

Exploring the Pedagogical Integration of Chinese Hanfu Artistic Language in Cartoon Character Design Education: A Case Study in Guangzhou College of Commerce

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Abstract: In response to the growing importance of connecting traditional Chinese culture with art and design education in Chinese colleges and universities, this paper proposes a pedagogical approach that explores the application of the artistic language of Hanfu in cartoon character design courses. The study aims to investigate the potential value of integrating these two domains and to establish a bridge between traditional Chinese culture and contemporary art and design education. A specialized course, titled "cartoon characters in Chinese Hanfu Clothing," was designed and implemented at the School of Art and Design in Guangzhou College of Commerce to exemplify this approach. Through the successful execution of this course, the feasibility of its construction model is confirmed, and valuable insights are provided for future development in this interdisciplinary field. This research contributes to the advancement of innovative teaching methodologies that enrich art and design education by incorporating elements of traditional Chinese culture, fostering a deeper appreciation of artistic diversity among students.

Keywords: Chinese Hanfu, University curriculum, Cartoon character design, Art design education

1. Introduction

Hanfu, a traditional form of clothing originating from ancient China, encapsulates the essence of Chinese civilization with its elegance, nobility, and cultural heritage. Characterized by flowing sleeves, intricate patterns, exquisite embroidery, and loose-fitting attire, Hanfu's style and design have evolved, reflecting variations based on gender, social status, and historical periods^[1]. Serving as a symbolic link between attire and China's rich history, Hanfu embodies the nation's identity, while each epoch's distinct Hanfu designs articulate a unique artistic language relevant to its era.

China's progressive cultural openness has fostered increased cultural inclusiveness among its populace, resulting in a burgeoning exchange in artistic endeavors. In response, Chinese colleges and universities have embraced an integration of culture and art, driven by a growing demand for diversity in the market. Consequently, the education sector has adopted a positive and open stance, emphasizing the cultivation of students' professionalism and skills in the art and design domain, while also encouraging the infusion of traditional Chinese culture into curricula.

Hanfu, as a conduit for the outward expression of traditional Chinese culture, presents a compelling opportunity to enrich design education and prompts students to grasp and re-imagine the artistic language inherent in traditional Chinese Hanfu. We can see the form of Chinese Hanfu in the Tang Dynasty from Figure 1, which was painted by Zhou Fang, a painter of the Tang Dynasty, as "The Flower Hairpin Ladies". Figure 2 is a cartoon character design of "The Flower Hairpin Ladies" uploaded by a Chinese illustrator, Yi Zhi Ye Ju, on the site ZCOOL. This integration not only enhances the world's understanding of Chinese culture but also fosters a meaningful bridge between the heritage of the past and the dynamic art and design education in contemporary academic settings.

In light of these considerations, this paper explores the pedagogical application of Hanfu's artistic language within cartoon character design courses. By designing a course titled "cartoon characters in Chinese Hanfu Clothing" and implementing it in the School of Art Design at Guangzhou College of Commerce, this study aims to ascertain the value of integrating Hanfu artistry and cartoon character

design in higher education, forging a deeper connection between traditional Chinese culture and modern artistic expressions. Through critical analysis and assessment, this research seeks to validate the feasibility of the proposed course construction model while illuminating valuable insights for advancing art and design education in culturally enriched contexts.



Figure 1: The Flower Hairpin Ladies Painted by Zhou Fang.



Figure 2: Cartoon character of "The Flower Hairpin Ladies" drawn by Yi Zhi Ye Ju.

2. The Current State of Teaching Cartoon Character Design Courses

2.1. Integration with Limited Thematic Depth



Figure 3: The cases wearing Hanfu in the "Cartoon IP Era".

The selection of professional textbooks plays a pivotal role in shaping the content of cartoon character design courses. Presently, most courses adopt an embedded approach, wherein The People's Posts and Telecommunications Press's "Cartoon IP Era" serves as a prominent example [2]. While this textbook showcases numerous exemplary cartoon character design cases from both domestic and international markets, it primarily focuses on design skills and comprehensive knowledge, proving particularly beneficial for novices. However, cases featuring the fusion of Chinese dress and cartoon character design,

such as ThinkPad's mascot "Bai Bian Xiao Hei," Qianlong Financial's mascot "Duo Duo," and personal IP "Yuan Qi Duck" (see Figure 3), lack substantive exploration of the underlying artistic language. Consequently, these embedded courses remain in a nascent stage with regard to their knowledge structure, hampering students' ability to achieve a deeper understanding of the subject matter. Furthermore, the absence of specialized courses dedicated to Hanfu's artistic language results in students' limited awareness, confining their grasp of the concept to surface-level notions.

