



# Analysis of AI Innovation Design and Adaptation of Journey to the West in Japanese Animation Works

Cong Yu<sup>1\*</sup>, Yue Wang<sup>2\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Dalian Neusoft University of Information, yucong@neusoft.edu.cn  
Dalian City, Liaoning Province, 116032, China

<sup>2</sup>Dalian Neusoft University of Information, 2022115377@qq.com  
Dalian City, Liaoning Province, 116032, China

**Abstract.** "Journey to the West," as a classic of Chinese literature, is deeply loved and respected by readers. Its rich storylines and unique character designs make it an important part of Chinese culture. This article aims to explore the modern expression of Chinese cultural heritage in Japanese animation by analyzing the adaptations of character design and storylines in "Journey to the West." It also seeks to understand the innovative AI designs of the characters, revealing the differences between cultures and promoting cross-cultural understanding. In Japanese animated works, the character designs and plots of "Journey to the West" have been thoroughly localized, with AI technology used for character illustration, making the designs and narratives more appealing to Japanese audiences. In these adaptations, the plot tends to emphasize individual abilities and heroism. Additionally, Japanese animation focuses more on character growth and emotional changes, in contrast to the grand vision of saving all beings found in "Journey to the West," which emphasizes a deeper exploration of individual emotional worlds. Through this study, we can understand the differences between cultures by examining the localization of character designs and storylines in adapted works, thereby enhancing our understanding of the preferences of audiences from different cultural backgrounds and promoting international cultural exchange. Furthermore, by delving into the spirit reflected in these adaptations, we can gain a deeper understanding of the national character of Japan, which aids in comprehending Japanese culture more thoroughly.

**Keywords:** Character design; The storyline; recompose

## 1 RESEARCH BACKGROUNDS AND PURPOSES

Shi Fei (2005) mentioned: Wu Cheng'en enjoyed miscellaneous histories and supernatural stories, and he once said, "I have a fondness for the biographies written by Tang authors like Niu Qizhang and Duan Kegou, who excel in capturing the essence of things; I always wish to write a book in response to them<sup>[1]</sup>." "It is also recorded in the 'Chronicles of Huai'an Prefecture' that he was quick-witted and wise, well-read in a wide range of books, and could easily compose poetry and prose<sup>[2]</sup>." Song Zuoshun (2009). This paper aims to explore the modern expression of Chinese cultural heritage in Japanese

animated works by analyzing the adaptations of character design and storyline in "Journey to the West," thereby revealing the differences between cultures and promoting cross-cultural understanding.

## 2 PREVIOUS RESEARCHES

Lai Shuchun (2010) pointed out in his paper: "Among the many stories about the quest for scripture, the character of Sun Wukong evolves from non-existence to prominence, ultimately replacing Tang Seng as the main character <sup>[3]</sup>." Then the reasons for the change and its advantages and disadvantages are analyzed. In Japan, Sun Wukong's image re-creation has absorbed the essence of Japanese Bushido culture, which is mainly reflected in the spirit of martial arts, firm will and gratitude. At the same time, he also devoted himself to the delicate emotional description of the characters. The adaptation of the image of Japanese Monkey King introduces foreign cultural elements, which has the advantages of exquisite production and full characterization. However, there are also disadvantages such as over-commercialization and negative content works.

## 3 OVERVIEW OF THE CHINESE CLASSICAL LITERATURE JOURNEY TO THE WEST

### 3.1 Creation Background and Characteristics

"Journey to the West" is one of the four great masterpieces of ancient Chinese literature, written by the Ming Dynasty author Wu Cheng'en. This novel is based on characters and stories from Buddhist legends, telling the arduous journey of four Tang monks and their disciples, as well as their struggles and resolutions against various demons and monsters they encounter along the way. Created during the Ming Dynasty, "Journey to the West" reflects the profound influence of Buddhism in Chinese society at that time. Wu Cheng'en incorporated numerous Buddhist stories and legends into his work to express his reflections on humanity, spiritual practice, and salvation. Sun Wukong is an intelligent and brave character. He has clear feelings of love and hate, harboring intense hatred toward evil forces. He possesses extraordinary abilities and serves as the strongest protector during the journey<sup>[4]</sup>. Wu Cheng'en (2021)

