Takayuki Toyama

Critical Essay: *The Office (U.S.)*

The Office, 30-minutes-comedy TV show, had the huge impact on me with

unprecedented comedy-style that cannot be seen in my home country, Japan. Just single

episode attracted me quickly, and now I even dream of directing the Japanese version of *The*

Office in the future. By analyzing this TV show, we can see the fact that production staffs

focus on how to withdraw extraordinary from normal daily life. In this essay, I will explain

two remarkable features of this TV show: characters and atmosphere.

The most outstanding feature about this TV show is each character's strong personality

instead of their quite ordinary appearance. As a matter of fact, all of characters in this office

are so unique that it is difficult to say who the most favorite character is. Generally, the only

few characters should have distinguished personality from beginning to the end because too

many varieties can distract us from focusing on the main plot. In this show, however, most of

characters are so unique that any of them can alternate the main character and assistive

character depending on episode to episode. In this way, we can enjoy each character's life

and story at different episodes. This technique only works on the story whose main plot

progresses at slow pace through many episodes.

There's an important point that multiplies the extent of character's uniqueness:

normality. At first glance, this entire tiny office looks quite ordinary. The atmosphere and

characters' appearance do not cross the line of usual office we know. This normality plays an

important role in multiplying the uniqueness of characters and the humor of each event. The

essential element of humor is "unexpectation." It goes without saying that we don't reveal the

punch line at the very first when talking about the funny story to the people. We need to bring

it to the right moment without being notice. In the same way, we think it's funny when

unexpected thing happens from unexpected people. Funny things from quite ordinary people are funnier than those from funny-looking people because of its big impact. This ingenious way of picking actor and actress who have appearance familiar to our daily lives successfully boosts the humor of this TV show. In addition to this casting technique, production staff apparently put the importance on making the realistic atmosphere.

Until *The Office,* all of the comedy TV shows I had ever seen had the laughter sound from hypothetical audience. This technique works very well in letting us know when to laugh and making the relaxed atmosphere. *The Office*, however, never used laughter sound because they supposedly do not care about neither of these two advantages.

The Office completely leaves a decision of when to laugh up to the audience. In this way, people can enjoy their own sense of humor. What's more, there's a "pleasure" when we discover the humor that's not shown obviously. It is also connected to the "unexpectation" that I mentioned above. For example, character's face is often zoomed in suddenly after ironical thing happens to him. However, we don't realize it is ironical and funny until this close-up. Thanks to this technique, we are able to know the real meaning of the events that already happened and this delayed realization gives us satisfaction. Just like this example shows, there are a lot of techniques to make us feel great about discovering the hidden humor. Creating the silence without laughter sound is exactly one of these skills.

The Office also ignores the relaxed mood that laughter sound usually makes. Rather, they are purposefully making the tense and awkward situations that even make the audience uncomfortable. Silence tends to emphasize the ugly aspects of human being severely such as betrayal and insincerity. We feel very awkward when this ugliness is exposed without any laughter. The advantage of this technique is to lead us to the reality. It lets us enjoy the likely situation and people that we occasionally may encounter in our daily lives. Moreover, revelation of ugliness highlights the flashes of beauty that human beings sporadically show. It

is also related to "unexpectation." We tend to be touched by heart-warming actions more from cold-blooded person than originally good person. Although disuse of laughter sound apparently ends up failing to make peaceful atmosphere, this technique succeeds in dramatically showing us wide aspects of humanity with reality.

As you can see from this analysis, *The Office* does not follow the conventional theory of comedy show. In contrast, it built the new aspect of comedy: the humor of normality. *The Office* successfully conveyed this idea by assigning the right person to each character and forming the quite realistic atmosphere. These ideas enable this TV show to touch our heart by showing us pure humanity with smile and tears.