INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL FOR LEGAL RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS

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Avinash Kumar

Avinash Kumar has completed his Ph.D. in International Investment Law from the Dept. of Law & Governance, Central University of South Bihar. His research work is on "International Investment Agreement and State's right to regulate Foreign Investment." He qualified UGC-NET and has been selected for the prestigious ICSSR Doctoral Fellowship.He is an alumnus of the Faculty of Law, University of Delhi. Formerly he has been elected as Students Union President of Law Centre-1, University of Delhi.Moreover, he completed his LL.M. from the University of Delhi (2014-16), dissertation on "Cross-border Merger & Acquisition"; LL.B. from the University of Delhi (2011-14), and B.A. (Hons.) from Maharaja Agrasen College, University of Delhi. He has also obtained P.G. Diploma in IPR from the Indian Society of International Law, New Delhi.He has qualified UGC – NET examination and has been awarded ICSSR – Doctoral Fellowship. He has published six-plus articles and presented 9 plus papers in national and international seminars/conferences. He participated in several workshops on research methodology and teaching and learning.

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INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL FOR LEGAL RESEARCH & ANLAYSIS ISSN

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THE GHIBLI PARADIGM – THE THREAT TO ARTISTIC INTEGRITY POSED BY AI

AUTHORED BY - SHIVANGI PRADHAN[1]

Abstract

This article examines the emerging crisis in intellectual property (IP) law as generative artificial intelligence (AI) systems increasingly replicate the aesthetic identities of human creators. Using Studio Ghibli and the distinctive style of filmmaker Hayao Miyazaki as a focal case study, it explores how AI's ability to mimic visual styles—commonly referred to as "Ghiblification"—raises urgent questions around authorship, cultural appropriation, and the limitations of current copyright frameworks. Although copyright law has historically guarded only physical forms and not abstract aspects such as style, the large-scale duplication of an artist's distinctive visual and emotional language by AI programs has revealed a deep legal and ethical blind spot. The author contends that style, defined as the persistent, recognizable, and emotionally evocative fingerprint of an artist, should be given recognition and protection as an intellectual property resource. By a close examination of legal doctrine, international agreements, case law, and ethical theory, the article urges extension of copyright to style-based protection in all creative fields, music, literature, and visual arts. It suggests an international legal regime, possibly through a revised Berne Convention or new WIPO treaty, to harmonize style protection worldwide. Ultimately, the article maintains that protecting the integrity of human creativity in the age of AI is not just a matter of law—it is a matter of culture. If left unremedied, the loss of creative identity will become an institutionalized form of digital exploitation.

Keywords: *Generative AI, copyright law, Hayao Miyazaki, Ghibli, intellectual property, aesthetic misappropriation, style protection, idea-expression dichotomy, moral rights*

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[1] The author is currently pursuing an LL.M. in Corporate and Commercial Law at Babu Banarasi Das University, Lucknow.

Introduction

The arrival of artificial intelligence has ushered in a paradigm shift in nearly every field of human creativitiy, from literature and fine arts to music and film. With advancements in generative AI technologies, the latter now produce outputs unrecognizable—at least at first sight—exactly like those generated by human manual labor. This innovation, while technologically fascinating, has highlighted some profound issues regarding authorship, ownership, and artistic integrity, particularly in the context of intellectual property (IP) law. But perhaps one of the most pressing issues that this digital innovation poses is in the area where IP law is least able to cope with: protection of style, aesthetic philosophy, and artistic essence.

Nowhere is the crisis better depicted than in the example of Hayao Miyazaki and the aesthetic world of Studio Ghibli. The world over admired for their traditionally hand-drawn animations that are rich with emotional nuance, environmental mysticism, and philosophical sophistication, the works of Studio Ghibli are an exemplar of artistic integrity based on methodical drudgery, cultural specificity, and personal vision. However, with the proliferation of AI art generators such as DALL·E, Midjourney, and Stable Diffusion, Ghibli's signature visual language—delicate watercolour palettes, soft rounded features, tranquil nature scenes, and whimsical character designs—has been absorbed into the machine-learning ether and regurgitated en masse, often in crude and contextless variations.