### 3.2 Character Design and Storyline

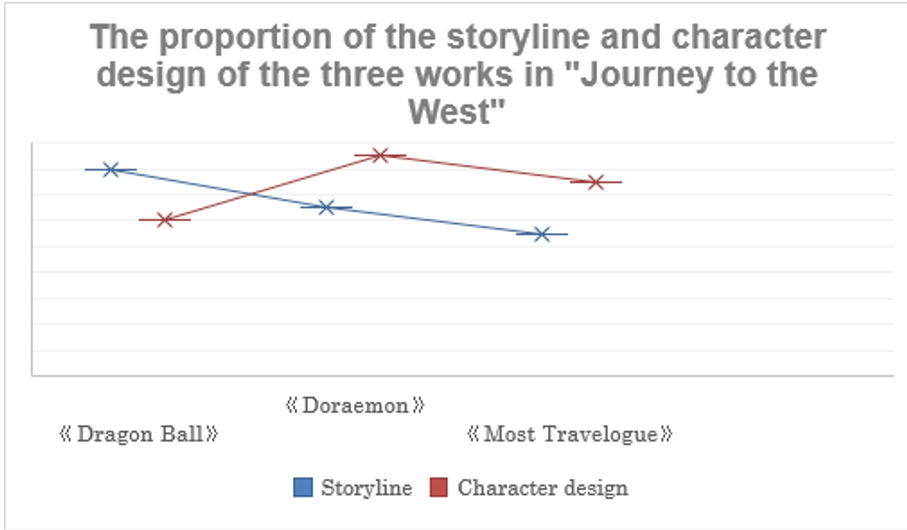
In terms of character design, each character has a distinct personality and traits, making their images memorable. First, regarding their appearance, the characters have rich and vivid features that leave a lasting impression. Song Zushun (2009) wrote: "For example, in the fourth chapter, Sun Wukong is described as: "With a golden forehead and bright eyes, round head and hairy face without cheeks. Sharp teeth and pointed mouth, temperament strange, looks like the ancient Thunder God<sup>[3]</sup>." This vividly portrays the image of a monkey demon with sharp teeth and a pointed mouth, and a rosy complexion.

This design aspect not only leaves a deep impression on readers but also corresponds with the characters' personalities, allowing readers to quickly understand their roles.

As for the plot, Journey to the West follows the journey of Tang Seng and his three disciples as they travel to the West to obtain scriptures, serving as the main storyline, which revolves around their battles and adventures against various demons and monsters. The plot is tight and diverse, filled with elements of suspense, humor, emotion, and reflection. The underlying storyline focuses on Sun Wukong, depicting his transformation from evil to good, and from demon to Buddha. From beginning to end, the plot escalates layer by layer, with each chapter containing its own independent story while also advancing the main storyline. These two major threads complement each other, driving the narrative forward. The conflicts and challenges within the story test the courage and wisdom of the master and disciples, allowing them to grow and progress through unity and friendship.

#### **4 RE-CREATION OF ELEMENTS OF JOURNEY TO THE WEST IN DRAGON BALL**

In November 1984, Akira Toriyama created a new comic strip, Dragon Ball, based on the classical Chinese novel Journey to the West. At the beginning of the creation, the author Toriyama Ming took the story of Journey to the West as the embryo, and designed the Q version of Sun Wukong and Pig Bajie according to the AI painting, but was rejected by the then editor Torijima Kazuhiko, and the story performance completely based on Journey to the West could not be compared with the popular works such as "Football Young General" and "Big Dipper Fist" at the same time. Finally, under the urging of the editor, Toriyama Akira finally chose to take the elements of Journey to the West as the cornerstone and go his own way. The serialization of "Dragon Ball" can be divided into three stages, the first stage is the funny adventure story based on the tone of his previous hit work "Aralei" and a lot of elements of "Journey to the West". This stage is mainly dominated by humorous and funny plots. The second stage was influenced by the popular "Big Dipper Fist" at that time, and the theme gradually moved closer to fighting, and began to enter the transition section of semi-funny and semi-fighting. At this stage, the influence of Journey to the West on the work gradually decreased, and Dragon Ball gradually opened up its own AI design and creation mode. In the final third stage, "Dragon Ball" officially transformed into an orthodox blood fighting comic, the elements of "Journey to the West" gradually faded, the importance of the plot also declined, and the tone of the comic changed to combat.



