

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Background of study

The purpose of this dissertation is to study the intertextual references that are incorporated into the formation of the fictional world of the Nickelodeon animation *Avatar: The Last Airbender*. These intertextual references are drawn from cultures and practices in our world and fitted into the creation of an animated world.

Intertextuality is a concept that does not just appear in written texts but exists in all forms of texts. Chandler (1994, p. 143) notes that not anyone, even for the first time, can “read a famous novel or poem, look at a famous painting, drawing or sculpture, listen to a famous piece of music or watch a famous play or film without being conscious of the context in which the text had been reproduce, drawn upon, alluded to, parodied and so on”. His statement goes to show that intertextuality is everywhere and in everything around us, like the materials we read, the images that we see and the music that we listen to. In this study, we would see how intertextuality plays a heavy role in the portrayal of an animation series.

The animation chosen for this study is a unique one, initially targeted for school-going children, but which eventually appealed to a wide range of audiences from various ages and demographics instead. *Avatar* is created from a blend of Western and Eastern cultures—conceptualized from American producers with backgrounds in Japanese anime and Hong Kong cinema, animated in Korea and voiced by American actors. Thus, this animation does not fall strictly into the category of an American animation or a Japanese anime, but rather, it is a new breed of animation which is a combination of the two.

As an introduction to this dissertation, I would state the objectives of this study, the research questions and the significance of this study. I would also give a slight introduction to Nickelodeon, the animation company who owns *Avatar*, as well as an introduction to *Avatar* itself. Finally, I would discuss the scope and limitations of this study.

1.1 Objectives

The thesis hopes to achieve the two following objectives:

1. To explore the East Asian, South Asian and Western cultural references made in the animation.
2. To investigate how these intertextual references were reflected in the animation.

1.2 Research Questions

1. What are the East Asian, South Asian and Western cultural references made in the animation?
2. How are linguistic and visual intertextual references incorporated and presented in the animation?

1.3 Significance of Study

This study is significant because *Avatar: The Last Airbender*, popular as it is, has never been thoroughly explored as a social semiotic subject before. Apart from the lack of studies done on this animation, there have also been very few studies done in this area of social semiotics. Therefore, this study would shed light into the efforts that animators put into creating a fictional world which is, to a certain extent, based on the world we live in. The animation is rich in cultural references that were incorporated into its presentation.

This study would reveal how these numerous references are realized and exhibited in the animation. From these references, we would be able to see how intertextuality is used in the pre-production to achieve social semiotic significance in its post-production. This insight would contribute to the limited literature of social semiotics in intertextuality studies, animation and *Avatar: The Last Airbender*.

1.4 Nickelodeon

Currently, Nickelodeon is arguably one of America's leading children's television networks. It is owned by MTV Networks which itself is a division of Viacom. According to its website, Nickelodeon was founded on the 1st of December 1977 (The History of Nickelodeon, 2011). Originally, Nickelodeon started off as "Pinwheel", one of the subscribers to QUBE, a two-way interactive cable TV system that was launched in Columbus, Ohio by Warner Cable.

Pinwheel was a children's cable channel that ran about 6 hours a day. On April 1st 1979, it was relaunched as Nickelodeon (The History of Nickelodeon, 2011). Two years later, the Nickelodeon channel became known as "the first channel for kids". This was because the Disney Channel and Cartoon Network channel had not yet been introduced into the industry.

Initially, Nickelodeon did not do very well, losing \$4 million by 1984 and was ranked last among the cable networks. MTV Networks took drastic steps to change their luck. President Bob Pittman fired the current staff and hired Fred Seibert and Alan Goodman, who had created MTV's famous IDs, to lend their talents to Nickelodeon (The History of Nickelodeon, 2011). They worked with Tom Corey and Scott Nast to replace the original "Pinball" logo with the now-familiar "orange splat" of Nickelodeon. Seibert and Goodman also hired a new group of animators, producers and writers in the rebranding of

the channel (The History of Nickelodeon, 2011). The “orange splat” logo of Nickelodeon now comes in all shapes, but retains the same color, type and scheme as sign of identity of the channel.

Nickelodeon has achieved a few milestones in the course of its broadcast. On July 1st 1985, Nickelodeon added a new segment to its channel called Nick At Night. It aired mostly classics from the 1950s, 1960s and some from the 1970s. Eventually, they added shows from the 1980s. Now, Nick At Night airs shows from the 1990s. On the 4th of January 1988, Nickelodeon widened its demographics to younger children, to those aged 5 and younger (The History of Nickelodeon, 2011). This segment was called Nick Jr. and aired during weekend mornings. Nick Jr. has its own logo, an orange “Nick” and a light blue “Jr.”, with the blue always in a smaller size than the orange.

By the 90s, Nickelodeon was doing very well, with a viewership of 53 million in homes all over the United States. In 1990, Nickelodeon decided to produce its own cartoons which eventually came to be known as “Nicktoons” (The History of Nickelodeon, 2011). Previously, they only screened foreign animated cartoons. The idea came into fruition in 1991, when *Doug*, *Rugrats* and *Ren and Stimpy* premiered on Nickelodeon. In general, all three Nicktoons did very well during their time. It was also in 1990 that Nickelodeon published its own magazine called Nickelodeon Magazine (The History of Nickelodeon, 2011). It stopped publications for a couple of years and resumed printing in 1993. It was originally published on a quarterly basis, but changed to being bi-monthly with the February/March 1994 issue (The History of Nickelodeon, 2011). In time, it published monthly before stopping in December 2009. Although it was a magazine by a cartoon network, Nick Magazine covered a variety of topics for children like informative non-fiction articles, interviews, pranks, recipes and comics.

Nickelodeon kept up with the rapidly progressing technology of the times by establishing its own website, www.nick.com, in the year 1995. The website was so successful that in March 1999, Nick.com became the highest rated site for children from the age of six to fourteen. In January 2000, the website's general manager, Mike Skagerlind, came up with plans for expansion of the website for children (The History of Nickelodeon, 2011). In the same year, on June 4th, the website was revamped. The new design featured a new interface and the usage of Flash for animated graphics and buttons. Sister channels were also added as well as a Nick Jr. website.

Today, Nickelodeon is keeping up with their successful momentum and airing cartoons for children around the world. They are still bringing in new animations and cartoons and catering to wide range of audiences. Their current popular animation runs from the pre-school-targeted *Dora the Explorer* to animation for more mature audiences like *Avatar's* sequel, *The Legend of Korra*. Their website has also expanded to include games and videos that are based on the cartoons and animations that they air. Nickelodeon has been going strong for 38 years and it looks like they will continue to do so.

1.5 *Avatar: The Last Airbender*

Avatar: The Last Airbender was created and produced by Michael Dante DiMartino and Bryan Konietzko. Together with Aaron Ehasz, they are also the show's executive producers. This American animated series aired for three seasons from 2005 to 2008 on Nickelodeon and has enjoyed a huge amount of success. Its viewership hit 5.6 million at its peak, making it one of Nickelodeon's best-rated shows.

This exceptional animation is the brainchild of DiMartino and Konietzko, who although were "big fans of Harry Potter and Lord of the Rings", did not want to make another British influenced magical world (DiMartino and Konietzko, 2010, p. 12). Instead,

they wanted to create an animation out of their interests in “Asian cultures and philosophies, traditional martial arts, yoga, anime, and Hong Kong cinema” (DiMartino and Konietzko, 2010, p. 12). This is why *Avatar* is truly a blend of cultures—an American produced animation, but animated in Korea in the style of Japanese anime and riddled with references from the Asian cultures in its conception and exhibition.

Although the series’ target audience was for viewers between the ages of 6-11, the storyline and mature themes covered by the animation appealed to older viewers as well. *Avatar: The Last Airbender* addresses themes like genocide, political conspiracies, responsibility, teamwork, respect and having integrity even in the midst of opposition. Its overarching plotline is about Aang and his friends who are helping him to be the Avatar, a powerful being that can manipulate elements of water, earth, fire and air, to stop the war that has been plaguing their world for a hundred years. In between, there are subplots that involve the various characters in the story, including a prominent one by Zuko, the Fire Nation prince who has been condemned by his father to capture the Avatar if he wants to regain his honor.

This animation has been one of the most successful animations ever produced by Nickelodeon and has garnered a number of awards and nominations. Some of their most outstanding awards include an Emmy in 2007 for an Individual Achievement Award that went to Sang-Jin Kim for the episode *Lake Laogai* and five Annie awards from 2006 to 2009. They were also nominated for an additional Emmy in 2007 for Outstanding Animated Program and two other Annie Awards in 2005. One of their more unique awards is the Humane Society Genesis Awards, won for the depictions of animal cruelty in the episode *Appa’s Lost Days* (DiMartino and Konietzko, 2010).

1.6 Scope of Study

The scope of this study is limited to only looking at the intertextual elements mentioned in the objectives of the study; which are the cultural references addressed in the animation. Other intertextual references that may have been made in the animation would not be covered in this study.

This limitation is due to the fact that it would be too great a scope to cover all the intertextual references made in the three seasons of the animation. As the total episodes of all three seasons of the animation are 58 episodes, it is quite a substantial amount of data.

Apart from that, the study also refrains from studying other animations produced by Nickelodeon. Even the sequel for *Avatar: The Last Airbender*, *The Legend of Korra* is not considered for this study. Although there is a substantial amount of data that could be analyzed from *The Legend of Korra* as well, it is deemed to be too wide to be covered in the course of this study.

Finally, although *Avatar* was also made into a comic series and adapted into a movie, this study is limited to only studying the intertextual references in the animation. The reason for this limitation is because the animation alone is sufficient enough to provide all the necessary data needed in this study, without needing to refer to the comics. Besides, *Avatar: The Last Airbender* started off as an animation production before it was adapted into the comics. As for the movie adaptation, the cultural and cast choices for the characters were so inaccurate compared to the animation that it triggered a massive negative fan reaction to it. Movie critics and fans labeled the film as being “whitewashed” because of the choice of white actors portraying the mostly Asian-looking characters (Hajela, 2010). Therefore, it is definitely unsuited as a socio-cultural intertextual reference study.

1.7 Summary

In this chapter, I have presented the purpose of this study, the objectives, research questions and the significance of this study. I have also provided a slight introduction to intertextuality, a brief introduction to Nickelodeon, and an overview of the animation that is to be studied—*Avatar: The Last Airbender*. Finally, I discussed the scope of the study and its limitations.

In the subsequent chapter, the Literature Review, I would be discussing studies that have been done in the area of intertextuality, animation, as well as intertextuality in animation. I would also introduce *Avatar: The Last Airbender* in detail and look at the previous studies that have been conducted on it.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

In this chapter, I will review the relevant literature in this area of study and provide the studies that been conducted before in them. The discussion of this chapter would include reviewing the literature regarding the studies done on intertextuality, animation, intertextuality in animation and *Avatar: The Last Airbender*.

2.1 Intertextuality

The term “intertextuality” was first coined by Julia Kristeva in the early 1960s, appearing in her works such as “The Bounded Text” and “Word, Dialogue, Novel”. Allen (2000) summarizes Kristeva’s “intertextuality” as “the manner in which a text is constructed out of already existing discourse”. This means that authors do not produce texts out of the ingenuity of their minds, but rather, assemble them from preexisting texts. Kristeva (1980) writes that a text is “a permutation of texts, an intertextuality in the space of a given text” and elaborates that in intertextuality, a number of utterances that are taken from other texts “intersect and neutralize one another”. Therefore, text is actually not a singular entity, but a compilation of cultural textuality (Allen, 2000). It is made out of a multitude of texts put together by others to form a new text.

Although Kristeva may be credited with creating the term of “intertextuality”, the notion of intertextuality has actually been around earlier than that. Allen (2000) chronicling the origins of the notion of intertextuality, names Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin, the Russian literary theorist as the originator of this concept in the 1960s. Boje (2001) points out that Kristeva substituted the word “intertextual” from Bakhtin’s word “translinguistic”.

Bakhtin perceives how the relational nature of words emerges from how human subjects use “a word’s existence within specific social sites, specific social registers and specific moments of utterance and reception” (Allen, 2000, p.11). On the other hand, Kristeva (1980) avoids talking about human subjects, but places more emphasis on “abstract terms, text and textuality”. They both, however, maintain that texts “cannot be separated from the larger cultural or social textuality out of which they are constructed” (Allen, 2000, p.36). This is where their similarity is highlighted.

From the origins of intertextuality from Bakhtin (1960) and Kristeva (1980), the concept of intertextuality made its way into the studies and exploration of other linguists. Barthes (1974) takes his place in stressing that texts are not self-supporting entities. Writers of texts are always first readers of other texts before they are able to produce any text. This is how initial texts influences subsequent texts. Apart from that, intertextuality is also distinguished by Barthes (1974) as how “relationships between texts are organized in reading certain text under certain circumstance”.

Original intertextual studies focused heavily on how intertextuality manifested in texts, as the term itself points to studying references in texts. Experts have looked at how intertextuality has played a part in the formation and writing of texts. Bazerman (2004, p. 84) defines intertextuality as “the relation each text has to the texts surrounding it”. In analyzing intertextuality, Bazerman distinguishes 6 different levels of looking at it:

1. Texts draw on prior texts are a source of meanings to be used at face value.
2. Texts draw on explicit social dramas of prior texts engaged in discussion.
3. Texts explicitly using other statements as background, support and contrast.
4. Texts less explicitly relying on beliefs, issues, ideas, statements generally circulated.
5. Texts implicitly using recognizable kinds of language, phrasing and genres to

evoke particular social worlds.

6. Texts rely on available resources of language of the period.

In summary, intertextual analysis according to Bazerman (2004, p.84) is the examination of the “relation of a statement to that sea of words, how it uses those words, how it positions itself in respect to those other words”.

Apart from Bazerman, Boje (2001) looks at how intertextuality is used in writing as well. His book *Narrative Methods for Organizational and Communicative Research* discusses how intertextuality is used to build narratives. He summarizes his version of intertextuality as “a web of complex inter-relationships ensnaring each story’s historicity and situational context between other stories” (Boje, 2001, p. 91). For him, each story is based on other stories that the writer or reader have come across before in their own cultural background. He states that “texts and narratives are not necessarily written”, which foreshadows the evolution of how texts and intertextuality would be perceived (Boje, 2001, p. 91).

As studies in intertextuality progressed, they moved on to studying intertextuality in not only texts, but also in communication. Gasparov (2010) observes that “linguistic expressions carry in their recollections of and allusions to other texts has been initially explored in regards to literary texts only” and that little has been done on the role that intertextuality plays in everyday communication. He argues that intertextuality is “as pervasive, and as crucial, in everyday as in literary discourses” (Gasparov, 2010, p. 16). Therefore, in his book, *Speech, Memory, and Meaning: Intertextuality in Everyday Language*, he expounds the role of intertextuality as the foundation of speech and how every new element of speech is in fact, derived from one’s previous speech experience.

Bauman (2004) examines the production of intertextuality in terms of its communicative practices in performances and genre. In his book, *A World of Other’s*

Words, Bauman focuses the chapters on the relationships of how speakers “align their texts to other texts” (Bauman, 2004, p. 5). His main concern in the book is of generic intertextuality—“orientating frameworks for the production and reception of particular types of texts” (Bauman, 2004, p. 5). He looks at reiteration as “saying again what has been said before” as well as parody, which is the “ludic or inversive transformation of a prior text or genre” (Bauman, 2004, p. 5).

The wide range of texts in which intertextuality is seen eventually led to the branching of more specific subtypes of the term. Genette (1997) proposed the term “transtextuality” to be a more comprehensive term compared to “intertextuality”. In his version, there are five subtypes of the term: intertextuality, paratextuality, architextuality, metatextuality and hypotextuality. These subtypes differ as follows:

1. Intertextuality: quotation, plagiarism, allusion
2. Paratextuality: the relation between a texts and it’s ‘paratext’ – that which surrounds the main body of text – such as titles, headings, prefaces, epigraphs, dedications, acknowledgements, footnotes, illustrations, dust jackets, etc
3. Architextuality: designation of a text as a part of a genre or genres
4. Metatextuality: Explicit or implicit critical commentary of one text on another text
5. Hypotextuality: the relation between a text and a preceding ‘hypotext’ – a text or genre on which it is based but which it transforms, modifies, elaborates or extends (including parodies, spoofs, sequels, translations)

To this list, Chandler (1994) added his own term, hypertextuality, in view of the age of computers, the internet and World Wide Web. Hypertext is text that takes the reader to another text by means of clicking on a link on a web page. The link connects the current text to another text, regardless of authorship or location of the initial text.

