

On the Reconstruction of Animation Education in Colleges and Universities from the Perspective of Chinese Traditional Animation

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Keywords: China, traditional animation, animation education, reconstruction

Abstract: In the mid-20th century, Chinese traditional animation deduced the national culture through diversified creation, and created a brilliant period of Chinese animation film. However, till now, our country is mainly engaged in processing and our animation lags behind the United States and Japan. How to make Chinese animation come out of the predicament and achieve a reversal? For this, college animation education bears an inescapable historical responsibility. It is essential to dig the cultural essence of Chinese animation carefully from the creation of Chinese traditional animation, find out the direction of the development of animation in our country, guide our animation education in colleges and universities, change the current animation pipeline talent training mode, reconstruct the animation education in colleges and universities according to the characteristics of the times, and train the real talents in the future of Chinese animation.

1. Multiculture of Chinese Traditional Animation

In 1926, the Wan Brothers' film "Studio Scene" was the first real animated film in China, which marked the birth of animated films in China. In the following decades, many classic animated works were produced in China. In 1943, "Iron Fan Princess" had a great impact on the Japanese animation master of Osamu Tezuka. On October 1, 1946, the Northeast Film Studio was established, which was the first people's film studio in New China. The animation industry in New China began here. On March 24, 1950, the art film group of the Northeast Film Studio moved to Shanghai. From then on, the art film group belonged to the Shanghai Film Studio, and later established Shanghai Animation Film Studio, which has created such classic animation works as *The Monkey King*, *Prince Nezha's Triumph Against Dragon King*, *Golden Monkey Vanquishes the Demon*, *Nine-color Deer*, *Little Tadpole Looks for Mommy*, *Pastoral Flute*, *Feelings of Mountains and Waters*. Through these works of Chinese style, our animation has gone to the world and won high praise as well as reputation from the world animation circle. These works and the cultural and historical connotations behind them are worthy of our careful review and reflection on the development of animation in China.

1.1 Multicultural Consciousness of Chinese Traditional Animation is Rooted in Excellent National Culture

In the 1950s and 1960s, animation was deeply rooted in national culture, and different deductions were carried out according to the theme of the times. *Iron Fan Princess*, *The Monkey King*, *Golden Monkey Vanquishes the Demon* which are drawn from Wu Chengen's *Journey to the West*, *Prince Nezha's Triumph Against Dragon King* which is drawn from *Legend of Deification*, *A Fool Buys Shoes*, *Mr. Nanguo* which are drawn from fables, *Butterfly Spring* which is drawn from folk stories and so on, are all rooted in Chinese traditional culture. They are the embodiment of Confucian culture in China, which emphasizes the social responsibility of characters and internalizes it into animated characters. They are used to shape characters and highlight themes. It conforms to the cultural characteristics of China and the aesthetics of audiences, and evoke a lot of ideological resonance with audiences.

1.2 Multiple Manifestations of Chinese Animation Originate from Our Rich Cultural and Artistic Categories

Throughout the works of film studio, animators represented by the Wan brothers and special works created many outstanding works of art by combining mud puppets, puppets, origami, woodcut and other arts with animation. At that time, Chinese animation was unique, known as the “Chinese School”, and also disseminated and displayed our nation. Excellent culture is not the passive blending of commercial films to cater to the audience and the market.

Little Tadpole Looks for Mommy in 1960, *Pastoral Flute* in 1963, and *Feelings of Mountains and Waters* in 1988 are closely related to Chinese traditional culture and customs. Through new forms of expression, the charm of ink and the animation story itself form a high degree of tacit agreement, creating a spiritual and elegant mood beyond time and space. *Prince Nezha's Triumph Against Dragon King* in 1961 adopted a typical single-line flat painting method to make the plot of the story easy to express. The first paper-cut animation “*The Pig Eats Watermelon*” integrated the essence of Chinese paper-cut art into the animation performance. In 1963, *Golden Conch* and *Fish Boy* in 1959 were produced through the carving and cutting techniques of paper cutting and the connection techniques of shadow puppets, with the beauty of shadow play and paper-cut.

2. Current Situation of Animation Education in Chinese Colleges and Universities

China has a long history of excellent culture, a lot of classic animation works, many outstanding animators as well as a strong cultural heritage. Different from the animation culture of the United States and Japan, these excellent things are worth inheriting and developing. Taking the development of animation in China and cultivation of animation reserve talents into consideration, there are many things worth reflecting on. Whether it is “Chinese style” or “Chinese model”, it is worth grasping deeply by the current Chinese animation operators, creators and learners, especially the professional education in colleges and universities, which bears the inescapable responsibility for the future of Chinese animation.

2.1 Negative Effects of Commercial Processing Films on Animation Education in China

Processing film style is unified with fluidization, standardization and fast return on investment, which is the project animation companies are willing to undertake at present. There will be a large number of orders once a direction is locked. Moreover, some fixed operations formed over a long period of time can greatly save the resources of enterprises and achieve quick results. But it is disastrous to Chinese animation and animation education in Chinese colleges and universities. Because there is no difference acceptance of traditional animation itself in China. The animation education in colleges and universities has lost the soil for research and application of their own culture. The blindly procedural teaching and training is only for the pipelining workers of animation industry.

