

# The Artistic Characteristics of Hisaishi Film Score and its Dissemination in China

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## Abstract:

Mr. Hisaishi, an internationally renowned music giant, has successfully spread his film score and unique music style in China. By analyzing the artistic features and lyrical functions of Hisaishi's film score, this paper explains the spreading process of Hisaishi's music in China, its acceptance of Hisaishi's music, and Hisaishi's successful cooperation with Chinese directors. It also analyzes its extensive influence in Chinese pop culture through concerts, cultural markets, and other communication methods, as well as its enlightenment to developing the Chinese cultural industry. This paper concludes that the development and dissemination of Chinese pop culture can be inspired, and pop culture can also build brands and make classics. In addition, in developing and disseminating popular culture, it should focus on finding a joint force between aesthetic self-discipline and heteronomy and the formation of a cultural industry chain.

**Keywords:** Hisaishi film score Cultural dissemination; Aesthetic self-discipline; Art field; Popular culture

## 1. Introduction

In the 1980s, Hayao Miyazaki's animated works, such as "Valley of the Wind" and "Spirited Away," set off a global animation craze, and the wonderful music performance added a lot of color to these works. Hisaishi, as the music master of Miyazaki Hayao's animation, with his unique creative style and outstanding musical talent, makes the perfect combination of animation and music the art classic of this era. Miyazaki Hayao's animation works have become popular worldwide because, in addition to the superb animation production, the contribution of music can not be ignored. Hisaishi creates a unique tone for each of his works through his music so that the audience can enjoy the unique rhythm of the music while enjoying the images. His music closely fits the plot and can also independently become a moving musical work. This dual nature gives Miyazaki's works far-reaching artistic connotations. Hisaishi's music has achieved great success in China and has gained wide acceptance in the mass market, and his representative works, such as the theme song of Spirited Away, have become a big hit in China and become classics in the hearts of a generation of audiences. This success is reflected not only in record sales but also in concert performances in major cities.

This paper will investigate the artistic characteristics and

dissemination of Hisaishi's film score and deeply analyze the influence of Hisaishi's works in multiple dimensions under the macro background of the development of the cultural industry. This research explores the law of balance between pop culture and mass culture, artistic self-discipline, and the cultural market. To provide a beneficial reference for the development of the Chinese cultural industry.

## 2. Artistic Features and Lyric Functions of Hisaishi's Music

### 2.1 Artistic Features of Hisaishi's Music

Because Hisaishi's music is often used as a soundtrack for film and television, the content and rhythm of the music must be closely related to the film's plot [1]. Hisaishi's music often has an unambiguous melody. It is highly creative in its thematic melodies, allowing it to highlight the characters' personalities and the story and create a strong emotional resonance. At the same time, his treatment of harmony is also very exquisite, using a variety of chord progressions to enrich the layers of the music so that the audience can enjoy more layers in the process of appreciation. His songs range from the energetic "Summer" to beautiful and long tunes like "Carrying You" and "Mother," as well as high-pitched tunes such as "Theme

of the British Empire.” Hisaishi is adept at using different but adapted rhythms and rhymes to convey emotions and create atmosphere. The emotional states such as tension, suspense, softness, and tranquility in the animation scene are accurately presented to the audience through clever rhythm arrangement and rhythmic construction.

Hisaishi carefully selects and uses a variety of musical instruments, including symphonic instruments, pianos, orchestras, choirs, etc., to create a rich and diverse musical effect. He also often changes the orchestration according to the needs of different plots, such as using individual instruments or small bands to highlight the emotions of loneliness or confusion in the characters’ hearts. The timbre and effect these instruments create are also a major feature of Hisaishi’s music [2]. Hisaishi’s use of timbre is exceptional, and through the combination of different instruments and playing techniques, he can create a striking sound and a three-dimensional effect. For example, he often uses percussion and electronically synthesized tones to add drama and mystery. Hisaishi’s approach to music is unique and uses many unique musical techniques. For example, playing on a diatonic scale, mimicking natural sounds, etc. These innovations in musical technique add a unique color to his compositions and make the soundtrack even more stunning.

