

The Integration and Innovation of Shandong Folktales in Animation Teaching in Higher Education

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Abstract

The folktales derived from folk arts are of abundant regional culture, local customs, national emotions, national spirit and the like, are one of the important forms expressing traditional cultural resources, as well as a valuable portion in the protection and inheritance of traditional culture in China. This paper holds that animation teaching and practices in colleges and universities should make full use of local folk culture resources, take the folktales in regions where the colleges and universities are located as the basis, and furnish design sources and materials for animation teaching and practices through the integration and innovation of folk culture, so as to reflect regional characteristics, connotations and values while satisfying the requirements of modern aesthetics, enrich the content of animation creation, and play a role in the inheritance and promotion of regional folk culture.

Keywords

Animation teaching; Shandong (also known as Qilu) folktales; Innovative expression

China has a rich cultural heritage, with an enormous variety of folktales which have survived throughout its long history. The folktales, important forms of narrative traditional culture, have been retold over the course of history, in diverse narrative styles as times vary, expressing the wishes of the people at different times, and carrying the semantics of varied societies over time. Gradually becoming an important element in the expression of traditional cultural resources, the preservation, the inheritance and the innovation of folktales can enhance the wide dissemination and vividness of their content. In the teaching and practices of animation in colleges and universities, effectively integrating characteristics of regional cultures and classical folktales into animation processes, an important issue in animation teaching and practices, is related to the inheritance and development of excellent traditional cultural resources. Meanwhile, starting from the folktales familiar to the public, the teaching and creations concerning animation are more likely to make the broadest public develop a sense of affinity and identity, awaken the local cultural memory through the practices of animation creation, so as to achieve transformation and innovation, transform excellent traditional cultures into the economic power for rural development, and boost the development of local industries.

1. Uniqueness and Vitality of Chinese Folktales

The representation of traditional Chinese folktales in

the form of animation has always been a vital source of subject matter in the teaching and practices of animation in China, and also an impressive exploration of national-style creations in Chinese animation processes. In the early days of animation practices, there existed some works that combined folktales with animation styles and expression techniques, including traditional classical animation works like *Nezha Riots the Sea*, *Baolian Lantern*, *Ginseng Doll* and *The Nine-Coloured Deer*. These works, employing a large number of eulogized historical archetypes and national cultural psychological archetypes in expressions and practices, not only enriched the subject matters in China's animation creations, but also produced touching national emotions and established a unique narrative style.

With the advent of multimedia, the development and the guidance of digital technology have transformed the concept of animation creation for Chinese folktales dramatically, which used to be copying traditional stories and following historical texts, but now turn out to be the current innovative expressions and the probes into realistic cultural values. A batch of representative, regional and dramatic elements and humanities in folk tales are being explored, whose themes and images are being enhanced through further creative designs, with their original storylines and derivative stories complementing each other to deliver profound meanings, and hence traditional story themes are expressed in a modern manner. For example, the famous works in today's animated films such as *Nezha*:

Birth of the Demon Child, Jiang Ziya, Crazy Nian and Toys & Pets are all derived and adapted with the help of traditional Chinese folktales. The deep reshaping of the expressions in the animated characters, and the full exploration and the paradigm restoration hidden in the surface of actions, dialogues and expressions, bring a new storytelling experience to the audience, and give life to the ancient folktales by making their characters from the historical context come to life, and hence a new paradigm of animation expressions arises. As Thomas Kuhn says in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, "The successive transition from one paradigm to another via revolution is the usual developmental pattern of mature science."⁽¹⁾

2. Classic Folktales in Shandong

In Shandong, a Chinese province with a long historical background, factors such as the natural environment, local customs, history and culture, as well as economic development, have given rise to a range of distinctive regional cultures, while the folk arts there have displayed an artistic form in which "a hundred flowers blossom and a hundred schools of thought contend". The diverse and unique folktales are loaded with local folklore.

The folktales of Shandong consist of stories with different connotations, like the culture of Mount Tai, the culture of the Yellow River, the culture of kites, the legends of New Year paintings, myths and legends, and the folklore of festivals, which unveil the regional characteristics and customs of Shandong. These stories, expressed in vivid language and handed down to this day, demonstrate people's familiarity with and love for Shandong, indicating the diligence, kindness, sincerity and sincere wishes of the working people. In Shandong, the birthplace of the Confucianism, folktales have also taken on the key task of carrying on with Confucianism.

The Shandong folktales are an integral part of the folk culture. By using animation to showcase and pass on the Shandong folktales in a detailed and subtly way, the excellent traditional culture is closely combined with modern life and modern aesthetics, which endows Shandong traditional culture with better continuity, inheritance and development. The animated works launched such as *The Legend of Bian Que*, *The Legend of Bao Shuya*, *The Legend of Qin Qiong and Liang Shanbo* and *Zhu Yingtai (The Butterfly Lovers)* vividly depict the folklore of Shandong, which is popular for both education and fun. As a key part in the Inheritance and Innovation Projects of Qilu Excellent Culture, the animation works named *Qilu Folklore Wonder Tour* was created with the representative historical allusions and folk legends from different parts of Shandong as resources. It turns out to be a model cartoon integrating knowledge, artistry, education and appreciation, receiving favorable feedback.

3. Integration and Innovation of Shandong Folktales in Animation Teaching

Folktales have been presented in various representational forms as story-tellers have repeatedly retold them with classic tales being adapted. As to the animation teaching and practical creations in local colleges and universities, we improve the teaching methods, fully combine the regional cultural characteristics, lead students to understand the content of classic folktales, help conduct the cross-interaction between traditional cultural folktales and animation education as well as practical courses, and urge students to deepen their knowledge of Shandong folktales through the collection and integration of Shandong folktales. By doing so, the students, who might deepen their knowledge of local art, will make Shandong folktales concrete, profound, stylized and vivid in their animation practices, while cultivating their innovation and practical ability, and inheriting and promoting the regional folk culture.

