

Sinicized Dreamcore Aesthetics: The Intertwining of Visual Expression and Temporal Significance

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Abstract: "Dreamcore" has emerged in recent years not only as a descriptive concept but has also evolved into a distinct cultural phenomenon. Within it, the "dream" symbolizes an aesthetic quality rooted in Surrealism, while the "core" points to fragmented core memories that carry a collective consensus. Sinicized Dreamcore aesthetics utilize iconic elements unique to China around the turn of the millennium as its core components. By drawing on the stylistic approaches of Surrealism in its artistic visual expression, it injects a strong sense of nostalgia while simultaneously highlighting a disorienting ambiguity and absurdity derived from temporal dislocation.

Sinicized Dreamcore constitutes a dialectical unity of "Restorative Nostalgia" and "Reflective Nostalgia": on one hand, it seeks emotional solace through the reconstruction of childhood scenes; on the other hand, it uses surreal techniques to reveal the rupture between present life and past memories. The resulting unique atmosphere is imbued with memory symbols familiar to the public, yet it also creates a palpable sense of detachment from reality.

Keywords: Sinicized Dreamcore; Aesthetic Characteristics; Visual Expression; Emotional Resonance

1. The Development of "Sinicized Dreamcore" Aesthetics

Amid the accelerating process of social modernization, China's rapid development over recent decades has formed a profound cultural correlation with the surreal aesthetics of "Dreamcore"—a connection reflected both in the socio-psychological dimensions of collective nostalgia and identity anxiety, and in visual art practices that reconstruct reality and memory.

Over the past four decades, China has achieved a leapfrog development from an agricultural society to a digital civilization. This "compressed modernity" has directly led to a rupture of intergenerational memory. It is precisely within this context that Sinicized Dreamcore aesthetics—through technical approaches such as low-resolution rendering, the application of retro filters, and yellowish tone coloration, combined with high-frequency visual symbols like blue glass windows in old buildings, redwood sofas, and spiral slides—constructs a "visual lexicon" that carries collective memory.

This aesthetic practice surreally reconfigures mundane life scenes from the 1990s and 2000s, such as state-operated stores, box-style televisions, and the Windows 98 desktop, thereby not only awakening collective public memory but also implying that these scenes have become an irreproducible past. In essence, this aesthetic practice serves as a form of psychological compensation for the rapid iteration of material landscapes amid modernization, alleviating the identity crisis brought about by the "progress narrative" through virtual nostalgia.

2. Memory Fragmentation and Aesthetic Compensation in the Process of Modernization

The evolution of Sinicized Dreamcore aesthetics has been a gradual process, influenced by both Romantic thought and the psychoanalytic school. In the early 20th century, the Dadaist and Surrealist movements further contributed to the formation of Dreamcore aesthetics. Surrealist painters, in particular, drew intuitive, dreamlike, and subconscious inspirations for their creations, achieving a delicate balance between abstract expression and figurative representation. Their works are imbued with a bizarre and absurd surreal sensibility while also conveying a sense of spatial timelessness and ethereality. Through depictions of dreams, illusions, and nightmare imagery, they delved deeply into the hidden realms of the human unconscious.

In the realm of contemporary art, Dreamcore aesthetics have permeated various fields such as animation, fantasy literature, film, and painting. Such works often center around whimsical scenarios and imagery, embodying the creators' spiritual yearning to transcend everyday life. The rise of Sinicized Dreamcore, in particular, serves as an aesthetic compensation for the memory fragmentation caused by China's "compressed modernity." By reconstructing scenes of the past, it fills the intergenerational memory void and alleviates public unease toward rapid societal transformation.

3. Visual Representation of Cultural Confidence and Identity Formation

The core audience of "Dreamcore" aesthetics belongs to Generation Z. Generation Z has been exposed to the internet and portable technological devices since early childhood. This deep connection with the digital world continued through their adolescence and into young adulthood. As the first cohort to grow up amid the widespread adoption of mobile devices, rapid iteration of internet communication technologies, and the explosive rise of social media, their highly participatory engagement in online social culture has profoundly shaped their cognitive and expressive habits. They exhibit a strong interest in emerging online cultural trends and niche subcultures, actively involving themselves in these spaces. Equipped with proficiency in various new media technologies, they articulate their thoughts and respond to social uncertainties through texts, images, videos, and other digital forms—ultimately gaining voice and influence within the realm of internet subcultures.

In the context of rapid economic and technological change, technological advancement has, to some extent, amplified the dominance of instrumental rationality over individual emotions and values. The fast-paced and high-pressure environment characterized by "involution," coupled with the broader global economic slowdown, has placed Generation Z—who are gradually stepping out of family and campus life into higher education or the workforce—in the face of intensified competition, fewer opportunities, and a severe employment landscape. As a result, they experience unprecedented levels of anxiety and stress. Individual self-worth and meaning have become confined to narrow metrics such as productivity, efficiency, and cost-benefit ratios, giving rise to a pervasive modernity-anxiety mentality.

Within this climate, some young people, feeling disoriented about the future, have adopted a "Buddha-like" (佛系) or "lying flat" (躺平) attitude as a form of compromise or resistance to reality. Some scholars argue that this mindset reflects both a rational recognition of social reality and a resigned acceptance of its constraints. In response, Dreamcore aesthetics has become a medium for some members of Generation Z to channel emotions, engage with social issues, and express personal stance. The tranquil, slow-paced imagery and nostalgic evocation of bygone times and hometowns in these works serve not only as a psychological soothing of modern anxiety but also as a form of gentle, escapist resistance in the face of relentless competition and involution-driven reality.

