

The Impact of the Peculiarities of EVA Characterization on Its Commercialization

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Abstract: At present, the issue of Japanese anime pop culture has received widespread attention from all walks of life. However, there are still insufficient studies on the relationship between character creation and commercialization. This paper analyzes the particularity of character building in Neon Genesis Evangelion and the influence and connection of character building on the commercialization of EVA. It is concluded that the characterization of EVA has the particularity of the times. It contains a lot of negative shaping and human nature analysis, and this characteristic has gained the audience's sense of recognition and empathy, thus promoting the development of commercialization. The commercialization of EVA is inseparable from the Japanese production committee system, and at the same time, character building is the fundamental reason that affects whether fans buy or not, character appearance is an important reason that affects the desire to buy. Based on this, this paper puts forward the following suggestions: Start with marketing and innovation to retain old audiences and attract new ones. Seize the hot spots of the times and maintain multi-sector cooperation.

Keywords: Neon Genesis Evangelion, Animation Industry, Characterization, Commercialization of Derivatives

1. Introduction

With the sustainable development and globalization of the Japanese animation industry, Japanese animation also has a huge market and loyal fan base in China. The influence of the Japanese animation industry in overseas markets has gradually surpassed that of the local market, and more and more Japanese animation works are taking advantage of the wave of cultural exchange to show their charm to more countries around the world [1]. *Neon Genesis Evangelion* (EVA for short) is a Japanese anime production co-produced by GAINAX and Tatsunoko Production, which has a large number of fans around the world for its unique narrative approach and profound character building. The work revolves around the struggle of a group of children against a mysterious enemy, that is the Apostle, and its characterization has attracted a lot of attention because of its peculiarities in the social structure. At present, one of the most representative studies at home and abroad is Azuma Hiroki, which focuses on the narrative and audience emotion of EVA and analyzes the East Asian culture contained in EVA from multiple theoretical perspectives [2]. Chunpo Zhou discussed in detail the mode and history of the spread of the anime [3]. The purpose of this study is to explore the specificity of character creation in EVA and the impact of this specificity on its commercialization. This paper analyzes the relationship between character building and commercialization by studying the unique role of

character creation in the work, as well as its impact on the audience's emotional investment and the derivatives market. The study uses a variety of methods, such as questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and event theory, to obtain data on the impact of characterization from the perspective of the audience, and deeply analyze how the characterization shapes the audience's consumption behavior. In addition, this study will help to fill the gap in the current research on the relationship between animation character shaping and commercialization and provide new perspectives and ideas for research in related fields. Through this research, it is expected to gain a deeper understanding of the important role of character building in animation works and provide a valuable reference for the creation and commercial operation of the animation industry.

2. Method

2.1. Questionnaires

The purpose of this study is to understand the relationship between the audience of *Neon Genesis Evangelion* about the specificity and commercialization of the work's characterization. To achieve this goal, questionnaires were used as the primary data collection tool. The design of the questionnaire follows the principles of structuring and systematization to ensure the accuracy and validity of the data. The survey was conducted among all viewers who had watched EVA, and the questionnaire was distributed online to the target audience. Extensive sample collection to more accurately reflect the overall views and attitudes of the audience base. The questionnaire design is divided into three main parts. Basic Information: This section aims to collect basic information about participants, including age, gender, occupation, etc., as well as how they were exposed to EVA and how long they have been exposed to EVA, to have a preliminary understanding of the background of the applicant. Characterization Issues: This section focuses on the participants' views on EVA characterization, including their evaluation of the particularity of characterization, the importance of characterization in the play, and the emotional investment in the characters in the play. These questions can gain insight into the audience's perception and attitude towards character building. Commercialization Issues: This section explores participants' behaviors and attitudes towards EVA commercialization, including their consumption of EVA products, their views on EVA commercialization strategies, and what they consider to be the most important factors for EVA commercialization. The final data were collected as follows: 104 questionnaires were filled in and 86 questionnaires were valid.