3.1 Enhancing students' understanding of Shandong folktales with Local Resources

There exist a large number of cultural archetypes among a wide range of Shandong folktales, rooted in the context of the real life and penetrating deep into the psychological and emotional imagery. In the early phase of the animation courses, related teachers, while lecturing on the theories concerning animation production, should direct the students to start with the classic Shandong folktales, to understand the cultural connotations of the very region, to become familiar with the types of Shandong folktales, and to refine the themes, creative elements and design materials of the animation works in line with modern aesthetics. Classes are based on an appreciation and analysis of existing outstanding animated films regarding Shandong folk tales, myths and legends, to stimulate students' interest in adapting stories and designing creatively, to raise their aesthetic awareness of folk culture, and to encourage students to re-examine local folktales and raw cultural essence of regional characteristics in an innovative and modern form.

At the same time, students are encouraged to utilize the open animation studio to learn more about the origins of Shandong folktales, and to increase the number of practice sessions. The forms like field trips and regular lectures by folk art experts invited would bring students closer to Shandong folk culture, who, on the basis of their similarities and differences among diverse folktales, will further illustrate and profoundly comprehend them in aspects like story types, stylistic features, style and form, etc. The students consequently make full use of animation modeling and visual symbols to refine and redesign, and combine the animation shapes and audio-visual language of

Shandong folktales while creating animations.

3.2 Steering Students to Construct the Core of Animated Stories and Effectively Refine Elements in Animation Creation

Teachers properly guide students in the visualization of narrative motifs in animation practices and creations. In his book *The Types of the Folktale*, American folklorist Stith Thompson defines a motif as "the smallest element in a tale having a power to persist in tradition", and hence it must have some unusual and touching power. The vast majority of motifs fall into three categories: 1) the characters in a tale such as gods or extraordinary animals or witches, demons, spirits or even traditional characters such as the beloved young children or the cruel stepmothers; 2) some kind of background, magic, artifacts, unusual customs, peculiar beliefs and other items relating to a plot; 3) those single events that encompass most of the motifs, with the motif elements often appearing in different stories and being re-coded and re-arranged in new ones. Through constructing the narrative motifs of Shandong folktales, the core of the stories would be identified and the creative elements be effectively processed.

The course can be guided and practised by teachers in the following ways. **Firstly, inspire students to practise animated characterizations using the prototypical images of Shandong folktales.** The images are the soul of the animated works, and the visualization of the prototype images is the core of the animation creation, serving as the important link of the animation storylines and playing an important role in expressing the storylines and conveying emotions. In the courses, we repeatedly analyze the characterizations and performances of outstanding domestic and foreign folklore animations, and explore their commonalities and uniqueness while starting with copying models. **Secondly, guide students to understand the essence of Shandong folktales and to integrate folklore into the audio-visual expressions of animation creations.** With a large part of the students in local colleges and universities from Shandong, those learners have been nurtured by the regional cultural atmosphere since childhood, hence a relatively intense regional cultural accumulation. Via brainstorming, Shandong folklore would be analyzed, different points of creative expressions revealed, and the animation scripts adapted and refined, so as to incorporate the unique regional folklore into animation creations. **Finally, stimulate students' animation creativity by experimenting with folk perspectives.** Students are required to observe daily life and the surrounding folklore, then collect and record folktales, find the design sources through observation and collection, cultivate creative thinking methods, and draw inspiration from folktales to create animation works

with local flavors.

3.3 Integrating and Innovating Shandong Folktales in Animation Creations

Due to the fact that each student might understand Shandong folktales collected earlier in a distinctive manner during the creation of the animation, teachers should take the initiative to understand the students' strengths and potentials, respect individual differences, guide them to think rationally, break the patterns of animation teaching, encourage students to work in groups and give full play to their individual strengths. In the face of the selected folktales, they should analyze them correctly to select the essence and discard the dross, combine them with the pre-conceived animation shapes, design and conceive animation storylines conforming to modern aesthetic sensibilities and spiritual needs, follow the basic rules of animation creations, and combine them with classic folktales to start their creative practices.

In terms of animation scenes, teachers instruct students to fully perceive the characteristics of the times, the humanities and the regions where a story takes place, start from the layout of scenes, architectural style and prop style, combine the characteristics of the plot, characters and modeling in the selected folktale to refine the animation scenes which could reflect the regional cultural characteristics, guide students to appropriately integrate innovative ideas, and deliver the animation theme by personalized and funny elements.

4. Conclusion

In the process of animation teaching and industry development, the cultivation of special talents is essential, and therefore local universities should give a sharper focus on the cultivation of unique and practical talents in distinct regional environments. By doing so, courses in colleges and universities should commence with teaching the mode and content of animation, organically infiltrate the regional cultural resources and folk culture resources with era features into the teaching, correctly guide students to explore ways like the combination of regional culture and modern animation, so that students can get enhanced in practices and realize the organic combination of theoretical teaching and practical teaching, as well as traditional culture and modern art. This is not only conducive to colleges and universities fully serving the local area, but also beneficial to the common development of domestic regional culture and animation works creation, since it renders more scientific and enriching teaching and curriculum construction for animation majors, realizing the integration and innovation of tradition and modernity, and regionalization and globalization in animation

designs, so as to better inherit and carry forward regional and folk culture.

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Project

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