

Dynamic Visual Prose--a Study on the Visual Art Style of Takahata Isao's Animated Films

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ABSTRACT. *Takahata Isao is a giant in the Japanese animation film industry. He has created many of the most popular animated films. His unique visual artistic style fully interprets the artistic and ideological nature of animation. This paper attempts to analyze and study the visual art style of Takahata Isao's works from three visual elements: painting style, color application and stream of consciousness expression. To pay tribute to this animation craftsman, and also to provide some help for the visual expression of Chinese animation films in the future, so as to provide some reference for relevant researchers.*

KEYWORDS: *Takahata isao, Artistic style, Visual elements*

1. Introduction

Animated film is a visual feast composed of picture elements such as composition, scene, character modeling and props. Compared with ordinary films, animated film is an art form with a high degree of assumption, and pays more attention to the shaping of visual art style. Creators need to accurately grasp and reasonably use the visual language in animation, show the artistic style and creation concept with individualism, and express the inner spiritual world and emotional resonance of animation. Japan, which has a profound impact on the world's animation films, has a group of gifted animation masters, Hayao Miyazaki is one of the great masters familiar to the audience. There exists another animation giant behind Hayao Miyazaki who is the talent scout of him and the guide of Joe Hisaishi – Takahata Isao, one of the three giants of Ghibli. Takahata Isao is an animation director with a very personal artistic style. Her major works include *Tombstone for Fireflies*, *Only Yesterday*, *The Raccoon War*, *The Tale of the Bamboo Cutter*. Unlike Miyazaki's animated films which are full of romantic magical realism and have a single and fixed visual style, Takahata Isao is proficient in describing events around the world, focusing on the gloomy and vigorous realities to display with a diverse visual style. In terms of his works, Takahata Isao delivers a fresh and profound song of time through his unique painting style, vivid colors and stream of consciousness with a combination of virtuality and reality.

2. Unique Painting Style

The painting style in animation is an artistic expression element as well as a form of visual artistic expression. Its essence lies in the creator's unique and distinct expression of aesthetics, which has infinite possibilities. It not only shows the creator's reasonable control over the representational elements such as character image, scene style and artistic language, but also shows the creator's expressive force in the choice of subject matter, the in-depth exploration of theme ideas, the uniqueness of content understanding, and the reasonable expression of these emotional elements. Only the animation works with original style can have great visual impact and artistic appeal, thus successfully realizing the expression of creators' unique thoughts, feelings and aesthetic concepts. Takahata Isao visited art galleries around the world, where he learned the beauty and power of art. He wrote a book, *A Painting Opens the World* documenting more than 60 years of exhibition thinking, which served as the basis for the diverse visual styles that Takahata Isao would go on to create.

2.1 Simple and Delicate Realistic Painting Style

Most of Takahata Isao's realist work tells the story in plain, painterly language, with prose and poetic storytelling. Since the *Prince of the Sun* in 1968, the painting style has presented a fine realistic style, focusing on the real changes of light and shadow in the actual space and striving to restore the real things. In *Only Yesterday*, Miaoko tries her hand to pick the red flowers to make a safflower cake, which is both real and beautiful. In order to recreate the scene in the film, Takahata Isao visits the farmers' homes and makes a book about the process of picking and drying the red flowers, which is taught to farmers. It is this spirit of craftsmanship that makes the portrayal of safflower in the film particularly detailed. It is almost the same as the safflower in reality, but more dynamic and vibrant. Takahata Isao likes to describe a real thing or environment, rather than abstract symbols, in her animations, a realistic style not only in the brushwork but also in the plots and characterization. Takahata Isao is delicate and not pompous in his characterization. Each character is a flesh and blood body full of emotion, each emotion full of the tension of real life. In *My Neighbors the Yamadas*, which was produced in 1999, Takahata Isao took the traditional Japanese family as the main body and put it on the screen, which truly showed the happiness, anger, sadness and happiness of the family. The film depicts the original appearance of life everywhere. Takahata Isao pays close attention to the social reality from a unique perspective, portrays the warmth and coldness of human nature, deduces realistic and emotional animated films, and narrates the obscure philosophy of life in easy to understand words. Even if the audience is not in the audience, this kind of reality can still be felt with empathy.