2.2. Semi-Structured Interviews

To further obtain the audience's understanding and perception of EVA, this study adopted a semi-structured interview method, that is, the interviewer followed the preset question framework and flexibly adjusted the question method and order according to the respondents' answers and feedback. This approach helps create a more natural and in-depth conversation that encourages respondents to express their true thoughts and feelings. The study conducted an average of 15 minutes of in-depth interviews with six respondents, including 2 teachers with profound knowledge of animation and 4 students with a deep interest in animation culture. The professional knowledge of the two teachers can provide in-depth insights for the interview and have important reference value for understanding the inner workings, cultural characteristics, and development trends of the animation industry. Four students volunteered to participate in interviews and express their opinions in EVA-related forums. Such interviewees can bring fresh and innovative personal insights to the interview. The interview questions are divided into two main parts. Character Building Questions: This part focuses on the respondents' views on character building, including their first impression of the anime, their favorite characters and plots, and the particularity of EVA character building. Commercialization Questions: This section revolves around respondents' perceptions of EVA commercialization. This includes the

frequency and cost of buying goods, the main reasons for buying goods, and whether it is enough to buy products for your favorite characters or recommend anime to others. The above design helps to provide insight into the respondents' perceptions and attitudes toward character building and how they relate these elements to their own life experiences.

3. Data Analysis

3.1. Characterization Related

Neon Genesis Evangelion aired on TV Tokyo in Japan from 1995 to 1996. After a series of natural disasters and social and political historical events broke out in the 90s, the mental state of young people in Japan was relatively depressed, and the public was deeply prejudiced against otaku. The birth of EVA breaks the story structure of the past, that is, the development of stories under the exact worldview, such as shoujo manga and mecha manga. After 1995, otaku entered the era of database cultural consumption, opening an era of grand narrative withering [2]. The focus of storytelling is on non-linear storytelling and characterization, as well as the use of stream of consciousness. The importance of the character setting is more important than the story itself, and the setting of the worldview is a secondary factor. EVA is complicated by its atypical method of storytelling, in which many plot details are revealed only in passing and are not verbalized by the characters [4]. At the same time, computers and other technological technologies have also accelerated the spread of animation culture [5]. EVA's story itself is a powerful representation of the word "despair". A group of 14-year-olds need to take on the responsibility of saving the world in a post-apocalyptic environment.

On the issue of character building, the questionnaire showed that the depth of character creation in EVA had a profound impact on the audience. The success of character building not only greatly affects the audience's preference for the work, but also invisibly shapes the audience's aesthetic and emotional connection. 54.65% and 52.33% of the applicants said that Ikari Shinji and Asuka were the most touched by the EVA characters. 66.28% and 56.98% of the respondents said that the role in EVA brought them a sense of identity and empathy. When it comes to the impact of character creation on EVA as a whole, "empathy and the moment of character discovery" is the main reason why 63.95% of the respondents believe that EVA is a masterpiece and can be watched many times. And 52.33% of the applicants believe that the in-depth discussion of human nature and existence is the most attractive part of the EVA plot. This underscores the centrality of character building in anime productions and its key role in the audience's overall viewing experience. According to the further analysis of the questionnaire data, it is found that the success of character building is not only reflected in the external image and personality characteristics of the character but also its inner emotional depth and the richness of the story background. 69.77% of the applicants believe that the delicate psychological portrayal of the characters is the most successful part of EVA character building. When a character can resonate emotionally with the audience and connect emotionally with the character, the work can truly touch the hearts and minds of the audience and leave a lasting impression.

