THE ARCHETYPE OF THE "SAGE" AND THE MODEL OF THE "IDEAL SOCIETY" IN THE DYSTOPIAN WORLD OF *SHINSEKAI YORI*: A READING EXPERIENCE (Part 1)

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Abstract
This article (Part I of a two-part study) explores the archetype of the Sage in anime through a theoretical framework grounded in Jungian analytical psychology and comparative mythology. It examines how Eastern and Western traditions conceptualize wisdom, particularly within mentor–disciple dynamics, and analyses the transformation of the Sage figure in contemporary Japanese popular culture. Part I focuses on the conceptual foundations of the Sage archetype, including its mythological origins, symbolic functions, and the evolving representation of female wisdom. Special attention is given to the relationship between wisdom, self-control, and the balance between rationality and emotional intelligence. Part II of the study (which will be published in the following issue of this journal) applies this theoretical framework to a detailed analysis of Shinsekai Yori, demonstrating how the anime reconfigures the Sage archetype within a dystopian narrative structure. Ultimately, the study reveals that wisdom in anime is portrayed as an ongoing process rather than a fixed state.

Keywords: Sage archetype, anime, Jungian theory, individuation, mythology.
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1. Introduction

Swiss psychologist Carl Gustav Jung introduced the concept of the archetype — a collective unconscious representation, a figure or image endowed with specific characteristics. Through the analysis of his patients' dreams, as well as his own, Jung identified recurring and universal patterns. He postulated that every individual, on an unconscious level, strives to tell their own unique story, seeking individuation and forming a personal narrative. In this process, a person undergoes a series of universal stages, reflected in myths, fairy tales, and the unconscious mind, which reveals itself in dreams. In addition to these stages, as an individual progresses toward the realization of the Self — the integration of all aspects of personality —

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they encounter and interact with universal representations known as archetypes (Jung, 2006: 16-27).

Jung's theory significantly influenced the development of narratives in popular culture. Notably, Joseph Campbell, author of *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (2004), demonstrated a strong interest in Jungian ideas. Campbell's work later served as the foundation for the "hero's journey" framework, which was academically reinforced by Soviet philologist Vladimir Propp. Through his analysis of a vast corpus of Russian folktales, Propp identified a similar narrative structure, highlighting the universality of these storytelling patterns (Sedykh, 2019: 77-92).

Over time, Jung's and Campbell's theories were further developed for practical applications, leading to the emergence of various classifications. At the same time, psychoanalysis—partially rooted in Jungian theory—continued to evolve, as did storytelling techniques, which became widely utilized in screenwriting and other narrative arts. The theory of archetypes was further expanded by Margaret Mark and Carol Pearson (2001), who applied it to marketing by identifying twelve archetypes, one of which is the Sage.
Marketing is relevant in this context primarily because anime, as a product of mass culture, often incorporates characters embodying specific archetypal attributes. If a particular anime features characters aligned with the Sage archetype, their presence can attract a specific target audience interested in and drawn to this archetype. This appeal stems from the audience's psychological need to engage with the figure of the Sage and to identify with it.

In this article, I employ the terminology provided by Jungian archetype theory, along with the classification system outlined in *The Hero and the Outlaw* (2001) by Margaret Mark and Carol Pearson. I apply this framework to the representation of the Sage archetype in anime and explore how non-Japanese audiences perceive this archetype within the context of Japanese animation. Furthermore, I examine the distinctive features of the Sage's depiction in anime and, more broadly, in Japanese culture as a whole.

By doing so, I compare the portrayal of the Sage archetype in Eastern and Western traditions. Additionally, through the lens of this archetype, I analyze the concept of the "ideal society" as it is depicted in the anime *Shinsekai Yori (From a New World, 2012-2013)*.

