

Reception and critique of "the tale of the princess kaguya"

[Entertainment](#), [Movie](#)



The unconventional, stylistic approach of “ The Tale of the Princess Kaguya” has been brought to the attention of several curious individuals, gaining a plethora of positive remarks from both film critics and audience viewers alike. A review by Mark Kermode praises the film for its exquisite technical production. As investigated earlier in this essay, the adoption of watercolor and charcoal mediums are specifically recognized early in Kermode’s review. He mentions that the audience can almost “ feel the brushstrokes upon fibrous paper as the proudly hand-drawn action unfolds”, and applauds the directing members for the classic craftsmanship. It’s equally important to acknowledge the comment that the animation may not achieve the same reception with a younger crowd, as it may be more difficult to fully grasp undertones implied with the depiction of mundane desires versus the intangible joy from being in nature.

Likewise to Kermode, several critics primarily attribute the film’s stylistic choices for its positive reception. As a product of Studio Ghibli, one of the lead animation studios in Japan, “ The Tale of the Princess Kaguya” is expected, to an extent, to match up to the visual standards of its predecessor films. One review takes notice of this film’s contrast with Takahata’s previous works: the usual vibrant colors and solid lines are instead swapped for a more impressionistic, subtle washes in the background. References to classic Japanese techniques such as printmaking and links to Buddhism have also been acknowledged (Burr), thereby successfully incorporating cultural heritage as part of the visual experience. A critic even claims it to be “ a near masterpiece”—in a way that distinguishes itself from live-action movies (Rainer). However, assessing the

extent of the success of "The Tale of the Princess Kaguya" resolves into ambiguity. Success can be defined as a "favorable or desired outcome" or alternatively "the attainment of wealth, favor, or eminence" ("Definition Of Success").

In terms of attaining positive critiques and reception from a large audience, the film accomplishes a desirable outcome in appealing to a wide range of critics; although, lesser can be said to the younger Western audience due to its lengthy feature (Kermode). Critical reviews attribute the traditional animation's beauty to its impressionistic style—it exudes elegance with its pastel and sketched out watercolor landscapes, and conveys powerful emotions with black charcoal lines (Jones) that arch out the characters' designs. Nevertheless, the seen creative value is not the only aspect mentioned in reviews, in terms of evaluating the success of "The Tale of the Princess Kaguya". As an adaptation of the monogatari, "The Tale of the Bamboo Cutter", its story contributes a large role to the animation's pace, context and basis for its overall production. Though the movie runs for a total length of 140 minutes (The Tale of the Princess Kaguya), Takahata paces the plot as if retelling the story of each chapter of Kaguya's life. The context is provided by the original folkloric narrative, dating back to 10th century Japan.

The poignant tone and melancholic themes are brought about by the narration of Kaguya's eventual loss of nature and her love on earth. The narrative evokes a series of emotions that wouldn't have been possible with outstanding visuals alone. Other aspects which comprise large components

of the animated film include music production—exemplar being the song of “birds, bugs, beasts, grass, trees [and] flowers”, as taken directly from “The Tale of the Princess Kaguya”—voice direction, sound effect production, and marketing direction. The extent to which the specific early Japanese stylistic techniques impact the reception of the film remains uncertain. Viewers revel at the handmade creation of the scenery and characters, but not all are necessarily aware about the historical and cultural Japanese contexts behind the chosen art direction. Rather, it may have been the director and animators’ informed knowledge of such techniques—through careful consideration of works produced around the same time period of the film’s original narrative, “The Tale of the Bamboo Cutter”—that have led to an exquisite, visual execution. The graphics appeal to the audience not necessarily only because of the underlying Japanese roots, but simply perhaps due to its distinct, inherent aesthetic, which has not been illustrated in animated films before.

Conclusion

Returning to my research question, “To what extent does the reference to stylistic techniques of early Japanese art contribute to the success of Isao Takahata’s traditional animation ‘The Tale of the Princess Kaguya’?”, it’s evident that the use of traditional Japanese formal conventions plays a large part in the overall reception of the film, thereby affecting its success to at least a moderate extent. Determining the main reason for success, however, remains uncertain as several factors in the production of the animation have not been thoroughly discussed, such as the overarching plot, the original

soundtrack, the voice acting, and the like. Furthermore, success can refer to several achievements of the film, from visual success in terms of retaining the authenticity of classical Japanese works, to financial success in terms of total gross sales, and even to its success in fully depicting the written narrative.

Nevertheless, it can be said that the reference to stylistic techniques of early Japanese art is authentic and consistent throughout the film, connecting to the time of the story. Remnants of yamato-e, nise-e, and sumi-e are visible in different scenes. In addition, connections to cultural elements such as imperial palaces, seasonal imagery and religious figures enrich the development of these key visual scenes in providing Japanese historical and cultural context. This research has implications on animation as a medium to express various styles. The shift towards the translation of historical art choices into modern adaptations can be a successful in communicating culturally-specific work to the contemporary audience; subsequently, cultural heritage is preserved and passed on to the knowledge of newer generations. "The Tale of the Princess Kaguya" challenges current art directions, and finds success in mediums typically associated with fine art—paving a path for the use of unusual styles for the animation industry. Insight is shed on how the shift in art direction can enrich both the film and the viewers' experience.

However, it is difficult to assess the success of a film through evaluating the formal conventions of stylistic techniques alone. Instead, questions could be raised on the possible factors that limit the film's success. Would "The Tale

of the Princess Kaguya” have the same impact if it hadn’t been produced traditionally? If the film had retained the usual stylistic conventions of Studio Ghibli animated features, would it have affected its overall reception? These unresolved issues could be further examined in the evaluation of Takahata’s work.