

1

Land of Waves

The tale of *Naruto* is one of a rambunctious child who, due to the demon he harbours, has been ostracised by his village and lives the fleeting existence of an outcast. Like most Shonen Jump manga, the protagonist is pitted against a rival - the yin to his yang - in the form of Sasuke Uchiha, a child who is supremely gifted and sits at the top of his class in every subject. Contrast this with Naruto, who's failed his graduation exam for the third time as he's yet to perform a perfect clone jutsu.

Mizuki sees a disheartened Naruto walking home, and out of the goodness of his heart tells him a secret that will guarantee his promotion! In actuality, he tricked Naruto into setting off a village-wide search for he has stolen the "sacred manuscript", and if it gets into the wrong hands it could jeopardise the village. The boy is now a threat, which is what he wanted to exacerbate^[1]. But his malice towards Naruto isn't peculiar to him, as it seems to represent the views of the average villager^[2], their hatred always staying hidden until now.

We see the revelation of the decree happen in the forest which has usually been a literary tool to express an environment of disorientation and dissolution of identity, yet here it is seen as a pivotal moment of *clarity*, for the cloud that surrounded Naruto his entire life has been lifted. It all fits, that nobody talks to him and everyone seems to despise him, and since he was born it's been that way. But Iruka doesn't want Naruto to live in all that despair and hopes he can find it in his heart to forgive people like him, and martyrs himself to protect the boy: "If I'd been a better teacher... a better self, maybe neither of us would have come to this"^[3]. A better self is a

unique turn of phrase and is the literalised translation, as this speaks to his mistake in seeing Naruto partly as a beast and didn't consider what effect the decree would have on his "self". He knew that he wasn't the fox, and its evil being sealed away was something he happened to be born into; however, he prioritised his role as a teacher and as a Shinobi, which is why I'm not surprised that Naruto ran away from Iruka for being a co-conspirator for so long. He chose to keep the secret away from him because he was assured it was in the village's best interest and opted for the collective over the individual, despite being the only person who could lend a hand.

But this sacrifice signifies Iruka's shift to realising that the individual isn't helped *at the expense* of the societal code, instead it is reified when the togetherness of people exists on a one-to-one level. The Othering which had been pernicious until now had Naruto excluded from the usual modes of conversation that alleviates conflict, boxing him in as the image of a monster. Interestingly, Mizuki has a perverse liking for this representation and hopes that he too is perceived in the same way - "Naruto and I are two of a kind. I can use that scroll to achieve the same kind of limitless power!"^[4]. He wants to be feared and despised as he could attain the strength to preside over an entire village, which fills his malevolent fantasies with glee. It is around this point that the Anime Profile for him states "Mizuki's dark ambition bares its fangs"^[5], as he tries to wear the cunning and imposing symbology of the fox itself, though to no avail, because he doesn't have its *bite*...

By using the logic he applied to himself, he is almost horrified that Naruto exists for he "understands" that he must be manipulating others too as they are "the same". Both Iruka and Mizuki make the claim they are mirror images of Naruto, but using two different frameworks: Iruka is trying to connect to his heart, this unfathomable collective which cannot be singled

out, whereas Mizuki tries to reason with a single aspect, the blade, that Naruto can impress onto the world. I say heart(心) and blade(刃) as these are the two aspects of the Kanji for Ninja(忍), with the literal meaning of "heart under blade". It is these two opposing forces which when balanced create a noble warrior. Whilst making the claim they were equals, Mizuki launched a shuriken at Naruto with the intent to kill. Does this mean he would apply such violence to himself? Of course not, for he has distinguished himself as master of evil, wit and charm - everyone else are mere pawns. Consequently he will never "peer behind the curtain" so to speak into the character of another person, and till the day he dies he won't see anybody else as really Real - a phenomena that's walled off when one doesn't sacrifice themselves.

Now it's all well and good that I can pick apart Mizuki, but how does Naruto know for certain that Iruka isn't just like everyone else, a master manipulator perhaps? He listens in on the two of them arguing about who and what he is whilst tucked behind a tree, which Kishimoto uses as a motif to symbolise genuine insights into another person's character. He tears up when Iruka calls him "a citizen of Konohagakure, Naruto Uzumaki"^[6]. He is dissuaded of any doubts that he doesn't belong, as he's not only been acknowledged as an individual, but welcomed into the village with open arms just by being *himself*. This moment is when he sees Iruka's sentiment to be true and jumps in to save him.

Bell training

Sasuke watches Naruto fall into each and every trap and this soothes his ego as he could never have fallen for such basic trickery. Naruto acts without any virtue at all, with little respect for his reputation or pride as there really isn't any: no Uchiha heritage, no discernible destiny he must fulfil; whereas Sasuke cannot afford to look like an idiot for he is the noble knight who

shall slay Itachi Uchiha, restore the clan and rewrite history. Kakashi acknowledges he's different, seeing the arrogance in him that he used to have too.

