일본 장편 애니메이션의 겉과 속: 의미작용의 특징을 중심으로

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요 약

본 논문에서 중심적으로 논의하고 있는 일본 장편 애니메이션의 의미작용 체계에 대한 접근은 궁극적으로 일본 장편 애니메이션에서 보이는 표현과 소통의 특징을 분석하는 것이다. 구체적인 스토리를 중심으로 하는 대부분의 캐릭터 애니메이션 작품은 의미작용 체계에 있어서 외시의미와 함축의미를 동시에 담고 있지만, 각 작품에서 추구하는 의미작용 체계의 특징에 따라서 미학적 표현과 소통의 경향이 다르게 나타난다. 본 논문은 방법론적으로 일본의 문화사회적 배경과 특징을 토대로 하여 일본 애니메이션에 나타나는 의미작용을 살펴보고 있다. 일본의 장편 애니메이션은 대체로 함축의미적인 의미작용 체계와 미학적 표현을 강조하며, 외시의미와 몰입을 강화하는 디즈니의 장편 애니메이션들과는 달리 관객 스스로가 작품에 담겨진 함축의미를 고찰하고 해석하도록 하는 경향이 두드러지게 나타난다. 그러므로 관객의 문화사회적 배경과 경험에 따라서 일본 장편 애니메이션이 전달하고자 하는 주제와 메시지, 그리고 추구하는 신화에 대한 임의적 해석과 수용이 발생할 수도 있다. 의미작용에 있어서 그러한 해석과 수용의 폭넓은 가능성은 문제점이라기보다는 일본 장편 애니메이션이 가지고 있는 차별적인 표현과 소통의 특징으로 보는 것이 바람직할 것이다

키워드 : 일본 장편 애니메이션, 의미작용, 외시의미, 함축의미

The Surface and the Inside of Japanese Feature-Length Animation: Focused on the Characteristics of Signification

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Abstract

The analysis on the characteristics of the signification system of Japanese feature-length animations that this essay centrally deals with eventually examines the characteristics of representation and communication in Japanese feature-length animations. In general, most animation works focusing on characters and stories contain the signification systems related to 'denotation' and connotation.' However, tendency of the aesthetic representation and communication that appears differently, depending on the characteristics of the signification system that each animation work pursues. From this point of view, Japanese feature-length animation emphasizes connotative signification system and aesthetic representation, unlike Disney animation that strongly shows the tendency that makes the audience directly immersed in the theme and message of the work conveyed further in the myths by pursuing denotative signification system. And, in the case of Japanese feature-length animation, the 'dissenting and arbitrary interpretation' of the theme, the message that the animation work intends to convey and myths pursued is bound to appear diversely, depending on the audience's experiences and cultural and social backgrounds.

Keywords : Japanese Feature-Length Animation, Signification, Denotation, Connotation

1. Introduction

1.1 Research background and Purpose

Japanese feature-length animations, which have led the world's animation markets for a long time, show their own unique, inherent characteristics in the representation and communication of animated performances. As such, the analysis on the characteristics of the signification system of Japanese feature-length animations that this essay centrally deals with eventually examines the aesthetic characteristics and value of Japanese feature-length animations. That is to say, from a communicative point of view, this research attempt to approach the aesthetic and semiotic characteristics of the reality effect shown in Japanese feature-length animations, respectively. In addition, from this point of view, Japanese feature-length animations' signification system and aesthetic representation can be explained through the terms 'surface' and 'inside' related to connotation.

1.2 The Scope of Research

In order to derive an objective and consistent study results that fit the study purpose, although there are many Japanese TV series animation works that were produced through limited animation technique and well known internationally, such animation works were excluded from the object of study, and the major object of study was limited to Japanese feature-length animations that were produced in 2D full animation.

Noteworthy is the fact that although Disney and Japanese feature-length animations for theatre are produced using the same technique, 2D full animation, their animated representations show different aesthetic tendencies and also different characteristics in terms of their communication with the audience. It can thus be said that it is both academically and practically meaningful and worthwhile to examine, through this study, the aesthetic and communication characteristics of Japanese feature-length animations.

1.3 Research Methodology

The eventual purpose of this study is to analyze first the characteristics of the signification system that Japanese feature-length animations have from the viewpoint of communication, and based on such study results, examine eventually the characteristics of aesthetic representations of Japanese feature-length animations in depth. From this viewpoint, the semiotic theory that can structurally approach the signification system of Japanese feature-length animations from the viewpoint of communication can be applied as the methodology most suitable to this study.