2.2 Flexible and Elegant Minimalist Line Art

Animated films often pursue delicate and complicated characterization in order to portray the characters more vividly. However, Takahata Isao did the opposite, depicting complex characters with simple lines, which was a breakthrough of self innovation. In *My Neighbors the Yamadas*, Takahata Isao abandons the traditional realistic hand-painted tradition and uses the minimalist lines to sketch and shape the characters. This is a bold attempt for Ghibli or Takahata Isao himself. In this minimalist sketch style, the image is exaggerated and each has its own characteristics. The mother with wavy lines and curly hair, father always likes to wear a simple white shirt, grandmother with hairpin hair, sister with short hair and big eyes, and brother with freckles on his face. Each character has its own characteristics and vivid expression under the drawing of minimalist lines. The details are also handled lively and full of life beauty, which makes the audience not only deeply impressed, but also feel the pain and joy of life in the play. In the animated film *The Red Turtle* released in 2016, Takahata Isao served as artistic director, which was also the first overseas joint work of Studio Ghibli. It can be seen that the visual art style of the whole film reveals a sense of minimalism. The simple and single line outline of the character, the face as the main image performance of the character: the character's "bean eyes", the lines of "mouth", "eyebrows" and "nose", between the points, lines and surfaces, the characters' inner anxiety, joy, uneasiness and other performances are incisively and vividly. It is also thanks to Michael Dudok de Wit and Takahata Isao, who love minimalist art style, that makes this minimalist animation stand out and win the best independent animation feature film of "Annie Award" in 2017.

2.3 Unique Ink and Wash

Chinese traditional ink and wash art flourished in the Tang Dynasty. Influenced by Taoist color concept, Chinese ink painting advocates black and white. Only two simple colors can depict the world with literati's interest and style. Blank art creates an artistic conception, which is a kind of implicit expression. It increases the space sense of the picture and renders the level sense of the picture. Appropriate blank space can make people's vision relax. It can not only highlight the subject of the picture, but also open the imagination space of people, and guide the viewer's eyes to the subject. Chinese ink animation is a great creation in the history of Chinese animation. It combines the layer by layer rendering of ink painting and remote artistic conception with animation, which creates the image of ink animation with the integration of thick, thin, virtual and real, light ink and light haze. Takahata Isao is very appreciative of Chinese ink and wash cartoons. He once saw the early *Baby Tadpoles Look for Their Mother* by Chinese animation master Teweï. He was very impressed by Mr. Teweï's ink and wash animation, and said that this kind of ink and wash blank style had a certain impact on many of his works.

The characters, scenes and so on in *The Tale of the Bamboo Cutter* are directly outlined by lines. The pigment is not a traditional Japanese mineral pigment, but the

use of Western watercolor. When Princess Kaguya returned to the mountain for the second time, lifeless black mountain, starry white snow and glimmering red buds of snot-white prune were in an integral reflection with the multilayer rendering of the dark situation of virtuality and reality to reveal the intangible artistic conception between the real and virtual difference and a lonely feeling of rapid changes occurring. When painting the landscape, the white treatment in the ink painting style makes the landscape appear full of artistic conception and layering and exposes people to a tranquil and intangible feeling. In *My Neighbors the Yamadas*, he also applied a multitude of white treatment. When the couple went boating between the inky landscape, a prominent white style with ink is adopted to turn the black color combined virtuality and reality sprayed in the mountains. Creeks flowing under the boat pushed them forward, making the viewers immersed in the tranquility of ink painting art.

3. Fantastic Animation Color

Color is not only the visual effect of light produced by human eyes and brain, but also the visual expression element of free shuttle in the animation world. Animation color stimulates both physical and psychological aspects of the audience. Through intuitive visual experience, it brings visual impact and stimulation to the audience. The other is the emotional touch and change caused by color differences caused by the movie plot. As an indispensable visual element, color shows infinite connotation and charm in the aspects of environment rendering, role shaping and emotional expression. The change of background color can create the ups and downs of the story; the collocation of the characters' colors can make the viewers understand the characters' personality characteristics and inner changes intuitively; the rendering of the environment color can display the author's emotional expression as a whole. Takahata Isao's animation color is very particular. He often uses soft light and dark contrast colors to set off the psychological world of the characters, leaving a large margin of blank and elegant color matching to render the environment atmosphere.