2. The Deficit of the Symbolic and the Substitution of Meaning by Marketing in Western Culture

In contemporary Western culture, philosophers increasingly speak of a "deficit of the symbolic" — the loss of deep, sacred meanings that once unified societies, and their replacement with superficial surrogates in the form of marketing and

consumption. As Russian philosopher and YouTube-based popularizer of philosophy Pavel Shchelin (2021, 2023) notes in his YouTube lectures that modern society is undergoing a crisis of symbolic thinking: metaphysical and religious sources of meaning have weakened, and the resulting void has been filled by mass culture and advertising. Similar ideas have been advanced by Western thinkers such as Jean Baudrillard, Slavoj Žižek, and Herbert Marcuse, who argue that happiness has become a commodity, and that consumer choice and advertising imagery have assumed the role once played by faith, myth, and sacred symbols.

To understand the roots of this phenomenon, we must trace the transformation of the symbolic throughout history — from the sacred foundations of power to the era of "marketing-driven meaning" — and then examine how advertising uses archetypes (specifically the 12-archetype theory of Margaret Mark and Carol Pearson) as substitutes for genuine meaning. These archetypes resonate with the unconscious search for wholeness, as described in Jungian individuation theory, within the soul of modern individuals. In traditional societies, the symbolic dimension was inseparable from the sacred. The authority of kings and emperors rested upon sacred legitimacy — they were seen as divine emissaries or bearers of the "divine right", while mythology and religion endowed the cosmos with a coherent and meaningful order. Symbols — from royal regalia to religious rituals — ensured collective experiences of holiness and metaphysical significance.

However, with the advent of modernity, a process began that sociologist Max Weber famously termed the *"disenchantment of the world"* (*Entzauberung*) (Salinas, 2023) — the displacement of magic and the sacred by rational explanation. According to Weber, the destiny of our time is characterized by the spread of rationalization and secularization: "the world becomes disenchanted, the magical fades away". Enlightenment revolutions (such as the French Revolution) overthrew "God's anointed" rulers, affirming secular values of reason and freedom in place of divine order (Salinas, 2023).

By the 19th and 20th centuries, religion had lost its monopoly on meaning. Secular ideologies such as Marxism promised utopias of earthly paradise without God, and scientific and technological progress further desacralized the worldview. Simultaneously, two world wars undermined faith in past ideals and in progress itself. The bloodshed and trauma of the 20th century created a spiritual vacuum and an existential longing for higher meaning.

Cultural philosophers began to argue that Western man had been left in a world without a "vertical" axis — without a transcendent point of reference. As early as the 1960s, Guy Debord wrote about the "society of the spectacle" (Debord, 1994: 25-31) in which direct reality is replaced by an endless flow of images and entertainment that distract from authentic values. Jean Baudrillard described late capitalism as the age of *simulacra* and *hyperreality*, where signs and images no longer refer to any deep truth, but only to one another (McLaverty-Robinson, 2012).

This is not merely a loss of traditional symbols but a kind of *deficit of reality* itself: people are immersed in an artificial world of advertising, media, and consumption, where meanings are flattened and depleted.

Baudrillard noted that “all cultural forms and media are absorbed by advertising”, which becomes a kind of “zero-degree of meaning”, a triumph of form over content. Images are presented in such a way that their glossy surfaces conceal any depth, leading to what he called “the entropy of meaning” (McLaverty-Robinson, 2012). Advertising and mass media no longer reflect reality — they replace it, creating a totalizing stream of signs. Baudrillard emphasized that contemporary advertising no longer sells products, but lifestyles; it promotes entire social systems, functioning more as a way of signaling a particular mode of life than as a mere economic practice. In other words, instead of real spiritual or social coordinates, people are offered an imitation of meaning through consumption — a lifestyle as a surrogate for salvation.

As early as the mid-20th century, representatives of the Frankfurt School observed that mass culture and the consumer industry had begun to take over functions once attributed to religion and art. In his book *One-Dimensional Man* (1964), Herbert Marcuse argued that industrial society creates false needs, integrating individuals into the system through consumption. He wrote vividly: “People recognize themselves in their commodities; they find their soul in their automobile, hi-fi set, split-level home, kitchen equipment” (Marcuse, 1964: 9). Social control, according to Marcuse, becomes rooted in the very needs the system itself produces.

