

New Ecology of Aesthetic Education: A Global Vision and Local Practice of Integrating Anime and Manga Culture into Aesthetic Education

Peng Yu^{1,2}

¹School of Artistic Design, Jiangsu University of Technology, Changzhou, Jiangsu, 213001, China

²School of Arts, Universiti Sains Malaysia, Penang, 11800, Malaysia

yupeng_arts@student.usm.my

Abstract: *With the popularization of anime and manga culture among young people, integrating it into aesthetic education has become an urgent topic for discussion. This study aims to explore the theoretical basis and practical approaches of incorporating anime and manga culture into youth aesthetic education. Through a comparative analysis of relevant research findings from China and abroad, this paper proposes the innovative concept of "Anime and Manga Culture+", aiming to promote the interdisciplinary integration of anime and manga culture. The research finds that foreign practices in visual culture education provide valuable insights for domestic implementation. Based on this, the paper proposes three main practical approaches: integrating anime and manga culture into STEAM education, using anime and manga culture to reflect on contemporary social issues, and enhancing cultural confidence through the dissemination of anime and manga culture. This research provides a theoretical framework and practical guidance for the innovative development of youth aesthetic education in the new era, contributing to the cultivation of young people's aesthetic abilities, interdisciplinary thinking, and cultural innovation capabilities.*

Keywords: Anime and Manga Culture+, Youth Aesthetic Education, Comparative Study.

1. Introduction

Since the reform and opening-up, the culture of anime and manga in China has seen multiple developmental waves in tandem with the evolution of mass media, gradually emerging as one of the most influential youth cultures of our time. As an intersection of popular culture, youth culture, and visual culture, anime and manga culture is rich in connotation and denotation. In different contexts, it is also known as ACGN culture, 'two-dimensional' culture (二次元文化), and has given rise to various forms such as doujin culture and fan culture. With the proliferation of digital media and the internet, the influence of anime and manga culture has transcended traditional geographical and cultural boundaries, becoming a global cultural phenomenon.

However, despite its popularity among young people, research on integrating anime and manga culture into aesthetic education has not garnered sufficient attention or undergone systematic exploration. For a long time, Chinese aesthetic education theory and practice have continued the thoughts of aesthetic education pioneers such as Wang Guowei (王国维) and Cai Yuanpei (蔡元培), focusing on the aestheticization of aesthetic education and confining it to the realm of "high" art, neglecting the significant impact of popular visual culture on cultivating young people's aesthetic abilities and creativity (Yao, 2020). At the end of the 20th century, global visual culture experienced an "aesthetic turn", blurring the boundaries between images, commodities, and aesthetics, with aesthetic activities becoming more popularized. Kerry Freedman (2003) believes that "as the boundaries between education, high culture, and entertainment become increasingly blurred, students learn more and more from visual arts, making art education increasingly important. In the ever-changing context of visual culture, it is necessary to investigate challenges to formal boundaries, object boundaries, and school subject

boundaries." Chen Xiaoming also points out that "aesthetic education should be infused with a postmodern concept to transcend the predicament of modernity" (Chen & Lin, 2012). Therefore, how to utilize anime and manga culture, a form popular among young people, to enhance their aesthetic literacy and cultivate image-critical abilities has become an important topic that aesthetic education research cannot avoid.

This paper aims to explore the theoretical basis and practical approaches of integrating anime and manga culture into youth aesthetic education. By reviewing relevant research findings from China and abroad and comparing the similarities and differences in anime and manga aesthetic education research between China and other countries, it attempts to propose the concept of "Anime and Manga Culture+" and explore the possibilities of interdisciplinary integration of anime and manga culture, providing ideas and suggestions for the innovative development of youth aesthetic education in the new era.

