

Chinese culture meets CG: Peach blossom spring

Watanabe Yuki^{1, a, *},

¹SEVEN STAR SYSTEM Co., Ltd. Room 2101, 1-11-9 Tsukuda, Chuo-ku, Tokyo 104-0051, Japan

a.watanabe_33@gmail.com

*Corresponding Author

Abstract: Culture is inherently pluralistic; the coexistence of regional and ethnic variations gives rise to a landscape where “a hundred flowers bloom and a hundred schools contend.” The very charm of culture lies in this multiplicity. Today, the word “animation” instantly evokes Disney, Pixar, Miyazaki, or Tezuka—names that, on closer inspection, all point to American or Japanese studios and creators. Their global appeal is rooted in the distinct Americanness or Japaneseness embedded in their works, for animation is, at its core, a cultural product.

Keywords: culture, animation, CG

1. Introduction

Chinese animation is "lost" at the moment. The glorious memories of Chinese animation still linger in the era of Havoc in Heaven and Three Monks, in the times of Wan Laiming and Ada. The reason is that the animation of that era was the "most Chinese". Setting aside market and systemic factors, the so-called "lost" Chinese animation, to some extent, is due to the waning of confidence in the pursuit of "most Chinese" characteristics. Starting from the 1990s, Chinese animation attributed its loss to the market and technology, and hoped to produce American or Japanese - style animations. While recognizing the gap and striving to learn, Chinese animation has been going further and further astray. It's acceptable to make mistakes while learning, but copying ideas and concepts without thinking becomes a terrible dogmatism that goes against the reality of the Chinese animation's foundation.

2. Cultural awareness: From "Four Olds" to the awakening of "Most Chinese"

In recent years, with the rise of China's economy and the awakening of national consciousness, this kind of cultural awareness and confidence have been increasingly acknowledged in the field of animation creation. Chinese animation has begun to reflect on itself and to retrieve the "most Chinese" elements. People have realized that what was once considered "old" and "out - of - date" is actually not old - fashioned at all, but the foundation and elegance of Chinese culture.

3. Tech Awareness: CG as the new engine

On another level, if Chinese animation continues to cling to outdated methods and rejects new technologies and media, it will remain lost. Animation has always been a combination of culture (art) and technology. Therefore, in the current stage, discussing and researching the organic integration of the "most Chinese" characteristics and modern CG technology is a realistic task that Chinese animators are facing.

4. Local Label: Laziest shortcut

The depth and calmness of Chinese animation come from local culture. This is the point where animators find a breakthrough and the biggest advantage of Chinese animation. However, in many cases, animators tend to understand and apply many elements of Chinese culture in a one - sided and superficial manner. They even simply put a traditional label on the animation and consider their job done. If we follow this line of thinking, then Kung Fu Panda and Mulan would be Chinese animations. Is this really the case? Of course not. In fact, the Chinese - flavored Kung Fu Panda and Mulan are very typical American animations. Culture is diverse. Animators need to elementize and abstractify it. For example, the patterns on colored pottery are

a way of elementizing and abstractifying things. By grasping the patterns and mastering the characteristics, animators can then recreate art and reach new artistic peaks.

5. Methodology: Elementization, abstraction, and recreation

On the other hand, how to organically combine the most Chinese local elements with modern CG technology is also a very important task. Local culture often has its own distinct characteristics and ways of expression. This is a feature, but also a limitation, because different media platforms are not the same. It is not advisable to mechanically graft local elements and CG technology together, and it will not lead to success.

Taking the animation *The Peach Blossom Spring* (hereinafter referred to as "the animation") as a case (see Figure 1), we analyze the combination of local culture and modern CG technology. The purpose is to provide some ideas or even references for the creative design and production of Chinese animations in the future.



Figure 1: Opening sequence of the animation *The Peach Blossom Spring*.

The animation *The Peach Blossom Spring* is adapted from the homonymous work by Tao Yuanming, a poet from the Eastern Jin Dynasty. It is a three - dimensional computer - generated animation short that presents the charm and artistic conception of traditional China. The film has won a number of awards, including the Best Award at the TBSDigiCon6+2 Digital Works Competition and the Best Short Film Award at the 2006 China International Animation and Film Festival's "Golden Monkey Award". It has been highly recognized within the industry.