In other words, the individual begins to identify with what they purchase — consumer goods offer a sense of identity and belonging, replacing lost values. Where religion once promised the salvation of the soul, now that same hunger is temporarily appeased by the purchase of a new car or electronic device.
French sociologist Jean Baudrillard directly addressed the commercialization of happiness. He asserted that modern society has invented happiness as part of the grand myth necessary to sustain the order of consumption. In advertising, the word “happiness” glows “in fiery letters” behind every slogan — from bath salts to vacation packages — and acts as an absolute referent of the consumerist society, a secular equivalent of salvation (Baudrillard, 1998: 101). Mass culture has secularized the idea of redemption, turning it into a worldly goal: the relentless pursuit of personal happiness, supposedly attainable through purchasing goods.

In this narrative, happiness becomes not only a slogan but also a product. Baudrillard observed that this happiness is primarily visual and material: it appears on screens, is sold through polished imagery, and often serves as the finale of Hollywood-style stories (Baudrillard, 1998: 101). To be happy means to own certain things — from a smartphone to a luxury car. This emphasis on the material markers of happiness and success creates the illusion of equality: if everyone has access to goods, then all can supposedly be happy. Yet behind this illusion lies growing inequality and the

emptying out of authentic content from the very idea of happiness — it is reduced to the quantity of consumed items (Baudrillard, 1998: 101).

Cultural critic Richard Cronk described this situation bluntly: traditional values — art, religion, community — are deteriorating under the weight of commercialization, and society increasingly believes in the myth of consumption — the idea that personal fulfillment and integration can be achieved through possession (Cronk, 1996). The collective rituals of the church or familial bonds are replaced by the collective experience of televised spectacle and participation in consumer trends. Consumption becomes a new myth in which individuals are promised selfhood through shopping. As Cronk writes, "The public fetishizes consumer images as substitutes for the lost experience of art, religion, and family. The consumer sublimates the thirst for cultural depth into the rewards of purchase and ownership, replacing spiritual rebirth with media-manipulated flashes of public identity" (Cronk, 1996).

Philosophers have noted that the pursuit of illusory happiness in late capitalism is inherently insatiable. Slavoj Žižek points out that contemporary ideology does not prohibit enjoyment but rather commands it, leading to a new form of repression. The commodification of happiness renders it unattainable: individuals perpetually feel a lack and chase the next purchase, akin to a donkey pursuing a carrot (Žižek, 2006: 295).

Žižek illustrates this with the example of Coca-Cola: we believe it quenches our thirst, but its true allure lies in its ability to perpetuate desire. The more we consume, the thirstier we become, making it a metaphor for consumption itself. The product promises satisfaction, but the engineering of consumer desire ensures that fulfillment is never complete, triggering a new cycle of desire (Žižek, 2006).

Ultimately, the industry sells a constant process of seeking happiness, not happiness itself — much like religion once sold not paradise on earth but the path to salvation. However, now this path is endless and leads through the shopping mall. Žižek encapsulates this modern formula as: "Enjoy!"— an imperative to purchase pleasures that paradoxically results in the opposite: a mass increase in anxiety and depression amid an imposed race for an unattainable ideal of happiness (Žižek, 2006).

According to Pavel Shchelin and the aforementioned thinkers, marketing culture has taken the place of former sacred symbolism, but at the cost of emptying the symbols themselves. Whereas symbols once pointed to something transcendent (God, higher values), now brands and advertisements simulate meaning without transcending consumption. This leads to a "deficit of the symbolic" - an acute lack of genuine meanings experienced by individuals as existential longing, concealed behind the facade of consumer well-being.

It is unsurprising that, amid this symbolic void, the 20th century witnessed a compensatory yearning for meaning — a desire to reclaim lost archetypal narratives and symbols, even in secular form. Mass culture responded with a surge of interest in genres that offered epic myths and battles between Good and Evil, stories absent from the prosaic reality of consumer society. One iconic example was *Star Wars* (1977), a saga that became a modern myth.

