



Research Article

**THE TALE OF PRINCESS KAGUYA
FROM A PERSPECTIVE OF APPLIED FOLKLORE***Nguyen Huu Nghia**Ho Chi Minh City University of Education**Corresponding author: Nguyen Huu Nghia – Email: nghianh@hcmue.edu.vn**Received: March 07, 2019; Revised: April 10, 2019; Accepted: May 09, 2019***“Simplicity is the ultimate sophistication”**

(Leonardo da Vinci)

ABSTRACT

The article analyzes the values of the movie Princess Kaguya (The Tale of the Princess Kaguya) by the late director Takahata Isao under the perspective of folklore applications. As one of the most successful products in applying folklore to the cartoon, this movie has created a connection between traditional folklore and contemporary, pop culture, which attracts the attention of the young generation to the values of national cultural heritage and practical experience of life. Not only does it meet the tastes of many kinds of viewers, but the film also stimulates multi-dimensional interactions through the author's unique narrative talent.

Keywords: Kaguya, Takahata Isao, folklore application, reality, tradition, contemporary.

Introduction

Applied folklore has been formed since the 1930s, shaped as an independent science in the 1960s and thrived in the late 70s of the twentieth century. As one of the names that initiated this research, Botkin (1953) said: “It is not until (a folklist) applies folklore to history and literature, characterized by society, education, entertainment or art, he becomes an applied folklist” (p.199). The concept of “applied folklore”, according to Hufford (1971), is simply understood as “applying the concepts, methods and materials of folklore research to solve practical problems” (p.6) Dorson (1971) went into details, “applied folklore” has 3 meanings: the first meaning is social transformation; the second one is the development of people’s intelligence; Finally, it is the expansion of research. (p.40) Thus, the universal concept of applied folklore covers most areas of life, a connection between traditional and contemporary life: “Applied folklore can imply improvement of society, the application of traditional techniques and knowledge to modern science and technology, from folklore studies to illuminate issues in the enriches human life or applies concepts and assumptions in folklore theory to solve any real problem of nature.” (Jones, 1994, p .13).

Within the scope of application of oral art compositions, from the 90s of the twentieth century, especially since the beginning of the 21st century, people who worked in mass culture have not only achieved success on entertainment services but also created a

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breakthrough in terms of art and community development, the explosion of the film universe is a typical example.

The movie *The Tale of Princess Kaguya*¹ (Japanese name is かぐや姫の物語 - Kaguya-hime no Monogatari), time length is 137 minutes, produced by Studio Ghibli (Japan), is the last and best film was written and directed by Takahata Isao (1935 - 2018), when he turned to 78. The film was highly appreciated by the experts, received 07 awards and 19 rank nominations for the best animated feature section at national and international film festivals. The work is adapted from the fairy tale The Old Bamboo Man (取物語 - Taketori Monogatari), or the Bamboo Fairy, Princess Kaguya (かぐや姫 - Kaguya-hime), one of the most ancient folklore stories (about the 10th century) of Japan. It can be affirmed that this is a cinematographic work with many applications from folklore.

2. The shift from traditional folklore culture domain to the popular culture domain in the post-industry era

By adapting the fairy tale The old man chopped bamboo into an anime Story of Kaguya, Takahata Isao and his crew made revival of fairy tales in a new, special and unique form. From the digital age (industrial revolution 3.0) and later, forms of folk tales preserved by oral retelling have gradually disappeared. That does not mean that people stop thinking about tradition, or rupture with legend. The fact that the concerns and interests of the contemporary public have shifted to direct, multi-tasking types of narrative to create emotional effects on the senses, bring life-like experiences. In the novel of Virtual Arena (Ready Player One - 2011), Ernest Christy Cline gave an interesting topic: Pop culture has become the “religion” of young people in the internet age.

