



Identities of Farming Culture in Jiangnan: The Creation of Animation to Inherit Folk Customs of Polder Rice Farming in Water Towns

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Abstract

Background and Aim: Jiangnan farming culture, a custom culture formed by Jiangnan people in their long history of agricultural production and life, highlights the features and connotations of the region. Recent years have witnessed a shift from a traditional agricultural society to a modernized and urbanized one, which is influencing the traditional agricultural cultural system deeply. In the context of increasingly globalized and intelligentized economic development, factors such as differences in survival and consciousness caused by the special geographical environment in Jiangnan (southern Yangtze River) have accelerated the modernization of farming civilization in the region. Confronting such a crisis, this study adopts an interdisciplinary research thinking pattern to protect, inherit, and spread Jiangnan farming culture in animation works by establishing a connection between the culture and animation art as well as combining theories such as semiotics, design, and communication.

Materials and Methods: Data was collected through literature research, field investigation, and expert interviews to analyze the value, connotation, and characteristics of Jiangnan farming culture, as well as extract its symbolic and animation elements.

Results: The research found that Jiangnan farming culture as a typical polder rice farming culture in China is featured by its unique Jiangnan water town characteristics, which serve as a foundation for creating animation works in this article with polder rice farming as the theme to inherit and spread Jiangnan farming culture.

Conclusion: 1. As an independent art category, the animation plays a key role in building a farming cultural space and shaping the image of farming culture in cross-cultural communication. 2. Through the narrative expression of animation art, farming ideas are spread and passed on through animation lenses, allowing people to further understand the origin of Jiangnan farming culture. 3. Animation brings unlimited creative space to Jiangnan farming culture, which can promote its future innovation and sustainable development.

Keywords: Jiangnan farming Culture; Animation Creation; Protection and Inheritance

Introduction

China is one of the three birthplaces of agriculture in the world. According to archaeological discoveries, a fairly developed farming civilization existed in the Yangtze River Basin of China five to six thousand years ago. Located on the south bank of the middle and lower reaches of the Yangtze River, Jiangnan refers to the present-day northwest Zhejiang, southern Anhui, Jiangsu, and Shanghai. With the Taihu Lake Basin as the center, it is bounded by the sea to the east, the Yangtze River to the north, Hangzhou Bay and Qiantang River to the south, and the mountainous areas of Zhejiang and Anhui to the west. Due to similarities in geography, hydrology, and natural ecology, it forms a relatively independent natural geographical space for farming. The area has a humid climate, abundant rainfall, criss-crossed rivers, and fertile land. A relatively stable political environment features it, a social custom of advocating literature and education, as well as a family tradition of farming and reading. As a typical agricultural area of polder rice in China, Jiangnan adopts paddy farming technology, creating a rich farming culture from the practice of agricultural production and life throughout the history of thousands of years.

Farming culture is presented in the form of the materialized expression of material culture and the oral teaching of intangible culture that inspires true understanding within. Farmers, farming equipment, rural environment, etc. are the soil for the survival of farming culture. In recent years, with transformation of the society, the material remains of farming culture have disappeared. Agricultural modernization has gradually led to a large-scale and mechanized development model of agriculture in the Jiangnan region. Large-scale mechanical planting and harvesting methods have continuously replaced the traditional farming model during the agricultural period, and a large number of production and living equipment during that period have been discarded. Many folk customs and beliefs are no longer passed down due to changes in production methods, and even some excellent farming ideas are slowly being forgotten.





Urbanization is an inevitable historical trend (Yuan, 2012). The "siphon effect" of urbanization has led to the outflow of the rural population. Young laborers and craftsmen swarm into the urban area and some folk skills are finally lost due to a lack of inheritors, which means the rural area is becoming hollow in aspects of political power, social culture, and industries, accelerating the decline of natural villages. At the same time, with the continuous expansion of urbanization, some traditional buildings have also suffered certain damage, reflecting that resource carriers with the characteristics of farming culture are becoming increasingly scarce.

The background of informatization and globalization has brought about a diversified development of culture. Farming culture has gradually lost its original aura as the mainstream culture in the agricultural period and encountered a crisis as people have gradually lost confidence in its inheritance which mainly relies on manual farming.

At present, the protection of agricultural cultural heritage in China remains in the stage of salvage collection and preservation, lacking an in-depth exploration of cultural connotation and contemporary value. In the present cultural context for the inheritance of cultural heritage mainly constituted by media culture, visual culture, and cultural industries, the connotations and functions of animation are becoming increasingly rich. As a form of artistic creation and leisure entertainment as well as a medium for cultural communication, unique animation art is a key carrier to manifest cultural symbols, humanistic thoughts, spiritual core, and values.

Therefore, this article adopts interdisciplinary research thinking patterns and combines the artistic features of animation creation to conduct in-depth research on the connotation and characteristics of Jiangnan farming culture, thus inheriting and spreading Jiangnan farming culture through animation creation to provide a reference for its sustainable development in the new era.