3.1 Complementary Environment Rendering

we can often see the sorrow when watching his animated movies which is recorded in *Yuxiaojie of Genji Monogatari* by Motoori Norinaga, a Japanese scholar during the Edo era, referring to a kind of emotion in the interlink of sadness and sympathy as well as love and sentiment. Out of the awe and love for nature, Japanese people can gain an acute understanding of the beauty to be losing quickly in a second. [1]In the *The Raccoon War*, when the civet cats found that the struggle was useless and decided to accept the reality, they all used magic to show the original appearance of the forest. The bright and bright colors here, the green fields and mountains, the blue sky, and the brilliant colors of Takahata Isao reflected the desperation of the civet cats. Takahata Isao uses the unique visual elements in his animated films to explore the traditional Japanese aesthetic pleasure and recreate the

beauty of sorrow, which shows his rational use of color and expresses the philosophic concept of the beauty of sorrow. In *The Tale of the Bamboo Cutter*, when Princess Kaguya was a child, her hometown was full of vitality with orange earth, green branches and colorful butterflies. In contrast to the scene Princess Kaguya saw when she came back to her hometown again, everything withered and the scenery was no longer there. The whole mountain was dark and in sharp contrast with before, beauty is short-lived, fleeting and sad.

3.2 Role Building with Abundant Color and Affection

Color plays an important role in the performance of animated characters. In animated films, the performance of main characters in color can reflect the characteristics of characters. The protagonist's color in the design is bright and attractive. If the character is steady and steady, the color will tend to be thick. If the character is evil and ferocious, the color will be cold and dull. In *My Neighbors the Yamadas*, the color lead and watercolor are used in the coloring part of the film. The color is fresh and elegant. In the film, dad forgets to bring his umbrella. When his family comes to take him home, the color is bright and colorful, which highlights that each character loves his family very much. Although the family quarrels, they still love each other. The film tends to be bright and elegant in color. The color is fresh, which sets off the warm and heavy family affection. It has not only the collision and friction of daily life, but also happiness and satisfaction. In *Only Yesterday*, miaoko recalls the scene of meeting a boy who likes her in the next class at the corner of the street after the baseball game in the fifth grade of primary school. The orange and yellow sunset shines on the two people. The bright color makes the viewer feel the two young and ignorant and the memory of the first feelings of youth and beauty.

3.3 The Combination of Light and Shade to Express Joy and Sadness

In Takahata Isao's works, light and shade are not black or white. He gives more emotional color to light and shade. In *The Tale of the Bamboo Cutter*, when Princess Kaguya goes out to see cherry blossoms, she sees peach red flowers, green branches and green grass. Takahata Isao boldly used colors and applied heavy colors. The bright and cheerful colors at this time set off the short-term happiness that Princess Kaguya was free and no longer bound. On the way home, I met my childhood playmate. With the advent of a rain, the color began to change to gray and black, highlighting the innocence and sadness that it was hard to return to childhood. The change of light and shade can attract the attention of the audience, and the viewer can feel the emotional change produced by the work. In *Tombstone for Fireflies*, the dark red color is the appearance of the dead world, while the normal color is the real world. At the end of the film, the souls of brothers and sisters meet in the dark red color, and the two people are closely related under the night. This loneliness is in sharp contrast to the bright and colorful lights from the city in the distance. The bright city lights do not make people feel happy. The collocation of different colors

in animation often reveals the author's personal preferences and emotional expression. In the color change, the audience's emotion is sublimated and satisfied. However, in Takahata Isao's works, color is not unchangeable and represents a kind of emotion. The combination of light and dark color has more charm and infinite possibility in visual metaphor.

