

The Innovative Application of “Open the Mountains and Brave Generals” in Dejiang Nuo Opera in Animation Character Design

Linling Xiang¹, Chao Zhang^{1*}

¹ Art College, Guizhou University, Guiyang, China

Email Address

464922741@qq.com (Chao Zhang)

*Correspondence: 464922741@qq.com

Received: 19 June 2023; Accepted: 12 July 2023; Published: 20 September 2023

Abstract:

Taking “Open the mountains and Brave Generals” in Dejiang Nuo opera as the starting point of research, this paper focuses on the role of “Open the mountains and Brave Generals”, expounds its cultural characteristics, modeling elements and character images, studies the application of “Open the mountains and Brave Generals” in animation role design, and puts forward how to innovate and shape “Open the mountains and Brave Generals” in animation role. Summarize the design elements of animation characters, and on this basis, put forward the design principles of the animation characters of Dejiang Nuo opera “Open the mountains and Brave Generals”.

Keywords:

Dejiang Nuo Opera “Open The Mountains and Brave Generals”, Animation Character Design, Innovative Design

1. Introduction

Dejiang Nuo Opera is a cultural phenomenon characterized by wearing masks and expelling evil spirits and epidemics, mainly for the purpose of thanking gods and entertaining people. There are a total of about fifty or sixty acting roles, among which “Open the mountains and Brave Generals”, also known as “Open the mountains and ferocity Generals”, referred to as “Open the mountains”, is one of the most ferocious demon gods in Nuo opera, and plays in the main opera “Open the mountains and Brave Generals”. Whether it is from the character image or the design of mask costumes, “Open the mountains and Brave Generals” reflects the cultural connotation of the characters and the aesthetic taste of folk artists. This paper mainly discusses the visual symbol characteristics and cultural significance of the role of “Open the mountains and Brave Generals” in Dejiang Nuo opera, as well as his innovative application in animation character design, so as to enrich the design language of animation character design and promote the development of Dejiang Nuo opera and Dejiang Nuo culture.

2. An Overview of Dejiang Nuo Opera “Open The Mountains And Brave Generals”

2.1. The origin of Dejiang Nuo opera

Dejiang Nuo Opera is said to have originated in the pre-Qin period. It originated from ancient Nuo rituals and was born out of Nuo dance and gradually evolved into a prototype of drama. It is a kind of religious sacrificial drama wearing masks, and it is also an ancient folk custom cultural activity. After the Han Dynasty, it gradually developed into a ritual ceremony with a strong entertainment color [1]. Dejiang Nuo opera is a unique and charming original opera that integrates Nuo sacrifice, Nuo ceremony, Nuo mask, Nuo song and dance, Nuo technique and Nuo opera. The performance of Nuo opera is generally divided into three stages, namely, opening the altar, opening the hole and closing the altar. Dejiang Nuo opera is also divided into half-hall opera and full-hall opera. Half-hall opera uses twelve masks, and full-hall opera uses twenty-four masks. There are many kinds of masks in Dejiang Nuo opera, and there are more than dozens of performance characters. Each mask has its corresponding characters. According to the cultural connotation and artistic characteristics of Dejiang Nuo mask, Nuo mask and performance characters can be divided into positive gods, ferocious gods and secular. The positive god mask usually has correct facial features, representing uprightness. The ferocious god modeling is bold and exaggerated, with strong visual impact and ferocious mystery of primitive culture. The secularized Nuo mask highlights the flavor of life and social secular characteristics.

2.2. The role culture of Dejiang Nuo opera “Open the mountains and Brave Generals”

2.2.1. The cultural connotation of the role of “Open the mountains and Brave Generals”

The mask roles of Dejiang Nuo opera mainly include Tang’s mother-in-law, Miss Pioneer, the land leading the soldiers, and the reckless generals. Among them, the corner of “Open the mountains and Brave Generals” is one of the most ferocious demon gods in Nuo opera. He appears in the main opera “Open the mountains and Brave Generals”. He holds a golden light axe and specializes in killing the five evil spirits and recovering the lost souls for people. “Open the mountains and Brave Generals” is a typical ferocious god in Dejiang Nuo opera. It is generally arranged to appear in the lower half of the altar, which belongs to the “ferocious god” series, and is side by side in the leader, dragon king, Zhong Kui and so on. From the perspective of masks, “Open the mountains and Brave Generals” Nuo masks are rough in shape, gorgeous in color, and very powerful. The legendary Open the mountains and Brave Generals is two feet tall, with a pair of red horns on his head. He is powerful, brave and good at fighting. He is ChiYou’s favorite general [2]. From the name point of view, the word Open the mountains has the meaning of pioneering, reclamation, splitting in Chinese, and also has the profound meaning of the guide and the pioneer. The word “brave general” expresses the character of the character, that is, brave and fearless. In addition to acting as the fierce god who sweeps the altar, the Open the mountains and Brave Generals will also shoulder the important task of exorcising evil spirits and recovering the lost souls of patients. Therefore, in the ceremony of

exorcism and treatment for the patient, it is necessary to increase the performance of mountain-opening and soul-chasing, so that the patient can get spiritual comfort [3].

