

Table Tennis Culture in Japanese Anime: An Analysis of Cross-Border Cultural Fusion with "Ping Pong" as an Example

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Abstract: The Japanese anime industry enjoys a worldwide reputation for its rich imagination and superb production skills. At the same time, table tennis, as a popular sport with unique cultural symbols in Japan, has also been widely expressed and paid attention to in Japanese animation works. This paper studies the presentation of table tennis elements in anime works through literature analysis, case study analysis and other methods. Taking Ping Pong as an example, this paper analyzes how Japanese anime shows the passion and skills of table tennis to the audience through its unique narrative and visual art, aiming to reveal how the Japanese anime industry influences the development of table tennis culture and the role of this cross-border cultural fusion in the promotion of the sport in Japan and even globally.

Keywords: Japanese anime; table tennis; cultural fusion; sport promotion; narrative art

1. Introduction

1.1 Overview

Ping Pong is a television anime produced by the Japanese animation company Dragon's Child Studio, adapted from the manga of the same name by Taiyo Matsumoto. Since its broadcast on Fuji TV in April 2014, the anime has received widespread attention for its unique artistic style and profound thematic exploration. The work tells the story of two very different high school students - introverted table tennis prodigy Yu Hoshino and passionate Makoto Tsukimoto - who grow up in the table tennis club of Katase High School. Through the vehicle of table tennis, this work shows the life trajectory and journey of the main characters. Through their matches and training, the animation shows the skills and strategies of table tennis as well as the psychological changes of the athletes, and explores the deeper themes of hard work, talent, and growth.

1.2 Narrative Technique and Visual Art

Ping Pong adopts a multi-line parallel approach in its narrative, showing the diversity and complexity of the game of table tennis by switching the perspectives of different characters. Each character has his or her own unique story line and growth process, and the intersection and collision between them form the exciting part of the whole story. For example, the duel between the protagonists "Wolf" and "Dragon", as well as the friendship and rivalry between "Hai" and "Chuan", all show the underlying characteristics of the game of table tennis. The emotions and humanity behind the game of ping-pong are all well illustrated. Moreover, Ping Pong skillfully blends reality and imagination in the narrative. For example, Kong Wenger's airplane metaphor compares table tennis balls to airplanes, symbolizing his obsession to return to China. The use of this metaphor requires the audience to interpret it on their own, adding to the artistry and depth of the work. At the same time, the anime contains many shots in which reality and imagination merge, and these shots appear natural and uncontrived in Masaki Yuasa's surreal style of drawing. It shows authenticity in its plotting and does not hide the disparity between people brought about by talent. Not all characters in the anime are successful; they discover their limitations through ping-pong and take different paths in life. This display of authenticity makes the work closer to reality and gives the audience a deeper understanding of success and failure ^[1].

In addition, the narrative techniques of anti-routine and anti-climax show its uniqueness and artistry, breaking the audience's inherent expectations of traditional sports anime. For example, in the final table tennis match, instead of rendering the intensity of the match too much, the scene of a group of children learning table tennis for the first time is portrayed through a few strokes, which breaks the audience's

expectation and brings a sense of freshness, and at the same time conveys a more profound message: table tennis is not only a competition, but also a way for people to discover life and feel happy.

The visual art in the animation is equally compelling. The production team of Ping Pong utilized an innovative split-screen technique to make the images more vivid and rich, combining a detailed portrayal of the character's inner self and the comments of bystanders. This technique not only saved production costs, but also made the anime more vivid and easier to understand. In addition, the anime makes extensive use of surreal expression techniques such as ultra-wide angle shots and character distortion under strenuous action, which, combined with Masaki Yuasa's signature style of drawing, provide a unique visual experience for the viewer. Each match in the animation is meticulously designed to successfully convey the tension and dynamic beauty of a table tennis match through detailed graphics and action representations. Especially when showing the contact between the paddle and the ball, the rotation of the ball and the movement of the players, the animation enhances the immersion of the audience through exaggerated visual effects and sound design. For example, when a player serves the ball, the camera focuses on the rotation and trajectory of the ball. Through the fast switching of images and movements, it makes the audience feel as if they are in the scene of the match, and feel the excitement and passion of each stroke.