**Fig. 1.** The proportion of the storyline and character design of the three works in "Journey to the West"

As shown in Figure 1, In terms of character design, Dragon Ball draws heavily on Journey to the West. The name of the protagonist Sun Wukong is the same as that of the protagonist Sun Wukong in Journey to the West, and it also leaves some features similar to AI painting on the appearance, such as a monkey's tail. This design left the foreshadowing for the plot that would later become Gigantopithecus. In terms of equipment, the Golden staff and Somersault Cloud have the function of free expansion, while having a strong combat ability that allows the protagonist to survive in the isolation of the mountains. At the same time, the protagonist has good qualities such as bravery and kindness, and always faces difficulties during the journey, facing various monsters and helping more people. In addition, the girl Bluma, who plays the master of Sanzang, has changed into a high-tech modern man with the background setting of the story, and this transformation of the AI image can attract young audiences with a modern sense and a sense of science fiction. Overall, the AI-painted character designs are distinctly Japanese in appearance. The characters in Dragon Ball conform to modern people's aesthetic consciousness.

In terms of storyline, "Dragon Ball" can be roughly divided into, the west to find the seven Dragon Ball of the dragon Ball, the world's first martial assembly, Saiyan and the following Salu, Buou, and so on. Dragon Ball borrows many elements from Journey to the West in its initial storyline, such as the protagonist's lifestyle, the main movers he meets, the team members, and the characters' personalities. However, Dragon Ball also innovates and ADAPTS these elements to make them their own.

## **5 RE-CREATION OF THE ELEMENTS OF JOURNEY TO THE WEST IN DORAEMON: NOBITA'S PARALLEL JOURNEY TO THE WEST**

Doraemon: Nobita's Parallel Journey to the West is also very special among Doraemon's many theatrical versions. Nobita's Parallel Journey to the West is the first theatrical version of Doraemon series set against the background of A world classical novel. It is the only theatrical version without the original manga when Fujiko F. Fujio was alive. Due to the death of Emperor Showa on January 7, 1989, Nobita's Parallel Journey to the West became the last theatrical version of Doraemon in the Showa era.

Unlike "Dragon Ball", which was written from scratch with reference to "Journey to the West", "Nobita's Parallel Journey to the West" is a separate theatrical version created in the existing complete worldview works. "Nobita's Parallel Journey to the West" only selected part of the plot of "Journey to the West" to recreate, while focusing on the description of Red Boy's inner changes.

In terms of character design, this work adopts new elements related to AI painting on the original character structure of the story, that is, while retaining the original image of the character, the dress of the character corresponds to the characters in Journey to the West. For example, in the plot, the four people except Doraemon wear half arms in Tang Dynasty costumes, while retaining features such as the golden stick and the hoop curse, and the nine-toothed harrow, so that people can know the corresponding role at a glance.

## **6 RE-CREATION OF THE ELEMENTS OF JOURNEY TO THE WEST IN THE MOST JOURNEY**

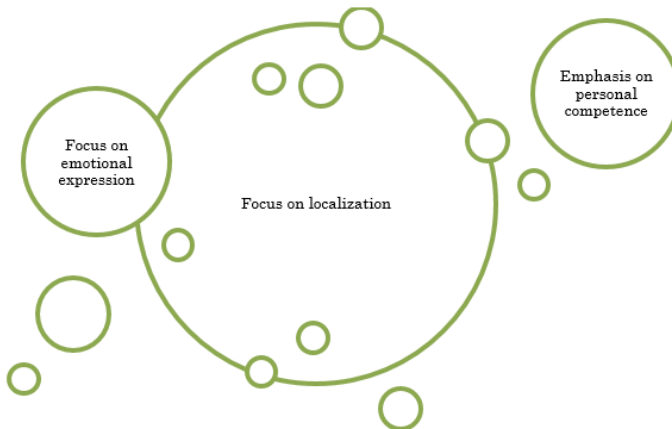
Different from ordinary works, The Most Travels has a unique painting style, smooth lines and a sense of power. The character design of the most travel AI painting is very beautiful, and is called "visual Journey to the West." Through rough lines, exaggerated shapes and individual figures, a unique beauty style has been formed. In addition to appearance, the relationship between the four main characters, Sanzang Master, Sun Wukong, Zhu Bajie and Sha Wujing, has been given a new interpretation by AI painting. They are no longer a simple mentoring relationship, but have a deep bond of friends, support each other, rely on each other, and face difficulties together. For example, Xuanzang Sanzang in The Most Travels is an abandoned son floating from the river, who was saved and raised by the Guangming Sanzang Master of Jinshan Temple. I was discriminated against by the monks in the temple as a child. After the master was killed by the monster, his personality changed greatly, and he became irritable and loved to smoke. Others, such as the half-demon Pig Bajie who massacred the Baimu family into monsters in order to avenge his beloved sister, the Monkey King who lost his memory and was imprisoned alone for more than 500 years in prison, and Sha Wujing, the red-haired son of taboo born of man and monster. The author sets a heavy

past for everyone, which also makes the relationship between the characters more complicated and heavier.

