Inheritance of Local Culture: Localisation of Contemporary Chinese Animated Films

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Abstract
Since 2015, Chinese animatied films frequently used folk tales or traditional visual styles, making them clearly indigenous. However, this trend has weakened in the past one or two years. While the output of domestic animations has gradually declined, the academic community has also begun to discuss the difficulties faced in producing localised animations. This study posits that such discussions often lack the valuable perspective of animated film directors, who actively contribute to the animation industry and are indispensable when deliberating on the production of animated films. To address this, this study employs in-depth interviews as a method of engagement with 19 seasoned Chinese animated film directors and experts, with the aim of understanding their cognition of and attitudes to animation localisation. It offers a fresh outlook on the localisation of animated films and aspires to provide valuable insights for animators at home and abroad.
Keywords: Animation localisation; Local culture; Animated film director; Local animated films; Animated fillm production

1.INTRODUCTION

Animation is a significant medium for cultural communication, playing the role of spreading artistic aesthetics and cultural values. At the end of the 20th century, due to the wave of globalisation, the Chinese local animation market has been severely impacted by the United States and Japan, and at one point fell into a trough. And in the early 21st century, the Chinese animation industry has learned a lot of production experience from those countries. In the interaction of different societies and civilisations, Chinese animated film began to explore its own characteristics and contemporary expression. Recent years have witnessed a resurgence in the Chinese animated film industry, during which time the industry has emphasised localisation.

Since the beginning of the 21st century, China has been committed to preserving its indigenous cultural identity within the global cultural landscape. The Chinese government has initiated measures to promote local animation and high-quality animation projects through entities such as the State Council, the State Administration of Radio Film and Television (SARFT) and the National Film Board. Consequently, original Chinese animations, infused with cultural elements, have multiplied. Chinese local animated film industry has entered a stage of high-quality development, with some excellent works springing up, such as *Nezha: Birth of the Demon Child (2019)*, *Nezha 2 (2025)* and *The Legend of Hei 2 (2025)*.

According to the latest data released by the Intelligence Research Group (2025): "In 2024, the total box office of Chinese animated films reached 6.863 billion yuan, among which local animations accounted for 41.89%." Although the output of local animations in China has made significant progress since 2015, the market potential of Chinese animated films has yet to be fully unleashed. By 2024, the number of imported animations exceeding 100 million yuan has risen to 14, setting a new historical record, while the number of local Chinese animations exceeding 100 million yuan has dropped to 2. This phenomenon reflects the recovery of Hollywood's animation

IPs and the optimization of their distribution strategies, which also exposes the challenges of insufficient local animation production and the extended innovation cycle in China.

Meanwhile, scholars have also noticed this phenomenon and analyzed these local animations from different perspectives. Some scholars hold the view that that although these animation works are full of "local elements", these works often lack the deep embodiment of local aesthetic consciousness. They also point out that the animators usually do not dare to produce the animations with localised foreign themes, and their production of local themes and styles is still relatively narrow, lacking the consciousness of integrating local characteristics into the world aesthetic. Therefore, it is of practical significance to discuss the production strategy of localised animation with animators and relevant experts. Remarkably, the insights of animation directors remain underrepresented in such studies. Therefore, this paper seeks to bridge this gap by conducting in-depth interviews with 19 seasoned Chinese animated films directors and experts. By gaining an understanding of their cognition of animation localisation, this study can offer practical guidance for industry professionals in China and other countries and also provide a fresh theoretical perspective on animation localisation for scholars in the field.

2. BACKGROUND OF ANIMATION LOCALISATION IN CHINA

2.1. The development of Chinese local animation

At the end of the 20th century, under the environment of opening, Chinese animation encountered the impact from various aspects. For example, the American and Japanese animations, have once made the local Chinese film market decline sharply. Various foreign cultural concepts have influenced the lifestyle of Chinese youth in the early twenty-first century through mass media. While marveling at the mature mechanism and stylised way of production in their animated film industry, China has been forced to adapt to the new environment. Regrettably, the goal of learning from other countries is good, but due to blind and superficial practice, the quality of Chinese animation has deteriorated, and 'the local style' in Chinese animation has gradually 'lost' (Gong, 2015: 212). Therefore, Chinese animated films began to adopt localisation strategies:

In the process of Chinese animation film production, the local aesthetics should be in line with international standards and integrated into the development trend of globalisation ... In art and technology, we can learn from the international advanced experience based on showing the local aesthetics, thus realizing the amalgamation of the local culture and global culture (Zhou, 2022: 34).

By 'absorbing' the production experience, technology and industrial system of other regions, combining with local cultural elements, 'modern innovation is carried out to increase the fashion sense of local animation, thus improving the acceptance of localised animations among domestic minors who have already accepted diversified aesthetics and values' (Xiao and Jing, 2021: 50).

In recent years, the Chinese government is increasingly feeling the urgency to build on the local value of 'Chineseness' (Li, 2011: 59). The expression of local culture has become one of the basic demands of Chinese animation production. In 2017, the General Office of the CPC Central Committee and the State Council issued The Opinions on Implementing the Project of Inheriting and Developing High-Quality Traditional Chinese Culture (Xinhua News Agency, 2017), which outlines 'Executing a project to create animations based on Chinese classic folk tales, establishing a television initiative to promote Chinese culture, and producing a range of cultural content, including cartoons, documentaries, and programs that preserve Chinese heritage, fostering audience engagement with these productions.' In the future, the SARFT (2023) will continue to implement these requirements, and it will actively carry out supportive projects for collecting 'Network animations of Chinese classic folklore'.