During the training exercise we see Sakura starting to think this task is unreachable (literally): "Even if we couldn't manage it this time, I'm sure next time if we give it our all..."^[7]. Come back next year? This rustles the spirit of the avenger in Sasuke, for he never feels he has enough time - to come back next year is out of the question. His purpose is threatened, and he falls back to why he is here in the first place: "Only I can kill him. He made me cry... My only goal is to have my revenge. I have to become stronger than he is... Now"^[8]. With that odd, fragmented affirmation he continues, while Sakura thinks he must mean the Sensei.

After many more failed attempts, Kakashi grills each of them for being too individualistic and not working cohesively as a squad. He squashes Sasuke like a bug, trying to convey to him the importance of keeping the team intact, as it is their combined abilities and group strategy which gets the work done. Whilst it is certainly the brilliance of a few individuals in key moments, consistent progress is made together, thus fostering more chances for individuals to shine^[9]. Sasuke huffs in a lowered, accepting tone that this does have some importance and he combines this idea with the necessary progress of destroying his brother. "We'll all need our strength if we're going to work together to get those bells. You're no good to me if you're just going to be a liability"^[10]. He convinces the other team members to fully accept companionship - though only he comprehends it, admittedly through a rather morbid lens. Sasuke will do whatever it takes, including being there for Naruto.

Kakashi said "A true Shinobi seeks for the hidden meanings within hidden meanings"^[11] so let's recap on this exercise to try and find those out. The

recurring theme that he set for each of Squad 7 were traps and illusions that he wanted them to sniff out and subvert, but they fell into all of them. Naruto just assumed Kakashi dropped one of the bells out in the open and went to grab it, setting off the rope trap and getting tied up. So, there was an initial hidden meaning behind the innocuous placement of the bell, but then what is the hidden meaning behind that? To isolate him. To prevent him from helping his teammates, thereby nullifying potential teamwork and there goes the only chance at succeeding. To immobilise Sasuke in the ground prevents him assisting, and putting Sakura under genjutsu was the quickest way to render her immobile. He showed off all three types of jutsu, whilst also illustrating their biggest weakness.

In addition to this, Kakashi made them more impulsive by not letting them have breakfast. By making them hungrier, it's more likely they'll prioritise the food and delay helping their comrade. A good Shinobi may be able to evade the traps that Kakashi set, which is useful when going out on missions, but would they have understood the intention of those traps? We can accept plenty of skillful Shinobi who care about themselves and have no interest in working collaboratively, but that would ruin many missions and eventually the village itself. This is the reasoning behind his central philosophy: "Those who violate the rules and fail to follow orders are lower than garbage. However, those who do not care for and support their comrades are even lower than that!"^[12].

The Warrior Code

The previous two volumes whereby we were introduced to the 'Honourable Grandson' Konohamaru and subsequent Bell Exercise have laid the groundwork for how Kishimoto wants to define his version of Shinobi, with their own unique philosophy, values and system.

Naruto is a world that borrows heavily from the Edo time period(1603-1867), which is after the Warring States of many diffuse clans. Here Ninja go from being in the thick of war to subsidiary agents for the Shogunate and their respective Feudal Lords, with work centring on espionage, assassination and so forth. Likewise, the once central role of the Samurai in keeping law and order within communities dissipated, and their unrivalled status came into question. With a number of sweeping reforms, economically powerful commoners could purchase Samurai privileges, like the right to wear swords^[13] which muddled the distinction between classes.

Thus began the task of theorists like Yamaga Sokō(1622–1685) to find a path forward for the Samurai, using Confucianism to answer this quandary. Essentially he theorised that the Samurai, due to the money they received in stipends, had more time to focus on ethical behaviour than the average person who is mired in daily labour, and could therefore serve as the moral bastions of society - directly in the image of the Chinese Confucian gentleman^[14].

This is why Ebisu takes himself to be the perfect person to get Konohamaru to the Hokage position, since neither of them have to concern themselves with everyday matters, allowing more time to learn about leadership. We know that he uses Confucianism as well based on his perfect recital of their primary virtues: “the revered Lord Hokage knows and understands the eight principles that are the cornerstone of all knowledge of the Shinobi: virtue, justice, ceremony, wisdom, loyalty, faithfulness, prudence and filial piety”^[15]; however, as Kishimoto illustrates, he has become ignorant of the primal urges not transcendent of them and gets completely incapacitated by the wiley Fox’s harem jutsu₁.

¹ This proclivity for *Naruto* to shapeshift into a woman is taken from the folklore of Tamamo-no Mae, a folktale about a nine-tailed fox who tricked Emperor Toba into being his concubine, but was eventually found out^[16]

Given a few years of multi-faceted research and academic writing, the umbrella term for which all of the Samurai ethical codes of honour and chivalry came to be assorted under would be *Bushido*, which translates to “The Way of the Warrior”. Not so much an ancient term, as its first instance can be found in the *Kōyō gunkan*^[17], which is a 17th century manuscript detailing the exploits of war of the Takeda family. Prior to its use we saw more specific *bushi* activities, using terms such as *kyūba no michi* (the way of horseback archery) and *yumiya toru mi no narai* (customs for those who draw the bow). The reason that Bushido was more fragmented reflected the state of the times, and the leading theory as to why there wasn't a “Grand Unified Bushido” was because Samurai were too busy with war and practical matters to do it^[18], but each clan had their own set of maxims^[19] which became assimilated to form a broader social order.

