

Generational Differences in Preference and Judgement Factors to the Styles of Popular Illustrations

Yen-Ching Lin¹

Summary

The world today is totally different from that of several decades ago. The experiences of visual communication have made “the visual” a new dominant language. Moreover, digital technology has caused this new generation accustomed to visualized communication. The image culture has taken root in the minds of adolescents. Although several previous aesthetic research studies mainly focus on the evaluation of artworks, their research methods and findings are applicable to other visual forms as well. Obviously, art is not the only way that we are exposed to aesthetic experiences. This study assumes that the preference and judgment factors of adolescents on popular illustrations is different from those of adults, and a psychological mode composed of different components may be involved in their aesthetic responses. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to examine and explain the differences and relations among preference, preference judgment factors, illustration properties, and generations in Taiwan, from a psychological perspective. There is a considerable body of knowledge about stimulus properties and aesthetic evaluations. This examination of popular illustration will build on the many properties investigated by previous researchers. This study also attempts to find proof and establish a theoretical foundation for visual arts education, in hopes that insufficiencies in this field can be addressed.

Thus, this study aims to explore generational differences in preference and judgement reasons for various styles of popular illustrations by means of interview survey, content analysis and statistical test. A total of 180 subjects were recruited from the Taipei area, evenly divided respectively into groups of adolescents and adults, as well as males and females. The average age of the adolescents was about 17 and that of adults about 42 (35-50). Thirty illustrations,

¹ Assistant Professor / Department of Industrial and Commercial Design, Oriental Institute of Technology

covering six themes and five forms, were selected as the experimental stimuli from popular graphic design magazines: *Creative Designs* (101-109) and *Masterpieces of Illustration* (301-309), that collect works of domestic illustrators were selected as the main sources of experimental stimuli. In addition, some materials were extracted from the magazines *IdN* and *dpi*, the Internet, and an *ImageMore* disk in order to achieve a sufficiently wide category distribution. These stimuli styles were distributed into two dimensions and thirty types. The two dimensions are theme and form. The six types of theme are: violent combat, sneering irony, sporty athletics, magic mystery, sweet romance, and modern fashion; and the five types of form are: realism, deformity, ornament, comic, and 3D figures. These works were chosen mainly from local illustrators, with some from Japan, South Korea, China, Europe, and US.

This study analyzed the literature of aesthetics which suggests that preference judgement is subject to six specific factors: subject matter, feature element, layout arrangement, emotional reaction, aesthetic feeling, and cognitive understanding. The first three factors focus on the description of content, form and construction. The other three factors emphasize the psychological aspects of beauty, emotion and cognition. The interview data were not only calculated into quantity figures and representation of preference percentage, but also statistically analyzed with the chi-square test to discover significant generational differences.

The results found are as follows: There are significant differences and similarities between adolescents and adults in terms of their preference judgement factors toward illustration styles; cognitive assessment is the most important factor for preference judgement. These results echo to the questionnaire survey of I and Lin (I, 2008; I, Lin, & Chan, 2006; I, Teng, & Huang, 2004; Lin & I, 2011, 2012) in the preferences of illustration styles, but are not totally in consistent with the studies of Chen (1998, 1999) and Chao (2005) on the preference judgments of art paintings and popular objects. The results also oppose that there is no difference between those of various works. In addition, the preference judgement factors of adults are not corresponding to the progress of cognitive development in that they are not moving forward to more advanced stages, but backward to those of subjective and emotional judgments of children. This phenomenon may be caused from the fact of generational difference in adepting to the visual cultural environment. The adolescent group scored higher on cognitive assessment for popular illustration when compared to the adults. It is possible that young people nowadays are frequently exposed to visual culture. This is not in accordance with the theory of aesthetic development, and contravenes the popular belief that adults have more knowledge. There might be some misunderstandings regarding

adolescents' visual interpretation abilities. If adolescents only had a surface understanding of popular illustrations, their interpretation abilities would not count as advanced. The techniques of expression frequently used in art, commercials, and graphic designs require better mental ability to interpret their meanings which is also considered an important basis for creation. In modern society with its abundant visual information, adolescents may have more opportunity to experience media. Hence, the key to these intergenerational differences seems to lie not only in innate conditions but also in the cultivation by society and culture.

Therefore, these results seem to offer promising prospects for future research. The processes as art appreciation somehow also occur in the processing of other aesthetic stimuli. Aesthetic appreciation of illustration is believed to follow certain principles that are suitable to all kinds. It is important to explore methods to apply these findings in reality outside the laboratory. From this viewpoint, researchers may gain insights into the role of popular illustration in aesthetic appreciation and ways to integrate the views of psychological construct in the fundamental research of art education. The results could be applied to classroom practice to help students learn more about the relations between illustration properties, individual characteristics, and aesthetic appreciation. In conclusion, this research provides a preliminary look at the aesthetics of popular illustrations; however, it has several limitations that may be addressed in future studies. Since the methods of interview survey, content analysis and statistical test that were adopted to measure the aesthetic responses, contain some cognitive components, they still could not provide a definitive and complete picture of the complicated and interacting psychological factors involved in the aesthetic process. Further research into these psychological factors and their interactions may offer more insights about aesthetic psychology and lead to applications in arts education.