Hisaishi has created his unique musical style by blending elements of classical, pop, folklore, and experimental music, especially in major and minor keys. Hisaishi skillfully combined different musical styles to create a rich and varied soundtrack. Whether it’s classical, jazz, or pop elements, Hisaishi can incorporate them into his work. Hisaishi’s compositional structure is often in the form of a gradual unfolding, with the music gradually changing as the plot progresses, thus contrasting with the image, creating a strong connection and a compelling effect. Hisaishi’s musical compositions are known for their emotional depth and deep touching. He uses music to resonate with the inner world of his characters with the audience and can convey complex emotions such as love, loss, hope, etc. Through emotional repression and release, Hisaishi can find a balance between restraint and soothing, and the audience is enchanted. In addition, Jiushi music also skillfully integrates different ethnic music. In the film “Princess Mononoke,” Japanese drums, a Japanese national percussion, are used. In *Spirited Away*, Japanese influences permeate the entire film, and as Hisaishi says, the music and singing are permeated with an “Okinawan flavor” [3]. Hisaishi’s soundtracks have been praised for their diverse styles, unique melodic feel, perfect fit with the picture, sensual expression, and innovative musical techniques. His music is impressive, enriching the movie-going experience

and showcasing his exceptional musicianship.

### 2.2 The Lyrical Function of Long-Term Music in Film

Hisaishi’s musical works in the film are not only a form of conveying music but also an expression of emotions as a foil to the atmosphere. Music is regarded as the most initial and direct expression of human self-emotion. Music is a primitive art, and as early as the national life of primitive societies, music has the function of transmitting information and expressing emotions. According to the earliest theoretical treatise on music in China, *Music Notes*, music originates from people’s inner emotions, and external objects evoke people’s inner emotions and emotions, and people express their emotions through sound, forming music [4]. However, there are few traces of commercialization in Hisaishi’s works; instead, he creates beautiful music that fully demonstrates the subjective initiative and profundity of the musician’s thinking [5].

Animated film music is the soul of an animated work, which can interpret the story’s background environment, promote the plot’s development, and help shape the characters and characters in the work. In Miyazaki’s animated films, through the soundtrack of Jean Hisaishi, the aesthetic conception of audio-visual integration is created, creating a distinctive animation image, and at the same time, it also conveys the emotions and themes in the animation very delicately, which makes people contemplative and evocative. Hisaishi himself has said that because he has both lines and images in the film, he focuses on combining the image and the music to create the film score rather than overemphasize the music.

For example, the soundtrack in the animated movie “My Neighbor Totoro” and the opening song “Walking” have the momentum of a march, refreshed, and give full play to the flexible colors of electronic music. At the end of the film, the cat bus took the two sisters to their mother’s hospital room, and the two sisters felt happy and relieved to see their mother, who was all safe. At the film’s end, Hisaishi uses a cheerful, lively rhythm and a warm melody full of life, which is very suitable for a film full of fairy tale colors and warmth. In *Castle in the Sky*, *Castle in the Sky* is a floating island called Laputa, which floats in the air because the island is on a giant flying stone. Hisaishi composed the theme song “Carry You” for the film, which has the style of Scottish music, and the theme song itself is also changed from the tune of a folk song, with a warm melody with a hint of sadness, which very aptly expresses the symbolism of “Castle in the Sky”--innocence, beauty, and transcendence.

For creators, music and picture books are two separate lines of work. And for the audience, the combination of

the two is crucial [6]. Hisaishi said that he first reads the script by heart whenever he writes an anime soundtrack. He believes that music should be written by watching movie images so that the film can be enhanced by music. In the animated movie “Spirited Away,” Jean Hisaishi’s music systematically promotes the plot. The faceless man is the most unique and classic image in the movie; he longs for friendship and love but has lost the ability to communicate and only knows how to pay money to show his interaction with people. This symbolizes that in the highly developed society of contemporary material civilization, people’s inner “wasteland” state has lost the ability to love and communicate. The soundtrack “The Sixth Station” uses piano and strings. Hisaishi uses the piano timbre to play the main theme of the middle and low voices so that the suppressed and sad emotions are invisibly spread out, deeply resonating with the audience. In one of the scenes, in the tram, people have indifferent expressions and do not talk. Outside the car window is an endless stream of tracks and rivers, and even the trees and houses are lonely. This is the music “The Sixth Station,” which directly hits the loneliness and helplessness in people’s hearts and conveys the characters’ inner emotions very delicately and accurately.