2.2 Negative Effects of Short-term, Fair and Fast Interest Pursuit of Animation Enterprises

At present, China's animation enterprises are mainly engaged in processing outsourcing and late-stage business of film and television. The lack of original projects and the restraint of outsourcing and film and television dramas have made them lose their dominant position and become a subsidiary of film and television dramas. In addition, China's film and television special effects have a low investment and tight filing period, which directly limit the level of animation special effects. The animation talents also lost their proper development platform. Colleges and universities also lost the direction of talent training. The main reason is that the current animation market investors pursue short and smooth economic benefits, but lack in-depth research and creative investment in animation, resulting in a large number of poor special effects in the market as well as a great negative impact on the career development of animation students.

2.3 Negative Effects of the Deviation in the Direction of Talents Training in Colleges and Universities

The main reason for the lack of original talents is the deviation of talent training program. It blindly and passively caters to the market and ignores the dominant position of colleges and universities in talent training, but equates enterprise employment with the training of assembly line processing skilled workers in talent training orientation. It takes 3 or 4 years to complete 3 months' skills training of social training institutions. Finally, there is still a lack of competitiveness in the market employment. This is an important question that animation educators in colleges and universities must rethink now. Whether we abandon Chinese animation or Chinese animation abandons us. Without the cultivation and precipitation of history and culture, it is impossible to become a qualified or even excellent Chinese animator, which should depend on the cultivation of animation quality in colleges and universities.

Long-term processing animation education mode makes our country lack a large number of real understanding of animation and Chinese animation, lack original talent of Chinese animation, lack talent to inherit and carry forward Chinese animation, and always let us be led by the United States and Japan commercial animation situation.

2.4 Negative Effects of Abnormal Employment in the Market on the Training of Animation Talents in Colleges and Universities

Now, the "threshold" for college graduates to enter animation enterprises has been artificially "raised". Abnormal employing methods hinder the healthy growth and development of animation talents. Through market research, now animation enterprises have formed a "strange situation" in employing people. If a new graduate wants to enter animation enterprises, he will conduct paid training again on the grounds that professional knowledge and skills are out of touch with the production of enterprises. The training cost in just three months is as high as 30,000 yuan, which is the sum of four years' tuition fees for students at school. The high training fee seems to be the "knocking brick" for the new graduates to enter the animation company, which makes many students who are ambitious but whose economic conditions are not allowed stand back and eventually have no chance in the animation industry. This also makes college animation education lose its place, the confidence and motivation of animation education.

3. Reconstruction of Chinese Traditional Animation to the Current Animation Education in Colleges and Universities

There are different responsibilities in the whole animation industry and the cultivation of animation talents in colleges and universities. They all should cooperate genuinely, study Chinese animation jointly, find a breakthrough in the development history of Chinese traditional animation, and train Chinese animation talents jointly, so as to build a good talent cultivation flow system. Only in this way can it benefit the healthy development of Chinese animation.

3.1 Only by Inheriting Different Traditions can We Better Develop Animation Education in Chinese Colleges and Universities

The inheritance and development of Chinese animation conforms to the national conditions and the laws of the development of excellent culture. Learning and inheriting classics can take root and make animation education not deviate from its direction. It is no coincidence that "The Great Sage Return of Journey to the West" broke through 800 million box office in 2015. It is the closest work to the last century's "The Monkey King". We can see the importance of inheritance from Monkey King's character setting alone. How to interpret Wukong's well-known responsibility is essential. From the earliest Wan brothers' *"Iron Fan Princess"* to *"The Monkey King"* to *"The Golden Monkey Vanquishes the Demon"* till Tian Xiaopeng's *"The Return of the Great Sage"*, Wukong's shape and body proportions from a ignorant teenager to a mature, responsible, chivalrous uncle with a slightly mid-aged crisis are reflected. The character is a new image that blends tradition and modernity.

Another representative work is “*Big Fish & Begonia*” in 2016, which is based on classical Chinese literature such as “Shanhai Jing” and “Zhuangzi Xiaoyaoyou”. It seeks inspiration and refines creative elements. It is a leap-forward development of traditional culture with modern aesthetic thinking, and is constantly digging deep into traditional culture and folk culture. On the basis of art, the combination of culture and animation forms creates an aesthetic visual feast of Chinese style, which will be a direction of the development of animation in China. In 2016, the door god and other gods in “*Little Door Gods*” are redesigned based on the prototype of traditional Chinese New Year pictures, while the “Nian” of Chinese elements is redesigned into a Chinese version of monster. The scenery of the film also comes from the ancient town of Nanxun in China. The whole film is full of Chinese elements and strong Chinese style. The re-innovation of traditional culture in the new environment is attempted, which makes the whole film vivid and refreshing. “*Return of the Great Sage*”, “*Big Fish & Begonia*”, “*Little Door Gods*” and so on are salutes to the traditional culture, are the inheritance and difference of traditional culture, and the basis of the direction and development that animators must pay attention to now, and the mission that our college education must accomplish.

