

# Discussing on the Traditional Chinese Elements and Animation Design

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**Abstract:** Image design of cartoon character is a very important part of the basis for making an animated film. It directly affects the success of animation. Elements of traditional Chinese culture in the form of its rich and profound culture impact on the animation character design deeply. Among them, the modeling, action and clothing are the essential factors in shaping an image. By the combination of these three factors, the temperament of the role emits lingering charm and connotation. When we start the role creation, we should pay attention to the elements of traditional culture, and grasp the essence of traditional culture to give the animated character distinctive art trait.

**Keywords:** animated character; image design; traditional culture

## 1. The importance of animated character design

In recent years, animation industry with its high efficiency, low risk, wider audience, higher advantage has flourished. Along with development of the new culture industry, animated character design has gradually become an independent and important subject. Role image is the prerequisite for evaluation. As an excellent cartoon, no matter how intricate the story line is, highly skilled director is, if there is not an attractive role image, it isn't a successful work. As the first considering standard of audience to choose a cartoon, the role image can fully express the character and the storyline, improve the cartoon's appeal and influence. As a result, the audience was impressed by the whole film and obsessed by the role of the film image. With the popular animated characters, the development of derivative markets also has expanded. So-called derivatives are the serial products designed by taking animation character's image as the core concept of development. An outstanding cartoon image can exploit lots of derivatives, including clothing, diet, toys, life products, collections and electronics etc. Thus, the cartoon image is not just a film and television animation art image, its influence even more than the cartoon itself. Good image is not only artistic, but also commercial, such as Mickey Mouse, Snoopy and Snow White etc, which have become the medium and spokespersons of commercial operations. They are not inferior to any one of Hollywood stars. Most images are lack of creativities and packaging in the modern Chinese animation market, which cause the market to out of operate and can't bring relevant industry develop, business profits do not create. Facing the new trend in the development of global economic, foreign film and television animations have taken a great impact on Chinese market. The images of the

Chinese original animations look extremely uncompetitive. In this case, solving the problem of blending traditional culture and China-style animation character is very meaningful for accommodating the environment of integration of world art as soon as possible, carrying forward the national spirit, mining the animation design talents, improving the level of Chinese animated image design and creating a world-class cartoon stars.

## 2. Traditional elements in the design of animated characters

### 2.1 Modeling

In every excellent cartoon, figurines play a pivotal role in shaping a character which is bright and outstanding. From the development of Chinese animation art, the age-old traditional culture and rich animation materials have been the largest breeding ground of China-style animation modeling. That's to say, Chinese traditional culture creates the animation style of China.

Chinese animated image designers, absorb a wide range of Chinese traditional folk art of wood carving, paper cutting, Peking Opera Art Deco style and the ancient paintings, much more focus on the decorative image and typical characterization. Imaginative, bold and exaggerated way manifests the artistic characteristics that are simple, antiquity, massy, aesthetic, characteristic and powerful. For example, in the film *Havoc in Heaven*, designers fasten the leading role Monkey King's figure personality by entire looks, dress, action and unite external and internal quality, combine with his three characteristics of "Monkey, God, Human". On the basis of the Monkey King's image in the comic book *Red Star Over China*, they learn from Peking Opera mask, folk arts for print and other traditional arts and then take the integration to complete this image of Monkey King who wears a soft hat, masks the inverted peach, has small arms and long legs, wears tiger fur. Thus, the image takes posses-

sion of the monkey's intelligence and lively characteristics and the God-shaped features what people can't transform through and more human emotions.

Other forms of different types of animated characters can also show and pass the different national aesthetic sentiment. For example, the character modeling of classic animation *Na Zha Nao Hai* absorbs its essence of Chinese door-god. Na Zha who naked, have light-colored flesh, red ribbon and a gold necklace, two black eyes coupled with feature and bushy eyebrows, which set him off to powerful. In short, this film is very successful in shaping an extraordinary young hero image. The red gorgeous gown fully shows Lijing's courtiers identity, and the knee-protected amour under the clothes leaks that he is a warrior. This role design with the type of both literal and martial completely fit the requirement for the storyline. On the other side, the role molding design in the whole film use the decorative style, simple lines with folk colors such as cyan, green, red, white, black, which make people feel fresh and at the same time full of the charm of traditional arts

## 2.2 Action

For the role of modeling, the action design is also very important. Modeling's charm can be also expressed by the role's expression. The role's action and expression can not only interpret the story, but also reflect the movie's rhythm, show the role's personal charm and so on. For example, *General fires* mirrors plenty of Chinese traditional opera elements, especially the Beijing opera in creation. In this movie, Animation Designers use a lot of Beijing opera as its music and types of facial makeup in operas as roles' model, and even a great many of characters' spoken language and action all design on the base of Beijing opera actors' show. In order to stand out General's character and imposing manner, the General's body, shape and the action are according to the requirement of Dan angle which needs to be drawn by the thick line. When General wins to return, other commanders welcome him to come back in glee feast. He holds his head high, paces and walks to the glee feast step by step with the rhythm of drum, which likes senior General coming on the stage in Beijing opera. He goes on the loose, military accomplishments fades with the time after he wins to return. Until the attacking army has reached the city gates, he orders troops under his command to take his arms, but his gun has been corroded to scrap iron. At last, he can do nothing but being caught and can not pride any more. On the side, the senior private adviser in the movie comes on the stage by the style of ugly angle, what is called "clown in Beijing operas", the white pattern on nose standing out his tricky and flattering character, and his triangular shaped face, white nose, exaggerated action and expression, the tune of spoken parts of a Chinese opera all increase the movie drama

atmosphere.

