

# The development and influence of Japanese aesthetics and its manifestation in Japanese animation

Yanze Li<sup>1</sup>, and Quanhong Jiang<sup>2\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup>BeiHang University, School of Automation Science and Electrical Engineering, Beijing 100191, China

<sup>2</sup>BeiHang University, School of Foreign Languages, Beijing 100191, China

**Abstract:** This paper sorts out the evolution and development of Japanese aesthetics chronologically, summarizes the features of Japanese animation, interprets the charm of Japanese animation by linking the characteristics of Japanese culture that correspond to Japanese animation, and eventually discusses the controversial social impact of Japanese culture on China brought by Japanese animation.

## 1 Introduction

With the stable development and prosperity of the world economy, the demand of people for better life including material and spiritual enjoyment is increasingly upgraded, resulting in the vigorous development of related recreational industries. In the era of digital and information technology, animation and its correlational industries have acquired a bigger stage and achieved resounding success with the assistance of computer graphics technology. In spite of the fact that Japan's animation industry started relatively late compared with its European and American rivals, with its unique style, profound national complex and sophisticated production, it has received considerable attention worldwide and has become a mainstay industry in Japan, playing a vital role not only in creating economic benefits but also in the process of cultural export. In addition to excellent production and design, its inner-core reflects the unique aesthetic characteristics of Japan, which is the epitome of history, culture, political situation and people's livelihood of Japan. It is no exaggeration to say that the study of Japanese animation industry is an indispensable part of the research on Japanese aesthetic concepts, as well as the analysis of the current situation of cultural export.

---

\* Corresponding author: [jiangquanhong@buaa.edu.cn](mailto:jiangquanhong@buaa.edu.cn)

## **2 Japan's unique aesthetic consciousness**

### **2.1 Aesthetics among east Asia**

The aesthetics of a culture is of great importance as it essentially reflects the spiritual pursuit and tendency of a group of people, working as a name card of the civilization. In the sense of geography, countries located in East Asia has a tendency of aesthetic convergence because of its distinctive geographical location and cultures radiating outwards from ancient China. Despite the impact of westernization in modern times, the theme still remains constant.

East Asian aesthetics is the aesthetics of living, concentrating on the basic theme of the living world. Its origin can be traced back to the myths and religious beliefs of primitive ancestors. The emergence of traditional myths and religious beliefs marked the progress of local civilization transforming towards a higher level, while some national cultural spirits and ideas arose in this process.

### **2.2 The influence of Japanese primitive myths on its culture**

Compared with other myths, the structure of Japanese primitive mythology is hardly ambiguous. With the concept of "animism", the story is rich in dramatic changes, narrating the legend about creation of beings and nations. The common deities are mostly deifications of natural phenomena, whilst the common demigods turn out to be idealization of national heroes. Therefore, Japanese mythology is adept in representing the emotion of gods, and extends mythological pedigree to the secular society. Hence individual or families' identities are often indicated by myths and legends or mythologized historical records. [1] The essence of such phenomenon lies in idealization and beautification, which demonstrates the pursuit of ideal personality and perfect image, holding a profound and lasting effect on Japanese culture and social ethics, and acting on the descendants to trace back to their ancestor's origin, which is recognized as the pursuit of beauty and the lively practice of the idea about "the unity of beauty and goodness".

In addition, the deified aesthetic consciousness gradually evolved into the comprehension of the world. For instance, Okakura's "the unity of matter and oneself becomes more dominant in Japanese thought, and finally the complete integration of the matter and oneself is in the inevitable destiny" explains the relationship between heaven and beings in traditional Japanese thoughts. It is universally acknowledged that the relationship between human and the world in traditional Japanese thoughts is more reflected in the unity of matter and oneself. [1] Despite East Asian countries share the same belief of the unity of man and everything in the universe, they have different interpretations for its connotation. Traditional Japanese thoughts advocate human nature and uphold the utter release of emotions, yet oppose the ascetic thought of Confucianism and Buddhism in China. Jinsai Ito, a materialist philosopher in the early Tokugawa period, believed that love is the essence of benevolence, even though he supported Confucianism in some ways. It is thoroughly shown that China and Japan are inconsistent in understanding the core of the unity of man and nature.

