Analysis on the Application of Chinese Elements in Classical Animation Character Design

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Abstract

In recent years, with the rapid development of the animation industry, animation characters have become more diverse in style and type. During the design process, many Chinese elements have been gradually incorporated into the character design and story scenes, reflecting a unique Eastern aesthetic and ethnic cultural connotation. More and more animation creators outside of China have also integrated Chinese elements into their animation designs, achieving a fusion of Eastern and Western culture, and adding new cultural details to animation character design.

Keywords

1. Introduction

"Chinese elements" have been extensively discussed in the context of cultural integration in the world today, and have created a trend. Whether it is China promoting its national image overseas or animation works relying on Chinese elements to attract attention, Chinese elements will undoubtedly become the mainstream culture in the world, like American culture such as Coca-Cola and Disney. The Chinese animation industry is an important part of China's cultural industry, not only loved by the Chinese people but also gradually becoming a part of people's daily viewing habits. With the progress of people's ideological concepts, new design forms have been adopted, including character design and animation scene application. The shaping of animation characters not only needs to be humorous but also needs to focus on the expression of artistic form. A good animation character design can not only leave a deep impression on us but also become a cultural image representative for a country, thus strengthening the use of Chinese elements in animation character design.

2. The Effects of Chinese Elements Integration in Animation Character Design

2.1 Enriching Character Design

As a traditional element, national art images have already penetrated into people's lives. Classic characters with ethnic elements such as the "Calabash Brothers" and "Zhu Bajie" have left a deep impression on people. First of all, the animation character design is a continuous shaping process, and with the development of technology, people's understanding of animation character design has become more profound. Secondly, the use of Chinese elements in animation design can not only enrich the connotation of animation characters but also inherit and promote ethnic culture. Finally, influenced by preconceptions, the addition of Chinese elements in animation works can evoke strong emotional resonance. Therefore, reasonable integration of Chinese elements in animation character design can greatly enhance the audience's impression of the artistic theme, making animation character design more vivid and colorful.

2.2 Inheriting Ethnic Culture to Enhance Ethnic Cohesion

Chinese culture is vast and profound, derived from continuous inheritance, development, innovation, and continuation in various forms. Incorporating Chinese elements into the design of animated characters is essentially an innovative and developmental approach utilizing new platforms. Children are the future and hope of the motherland, and their interaction with animation is quite frequent. Animation has been accompanying children throughout their entire childhood. Incorporating Chinese ethnic elements into the design of animated characters is an important measure to cultivate traditional cultural thoughts in children, enhance ethnic self-confidence and pride. Furthermore, conveying ethnic cultural thoughts in the world of children not only can inherit ethnic culture but also can innovate culture, playing an important role in enhancing ethnic cohesion and centripetal force.

3. Expression of Chinese Elements in Animation Character Design

3.1 Chinese Elements in Character Design

Successful animation character design requires uniqueness, visual simplicity, strong recognizability, and a lasting impression, especially in the design of the main characters. The distinctive features of Chinese people, such as yellow skin, black hair, red eyes, and flat noses, are easily reflected in animation design. In the animated film Mulan, the character who takes over her father's role has a sunflower-like face, phoenix eyes, and monolids. The costume design references the fashion of the Northern and Southern Dynasties, with the left side wearing the attire commonly seen in the North at that time. The shape of the horse in the animation is also worth noting, as it is dynamic and represents freedom and strength. The cartoon images of Chinese dragons and crickets add to the atmosphere of Chinese folk entertainment.

In the animated film Proud General, the character design of the general draws inspiration from the facial makeup of Chinese opera. The general's face is designed with a combination of white and red colors, and his exaggerated beard is consistent with the character design in Chinese opera, highlighting his majestic, confident, and heroic temperament. The design of the mentor in the animation adopts the prototype of the "ugly" characters in Chinese opera, with small eyes, a small mouth, and white dots in the middle of the face. The two small mustaches on his face further emphasize the character's cunning personality traits. For example, in the animated film Little Soldier Zhang Ga, the realistic technique is used in character design, and Zhang Ga's thick black eyebrows, big nose, thick lips, and other physical features highlight the honest and brave character of Chinese people. In the animated series Food Adventure, a group of cute Chinese foods such as Sihai (steamed bun), Baoqiang (steamed bun), You Wanjin (deep-fried dough stick), Qiaoqiao (noodles), Guokui (baked wheat cake), Huaxiaolei (steamed twisted roll), and Doudou (dumplings) are anthropomorphized, and the culture of Chinese traditional food, especially noodle culture, is integrated into the creation of animation characters.

