

05.07.2019

Critique of “Journey to the East”

Crystal Sin’s *yonkoma*, “Journey to the East,” is an interesting narrative of her experiences as a Chinese American studying in Kunming, China. The two points of focus for this critique will be Sin’s art style and storytelling. We will first begin with the art style to regard the work from a brief glance and then take into consideration the storytelling that delivers her experiences.

Sin’s art style is quite simplistic and there are areas such as depth and details that can be improved so the audience is more engaged and interested. The perspective of the panels is limited since Sin only draws characters in either a side profile or front view and omits shading of any kind. As a result, the panels lack depth and feel rather flat. Another factor contributing to the flat feeling is the lack of details. The side characters are only distinguishable from their hairstyles since they are drawn with similar eyes and clothing in contrast to Sin who consistently wears glasses and earrings with her hair down or in a braid throughout the work. In addition, the setting of the scenes is not evident for the majority of the experiences when regarding solely the visuals since the backgrounds are for the most part empty. This provokes confusion from the audience as they are uncertain of the characters’ surroundings. Also, hands are drawn several times without fingers in favor of a semicircle similar to those in “The Powerpuff Girls” created by Craig McCracken. Yet, one must consider that these semicircle hands are portrayed only when they are doing nothing of importance to the plot. Sin draws hands with fingers when it is necessary for the storyline. For instance, they are portrayed when someone is holding, grabbing, tossing, or clicking someone or something. At the very least, Sin utilizes primarily the eyebrows, mouths, and to a lesser extent, the eyes of the characters to display their expressions.

The storytelling of Sin's work is straightforward and fills in the context that is not provided with solely the visuals well. Before reading the strip, the title is read. The title of each strip serves as an important context for the audience and appropriately sets up the general concept that will be approached. Then, the dialogue and/or thoughts of the characters depicted are not only short and sweet but also provide information about the setting and situation. There are only a few times when the situation needs a heavy emphasis on text. As for the characters, the majority of them are reasonably not given a name since they are not reoccurring characters. They are of interest because they interact with Sin. On a related note, the use of marking the conversations explained in the author's note that happened in Mandarin in contrast to those in English provide more context to Sin's experiences. This marking allows the audience to better infer whether she is speaking to Chinese people or perhaps the people in her study abroad group that speak English. It is also mentioned in the author's note that the experiences are told in chronological order, which gives meaning to the last strip, "Parting Superlatives." Although the majority of the strips would most likely not provoke the audience to laugh out loud, they may be seen as amusing in a subtle way.

Improvements for this *yonkoma* could be made primarily with the art style concerning backgrounds, depth, and details because it would allow the readers to more easily understand the context of the situations. Ultimately, Sin's portrayal of her experiences in China as a Chinese American is conveyed well by applying her art style and storytelling elements.