Research on the Construction of Chinese Undergraduate Comic Major

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Abstract—**Around the world, comics have a strong brand effect which are at the core of the animation industry. In recent years, Chinese comics have achieved rapid development, but in a mass of Chinese colleges and universities, graduates and market demand exist problems of different degrees about the construction of the curriculum system of comic major. What role does comic play in the animation industry? How does the market position comic professionals? What are the problems with current comic major education? As a professional teacher in the direction of comics, this article will conduct corresponding research and exploration.**

Index Terms—**comic major, discipline construction, exploration, brand effect**

I. INTRODUCTION

With the rapid development of Chinese Internet industry, the creation pattern, communication pattern and performance characteristics of Chinese animation industry are also undergoing corresponding changes. In recent years, the popularization and performance improvement of mobile smart terminals have brought about tremendous innovations in Chinese comics industry: traditional paper comic has gradually retreated to the second line, while internet comics based on cellphone applications have risen strongly, and gradually it has a stronger and stronger influence on the economic level and cultural influence level. According to the research report from iResearch Consulting Institute: in the five years from 2013 to 2018, the market size of online comic in China has increased from 1.02 billion yuan to 14.16 billion yuan. The number of audiences of online comic also jumped from 89 million to 346 million. [1] Under the overall framework of Chinese current animation comprehensive industry, the comic industry has great vitality. Since 2008, China began to support the domestic animation industry, the upsurge of animation education in various colleges and universities has also followed. Although abundant teaching achievements have been achieved in the discipline construction of Chinese comic in the past 11 years, there are still many problems need to be solved. What are the characteristics of the current Chinese comic industry?

What is the status quo of the instructional plan of comic in Chinese colleges and universities? What are the characteristics of a benign comic talent education model? In this regard, this article will conduct corresponding research.

II. THE POSITIONING OF COMIC IN THE ANIMATION INDUSTRY AND THE MARKET DEMAND FOR COMIC PROFESSIONALS

To establish a suitable instructional plan for comic professionals in the universities of China, we should clarify the mechanism and corresponding status of comic in the animation industry first. In this way, the specific demands of the market and employers for comic professionals can be accurately grasped, to establish a practical and scientific comic curriculum system. Comic occupies an extremely essential position in the mature integrated animation industry system such as the American and Japan. Taking the Japanese animation industry as an example, Manga can be described as one of the cores of the entire Japanese animation industry. Professor Tsugata Nobuyuk, which from Kyoto Seika University and the renowned historian of Japanese animation had identified manga as one of the most important axes in the history for Japanese animation. [2] Distinguished professor of Musashino University and chairman of Mad House Animation Company Masuda Hiromitsu convinces the manga is an important factor for the popularity of Japanese animation worldwide. [3] Professor Li Changqing from Peking University which believes Comic is one of the fundamental competitiveness of Japanese animation. [4]

The core ideology behind Japanese comics' success is that most of them are based on the idea that the screenwriting philosophy emphasize the "Content is the King", which continuously subdividing a variety of categories of scriptwriter for different audiences, focusing the selection of corresponding artistic styles for sophisticated production and promotion. In addition, Japanese manga emphasizes the absorption of newly sprouted things, such as the creative form, narrative content, expression method, and art style, they are constantly trying to update. This is one of the essential reasons for the long-term prosperity of Japanese comic. In additional, such as *Saint Seiya*, *Dragon Ball*, *Bleach*,

Naruto, *Attack on Titan* and several highly popular Japanese TV, Movie, and OVA animations that have strong cultural influence which are adapted from the same name comics. In order to complete the secondary market operation for the original comic, then the comic and the adapted animation will cooperate with each other to complete the re-market operation for derivative products involving peripherals, audiovisual, games and the publications. From this we can clarify the basic commercial operation of the Japanese animation industry: The first animation creative conception and art style determination with comic, and then through "animation" with the help of film and television media to promote the original comic creative and form the corresponding brand, then, under the premium effect of "anime integration", this IP was integrated into many derivative products, and finally a complete animation brand system with vitality was formed. The American animation industry is similar: many popular comics of Marvel and DC also derive from similar ideas into their own huge animation brands.