Correspondingly, some Chinese films have turned to commonly known stories from traditional Chinese culture. By reconstructing classic works with a modern perspective, they intend to build

a Chinese cinematic universe to show Chinese aesthetics. These phenomena also reflect the cultural anxiety of China as a developing country amid the wave of globalisation. Sometimes, 'the inferiority and desire for cultural revitalisation caused by cultural stagnation led to a fretful attitude of film directors' (Song, 2015: 6).

2.2. Literature review of animation localisation in China

As mentioned above, Chinese 'traditional culture' in local animations 'was once discarded and replaced by foreign culture' (Chen, 2017: 58). Therefore, the concept of 'animation localisation' is proposed 'against the phenomenon of the gradual dissolution of national culture under the background of globalisation', aiming at safeguarding the national culture and realizing the development of national culture (Min, 2013: 110).

Within the academic realm of Chinese animation, scholars have exhibited divergent stances on animation localisation. Based on the development history of Chinese animation, some scholars argue that although 'Chinese animation has made progress in technology', it still 'imitates other countries' in terms of story content and artistic expression (Ji, 2020: 99). They highly appreciate classical Chinese animations and believe that it is necessary to further promote the animation localisation. Some scholars recognise the positive significance of animation localisation while they find that Chinese animation localisation is too focused on traditional content. Therefore, they believe that in the process of continuing to promote animation localisation in the future, Chinese animation production should 'embody national identity while drawing insights from successful foreign works' (Peng, 2014: 79-80), 'striking a balance between traditional elements and contemporary culture' (Li, 2010: 54-55). In addition, there are some scholars who argue against animation localisation, contending that 'binding Chinese animation to localisation and nationalisation may compromise its ability to deliver compelling narratives' (Li et al., 2013: 101). As Wu (2015: 61) acknowledges, animation directors should 'promote a hyper-textual exploration of Chinese cultural symbols from an open perspective, advocate for the international and contemporary evolution of national culture'.

There has been much discussion on the topic of animation localisation, but these discussions are often derived from scholars' observation of Chinese animation development instead of the practical experience in animation production. At a time when the craze for localisation in Chinese animation production is gradually cooling down, while understanding the different views of scholars on contemporary localisation production, it is also indispensable to have a dialogue with the animation filmmakers themselves. Therefore, this study interviews 19 contemporary Chinese animation directors and scholars, hoping their extensive experience can not only provide a fresh outlook on corresponding theoretical research, but also provide inspiration for the subsequent production of relevant practitioners.

3. RESEARCH METHODS AND INTERVIEW DESIGN

Animation directors are central to the production of animated films, influencing their narrative, character design, cinematography and sound. Animation directors and their cooperating teams are often responsible for the 'animation production stages', they are in 'similar cultural contexts' and use 'highly localised and region-specific tacit knowledge' to 'create new characters, stories, and images' for animation (Yoon, 2017: 636). Therefore, they are crucial for the quality of localised productions, and the significant expertise in animation production of animation directors and experts would be of great value.

This study used in-depth interviews to explore Chinese animation directors' attitudes towards animation localisation, collecting their creative experience and strategies. According to the purpose of the study, and to ensure the free expression of the interviewed experts, the interview outline was formulated according to the criteria of semi-structured openness. After the draft outline was drawn up, we invited two professors to revise it, and finally determined the interview outline for

this research as follows:

H1. Do you agree with the localisation of animated films? What is the significance of animation localisation?

H2. In your opinion, when creating localised animated films, do directors need to change the original style and features of local culture to adapt to internationalisation?

H3. Please give us some suggestions if we want to produce a localised animated film.

The outline of the interview is mainly including several aspects: the understanding of animation localisation, the interpretation of the expression of animated film localisation, and the experience of localised animated film production, that is, the three different dimensions of understanding, cognition and implementation of animated film localisation.

According to the research purpose, there was a need for the interviewees to still be engaged in works related to animation and to have extensive creative experience. This study conducted semi-structured interviews with 19 experts and scholars (numbered A1–A19; see table 1). Each interview lasted 20–50 minutes, and the interview outline was sent to the interviewees 1 week in advance. The interview recordings were initially compiled into verbatim transcripts by others and then compiled by the researchers according to the recordings and on-site notes. Finally, the verbatim transcripts were sent to the interviewed experts for confirmation.

Table 1: Background Profiles of the Interviewed Experts and Scholars

Present Positions	Seniority (years)	Serial Number	Areas of Expertise
Animation director Chief artistic officer	≥35	A1	Animation production, Comic creation
Animation director	15	A2	Animation production
Animation director	10	A3	Animation production
Full-time professor Animation director	≥35	A4	Animated film production, Animation education
Full-time professor Animation director	≥35	A5	Animation production, Animation theory
Full-time professor Animation director	≥35	A6	Animation production, Animation theory
Full-time associate professor (PhD) Animation director	20	A7	Animation production, Animation theory
Full-time professor (PhD)	30	A8	Film aesthetics, Animation theory
Screenwriter PhD	15	A9	Animation production, Film production, Film theory
Full-time professor (PhD)	30	A10	Creative design, Aesthetics
Animation director	≥35	A11	Animation production, Animation management
Animation director	15	A12	Animation production, Animation management
Full-time professor Animation director	30	A13	Animation production, Animation theory
Full-time associate professor (PhD) Animation director	10	A14	Animation production, Animation theory
Full-time professor (PhD)	30	A15	Animation aesthetics, Animation theory
Full-time professor (PhD)	20	A16	Animation aesthetics, Animation theory
Full-time associate professor (PhD)	15	A17	Animation theory
Full-time professor	30	A18	Animation theory, Film theory
Full-time professor (PhD)	15	A19	Film aesthetics, Film theory