2. Comparison of Research Status on Integrating Anime and Manga Culture into Aesthetic Education: China and Abroad

2.1 Domestic Research Status

Research on integrating anime and manga culture into aesthetic education in China, both theoretical and practical, is still scarce. Most studies are still at the stage of discussing the feasibility and necessity of such integration. However, some research has been able to discuss in combination with the characteristics of disciplines and teaching contexts. These findings can be categorized into theoretical explorations and practical studies:

2.1.1 Theoretical Explorations

(a) Educational value of anime and manga culture. Some researchers, such as Dong (2013), have recognized the unique role of anime and manga culture in youth education. They have introduced the concept of 'anime and manga culture literacy education', viewing it as a sensory, engaging, and personality-forming education that can enhance young people's cognition and creativity by reflecting on the realities depicted in anime and manga, including both the true and the fictional.

(b) Goal orientation of anime and manga aesthetic education. Some views suggest that the main objectives of anime and manga aesthetic education are to improve young people's anime and manga appreciation abilities, aesthetic tastes, and aesthetic creativity (Deng, 2011). This echoes the practical direction of visual culture education in Europe and America, emphasizing the use of anime and manga culture to cultivate young people's aesthetic analysis, evaluation abilities, and creativity.

(c) Relationship between anime and manga aesthetic education and traditional aesthetic education. Some scholars have attempted to combine anime and manga aesthetic education with traditional aesthetic education theories. For example, some research has explored how to use anime and manga art to understand and inherit Chinese traditional culture, as well as how to incorporate anime and manga elements into basic art teaching.

2.1.2 Practical Research

(a) Teaching forms: Some researchers have analyzed the importance of offering courses in anime and manga appreciation as part of art education. They argue that such courses can help students understand the artistic characteristics and origins of foreign animation, and by comparing the similarities and differences between Chinese and foreign anime and manga, they can appreciate the diversity of global anime and manga art and recognize the intrinsic qualities of Chinese animation. They also believe that understanding the storylines of anime and manga art can enhance students' humanistic reflection and attention to life (Zhu, 2017).

(b) Teaching strategies: Some researchers have explored the possibility of using anime and manga characters as teaching tools in art courses. For example, anime and manga works can be used to analyze art colors, or anime and manga characters can be used to promote traditional culture in Chinese language classes (Zhang, 2017). Or combining anime and manga creation with traditional art activities to carry out comprehensive artistic creation (Chen, 2018).

(c) Extracurricular teaching: Some researchers believe that club activities are an ideal venue for organizing anime and manga aesthetic education. Junior high school art teaching faces the problem of "few class hours and short time", which cannot ensure the continuity and effectiveness of art learning. Anime and manga clubs can not only "introduce anime and manga knowledge, convey anime and manga information, appreciate anime and manga works, and engage in anime and

manga creation" but also "successfully achieve teaching interaction and promote students' independent learning through flexible forms such as publishing newsletters, reading magazines, and organizing activities" (Xu, 2010).

(d) Teaching significance: Some scholars have analyzed that middle school students' aesthetic psychology has four characteristics, including "emotionality of aesthetic attitudes", "sensitivity of aesthetic perception", "diversity of aesthetic tastes", and "autonomy of aesthetic judgments". They believe that anime and manga appreciation courses have a positive impact on middle school students' aesthetic psychology, "promoting the accumulation of students' aesthetic experiences, conforming to the characteristics of aesthetic education, and contributing to the maturity of middle school students' aesthetic psychology". Specifically, it can develop middle school students' "keen perceptual abilities", "rich imagination", and promote middle school students' "enhancement of inner emotions" and "aesthetic comprehension" (Ao, 2010).

2.2 Foreign Research Status

2.2.1 Development of Visual Culture Education

Internationally, developed countries like the United States, Japan, and the United Kingdom have integrated visual culture into their art education curricula and established corresponding teaching standards.

United States: In 2002, Paul Duncum (2004) proposed the concept of "Visual Culture Art Education" (VCAE), aiming to help teachers and students understand the societal role of images. In 2014, the National Art Education Association (NAEA) revised the national standards for visual arts education, covering educational stages from kindergarten to K12, including multiple fields such as traditional fine arts, media arts, and architecture.

Japan: In 1998, manga was included in the national art education curriculum, and in 2001, art textbooks containing manga and anime content were published. In 2015, the "This is also learning manga!" (これも学習マンガだ!) project was launched, establishing an online database recommending different types of manga as supplementary teaching materials for schools (Osamu, 2020).