Comic plays a pivotal role in the healthy development of the animation industry. Therefore, if we want to establish the construction of a reasonable comic professional discipline, we should first understand the current domestic industry and company's specific needs for comic professionals. In the recent years, with the rapid development of mobile intelligent terminals and image technology, Chinese comic has been greatly improved in terms of quantity and quality requirements. Under this situation Chinese comic companies have begun to change their operating mode and personnel composition: a four - level staff structure like the "Director → Editor → Chief Artist → Assistant" model of the Japanese manga agency which has been formed. Among them, director is a leading figure in the comic company, whose responsibility is to take charge of the overall strategic structure and planning of comic products, which requires not only the comprehensive and excellent professional ability, but also the excellent management ability. The responsibility of the comic editor is to assist the chief artist to complete the work: it is necessary to guide and rationalize the ideas of the chief artist such as the creativity, screenwriting, storytelling, and composition, to make the concept more mature and perfect. Therefore, the comic editor which is required to have the unique insights, the outstanding professional capabilities, and the preeminent communication and coordination skills. Chief artist is the main creator of the comic project which is required to master the popular comic styles, comic language, creative thinking, and the fine arts ability. Specifically, it will involve a series of specific tasks such as the style control for the comics, such as the characters, scenes, the color settings, the storyboard, the art direction, and the quality inspection. And the assistant is responsible for assisting the chief artist to complete a series of comic work such as line marking, coloring, background, and special effects. Therefore, the current personnel structure logic of Chinese comic companies is very clear, and the four - level staff have different skills and ability requirements. Under the

internet era, the chief artist and assistant can also participate in the comic industry in the form of "free comic professionals", and can also form a well cooperative relationship with the industry.

However, the current orientation of comic instructional plan in many Chinese colleges and universities is out of touch with the market in a variety of degrees.

III. CURRENT EDUCATION STATUS OF COMIC MAJOR IN CHINESE UNIVERSITIES

According to the previous research in this article, we can conclude that the composition of comic companies is much simpler than the animation companies. This way it works determines that comic professionals which demands to have the comprehensive abilities such as the cross-border and the independent working capabilities. However, there is a certain degree of disconnection in the positioning of comic education in most colleges and universities in China, which is specifically reflected in the following three aspects:

A. Inaccurate Positioning of the Comic Major

At present, most colleges and universities in China define comic as a branch of the animation major, so there is no scientific and reasonable comic course system based on market demand and subject characteristics from the source. Reflected in the curriculum system of the comic major, it directly follows the basic modeling, design thinking, movement grasp, performance, storyboard, and other pioneering courses of the animation major. There is another issue with such an unclear talent training program: This will cause unnecessary professional courses to be inserted into the comic curriculum system, so that the core courses for the comic major are seriously insufficient.

After the author's research in various universities in China, this problem is relatively common. Even some universities which are classified as the National Characteristic Specialty, their comic direction of students are required to spend a lot of time to learn the required professional courses such as: *Principles of Animation*, *2D Animation Production Process*, and *Music Effect*, while there are only 6 courses in the comic direction of their junior year, which will inevitably lead to a serious lack of learning quality for the comic major students. Furthermore, this curriculum orientation emphasizes on the training of students' professional and technical abilities, but ignores the high demand of the comic discipline itself for creative thinking and comprehensive abilities. Therefore, the inaccurate positioning of the comic major is an important problem in many domestic universities.

B. The Misunderstanding of the Traditional Fine Arts Instructional Plan

In the current compulsory and professional elective courses for animation and comic in China, there is also a serious disconnect between teaching and reality. It is reflected in the teaching philosophy of some teachers in the basic courses is still dominated by completely fine arts painting teaching orientation, and the instructional plan

are still adopting the Traditional Sectarian Thinking of early western art education era. Their teaching orientation emphasizes a long-term basic training and a relatively abstract understanding of thinking model. They treat students as the object of teaching, supplying systematic education for them and emphasizing the role of the educators. [5] In fact, this seriously violates the subject characteristics and teaching rules of comic major. According to such teaching ideas, students will obviously lack the normative concepts. Therefore, in a reasonable curriculum system for comic, we must repeatedly emphasize the training of normative abilities in courses. As a result, in the reasonable curriculum system for comic major, we must repeatedly emphasize the training of normative abilities in enough courses. Furthermore, in accordance with the fine arts drawing education orientation, most colleges and universities currently have obvious insufficient training for the teamwork ability of comic students. Although comic corporations are much simpler than animation companies on the personnel level, they still demand employees to have a high degree of teamwork. Among them, especially the requirements for the chief artist. They should not only cooperate closely with the editor, in order to carry out repeated consultation and revision in the aspects of plot, narration, appearance and artistic style, but also need to coordinate and manage several assistants with different drawing style, to unify the style for the entire comic project. Similarly, comic assistants also need to collaborate with each other as a team. If we continue to follow a curriculum system that emphasizes personal creation, such as traditional Chinese painting, oil painting, printmaking, and sculpture, it is obviously impossible to cultivate comic professionals who adapt the needs of the requirement of the market.

