

A Review of the Implementation and Challenges of Animation Education Program in China

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Abstract

This literature review investigates trends in animation education, its cultural influence, and the specific context of animation education in China. It traces how animation has become a recognized academic field, shaped by technological and interdisciplinary advancements, and underscores its impact on popular culture. Moreover, this review looks back at the development of animation education in China, from its early stages to its current form, which adapts to standards and demands of this industry. In addition, it highlights challenges faced by Chinese animation majors, such as limited resources, outdated technologies, and balancing creative and academic needs, and examines how these challenges affect student preparedness for industry roles.

Keywords: animation education, China, literature review

1. Introduction

The animation industry has undergone exponential growth globally, becoming a significant player in the creative economy. Recent statistics show that the global animation industry is projected to reach \$400 billion by the end of 2024; thus, it reflects its expanding influence across various sectors such as media, entertainment, and education (Chaves, 2024). Therefore, there is a growing demand and competitiveness in the production of animators which challenges various universities or colleges.

Globally, the status of animation education programs has evolved significantly. In a survey conducted by the International Animated Film Association (ASIFA) over 1,500 institutions worldwide offer specialized animation programs which indicate a good educational framework supporting this field (ASIFA, 2022). However, challenges persist such as curriculum relevance and technological advancements. For instance, a report by the Animation Guild (2023) highlights that many programs struggle to keep up with industry trends, leading to a skill gap among graduates. This is why institutions delivering the programs are keeping up with implementing solutions such as incorporating emerging technologies and collaborative projects with the industry leaders (California Institute of the Arts, 2022).

2. Review of Related Literature

2.1. Global trends in animation education

Japan and France are traditional animation powers and have developed their own unique animation professional education and training models. Through the animation education in Japan and France, the global animation professional curriculum is constantly expanding.

According to statistics from Japan's Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, there

are currently five main types of higher education institutions in Japan: national universities, public universities, private universities, short-term universities, and specialized schools. Among these educational institutions, private universities and specialized schools are the main forces to open animation-related majors. Since Kyoto Seiko University first established manga majors, the number of animation-related majors in Japanese universities has shown a growing trend. The development of animation education in Japanese universities has experienced diversified development from a single private university to specialized schools and national universities, and the professional setting has also expanded from a single manga major to a variety of animation-related majors. Since 2000, when Kyoto Seiko University first started, more than 20 universities have opened animation-related majors (Hu, 2023).

Since 2018, the Paris campus of the Institut Goubelin, a French motion picture school, has been offering courses in English from undergraduate to postgraduate level, not only for international students, but also for French speakers who can prove they have international experience. The Academy also offers a "Summer School" program for international students and young professionals, and in early 2022 launched an English version of the preparatory class designed to help students master the fundamentals needed to enter the animation program. The online program has attracted students from 18 different nationalities. Moreover, since 2019, the College has partnered with Netflix to provide scholarships to African students, giving them the opportunity to study the College's English language courses as a way to cultivate innovative talents. The Rubika Group, which owns Goblin College, has had a campus in Montreal, Canada, since 2016, and partner campuses in India, Kenya and Vietnam in 2018, 2019 and 2020, respectively. It is worth mentioning that the number of foreign students at Goblin College accounts for half of the total enrollment (Zhang, 2023).

2.2. The influence of animation on global popular culture

Storey (2015) believes that culture has three broad definitions: first, culture is often described as aesthetic, intellectual and refined the common source of God's development; second, the word "culture" is often used to indicate a mode of life, and is not limited to one person, one period, or one group; and, third, culture is the best carrier to display artistic activities and text practice.

Japan plays a pivotal role in the global manga and animation industry and is seen as an iconic feature of popular culture. In 1994, two billion comic books and magazines were published in Japan, accounting for 35% of all publications, demonstrating the significant contribution of the manga and anime industry to the Japanese economy. Since the 1960s, Japanese animation culture began to go to the world, and quickly occupied a place in the international market, surpassing the United States and becoming an important force in the global cultural market.

Anime and manga are not only lucrative cultural products, but also attract the attention of many commercial organizations around the world. TV stations, publishing houses and media platforms in many countries have introduced Japanese animation, which has not only promoted the Japanese animation industry, but also promoted the globalization of the animation industry itself. This period was also a time of vigorous development of mass media, which also boosted the status and influence of Japanese animation industry in the world. As a result, the influence of the Japanese animation industry has reached all over the world, affecting people of different ages, occupations, countries and ethnicities, shaping their values and consumption habits. With increasing consumer interest in related products, various anime exhibitions, anime cities and related events have also increased, deepening people's identification with Japanese pop culture.

In addition to manga and animation itself, spin-off products such as toys, video games, theme parks and

Cosplay have also become a key part of Japan's cultural industry chain. The success of the Japanese animation industry can be attributed to several factors: first, its unique character design and diverse storylines; The second is the in-depth study of teenagers' psychology to create roles and trends that meet their psychological needs; Third, there are a large number of professionals to animation, Japan attaches great importance to the training of animation talents and has established a complete training system (Yu, 2019).