United Kingdom: In the 1980s, Education Scotland began curriculum reform, introducing cultural critique teaching activities in art and design courses. This created conditions for research on popular visual culture, design thinking, and the life-oriented study of fine arts and design. By the 1990s, more visual culture content became resources for middle school art and other curriculum teaching, thus forming a broader and more socially engaging curriculum.

2.2.2 Analysis of Typical Cases

This section presents three representative case studies. These cases, conducted by researchers from diverse countries and academic backgrounds, employ various methodologies including long-term observation, participatory research, and cross-media analysis, showcasing the diversity and

interdisciplinary approach of international research on anime and manga culture in aesthetic education.

(a) Masami Toku's Long-term Observation Research

Masami Toku (2020) from California State University, through long-term observation of Japanese children's drawings, discovered the enormous influence of visual culture products on children's drawings. Using her own son as a research subject, she conducted a 12-year longitudinal study, observing how anime and game works encountered at different age stages shape children's drawing forms. She concluded that the ultimate goal of artistic development is not always realism, but may present more complex and multidirectional development due to aesthetic and cultural background values.

(b) Michael Bitz's "Manga High" Case Study

Michael Bitz (2009) from Ramapo College of New Jersey conducted a four-year participatory observation study of the manga club at Martin Luther King High School (MLKHS) in New York City. He found that this extracurricular manga creation activity not only improved students' language skills but also promoted positive competition and creative enthusiasm among students. Bitz believes that benefiting from the narrative function of manga, students opened paths to history, literature, and even mathematics and science through manga creation practice. Secondly, empowering students with learning power and allowing them to produce results through self-exploration is a creative learning method beyond standardized curricula.

(c) Yukari Yoshihara's Cross-media Research

Yukari Yoshihara (2020) from the University of Tsukuba used the manga adaptation of Shakespeare's work "Ophelia" as an example to illustrate two types of adaptation in Japanese manga adaptations of original works. One is parody-style adaptation, such as Osamu Tezuka's "Robio and Robiette" (a manga in the "Astro Boy" series); the other is adaptation of the original story's direction. She used the animated short film "Ophelia" created by Akira Inoue as an example, believing that this work "subversively twisted" the original. Not only did Ophelia not drown, but she became the national backstroke champion. This indicates that the purpose of adapting anime and manga texts is to construct "Shakespearean cultural authority that meets the needs of youth culture". The author believes that this type of anime and manga adaptation can promote the exchange between mainstream culture and popular culture. She points out that this form of adaptation is particularly suitable for cultivating university students' media critical abilities, as contemporary university students already possess intertextual reading abilities and are familiar with Japan's "media mix" practices.

3. Comparison and Implications of Chinese and Foreign Research

A comparison of domestic and foreign research on anime and manga in aesthetic education reveals significant differences. In terms of research perspectives, foreign scholars tend to start from the broad background of visual culture, viewing anime

and manga culture as an important tool for cultivating students' image literacy and critical thinking. In contrast, domestic research is mostly limited to the ontology of education and teaching, lacking in-depth discussion on the social functions of anime and manga culture.

In terms of research methods, foreign scholars generally adopt qualitative research methods such as long-term tracking and participatory observation, like Masami Toku's 12-year observation of children's drawings. Domestic research, however, is mainly based on theoretical discussions and short-term teaching practices, lacking systematic empirical research support.

Regarding research depth, foreign studies involve multiple issues such as the relationship between anime and manga culture and cognitive development, cross-cultural communication, and media literacy, while domestic research mainly focuses on the application of anime and manga in art education, with depth and breadth yet to be expanded.