As we can see throughout the literature, the concept of intertextuality has evolved largely within the context of textual intertextuality, and eventually, communication. In terms of visual intertextuality, the perception of it is still fairly new and untapped. There is a reason to this divide between textual and visual significance. As Kress and Van Leeuwen (2008) posit, the earliest forms of written communication was in the form of writing and therefore considered the oldest form of visual communication. This “old” form of visual literacy has for centuries marked the most crucial achievement and value of Western education, as well as being one of the most important aspects of education (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2008).

As we move towards more modern forms of visual literacy, those which are based on images and visual elements, they are seen as a threat to the “old” form of visual literacy, which is the written word (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2008). Images are a sign of a decline of culture, because it is an alternative to writing and poses to be a competition with the dominance of verbal literacy. Opposing this view of images being “second-class” when compared to writing in visual literacy is Kress and Van Leeuwen (2008). They regard that using images as forms of communication are as important as using linguistic forms.

Arguing out their stand, they are moving away from Barthes (1964), who argued that the meaning of images are always related to and dependant on verbal texts. By itself, images are too open to varieties of meaning and need verbal texts to specify what is being expressed. Kress and Van Leeuwen (2008) agree that although “both language and visual communication express meaning belonging to and structured by cultures on one society, the semiotic process... are broadly similar”. Each medium has its personal possibilities and boundaries of meaning. Not everything that can be expressed in language can also be express with images and vice versa. Therefore, images as a form of visual communication are critical as well.

Lester (2011) respects this viewpoint of having words and images bringing the best out of each other. In his book *Visual Communication: Images with messages*, he writes that “one of the strongest forms of communication is when words and images are combined in equally respectful ways”. He reasons that although we use our eyes to see, we usually think with words. Thus, words, combined with our memory and culture, heavily affect our understanding and recall of an image. It is this combination of images and the written word that would be explored in this study. The potency of not pitting images and text against each other, but using them together would be used as tool to magnify and strengthen the intertextual references in *Avatar: The Last Airbender* for this study.

Through this section of the literature review, we are able to observe how the arguments and views of intertextuality have evolved from when Kristeva first coined the term. It has evolved from being just a written, textual term to one that encompasses communication and visual texts as well. With progress, new terms like “hypertextuality” emerges to keep up with the circumstances of how the Internet has affected our lives and how it relates to intertextuality.

2.1.1 Studies in Intertextuality

As intertextuality occurs across different genres of texts, studies in intertextuality are diverse as well. In general, most of them have been conducted upon written texts, but the trend of it is moving on to other forms of texts like movies, music, religious texts and even media personalities. In this chapter, we will look at the different studies that have been conducted on intertextuality.

As mentioned, one of the most common studies done on intertextuality is on written texts. An example of this type of study was conducted upon the essays of Chinese high schools in Taiwan. This study, run by Chen, Liddicoat and Scrimgeour (2008), investigated

the intertextual practices that schools in Taiwan used for developing writing skills in their students. Not only are the intertextual practices analyzed, the study also looks at the teaching approaches and evaluations given by the teachers of these students. They drew a difference between the writing styles of English and Chinese in this study. In their conclusion, they posited that although both the Chinese and English writing styles requires one to state the source and origin of references, the perception of source and originality is culturally contextual and realized in a dissimilar manner in both cultures.

Studies in intertextuality have also been conducted in different genres of the written text. One of these genres includes literature—analyzing intertextuality in literary texts. Usually, studies of this nature are conducted on popular or well-known literary texts. An example of this would be Kleinhenz's (2007) paper on intertextuality in Dante's *Divine Comedy*. Kleinhenz examines how Dante Alighieri, the famed Italian poet of the 13th century applied intertextual citations to generate authority and give meaning in his popular poem. Among the texts that were Dante's references are from the Bible, a collection of other poems from poets before his time as well as hymns from *Venantius Fortunatus*. Dante's intertextual references go deep and only a reader who has an understanding and appreciation of the other texts may have a complete idea of the relationship of these texts in the *Divine Comedy*. This study shows the significance of intertextuality as various different texts are used as the basis of a new text.

Intertextual studies have also been conducted upon religious texts, especially on texts from the Bible. There have been some studies of this variety conducted on the different books in the Bible, especially of the books in the New Testament. In these studies, one sees how the New Testament is written with intertextual references to the Old Testament. A study by Popkes (1999) used intertextuality to examine the Gospel of John from the New Testament in the Bible. His study on the Gospel of John revealed that it drew

upon Old Testament quotations and other forms of excerpt-material from other various sources. It was not just written purely based on oral tradition. He discusses the origins of where John gathered his secondary data and how he gathered them in preparation for writing his gospel.

On the other hand, Oropeza (2007) examines Romans 9-11 from the New Testament of the Bible and addresses three questions that the apostle Paul asks God regarding his faithfulness to the people of Israel. These questions are: “Is God unjust in reference to His election?” “Why does God find fault?” and “Has God rejected His people?” His study looks at how Paul’s answers to these questions are references that the apostle draws from the Jewish Old Testament text and its’ teaching. His focus of the study is how Paul uses to his advantage catchwords drawn from Scripture in the Old Testament to answer the three questions.

From looking at intertextuality in written texts, we now look at studies of intertextuality in music. Studies of this nature are fairly limited, but have been gaining popularity in recent years. Downes (2004) looks at twentieth-century compositions in music in his paper titled *Hans Werner Henze as Post-Mahlerian: Anachronism, Freedom, and the Erotics of Intertextuality. The Bassarids*, a composition of Henze’s is compared to Mahler’s *Fifth Symphony*. His results were that in *The Bassarids*, there is an intertextual reference to the second movement of *Fifth Symphony*. This reference leads Downes (2004) to suggest that Henze was “symptomatic of his understanding of Mahler’s importance for twentieth-century music”.

Butler (2003) investigates the intertextuality in two songs covered by the English musical duo, the Pet Shop Boys. He analyzed the sounds, performance styles, themes in the lyrics, as well as the surrounding discourse of the production and reception of the songs that were previously performed by other bands. He used his results to determine the authenticity

of these songs as compared to their originals. The songs that covered were *Where the Streets Have No Name* by U2 and *Go West* by the Village People.

Significant events have also been studied for their intertextuality as well, the most notable being the event of September 11, 2001. This disaster that struck America is approached by intertextual scholars from various angles. This tragic date—9/11, is not only significant to America, but also to the whole world. Wang Wei (2008) investigates the intertextual references made in Chinese newspaper commentaries regarding the events of September 11. According to Wang, newspaper commentaries in China are a combination of news reports and opinion articles. Thus, her paper aims to study how the Chinese writers use external sources in their commentaries as well as how they position themselves as fellow writers to these other sources. Wang's (2008) results show that the Chinese writers use "the explanatory micro-genre" together with accredited but untraceable sources to distance themselves from the original sources in their writing". Her study also looks at the part played by the press in the Chinese context.

Intertextuality has even been used to investigate the branding of celebrities. In Boyle's (2010) paper, she studies Arnold Schwarzenegger's career and how intertextuality has played a part in branding him as an actor, a celebrity and finally, the governor of California. According to her, Schwarzenegger went through 3 stages in his image; from a foreigner, to an icon of muscular masculinity in Hollywood to being a family man in comedy and family themed movies. Her analysis shows that discourses in masculinity, whiteness, wealth and American nationhood are all intertextual images that played a part in shaping Schwarzenegger's brand and ultimately, his career.

Closer to the nature of this research, intertextuality in animation, there have also been studies of intertextuality in movies. Ding (2011) uses postmodernist styles of intertextuality to argue that Ang Lee's film, *Lust/Caution*, which was adapted from Eileen

Chang's short story *Lust, Caution*, is a film work filled with nuances of subtle and significant cultural politics. She also discusses the other literary works that Eileen Chang and Ang Lee referred to in making the book and the movie resonate more with audiences to the intensity of the Sino-Japanese war. With all these references from other written works and songs slipped into the movie, Ding's research also revealed Ang Lee's attempts to shape the identity of Self and Other as well as problematizing the theme of nationhood in his movie. In this research, one finds that not only is intertextuality used to add to the authenticity of a war movie, but is also used to bring out other themes, like self discovery and national identity.

Apart from *Lust/Caution*, an intertextuality study was also conducted on the film "*Bride and Prejudice*" by Gurinder Chadha by Geragthy (2006). She analyzes how Chadha reproduces Jane Austen's British classic by blending movie-making features from Indian and British cinema as well as British television. She maps out the parallels of the plot between the movie and the novel and states the similarities of the characters in the movie with the novel. The characters, instead of being British, are Indian in the movie. She notes that the referencing here is not only by the audience, but also done heavily by the director herself. By blending references from both cultures, Chadha is able to rebrand Bollywood movies to Western audiences, giving them something they are familiar with, but with a different flavor. In her closing statement, Geragthy (2006) identifies the intertextuality used in the movie as "self-conscious intertextuality". This form of intertextuality is dependent on the recognition of its audience as well as having filmmakers who are willing to break the borders of text.

Another example of a study of intertextuality in movies is by Tóth (2011). He examines the use and importance of intertextuality in Quentin Tarantino's *Pulp Fiction*. His discussion includes identifying and analyzing the intertextual references that Tarantino

exhibits in his movie as well as determining how intertextuality functions to make *Pulp Fiction* the “ultimate cult movie” (Tóth, 2011, p. 6). His concluding statement about his findings is that intertextuality played a part in building an author-viewer rapport—the audience finding and identifying the pop-cultural references placed by Tarantino in the movie, and the pleasure that they get from that (Tóth, 2011).

2.1.2 Review: Intertextuality

From the literature on intertextuality, one sees the progress of intertextuality as it passes through the scrutiny of different experts. It leads to a conclusion that studies on intertextuality have been conducted upon many forms of texts and genres in different manners, focusing on different aspects of the texts. Among variations of texts studied are written texts, religious texts, music, movies and celebrities. But, although there have been analytical categories that examines intertextuality in spoken and written discourse, there is no schema that investigates visual intertextuality in a systematic manner. Even more obvious is the lack of literature on how visual and verbal texts complement one another and how it can be used to bring out the intertextuality in a particular text or genre.

2.2 Animation

In introducing animation in terms of *Avatar: The Last Air Bender*, it must be kept in mind that this is no ordinary American animation production. The uniqueness of *Avatar* comes from the fact that the producers, Bryan Konietzko and Michael Dante DiMartino, are exposed to the influence of anime. The term “anime” basically means Japanese animation, being the Japanese abbreviation of the English word “animation”. Konietzko is a self-confessed fan of *Cowboy Bebop*, an anime about the exploits of a group of space bounty hunters, while both of them, according to Konietzko, are “big fans of Hayao Miyazaki, and

my sketches from this time were heavily influenced by his sensibilities” (DiMartino and Konietzko, 2010, p. 11). This interest is reflected heavily in the animation, whereby *Avatar* bears heavy elements of Japanese anime in its visual and production styles, rather than being the same as a typical American cartoon.

Keeping this in mind, with the interest of the two producers, this section would give an introduction to anime in general, rather than an introduction of American animation. What then, is anime? In her book, *Anime: From Akira to Howl’s Moving Castle*, Susan Napier (2005, p. 6) defines anime as such: “anime works include everything that Western audiences are accustomed to seeing in live-action films—romance, comedy, tragedy, adventure, even psychological probing of a kind seldom attempted in recent mass-culture Western film or television”. This definition fits precisely into the kind of animation *Avatar* is, leading me to categorize it more towards a Western-styled anime, rather than a Western cartoon.

Perhaps a good introduction to anime is to discuss its popularity in not only Japan, but also in the West. The interest in anime is growing, and growing fast; so much so that the lines between Japanese animation and Western animation are starting to get blurred, just like in the production of *Avatar*. With an understanding of why anime has found its way into the hearts of American producers, one understands better where hybrid animations like *Avatar* have their roots.

2.2.1 Anime as a culture and in America

In the recent years, the popularity of the genre of fantasy has soared like never before. The success of the books and movies of the *Harry Potter* and *Lord of the Rings* series have unleashed a global clamoring for more fictional fantasy, leading to many forms of entertainment like books and movies to piggyback on the success of these two franchises.

More and more people are seeking out an alternative to the world we live in and are willingly immersing themselves in the world of fantasy. That is where animation and anime enters to satisfy this demand.

In fact, the popularity of animation is such that Wells (1998) argues that animation is probably the more important creative art form of the twenty-first century. Animation is “an art, an approach, an aesthetic and an application” that has immersed itself into many areas of visual culture, from sit-coms to cartoons to display functions on communicative gadgets (Wells, 1998, p. 1). There is no escaping animation in our modern world. In her book, Susan Napier, a lecturer in Japanese literature and culture as well as an expert in anime, studies modern anime and how it has evolved to fit into society’s need, not only with Oriental audiences, but also their Western kin. This is the paradigm of anime that the American-produced *Avatar* is based on.

The anime culture in America is considered to be a “sub-culture” rather than the “mass-culture” it is back in its native Japan (Napier, 2005, p. 4). But recently, judging by the popularity of *Avatar: The Last Airbender* and its’ sequel, *The Legend of Korra*, the state of anime in America may very well be increasing. This raises the question to the reason of the rising popularity of anime. Napier (2005) suggests that as a cultural element itself, anime builds upon our own cultural traditions. This means that anime reinforces certain traditions that we believe in or help shape new traditions. This aspect is what this study is aiming to look into as well— using the cultures that we know about to help shape and reinforce an animated culture. Apart from that, she also reveals that modern anime applies universal traditions of twentieth-century cinema and photography in their film making techniques (Napier, 2005, p. 4). Being updated with the animation industry’s technology helps anime filmmakers create anime with better quality graphics and visual effects.

One interesting fact that Napier raised about the increasing appeal of anime to the mass was the issues addressed in anime. These issues are sometimes in presented very complex ways, but relatable to audiences with knowledge of “high-literature” and audiences of modern art cinema. On a basic level, these anime are entertaining, but more than that, anime touches and provokes audiences on a deeper level (Napier, 2005, p. 4). Not all anime is targeted at children. Some of them address serious themes like dealing with the aftermath of suicide (*Haibene Renmei*), the dark side of computer technology (*Serial Experiments Lain*), homelessness and rejection (*Fruits Basket*) and the disappointment of lost dreams (*Wolf's Rain*), to name a selected few. These profound themes appeal to older audiences, stimulating audiences in their appreciation of them and for them to have a different take on the themes addressed.

As such, Napier is convinced that anime as a whole is now “a cultural phenomenon that is worthy of being taken seriously, both sociologically and aesthetically” (Napier, 2005, p. 4). Napier sees anime as a fascinating subject matter to study as it “brings insight into the wider issue of the relationship between global and local cultures at the beginning of the twenty-first century” (Napier, 2005, p. 8-9). Anime by itself does not only help shape culture, it itself is a form of culture. It’s a cultural form whose “themes and modes reach across arbitrary aesthetic boundaries to strike significant artistic and psychological chords” (Napier, 2005, p. 14). And certainly, anime has crossed the ocean from Japan and found a foothold in America.

The uniqueness of anime has certainly left its mark in America. As fascinated researchers point out, the originality of anime is remarkably well preserved in America. Susan Pointon observes that the most prominent thing about anime is its ability to stay true to itself, compared to “other imported media that have been modified for the American market” (Pointon, 1997, p. 45). The narratives in anime, as well as its pacing, imagery, as

well as emotional and psychological elements run deeper and wider compared to animated American texts (Napier, 2005, p. 9). Anime also holds true to its complex storylines, unlike the predictability of many Hollywood productions, and especially Disney. These differences, instead of making audiences shy away from anime, make them more appreciative of the freshness anime offers, while being able to relate to the universal themes that are addressed in them.

Apart from the different narrative styles, another aspect that sets anime apart from American cartoons is the difference in their visual styles. Anime critics Trish Ledoux and Doug Ranney explain that, even from the early 1970s, Japanese animation had already a signature film making style. Japanese animation “absolutely overflow with tracking shots, long-view establishing shots, fancy pans, unusual point-of-view ‘camera angles’ and extreme close ups...” (Ledoux & Ranney, 1997, p. 3). This style is in contrast with American cartoons which basically focus only on “action obsessed middle distance” shots. A perceptive audience of *Avatar: The Last Airbender* would detect that the animation adopts the visual style of Japanese animation, as would be discussed in the later sections of the literature review.