3.2 Chinese Elements in Story Settings

The setting of an animation scene is the basis for shaping the characters and presenting the plot. The design of camera space and scenes is crucial. Chinese architecture is very distinctive and attractive, and it is essential to grasp Chinese elements and work on architecture and scenes. The architectural design in the animated film Big Fish and Begonia is inspired by the Hakka earth buildings, a world cultural heritage site. In the movie, the home of the girl Chun is designed based on the Hakka earth buildings in Fujian Province, which is rarely seen in foreign animation films and embodies the traditional Chinese national characteristics. Each earth building's entrance is adorned with couplets in Chinese, and the names of places are taken from the Chinese book Xunzi Tian Lun.

In the animated film Proud General, the scene design is quite distinctive, emphasizing the sense of stage and space. The pavilions and terraces of the general's mansion, the magnificent and colorful halls where beauties dance and officials wish him longevity, are like the opening of a theatrical curtain. The scenes of children playing in thatched huts in the countryside and the general and commoners

competing in archery resemble the countryside scenery with a gentle breeze and the aroma of rice. In another animated film Nine-colored Deer, the design of the scene adopts the traditional Chinese landscape painting style. The mountains, rivers, and ancient architectures in the story are depicted in the form of traditional Chinese painting, which reflects the unique aesthetic of Chinese culture.

In addition to the aforementioned visual elements, Chinese elements also include popular symbols such as "kung fu". The "Kung Fu Panda" series of movies produced by the United States is a good promotion of Chinese kung fu. In the movie, traditional martial arts movements, the dumplings that the panda eats every time, and the mysterious master all reflect the characteristics of Chinese people and culture.

3.3 Chinese Elements in the Soundtrack Aural

The sounds in animation are composed of three basic elements: language, music, and sound. Music can effectively combine auditory and visual elements and improve the overall viewing effect of animation with its unique artistic performance form. For example, in the music of "Kung Fu Panda", composer Hans Zimmer, based on his understanding of many Chinese elements, visited Chinese symphony families and many folk music professionals to gain inspiration for Chinese-style music creation. Some of the music maintains a consistent strong momentum, combining traditional Chinese elements with representative instruments such as flute, guzheng, and pipa. The theme is mainly based on Chinese martial arts flavor. In the music played when Tiansha appears in the animation, a knife, a step, and a note are used to create an imposing villainous image.

Another example is the Chinese-produced animated series "Boonie Bears". The most representative cartoon characters here are the two clumsy and lovable bears, Briar and Bramble. In this animated series, when Briar and Bramble communicate with others in the story, they both use "俺" as their personal pronoun, which is a dialect in northeastern China and is a way of self-addressing for the characters, similar to the use of "我" in Mandarin. This makes the audience feel the dialect characteristics of northeastern China and is full of life interest.

3.4 Chinese Elements in Costume Design

In many animated works, in addition to character design, the design of animated clothing can also have a certain impact on the characters themselves. The characteristics and beauty of a character's clothing can influence the development of the animated work. Many traditional classic elements of clothing from Chinese culture have been widely used in the design of animated character clothing. For example, in the animated film "Big Fish & Begonia," the female protagonist "Chun" uses an oiled-paper umbrella on a rainy day, while the male protagonist "Qiu" wears a raincoat and straw hat, which are both very obvious traditional Chinese clothing characteristics. Additionally, the costumes in Beijing opera have distinctive local characteristics. If these costumes were applied to animated clothing design, the resulting images would surely be unique. For example, pleated clothing is common in Beijing opera and offers great potential for use in animated character design, whether for common people or high officials. The male clowns in Beijing opera often wear green pleated clothing, which can also be well utilized in animation. In the animated version of "Romance of the Three Kingdoms," there is a male character wearing green pleated clothing, whose appearance and personality correspond to each other. In addition, the fast clothing and pants in Beijing opera are also important elements that can be used on warriors, which are both fitting for the character image and convenient for the warrior's movements. Many excellent Chinese animations have utilized these elements, such as the costume design for the character "Wu Song."

4. Conclusion

In summary, China has a long history and profound cultural heritage. Chinese elements are not only the essence of Chinese culture but also a symbol of our country's culture. The creation of animated designs should strengthen the integration of Chinese elements. Especially now, animated films are popular in countries around the world, and we should draw on the essence of this art form, inherit and

develop Chinese elements according to our own cultural characteristics, and develop a diverse style of animated design, making the animation design more vivid and achieving sustainable development of China's animation industry.

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