In other words, diverse elements shown in animation works are created as signs by the animator's manifest intention and the signification with the audience is performed. In view of this fact, the semiotics theory can be applied as the most appropriate research methodology among various theoretical frameworks of aesthetics in conducting a analysis as to how the signification system of the animated performance of Japanese feature length animations, which is the major subject of this research.

2. Theoretical Background: Semiologic Discourses

2.1 Semiologic Background

A sign is a unit of signification, and paradigms and syntagms are the methods of organizing the units of signification[1]. Here, signification means a process in which a sign represents something on its behalf. The explanation of this process differs, however, depending on how the sign is viewed. From

Ferdinand de Saussure's viewpoint, signification is most simply a process in which the signifier is connected with the signified[2]. Naturally, however, the signification of a sign is not always so simply achieved. According to Saussure, the meaning of a sign is determined by its relation structure (significance value) with other signs. Moreover, it is indicated that the relation structure of these signs can be represented diversely depending on the culture and circumstance. In other words, a sign is a point that indicates that it can be read differently depending on the cultural experiences of the sign users. This point can be said to comprise the basic characteristics of Roland Barthes' mythology.

It is Louis Hjelmslev who further developed such an idea of signification and presented a systematic model that can analyze signs and codes, and by extension, the signification of text, and it is Barthes who made this model known[3}. In the signification model of the sign that Hjelmslev referred to as connotative semiotics, he divided the signification of a sign into two levels – the first-stage and the second-stage – and distinguished the first-stage that means 'denotation' from the second-stage that means 'connotation'[4]. Barthes, in his *Mythologies*, analyzes how the connotative signification of a sign works in the culture of a society, based on Hjelmslev's signification model[5]. That is to say, he discussed fully about the relationship between the revealed meaning and the hidden meaning of the text[6].

The book *Mythologies*, published in 1957, is the collection of reviews that Roland Barthes wrote on modern myths in French popular culture and contributed to journals from 1954 to 1956. It is noteworthy in that it offers ideological criticism and semiotic analysis of the language of popular culture. What, then, did he mean by the modern myth? The 'myth'

that he referred to is a 'message' and a form of 'signification'. In that sense, everything that conveys a message to us can become a myth. Therefore, not only writings but also photographs, films, sports, performance, advertisements and animation works can be considered myths. In other words, for Barthes, a myth is a way of understanding and explaining social realities of a culture such as social conventions or values, beliefs, and ideologies[7].

2.2 Denotation and Connotation

The signification of signs begins with the connection of the signifier with the signified. This is first-stage signification, the meaning formed here of which is 'denotation'. More strictly speaking, denotation is the meaning formed by a signifier divided in substance being connected with the signified that is correspondingly divided. Thus, the concept of a sign that Saussure refers to in *General Linguistics* is about first-stage signification. Saussure views a sign as made up of two elements-the signifier and the signified－which are combined, and explains that it is through the connection of these two elements that a sign represents a meaning. The signifier is the 'physical substance' of a sign such as sounds, printed letters, and images to express something, and the signified means the 'mental concept' that the sign represents. The signified is not 'a certain thing' or reality itself but a mental symbol that we have with regard to that certain thing.

And, the signification of the connotation system can be made by conveying a new signified through a signifier and a signified, in which the first-stage signification system becomes the expression of the second-stage signification system. Here, considering that the meaning value of a sign consists of a form rather than a substance, a connotation can be said to be an additional concept that is

conveyed through the form of the first-stage signification system.

Thus, if the denotation of the first-stage signification system is what has objective value, connotation depends on the subjective emotion and feelings of the sign users or their shared 'mutually subjective' cultural experiences or values. Accordingly, denotation has a more stable meaning value than connotation, whereas connotation has a more polysemous and fluid meaning value. Moreover, when taking into account the fact that the first level denotation system is accepted as signifier to the second-stage level connotation system, this means that the connotation system depends basically on the forms of the first-stage signification system. In other words, it is to say that diverse connotations can be derived through intentional directing of denotations.

