

Diversified Integration of Cartoon Character Design: Exploring the Influence of Different Regional Cultures on Character Image Building

Jinwen Cao

Communication University of China, Nanjing (CUCN), School of Animation and Digital Arts,
Nanjing, Jiangsu 211199, China

Abstract

Animated films breathe new life into traditional stories by blending different regional cultures, traditional stories, and mythological characters. This paper will analyze the characteristics of different characters and the related cultures behind them from various types of classic film and television works, and analyze the influence of different cultural backgrounds, ethnic characteristics, natural regions and other factors on the design of cartoon characters. The design of animated characters is not only a maintenance of tradition, but also an expression of cultural stance. They are equally important in areas such as city branding, large-scale event promotion or corporate image building, and the animation character design absorbs different cultural elements to form a cross-cultural design style, showing multicultural characteristics and resonating with the audience.

Keywords

Animate; Characters; Design; Film; Culture.

1. Introduction

In recent years, many animated films are trying to integrate the humanistic characteristics of different regions, traditional folk tales, mythological roles, etc. into film and television works, it is precisely because the cartoon character image has the charm of transcending age and cultural boundaries, through the well-designed plastic visual art animation can also adapt the traditional characters to create, into the novel narrative mode or value orientation can inject new vitality into the traditional story, so that it glows with different meanings and depth in modern society.

Animation character design is one of many artistic modeling methods, which refers to the comprehensive use of deformation, exaggeration, personification and other artistic techniques to design animation characters as visual images, with the purpose of giving every animation character appeal and vitality(Yuan mei, 2024).From ancient Greek and Roman myths to folklore and fairy tales, mythology has provided a rich source of inspiration for animators to create compelling characters that resonate with audiences(Yusa, I, et al., 2023).In this way, animation not only retains the core spirit of the mythological story, but also resonates with the values and life experiences of contemporary audiences, providing a richer and more diverse perspective.In general, as far as animated feature films are concerned, designing a character is constantly prioritized before other elements are created or supplemented(Juhan M S, &Ismail N, 2016).

Of course, in the process of narrative adaptation or modeling image design, it is also necessary to follow a certain "freshness" of the characters. The creation of prototypes and sources of animated characters needs to be carefully refined, and many animated characters are inspired by specific cultural backgrounds. For example, the design of Simba's character in "The Lion King" is partly inspired by Shakespeare's Hamlet, but also incorporates cultural elements from the African savannah, telling a story of growth, responsibility and inheritance. The character of

Mulan in "Mulan" is derived from ancient Chinese folklore and poetry, telling the story of a woman joining the army for her father, embodying the image of female heroes and the spirit of filial piety in traditional Chinese culture. Elsa and Anna in "Frozen" incorporate elements of Nordic mythology and culture into their story settings and costume designs. Some animated characters may be designed to draw on images and stories of historical figures. By cartooning or mythologizing historical figures, animation creators are able to tell historical stories in a more vivid and entertaining way that captures the interest of the audience.

In traditional mythological stories, characters often have divine and supernatural abilities, and there is a certain sense of distance and estrangement between them and the audience in modern society(Xue, 2023). However, the design of mythology-themed characters is not merely a matter of aesthetics; it is a reflection of cultural values, social commentary, and historical significance(Yusa et al., 2023).

The use of character archetypes that have been found in traditional stories can also have a positive cultural impact, and animation is a vivid art form that can tell stories from different countries and regions in a new way, appealing to audiences of all ages and backgrounds. The old story has been modernized through animation, not only retaining its original educational and inspiring value, but also adding fun and accessibility. In addition, the characters and stories in animation can often stimulate the audience's interest in the source culture, which in turn explores deeper cultural values and historical contexts. This combination of cultural heritage and innovation provides a window for the younger generation to understand and appreciate different cultural traditions.

2. Analysis of the Characters in the Work

The design of animated characters with cultural or mythological themes is not only a maintenance of tradition, but also an expression of a cultural position. Animation must have a strong character design with a good personality, appropriate costumes and accessories(Khalis F M& Mustaffa N, 2017). The following is an in-depth cross-cultural analysis of successful cases from different countries and regions that explore how these works effectively integrate indigenous mythology with the aesthetics and values of a global audience, and the role they play in promoting cultural diversity and understanding.

