Investigating Storytelling Differences Between Western and Eastern Computer Animation

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Abstract. Throughout the twentieth century, animation has been used to tell a variety of stories. The narratives told through animation are diverse, owing to their origins on various continents. Different regions of the world produce an animation that takes a unique approach to storytelling. This distinguishes the animation's story, as the storytelling approach would significantly influence the culture from which it originated. The story's origins can be traced back to the geographical location of the animation's production, and this approach is classified as either western or eastern animation. This classification demonstrates a significant distinction between the animation produced and its storytelling approach when viewed from a western and an eastern perspective. Numerous previous studies have established a significant distinction between the western and eastern approaches to computer animation storytelling. Two critical factors have been identified as having a significant impact on and influencing the storytelling approach of western and eastern animation: culture and origin. Culture has a significant impact and influence on how western and eastern computer animation storytellers tell their stories. This paper investigates the storytelling differences between western and eastern computer animation. The paper begins with an overview of the storytelling approach from both a western (American) and an eastern (Japanese) perspective in computer animation. Both western and eastern computer animation storytelling approaches are discussed in detail to provide a thorough understanding of the storytelling approaches used and practised within each category. Following that, an analysis of the significant differences and approaches between western and eastern computer animation storytelling is presented, focusing on the storytelling elements and storytelling models (narrative structure). The findings of this analysis will be used as a foundation of storytelling approaches and practice in western and eastern computer animation, with the goal of proposing a conceptual storytelling model for Malaysian computer animation.

Keywords: Animation Storytelling · Western Animation · Eastern Animation · Storytelling Elements · Storytelling Models

1 Introduction

Animations have been created in many different places throughout the last century, and the animations produced can be classified into several categories. The most notable of

these classifications are western and eastern animation, which are determined by the origins of the animation produced. For centuries, the word or notion of east and west has been coined and applied to distinguish the western and eastern worlds, particularly in terms of culture, religion, and geography [18].

Western animation, notably American animation, and eastern animation, specifically Japanese animation, have risen to prominence over the last four decades. The United States of America and Japan are often regarded as the world's two most influential animation industries [8]. In general, Western animation is referred to as American cartoons. In contrast, Eastern animation is referred to as Japanese anime, as the animation created by these two countries is deemed successful and internationally recognised [12].

On the contrary, the United States of America and Japan are widely regarded as the two major countries that pioneered animation development by utilising cutting-edge hardware and software technologies to create high-quality animation [4]. Pixar Animation Studios, Walt Disney Animation Studios, DreamWorks Animation, Sony Pictures Animation, Warner Bros. Animation, and Blue Sky Studios are just a few of the significant leading animation studios that have pioneered animation development using cutting-edge hardware and software technologies (western animation studios). Similarly, Studio Ghibli Inc., Toei Animation, Madhouse, Bandai Namco Filmworks., Kyoto Animation, and Bones Inc. are just a few of Japan's major animation studios (eastern animation studios). While both western and eastern animations share similarities in using cutting-edge technology in their animation development, both take very different approaches to storytelling.

According to a recent study, western and eastern animation approaches storytelling differently and uniquely [17]. Similar studies conducted [5, 13, 15, 18] discovered similar results, emphasising that the western and eastern animation storytelling approaches are diametrically opposed in terms of storytelling elements and models.

On the other hand, the primary distinction between western and eastern animation storytelling is in the narrative development of the storytelling approach, which varies across regions and countries [14]. In contrast, it is argued that the primary distinction between western and eastern animation storytelling is in the philosophical approach to narrative development within the narrative structures used as the storytelling approach [10]. Additionally, the primary storytelling approach in Japanese animation (eastern animation) is to portray Japanese culture, style, and art [9], whereas the primary storytelling approach in American animation (western animation) is based upon the fundamental premise of western culture [14].

2   Western Animation Storytelling

In recent years, there has been an increase in literature on the storytelling approach used in western animation, particularly American animation. The American animation's story and narrative approach are entirely influenced by American culture and style [14]. American animation storytelling is defined by its uniquely American style and approach to the narrative introduced. The narrative and themes of the story are founded on the effects of western culture as portrayed and incorporated into the storytelling approach [12].
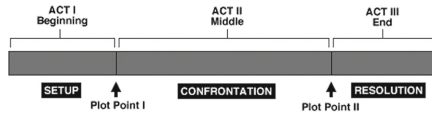
Fig. 1. The Three-Act Structure by Aristotle

Similarly, the significance of themes (major or minor) as an essential component of the western storytelling approach is emphasised within the story and narrative, which plays a critical role in the development of American animation storytelling [18]. The overall approach of themes is prevalent in American animation, and popular themes are also frequently used as the storytelling foundation for western animation. American Superheroes, Grimm's fairy tales, and technology versus nature are just a few of the recurring themes in American animation [15].