Its creator, director George Lucas, consciously drew upon classical mythological structures. He admitted: “I realized we don’t have a modern mythology. I wanted to take old myths and repackage them in a format that would be accessible to young people”. He explicitly sought to re-enchant a disenchanted world by crafting a tale of heroes, princesses, and magic in the language of science fiction. “Mythology always takes place in strange, unknown worlds,” Lucas said, “so I chose space” (Lucas, 1999).

Star Wars resonated so powerfully precisely because it filled a mythic vacuum: millions of viewers, weary of postmodern cynicism, responded with heartfelt enthusiasm to a story about the Force, Jedi knights, and the choice between light and dark. Lucas drew inspiration from mythologist Joseph Campbell and psychologist Carl Jung. Campbell had described the universal pattern of the "Hero’s Journey" that underlies myths across cultures, while Jung introduced the concept of archetypes — primordial images in the collective unconscious (the Warrior, the Sage, the Trickster, the Great Mother, etc.) (Sedykh, 2019: 77-92).

Star Wars became a cinematic illustration of these archetypes: the old mentor (Obi-Wan Kenobi), the fallen father-Shadow (Darth Vader), the youthful Seeker-Hero (Luke), the Princess, the Rogue, and others — an entire pantheon of mythic roles reimagined in sci-fi aesthetics. Viewers unconsciously recognized eternal patterns embedded in the psyche, which made the story feel resonant on a deep level. In this sense, *Star Wars* reintroduced symbolic depth to popular consciousness — albeit in cinematic fantasy form, it reminded audiences of lost magic and heroism. Campbell himself hailed the success of *Star Wars*, calling it “the myth of our time”, capable of translating timeless archetypes into modern narratives and thereby uniting people around a shared symbolic field.

But this tendency was not limited to cinema. Marketing, too, has increasingly adopted the language of archetypes and myths to imbue products with emotional and symbolic appeal. In the absence of genuine sacred meaning, its place is occupied by “sacred brands” with devoted followers. People line up for the newest iPhone not because they objectively need another phone, but because the Apple brand embodies a certain mythic image (often the Creator or Rebel archetype) and promises membership in a community of the chosen. Like religious devotees or fans of epic tales, brand followers draw from this a fleeting sense of meaning and identity (Mark & Pearson, 2001: 65-68).

The framework of 12 brand archetypes, developed by Margaret Mark and Carol S. Pearson, categorizes brand identities according to core human motivations. For example, the segment "Yearn for Paradise" includes the archetypes of the Innocent, the Sage, and the Explorer; while "Connect with Others" includes the Everyman, the Jester, and the Lover (Mark & Pearson, 2001: 35-96).

In their influential 2001 book *The Hero and the Outlaw: Building Extraordinary Brands Through the Power of Archetypes* (2001), marketer Margaret Mark and psychologist Carol Pearson proposed a system of 12 brand archetypes directly based on Jungian theory. Their core idea was that every successful brand corresponds to a specific archetype that reflects the deep values and motivations of its target audience.

Among the archetypes they define are:

- **The Innocent** (seeking safety and simplicity)
- **The Explorer** (yearning for freedom and adventure)
- **The Sage** (pursuit of truth and understanding)
- **The Hero** (striving for mastery and victory)
- **The Outlaw** (desire for revolution and liberation)
- **The Magician** (drive for transformation and change)
- **The Everyman** (need for belonging and ordinariness)
- **The Lover** (pursuit of intimacy and sensual pleasure)
- **The Jester** (joyful spontaneity)
- **The Caregiver** (service and protection)
- **The Creator** (creativity and self-expression)
- **The Ruler** (need for control and order) (Mark & Pearson, 2001: 35-96).