The concept of the unity of man and nature leads to a consensual understanding of the connection between personality and art in East Asian cultural circles, which is, the beauty of personality is the core of aesthetics. The philosopher of the Joseon Dynasty believed that the exquisite state of art is not only from experience, but also from transcendence, which illustrates the direct relationship between the author's personality and the work's artistic value. This concept is also applicable to Japan, and has derived a unique style of expressing emotions in Japanese aesthetics.

## 2.3 Evolution of Japanese aesthetics

### 2.3.1 *The idea of "trueness"*

Japan is located in the East of Asia, surrounded by oceans and has numerous islands. With temperate oceanic monsoon climate, Japan is mild and humid all year round. Such a unique geographical location brings abundant Marine resources, but also makes Japan prone to typhoons in summer and autumn. Even so, the vastness of the ocean and its long, zigzagging coastline has nurtured a wide variety of terrestrial and marine organisms, making the residents adjacent to natural resources. [2] As early as 300 BC, when rice was introduced to Japan in the Yayoi era, Japanese people realized that there would be a corresponding reward for their efforts in cultivation, and gradually developed a consciousness of "trueness" as beauty for nature, people and things. According to Japanese mythology, the Japanese believed that there were "eight million gods" in Japan. These deities arrived in Japan and resided in various natural objects, so that everything in the world had a divinity. The Japanese attitude towards everything in the world also originated from this idea, which is an apparent reflection of the "trueness" aesthetic. [3] Japan is also greatly influenced by China in terms of culture thanks to its geographical location, and it has also developed its own aesthetic consciousness and philosophy: abandoning extravagance and lavishness. On the contrary, it advocates convergence and simplicity with a sense of Buddhist disillusionment. With frequent occurrence of natural disasters such as typhoon and earthquake, and the influence of maritime monsoon climate, the seasonal changes are obvious in Japan. In this way, the natural scenery such as cherry blossom are considered perishable under the influence of climate, which leads Japanese people to develop a sensitive and delicate aesthetic concept of quiet beauty, but lack optimistic spirits. Thus, the aesthetic consciousness of "Mono-no-aware" and "Yūgen" has emerged successively.

### 2.3.2 *The idea of "Mono-no-aware"*

In the Edo period, Motoori Norinaga, the master of philosophy, put forward "Mono-no-aware" as the aesthetic feature of Japan's Heian period when commenting on "The Tale of Genji". The word "Mono-no-aware" was originally used to generalize the literary aesthetics of Heian period, and then extended to other fields of art. The word "Mono-no-aware", literally "the pathos of things", and also translated as "an empathy toward things", or "a sensitivity to ephemera", generally means feeling or emotional resonance. [4] "Mono-no-aware" expresses the emotion that is implicit and conservative, with delicacy and tranquility, including empathy and compassion for everything in the world. [3] It is worth mentioning that "Mono-no-aware" does not merely refer to pessimistic emotions such as sorrow or depression, but more generally refers to all genuine feelings of human beings towards objects, instead of being limited to sadness. As most Japanese literature have indicated or emphasized its negative side, the public has many misunderstandings that the interpretation of "Mono-no-aware" is misanthropic. The Literary tradition of The Japanese nation is mostly non-utilitarian and pays more attention to aesthetics itself. This is completely different from the Chinese tradition of poetry that emphasizes ethics, and as a result, Chinese literature concerning affection and love between men and women are more likely to be absorbed instead of works about economy and politics. The erotic art, which wallows in love and hatred, had been occupying the mainstream. [5]