As we all know, Tao Yuanming' s *The Peach Blossom Spring* depicts and presents a beautiful, peaceful and utopian world that people yearn for, in a way that is typically Chinese. The Chinese - style ideal world exists deep in the hearts of every Chinese person. In other words, every Chinese person has a desire to experience life in the Peach Blossom Spring. The animation *The Peach Blossom Spring* happens to meet the unique Chinese - style yearning for the Peach Blossom Spring and the poetic charm in the hearts of Chinese people in some of its forms of expression, thus creating a beautiful emotion. Meanwhile, the use of traditional Chinese elements in the animation also satisfies the deep - rooted longing for tranquility and peace in Chinese people's hearts.

These effects originate from the successful use of traditional Chinese elements in the animation.

The animation does not simply borrow the forms and techniques of shadow - play or ink painting. Instead, it finds a suitable integration in both form and content. The use of these traditional elements is not awkward or rigid. Instead, they serve the main body and content well, complementing each other.

Many of the animation's background scenes adopt the form of ink - wash shading to display a Chinese - style ideal charm. Meanwhile, in the animation character design, the animation borrows the unique shadow - play form of Shaanxi to display the characters' inner worlds. In a certain sense, the combination of shadow - play and ink - wash painting is also a disassembly and re - combination of traditional elements. It is a

beneficial attempt and innovation. All these are Chinese - style, but not simply Chinese - style. They are a fusion and innovation of elements that serve the content and form.

6. Local elements in peach blossom spring

To create an animation that is "most Chinese," an essential condition must be met: the identification of a "most Chinese" medium. This medium must not only reflect typical local elements but also be suitable for new technological media. It is definitely not a mere pile - up of relevant elements.

6.1. Ink wash as the best medium for translating Chinese charm from text to image

Text and image are two different types of audio - visual media. Text is more imaginative and spatial. After reading the same passage, a hundred people often come up with a hundred different conclusions. In this regard, images can't compare with text. How to use images to restore the charm of text as much as possible, especially the Chinese - style charm and charm in the text, the animation seems to have found a pretty good medium - the expressive elements of Chinese ink wash painting. Because the freehand brushwork and the ethereal artistic conception pursued by Chinese ink wash painting are just in line with the description of Peach Blossom Spring. The expressive elements of Chinese ink wash painting are all over the animation's scene design.

For example, the animation's treatment of peach blossoms is just right. Peach blossoms have a strong symbolic meaning throughout the film. They are also a kind of spiritual yearning for the Chinese - style ideal world. In this situation, using the ink wash effect skillfully to deal with the falling petals in the film is just right. At this moment, the image can often reach a perfect combination with the text on a certain level. In addition, in the treatment of background elements in the animation, such as forests, strange rocks and streams, the combination of Chinese ink wash painting's dry brushwork and ink wash is used, which strongly shows a Chinese - style aesthetic interest of "forgetting the form when getting the meaning, and seeking endless charm". Of course, these effects can be integrated with the artistic conception conveyed by the text of Peach Blossom Spring. This kind of aesthetic is actually a manifestation of the most Chinese - style.

The application of ink wash painting in CG technology, which is based on modern new media as a carrier, has become increasingly mature. Therefore, this "most Chinese - style" element has been very well reproduced.



Figure 2: Scene Design of the Animation The Peach Blossom Spring.

6.2. Integrate traditional elements into character design, uniting characters with text

The textual description of "The Peach Blossom Spring" sparks a myriad of imaginations. As everyone harbors their own vision of a The Peach Blossom Spring (Peach Blossom Spring), overly realistic animation characters could confine the audience's imagination and disrupt the narrative. Thus, the animation seeks innovation in character design.

This innovation lies in the incorporation of traditional Chinese shadow - puppetry elements, which are reflected in the characters' appearance and movements. The abstract and flat - style processing of shadow - puppetry aligns with the Chinese aesthetic pursuit of "resemblance in dissimilarity". In this way, much like in opera, the visual presentation is highly artistic and aesthetic, greatly enriching the audience's imagination of the content and bridging the gap between visuals, especially CG images, and text.

All characters in the animation, be they mandarins, old fishermen, or others, are vivid, lively, and humorously interesting. The integration of operatic facial makeup design also makes their personalities and characteristics well - defined.