This practice, now informally known as "Ghiblification," is the mass copying of Ghibli-style looks by AI algorithms that have mined image files from the web, usually without permission or acknowledgment. Social media is now dominated by AI-generated "Ghibli-style" images of popular culture icons, politicians, and more, and the result has been a tsunami of content that replicates the studio's look but none of its substance. In question is not so much a case of copyright infringement—although that one is seriously contested too—but far more so: artistic ethos appropriation, uncrediting replication of cultural labor, and regulatory vacuum concerning the safeguarding of artistic identity.

Hayao Miyazaki, who is himself renowned for being a conscientious and hard-working artist but not at all tolerant of unscrupulous exploitation of technology in art, has been a vocal critic of the role of AI in art applications. In a now-viral 2016 documentary segment, Miyazaki endured an AI-generated animation—a sort of gruesome motion of a humanoid body—and

responded with evident revulsion, declaring, "I strongly feel that this is an insult to life itself." This mindset is representative of a philosophy by which art is necessarily a manifestation of the human spirit—of emotion, memory, pain, happiness, and ethics. As an alternative, AI has no empathy, consciousness, or intentionality; it is a computer that calculates, not a mind that reflects. It is therefore not only inefficient but also unethical to employ it as a creative surrogate.

The ethical discomfort over the encroachment of AI upon human creativity takes on an especial seriousness when one reflects upon the intellectual property regime's inaction. Copyright legislation, as it stands, only covers the final presentation of an idea—i.e., the completed film, painting, or book—but not the style or aesthetic decisions upon which that work rests[2]. In this context, "style" refers to the distinctive and recurring aesthetic elements that characterize an artist's work, including visual motifs, color palettes, compositional structures, tonal rhythms, emotional textures, and creative atmosphere. . It is neither a mere idea nor a fixed expression, but an identifiable creative fingerprint that forms the bridge between concept and execution.

While traditionally deemed too abstract or subjective to be legally protected, the ubiquity and cultural significance of an artist's style make it essentially equivalent to a brand or signature—implying that it should be protected in a revised intellectual property system. Accordingly, while maybe illegal to employ a frame-by-frame rip from Spirited Away, nothing is stopping an AI from producing a "Ghibli-style" frame that replicates its unique mood, composition, and color scheme. This places artists like Miyazaki susceptible to a type of moral plagiarism not under legal theory. Even more so, as since images generated through AI are routinely spread with open licences or with no acknowledgement at all, they contribute to stripping away the initial appearance, thereby lowering its aesthetic value.

Such degrading is not just figurative. The increased circulation of Ghibli-like content online threatens to devalue the original works in the public's eyes, reducing them from revered, handcrafted masterpieces to just another filter or visual meme. Additionally, aspiring artists may turn to AI for shortcuts rather than engage in the rigorous training and emotional introspection that define Miyazaki's own path. The end result is a creative space where quality succumbs to quantity, imitation supplants invention, and the machine aesthetic dominates over the human.

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[2] University of London Press Ltd v University Tutorial Press Ltd(1916) 2 Ch 601(Ch D)

This issue is also compounded by the absence of international legal frameworks that are able to effectively address these issues. Although some jurisdictions recognize moral rights—such as the right of attribution and the right to object to derogatory treatment of work—these rights are often ineffective, poorly enforced, or do not extend to stylistic appropriation cases. Moreover, the intellectual property character of style as an IP asset is underdeveloped in law. IP law has traditionally been founded on economic rights, dealing with the economic value of reproducible material. Conversely, style and aesthetic are considered abstract, philosophical, or even fortuitous and thus not protected. This doctrinal absence opens up creators to a new kind of exploitation, one that is not easily measurable in economic terms but with far-reaching cultural and ethical implications.

To safeguard the work of artists like Miyazaki, and maintain the dignity of human imagination in the age of AI, IP law must evolve. It must look beyond its fixation with material form and begin to consider the aesthetic essence and philosophical worldview embedded in a work. It must ask hard questions: Can a style be copyrighted? Is artistic identity an attribute to be protected? What role can moral rights play in preventing machines cannibalizing human imagination? And how can global law respond when AI-generated content overwhelms markets with replicas that desecrate the cultural heritage of the original?

This chapter will seek to address these questions through the lens of the Ghibli case study as a lens through which to view the broader limitations of intellectual property law when applied to generative AI. It will unpack the philosophical, legal, and cultural dimensions of "Ghiblification" and argue that the Miyazaki creative model—based on soul, sincerity, and slowness—is deserving of more than praise; it deserves legal protection.