Being the focal point of modern pop culture, all kinds of image narrative such as Movies, Game, Cartoon, Anime, Comic, Manga.vv. have created a virtual reality, where only with little money, people can escape to forget the bad effects of real life, according to Luis Sucasas², today "the moral lessons that young people get from Luke Skywalker³ rather than from Jesus."(Evangelicalfocus, accessed at 10:30, on 08. 6. 2018). Therefore, it can be said that Princess Kaguya's story is a trendy product and a vital requirement to revive the traditional cultural heritage.

Regarding the effective approach and exploitation of traditional cultural capital, this is not a new direction. From the supreme deities to demigods, demigods, from gods to goddesses and their descendants in Greek, Roman, Nordic and Egyptian myths like Zeus, Poseidon, Death, Odin, Set, Gaea, Thor, Hela, Bast, Hercules, Heimdall. etc. are reproduced to a certain extent the inherent powers and are remade with a new look on the basis of postmodern cinematic thinking. However, when adapting the fairy tale, the old man cut bamboo into an animated film, departed director Takahata Isao made a bold choice. While the majority of contemporary film makers were exploiting mythical materials in a miraculous, miraculous way,

¹ Source: *phimmoi.net*

² Writer, journalist, translator and editor of technology and game.

³ A fictional character and also the main character in the original trilogy of the space chronicles *Star Wars* created by George Lucas.

aiming to build monumental superstitions with outstanding fictional colors, Studio Ghibli's film products in general, especially director Takahata Isao focused on realism of life with the sad ending, was a brave decision and a challenging process.

Looking back at the history of Kaguya's visual application in the Japanese manga and anime universe, we will see clearly the adventure or the reverse of Isao Takahata. In the last four decades, there have been 19 films, short stories, long stories and comics that each adapted, inspired or borrowed the character image of Kaguya. In 1974, the first animated series of Princess Kaguya characters was produced and broadcasted on Japanese television, which was then displayed widely on television systems of Western countries such as Germany, France, Spain, Italy, Mexico, Chile etc. Kaguya character has appeared in Doraemon, in episode Nobita adopted the princess Kaguya (2005) of painter Fujiko Fujio. After the anime Princess Kaguya (The Tale of the Princess Kaguya) was born a year ago, in 2014, Hobby Japan bookstore launched a new series of female characters based on Kaguya image in the fairy tale. Among four typical anime variations inspired by the image of the princess from the moon, except Kaguya Hime in The Tale of the Princess Kaguya, the other three characters all play antagonists: Otsutsuki Kaguya in Naruto - the source of chakra, the power of ninjas- life was bound in hatred and power, Kaguya in the Inuyasha anime - a monster who was capable of absorbing the fair nymph's energy and Schneepriinzessin Kaguya in Sailormoon - a villain has ice power. Despite being composed late, the story of the departed director Takahata Isao "Princess Kaguya" is the only work can keep almost information from the plot to the character of the oldest original story.

Moreover, the adaptation movie The story of Princess Kaguya revived fairy tales in a rather old way. While most of the animation studios in the world have made movies with 3D and 4D technology for a long time, the Studio Ghibli artists still use the pencil and diligently take care of each frame. However, with "the old man cut bamboo", it can be said that Japanese traditional 2D drawing style is a particularly suitable choice. From the minimalist strokes and the deep colors of the graphic to the moderate level of movement, from the subtleties of observing and expressing the material of life to the choice of music and the effects of aesthetic emotions has formed a whole body that reaches the level of sophistication of cinematographic art. In Japanese anime history, until now, apart from the only case is Spirited Away, which was directed and written by Hayao Miyazaki, won the Oscar in 2002 for the film category. The best animation is only Takahata Isao's Princess Kaguya (The Tale of the Princess Kaguya) nominated for this prestigious category at the 2015 American Academy Film Festival.

