

Original Research Article

A Brief Analysis of the Style, Content, Characteristics and Influence of Japanese Animation Director Makoto Shinkai's Works*Zeyu Hao**University of huddersfield, Huddersfield HD1 3DH*

Abstract: As Japan's second largest pillar industry and an important part of mass culture media, Japanese animation has been widely recognized by other countries for its quality and influence. Studying the successful experience of Japanese animation cross-cultural communication in the context of new media has certain representativeness and research value. At the same time, Japanese animation master Makoto Shinkai is currently one of the most watched Japanese animation writers and film directors. He is the first animator to break into the top ranks as an independent animation producer. He raised the animated film to a new height, and the study of the animated film he created has practical significance. Makoto Shinkai put forward an animation creation concept that transcends the times --- "Makoto Shinkai Model", which is more suitable for individual or small-team animation production than the traditional animation production mode that consumes a lot of money, manpower, and material resources for ordinary commercial animation. Therefore, Makoto Shinkai 's works have a strong personal style. Throughout Makoto Shinkai's animation works, the gorgeous hyper-realistic scene design endows his works with unique artistic charm, especially the performance of light and shadow and the beautiful picture presentation of many natural phenomena, which excellently create the unique atmosphere in the film. Ambiance. This article aims to analyze Makoto Shinkai's representative animation films, and to study the characteristics of its urban culture and the causes of its animation style. Study the light and shadow design in director Makoto Shinkai's animation scenes, find out the origin of the design, the expression of concepts, and the application of methods, and use this to analyze the influence of Japanese aesthetics on animation films, and explore new animation digital technology changes.

Keywords: Mass culture media cross-cultural communication; Hyper-realistic scene design; Japanese aesthetics; Animation digital technology changes

1. Urban Culture Complex in Makoto Shinkai's Animation Films

One of the common features of Makoto Shinkai's animation works is that the scenes are fine. He pays great attention to restoring the real scenes in real life on the screen of the works, hoping that viewers can have a strong and beautiful "sense of substitution", and then they can have a wonderful feeling of "as if they were the characters in the scene" when watching animation works, making the visual effect of the animation picture comparable to the real scene. Achieving this overall effect requires a very serious attitude. Before making the film, Director Makoto Shinkai will select the shooting scene according to the content of the film, select the shooting angle, and take a digital picture. Then select the appropriate picture according to the needs, and finally make the static background of the film through the image production technology. In Makoto Shinkai's famous animated film "Your Name", the screen simulation, details, colors and other aspects are extremely realistic, while maintaining the unique two-dimensional beauty of animation works. Because the characters in the picture are not realistic, the contrast between each other makes the overall animation picture cleaner and concise, giving the viewer a wonderful feeling of fusion of reality and illusion.

The urban images in Makoto Shinkai's animated films are characterized by simulating scenes in real life. From the perspective of humanities and art, animation art scene is an important factor to reflect the character of animation characters, so Makoto Shinkai pays special attention to the picture quality of animation, and strictly controls each frame of picture. In Makoto Shinkai's animated works with a strong urban atmosphere, similar environments are the material basis for arousing people's emotional resonance. From the perspective of visual art, the construction of animation scenes is the most direct and vivid[1]. In the creative process, Makoto Shinkai used the method of simulating a camera to collect images and landscapes of every corner of the city in real life, and then rendered, modified and beautified the pictures, making the pictures similar to real scenes as high as 90%. Makoto Shinkai himself once said that he insisted on implementing on-the-spot shooting to maximize the real details of people's daily life. Although there are fewer dramatic scenes in this way, the works are also full of the ups and downs of people's daily life. While creating a three-dimensional animated image world, he also enhanced the emotional resonance of the film's story and viewers, thus achieving the purpose of expressing emotion through the scenery. The urban image in Makoto Shinkai's animation works seems to be the reflection of the city. It is the sustenance framework of Makoto Shinkai's urban feelings, such as the construction of the apartment building environment of ordinary citizens in the urban daily life scenes, so as to accurately show the life in The personality of the characters creates a cold atmosphere unique to the Japanese metropolis.