3.1.1. Respondents' Perceptions of Character Creation

In the characterization interviews, the main questions focused on the interviewees' initial impressions of EVA and their preferences and feelings about EVA characterization. During the interview, it was learned that the respondents were exposed to EVA for different reasons, ranging from contact with game companies due to the theme song or simply watching the anime based on the release time. Respondents believe that EVA character building has particularity, that is, compared with the same type of drama, its characters are full of negative portrayals, and the protagonists are all non-traditional heroes. This negative shaping has won the empathy and recognition of a large number of audiences

and promoted the commercialization of EVA products. From the interviews, it can also be seen that the first impression of EVA includes concepts such as "mystery, abstraction, and stream of consciousness". They believe that EVA is no longer similar to traditional mechas, but is full of religion, philosophy, and stream-of-consciousness shaping. EVA uses a lot of repetitive words, and distorted and ambiguous spaces to show inner struggles, or uses virtual fabricated scenes to reflect the emotional collision of characters, combining elements with a sense of loneliness such as trains and sunsets. Not only is it visually abstract, but also music plays an important role. When Ikari Shinji held Kaoru Nagisa in his hand and wondered whether to kill him, Beethoven's Ode to Joy lasted sixteen seconds during this time [6]. In short, the interviewees came into contact with EVA through different means, but their first impression was that of mystery, abstraction, and stream of consciousness, and they felt that the work transcended traditional mecha and presented an extraordinary artistic style.

3.1.2. Respondents' Feelings About the Characterization

From Table 1, most of the interviewers believe that there are a lot of negative emotions in EVA characterization, that is, everyone is evading responsibility and hating themselves and the world. The characters in EVA break the traditional heroes of the 90s anime, such as in "Gundam", Amuro Ray did not hesitate to take on the responsibility of saving the world. However, Ikari Shinji, the protagonist of EVA, has been rebelling against his father's expectations and orders for him and reflects his inner world in the form of constantly running away from home, escaping, crying, and autism. According to Freud's theory, in the process of Ikari Shinji's growth, there was a contradiction between the id and the superego, that is, the contradiction between a comfortable and stable life and the person he wanted to be [7]. Ikari Shinji is constantly entangled and painful between his father's denial, his pursuit of a stable life, and the suffering of his friends. The whole article presents the process of the male protagonist finding their "ego", which profoundly reflects the psychological situation of many people in real life. In addition to the Ikari Shinji, other characters also have a lot of negative portrayals. For example, Asuka's stubborn temper, constantly denying others and constantly competing with others. Ayanami Rei is impersonal and unpredictable. Ikari Gendo is full of paranoia about everything, and even being very vicious towards his son. In some episodes, the characters' shortcomings outweigh their strengths.

Table 1: Respondents' views on EVA characters.

Respondents	Characterization
Student 1	The portrayal is delicate, all characters have flaws, and even the shortcomings outweigh the strengths. However, all of them are not annoying.
Student 2	EVA is good at showing the negativity of human nature.
Student 3	EVA can deeply reflect the characters through the narrative.
Student 4	The inner and outer portrayals of the characters are different.
Teacher 1	Japanese historical reasons influence anime character-building.
Teacher 2	The characters are mostly passive and avoidant.

3.1.3. The Impact of Character Building on EVA

Respondents believe that this particular negative portrayal can bring them a sense of authenticity, identity, and empathy. Different from the sports manga, the characterization in EVA is divided into two layers, the inner and the outside, and the surface expression of the character is often not the same as that of the heart. Due to factors such as personal trauma, external pressure, and self-avoidance, the

character does not express his heart in words. For example, although Asuka is tough on the surface, and even has extreme words and behaviors, she craves the love and attention of others in her heart, and her essence is also very kind. Misato Katsuragi looks hearty and self-consistent on the surface, but actually, there are a lot of traumas and painful memories that stay in her heart. Above, the respondents believe that the negative portrayals of the characters in EVA give the characters a sense of realism, deeply arouse resonance among the audience, and increase the audience's love for EVA. And what's interesting is that although the characters have negative portrayals, in the play, they are constantly trying to reconcile with themselves. *Neon Genesis Evangelion* does not justify the path the characters have chosen, but they're all looking for meaning in their lives. EVA believes happiness must be taken into one's hands through a conscious effort to change one's point of view [8].