One of the most significant storytelling elements that significantly influence the American animation storytelling approach is the characters. In American animation, the story revolves around the main character's (a single protagonist) journey through a world defined by change and disruption [11]. American animation's overall narrative is frequently focused on the character's micro journey, which has an effect on the macro journey. This approach is based on an individualistic ideology that places a premium on the action and triumph of a single protagonist hero, more commonly referred to as the American Hero.

In contrast, American animation storytelling emphasises the more self-centred nature of the characters [14]. The majority of the story is focused on the protagonists, who are typically portrayed in first-person. This demonstrates that the primary protagonist character receives more emphasis and attention in American animation storytelling, which is considered the fundamental approach in western animation storytelling. On the other hand, the characters developed and portrayed in American animation are predominantly fictional rather than believable [1]. The majority of developed characters are more fiction-based, as this is the most common approach when adapting stories and characters from comic books and novels.

Apart from the heavy influence of American culture, themes, and storytelling elements, another critical component of the storytelling approach in American animation is the storytelling model or story structure (narrative structure). The majority of straightforward plots and stories adhere to the three-act structure prevalent in western animation, particularly American children's cartoons. The plots are developed using Aristotle's three-act structure (refer to Fig. 1) as a guide for plot development [1].

Additionally, the American animation storytelling approach does employ a more complex storytelling model, such as Christopher Vogler's (2007) twelve stages of the hero's journey (refer to Fig. 2), as a guide for developing the story structure [11]. The story and plot development follow the twelve stages as outlined within the structure from the beginning to the end of the story. The approach to plot development is considered complicated because it is structured around the overall structure. The twelve stages of the hero's journey are regarded as a more modern version of Joseph Campbell's The Monomyth (1949).

Fig. 2. The Twelve Stages of the Hero's Journey by Christopher Vogler

3   Eastern Animation Storytelling

Numerous prior studies have documented the plethora of approaches to Japanese anima-
tion storytelling. The storytelling approach of Japanese anime is influenced by Japanese
culture, art, and style [9]. This can be traced all the way back to early Japanese art in
the early 1900s, which influenced the storytelling approach used in Japanese anime.
Similarly, Japanese anime storytelling depicts and heavily relies on aspects of Japanese
art and culture that are ingrained in the storytelling approach [19]. This is evident in the
way storytelling is portrayed in the narrative through the lens of Japanese culture and
translated into the visual design approach for the characters.

In addition, the storytelling of Japanese anime is comprised of few narrative elements
[11]. Themes, character archetypes, and aesthetic solutions are some of the storytelling
elements incorporated into the Japanese anime storytelling approach. Themes introduced
in Japanese anime storytelling are frequently repeated and take on a typically Japanese
cultural theme approach in the stories depicted. Alternatively, it supports and emphasises
the significance of the theme in Japanese anime storytelling [9]. In most cases, the story
in Japanese anime follows a similar theme in terms of a storytelling approach. Among
the pervasive Japanese anime themes are rites of passage, good versus evil, technology
versus magic, and humanity versus technology.

On the contrary, Japanese anime storytelling frequently falls short of utilising avail-
able storytelling models or story structures to guide the story and narrative [7]. The
majority of Japanese anime is not structured according to Aristotle's basic three-act
structure. This is because the majority of Japanese anime stories are complex, and the
storytelling approach is based on unconventional directions with unrelated paths for the
audience to follow in order to make sense of the story. Eastern animation storytelling
is limited to a four-act story structure or storytelling model known as *'Kishotenketsu'*
(refer to Fig. 3). Within this storytelling model, *'Ki'* denotes the beginning, *'Sho'* denotes
the story's progression, *'Ten'* denotes the twist or conflict, and *'Ketsu'* denotes the con-
clusion or resolution. Since ancient Japanese times, this storytelling model has been
employed in and discovered to be employed in Korean and Chinese literature, poetry,
jokes, and other narrative forms [2].