"Mono-no-aware" appears to be a realistic romanticism in literature with its representatives such as Murasaki Shikibu and Sei Shonagon in the Heian period who criticized the utopian illusion and advocated to express people's feelings about the real world and their yearning for the ideal world with the assistance of meticulous description. However,

it is frequently presented as the extreme external gorgeousness and the extreme internal emptiness. [3] The Japanese ethicist and philosopher Tetsuro Watsuji once explained that the aesthetics of "Mono-no-aware" as "sensuous hedonism with permanent quadruple colors, aestheticism soaked in tears and optimism shouldering toughness and suffering." [6] The emergence and development of this aesthetic is inseparably related to the social condition and political situation in Japan at that period of time. The "Vajrayana Buddhism", which was established since emperor Kanmu's reign, evolved from Buddhism and stated that the world is impermanent and all good things will eventually fade away. On the other hand, chaos of Japanese society in the 10th century and corruption of the upper class further deepened the people's recognition of the impermanence of the world advocated by "Vajrayana Buddhism". Four hundred years of the Heian period had witnessed a succession of 33 emperors, with an average reign for basically twelve years. Furthermore, power belongs to the hands of the hereditary aristocracy involved in politics instead of the frequently-altered emperor. Because of the disorder in Fujiwara Hokke, which is a politically influential family, the authority is constantly unsteady. Therefore, with chaos between the royal family and the nobility, the whole society was immersed in a passive atmosphere of helplessness, which was reflected in literary works with "Mono-no-aware".

### 2.3.3 The idea of "Yūgen"

Unlike "Mono-no-aware" acting as the epitome of Japanese society in art and literature "Yūgen" is originally a foreign conception. Literally, it means the subtle profundity of things that are only vaguely suggested. "Yūgen" also originated from Buddhism, in Buddhist classics showing its abstraction. After the spread of Buddhism from China to Japan during the Kamakura period, "Yūgen" initially inherited its Chinese meaning that describes the profoundness of Buddhist texts. [7] This is closely identical to the "animism" of Japan's indigenous Shinto and the philosophy of "Mono-no-aware". Combined with the newly introduced thoughts of "emptiness" and "tranquility", the idea of "Yūgen" gradually evolved into a distinctive Japanese aesthetics of the new generation. [3] It can be summarized as an indescribable residual feeling that is hidden and reserved. Due to the limitations of human senses, we are incapable to directly and comprehensively perceive the object. However, the obscured parts would stimulate our senses, so that we can feel more attentively. In addition, "Yūgen" also refers to euphemism, which means that although the objective space and time distance between people and objects cannot be ignored, it is precisely such sense of distance that embodies our mysterious and intriguing feeling. Therefore, "Yūgen" is often associated with mystery and incredibility, manifesting as indefinable feeling and lack of logic. The famous Japanese esthetician Yoshinori Ōnishi pointed out that the general concept of "Yūgen" is directly related to the sense of remoteness, fullness, and directly refers to the deep and profound truth of unspeakable feelings. But in aesthetic sense, "Yūgen" also stands for fantasy and illusion that could hardly be described by language. Representative writer of Japanese estheticism, Junichiro Tanizaki, explained in his prose work "In Praise of Shadows" that "Beauty does not exist in objects, but in the shadows and shades produced by objects and lightings... It seems to me that we Easterners often seek for content with what we have already possessed, that we are in the habit of getting satisfaction with what we have owned, and that we can find our beauty in the darkness."

In addition to literature, "Yūgen" is of great significance in other fields of art. Zeami, a musician and playwright in the early Muromachi period, defined the highest level of Noh, a major form of classical Japanese dance-drama, as "rich in mysterious interest". He tries to eliminate all possible distractions on the stage so that the audience can get fully devotion in the performance. Through the lifelike performance without scenery, expressionless and props, the audience can appreciate the deeper meaning beyond the performance, so as to get rid of