Objectives

1. To study the basic characteristics of Jiangnan farming culture and transform them into symbols expressed in animation.
2. To protect the inheritance and spread of Jiangnan farming culture by creating animations with relevant characteristics and symbols.

Literature Review

Inherit Folk Customs

The term "inherited folk customs" describes how habits, beliefs, and behaviors from one cultural group to another are passed down through the generations. These traditions frequently act as a safeguard for cultural identity, enhance social cohesiveness, and transmit ideals and collective wisdom from one generation to the next (Wang & Lin, 2019). The idea of passing down folk traditions includes a variety of cultural heritage elements, such as religious rituals, folklore, traditional arts, and customary behaviors. These elements are firmly anchored in the historical experiences and cultural contexts of communities across the globe (Mao & Kong, 2018). These traditions frequently mirror the distinct cultural manifestations, perspectives, and social conventions of a community, molding its overall identity and offering a feeling of connection with the past (Shi, 2020).

Traditional practices can be preserved or changed over time by a variety of socio-cultural factors, such as modernization, urbanization, and globalization, which all have an impact on the dynamic process of folk custom inheritance (Deng & Li, 2017). Certain folk rituals might modify or adapt to new situations, but others might find it difficult to survive or thrive as a result of population shifts, socioeconomic changes, or cultural assimilation (Chen & Liang, 2016). However, preserving cultural diversity, encouraging the transfer of information between generations, and promoting a sense of continuity and belonging among communities all depend on efforts to preserve and advance folk customs (Zhang et al., 2021). Additionally, folk customs' preservation enhances cultural legacy, builds cultural resilience, and fosters respect and understanding amongst various ethnic groups (Wang & Lin, 2019).

To sum up, the passing down of folk practices is essential to the maintenance and dissemination of cultural heritage since it acts as a storehouse for shared memories, customs, and values among many communities across the globe (Shi, 2020). Societies can promote cultural sustainability, intergenerational cohesiveness, and cultural exchange by acknowledging and appreciating these customs. This will enrich global cultural diversity and advance cultural harmony and mutual respect (Deng & Li, 2017; Mao & Kong, 2018). Thus, to maintain the vitality and resilience of cultural heritage in a world that is always changing, efforts to preserve and promote the inheritance of folk customs must continue (Chen & Liang, 2016; Zhang et al., 2021).

Farming Culture in Jiangnan, China

Jiangnan, China's farming culture is a multifaceted blend of agricultural customs, beliefs, and practices that are ingrained in the history and character of the area. Southern China's Jiangnan province is well-known for its rich soil, moderate weather, and an abundance of water supplies, all of which have contributed to the centuries-long growth of a distinctive farming culture (Li & Chen, 2018). The production of rice, tea, silk, and other crops, along with the sophisticated irrigation systems, terraced fields, and water management systems that have maintained the region's agricultural output, are essential components of Jiangnan's farming culture (Huang & Wang, 2019). Furthermore, Jiangnan's farming practices are frequently entwined with community festivities, religious rites, and seasonal festivals, demonstrating the tight linkages that exist between agriculture, culture, and society (Shi & Zhu, 2017).

Jiangnan's farming culture also includes an abundance of intangible heritage, such as oral traditions, folk songs, dances, handicrafts, and other customs that have been passed down through the years (Wu & Xu, 2020). These cultural components are important for maintaining ecological wisdom, promoting social cohesiveness, and serving as manifestations of local identity and creativity (Zhang & Li, 2016). Furthermore, dynastic shifts, migration patterns, market integration, and technological advancements are just a few historical, geographical, and socioeconomic factors that have shaped Jiangnan's farming culture and impacted the region's agricultural practices, land use patterns, and rural livelihoods (Yang & Liu, 2019).

In conclusion, Jiangnan, China's farming culture is an intricate legacy that reflects the socioeconomic dynamics, cultural variety, and rich agricultural past of the area (Huang & Wang, 2019). Jiangnan's farming culture is an essential part of China's rural history, supporting not just agricultural productivity but also community resilience, environmental care, and traditional knowledge preservation (Shi & Zhu, 2017). In an era of fast urbanization and globalization, acknowledging the value of Jiangnan's farming culture is critical to fostering sustainable rural development, cultural heritage preservation, and rural community rejuvenation (Wu & Xu, 2020).

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this research is illustrated in Figure 1. This study adopts interdisciplinary research, integrating semiotic theory, animation creation theory, and protection and inheritance theory to study the background, history, mode of production, lifestyle, folk customs, etc. of farming culture in Jiangnan, analyze its value, connotation, and characteristics before refining relevant symbolic elements expressed in animation to explore their roles in the protection and inheritance of the farming cultural heritage. The research tool is to collect feedback and data through interviews and questionnaires, and finally create animation works with the theme of polder rice accordingly, as shown in Figure 1.