2008, Paramount produces the new animated film named *Kung Fu Panda*, and its element which includes scene, roles and storyline etc, all shows great Chinese flirtatious expressions. The leading role is Chinese national treasure — a panda named Paul. He has fat and strong body, round head, charming naivety, and looks funny and sly. The traditional elements exist almost everywhere in this movie, like the ladder leading to the sky, towering building, festive squibs, artful dragon sedan, which are created for Paul to make laugh. Such as, he climbs up the ladder leading to the sky out of breath and falls on the ground latter, when Paul defeats TaiLung by the air craft made by squibs then become the dragon fighter, the number of the people to lift up the dragon sedan for Paul's fat but strong body has become 8 from 4. This movie's scene mirrors great many Chinese style acting movies. For example, the segment of Paul robbing the bowl with his master comes from the movie named *Snake-shaped hand*. The segment of Paul rolling down the hill looks great whose inspiration comes from Xing chi Zhou's unique skill named hot wheels in the movie *Love on Delivery*; otherwise, we can say Xiao long Li has a powerful influence to the western society from the animals' sounds and action what like Xiao Long Li's when they fight. On the side, Tiger, Crane, Monkey, Viper, Mantis are past masters and their Kung Fu are one type of Chinese Kung Fu named Chinese mind-body boxing. It stands out Crane's lightness; Monkey's quickness; Tiger's brave and fierce; Mantis' intelligent; Viper's fast, liquidity etc. In addition, the perfect segment "the war of bridge cutoff" is more beautiful and charming than some of Chinese action movies which brings a great powerful vision impact and gives us the feeling that it is not only a animation. This film has too many good action scenes for us to mention one by one. *Kung Fu Panda* is absolutely successful on showing the action about Kung Fu. *Kung Fu Panda* is an inspiring story which is made by Americans; it mirrors Chinese traditional art and sprite to reflect American lifestyle than only a pure American animated film. The pursuing for excellently using the traditional art and national sprite is the key for this American animated film to success all over the world.

Fig.1



Fig.1 *Kong Fu Panda*

### 2.3 Costume

In 1998, Disney produces the animated film named *Mulan*. Along with the spacious battle scenes and winding frontier amorous feelings, the authentic Chinese costumes of the film are also impressive. Through the household heroine image in Chinese history of thousands of years, the world people appreciate and amaze at the ancient Chinese civilization.

*Mulan* verified the ancient Chinese costumes seriously, including Tang figurines, Han figurines, and Ladies map. Therefore, the costumes of this film are much closer to historical reality than the costumes of other Chinese ancient loads. From *Mulan*'s long and colorful skirt before joining the army to her service dress and then to her majestic-looking armor on the field of battle, the clothing change shows her status' change from a lovely girl to a muddleheaded batman and then to the heroine who established brilliant achievements in war. Those image changes are natural and orderly and have left a deep impression for people. In the clothing, the designer of the movie shows his insight in choosing the Tang costumes as key subject. Because Tang's culture represents the summit of the Chinese traditional culture, and Tang costumes reflect this correctly. The precise clothes of the roles in this film are the pivotal factors to become successful.

### 3. The development and innovation of traditional elements

All these years, in creation of animated art image, some people have thought it was backward and stale, not conforming to the development of the times. This understanding of Chinese traditional culture is one-sided. However, this point is very prevalent in current animated area. From the 1950's, we started the study on Chinese traditional art, especially the art types with more aesthetic value such as paper-cutting, New Year picture, embroider, shadow puppet etc. Regrettably, there is few works to lead these artistic forms in animation works as creating symbols. Take animation creation for example, by learning from traditional art such as Chinese ink painting, paper-cutting, shadow puppet, Peking Opera mask and fresco etc, we created many excellent animation roles and lots of splendid films since the 1960s, such as *Monkey King*, *Na Zha*, *Children of Cucurbit* and *Black Cat Detective* and these character had become the visual images of teenagers at that time. But in recent years, there is no breakthrough or innovation, so the suggestion that Chinese style images should learn from traditional art is very significant. Traditional arts have

strong aesthetic characteristics, and its potential is enormous. We have recognized that if there is no traditional culture in Chinese animation creation, whether it be grand, and then well-made, is only an imitation of other country's animation. Therefore, we should objectively look at the elements of Chinese traditional culture and art, neither negate the value of traditional arts nor repeat and take the old road, but should take the creative spirit of initiative, absorb nutrients from various traditional plastic arts of China, then create fresh images that is corresponding to aesthetic sense in modern society.

### 4. Acknowledgement

Animated cartoon character design is an important issue, what is changed with the different stories and plots. Especially in modern market economy, excellent animation character design is not only the embodiment of art, but also may bring new business opportunities. Therefore, the shape of the animated character design can not be merely on paper. Animation designers will face the new issues that how to create animated characters combining with artistic creation and commercial exploitation. As for Chinese cartoon image design, it convey the essence of traditional culture to audience by external forms of animated images to achieve the aesthetic of pleasure. These new animated images become the carriers of thinking way of cultural. Animation image designers can produce the national characteristics by basing on the forms of Chinese traditional arts. "Only by nationality can be the world." Only learning from the spirit of the connotation of traditional culture can we create new animations conforming to the development of the times, and make Chinese animated films which not only belong to our nation but also widely recognized by the world.

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