But Bushido would come to evolve almost as quickly as it could be defined, as the coming of the Meiji Period(1868-1912) saw a radical reinterpretation, with values of obligation to one's sovereign taking precedence. The reason being is that heads of state began to worry about the looming threat of Western Expansionism, and needed a citizenry that would ostracise the foreigner whilst heightening the image of the Emperor. Just a book came to be pulled from the annals of history, *Hagakure*, with its message aligning perfectly with said requirements. You may have noticed that the Japanese name for the Leaf is *Kono-hagakure*, which is a play on words for representing their home as the quintessence of the warrior. This has and will become one of the primary virtues of a Shinobi depicted in the Land of Waves arc, which illustrates the relatively modern strain of Bushido that Kishimoto has elected to describe his characters.

What followed historically is a partial integration of Western values as Japanese people began to change their diet, behaviour and clothing - an

uptake that was fastest amongst the upper classes^[20]; however the pearl of individualism was met with scepticism and unease, and a prioritisation of nationalistic-confucian values began to mount as primary^[21]. *Naruto* as the blonde, blue-eyed Ninja is meant to evoke this very same symbiosis, and his message of radical individualism comes across as equally weird.

There was somebody though that shared many of *Naruto*'s core beliefs, and that man's name was Fukuzawa Yukichi(1835-1901). Contrary to many of his contemporaries, he saw the xenophobia of the Imperial Loyalists as bad for development because it would mean the rejection of bonds with other lands; it would hinder the ability to incorporate Western technology and science, of which he believed it would benefit society. Fukuzawa's Bushido went against the grain of unconditional loyalty to the Emperor, not just articulating an individual's sense of freedom^[22], but even egalitarianism to the point of abolishing the class system.

Whilst this resembles much of what *Naruto* advocates for, let's not forget he is still a ninja. Moreover, there's no formal explanation of "Bushido" in *Naruto* as the closest we get are mentions of "Nindō", or Ninja Way. Now we have to understand whether this is a repackaging of the Samurai tradition or whether the Ninja have their own sort of ethical structure. To answer the latter, we can peer at some historical records.

Unlike their brothers in arms, the ninja have never been tied to the Bureaucratic and Aristocratic structures of society, with the majority of them coming from the working classes^[23] and living separate lives from the Samurai both socially and consequently ethically. The average person felt their contempt at being a lesser citizen, so their disdain for all things chivalric was described as 'legendary'^[24]; their refusal to abide by the same code wasn't just a militaristic move, but something that carried over from their normal lives.

There was definitely no “creed” or “agreement” that Ninja had between each other or anyone on the battlefield: whatever Ninjutsu (techniques used by *Nin*) worked, would be implemented. There was no attempt to square up to their opponents and declare a duel, and if any chance could be taken to get them without a fair challenge, the better^[25].

As you can imagine, the Japanese government didn't want to highlight the role that Ninja played during the Sengoku period and tried to restrict knowledge of them in favour of the gentlemanly, upright Samurai. Take for example the *Ehon Toyotomi Kunki*, which was about the life of the Daimyo Hideyoshi, where only *a single page* covers the ninja^[26]. During the austerity measures around the late Edo period, productions of prints were limited to works designed to improve morality and reduce extravagance and thus there was no media on things like ninja assassinations until the Meiji period^[27].

This image was hidden from Naruto too, as when he left the village to go on his first mission, he still had the ideals of himself vanquishing enemies with nothing but sheer brilliance; but what he learned is that there are no rules beyond Konoha's borders. His first adversaries typified this as they were the demon brothers Gōzu and Meizu^[28], taken from the two characters with the same name that guard the underworld in Shinto Mythology. They specifically stand at the rear gates to stop souls from escaping once they've gone down into Hell, in this case to stop Naruto going back home.

As it stands, Naruto doesn't coincide with the combative arts of the ninja beyond just street smarts, as he wants to use the Way of the Shinobi to get respected, and all the jutsu he performs reflects his playful childishness; he doesn't really want to kill or be killed as that is still too far away, but now he has seen how intense a mission is up close. Naruto will need to admire the

art form and immerse himself but he needs a *reason* to do so. The Land of Waves arc establishes this motivation and makes a Ninja out of him in the end. When he's at the grave of Zabuza and Haku he realises the pain in the life of a Ninja, and is adamant that he will forge his own *dō*, but there is no mention of any ethics attached to it^[29] in true Ninja fashion - only the anime slides in the added caveats of it being "good and true". Primarily it is a Way out of this dark fate and what is good will be what his individuality interacts with - for now.

Just as Naruto is both a Samurai and a Ninja, and neither at the same time, *Naruto* as a universe isn't firmly set in either the Edo or Meiji periods, but relies on key elements of both to construct its narrative. The Edo is the time of the military dictatorship and the transition of Samurai and Ninja out of the times of war, which is where our characters are at the moment; but in terms of values and major themes, the latter is the one that has the Japanese citizen struggling between the worth of the individual, and the individual's relation to society and God^[30].