Works that reflect regional cultures, such as Disney's "Aladdin" (1992), is an animated film that successfully blends elements of Middle Eastern mythology and modernity. Known for its humor, music, and rich visuals, it shapes a fantasy world full of magic and adventure. Through the story of Aladdin and Princess Jasmine, the film conveys the themes of freedom and true love, which is loved by audiences around the world. Loved by audiences around the world.

"Pocahontas"(1995), is based on Pocahontas, the daughter of an Indian chief. Disney used a lot of commercial film elements, which mixed different elements of various film genres such as neuro-comedy, western movies, and song and dance movies, and rewrote the painful colonial history into a romantic colonial fairy tale. The animated work "Baolian Lantern"(1999) presents a large number of ancient architecture, ancient murals and other ethnic elements to the audience(Li Q, 2019). "Olympus Guardian" (2002) is a Korea-made animated series that reinterprets classical stories through modern animation techniques based on Greece mythology. With its unique visual style and creative storytelling, the work presents ancient mythological characters and stories to modern audiences in a novel way, preserving the traditional essence of Greece mythology while adding elements suitable for contemporary audiences. The "Secret of the Book of Kells" (2009) has garnered worldwide acclaim. These films explore Irish history, mythology, and tradition through several time periods and explore themes of liminality and coming of age(Hargrave R I, 2021).

In "Song of the Sea" (2014), the mystery and beauty of Ireland was presented to audiences with almost unanimous praise. "The Book of Life" (2014) and "Coco" (2017) are animated films set in Mexico culture and mythology, each showing Mexico's unique view of life and the way in which death is celebrated. "The Book of Life" is a fantastical love story that celebrates the Day of the Dead in Mexico. "Coco" delves into Mexico's family ties and love of music, while also presenting the celebration of the Day of the Dead. One of the distinctive cultures of Mexico that Suo wants to express in the film is the belief that death is not the end, but a journey to another vibrant and colorful world, where people connect with their loved ones through celebrations and remembrance. The land of life, the place of memory and the place of oblivion in the film reflects the respect for life and memory in Mexico culture. "Moana" tells the adventures of Moana, the daughter of a Polynesian chieftain, whose image embodies the character and spirit of the peoples of the South Pacific islands. Moana was the way it revealed underlying ideological fault lines among Islanders regarding how Pacific culture should be represented and by who, and the degree to which such differences can potentially lead to fragmentation (Tamaira A M K& Fonoti D, 2018).

"Kung Fu Panda" (2008-2024) is a series of films set in Chinese kung fu and showcasing the essence of traditional Chinese culture through humorous and adventurous storytelling. The film incorporates Taoist philosophy, Confucianism, and Chinese martial arts, while conveying values of unity, courage, humility, and self-transcendence through characters and plots. In animated character symbols, identity is shaped by the character's cultural background and life experiences. Character design is visually constituted by two factors: physical features and costumes (Andrian et al., 2023). A well-crafted costume can aid the audience in identifying the key protagonist, supporting actors, or antagonists by visually representing their personality and demeanor. A unique identity can differentiate character design (Kerlow, 2009).

Po is the main character, and Po is a cute and optimistic panda. His image embodies the ideas of "harmony is precious" and "harmony between man and nature" in traditional Chinese culture. Po's lack of self-confidence to ultimate self-realization demonstrates the process of personal growth and self-transcendence. Master Shifu is a serious, strict Red Panda that represents the rigorous training and master-apprentice relationship in Chinese martial arts. His image and behavior embody the traditional Chinese culture of "respecting teachers and respecting the way" and "strict teachers produce high disciples". Tigress Tiger Girl is the only woman in the Five Heroes, and her image shows the independence and strength of women. Her courage and determination embody the image of female heroes in traditional Chinese culture, such as Mu Guiying and Hua Mulan. Through these characters, the film not only shows the outward form of Chinese Kung Fu, which delves deeper into the philosophical ideas and cultural values behind them, such as harmony, balance, self-transcendence, etc.

