

Animation-constructed National Images: Cross-cultural Communication among Youth Groups

Yuanyue Zheng^{1,a,*}

¹*School of Animation, Beijing Film Academy, Beijing, 100091, China*

a. callmelial@yeah.net

**corresponding author*

Abstract: Animation is a form of cultural communication in which a nation displays its own culture and the value system behind it to specific audience groups of other cultures, and the widest audience of this form of cultural communication is the youth group. Therefore, analyzing the essence and path of cross-cultural communication of animation, this paper tries to explore the possibility and importance of shaping the image of the nation with animation as the ontology in cross-cultural communication. This paper firstly analyses that animation, as an art form showing culture and spiritual core, is a cultural system constructed by nationalities as the cultural foundation, and animation, in turn, shows national uniqueness as a means of communication; on this basis, through the analysis of the unconscious cultural projection phenomenon of the youth audience group, this paper elaborates that animation is an important way to build up a country's image at the initial stage. This paper then analyses the key to cross-cultural communication through animation is to find the common accepted universal values in different cultural backgrounds, and to find the universality of spiritual values; on the basis of universality, in the process of animation creation and dissemination, it is necessary to strengthen the establishment of cultural self-awareness and cultural identity of the nation in order to enhance the cohesion of the country's image.

Keywords: Animation, National Image, Nationality, Intercultural Communication, Cultural Identity

1. Introduction

In the process of formation and stabilization of different nationalities, influenced by different geographical environments, production and living styles, and cultural backgrounds, different national cultural mentalities are formed, which, after a long period of accumulation and precipitation, form the collective way of thinking of the nationalities, and in the process of continuous social and cultural practices, manifest themselves in the form of different cultural forms, which inversely influence and restrict the development of the nationalities, influencing the aesthetic habits, aesthetic ideals, aesthetic interests and aesthetic value orientation of the whole nation, and making the aesthetic tendency of the whole nation holistic and consistent, and the aesthetic field full of rich traditional national characteristics, forming the basic point of the aesthetic "nationality". The purpose of this paper is to analyse the importance of shaping the national image among the specific group of young audiences through the artistic expression of animation in the perspective of intercultural communication.

2. Animation as a Preface to the Book of National Images

2.1. The Ethnicity-constructed Animation

Animation art as a form of art, is a display of the creator's cultural background and spirit of thought, it is in a specific national cultural aesthetic range, and it is because each nation's culture has different characteristics and uniqueness, the whole nation can be in the unity of ideology and purpose, can be able to continue to develop and progress. "The national character of art means the feelings, will, interests, appreciation habits and aesthetic interests of the nation as reflected in its moral thought and traditional culture." [1] The individuality of a national culture is precisely the origin of and is embodied in ethnicity. Ethnicity is the cohesive essence of the connotation of a nation's cultural thought, the carrier of national culture and ideological concepts, and has the function of regulating the resistance and identification of the nation with foreign cultures, affecting the development of national culture. The national character of animation draws nutrition from the national culture with uniqueness, and the national culture is the foundation and source of national character, and the nation with a long and profound history of national culture is more capable of supplying the national character of cultural creation. At the same time, to show the ethnicity and uniqueness is the purpose of nationalization of cultural creation. "Although animation takes humour, exaggeration and hypothesis as the main features of its performance, and although animation has strong commercial functions, in terms of its cultural quality, what it carries is still the aesthetic concepts, behavioral norms and ethical standards that animators wish to convey, and its cultural spirit is still the genes of the national culture that creators pursue internally. It can be said that animation film is like a broad stage for displaying culture and spirit, showing people the respective cultural style and essence." [2] The core of nationalization is the presentation and communication of national cultural spirit and ideology.

Therefore, it is not difficult to see that animation art is a business card to introduce a country's nationality to strangers, and the values, national cultural connotations, and spiritual and cultural images embedded in animation art works have a direct impact on the process of establishing an initial impression of a nation in the audience.

2.2. Animation-induced Cultural Projection

In the increasingly accelerated process of globalization, the speed and diversity of cultural dissemination in various countries have been significantly enhanced, and animation, as a form of spiritual culture rich in expressive power and infinite creative materials, has a powerful spreading power and influence among specific groups of young people around the world. In the process of long-term development, animation has not only absorbed the essence of traditional culture and wisdom in the history of mankind, but also embodied the cultural core, national temperament, value system and other factors of a country. As a form of ideological expression, animation is not only a medium of communication of national culture and national spirit, but also a cultural phenomenon, which has become the entry point for young people to make their first contact with and projection of unfamiliar national culture. [3] Through watching animation and reading the text in depth, young viewers are engaged in a process of independent learning and judgemental absorption of unfamiliar spiritual and cultural connotations, laying the ideological foundation for strengthening their value identity.