Inspite of not being commercially successful, the story of Princess Kaguya was highly praised by professional critics, and those who used to watch this movie, gave it a special affection. On Rotten Tomatoes cinema page (accessed at 14: 10 h, June 8, 2019), The Tale of the Princess Kaguya achieved 100% positive scores out of 89 reviews, while Spirited Away 97% of 185 articles. In Vietnam, on Phimmoi page (accessed at 14: 15 h, 08. 6. 2019), the film reached 1. 165. 287 views with 770 likes and 618 comments. Takoyaki, "Vietnam's leading Japanese culture site" (accessed at 14: 25, on June 8. 2019), for this movie 8.5 / 10

points. The impression that movie made on young viewers are a good sign, on Escapistmoment (accessed at 15:30, on 08. 6. 2019), a female blogger with the Escapism nickname wrote: “Before watching this anime, I didn't really think a movie adapted by the fairy tale can make such a deep impression like that”. On the Phimmoi page (accessed at 4:36, on 08th June, 2019), the audience Trung Reuta commented: “This is a completely successful animated movie which is worth for those who watch movies with a soul ready to receive emotions.” The content of 618 lively comments on Phimmoi page were mainly about the details, the meaning of the film, shows special attention of the youngsters to that movie.

3. The connection between traditional values with contemporary life

In the contemporary society, the orientation to access traditional cultural values to young people is an essential requirement. By transforming a folk tale into an animated film, Takahata Isao has built up the traditional beauty of Japan with realistic and vivid drawings. The author has solved the most difficult problem of how to fill in the gaps of the folk story to attract young audiences while still retaining almost intact the narrative structure of it.

Anime brings Japanese culture all over the world, which is unquestionable. The problem of applying the meaning of folklore to contemporary Japanese life is the role of connecting traditional values with the young generation - digital generation, cloud citizens - those who do not imagine life before it has a social network. The story of Princess Kaguya is a jaunt with the wild nature, where children climb trees, pick fruits, play with insects every day. They wore old clothes with growling stomachs and they had to eat roots and occasionally had to steal. The older child led the younger. The childhood gradually passed with joyfulness and innocence as wild trees. In spite of the destitution, it is truly a paradise with full of laughter, clear eyes and innocent voices under the shadows, which are as simple as the original source of all things

So what do the actual facts mean to young people today?

If generation Y (born between 1981 and 1996) is regarded as a digital generation, then generation Z (from 1997 onwards) is regarded as cloud citizens (IGEN or Centennial). They are people who have quite a lot of advantages, such as being good at self-awareness, self-reliance, independence, innovation and goal-oriented. However, besides the basic science knowledge in books and experience of urban life, digital technology, artificial intelligence, people are significantly lacking of experience: experience of natural life (including the experience of wild nature, interacting with the living environment and the rules of the universe) and the meaning of life. These experiences are not merely knowledge but a combination of awareness and emotion - two basic elements in the personality structure of each human being.

The story Princess Kaguya brings the familiar atmosphere which closely related to nature and daily life. The generation of Takahata Isao deeply attached with nature, leaf houses, trails, plants, birds, insects and endless cycles of seasons. He gathered most of the natural things into the frames: the cicadas were emerging in its new form, the frog was croaking while jumping, the snake was swimming across the river, the weaverbird was nesting, the squirrel was passing the trees, the deer is grazing near the roadside, the wild

boars were competing to be breast-fed the kingfisher was falling into the river to catch prey, etc. Each species has a habit that appears throughout the film, creating a full picture of the wild life as well as the tranquility of the mountains.

However, it is not important to display the specimens of life with pictures or animations but as a way of telling stories, the ability to create the feeling viewers' hearts. Right in the first minute, the film story led us with the sound of "chasing... tripping... tripping..." echoing in a quiet space of a wide forest, then it showed an image of an old man cutting bamboo strut. This man cut the bamboo tree, took the stem away and then dragged them out of other trees, put them on the ground, cut them into small branches, bunched them up into bundles and carried on home. The detail is simple but it must be a director who came from a farm or he spent time observing and listening carefully to organize a scene with only 2 minutes (1-2 minutes) but achieving the perfect level of honesty about such a rustic work.