Foreign research on anime and manga aesthetic education provides many valuable insights for related fields in China. Firstly, we should re-examine the social aesthetic education function of anime and manga culture, viewing it as an important carrier for cultivating young people's aesthetic abilities and critical thinking. Secondly, we need to expand our research vision, deeply exploring the connection between anime and manga and contemporary social issues, such as environmental protection and cultural diversity, making anime and manga aesthetic education more relevant to reality. In terms of research methods, domestic scholars can learn from their foreign counterparts by adopting diverse methods such as long-term tracking and participatory observation to enhance the depth and scientific nature of research. Moreover, interdisciplinary collaboration is also a direction worth noting. Through media literacy cultivation and art-science integrated education, the connotation and extension of anime and manga aesthetic education can be enriched. Finally, strengthening empirical research is crucial for improving the quality of domestic anime and manga aesthetic education research, as it can provide stronger support for relevant theories and practices.

4. Proposal of the "Anime and Manga Culture+" Concept and Its Practical Approaches

To fully harness the potential of anime and manga culture in youth aesthetic education, it is essential to develop a systematic theoretical framework that serves as a methodological guide for practical exploration. In the field of cross-cultural studies, the generation mechanisms and effects of "articulation" and "hybridity" of different cultural symbols have always been the focus of academic attention. Related research provides important perspectives for understanding the interaction, integration, and complexity of cultures in the context of globalization. Inspired by this, this study proposes the concept of "Anime and Manga Culture+", attempting to use anime and manga culture as a medium and method to integrate multidisciplinary knowledge and ability cultivation. The core is to utilize the visual language and narrative characteristics of anime and manga to enhance students'

aesthetic abilities, critical thinking, creativity, and cross-cultural understanding, among other comprehensive qualities, promoting the all-round development of young people. The application scenarios of this concept are not limited to art education but can extend to multiple subject areas such as language, history, and science. This paper proposes practical approaches from three perspectives: subject education, media cultural literacy, and cultural communication:

4.1 Integrate Anime and Manga Culture Participation into STEAM Education to Cultivate Students' Interdisciplinary Thinking and Innovative Abilities.

STEAM education, which stands for Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics, emphasizes interdisciplinary integration. Anime and manga, as comprehensive art forms, inherently possess these interdisciplinary qualities. Integrating anime and manga appreciation and creation into STEAM education can inspire students' interdisciplinary thinking while enhancing their interest in learning complex concepts. The planning, drawing, and publishing of anime and manga creation can be combined with different aspects of STEAM education at every stage.

(a) Combination of Anime and Manga Appreciation with STEAM Education

Anime and manga appreciation can be part of STEAM education. Through the form of visual art, it can stimulate students' creativity and interdisciplinary thinking. The unique narrative methods of anime and manga can narrativize complex formula derivation processes and visualize and personify abstract concepts, which will greatly enhance students' learning interest. The introduction of games and visual interactive means will further help cultivate students' ability to explore and learn independently.

(b) Anime and Manga Creation and Interdisciplinary Practice

Taking Michael Bitz's "Manga High" study as an example, students not only gain inspiration from manga but also create, design, and publish manga. This process involves multiple fields such as artistic creation, technology application, engineering thinking, and mathematical calculations, making it an ideal practice for interdisciplinary learning. By creating their own manga, students can apply scientific principles and technological tools to artistic creation, cultivating interdisciplinary thinking and innovative abilities.

4.2 Use Anime and Manga Culture to Reflect on Contemporary Society, Improving Students' Media Information Integration Awareness and Critical Thinking Skills.

(a) Correlation between Anime and Manga Works and Social Issues

The intertextual and metaphorical narrative methods commonly used in contemporary anime and manga often reflect real-world issues. Many anime and manga works contain reflections on important contemporary issues such as environmental protection, cultural diversity, and social justice.

The process of audiences accepting anime and manga cultural works involves comparing, judging, and filtering different information. Taking the manga adaptation of Shakespeare's works mentioned in this article as an example, the recreation of traditional texts by anime and manga culture not only reflects a reinterpretation of the original but also reflects the cultural needs of contemporary society. Guiding students to participate in discussions on anime and manga texts can improve their intertextual reading ability and media literacy, and can also cultivate students' critical thinking and sense of social responsibility.

