

Conference Paper

Representation of Western and Eastern Culture in Hayao Miyazaki Animation

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Abstract

The article explores representation of Western and Eastern Culture using an example of Japanese animation of Hayao Miyazaki. By analyzing Miyazaki's main images and techniques, the author shows the complexity and ambiguity of transcultural processes that, in turn, demand an expansion and revision of the main concepts of cross-cultural interaction.

Keywords: Japanese animation, Eastern culture, Western culture, intercultural dialogue, interpretation, adaptation

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1. Introduction

Hayao Miyazaki's animation has already achieved a status of classics, not only in Japanese cinema, but also in global culture. It enjoys equal standing with the films by Akira Kurosawa, Kaneto Shindo, Nagisa Oshima and others. Russian-language publications talk about the representation of Japanese culture – and Asian culture in general – for the 'Western' audience [2]. As for Miyazaki, it is often noted that he is interested in the ideas of the so-called Pan-Asianism – an ideology and political movement that promotes unity and integration among Asian peoples [3].

2. Characteristics of Hayao Miyazaki's Animation

However, when we analyse Hayao Miyazaki's images in detail, the 'non-Japanese' character of many of them becomes obvious (apart from *My Neighbor Totoro*). Rather, Miyazaki's nature is a construct that combines virgin purity and radioactive waste, power and aggression (*Nausicaa of the Valley of the Winds*, *Princess Mononoke*).

Many authors note Miyazaki's 'dynamism' and his focus on 'transformation'. One of the examples of this approach is a 'conjunction' of two semantically opposing 'structures' within one image. For example, the forest in *Princess Mononoke* is both a reserve

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for a unique world of spirits and beings fighting against civilization, and an entertainment park.

Western culture is undoubtedly present in 'socially oriented' works by Hayao Miyazaki. Miyazaki's style was developed, to a large extent, in a 'dialogue' with an outstanding American animator Walt Disney (not by chance he is known around the world as a 'Japanese Disney'). One of the examples is the trademark pupils and outsized eyes prevalent in the Japanese animation. Classical Japanese drawings of the previous era have 'Eastern' narrow eyes. Some researchers believe that these huge pulsating pupils common in the Japanese animation are a result of the influence by Betty Boop and other classical Disney characters, such as Bambi or Mickey Mouse.

Indeed, Hayao Miyazaki's early works of 1970s–1980s are almost identical to the US animation. Another example of the images of one culture being transformed within another culture are Miyazaki's characters turned into pigs – despite the fact that pigs are considered 'non-Japanese' animals [1].

Subsequent analysis requires us to focus on typically 'Western' and 'Eastern' characteristics. Again, analysis of the relevant literature shows a strong 'dichotomy'. One of the oppositions is an attitude to nature: The West is aggressive; the East is not. Explanations tend to refer to the religious 'background'. Japan was influenced by several religious traditions. Zen Buddhism came from abroad. Shinto is a national tradition underpinning Japanese identity. Approaching Shinto from the cultural interaction angle, we may say that after the WWII (that is, in the latter half of the XXth century), Japanese culture produces images that would be given new meanings in new contexts. For example, the concept of 'purity' is reinterpreted in a general cultural sense, and not only in its ritual meaning.

Aggressive attitude to nature is considered a 'Western' characteristic (see the etymology of the word 'culture'). Turning to Hayao Miyazaki's animation, it is easy to see these 'Western' motives, and they should not be interpreted as *only* a reminiscence of American or European challenges of the 'postcolonial' era.

Japanese and Western cultures became historically intertwined several centuries ago. Literature often exhibits 'Western' influences. However, global popularity of Hayao Miyazaki is an established fact, and his influence may continue in more concrete forms. Today it is obvious that the Japanese screen culture has reinterpreted the most important Western concepts: war, peace, harmony, beauty, humanity.

Hayao Miyazaki's adaptation of Western literary works is another theme for consideration. According to the artist's biography, he has never limited his work to 'borrowing

images', both from literary sources (for example, Sherlock Holmes, a famous English detective created by A.Conan-Doyle), and from European folklore or urban landscapes.

3. Conclusion

All of this shows that Japanese culture has literally 'conquered' the world through its animation. An analysis of Hayao Miyazaki's images and artistic techniques highlights a symbolism of this unique dialogue. Western world recognizes itself and its own history, with its mistakes and catastrophes, in the interpretations by the Japanese artist – someone 'different', but not 'alien'.

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