C. Emphasis on the Paper Media Orientation of Comic Teaching

At present, great changes have taken place in the carrier media of comic. The market share of traditional paper comic has begun to decline sharply, and they are replaced by mobile comic and web comic which are spread through intelligent platforms and comic applications. In the context of the internet era, the iteration of media technology is extremely rapid, so the art form of comic is constantly undergoing self-innovation, such as smart phone comic, H5 interactive comic and other new art forms are also gradually generated. However, in current comic courses of many Chinese colleges and universities, the education orientation has not taken the corresponding thinking and adjustment in view of the specific influence of the new carrier media on the creation characteristics of comic. The outdated training projects that are more specific to traditional paper media such as portrait exaggerated comics, four-frame comics, comics are still being used. Moreover, the teaching contents in the core courses of the major are relatively repetitive.

If the above three issues are not been resolved, it will have a relatively obvious negative impact on the development of Chinese comic industry.

IV. CONSIDERATIONS ON THE BASIC CURRICULUM SYSTEM FOR COMIC

Based on the above argumentation, the curriculum system of the comic major obviously needs corresponding independence, so this section tries to construct the system and structure of the basic curriculum of the comic major. The basic comic courses can be roughly divided into three parts: modeling courses, color courses and software courses. We will research this in details.

A. The Modeling Course

Modeling course is the most basic and important subject in all kinds of art talent training program. It's also the first major course for every college freshman. Therefore, this series of courses played an extremely important leading role in introducing freshman into the curriculum system of comic professional education. At present, many colleges and universities have some issues in their instructional plan, which are reflected in the deviation in positioning, and do not pay enough attention to the professional characteristics of comic. The fine art education idea is still followed, and the teaching content is still emphasis on the traditional sketch and croquis by pencil. Such a teaching mode that does not focus on the modeling characteristics of comic is obviously in contradiction with the ability requirements of comic professionals. So, in the training of corresponding courses, it is suggested to appropriately maintain some of the traditional training contents such as the gypsum and human body sketching on the basis, and incorporate the targeted training in line with the characteristics of caricature modeling. For example, sketching according to the animation garage kits is an effective training idea. Introduced from sketches focus on basic Japanese style animation garage kits, gradually increasing the difficulty with the progress of the course, and finally realized that it can accurately draw more complex and realistic on American style animation garage kits for the structure and the shadow sketches. This high-intensity teaching pattern can forcibly separate students' modeling thinking from the stylized mode of art training in the college entrance examination, re-analyze and summarize the structural characteristics of the different style garage kits, to have a preliminary understanding and accumulation of the modeling characteristics of comic major.

The thinking of the croquis course is also similar. Based on the traditional croquis training, it is recommended to integrate the analysis and refinement on the motion and action of the human from the characters in the classic comic. These characters are summarized according to their body shape characteristics and lumped into a shape like that of a ball-joint figure. In this way, the motion analysis is carried out accurately without the interference of the detailed shape. After the accurate extraction of the human body motion, the joint angle and limb orientation can be appropriately modified, and a new series of movements can be created according to the motion of the role, it would lay a certain foundation for the later course of movement rules.

In addition, training on the standardization of drawing manuscripts is also a very essential instructional objective of modeling courses, because the comic commercial has a high requirement on standardization, and if the painting expression is not accurate, it will greatly increase the difficulty of the work in the middle and post produce stages, which cannot be accepted by the industry. The requirements of modeling ability in the industry are reflected in the need to use accurate lines and shapes to depict the corresponding shape structure and spatial relations. At present, many colleges and universities ignore the standardization training in the teaching of modeling courses, and emphasize more on the "feeling" and other perceptual factors that cannot be standardized, so the students educated by such concept naturally cannot satisfy the industry. Therefore, during comic modeling courses, students must always adhere to the particle of normative and standardized ability, to establish a firm sense of standardization.