2. Meteorological and Natural Scenery in Makoto Shinkai's Animation Works

One of the natural scene elements that frequently appear in the screen content of Makoto Shinkai's animation works is "cloud". The most prominent feature of the beauty of clouds in Makoto Shinkai's animation works is its color. The clouds in our real life do not have too many color changes, but the clouds in Makoto Shinkai's animations are gorgeous and colorful, with rich changes in warm and cold tones. Makoto Shinkai When using cloud colors, pay special attention to the alternation of cold and warm, such as the alternation of yellow and blue, orange and purple, etc. In terms of color, there are not only highly saturated colors but also an overall soft and light pink system, so that there is a contrast between cold and warm but not dazzling. Makoto Shinkai's color concept is a subjective expression based on reality. He emphasized the depiction of the sense of light in the color expression of the clouds in the animation screen. For example, the warm yellow tone of the light part of the cloud surface and the cool purple tone of the backlight part form a visually appealing contrast and contrast, which has a subjective expression of color similar to Impressionism. The changes in the use of the three elements of color are set according to the weather changes and atmosphere needs in the animation plot[2]. For example, the orange-pink gradient is one of the colors he often uses in his works, and it is mostly used to create a romantic and melancholy atmosphere. The pure color with higher saturation is used to set off the noon, evening and specific atmosphere. Although Makoto Shinkai used a lot of CG production techniques in the creation of the specific cloud shapes and colors in the animation screen, he still paid great attention to the details of the painting. He tried his best to express the hand-painted style and the moist and harmonious sense of watercolor painting at the same time.

This method of light irradiation produces softer light and shadow, richer gray tones, and is more common in daily life, so it also gives the audience a strong sense of substitution. For clouds under cloudy and drizzle weather, backlighting is often used. This makes the clouds in a large area of dark tones also rich in layers and changes, which will make the overall visual appreciation of the animation picture better.

The beauty of light and shadow effects in the animation screen is brought to the extreme in Makoto

Shinkai's animation, and the same is true for "cloud". Among them, the clouds have a certain contrast between light and dark, and have a strong texture of light and dark transmission. At the same time, the lighting method of clouds is also a very changeable physical fluid in nature besides water. For example, the ultra-low and ultra-thick clouds commonly used in movies are more orderly and clear than the light and dark layers of clouds and fog in the real sky. The way the light shines into the clouds is generally oblique light with a strong sense of transparency. In most of the animation scenes in the past, the clouds and the weather are more often used as a supporting object, and the creators do not describe the weather and scenery in too much detail, but in Makoto Shinkai's many animations. However, some of the opposite personality characteristics are fully displayed in the works. The meteorological clouds in his works have a strong sense of flow and realism. The shapes of the clouds are depicted in his works rigorously and meticulously, and the various meteorological clouds and other living environment things set off by the surroundings have a strong sense of reality. regional characteristics. In fact, this kind of authenticity comes from Makoto Shinkai's childhood experience and love for his hometown, as well as his habit of carefully observing the subtle things in daily life around him. He once said in an interview: "In the animations I made, the visual transparency is very high, and the air is shining. This may be related to the area where I grew up. I was born and raised in Nagano Prefecture, Japan. The average altitude there is about 1,000 meters, surrounded by mountains and valleys, the light is bright and dark, and the air is very fresh, which has an impact on the light and images of the world in my mind." He pays attention to the real and delicate things in the surrounding environment in daily life. Life situations and details are vividly displayed and created through their own animation screen language.

The clouds in Makoto Shinkai's works belong to the realistic category, but why do the viewers feel the beauty of astronomical phenomena far stronger than the real weather scene? The answer comes from its exaggerated performance techniques based on reality. First of all, the shape of the clouds adopts an exaggerated presentation method, which intentionally emphasizes the winding and changeable contour lines of the clouds, and exaggerates the shape to show the vast beauty of the natural atmosphere gently and unrestrainedly, so that the screen area occupied by it increases. This adds to the dreamy and hazy beauty of the picture. To say that its changeability means that the shape has no concept at all, but is round or narrow, dense or distant according to the needs of the plot[2]. At the same time, the beauty of its shape is also reflected in the change of cloud flow density. In addition, the characteristics of the shape are also reflected in the difference in shape in different seasons and different time periods. It can be seen that the creator's usual meticulous observation ability and profound sketching ability, and his shape also shows a strong sense of reality. Exaggerated and changeable techniques, but still let the audience feel a strong sense of "reality". This kind of reality is an illusory sense of reality, that is to say, although it is not real, it still makes the viewer intoxicated and convinced. This is one of the charms of animation.