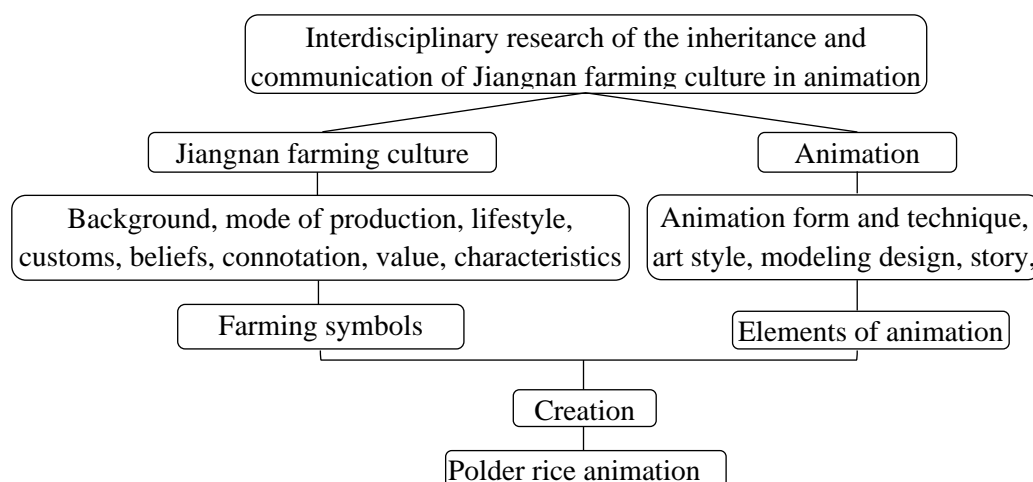


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework
Note: Constructed by the researcher



Scope of Research

1. Content scope: historical origin, evolution, production mode, lifestyle, cultural connotation, contemporary value and extraction, and animation expression of symbolic elements of Jiangnan farming culture.
2. Time scope: mainly the traditional agricultural stage before the reform and opening-up in China.
3. Geographical scope: Jiangnan area, located on the south bank of the middle and lower reaches of the Yangtze River, present-day northern Jiangxi and Zhejiang, southern Anhui and Jiangsu, and Shanghai.
4. Design scope: animation creation of the typical traditional agricultural landscape "polder rice farming" in Jiangnan as the main body with a background of its context, history, and lifestyle, and on the prototype of the production, living utensils, and buildings at that period.

Methodology

1. literature study

In the early stage of this study, a large amount of literature collection and analysis were carried out, which laid a solid theoretical and data foundation for the writing of the paper. On the one hand, ancient books about Jiangnan agricultural development and important documents such as local chronicles that have recorded local economic and social activities were consulted to sort out the origin and history of Jiangnan farming cultural heritage for analysis and reference vertically. On the other hand, monographs and academic journals of archeology, agricultural history, and agricultural cultural heritage, were read to understand the research trend of Jiangnan farming culture and to study the production mode, lifestyle, beliefs, folk customs, and other characteristics of Jiangnan farming culture from a horizontal perspective.

2. Fieldwork

On-the-spot inspections of sites sampled from five types were carried out, including farming museums, folk museums, ancient villages, cultural centers, and polder areas in Jiangnan, to collect information for understanding the history, current situation, lifestyle, and customs of Jiangnan farming culture.

3. Interview method

In-depth interviews with agricultural experts, curators of agricultural museums, folk art inheritors, and agricultural department officials were conducted to sort out the connotations and characteristics as well as refine the symbolic elements of Jiangnan farming culture. At the same time, interviews were conducted with local farmers, students, and other public groups for in-depth exploration and analysis of the development status of Jiangnan farming culture and current specific measures for its protection and inheritance.

Results

1. Basic characteristics of Jiangnan farming culture.

Jiangnan farming culture mainly includes physical material cultural resources and metaphysical intangible cultural resources. From the perspective of material cultural resources, it mainly refers to elements preserved in physical form, specifically including crops, farming methods, equipment, clothing, and buildings. From the perspective of intangible cultural resources, it mainly alludes to various ideological cultural factors based on methods of agricultural production, including annual festivals, agricultural customs, etc. (Chen, 2013).