B. The Color Course

In comic design, the use of color is also a vital link which playing an essential role in visual communication for the comic. Color design not only makes the great effects on the balance of images in the comic strip, but also is responsible for the emotional expression and storytelling. The excellent comic needs to increase the artistic quality through the excellent color design, in order to attract the audience's attention. Since the development of comic, color is no longer a perceptual form of perception, but a rational design which serves the overall art style of comic. Therefore, the industry's requirements are also different from traditional art teaching positioning.

At present, the instructional plan for comic color link in many colleges and universities still emphasis on the still life painting, landscape sketching to cultivate students' color conceptions. The teaching objectives are also to strengthen the students' ability to master the color expression in comic design. However, the audience of comic design are the ordinary people, so comic design must not one-sided pursuit for "artist-like" personality expression in color selection and matching, it should emphasize inclusive expression that meets the aesthetic needs of the majority of users at many aspects. Therefore, in the teaching of color courses in comic major, the instructional content and training requirements of color psychology and color composition should be strengthened, so students could clearly design the different patterns of color collocation to generate a number of psychological feelings form the audience, so as to design the accurately color scheme to match the psychological needs for the users.

It is recommended to cultivate the students to perform color analysis capabilities on electronic comics, so that they can perform rational and quantitative analysis of the use of many factors such as hue, brightness, purity, matching mode, and contrast between cold and warm colors in reference digital materials. Summarize the rules and make corresponding records to establish their own color matching template, which is great benefit for the students to their approaching comic creation course.

C. The Software Course

Comic design work has extremely high-level demand for the digital software. Modern comic has abandoned the traditional "pen hand drawing & dotted paper" working pattern, and have completely turned to the era of digital comic. Therefore, no matter in the pre-design, mid-term production, or post-layout editing, which are inseparable from the corresponding digital image software. Comic professionals must be proficient in software. Some basic software courses should be set up in the basic curriculum system for comic major, to cultivate students' software quality and make technical preparation for the sequential courses. It may start from the two-dimensional image software Adobe Photoshop, to train students' digital image awareness and image processing techniques, and gradually introduce more professional comic production software such as Easy Comic, Comic Studio, or Manga Master.

In addition, it is recommended that comic major students could properly learn some part of three-dimensional software such as 3DS Max, Maya, and Zbrush. By mastering the basic 3D modeling, texture, and rendering capabilities, 3D technology can be integrated in the comic creation procedure to undertake more complex characters, props, and environmental design work, which expand the students' professional vision, and strengthen students' comprehensive capabilities for comic design.

Basic software courses can be linked with previous modeling and color courses. This digital assignment methodology which different from the hand-painted design work, would strengthens students' cognition of modeling structure, spatial relationship, and color matching, thereby further breaking students' inherent concepts and making them more adaptable and integrated into the work mode of comic design.

V. CONCLUSION

The current animation industry has long developed into a composite mode of highly collaborative among multiple platforms, and comic has always been at the core position of the animation industry. Because the core concept of modern comic is to emphasize "Creative Production" and "Content is the King", which is essentially an upstream area in the animation industry. At the same time, the difficulty and cost of comic creation are relatively low. Therefore, comic is most likely to have a brand effect among many animation platforms. Comic also can be adapted into the TV, the OVA, and the film animations through the "secondary commercial operation" pattern, and finally constitute a huge and vital work network. Therefore, this is sufficient to explain why the most popular animation brands in the United States and Japan are adapted from comic. In recent years, the development of Chinese animation industry has gradually become benign. The outstanding Chinese comic represented by *The Outcast* have gradually begun to have a strong brand effect. Not only has it completed the comic serialization for 15 volumes, but also has been adapted into two seasons

with 37 episodes of TV animation by the Japanese Pandanium animation company. Therefore, it can be predicted that the Chinese comic profession will continue to prosper within the next decades.

However, the current issues in the Chinese comic curriculum system are essentially due to the fact that the development speed of the Chinese comic industry in recent years has far exceeded than the adjustment cycle of the construction for the comic discipline, resulting in some professional teachers are still adhering to the outdated traditional educational thinking and fail to carry out synchronous innovation according to the current industry characteristics and requirements of comic. For the professional construction of the comic major, at first, we should to clarify the positioning of the market and the industry for the comic professional. Comic professionals not only have been required to obtain the solid drawing ability, but also need to have qualities in organization, planning, literary text, performance expression, and marketing communication. More importantly, comic professionals need to have strong comprehensive ability, creative ability, and the ability to work independently and in a team. They should to keep the continuous analysis and learning of new technologies. As for the curriculum system of comic major in colleges and universities, we still need to think and explore deeply.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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