Works that also use Chinese elements Dragonball Z (1989) were anime's first foray into mainstream popular culture in the US (Steele C, 2022). Adapted from the manga of the same name by Japan manga artist Akira Toriyama. It is known for its rich imagination, exciting battle scenes, and humorous elements. Successfully combines the martial arts elements of the East with science fiction and fantasy to create a unique worldview. After 30 years, "Journey to the West: The Return of the Great Sage" (2015), which also uses Monkey King as the prototype, is adapted from the ancient Chinese classic "Journey to the West". The deconstruction of the story of "Journey to the West" and the reconstruction of the classic image of Monkey King have become the enthusiastic theme of many film and television works, including animation works (Wang Y, 2024).

The film reshapes the image of the Monkey King, making it more distinctive and witty and brave. Such films all reinterpret classic stories and characters from traditional Chinese culture, making them more in line with the aesthetics and values of modern audiences. And gradually become

the animation film and television and related game products of the Chinese mythological IP system.

"Nezha: Birth of the Demon Child" (2019) is based on Nezha in the classical Chinese mythological novel "The legend of deification", and tells a story about self-identity and rebellion against fate. In modern cartoons, color plays a decisive role, which is mainly reflected in the aspects of character modeling, screen style, and revealing themes(Shuting Y, 2020). The film interprets Nezha's impulsive but resilient image through a modern perspective and red-based costumes, making it more in line with the aesthetics and values of modern audiences. "White Snake"(2019) and "Green Snake"(2021) are adapted from the Chinese folklore "The Legend of the White Snake", which tells the love story of the White Snake and Xu Xian. "I Am What I Am(Male Lion Boy)" (2021) shows the cultural charm of lion dance as China's intangible cultural heritage. During a lion dance, the dancers enact a series of rehearsed dance forms by following the rhythm and tempo of the drumbeats(Li T Y& Chen J R, 2006). The characters in the film reinterpret this classic love story by blending the aesthetics of traditional Chinese costumes with modern aesthetics. The film not only shows the romance and beauty of traditional Chinese culture, but also conveys the praise of true love and sacrifice through the love between White Snake and Xu Xian. Paul Wells divides animation into three styles: orthodox, experimental, and development (Wells, 2013).

Regardless of the style of animation, the character, movement, and emotion are derived from the cultural background of the character, resulting in characteristics and identities that are very different from those of the other characters. With the blessing of distinct character images, these characters are shaped by the foundation of the characters' personalities to "live", which not only resonates with the audience but also makes the story full of vitality.

3. Positive Effects of Successful Character Building

In addition to animation and film and television works, the shaping of character image is equally important in other fields, such as city branding, large-scale event promotion or corporate image building. For example, in international sporting events such as the Olympic Games, these personas are often designed as easily recognizable visual logos, which not only attract the public's attention, but also help shape and strengthen the company's brand image.

Such images have been widely used as symbols for visual identity in athletic contests such as the Olympic Games, subsequently arousing public attention and establishing corporate identity(Lin R et al.,1999).

This image is mostly a cartoon animation character with symbolic meaning and affinity, whether it is two-dimensional or three-dimensional or even materialized, its purpose is mainly to convey positive images and emotions, to attract the audience's interest in the culture behind it, and its main role is also as a marketing tool, in order to promote the recognition of the brand or event. These cartoon characters are often closely associated with specific events or organizations, and often belong to a specific identity memory around promotion and promotional activities.

Of course, with the improvement of cultural refinement, cultural phenomena and industrial ecology can gradually be formed through legal concepts such as copyright, trademark, and patent. That is, intellectual property, Analysis on the New Development Directions of Dalian Forest Zoo Based on Animation IP Plus Tourism(Cao Y,2021). This includes not only specific images such as mascot characters, but also various forms of cultural products and services such as animation, games, film and television, literary works, and artistic creation. It has become a large entertainment enterprise group with film and television production as the core, integrating theme park resort, consumer products, media network and book publishing. Disney

has a number of branches, almost covering the entire cultural industry and forming a relatively complete industrial chain(Zhang Y,2021).

4. Conclusion

In short, the creation of characters involves many aspects such as culture, history, nature, society, personal experience, audience needs, technical limitations, etc. animation has been facilitated by several factors, notably the development of digital technologies; the rise of the so-called content industries or creative industries in North America, Europe, and Asia(Silvio T, 2010).

