Research on the Cross-regional Collaborative Mechanism of Regional-Cultural Film, Television and Animation Industry in the Digital Era — A Case Study of Cultural IP Development of Jiangnan Water Towns and the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area

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ABSTRACT

The popularization of digital media and the integration of culture and tourism have turned regional culture into a core creative resource for film, television and animation IPs. However, most domestic regional cultural industries are plagued by practical difficulties including fragmented resources, insufficient capacity for independent development, inadequate cross-regional coordination, and the risk of local cultural erosion in collaborative projects. Existing studies mostly focus on cultural-creative development within a single region and lack comparative mechanism analyses between single-region independent development and cross-regional collaborative development. Taking typical film-television and animation IP projects of Jiangnan Water Towns and the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area as dual cases, this paper adopts literature research, comparative case analysis and content analysis to build a three-dimensional analytical framework of resources-production-communication, and compares operational disparities between different development modes in the two types of regions. The study finds that single-region independent development within a single region can fully preserve local cultural traits yet suffers from weak IP communication constrained by capital, talent and distribution channels. Cross-regional collaborative development enables complementarity in cultural materials, creative capacity and market channels, but brings problems such as homogenized cultural symbols and ambiguous allocation of rights and responsibilities. This paper identifies the internal paths for cross-regional collaborative development to balance resource integration and regional cultural preservation, enriches theories on the coordination of digital cultural-creative industries, and offers practical references for the joint development of film-television and animation IPs across China.

Keywords: Regional Culture; Film, Television and Animation; Cross-Regional Collaborative Development; IP Development; Cultural Industry

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Research Background

Digital audio-visual forms such as short-form videos, web-based animations and theatrical animated films keep expanding. Indigenous cultural symbols including regional history and folk customs, water-town landscapes and Lingnan features have become core materials for differentiated competition among cultural-creative products. Local governments have successively supported native film-television and animation projects, giving rise to two mainstream development paths. Jiangnan cities such as Suzhou and Shaoxing adopt single-region independent development to create animation and short-drama IPs drawing on local cultural-tourism resources; the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao region carries out cross-regional collaborative development for film-television and animation works based on industrial clusters. In the digital context, the communication boundaries of regional cultural IPs have been broken, and inter-regional industrial linkage has become a new trend of the industry. Nevertheless, there exists no systematic research on applicable scenarios and operational logics of the two development modes.

1.2 Existing Problems and Research Gaps

From an industrial-practice perspective: small- and medium-sized cities adopting single-region independent development to produce animation works frequently encounter shortages of creative talents, narrow promotion and distribution channels, and broken chains for IP derivative development. By contrast, multi-region joint creation under cross-regional collaborative development commonly faces pain points: local cultural connotations are weakened to cater to mass-market tastes, regional division of labor is chaotic, and conflicts arise over benefit distribution.

From an academic-research perspective: existing outputs mostly focus on cultural-creative industries of a single city or interpret cultural symbols in individual animation works. Few studies treat "single-region independent development" and "cross-regional collaborative development" as comparative models. A unified multi-dimensional analytical framework covering resources, production and communication is missing, and in-depth mechanism exploration regarding how cross-regional collaborative development balances industrial benefits and cultural inheritance remains insufficient.

1.3 Research Objectives

This paper aims to compare two development modes of film-television and animation IPs in Jiangnan Water Towns and the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, clarify the operational logic of cross-regional collaborative development in resource integration, creation-production and market communication, and explore feasible paths for balancing industrial expansion and retention of regional cultural characteristics during collaboration.

1.4 Research Significance

Theoretical Significance: It constructs a three-dimensional analytical framework of resources-production-communication, integrates regional coordination theory and IP operation theory, fills the gap of missing dual-mode comparative analysis in current cultural-creative research, and expands research perspectives for regional cultural communication in the digital era.

