

The Application of National Elements in Animation Costume Design

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Abstract. The paper first analyzes the application of national elements in animation costume of “Chinese School” animation in the 20th century. Then draws lessons from the application of ethnic elements in American and Japanese animation costumes. And finally puts forward the application strategies of national elements in animation costume design from two dimensions of nationalization and internationalization.

1. Introduction

Only by taking national elements as the premise of animation creation and keeping up with the international trend, can we produce animations with national characteristics and in line with the aesthetics of modern audiences and so that our animation can stand firm in the fierce market competition [1]. The paper takes animation costume as the foothold to explore the application of national elements in animation costume at home and abroad.

During the period of “Chinese School” animation, a large number of outstanding animation works with distinctive features have emerged because of the predecessors’ exploration to the application of national elements, which provide references for the nationalization of animation costume in China. The following part mainly analyzes the application of ethnic elements in “Chinese School” animation costume design from three aspects: style, pattern, and color.

2. The costume design characteristics of “Chinese school” animation

2.1 Innovation of costume style

The costume style of “Chinese School” animation which is reconstructed according to the character and plot needs mainly comes from costumes in different dynasties, operas, murals and so on. For example, the costume of Sun Wukong in *The Monkey King* derived from “monkey clothing” and short martial arts costumes in the opera. Opera costumes of the goose yellow slopping jacket, scarf and belt are unchanged, but the short skirt at the waist is changed into tiger skinned skirt and trousers are changed from loose to tight which convenient large number of action performances of Sun Wukong [2]. The *Nine-Colored Deer* originated from the Dunhuang frescoes -- *Deer King Bensheng Map* in Northern Wei Dynasty. The King's clothing Refers to the Emperor's court dresses: wide cuffs, right overlapping part, upper and lower garment. But the costume in the animation has been integrated into the Western style, changing the right overlapping part to pullover style which makes the animation has exotic flavor. The costume of *Three Monks* derived from the Haiqing garment with long-slanted robe which has large cuffs, hem and waist and 53 lines in front of the collar. It is simplified in the animation only retains the feature of large which has the artistic style of brief brush painting and consistent with the concise artistic expression of the film.

2.2 Simplification of costume pattern

Due to the change of artistic form, the patterns of animation costumes are usually simplified to meet the requirements of traditional two-dimensional animation forms and production techniques and increase the decorative of the film to some extent. For instance, the costume of Sun Wukong in *The*

Monkey King has removed complex patterns in the opera clothing and has more visual impact in the panoramic lens. The costume of king in *The Nine-Colored Deer* removed the pattern of emperor's court clothing and only retains the pattern of dragon in the knee in order to indicate his identity. The costume of Nezha in *Nezha Conquers the Dragon King* is implanted the opera stage costume, but removed the clothes and trousers. The upper shoulders of Nezha are covered with pink lotus petals while the lower petals are changed into dark green lotus leaves.

2.3 Nationalization of costume color

In order to observe the traditional psychological cognition and habit preference of color, "Chinese School" animation usually extracted colors from traditional arts such as New Year paintings, murals, traditional Chinese paintings, etc. For instance, the costume of king in *The Nine-Colored Deer* has black coat, earthy red dress and blue covering knee with the dull red dragon pattern. Earthy red, blue and black were widely used in the Northern Wei Dynasty. It combines oil painting techniques with Chinese painting techniques to create the unique texture effect which gives the animation a strong Dunhuang fresco style. The costume color of Sun Wukong in *The Monkey King* is yellow, red and blue which has strong decorative style and traditional flavor. Yellow was only used by the royal family during the feudal time, indicating that Sun Wukong despised authority; red symbolizes revolution which shows his rebellious spirit; blue symbolizes hope which shows his vitality and courage.

According to above analysis, the integration of ethnic elements into animation costumes is a process of deconstruction, transplantation and reconstruction [3]. But nationalization "is not to exclude the absorption of foreign experience and technology" [4]. We should actively absorb the production experience of the United States, Japan and other countries with an open attitude to cater to the aesthetic preferences of modern audiences.

3. The animation costume design characteristics of American and Japanese.

3.1 Technological innovation

In 1995, *Toy Story*, produced by Pixar in the United States, started the era of three-dimensional animation. The application of 3d technology opens up more possibilities for the expression of animation costume, making costumes more realistic in texture, light, shadow, etc. Pixar went to zoos and museums to observe animals' fur with a microscope during the production of *Zootopia* and got the appearance characteristics of fur and the expression mode of hair follicle level. And they came up with a new method to reconstruct hair follicle to make the hair looks more real close.

Nowadays, although 3d technology is developing rapidly in China, there is still a big gap compared with abroad. The latest animation films such as *Bear, Kunta and Sail* are still cannot match for American animation movies in terms of hair, light and shadow rendering and materials of clothing. Lack of funds and technical personnel is one aspect, but the general impetuous attitude of animation employees in our country is the more important reason.