1.3 Expressive technique

Ping Pong makes extensive use of stream-of-consciousness techniques in presenting the inner activities of the characters. Through abstract images and non-linear narrative, the audience can feel the psychological changes and emotional fluctuations of the characters. Meanwhile, combined with music and sound effects, it creates a unique audio-visual experience that enhances the emotional depth and artistic expression of the story. Music plays a role in strengthening and transforming emotions in anime. When characters experience inner conflicts or emotional fluctuations, changes in the background music can guide the audience to feel the inner world of the characters. For example, when Makoto Tsukimoto faces a challenge, the tense rhythm of the music can strengthen the viewer's perception of his nervousness, whereas when Yu Hoshino remembers the past, the softer melody can evoke the viewer's sympathy and understanding for him. The sound effects work in tandem with the stream-of-consciousness narrative in the images, and together they build the character's psychological state. For example, in scenes where a character reminisces or fantasizes, sound effects such as echoes, muffled dialogue, or specific ambient sounds can help the audience better immerse themselves in the character's inner world and feel the flow of their thoughts. A character's theme song not only appears in their key scenes, but also plays during the character's inner monologue or stream-of-consciousness presentation, reinforcing the character's personality and emotions through music.

In stream-of-consciousness narratives, the integration of music and sound effects with visual images creates an immersive experience. Visual elements in anime, such as color, light, and abstract images, combine with music and sound effects to build a multi-layered narrative space that allows the audience to experience the character's inner world both visually and aurally.

1.4 Presentation of Table Tennis Elements

The animation of "Ping Pong" skillfully integrates the elements of table tennis into the storyline, which not only shows the charm of the sport itself, but also explores the inner world and growth process of the athletes. The table tennis elements in the anime are not only the sport itself, but also a catalyst for character and story development. For example, Yu Hoshino's table tennis talent and his personal struggles, and Makoto Tsukimoto's passion and his desire to win are all deeply displayed through their performances on the table tennis court. In addition, the animation also touches on the hardships of table tennis training, the development of match strategies and the psychological games between the players, all of which provide viewers with a comprehensive understanding of the sport of table tennis.

1.4.1 Characters' Table Tennis Talents and Personal Struggles

In the anime, each character possesses his or her own unique table tennis talent and personal struggles. For example, the protagonist Yu Hoshino's natural table tennis talent serves as the foundation for him to become a top player, but at the same time, he faces the hardships of training and challenges to his self-worth. This combination of talent and struggle adds emotion and tension to the story.

1.4.2 Character's passion and desire to win

In addition to talent, a character's passion and desire to win are also important elements in the anime.

Makoto Tsukimoto, another main character, is passionate about table tennis and harbors a desire to win. His story line shows his relentless efforts to realize his dream, which intertwines with Yu Hoshino's growth and shows the struggles and efforts within the athlete.

1.4.3 Toughness of Table Tennis Training and Match Strategy Development

The anime also vividly shows the hardships of table tennis training and the process of formulating game strategies. The characters go through hard training day in and day out and fight against their opponents on the field through skillful techniques and tactics. Their efforts and intelligence are reflected in every game, showing the audience the richness of table tennis.

1.4.4 Mental game between athletes

The psychological game scenes in the anime Ping Pong are rich and deep, not only in the interactions and matches between the characters, but also in their inner struggles and growth. For example, the relationship between Makoto Tsukimoto and Yu Hoshino constitutes one of the most complex and profound psychological games in the anime. Tsukimoto initially sees Hoshino as a hero, while Hoshino sees himself in Tsukimoto. The mutual influence and growth of the two in terms of skill, belief and psychology is one of the most moving psychological game scenes in anime. In particular, before the final match, Koizumi-sensei brings up his past of giving up the ball to his best friend who has a knee injury and questions Tsukimoto about whether or not he is going to play after Hoshino's knee injury, a plot point that reinforces the impact of heroic beliefs on Tsukimoto, while also demonstrating how the two men are mutually reinforcing because of their shared beliefs. Makoto Tsukimoto's psychological game scenes are mainly reflected in his inner changes and self-perception. From the lonely "Man in the Closet" to the "Real Man" who is saved by the hero, to the "Smile" who finally breaks through the bondage, Tsukimoto's psychological activities and growth are delicately depicted in the anime. In particular, his memories of being bullied as a child in his fight with Koizumi-sensei sparked his anger and transformed him. Yu Hoshino's character is made more three-dimensional by his righteousness and cherishing of his friends. He suffers from a knee injury before his fight against Kazama, but decides to show his will to keep fighting for Tsukimoto's sake. This belief in heroism not only affects Tsukimoto, but also makes Hoshino's character deeper.

Ryuichi Kazama's character is also greatly enriched, with his familial bonds and internal struggles becoming a major part of the psychological game. Kazama's relationships within his family, his connections with his coach and the owner of a table tennis supply company, and his emotional entanglements with his cousin Yurie-chan all add depth to the character. The pain and pressure Kazama carries after his father's suicide and his mental activities during his battle with Hoshino are classic mental game scenes in anime.

These mental game scenes not only show the interaction between the characters and the tension of the match, but also deeply depict the characters' inner growth and change. During the match, the characters not only have to deal with the technical pressure of their opponents, but also face their own inner fears and challenges. They must overcome their own mental barriers and remain calm and focused in order to win.