(b) Improving Media Information Integration Awareness

Anime and manga, as comprehensive media, integrate elements such as visuals, audio, and narrative. Guiding students to analyze the information expression methods in anime and manga works can improve their media literacy and information integration abilities. By comparing the presentation of the same theme in different media, students can understand the characteristics and advantages of various media forms, enhancing their information expression abilities.

(c) Cross-cultural Understanding and Global Perspective

As a global cultural phenomenon, anime and manga provide students with a window to understand different cultures. By comparing the different approaches to similar themes in Chinese and foreign anime and manga works, students' cross-cultural understanding abilities and global perspectives can be cultivated. For instance, in the integration practice of anime and manga culture with language teaching, comparing hero themes in Japanese, American, and Chinese anime and manga can help explore the cultural differences and cultural appropriation reflected therein, contributing to students' attention and reflection on issues of cultural globalization.

4.3 Utilizing Anime and Manga Culture Dissemination to Enhance Youth Cultural Confidence and Cross-cultural Communication Abilities

The evolution of anime and manga culture in China involves a continuous interplay and integration of Chinese cultural elements and traditional visual symbols. In recent years, Chinese original anime and manga works have incorporated more and more Chinese traditional cultural elements while drawing inspiration from the cultural symbols of two-dimensional anime and manga, forming an original anime and manga cultural style represented by "New Chinese Style". For example, the "Chinese Ancient Poetry Anime" series animation successfully integrates the exquisite artwork and aesthetic scenes of two-dimensional anime with the imagery beauty of Chinese traditional culture, not only enriching the connotation of anime works but also providing new possibilities for the inheritance and development of Chinese traditional culture in the modern context.

Anime and manga club activities are an ideal domain for youth aesthetic education. Cosplay, collection displays, and doujinshi exchanges constitute the main content of anime and manga clubs. Guiding young people to explore new forms of cultural practice in anime and manga's New Chinese Style based on understanding traditional culture, visualizing,

concretizing, personifying, and narrativizing themes such as Chinese traditional festivals, folk customs, and mythological characters, allows students not only to deepen their understanding of Chinese civilization through anime and manga creation and appreciation but also to enhance their cultural confidence and form a more solid cultural identity through cultural exchanges.

In conclusion, using "Anime and Manga Culture+" as a driving force to combine anime and manga culture with STEAM education, reflection on social issues, media literacy cultivation, and cultural dissemination can fully realize its diverse values in aesthetic education. It can also provide feasible pathways for young people to actively participate in cultural practices in the contemporary complex media environment, echoing the evolutionary logic of media culture in the digital age. Therefore, the theoretical construction and practical exploration of "Anime and Manga Culture+" should receive high attention from aesthetic education researchers and be implemented cautiously and systematically in educational practice.

5. Conclusion

This study compares research findings on integrating anime and manga culture into youth aesthetic education, both from China and abroad, and analyzes the limitations and potential directions for expanding current theoretical research in aesthetic education. Based on these findings, this paper proposes the innovative concept of "Anime and Manga Culture+", aiming to integrate anime and manga culture with multidisciplinary knowledge and ability cultivation to meet the requirements of aesthetic education work in the new era.

Centering on the concept of "Anime and Manga Culture+", this paper discusses three main practical approaches: integrating anime and manga culture into STEAM education, using anime and manga culture to reflect on contemporary social issues, and enhancing cultural confidence through anime and manga culture dissemination. These approaches aim to cultivate young people's aesthetic abilities, interdisciplinary thinking, critical thinking, cross-cultural understanding, and cultural innovation capabilities.

Looking to the future, to improve the current insufficient research on media literacy and media culture education in aesthetic education, this study suggests that domestic education research and teaching practice subjects should actively conduct empirical research and long-term tracking studies, establish systematic evaluation systems, provide a basis for relevant policy-making, and lay a solid scientific foundation for theoretical innovation and practical application of anime and manga aesthetic education.

Funding Project

2021 General Funded Project of Philosophy and Social Science Research in Jiangsu Province Colleges and Universities, Research on the Reconstruction of Mainstream Animation and Comic Creation in the Field of Two-Dimensional Culture (2021SJA1211).