2.2.2. The role characteristics of “Open the mountains and Brave Generals”

“Open the mountains and Brave Generals” plays the role of exorcising evil spirits and eliminating demons in Dejiang Nuo opera. People hope to use his power to deter ghosts. Therefore, folk artists shape his mask into an artistic image with long horns on his head, protruding glasses, facial muscles blooming and interlaced tusks [2]. The shape of the mask looks ferocious and ferocious in the rough, but there is a fierce and awe-inspiring spirit in the fine view, and the uprightness is permeated in the ferocity. (Figure 1), in the production of masks often use bold, exaggerated approach: pay great attention to the head of the two horns straight, ears towering shape, teeth protruding exposed to the outside, but also highlights its ferocity and ferocity: eyes protruding, strong flame eyebrows, red complexion, showing its bizarre and strange artistic style and the treatment of evil forces ruthless character [3]. In the production process, there is a complete formula: “the head has double horns, the mouth spit fangs, the eyes burst, the eyebrows are like flames”.



Figure 1. *Open the mountains and Brave Generals will Nuo mask.*

Dejiang Nuo opera masks are gorgeous in color and strong in contrast, with unique national, regional and cultural characteristics. The color of the mask represents the basic personality characteristics of the characters in Nuo opera. Red implies loyalty and bravery, majesty and integrity; yellow symbolizes sacredness; black represents fierce majesty; white represents simple and noble; the shape of cyan green is grotesque and strange. As a ferocious god, “Open the mountains and Brave Generals” mainly uses red and black in color, supplemented by other colors, and has a strong contrast between light and shade. This strong color matching of visual impact strengthens the sense of strength of Nuotang opera masks and highlights the original mystery [4]. This kind of collocation fully embodies the strong vitality and strength of the role of “Open the mountains and Brave Generals”, majesty. It shows the character characteristics of “Open the mountains and Brave Generals” under the ferocious and ferocious mask to remove the devil and defend the way, justice and bravery.

3. The Inheritance and Reference of Animation Character Design to Drama Characters

Chinese traditional culture has always been the source of inspiration for animation design, especially in the design of animation characters. Since the birth of animation, many excellent animation characters have been drawn from traditional culture and art. As China's intangible cultural heritage, Dejiang Nuotang Opera not only has profound cultural connotation, but also contains a large number of excellent character images, which greatly enriches the animation character design language and design inspiration.

It is a very important and valuable resource for animation character design. As a kind of digital media separated from traditional paper media, animation can well display the valuable resources in Nuo opera in the form of digital art. In the aspect of animation character design, the visual elements of Nuo opera characters ; graphic elements and cultural connotations of characters are effectively extracted and redesigned to retain the original culture while showing better communication and inheritance effects.

3.1. Animation character design features

At present, China's culture presents a diversified development trend. In the face of people's growing spiritual and cultural needs, how to inherit and carry forward and develop local traditional culture has become an important mission of current cultural development. As a form of artistic expression, animation design is essentially the integration of cultural form and artistic concept [5]. Animation character design is the core of animation success, and can shape the artistic image with local characteristics. In this regard, the representative animation character is the image of Sun Wukong in "Havoc in Heaven" (Figure 2). Its shape is very unique. The image outlined by traditional drama facial makeup contains the meaning of benevolence and loyalty, which can bring a different emotional experience to the audience.



Figure 2. The two-dimensional animated film "Havoc in Heaven" made by Shanghai Fine Arts Film Studio.

Animated character design generally begins with a "role overview". Simply speaking, it is a simple, abstract textual overview of the character, using a simple description to enumerate his key features, and then entering the design. The overview of the role includes not only the visual embodiment of the role appearance, but also the internal personality characteristics and cultural connotation of the role. Only by integrating these key points can we create a good animated character.