Similarly, it is claimed that the majority of Japanese anime features a complex story-
line that incorporates a variety of Japanese genres [4]. However, it is argued that Japanese
anime takes a straightforward approach to plot development [1]. This straightforward
plot structure enables the characters in Japanese anime to develop within the context
of the overall story, which incorporates multiple themes. This approach enables the
character to develop throughout the story through the introduction of major and minor
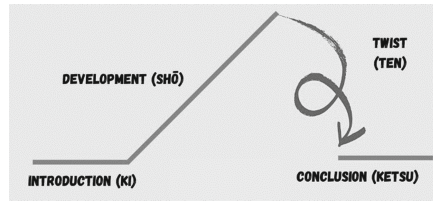conflicts.

Fig. 3. The Four-Act Story Structure: Kishotenketsu

Another intriguing aspect of Japanese anime's storytelling is the concept of characters and their journey through the narrative. The main character or hero (the protagonist) typically relies on collaboration (teamwork) rather than individualism [11]. The protagonist's approach is based on eastern collectivism and the philosophy of peace. The majority of main characters or protagonists in Japanese anime are mortal and will perish during the course of the story. The protagonist's primary goal throughout the story is to comprehend the journey and character development and strive for a peaceful and harmonious world. This is consistent with the assessment conducted on the Japanese anime protagonist, which emphasises the character's wistful separation from the viewer as the medium's greatest storytelling strength [9].

4   Differences Between Western and Eastern Animation Storytelling

Arguably, numerous previous studies have distinguished the different storytelling approaches used in western and eastern animation, most notably in storytelling elements and storytelling models (narrative structure). In general, western and eastern animation depictions of stories differ significantly depending on the story's origins or local stories based on geographical approach. The distinctions between western and eastern animation storytelling come down to the story's origins, which are viewed differently from a western or eastern perspective [6]. In addition, the significant differences between western and eastern animation storytelling are highlighted through the lens of history, origins, culture, and storytelling approaches [16]. Similarly, it is evident that there is a discernible difference between western and eastern animation storytelling, which is reflected in cultural and societal characteristics [3].

The storytelling element of character is one of the most significant distinctions between western and eastern animation storytelling. Western narratives place greater emphasis on a single central character (character arc), who serves as the narrative's focal point [6]. Throughout the story, the protagonist will encounter numerous obstacles, which he will overcome with determination and fortitude in order to achieve the story's goal. On the contrary, the typical approach to character development in eastern animation storytelling is for one of the characters to eventually become the protagonist. Alternatively, to the western approach, where the protagonist is introduced at the beginning of the story, the protagonist can be introduced in the middle of the story.

Likewise, there were discussions that the western and eastern animation storytelling approaches characters similarly [14]. Western animation storytelling values individualism more than eastern animation storytelling, as the story is centred on a single protagonist (hero). In contrast, eastern animation storytelling focuses on a group of characters who share a common trait of welfare. However, western and eastern approaches to animation storytelling are similar in nature, as American cartoons and Japanese anime are both classified as animation [16]. Significant distinctions exist in terms of history, origins, culture, and storytelling methods.

The following table (refer to Table 1) compares western and eastern animation storytelling in terms of storytelling elements [2, 8, 14–16, 18].

Table 1. Comparison of Western and Eastern Animation storytelling from the perspective of Storytelling Elements

Storytelling Elements	Western	Eastern
Story	• Western culture exerts a sizable influence	• Eastern culture exerts a sizable influence
Narrative	• The story is dependent on an individual • First-person Narrative • The protagonist appears early in the story • The story is dependent on an individual.	• The story is dependent on collaboration • Third-person narratives • The protagonist may appear in the middle of the story • The story is dependent on collaboration.
Plot	• The journey is one of change and disruption • The story is plot-driven	• Recognise the journey and maintain harmony • The story is emotional Drive
Characters	• The protagonist assumes the leadership • Individualistic (self-focused) • Pursues a specific objective • Heroes endure in perpetuity • Villains motivated by greed and power	• Numerous characters can take the lead • Dedicated to the group (Nakama) • Confront difficulties only for the sake of overcoming them • Everyone eventually dies. Most of the stories do not have a villain
Conflict	• It is primarily concerned with the age-old conflict of 'Good versus Evil' • The actual conflict revolves around resolving the protagonist's dilemma.	• The majority of the time, there is no actual conflict because people believe that they are always correct • The real battle is to locate and nurture this good
Resolution	• Victory determination and a happy ending	• Harmony's resolution