2.2. Time Constraints Impacting Depth of Learning

The cartoon character design course at Guangzhou College of Commerce's School of Art Design is scheduled during the 5th semester of the undergraduate degree, amounting to a total of 32 class hours. Each segment of the course, including design theory, main image, expression extension, action extension, costume extension, scene extension, auxiliary graphics, auxiliary image, and cartoon story, receives a mere 4 hours of instruction. Consequently, the overall course duration falls short, leaving insufficient teaching time for each subject. Within the context of costume extension, the teaching of Hanfu's art language faces significant limitations and can only be introduced in a rudimentary manner. The allocation of class time significantly influences students' knowledge acquisition within the classroom setting^[3]. As a result, undergraduates have limited opportunities to explore the intricacies of Hanfu's art language within the domain of cartoon character design.

2.3. Pedagogical Approaches Lacking Complexity

The traditional teaching of cartoon character design predominantly consists of case appreciation and design practice, typically spanning 2-3 hours. Through case appreciation, students gain insight into the historical evolution of cartoon character design and its diverse styles across different periods. Subsequent lessons guide students in combining design theory with practical application, fostering their proficiency in cartoon character design expression techniques and encouraging creative endeavors in the third lesson. This approach nurtures students' abilities in image interpretation, artistic expression, aesthetic judgment, creative practice, and cultural understanding. However, when it comes to the artistic language related to clothing, most emphasis is placed on appreciation sessions, with only a limited number of institutions offering practical courses. Consequently, the current curriculum in colleges and universities lacks adequate attention to the extension of clothing, thereby restricting the depth of teaching related to the artistic language of Hanfu.

3. Course Design Approach

3.1. Establishing a Robust Communication Bridge between Hanfu and Cartoon Character Design

The integration of Hanfu art language and cartoon character design calls for the establishment of a comprehensive communication bridge, centered around a compelling "big idea." China's art discipline emphasizes five key competencies: image interpretation, artistic expression, aesthetic judgment, creative practice, and cultural understanding. The "big idea" represents the core knowledge, ideas, and values that underpin the essence of this discipline, connecting fragmented knowledge within the curriculum^[4]. By incorporating the "big idea" into instructional programs across various disciplines, students can develop a deeper understanding and retention of knowledge over the long term^[5]. Multiple "big ideas" collectively form a curricular framework that facilitates comprehensive coverage of various disciplines, encompassing both social issues such as intangible cultural heritage inheritance and innovation and disciplinary concepts like the influence of humanistic ideas on art and design, ideological change, and technological innovation.

Within the realm of teaching, the concept of the discipline serves as an entry point to encourage students to explore the artistic language of Hanfu. This approach aids in cultivating a profound comprehension of the design relationship between Hanfu and cartoon characters, fostering key abilities, and providing students with valuable educational experiences for applying and innovating Hanfu's artistic language.

3.2. Building a Bridge: Integrating the Artistic Language of Hanfu with Contemporary Design Techniques

Effectively integrating Hanfu art language and cartoon character design necessitates the creation of a

bridge that embodies both mobility and practicality [6]. Mobility refers to the interconnectedness of Hanfu's artistic language and cartoon character design, while practicality implies that this bridge can be readily applied in the teaching of cartoon character design courses across most colleges and universities [7].

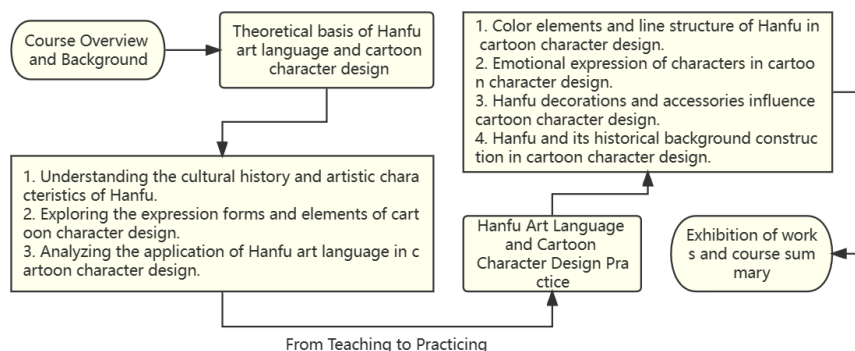
Constructing this bridge entails three crucial steps: Firstly, introducing the history, cultural significance, and artistic elements of Hanfu to enable students to grasp the influence of Hanfu art language on cartoon character design. Secondly, exploring the convergence of Hanfu art language and cartoon character design and analyzing methods to seamlessly integrate Hanfu elements into cartoon character design. This can be exemplified through case studies, inspiring students, and demonstrating the realm of possibilities. Finally, integrating the artistic language of Hanfu with contemporary design techniques, introducing modern techniques and trends relevant to cartoon character design. Emphasis is placed on incorporating traditional elements into modern aesthetics, encouraging students to explore innovative approaches that maintain contemporary aesthetic appeal [8].