### 3. Hisaishi’s Music Spread in China

#### 3.1 Acceptance of Hisaishi’s Music by Chinese Literary and Art Circles

The field is a concept proposed by Bourdieu, and forming a cultural field provides a strategy. In the interpretation of sociologist Bourdier, “strategy” provides eternal artistic creativity [7].

Hisaishi has formed a rich path for disseminating music in China, which mainly includes music performances on stage, film soundtrack creation, and disseminating online music platforms. At the same time, his cooperation with masters such as Hayao Miyazaki and Takeshi Kitano shows the artistry of his works. His music has been widely accepted in popular culture and serious literature and has promoted music, drama, and film integration. Thus, Hisaishi’s music spread in China, forming a “whole space.” In this integrated field, ordinary audiences and artists share the artistic language of Hisaishi music, and the creators of music, drama, and film also convey the unique charm of Hisaishi music. The specific analysis of Hisaishi’s music in China’s communication field composition mechanism first relies on the success of Miyazaki Hayao’s animated films, “Spirited Away,” “My Neighbor Totoro” and “City in the Sky” and other classic animation music, for him in China and even the world has won huge popularity. As the most powerful contemporary mass text, film provides

a stable medium for Hisaishi’s music communication. When these animations become classic texts in the minds of all generations, audiences want to grab more information about the film, and Hisaishi’s music becomes a key clue to decoding the film. Thus, Hisaishi’s music has a kind of cultural memory under the view of acceptance, which is related to the growing memory of a generation of animation viewers for the animation world of Miyazaki Hayao. At the same time, Hisaishi regularly conducts international Tours, and his solo exhibitions have been held in Shanghai, Shenzhen, and other cities in China. These stages have given Hisaishi the position of music ontology; that is, he does not need to be tied to any master, and his music itself has rich artistic discourse expression, which further lays the foundation for Hisaishi to make music become a shared art material in the field of Chinese literature and art.

#### 3.2 Hisaishi Film Score in Chinese-Foreign Co-Productions

Hisaishi’s collaboration with film director Jiang Wen in the two films “Let the Bullets Fly” and “The Sun Also Rises” shows the artistic appeal and vitality of Hisaishi’s music across countries and regions. In the allegorical film *The Sun Also Rises*, which has a surreal style, Hisaishi’s “Prelude” chimed in with the film’s fantasy and gorgeous artistic tone. The adapted “Prelude” also appears in “Let the Bullets Fly,” the music and image form a thematic, structural echo. The cooperation between Director Jiang Wen and Hisaishi is an example of Hisaishi’s music spreading and gaining acceptance and recognition in China and highlights the spatial penetrating power of art. Under this penetrating creativity, the wide introduction of Hisaishi’s music in Chinese literary and art fields, from music and drama to film, shows the core appeal of Hisaishi’s music.

In the soundtrack practice of the film “The Sun Also Rises,” Hisaishi, as a world-renowned master, still holds the most artistic creation of his devotion, spent months in the film, devoted himself to the creation of music, and created hours of soundtrack music for the film. His music enhances the artistic aesthetic of the film, especially the Prelude, which accurately captures the magnificent dreamlike color and romantic spirit presented in Jiang Wen’s films. The film’s music is composed of multiple movements, full of fantastic customs, and the overall style is as ethereal as the picture, forming a harmonious counterpoint between sound and painting. The “Prelude” in the film is used to render the “crazy mother” scene in the film; through precise musical coordination, Hisaishi hints at the beginning of the mother’s madness through music while creating the tense atmosphere of the film’s chase picture. Here,

the Prelude serves as a functional element of the explicit representation to set off emotions and push the film to its climax and bears the responsibility of narration. The narrative text provided by the film constitutes another recessive musical text. The two texts form the weaving aesthetics of symbol decoding often found in director Jiang Wen's works. There is a mismatch between the crazy woman and the excited musical tone; that is, "madness" becomes a thing to be celebrated in the film, just as Derrida discussed the "different" thinking, the signifier and the signified constantly deviate and create new meanings [8]. In conjunction with Hisaishi's music and Jiang Wen's unique authorship, the film opens up a carnival world of crazy people outside the real world. The soundtrack seems to be the external form of the film. Still, the expression effect of the image creates a kind of "occurrence that did not happen," and the audience can generate individual imagination under the guidance of the music. This is one of the charms of Hisaishi's musical language.