3.2. Commercialization of EVA

In the late 90s of the 20th century, after the birth of EVA, the official gradually gave birth to the fan economy, fans were encouraged to interpret and recreate in many aspects [9]. The production trend of animation is also gradually and intentionally creating a loyal user base, and the combination of voice actors, merchandise, and company publicity is constantly expanding [3]. On the issue of commercialization, the analysis of questionnaire data reveals the consumption trend and consumer psychology of the animation merchandise market. Most consumers show a rational consumption attitude when buying anime merchandise, they pay attention to the cost-effectiveness and practicality of the product and also consider their own economic ability and purchase needs. 62.96% of the respondents will decide whether to buy their favorite character's merchandise at a higher price based on the price of the product. Among them, the character's personality and appearance have become important factors influencing consumers' purchase decisions. 70.93% of the respondents believed that the distinctive personality of the character is a factor that is easy to commercialize, and 40.7% of the respondents believed that the appearance of the character is also very important. 43.21% of consumers are more inclined to buy their favorite character-related goods, which reflects that character building determines their sense of identity and loyalty to the character. In addition, when consumers buy goods, they will also buy merchandise that they do not like according to the shape and cost performance of the product. Above, the questionnaire shows that consumers tend to be rational in their purchases. A character's personality and appearance are important factors in the purchase decision.

In the interviews on commercialization-related issues, the questions revolved around the respondents' consumption habits. Respondents have different opinions, but they are very rational in their consumption and only buy their favorite character's goods. Students believe that the personality and appearance of the characters in character creation are the most important factors affecting commercialization. The official will guide the plot according to the audience's preferences. The Japanese animation industry has always attached great importance to the maintenance and inheritance of character brands, and the characters of excellent works can often be stably maintained during the animation update [10]. The two teachers believed that the fundamental reason for the commercialization of EVA was the influence of the Japanese production committee system. Japan has formed a mature system of animation-related merchandise and games, so it is proficient in the use of character linkage and the production of merchandise. Originating from *Neon Genesis Evangelion*, the Animation Production Board is a multi-departmental team that is usually formed when an animation production company is small and has limited resources. These companies, including advertising companies and toy companies, jointly fund and elect representatives to form committees to be responsible for market research and product promotion to share benefits and risks [11]. Students and teachers have different perspectives when discussing the factors behind the commercialization of successful anime. Students tend to think that the character and appearance of anime characters are the keys, while the teacher emphasizes that the mature production committee

system in the Japanese anime industry and its related merchandise products and game systems, especially the linkage of character images and the development of merchandise products, are the basis for promoting commercial success.

From Table 2, respondents are generally loyal to buying products for their favorite characters, and if the items are practical, convenient, or beautiful, they will also buy merchandise from characters they are not very interested in. This shows that when making a purchase decision, respondents consider not only personal preferences but also the actual value and attractiveness of the product. Combined with the questionnaire, it can be seen that in general, the character shaping of the character is the fundamental factor affecting whether fans buy or not, and the appearance of the character is the most important factor affecting the purchase desire of fans.

Table 2: Respondents' purchasing preferences for EVA merchandise.

Respondents	Purchasing preferences
Student 1	I like Ayanami Rei, so I bought merchandise related to her.
Student 2	I like Misato Katsuragi and Asuka, and I've bought badges and cosplay clothes.
Student 3	I like Misato Katsuragi, but when the price is right and the appearance is good, I also buy merchandise from other characters
Student 4	I only buy merchandise from my favorite characters (Ikari Shinji and Nagisa Kaoru).
Teacher 1	My friends have given me some goods, and I will buy beautiful and interesting products myself.
Teacher 2	I've bought an EVA garage kit and notebooks, and I think it's convenient and beautiful.