the bondage of time and space while imagine the emotions such as happiness, sadness conveyed by the characters in the story. Thus, creating a mysterious "Yūgen" aesthetic realm. [8] In the field of architecture, dry garden, a miniature Japanese landscape style composed of white sand and stones, also reflects the aesthetic taste of "Yūgen" with some representative courtyards such as Daitokuji, Myoshinji and Ryoanji. Designers use the basically empty courtyard to symbolize everything in the world, hoping that viewers can understand the value of life by observing the pattern of white sand and the placement of stones in the courtyard. Moreover, since the technique of ink painting was introduced into Japan from China, it has also become a platform and tool to highlight the aesthetic quality of "Yūgen". After the rise of Japanese ink painting, it popularized the composition style that leaves blank to suggest the audience freely imagine the work and finally pursuing a realm beyond the picture. Through such hints indicated by blanks, the painter can get rid of the obstacle of objective conditions such as time and space, so as to convey the emotion that is difficult to paint directly with brushes to the audience through the imagination implication brought by the white space. In this way, one gets to express the deep connotation behind the painting, and voice one's idea spiritually. White spaces awaken the complicated and abundant aesthetic feeling including the sound of silence, the shape of intangible and the shade without colors. The picture depicted with sufficient blanks could possibly deliver the transcendent image. This kind of blank space later became the biggest characteristic of Japanese ink painting, that is, through immersion in the empty "nothing" to achieve an artistic level higher than the object itself. From "nothing" to discover the "something", and thus establish its artistic value of beauty. This kind of aesthetics that advocates "nothing" leads people to see the essence of things through phenomena. [9]

## **3 The animation industry in Japan**

### **3.1 The history and general situation of Japanese animation industry**

Japanese animation holds its undeniably influential power in today's world. As one of the three pillar industries of Japan, animation has not only brought huge economic benefits and excellent international reputation to the nation, but also revealed the stylish painting techniques and culture, and inevitably exported Japanese characteristics and values. Throughout the development of Japanese animation, it arose in the 1990s, after which many excellent animation directors emerged, such as Hayao Miyazaki, Yamada Naoko, Anno Hideaki, whose works hold respective characteristics. In 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>th</sup> centuries, the main developmental law of Japanese animation film can be summarized as follows: the theatrical version of animation takes up the majority of productivity with high box office in reward, which has become an important pillar of Japanese animation industry.

### **3.2 Features of Japanese animation**

#### ***3.2.1 Themes and subjects of Japanese animation***

With the successful commercialization, animation companies and the producers for different age groups launched different subjects meeting the features of all age groups and different preferences. [10] Japanese animation does not limit its inspirational materials to local events, but also often adapts from European, American and Chinese literary classics. Japanese animation focuses on different age groups and social classes, and is equally eclectic and draws on non-realistic themes. For example, most of the so-called "girls' comics" describe the feelings of sentimental students in high school. There are many depictions of daily

activities on campus and family chores, and portraits of campus learning and community activities, which make the film close to the reality while become more idealized. In addition, some cartoon works are based on various sports. From popular ball games, car racing to fishing and adventure, sports activities in all categories regardless of its popularity has been drawn on the comics journal or even presented on silver screens. For instance, "major league baseball" series about baseball, "Slam Dunk", "Kuroko's Basketball" about basketball, as well as "Initial D" about car racing which triggered the phenomenal activities of automobile modification in Japan, are all models of animation themed on competitive sports and races. It can be asserted that all aspects of life can become the inspiration of animation, a new form of recreation after literature and traditional broadcast industry.

In terms of creative inspiration or story prototypes, Japanese animation is also adept at using references. Whether it is "the Count of Monte Cristo", a famous French novel, or "Journey to the West", one of the four greatest Chinese classics, have all contributed to the selection of topics covering revenge and adventure for Japanese animation. Even many classic Western movies and TV dramas are remade or reshot in Japan. For example, the famous Japanese animation series "World Masterpiece Theater" is adapted from Grimm's and Hans Christian Andersen's Fairy Tales. "The Secret of Blue Water" directed by renowned animation producer Anno Hideaki is based on two science fictions "The submarine two miles" and "mysterious island" written by Jules Gabriel Verne. Celebrated film director Miyazaki Hayao's representative work "Castle in the Sky" originated from British writer Jonathan Swift's Gulliver's travels.