#### **4. The Inspiration of Joe Hisaishi's Music to the Chinese Cultural Market**

Joe Hisaishi's music is loved by anime fans and music lovers in China. It hugely influences the Chinese film and television industry and the derived cultural industry chain. Because of its artistic characteristics, Joe Hisaishi's music has a high aesthetic and belongs to fine music in communication, both popular culture and high cultural characteristics. Joe Hisaishi's film score not only has artistic value but also contains great commercial and cultural value, and its spread has widely influenced and inspired the Chinese cultural market.

##### **4.1 From Pop Music to High Culture**

In the process of spreading, Joe Hisaishi's music gradually changed from popular to elegant. This spreading phenomenon of Joe-style music has inspired the spread of Chinese culture. Popular art can also improve artistic taste and develop into high culture in the development process. China's cultural market should be committed to improving the taste of culture and art, and pop art can also be made into a classic.

Joe Hisaishi's music is popular and fashionable, simple and easy to spread, and loved by young people [9]. Joe Hisaishi's music combines elements of Western classical music and traditional Japanese folk music, and this cross-cultural fusion is extremely appealing. Joe-style music meets the needs of modern Chinese young people for music and has wide acceptance and recognition among Chinese audiences. On the other hand, Joe Hisaishi brought his symphonies to the concert hall and held several large-scale concerts, each of which became a classic.

The way of concert communication in concert halls and theaters presents Joe-style music in another way of high culture. His music works are ethereal and clean, with the beauty of the artistic conception, creating an elegant and silent aesthetic artistic conception [9].

In China, developing and disseminating popular culture can also produce fine and classic products. For example, the series of cultural music programs of Classical Chinese Poetry, traditional culture, and modern pop music combines the communication mode, which is both popular and classic, elevates the popular music and entertainment programs to the taste of elegant culture, and effectively spreads the Chinese classical poetry culture in a way that is popular and popular with the public. In developing and promoting Chinese popular culture, attention should be paid to the quality of cultural products and building classics and brands. At the same time, the organization and people of literary and art circles can excavate the factors and resources in traditional culture and apply them to the creation of pop culture artworks. In addition, it is also necessary to encourage and support domestic pop culture artworks to participate in international exhibitions and competitions to better spread.

##### **4.2 Promote the Development of Cultural Industry Chains**

Joe-style film soundtracks spread widely and use multiple fields and media to spread, which belongs to the category of mass culture. The dissemination of mass culture using modern media has the characteristics of mass production and mass reproduction. In this way, mass culture is derived from the industrial chain and has the characteristics of great influence and rapid development. The spread of Joe Hisaishi's film score also produced such a phenomenon. The first is to promote the development of the music market. Joe Hisaishi has given many concerts in Japan, Europe, and China. The holding of the concert itself is a great opportunity and driving force for the local music industry and cultural market. In addition, Joe-style music has profoundly influenced Chinese music producers. In addition, as Hisaishi's popularity in China continues to increase, people's demand for and consumption of music goods also increases. Hisaishi's music record sales in China continue to grow, and music downloads and clicks on online music platforms continue to increase. Secondly, Hisaishi's score greatly promoted the development of animated films and created a high box office. Hisaishi's work with Chinese film directors in China has produced a similar situation. Hisaishi participated in "Aunt's post-modern life," "The Sun Also Rises," "Let the Bullets Fly," "Sea Paradise," and other films score. His music added luster to the films and greatly promoted the rise of the film



box office. Third, the Joe-style film soundtrack (including Miyazaki Hayao animation), derivative action, comic books, records, videos, and cultural and creative works of art emerge in an endless stream, forming a prominent phenomenon in this industrial chain. Cultural creations with the theme of “Sky City” and music boxes made with the melody of “Sky City” can be seen everywhere in People’s Daily life. There are even cafes, bars, and Western restaurants named after “Sky City.” The dissemination of Joe-style music forms an industrial chain in the music industry -- the film industry -- the cultural market -- and other commercial fields.

This communication phenomenon provides reference and inspiration for developing the Chinese cultural market. In the communication of popular culture and cross-cultural communication, attention should be paid to the formation of the industrial chain and the impetus to the cultural market, which can greatly help the development of China’s cultural market. One of the important reasons for developing the Japanese pop culture market is the expansion and strengthening of “media convergence.” Through commercial operations such as brand building and the derivative commodity sales industry, such an industrial chain makes the pop culture market develop and prosper. This has brought great inspiration for the development of the Chinese cultural market; it should focus on brand building and “image alliance” and pay attention to the formation and development of a cultural industry chain.