1.1 Farming equipment

Farming equipment is the most typical symbolic element in farming culture. In agricultural work, the people of Jiangnan created, invented, and improved a large number of agricultural tools that were adapted to the local climate and geological conditions for intensive farming of paddy fields. According to the laws of agricultural farming, they are divided into tools for land preparation, sowing, irrigation, harvesting, and processing. The rice farming tools in Jiangnan are diversified and detailed in the division of labor and highly practical, which is a physical expression of Jiangnan agricultural civilization with regional characteristics, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Jiangnan agricultural tools

Steps of Cultivation	Tools
Land preparation	plow, harrow, spade, cramp iron, hoe, harrow-like implement for pulverizing soil(耖), plowshares, pickax
Sowing	gourds pointing(点葫芦), seedling-horse (秧马), basket for carrying earth, wastebasket
Irrigation	dragon-bone water lift, waterwheel (cattle-driven, wind-driven, pedal-driven), cylinder wheel, bailing bucket
Harvesting	ear cutter(铎), sickle, rice threshing and catch container、Rice threshing tub(稻床), bamboo placed across wooden frames on which grain may be stored in damp climates(笕子)
Processing	pestle and mortar, chongdui (舂堆), frail, rice huller, grinder, dustpans

Tools for land preparation are divided into plowing tools and leveling tools with different functions according to different farming methods. The plow is the primary tool for preparing the ground, and also the most basic and vital one in the entire agricultural production process. In the late Tang Dynasty, the northern people also brought their advanced farming technology to the south when they moved there, "Crankshaft plow(曲辕犁)", also called "Jiangdong plow (江东犁)", was used for the first time in Jiangnan. The plow consists of eleven parts despite its small structure, which is quite suitable for small-area paddy field farming in the south. The use and promotion of the Jiangdong plow boosted the rapid development of agriculture in Jiangnan, playing a significant role in the agricultural development in China. Moreover, Chao (耖), a harrow-like implement with longer and closer teeth, is also a crucial tool for pulverizing soil in Jiangnan.

Sowing equipment in Jiangnan includes "column carts (耒车)", "gourds pointing(点葫芦)" and "seedling-horse (秧马)". "Seedling-horse" is the tool used by farmers in Jiangnan to pull out and transplant rice seedlings. Shaped like a small boat with a smooth bottom and a tilted head and tail, it can help farmers slide in the rice fields. As paddy farming in Jiangnan is inseparable from water, irrigation tools need to be adapted to local water sources and terrain. The commonly used irrigation tool in Jiangnan is the dragon-bone water lift, which can be driven by cattle, wind, and pedaling. Other irrigation tools include a cylinder wheel and bailing bucket, as shown in Figure 2.

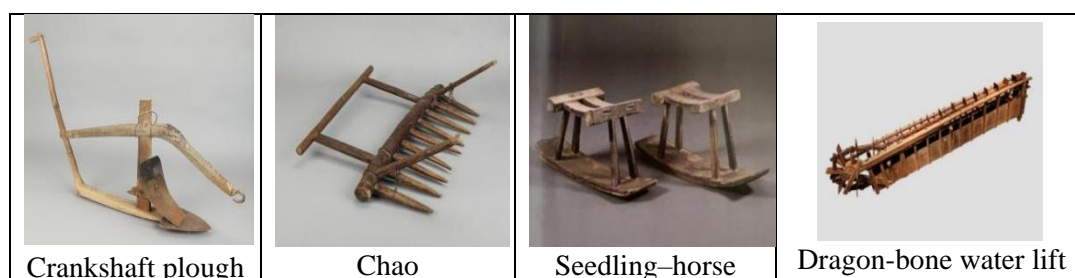


Figure 2. Sowing tools
Note: Photographed by the researcher

Sickle is the major tool of rice harvesting in Jiangnan and also one of the oldest farming tools. Its shape is relatively simple, consisting of a blade and a wooden handle which are installed vertically. Being compact and lightweight, it is easy to harvest.

Processing tools. The paddy harvested requires three more processing steps before being made into rice. The first process is threshing. Traditional threshing tools in Jiangnan include rice threshing and catch containers (稻桶), flails, rice threshing tubs (稻床), etc. The second process is shelling. Commonly used tools include pestle and mortar, rice huller, grinder, water-powered trip-hammer, etc. The third process is cleaning. Commonly used tools include fan cars, screens, dustpans, and other tools, as shown in Figure 3

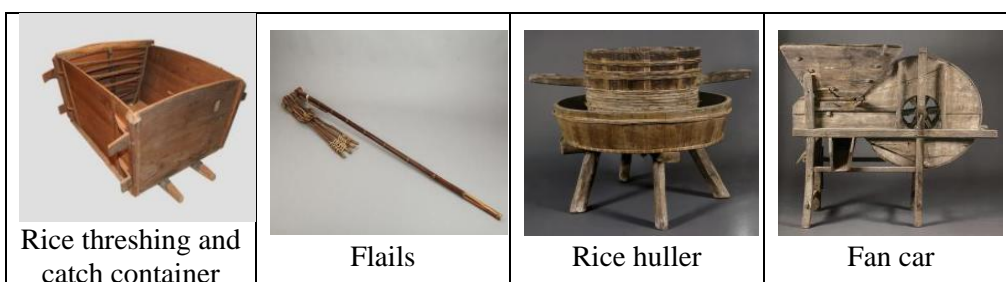


Figure 3. Processing tools
Note: Photographed by the researcher

Jiangnan farming equipment is a form of the rice farming culture with obvious Jiangnan characteristics. Having witnessed the development of the entire Jiangnan farming history, it can be regarded as a living fossil of rice agriculture as well as a symbol of Jiangnan farming culture as it is a manifestation of people's psychology and cognitive emotions.