After a period of imitation and adaptation, the prosperous of Japanese manga, animation and game works gradually discovered their exclusive creational direction, mastered unique skills and produced many excellent works. In recent years, many movies and TV works in Europe and America, even some in Mainland China, are remade from classic Japanese manga, animation, games and even popular novels. For example, "Alita: Battle Angel", scripted and produced by world-renowned filmmaker James Cameron and released in 2019, is based on "Gunnm", a manga series drawn by Japanese artist Yukito Kishiro. "Edge of Tomorrow", starring Tom Cruise, is also based on a 2004 Japanese novel "All You Need Is Kill" written by Hiroshi Sakurazaka. In addition, Japanese games such as "Resident Evil" series have also contributed a steady stream of materials for filmmakers all over the world, and have realized the export and advocacy of Japanese culture in the meantime.

### *3.2.2 Character setting in Japanese animation*

Character setting in Japanese animation has formed its distinctive style. Most of the characters are realistic, then aesthetically beautified and exaggerated. The role modeling not only has national characteristics, but also takes fashion trends into account. Painting style can be roughly divided into aesthetic, realistic, line-drawing and so on, reflecting the perfect combination of modern fashion consciousness and Japanese traditional culture. Generally speaking, the height of 7 heads is the common ratio in reality, which is relatively generally seen in animation works. It is commonly used for young adults with standard slender body shape. The body ratio of 5 to 6 heads is slightly cuter, and the legs are obviously much longer than the upper torso, which is generally used on teenagers with slim limbs. The ratio of 3~4 heads is mostly seen on children, and the outline of the head is basically round. Characters with the height of 2 heads are relatively rare and are basically infants or surreal humanoids.

Japanese animation characters pursue the ultimate visual plastics, the most prominent example is the "Shōjo manga", reflecting the vitality of young teens. Most of the characters in the film are students (mostly high school students), who are innocent and immature. The work emphasizes on the characteristic with certain stereotype. In particular, the female characters are sweet, lovely even sometimes erotic, with template facial features. Such



phenomenon also fits with the male-oriented market. This kind of figure modeling has some common characteristics, and has increasingly become the mainstream: (1) eyes are unproportionally big (width of eye is more than 1/5 of head); (2) Very large pupil or iris; (3) Simplified nose (small or even omitted); (4) Flat face; (5) Slightly larger head; (6) Small hands and feet; (7) weak stereoscopy. [11] Such modeling features are realistic while emphasize certain parts with moderate exaggeration, which is the embodiment of Japanese people's persistent pursuit of beauty and idealization.

In addition, the omission of structure is also a recognizable feature of Japanese animation works. For example, when characterizing facial appearances, there is often a line representing nose and several simple lines representing ears. Animation creators may simplify most of the details of the characters and retain only one or two major features, so that the expression of the characters will be more attentive and straightforward. On the one hand, there are certain limitations in using lines and colors to represent characters on two-dimensional screens, which cannot pursue the ultimate realism. Due to the lack of color in black and white cartoons, the contrast between black lines and white paper is more obvious. In animation works, the processing of coloring is relatively monotonous, which not only makes the performance of some complicated and dynamic images and details time-consuming and laborious, but also produce unsatisfactory effects. Therefore, it is better to simply omit these points and only keep the extremely necessary parts (such as eyebrows and eyes). Limited by the two-dimensional screen and human eyes' capability on judging the "scale" of objects, relatively small details seen by the naked eye in reality are difficult to be mimicked by lines that presents in various width and thickness. As a result, most of them are omitted in order to achieve harmony in the picture. Even though the hand-drawn manuscript inevitably makes some choices in detail in pursuit of efficiency, it also creates a symbolic and labeled style, forming a tacit consensus between the readers and creators.

Japanese animation character modeling is different from traditional Chinese or European and American animation techniques. The traditional animation character modeling is entirely dependent on the plot, and its own characteristics do not draw much attention, as the role simply act as the container of plots. Since Japanese animation has evolved to the current stage, the functionality of roles and characters has changed dramatically. Characters communicate information and convey emotion with the assistance of their appearance, so as to interact with the audience. Body movements, facial expressions, line of sight, language expression and even pet phrases are used to refine and summarize some symbolic features and convey messages through visual and audio channel. For example, the position of the pupil highlights can reveal the mood or state of the character itself. If the person is in high spirits, the pupil highlights are generally arranged on the top and occupy a large area, and the relative position of the two eye highlights is uniform to one direction, which can also express the direction of eyesight. To show that a person is depressed or immersed in pessimistic emotions, usually the highlight is painted moderately; No highlights indicates that the character's consciousness is manipulated or it is unconscious at all. The perspective and projection, coloring, light and shade of the character modeling do not follow the physical laws in reality, but regard the manifestation of the character as the premier goal. [11]