### **4.3 Find the Resultant Force between Aesthetic Self-Discipline and Heteronomy**

Joe-style film score pays attention to details; the string method is delicate, the picture sense is strong, is classical, elegant, and has a strong aesthetic. Joe Hisaishi perfectly blends the principles of classical music with the techniques and characteristics of modern music, making Joe Hisaishi’s music sometimes full of tension and sometimes elegant and balanced. This aesthetic effect can only be achieved in the art of music. This aspect of Joe-style music conforms to the law of aesthetic self-discipline of works of art. Art belongs to aesthetic ideology, which is not only aesthetic but also has social, political, and historical attributes. The same condition is true for Joe Hisaishi’s music, a fine art and a social ideological product. The success of his music is closely related to the social and economic environment. Inspired by the successful collaboration between Miyazaki Hayao’s films and Joe Hisaishi’s music, the Chinese film market began cooperating with Hisaishi to create Joe-style film scores. The director Jiang Wen and Hisaishi achieved good box office results twice. When analyzing contemporary art, Western Marxism examines art problems from the perspective of modernity

and puts forward the theory of aesthetic self-discipline and heteronomy. Aesthetic self-discipline is the formation of aesthetic independence and the norms and rules that establish the legitimacy of their fields. Heteronomy refers to daily life, social systems, and values in fields such as science and moral culture in non-aesthetic fields. Marcuse said that a work of art can relate to politics only as a work of self-discipline [10]. In Adorno’s view, the social nature of art must be considered from two aspects: on the one hand, the self-existence of art, and on the other hand, the connection between art and society. This dual nature of art manifests itself in all artistic phenomena. These phenomena are variable and contradictory [11]. Joe-style music is elegant and in line with the characteristics of aesthetic self-discipline. In contrast, Joe-style music is widely spread because it conforms to the cultural market law and adapts to the principle of artistic heteronomy.

The inspiration brought to the Chinese cultural market by the phenomenon of Joe-style music communication is that in the process of spreading Chinese culture, whether it is high culture, mass culture, or even folk culture, the Chinese literary and art circles should try to find the joint force between artistic self-discipline and artistic heteronomy, not only to create high-quality artistic masterpieces but also to pay attention to the external factors affecting cultural transmission.

In spreading popular culture, traditional culture, and even folk culture in China, respecting the aesthetic self-discipline of works of art is a foundation. “To tell a good Chinese story,” the most important thing is to create fine art and meet the standards of aesthetic criticism. Documentaries such as “A Bite of China” and “Garden - Inside the Great Wall is a Garden” are good examples in recent years. In addition, in the process of cultural communication and the construction of cultural markets, it is also necessary to make full use of commercial channels and give full play to the role of domestic and foreign merchants, insiders, and audiences. It is also necessary to consider geographical and political factors, including the different situations of cultural markets in different countries etc. Only in this way can Chinese culture be spread more effectively and form a wide range of influence.

## **5. Conclusion**

Hisaishi’s film score has a strong artistic and aesthetic value, which realizes the integration of sound and painting and delicate and beautiful lyricism in the film. Hisaishi’s scores have added to the works of directors such as Hayao Miyazaki, fueling box office growth. Joe-style music is both popular and classic. In the process of spreading in China, there are many audiences, and young people love

them. Joe-style music has gradually been promoted in China, forming an industrial chain with great influence in the cultural market. By studying the phenomenon of Joe-style music spreading in China, Chinese culture can be greatly inspired. Popular art can also become a classic, and popular literature and art with strong aesthetic characteristics and high artistic standards can also be made into a classic. In the development and dissemination of Chinese literature and art, a joint force between artistic self-discipline and heteronomy should be found to help form a cultural industry chain. While focusing on its artistic quality to create fine art, Chinese pop culture pays attention to external influencing factors. With the help of its internal laws and external influences, Chinese culture, including traditional culture and even folk culture, can be well developed and disseminated in future cultural communication.

#### Authors Contribution

All the authors contributed equally, and their names were listed alphabetically.

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