4. The Expression of Stream of Consciousness of the Combination of Virtual and Actual

In animated films, “stream of consciousness” is often used to show the inner world of characters, making the plot more rich and coherent. The use of stream of consciousness is to materialize people's invisible and abstract inner world, so that we can better feel the characters' thinking and emotional changes. Unlike Hayao Miyazaki, a contemporary master, who was good at using magic style to express things or characters' hearts, Takahata Isao likes to use stream of consciousness and surrealism to express his inner thoughts and thoughts. Takahata Isao's expression of stream of consciousness is not only to satisfy the characters' inner fantasy world, but also to express the inner feelings of animated films and strengthen the expressive force and tension of animation.

4.1 Satisfy the Characters' Inner Fantasy World

The use of stream of consciousness breaks the boundaries of time and space, combines the pictures of different spatial dimensions together, so that the creator can better express the theme and make the whole story more coherent. In the *Tombstone for Fireflies*, when the hungry brother is swimming in the sea, he turns back to the shore. His mother waves to him and asks him to come back to eat cold noodles. This flashback expression method of stream of consciousness breaks the spatial structure, but it is not abrupt at all. On the contrary, it appropriately highlights the brother and sister's strong desire for food and their deep yearning for their mother. In the *Only Yesterday*, miaoko often recalls herself when she was a child. Takahata Isao used the expression form of inner monologue of stream of consciousness, which is the expression of the real meaning of the protagonist and gives the audience a real and intuitive feeling. In the animation, miaoko of two periods always appears alternately. At the end, both adult miaoko and childhood miaoko appear at the same time. Takahata Isao deliberately creates a sense of time and space crisscross and parallels the story structure, presenting the fragments of memory perfectly, and unconsciously narrates and condenses miaoko's ordinary and real growth process. Miaoko's final ending, it seems that under the guidance of her childhood friends, she really listened to her inner feelings. She took the train back to her hometown and chose to accept min Xiong's feelings. At the same time, she started her new life track.

4.2 Express the Inner Feelings of the Film

There are various ways to express feelings in animated films. Many creators often like to hide their feelings in the stream of consciousness, because the stream of consciousness can not be achieved in real life. This kind of unreal feeling instead contributes to the most genuine emotional expression of the creator. In *The Tale of the Bamboo Cutter*, Princess Kaguya decides to elope with her lover. They start to run hand in hand and run and fly. They are soaring in the sky, from white clouds and blue sky to grassland and lakes. This process seems a naked eye 3D painting volume. . Finally, they run to the moon together and are forcibly separated by the energy generated by the moon. This is the protagonist's last self exile in pursuit of freedom, realizing his wish before leaving this world. When grandma read out her wedding speech in *My Neighbors the Yamadas*, Takahata Isao chose to use surreal techniques to vividly and wittily show the audience what is marriage life. In fact, it is subconscious fantasy of future life. For example, father and mother experience the storm together on the sea, which means that the partner needs to take responsibility in life, the crops harvested in the field mean a new baby born together by the couple. Takahata Isao's works of art are derived from his perception of life and his artistic expression of life. Every small piece of his work is closely related to reality, The characters in the works are the typical representatives of ordinary individuals in real life. In real life, we can find the shadow of the characters in the works. After being refined and sublimated by him, the ordinary and trivial matters in family life are more vivid and specific. The interpretation of family ethical relations is very detailed and thought-provoking.

5. Conclusion

With his unique visual elements, Takahata Isao shows us the unique artistic and ideological charm of animation. His persistent, tough and serious craftsmanship spirit is worth learning. His works are different from that of those showy masters on a blind pursuit of amazing painting skills and with ornaments of tenebrous words. He is always using the most simple way of creation to provide a detailed interpretation of ordinary life and an insight into the world. In recent years, some domestic animations, such as *Monkey King: Hero is Back*, *White Snake*, and *Nezha: Birth of the Demon Child*, have achieved good results and public praise. In the final analysis, the reason is that the directors of these animations have devoted all their efforts to creating animation works. It is not so much the rise of domestic animation as the return of craftsman spirit. When the directors put down the box office and outside constraints, concentrate on creation and independent thinking, our Chinese animation can really rise.

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