The Land of Waves

On the boat towards home, Tazuna reveals the true difficulties of the mission and the destitution they are about to see. His land was once a proud and noble people, who have been reduced to homeless desperates dependent on drugs that Gato has imported^[31]. The international billionaire businessman has destroyed local forms of government, accruing too much wealth and power making him unaccountable and thus free to exploit the poorest members of the populace. If only these plotlines had some real world relevance!

In the anime they mentioned "he casts a long and deadly shadow"^[32] and in previous episodes we learnt that Kage means "shadow" which may imply

here that the monstrously rich and powerful can balloon into governments of their own. Back in the time of Edo, Lords(Daimyo) would often hire mercenaries to do the dirty work of espionage and assassination, as they didn't want to have their Samurai's reputation soiled by engaging in such things. This is where we would see the birth of the dark-cloaked and elusive symbol of the ninja take root^[33].

Ninja almost exclusively comprised the role of mercenary work, and as we see in the next arc, Zabuza was hired to do Gato's bidding for pay. Kishimoto plainly illustrates that businessmen have become the new lords of our time, but without departing from many of the ways of old. Interestingly, when power was consolidated under a single Shogun it was still allowed for Daimyo to have Shinobi as an army if their income was at 10,000 Koku or above^[34]. Zabuza's presence shows the collapse of the ideal of the Shinobi as a self-righteous individual who does what needs to be done, to being someone who can sit in the shadows for pennies to kill people who're declared obstacles.

It's thanks to these thugs that Gato's business has swelled, keeping the people in perpetual fear of punishment so they don't leave their jobs, protest or react to the widespread destruction: control of the masses has been achieved. It takes someone like Kaiza - who is Inari's stepfather - to fight on despite all this and stare death in the face. The scars on his body are testament to his philosophy.

We learn that Tazuna is the man who will construct the one and only thing that will release his otherwise iron grip, which is the bridge to allow trade with nations outside of marine transport^[35]. This will allow smaller, independent businesses to trade without having to go through his shipping network which always had the last say on all things that left the land. The

demand for his shipping networks will plummet and people will have a degree of autonomy - we can't have that!

They get off the boat and make their way to Tazuna's residence where Kakashi, again, is the only one able to detect the subtle trap Zabuza laid out. A white-hare isn't supposed to have that colour pelt, meaning it has been kept indoors - now it's being used as a decoy to see whether they fall for it. Zabuza swings down and stands on the handle of his sword, blade jutting into the trunk of a tree. Naruto wants to prove himself and is about to run straight in, but this guy is in a completely different league. It's time to unveil the eye which can "penetrate and see the reality behind any illusion or spell"^[36] - the Sharingan.

The "Mirror Wheel Eye" is a form of Dojutsu (ocular ninjutsu) which is capable of seeing chakra (though not as clearly as the Byakugan, nor over long distances either), but due to its acuteness someone like Kakashi can deduce the secrets of a technique quickly and even replicate it himself. This greater level of detail is what makes the Sharingan capable of seeing things like genjutsu and reflecting them back at the caster, which Itachi is famous for.

This could be a real nuisance, and Zabuza has just the antidote - the Hidden Mist Jutsu. A technique which layers the battlefield in thick fog which makes seeing anything beyond an arm's stretch impossible. A couple chapters ago, at the start of the Bell exercise, Kakashi said: "The basis of all Shinobi arts is to become invisible... eradicate yourself"^[37], meaning that you must get rid of your scent, your footsteps, anything which would identify you. Such skill in the fundamentals will translate to mastery of Shinobi arts, and he has become the master of silent killing; combine this with the Sharingan which represents the ability to parse through illusions and we have our first symbolic battle.

Zabuza lets the suspense build and build, driving them all insane. Even our cool-headed Sasuke is sweating knowing that any small movement will give away his position and he'll die, it's almost too much to bear. Zabuza swoops down right in the centre of their manji formation and Kakashi just about gets the clone, "tricking" Zabuza with a clone of his own. But this Zabuza is also a water clone^[38]! He kicks Kakashi into the river and traps him inside a water prison. He's played this perfectly, and now his clone is going to clear up the rest of them; however, if they just run then the clone cannot follow them past a fixed distance^[39], the bridge builder will be safe.

Naruto thinks that's pretty sound advice and is ready to go, but in stumbling back he feels the pain of his left hand. The promise he made, "to never run away again" is irrevocably tied to his journey as a Ninja, and he runs toward Zabuza to grab his fallen headband. He stands out in front and exemplifies the hard-nosed *sakigake* of the Samurai, which is an ideal that basically demands a warrior to stand without fear, to not merely be present but *eager* to engage the enemy^[40].