3.2. The method of drawing lessons from and extracting drama characters in animation character design

3.2.1. Combined with modern aesthetic form

Successful role design has a wide range of communication and is easier to gain popularity. Chinese traditional culture ; modeling elements; the modeling elements such as pattern patterns have brought new vitality and vitality to the design of animated characters. In the face of the growing cultural needs of the people, the integration of Chinese traditional cultural elements into the design of animated characters can make animated characters more full of vitality and expressiveness. At the same time, it helps to improve the visual image of animated character design, increase the topic selection of stories, convey better animated works to the audience,

and create a stronger national artistic atmosphere. With the development of productivity and the progress of science and technology, modern aesthetics has become more diverse and rich. With the continuous development of public aesthetic practice, modern aesthetics has moved from tradition to pluralism and realized the reconstruction of modern aesthetic form. The richness and diversity of the world have created the richness and diversity of things. The progress of science and technology has accelerated the development of public aesthetic culture and promoted the diversified aesthetic trend. In order to meet the new aesthetic needs, more and more “diversified products” have been born in the market, especially in the innovation and inheritance of traditional culture. In order to better spread and promote traditional culture, the combination of Dejiang Nuo opera and animation design can bring Nuo opera into the public view in a more acceptable form of expression. This innovative form not only meets the aesthetic needs of contemporary people, but also injects a steady stream of vitality into the animation industry. For example, the animated film “Monkey King: Hero is Back” (see Figure 3) directed by Tian Xiaopeng, which was released in 2015, is also the theme of “Journey to the West” and the same protagonist. There are obvious differences between the image of Sun Wukong in the film “Monkey King: “Hero is Back” and “Havoc in Heaven”. As the name of the film, new stories are combined with new technologies to show the invariant core of the local and national spirit in a new attitude. The enrichment of new technologies and forms of expression enables traditional culture to be displayed in front of people with more diverse faces. Let every generation have the traditional cultural memory of that era.



Figure 3. 3D animated film “Monkey King: Hero is Back”.

3.2.2. The reconstruction and change of the role image

The animation works are exaggerated. In addition to the exaggeration of the rhythm of the role action, the costume design and the action expression are also exaggerated, which is an exaggerated expression of the physical shape. The reconstruction and change of the physical role is an important part of the role image design. It is necessary to focus on the original modeling foundation, highlight the basic characteristics, extract distinct design elements in the design, and reconstruct the role image. Taking “Open the mountains and Brave Generals” as an example, the two corners are upright; tall ears; tooth exposure; the expression is ferocious, ferocious and fierce; eyes bulging, flame thick eyebrows, red complexion as its character characteristics, in the design to retain and extend to other decorations; in terms of

creative elements, it can greatly highlight the role image, reflect the cultural connotation of the characters through the adaptation of the character and the background of the story, and create a more three-dimensional animation role image of “Open the mountains and Brave Generals”. Behind the in-depth understanding of the visual characteristics and cultural connotation of Nuo opera characters, the visual break and reorganization are carried out, and the cultural connotation is extended and adapted. Let the ancient Nuo opera culture be better inherited and disseminated through the medium of animation.

3.2.3. The extension of cultural connotation emphasizes

Chinese traditional culture has many categories, rich content and various forms. The application of animation character design can enrich the cultural background of characters and create a more three-dimensional character image. For the role with strong national cultural characteristics and visual characteristics, we can not ignore him as a cultural carrier of national spiritual connotation. The adaptation and extension of the role’s own culture has become particularly important. Successful animation works are due to the strong national culture. Support and truly rooted in the fertile soil of the nation’s culture. Adhere to the extension and emphasis of the cultural connotation of the original work in the modern context, and create a cultural atmosphere with national characteristics.

4. The Innovative Application of Dejiang Nuo Opera “Open The Mountains and Brave Generals” in Animation Character Design

4.1. “Open the mountains and Brave Generals” role innovative design ideas

In the design of animation characters, modeling and color are the two basic elements of role modeling, and verve is the inner spiritual and cultural characteristics of animation modeling through “shape” and “color”. In the process of modeling creation, we should pay attention to the reference and refinement of traditional cultural elements “shape” and “color”, and grasp the spiritual core of traditional culture with distinctive artistic verve [6].

As an important role in Dejiang Nuo opera, “Open the mountains and Brave Generals” shows its strong ability to eliminate demons in the drama, but once this ability is not constrained, it will cause harm to the people. In the observation of the mask of “Open the mountains and Brave Generals”, it is not difficult to find that the forehead of the mask has something similar to the eye, which represents that there is a higher level of “God” supervising it above it. From the side, it reflects that although “Open the mountains and Brave Generals” has a strong mana, it is not an object that is not controlled by anyone. He has been educated by “God” and has human nature. This symbolic image has formed an excellent psychological comfort to the people. Although his appearance is horrible, people still regard him as a god. These cultural characteristics have greatly enriched the character image of the character “Open the mountains and Brave Generals”. In the design of animated characters, starting from the cultural connotation of the characters, the mask image is highlighted in the shape, and the role image with a strong local national sense is created. The animation itself has the characteristics of easy acceptance, which is closely related to the shaping of characters, stories and scenes in the animation. The design of the role modeling will be an important step in the innovative design of the “Open the mountains and Brave Generals” animation role. In the modeling design, we should try our best to show its