Each archetype, they argue, represents universal human motivations. The Outlaw appeals to a desire for rebellion (e.g. Harley-Davidson, Virgin), the Explorer evokes the spirit of freedom (Jeep, The North Face), the Everyman offers a sense of community and ordinariness (e.g. IKEA or craft beer brands), the Hero symbolizes achievement and courage (Nike's "Just Do It"), and the Lover speaks to romanticism and sensuality (e.g. Chanel, Victoria's Secret). Mark and Pearson showed that the most successful global brands intuitively embodied one of these archetypes — this, they argued, is what earned them deep consumer loyalty (Mark & Pearson, 2001: 35-96).

The authors explicitly describe their method as "the first meaning-management system" in branding. In a postmodern world where old stars and compasses have disappeared, brands are invited to become new beacons of meaning (Mark & Pearson, 2001: 35-96). "Today's brands are among the loudest meaning-makers in culture", notes researcher Lindsey Isler, "and this is because they rely on the same deep archetypal patterns as their mythic predecessors" (Isler, 2021). Mark and Pearson metaphorically compare brand strategy to navigating in the dark: without a guiding meaning, a brand sails "beneath invisible stars", whereas archetypes offer symbolic navigation (Mark & Pearson, 2001: 3-5).

"We created this system so that brands could deliberately embody timeless archetypal meanings and thereby generate deep, long-lasting emotional responses", they write (Mark & Pearson, 2001: 3-5). Their research with the Young & Rubicam agency showed that brands with clearly defined archetypal identities demonstrated the most consistent success and emotional engagement with audiences.

It is important to emphasize that modern consumers often do not make purchasing decisions rationally, but emotionally — based on the image projected by the brand. As Mark and Pearson state, "Archetypes are the heart of a brand because they deliver meaning in a way that makes consumers feel like the product is alive — as if they are in a real relationship with it" (Mark & Pearson, 2001: 3-5). In other words, a strong brand evokes personalized emotion, as if the product were not a lifeless object but a friend, mentor, or ally sharing the buyer's values. Marketing studies confirm that up to 95% of purchasing decisions are made unconsciously, based on emotional and symbolic associations. Thus, archetypal imagery — universal and deeply familiar to the psyche — becomes an ideal anchor for these associations (Zaltman, 2003; Lindstrom, 2008).

It is essential to understand that the attraction to archetypal symbols in consumer behavior reflects a deeper psychological drive: the individual's longing for meaning and wholeness — a process that Carl Jung described as *individuation*. Jung defined individuation as the psychological journey toward the realization of one's true self through the integration of unconscious elements and archetypes. He described it as "the process of becoming who you are, of finding and fulfilling the meaning and purpose of your life". In other words, within each person lies a yearning for a meaningful, authentic path — a unity between the inner and outer worlds (Jung, 2018: 3–4).

In traditional cultures, this yearning was satisfied through religious rituals, initiation rites, and myths that guided individuals toward spiritual goals. In a secular and fragmented world, however, this search for meaning often takes other forms. Modern people may not consciously recognize their "thirst for wholeness", but it manifests in the choices they make — including their consumer behavior.

Marketing culture, by appropriating archetypes, essentially offers a surrogate for the individuation process. Instead of genuinely walking the hero's path — working on oneself, confronting inner contradictions, discovering one's soul — it becomes easier to simply buy a symbol of that path. Do you feel the urge to rebel against conformity? Buy a Harley-Davidson, put on a leather jacket, and you'll unconsciously satisfy the Rebel archetype, feeling like a free spirit of the road. Do you long to feel heroic? Nike invites you to "Just Do It," aligning you with the Hero archetype. Craving magic and transformation? Choose Apple, whose fans speak of the "magic of Apple" and experience a sense of belonging to an innovative, visionary world. Seeking intimacy? A Chanel perfume promises the allure of the Lover archetype. Even mundane products like detergent or yogurt are often framed through the Caregiver

archetype ("trusted by families for generations"), evoking warmth and trust (Mark & Pearson, 2001: 35-92).