This is not an academic exercise. The future of creativity is in the balance of our response to these dangers. If we continue to allow machines to copy the works of masters with impunity, we risk a future where originality is irrelevant, sincerity is passé, and artistic labor is expendable. In such a world, Miyazaki's fears will have come true: art will no longer be a tribute to life, but a shallow simulation of it.

Ghiblification as Aesthetic Misappropriation

The universal application of AI to mimic the aesthetic appeal of Studio Ghibli's signature style is a highly problematic instance of artistic appropriation. This is an issue that we term

"Ghiblification," in which the visual and emotional tone that characterizes Miyazaki's films is reproduced without the permission of the creator. While AI-generated works may avoid legal challenges by producing new images that do not directly copy specific elements from Ghibli films, they nevertheless reproduce the distinctiveness of the studio's visual language. This leads to a problematic form of aesthetic misappropriation.

The essence of Ghibli's unique style is not limited to individual characters or scenes but is instead embedded in the very fabric of its world-building. Miyazaki's distinctive use of colour, texture, composition, and animation technique creates an immersive atmosphere that evokes a particular emotional response. As AI systems are trained on vast datasets, they can easily learn to replicate these stylistic elements—creating new works that evoke the same feelings and visual experiences without acknowledging the source. While not strictly copyright infringement, this poses the question of the validity of the work and the concealment of the original artist's identity.

One of the major ethical issues around Ghiblification is the absence of proper credit to the original creator. AI works that emulate the style of Ghibli are frequently described as being "Ghibli-inspired" or "Studio Ghibli-style" without crediting the people or group behind the original works. This erasure of authorship devalues the acknowledgment of the intellectual and creative labor of the original artist. Without the special legal safeguards of style, the cultural value of such works can be undermined, and the reputation of the original creator is not afforded protection.

Ghiblification is also a paradigm case for a larger cultural problem: increased commodification of art via generative AI. When AI creates Ghibli-like pieces in bulk, they stand the risk of over-saturating the market with "cheap imitations" that water down the original art form. This would result in a situation where the public becomes less willing to value the worth of original, human-made pieces. Such a situation would lead to the loss of cultural and artistic authenticity, where the distinction between original artistic creation and AI-generated pieces gets progressively blurred.

The consequences of this misappropriation are not only legal but also cultural. With more AI-generated works being produced, they complicate the conventional sense of authorship, creativity, and artistic merit. With no safeguards on style and aesthetic identity, the integrity of

the creative industries could be threatened, as artists such as Miyazaki could lose control over the unique features that make their work.

Extending Protection Beyond Art: The Argument for Music and All Intellectual Labour

As the limits of existing copyright systems become increasingly clear with the advent of AI to replicate art styles, it is important to note that this problem is not limited just to visual art. If we are to uphold the integrity of creative works in a world where generative AI more and more obscures the distinction between human and machine creativity, the safeguarding of style and aesthetic identity must go beyond art to cover music and all intellectual work.

Just as visual artists such as Hayao Miyazaki have developed distinct aesthetic identities, so too have musicians developed identifiable sonic styles. From the ambient, minimalist compositions of Brian Eno to the sweeping orchestral soundtracks of Hans Zimmer, these styles are inseparable from the emotional and atmospheric qualities that define their work. Yet, like visual artists, musicians' aesthetic signatures are not protected under current copyright law. Whereas copyright protects particular melodies, lyrics, and recordings, it leaves unprotected the broad style, mood, or instrumental textures that constitute an artist's distinctive voice. The result is a void of legal protection that permits AI to create "Zimmeresque" scores or "Sakamoto-style" piano pieces without recourse for the original artists.

This void in protection is not hypothetical. Already, AI-synthesized music mimicking songs of famous artists is saturating platforms, often with no or minimal credit to the original artist. The phenomenon is similar to the issues observed in painting, where an artist's style is mimicked through an AI program without payment or due credit. Expanding copyright protection to a creator's style—be it visual, musical, or literary—would solve such concerns by protecting the essential nature of a work, even if not the exact output of an AI-generated output from copying the exact work itself.