Moreover, in the design of some indoor scenes and decorative elements, the animation adopts the paper - cutting art form. The introduction of these traditional elements greatly enriches the short film's modes of expression. Their well - blended combination does not cause any sense of incongruity among the audience. The use of traditional Chinese elements in the animation is not a simple symbolization but a seamless integration with the visual content, achieving a flawless visual presentation.



Figure 3: Character Design of the Animation The Peach Blossom Spring.



Figure 4: Character Gallery of the Animation The Peach Blossom Spring.

7. CG technology in local elements of peach blossom spring

The introduction of contemporary computer - generated (CG) technology aims to enhance the expression of animation content. If the CG form of an animation is merely used as a selling point to showcase the latest technology, it will only make the animation simplistic and crude. Such an animation would be devoid of artistic value. The application of CG technology should always maintain consistency with the animation's style and form a unified aesthetic interest. In this way, local cultural elements and modern CG animation technology can be organically integrated.

7.1. CG bridges local elements in animation

The application of CG technology facilitates the presentation of traditional artistic elements in the animation, allowing ink wash, shadow - play, paper - cutting, and other local elements to be skillfully blended together. A variety of expressive techniques complement each other, resulting in a high degree of integration.

In the animation, the planar artistic characteristics of shadow - play and paper - cutting styles are juxtaposed with the three - dimensional visual effects created by CG - animated characters. This creates a unique visual contrast.

On another level, the use of expressive ink wash and traditional detailed brushwork effects in the animation backgrounds also creates a yin - yang relationship with the shadow - play - styled characters. The application of these techniques integrates local cultural elements in a way that offers audiences a cinematic experience unlike anything they have seen before.

7.2. CG drives breakthroughs in local art expression

It is known to all that traditional shadow - play has very limited and planar expressions of characters' facial movements and transitions. CG technology, however, enriches the facial expressions of characters, which is a beneficial enhancement and breakthrough of the original shadow - play - styled character portrayal.

These techniques enhance the three - dimensional visual impact, giving the audience a visual experience that is different from traditional shadow - play art. This is both a new attempt and a useful exploration of the integration of traditional methods on a new CG - based production platform.

In terms of camera work, the animation extensively employs popular film - making audio - visual languages, such as the combination of long - and short - shots and the skillful use of montage techniques. These methods have greatly extended and expanded the ways of expressing traditional Chinese shadow - play art. It is more accurate to say that it is a re - creation of local shadow - play art in the CG medium rather than merely using local shadow - play elements.

7.3. CG technology enriches the expression of traditional Chinese ink - wash animation

CG technology has greatly enriched the expression of traditional Chinese ink - wash animation. On one hand, it enhances the interplay of reality and illusion, density and lightness that are characteristic of ink - wash animation. On the other hand, it renders dynamic three - dimensional spaces that could not be expressed in the original two - dimensional ink - wash animation format.



Figure 5: Scene Design of the Animation The Peach Blossom Spring.

To articulate "the most Chinese" animation, a primary necessity is the innovation of the creators' concepts, as well as the learning and acceptance of new CG technologies. Most crucially, the appropriate point of integration and carrier for the expression of local elements through CG technology must be identified. Thus, a successful animation initially necessitates unique artistry, that is, the integration of local

cultural characteristics and concepts, since animations are cultural and fall within the realm of culture. On the other hand, it is imperative to identify fitting local cultural elements as the subject of animation expression, ensuring that they are in accordance with national traditions and can be effectively combined with contemporary new media.

8. Conclusion

The animation *The Peach Blossom Spring*, with the void of ink wash, the shadow of shadow - play, and the reality of CG, has within a single frame enabled the handshake between the poetic nature of a thousand years and modern technology. It reminds us that "the most Chinese" does not mean preserving culture as a specimen, but rather allowing it to continuously burn in the flame of new media. And so - called technical awareness is not about showing off skills, but using digital light to illuminate old dreams of rivers and mountains. When local elements are abstracted into a growing language, and CG technology is internalized as an expressive brush, Chinese animation will no longer be "chasing" others, but rather retelling the world's stories in its own intonation. May future creators continue to see longer - lasting nostalgia and vaster stars within these burning peach blossoms frame by frame.