As mentioned continuously in this section, the characteristics of *Avatar: The Last Airbender* leans more towards being a Japanese animation as opposed to being an American cartoon. In the subsequent section, we would discuss more on the development of *Avatar* and its formative years as well as the inspiration that contributed to it.

2.2.2 Studies in animation

A number of studies have been conducted upon animation since the genre became popular. In this section of the literature review, I would provide examples of studies centered on anime.

A favorite among anime connoisseurs is analyzing works by Hayao Miyazaki. Miyazaki is a legendary anime filmmaker beloved for his works like *Princess Mononoke*, *My Neighbor Totoro*, and *Howl's Moving Castle*, to name a few. His works are a form of art, blending supernatural elements, unusual characters with relatable storylines that most people are able to enjoy and appreciate. As mentioned before, the producers of *Avatar*, Bryan Konietzko and Michael Dante DiMartino are self-confessed fans of Miyazaki's works themselves. Miyazaki's works have been translated into English and marketed to an American audience as well as translated into other languages for other countries.

This "American marketing" has influenced Denison (2008) to study the "Americanization" of Miyazaki's works. Her study examines the use of American stars in dubbing Japanese animation and its repercussions. Apart from that, she also incorporates a textual and contextual approach to analyze Miyazaki's works in terms of it being marketed in America. As a whole, Denison relates the star power used by American producers in promoting anime to the increasing significance of anime in America. Miyazaki's works are one of the more prominent anime that has left its mark in America's animation culture.

Other studies analyze Miyazaki's work in a more straightforward manner, focusing on just one anime film produced by him. Bartholow and Moist (2007) selected *Porco Rosso*, the story about an Italian World War I ex-fighter who is now a bounty hunter who was cursed into a pig. "Porco rosso" is Italian for "Crimson Pig". By studying *Porco Rosso*, the researchers argue that anime is a form of postmodern popular culture that is flowing into the West. It is best understood through a "triangulation of different approaches" which considers issues of form, medium, different cultural contexts and individual creators (Bartholow and Moist, 2007). They conclude this study by giving credit to Miyazaki, calling him a "creative traditionalist" or "creative conservative" for being able to balance tradition and innovation in his work.

Because the range of animation and anime is so wide, studies have been conducted on the different genres of anime as well. One of the more unusual and interesting genres of anime is *yaoi* or BL (Boys Love). Mostly written by women for other women, the focus of this genre is the sexual relationships between male characters in the anime. Zanghellini (2009) addresses this sensitive genre, as well as the issue of underage sex of the *yaoi* characters in Japanese manga and anime. His paper discusses the prominent feature of the *yaoi* genre as well as the social and legal acceptability of this genre in Japan. He also discusses the censorship concerns of *yaoi* in Australia and Canada. He ends his paper by concluding that the harmfulness of *yaoi* is very much debatable, thus questioning the relevance of restricting the publishing of this genre of anime.

2.2.3 Review: Animation

In this section of the literature review, we have briefly looked at the significance of Japanese animation as a form of culture and how it has seeped into the American culture. This significance is due to the fact that the producers of *Avatar* are heavily influenced by anime and this interest is reflected in the formation of the animation. I have also discussed the relevant studies on animation, which includes looking at specific works from animators and the genres of animation. It is apparent from the literature review that the amount of studies that have been conducted on animation is limited.

2.3 Intertextuality in Animation

In terms of intertextuality in animation, there have been a handful of studies conducted on popular American animated sitcoms like *South Park* and *The Simpsons*. These studies look at intertextuality from a broad point of view, like how the storyline of a particular episode is adapted from an incident that has happened recently in the world.

In *South Park*, a study by Block and DiIorio (2012) looked at the *Margaritaville* episode in *South Park* and how it addresses the events of recession and housing bubble in America. *South Park* is an animated sitcom for mature audiences famous for its rough language, dark humor and parodies of social events and personalities. The result from Block and DiIorio's study revealed that although an animation, *South Park* expounded accurately the issue addressed, from the reasons of why recessions happen, to its effects on the citizens of America. This study shows how much animation can relate to the real life happenings in our world. They provide commentaries and opinions on world problems in a non-stressful way to audiences.

Apart from *South Park*, *The Simpsons* is another popular adult animation that has been running for 24 seasons since airing in 1989. *The Simpsons* is about a middle-class American family and their exploits. They tackle issues about the American culture, society and many areas of the human community. Knox (2010) studies the complexities of double-codedness in this long-running animation. In her study, she reveals that *The Simpsons* have a distinct interplay between its text, audience and institutional context. To breakdown the textual strategies used, it would be a challenge for postmodern critical theories and interpretation. She concludes that reading *The Simpsons* animation from theory to text is not enough, there is also much to be approached from text to theory.

As for studies of intertextuality in anime, there has been an intertextual study conducted on *Cowboy Bebop*, one of Bryan Konietzko's favorite anime (DiMartino and Konietzko, 2010, p. 11). This anime is set in the year 2071 and it is about a group of space bounty hunters and their adventures. Hiramoto (2010, p. 235) studied the animation in terms of how "ideas, including heterosexual normativity and culture-specific practices, are reproduced in media texts in order to negotiate the intertextual distances that link the character and audience". Her findings show that the characters in *Cowboy Bebop* "conform

to the hegemonic ideals of gender, sexuality, occupation, age and race” (Hiramoto, 2010, p. 252). Intertextuality plays its role as tool that is used to shape this conformity of the anime to societal norms.

2.3.1 Review: Intertextuality in Animation

From the literature gathered, it is evident that there have not been many studies focusing on intertextuality in animation. The existing studies are mostly focus on generic American sitcoms, like *South Park* and *The Simpsons*. Even less existing studies are studies of intertextuality in anime. Children’s animation, like *Avatar: The Last Airbender*, have not been considered as intertextual studies. And certainly, these studies do not study the visual and verbal intertextual references that come together in depth nor present them in a systematic way.

2.4 *Avatar: The Last Airbender*

As briefly introduced in the Introduction, *Avatar: The Last Airbender* is an American animation produced by Nickelodeon. It was created and produced by Bryan Konietzko and Michael Dante DiMartino, a pair of animators who are also good friends with each other. Konietzko and DiMartino are also the show’s executive producers. This animation aired for three seasons from 2005 to 2008.

The series is called *Avatar: The Last Airbender* because the protagonist, Aang, is an Avatar. The Avatar is an all powerful spirit that is reincarnated into the different nations in the cycle of Earth, Fire, Water and Air. His or her purpose is to bring balance to the world, peace between the Four Nations and be the bridge between the spirit realm and the earthly realm.

The world of Avatar is divided into four nations, the Earth Kingdom, the Fire Nation, the Water Tribes and the Air Nomads. These nations are each named after the element that the citizens are able to “bend”. Bending is a kinesthetic art form where certain people are able to manipulate these elements to move around. They use it as a form of defense and combat, as well as to enrich their lives. Each individual is only able to bend one element, with the exception of the Avatar. He or she is able to bend all four elements at once, making him or her, a very powerful individual.

The premise of the story is set in the middle of a war, in which the Fire Nation has fought against the other nations for 100 years. They started by wiping out the Air Nomads, Aang’s people, leaving Aang as the sole survivor. Aang survived because before the Fire Nation attack, he ran away on his flying bison and was caught in a storm. To protect himself, he froze himself and his bison, Appa, in a block of ice, until he was found a hundred years later.

2.4.1 Synopsis of *Avatar: The Last Airbender*

The series kicks off with Katara and her brother, Sokka finding a 12 year old boy frozen in a large block of ice. They realized that this is Aang, the long-lost Avatar from the Air Nomads. Aang learns that he is the last survivor of his people and that the world now is in the midst of a 100 year war, with the Fire Nation attacking the other nations and conquering them. He realizes his purpose as the Avatar is to restore balance to their world by ending the war. Katara and Sokka embark with him on this journey.

In the meantime, hunting the Avatar is Prince Zuko, the crown prince of the Fire Nation. Scarred on his left eye by his father, Fire Lord Ozai, for speaking out in defense of the troops sent out as bait in the war, he was exiled until he captures the Avatar. Due to this,

Zuko is convinced that the only way to restore his honor and place as Crown Prince was to capture Aang. Along with Zuko is General Iroh, or Uncle Iroh, as Zuko calls him.

At the end of Season 1, Aang manages to learn water bending, having found a master from the Northern Water Tribe to train Katara and him. When they were there, Aang and his friends engaged in a battle to save the Northern Water Tribe from an attack by the Fire Nation. Aang, who is able to commune with the spirit world, merged his spirit with the Ocean spirit to defeat the Fire Nation armada.

With water bending under his belt, Aang sets off to learn earth bending in Season 2. This season introduces Toph, a powerful earth bender who is only 12 years old and blind. She senses her surroundings through the vibrations that bounces back to her when she earthbends. Stubborn and strong-willed, she joins Aang, Katara and Sokka on their journey as Aang's earthbending instructor. Audiences are also introduced to Azula, Zuko's younger sister. She is enlisted by their father to bring back the Avatar, Zuko and Iroh. Unlike Zuko who is righteous and straight thinking, Azula is manipulative and conniving, as well as a powerful firebender. From Season 2 onwards, she is the main antagonist in the series.

In the meantime, Zuko and his uncle, having failed to capture Aang in the Northern Water Tribe, have been branded fugitives by the Fire Lord and are on the run. They seek refuge in the Earth Kingdom stronghold, the city of Ba Sing Se, posing as common refugees and making a life for themselves by working in a tea shop.

On the surface, Ba Sing Se seems like a thriving city where refugees can escape the war. But when Aang and his friends arrive, they find that beneath its thriving exterior, the city is not what it seems. The Earth King is a puppet leader, ruling under the governance of the Dai Li, a group of elite earthbenders who call themselves the protectors of the city's cultural heritage. Aang and his friends come face to face with Long Feng, the leader of the

Dai Li and confront his agenda about hiding the war from the Earth King as well as brain-washing citizens into not speaking about the war.

In the final battle of Season 2, Azula is able to infiltrate into the Earth Kingdom, convince the Dai Li to side with the Fire Nation and take over the city. Aang, who has been trying to unlock his “Avatar state” a defense spiritual mechanism that grants him immense power, is struck by Azula’s lightning in the small of his back, making him unable to unlock the chakra that enables him to access this power. Zuko turns on his uncle, joining his sister in fighting Aang and Katara. Iroh, painfully disappointed with Zuko, helps Katara escape with an injured Aang before being caught.

The series continues in Season 3, with the injured Aang waking up after a coma from his wounds. Katara tells that him that he is reported to be dead by the Fire Nation. At the same time, Azula has reported to their father that Zuko has killed the Avatar, thus restoring his honor and his place back in the palace. Zuko, on the other hand, has a suspicion that the Avatar is not dead and sends an assassin to finish the job. He is also suffers an emotional turmoil within himself, torn between the joy that his father has welcomed him home, and the guilt that he has betrayed his uncle who loves him. Eventually, Zuko comes to terms with his turmoil, realizing that his honor cannot be restored by anyone but himself, by doing the right thing. He turns over a new leaf and leaves the Fire Nation palace in hopes of joining Aang in his fight by teaching Aang firebending. At the same time Iroh escapes from prison.

Initially, Aang and his friends are against accepting Zuko into their group, as he had previously been trying to capture Aang. When Zuko rescues them from the assassin that he had sent to kill Aang, they reluctantly agree to accept him. As time goes by, Zuko proves his sincerity in playing his part to end the war by engaging in life-changing trips with the rest of the group.

With Zuko now on their side, Aang and his friends start to plan for their next course of action. Zuko and the rest are convinced that Aang must kill Fire Lord Ozai as that is the only way to stop the Fire Nation and end the war. But Aang, with his peaceful upbringing from the monks, is against destroying the Fire Lord. He struggles very much with the dilemma of killing or not killing the Fire Lord. While meditating on this and consulting his previous lives for advice, he is summoned by a huge Lion Turtle, a sage and wise magical beast which offers him another option to deal with the Fire Lord.

While Aang is with the Lion Turtle, his friends are frantic with his apparent disappearance. Unable to find him, they decide that the best course of action is to find Uncle Iroh, the only person other than the Avatar which has a chance of defeating the powerful Fire Lord. They eventually find Uncle Iroh with the Order of the White Lotus, a secret society which strives to uphold the balance of the Four Nations. Uncle Iroh is a “Grand Lotus”, the highest ranking member of the society.

When the day of battle draws upon them, the group splits up, each heading their own way to fight the war. The members of the White Lotus, led by Uncle Iroh, head to Ba Sing Se to take back the city from the Fire Nation. Toph, Sokka and Suki (a female warrior that they meet) take on the Fire Nation airships that were headed to burn down the land. Zuko and Katara return to the Fire Nation palace to confront Azula, whom Fire Lord Ozai has left in charge as he goes to war. Aang takes off by himself to battle the Fire Lord, after being enlightened by the Lion Turtle.

Back in the Fire Nation palace, Azula gets ready for her coronation as the new Fire Lord. Her perfectionist and dictatorial nature soon becomes out of hand and overcomes her sensibility. She loses her sanity, believing everyone around her would one day betray her and that fear is the only way to demand respect. Azula also starts getting hallucinations about her long-lost mother, telling her that she cannot rule people using fear.

Right before she is crowned as the Fire Lord, Zuko arrives with Katara to confront her for the last time. Zuko senses that something is off with Azula, giving him the confidence that he can fight her alone, without needing to endanger Katara. Zuko and Azula fight an Agni Kai, a firebending duel. In the middle of the fight, Azula directs a lightning attack towards Katara, making Zuko jump in the way of the lightning strike to protect her and mortally wounding himself. With Zuko injured, Azula turns her attention to Katara instead. After dodging Azula's multiple attacks, Katara manages to freeze Azula in a splash of water and ultimately chains up her hands, preventing her from bending. Defeated and humiliated by what she considers as two of the lowliest people she knows, Azula loses her mind totally, screaming and crying in defeat. Katara, who possesses with waterbending healing abilities, heals Zuko from his lightning wound.

In the meantime, Sokka, Toph and Suki sneak into one of the Fire Nation airships and use it to attack and destroy the rest of the airships. As the last of the airships crashes, they finally see Aang, ready to face the Fire Lord.

Aang and Ozai engage in a furious battle, with Ozai gaining a slight upper hand. After crashing through the rock forest, he finally pins Aang to a wall of rock. When Ozai's fire blast pushes him to hit the rock, a projection in the rock hits Aang old scar, the one that Azula locked with her lightning strike. Able to shift into his Avatar state again, Aang becomes powerful enough to defeat Ozai. Ozai expects Aang to kill him, but instead, with the knowledge and wisdom from the Lion Turtle, Aang takes away Ozai's ability to bend, leaving him a helpless shell of the powerful man he once was.

With Ozai defeated and Azula safely locked away, Zuko is crowned as the new Fire Lord. He and Aang vow to do their best in bringing peace and balance to their world. The ending scene of the series shows Aang and his friends relaxing in each other's company in Uncle Iroh's teashop. As Aang comes out onto the balcony to contemplate how their lives

have changed, Katara follows him. They look at each other; hug, and share a passionate kiss in the glow of the sunset.

2.4.2 Characters of *Avatar: The Last Airbender*

Avatar has five main characters as well as a host of secondary characters. Some characters appear at the start of the series while others, appear as the animation progresses. The late appearance of these characters does not diminish their importance; instead, each of these “late” characters enhances the plot of the animation.

Main characters:

1. Aang

Aang is the primary character in the series. He is the Avatar, an all-powerful spirit sent to earth to maintain its’ balance and to be the bridge between the living world and the spirit world. He is the last airbender alive, as the rest of his people were annihilated by the Fire Nation at the start of the war. In general, Aang is a peace-loving, cheerful 12 year old child who is also sometimes playful and passionate. His innocent childhood is marred by the fact that he has to shoulder the very heavy responsibility of ending the war in his world.

2. Katara

Katara is Aang’s closest friend and his love interest. She is a beautiful 14 year old Water Tribe waterbender. Katara is matured for her age and is always optimistic about their sometimes dire situations. In selected situations though, especially those that she is connected to emotionally, she lets her temper get the better of her and thus reveals her more headstrong and stubborn nature.

