

# A Comparative Study on the Cultural Transmission of Music Narration in Chinese and Korean Animated Films

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**Abstract:** By comparing Chinese and Korean animated films, this study expounds the cultural transmission of music narration in Chinese and Korean animated films, and reveals how music, as an important medium, expresses and transmits the cultural characteristics of each country in animation production. The study found that the music of Chinese animated films usually pays attention to the reproduction of historical depth and tradition, emphasizing the classical and emotional depth of the story, and the musical style is often closely connected with Chinese literary and philosophical traditions, showing poetry and symbolism. In contrast, the music of Korean animation emphasizes the integration of modernity and tradition, which reflects Korea's modern interpretation of local culture in the context of globalization, and tends to use a direct and modern musical style, reflecting the rapid change of Korean culture and the attitude of opening up to the outside world. The study emphasizes the central role of music in cross-cultural communication and animation art, and provides a new perspective on the application of animation music narrative strategies in global cultural communication.

**Keywords:** Chinese Animated Film; Korean Animated Film; Music Narrative Function; Cultural Transmission; Comparative Study.

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## 1. Introduction

Popular culture plays a vital role in the communication of modern society, not only because of its value in entertainment, but also because of its function in shaping social ideas, conveying information, and promoting cultural understanding. As a bridge of cross-cultural communication, media helps people from different cultural backgrounds understand each other. [1] The dissemination of mass culture can strengthen social cohesion, provide shared cultural experiences, and contribute to cross-cultural communication and understanding. As a key medium of mass culture communication, video content has a profound impact on modern society. As a communication medium, image can cross the boundaries of language and region, and is an important tool for sharing and understanding different cultures. In today's accelerated globalization, the visual content conveyed through films, advertisements, art works, etc., not only reflects the respective cultural background, but also promotes the communication and understanding between different cultures. For example, the Looking China Youth Film Project is an international collaboration founded in 2011 by Huang Huilin, a professor at Beijing Normal University. The goal of this project is to complete a short documentary about Chinese culture through the perspective of international young filmmakers and present it at multiple platforms and film festivals. This project showcases Chinese history and cultural diversity and Bridges the differences between different cultures through visual narration.

As a popular mass media, animated films have unique cultural communication ability. The research on animated films is necessary not only because of its entertainment value, but also because of its important role in the transmission of cultural influence and social ideology. Animated films often contain rich cultural elements and values, which can effectively convey and show the history, traditions and customs of a country or region. Animation is a unique art form

and communication medium that is consumed and interpreted globally as a cultural product. [2] With the advancement of technology and the deepening of globalization, animation works are easy to spread across borders and become an important medium for global cultural exchanges.

At present, most scholars' research on cultural communication of animated films mainly includes cultural representation and identity construction, globalization and localization, cross-cultural communication, technology and innovation and other fields. Animation reflects and shapes social identities, including national, racial, and gender identities, and is used to convey specific cultural messages and values. Animation spreads globally and ADAPTS to the needs of audiences from different cultures. [3] As a medium of cross-cultural communication, animation promotes understanding and communication between different cultures. [4] Some scholars explore various techniques of animation production, from traditional hand-drawn animation to computer-generated imagery (CGI), and analyze how technology drives innovation in animation art and cultural content. However, there is insufficient research on the cultural transmission of animated films from the perspective of music narration. First, there is a lack of systematic research analyzing culture-specific musical elements used in animation, such as ethnic instruments and traditional melodies, and how these elements affect cultural transmission. Secondly, there is a lack of in-depth theoretical discussion on how music expresses and strengthens the cultural identity in animation. In addition, although music is a powerful tool for cultural and emotional expression, there is insufficient research on the specific role of music in promoting understanding and empathy between different cultures. The deficiencies of these studies limit the understanding of animation music narration.