Finally, such extension of protection is most relevant during the age of the Internet, when commoditization of music and art has created a surge of derivative works. In the case of music, for example, AI can help produce pieces that replicate the emotional effect or sonic texture of popular artists, such as Taylor Swift or The Weeknd, and thus diminish the value of original

human-made music. Just as the legal system today acknowledges the significance of safeguarding the moral rights of artists in visual art, the same should be done for musicians and other intellectual labor creators. Safeguarding style will ensure that the original emotional and aesthetic contributions of the artist are not watered down or misappropriated by AI systems.

Extending this protection to all intellectual work guarantees that creators, whether artists, musicians, writers, or any other type of creator, can retain control over the unique aspects of their work. This would also preserve the cultural integrity of creative industries from the mass production of generic, AI-created content that does not have the depth and creativity of human-created works. By acknowledging the value of style and aesthetic identity among creative fields, intellectual property law may be reconstructed to more adequately mirror the variety and complexity of human creativity during the digital age.

Legal and Economic Implications: The Wider Reach of Expanding Style Protection

1. **Legal Framework Expansion**: Having recognized the necessity of protecting the artistic character of a work, we then need to think about how the legal framework might be developed to recognize the protection of style and aesthetic identity across ranges of disciplines, including music. The principal legal challenge is to reform copyright to encompass the general stylistic themes of a creator's work. This might be done by the addition of a new category of copyright protection—a type of "style protection" provision that safeguards not only particular expressions but the broader, amorphous qualities that differentiate an artist's style. In practice, this might be done by adjusting current copyright doctrines or adding a new legislative framework. For instance, the "idea-expression dichotomy," a doctrine that differentiates between the ideas of an artist and the physical manifestation of their work, would have to be redefined in the light of AI-generated works. A variation of this doctrine would enable the integrity of an artist's style to be maintained while enabling the free exchange of ideas in creative industries. This would entail the careful delineation of what exactly makes up "style" and how it can be differentiated from ideas in general so that creators have the authority to safeguard the originality of their work without hampering creativity.

2. **Economic Considerations: Value of Style and Attribution:** The economic impact of safeguarding style is far-reaching, especially in the creative sectors. Musicians, visual artists, and authors depend considerably on the uniqueness of their styles to build their brand, engage with their audience, and make money. By safeguarding the style of a work, artists would have the right to regulate the use of their style, guaranteeing they are rewarded fairly when it is copied or applied in derivative works. For example, when AI music created that sounds identical to the work of a highly accomplished artist such as Hans Zimmer or Taylor Swift is created, the original author would be entitled to royalties or licensing payments on the use of their visual or sound identity. This is particularly pertinent in an era of reproduction on demand by means of technology, where machines are able to reproduce an artist's style without bounds by comparison with human craftsmanship. A new "style licensing" system may develop, in which creators license their style to be used by AI systems so that they gain economic benefits from the spread of AI-generated work in their distinct style. This would be similar to existing models for licensing particular works, such as music samples or visual motifs. The worth of style, as a commodity, would be appreciated, enabling creators to have a stake in the digital world while promoting innovation that honors the original creative intent.

3. **Moral and Ethical Implications of Style Protection**: Apart from the legal and economic implications, there are strong moral and ethical implications when it comes to protecting style. Most artists, especially those in music, have spent decades or years honing a style or sound. Protecting an artist's style is not simply a matter of protecting intellectual property; it is protecting the artist's creative work and his or her contribution to society's cultural landscape. It is protecting the emotional and personal investment artists put into their work. For instance, artists who produce signature sounds—be it in a particular genre, tone, or musical form—are not only producing goods; they are adding to the cultural discourse. Permitting AI to reproduce their style without permission or credit devalues the worth of their unique contribution, causing it to dwindle away from their cultural capital.Beyond safeguarding creators, protection of style would also benefit the public interest at large. It keeps listeners experiencing the real, emotional richness of music and art, not homogenized, AI-produced copies that are devoid of human personal connection and authenticity of human creativity.

4. **Global Implications: International Coordination for Style Protection:** Lastly, defending style in different types of intellectual work would necessitate international coordination and legal reform. With further development of AI technology, the international nature of the digital economy implies that creative works are no longer localized to national boundaries. Artists, musicians, and creators operate across borders, and their works are spread globally in a matter of seconds.For style protection to be effective, it would have to be recognized worldwide. This could involve an international treaty or the enlargement of the Berne Convention, which already offers a basis for international protection of copyrights. This treaty would have to specify the particular problems of AI and codify the protection of style as an international standard. This would ensure that creators everywhere are protected from unauthorized AI copying their styles, wherever the infringing AI system is based.