In all these cases, the utilitarian function of the product recedes into the background; what matters most is the symbolic image it conveys. The consumer, often unknowingly, chooses with the soul, not the mind — with the part of the psyche that seeks an archetypal match for its needs.

Jungian analyst James Hillman once wrote that the modern soul "speaks in images". In the consumer landscape, products have become the medium through which the soul attempts to speak. People shop not merely for objects, but in search of symbols that resonate with their unconscious. Advertisers know this well (Hillman, 1975: 23). As Mark and Pearson observe, "Today's consumers don't just buy products; they buy meaning and reputation — the qualities that forge emotional bonds" (Mark & Pearson, 2001: 13). In simpler terms, we don't buy an item — we buy a story, a narrative in which we long to take part.

Yet critics (Jung, 2006: in Russian translation: 112-115) (Lindquist, 2021) argue that this symbolic substitution is only a palliative. A brand may temporarily satisfy the hunger for identity, but it cannot resolve its root cause. When the initial thrill fades, the symbol loses power — and a new purchase is required. Jung emphasized (Jung, 2006) that true individuation requires inner work and awareness of one's projections. If a person projects their longing for wholeness onto external objects (be it a guru, a romantic partner, or a beloved brand), they risk dependency and disillusionment.

In the case of marketing, the consumer industry actively encourages such projections for profit. The product becomes a fetish object onto which deep hopes for happiness are transferred — but plastic and pixels can never fully deliver. Thus, the "festival of consumption" never ends; the cycle continues. Baudrillard described this as the simulation of satisfaction: the consumer system keeps the individual in a perpetual state of desire, replacing real spiritual growth with endless brand-switching (Baudrillard, 1998), (Baudrillard, 1994), (Žižek, 1989).

In the end, we are left with a dual picture. On the one hand, the sacred symbolic order of earlier epochs has been dismantled — neither kings nor churches unify Western society around a shared meaning anymore. The resulting void has been filled by mass culture and marketing, offering countless fragmentary substitutes for meaning. These substitutes exploit ancient myths and archetypes, repackaging them into films, brands, and consumer goods — temporarily alleviating the spiritual hunger of the masses.

On the other hand, the very nature of the symbolic has changed — from depth to surface. Symbols have been profaned and commercialized, stripped of authentic transcendence. As Baudrillard put it, this is the "radiance of emptiness": the images surrounding us are bright and omnipresent, but beneath them lies "no mystery", no

hidden truth. For meaning to be truly transformative, it must be embedded in a scene—a context larger than a purchase — but consumer culture does not offer such a context (Baudrillard, 1994: 97-99).

And yet, the longing for meaning has not disappeared. It persists in our dreams, in our emotional impulses, in the inexplicable attraction we feel toward certain symbols. Archetypes continue to operate in the unconscious, and thus even in a world saturated by advertising, there remain occasional “flashes” of the symbolic — be it the sudden popularity of a fantasy saga, the cult of a brand, or the emergence of communities that resemble spiritual sects.

Philosophers urge us to become conscious of these dynamics. Both Shchelin and thinkers like Žižek call on us to recognize a fundamental truth: that human beings are not ultimately seeking products, but a lost path to themselves. And this path cannot be purchased or replaced by a commercial — it must be walked inwardly. Marketing archetypes are but shadows of the true archetypes of the soul. They may point the way, like fingers pointing at the moon, but they are not the goal themselves.

By recognizing this, we can enjoy the material blessings of civilization without becoming prisoners of simulacra. In the end, the deficit of the symbolic can be overcome only by restoring depth to symbols — whether through new forms of creativity, reconnection with spiritual traditions, or the development of cultural practices that enrich rather than impoverish the soul. As Jung taught, the meaning of life arises from within, and no external object can substitute for the process of individuation.

3. The Sage Archetype in European and Eastern Traditions

In this section, drawing upon the work of M. Vasilieva, *Visualization of Wisdom: Eastern and Western Traditions* (2021), I first clarify the meaning of the terms "European" and "Western traditions" as they pertain to our analysis.