In the field of culture and art, the image of a nation is extended through artificial shaping, and the complex political context of reality enters into the art text with the cultural metaphor and encoding function of generalization and enhancement. The text borrows fictional contexts to mix and recast a wide variety of ideologies from reality, producing ideologies that reshape value identities in ways that are imperceptible to people in the organization and choreography of specific situations, story

lines, and character destinies. From this we can figure out that animation is a form that uses the content as a tool, uses various forms of expression to reflect life graphically, expresses the creator's knowledge and emotion of life and society in a specific context and within the scope of the national culture, in order to arouse people's sense of aesthetics and give them artistic enjoyment. As Pierre Macherey pointed out, the function of a work is to express ideology in a non-ideological form; a work has an ideological content, but it gives this content a special form. [4] The art form of animation is one of the most direct means of influencing the audience to project and recognize a country ideologically. Animation shapes the image of the country in a fictional way, interpreting the image of the country in the artistic medium at the level of cultural values. The artistic narrative medium of animation conveys a holistic national image through cultural activities that constitute a specific receiving group, mostly young people, and through specific narrative means and forms of expression, it conveys a message that meets the receiving tendency of the young people, which is precisely the state of reception of the national image of the overall cognition, judgement and conception of the country in cross-cultural communication, and thus potentially enhances their understanding, identification with and even recognition of the country in the real geographic and social sense. This is the overall state of perception and conception of the national image in cross-cultural communication, thus potentially enhancing their understanding, recognition and even belief in the real country in geographical and social sense. Animation forms an imaginative community among young people through exciting story situations and empathetic characters' ups and downs, leading the audience to immersive and imaginative participation, and enhancing the interpretation and persuasion of the real situation.

3. Riding the Wave of Intercultural Communication

3.1. Searching for Universal Values in Animation

Due to differences in geographic location, cultural traditions, social systems, customs and habits, different ethnic groups have a unique understanding of values and understanding of the world and values, which leads to different choices of ways and means of cultural dissemination and forms of media. At the same time, there are also barriers of understanding and awareness between works of art from different cultures. Cultural globalization is not a homogenization of global culture, but rather an emphasis on the mutual acceptance and symbiosis of different cultures in the global culture. The premise of cultural diversity is the subjectivity of each nation's indigenous culture, the social, historical and political experiences that are closely related to its own ethnicity. Under the premise of cultural diversity, how to find the universal values that enable different people to coexist on the same planet under cross-cultural backgrounds, how to grasp the common universality of human beings through cultural particularities, and how to discover the moral concepts and aesthetic principles that impress young people from different cultures and nationalities, are the keys to constructing a good image of the country among young people through cross-cultural art works.

Expressing nationalism through animation works and emphasizing the expression of local experience in animation creation has the derived function of grasping the universality shared by human beings through particularity. As a kind of cultural productivity, animation is a special form of expression governed by specific cultural concepts and ideological systems. With the diversification of communication methods and the expansion of communication scope in today's society, countries' politics, economy and culture are deeply connected with other countries in the international society under the situation of globalization and bear more international responsibilities, animation cultural concepts are facing more national, global and discourse-oriented issues with the improvement of communication scope and speed and the intensification of secondary interpretation. The cultural vision of animation needs to gradually change from focusing on fragmentary plots to focusing on

social issues, national development and human destiny, and to think and discuss controversial topics and express opinions from the perspective of human history and ultimate care, which is the condition for animation works to gain cross-ethnic and cross-cultural attention and to gain the value recognition of the young people who have grown up in the background of other cultures. Regardless of the objective natural environment, political and economic situation, social development trend, analysis of history and culture, hope or fear for the future, or subjective growth troubles, emotional conditions (among family, lovers, friends, etc.), existential thinking, etc., as long as we show the real or surreal scenes from the universal perspective of human beings, express the true emotions of human beings, and guide and develop young audiences with positive values, we can correctly adjust and expand the cultural orientation of animation works in the new situation, explore the combination of national consciousness and human history, and the further intermingling of national and international cultures, and move the emotions of audiences with truly universal perspectives, which will then have a cumulative influence on the process of shaping their values, and on the basis of their value recognition, we will target at building up a positive, intriguing, and proactive image of a country.