With such an honest description, the scene described the feelings of Mat Tre and Sutemaru, it was such an interesting scene while they were sitting in a grove of trees and stealing melons. After being safe and sound, because the garden owner turned away, Sutemaru took the small knife hidden in his belt, cut a very fine line and separated the melon into two parts. And then he curled his five fingers just like a spoon, scooped up the seeds in the ripe melon, dropped it in his mouth and enjoyed the sweet flavor with the refreshing expression. Mat Tre also quickly imitated every single Sutemaru's gesture. The two children ate single cool pieces, looking at each other with four eyes, and giggling in the 23rd – 24th minute). As another example, in the 9th – 10th minute, the film shows the peaceful atmosphere of the Okina family. While the husband was whittling bamboo, the wife was washing clothes. Nearby, the children were laying and rolling on the ground, then there was a fog suddenly jumped in, which made them surprisingly delighted; they followed the fog and imitated the fog's croaking. It can be said that Takahata Isao is "a realistic magician".

The material of life in his works is so rich that people also call him "a Japanese history writer with animation". Through the movie about Princess Kaguya, it can be seen that Takahata Isao knows in details every single view the mountain, the edge of the forest, clearly remember the shape of each traditional house. Watching the film about the life of Mat Tre (1st– 31st minute), young people nowadays can know how the wooden stone leaf house in Japan 10 years ago was elaborately made, and simply decorated, the front of the house was always covered with wooden doors, bamboo platform was put in the porch. They usually grew a cherry blossom in the yard. The house turned its back to the mountain, there were trails before and after the house to go into the forest to make and meet. In the house, all items are made of natural materials, and carefully made by hands. All of them expressed the simple healthy lifestyle which was not fancy or luxurious but happy and peaceful. We also understand more about the diligence and patience of Japanese people through handicrafts such as spinning fabric, weaving bamboo baskets, making bowls, burning bricks, etc. Those are people who are optimistic and love working, be calm in front of the hardships in life.

Moreover, Takahata Isao was skillful to convey traditional culture into the appropriate parts of the narrative layout. Kaguya's life in the city seemed to open a completely different page from the custom in her childhood. In this movie, Japan's rituals, rules, quintessence, and customs of the Heian era (平安時代: 794 - 1192) was reproduced in details like a scroll of ancient paintings opening in front of viewers. Kaguya wears junihitoe (a kimono-type, with elegant flowers of noble women at that time), she let her hair straight and tied behind the back, neatly covering the ears and eyebrows was shaved and then she used a black ink brush to draw a bold line, etc. Her bedroom and study area always had curtains. When there was a guest, she sit sat deep inside, and spoke out, not letting the outsider see, only with a command of the father can she meet the stranger.

A noble lady must learn to play musical instruments, play chess, make poems, and paint. The way to walk, stand, eat and wear must follow ritual. Girls who reach puberty can be celebrated a party to mark an important milestone in their lives, etc. In those occasions, people drink wine, listen to songs and invite singers, dancers to sing, to dance and perform with unique traditional music instruments.

Through this cinematic work, cultural and historical knowledge can be received by young people easily and naturally than the boring historical lessons taught at school. For the young generation, nothing is limited and standardized even the ugliness can be a trend. They are not afraid to approach the old, but only the boring ones. With the slogan "Always be yourself", they can only be convinced when what they approached has really valuable and positive impact. With the Story of Princess Kaguya, Takahata Isao did that. The film itself is unique enough to inspire young people to consciously live in harmony, protect the natural environment, preserve the traditional cultural values of the nation and desire to build a great world.

4. Going beyond the boundary of the anime to create multidimensional interactions

Entertainment is the dominant default function and can be considered a “privilege” of animation. However, the best thing about stories is that they are not framed or limited by narrative formulas. Each of us is a potential storyteller and can have our own storytelling. Takahata Isao has told stories in a very special way, breaking every framework. His anime has two outstanding properties: one is the pursuit of pure entertainment, swirling the material; second is the ability to store art codes, create a multi-purpose, interactive stimulus and meet the needs of many types of public.