3. Light, Shadow and Color in Makoto Shinkai's Animation Works

Makoto Shinkai used a more realistic scene drawing style in his animated films to create a realistic picture effect, showing the unique artistic charm of two-dimensional animation. A large number of light and shadows are used to convey the theme and emotion of the film to the audience through each frame. Ambient light is mainly used to set off the stage atmosphere of the scene and explain the time point when the plot takes place[3]. The ambient light design in the scene content of Makoto Shinkai's animation works is different from the Japanese-style scene design represented by Hayao Miyazaki that we are familiar with, and is contrary to the mainstream

Japanese-style scene drawing style. Different from the elegant and soft ambient light in the works of Hayao Miyazaki's scene painter Kazuo Oga, the ambient light design in Makoto Shinkai's animation scenes has the following unique features.

Among the many film scenes directed by Makoto Shinkai, the dreamy ambient light design can be said to be the charm of Makoto Shinkai's animation scenes. Among them, dusk is one of the most frequently expressed scene time points in the film. In the animated film "The place promised in our early days", the train station platform is shrouded in a thick golden color, and the gorgeous orange-red gradient forms a strong contrast with the dark blue gradient of the distant sky. Similarly, in the movie "5 Centimeters Per Second", the heroes and heroines who pass the train crossing are also set at dusk. Again, one side of the frame is a bright orange gradient, while the other is a dark blue gradient. The depiction of the starry sky has a similar effect in Makoto Shinkai's many films. The colorful nebulae are intertwined and the sky is full of shining stars, making the scene more dreamy, hazy and mysterious. Regarding the natural light during the day, Makoto Shinkai also has a unique performance in the scene, showing a very penetrating light color everywhere. The light blue sky shows different shades from dark to light, and the dark parts of the clouds range from orange and pink to dark blue. Under the natural light during the day, the light pink light source and the light blue cold light each occupy a corner of the screen. This hazy and dreamy light color effect is reflected in many of Makoto Shinkai's films.

The strong light and shadow produce a strong contrast between light and dark, which highlights the main objects in the scene and also renders the emotional ups and downs of the characters. The strengthened building shadow effectively highlights the sense of volume of the main building[4]. The enhanced character shadows also make the two-dimensional characters more three-dimensional. The strong contrast between the light-receiving color and the dark part color not only makes the shape of the light source exceptionally prominent, but also connects the shadow shapes of the dark part into a whole. This is exactly what Makoto Shinkai deliberately expressed in his animation scene design.

The exaggerated light shape is another highlight of Makoto Shinkai's animation film. In the scenes of many animated films, enhanced ray modeling and eye-catching radial starlight are used to represent light sources such as sunlight, making the light effects of the scenes more dazzling and gorgeous. Ring-shaped lens flares are also often seen in Makoto Shinkai's scene lights. These enhanced lens lights and exaggerated light shapes are not only close to the pictures under the photographer's lens in reality, but also form a digital image style that is completely different from the style of photographic images because of its unique shape and color.

The depiction of the shadows of clouds, trees, and flowers enriches the details of the natural scenes in the picture. In the empty scene, it also reflects the ultimate pursuit of "things and sorrow" in traditional Japanese aesthetics[5]. The cherry blossoms are falling, the clouds are light and the wind is light, the shadows of the trees are dancing, and the beautiful things are fleeting. Mono-sorrow aesthetics not only penetrates into Japanese literature, but also penetrates into the scenes conveyed by Japanese animation. Makoto Shinkai's animation works also reflect the aesthetic form of "things and sorrows". "Sorrows" does not make people sad or cry, but makes the whole animation story cover a layer of light sadness, which makes the viewer feel sad. The reader experiences a wonderful feeling of beauty but also sadness and melancholy. "Things and sorrows" is a symbol of Japanese culture. "Material" refers to the changing stars and the myriad changes of all things.