4.ANIMATION DIRECTORS' ATTITUDES TO THE LOCALISATION OF CHINESE ANIMATED FILMS

As mentioned above, in China, the production of localised animation is advocated and encouraged by both the government and general audience. Majority of Chinese scholars are actively discussing the topic of animation localisation and tend to be very positive about it (see fig. 1).
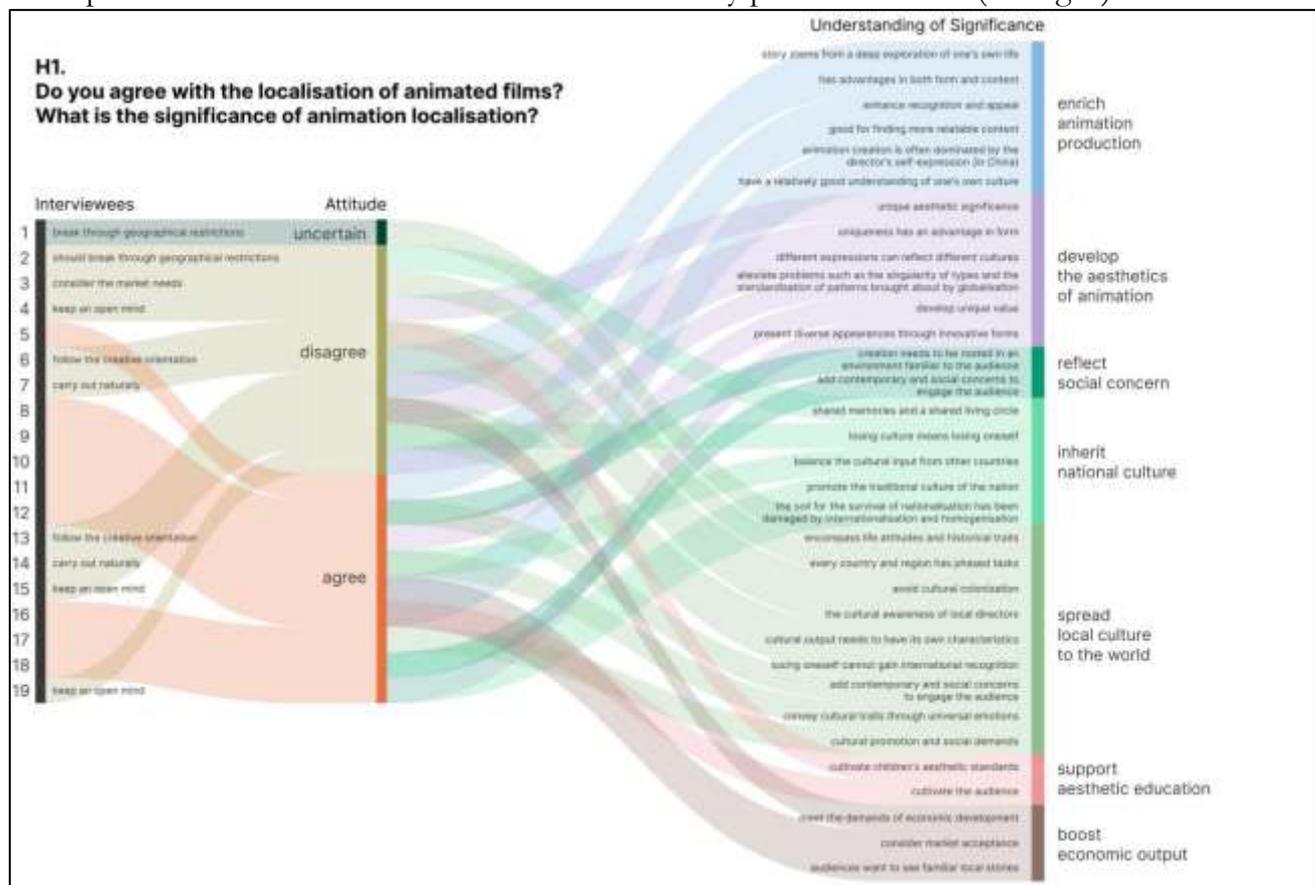
Fig.1: Animation Directors' Attitudes to the Localisation of Chinese Animated Films

As can be seen from Figure 1, only one expert interviewed opposed the localisation of animated films explicitly:

Animation has already been globalised and internationalised and has become a world language. Localised animation is merely a medium of the cultural expression. As for the specific content of what it may express, the same thing in different regions will have different forms of expression. Nowadays, animation production has broken the restriction of regions...There is no need for localisation in the allocation of animation creators (A1).

The production of animated films is highly globalised. Even in homemade animations whose investment companies and production companies are based in China, outsourcing is still very common. Due to the shortage of animators in China, the outsourced tasks encompass not only basic operations like drawing in-between and coloring but also relatively significant ones such as concept painting and production supervision. Under this premise, the localised expression of the animations is bound to be discounted. It is impractical to deliberately demand its localisation.

Among the remaining 18 experts interviewed, nine of them strongly concurred with the localisation of animation while the other nine experts expressed a basic agreement with localisation, and pointed out that this agreement is not absolute or exclusive. They believe that the localisation of animated films is an important issue, but at the same time, it also needs other aspects of thinking and should be viewed with openness. From the perspective of the process, Localisation should be understood as 'an action led by local creators, showing a positive attitude

of local creators to explore local resources and re-create them' (A19). And if localisation is thought to mean 'making content relevant to a certain area that only local people can understand', it is 'narrowing the definition' of localisation (A4). China is a vast country with its language, climate, diet, clothing and so on are different from region to region. With the migration of people, the culture of different regions will influence and mix with each other. Therefore, 'localisation should not be defined in isolation', but should 'be considered in a wider perspective of the Chinese nation' (A15). Some of them agreed that localisation needs to be promoted in specific situations -- localisation only makes sense in the context of globalisation. Localised animations may be easy to express local content and emotion, while the form of animation is really worth thinking about:

> It needs to be considered whether traditional Chinese forms, such as shadow puppetry or ink painting, can well present the required content. In fact, contemporary animation relies heavily on our computer. Creators should use multi-dimensional ways to render animation and should not be limited in technology (A13).

