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Post-Traumatic Growth and Comfort Characters in Japanese Media

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Abstract

A study of the concept of comfort characters as an idea formed thanks to post-traumatic growth and an emotional attachment to fictional characters thanks to survivor stories.

Keywords

Anime, Media, Japanese Culture, Trauma, Comfort Characters

Disciplines

Japanese Studies | Psychology

Comments

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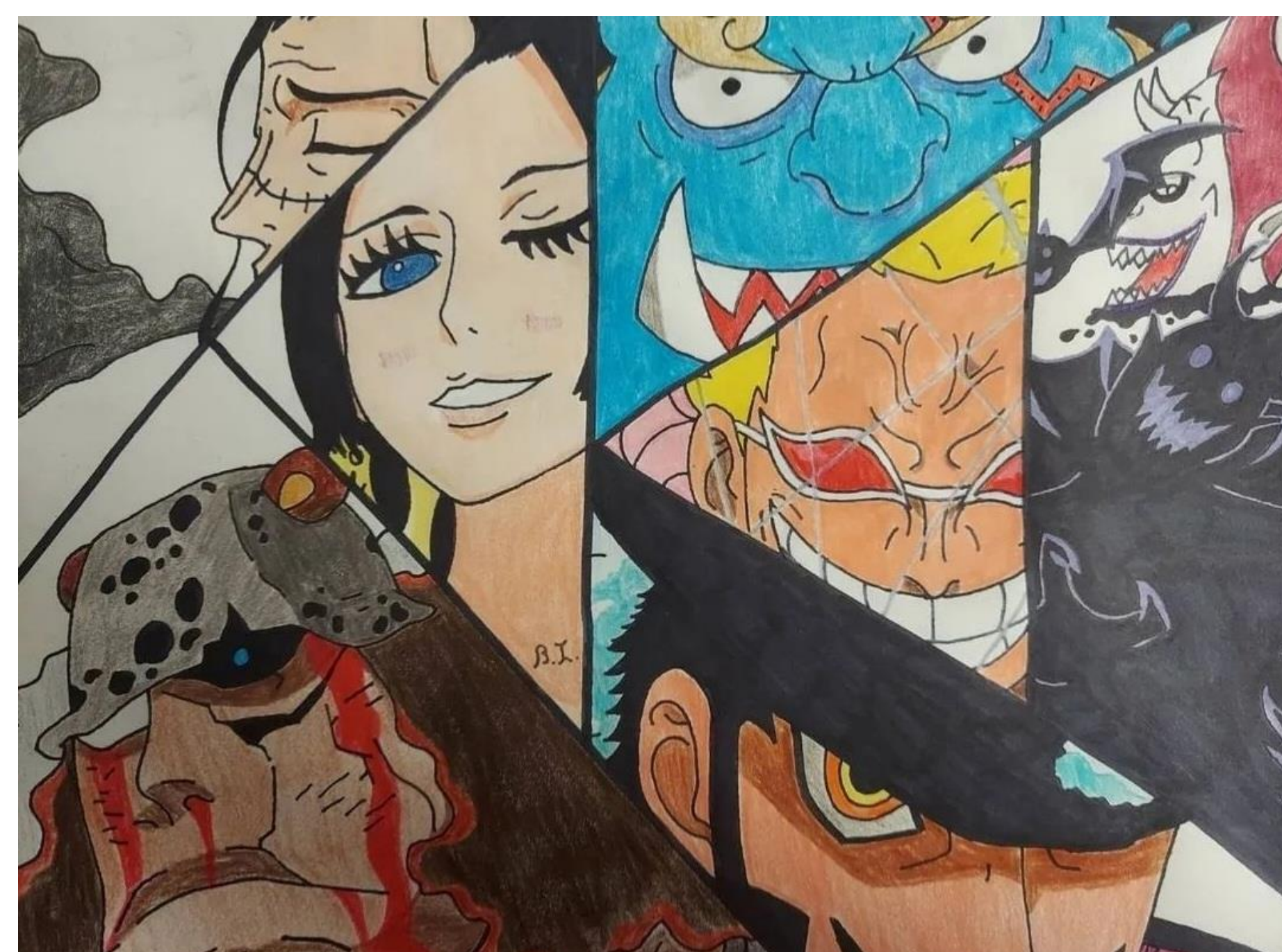
Post-Traumatic Growth and Comfort Characters in Japanese Media

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Introduction

Traumatic experiences often lead to a permanent change in an individual's behavior, which can cripple them socially if significant enough. Trauma is often explored in stories through the development of characters and backstories. Japan is known for its diverse culture and world-wide impact on media. The stories produced by Japan commonly use characters to heal viewers with trauma through survivor stories and shared experiences. This is most notably seen on a widespread scale after the usage of nuclear bombs, leading to the creation of *Gojira* (1954) by Ishiro Honda, and *Gundam* (1979) by Yoshiyuki Tomino, to cope with the idea of nuclear destruction. More popular examples of this trend include *Neon Genesis Evangelion* (1995) by Hideaki Anno, *One Piece* (1997) by Eiichiro Oda, and most recently *Belle* (2021) by Mamoru Hosoda. All the previously named stories contain characters that form such a tight bond with audiences that just the sight of them can cause an individual to relax or feel happy. This is a phenomena titled by the internet under the name of "comfort characters".