## 2. Materials and Methods

### 2.1. Research Issues

A synthesis of previous studies reveals that while Korean and Chinese animation histories also show different achievements and cultural communication strategies from different perspectives, there are fewer in-depth studies of musical narratives. Korean animation is more prominent in technological innovation and international cooperation. [5] However, such strategies sometimes lead to the dilution of cultural markers and the generalisation of musical narratives, which may not be sufficient to fully express the cultural characteristics and emotional depth of Korea. In contrast, Chinese animation is deeply rooted in rich local culture and historical traditions, and the limitations of musical narratives sometimes fail to adequately express emotional subtlety and layers. [6] The animation industries of the two countries need to further explore and innovate the use of musical narratives to enhance the expression of cultural uniqueness and the emotional resonance of international audiences, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of cross-cultural communication. Therefore, this study aims to explore the role and influence of music narrative in cultural communication through a comparative analysis of Chinese and Korean animation films.

### 2.2. Scope of Research

In selecting cases of cultural communicability of music narratives in Chinese and Korean animated films, four main

aspects are referred to: firstly, works with cultural identifiers, secondly, animated films with diversity and complexity of soundtracks, thirdly, works with high audience acceptance and influence, and fourthly, works that have won domestic and international animation or music awards. Based on this, a total of two Chinese animated films were selected, namely <Big Fish & Begonia> (2016) and <Nezha: Birth of the Demon Child> (2019), and two Korean animated films, namely <Yobi, the Five Tailed Fox> (2007) and <Underdog> (2018).

The Chinese animated films <Big Fish & Begonia> and <Nezha: Birth of the Demon Child> are not only outstanding achievements in visual art, but also effectively convey rich cultural connotations through elaborate musical narratives. <Big Fish & Begonia> is made possible through the use of representative Chinese musical instruments, such as drums, gongs, wind chimes and zither. The use of these instruments not only gives the musical style of <Big Fish & Begonia> a strong characteristic of representative Chinese music, but also helps the film to form a unique cultural identity both visually and aurally, enhancing the emotional depth and cultural connotation of the story. <Nezha: Birth of the Demon Child> uses a lot of percussion and strings with dynamic rhythms to reinforce Nezha's rebellious and heroic qualities. Through their musical narratives, these two films not only spread Chinese culture domestically, but also demonstrated the unique artistic charm and cultural depth of Chinese animation internationally, enhancing cross-cultural exchange and understanding, as shown in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Chinese animated film case introduction

Year	Animation	Box office revenue	Director	Awards
2016	<Big Fish & Begonia>	\$78.5million	Liang Xuan Zhang Chun	The 14th Seoul International Cartoon & Animation Festival (Korea) - Best Technical Award The 15th Budapest International Animated Film Festival-Best Animated Feature Film Award The 17th China Movie Huabiao Award-Outstanding Feature Film Award
2019	<Nezha: Birth of the Demon Child>	\$693 million	Jokelate	The 32th Tokyo International Film Festival Gold Medal Award The 18th China Huabiao Film Awards for Best Genre Film

The Korean animated film <Underdog> has received international recognition and has been screened in several international film festivals. The film showcases the artistic achievement and cultural characteristics of Korean animation, making it a good example of the spread of Korean culture. The soundtrack of <Yobi, the Five Tailed Fox> combines the

tones of traditional Korean instruments with modern musical elements, making it not only an entertaining animation but also a cultural showcase. Through animation, international audiences can be exposed to and learn about Korean mythology, traditional beliefs and aesthetic concepts. As shown in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Korean animation film case introduction

Year	Animation	Box office revenue	Director	Awards
2007	<Yobi, the Five Tailed Fox>	\$2.3 million	Lee Sung-gang	2007 Presidential Award for Animation (Grand Prize) at the Korean Cartoon, Animation, and Character Awards (Grand Prize) 2007 Best animated film voted by the audience at the Lyon Asian Film Festival, France
2018	<Underdog>	\$7 million	Oh Sung-yun Lee Chunbaek	2018 Golden Silk Road Media Awards Best Animated Feature Film 2019 Seoul International Cartoon & Animation Festival Special Award

### 3. Theoretical Background

#### 3.1. The Cultural Elements of Animated Films

Based on the previous research, it is found that the story background and theme setting, soundtrack and sound effects, as well as cultural symbols and symbols in animated films are the key aspects to highlight and convey cultural elements. Together, these elements not only enhance the appeal of the story, but also deepen the transmission of culture.