3. Sokka

Sokka is Katara's 15 year old elder brother and a non-bender. He makes up for his non-bending abilities with his talent in using his boomerang and sword. Sokka is intelligent, resourceful and sarcastic. He is also the joker of the group, telling jokes and being the butt of the teasing. Sokka is highly protective of his sister, as his father left him in charge of their family and village before going off to war.

4. Toph

Toph is a 12 year old blind earthbender. She plays a big role in teaching Aang earthbending. Coming from a rich noble family, Toph's parents overprotect and over shelter their daughter, thinking that as she is blind, she is frail and weak. In reality, Toph is an excellent earthbender, tough, independent and opinionated.

5. Zuko

Zuko is the 17 year old crown prince of the Fire Nation. Exiled by his father and dishonored until he captures the Avatar, Zuko's sole purpose in life is to catch Aang to get back into his father's good graces. He is the main antagonist in Season 1. Zuko is a talented firebender, with a fiery temper to boot. He is stubborn, determined and brash. However, he is also loyal, intelligent and has a soft spot for his Uncle Iroh, who has stood by him through thick and thin. Zuko is the only character in the animation which goes through the most emotional development. From being the main villain in Season 1, his character evolved through Season 2 and finally changes in Season 3, in which he ultimately realizes that his honor cannot be restored by capturing the Avatar, but rather, by doing the right thing to help Aang end the war.

Supporting characters:

There are many, many supporting characters in *Avatar*, spanning from Season 1 to Season 3, but the three most important supporting characters are Uncle Iroh, Azula and Fire Lord Ozai.

1. Uncle Iroh

Uncle Iroh is Fire Lord Ozai's elder brother, and thus the rightful Fire Lord to the throne of the Fire Nation. Iroh was a powerful warrior during his war days, but the death of his son crushed his spirit and he let Ozai have the throne instead. He loves Zuko like his own son and is his mentor, teacher and friend. Iroh is wise, humorous and loves good food and music. It is revealed that he is also known as the Dragon of the West and is hinted that he, apart from the Avatar, might be powerful enough to defeat Ozai.

2. Azula

Azula is Zuko's younger sister, although her age is not mentioned in the animation. She is the main antagonist in Season 2. Azula is a firebending prodigy, one of the few firebenders that can produce lightning. She is beautiful, a perfectionist, as well as manipulative and cunning. Azula eventually loses her mind, as she cracks under the pressure of being the perfect Fire Lord and the fear that the people around are not afraid of her anymore.

3. Fire Lord Ozai

Fire Lord Ozai is the ruler of the Fire Nation and Zuko's and Azula's father. Like his children, he is a powerful firebender. Ozai is proud, arrogant, and heartless. He scarred Zuko when he was only 13 to teach him a lesson. He also banished Zuko's mother. Azula inherits her manipulative and cunning nature from him. Ozai aims to rule the entire world by burning it to the ground and emerging as its sole emperor. He is finally defeated by Aang and has his bending abilities taken away.

2.4.3 Previous studies in *Avatar: The Last Airbender*

Studies on this particular animation have rarely been done. Most studies have just made passing remarks to the animation, without going into an in-depth study. Other studies have looked at the movie spin-off of *Avatar*, titled *The Last Airbender* directed by M. Night Shyamalan. The movie came under fire for poor ratings and sparked off fans' anger for "whitewashing" the characters. Shyamalan used mostly white actors to portray the dominantly Asian characters. The fans were angry for this inaccuracy. There are a handful of studies that address the fan protests in this issue. Lopez (2011) looks at how this "whitewashing" of race affects the fans and how it prompts them to get involved in racial politics in the entertainment media. In this study, though, we will not go into the movie version of the animation.

Moving on to the animation itself, there have been minimal studies conducted upon it and none of them have looked into the social semiotic aspect of *Avatar*. Karla (2010) analyzes the narrative structure of *Avatar* and how this narration reveals the "natural elements" of the characters. In her study, "natural elements" refer to the water, earth, fire and air elements in the animation. Apart from looking at how the narrative structure incorporates these elements into the formation of the characters of the Four Nations, she also looks at how the plot of the animation brings audiences to the different Nations and their cultures. Karla's study draws surface references of the clothing of the characters and the Asian cultures in the introduction of her characters of *Avatar*. Specifically though, her focus is on the narrative structure of the animation and how it is used to manipulate the audiences' journey through the animation.

A more recent study of *Avatar: The Last Airbender* was done by Kat Bakonyi (2012), who drew parallels from the animation style of *Avatar* to Japanese anime. Her study of the animation revealed that *Avatar* blended the best of Western and Japanese animation.

Avatar merges Western character animation that includes deep research and live-action footage for reference, with Japanese varied visual effects in their color, background, camera movements and visual story telling cues. Her study is parallel to what the literature review has discussed about *Avatar* being more similar to a Japanese animation than an American animation. Bakonyi (2012) also mentions very briefly the real cultural influences of the Four Nations. She lists Indian, Alaskan Inuit, Chinese, Tibetan, Persian and 20th century Imperial Japanese cultures as her cultural make-up of the Four Nations. Although Bakonyi did not state it, but her study of *Avatar* is by extension, a minor intertextual study as well.

Apart from studying the animation, there have also been studies conducted on the comics of *Avatar* as well. The comics are more loyal to the animation compared to the movie, as they are produced by the same production team as the animation. An example of a study on the comics of *Avatar* is by Laili (2008). She studied the comics on their use of onomatopoeia. The comics are a sequel to what happened in the animation. In her study, she very briefly mentions the use of Asian cultures by the writers as well. She identifies the Asian references in the animation's philosophy, religion, fighting styles, art and clothing. She did not, however, mention specifically what Asian cultures were referenced.

2.4.4 Review: *Avatar: The Last Airbender*

Based on the synopsis of *Avatar: The Last Airbender*, one can tell that is an action-packed, thought-provoking animation, filled with interesting and unique characters. This combination, along with the authentic imagery used in its production, is the reason to its popularity. Having a background of the animation would further increase and enhance the appreciation for the intertextuality studied in this dissertation.

Observing the studies that have analyzed *Avatar*, one realizes that Bakonyi's (2012) list of cultures is similar to the ones identified in this study. Laili (2008) also reveals that

there are Asian influences in the animation. Although they both mention the cultural references, their studies do not discuss in detail how exactly these cultures were incorporated into the animation. They also did not identify their studies as intertextual studies. From the literature about *Avatar*, we can see that there is a lack of studies conducted upon this animation. These few studies also do not address the questions that are posed in my research. There has not been a study that looks at the intertextual references that *Avatar: The Last Airbender* has made to existing cultures in the manner that this study is going to.

2.5 Summary

In general, this study is able to fill in the gaps in the existing literature about intertextual studies, animation and *Avatar: The Last Airbender*. In each of these categories, as discussed in their respective sections (2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.4), there are gaps which are waiting to be explored, but have never been done before. Based on the gaps highlighted in the literature review, this study would be able confront these missing areas and provide a source of information for them.

In terms of intertextual studies, this study would discuss how visual and verbal texts, analyzed together, complement each other in expressing the intertextual references made in the animation. In terms of animation, it is apparent that not many intertextual studies have been conducted on this genre. Those that have been, are usually typical American-flavored animated sitcoms, not anime-based American animation. Therefore, this study would be a valuable addition in increasing the amount of literature on animation. As for *Avatar* itself, based on the limited studies that have been conducted, it is an animation which has not been studied extensively, and certainly not in the field of social semiotics. Thus, this study

would be a solid addition into analyzing this animation as a worthy subject in the field of social-semiotics.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

This study takes on the qualitative approach as it primarily consists of gathering large amounts of data, analyzing them for the relevant themes and grouping them in definite sections together. Specifically, this dissertation is a social semiotic analysis of *Avatar: The Last Airbender* for its intertextual reference to the socio-cultural representation of the real world in the formation of the animation and how these references are realized. The purpose of this dissertation is achieved by answering the two research questions presented in the **Introduction**. These research questions are:

1. What are the East Asian, South Asian and Western cultural references made in the animation?
2. How are linguistic and visual intertextual references incorporated and presented in the animation?

With the purpose and nature of this dissertation in mind, the methodology of the study is aimed at gathering relevant data from the animation and coding them in a manner that best illustrates their dependence on the intertextual references that are drawn from the real world.

3.1 Conceptual Framework

The main conceptual framework of this thesis is based upon the concept of intertextuality. As explored and discussed in the Literature Review, the notion of intertextuality is when a text is constructed out of the presence of other texts (see **2.1**

Intertextuality). This construction could be in the form of references, allusions, parodies or any manner of reproduction. In the study, the text that is being analyzed in terms of intertextuality is the animation *Avatar: The Last Airbender*.

In detail, intertextuality can be analyzed in many sub-concepts and categories, as discussed in section **2.1.1 Studies in Intertextuality**. However, in this study, only the general concept of intertextuality is used to analyze the data. This concept encompasses the idea of looking at intertextuality at its surface level—how the knowledge of initial text is drawn upon in the formation of the subsequent text. There is no such thing as originality in text, because all text is produced by reading and hearing about other texts (Chandler, 1994).

This study applies the concept of intertextuality to explore how an animated television series, a fictional body of work, borrows or makes references from existing cultures in our world to create a new work. These references highlights Chandler's (1994) observation, who stated the fact that no form of text, either written texts, art, music or films can be produced without first being referenced to something beforehand.

Thus, using intertextuality, this study analyzed how the animation references architecture, landscapes, clothing and lifestyles from various cultures and adapts them into an animated series. Among obvious cultural references that were made, were to the Inuit culture, the Chinese culture, the Japanese culture and to the Tibetan culture. This study identifies the intertextuality made in the animation through verbal and visual references, highlighted by the stills and the script of the animation. Using visual and verbal texts proves that intertextuality does not exist only through written works, but also through spoken and illustrated texts.

3.2 Data

The data is from Nickelodeon's animation series, *Avatar: The Last Airbender* and spans through all three seasons of the animation. Each season is titled *Water*, *Earth* and *Fire* respectively, according to the elements that the Avatar must master in order to realize his or her full potential. Although there are four elements in the animation, there is not a season titled *Air*, as Aang, the Avatar in the series, has already mastered it at the start of the animation.

The three seasons of *Avatar: The Last Airbender* consists of 61 episodes, each running for around 23 minutes. The episodes are not equally divided among the seasons. Seasons 1 and 2, *Water* and *Earth*, are both 20 episodes each. Season 3, *Fire*, however, contains 21 episodes, with the season finale merging the last four episodes in one screening. In total, the animation runs for around 23.4 hours.

3.2.1 Data Collection

The researcher purchased the DVDs of all three seasons of *Avatar: The Last Airbender*. These DVDs were copied onto a laptop to be converted into files that would be compatible for the scenes to be clipped into movie stills. On the other hand, the script for all seasons of the animation was acquired online. The site which the script of the animation were acquired from is from a fan website dedicated to *Avatar: The Last Airbender*—http://avatar.wikia.com/wiki/Avatar_Wiki:Transcripts.

3.2.2 Data Selection

Not all the episodes from the animation are used in the study. Only episodes that would yield the richest data are chosen. Episodes which constitute as having “rich data” are those that have significant scenes which highlight the socio-cultural elements of the animation. These scenes include those that contain intertextual references to the landscape

and architecture, clothing and lifestyles of the cultures identified from our world including the Inuit, Chinese and Japanese cultures. The scenes were captured into animation stills. The accompanying script, if present, from those particular scenes is included in the analysis as well, in order to have both the visual and verbal data. Table 3.1 shows the episodes which were selected to be analyzed in the study.

Table 3.1: Episodes selected from each season to be used in the study

Season	Episodes
S1: Water	E1: The Boy in the Iceberg E2: The Avatar Returns E3: The Southern Air Temple E12: The Storm E13: The Blue Spirit E15: Bato of the Water Tribe E17: The Northern Air Temple E18: The Waterbending Master E19: The Siege of the North- Part 1
S2: Earth	E1: The Avatar State E5: Avatar Day E6: The Blind Bandit E7: Zuko Alone E13: The Drill E14: City of Walls and Secrets E15: Tales of Ba Sing Se E16: Appa's Lost Days

	<p>E18: The Earth King</p> <p>E19: The Guru</p>
S3: Fire	<p>E2: The Headband</p> <p>E6: The Avatar and the Firelord</p> <p>E10: The Day of Black Sun (Part 1 - The Invasion)</p> <p>E11: The Day of Black Sun (Part 2 - The Eclipse)</p> <p>E20: Sozin's Comet Part 3 - Into the Inferno</p>

3.3 Research Design

This research adopts the following strategies in analyzing the gathered data. Firstly, the animation was screened for episodes that would yield the richest data for the study. When the particular episodes were selected, relevant scenes were captured into animation stills and extracted. These are the stills that are used as the permanent data. Once again, the episodes that are considered data-rich for the study are those that have the most representation of socio-cultural elements that resemble the cultures in our world in them, as pointed out in the research questions. Not only are the visual cues selected for the study, but also the script that comes with it. The script represents the verbal text that would be analyzed.

As both the visual and verbal text of the data would be examined, the research design is specifically created by the researcher to analyze these two different texts of the animation in all the elements that were mentioned. In short, the research design is created to analyze references of the landscapes and architecture, clothing and lifestyles in the animation in terms of their visual and verbal references. This research design is also

devised to analyze the data, bearing in mind that the visual and verbal texts may or may not occur simultaneously.

Table 3.2: Research Design

Cultural elements	Text	
	Visual	Verbal
1. Landscapes and architecture 2. Clothing 3. Lifestyles	a) Direct references b) Adaptations	a) Description b) Allusion

As shown, the research design or framework is designed to study the visual and verbal intertextuality of the data in terms of the landscape and architecture, clothing and lifestyles incorporated into *Avatar: The Last Airbender*. Each section of the cultural elements would be coded and analyzed in separate sections in the analysis. They would be analyzed under the current nation in the animation that is being discussed. For example, in the analysis, the Water Tribes are analyzed under section 4.1.1 in the analysis. As such, the landscape and architecture of the Water Tribes are analyzed under section 4.1.1.1, followed by section 4.1.1.2 for the clothing and section 4.1.1.3 for the lifestyles of the Water Tribe people. This segmentation would be applied in analyzing the intertextuality in all four nations in the animation starting with Water, followed by Earth, Fire and finally Air.

3.3.1 Cultural elements

As seen in the research design, there are three cultural elements that would be analyzed in the study. The first element is the landscapes and architecture that appear in the animation. These two aspects are linked together and analyzed as one because they are usually shown together in the animation and sometimes complement each other. The architecture of the buildings is sometimes dependant on the grounds on which they are built

on. According to the Oxford dictionary (2014), “landscape” is defined as “all visible features of an area of land, often considered in terms of their aesthetic appeal”. On the other hand, architecture is defined as “the style in which a building is designed and constructed, especially with regard to a specific period, place or culture” (Oxford dictionary, 2014). In the analysis, we look at the terrain that the landscape is made out of and the styles of the buildings that were built upon them.

The second cultural element is clothing. The Oxford dictionary (2014) defines the root word of clothing, “clothes” as “items worn to cover the body”. For this research, “clothing” is not only the pieces of cloth worn by the characters in the animation, but extended to include their hairstyles and weapons. Usually, hairstyles and weapons would co-relate to the clothing of a particular culture and era that the culture is set in. Therefore, the hairstyles and weapons of the characters are included under “clothing”.

Finally, we will also look at the lifestyles of the characters from the different nations in the animation. “Lifestyle” is defined as “the way in which a person lives” by the Oxford dictionary (2014). In the analysis, lifestyle encompasses the daily practices, beliefs, superstition and religious values followed by the characters of the Four Nations in the animation.

Only these three elements would be analyzed in the study as they are the ones which are the most obvious in terms of their intertextual references to the cultures in our world. In the animation, there are other intertextual references as well, but as stated in **1.6 Scope of Study** in the **Introduction**, it is impossible to cover all the intertextual reference in this study.

3.3.2 Text

On the textual side, the textual data is divided into analyzing the intertextuality in the visual text and verbal text. This separation is to set aside the differences between the visual and verbal text and how they are analyzed. On the other hand, they would be analyzed side by side, with the script to complement the scenes in the animation. Thus, although the texts are viewed separately, they are also viewed as one at the same time. As discussed in section **2.1 Intertextuality** of the **Literature Review**, visual communication comes across best when words and images occur together. Here, we highlight again what Lester (2011) observes about the strongest form of communication is when “words and images are combined in equally respectful ways”.