On the stone-paved road, outside the deserted shrine, etc., the shadows of the trees are shaking, and the mottled shadows are endowed with colorful gradients from blue-purple to rose red. Director Makoto Shinkai

carefully designed lonely and beautiful scenes in it. In the animated film “5 Centimeters Per Second”, the large cherry blossoms in full bloom cover the scene with pink tones, and at the same time project beautiful projections of petals emitting pale pink light on the car windows and car body under the tree, creating a sense of beauty and touching picture atmosphere. In the animated film “The Garden of Words”, the shadows of the leaves reflected on the water surface achieve the ultimate in two-dimensional animation scene realism with realistic images.

In Makoto Shinkai’s films, the lighting effects of the scenes not only exist to highlight the gorgeous visual effects, but also to better set off the animated characters. In Makoto Shinkai’s popular work “Your Name” in recent years, meteors and meteorites streaked across the night sky, leaving brilliant and dazzling light bands, exaggerating the emotional sublimation of the protagonist. When the hero and heroine are looking at each other, the light transmitted from a distance further strengthens the outline and shape of the characters, and also promotes the emotional relationship between the two parties. In the animation “The Garden of Words”, the hero and heroine sit in the gazebo, and the warm rays of light shining from the backgrounds of both sides set off the warm and romantic mentality of the characters.

With the development of computers, computer coloring is increasingly used in the field of animation coloring, gradually changing the traditional hand-painting method^[1]. The light and shadow texture brought by digital software achieves a dazzling effect that cannot be expressed by traditional hand-painted light and shadow. Makoto Shinkai once introduced his scene creation in an interview. In order to distinguish it from the mainstream method of using paint to color and draw the scene at that time, he deliberately used photoshop digital software to create color transparency that could not be highlighted by paint. This is also a major change to the traditional hand-painted coloring technique, allowing the audience to see the unique charm of digital scene art.

4. The Sound Effects, Music and “Rotoscoping” Creative Technique Of “Makoto Shinkai Style” In Makoto Shinkai’s Animation Works

Makoto Shinkai is very attentive in the use of music and background sound effects in the animation screen. The dubbing and background music of the animation screen are also extremely important. In many cases, they can convey to the viewer some content that the screen cannot show during the progress of the animation plot. For example, the arrangement of the narration and the rhythmic music can better promote the development of the plot while setting off the atmosphere, greatly increasing the expressive tension of the animation. The music and sound effects of animation pictures are not always completed independently. Makoto Shinkai’s partner in music creation is the music creator Tenmon. He has his own unique style - pure, soothing. As a creator, he pays the same attention to details as Makoto Shinkai, and he is good at grasping the small rhythm and moving the viewer’s heart a little bit. Tenmon is good at using piano and stringed instruments.

When watching Makoto Shinkai’s animation works, there will be a quiet and gentle inner feeling. This is not to say that Makoto Shinkai’s animation works lack dynamism, but highlights the characteristics of dynamic and static coordination, which is more inclined to the performance of static pictures. The animation “Your Name” stands out with the performance of static pictures. The beautiful frame and melodious artistic conception make the audience greatly touched their inner emotions, and they are deeply impressed and brought to the audience. A new creative inspiration for animation design.

The biggest feature of Makoto Shinkai’s animation is the beautiful animation scene content, whether it is the street corner with falling cherry blossoms, the water surface hit by raindrops, or the quaint village or the high-rise

Tokyo, it all reflects Makoto Shinkai and his other characters. The exquisite craftsmanship of the team. Makoto Shinkai cleverly found a balance between the traditional aspects of Japanese animation and high technology. He used a lot of “rotoscoping” in his films, which is different from the “copy” in traditional animation. Yes, Makoto Shinkai does not describe the moving things in the picture, such as people, animals or other things, but makes a technical change to the scene in real life, and uses digital technology to achieve artistic quality on the basis of the real scene. This kind of live-action rotoscoping is widely used in Makoto Shinkai’s films.

The process of rotoscoping not only preserves the sense of reality of daily life, but also carries out the artist’s subjective creation in a limited context, adding to the artistry and aesthetics of the work^[1]. Such scenes abound in Makoto Shinkai’s films, and over time, rotoscoping has become an important aspect of Makoto Shinkai’s video features.