Practical Significance: It provides criteria for regions with diverse resource endowments to select film-television and animation development modes, addresses real-world challenges such as cultural dilution and inefficient industrial coordination in cross-regional collaborative development, and supplies references for local cultural-creative support policies and joint development of cultural-tourism IPs.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Definition of Core Concepts

Regional-cultural film, television and animation industry: A digital cultural industry rooted in regional cultural resources such as local folk customs, architectures and historical stories. It takes animations, film-television shorts and animated feature films as carriers and covers the whole industrial chain of creation, production, promotion-distribution and IP derivatives.

Single-region independent development: Dominated by the administrative entity of one city. Local enterprises and cultural-tourism authorities independently complete the whole workflow including script writing, production and market promotion, with cultural resources exclusively obtained from local sources.

Cross-regional collaborative development: Market entities and government agencies from two or more regions cooperate through division of labor. They share multi-regional cultural materials, creative teams and broadcasting channels to jointly build unified cultural IPs.

2.2 Review of Foreign-related Studies

Overseas research on cultural-creative industry coordination started early. Florida proposed the theory of creative-class agglomeration, pointing out that cross-regional flow of talents and industrial resources can improve the market competitiveness of cultural-creative products [1]. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) reports suggest that cross-regional cultural cooperation enables global dissemination of niche cultures; meanwhile, cultural-protection standards must be established in cooperation to prevent commercial erosion of indigenous symbols [2]. Most overseas studies on animation industries concentrate on mature industrial clusters in the United States and Japan and analyze division-of-labor modes in industrial chains. However, few comparative dual-case studies have targeted Chinese-style water-town culture and the pluralistic Lingnan culture.

2.3 Review of Domestic-related Studies

Domestic research falls into two major branches. First is research on the transformation of regional-cultural IPs. Scholars mostly take animation works from individual cities as cases, analyze visual translation approaches for traditional culture, and highlight the value of indigenous cultural uniqueness [3]. Second is research on regional cultural-creative coordination, which mainly discusses cultural-tourism industrial linkage among urban agglomerations and explores mechanisms for policy and resource sharing, yet seldom narrows down to the segmented film-television and animation track [4]. Some scholars examine cross-regional co-production of film-television IPs but only analyze cooperative advantages from the single dimension of promotion and distribution, without comparing strengths and weaknesses of single-region independent development modes [5]. Further studies discuss the inner development logic of regional cultural-creative IPs as well as practical dilemmas of native-cultural IP operation under culture-tourism integration [6] [7]. From the perspective of cultural industrial economics, the allocation of cultural resources directly shapes the choice of industrial development models for regional film-television and animation projects [8].

2.4 Research Commentary

Existing research has verified that regional culture constitutes the core competitiveness of film-television and animation works and has recognized the market value of cross-regional industrial coordination. Still, three notable research gaps remain. First, there is a lack of binary comparative analytical perspectives for "single-region independent development — cross-regional collaborative development". Second, no unified analytical framework covering the full process of resources, production and communication has been established. Third, few case comparisons have been conducted between Jiangnan and Lingnan, two regions with prominent cultural disparities, which makes it hard to extract general-applicable collaboration mechanisms. Accordingly, this paper constructs a three-dimensional analytical framework and fills existing research gaps through dual-case comparison.

3. RESEARCH METHODS

3.1 Research Design

This study adopts the comparative-case-study method combined with literature research and content analysis to conduct mixed-methods research. It takes two differentiated regions and two development modes as core comparative dimensions, combines theoretical sorting and textual empirical analysis, and fully addresses three core research questions: mechanisms of cross-regional collaborative development, disparities between the two modes, and paths for cultural balance.

3.2 Research Subjects and Sample-selection Rationale

This study selects two typical animation short-film samples that respectively stand for single-region independent development and cross-regional collaborative development. Detailed metadata of each case is specified below to guarantee comparability.