### *3.2.3 Production technology of Japanese animation*

Japanese animations are usually produced on two-dimensional platform, and for complex action scenes, it adopts the combination of two-dimensional and three-dimensional technology, which supplement each other or switch seamlessly. This form of production has also been recognized and well-received by the world animation market. The essence of animation lies in the use of lines and color blocks to represent the reality. Japanese animation has a strong realism in the processing of the picture. Animation creators often faithfully

restore the real material when drawing the background, and only slightly modify the color and scene structure to adapt to the two-dimensional screen, such as the white air exhaled by people in the winter morning, the teetering dewdrop on the leaves of plants, the clouds reflected in different colors under the sun at different times. The creation faithfully restores the natural phenomena existing in the real scene, but the reproduction of reality is realized by utilizing the techniques of animation (painting) as mentioned above. Thus, it can be concluded that the production is true to reality in motivation, yet concise at the end.

### *3.2.4 Music and sound effect in Japanese animation*

Japanese artists have their particular application of sound element in animation works. Most of the scenarios take place through narration or dialogue. Using the self-confession and parallel narration of the protagonist, with the supportive function of the surrounding setting, the emotion that language could hardly express is conveyed through visual and audio elements. The soundtrack in the animation is of great importance, not only to render the atmosphere, but also to deduce and enhance the mood of the characters in the film, and ultimately to sublimate the theme. In many cases, the music will form synesthesia in the audience's heart, so that the audience can understand the inner thoughts of the characters and depict their inner world. [12]

And many of the animation soundtrack or the opening song, the ending song, have immense musical value. For example, Japanese musician Joe Hisaishi, who has collaborated with Miyazaki many times, wrote several film scores (for example, "Life's Merry Go Round", a multi-trilogy G harmonic minor in the film "Howl's Moving Castle"), which have been played in classical concerts. In recent years, the popular animation series "JoJo's Bizarre Adventure" directly purchased copyrights of singles from released albums as the opening and ending songs.

Japanese animation possesses the above production features to design the role modeling, endow the role with distinct appearances and internal personalities, and place them in the story with strong national traits and appropriate music to convey audio-visual information to the audience. In this way, the audience's understanding of the characters' moods and the core of the story is affected their absorption of audio-visual senses, combined with the audience's inner restoration of the role based on their own experience and cultural background. This requires the author and the audience to have a similar cultural background and aesthetic taste, in order to interpret the works according to their common psychological consensus of the author and the audience. Therefore, a shared cultural background between audiences and producers is a prerequisite for the understanding of works. The principle is that in the East Asian cultural circle, the similar traditional cultural concepts and the unity of understanding of the relationship between nature and mankind enable people in different regions to understand Japanese animation works. The meticulous observation of everything, the description of emotion, the implicit blank of expression and are all the actual embodiment of the Japanese aesthetic concept of "Mono-no-aware" and "Yūgen". The aesthetic temperament carried out not only in the setting of characters and script plot, even music background, work as the basis of constructing a framework for understanding and appreciation, presenting a national complex and the nature of ultimate cultural embodiment, which has contributed to the considerable recognition Japanese animation received worldwide.

## **4 Reflections of Japanese aesthetics and values in animation**

Japanese animation holds a wide range of subjects. When absorbing foreign cultures, creators will selectively absorb them according to their own national characteristics. This selection is done spontaneously. After absorption, subjects or materials are processed based on the



Japanese perspective and eventually become a part of its culture with distinctive ethnic characteristics. Such process of absorption is an example of Japanese nation's open attitude towards foreign imports and innovation. This concept not only leads to Japan's comprehensive reform twice in history (Taika Era Reforms and The Meiji Restoration), but also enabled Japan to rapidly attain its predominant competence in science and education and had greatly improved people's livelihood after the catastrophe of World War II.