Zabuza chuckles... these runts think they're tough? Back when he was their age he had already dyed his hands in enemy blood. The graduation exam in the Hidden Mist wasn't so concerned with teamwork as the Leaf, in fact it was the opposite: the very comrades who you shared your dreams with, you had to kill - or be killed in the frenzy^[41]. In fact, this barbaric practice that was designed to instil fearlessness and killer-instinct had to be reigned in because of one specific student. A fiend, who hadn't even graduated, butchered over a hundred members of that year's graduating class, terrifying even the proctors that instantiated the rule. That child was Zabuza Momochi.

No knowledge of teamwork, no knowledge of comradery, just a fight to the death and the line between killing in the name of Shinobi and ceaseless murder was lost in this blood. Shinobi look upon this in fear that it may be the way to find and foster the strongest Ninja capable of completing missions without wavering. This is the ideal which people like Danzo took and directly incorporated into his own model called the Foundation (or the Root in the original manga). More on that in subsequent chapters.

This battle between him and Kakashi seems to be an adaptation of a legendary duel between two famous Japanese swordsmen, namely Miyamoto Musashi and Sasaki Kojiro. The latter was famous for fighting with an oversized *nodachi*, a type of long sword colloquially called a "laundry-drying pole" but here we see Zabuza's sword spans around a foot wide as well, hyperbolised to make him more intimidating. Kojirō was also given the nickname "The Demon of the Western Provinces"^[42], to which Zabuza was coincidentally named "The Demon of the Hidden Mist".

Kojirō would come to fight his toughest duel against Musashi who was undefeated - and would die never losing a single duel either. Whilst I don't think Kakashi resembles much of Musashi outside of having the "lightning blade" technique (and thus it loosely being a duel of swordsmen), he repeatedly taunted Zabuza - something Musashi does in his own duels. In his fight against Kojiro he annoyed him by turning up hours late for their duel, which is actually a trait Kakashi has when meeting Team 7.

Musashi would go on to write one of the most famous books in Japanese martial arts and strategy, *The Book of Five Rings*, which I theorise had a few of its teachings spill over into this match. For example, whenever your opponent plans to strike, you have to grasp the first few letters - "stri" - and be there first, stopping him from completing his striking movement^[43]. It requires a predictive prowess which Kakashi was able to induce when he

fooled Zabuza into thinking he was a psychic, completing his sentences and performing the jutsu he was about to use. Likewise, at the start of the fight Zabuza had already been infusing his chakra into the lake before making his first move, which is how he set up the water prison whilst Kakashi was thinking of a ground based assault. This ties into another tidbit of Musashi's philosophy in regards to thinking about the sea whenever your opponent has their mind set on the mountain^[44]. And lastly, Zabuza's art of silent killing requires him to reign in his desire to rampage and butcher, for he has to strike exactly at the point his opponent does not expect it^[45].

But just as the tables have turned and the demon is about to be slain, we are introduced to the mysterious boy in the mask who flies down gracefully from the trees and kills him with two perfectly placed needles to the neck. We later learn this is Haku, currently the greatest child prodigy in the series. Naruto is incandescent with rage as he can see this kid is no bigger than him, yet took him down "like it was nothing! What, do we suck or something? What's up with that?"^[46]. It cuts to Sasuke scowling as he also compares himself, probably imagining how much he could've progressed if he had such ability too. Ironically, Haku has merely cast this illusion of brilliance, mastering the art of theatre: the swiftness of the kill, the mystery of the mask and the believable story of being a tracker all go hand in hand to compliment each other - illuminating the stage, inciting trust and integrity. He is no more than a lucid caricature, these abilities springing up from his own lack of identity - making it easier to swim from one character to the next.

At Tazuna's home Team 7 realise that Haku wasn't in fact part of the Mist tracking squad and there'll most likely be another run-in with the Demon. Naruto is elated at the opportunity for a second chance, though this sparks an embittered Inari to speak up: "Hero'? You're dumb! There's no such

thing"^[47]. Obviously if Naruto had believed such a thing he wouldn't have gotten to where he is now, rightfully rejecting such pessimism.

The name of this little man is taken from the Shinto God of Agriculture, often drawn and affiliated with rice due to its prevalence in Japanese history - the name itself means "carrying rice"^[48]. The relationship with Inari therefore correlates to the wealth of the harvest, the fertility of the lands and consequently the state of hunger, or lack thereof. The boy then is representative of the poverty-stricken Land of Waves, as Inari himself is lost, devoid of hope and weak.

But funnily enough, the shrines of the Agricultural God often feature a protector, an overseer of the rice fields, which usually takes the form of stone statues of foxes^[49]. Across the thousands of temples of Inari that populate Japan, the kitsune serve as guides and messengers to the people that come to pay respect. One of the reasons being is that the fox symbol became a metaphor for individuality due to its shapeshifting abilities, and people would imagine that they too could change their circumstances despite restricted social mobility^[50].

The symbol of the fox in Naruto is probably undergirding the nindo he shall declare later - to walk his own path and find the answer himself. Indeed, if Inari can come to this realisation too, then collectively the villagers will start to break free from Gato's iron clutches; Inari (the Shinto God) is *meant* to symbolise change in the face of continuity in the first place^[51], and so the first presumption that needs to topple is that there are no heroes...

