

"From London to Chang'an": Research on the Cross-cultural Collaboration and Development Strategies in China-Ukraine-Nepal-British Animated Film

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Abstract: In the context of globalization, cultural exchange and integration have become important topics of the era. As an important carrier of cultural dissemination, animated films possess unique artistic charm and widespread influence. This paper aims to integrate the profound cultural heritage of Chang'an, the cultural, traditional art, and musical heritage of Ukraine and Nepal along the "Belt and Road", as well as the open and advanced innovative thinking mode in the London area. With "From London to Chang'an" as the project theme, it promotes cultural self-confidence, cultural exchange, and cultural integration, carries forward the great characteristics of the Chinese nation, builds a global community of shared future, realizes cross-cultural cooperation and exchanges in the field of animated films among China, Ukraine, Nepal, and the United Kingdom, and proposes specific cooperation strategies and development suggestions. The goal is to promote the exchange and integration of global animated films, carry forward the cultural characteristics of various countries, and build a global animated film community of shared future.

Keywords: Animated Films; Cross-cultural Cooperation; "From London to Chang'an"; China-Ukraine-Nepal-UK; Development Strategy

1. Introduction

With the accelerated progress of globalization, cultural exchanges and integration have become the main theme of the times. As an important carrier of cultural dissemination, animated films possess unique artistic charm

and widespread influence, demonstrating immense development potential and immeasurable value in cultural exchanges between different countries. China, Ukraine, Nepal, and the United Kingdom have different development histories and characteristics in the animated film industry. Cross-cultural cooperation not only helps the animated film industry expand into international markets and enhance international competitiveness but also promotes cultural exchanges between different cultures. By delving deeper into local cultures and combining market demands, impactful animated works with ethnic characteristics can be produced. Meanwhile, cross-cultural cooperation between different countries also faces some challenges. Audiences from different cultural backgrounds have many differences in aesthetic and value concepts towards animated films. Therefore, formulating reasonable development strategies based on the development profiles of various film industries is also the key to successful cross-cultural cooperation in animated films.

2. The Development Path of Animated Films in Ukraine and Nepal, Countries along the "Belt and Road"

2.1 The Development Path of Animated Films in Ukraine

From the "seemingly illusionary images" and "metaphorical themes" in Ukrainian "poetic films" emerging in the 1960s and 1970s, to the documentaries with "signaling themes" in the 1980s, Ukrainian cinema seemed to have long lived within "walls." [1] Therefore, the development of the Ukrainian animated film industry also started relatively late. During the Soviet era, Ukrainian animation flourished rapidly, giving rise to a number of excellent

animators and works. However, after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the Ukrainian animation industry suffered a certain impact. In the 21st century, Ukrainian cinema remained stagnant for a long time. Following the outbreak of the "Crimea crisis" in 2014 and the promulgation and implementation of the "Ukrainian National Film Industry Development Strategy 2015-2020" in 2015, Ukrainian animated films showed signs of gradual recovery. Some highly recognized works emerged, such as "Light of Dawn," "Snow Queen," and the animated feature "Forest Tale." Although the Ukrainian animated film industry is relatively small in scale, it possesses unique advantages in artistic style and production techniques. Ukrainian animated works focus on delicate art styles, character building, and the expression of traditional culture and ethnic characteristics. Ukrainian animated films also emphasize emotional expression and humanistic care. Works like "My Dad is the King of the Forest" have gained some international recognition. The animation market in Ukraine is relatively small, and its media influence is relatively weak. Due to the late start of the Ukrainian animation industry and the influence of political and economic factors, the international dissemination of Ukrainian animation faces certain difficulties. In recent years, with national policy support and funding, Ukrainian animated films have made distinctive explorations in industrial models, film festival awards, and nationalized creations. However, the sudden outbreak of the Russia-Ukraine war in 2022 pushed the Ukrainian film industry, which had just shown signs of revival, into an unpredictable and enormous dilemma. The future development of Ukrainian cinema under the shadow of war remains to be further observed. [2]

2.2 The Development Path of Animated Films in Nepal

Nepal, bordered by China in the north and India in the west, south, and east, has a long history of friendly exchanges with China. Although Nepal's technological and cultural industries have developed slowly, with limited government support for its film industry, the rise of international cultural exchanges has brought vitality to its animated film market. Nepalese animated films, such as "Patanjali",

are beginning to explore the fusion of traditional cultural elements with modern animation techniques. However, Nepal's animated film industry still faces challenges in the international market, especially in terms of technology, funding, and talent, compared to China and the UK.