Then, the experts interviewed explained the benefit of localisation in many aspects. Firstly, localisation can enrich animation production and improve the originality of animated films. Animators generally 'have a better understanding of their own culture' (A11). Therefore, they can 'explore the story in their own growth process' (A7), which is easier for 'local audiences' to 'empathize with' (A5), and can maximize the 'cohesion of local audiences' (A19). Meanwhile, animation localisation in different regions is also an expansion of animation aesthetics. Localisation can 'present the unique cultural background' of the region (A14) and help develop 'the unique values of the region' (A9). Even 'when universal emotions are expressed, the form of its expression can also be localised' (A18). This can realize the differentiated competition of animated films on a global scale, and 'alleviate the problems of increasingly single, concentrated and patterned animation production aesthetics' (A19).

When it comes to the homogenisation that globalisation may bring, these experts further explained the significance of animation localisation from the perspective of reflecting social concern, as well as the inheritance and spreading of local culture. The localisation of animated films can convey unique 'national cultural characteristics' (A10), so as to 'protect the traditional culture against homogenization' (A18). In addition, 'market acceptance' must be considered when making animated films (A11). When society is imbued with international cultural products, local residents' desire for 'local culture' will be 'aroused' (A17), so they are 'more inclined to see local stories' (A12). If we lack local cultural products, it is easy to 'forget who we are' (A15) and face 'foreign cultural colonization' (A6).

In addition, some experts also believe that the localisation of animated films can contribute to education and enhance people's abilities to recognize, understand and appreciate aesthetics and the local culture. From the educational perspective, it is very important for animated films to 'make good use of localised symbols', as 'they are too likely to influence children' (A6). Some experts also took into account 'the preference of local audiences for local content' (A12) and believed that the localisation of animated films could 'boost economic development' (A14).

As mentioned above, the interviewed experts generally regard the animation localisation as a strategy to actively cope with the problems brought about by the globalisation and affirm its significance from the aspects of the works themselves, artistic aesthetics, social culture and so on. But they also believe that the strategy should be used with caution. When making animated films, creators should still take the work itself as the threshold. Localisation should be spontaneous rather than deliberate. The adoption of animation localisation strategy does not mean the denial of the globalisation, nor does it point to the pursuit of a pure traditional culture, but emphasizes that under the premise of globalisation, through the efforts of creators, the local characteristics including customs, aesthetics and values are still in the main position and can be expressed in animation.

5. THE BALANCE BETWEEN THE LOCALISATION AND INTERNATIONALISATION

The strong dominance of other countries in the field of animated films has stimulated the localisation strategy of animated films in relatively disadvantaged regions around the world. For contemporary Chinese animation creators, how to 'establish and maintain the subjectivity of Chinese culture in this complex and changeable process of cultural blending' is very important (Gong and Qin, 2020: 290). Meanwhile, in practical application, there also exist such problems as 'over-emphasizing national culture, over-respecting ancient themes, over-focusing on domestic market, ignoring globalisation and international market' (Xiao and Jing, 2021). Therefore, this article uses H2 to further explore the directors' views on this controversial issue.

We regrouped the experts based on their statements about H1, and then classified them according to the different tendencies they showed when answering H2. Further, their responses were divided into the following four categories: need to change; don't need to change; should change moderately; and should view differently (see fig. 2).
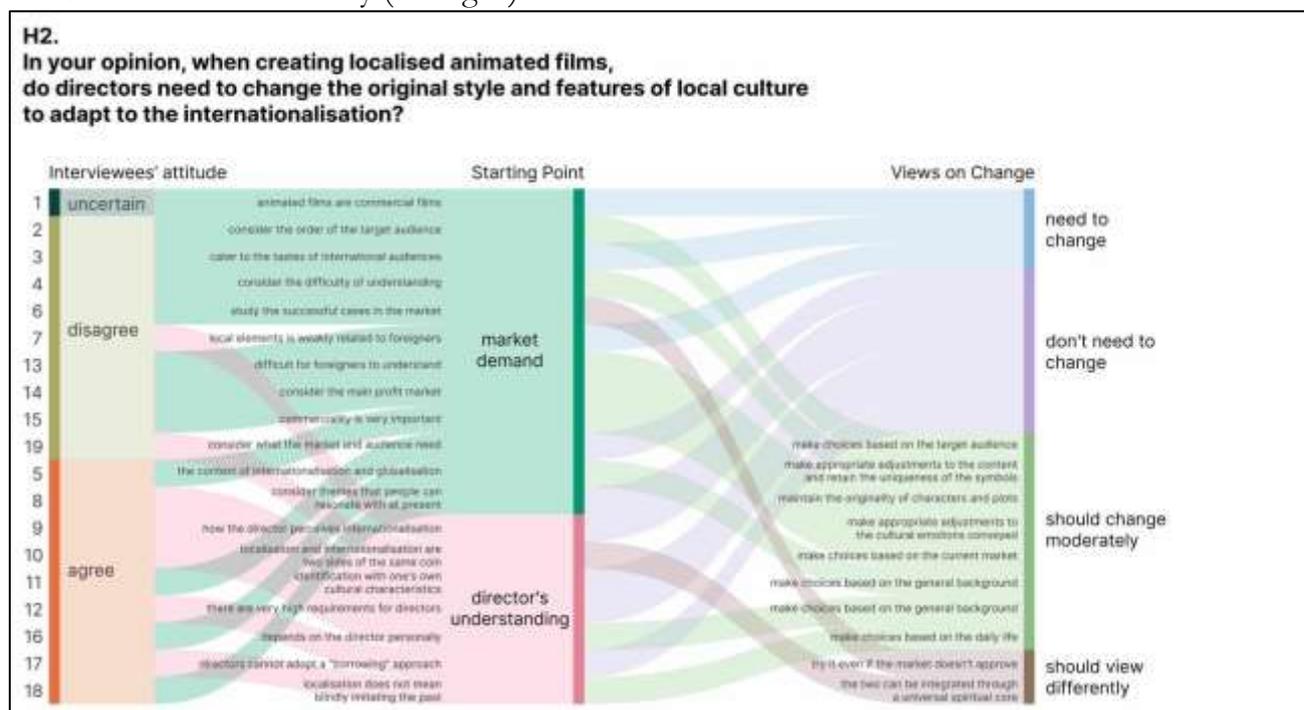
Fig. 2: Animation Directors' Views Towards the Localisation and Internationalisation