This is also why Inari temples, whilst all under the same name, have a range of other agricultural deities incorporated, with slightly different practices for people to show reverence^[52]; it is another way of saying that what

composes the individual is a vast pantheon of expression indebted to all kinds of things, as that milieu clarifies who and what they are. This is exactly the kind of unusual hero Naruto wants to be: one that never forgets the tireless work and sacrifice of his friends in tandem with his own accomplishments.

The history of Inari started with her being associated with rice, crop fertility and the protection of fields in general^[53], which continued in its pure form until roughly the late Heian period(late 10th century)^[54]. This is when we can say kitsune started to get incorporated, but it may be even earlier^[55]. The final iteration came around the sixteenth century, as the God had become the protector of warriors^[56], but this image would wane with the drop in warfare that was existing at the time. If the historical side-by-side isn't leaping out at you already, this mirrors the timeline of the Inari that *we* see: he went from connections just to the agricultural land, to his meeting with Naruto and forming a connection with him, to being on the frontlines of battle against Gato's goons in the end.

We see this first transition when he goes from scolding Naruto to watching him in the woods doing his tree-climbing training^[57]. It's because he finally sees another person embody some courage and grit, qualities which Tazuna mentions his people had lost: "Our people - and especially little Inari were robbed of the very meaning of courage"^[58]. With all the mythological journeying we've done we can see the double-meaning of Inari, as child and agricultural god: the symbiosis of people and spirit is broken.

Later in the story, we see that Inari watched the murder of his father, publicly, as it was Gato's way of discouraging any other resisters to the regime. In the manga he actually gets crucified "to ensure that such an awful thing will never disturb any of us ever again"^[59] and is textbook "dictator for the people". Such brutal sights stamped on him the way of the world:

the strong would play with its prey and humiliate the weak, change was a fantasy and heroes were idiots who purposefully stuck their necks under the guillotine. That's how reality was written, for the boy who now only saw and felt pain. I'm sure seeing Naruto reminded him of his father, and his outbursts were merely etched into him by his past - he thought he foresaw history about to repeat itself.

The overarching theme, from Iruka, to Kakashi, to Kaiza to Haku, shows that no matter what, you have to protect that which you hold precious, otherwise it shall be taken. The story of Kaiza holding the Land of Waves precious to him, meant he would do anything no matter the tiny chances of defeating someone like Gato. He had to try, and he knew that he may fail, but what was equally important is not letting the next generation be born without a flame in their bellies. Kakashi holds his comrades as truly precious, he didn't consider his own life when taken in by the Water Prison, he wanted them to escape if they had the chance. Haku holds Zabuza as that which is most precious to him, sacrificing his life without a flicker of hesitation; however, deep in the depths of all this passion is an issue: we may create future enemies by drawing the line so firmly on what we protect and what we don't. But it seems we must, so is it also inevitable that conflict will always exist? How will we achieve peace and understanding? This void is embodied in Haku even after he has found something to protect and he forces Zabuza to become the friend, the father-figure and community. By doing this he doesn't have to worry about any possible conflicts that would arise with anyone else.

Additionally, affirming our need to protect puts an incredible amount of pressure on individuals to act and imposes an ultimatum on them, most notably when Inari could only watch in fear as his mother was taken by Gato's bandits^[60]. He is just a child who cannot compete with armed swordsmen, and this well-entrenched desire to protect is obliterated in

front of him, doing much unnecessary psychological damage as he is forced to admit his own inadequacy. He shouldn't put all the pressure on himself to do so, and life shows us time and again there are people who we may consider strangers but consider us family, helping to protect his mother as if she were their own. Naruto stuck his neck out to save her, which was able to relight the belief within Inari's heart to trust in others, to fight once more for what his father believed in. He soon raced around trying to rally support in the village - the flame slowly spreading from house to house.

This goes back to what I was saying earlier that lines of trust are too sharp, but the method of establishing a “social membrane” of what to let in versus keep out is still unclear. Inari is about eight years old here, and is still much in the phase of imitating others and finding himself through constant interaction with the outside world. But not everything will resonate as profoundly as Kaiza's message or Naruto's actions. Why? Because they speak to his *spirit* and regardless of how he chooses to grow up and apply himself, he shall do it with the passion that they've shown.

Naruto beats up the goons and commends Inari for being brave, and takes a moment to apologise for calling him a baby. “You're a big strong boy”^[61] is the encouragement he wanted to hear and he begins to tear up. Fearing he may get made fun of again, Naruto reassures him - “Nothing wrong with crying when you're happy!”^[62] as he remembers how he cried when Iruka called him “Naruto Uzumaki of the Leaf”^[63]. He knows the strength that abounds from being accepted as yourself, but it's even more than that. The praise isn't *literally* true, he isn't big nor strong but it's a potential which he wants to leap into - it's part of the fuel that keeps those flames alive and if tempered carefully, will see him grow into a fine young man.