The theme of animations often reflects the aesthetic characteristics of Japanese "Mono-no-aware", accompanied by bushido spirit from time to time, with "tragic beauty" and "plaintive beauty". Throughout the works since the new century, this feature is constantly seen. For example, Hayao Miyazaki's animated film "The Wind Rises" (2013), which was adapted from the autobiographical romance novel with the same name by author Tatsuo Hori. Through the tear-jerking love story of Jiro Horikoshi, a Japanese fighter plane designer, and his severely ill girlfriend in the turbulent early 20th century, the author criticizes the war and express the anti-war thoughts and the introspection about the fact that the indifference to Japan received from eastern countries after its failure in the war and the western countries' disapproval to Japan due to their different cultural core. In the film, the young pilot of the fighter plane falls into the battlefield and is buried as sacrifice to militarism. Such sacrifice and burial set the strong tragic tone for "The Wind Rises". And the hero Horikoshi's persistent dream of "making incredible aircrafts" is also the source of the tragedy. In addition, tuberculosis suffered by the heroine is a disease with strong symbolic meaning, especially in traditional Oriental poems and proeses, corresponding to the image of cuckoo birds crying and coughing out its blood, which is consistent with the Japanese aesthetic concept of "Mono-no-aware".

Japanese animation works are mostly in black and white, and use lines as expression and depiction. It is similar to the Japanese ink-painting art form. Even the colored animation works after the advent of the color era also retained the style and essence of the black and white era. In this way, although many details in reality are omitted in the picture, the overall frame still remains, and some expressive parts are emphasized and exaggerated, becoming a recognizable art form. This is matched with the idea of "Yūgen" in traditional Japanese aesthetics. The blank space is left for the imagination of readers and audiences, and the sound, shape and color beyond reality are accepted in the picture of "nothing", leading to the replenishment by viewers themselves to fill the vacancy. Corresponding to specific scenes and examples, such as the natural scenery in the picture, the magnificent beauty of the marvelous nature will directly awaken people's affection and pursuit of beauty, and also reflect the creator's observation and empathy for all things in nature. This is also the direct embodiment of "Mono-no-aware".

With the normalization of Sino-Japanese diplomatic relationship in 1972 and the transformation of the world pattern, more and more Japanese works entered China. Traditional TV dramas, films and animations along with games, novels, comics, have become an unforgettable part of contemporary Chinese people's memory in childhood or early adulthood. For instance, the early Japanese film actor Ken Takakura representing the image of tough guy motivates people to gain a sense of perseverance, and the trend of sporting caused by the classic animation "Slam Dunk". Even in recent years, the thoughts on family and friendship conveyed in "Naruto" are all the output of Japanese culture to China. These works have greatly enriched people's daily life and spiritual world, played significant roles in publicizing and advocating sports, and promoting the values of kindness, friendship, self-improvement and self-reliance, which are undeniably of great positive significance.

On the other hand, some typical and exaggerated Japanese values have also exerted significant influence on contemporary Chinese people. For example, the female image of "Nadeshiko Yamato" in Japan has received affections from male, which actually represents the objectification and exploitation of female in the patriarchal society. The exaggerated

depiction of characters in Japanese animations, such as extremely large eyes, acutely pointy chin, tremendously big breast, excessively thin waist and exceedingly slim legs, also triggers the abnormal appreciation standard of the opposite sex among young people, and even the anxiety of the female group on body shape and appearance. This nearly pathological pursuit to some extent caused by animation, become a thorny issue. What's more, some people mistake the animated world for reality and have obsessive feelings towards virtual characters, which can eventually cause them to live unhealthily in real life, or even commit crimes or suffer mental problems. Even though this problem should not be completely attributed to Japanese animation, it is undeniable that the introduction of Japanese animation to China has provided another quite broad stage for these undesirable social phenomena.