Visual Text

The visual text is presented in the form of the stills captured from the animation. The intertextuality of the visual text is analyzed in two forms—direct references or adaptations. The terms “visual direct reference” and “visual adaptation” were drawn by the researcher specifically for this study.

- a) **Visual direct reference** are elements in the visual data in the animation which were referred directly from the world that we live in. These references bear almost identical similarities to practices, places, buildings or landscapes that we have in the real world.
- b) **Visual adaptation** references are elements that do not bear such striking resemblances to the original form of the referenced elements, but rather, a modified version, adapted in some way to fit into the animation.

Verbal Text

The verbal text is garnered from the script of the animation, which also includes the dialogue. The intertextuality of the text is also analyzed in two forms—description and allusion. Depending on the script, the verbal description and the verbal allusion may occur together in some instances. Similarly to the terms of the visual texts, the terms “verbal description” and “verbal allusion” were drawn by the researcher specifically for this research design.

- a) **Verbal description** is when the script of the animation describes the elements that were portrayed in the visual text, like the landscape, architecture, clothes or way of life. This description could be part of the narrative of the script or uttered by a certain character in the animation.
- b) **Verbal allusion** is when the script contains verbal references that do not directly quote or describe an existing text, but makes an allusion to it. This allusion could be referencing, rephrasing or reiterating a particular existing text.

It should be noted that in this framework, although the ideal is that the two different forms of texts appear and are analyzed together simultaneously, the texts do not necessarily appear at the same time on occasion. In some cases, there is a visual representation of the text, but not the verbal. In other cases, the verbal text is present while the visual is absent. Thus, whichever text is present would be analyzed accordingly with or without its accompaniment.

Once again, this whole research design was created specifically for this study by the researcher. The terms in this design are meant to complement the design and to analyze the data in the best possible way. The reason for developing this research design was to fill in the gap of the non-existence of a cohesive schema to analyze both the visual and verbal text.

So far, there has not been a systematic way of presenting and analyzing both visual and verbal data at the same time. Hence, this research design not only comes up with a methodical way of observing visual and textual data, it lends to it terms to which the data can be analyzed.

3.4 Summary

In this chapter, I have discussed the conceptual framework that I am using in this study, the data of the study and how it was collected and selected and finally, the research design that was created to analyze the data.

This study is based primarily on the concept of intertextuality which would be used to identify the cultural intertextuality in *Avatar: The Last Airbender*. The animation references cultures from the real world to build its own fictional world. The study uses intertextuality to analyze how these references are realized in the animation.

As mentioned in this chapter, the data is extracted solely from the animation of *Avatar: The Last Airbender*. Episodes in the animation that were data-rich were captured into animation stills along with their scripts. The researcher converted the DVDs of the animation into compatible files in the laptop while the script of the animation was acquired online.

The intertextuality that would be studied in the animation is analyzed using a research design that was devised by the researcher to look at both the verbal and visual texts in the animation. In the verbal texts, the intertextuality is realized by direct references and adaptations while in the visual texts, the intertextuality is referenced by description and allusion. This research design was developed by the researcher to analyze the data in a systematic and cohesive manner as currently, there have not been any research designs which are able to do so.

In the following chapter, **Data and Analysis**, I would be discussing and presenting the analysis of the data based on the concept of intertextuality using the research design that was formulated in this chapter.

CHAPTER 4

DATA AND ANALYSIS

4.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the data that was collected as well as the analysis. I would present my data and analysis synchronously. The data would be coded as animation stills, along with its script according to the form of the research framework table. The analysis would be discussed as we go along. To triangulate the analysis of the data, I would, from time to time, make references to this book—*Avatar: The Last Airbender: The Art of the Animated Series*.

This book is written by *Avatar's* creators and producers Bryan Konietzko and Michael Dante DiMartino and published two years after the animation. This book showcases the creative process that the animators went through in developing the concept and characters in the animation. In building the animation, they reveal and discuss their inspiration and ideas that they had in conceptualizing the plot and characters in the animation. At certain times, they mention specifically the references they draw from our world into building their animated world. Their sharing would be used to triangulate the data in the analysis.

This chapter is structured to be analyzed according to the nations in the animation in the order of Water, Earth, Fire and Air. In each of these nations, they would be discussed following the elements listed in the research design. For example, the first nation in the analysis is **4.1.1 Water**. In this nation, I would first analyze the landscape and architecture of the Water nations, followed by the clothing and the lifestyles of the Water Tribesmen. The next section is **4.1.2 Earth**, the Earth Kingdom. I would also be analyzing the landscape and architecture of the Earth kingdom, the clothing and finally the lifestyles of

the Earth Nation citizens. The analysis of the subsequent Fire Nation and Air Nomads would be analyzed in the same structure.

4.1 Socio-cultural analysis

As mentioned earlier in this study, *Avatar: The Last Airbender* is an animation with very heavy references to Asiatic cultures—using Chinese calligraphy for all the writing in the animation, as well as adaptations of Buddhist philosophies for the spiritual elements of the animation. The overall conceptualization comes from the producers Michael Dante DiMartino and Bryan Konietzko, who mentioned that they are fascinated with the Chinese culture. From the early stages of *Avatar*, intertextuality is already present in its formation, drawn from the shared initial knowledge of its creators. As Allen (2000) has mentioned, intertextuality is not just a combination of texts, but also how it exists in the continuation of society and culture. This analysis hopes to shed light on how intertextuality in *Avatar: The Last Airbender*, exists in the form of references to societal cultures from our world.

The cultures used in this anime have distinct differences with each other. From the Inuit culture to the Chinese culture, DiMartino and Konietzko blend different societies from our world to form the Four Nations in the animation which are—Water, Earth, Fire and Air. These differences are the beauty of the Four Nations. As stated by Arjun Appadurai, a scholar of culture, “the most valuable feature of the concept of culture is the concept of difference” (Appadurai, 1996, p. 12). These differences also make for a myriad of visual stimuli for the audiences. Lester (2011) states that cultural influences have a huge impact on visual perception as a “manifestation of the way people act, talk, dress, eat, drink, behave socially, and practice their religious beliefs”. In the analysis, one would see how these manifestations are exhibited.

As there are four nations in the animation, a manner was needed to frame them apart from one another. This is done by framing them in different colors in terms of their clothing, flags and accessories. This color framing makes it easy to distinguish between the citizens of the Four Nations, especially when they are standing together in a scene.

Table 4.1: The Four Nations by color and culture

Nation	Culture	Color
Water	Inuit Native American	Blue
Earth	Chinese	Green
Fire	Chinese Japanese	Red
Air	Tibetan Bhutanese	Brown/ Yellow

The heavy intertextual references made to the abovementioned cultures in the formation of the Four Nations is what this research aims to look at in the current section of this chapter.

Elements that I would be discussing in this section of the analysis are the landscape and architecture of the buildings in the Four Nations, the clothing the characters wear (including their weapons and hairstyles) and their lifestyles (daily practices, beliefs, superstition and religious values). In this section, I would present the intertextual references made from all these elements to those that are drawn from our world.

4.1.1 Water

The Water Tribes are the first nation to be introduced in the animation. This nation is important in Aang's life as the first friends that he makes after waking up from his 100-year freeze are from the Water Tribe. Katara and Sokka, who are both from the Water Tribes, play a big part in motivating Aang to fulfill his potential and encouraging him when he is down. Katara is also his love interest, with whom he shares a sweet, innocent, relationship.

There are two main Water Tribes in the animation, the Southern Water Tribe and the Northern Water Tribe. Aang first finds himself in the Southern Water tribe when he wakes up from his 100-year freeze. He then travels with Katara and Sokka to the Northern Water tribe to look for a water bending master to teach him waterbending and eventually ends up saving it from an attack by the Fire Nation. Along the course of the animation, Aang meets other Water tribesmen, one of them being Hakoda, Sokka and Katara's father. The two Water Tribes, being sister tribes, are crafted to be similar with each other. But at the same time, they have significant differences from each other as well. Unlike the kingdoms of Earth, Fire and Air which draw very heavy references from the Chinese culture, the references for the Water Tribes come from mostly the Inuit culture and a little from the Native American cultures.

Compared to the more well-known Chinese culture, the Inuit are a lot less known culture in the world. Not many people are aware of this, but the Inuit are actually an extension of the Native American people. They are the Northern counterpart of the Native Americans. To provide a better background on the analysis, a brief introduction to the Inuit culture is necessary. One of my references comes from Glenn Morris, an Arctic explorer who went on three expeditions to the Arctic to learn more about the Inuit people. Specifically, he stayed with the Inuit people of North West Greenland. These expeditions

were supported by the Royal Geographical Society. Morris documented his first hand experiences during the expeditions in a blog called the Arctic Voice.

According to him, the Inuit are a group of people who are descended from the Thule culture and are a group of nomadic people spread out from Western Alaska and across the Arctic (Morris, 2009). Today, the Inuit people, also known as Eskimos, live in the Arctic regions of Greenland, Canada, Alaska and a part of Russia called Chukotka. The traditional Inuit culture is basically an egalitarian, hunter-gatherer society (Morris, 2009). They live in a harsh landscape, in which crops cannot be grown and survival depends much on their own skills and ingenuity in dealing with the environment (Morris, 2009). It should be noted that the Inuit only live in the Arctic, which is the North Pole and none of them live on the Antarctic, the South Pole. On the other hand, the Water Tribesmen inhabit both the North and South Poles in the animation.

4.1.1.1 Landscape and Architecture

The homelands of the Water tribes are primarily modeled after cultures which have a strong relationship to water in terms of their geographical location and dependence on them. The Water tribes have an affinity to water, snow and ice, being able to “bend” or manipulate them at will to fight or to enrich their lives. Thus, the landscape of the homeland of the Water tribes is largely based on the North Pole and South Pole of our world, where there is ice and water to bend aplenty. For the Northern water tribe, their cultural landscape is not only one of ice and snow, but has also the strong influence of the grandeur of Venice as well.

Geographically, the Water tribes are located in the North and South poles in the animation. As mentioned, they are known as the Northern and Southern Water Tribes. This

is clearly a direct reference to the North Pole and South Pole in our world. One of the Southern Water tribe benders, Hama, talks about her homeland in Season 3 Episode 8.

Table 4.2: Hama talks about the Southern Water Tribe

Culture	Text			
	Visual	Verbal		
Inuit S3E8	<i>No visual text</i>	Description <table border="1"> <tr> <td>Hama</td> <td>Growing up at the South Pole, waterbenders are totally at home surrounded by snow and ice and seas.</td> </tr> </table>	Hama	Growing up at the South Pole, waterbenders are totally at home surrounded by snow and ice and seas.
Hama	Growing up at the South Pole, waterbenders are totally at home surrounded by snow and ice and seas.			

In Table 4.2, Hama says that growing up in the South Pole, the waterbenders are “*surrounded by snow and ice and seas*”. This description by itself sums up the location of the tribe, which is a direct reference to the South Pole in our world; as well as describes the terrain that the waterbenders live in. The words “ice”, “snow” and “water” describe exactly the South Pole in our world, a land which is covered by ice and snow and surrounded by water.



This choice of location is perfect for the waterbenders. As mentioned, the waterbenders have the ability to bend water, ice and snow. Staying in the North and South Pole, the waterbenders have an abundance of these elements and are able to manipulate them to their advantage. To quote Hama again, she says that “*waterbenders are **totally at home** surrounded by ice, snow and seas*”, meaning that they not only live among the water and ice, but totally embrace the elements. The Northern Water Tribe benders are able to use their bending skills to bend the water and snow into icy fortresses and dwelling places to

protect themselves. Unfortunately, the benders of the Southern Water Tribe have all been captured by the Fire Nation, with the exception of Katara and Hama. Thus, they are not able to construct the sculptures and monuments like those of the Northern Water Tribe. This causes a noticeable difference between the architecture of the Northern and Southern Water Tribes, which would be discussed further along this analysis.

In terms of the tribes themselves, the Southern Water Tribe is a smaller, less developed tribe compared to their sister tribe, the Northern Water Tribe. As such, the village of the Southern Water Tribe is referenced from a small Inuit village, where the villagers stay in little igloos or tents made out of animal skins. *The Inuit Way*, a book written by the women of the Pauktuutit tribe from the Canadian Arctic, describes the traditional Inuit as nomadic people, staying in tents so that it would be easy to pack up and leave at a moment's notice when they need. They are self-sufficient, small communities of less than 1000 people and they hunt, fish and gather for their basic survival and physical needs (The Inuit Way, 2006). This description is the exact description of Sokka and Katara's village in the South Pole.

The producers, Michael Dante DiMartino and Bryan Konietzko have said that they were inspired by *Atanarjuat: The Fast Runner*, a movie about the life in a small Inuit tribe (DiMartino and Konietzko, 2010, p. 42) when creating the Southern Water Tribe. This piece of information further strengthens the intertextuality that was drawn from the Inuit culture into building the animation. In the following pictures, we see how tiny the Southern Water Tribe is.

Table 4.3: The Southern Water Tribe

Culture	Text	
	Visual	Verbal
Inuit	Direct reference	
S1E1		<i>No verbal text</i>
S1E2		

As mentioned above, all the waterbenders in the South have been captured. This tragedy left its mark in the architecture of the village. Unlike the Northern Water Tribe, which we would analyze in the following section, the Southern Water Tribe is unable to fully manipulate the elements of ice and water to fend for themselves. Not only that, because all the men in the village have left for the war, only the women and children are left behind. Even so, the Southern Water tribeswomen make do with their limitations, using


the snow to build a shallow wall around the village and building little igloos and tents as shelters.

In the second still, there is a collection of small igloos. The image of an igloo has been synonymous with that of when one mentions “Eskimo” or “Inuit”. This reference is portrayed splendidly in the animation. Igloos are actually houses made out of blocks of ice arranged in a spiral upon one another until they meet in a dome-shaped roof (Tyman, 2008). They are well insulated and are kept warm by millions of air holes in the snowflakes in each block of snow (Tyman, 2008). They are further kept warm by a little fire inside the igloo and rugs of animal fur to trap heat.

In the first still, there is a collection of tents as well in the village, apart from the igloos. In reality, the Inuit rarely set up both igloos and tents together. The tents are set up when the igloos melt away in the sun in spring (Tyman, 2008). Still, the reference of both the igloos and tents are made in keeping up with the authenticity of the Inuit community. The tents are secured to the ground by tying them to large rocks which cannot be moved by the wind (Tyman, 2008). As revealed before, these tents are made out of the skins of the animals hunted by the Inuit people.

The Southern Water tribesmen employ the same skills of the Inuit people in keeping their homes warm. They use animal skin to build their tents and line their homes with animal fur to trap heat and keep warm. The Inuit people hunted furry animals like caribou, polar bear, fox, wolf and musk ox (Morris, 2009). The meat was eaten and the furs of these animals were used to make their clothes, blankets, tents and boats. This practice is seen in Season 1, when Sokka and Katara visit their father’s friend in his temporary home. They are delighted that he has decorated the place like their homes back in the South.

Table 4.4: Bato's hut

Culture	Text	
	Visual	Verbal
Inuit	Direct reference	Description
S1E5		<p><i>The scene cuts to the hut that Bato is staying in, with a tent on the opposite side of the door being the bed chamber, a fire with cushions in the middle, and various pelts placed and hung everywhere.</i></p> <p>Katara Bato, it looks like home! [Bato, Katara, Sokka, and Aang file inside.]</p> <p>Sokka Everything's here, even the pelts!</p>


In the script, Bato's hut is described as having a tent in it with “*various pelts placed and hung everywhere*”. Upon seeing it, Katara exclaims, “*It looks like home!*” while Sokka validates what she says by observing that “*Everything's here, even the pelts!*”. The exchange by Katara and Sokka and the use of the word “home” upon seeing the décor in Bato's hut is proof to how their own tents are decorated back home in the Southern Water tribe. The pelts or the animal fur are laid about and hung around the tent to trap heat for warming the tent on the cold days in the South Pole. This is a direct reference to how the Inuit people keep warm in their own homes.