First, the setting of story background and theme is one of the most direct ways to display culture in animated films. By setting the story in a location with strong cultural characteristics, animated films can transport the audience into a culturally charged environment. Mulan as an example to explore how Chinese animation can express a unique cultural experience by integrating local and global story elements and adding enough exotic cultural factors. [7] Korean animation shows cultural characteristics through animated stories that reflect social changes and the conflict between tradition and modernity. [8]

Second, soundtrack and sound effects play an important role in conveying emotion and enhancing cultural experience in animated films. Using the traditional music and instruments of a particular culture, such as the Erhu of China or the Gayageum of South Korea, can immediately evoke the unique atmosphere and emotions of that culture. The sound design enhances the visual experience, and the rhythm, mode, and melodic style of the music can deeply reflect the characteristics and emotional depth of the culture.

Third, cultural symbols and symbols are complex elements used to deepen cultural transmission and identity in animated

films. These symbols may be specific objects (such as traditional clothing, holiday objects), specific patterns (such as ethnic totems, religious symbols), or habits and rituals. Through these cultural symbols and symbols, animation not only increases the visual and emotional level, but also allows the audience to understand and feel the connotation of culture more deeply. Chinese animation uses the mythical characters Nezha and Sun Wukong to convey specific cultural values. [9] Through careful design and presentation of these aspects, animated films can effectively show and spread culture, making them a bridge of cross-cultural communication and promoting understanding and appreciation between different cultures.

#### 3.2. Music Narrative Function

Music plays a key role in the narrative of film and animation, not only deepening the audience's emotional experience through emotional guidance, but also providing clues about the characters and plot through the enhancement of themes and motivations. Music can regulate the narrative rhythm and control the time perception of the scene, thereby speeding up or emphasizing key moments in the story. In addition, music creates a specific space and cultural atmosphere. Music is also often used as a narrative bridge, smoothly connecting different narrative passages to maintain the flow and continuity of the story. Music is not only a tool to convey emotion, but also an indispensable symbol and metaphor carrier in narrative. The role of music in narrative involves multiple theorists and researchers exploring how music enhances storytelling, emotional expression, and cultural communication. Table 3 shows the main points made by several theorists:

**Table 3.** Music narrative function

Year	Scholar	Music narrative function
2019	Michel Chion	Emphasis is placed on the concept of 'value-added', that is, how music and sound effects increase the perceived value of visual content, making images more expressive and emotionally deep. [10]
1988	Claudia Gorbman	There are seven principles of film music that explain how film music imperceptibly affects the viewer's mood and understanding. Music should generally be 'heard without being noticed,' emphasizing the central role of music in constructing the emotional and psychological environment of a film. [11]
2006	Lerner, N., & Straus, J.	As a cross-cultural communication tool, music plays a key role in storytelling. Music carries symbolic meaning in the film and is closely linked to the theme and emotion of the film through specific musical themes and melodies. [12]
2000	Buhler, J., Flinn, C., & Neumeyer, D. (Eds.).	The music is combined with the film narrative to enhance the coherence of the story by repeating the theme and the structure of the music. Music adds to the narrative level by predicting the upcoming events or reflecting the inner psychological state, making the narrative of the film richer and more fascinating. [13]

#### 3.3. Media Communication

Marshall McLuhan is one of the most influential communication theorists of the 20th century, whose research focuses on the understanding of how media technologies shape society and culture. McLuhan's core ideas include: The Medium is the Message. This is McLuhan's most famous statement, emphasizing that the medium itself, not just the content conveyed by the medium, plays a decisive role in culture and society. According to McLuhan, the form and nature of media influence the way information is received and processed, thereby shaping social structures and cultural perceptions. The 'medium is the message' theory is

particularly important in analyzing the social and cultural role of music as a medium of communication. McLuhan believes that the form and characteristics of the medium itself determine the way of information transmission, which is particularly evident in the evolution of music media. The shift from physical media to digital media has not only changed the access and consumption patterns of music, but also reshaped the way music culture is produced and received, which in turn affects the entire structure of social culture. [14]