For a Western researcher, whether consciously or not, the fundamental perspective on world cultures and sociocultural phenomena is inherently Eurocentric. As a foundational principle, the scientific knowledge of a European scholar is rooted in the cultural values of Antiquity, particularly when addressing philosophical questions. Consequently, as M. Vasilieva observes, the European or Western philosophical and cultural tradition is fundamentally based on the concepts of ancient Greek philosophy (Vasilieva, 2015: 33-34).

From this standpoint, the Eastern tradition — despite its diversity and the significant differences between various Eastern cultures — appears equally exotic and, therefore, "other" to a Western scholar. This perception leads to a generalization encapsulated in the term "Eastern tradition". In other words, it refers to a tradition

whose axiomatic foundations do not rely on the categories and principles established by ancient Greek thought, which form the bedrock of European philosophy (Vasilieva, 2015: 33-34).

Thus, in narrowing the scope of meanings, the term "Western tradition" in this study refers to the intellectual paradigm in which I was initially trained as a scholar and researcher — one that is difficult, if not impossible, to completely transcend, regardless of any conscious effort to do so. The term "Eastern tradition", meanwhile, primarily denotes the Japanese tradition, while also acknowledging the profound influence that Chinese philosophy and culture have exerted on it over the centuries.

Alongside M. Vasilieva, who examines the representation of wisdom across different cultures, A. Dyakov, in his article *The Return of the Sage: The History of Ideas and the History of Philosophy* (2019), posits that in the European tradition, the figure of the Sage — as someone who possesses wisdom — was swiftly replaced by the Philosopher, the "lover of wisdom", who does not necessarily possess it himself (Dyakov, 2019: 227-236).

At the same time, M. Vasilieva concludes that in Western tradition, wisdom is often embodied in the image of a person — the Sage — and thus expressed in a tangible form. As an example, she cites statues and busts of Socrates, Plato, Pythagoras, and other Greek scholars. In contrast, in Eastern traditions, particularly in Chinese philosophy, wisdom is conceived as a process rather than a fixed state (Vasilieva, 2015: 37-49).

This distinction is further supported by linguistic evidence. In European languages, the words for "wisdom" and "sage" are used with roughly equal frequency and are similarly widespread. However, in Japanese, the word *chie* (知恵), meaning "wisdom," is more commonly used than its derivative *chiesha* (知恵者), which refers to a wise person. There is also the term *kenja* (賢者), but it is more frequently applied to Western sages — for instance, in the Japanese translation of the Bible. Additionally, the words *rōjin* (老人) and *rōba* (老婆), which denote elderly men and women, respectively, associate wisdom with old age. These terms perhaps come closest in meaning to the Western notion of a sage, yet they do not inherently imply wisdom, only an indication of advanced age (Vasilieva, 2015: 37-49).

Regarding the historical process identified by A. Dyakov — where, following Plato, philosophers gradually assumed a more privileged position than sages, and were later supplanted by scientists as the primary bearers of knowledge — this development did not occur as swiftly in the East. The traditionally hierarchical structure of Eastern societies preserved the status of sages for a much longer period (Dyakov, 2019: 227-236).

M. Vasilieva observes that in the Eastern tradition, there was no established practice of dividing the world into discrete categories for separate analysis. Instead, Eastern thinkers sought to understand the world in its entirety — as a continuous flow, as *Dao*. Consequently, the Eastern image or archetype of the Sage encompassed the Confucian concept of the "noble man" (*junzi*) — a respectful and courteous figure in the Confucian tradition — or else retained the qualities found in the original European archetype of the Sage as someone who already possesses wisdom (Vasilieva, 2015: 37-49).

Vasilieva further argues that while Europeans sought an idealized form in which to depict the true Sage — an image that would be unmistakable, requiring a certain degree of age, a specific physical appearance, and attire that would immediately suggest wisdom — Eastern traditions, particularly in China, prioritized mastery of artistic technique over strict representational accuracy. Before attempting to depict a figure, an artist had to first master the brush; the pursuit of absolute realism was not only unnecessary but even inappropriate. In this perspective, saying too much could mean saying nothing at all, making form secondary to the ability to convey meaning.