Moving on, let us now look at the Northern Water tribe. As mentioned, the Northern Water tribe slightly similar to the Southern, but different in certain aspects. In general, the

Southern Water tribesmen have a simpler lifestyle compared to the Northern Water Tribe. They have a less impressive dwelling place to live in, as well less lavish clothes and accessories. If the Southern Water tribe was referenced from a small little Inuit village, then the Northern Water tribe, being a bigger, more cultured tribe, was modeled after the architecture of the buildings from the floating city of Venice.

Venice is a place famously surrounded by water as well, making it extremely suitable to be modeled after for the Water Tribes. It is located in the center of Laguna Veneta, a crescent-shaped lagoon and built on a collection of islets and mud banks (Rodgers, 2008). Using Venice as a reference for designing the city of the Northern Water Tribe is ingenious, not only due to the fact that it is surrounded by water which could be used by the waterbenders, but also because of its majestic cultural surroundings.

Table 4.5: The Northern Water Tribe

Culture	Text	
	Visual	Verbal
Venice	Direct reference Adaptation	
S1E18		<i>No verbal text</i>



In both the stills above, one can see that there are canals cutting through the city of the Northern Water Tribe. Above the canals are bridges joining the streets with one another. The landscape portrayed is that of what one might see in Venice. There are more than 200 canals in Venice, used as the streets and avenues of the city. Crossing these canals and waterways are around 400 bridges, connecting opposite sides of the streets together (Rodgers, 2008). The arching style of the bridges in the Northern Water Tribe is modeled after The Rialto, the most popular of the Venice bridges. It is engraved with carvings that mark its architectural value. Another noteworthy bridge in Venice is the infamous Bridge of Sighs, “so named because convicts were taken across it from Doges Palace on the left to the prison on the right” (Rodgers, 2008, p. 298). The shape of the arch of this bridge is also referenced to in the city of the Northern Water Tribe. The references made to the architectural layout of Venice are quite accurately portrayed in the Northern Water Tribe of the animation.

The Northern Water Tribe is a big city, encased by a huge wall which the waterbenders constructed to keep out enemies and their people safe. The Northern city has bridges, canals, archways, walkways, sculptures and monuments, all made out of ice. These structures are not found at all in the Southern Water Tribe. The layout of the city, as

mentioned, is similar to that of those in Venice. Within the city, the people could walk around on the pavements by the canals, or ride in gondolas through the canals.

After analyzing the architecture of both the Southern and the Northern Water tribes, the differences between them are clear. The Southern Water tribe is small, rustic and unimpressive, while the Northern Water tribe is huge, cultured and majestic. The characters themselves are aware of it, with the son of the leader from the Southern Water tribe, Sokka, saying to the princess of the Northern Water tribe, Yue, in Season 1 Episode 18:

Table 4.6: Sokka’s conversation with Princess Yue

Culture	Text				
	Visual	Verbal			
Inuit	<i>No visual text</i>	Description Allusion			
S1E18		<table border="1"> <tr> <td>Yue</td> <td>So they don't have palaces in the Southern Tribe?</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Sokka</td> <td>[<i>Sitting down on the ledge.</i>] Are you kidding? I grew up in a block of ice. It's not exactly a cultural hub.</td> </tr> </table>	Yue	So they don't have palaces in the Southern Tribe?	Sokka
Yue	So they don't have palaces in the Southern Tribe?				
Sokka	[<i>Sitting down on the ledge.</i>] Are you kidding? I grew up in a block of ice. It's not exactly a cultural hub.				

Yue has been brought up in the North all her life and has not seen her sister tribe. She asks Sokka more about his village and naturally assumes that her sister tribe is as advanced as her own Tribe. She is somewhat curious that there are no palaces in the Southern tribe, unlike her own home. Sokka, being in awe of the North and aware of the differences of their homes, is slightly ashamed. He describes his little igloo home as “*a block of ice*”. This description makes his home seem small, insignificant and

underdeveloped as compared to the huge ice structures of the North. His statement “*not exactly a cultural hub*” emphasizes the difference of the social maturity of their Tribes even more. To him, the Southern Water Tribe has nothing, unlike the Northern Water Tribe which has the means and wealth to preserve the culture of their people.

The Northern Water tribe, being referenced from Venice, is a place where the culture of their people is protected. They not only have impressive buildings, but also dress better, have a spiritual center in their city and a team of waterbenders which uphold the waterbending traditions of their people. In the same way, Venice is now viewed as one of the great cultural centers of Europe. Along the canals of Venice, one would, according to Rodgers (2008, p. 299), find “noteworthy monuments like churches, palaces, museums, and public buildings, and Venice’s libraries” which contain priceless manuscripts and relics. This richness of culture is highlighted in the Northern Water Tribe to contrast it with the Southern Water Tribe. Sokka emphasizes it when he sighs: “*it’s not exactly a cultural hub*”, when talking about the Southern Water Tribe.


This contrast of culture was something that the producers were aware of and did on purpose. According to them, they wanted to show how the people of the Northern Water tribe were “a little fancy and cosmopolitan, in contrast to Katara and Sokka’s more rugged tribe in the South” (DiMartino and Konietzko, 2010, p. 42). This is an apparent intertextual reference of basing the less cultured tribe on the Inuit and the more cultured tribe to the Venetians. The Inuit are very much protected and confined to their tribes in their homelands, much like the Southern water tribe villages who rarely venture out of their village. In contrast, the Northern water tribe is portrayed as a more civilized nation. This is synonymous with how we view Venice, as a city with a rich social life, filled with art and culture, as well as with people who are sophisticated and learned.

4.1.1.2 Clothing

In the section above, landscapes and architecture, we discussed not only the difference of the architecture of the Southern and Northern Water tribe, but also how these differences were referenced from the Inuit culture against the culture of Venice. In this section, we would be analyzing the clothing worn by the characters from the Water Tribes, but comparisons would no longer be drawn from the differences of the tribes. This is because the difference in the clothing of the North and South are not very large apart from the fact that the Northern tribesmen have slightly more glamorous looking clothes and more accessories compared to their Southern relatives.

Generally, the Water tribe people are dressed in thick fur clothing to keep out the cold. As discussed above, the Inuit hunted mammals to use their fur to make and line their tents and igloos. More importantly, the fur from the caribou, musk ox, polar bear, fox and wolf were also made into clothing (Morris, 2009). The thick fur from these animals were perfect for keeping the Inuit people warm in their cold, harsh land. In the same way, the Water Tribesmen wear the furs of the animals they hunted to keep warm.

Table 4.7: Water Tribe clothing

Culture	Text	
	Visual	Verbal
Inuit S1E2	<p>Direct references</p> 	<p><i>No verbal text</i></p>


In the stills, the clothes worn by the Water tribe people are almost referenced exactly from the clothes worn by the Inuit. In the stills, Katara and Sokka are dressed in fur parkas, or in the Inuit language, *amautl* (The Inuit Way, 2006). These parkas are heavy outer jackets with the fur facing outwards (Tyman, 2008). They have furred trimmed hoods, as seen in the one worn by Katara. Fur that repels moisture, for example, wolverine fur, is used to line the hood of the parka (Tyman, 2008). The rim of the hood is trimmed with wolf fur to keep out the wind from their cheeks. Inside the first layer of parka, there is a second

jacket called the *atigi*. This jacket has the fur facing inwards instead to keep warm (Tyman, 2008). These thick, fur-lined clothes are accurately referenced and provide a sense of authenticity for the characters in the animation.

Their trousers are usually made out of caribou fur and usually two layers thick (Tyman, 2008). On their feet, both Sokka and Katara are wearing boots. The Inuit people call their boots *kamiks*, and they are also made out of caribou skin (Tyman, 2008). The boots also come in two layers, one worn with the fur facing the skin, the other worn with the fur facing out. There is also a third boot, more like an overshoe which is also sometimes worn. This boot is made out of sealskin and water proof (Tyman, 2008). On their hands, Katara and Sokka wear thick mittens with long, furred cuffs. The Inuit make these mittens out of sheepskin or even husky fur (Tyman, 2008).

Finally, let us analyze the weapons used by the Water Tribesmen. The Water Tribe uses weapons that are direct references to the types of weapons used by the Inuit people, especially those from the olden days. Apart from hunting mammals for their fur, the Inuit also hunted marine animals like seals, whales and walrus. The bone and ivory from these animals were made into tools and weapons (Morris, 2009). The traditional Inuit man uses weapons made out of bone like the harpoon and lance (Morris, 2009). In the following exchange, Sokka tells Aang about a Water Tribe weapon.

Table 4.8: Water Tribe weapon


Culture	Text					
	Visual	Verbal				
Inuit S1E15	<p>Direct reference</p> 	<p>Description</p> <table border="1"> <tr> <td>Aang</td> <td> <p>Hey, look! [Examines the sword.] A sword made out of a whale's tooth. [Turns to Sokka.]</p> </td> </tr> <tr> <td>Sokka</td> <td> <p>[Approaches Aang.] Let me see that. [Seizes the sword from Aang and looks at it thoughtfully.]</p> <p>This is a Water Tribe weapon.</p> </td> </tr> </table>	Aang	<p>Hey, look! [Examines the sword.] A sword made out of a whale's tooth. [Turns to Sokka.]</p>	Sokka	<p>[Approaches Aang.] Let me see that. [Seizes the sword from Aang and looks at it thoughtfully.]</p> <p>This is a Water Tribe weapon.</p>
Aang	<p>Hey, look! [Examines the sword.] A sword made out of a whale's tooth. [Turns to Sokka.]</p>					
Sokka	<p>[Approaches Aang.] Let me see that. [Seizes the sword from Aang and looks at it thoughtfully.]</p> <p>This is a Water Tribe weapon.</p>					

While wandering about, Aang picks up a sword lying on the ground. Aang recognizes the material used to make the sword, exclaiming that it is “*A sword made out of a whale's tooth*”. The moment he says that, Sokka snatches the sword away from him as he knows that the weapons of his people are made from the bones of marine animals. After looking at it, he confirms with Aang that the whale-tooth sword is “*a Water Tribe weapon*”. This reference is in accordance with what Morris (2009) described about the bone and ivory from seals, whales and walrus being made into tools and weapons.

4.1.1.3 Lifestyles

The lifestyles and the practices of the Water Tribe people are similar to the Inuit people and the Native Americans. They hunt animals for food and for most of their daily needs. Apart from that, they have a few cultural practices that were referenced to in the animation to these cultures.

Table 4.9: Water Tribe ceremonial pelt

Culture	Text			
	Visual	Verbal		
Native American S1E15	Adaptation 	Description <table border="1"> <tr> <td>Bato</td> <td>Hey, Aang! Please put that down, [Aang is shown wearing a fur pelt on his head.] it's ceremonial and very fragile.</td> </tr> </table>	Bato	Hey, Aang! Please put that down, [Aang is shown wearing a fur pelt on his head.] it's ceremonial and very fragile.
Bato	Hey, Aang! Please put that down, [Aang is shown wearing a fur pelt on his head.] it's ceremonial and very fragile.			

When Aang, Katara and Sokka visit Bato in his dwelling place, Aang innocently plays with the headgear hanging on the wall and is gently reprimanded by Bato. The references to the Native American culture is prominent here as Bato highlights the importance the fur pelt as “ceremonial” and therefore not a child’s plaything. According to the Oxford dictionary (2014), as a noun, the definition of ceremonial could mean a “religious occasion” or a “rite or ceremony” (2014). This definition highlights the

importance of the fur pelt as an important element of a serious ritual in the community of the Water Tribe people.

The Inuit and the Native Americans have shamans or medicine men in their communities that dealt with the spiritual side of their lives (Skutsch, 2005). In dealing with the spirits of nature, the shamans made sure taboos were followed and rituals or ceremonies were held to avoid harming the spirits of animals that could harm them during a hunt (Skutsch, 2005). In these ceremonies, sometimes masks or headgears are worn to depict the animal spirits that they revere (Skutsch, 2005). These masks could be made out of wood, or made from sealskin. An example of a tribe that celebrates these ceremonies is the Yup'ik people of the Alaskan Inuit. This reference is adapted into the animation by having Aang play with a furred headgear which looks like it was skinned from some kind of big raccoon-like animal.

Another prominent reference to the Native American culture is the practice of having a rite of passage for the young male Water Tribe members. When Sokka and Katara met Bato and saw his boat, the following exchange took place in Season 1 episode 15.

Table 4.10: Water Tribe rite of passage

Culture	Text					
	Visual	Verbal				
Native American		Description Allusion				
S3E8	<i>No visual text</i>	<table border="1"> <tr> <td>Sokka</td> <td>[<i>To Bato.</i>] Is this the boat he took you ice dodging in?</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Bato</td> <td>Yep! It's got the scar to prove it. Ha. How 'bout you Sokka? You must</td> </tr> </table>	Sokka	[<i>To Bato.</i>] Is this the boat he took you ice dodging in?	Bato	Yep! It's got the scar to prove it. Ha. How 'bout you Sokka? You must
Sokka	[<i>To Bato.</i>] Is this the boat he took you ice dodging in?					
Bato	Yep! It's got the scar to prove it. Ha. How 'bout you Sokka? You must					

			have some good stories from your first time ice dodging. [<i>Sokka begins to look saddened.</i>]
		Katara	He never got to go, Dad left before he was old enough.
		Aang	What's ice dodging?
		Bato	It's a rite of passage for young Water Tribe members. When you turn fourteen, your dad takes you- [<i>Bato smiles and puts his hand on Sokka's shoulder with a new thought.</i>]
		Bato	Ice dodging is a ceremonial test of wisdom, bravery, and trust.

Upon seeing the boat, Sokka asks Bato if it is the one he was taken ice dodging in, hinting that ice dodging is a practice by the Water Tribesmen. Bato proudly answers Sokka, prods Sokka to reveal his ice dodging experiences as well and said: “*You must have some good stories from your first time ice dodging*”. Sokka immediately looks saddened, and Katara explains that their father never got to take Sokka ice dodging, giving another hint that it is an important event that bonds a Water Tribe father and son together. Aang, not being a Water Tribesman, is curious to what they are talking about and asks “*What’s ice dodging?*” Bato replies that “*It’s a rite of passage for young Water Tribe members*”.

Bato’s answer is a direct reference, with the exact terms, to the Water Tribesmen having a rite of passage for their young people like how the Native Americans do. The

practice of rites of passage for the young people in a community is not one exclusive to the Native American. Many other indigenous cultures have specific rites of passage in their communities, like the Vanuatu people of the South Pacific, the Hamar tribe of Ethiopia and the Maasai people of Kenya and Tanzania (McKay and McKay, 2010). Hoare (2006) defines a rite of passage, or a more scientific term to it, “adolescent initiation rites”, as a mark of “the beginning of adulthood in many small-scale cultural communities”. It marks the change of status of a child into adulthood and official acceptance into the community. In the Water Tribe community, Bato explains that when children turn fourteen, their fathers take them to ice dodge. The age that the Water Tribe youth are taken dodging, fourteen, is the age of an adolescent, emphasizing the authenticity of this reference. Once again, I highlight that the Inuit people are an extension of the Native Americans, making this reference of the Water Tribe practice relevant to the culture that it is based upon.

In the Native American culture, the rites of passage are rituals that “manifest the energy of growth” of an adolescent into adulthood (Arthen, 1989). Compare Arthen’s statement to Bato’s description of “*Ice dodging is a ceremonial test of wisdom, bravery and trust*”. Again, we see words like “rituals” and “ceremonial” being used, signifying that the rite of passage is a practice in the community and it is serious and solemn, not to be taken lightly in the Native American culture or the Water Tribe culture. Arthen (1989) also uses the word “manifest”, meaning that, after the rite is completed, a result has to be shown of the youth’s growth. Bato uses the word “test”, which also means that results need to be seen after successfully completing the ice dodging. The result that they expect from the youth that has completed their rite of passage is “energy of growth”, in Arthen’s case, and more specifically, “*wisdom, bravery and trust*”, for a Water Tribe youth. By comparing Arthen’s and Bato’s descriptions, one clearly sees the intertextuality at hand here.

4.1.1.4 Summary: Water

The references for the Water Tribes are mostly drawn from the Inuit culture. This is apparent in their clothing and some of the lifestyle and practices. There is also a smattering of the Native American culture in the Tribes. What is unique to the Water Tribes is the division of cultural references when it comes to the Southern Water Tribe and the Northern Water Tribe. Although they are one nation, they are separated into two different levels of social maturation.