3. Development Paths and Current Status of Animated Film Industries in China and the UK

3.1 Animated Film Industries in the UK

As a society rich in multiculturalism and open-mindedness, the UK's animation works often reflect the unique national characteristics of the British people. The British animation industry dates back to around 1930, with most of its early works being shorts. The first feature-length animation, "Animal Farm," emerged in 1954. In 1997, under the direct advocacy and promotion of then-Prime Minister Blair, the government actively supported the development of the creative industries. Favorable environments and policies have made the cultural industry, including animation and film and television, the second largest industry in the UK after the financial industry.

Compared to American animated films, the number and quality of British theatrical animations may not be as high, but they still hold their own distinct features and status. Notable works include "Chicken Run" (which won a Golden Globe), "Valiant," "The Curse of the Were-Rabbit" from the "Wallace & Gromit" series (which won an Annie Award and an Oscar in 2005), and others such as "Bread and Death," "The Legend of Tingatinga," "The Magic Roundabout," "Freddie as F.R.O.7," "Fairies," and "The Boots on Whitehall Street." These animations are full of imagination and perfectly demonstrate the magical and bizarre nature of animation. [3]

Meanwhile, British animated shorts come in a wide range of genres and styles, exhibiting strong exploratory qualities, imagination, humanistic connotations, political implications, and irony. They often delve into profound topics like life, death, philosophy, and fate. Some animations even possess allegorical, symbolic, metaphorical, abstract, and adult-oriented elements.

With significant support from the government and television stations, the UK animation industry prioritizes creativity, technological upgrading, animation education, and talent cultivation. It leverages talent and creative advantages, often adapting themes from other countries. British animation has engaged in numerous cross-border collaborations, such as co-producing "Chicken Run," "Corpse Bride," "Flushed Away," "Romance & Cigarettes," "Valiant," and "The Legend of Tingatinga" with the US; "The Magic Roundabout" and "The Elephant Family" with France; and "The Earthquake Tuner" with Germany and France. Additionally, collaborations with Russia, the Netherlands, and Canada have yielded animations like "Manipulator," "Father and Daughter," and "Bob's Birthday." The UK government also emphasizes brand maintenance and image development, enabling sustainable animation growth, continuous development and marketing of peripheral products.

Successful works with global influence include "Creature Comforts," "Shaun the Sheep," "Mr. Bean," "Horrid Henry," "Thomas & Friends," "Animal Doings," "Octonauts," and a series of cartoon characters like the odd duck and Shaun the Sheep. To attract children to classic literary works and traditional culture, the UK has also adapted classic works by Shakespeare, Dickens, Kafka, and other masters into animated books with diverse styles and lively images, which are deeply popular among young people. This reflects the humorous yet rigorous, multifaceted, innovative characteristics of the British nation.

The UK animation industry, composed of numerous independent small companies, is a vast sector encompassing shorts, films, TV programs, post-production, games, and other media formats. Despite their uniqueness stemming from traditional skills and cultural heritage, these "small yet exquisite" animation studios face competition from Hollywood. They achieve growth through digitization, industry consolidation, expansion of the industrial chain, and international collaboration. Government support, particularly in the form of tax reliefs, serves as a significant driving force for the development of British animation. When formulating support policies, the government prioritizes the cultural expression of animated works, and the cultural essence

within these works can be summarized as a "heritage spirit" similar to that embodied in heritage films. Furthermore, the widespread demand for animation from large-scale events, concerts, theatrical productions, and theme parks has created a growing and enormous market. [4]

3.2 Development Path and Characteristics of Chinese Animated Films

3.2.1 Chinese school animation

Since the release of the Wan brothers' "The Great Studio Uproar" in the 1920s, Chinese animation has traversed a journey of nearly ninety years filled with challenges. The growth of Chinese animation has progressed through various stages: the initial period of imitating American and Soviet animation styles in the 1930s and 1940s, the developmental phase of establishing a distinctive national style from the 1950s to the late 1980s, and a period of stagnation from the 1990s onward. Notably, a batch of animated works with distinct Chinese characteristics, emerging in the 1950s, maturing in the 1960s, and flourishing in the 1970s and 1980s, is renowned as the "Chinese School" of animation. [5]