As can be seen from Figure 2, most experts held the view that animated films, as commercial works, should be created based on audiences' preferences. Among them, three interviewed experts (A1, A3, A13) believed that the current Chinese animated films should be produced in an 'international' way. In order to 'achieve higher profits', commercial films need to appeal to as many audiences as possible, so the 'localisation strategy is not suitable for commercial animated films' (A1). On the contrary, two interviewed experts who also took market demand into account believed that the animation localisation should be adhered to. They believed that imitating others will only become 'pseudo-localisation' (A11).

In addition, many of the interviewed experts also shared their understanding of the connotation and significance of animation localisation as directors and further expressed their attitudes towards H2. Among them, many experts believed that the local characteristics in animated films represent 'the identification of one's own cultural characteristics in response to foreign cultures in the wave of globalisation', and the animation localisation is 'universally occurring everywhere' (A8). For animators, discussing international topics is 'costly and difficult', and 'the more profound the local story, the more capable it is of touching the audience' (A9).

Compared with the above viewpoints, the more mainstream view is to make moderate international changes. Nearly half of the experts surveyed believe that localised animated films can adapt to internationalisation through moderate changes. 'Localised content is difficult to gain recognition from international audiences', so appropriate adjustments are necessary (A14). Animators can use 'common cinematographic grammars' while 'presenting local characteristics by using local elements' like 'dialects' (A2).

Unlike the experts who have clearly expressed their views, two of the experts interviewed believed that internationalisation and localisation are just two aspects of artistic creation. A6 believed that if directors want to 'imitate the ancient style', then 'the original cultural style should be maintained' and the imitation can also be done very well. It is also possible to appropriately integrate some international elements as we can see that most of the successful cases of localisation in the current market 'usually combine tradition with modernity timely' (A6). A19 believed that localisation is about strengthening individuality, while internationalisation is about deconstructing it, 'the greatest gap in integrating the two lies in the eternal and universal spiritual core.'

In short, among these animation experts, some do think that the existing local Chinese animated films have the problem of focusing too much on traditional culture, and that Chinese animated films need to break this limitation and go international. But most of them still insist on the animation localisation and are ambiguous about the extent to which they will change in response to internationalisation. Some people are not even in favor of changing in line with internationalisation. This may be because respondents make judgments based on their own practical experience or the existing cases in the market. Chinese animated films have not been particularly successful overseas, so directors are very conservative about the issue of overseas market, after all, for local commercial films, the safest approach is to try to meet the needs of the local market.

This has also led many animation directors to develop a "path dependence" when creating localised animated films, resulting in the emergence of many "lazy" works that are regarded by animation scholars as "lacking in-depth exploration of local culture". In fact, based on the box office changes of local animated films in recent years, it is not difficult to find that local audiences' demands for lcoal animated films are constantly rising. Some works that are disguised as traditional culture have become increasingly difficult to gain the recognition of audiences. Therefore, animation directors still need to think more about how to reflect local characteristics in their works during the production.