McLuhan proposed the concept of a 'global village'. In this global village, the immediate flow and sharing of information reduces the barriers of time and space, deepening human interdependence and interaction. The concept of a global

village mentioned by McLuhan is also reflected in the animated music. Animated music often incorporates elements from different cultures, such as the use of specific ethnic instruments or styles, which not only enriches the animation's global appeal, but also makes music a bridge for cross-cultural understanding and communication. Music as a medium here conveys a cultural message, and its global dissemination and cultural integration reflect McLuhan's description of electronic media.





Based on the above research, this study will explore the cultural transmission of music narration in Korean and Chinese animated films from three parts: the synchronization of animation music and narrative, the role of music in transmitting cultural information, and the expression of music as a cultural symbol and image.

## 4. Comparative Analysis

### 4.1. Synchronicity of Music and Narrative

The music is synchronized with the narrative structure and rhythm in the animation, which can enhance the emotional expression and narrative flow of the story. Music synchronizes with visual elements and dialogue during key plot turning points, emotional climaxes, or thematic displays, helping the audience better understand and feel the cultural characteristics of the story background, deepening the audience's sense of immersion and emotional experience. Table 4 shows the performance of music and narrative synchronization in four animated films.

**Table 4.** A case study of music and narrative synchronization

Year	Animation	Movie scene display	case analysis
2019	<Big Fish & Begonia>		With the birth of the universe and life, the background music gradually increases, and the music synchronizes with the visual effects to enhance the shock and mystery of the scene.
2019	<Nezha: Birth of the Demon Child>		During Nezha's confrontation and battle with Aobing, the tense music not only synchronizes with the blows of each move, but also peaks at the emotional climax.
2007	<Yobi, the Five Tailed Fox>		When Yobi looks in the mirror, the background music uses a gentle and curious melody, and the music reflects Yobi's curiosity and sense of wonder about the new world.
2000	<Underdog>		The dogs explore nature and the unknown, and the music is brisk. This style of music synchronizes with the images of the curious dogs exploring, representing an atmosphere full of fantasy and adventure.

According to the above analysis of animation scenes, background music in Chinese animation films is often used to emphasize specific emotional scenes, such as battles, celebrations or sad scenes, and music is closely synchronized with visual narration to deepen the cultural connotation and emotional depth of the story. Music and narrative synchrony in Korean animation pay more attention to dynamics and rhythm to match the animation rhythm, which is particularly popular in the youth and international markets.

### 4.2. The Role of Music in Conveying Cultural Information

As a form of cultural expression, music often contains rich cultural symbols and information. Music is used in Korean and Chinese animated films to convey specific cultural values, customs, history and social messages. These include the use of traditional Musical Instruments, specific musical styles, and the use of musical narratives to reflect and reinforce cultural themes and identities in the animation. Table 5 shows the performance of four animated films in the role of music in transmitting cultural information.

According to the analysis of the above animation scenes, it

can be seen that the music in Chinese animated films often deeply explores and makes use of China's rich traditional music resources. Traditional Musical Instruments such as pipa, Erhu, suona, and flute are used, which not only add a strong Chinese cultural atmosphere to the animation, but also help convey the Chinese philosophical and spiritual elements of the story. Korean animations often combine modern musical styles with traditional Korean musical elements. For example, the use of traditional Musical Instruments such as Korean drums, guitars, etc. to match modern musical elements to create music that is both modern and without losing Korean traditional colors. This combination aims to strengthen the international appeal of animation while maintaining cultural uniqueness.