Case 1: Sample of single-region independently-developed animation, Jiangnan Water-Towns (Suzhou, Shaoxing, Wuzhen)

Official Title: Jiangnan Baijing Tu (One Hundred Scenes of Jiangnan) Derivative Animated Shorts

Production Year: 2022

Total runtime: 12 episodes, each episode 3-5 minutes; total runtime 42 minutes

Producers: Local cultural-tourism institutions and animation studios based in Suzhou

Release platforms: Local cultural tourism official channels, domestic short-video platforms

Project scale: Small-budget local cultural-tourism-oriented animation project, fully funded by regional local cultural budgets.

This sample represents the model of single-region independent development. All creation, production and promotion procedures are completed by Jiangnan local participants without cross-regional creative partners.

Case 2: Sample of cross-regionally collaboratively-developed animation, the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (Guangdong-Macao joint creation)

Official Title: Anthology of Lingnan Folk Customs Animated Short Series

Production Year: 2023

Total runtime: 8 episodes, each episode 4-6 minutes; total runtime 38 minutes

Producers: Joint production by Guangdong animation production enterprises and Macao cultural-research consultants; co-sponsored by Guangdong and Macao cultural-tourism authorities

Release platforms: National mainstream video streaming platforms, cross-border cultural exchange channels for the Greater Bay Area

Project scale: Medium-budget cross-border cultural co-creation project with joint financial input from two regional cultural-tourism departments.

This sample represents the model of cross-regional collaborative development, integrating creative resources, cultural experts and distribution resources from two different administrative regions.

Selection rationale: First, the two animation short-film samples are comparable in work form (animated short anthology), episode length and overall total runtime, which mitigates structural differences for comparative analysis. Second, their corresponding regions show marked differences in cultural foundation and economic-industrial basis. Third, both are typical mature outputs of their respective development modes, with complete publicly-available creation materials, interview records and communication data suitable for content coding analysis.

3.3 Data-collection Approaches

1. Literature materials: Journal articles and dissertations concerning cultural-creative coordination and animation IPs retrieved from CNKI and Web of Science; industry white papers and industrial-policy documents released by cultural-tourism administrations.

2. Case textual materials: Complete animated works of the two samples, official creation interviews, news interviews with production teams, and promotional texts released on online platforms.

3. Communication data: Publicly-available data including view counts, user comments on short-video platforms and video-streaming websites, and sales data of derivative cultural-creative products.

3.4 Data-analysis Procedures

The thematic-analysis method is applied. Case texts, animation scripts, production interview transcripts and platform-released promotional materials are coded along three pre-operationalized analytical dimensions: the resource layer, the production layer, and the communication layer. Each dimension is assigned measurable coding indicators as follows.

(1) Resource layer: ① source of cultural materials (local-only vs. multi-regional sources); ② diversity of cultural symbolic elements; ③ depth of cultural connotation reflected in the adapted materials.

(2) Production layer: ① composition and geographical origin of creative participants; ② mode of creative labor division; ③ consistency of aesthetic and cultural expression requirements among production stakeholders.

(3) Communication layer: ① types and distribution of release and promotion platforms; ② audience geographical coverage and scale; ③ audience cultural-identity feedback from public comment sections.

According to the above indicators, this study compares characteristic differences between the two types of projects in cultural-material sources, creative division of labor, promotion channels and audience feedback, so as to summarize operational rules for the two development modes.

3.5 Rationale for Method Selection

Literature research lays a theoretical foundation and supports the construction of a unified analytical framework. The comparative-case method can intuitively identify merits, demerits and applicable scenarios for single-region independent development versus cross-regional collaborative development. Content analysis enables quantitative and concrete assessment of how much regional-cultural symbolism is preserved in works. The combination of the three methods can comprehensively and objectively answer the core research questions of this paper.

4. RESULT ANALYSIS

4.1 Comparative Analysis at the Resource Layer

Materials for the single-region independently-developed Jiangnan animation are entirely drawn from local elements: water-town architectures, black-canal boats, Suzhou embroidery, Shaoxing rice wine and other native symbols. The cultural resources are pure with strong regional recognizability, yet the material library is limited, easily leading to thematic homogenization in storytelling.