1.2 Living utensils

Jiangnan is known as a land with milk and honey. Its prosperous agricultural economy had bred a colorful lifestyle in the traditional society. Jiangnan traditional living utensils are utensils of different textures, shapes, and functions created by local people to use in their daily lives. According to the functional classification method, the traditional living utensils in the farming period collected during the field survey can be divided into three categories: cooking, furnishing and living, and spinning and weaving.

Commonly used daily cooking utensils include stoves, bellows, clay pots, wine jugs, thermal barrels, etc. Below is the most commonly used blowing tool for farmers to cook, consisting of a wooden box, a push-pull wooden handle, and a movable wooden box. By pushing and pulling the movable box, the air entering the air inlet is transported to the air duct through the exhaust port, which can help light a fire to cook. Furnishings and living utensils refer to furnishings and decorations in home living, such as beds, screens, seats, dressing tables, and other furniture, as well as tools for heating, cooling, cleaning, and lighting. "Men farm and women weave (男耕女织)" is the origin theory and major embodiment of China's farming culture. It means that men till in the fields and women weave at home. Jiangnan is a key area of cotton planting in China due to its advantages in geography and climate. That's why the textile industry has thrived in Jiangnan since ancient times, and many textile tools were invented, such as spinning wheels, looms, etc., as shown in Figure 4.

Farming utensils are a comprehensive reflection of people's attitudes towards and concepts about life in rural land. Having been passed down to thousands of households in rural villages, these utensils are blended into people's daily diet, living etiquette, and seasonal customs while shining with the wisdom of traditional living and folk customs.



Figure 4. Living appliances
Note: Photographed by the researcher

1.3 Clothing

As the main source of livelihood in Jiangnan, rice farming has enabled local people to form their clothing style from generation to generation. They usually have their hair combed and wear package kerchiefs(包头巾), spliced upper garments (拼接衫) and pants, girdle skirts (束襦裙) and waistbands,

breast pockets(胸兜), rolled arms (卷膀), and embroidered shoes, which are quite characteristic of Jiangnan water towns.

Package kerchiefs are shaped like an isosceles trapezoid, with colorful tassels hanging from the tail which swing rhythmically to create a distinct decorative effect when the woman moves. It not only has the practical functions of holding hair, resisting wind, shading the sun, and preventing insects but also has the aesthetic taste of ornamenting clothes and beautifying life. The breast pocket, also called "belly pocket(肚兜)", is rhombus-shaped, with embroidery on the edges at the base of the neck. A red belt or silver chain is tied around the neck, and the left and right corners are tied with straps, which are knotted at the back (Jiang, 2012). In midsummer, women in water towns often wear belly pockets alone to enjoy the coolness in their leisure time, forming a natural, forthright, and lively scene. The spliced upper garment is also called "Side-opening spliced upper garment(大襟拼接衫)" or "patchwork shirt(接衫)". The spliced parts are the parts that are easily worn by local women during their work. Once damaged, these patches can be replaced directly, thus the traditional patching method falling into disuse. Moreover, the life of the garment is extended cleverly in this way, as shown in Figure 5.



Figure 5. Clothing

Note: Photographed by the researcher

The Girdle skirt is composed of two large pieces of skirt of knee-length, with pleats on both sides of the waist and ties at both ends of the waist. The unique design style can not only reflect the graceful figure of women but also provide their waist support and protection from wind and cold. It is also convenient for them to excuse themselves in the fields during busy hours of farming without being ashamed. The waistband (襠腰) is usually made of two layers of cotton of different colors, one small and one large, with a pocket hidden between the two layers of cotton to store personal belongings. The outer edges of the waistband are often strips of cloth of different colors, both for decoration and prevention of damage. The waistband is made of multiple layers of fabric with buttons sewn at both ends to connect to the waistband. The texture is stiff, giving support to the waist to reduce the fatigue of women when bending over to work. Women often embroider delicate and lively patterns on their waists for decoration, as shown in Figure 6.



Figure 6. Girdle skirt

Note: Photographed by the researcher

Spliced pants (拼裆裤) are one of the relatively common styles of trousers in Jiangnan. The waistband of the trousers is large and the length is only above the knees. The short and narrow legs allow women to move easily when working in the rice fields and avoid being bitten by mosquitoes. Mostly made of dark cloth and blue printed fabric, the pants have not only extended their service life

but also enriched the overall visual effect. Rolled arms are commonly used in labor production in Jiangnan water towns. When worn, the upper and lower ends are wrapped around the calves with cloth bands to protect against wind and cold, dust, and bites, and to prevent the trouser legs from being stained with mud. Embroidered shoes are made by the local people who wash and starch rags and old cloths, stack them layer by layer, and dry them in the sun before cutting out the soles and uppers according to the size of the shoes. Embroidered shoes have layered soles, exquisite auspicious patterns embroidered on the uppers, and embroidered shoehorns sewn on the heels as shown in Figure 7.