Toward a Harmonized Global IPR Regime: Protecting the Artist's Soul in a Borderless Digital Age

As the jurisdiction-ignoring artificial intelligence revolution shifts seamlessly across national borders, inconsistencies in intellectual property rights (IPR) enforcement around the world become more and more problematic. Mimicry for beauty's sake—be it in art, sound, or text—now takes place in a genuinely world market. Absent a harmonized legal framework, artists remain exposed to exploitation based on geographic location of infringement.

At the center of the matter is the notion of idea-expression dichotomy, a concept that has been the limiting line between free ideas and protected expression for centuries. But in the age of AI, the dichotomy is not merely a technical barrier—it is a battlefield for the creative soul. The current lack of global coherence in how this doctrine is interpreted and enforced means that what is protectable in one country may be free to exploit in another.

Hence, it is crucial that international law gets started on heading toward harmonization, especially on fronts like protection of style, moral rights, and AI-facilitated imitations. One single, cohesive global model—maybe a broader Berne Convention protocol or a new convention under the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO)—should put style and aesthetic identity into statutory language as safeguardable interests and provide that one's rights over one's own creative work don't get alienated even if AI reproduces one's own unique vision

or voice.

This is not merely a legal requirement but a moral one. When an artist devotes his or her heart and soul to a work—creating a distinctive style through years of toil—they should not only receive acclaim but legal protection of that integrity, no matter where in the world their work is re-used, re-purposed, or re-interpreted by AI. Authentic harmonization would respect the dignity of creators and manifest a common global consensus in favor of genuine human expression in the age of the internet.

Conclusion

The Ghibli model is not just a solitary aesthetic fad or ephemeral artefact of digital culture. It is a legal and philosophical challenge—a mirror held up to the soul of intellectual property regimes that have not kept pace with technology. Through AI-generated imitation, the law is being challenged to its own weakness: its inability to understand or safeguard the intangible, soulful aspects of human creativity—style, feeling, identity, and authorship.

As this paper has shown, existing copyright law, based on the notion of the idea-expression dichotomy, no longer accounts for the realities of creation in the generative AI era. It safeguards the material output—the particular frames, the exact melodies, the lines of code—but is still oblivious to the artistic fingerprints lodged in aesthetic identity. By so doing, it leaves a risky void: where computers are able to replicate the emotional vocabulary of geniuses like Hayao Miyazaki or Joe Hisaishi without credit or penalty.

This is not merely a copyright issue—it is a matter of cultural ethics. The ability to imitate a creator's voice, without ever quoting their words, destabilizes the foundations of authorship itself. When an AI can produce music that feels like Hisaishi, or visuals that breathe like Miyazaki's—but with no legal recognition of the original source—the artist is dispossessed of their own legacy. The law, by omission, facilitates this quiet erasure.

The issue is not specific to visual art. As discussed in brief, music is also afflicted by this blind spot. A composer's style, an arrangement's timbre, a soundscape's ambient mood—all are a part of a sonic identity that is intimate and yet not covered. AI-creates "Sakamoto-style" or "Zimmeresque" pieces now descend on digital worlds, replicating the affective design of human composers without going through the legal construct that regulates authorship and

originality.

And so we come to an inflection point. To reassert artistic autonomy in the wake of AI, we need to rethink the law—not to choke off innovation, but to keep it from eating away at the very human practices it draws on. The future lies in a harmonization of international IP systems—one that extends protection beyond literal expression to include recognizable aesthetic style. This kind of reform would not water down the commons but would bring back dignity to the artist, recognising that the labour of style is as sacred as the labour of execution.

This reconceptualization needs to be interdisciplinary. Law needs to speak to philosophy, to ethics, to technology, and most of all—to art itself. It needs to embrace that artistic identity cannot be reduced to pixels, words, or notes, but is threaded through atmosphere, rhythm, silence, and soul. It needs to step up.

Ultimately, the question is not whether machines can produce—but whether we, as a society of law, will permit them to do so by appropriating the specters of human producers without credit. If art is the dregs of the soul, then AI-produced imitation—without legal check—is a cultural haunting. The law must now decide: to be a refuge for human spirit, or a silent bystander to its attenuation.