Napier (2005) pointed out that Japan has not only made remarkable achievements in the export of culture, but also excelled in absorbing the essence of foreign culture. Osamu Tezuka, known as the "God of manga," combines Western film techniques with traditional Japanese culture to create a unique style of manga.

Finally, the Japanese animation industry emphasizes the "spirit of craftsmanship", which not only requires professional dedication and excellence, but also emphasizes continuous innovation on the basis of the original. This spirit is crucial to driving the development of the animation industry (Napier, 2001).

The globalization of the Japanese animation industry has enabled anime to gain a huge market share and ratings in the international market, but more importantly, anime has become a part of the daily life of many consumers and an integral part of global popular culture (Gao & Yu, 2017).

2.3. History and development of animation education in China

In the early 1950s, Qian Jiajun, Fan Jingxiang and other animation pioneers opened the first animation courses in China in Suzhou Art Academy and enrolled two classes of students. In 1952, the animation program merged with the Beijing Film School, and after the first students graduated in 1953, most of these graduates joined the Fine Art Film Studio, but with the graduation of these two groups of students, the program was discontinued. In the early 1960s, Shanghai Film Academy was established in 1959, and opened the animation major, still by Qian Jiajunren, acting as the director, deputy director Zhang Songlin served as, training animation professionals with college degrees. The academy trained two classes of students, graduating in 1961 and 1963, before closing in 1963 and the students once again joined the Art Film Studio. Subsequently, due to the influence of the Cultural Revolution, animation education stagnated for more than ten years, resulting in a shortage of talents.

In the 1980s, with the end of the Cultural Revolution, animation professionals experienced their first rapid growth. In the 1990s, art film studios cultivated animation talents through various ways. Beijing Film Academy opened the first animation education major in China and cooperated with Shanghai Huashan Middle School to set up a middle animation class. The course content trained students by combining practice and study. However, compared with developed countries, China's animation education is small in scale, and the discipline construction is not perfect and systematic. After 2000, the rapid growth of the animation industry promoted the development of animation professional education. In 2003, according to the China Animation Association, there were 93 junior college and undergraduate colleges offering animation majors, with about 7,000 students. In 2004, the State Administration of Radio, Film and Television established the first batch of animation teaching bases in four universities. In July of the same year, the number increased to 171, and with the assistance of private training institutions, there are 1,200 colleges and universities nationwide offering animation majors, and nearly 1,900 colleges and universities offering relevant courses. However, the formalization of animation teaching has not yet been realized.

At present, there are three types of colleges offering animation majors: film and television art colleges, such as Beijing Film Academy, which focuses on TV programs, art films and script creation; Pure art colleges, such as Xi'an Academy of Fine Arts, focus on comic publishing, video editing, and multimedia

technology; and comprehensive universities or teacher-training colleges, such as Chongqing University of Posts and Telecommunications, provide a wide range of educational services. Although undergraduate animation education has developed significantly, the training level has been significantly improved, and each has its own characteristics, more efforts are still needed to realize the commercialization of domestic animation (Du, 2012).

2.4. Challenges faced by animation majors in Chinese universities

Although the number of animation majors in Chinese universities continues to increase, the problem of improper integration between professional talents and market demand is becoming more and more obvious. According to statistics, there are about 40,000 domestic animation employees, and the market demand is as high as 150,000, which is a very embarrassing figure. Although the scale of education is expanding, it is generally difficult for animation graduates to meet the market demand. This is because the teaching mode and content of animation major in Chinese universities are out of line with the needs of the industry, and the old teaching equipment and slow updating speed also affect the practical ability and learning interest of students. Animation teachers in universities generally lack practical experience in companies, and many teachers enter the teaching post directly after graduation, their status changes from students to teachers, and they have no working experience in animation companies. For a variety of reasons, it is difficult to meet the industry's demand for talents in the market for animation graduates. After realizing this, many students will choose to sign up for special animation training classes in society to deal with the problem of graduation. Although the professional animation training institutions in society supplement the deficiencies of higher education, they also expose the shortcomings of higher education. The difference of animation training goals among universities reflects the diversity of education, but there are also problems of blindly setting up majors and ignoring industry needs. There is an obvious gap between college talent training and market demand, especially in the aspects of teamwork, self-learning ability and software application. The cause of the problem is very complicated: since animation is a technical type of work, animation education in universities also attaches more importance to the training of production personnel, ignoring the demand for talents in other links of the entire animation industry chain. The teaching staff is weak, many teachers lack necessary practical experience in animation, the teaching content is out of line with the needs of the industry, there are misunderstandings about the understanding of animation, ignore the importance of interdisciplinary, and lack a comprehensive understanding and research on the animation industry (Du, 2012).

3. Conclusion

This review of literature reveals that while animation education has made significant strides globally and in China, its development is marked by both opportunities and challenges. The integration of animation into academia and its pervasive cultural impact underscores its importance as a field of study. However, Chinese universities face distinct challenges in providing resources, modern technologies, and effective curricula that align with industry demands. Addressing these challenges is crucial for enhancing the educational experience and preparing students for the evolving animation industry. Future research and policy adjustments may be necessary to bridge these gaps and support sustainable growth in animation education.

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