In contrast, from the perspective of storytelling model and story structure in western and eastern animation storytelling, different approaches are seen to be used as part of the story development process. The vast majority of available storytelling models were developed by westerners from a western ideological perspective. The majority of American animation uses storytelling models and structures to develop the story and plot with a straightforward narrative. Some of the storytelling models that were developed by the westerns and available in guiding to the structure of the story for western animations are the three-act structure (Aristotle), Freytag's pyramid (Gustav Freytag), the seventeen stages of the hero's journey (Joseph Campbell), Paradigm (Syd Field), the 12 stages of the hero's journey (Christopher Vogler), story circle (Dan Harmon), the six-stage plot structure (Michael Hauge) and many more. Story development in Western animation, particularly American animation, places a greater emphasis on the use of a storytelling model or story structure [1, 7, 9, 11, 14].

On the contrary, eastern animation storytelling, particularly Japanese animation, makes little use of storytelling models or story structure. This is because the majority of Japanese stories are more intricate and complicated. Many Japanese anime do not follow established storytelling models, owing to the fact that Westerners create the majority of them. Most of the stories have a strong influence on Japanese culture and Art. As a result, the majority of stories created and developed do not follow Aristotle's traditional and fundamental storytelling model, which is a three-act structure comprised of a beginning, a middle, and an end. Only one storytelling model is available in eastern animation,

Table 2. Comparison of Western and Eastern Animation storytelling from the perspective of Storytelling Models

Story Structure	Western	Eastern
Storytelling Models	• 3-act structure (Aristotle) • Freytag's Pyramid (Gustav Freytag) • 17 Stages of the Hero's Journey (Joseph Campbell) • Narrative Theory (Tzvetan Todorov) • Paradigm (Syd Field) • The Four Act Story Structure (Kristin Thompson) • The Seven Basic Plots (Christopher Booker) • Beat Sheet (Blake Snyder) • The 12 stages of the Modified Hero's Journey (Christopher Vogler) • Story Circle (Dan Harmon) • 6 Stage Plot Structure (Michael Hauge)	• 4-act story structure (Kishotenketsu)

dubbed 'Kishotenketsu.' '*Kishotenketsu*' is a four-act story structure used in Japan, Korea, and China. In Korea, it is referred to as *'Gi Seung Jeon Gyeol'*, while in China, it is referred to as *'Qi Cheng Zhuan He'*. This four-act narrative structure is commonly found in Japanese anime, manga, poetry, and other narrative forms [1, 3, 4, 7, 9, 11, 19].

The following table (refer to Table 2) compares the storytelling models available and used in western and eastern animation storytelling [2, 8, 14–16, 18].

5 Conclusion

It can be concluded that western and eastern animation takes a very different approach to storytelling. Two significant factors were discovered to significantly impact the storytelling approach used in western and eastern animation: culture and origins (geography). In both western and eastern animation, particularly in the United States of America and Japan, culture is seen as dictating a significant role in the storytelling approach. Both of these countries' societies were founded on diametrically opposed cultural concepts. For example, while western society in America is founded on the premise or concept of individualism (individual), eastern society in Japan is founded on collectivism (*'Nakama'*). Individualism is reflected in the storytelling approach of western animation, whereas collectivism is reflected in the storytelling approach of eastern animation, most notably in the character development within the story.

Additionally, within the seven storytelling elements of story, narrative, plot, characters, conflict, resolution, and theme, this study demonstrates a diametrically opposed approach to story development and construction from both a western and an eastern perspective. The storytelling approach reflects both western and eastern cultures and philosophies. The focus of western animation is typically on a single hero (protagonist), whereas the focus of Japanese anime is on *'Nakama,'* a group of characters.

On the contrary, the storytelling approach's perspective on storytelling models (narrative structure) is significantly different. In American animation, the storytelling approach typically employs a three-act or five-act structure as the foundation for structuring the story, with conflict serving as the primary driving force. However, in Japanese anime, the four-act structure is seen as rooted in the storytelling approach, and the stories are frequently devoid of conflict or are based on it. Additionally, while the majority of American animation is based on a narrative with a happy ending, not all Japanese anime narratives do. The findings of this study emphasise the distinctions between western and eastern animation's storytelling approaches in terms of storytelling elements and storytelling models. The distinctions between the western and eastern approaches to storytelling in computer animation will provide a better understanding of the United States and Japan's storytelling practices. These significant differences can serve as a point of reference for future story development that can be implemented and utilised in Malaysian animation. The findings of this analysis will also be used to propose a conceptual storytelling model for Malaysian computer animation.

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