4. Recommendations for the Commercialization of EVA

4.1. Current Status of the IP

Compared with the commercialization of other anime, EVA's advantage is that its IP is very classic, with a history of nearly 30 years, making EVA occupy an irreplaceable position in the hearts of anime fans around the world. In addition, EVA's uniqueness in characterization is also the key to its success. Different from the "hero" or "perfect" characters that are common in traditional anime, the characters in EVA have distinct personalities and a lot of negative portrayals, which makes the characters more realistic, three-dimensional, and easy to resonate with the audience. At the same time, the appearance design of these characters is also very aesthetic, whether it is the design of the robot body or the costumes of the characters, they are full of artistic sense, which further enhances their commercial value. The disadvantage is that EVA's animated comics have all ended, and there is no new plot content output. So the new audience is gradually decreasing, and the overall popularity is gradually decreasing. And old viewers may also be lost due to a lack of new content. Therefore, it needs to create new content to bring in more new audiences and capture more old audiences.

4.2. Marketing Advice

Here are a few marketing tips: First, make more use of online channels such as social media and short video platforms to promote products and brand promotion, EVA is already a classic IP, and animation has also ended, the follow-up popularity will gradually decline. So maintaining popularity on social media is a major focus. Secondly, to attract old audiences, produce more merchandise related to feelings, to arouse the curiosity of new audiences and the nostalgia of old audiences. Thirdly, product

design and marketing need to continue to emphasize the emotional connection between the audience and the characters, and enhance consumers' desire to buy through stories and emotional resonance. Next, pay attention to the appearance of the product, although most people decide whether to buy merchandise based on the personality of the character, the stunning appearance shaping will increase the audience's desire to buy, increase the possibility of the audience buying other characters' merchandises and promote the desire to consume. Fifthly, organize more EVA-themed offline activities, such as theme exhibitions, cosplay competitions, autograph sessions, etc., to communicate face-to-face with fans and enhance brand influence. Finally, Special events can be held on important anniversaries of EVA (such as premiere day, end day, etc.). Such as re-screening classic episodes, releasing commemorative edition peripherals, etc.

4.3. Advice on Innovation

Here are a few suggestions for commercializing innovation: Firstly, based on the particularity of EVA character building, the author and the official can deepen the sense of character identity, and continue to make the character's daily story based on the end. The author can throw away the pain and negativity in the story and shape characters from another angle. The constant emergence of new stories can drive the innovation of character merchandise and provide fans with more opportunities to experience the plot and characters [12]. Secondly, the official should continue to launch new products, and regularly launch products for new and old characters, including limited edition products, special edition products, etc., to maintain consumers' enthusiasm for purchasing. Thirdly, the official can adopt a diversified product strategy to develop a more diversified product line, in addition to traditional character peripheral products, it can also produce virtual exclusive products, character offline experiences, etc., to attract a wider range of consumers. Next, make good use of current science and technology to develop VR or AR applications to lead fans to explore the virtual world of EVA. This can include interactive experiences such as driving an EVA simulator and visiting the NERV headquarters. Host a VR concert that allows fans to experience EVA's classic music in a virtual environment, with performances by acoustic musicians or rearranged artists. Last but not least, maintain cross-border cooperation, jointly launch products with fashion brands, household products, and beauty products, and also maintain cooperation with popular theme parks, such as Universal Studios to consolidate old fans and attract new audiences.

5. Conclusion

This study found that the characterization of EVA is very special under the influence of many aspects. Both questionnaires and interviews show the importance of character-building to the audience's perception. EVA focuses on character building and weakens the role of worldview, the negative portrayal of its characters can arouse the audience's empathy and identity, and strengthen the audience's loyalty to EVA. Based on character building, the commercialization of EVA is deeply influenced by the personality and appearance of its characters. Character personality is the fundamental factor that affects whether fans buy merchandise, and character appearance is the most important factor affecting fans' desire to buy. Therefore, EVA should follow the character setting and pay attention to quality and appearance when making merchandise. To a certain extent, this paper makes up for the related research on the relationship between animation character building and animation commercialization, which is conducive to the further understanding of character creation and commercialization in the animation industry. The shortcomings of the studies were the limited sample size of the questionnaire and the limitations of how the data were obtained. In the future, it's important to expand the research sample based on the above research methods and allow more domestic and foreign fans to express their opinions, to enrich such research.

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