Makoto Shinkai is known as a “image literati in the digital age”,^[4] and this title sums up the uniqueness of his works well. The rotoscoping based on digital technology combined with the gorgeous and romantic light and shadow in Makoto Shinkai’s works creates a beautiful and poetic image space for the audience, forming a unique “Makoto Shinkai style”.

5. Conclusion Summary

The basis of animation works is stories, and many stories are fictional in nature. The creator explains many aspects of real life to the viewers in various forms and perspectives through the framework of the fictional story. The choice of narrative symbols is the key to convey. From the perspective of the post-industrial age, the alienation of the human spiritual world by the development of urban modernization is becoming increasingly apparent^[5]. The elimination of aesthetics by consumerism is increasingly apparent^[5]. The stereotyped symbols and types can no longer meet people’s viewing needs. People are more eager to appreciate animation works that focus on their inner world and reflect on real problems and contradictions from a unique and novel perspective. In Makoto Shinkai’s animated film “The Garden of Words”, the hero and heroine are the epitome of the most common characters in Japanese society in this era. They restrained and carefully poured out their feelings, both lonely and introverted. Animation is a complex form of artistic expression, and the narrative of its works is quite complicated. Many content elements must be closely linked with the current cultural context. In the end, it is possible to complete an excellent work that arouses the emotional resonance of the audience.

With the spread of “consumerism” in the current social environment, it is accompanied by the trend of “aestheticization of daily life”. This is the product of the transition to the economy and society, and it is unstoppable. As a typical case of “aestheticization of daily life”, animation is not only a cultural product for entertaining the public, but more importantly, it needs to have the return of aesthetic value and cultural appeal.

Since the creation of the first personal animated short film in 1997, director Makoto Shinkai has always adhered to the exploration of the characters’ hearts, eager to seek the free habitat of the soul from novel angles such as anti-nature. For example, in the animation “Your Name”, elements of “witches” in traditional Japanese shrine culture repeatedly appear. The identity of the heroine and her grandmother “witches” is the turning point of the entire film. With the help of the power of “witch”, the hero and heroine break through the barriers of time and space, life and death, and finally get together. In fact, what “Witch” connects is not only the emotional appeal of the hero and heroine, but also the inner desire of the hero and heroine who lived in the urban environment since childhood for the soul to return to nature. In the activities of the traditional Japanese shrine culture “shaman”, “this sense of sacred mission and sense of historical responsibility transcends individual survival and life, and

enables the existence of limited individuals to acquire sacred life meaning, value, and survival intention.” In the film, the meaning of life and the intention of living are born from the fusion of tradition and nature. What the hero is desperately looking for is not only the heroine herself, but also what she symbolizes: the great nature. The cultural appeal of the film is highlighted here. This is to explore a link between the gradually disappearing traditional culture and the strong modern urban civilization.

In the current era of multicultural collision and friction, many people wander between multiple cultures and unknowingly become “marginal people” in the cultural torrent[5]. Faced with traditional culture and modern culture, these “marginal people” should completely “abandon the old and welcome the new” or “stay in the old ways”? This gradually exacerbated the split and alienation of personality. People have lost the dwelling of their souls. Animation art, as one of the mainstream forms of artistic expression today, should undertake the repair of personality by art. It is undeniable that the current animation art culture is the result of multiple cultures such as “visual culture”, “consumer culture” and “media culture”. But a good animation work is not enough if it only shows a beautiful picture. As an important form of expression of today’s art, animation should always adhere to “aesthetic value” and “emotional value” as the main criteria for judging, rather than just “commercial value” hegemony. The aesthetic education power of animation should be fully utilized.

Makoto Shinkai’s works are not perfect, and his early works also have the problem that the visual spectacle is greater than the value of the content. However, with his continuous exploration and progress in practice, he has gradually formed his own unique narrative style and Makoto Shinkai’s animation image style, and has gradually matured. What is even more commendable is that in his works, he always insists on thinking about culture and thinking about the belonging of human spirit. This spirit of reflection still gives a lot of inspiration to animation creators around the world.

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