4. Applications of Sinicized Dreamcore Aesthetics in Visual Communication

Sinicized Dreamcore aesthetics can be applied across various media forms such as photography, illustration, video, and installation art. Each medium possesses distinct characteristics that require tailored expressive strategies to maximize the immersive quality of Dreamcore. For instance, in photography and static illustration, the core strength lies in capturing the "absurdity of a moment," allowing viewers to dwell on details and enhancing a sense of "deliberate imbalance" in composition and a "weathered" texture. By employing a "single scene + key symbol" approach, artists can effectively convey emotion while avoiding visual clutter.

In video and motion imagery, sound can be incorporated to simulate the "fluidity of dreams," adding an auditory layer to the visual experience and intensifying sensory engagement.

In installation art, the aim is to create an "accessible liminal space" that offers an immersive experience. Using a combination of "physical objects + light and shadow projections", artists construct evocative settings—for example, recreating an old classroom where "slowly moving chalk writings" are projected on the wall and "luminescent floor tiles" are laid underfoot, inviting the audience to step "into their own dreams."

Within digital interactive art, works can facilitate "audience interaction with the dreamscape." This can be achieved through "trigger-based dynamics"—such as a scenario where "when a viewer touches an old TV screen, the static snow transforms into a childhood animation," or "as a person walks down a corridor, the doors on both sides open and close automatically, yet reveal nothing behind them."

The essence of Dreamcore visuality lies in its capacity to "awaken the viewer's subconscious."

A successful Dreamcore work is not a "soliloquy of the creator," but rather uses the "alienation of familiar settings" to evoke in the audience the sensation of revisiting "their own vague, half-remembered dreams"—perhaps a "school with no exit," a "childhood toy that seems to move on its own," or a "hometown street lying eerily empty."

By capturing this essence and implementing it through thoughtful use of space, color, and meticulously crafted objects, the abstract emotion of a "dream" is transformed into a tangible visual experience.

The sense of "absurdity" in Dreamcore never emerges from nowhere—it is fundamentally built upon the viewer's pre-existing cognition of "everyday memory."

Only when the audience first recognizes "what it is" can their expectations be subverted; it is this rupture of conventional logic that generates the unsettling feeling that something is "eerily familiar yet unsettlingly wrong."

The crucial step in this process lies in the precise selection of "memory anchors" and their "subtle distortion" rather than "complete sub-

version."

Moreover, the chromatic core of Dreamcore revolves around an "unreal sense of realism"—eschewing both the "plastic feel" of high saturation and the "oppressive mood" of overly dull and gray tones. By anchoring in "memory symbols," it leverages a "familiar foundation" to evoke "strangeness," thereby constructing a "visual grammar" where "technical details" reinforce the "texture of dreams."

The visual language of Dreamcore is not about "sloppily crafted grotesquerie"—it simulates the "visual logic of dreams" through precise control of color, light and shadow, composition, and texture. Specific visual techniques are employed to convey dreamlike qualities such as "blurred edges," "ambiguous light sources," and "slowed motion."

5. Symbolic Metaphors of Nostalgic Psychology in Sinicized Dreamcore Aesthetics

As an artistic form that gives expression to the deeper layers of the human subconscious, Sinicized Dreamcore aesthetics emphasizes the intuitive desires and emotional experiences embedded within the human psyche. By incorporating irrational elements such as dreams and fantasies, it transcends the binary opposition between reality and illusion, thereby endowing artistic expression with enhanced imaginative and expressive power.

It is noteworthy that, alongside the pressures of economic slowdown, the psychological impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has also profoundly influenced the mental health and future outlook of Generation Z. The accessibility of the internet accelerated the spread of pandemic-related news coverage, further exacerbating feelings of powerlessness and anxiety. Measures such as lockdowns, home quarantine, and various social distancing restrictions significantly heightened a sense of isolation among the public. Moreover, the direct confrontation with disease and death imposed substantial psychological burden on everyone.

What was once perceived as mundane daily life before the pandemic has since been romanticized in memory as the "good old days." What people yearn for is not the actual past, but an "idealized past" processed through nostalgia—a version in which backwardness, negativity, and imperfections are selectively overlooked, resulting in a representation that feels "half-true, half-illusory." This blend ultimately gives rise to a distinctive aesthetic where nostalgia, familiarity, and absurdity coexist.

6. Conclusion and Future Perspectives

Currently, Sinicized Dreamcore aesthetics exists primarily in the form of a visual style, yet it already embodies critical reflections on technological society. China's rapid social development has provided fertile ground for the growth of Dreamcore aesthetics, and this aesthetic practice, in turn, serves as a crucial "prism" through which to observe social transformation: it functions both as a visual projection of anxiety amid modernization and as an aesthetic response to technological revolution; it carries experimental significance in the reconstruction of cultural identity while also acting as an early-warning signifier of ecological ethics.

With the gradual proliferation of cutting-edge technologies such as the metaverse and brain-computer interfaces, Dreamcore aesthetics is likely to further transcend the limitations of two-dimensional representation, constructing more complex narrative systems within virtual spaces. This evolution is not merely about innovation in artistic form—it signals a philosophical shift in the digital civilization era toward redefining the "boundary between reality and dreams." In the future, Dreamcore aesthetics may become a vital medium in visual communication art for exploring the relationship between "digital existence" and "psychic reality."

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