go back, and face *Scar*. Thus, *The Lion King* represents Carpe Diem not merely as an invitation to enjoy life, but as an ethical imperative to take timely action for the restoration of social order and leadership responsibility. According to Carpe Diem, time is a finite resource that needs to be used to its fullest before it expires (Sneed, 1997).

In contrast "Ma" in Japanese philosophy sees time as a flow that should be lived and felt rather than pursued. The narrative and visual rhythm of Ghibli's *Spirited Away* (2001) effectively convey the Japanese idea of "Ma", a "pause" or passive time gap that permits quiet, waiting, and reflection (Goda, 2011). This movie frequently has scenes when time seems to slow down or stop, in contrast to stories that are motivated by a feeling of urgency. One such scene is when *Chihiro* sits lost in thought on a train crossing water, taking in the quiet surroundings without any overt conflict or dialogue. Instead of serving as narrative holes, these pauses serve as significant places when characters and viewers may progressively process events, feelings, and internal transformations. Instead of putting *Chihiro* under pressure to act right away, Time in *Spirited Away* allows her to develop by tolerance, composure, and acceptance of the process. As a result, *Ma* develops as a productive passive time a pause that reflects Japanese aesthetics that see silence as a source of meaning and is precisely the basis of moral development and character identification. "Ma" is a time-pause that promotes harmony by preventing overload, encouraging introspection, and accentuating the beauty of what is unsaid or undone (Bachnik, 2002). Additionally, in *Spirited Away* (2001), the concept of Jepang "Ma" as a "pause" when time functions in a passive manner is seen in the scene where *Chihiro* is with a family member at the beginning of the movie. Miyazaki composes this sequence with a leisurely tempo and shots that offer room to motions, the sound of eating, and facial expressions without clear spoken explanation, even if narratively it looks straightforward and modest in thoughtful conversation. Without the need for overt confrontation, this visual halt signifies the passage from the material world to the spirit realm and evokes a mild sensation of anxiety. Time lets the audience progressively experience the changes in atmosphere rather than pressuring them to behave quickly. Furthermore, the scene in which *Chihiro* cleans the body of the River Spirit similarly demonstrates "Ma" as the patient, repeated rhythm of labor without undue dramatic strain. Time is transformed into a meditative environment rather than just a tool for achieving objectives by concentrating on slow motions, pauses between operations, and the stillness that surrounds the cleaning process. "Ma" fosters the organic emergence of ethical concepts about tolerance, compassion, and balance with the natural world (Carter, 2001). Both instances demonstrate that pauses and passive time in *Spirited Away* are vital moments for moral development that are vital to *Chihiro's* character growth rather than empty gaps.

Two opposing philosophical stances in interpreting the presence of time in film narratives are revealed by contrasting the idea of time as a pause in the Japanese concept of “*Ma*” in *Spirited Away* (2001) with the idea of time as a driving force for action in *Carpe Diem* in *The Lion King* (1994). Time serves as a moral pressure in *The Lion King*, forcing people to take urgent action. The past, present, and future are interwoven to highlight the ethical failure that results from procrastination, so *Simba* must “seize the moment” to return and mend the damaged social order. In contrast, *Chihiro's* character growth takes place through waiting, stillness, and a reduced narrative pace in *Spirited Away*, which presents time as a passive and reflective stop. Time in Miyazaki's works permits awareness, empathy, and inner development to develop gradually rather than imposing quick action. Therefore, *Spirited Away* views time as a transitional place that permits silent and ongoing moral reform, whereas *The Lion King* depicts time as a catalyst for immediate change and vigorous action.

### **Deliberate Delays vs Quick Decisions**

*Carpe Diem*, a Latin adage from Horace that means “seize the day,” encourages people to act quickly, bravely, and decisively by encouraging them to seize chances while life is short. This idea appears in cinema studies in stories where people take risks and act fearlessly in the face of limitations, encouraging personal development. *Carpe Diem's* original advice is to live in the moment while the time flies by, subtly promoting quick, courageous participation with life rather than reluctance (Wang, 2020). Because time is fleeting and beneficial use of the present is required, this admonition challenges fatalism by emphasizing prompt action. Its urge for decisiveness in poetry and fiction, where delays risk lost delights, is emphasized in scholarly interpretations. The idea of *Carpe Diem* is well expressed in Disney’s *Mulan* (1998) through a story that presents time as an urgent moral force requiring quick judgment, bravery, and prompt action. *Mulan's* decision to enlist in the army in her father’s name is an example of a determined seizing of the moment because there is no time for extended contemplation or indecision due to the looming conscription. *Mulan's* split-second tactical judgments during battle and her determination to disobey military tradition to warn the Emperor of impending danger are examples of how this urgency persists throughout the story, as survival and honor depend on quick thinking, flexibility, and audacious action (Smeyers, 2001). Instead of depicting action as careless, the movie links prompt decision-making with moral clarity, implying that bravery arises when people identify the crucial time and act quickly. Through *Mulan's* journey, *Carpe Diem* is reinterpreted as an ethical need to take decisive action when time offers a brief chance to defend others, question unfair conventions, and change one's fate, rather than just as a call to live completely.