In his lifetime, Takahata Isao often expressed frustration with the anime industry, Japan's pride. He said that television anime was commercialized, less educational, just about the subject of robots, space wars, metamorphosis superheroes or frivolous love affairs. According to him, these topics are highly entertaining but do not help the child's soul find meaning in life. Because of that, he was determined to create a true world in animated films. According to the information from Lostbird website (accessed at 20:00 h, on August 8, 2019), Takahata Isao, when answering the Variety in 2016, affirmed: “It definitely will make the works become less fatasy, but it is absolutely necessary for those who still believe in fairy tales. The unimaginable jump just become successful when it relies on a firm foundation of reality”.

The story of Princess Kaguya is possibly seen as a “Song of Life”. The first half of the film (actually only accounts for about a quarter of time - from the 1st to the 31st minute) is “the song of joy”, the second half is “the tragic song”. The film's message is sent through 03 songs, in addition to the title song “Memories of life” (おちのちの記憶 - Inochi no Kioku), the film also uses the song "Chorus" (わらべ唄 - Warabe Uta) and “Celestial Song” (天女の歌 - Tenjo no Uta). The melodies kept humming, and still in the viewers' minds: *“Turn around, spin around, water wheel, spin around and then call the sun. Birds, insects and animals, grass, plants, along with flowers bring spring, summer, autumn and winter, flowering, left, and then dies. Human life comes and then goes.”*

This is a Zen tone, a deep awareness of the regular rule of the universe: the birth and death of all eternity are the chorus of the song of life. In the restraint of social norms and institutions, people fall into contradictory riches - poverty, freedom-framework, love-responsibility, joy-suffering. The risk of being corrupted, paying, losing themselves is an obvious fact of life. Kaguya came from the moon, going through years of youthful and peaceful childhood, then forced to live to become a true princess. The actual collisions, the breakdown and spurt of instincts made her leave the world forever in her regret. Takahata Isao has reconducted faithfully, without embroidering the story or feeling pessimistic with reality. It is a full appreciation of the two extremes of life.

It is easy to assumed the sad color of the work through the films when Kaguya lived as a princess but unhappily, especially unhappy ending with the details of Shakyamuni came to take her in front of the extreme misery of her parents. (in the 123rd -130th minute). It may suggest that Takahata Isao wants to convey the message of “Life is suffering” of Buddhism while appreciating the realm of Nirvana. However, in fact, pushing the drama into climax by installing an artistic indicator at the end of the story that created a strong criticism of the cynical philosophy of life. In fact, the author has succeeded in implementing his artistic intentions. On Phimmoi.net page, there are quite a few comments that are disappointed, even indignant about this ending. That attitude stems from the misinterpretation of the artist's artistic intentions, but the result is referenced to that idea: No matter how happy or miserable life is, it is worth living. The author's antithesis has created the powerful cinematic effect as expected.

The success of “realistic magician” is creating the atmosphere for the work. It is the combination and adjustment of different darknesses, hot and cold of color, high-low tone, fast-slow melody of soundtrack, fast-slow motion of frames, etc. The most important is the calculation of the level of coordination.

Takahata Isao has chosen pale color and slow rhythm throughout the film. However, in some segments, he subtly handled these two factors to accurately convey the progress of the film as well as his artistic intentions. The daily life and labor scenes are drawn by standard lines and neutral colors. But when it comes to recreating dramatic details, the frames seem to raise up. After Kaguya heard the insulting mockery of her princess status, she run away from the fake noble place. The fast movements combined with smudged lines and dark colors have depicted the wrath and extreme pain of the character. The speed of turning the frame over and over again constantly made it seem like there was a strange