In 1957, Te Wei, who was the head of the animation team at Shanghai Film Studio at that time, officially put forward the slogan of "pursuing a path of national style" for Chinese animation. Since then, inspired by their national sentiment, a cohort of talented Chinese animators drew nourishment from traditional Chinese artistic resources, creating masterpieces such as "Havoc in Heaven," "Nezha's Triumph Against the Dragon King," "Little Tadpoles Look for Their Mother," "The Flute," "Piggy Eats Watermelon," "The Fisher Boy and the Magic Pearl," and "Landscape with Feelings." These works garnered international acclaim for Chinese animation, earning it the reputation of the "Chinese School." [5] Towards the end of the 20th century, the Chinese animation industry witnessed rapid development, with various film genres and animation production departments emerging quickly. A total of 219 animated films were produced nationwide. For instance, in 1979, "Nezha's Triumph Against the Dragon King," created by Shanghai Animation Film Studio, garnered awards at multiple international film festivals, comparable to the fame achieved by "Havoc in

Heaven" (see Figure 1 and Figure 2). [5] Nevertheless, animated films during this period still faced challenges such as a limited audience base, lack of innovation, and varying film quality.



Figure 1. Havoc in Heaven



Figure 2. Nezha Conquers the Dragon King

3.2.2 Chinese elements in contemporary animation

Chinese elements refer to the summation of various things originating in China, which can represent traditional Chinese cultural elements, such as national totems, cultural symbols, folk customs, and ideologies, as well as modern Chinese cultural elements in the new era, such as the Olympic spirit and the Chinese Dream. Due to Chinese audiences' inherent kindness and strong sense of identity towards domestic animated films containing Chinese elements, these elements are repeatedly used in animation creation and continue to innovate, integrate, and reconstruct with the changing times. [6]

Since the 1990s, Chinese animation has witnessed a resurgence, with a growing emphasis on exploring and innovating traditional cultural elements. Mythology, historical figures, and traditional themes have provided rich material for animated film creations. Notable recent works, such as "Big Fish and Begonia," "Monkey King: Hero is Back," and "Nezha," have garnered both critical acclaim and commercial success.

3.2.3 The unique charm of "Chang'an" themes
Chang'an, the ancient capital of China, is renowned for its rich historical and cultural

heritage. It serves as a backdrop for numerous animated films, showcasing the vibrant and diverse culture of the Tang Dynasty. The animated film "30,000 Miles to Chang'an" vividly depicts the intertwined lives and poetic journeys of Tang Dynasty poets like Li Bai and Gao Shi. [7] The film not only captures the artistic style and language of the Tang Dynasty but also expresses the vivid aesthetic spirit of Chinese culture. [8]

4. Key Disparities between Chinese and British Animated Film Industries

4.1 London, the Capital of Creativity

London, a leading global city, is one of the wealthiest, most economically developed, and commercially prosperous cities in the world. It influences the world in culture, education, media, fashion, and innovation, serving as a paradigm of globalization. As early as 2010, during an interview with the Economic Daily, the president of the Greater China Region of the London Investment Bureau stated that "China and the UK have very rich complementary resources in the creative industries." The Chinese animation market harbors tremendous potential, while the UK excels in original design, production technology, market operation, and derivative development of animation. Hence, the prospects for cooperation between the two countries are vast.

4.2 Primary Disparities and Their Roots

4.2.1 Disparities in forms of expression, theme selection, and fields of application

Unlike the UK, which does not solely view narrative and entertainment as the only functions of animated films, the Chinese animated film industry tends to have a narrower scope in terms of forms of expression, theme selection, and fields of application. The UK has leveraged its creativity and advanced technology to widely apply animation in various fields such as education, advertising, MVs, interactive games, and special effects in film and television.