Throughout the course implementation, teachers engage in researching and familiarizing themselves with Hanfu, setting learning objectives, designing the curriculum, selecting appropriate teaching methods and resources, and developing effective assessment strategies. From the student perspective, the course involves learning theoretical foundations, engaging in hands-on practice, collaborative learning, and completing project assignments. These strategies culminate in the effective integration of Hanfu's artistic language and cartoon character design, creating a seamless connection between traditional culture and contemporary design practices.

3.3. Strategies for Constructing the Curriculum System

Within the domain of art and design, problem-solving and inquiry-based learning constitute key competencies. Students harness art design to address learning, life, and work-related challenges by creating problematic situations, observing, collecting materials, conceptualizing ideas, and exploring various expressions. The current education reform prioritizes core literacy across educational stages, with a focus on enhancing students' practical abilities and understanding of social issues. Drawing from the standards and "big ideas" of the Art Design College at Guangzhou College of Commerce, this paper proposes a comprehensive flow chart for constructing the Hanfu art language and cartoon character design course, as presented in Table 1. The course objectives and core qualities center around cross-cultural education, integrating Hanfu into cartoon character design, fostering an appreciation of Chinese culture, and promoting cross-cultural exchanges. Additionally, the course targets both theory and design skills, cultivating creativity and performance ability, encompassing the value of cross-disciplinary learning, and expanding students' knowledge base. Moreover, it accentuates the importance of traditional cultural inheritance and innovation, thereby encouraging the application of the Hanfu art language in modern design practices.

Table 1: The mindset for designing this course.



4. Course Practices

4.1. Course Theme: Cartoon Characters in Chinese Clothing

The teaching intervention conducted at the School of Art Design, Guangzhou College of Commerce,

focused on the Visual Communication Design 3 class of 2020, comprising 44 students pursuing a degree in Visual Communication Design. These students had already completed fundamental art and design courses during their freshman and sophomore years, familiarizing them with design principles, techniques, and digital tools like Photoshop, Illustrator, InDesign, and Procreate. Additionally, their exposure to traditional Chinese culture and art varied due to elective courses and extracurricular reading. This course was strategically positioned in the middle of their academic curriculum, ensuring that students possessed a solid foundation in design theory, main image design, and expressive extension. Given the limited overall class time, this course thoughtfully combined lessons on movement extension and costume extension, spanning a total of 6 hours.

4.2. Teaching Objectives

Centered on the artistic language of Hanfu, the primary concept of this course revolves around "utilizing Hanfu's artistic language for cartoon character design." The key teaching objectives include fostering students' ability to independently create cartoon characters featuring Hanfu attire, with an emphasis on the significance of symbols in artistic expression. By encouraging students to employ self-created symbols to convey emotions, the course aims to deepen their understanding of traditional Chinese culture. Moreover, it seeks to enhance students' appreciation and comprehension of traditional Chinese culture within the context of art and design, while stimulating their creativity and innovative thinking to seamlessly integrate Hanfu's artistic language into modern cartoon character design. An additional objective is to improve students' proficiency in cartoon character design and potentially introduce new artistic techniques unique to Hanfu art.