6. PRACTICAL EXPERIENCE OF CHINESE ANIMATED FILMS' LOCALISED PRODUCTION

In the previous discussion, we found that localisation is a widely recognised strategy for making animated films in China. Next, we will further explore how to use this strategy to make animated films. Based on the results of the interview, we have summarized and sorted out the key points of the experts' responses and concluded several suggestions given by the experts (see fig. 3).
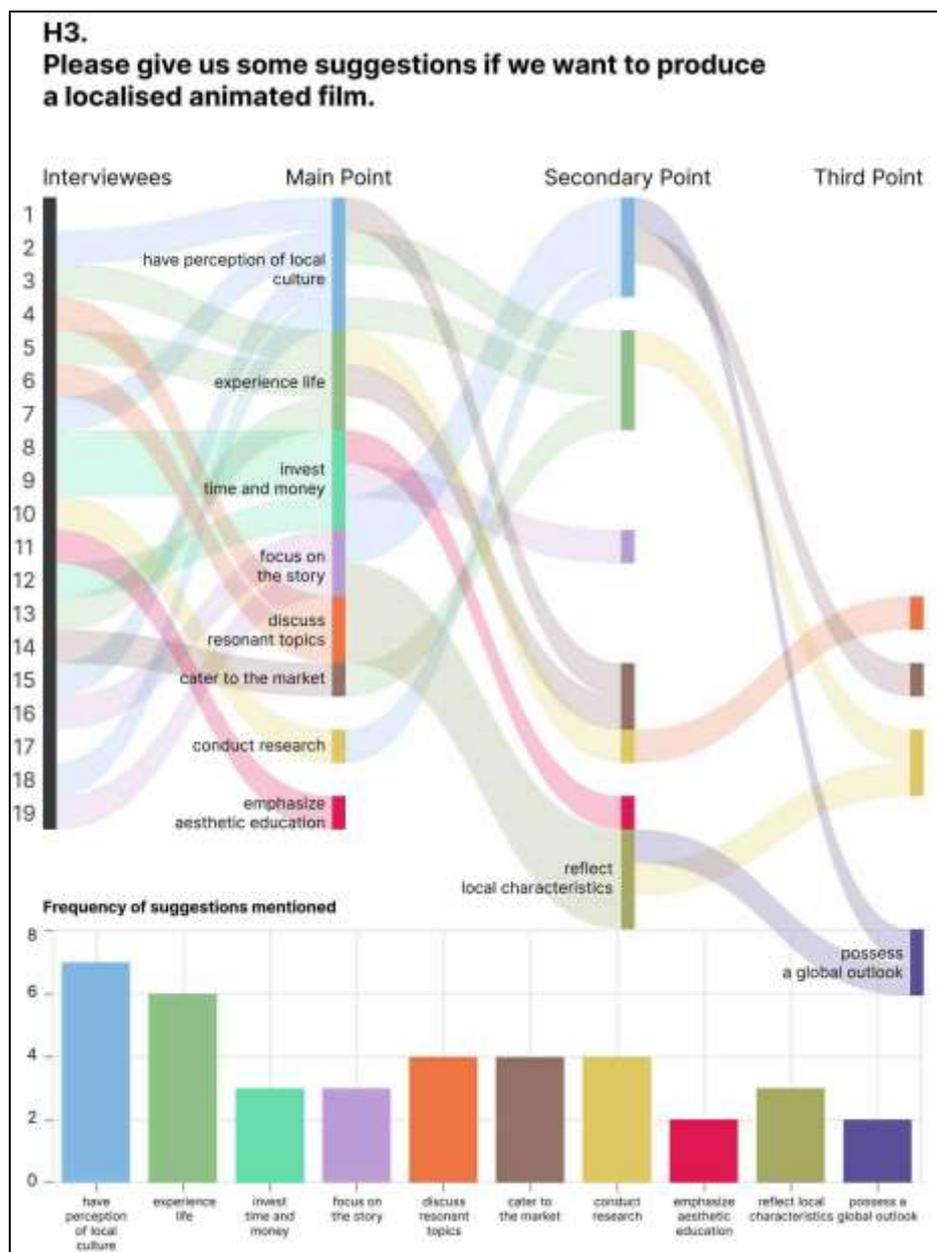
Fig. 3. Animation Directors'Suggestions on the Localised Production of Animated Films

As shown in Figure 3, in the view of experts, the most important thing for making localised animated films is that the directors need to have perception and love for the local culture. Good localised works should arouse people' s interest in local culture, it demands the animators to 'think deeply about what factors will give animations local characteristics' (A10). Creators should 'have genuine love and reverence for their own national culture', otherwise, the localised works they create will 'only have an appearance of cultural symbols but lack actual cultural connotations' (A15). The animators should 'consciously summarise the traditions of the local aesthetic', 'embrace the nationalised and stylised packaging of local resources' and eventually form a recognisable local style (A19). In conclusion, the core problem of animation localisation lies in the creator's consciousness of protecting local culture and intention of spreading it. The interviewees repeatedly stressed that animation creators should sincerely love their own local culture and seek inspiration from their actual life experiences. Creation should avoid being intentional. For those animators who have a delicate sense of local life, localisation is a natural behavior, and deliberate localisation would become a pander to stereotypes.

Apart from the cultural self-consciousness, the creator's observation and experience of life are equally important. The theme of localised animations could be 'derived from the life experience

of the animator' (A3). This strategy has been widely used in Chinese localised animated films in recent years. Maoning Liu, a Chinese animator, uses his childhood as a source of inspiration to create animations depicting life in his hometown. In his works, 'the scenes of rural life in northern China have struck a chord with many northern Chinese audiences', and the discussions about birth, age, illness and death in his works have also aroused great emotion (Beijing News, 2023).

As can be seen from Figure 3, conducting thorough research and catering to market demands are also very important, and both are in line with the perspective that creators need to observe life. A2 believed that it is a good idea to look for inspiration from daily life, to view on 'life, family and friendship, and on people' s experiences of making decisions'. And if the content of a creator is not highly related to their own life, then the animator should seriously accumulate new experiences, for instance, 'conduct more field investigations' (A4). The localisation of animated films required creators' true feelings, its vocabulary should be derived from the observation of these anthropological views:

The content of animations requires creators to dig deep into life, to observe the people and things around them. Only by exploring the life with which they are familiar and bringing their true feelings into their works can creators arouse the emotions of others (A7).

It's worth adding that, works cannot be separated from life and should be related to people' s 'contemporary' lives (A18). Animation should 'recount the living situations and social backgrounds of contemporary people' (A14). Therefore, the localisation of animation is often highly related to modern life and modernisation. In New Gods: Nezha Reborn (2021), we can see that director Ji Zhao chooses to look at traditional Chinese culture from a younger perspective. Instead of setting the story in an ancient time and space, Nezha is reborn in the modern world. And in Chang An (2023), the directors did not make its theme around the talented poets of this period, such as Li Bai or Du Fu, but with the poet Gao Shi as the protagonist, because they thought that 'Gao Shi is very similar to us ordinary people who have been pursuing their ideals. Through numerous efforts, he eventually succeeded. Thus, we considered him to be a character easily relatable for the audience' (Zhou, 2023).