However, both China and Japan belong to the large circle of East Asian civilization. In some concepts, the value orientation and moral standards of China and Japan are highly consistent and unified. Therefore, these excellent Japanese works have an immediate positive effect on the education and cultivation of young people. On the other hand, Japan's bellicosity, bushido spirit and extreme aesthetics of "Mono-no-aware" have been exported to China in the meantime. For example, the spirit of sacrifice oneself, "better to be a shard of jade than a whole tile", will cause aggression and impulsiveness in many cases in contemporary China. Or the military spirit and the controversial "anti-defeatism" in recent years show that some people in Japanese society despise peace and disrespect the history. Even the vicious events (such as arson, suicide, etc.) caused by self-destruction in pursuit of the ultimate beauty will also lead to the loss of social property and casualties, which are closely related to the examples or value that could be easily noticed in Japanese animations. Even though not to the extent of "instigation", the depiction of bloody violence and eroticism in Japanese animations often goes beyond the bottom-line of Traditional Chinese ethics and public order. Admittedly, these same elements exist in Chinese civilization as well, but they are scarcely mentioned in modern society. For teenagers who have not yet fully developed their view on the whole world, these "heroic and righteous" stories can be counterproductive.

This is exactly what we need to be cautious about when absorbing from other countries' cultures. The essence is to eliminate the unenlightened notions and integrate the remains with our existing culture, to achieve the innovation and progress of civilization. Only by recognizing the excellence of other civilizations and selecting and absorbing them, can real cultural confidence be formed.

## 5 Conclusions

With ample examples in the chronological analysis of Japanese aesthetics in three crucial concepts, it is obvious that Japanese aesthetics have significant particularity compared with other civilizations. The primitive thought of "trueness", subsequent ideas of "Mono-no-aware" and "Yūgen" focusing on sophisticated emotions have contributed to delicacy in animation production and expression of theme. Several major aspects of animation, including selection of subjects, character setting and modeling and utilization of audio and visual effects, are all manifestation of Japanese culture and aesthetics. As major reflection of Japanese culture in fields of art and humanity, Japanese aesthetics correspond with features of animation which plays a momentous role in cultural export. Whilst releasing positive notions rich in humanitarianism, Japanese animation spreads adverse impulses and instigates vicious incidents as extreme externalization of Japanese culture. With research on such topic, the writer hope that people can integrate culture of their nations with excellence in other civilizations in order to achieve the innovation and adaptation in new era.

## References

1. L. Zheng, Dong Jiang Journal, *Common values among traditional East Asian Aesthetics*, **37**, 52-59 (2020)
2. W. Ye, *History of Japanese culture*, 176-177/233 (2005)
3. Y. Liang, Journal of Heihe university, *The development of traditional Japanese aesthetics*, **11**, 181-183 (2020)
4. Z. Jia, Art Evaluation, *Thoughts of “Mono-no-aware” in Makoto Shinkai’s animation*, **13**, 168-170 (2021)
5. X. Yang, Journal of PLA University of Foreign Languages, *Analysis of works of Kawabata Yasunari and Kenzaburo Oe*, **02**, 99-102 (2002)
6. X. Wang, Jiang-huai Tribune, *The idea of “Iki” in Japanese aesthetics*, 03(2013)
7. P. Yan, Literature Education, *Rice planting culture and the beauty of “Mono-no-aware” and “Yugen”*, **04**, 184-185 (2021)
8. J. Zhou, Journal of Dalian University of Technology (Social Sciences), *Inheritance and fusion of cultural arts based on animation*, **32**, 125-128 (2011)
9. H. Chen, Aesthetics, *Japanese aesthetics in ink painting*, **02**, 70-72 (2021)
10. Y. Chen, Journal of Liaoning Teachers College (Social Sciences Edition), *Artistic features of Japanese animation*, **04**, 25-26 (2011)
11. H. Liu, Art Panorama, *Design and modelling of characters in Japanese animation*, **10**, 152-153 (2008)
12. Y. Wang, J.H. Sun, Movie Literature, *Modelling of characters in “Violet Evergarden”*, **13**, 98-100 (2020)