3.2. Cultural Self-awareness and Cultural Identity

Intercultural communication is an activity of information dissemination and cultural exchange between different cultural systems [5]. In this communication process, both parties can easily perceive cultural differences and interact with each other based on the concepts of "unfamiliarity" and "difference", so as to construct a corresponding cultural space, and then shape the image of the country through the formation of a cultural identity space. When cultural backgrounds and value systems differ greatly, people will unconsciously seek recognition from the culture of origin. Therefore, as the communication scholar Stella Ting Toomey interprets cross-cultural communication as "the process of exchanging symbolic symbols for sharing meanings", to select symbols that can be commonly accepted by people from different cultural backgrounds, and establish effective ways to illustrate and understand meanings, are the prerequisites for cross-cultural communication.

In the process of intercultural communication of animation, a country's culture will inevitably face the problems of cultural self-awareness and cultural identity. Cultural self-consciousness is mainly manifested in a country's content creation and dissemination to explain its own subjectivity in an unobtrusive manner, explain the value and charm of its own culture, and then get the general recognition of cultural receivers around the world. As Hayao Miyazaki's point of view "My work is the perspective of Japanese history, the product of Japanese nature; I didn't have any idea of the world market in my mind when I produced the film; Japan will always be the best foundation for my work." [6] A national culture needs to fully discover the advantages of its own culture, draw inspiration and nutrients from the social, historical and cultural soil of its own people, discover the essence of its own national culture, discover the most valuable part of its own spiritual kernel, and give full play to the most precious qualities of its own character and behaviour, and activate its cultural self-consciousness from its own point of view in order to expand the scope of the group of people who can accept its culture and values, and influence the culture of other cultures from the core of its mind and spirit. It is only by activating cultural self-awareness from one's own perspective that one can expand the range of culture and value recipients, influence the recipients of other cultures from the core of one's ideology and spirituality, and establish a national image with a solid foundation.

The prerequisite of cultural identity is that both parties, despite the differences in cultural backgrounds, understand and acknowledge the core values, habits and behaviors of other cultures, just as scholar John Tomlinson pointed out when analyzing culture in globalization: "The most essential things in daily life are defined by locality rather than by globality, and it always remains culturally distinct in the face of aggressive associations." [7] Cultures identify themselves with each

other by moderately adjusting their cultural boundaries, flexibly embracing "other cultures" while at the same time allowing themselves to be embraced and identified with "other cultures".

4. Conclusions

Animation is a name card that a country hands to the youth of other countries for the first time, and it is the preface that a young audience reads when they open a "national" book written by an unfamiliar country. The values, national cultural connotations, and spiritual and cultural images embedded in animation directly affect the process of young people's initial impression of a nation. In terms of the essence of cross-cultural communication, it is necessary to grasp the core of a country's culture and national spirit, and show the original spiritual values by artistic means. In the path of cross-cultural communication, positive and correct values should be used to guide the audience, to find the basis of universal spiritual values, to strengthen the establishment of cultural consciousness and cultural identity of the nation, to form an imaginative community among the young people, to lead the audience into an immersive imagination and empathetic value orientation, and to enhance the interpretation and persuasive power of the realities of the situation, so as to contribute to the establishment of a favourable and beneficial image of the country.

References

- [1] Li, Weishi. (2001) *An Introduction to Arts*. Hebei Fine Arts Publishing House, Shijiazhuang.
- [2] Peng, L. (2007) *Foundations of Animated Film/TVs*. Shanghai Jiao Tong University Press, Shanghai. 9787313048103.
- [3] Liu, Haijinlei, and Lin, Guoshu. (2021) *Research on the "Going Abroad" Strategy of the Domestic Animation since the 21st Century*. Contemporary Animation.
- [4] Macherey, Pierre. (1978) *A Theory of Literary Production*. Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd.
- [5] Maletzke, Gerhard. (1996) *Interkulturelle Kommunikation: Zur Interaktion zwischen Menschen verschiedener Kulturen*. VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften Wiesbaden.
- [6] Trish, Ledoux. (1997) *Anime Interviews: The First Five Years of Animerica, Anime and Manga Monthly (1992-97)*. Viz Communications.
- [7] Tomlinson. John. (1999) *Globalization and Culture*. The University of Chicago Press.