Many experts interviewed agreed that in the early stage of animation production, animation creators need to clarify the positioning and orientation of their works, making accurate target market positioning. Animators need to think about whether their works are mainly 'targeting the domestic or the international market' and then consider the resonance points of different audiences (A2, A3, A4, A7, A10, A15). For the audience to gain a sense of identity, animations need to 'resonate with them' (A3, A4, A6). To localise animations, 'the ethnic group to which the animation relates' and 'the audience group to which it is aimed' should first be recognised (A14). Only after the positioning of the target group, can the animated films be better made. For animated films that use localisation strategies, their target audience is often local audiences. Therefore, superficial formal expression of local culture may no longer be enough to attract audiences to the cinema. In terms of the theme and script, animators also need to think about how to carry out localised narration.

In addition, many of the interviewed experts talked about the selection of themes and the creation of stories. Designers need to deeply analyse what kind of themes will be 'more acceptable and common to the audience' (A7). And script is also important, if the animation script is boring, then even if the visuals are good, the work will still be useless:

In planning the plot, the most important thing is to predict audiences' attention. If designers can create a sense of immersion, they can make audiences ignore any technical shortcomings. If designers want to create complete and engaging stories, they must increase their investment in the early stages, such as in the scripts (A9).

Animation production should 'put the story first', and designers often need a good creative point (A16). Nowadays, the animators often tap into traditional themes and local resources such as traditional myths, classical literature, folklore and other classic intellectual property because these

materials can 'produce recognisable images and stories' (A18, A19). However, some highly used traditional Chinese stories have gradually caused the audience's aesthetic fatigue. In the future, animation directors may try to discover contemporary stories as well as stories from other regions and localise them.

Besides, the audiovisual language and technologies of animation are also crucial. Localised animations need to integrate a variety of elements so as to fully reflect local characteristics. Some interviewees pointed out that if the animation is to be localised, then the audiovisual language of animation should 'conform to the characteristics of the era and the region' (A4). For example, in Scissors Seven (2018), the director used Cantonese elements, such as Cantonese food, Cantonese geographical environment, local dress, local dialect and so on, to 'highlight its individuality and reflect local characteristics and culture' (Fusong, 2021: 4). China is rich in local cultural resources, and the use of elements with cultural connotations can guide Chinese audiences to truly feel their own consciousness of local culture. However, the application of local elements should be appropriate, not just 'the imitation and reproduction of traditional local culture' (A6). In some popular local animated films, we can find that directors not only rely on the setting of recognisable traditional elements to reflect the localisation, but also carry out modern innovation. In New Gods: Nezha Reborn (2021), Zhao derived a style of "oriental-punk" based on the concept of "cyberpunk", in which he 'combined the cultural elements of ArtDeco with traditional images of the Old Shanghai' (Thepaper, 2021).

Some of the interviewed experts also discussed the issue of talent cultivation from a longer-term perspective. A8 and A11 all mentioned the problem of student cultivation, arguing that animators often have 'the responsibility to think about education'. Animation directors should be able to guide young people to consciously feel the local culture and cultivate their imagination and creativity. Some domestic media and audiences have now 'formed self-cultural blindness due to the influence of foreign cultures' (A11). Localised animation can help them fill this blindness. This kind of statement coincides with the points raised by the Chinese scholar Deng (2012: 116).

It's worth noting that 'it's easy to get lost' when we talk about what makes the film more local (A10). Sometimes we judge by its form, but other times it's the content or values that are familiar to local audiences. Localisation cannot be limited to traditional things, instead they need to carry out modern innovation. It is often very difficult to 'reproduce classics and imitate ancient' (A6). In contrast, it is 'easier' to 'make the form consists of traditional features' (A2) while expressing a issue of globalisation. Animation localisation is important for countries and regions 'with a certain scale of film production' (A9). In the field of animated films, China's international image is not as strong as that of the United States, Japan and other countries, so 'it is necessary to find themes that can rouse the international resonance, only then could we consider using local characteristics to present this point' (A10).

7.DISCUSSION

As mentioned above, within the academic realm of Chinese animation, although there are views against animation localisation, it is still the mainstream to support animation localisation. H1 was designed to explore the Chinese animation directors' attitudes to animation localisation, aiming to understand animators' views on animation localisation. Most of the experts interviewed agreed that it is necessary to adopt the strategy of localisation to cope with the animation globalisation, while one scholar argued that we should adopt a natural attitude, embracing this indispensable and ongoing trend of globalisation. Sometimes the media's promotion of the 'Chineseness' in Chinese animation makes some people misconcept that localisation refers to a purely local or traditional transformation of commercial animation. However, through H2, we can find that for these animators, the use of localisation strategies in animated films does not mean rejecting global

culture. Finally, as a supplement to the existing theoretical researches, H3 was to summarise the practical experience and strategies of animation localisation according to the interview results.

Nearly half of those interviewed had a clear resistance to the cultural homogeneity brought about by the wave of globalisation. They believed that animation localisation in China is conducive not only to the 'diversity of global culture and art' but also to the 'reproduction and sustainable development of Chinese local resources' (Ji, 2020: 99). These points echoed the views on localisation of Mei (2022: 1012), who viewed localisation as an important means for Chinese animation to 'develop and inherit the national culture'. Perhaps in the future, localisation will be one of the main strategies of Chinese animated films for a long time. After all, it is 'a good direction for the development of domestic animation and an experience worthy of promotion' (Fusong, 2021).