Compared with *Journey to the West*, *The Most Journey* greatly increases the proportion of emotional drama. Through meticulous writing, Minakura Kazuya directly describes the feelings of four people, so that readers feel their sincere and profound feelings.

## 7 THE JAPANESE CULTURAL CHARACTERISTICS REFLECTED IN THE ELEMENTS OF JOURNEY TO THE WEST IN JAPANESE ANIMATION WORKS

Through the previous analysis, the following three conclusions are summarized. As shown in the figure2 below.



(Note: Made by the author)

**Fig. 2.** The characteristics of Japan culture embodied in the elements of "Journey to the West" in Japan anime works

### 7.1 Focus on Localization

In the adaptation of *Journey to the West* by Japanese animation, the localization and the embodiment of Japanese traditional culture are mainly manifested in two aspects: character design and cultural connotation. First of all, when adapting *Journey to the West*, Japanese anime will carry out Japanese character design, including the reconstruction of character modeling, personality and relationship. This kind of Japanese character design is usually adjusted according to the aesthetic habits and cultural cognition of the Japanese audience, so that the character is more in line with the preferences of the Japanese audience. Usually retain the classic elements of the original, such as

Tang Monk, Sun Wukong, Zhu Bajie and Sha Seng characters, as well as their weapons and magic weapons, but also add some elements unique to Japanese culture, Japanese animation will also combine these classic elements with Japanese culture, so that these characters and stories are more rich and diversified, easier to be favored by the market.

Secondly, when adapting Journey to the West, Japanese animation often integrates the ideas and values of traditional Japanese culture into the story. Through the means of expression, music, harmony and language expression, the work has a strong Japanese atmosphere in terms of vision, hearing and emotion. To sum up, when adapting Journey to the West, Japanese anime successfully integrated traditional Japanese culture into the work through the localization of character design and cultural connotation, which made the work have unique Japanese characteristics.

## 7.2 Focus on Emotional Expression

The story lines of Japanese animation are usually more focused on emotion and character growth. This approach makes the work more resonant with the audience, because by seeking a balance between the virtual sense of saving the world and the reality of protecting family and friends, the work can better convey the importance of emotion and character growth. In contrast, the characters in Journey to the West act for the greater good, and pay more attention to the transmission of educational significance and moral concepts. This high-minded setting enables the work to convey deeper ideas and values, but is relatively weak in terms of emotion. He Jiaxin (2021) pointed out: "The Journey to the West stories and characters have become traditional cultural symbols that can be freely appropriated, serving various popular cultures for audience consumption."<sup>[5]</sup>"

## 7.3 Emphasize Your Abilities

The style of Japanese animation emphasizes individual ability and heroism, which is closely related to multiple factors such as Japanese culture, society, audience group and story plot. This style has also won Japanese animation a wide fan base around the world. The reason for this is the influence of the traditional Bushido culture, which advocated for the strong in Japanese history. Before the Edo period, Bushido mainly advocated personal glory and family reputation, and emphasized personal strength. After the Edo period, many martial laws were enacted, and gradually changed to loyalty and bravery.

To sum up, the style of Japanese animation that puts more emphasis on individual ability and heroism is closely related to multiple factors such as Japanese culture, society, audience group and story plot. This style has also won Japanese animation a wide fan base around the world.

# 8 SUMMARY

This paper focuses on the character design and story plot of Journey to the West, analyzes the characteristics of adaptation of Journey to the West in Japanese anime works,

analyzes the cultural differences between different cultural backgrounds, and discusses how Japanese combine the story plot, characters and values of Journey to the West with Japanese culture in anime works. However, the influence of Journey to the West on Japanese culture is not limited to the field of anime. In fact, this classical Chinese literary masterpiece has penetrated into all aspects of Japanese culture, in literature, Noh music, kabuki, TV series and so on. Through in-depth research and understanding of the characteristics of adaptation, we can better understand the cultural background and aesthetic consciousness of Japan. This is of positive significance to promoting cultural exchanges and mutual understanding between China and Japan.

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