3.2 Inherit the Tradition through Education and Improve the Quality of Animated Movies in China

The experience of the development of Disney animation in the United States is repeated, accumulated and improved over the years. Although today’s technology and fashion are different from those of decades ago, Disney’s main style has never changed subversively. That is the importance of inheritance, as well as the importance of inheriting and developing excellent culture.

Animated film is a cultural product and a form of culture. Our country’s animated film should originate from Chinese culture and inherit Chinese culture. Education is a vital way of cultural inheritance. It can systematically and thoroughly study and develop excellent culture continuously and pertinently. Our animation education in China needs to be rooted in the local culture, increase the inheritance of traditional classics, and strengthen students’ education of national traditional culture and animation art accomplishment.

3.3 Pay More Attention to the Cultivation of Artistic and Cultural Accomplishment

According to the statistics of 2018, there were 359 undergraduate colleges and universities offering animation majors in China, and more than 200 higher vocational colleges offering animation majors. In the process of enrollment, in order to cope with the shortage of candidates, colleges and universities relax the type of candidates to non-artistic students, and have no requirements for students’ art foundation and artistic accomplishment. As a result, some students who lack the foundation of artistic accomplishment and dislike artistic creation join in the study of animation specialty, which brings enormous troubles to the training of professionals, which is not conducive to the healthy development of the animation industry as a whole. To grasp the source of students, it is of necessity to absorb the talents who are motivated to engage in animation into the key training of colleges and universities.

3.4 Strengthen the Study of Traditional Culture Training Courses and Improve Students’ Animation Cultural Literacy

College animation education must attach importance to the courses of animation history, history and culture, humanistic culture, music, clay sculpture, cloth art, handicraft and so on, strengthen students’ understanding of animation itself, the overall thinking of animation, script creation, character creation, director, dubbing, animation product development and so on, develop students’ animation vision, and cultivate students’ animation thinking.

According to survey results, computer courses account for 3/4 of the more than 40 professional courses offered by animation majors, and only about 3 courses about the history of animation and animation cultivation are available in the remaining 1/4. The history of animation films, traditional Chinese culture and other animation culture are optional courses in most colleges and universities, some of which have not even been offered, instead of a uniform computer course.

Colleges and universities are required to change the standardized teaching of animation production process industry, as well as the cultivation method in which school education is limited to some skills and lack a large number of literary and artistic training courses. To develop students' creative thinking, talent training should focus on students' overall artistic and cultural quality, rather than sticking to a few processes and software. Animation has become a cold industrial product, without ideas, temperature and soul.

Colleges and universities need to put themselves in a right position. The real reserve talents we have trained for the development of Chinese animation can not equate themselves with the short-term technical training of the society. The animation students trained in 3-4 years simply fail to compete with the technical workers trained in the society for 6 months. Graduates have to spend more than 30,000 tuition fees for six months of social training after graduation. These phenomena should cause colleges and universities to think deeply. Our educational philosophy and curriculum are unreasonable, and our direction of talent training is biased.

3.5 Animation Education is an Education of the Process of Animation Creation, which can not be Simplified as Production Education of Animation Works

In the course of reviewing and sorting out the animation films in the middle of last century, we find that it is very difficult for the high-quality traditional animation to appear in students' classes. We have not studied and sorted out the differences in depth. Although some of the production technology of the older generation has been replaced by computers now, their persistence in animation creation and the sense of mission of inheriting Chinese art and culture in combination with the times are all lacking in college education.

In the survey of some college animation teachers, we find that most of the teachers engaged in animation teaching lack the cultural accomplishment of animation, and their works are only passively responding to the situation, not reflecting the traditional culture of the nation. Secondly, animation managers and educators in colleges and universities are required to focus on the research process of animation. They should also study and practice traditional animation forms, such as clay-sculpture animation, paper-cut animation, origami animation, ink-and-ink animation, woodcut animation, puppet animation, ink-and-paper-cut animation and so on. It not only enriches our animation performance forms, but also cultivates students' animation spirit through this means. We should not let students learn several software unilaterally and deal with several special effects, but make students majoring in animation understand animation, understand the cultural connotation contained in animation, expand animation horizons, and cultivate animation thinking. In the process of creation, they will be able to stand in the overall position to understand an animation film, but they should not become machines for animation production.

4. Conclusion

Chinese animation took root in national culture in the middle of the last century and created the brilliance of Chinese style animation in combination with the times, which left us a lot of valuable creative experience. These valuable experience has been verified again in recent years in "*The Coming of the Devil Child, Ne Zha*", "*The Great Saint Return of Journey to the West*", "*Big Fish & Begonia*" and "*Little Door Gods*". College animation education is an important way to inherit animation differences in China. We should earnestly tap and learn, apply good experience to the current animation education in colleges and universities, reconstruct the unreasonable animation education, and cultivate future animators of China.

Acknowledgement

Shandong Education Department, Shandong Provincial Finance Special Support Project: One of the achievements of the teaching guidance program of animation production technology major in Shandong Three-year Higher Vocational education.

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