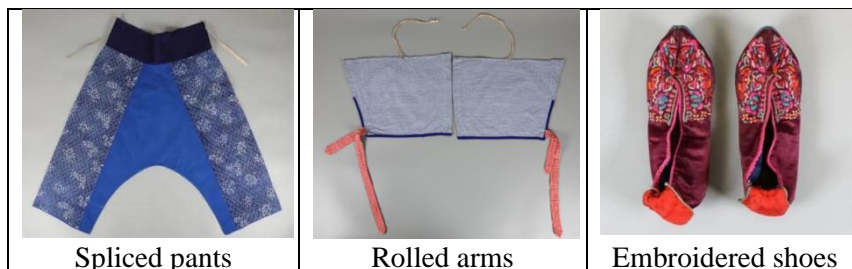


Figure 7. Clothing

Note: Photographed by the researcher

Women's clothing in water towns is a crucial manifestation of the rice farming culture in Jiangnan, embodying the wisdom, simplicity, pragmatism, and aesthetics of the local working people. As age increases, the clothing of young women and older women also differs in color and decoration. Young women mainly wear fancy clothes, emphasizing the beauty of the body and decoration; older women mainly wear dark colors, highlighting the sense of solemnity, stability, and looseness.

1.4 Architecture

The traditional farming villages in Jiangnan are typical water town dwellings where people's production, labor, and daily life are all dependent on water. Located in the Taihu Lake basin in the middle and lower reaches of the Yangtze River, Jiangnan has intertwined rivers and lakes that are connected to the sea. Residential houses here are generally built near the water and along the alleys with a residential style of white walls, black tiles, and well-proportioned horsehead walls. Decorations there generally adopt "three carvings", namely brick carvings, wood carvings, and stone carvings, which are extremely distinctive of local cultural characteristics.

Brick carving is a common technique for folk house decoration in Jiangnan, often seen in gate towers, walls and doors, screen walls, and lattice walls, and features compact compositions, novel ideas as well as vivid shapes for aesthetic decoration and cultural beliefs. Wood carving is generally applied to the building structure, indoor space, indoor furniture, and other shapes. The materials used are mostly ginkgo, fir, boxwood, and nanmu and the techniques adopted are mainly hollow carving, round carving, relief carving, and intaglio carving. Most of the themes can provoke deep thinking, reflecting an inheritance of local culture. Stone carvings mostly appear in decorative objects and architectural constructions such as gates, archways, steps, railings, etc. As stone carving is easy to preserve for its hard texture, it is often applied outdoors to decorate and defend houses or express good wishes as shown in Figure 8.



Figure 8. Jiangnan Architecture

Note: Photographed by the researcher

The unique Jiangnan architectural style is the result of its specific natural and cultural relics throughout its long history. As a shining pearl in the history of ancient Chinese architecture, Jiangnan traditional houses focus on formal beauty and practical functions, bringing together the essence of traditional folk crafts and decorative arts in the region.

1.5 Farming customs

Following the steps of sowing in spring, cultivation in summer, harvest in autumn, and storage in winter, Jiangnan farmers have developed many customs in the production, living, and beliefs, which played a key and active role in the agricultural production at that time. Farming customs are not just a kind of traditional culture, but also an inherited and promoted value of the times, representing the height of farming culture and labor spirit, as well as people's reflection on and perception of life, nature, and society.

Spring is the season of sowing in a year. According to the local customs, a series of measures must be taken to prepare the rice fields before farming, such as "reclaiming frozen fields", "gathering river mud" and renovating tools. Every year after the Beginning of Spring, Jiangnan enters the rainy season when the river rises. Gathering river mud as fertilizers is a key process for farming in Jiangnan as the Beginning of Spring is the beginning of a year's farming. Featured by paddy field farming, Jiangnan mainly relies on cattle-driven plowing. In Jiangnan rural areas, a ritual called "whipping cattle in spring (鞭春牛)" is always held on the day of the Beginning of Spring to pray for favorable weather for future farming. Before the rice is harvested, Jiangnan farmers often make various types of lanterns and walk around the rice fields to celebrate the harvest, commonly known as the "Lantern Show of Rice" as shown in Figure 9.