But not everybody is as fortunate as Inari to have these kinds of role models, as we look at Haku when he was a child when he faced a similar

ultimatum - but here his mother was killed and he was next. Only by succumbing entirely to the powers which lay dormant was he able to overcome certain death. But what he finds after that is sparse, soul-destroying nothingness. Nagato is another character we see, this time in Shippuden, who was just a child when he could only watch in horror at his parents being murdered in front of him, trying their best to offer him time to escape. Again, only by losing himself completely and relying on his untrained Rinnegan did he survive. The difference between Nagato and Haku were the mentors they had: Yahiko seeking peace and cooperation, Zabuza seeking vengeance, destruction and takeover.

The fact that Haku was attacked by this tribalistic domination and *won* however meant the concept of overwhelming power was inscribed into him, more specifically the utilisation of his Kekkei Genki and the ability to act without the help of others. Zabuza concretised this idea by exemplifying the dominator image further and pretty much negated any chance of Haku returning to the notions of community or knowing the strength that comes through cooperation. He wanted him to act as the unconscious warrior once again, only this time to be the demon under his control.

Naruto catches up to the rest of Team 7 at the bridge, where he has to fight the masked man from before. A particularly vexing jutsu, an Ice-Style technique, made by combining Water and Wind-Style chakra - hence it is something Kakashi cannot copy. How the Ice-Mirror technique works is that he pours himself into one, and that image is reflected onto all other mirrors, so any attack he throws becomes very difficult to identify at its source. It's even harder to see when there are hundreds of needles flying from everywhere, as he combines this with the teleportation technique^[64].

Whilst it may not be immediately obvious, this jutsu is psychologically very apt at expressing Haku's identity as someone who relies on images rather

than physical form as he took up the costume of the assailant, the boy gathering herbs and in the end the martyr. Intuitively it looks like a dimensionality reduction from his complex three-dimensional self, to a simplified two-dimensional representation used solely for the purpose of fighting.

Haku has accepted that role as a tool and made his dream the same as Zabuza's, helping in any way he could to accomplish it. He made the dream "his own" but gave up on himself first, as he says: "I shall kill my own heart with my blade - just as the word 'Shinobi' was originally the words 'heart' and 'blade' - and act as a full-fledged Shinobi would"^[65]. It's sad that he has to pierce his own heart to have the ice in his veins to take another person's life. That the Hidden Mist cultivates this mentality makes their Shinobi strong enough to do what's necessary - making the battlefield an abattoir for unconfident ninja. As the demon says, "you don't live with death or grow up needing to kill to ensure your own survival. In you those skills - and the mindset they require - die stillborn!"^[66].

Since the day Zabuza found Haku in the middle of nowhere, with nothing at all and barely able to survive in the cold, he took him in and instilled these fighting instincts into him. But no matter how hard or how long he kept trying to turn him into a machine, it was only because Haku wanted to repay Zabuza for adopting him that he could kill others. But his nature struggled against this image even when trying to be for his master. Haku wasn't a machine, and remains human.

Sasuke is straining his eyes trying to keep track of him and he is still able to move out of the way of fatal Senbon shots, slowly getting better - and he's starting to see through the illusion, dodging an almost impossible shot. The only way he could do that is by predicting Haku's movements... and lo and behold, the Sharingan has awakened^[67]! But he may not live to see them

come into bloom, as can hardly move now with all the needles that've bombarded his neck, arms and legs. Naruto thought he blocked them, but his comrade has a real chance of dying in front of him. Why would he do such a thing? Sasuke has no idea why he moved, he just did^[68], but Haku knows the reason: "in order to protect someone he cared about, he threw himself headlong into what he knew full well was a trap"^[69]. This seems to be one of the things that come with making something precious enough that you protect it, as his commitment probably stemmed from the fact he had already lost so much - he couldn't take losing his teammates.

Naruto's rage bubbles to the surface and he screams that he will never forgive him for this^[70]. Kakashi was worried that the pair of them would lose because they don't have the same killer instinct as Mist Shinobi, but even Haku cannot believe the bloodthirsty shift manifesting before him. He shatters all his mirrors with just the physicalisation of his chakra and delivers one heavy punch to the face, splitting the mask.

Despite his eyes red with blood lust, he can't kill this person now he knows it was the kid from before, as he thought they could've been friends. Haku is disgusted by this "mercy" and claims it isn't kind nor right to leave him alive as he killed his beloved friend^[71]. In fact, we know he *didn't*, but since he failed he wanted to use that to spur Naruto to hate.

Haku says nonchalantly that "Master Zabuza has no use for a weak Shinobi. You've taken away my reason for living"^[72] and wants to be killed for he no longer has a purpose. He considers himself to be a disgraced Shinobi and qualifies as a *Rōnin* - a wandering Ninja. Ro(浪) also has the meaning of "waves" and in this context refers to a ninja that has gone "adrift" from their obligations, and you don't have to stretch the definition far to see the application toward the villagers of the Land of Waves either.

This Samurai terminology has also been adapted into the workplace, as it can refer to someone that has been made jobless, and so the symbology of obligation to their Lord has been carried over to his or her employer. Fortunately there isn't an analogue to this ritualistic self-sacrifice yet, which can be demanded the moment one falls short of their duty. In the time of Edo, it wasn't uncommon for a Samurai to perform this act as it was supposedly better to cut open your stomach than live in depression, according to a cheerful excerpt from *Hagakure*^[73]. Due to this defeat Haku welcomes death, but obviously this implies throughout his whole life he would have to go undefeated.