2.3 Roland Barthes' Mythology

Roland Barthes views a myth as 'a chain of connotative concepts that are mutually connected'. For him, a myth appears through a chain connotation (a chain of concepts) that is mutually related, due to the first-stage signification system. For example, according to social conventions regarding men and women, men are strong, rational, and logical, whereas women are weak, passive, emotional, and illogical. Accordingly, men are typically depicted in live-action films or dramas as, under critical circumstances, playing the roles of rescuing and protecting women, and under conflicting circumstances, acting rationally while women act impulsively and emotionally. The connotation of the scene in a live-action film where terror-stricken women are rescued is made through common interconnected general conventions.

Barthes approaches to a myth as a parole. Langue and Parole are the terms that Saussure, the progenitor of structural linguistics, used. The social and systematic aspect of the speech function was called *langue*, and the personal aspect and the aspect related to the practice of concrete speech was called *parole*. Langue and parole are opposite terms, but they work complementarily. Language is communication with other persons, so langue and parole have common rules. Parole can be said to be talking 'individually', and the fixed rules in common grammar or words can be said to be langue. This is because of the parole that the meaning of the same word differs according to the circumstance and the intonation[8]. That is to say, everything can be a myth provided it is conveyed by a discourse. It can be formed with letters or various representations. It can be not only a discourse written with words, but also a photo, live-action film, report, sport, performance, or advertisement. All these can be used as forms of support for a mythic parole. In other words, the basic signifiers (languages, photos, posters, ritual festivals, things, etc.) that comprise the first-stage signification system of myths become pure forms that convey myths. Thus, Barthes differentiates the second-stage signification system of myths from the first-stage signification system by referring to the signifier as the form, the signified as the concept, and the whole that it composes as signification. According to him, a myth is formed in the same manner as a connotation but is a special kind of connotative system[9].

3. Representation and Communication of Japanese Feature-Length Animation

3.1 Cultural Background

In Japanese animation, the surface and the inside coexist. In other words, in Japanese

animation, the first-stage and second-stage significations coexist, and depending on the socio-cultural backgrounds and experiences of the audiences, the possibility of any one side of the two being accommodated tendentiously exists.

The Japanese people, an agricultural ethnic, have wanted to exist together with nature and to be identified with it, and most of Japan's contents created from such natural characteristics consider the thematic and formal confusion with nature important. In this regard, animism can be seen as an essential factor. In a narrow sense, animism is a theory based on the idea of the soul, and in a wide sense, it is a theory based on the existence of souls. Japan is a country where animism remains as a traditional form of religion and has been handed down as a form of native religion, Shintoism.

Shintoism was the only religion in Japan before Buddhism came thereto, and unlike other religions, it has no specific system and can be defined as a religion that embraces *kami,* meaning a soul that lives in everything. A *kami* is nothing like the Western idea of a god. A *kami* is the essence or soul of anything that inspires awe. An impressive mountain or a beautiful waterfall can be a *kami.* An ancient tree, an oddly shaped rock, and almost all animals can be *kami.* Human emotions such as anger, jealousy, or mirth can be *kami.* Thus, war, fertility, and mercy can be abstract qualities, and of course, people can be *kami.*

Antonia Levi pointed out that the creatures made by the Japanese people appear to be unfamiliar to their overseas audiences because they make use of their own materials, drawing from a native-religion-oriented culture and an animism-oriented cultural tradition, which can be seen as the foundation and characteristics of Japan's native religion, when they make a product[10].

In many cases, Japan's fantasy products come from the native Japanese religion Shintoism, or from folk tales. In fact, most stories are drawn from Shintoism, an animistic form of nature worship that provides animation and video games with over eight million deities and their legends from which to draw on. For example, there are many folk and Shrine Shinto perspectives embedded in the cultural vocabulary of *Spirited Away,* which was directed by Hayao Miyazaki. Among the animation works by Hayao Miyazaki made available in English translation, *Spirited Away* contains the most folk and Shrine Shinto motifs. The central locale of the animation is a bathhouse where a great variety of creatures, including *kami,* come to bathe and be refreshed. This animation work, plus the portrayal of various other folk beliefs and Shrine Shinto perspectives, suggests that Miyazaki is affirming some basic Japanese cultural values which can be a source of confidence and renewal for contemporary audiences[11]. In additional, the Japanese title of *Spirited Away*(2001) explicitly indicates the liminal realm. The last phrase in the title *Sen to Chihiro no kami-kakushi* literally means "something hidden by *kami.*" There is the expression in Japanese *kami-kakushi ni au* (to experience *kami-kakushi*) which refers to the folk designation of incidents when someone is inexplicably missing for some time. In the Japanese context, if and when the person returns, and whether or not that person remembers being gone, people say that that person has been 'hidden by the *kami*'. In addition, Isao Takahata's *The Raccoon War Pom Poko* (1994) can be included in this discussion's category in that it deals with a spirit living in the woods. As mentioned earlier, these works are based on an animistic way of thinking that is deep-seated in the Japanese society, which means that the presence of life should be accorded to