Regional Cultures, Animation, Character Design, and Character Design Styles also have some commonalities when it comes to final presentation. In order to cater to a wider audience, animation character design often absorbs and integrates different cultural elements to form a cross-cultural design style, so this cultural exchange not only promotes the dissemination and integration of various cultural elements, but also provides a rich source of inspiration for animation character design.

Animated character design has become an important bridge for cross-cultural communication in the process of absorbing elements from different cultures. Not only do they showcase the diverse cultures of the world, but they also resonate with audiences around the world through innovative storytelling and visual art. While conveying positive energy and values, these works are also tirelessly pioneering different vivid cartoon images, not only committed to the development of the industry, but also constantly enriching people's spiritual world.

References

- [1] Wang Y. On the Character Design of Monkey King in the Animated Film The Monkey King: The Return of the King[J]. Highlights in Art and Design, 2024, 5(2): 57-61.
- [2] Yusa I, Ardhana I K, Darma Putra I N, et al. Interpreting Balinese Mythology-Themed Character Design Signification as a Virtual Entity in Animation[J]. E-Journal of Cultural Studies, 2023, 16(3): 48-61.
- [3] Juhan M S, Ismail N. Character design towards narrative believability of Boboiboy in the Malaysian animated feature film Boboiboy: The Movie (2016)[C]//Proceedings of the 2nd International Conference on Advanced Research in Economics, Social Sciences & Trade Development. 2016.
- [4] Gu X. Study on the modernity of character design in mythical animation films[J]. Highlights in Art and Design, 2023, 2(3): 94-97.
- [5] Yusa I M M, Ardhana I K, Putra I N D, et al. Reality In Animation: A Cultural Studies Point of View[J]. Eduvest-Journal of Universal Studies, 2023, 3(1): 96-109.
- [6] Wikayanto A, Damayanti N Y, Grahita B, et al. Aesthetic Morphology of Animation[J]. Harmonia: Journal of Arts Research and Education, 2023, 23(2): 396-414.
- [7] Khalis F M, Mustaffa N. Cultural inspirations towards Malaysian animation character design[J]. Malaysian Journal of Communication, 2017, 33(1): 487-501.
- [8] Li Q. Exploration of the Application of Chinese Traditional Culture Elements to Animation Design[J]. Search in, 2019.
- [9] Hargrave R I. Cartoon Saloon as Mythopoeic: Reimagining Irish Mythology through Animation[D]. Virginia Tech, 2021.
- [10] Tamaira A M K, Fonoti D. Beyond paradise? retelling pacific stories in Disney's Moana[J]. the contemporary pacific, 2018, 30(2): 297-327.

- [11] Kerlow I V. The art of 3D computer animation and effects[M]. John Wiley & Sons, 2009.
- [12] Steele C. Exploring Japanese Anime and its Impact on Character Design in US Animation[M]. Drexel University, 2022.
- [13] Wang Y. On the Character Design of Monkey King in the Animated Film The Monkey King: The Return of the King[J]. Highlights in Art and Design, 2024, 5(2): 57-61.
- [14] Shuting Y. Research on the Paradigm of Pixar Animation Modeling[J]. Frontiers in Art Research, 2020, 2(1).
- [15] Li T Y, Chen J R. Procedural rhythmic character animation: an interactive Chinese lion dance[J]. Computer Animation and Virtual Worlds, 2006, 17(5): 551-564.
- [16] Wells P. Understanding animation[M]. Routledge, 2013.
- [17] Lin R, Lin P C, Ko K J. A study of cognitive human factors in mascot design[J]. International Journal of Industrial Ergonomics, 1999, 23(1-2): 107-122.
- [18] Cao Y. Analysis on the New Development Directions of Dalian Forest Zoo Based on Animation IP Plus Tourism[C]//E3S Web of Conferences. EDP Sciences, 2021, 251: 02012.
- [19] Zhang Y. Disney IP Industry Development Strategy[C]//2021 International Conference on Economic Development and Business Culture (ICEDBC 2021). Atlantis Press, 2021: 215-218.
- [20] Silvio T. Animation: The new performance?[J]. Journal of Linguistic Anthropology, 2010, 20(2): 422-438.