Figure 9. Farming customs
Note: Photographed by the researcher

After the harvest, rice is threshed and dried in the sun. People use windmills to remove the shriveled kernel, straw, and other debris, or wooden shovels to lift the rice directly against the wind. Then masters are asked to hull the rice before the husk of rice is removed by using a stone mortar or a rice huller to get the white rice, a process commonly known as rice pounding. The last step is to put rice into the warehouse where Jiangnan people will kill sheep and pigs to offer sacrifices to the ancestors, a ritual commonly known as "year-old wine (年常酒)".

In today's society, farming customs are constantly changing, adapting to the needs of modern society. Behind these customs, traditional virtues are unfolded, such as harmony between man and nature, social solidarity and mutual assistance, as well as people's new understanding of the values of labor, nature, and life.

2. Animation expression in the context of cultural communication.

Animation expression of Jiangnan farming cultural heritage utilizes animation creation and animation language to transform the heritage into animated images that can be seen, heard, and felt by the audience. In the current era where visual culture dominates, based on the current conditions and context of farming culture inheritance, animation explores the strategies of animation expression for Jiangnan farming culture from three aspects: spiritual theme, image pedigree, and aesthetic appeal, as well as animation communication.

2.1 Animation narrative expression of the farming theme

As a form of artistic expression of the cultural space in our lives, animation plays an active role in conveying ideas, expressing themes, and spreading culture. Since its emergence, Chinese animation has shouldered the mission of inheriting and spreading the excellent traditional ethnic culture. Farming culture is the essence of Chinese culture and a vital spiritual and cultural resource for building the core values of the Chinese nation. To this day, some farming ideas, spirits, and laws are still of great significance. Through the narrative expression of animation art, Jiangnan farming ideas are spread and

inherited through animation lenses, allowing people to further understand the origin of culture, such as diligence and dedication, compliance with nature, and ecological awareness, as shown in Figure 10.



Figure 10. Farming painting
Note: Drawn by the researcher

2.2 The pedigree and aesthetic expression of farming images through animation modeling

As a concrete presentation of animation elements, the visual art design of animation is a significant carrier for the audience to remember animation works. The image genealogy of Jiangnan farming culture is transformed into visual images that people can watch directly, including the design of movements, the design of visual styling elements such as production and living style, folk handicrafts, recreation and farming customs, etc., as shown in Figure 11.