everything that coexists with the human race. Accordingly, in expressing and conveying the theme (myth) of a work, Japanese animations basically strongly connote animistic influences. As such, the audiences who do not come across such culture are bound to bump into graduated limitations in doing significations for the works.

3.2 Connotative Representation and Communication

According to Isao Takahata, Japanese feature-length animations put more emphasis on the dramatic story instead of stressing and expressing the characters' movements, as Disney feature-length animations do, as well as on entertainment factors like music, and the audiences in Japan enjoy the stories of the Japanese animations. As a result, the animators in Japan do not feel ashamed of their poor abilities as entertainers[12]. In fact, Disney feature-length animation maximizes the denotative representation that strongly shows the tendency of first-stage signification by totally making use of the movements of the characters as well as dazzling visual and musical elements fundamentally for storytelling, which ultimately leads the audiences to be positively engrossed in the work. Japanese feature-length animation however allows the audiences to see and interpret the work with the controlled movements and lines of the characters, rather than leading them to become engrossed in it. In other words, despite the fact that Japanese feature-length animation for a theater are mainly based on full animation, it conveys a multi-layered message for the second-stage signification – i.e., the mythical message to the audiences – by applying the characteristic factors like the positive utilization of non-diegetic sound (mainly voice description of the characters who are not in the scene) to the works interpretatively. As such, the

audience can naturally see the hidden side of the animation images. This tendency of the animation images can be referred to as 'connotative representation', as distinguished from 'denotative representation', from the viewpoint of comparison.

(Figure 1) Akira (1988)

For example, the audiences in Western countries who have seen Akira(1988) by Katsuhiro Otomo were fascinated with the visual perfection shown in the work and enjoyed it because Otomo, who wrote the original comic book, directed the work. His work, however, has been symbolically elevated to the top rank, representing Japan's cyberpunk. It is also estimated to be a difficult work as wide stories, elaborate setups, and the hostility structure among the characters are much condensed in the work. In particular, the prophetic last scene warns of the end of the old era and takes off to the new era, saying that "It has already begun with us." Therefore, it can be described as genuinely pleasure to be able to read the thematic implications flowing through Akira's images and lines. It can be said that it is pleasure to read the myth that the work conveys as connotative representation.

In addition, Satoshi Kon, an animation director who directed Perfect Blue(1997), Millennium Actress(2001), and Tokyo Godfathers(2003) said of his works in an interview in September 2005 at Mad House (Tokyo, Japan), "I make an effort to create

new aesthetics and techniques that are suitable for the theme of each of my works, and I don't expose everything to the audiences through actions, as Disney animation does. That is, I consider the relationships among all the factors in my work significant, and it is totally up to the audiences to accept it." In the relationship among the factors appearing in the animation images emphasized by Kon, there is a stronger aspect of wanting the audiences to interpret and appreciate the works rather than an intuitive understanding of the works. For example, by showing diverse relationships such as the relationships among the characters, the relationship between the characters and the backgrounds, and the relationship between the characters and the props, the works enable the audience to interpret and appreciate the other aspect hidden behind such relationships rather than to intuitively accept only the animation images that are visible. In other words, it shows second-stage signification. It is Kon's directing style formed based on the limited animation techniques, and is broadly a form and characteristic of the connotative representation of Japanese animation. In other words, when seen from Barthes' point of view, the animation images in Kon's works show that several signifiers represent the one signified, and the audiences encounter the second-stage signification through the several signifiers (i.e., the meta-language).

3.3 The Surface and the Inside of Signification

As Antonia Levi pointed out, noteworthy is the fact that as the audiences in other countries, particularly those in the West, do not have the same level of socio-cultural background and experience in reading the myths connoted in Japanese animation as the Japanese do, they may not experience the full surface (the first-stage signification) and inside (the second-stage signification) that coexist in Japanese animation[13]. The point that the same phenomenon can happen to the audiences who do not share the dominant value or ideology about the myth contained in the work or who do not have background information is included.