4.3. Focuses and Difficulties in Teaching

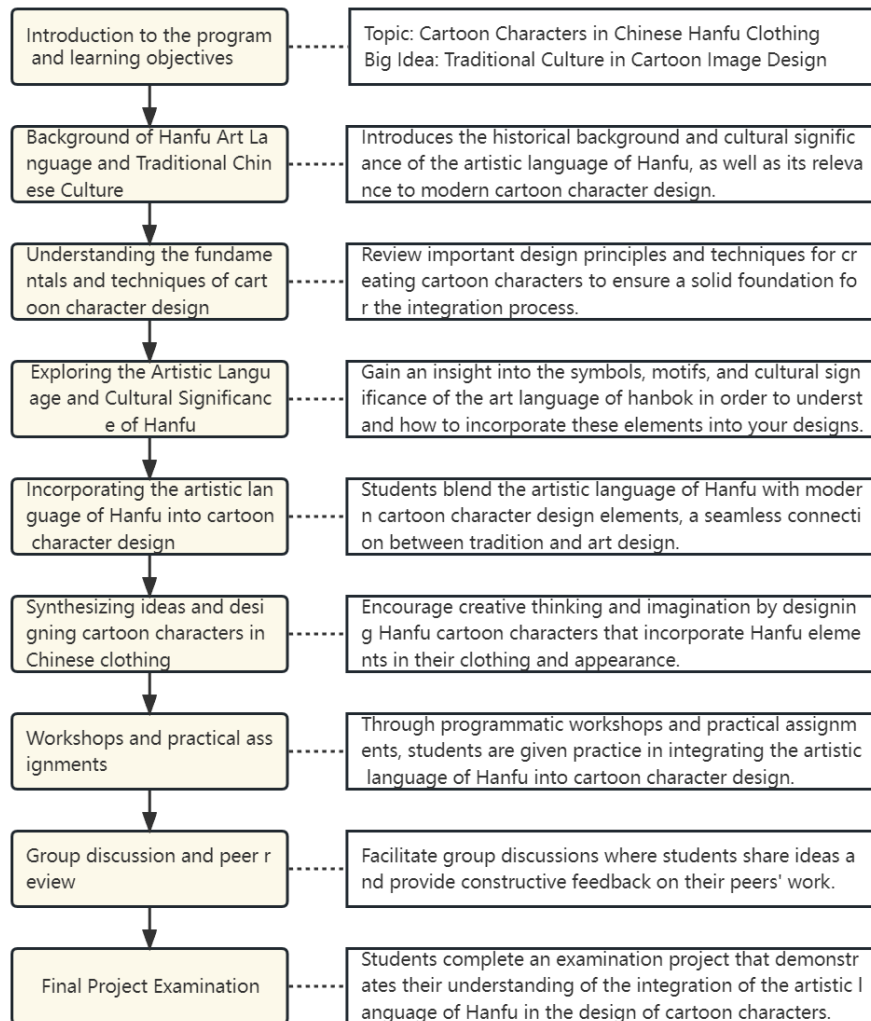
The key emphases of this course encompass exploring the interrelation between Hanfu's artistic language and modern cartoon character design, creating a bridge between the two domains. Integrating Hanfu elements into the creation of cartoon characters offers a pathway to enriching the cultural connotation of the artworks. However, several challenges emerge during the teaching process. One of the main difficulties lies in navigating the complexity of traditional Chinese culture, necessitating meticulous explanations to ensure students' comprehensive understanding. Encouraging creative synthesis poses another challenge as students strive to strike a balance and harmony in their design endeavors. Additionally, technical skill development becomes crucial as students learn relevant art forms and techniques associated with Hanfu. Lastly, cultivating cultural relevance proves essential in persuading students about the significance of traditional culture in modern design, especially for those with limited exposure to such cultural aspects.

4.4. Teaching and Learning Process

This section presents a methodical and comprehensive teaching process designed to introduce students to the intricate artistic language of Hanfu and the rich tapestry of traditional Chinese culture in the context of modern cartoon character design. The teaching flow chart, as depicted in Table 2, outlines a step-by-step progression that guides students through a coherent and logical learning journey. Commencing with the introduction of the course's theme, goals, and objectives, students are provided with a clear roadmap for their exploration of the subject matter. Subsequently, the historical background, cultural significance, and interplay with contemporary cartoon character design of Hanfu art language are carefully elucidated, affording students a deeper contextual understanding. Crucial to the learning process is the acquisition of basic design principles and techniques, ensuring students possess a solid foundation before embarking on an in-depth study of Hanfu's artistic language, with a specific focus on the symbols, patterns, and cultural connotations that underpin its uniqueness. Armed with this comprehensive knowledge, students are adeptly guided in integrating Hanfu elements into modern cartoon character design, thereby attaining a seamless blend of traditional culture and contemporary art. The cultivation of creative thinking is encouraged, inspiring students to imaginatively incorporate Hanfu elements into their cartoon characters while upholding cultural authenticity. The pedagogical approach further fosters practical application through hands-on workshops and assignments, enabling students to apply theoretical principles in real-world design scenarios. Additionally, group discussions and peer critiques are employed to promote collaborative learning, while nurturing critical thinking and refining design skills. The culmination of the course is marked by a final project, wherein students demonstrate their ability to skillfully unite traditional Chinese culture with modern artistic expressions. Throughout the entirety of the program, instructional flowcharts are instrumental in upholding a logical and structured

learning framework, augmenting students' comprehension and appreciation of the profound connection between culture and art.