### 4.3. Expression of Cultural Symbols and Images

Music is used as an expression tool of cultural symbols and images in animation. Specific melodies, harmonies, or rhythms in music symbolize specific cultural elements or emotions that interact with visual symbols and themes in animation. Music is used in animation not just as a


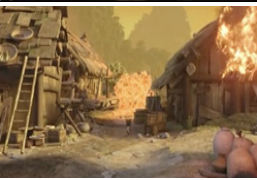

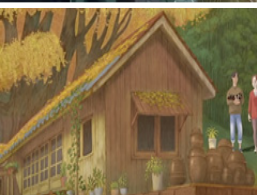
background or supporting role, but as an active narrative and cultural communication tool. Table 6 shows the expression of

musical cultural symbols and images in four animated films.

**Table 5.** A case study of the role of music in transmitting cultural messages

Year	Animation	Movie scene display	case analysis
2019	<Big Fish & Begonia>		The scene music at 40 minutes and 22 seconds uses Beijing Opera. As a treasure of national culture, Beijing Opera endows the film with deeper cultural connotation and enhances the aesthetic value of the film.
2019	<Nezha: Birth of the Demon Child>		The scene of Nezha kicking the shuttlecock uses the pipa, a typical Chinese musical instrument. The use of the pipa not only adds a strong flavor of traditional Chinese culture, but also highlights Nezha's playful and energetic personality.
2007	<Yobi, the Five Tailed Fox>		The Yobi sings and dances with the little monsters in the abandoned amusement park. The background music is Korean music with a sense of time, creating an emotional connection through common nostalgic elements.
2000	<Underdog>		Moqi and my friends came to the residence of a couple and stayed here temporarily. The male host played guitar and sang songs at night. The songs here are the style of Korean folk songs with the characteristics of Korean culture.

**Table 6.** A case study of music culture symbol and image expression

Year	Animation	Movie scene display	case analysis
2019	<Big Fish & Begonia>		As one of the important symbolic elements of the film, the ocarina has appeared many times. As the main instrumental music in the music of the main actor's appearance, the ocarina's graceful melody shapes the image of its pure and kind characters.
2019	<Nezha: Birth of the Demon Child>		Nezha chases a water demon, and the melody uses the harmony of the traditional Chinese pentatonic scale. Pentatonic scale as a musical cultural symbol strengthens the cultural identity and roots in animation.
2007	<Yobi, the Five Tailed Fox>		Geum-ee told Yobi that her dream was to be a comedian and sing a popular Korean song. So that the audience can better feel the emotions and personalities of the characters. Songs have become a window into modern Korean culture.
2000	<Underdog>		In the display of the traditional Hanok in the Korean countryside, the background music adopts a softer and melodious melody, including the male host playing the guitar and singing Korean folk songs, which enhances the cultural atmosphere of the scene.

Chinese and South Korean animated films have their own unique ways and styles in the expression of cultural symbols and images through music, which are mainly due to their different cultural backgrounds and historical traditions. Chinese animation uses traditional Musical Instruments such as the zither and Erhu to emphasize the historical roots and

mystery of the story. Music is often used to reinforce the sense of antiquity and solemnity of the narrative, echoing classical elements in the animation such as traditional symbols such as dragons and phoenixes. In Korean animation, music is used to express and reinforce Korean cultural identity. The use of music to convey the traditional values of Korea and the

changes in modern society is reflected through the choice of lyrics, melodies, and themes related to Korean life.

## 5. Conclusion

In comparing the cultural communication of music narratives in Chinese and Korean animation films, it is found that the music in Chinese animation tends to pay more attention to the historical depth and the reproduction of tradition, emphasising the classical nature of the story and the depth of emotion. Korean animation, on the other hand, pays more attention to the fusion of modernity and tradition, showing a modern interpretation of local culture in the context of globalization. At the same time, the music of Chinese animation is often poetic and symbolic, closely related to Chinese literature and philosophy; while the music of Korean animation may be more direct and modern, reflecting its rapid cultural changes and openness to the outside world. In this way, music becomes an indispensable tool for cultural expression and emotional transmission in the animation of both countries.

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