In *Mulan* (1998), the concept of *Carpe Diem* is embodied through the narrative construction of time as a decisive force that urges characters toward rapid judgment, courage, and immediate action. The announcement of imperial conscription creates an urgent temporal condition in which delay is not an option, compelling *Mulan* to make a swift and life-altering decision to replace her father in the army. This moment illustrates *Carpe Diem* as the recognition of a critical present in which moral responsibility demands instant action rather than cautious postponement (Smeyers, 2001). Instead of depicting action as careless, the movie links prompt decision-making with moral clarity, implying that bravery arises when people identify the crucial time and act quickly. Through *Mulan's* journey, *Carpe Diem* is reinterpreted as an ethical need to take decisive action when time offers a brief chance to defend others, question unfair conventions, and change one's fate, rather than just as a call to live completely.

The notion of “*Ma*” in Japanese philosophy and aesthetics is a deliberate wait in which restraint, patience, and the rejection of hurry become sources of meaning rather than indicators of passivity (Goda, 2011). *Ma* is the deliberate gap or pause between sounds,

activities, or occurrences when meaning is revealed by paying attention to pause and absence (Watanabe, et al, 2008). According to this paradigm, meaning is created by giving oneself time to breathe, which enhances consciousness and allows for a more complete perception of relationships—between oneself, others, and the environment. Studio *Ghibli* uses a narrative rhythm in *Howl's Moving Castle* (2004) that emphasizes patience, deliberate delay, and the development of meaning via leisurely experience in order to express the Japanese notion of “*Ma*”. Character development, especially in *Sophie's* transformation, is shaped by the film's use of patient observation, repetition, and periods of silence rather than relentless urgency or linear growth. Her emotional development takes place through gradual acceptance, everyday household gestures, and persistent attention to people within the moving castle rather than through abrupt acts of heroism. Time seems to slow down during these temporal pauses, which invite both the actors and the spectator to stay in the present moment without feeling compelled to find a quick solution. Examples of these sequences include traveling over wide landscapes, cleaning the castle, or just sitting in silence.

The scenes when *Sophie* discreetly cleans and rearranges the floating castle have languid tempo, little conversation, and a focus on everyday gestures rather than dramatic action. Domestic chores are given time to linger, transforming routine movement into a contemplative pause where *Sophie* progressively gains self-assurance and a sense of community. Another instance of “*Ma*” is found in the recurring walking scenes across open landscapes, particularly when *Sophie* travels alone or with *Howl* in silence, allowing the environment and the passage of time to speak without narrative urgency. By encouraging reflection and emotional attunement, these pauses add emotional significance without immediately advancing the story. The concept that comprehension and acceptance cannot be hurried is further reinforced by allowing *Sophie's* physical age to gradually change from youth to old age without any quick explanation. Through these scenes, *Howl's Moving Castle* portrays “*Ma*” as a temporal ethic in which delay and patience are necessary conditions for moral clarity, personal development, and empathy rather than barriers to advancement. This shows how meaning arises most potently when time is given room to breathe rather than being pushed forward.

Comparing *Mulan* (1998) and *Howl's Moving Castle* (2004), which both represent a different philosophy of time and action, highlights the contrast between *Carpe Diem* and the Japanese notion of “*Ma*”. *Carpe Diem* is shown in *Mulan* via a story of urgency in which time necessitates prompt decision-making, bravery, and prompt action. This is especially evident when *Mulan* quickly decides to replace her father in the army, turning reluctance into moral conviction. The movie presents decisive action as an ethical need, implying that prompt response during times of crisis forges fortitude and identity. *Howl's Moving Castle*, on the other hand, describes the Japanese concept of “*Ma*” as a deliberate wait in which self-improvement depends on patience, self-control, and the rejection of hurry. *Sophie's* development occurs through peaceful routines, pauses, and leisurely exchanges that enable meaning to gradually emerge rather than through hurry. Together, these movies show two conflicting but complementing temporal ethics: *Howl's Moving Castle* respects the moral understanding and depth that emerge when time is allowed to evolve naturally, whereas *Mulan* promotes action taken in the present.

### Conclusion

This study indicates that two essentially distinct cultural constructs of time, action, and moral agency are revealed by comparing *Carpe Diem* with the Japanese idea of “*Ma*” in *Disney* and

Studio *Ghibli's* animated films. The research shows how cinematic signs such as narrative pacing, visual rhythm, character movement, and temporal structuring serve as meaning-making systems that encode various philosophies of time, drawing on Christian Metz's film semiotics. *Carpe Diem* is expressed as a temporal ideology in *The Lion King* (1994) and *Mulan* (1998), where time is seen as a finite and urgent force that drives motivation, moral urgency, and decisive action, inspiring characters to act quickly, bravely, and directly in times of crisis. On the other hand, the analysis of *Howl's Moving Castle* (2004) and *Spirited Away* (2001) shows that the Japanese concept of "Ma" emphasizes deliberate delay, patience, and the emergence of meaning through unhurried experience, constructing time as a natural, flowing continuum to be inhabited rather than conquered.

Utilizing Zepetnek's comparative literature framework, this cross-cultural comparison highlights how divergent narrative temporalities shape differing moral orientations: *Disney* films privilege action-oriented heroism grounded in immediacy, while *Ghibli* films foreground ethical maturation through stillness, restraint, and temporal openness. In the end, the results highlight the fact that cinematic depictions of time are not neutral but rather culturally entrenched value systems that have a significant impact on how moral development, bravery, and responsibility are conceived and communicated through animated film tales.

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