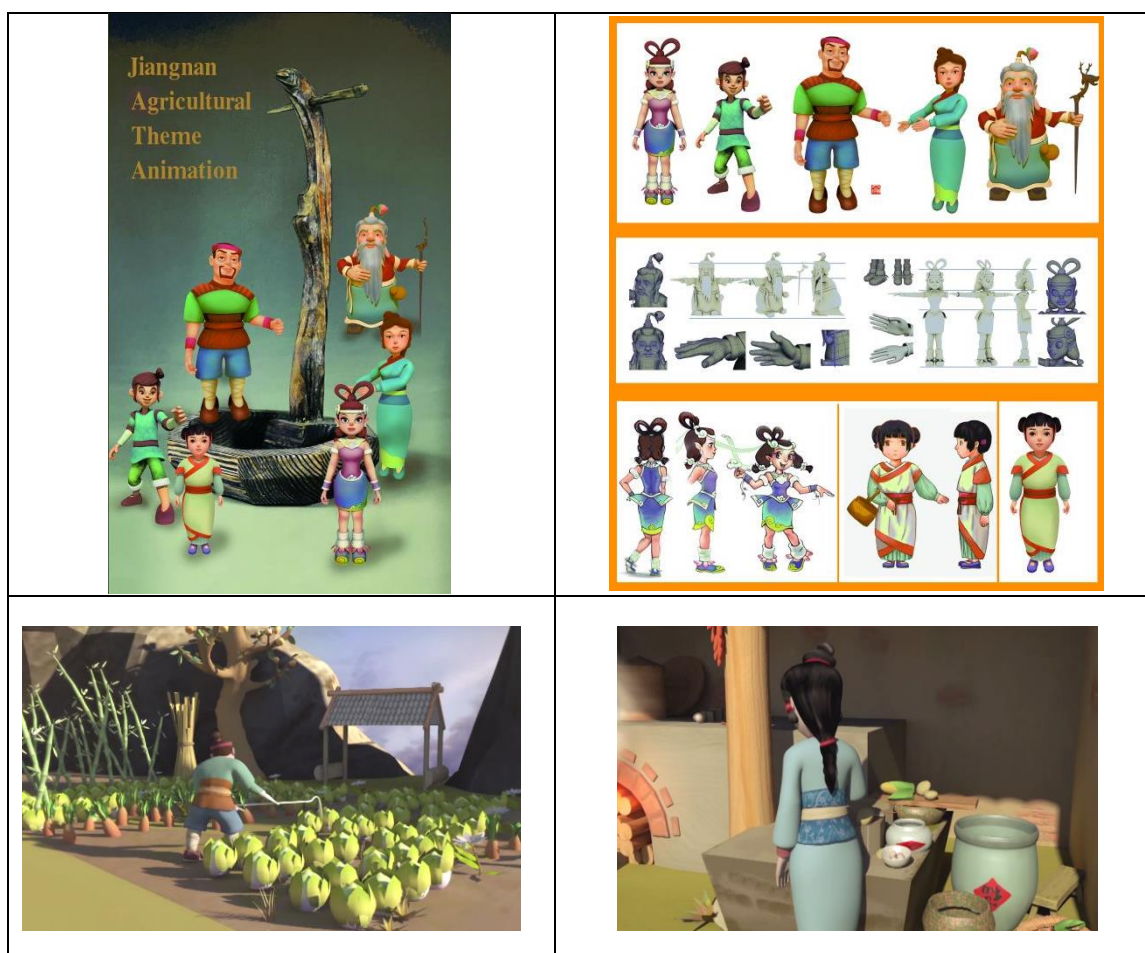


Figure 11. Animated characters
Note: Designed by the researcher



Jiangnan farming culture assembles the aesthetics and wisdom of local people in the history of thousands of years. The aesthetic appeal of Jiangnan farming culture is to explore, inherit, and express the aesthetic essence of Jiangnan farming culture through animation works. At the same time, the openness, inclusiveness, and folk nature of animation also provide diverse means for the animation transformation of the rich farming cultural heritage (Chen, 2014).

2.3 Spread of Jiangnan farming culture in animation

As a form of artistic expression and cultural carrier, animation is not only expression but also communication. In 1972, the famous American scholars Maxwell E. McCombs and Donald Lewis Shaw proposed the theory of mass communication. Inspired by the theory, animation can serve as an effective mass communication medium to provide a way for the cross-cultural communication of farming culture. The core of the nationalization of animation art is to express and spread the cultural and spiritual content contained in nationality. (Fu, 2015) The animated expression of Jiangnan farming cultural heritage has transformed its cultural elements to widely disseminated animated images in modern media using animation works as a carrier.

Discussion

1. Animation works with highly hypothetical and exaggerated characteristics may affect the overall characteristics and unique charm of Jiangnan farming cultural heritage to a certain extent, bringing about ontological crises. However, they also bring unlimited creative space to the heritage, promoting its innovation and sustainable development.

2. Cross-cultural communication is one of the crucial means to inherit and protect cultural heritage. Disseminated cross-culturally through animation, an independent art category, Jiangnan farming culture enriches its communication channels which can not only solve the practical problems in protecting the cultural heritage but also be a historical text for people to comprehend and interpret the heritage in the future.

Conclusion

Through in-depth investigation and analysis, the main research results and conclusion are as follows:

1. Jiangnan farming culture, as a crucial part of the ethnic culture, is also the fruit of human wisdom which requires protection and dissemination. Protecting and inheriting Jiangnan farming culture is of great significance in the inheritance of national cultural spirit and the construction of human cultural ecology.

2. This study collected and sorted out data through literature research, field visits expert interviews, etc., and analyzed the basic characteristics of Jiangnan farming culture from five aspects: production equipment, living utensils, clothing, architecture, and farming customs, which would promote the preservation and inheritance of Jiangnan farming culture, as well as provide reference and foundation for the next stage of work.

3. This study conducts cross-cultural communication of Jiangnan farming culture by creating animation works. In terms of communication content, it starts from the ontology of animation, transforming the elements of Jiangnan farming culture into animation works to express its cultural connotation in a special language. The communication carrier has changed from "people" to "animation works", and the communication method has also turned to mass communication of modern media from traditional oral instruction. By adopting animation, the dynamic, direct, concrete, and multi-dimensional communication method that is not limited by time and space, more opportunities are provided for Jiangnan farming culture to be understood and accepted by the audience, as well as to be survived and inherited in the contemporary cultural environment.

Recommendation

General advice:

1. Consider cross-cultural exchanges and cooperation with local agricultural experts, rural government officials, and directors of agricultural museums to further explore the characteristics, gain a deeper understanding of the history, connotation, and contemporary value, as well as establish a regional animation IP of Jiangnan farming culture.



2. Integrate with the current "rural revitalization" strategy in China, utilize animation communication to deeply explore the excellent ideas, humanistic spirit, and moral norms contained in farming culture, and give full play to its key role in uniting people, educating the masses, and improving folk customs.

3. Examine the contemporary value transformation of Jiangnan farming culture, combine it with local rural tourism and cultural creation, and explore animation derivatives and relevant farming-themed tourism cultural creative products that are combined with the local agricultural economy.

Recommendations for further research:

Cooperate with local government departments to create more farming-themed cartoons, promotional videos, and popular science films to let more young people understand the Jiangnan farming culture. Meanwhile, integrate AR interactive technology to transform the traditional way of obtaining information only through audio and video while watching movies, and shift the concept of movie viewing from audio-visual language to a "multi-sensory experience".

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