This separation is done based on the making the landscape and architecture of these two tribes very different from each other. The Southern Water Tribe keeps to its references of the Inuit culture. But Northern Water Tribe looks to the more progressive Venice for its references. This segregation is unique only to the Water Tribes. No other nation in the animation employs this difference in the intertextual referenced made to the cultures.

4.1.2 Earth

The Earth Kingdom is a crucial nation in the animation, especially to the plot in Season 2. Many of the critical plotlines and pinnacle of the events in Season 2 of the animation happen in the Earth Kingdom and its capital, Ba Sing Se. It is one of the last strongholds of the free nations against the Fire Nation. Ba Sing Se is also the center of political unrest, with an incompetent ruler being manipulated by his chief advisor. Aang and his friends find themselves there when looking for Appa, Aang's lost sky bison. During their stay in Ba Sing Se, they have to deal with finding Appa, resolving the internal threat of the threatened monarchy as well as the external threat of the attacking Fire Nation.

In creating the visually impressive Earth Kingdom, the animators drew inspiration from another great and ancient nation in our world—China. The conception of the Earth Kingdom is very much influenced by Bryan Konietzko and Michael Dante DiMartino's


exposure and trips to China. As previously discussed, the whole concept of the animation is mostly Asian, drawn most notably from the Chinese culture. Elements of the Chinese culture bleed into the other three nations in the animation, even if just a little. But no other nation in the animation is so heavily saturated in the Chinese culture like that of the Earth Kingdom. Not only does the architecture in the Earth Kingdom pay homage to great Chinese structures, but the clothes and lifestyles of the characters as well.

4.1.2.1 Landscape and architecture

The architecture of all the buildings in the Earth Nation is referenced from the styles of ancient Chinese architecture. From the houses in the villages of the Earth Kingdom to the buildings in the capital of Ba Sing Se, these buildings are what one would see on a trip to China. The producers took various photos of the architecture of buildings in Beijing and other cities as well as the Great Wall and used these photos as references for the buildings in the animation.

One of the first buildings that we are introduced to in the Earth Kingdom is General Fong's army base. Aang and his friends seek refuge here as he tries to unlock his Avatar State at the start of Season 2.


Table 4.11: General Fong’s army base

Culture	Text	
	Visual	Verbal
Chinese S2E1	<p>Direct references</p> 	<p><i>No verbal text</i></p>

General Fong is a general from the Earth Kingdom. As one can see, his base camp consists of walls surrounding a courtyard, with a pagoda-like building as the main structure in the courtyard. Traditionally, pagodas are ancient Buddhist buildings that are used to keep the bone relics of Buddha and other revered monks (Cai & Lu, 2006). From having a religious purpose, the pagodas soon took to have a military purpose as well and were used in navigation and reconnaissance for the army (Cai & Lu, 2006). One example of a pagoda used for military functions is the Liaodi Pagoda in Hebei province in China. This pagoda is the tallest ancient pagoda in China, standing at 84 meters tall (Cai & Lu, 2006). The pagoda in General Fong’s base camp is a direct reference to such pagodas—those not primarily used for religious purposes, but military. It is situated in the middle of the fort and thus protected from all sides from any attacks. General Fong conducts his war meetings in this pagoda with his fellow officials. This usage of the pagoda fit perfectly with what Cai and Lu (2006) has stated—pagodas used for military purposes and reconnaissance for the army.

Apart from the military base camp of the Earth Kingdom, audiences are also exposed to other buildings in the nation. These include the normal civilian buildings that are sometimes shown in the background of the Earth Kingdom or those that are shown when the camera is panning over the landscape of the country. An example of that is shown in Table 4.12.

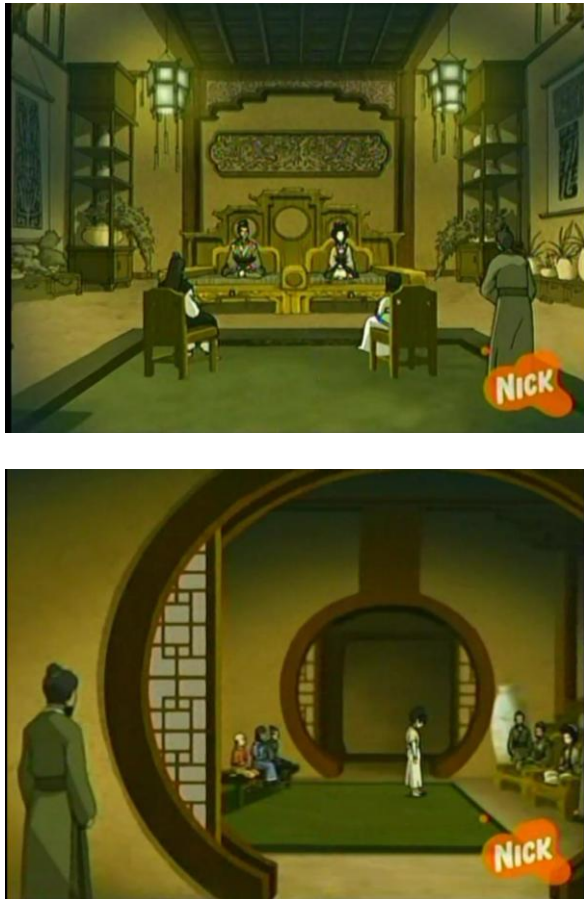
Table 4.12: Earth Kingdom building

Culture	Text	
	Visual	Verbal
Chinese S2E5	Direct reference 	<i>No verbal text</i>

In the still above, one sees the aerial view of an Earth Kingdom town that Aang, Sokka, Katara and Toph visited. As one can see, the rooftops of the houses in the town are curled at the eaves. The eaves are curled as a form of ornamentation in the architecture of Chinese buildings. The purpose of this design was not only to be pleasing aesthetically, but also to serve a more practical purpose. A curved eave disperses the load of the roof of a building and prevents the roofs from drooping (Cai & Lu, 2006). This feature of the Chinese architecture is directly referenced to in the buildings in Ba Sing Se.

Apart from referencing the exteriors of the buildings from Chinese architecture, the interior of the houses are accurately depicted as well in the animation. The following stills are taken from Toph's house, when Aang, Sokka and Katara visit her for the first time.

Table 4.13: Interior of Toph's house

Culture	Text	
	Visual	Verbal
Chinese S2E6	<p>Direct reference</p> 	<p><i>No verbal text</i></p>



The first still shows the Bei Fong living room, in which Toph's parents sit on the dais to entertain their guests. Their guests are brought in and presented to them by their man servant. He is shown standing beside Toph in the first still. Toph's living room is

designed in the traditional Chinese “quadrangle house” system. This system follows the belief that the man of the house and his wife always sit facing south, the most preferred direction in a quadrangle house (Cai & Lu, 2006). This meant that the other people in the house and their guests do not sit on the same side as them. The guests are seated at the side or in front of the host. This tradition is portrayed in Toph’s household. Xin Fu, a guest, and Toph, a junior family member, both do not join her parents sitting on the dais facing them.

Next, let us look at Ba Sing Se, the capital of the Earth Kingdom. Because it is such a great city in the animation, in which the main characters spend a considerable amount of time, the producers and animators splurge a substantial amount of effort in developing the authenticity of the architecture of the buildings there. Konietzko (2010) mentioned that “our visits to Beijing provided endless inspiration for the architecture in our world’s biggest metropolis”. He and Michael Dante DiMartino incorporated these inspirations into shaping the buildings in Ba Sing Se into authentic looking Chinese structures. One of the most magnificent structural references from China is the mighty Great Wall of China. The producers pay homage to it by making Ba Sing Se a city surrounded by huge walls. Like the Great Wall, the walls surrounding the city of Ba Sing Se are meant to keep out invaders, prevent invasions and keep the people in them safe.

When the audience is first brought into Ba Sing Se with the characters, they are shown an aerial view of the city. It is huge and packed with residential buildings. It strongly reminds one of the densely populated China. According to Davies (2008), China has an approximate population of 1,321, 851,000 people, making it easily “the largest of any country in the world”. The size and population in Ba Sing Se is an obvious reference to this population of China.

Table 4.14: Entering Ba Sing Se

Culture	Text	
	Visual	Verbal
Chinese	Adaptation	Description Allusion
S2E14	 	<p><i>The scene shows the monorail entering the Inner Wall. Cut to Sokka, Katara, and Aang viewing the giant city through the windows.</i></p> <p>Sokka <i>[Realizing the city's gigantic size.] Oh.</i></p> <p><i>The three notice that Ba Sing Se stretches almost as far as their eyes can see, and it has many roads and buildings.</i></p>

As they are brought into the city by monorails, the characters see the city of Ba Sing Se for the first time. Judging by Sokka’s “Oh.”, we know the characters are stunned, along with the audience, with how vast Ba Sing Se is. In the script, Ba Sing Se is described as being so big that it “*stretches almost as far as the eye can see*” and that it “*has many roads and buildings*”. This description is an allusion to the heavily populated China and highlights again how big Ba Sing Se is, just like the cities of Beijing and Shanghai in China.


Because the city is so large, a system is devised to segregate the people living in it. The system of the city of Ba Sing Se is very unique compared to the other kingdoms. The people of the city are divided into three sections based on their socio-economic status into living in the Lower Ring, the Middle Ring and the Upper Ring of the city. How this division is referenced to from China is worth a discussion in this study.

The capital of the Earth Kingdom Ba Sing Se is divided into three sections by their numerous walls. These three sections are called the Lower Ring, Middle Ring and the Upper Ring. This division is to separate the upper echelons of the society from the lower, as well as to segregate the war refugees from the residents of Ba Sing Se.

This practice of using walls to differentiate people of different class is referenced from how the feudal Chinese built their cities. This intertextuality can be clearly seen in this Chinese saying of “*using a neighbor’s fields as a drain*” (Xu, 2006). In his book, *Old Beijing—In the Shadow of Imperial Throne*, Xu explains this saying and how it relates to the segregation by walls. In ancient China, when a person, a state or a nation has done well, they would protect themselves against encroachment from outside. They do this by “wrapping up themselves” with layers of walls (Xu, 2006). Thus, this system had the repercussions of leaving out the poor common people in the outer city. Within the walls, closer into the city, were the middle class people who had some wealth and social status. Further in were the loyal bureaucrats; and the innermost, most protected, part of the city was for the emperor and the royal families (Xu, 2006). When people of different social statuses live in the city, the architecture of the buildings in the city would be different as well, in accordance to their wealth. Such is the case with the city of Ba Sing Se and its walls.

As Aang and his friends enter Ba Sing Se, Joo Dee, their guide, introduces the city to them.

Table 4.15: Inside Ba Sing Se


Culture	Text	
	Visual	Verbal
Chinese	Direct reference	Description
S2E14		<p><i>Cut to an overhead shot of the area of the city near the wall. An ostrich horse pulls a carriage through the streets. Many shops and refugees line the streets.</i></p> <p>Joo Dee This is the Lower Ring.</p> <p>Katara What's that wall for?</p> <p>Joo Dee Oh, Ba Sing Se has many walls! There are the ones outside protecting us, and the ones inside, that help maintain order.</p>

Joo Dee tells them that the city walls in Ba Sing Se serve the purpose of protecting the people and separating them. As they drive along within the city, she tells them more about the different Rings in the city and how the walls are used to separate these Rings. As mentioned above, in ancient China, walls were not only used to protect the country, but also to segregate people of different social standing in the cities (Xu, 2006). This reference is highlighted in Joo Dee’s answer of “*Oh, Ba Sing Se has many walls!*”. She describes the walls of Ba Sing Se as “*the ones outside protecting us, and the ones inside, that help*

maintain order” when asked about the walls in Ba Sing Se. This reference is in league with the explanation on the usage of walls given by Xu (2006).

Aang and his friends first arrive at the Lower Ring of the city, the outermost layer of the three Rings. As they move further into the Lower Ring, Joo Dee tells them more about the people that stay in this part of the city.


Table 4.16: Lower Ring of Ba Sing Se

Culture	Text	
	Visual	Verbal
Chinese S2E14	Adaptations 	Description Allusion <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px;"> <p>Joo Dee This is where our newest arrivals live, as well as our craftsman and artisans, people that work with their hands.</p> </div>

Joo Dee’s description of the people that live in the Lower Ring is reflected in the shabby buildings that we see in the animation. As to be expected from the Lower Ring, which is equivalent to the slums of the city, the buildings are unimpressive—just simple brick structures with a roof. In Joo Dee’s description of the Lower Ring, she says that it is where the “*newest arrivals live*”, making an allusion to the refugees from the war who have arrived from outside of the wall. As it is the case in every country, refugees do not make it into the higher statuses of society in the city when they first arrive.

Soon, Aang and his friends are brought through the Middle Ring of the city, which, like its names suggests, where the middle-class citizens live.

Table 4.17: Middle Ring of Ba Sing Se



Culture	Text			
	Visual	Verbal		
Chinese S2E14	Adaptations 	Description <table border="1"> <tr> <td>Joo Dee</td> <td>This is the Middle Ring of Ba Sing Se, home to the financial district, shops and restaurants, and the university.</td> </tr> </table>	Joo Dee	This is the Middle Ring of Ba Sing Se, home to the financial district, shops and restaurants, and the university.
Joo Dee	This is the Middle Ring of Ba Sing Se, home to the financial district, shops and restaurants, and the university.			

Joo Dee describes to them that the residents of the city are those who are involved in the socio-economic make-up and education of the city, where the “*financial district, shops and restaurants, and the university*” are located. The middle class citizens would be able to afford amenities like these, compared to the poor living in the Lower Ring. In terms of the architecture, the designs of the buildings in the Middle Ring are noticeable more refined compared to the Lower Ring. As Aang and his friends travel in the carriage through the Middle Ring, the scene around them is not only that of buildings, but of elements that beautify the city. There are canals with bridges over them running through the city, with potted plants for added aesthetics. The buildings look cleaner and newer as compared to the ones in the Lower Ring. This newness and cleanliness can be traced back again to the

reference of how the cities in ancient China were built—to protect themselves, the richer people walled their homes from the poor outside (Xu, 2006).

Finally, Aang and his friends arrive in the Upper Ring, the innermost part of the city. This is where the imperial family as well as where the most important citizens are housed.

Table 4.20: Upper Ring of Ba Sing Se

Culture	Text					
	Visual	Verbal				
Chinese S2E14	<p>Direct Reference</p>  	<p>Description</p> <table border="1"> <tr> <td></td> <td><i>The scene changes to the carriage in which Team Avatar is touring in, which is now in the Upper Ring.</i></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Joo Dee</td> <td>The Upper Ring is home to our most important citizens. Your house is not too far from here!</td> </tr> </table>		<i>The scene changes to the carriage in which Team Avatar is touring in, which is now in the Upper Ring.</i>	Joo Dee	The Upper Ring is home to our most important citizens. Your house is not too far from here!
	<i>The scene changes to the carriage in which Team Avatar is touring in, which is now in the Upper Ring.</i>					
Joo Dee	The Upper Ring is home to our most important citizens. Your house is not too far from here!					

When they arrive in the Upper Ring, Joo Dee tells them that “*The Upper Ring is home to our most important citizens.*” As the Avatar is a prominent figure in their world, Joo Dee houses them in the Upper Ring. Keeping up with the references of the architectural structures of cities from ancient China, the Earth King’s palace is located in the middle of Ba Sing Se, just like the Forbidden City is located in the middle of the city of Beijing. As recounted above, resourced from Xu (2006), this manner of building the palace in the middle of the city keeps it safe, with the citizens from the outer layers forming a natural barricade for the imperial family inside.


As Aang and his friends drive through the Upper Ring, the scenes of the buildings in the Upper Ring reflect the houses of the rich noblemen in ancient China. Their buildings have more levels compared to the houses of the common folk. In the second still, the carriage passes an archway which leads into a garden with a pagoda. The archway is the exact replica of Chinese archways that one may see leading into gardens, houses of noblemen, tombs or important places. The plaque on middle section of the gateway usually bears the name of the place that the gateway leads into, like the name of the garden or the name of the residence. An example of an arch like this can be seen at the Fu Tomb, where Emperor Tai Zong was buried. Called the *pailou* or the main arch, it has double-eave roofs and an “inscription on it with a eulogy to the greatness of the imperial ancestors in the calligraphy of Emperor Kangxi” (Booth, 2004, p. 26).