The animation under cross-regional collaborative development from the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao area integrates multi-regional cultural resources such as Guangdong lion-dance culture, Mazu worship in Macao and Lingnan arcade buildings. It boasts richer materials and broader narrative space for stories. Nevertheless, some secondary regional-cultural symbols are simplified and presented superficially, with insufficient expression of in-depth cultural connotations.

4.2 Comparative Analysis at the Production Layer

For projects adopting single-region independent development, core creative teams and production companies are all local institutions with unified creative concepts, which can fully realize the expressive demands for local culture. However, local reserves of animation talents and special-effects technologies are limited, bringing deficiencies in visual quality and narrative completeness.

Projects of cross-regional collaborative development implement specialized division of labor: Guangdong undertakes animation production while Macao provides folk-culture consultants. Each region gives play to its industrial strengths to achieve higher production quality. Conflicts may emerge over aesthetic standards and creative demands among multiple participating entities; niche distinctive cultural contents tend to be trimmed to cater to mass-market aesthetics.

4.3 Comparative Analysis at the Communication Layer

Single-region independently-developed Jiangnan animations are promoted merely through local cultural-tourism channels, targeting mainly tourists within Jiangnan. Their nationwide reach is limited, yet local audiences demonstrate strong cultural identification.

Joint projects under cross-regional collaborative development from Guangdong and Macao integrate online and offline promotion channels from both regions, are released on major national video platforms, and reach audiences at home and abroad with greatly-expanded communication scale. To fit mass-market tastes, details of niche regional culture are weakened, triggering polarized evaluations among local in-depth audiences.

4.4 Summary of Core Contradictions

Data analysis reveals inherent trade-offs for the two modes. Single-region independent development guarantees cultural purity yet has an upper ceiling for industrial resources. Cross-regional collaborative development improves industrial productivity and communication coverage but carries risks of local-cultural dilution. Balancing these two aspects constitutes the core difficulty for cross-regional collaborative development mechanisms.

5. CONCLUSIONS

5.1 Major Research Findings

First, single-region independent development suits small-scale animation projects oriented toward niche local cultural-tourism markets. Its strength lies in high cultural integrity, while its weaknesses include insufficient industrial resources and restricted communication scope. Cross-regional collaborative development fits large-budget long-term full-IP development projects. It can integrate multi-regional resources and expand communication influence, yet cultural-review mechanisms must be established to prevent loss of regional characteristics.

Second, the complete operational mechanism for cross-regional collaborative development contains three tiers. At the resource layer, a hierarchical cataloguing system for multi-regional cultural materials shall be built to preserve core distinctive symbols. At the production layer, local cultural consultants shall participate in the full creation workflow. At the communication layer, general-audience promotion shall be separated from special marketing focused on regional features.

Third, Jiangnan water-town culture shall consolidate its foundation via single-region independent development before launching mild cross-regional linkage. Boasting high industrial maturity, the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao region can further deepen inter-city and cross-border collaborative modes. The two types of regions shall pursue differentiated development paths.

5.2 Theoretical and Practical Contributions

Theoretically: This paper constructs the three-dimensional resources-production-communication analytical framework, improves comparative research on dual modes for regional film-television and animation industries, and enriches interdisciplinary theories of regional-cultural coordination and IP development.

Practically: It delivers clear criteria for regions to select development modes, proposes implementable mechanisms for protecting local culture in cross-regional collaborative development, and provides replicable operational schemes for joint creation by cultural-tourism authorities and animation enterprises.

5.3 Research Limitations and Future Prospects

This paper only selects two sets of typical cases. Future research may expand cases from central and western China to improve comparisons of cross-regional collaborative development across regions with varied economic levels. This research mainly adopts textual-content analysis; follow-up work may add semi-structured interviews with industry practitioners to deepen mechanism research on practical industrial operations.

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