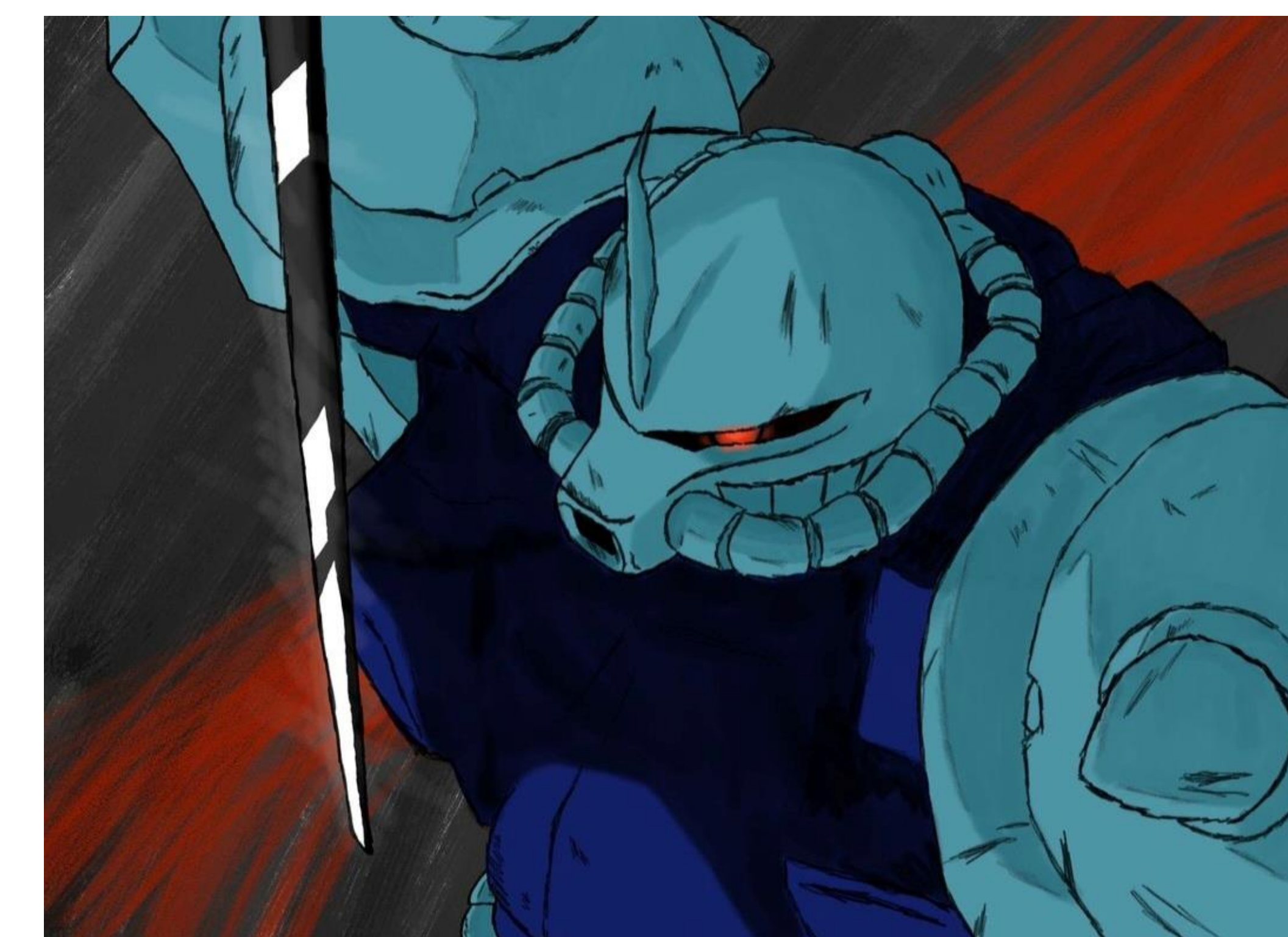
What Causes It?

Trauma, defined as an event so sudden and visceral that it flips a person's entire view on life, although negative, can lead to growth for an individual. Post-traumatic growth is a relatively new concept that views how trauma can change an individual's view on their life. Survivor stories, which are now far easier to access thanks to the digital age, are the most common driving force for post-traumatic growth. Gaining inspiration from others who have thrived despite experiencing what you have allows you to know that you can thrive too. To those who have lost family, to those who have been abused, to those who struggle socially, characters such as Suzu from *Belle* can be more than just a character in a movie, she can be hope. All this combined has led to the creation of comfort characters.



Conclusions

While some may view the idea of having a strong emotional connection to a fictional character strange, the process of post-traumatic growth and the adopting of a comfort character can allow an individual to enter society once more after trauma. Not only does the survival story of the character assist the viewer, but the community formed around the story or character that is gained when shared love is formed leads to access to more survivor stories in real life, socialization, and friends. Japanese culture has globally brought together billions of people, allowing them to form an endless community, bringing all of us together.



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