Table 2: Teaching and learning process mapping.



4.5. Course Results

At the culmination of the course, students exhibited remarkable creativity and cultural sensitivity in their teaching practice, drawing inspiration from the expressive artistry of Hanfu. The left side of Figure 4 showcases Zhu's exceptional talent in crafting a captivating cartoon character that skillfully captures the elegance and grace of the Tang Dynasty Hanfu. Zhu's design seamlessly blends traditional elements with a contemporary flair, resulting in a visually striking and culturally significant composition. Similarly, The right side of Figure 4 presents Cao's outstanding work, a masterful fusion of traditional Hanfu aesthetics and the dynamic world of cartoon design. By preserving the authenticity of the original costumes while skillfully infusing the essence of "moe," Cao adeptly symbolizes the harmonious convergence of cultural heritage and innovative creativity. Notably, the course also showcased the exceptional works of other students, each exploring the art of Hanfu from different dynasties. These endeavors eloquently demonstrate the successful integration of traditional cultural motifs into the realm of cartoon design, reflecting a profound appreciation for the interconnectedness of heritage and contemporary artistry.



Figure 4: Students' coursework.

4.6. Post-Lesson Reflections

In this post-course reflection, we are pleased to report that the integration of Chinese Hanfu's artistic language with cartoon character design yielded exceptional results, showcasing students' adeptness in creating "cartoon characters in Hanfu" that exhibit symbolic expression, visual richness, and a vibrant color palette. The course surpassed expectations, and this unique perspective proved to be a transformative and enlightening experience for all participants.

Throughout the course, an in-depth exploration of the history and cultural significance of Hanfu's artistic language unfolded, illuminating intricate symbols and culturally significant patterns. The hands-on workshops and assignments provided invaluable opportunities for students to translate theoretical knowledge into practice by seamlessly incorporating Hanfu's artistic language into their cartoon character creations. However, it was observed that some students were influenced by the allure of Hanfu's traditional aesthetics, leading to an overemphasis on conventional reductions in their designs and a lack of individualistic creative expression.

To optimize future teaching approaches, it is imperative to guide students toward expressing their emotions and aesthetic sensibilities authentically. Encouraging students to delve deeper into their personal design understanding and develop a strong sense of artistic identity will foster a more diverse and innovative spectrum of cartoon character designs that honor the essence of Hanfu while reflecting the unique perspectives of each individual.

Overall, this post-course reflection affirms the success of incorporating Hanfu's artistic language into the realm of cartoon character design, while also highlighting the importance of empowering students to explore their creative voices and emotions in their artistic endeavors. These insights will undoubtedly inform and enrich future iterations of this course, ensuring a more comprehensive and empowering learning experience for students seeking to bridge traditional cultural elements with contemporary artistic expressions.

5. Conclusions

This study has explored the innovative application of Hanfu's artistic language in a cartoon character design course, offering a valuable and distinctive approach to bridging traditional Chinese culture and contemporary art and design education. The successful integration of Hanfu's art language demonstrated the feasibility and effectiveness of this teaching method, leading to enriched artistic expression and a profound understanding of Chinese Hanfu among students at the School of Art Design, Guangzhou College of Commerce.

By providing students with a clear and coherent framework through Big Ideas, this approach facilitated a harmonious synthesis of traditional Chinese culture and contemporary art design principles. The significance of preserving and revitalizing traditional cultural elements within a modern educational environment was underscored, encouraging students to embrace cultural diversity and explore novel forms of artistic expression.

Through the incorporation of Hanfu's artistic language, a detailed and vibrant creative environment emerged, fostering a deeper comprehension of the dynamic relationship between tradition and modernity in art and design. This transformative educational experience not only bears practical applications but also cultivates students' appreciation and understanding of culture while inspiring educators to embrace

diverse cultural elements and foster cultural exchange.

The study's findings underscore the enduring relevance of traditional Chinese culture and the boundless potential of modern artistic expression. The intersection of cultural heritage and creativity opens new horizons for students, enabling them to draw inspiration from their historical heritage and chart a course toward a culturally inclusive and vibrant future. As such, this research catalyzes educators and learners alike, fostering a spirit of exploration and celebration of cultural diversity while igniting a passion for artistic expression in the context of contemporary times.

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