shape characteristics, such as the double corners of the head, the exposure of fangs, etc., but while retaining these characteristics, we will integrate the characteristics of animation design into it, and change the original ferocious visual image and sensory experience of the “Open the mountains and Brave Generals” role. Similarly, in clothing design, action design, expression design and other aspects have always adhered to this method, with a softer way to shape the treatment. In terms of color, grasp the main tone of red and black, integrate the color collocation with strong local color into the design of animation characters, and create a role culture atmosphere.

4.2. The expression and extension of role cultural connotation

The design of the role's appearance is not only to highlight the role's feature service, but also to serve the performance and extension of the role's cultural connotation to a certain extent. “Open the mountains and Brave Generals” as a justice, in addition to the role of the devil to defend the road, “jealous of evil, to protect the people” this content will run through his role always. He has boundless power and superior force, but in animation design, in order to better create the role story, it is necessary to throw the cultural story behind the role in front of the audience, so that the audience can better understand the role through the plot and role interaction, so as to achieve the effect of “deeply rooted in the hearts of the people”. For example, something similar to eyes on his mask; his weapons, his character; his beliefs can be understood through role modeling and animation plot, and the cultural connotation of the role can also be expressed and extended in the plot promotion. Usually, the growth line is designed to promote the plot. The growth line is another important part of the role design, and it is also the key point to shape a successful role. In the design, the change of the mask, the change of the costume, and the change of each decoration have his meaning. The design of the growth line is a necessary method to enrich the spiritual core of the character, which contains a lot of educational significance. The animation character design is not only a visual display of an art form, but also a reflection of a nation's national spirit, cultural connotation, and artistic interest. Excellent animation character design creates excellent animation works. Excellent works can bring good social impact and commercial value, and help the better dissemination of traditional culture.

5. Conclusions

As one of the important ways of cultural communication, animation should pay more attention to the inheritance and publicity of its own national culture in today's increasingly frequent cultural exchanges in the world. Standing on the fertile soil with rich cultural resources, we should seize the opportunity, base ourselves on the local and take root in the nation. The combination of “Open the mountains and Brave Generals” in Nuo opera and animation character design is a rare field for animation producers before. As a living fossil of Chinese drama, Dejiang Nuo opera has rich cultural resources that can be used for reference. The combination of the two helps cultural exchanges and dissemination, so that more people are familiar with it. At the same time, it establishes a certain commercial value in the market. In recent years, more and more animation works about Chinese culture have appeared and achieved certain success. This phenomenon has promoted the development of traditional culture, promoted the inheritance and innovation of traditional culture, stimulated the national cohesion of the country, and maintained vitality for the development of traditional culture.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

Funding

This work was supported by A Study on the Revitalization Road of Ethnic Minority Embroidery in Guizhou Province (No.: 2023GZGXRW081), “Modern Transformation and Innovation Practice Based on the Wisdom Culture of Traditional Skills in Guizhou”, Guizhou University Graduate Innovative Talents Program in 2021 (No.: CXRC202108); 2021 Guizhou Undergraduate Teaching content and curriculum system reform project “Graphic Design” (No.: 2021023).

References

- [1] Liu, D.X.; Wang, Y. Guizhou Nuo opera culture research. Beijing: China Social Science Press, 2016, 3.
- [2] Wang, L.Y. Analysis of the plastic arts of the national intangible cultural heritage Dejiang Nuotang opera masks. *Guizhou Ethnic Studies*, 2012, 33(02), 45-47.
- [3] Wan, Z.X.; Lv, F.W.; Gu, P.G. Guizhou Ancient Nuo. Guizhou: Guizhou Ethnic Publishing House, 2004.
- [4] Penza. The cultural aesthetic connotation of the mask art of Dejiang Nuo Opera in Guizhou. *Encyclopedia*, 2021, 18, 17-18.
- [5] Guan, X.X. The innovative application of Chinese Tang Dynasty art elements in animation character design. *Shenhua (I)*, 2022, 07, 65-67.
- [6] Zhang, S.J. The application of Chinese traditional cultural elements in animation modeling design. *Hundred Schools in Arts*, 2010, 26(S1), 128-129 + 70.



© 2023 by the author(s); licensee International Technology and Science Publications (ITS), this work for open access publication is under the Creative Commons Attribution International License (CC BY 4.0). (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>)