References

- [1] W. Yao, "From 'The Third Kingdom' to 'Daily Life': The Postmodern Turn of Contemporary Aesthetic Education," *Journal of Zhengzhou University (Philosophy and Social Sciences Edition)*, vol. 53, no. 6, pp. 67, 2020.
- [2] K. Freedman, *Teaching Visual Culture: Curriculum, Aesthetics and the Social Life of Art*, Teachers College, Columbia University, New York and London, 2003.
- [3] B. Chen and Y. Lin, "Summary of the High-end Forum on 'Humanities and Aesthetic Education in the 21st Century'," *Journal of Aesthetic Education*, vol. 3, no. 1, pp. 115-116, 2012.
- [4] H. Dong, "Practical Path of Animation Culture Literacy Education - Taking Japanese Animation 'Spirited Away' as an Example," *Journal of Xinyang Normal University (Philosophy and Social Sciences Edition)*, vol. 33, no. 5, pp. 27-28, 2013.
- [5] J. Deng, "Discussion on Anime and Manga Aesthetic Education for Adolescents," *Journal of Aesthetic Education*, vol. 2, no. 1, pp. 37-40, 2011.
- [6] T. Zhu, "Thoughts on Strengthening Local Cultural Awareness through Animation Art Education," *Art Evaluation*, no. 11, pp. 165-167, 2017.
- [7] Y. Zhang, "Research on Animation Characters and Their Influence on Primary School Art Education," *Popular Literature and Art*, no. 9, pp. 246-247, 2017.
- [8] T. Chen, "Practical Exploration of the Improvement of Students' Creativity in Primary School Art Courses Based on Animation," *Art Education Research*, no. 20, pp. 158, 2018.
- [9] Z. Xu, "The Role of Organization and Management of Art Clubs in Extracurricular Art Education Activities in Junior High Schools," *Contemporary Education Forum (Teaching Research)*, no. 6, pp. 126-127, 2010.
- [10] Y. Ao, "The Influence of Animation Appreciation on Middle School Students' Aesthetic Psychology," *Journal of Inner Mongolia Normal University (Educational Science Edition)*, vol. 23, no. 6, pp. 47-49, 2010.
- [11] P. Duncum, "Visual culture isn't just visual: Multiliteracy, multimodality and meaning," *Studies in Art Education*, vol. 45, no. 3, pp. 252-264, 2004.
- [12] National Art Education Association, "National Visual Arts Standards," [Online]. Available: <https://www.arteducators.org/learn-tools/national-visual-arts-standards>. [Accessed: July 27, 2024].
- [13] O. Sahara, "A Look at Manga in Japanese Public Education," in *MANGA-visual pop culture in ARTS Education*, T. Dollase, (eds.), Viseu: InSEA Publication, 2020, pp. 28.
- [14] Education Scotland, "Expressive Arts," [Online]. Available: <https://education.gov.scot/education-scotland/scottish-education-system/policy-for-scottish-education/policy-drivers/cfe-building-from-the-statement-appendix-incl-bt-c1-5/curriculum-areas/expressive-arts>. [Accessed: July 27, 2024].
- [15] M. Toku, "Manga's Influences: New Direction of Artistic and Aesthetic Developments in Children's Pictorial World," in *MANGA-visual pop culture in ARTS Education*, T. Dollase, (eds.), Viseu: InSEA Publication, 2020, pp. 14-21.

- [16] M. Bitz, *Manga High: Literacy, Identity, and Coming of Age in an Urban High School*, Harvard Education Press, Massachusetts, 2009.
- [17] Y. Yoshihara, "Toward 'Reciprocal Legitimation' between Shakespeare's Works and Manga," in *MANGA-visual pop culture in ARTS Education*, T. Dollase, (eds.), *Viseu: InSEA Publication*, 2020, pp. 119-126.

Author Profile

Peng Yu received an M.S. degree from the Hubei Institute of Fine Arts in 2009. Since 2009, he has taught at the School of Artistic Design, Jiangsu University of Technology, Changzhou, Jiangsu Prov. in China. Currently, he is pursuing his PhD at the School of Arts, Universiti Sains Malaysia.