As a result, Vasilieva concludes that identifying common visual characteristics of the Sage in Eastern tradition is far more challenging than in the West. In Eastern representations, the Sage may appear in any number of ways, and the artist has considerable freedom in choosing which aspects of the figure to emphasize. More important than the Sage's outward appearance are his actions — whether he follows the path of *Dao*.

In this sense, the image of the Sage in the Eastern tradition appears closer to Jung's understanding of the Sage archetype. According to Jung, the form in which an archetype appears to a dreamer or an inspired poet can vary significantly depending on the individual characteristics of the observer. However, its function—following the *Dao*—remains constant and serves as the key to identifying the figure as the Sage archetype rather than any other.

It is possible that because the observer's focus is directed toward the function of the Sage rather than their outward appearance, the representation of this archetype in Japanese anime—provided that the character's actions align with the expected function—tends to be less contradictory than its European counterpart. As an illustration of this idea, one need only recall Albus Dumbledore from *Harry Potter*. He visually conforms to the canonical image of a Sage, yet his actions continue to spark heated debates among fans of the franchise, as not everyone agrees that his outward appearance corresponds to the decisions he makes. Conversely, there is far less controversy among anime fans from the West regarding characters that embody the Sage archetype, particularly when their physical appearance does not match the stereotypical image of the "wise old man." In such cases, discussions tend to focus on teaching methods, and some fans may conflate the archetype of the Mentor with

that of the Sage. However, if examined rigorously, it becomes evident that a Mentor is not necessarily a Sage in relation to their disciple, as their function is fundamentally different.

4. Conclusion

The analysis presented in this first part of the article demonstrates that contemporary Western culture is characterized by a profound transformation of the symbolic sphere, in which traditional sources of meaning have been displaced and partially replaced by marketing-driven structures. Drawing on the works of Baudrillard, Žižek, Marcuse, and others, it becomes evident that the modern individual increasingly encounters archetypal imagery not within sacred or mythological frameworks, but through the mediated environment of mass culture and consumption.

At the same time, this transformation does not eliminate the archetypal dimension itself. On the contrary, it reveals its persistence and adaptability. As originally theorized by Carl Gustav Jung, archetypes continue to function as fundamental structures of the psyche, shaping perception, desire, and identity, even when they are embedded in commodified forms. The widespread use of archetypal frameworks in branding and popular media — systematized, for instance, in the twelve-archetype model proposed by Carol Pearson and Margaret Mark — confirms that the human need for meaning, coherence, and symbolic orientation has not disappeared, but has instead been redirected.

Within this context, the figure of the Sage occupies a particularly significant position. As an archetype associated with knowledge, truth, and orientation within a complex world, the Sage reflects the enduring human aspiration toward understanding and wholeness. However, as the comparison between Western and Eastern traditions suggests, this archetype is not fixed in form but varies in its representation, emphasizing either the external embodiment of wisdom (in Western traditions) or its processual and functional dimension (in Eastern thought).

This distinction becomes especially relevant when considering contemporary cultural products such as anime, where archetypal representations often operate at the intersection of global and local symbolic systems. The relative flexibility of the Sage archetype in Eastern traditions allows for more diverse and less visually constrained representations, which may contribute to its particular resonance among global audiences.

Thus, the deficit of the symbolic in Western culture does not signify the disappearance of meaning, but rather its transformation and displacement. The persistence of archetypes — both in marketing and in narrative media — indicates an ongoing search for symbolic depth, even within conditions of commodification.

The second part of this article will build upon this theoretical foundation by examining how the Sage archetype is concretely realized in Japanese anime, with particular attention to the series *Shinsekai Yori*. Through this analysis, I aim to explore how archetypal structures function within narrative form and how they are perceived by contemporary audiences across cultural contexts.

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