4.2.2 Disparities in exploratory nature, humanism, and innovation

British animated series are deeply rooted in their national culture, enjoying high popularity and significant earnings. In contrast, Chinese animation often loses out on opportunities to

utilize indigenous themes, with many distinctly Chinese characters being adapted by Western counterparts. Although some successful IP developments have alleviated the issue of production quality in the Chinese animation industry, there is still considerable room for improvement in terms of theme selection, storytelling, and innovation.

4.2.3 Disparities in the integrity of the industry chain

The maturity of the UK's animation industry chain, from IP introduction to production, distribution, licensing, and derivative development, contrasts sharply with the relatively weaker chain in China. Despite recent growth in the Chinese animated film market, there are still many shortcomings in areas such as theme collection, creation, production, promotion, and distribution. Additionally, the Chinese animation market faces serious copyright issues due to a lack of anti-infringement systems and professional technical talent.

5. Strategies for Cross-cultural Cooperation and Development in Animated Films

5.1 Strengthening Cultural Exchanges and Mutual Learning

Governments of China, Ukraine, Nepal, and the UK should increase support for the animated film industry, formulate preferential policies, and encourage enterprises to carry out cross-cultural cooperation. Establishing a transnational animated film industry alliance, holding animated film festivals or forums, and conducting animated film exhibitions can facilitate exchanges and cooperation between animators from different countries.

5.2 Deepening Industrial Cooperation and Win-win Outcomes

These four countries should actively expand cooperation channels in the field of animated films, introduce advanced production technology and management experience, and encourage domestic animated film enterprises to participate in international competition. Establishing a joint production mechanism, sharing resources, and realizing risk sharing can promote common progress in animation production technology and special effects rendering.

5.3 Promoting Talent Training and Exchange

Strengthening cooperation in animation education, jointly cultivating animated film talents with an international perspective and innovation ability, and carrying out student exchange programs can help foster a new generation of animated film creators with a global vision.

5.4 Actively Tapping Cultural Resources

Making full use of the rich cultural resources of the four countries and digging deep into traditional cultural elements and folklore can create animated films with national characteristics. Cross-cultural cooperation can organically integrate cultural elements from different countries, resulting in more attractive animated films.

5.5 Audience Feedback and Improvement

Paying attention to feedback from audiences with different cultural backgrounds and timely improving and optimizing works is crucial. For instance, some animated films invite artists from different countries to participate in the production process, creating a unique visual style, or incorporating diverse musical elements into the soundtrack to make the film more infectious.

6. Project Implementation Plan and Achieved Effects

6.1 Project Implementation Plan

Leveraging the rich historical heritage and cultural background of Chang'an in Shaanxi, along with the open and advanced innovative thinking mode in London and surrounding areas, the project aims to explore the nationality of animated films and develop cross-cultural strategies. The theme of the project is "Cross-cultural Cooperation and Development Strategies in Animated Films between China, the UK, Ukraine, and Nepal." By connecting the four historic cities of London, Kyiv, Kathmandu, and Chang'an, the project aims to promote cultural confidence, cultural exchange, cultural integration, and the construction of a global community with a shared future.

6.2 Achieved Effects

The project has achieved several notable

effects, including shaping and innovating the core concepts of major projects, promoting the blending and inspiration of animated film cultures, driving the construction of first-class disciplines, and strengthening talent cultivation. Through these efforts, the project aims to tell Chinese stories and spread Chinese culture, enhancing the influence and popularity of Chinese animated films on the global stage. [9]

7. Conclusion

In the historical process of Chinese animation creation and theoretical research, telling national stories has always been a focus pursued by Chinese animation artists. In today's globalized cultural atmosphere, where various cultural ideologies interact, social and cultural life is diverse and rich. Against this backdrop, national animation should adopt a higher development strategy and thinking pattern. By integrating the deep cultural heritage of Chang'an, the humanistic history, traditional arts, and music cultural heritage of Ukraine and Nepal along the "Belt and Road," as well as the open and innovative thinking mode in London, the project aims to promote cultural confidence, cultural exchange, cultural integration, and the construction of a global community with a shared future. This cross-cultural cooperation and exchange in the field of animated films between China, the UK, Ukraine, and Nepal have important theoretical and practical significance. Looking ahead, with the deepening of globalization and the continuous strengthening of cultural exchanges between countries, cooperation in the field of animated films among these four countries will become closer and broader, bringing more splendid works bearing human civilization to the global audience.

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