Naruto hears of his past and how he felt totally unwanted, unloved and shunned from the world - but this is precisely why it hurts him to see someone resolve themselves to an object! But even a cursory look at his past illustrates why he can do this to himself, as Haku thought his father loved him but then he found out about his "barbaric" blood and decided to kill him^[74]. His father's love was conditional and so that's been carried over into how he forms a bond with Zabuza. In meeting someone who loved the parts of himself everyone had hated, he presumed he must've loved the *totality of his person*, but this doesn't have to be the case, in fact it looks like just the other side of the coin.

Just as Naruto finds it within himself to attack for the last time, Haku stops him - as he has sensed he may still have a shred of use left after all.

His body lays cold, motionless on the bridge just as Gato and his bumbling idiots come sauntering up - with the boss taking great pleasure in kicking the dead child who nearly broke his arm. Zabuza and Kakashi are able to stomach this heinously immoral, truly evil act without flickering probably due to the countless missions that had some of the same gut-wrenching infliction. What's interesting is that the manga showed Gato kicking his

face with enough force that blood flew out, but in the anime this is cut and we don't see anything which is an allusion to our own impressionability, our own unwillingness to stomach such things too.

Deep down this wasn't the loss of a mere tool, as Zabuza's attacks have now become sloppy, maniacal and inaccurate, with Kakashi slapping him away easily. No longer can his mind be devoid of thoughts or impulses^[75], as whether he likes it or not emotions are bubbling up to the surface.

Now that he's no longer in Gato's employ he has no need to fight, and he and Kakashi agree to stop. I imagine they just shrug shoulders and head home, it's just business, and Gato says he employs people like him as nobody cares what happens to renegades, it's just economical^[76]. All of them seem to be skirting around the humanity of it all, but Naruto doesn't buy it and keeps shouting at Zabuza to recognise what Haku meant to him. He made the ultimate sacrifice and asked for nothing, he threw away the chance to have a dream of his own and never wavered once. Can Zabuza still stand here and say that he liked Haku just because of his gifts?

The armour finally cracks and he begins to shed tears. He opens up about just how much he cherished the boy in all his quirks, and recognises the love he received. It is at this point he truly despairs. He admits that Shinobi can say and do what they will, but in the end they are still human and may not be able to escape that fact^[77]. Shinobi are trying to cut through their own heart with a blade, as Haku said, but the only way he managed to do it was by standing in the way of Kakashi, making a sacrifice for what he believed was right, in true Shinobi fashion.

It is here, standing with absolutely nothing, that Zabuza decides his final moments will be in taking down Gato. He takes one of Naruto's kunai in his mouth and charges, with this "demonic phantasm"^[78] being eerily

similar to the manifestation of the Nine-Tails that spawned when Naruto held an unconscious Sasuke. In both cases, they got riled up enough to give everything in their heart to strike, so only by loving did Zabuza actually become a demon.

Gato actually gets beheaded in the manga as Zabuza stares into his soul and says "I'm taking you with me to Hell"^[79] and watches his head roll into the mob. The main head of hydra goes down, but now all the thugs he hired aren't going to get paid - so they decide to loot any and all things from the village. It's too tall an order for Kakashi and even Naruto doesn't have enough chakra for all of them. But not all heroes wear capes (or headbands), some wear makeshift helmets and carry wooden crossbows. Inari has managed to gather everyone in the village to protect their homeland^[80] and they come together to confront the sprawling remainder of Gato's men.

With that battle over, the Land of Waves is finally liberated! Inari seems revitalised and his happy childish self, which will surely reflect on the prosperity of the land and people. A job well done indeed for Team 7.

Next we see them gathered around the graves of the boy and his master, questioning what it really means to be a Shinobi. Kakashi, being a man who stands by the traditional warrior mentality, says it isn't up to him to question things^[81]. He instils his faith into the Hokage and focuses on the mission. Naruto cannot accept this as an answer after seeing what Zabuza was deep down. His compassion went the extra mile, but in the same vein he also said "He's still my enemy"^[82] - so would we say Naruto's nindo overreaches beyond the spheres of a Shinobi?

Well, he wants to supersede the prevailing ideology of people being tools for people being people, but ironically the former is vital to wage wars

against others. Should he succeed, Shinobi as such will no longer be necessary. Now that is in the spirit of self-sacrifice.

Naruto knows what saved him from the darkness were the bridges he built with people and seeing them go out of their way to help him beyond the standard definition of a Shinobi. “Naruto built the bridge that eventually carried us all to hope and courage [...] our bridge will become super-famous the world over, as a symbol of triumph and endurance”^[83] - Tazuna. Naruto needs to take this metaphor and extend his relations far and wide, if he truly wishes to change the Ninja world. On the bridge is where Naruto first employed the Talk No Jutsu, which will come to be a valuable tool in his arsenal as that authenticity and emotion from him is what makes his inquiry so genuine.