power of instinct that led Kaguya to pass through countless miles, overcoming the barrier of coincidence, when the body was being scratched, and the clothes was ragged. In the peak of that spurt, she was wild and senseless, no longer aware of the physical pain (in the 51st - 53rd minute). In another dimension, to recreate the world of dreams, each frame seemed to be stretched out, endlessly flowing along the emotions of the characters. The last time returning to her hometown, Kaguya met Sutemaru again. Hand in hand, they led each other through the vast valley of yellow flowers, gliding through the clear blue autumn water and then soaring out of the towering trees, entering the flock of geese; then they turned down to the vast rice fields again, swooping down to the grass, then heaping up into the sky, crossing the meadows and hills, reaching out to the sea, wandering with white seagulls (minutes 120-121). By blending the character's soft and expressive movement, the bright and rich colors of the natural scenery, along with the high-pitched rhythm and sometimes with peaceful melody of the music and image rotation. Through many different spaces, it can be said that this is one of the most exciting scenes of cinema history. The talented magician Takahata Isao has fostered the flesh for the minimalist texture of the folk story, making it the most extraordinary experience of the anime universe, a proof "Simplicity is also extreme sophistication" (Leonardo da Vinci).

The film transfers many layers of meaning which are not only for children. Kids can see themselves through the pure innocent world of children living in the mountains in harmony with nature, in the friendship of friends as well as in the warm arms of their mothers or in the strict love of their fathers. Through the story, parents can redefine what love is for children in the family. Young people on their journey to discover themselves, fulfill their dreams can put themselves in Kaguya's position to understand the responsibility of being a child as well as forming a lifestyle and to know how to behave. How to get true happiness? Answering this question, are we approaching an awareness of the limit of human life, the cruelty of the cycle of time, from which to respect every moment of reality, to live fully? And then knowing the how to keep integrity and honesty in every moment, holding happiness and self-determination in the future?...

Passing through the dogmatic path of one-way example, the story sets the issue with antithesis. This is a playground for authors and the public to have positive interactions. Reflecting on the details of the drama story is a possible process for young audiences to assert their independence and self-freedom as the root of life, thus contributing to build a multidimensional world view and life and act for values and sustainable development.

5. Conclusion

The Tale of Princess Kaguya is a story written by Takahata Isao with full of passion and dedication that links traditional Japanese cultural values to contemporary life before closing the 57-year career of art. The author has enlivened a thousand-year-old fairy tale, turning it into a living artistic entity, a gift for future generations. The legacy he left is a redefinition of a core genre of popular culture. Takahata Isao deserves to be designated "realistic magician", "Japanese history writer with animation".

❖ **Conflict of Interest:** Author have no conflict of interest to declare.

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CHUYỆN CÔNG CHÚA KAGUYA DƯỚI GÓC NHÌN VĂN HÓA DÂN GIAN ỨNG DỤNG

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“Sự giản dị cũng là sự tinh tế tốt cùng”

(Leonardo da Vinci)

TÓM TẮT

Bài viết phân tích những giá trị của bộ phim *Chuyện công chúa Kaguya* (*The Tale of the Princess Kaguya*) của cố đạo diễn Takahata Isao dưới góc nhìn văn hoá dân gian ứng dụng. Là một trong những sản phẩm thành công nhất trong việc ứng dụng truyện dân gian vào lãnh địa phim hoạt hình, tác phẩm này đã tạo ra được một sự kết nối giữa văn hoá dân gian truyền thống với văn hoá đại chúng đương đại, thu hút sự quan tâm của thế hệ trẻ vào những giá trị của di sản văn hoá dân tộc và những cảm nghiệm thực tế về đời sống. Không những đáp ứng được thị hiếu của nhiều loại công chúng, bộ phim còn kích thích sự tương tác đa chiều thông qua tài năng kể chuyện độc đáo của tác giả.

Từ khóa: Kaguya, Takahata Isao, văn hoá dân gian ứng dụng, hiện thực, truyền thống, đương đại.