3.2 Re-creation of national elements in American animation costume

Similar to the "Chinese School" animations, American employ the method of "simplifying the complexity" either. Laces and patterns in European aristocratic dresses are simplified and the color is bold and layered. For example, Snow White's skirt is drawn by several strokes.

In animations themed on other countries, American usually carries on localization innovation to the foreign traditional clothing. Taking *Hua Mulan* as an example, they cut and innovate the traditional Chinese costumes, and retaining the style of Chinese costume at the same time. The wide sleeves of Hanfu are reduced to narrow sleeves to accord with the restless character of *Hua Mulan* (refer with: Fig. 1). The tailoring cuffs are originating from the design of modern fashion, which not only has Chinese classical flavor but also reflects modern fashion style (refer with: Fig. 2). *The Prince of Egypt*, *Coco*, *Kubo* and *the Two Strings* also localized and innovated to the costumes of the characters.



Fig. 1. Mulan's family dress



Fig. 2. Mulan's dating costume

3.3 Innovation of national elements in Japanese animation costume

Japanese animation costumes have a unique style. Kimono, as a kind of traditional costume of Japanese, is innovated according to the needs of plots and roles in an animation. For example, the protagonist of Flower Card Love changes clothes into beautiful kimonos with various and exquisite patterns during competition every time.

In addition, Japanese is good at integrating and innovating other cultures in the process of making animation. Take the example of Mononoke (refer with: Fig. 5). Costumes in the animation combines the kimono with European art. Firstly, the style of the animation costume comes from kimono; secondly, based on Ukiyoe style (refer with: Fig. 3), the painting is outlined by lines from traditional Japanese painting techniques and filled large areas with complementary colors and reduced the color saturation to makes the clothing appears bright, lively and elegant. Furthermore, the decorative style of Klimt (refer with: Fig. 4), a representative of the Art Nouveau Movement, is used to transform clothing patterns into decorative elements [5].



Fig. 3. Night Rain Beauty



Fig. 4. Kiss of Klimt



Fig. 5. Costume in The Strange Cat

Based on above analysis, all excellent animation works are bound to the unification of nationalization and internationalization [6]. So how can we use these experiences to innovate the nationalization and internationalization of our animation costumes? The following is a detailed analysis.

4. The nationalization and internationalization of animation costumes

4.1 Nationalization of animation costumes

The national is the world. As a kind of "exotic product", animation requires constantly absorb nutrients from other art forms in our country to complete its nationalization.

The process of nationalization of animation can be divided into two stages. "Take its shape" is the first stage. In this part, various forms of national art such as traditional opera animations are transplanted into animation costumes, which has not yet formed the new costume style. Wei Te once said that the way of adding "Chinese-style belly pockets" to animated characters or adding "traditional decorative patterns" to clothing has great limitations which is not conducive to creating

excellent animations [7]. The second stage is "get its god". Based on the animation ontology language, we should deconstruct the traditional culture according to the needs of the animation, and then integrate national elements into the animation costumes to form the constitutive elements of animation ontology. It completes the transformation from "general" symbolic to "expressive" symbolic in this part. Such as *The Monkey King*, *Three Monks*, *The Proud General*, etc.

The "Chinese School" animation not only grasps the essence of national elements but also transforms national cultural into animation images which conform to contemporary aesthetics. Costume style references to the costumes in traditional operas, ethnic groups, murals and other art forms, and then integrates and innovates with each other. Costume patterns are simplified to adapt to the drawing mode of 2d animation single-line flat painting. The color in "Chinese School" animation not only transplant reference costumes but also extract from traditional arts such as New Year paintings and murals to achieve the effect of inclusiveness.

4.2 Internationalization of animation costumes

It is not enough to create unique animation costumes only by drawing lessons from national culture. We should also learn foreign experiences -- "take its essence and dregs"--to inject new vitality to animation costumes.

The references to foreign animation can be divided into two aspects. One one hand, we should learn 3d animation technology from foreign countries. Compared with the United States, 3d animation technology in our country is still far from perfect. There are a lot of various clothing fabrics including silk, cotton, wool, brocade, hemp and so on and numerous costume styles in our country. New techniques should be developed according to the needs of animation. On the other hand, internationalization is not simple imitate foreign countries which will lead to lose the national characteristics and recognition of audiences. We should learn from national culture and other countries' culture, then conduct an in-depth discussion on creation ideas and aesthetic characteristics to find the conjunction points, and finally create the animation costumes which will be widely recognized by modern audiences with both national characteristics and exotic styles.

5. Summary

Traditional cultures, thinking modes and design methods are different in different countries. Only rooted in national cultural and integrated the strength of the design methods of other countries, can we build a more complete modern animation costume design system, and then create animations with Chinese charm.

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