To discuss this argument more deeply, the terms omote and ura, which are the basic modes of behaviour among the Japanese, must be introduced. Takeo Doi describes these terms in detail to explain the characteristics of the Japanese individual and society in a sociological context. Like their Latin counterparts recto and verso, omote and ura are paired opposing concepts. We speak of the omote-ura of things, referring to the two sides of everything, and we also use them as opposing concepts in various combinations with other words. Even when we use them separately, one term implies the other: To speak of omote is to speak of ura; to speak of ura is to speak of omote.

The meanings of omote and ura may be applied to Japanese feature-length animations to describe its signification characteristics, and it is contextually in accord with what is explained through the words 'surface' and 'inside'. The important point is that Japanese feature-length animation can be approached basically through two layers of signification, and of these two layers, it emphasizes the inside, the second-stage signification. Therefore, it is not very easy for the audiences in other countries who have had no experience of Japan's socio-cultural background to read the myths implied in animation images.

(Figure 2) Grave of the Fireflies (1988)

Grave of the Fireflies(1988) directed by Isao Takahata is a most appropriate example for the discussion dealt with in this chapter. This work dispassionately describes a young boy and his small sister who are dying miserably amid the inhospitality and indifference in the refugee camp where they were parted from their parents against the backdrop of Japan during the Pacific War, making the audience shed tears without even realizing it. What should be realized here is that if the work is approached from this viewpoint, it is the same as approaching them from the viewpoint of denotative representation, emotionally dramatizing the war tragedy brought about by air raids and atom bomb dropping, which is the first-stage signification (i.e., the surface). Therefore, if the audiences do not know Japan's historical background, they might think that the work is simply an anti-war animation.

What this work eventually intends to convey to the audience, however, is 'the myth of damage', which can be read as the second-stage signification, the inside. The myth of damage is the self-defence mechanism on a collective scale working to escape from the fear and shuddering of the Japanese, worrying about if they might be retaliated after the War to the same degree of severity with which they knew what atrocity they had done to their war victims during their colonial rule. This psychological mechanism disguised the nation called 'Japan'

and the entire country quite easily as the victim, regardless of the truth, on an individual basis, by recording and disseminating a series of experiences of how horribly the Japanese people were victimized, after they were defeated in the war, by the armed forces of the enemy country and even by the victims of colonies they forcibly occupied.

It means that Japan, which stood victoriously as an economic power after the war, newly emerges in the form of a victim from the position of the assailant in history, and in this process, as the properties of Barthes's modern myth, it conceals the nation's historical motive and intends to make it pass the general common sense[14]. In other words, the myth of damage connoted in the work presents the meanings it conveys as very natural and fair facts, thereby concealing historical motives, and eventually conceals the political effects (ideological effects) of the myth. In other words, in this work, the myth of damage is formed as the naturalization of motivation.

Furthermore, the myth of the work functions as a conveyer of making the dominant value or ideology of a country called Japan known to the entire world through the naturalization of motives, and in the course of the naturalization of motives, the biggest beneficiary, Japan, becomes the victim group without having to be especially categorized, and such a phenomenon is accepted as self-evident.

4. Conclusion

Modern society has produced various forms of mass media to convey different messages to the public. Animation particularly has been developing and expanding its own unique genre and cultural code[15]. The connotative

representation and communication that was intensively discussed in this essay as the crucial characteristic of Japanese feature-length animations. That is to say, Japanese feature-length animations emphasizes connotative signification system and aesthetic representation. As such, the characteristics of the aesthetic representation that appears in the animated images in Japanese feature-length animations eventually increase the possibility of aberrant decoding in the connotative second-stage signification, and can be viewed as increasing the breadth of the arbitrary interpretation and accommodation with regard to the work for the audience. There is no guarantee, however, that the message conveyed by the animated image is received by a wide variety of audiences in different environments and cultures, as intended by the animator. As such, in Japanese feature-length animations, it is possible that the thematic and mythical messages that the work intends to convey to the audience are not accepted universally due to the aberrant decoding. Nevertheless, Japanese feature-length animation can be said to show the characteristics of 'open aesthetics' from the accepting viewpoint because the arbitrary interpretation is broad in the process of the signification and acceptance of the messages.

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