It is noteworthy that about half of the experts believed that the localisation of animated films should be viewed more rationally. Firstly, it is widely believed that animation creation should take the international market into consideration. Secondly, when facing local audiences, such creations should not blindly restore what is traditional. These two issues are also reflected in the relevant discussions among the animation scholars. In fact, many animators are rather lazy when making localised animations. For commercial purposes, in order to obtain high box office in the local market, they cater to some audiences' favour for local elements. They 'neither have in-depth thinking about traditional culture nor the contemporary life' (Zhou, 2022: 33), so that many works with superficial cultural appearance are produced. If animators are going to make localised animated films in the future, they could not only 'explore local stories' (Lu, 2021: 105), but also consider 'extracting overseas material for localisation' (Xiao and Jing, 2021: 54). They should be 'multidimensional and open' and consider the audience's aesthetic taste and pay attention to 'the core of cultural spirits' (Li, 2010: 52-55).

The majority of those interviewed believed the relationship between localisation and globalisation to not be confrontational but mutually reinforcing and interwoven. As Liu, Lei and Li (2023) pointed out that 'cultural localisation is a means of cultural globalisation, and cultural globalisation is the ultimate goal of cultural localisation', which also makes sense in the field of animation. This reflects the glocalisation perspective of the experts interviewed, who generally believed that animation glocalisation can balance local and global characteristics and be consumed across borders while also meeting the needs of local audience members (Jang and Song, 2017: 179). The experts also pointed out that localised animations that are successful in the market often combine traditions with the contemporary age, as well as locality and internationality. And through the glocalisation of animated films, Chinese animators can 'adapt to a changing and much more diversified world of animation in their pursuit of artistic and commercial success' (Du: 2019).

Most interviewees believed that the local culture can be adapted internationally according to the actual situation in the work. The respondents who opposed localisation or chose to treat it dialectically in the first research question were more willing to create globalised animations, while those who positively agreed with the localisation of animation attached more importance to the uniqueness of the local culture. The controversy also persists in the academic realm. Some scholars have argued globalisation to be 'the cultural domination of the West' (Hirst and Thompson, 2015: 31), that the flow of cultural products dominated by America and Western Europe cannot properly present the stories of other cultures (Banh, 2020: 147; Ding, 2017: 46-47); thus, China needs animated films that can preserve and promote its local culture. Nevertheless, other scholars have stated that 'the absence of a singularly identifiable geographical anchor does not mean the absence of cultural identity or flavour' and the global aesthetic can also be used to express local issues (Musa, 2022: 282).

This study sorted out several key points for localised animation creation. Animated films should be able to clearly locate their audiences and then formulate the theme and content according to the market positioning (Banh, 2020: 157). The localisation of audiovisual elements should be

properly deployed according to the actual needs of an animated film (Onuzulike, 2014: 287; Rao, 2010: 1). The use of local elements cannot simply be 'imitated' and 'reproduced' (Li, 2010: 53; Peng, 2014: 80); rather, how to transform traditional elements into modernity should be what animation creators consider in their creation. In recent Chinese localised animated films, there still exists the phenomenon of 'being dominated by Western values', and Chinese cultural symbols are usually just formal vassals (Xia, 2017: 21). Traditional culture is usually only visually proven in animated films (Chen, 2017: 181). Therefore, animation directors who intend to create localised works should think about what gives their films local characteristics.

The default position of most of the interviewees was that local audiences prefer to see localised works, and they pointed out that Chinese animation therefore needs localisation. This study suggests that this logical chain remains to be investigated. Only one of the experts interviewed, A11, stated that due to the impact of foreign culture and the fact that contemporary young people have formed an incomplete understanding of local culture, it is difficult to make a particularly local work if it is to cater to the current market. Chen and Liu (2023: 135) pointed out that contemporary audiences do not necessarily identify with the 'Chinese culture presented in films' but are more likely to empathise with the 'personal emotions and issues' presented in films. Whyke et al. (2019: 165) also pointed out that the sub-cultural elements used in Chinese animated films appeal to 'numerous' young Chinese audiences. This study suggests that animation localisation needs to be based on more segmented audiences' preferences. For directors, the difficulty in animation localisation may not lie in how to describe the collective past but in how to understand and describe local life in the present. Another problem is the over-consumption of local cultural features that cater to the stereotype of people from other regions. Although this effectively attracts audiences from other regions, 'it makes local audiences feel resistant' (Chen and Liu, 2021: 135). This phenomenon requires Chinese animation directors to be alert when balancing local elements and international elements reasonably in their creative practice, and they should not be too utilitarian for the sake of publicity.

In addition, the experts talked about aesthetic education and personnel training and also put forward new requirements for animation practitioners. They believed the problem of creation to also be the problem of education, which might contain two aspects, the first being how to train a new generation of students to create attractive stories and the second being how to guide contemporary audiences into understanding the local culture. To answer this question, we need to call not only on the efforts of animation directors but also the support of national policies. The development of technology is taking place very quickly, while the cultivation of creative talent is a long process.

8. CONCLUSIONS

In this research, we find that Chinese animation directors commonly agree that the localisation of animated films is crucial to upholding local culture, fostering national cultural education and preserving artistic diversity. Therefore, localisation may still be the direction of Chinese animation development for a long time into the future. Based on interviews, this study summarised the practical points of animation localisation, aiming to help animation practitioners who intend to create localised animations. This study has responded to relevant research in the field of animation localisation through interviews with animation practitioners. However, it lacks quantitative analysis and also lacks further verification from other perspectives. The problems of animation industry development and animation subject education mentioned by experts in the interviews also need to be further discussed in future research.

Declarations
Conflict of Interest: The Authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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