2. Case Studies of Cross-border Cultural Integration

2.1 The combination of animation and sports

The combination of animation and sports is an important case of cross-border cultural integration. As a representative work of this combination, Ping Pong not only shows the artistic charm of anime, but also conveys the spirit of sports. The sports elements in the anime, such as the game scenes of ping-pong, the training and competitive psychology of the athletes, are all endowed with profound emotions and story backgrounds, which enable the audience to enjoy the visual art and at the same time feel the reality and intensity of the sports competitions, and also convey the sports spirit of teamwork, perseverance and fair competition. This combination not only enriches the subject matter of animation and injects new vitality and significance into animation works, but also provides a new way for the dissemination of sports culture ^[2].

2.2 Dissemination and Acceptance of Table Tennis Culture

As a global sport, the culture of table tennis has been widely spread and accepted around the world.

By integrating table tennis into the storyline, anime works such as Ping Pong have enabled the culture of this sport to cross national boundaries and be understood and loved by viewers from different cultural backgrounds. The culture of table tennis in anime includes not only the skills and rules of the game, but also the athletes' spirit, competitive attitude, and emotional resonance with the audience. The dissemination and acceptance of this culture not only promotes the internationalization of table tennis, but also deepens the communication and understanding between different cultures and injects new vitality into the development of sports culture [3].

2.3 Mutual Influence of Table Tennis and Japanese Anime

The combination of table tennis culture and Japanese animation is not only a one-way influence, but a relationship of mutual promotion. On the one hand, the competitiveness and universality of table tennis provide rich materials for the creation of anime; on the other hand, the creativity and expressiveness of anime add new dimensions to the dissemination of table tennis culture. Table tennis elements in anime works not only attracted anime fans, but also stimulated the interest of table tennis fans. Anime characters have become role models and sources of inspiration for many young viewers, who improve their table tennis skills by imitating the characters in anime. At the same time, the table tennis game scenes and skill descriptions in the anime works provide table tennis players and coaches with new training ideas and strategies. This two-way interaction not only promotes the development of table tennis, but also enriches the content and depth of the anime works.

The success of works such as Ping Pong has not only enhanced the influence of table tennis among the younger generation, but has also led to wider global recognition of Japanese anime. This mutual influence shows the great potential and value of the cross-border integration of sports and animation, bringing new opportunities and challenges for the development of both fields [4].

2.4 Animation's Shaping of Table Tennis Cultural Identity

The role of anime and manga in shaping table tennis culture should not be overlooked. Major characters in anime, such as Makoto Tsukimoto and Yu Hoshino, use table tennis as part of their identity. Table tennis is not only their hobby, but also the core of their self-identity. Through table tennis, they find their self-worth and purpose in life, and this identity pushes them to improve and grow. The coaching characters in the anime, such as Mr. Koizumi, represent the inheritors of table tennis culture. They not only teach skills, but also convey the spirit and cultural values of table tennis. Through the interaction between coaches and students, the anime shows how the culture of table tennis is passed on from generation to generation. In addition, the character of Kong Wenger embodies table tennis as a bridge for international exchange. As a player from China, his inclusion not only brings an international perspective to the anime, but also shows how table tennis crosses borders and connects people from different cultures, demonstrating the diversity of table tennis culture, including different playing styles, training methods, and competition styles. This diversity not only enriches the content of the anime, but also reflects the inclusive and global nature of table tennis culture. Many scenes in the anime emphasize the spirit of table tennis, such as fair play, respect for opponents, teamwork, and constant self-challenge. These spirits permeate the characters' training and competition, becoming part of their lives and influencing their behavior and decision-making.

Through anime, table tennis is seen not only as a sport, but also as a cultural phenomenon and a way of life. Characters and stories in anime reflect the diverse values of table tennis, such as friendship, competition, and self-transcendence, which are closely related to the viewers' daily lives, thus enhancing their identification with table tennis culture. The global popularity of anime works also provides a platform for international identification and exchange of table tennis culture, promoting common understanding and respect for the sport among people from different cultures [5].

3. Conclusion

The global influence of the Japanese anime industry provides a strong platform for the spread of table tennis culture. Through its unique narrative and visual art, anime and manga works have enabled the charm of table tennis to cross cultural and linguistic barriers and to be accepted and loved by global audiences.

The cross-border cultural combination of animation and sports helps to enhance the influence of table tennis and promote cultural diversity and innovation. In the future, with the continuous progress and

innovation of virtual reality (VR), augmented reality (AR) and other technologies, we expect to see more combination of sports and animation, driving the development of related derivatives, bringing new growth points for the development of the industry, and jointly promoting the prosperity of global sports culture.

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