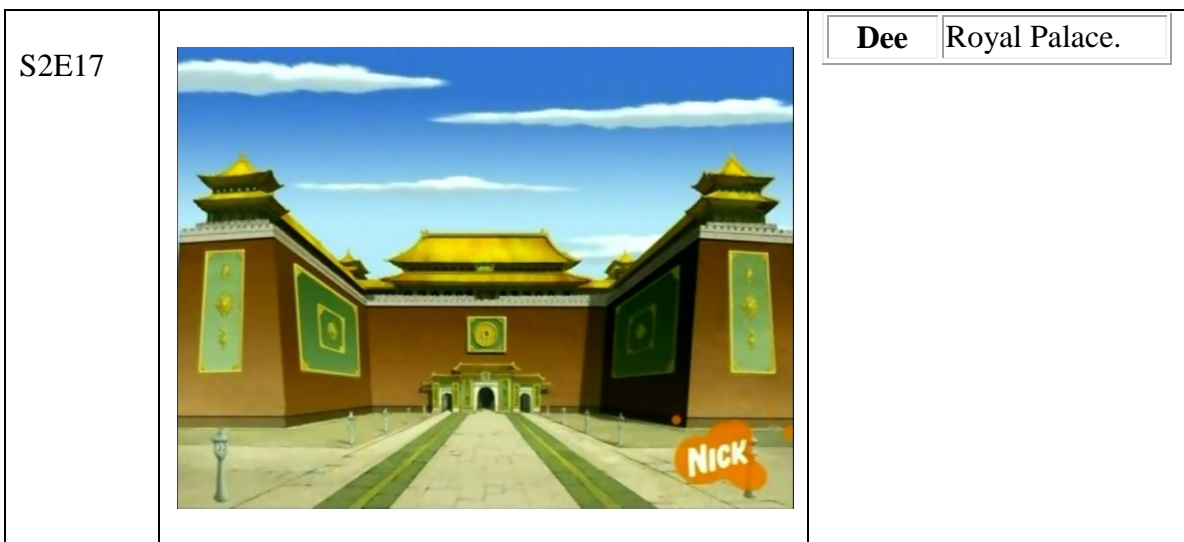
The architecture of the buildings in the Upper Ring is understandably more magnificent compared to the Lower and Middle Ring. The Upper Ring, as mentioned, is where all the upper echelons of the society reside. Thus, the structures are huge and have a grandness around them that boasts of their importance. Again, it is also in the Upper Ring where the Imperial Palace is located. To accomplish this sense of importance and regalness

for the palace, two impressive structures in China were used for inspiration—Tiananmen Square and the Forbidden City in Beijing.

The Forbidden City, also known as the Palace Museum, was once the royal palace of the Ming and Qing dynasties (Fang, Jiao, Li & Zhao, 2006). It is the world’s largest palace complex and located right in the middle of the city of Beijing (Cai and Lu, 2006). In the same manner, the Earth King’s palace is built in the middle of Ba Sing Se. This location not only protects the imperial family, but also follows the traditional Chinese ideology of the Emperor having the importance of being in the central position of ultimate power in the land. The whole concept of the Earth King’s palace is a combination of the conceptual design of Tiananmen Square and the Forbidden City. The main gates of the palace are a direct reference to Tiananmen Square. Beyond the walls, the Palace grounds are as large and sprawling as the Forbidden City. The interior of the throne room is designed to look like the throne rooms in the Forbidden City. We would analyze these areas one by one.

Table 4.19: Earth Kingdom Palace




Culture	Text					
	Visual	Verbal				
Chinese S2E14	Adaptation 	Description <i>Fade to the carriage passing by another wall with a tall gate. Behind it, the roof of an enormous building can be seen.</i> <table border="1"> <tr> <td>Katara</td> <td>What's inside that wall?</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Joo</td> <td>Inside is the</td> </tr> </table>	Katara	What's inside that wall?	Joo	Inside is the
Katara	What's inside that wall?					
Joo	Inside is the					



The picture above shows Aang and his friends, in the carriage, seeing the Earth King’s palace gates for the first time. The script describes it as “*an enormous building*”. The ancient Chinese Imperial structures are famous for being enormous, as the Chinese believed it portrayed a symbol of power and strength. For example, the Forbidden City, as mentioned, is the worlds’ largest preserved palace complex and boasts of 9000 rooms, divided into the “front court” and the “inner court” (Fang et al, 2006, p. 118). It is so majestic that the teenagers feel compelled to ask what lies within its walls. Joo Dee tells them that beyond the walls is the Royal Palace. The design of the gates is more clearly seen in the slight close-up of the second still. The middle wall is flanked by the two walls on either side. It is the almost exact replica of Tiananmen. In place of Mao Ze Dong’s portrait in the middle wall, the Earth Kingdom insignia takes the main spot. The insignia and the surrounding designs on the walls are green in color, to keep up with the color coding of the Earth Kingdom.

Aang and his friends are eventually able to enter the palace to speak to the Earth King to warn him about the war. Before reaching the throne room, they first need to cross the courtyard and go up a flight of stairs.

Table 4.20: Inside the Earth Kingdom Palace



Culture	Text	
	Visual	Verbal
Chinese	Direct reference	
S2E20		<i>No verbal text</i>
S2E18	<p>Adaptation</p>  	

The first still shows the view of the courtyard of the Earth Kingdom palace, as well as the rest of the palace grounds. As one can see, the palace has huge sprawling grounds which extend from the main building to individual buildings towards the back. These are direct intertextual references to the Forbidden City (Konietzko & DiMartino, p. 120). This is how the Forbidden City was designed too—multiple structures housed under the protection of the outer walls. The next still portrays the stairway heading up to the palace. The second still shows a side view of the stairs. The impressive staircase is synonymous with the imperial Chinese palace. On the staircase leading to the throne room in the Forbidden City, although not as high as the one in the animation, is adorned with carvings of dragons and phoenixes. This manner of elevating structures is an ancient Chinese practice. According to Cai and Lu (2006), the ancient Chinese loved a sense of dignity on their buildings. They achieved this by building important buildings on high podiums.

The courtyard of the Palace gates to the Earth King's Palace are aligned with one another as Tiananmen Square is aligned to the Forbidden City. These two magnificent structures are used together as direct references in creating the Earth Kingdom Palace.

Moving on from the courtyard, Aang and his friends arrive in the throne room to see Earth King Kuei. Again, in the traditional Chinese custom, the host, in this case, the King, sits facing the guests.

Table 4.21 Earth Kingdom Palace throne room


Culture	Text	
<p>Chinese</p> <p>S2E18</p>	<p>Adaptation</p>  	<p>Description</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin-top: 10px;"> <p><i>They arrive in the Earth King's chamber with Kuei sitting in his throne.</i></p> </div>




The features of the throne room seen in the animation are the features that can be seen in the throne rooms of ancient Chinese palaces. It is big and grand, aimed at making the ruler's subjects feel small when they come before him or her. According to the producers, their inspiration for the "immensity and grandeur of the Earth King's throne room was directly inspired by our visit to the palaces of Beijing" (Konietzko & DiMartino, 2010, p. 121). Just like the Chinese palaces, the architecture behind the throne is impressive, adorned with carvings and highlighted in green and gold. A boar's head serves as the main

background to create a sense of power and strength. Apart from that, the throne is elevated from the ground, with three parallel sets of stairs leading up to it. The ancient Chinese rulers were regarded as “Sons of Heaven” and thus above all their subjects.

Finally, let us look at the outer walls of Ba Sing Se. As mentioned by Joo Dee earlier on, the walls surround the city of Ba Sing Se and serve as a protection against external threats. This was the purpose that the Great Wall as well—to protect the people of China from the invading Mongols of that time. It was Emperor Qin Shihuangdi of the Qin dynasty who linked up and fortified the separate walls around the nation into one wall. This is the Great Wall of China as we know it today (Cai and Lu, 2006). The Great Wall is 6000 kilometers long, spanning from the Yalu River of the Liaoning Province in the east, to the Gansu province in the west.

Table 4.22: Walls of Ba Sing Se

Culture	Text							
	Visual	Verbal						
Chinese S2E12	Direct reference 	Allusion <table border="1"> <tr> <td>General Sung</td> <td>I assure you the Fire Nation cannot penetrate this wall. Many have tried to break through it, but none have succeeded.</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Toph</td> <td>What about the Dragon of the West? He got in.</td> </tr> <tr> <td>General Sung</td> <td>[<i>Slightly taken aback.</i>] Well... uh, technically yes, but he was quickly expunged.</td> </tr> </table>	General Sung	I assure you the Fire Nation cannot penetrate this wall. Many have tried to break through it, but none have succeeded.	Toph	What about the Dragon of the West? He got in.	General Sung	[<i>Slightly taken aback.</i>] Well... uh, technically yes, but he was quickly expunged.
General Sung	I assure you the Fire Nation cannot penetrate this wall. Many have tried to break through it, but none have succeeded.							
Toph	What about the Dragon of the West? He got in.							
General Sung	[<i>Slightly taken aback.</i>] Well... uh, technically yes, but he was quickly expunged.							

<p>S2E13</p>		<p>[<i>Confidently.</i>] Nevertheless, that is why the city is named Ba Sing Se. It's the "impenetrable city". They don't call it Na Sing Se. [<i>Laughs then grows serious.</i>] That means "penetrable city."</p>
		
		

The walls of Ba Sing Se are built in the almost exact replica of the Great Wall of China. The walls are tall, wide and sturdy, and span for as far as the eye can see. The real Great Wall is “tamped with earth at its core and fortified with outer layers of rocks and giant sized bricks” (Cai and Lu, 2006, p. 23). With this description of the Great Wall, it is

not difficult to see why the Chinese nation and their famous wall are used as a reference to the Earth Kingdom. The usage of “earth” and “rock” highlight how the element is in relation to the Earth Kingdom. The authenticity of how the Great Wall was built is expressed in how the Earth Kingdom people manipulate earth to build, fix or fortify their wall. It also serves to highlight the Earth benders’ resourcefulness and dependence on earth as their main form of defense. The walls surround the city, and there are troops stationed on top of the walls. These troops guard the walls and watch out for any signs of attack from the outside of the wall.

In the third still, there are watch towers at intervals on the walls. The audiences also see piles of rock stationed at the edge of the walls. When attacked, the soldiers hurl these rocks down on their enemies. The wall then is not just a means of defense for the people within the wall, but also a means of offense. Once again, these references are made from the Great Wall. According to Booth (2004), in the olden days, there were two kinds of watch towers built along the Great Wall. The first one was the *qingtai* (wall towers) which were erected on the wall itself or jutted from its side (Booth, 2004). The second was the *ditai* (enemy towers) which were two-storey fortifications with quarters for soldiers to stay and places to keep arsenals and crenellated parapets (Booth, 2004). These direct references from the Great Wall were obviously made in the wall of Ba Sing Se as the walls are not just stretches of brick, but fortresses with watch towers that carry out the functions that they were meant to.

In the second and last still, we get a glimpse of the geography of the Earth Kingdom and how the wall is built following it. In the final still, one sees the walls built along the geography of the hills and valleys in the land. The Great Wall is built in the same manner in China, following the geography of the land. The shape that the walls create as it snakes

over the hills and valleys is an almost replica of the pictures that we see of the Great Wall of China.

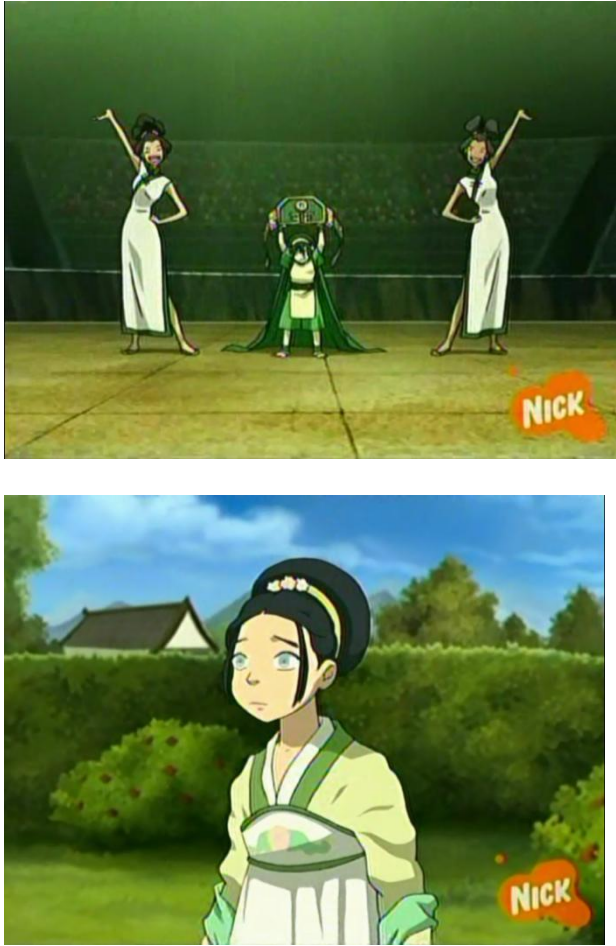
The people of Ba Sing Se are proud of their wall, just as the Chinese people are proud of their Great Wall. When Aang and his friends warn an Earth Kingdom general about the Fire Nation attack on the walls of Ba Sing Se, he is skeptical that they are able to do so. General Sung reassures them that: *“I assure you the Fire Nation cannot penetrate this wall. Many have tried to break through it, but none have succeeded”*. He is confident that the size and stability of the walls that have held true for so many years will not disappoint them. Fang et al (2001) states that the Great Wall is one of the Seven Wonders of the World, known for its incomparable grandeur and until today, remains to be the pride of the Chinese people. In this pride of their nation, the Chinese share the same sentiments.

The Chinese people are proud of their national heritage and what they symbolize to the world—the history and might of the Chinese civilization (Fang et al, 2001). They also take great pride in the consistency of their civilization and the preservation of it. All the architecture mentioned in this section is still present and preserved in the Chinese society till this day.

4.1.2.2 Clothing

The clothing of the Earth Kingdom characters, as briefly mentioned above, is referenced from the Chinese style as well. There is a variety of clothing that the Earth Kingdom characters are dressed up in. For example, due to the war, some of them are dressed in their battle armor. Other occasions call for more fancy clothes for the characters. In general, the men and women of the Earth Kingdoms are dressed in the clothing of the Manchu people in China. The Manchu ruled China for nearly 300 years, after setting up the Great Qing dynasty (Ren, Shi, Li, Zhao & Peng, 2006).

Table 4.23: Earth Kingdom clothing

Culture	Text	
	Visual	Verbal
Chinese S2E6	<p>Adaptations</p> 	<p><i>No verbal text</i></p>

The first still shows Toph when Aang, Sokka and Katara see her for the first time. She is an earth bender in an underground wrestling tournament. Flanking her are two arena girls dressed in cheongsams. The cheongsam is a traditional Chinese female wear, worn by the Manchu women (Ren, Shi, Li, Zhao & Peng, 2006). In the second still, we see Toph dressed in a feminine dress instead of her battle clothes. As the daughter of a rich, noble family, Toph gets pretty clothes to wear. According to the producers, her dress here is

“modeled after Tang-dynasty clothing (DiMartino and Konietzko, 2010, p. 97), proving that the clothing choices in *Avatar* are directly referenced from ancient Chinese clothing.

We see more references to the Manchu fashion in *Ba Sing Se*, when Katara and Toph sneak into an imperial ball.

Table 4.24: Earth Kingdom clothing


Culture	Text	
	Visual	Verbal
Chinese S2E14	<p>Adaptations</p> 	<p><i>No verbal text</i></p>

Katara and Toph’s dresses, as well the dresses of the other guests, were modeled after clothing from the Manchu women. The dresses worn are a variation of the cheongsam,

which had a straight skirt and broad sleeves. Fashion that time also consisted of a high collar for the ladies, as well as long sleeves (Ren et al, 2006). Their sleeves were so long that the women could place their hands inside them, as seen in the second picture.

The hairstyles of the Earth Kingdom women are directly referenced from the hairstyles of the Manchu women as well. Their hairstyles are clearly shown when Sokka ends up in a women's poetry club in Ba Sing Se.

Table 4.25: Earth Kingdom women hairstyles



Culture	Text	
	Visual	Verbal
Chinese S2E14	Direct reference 	<i>No verbal text</i>

The headdress of the women is fairly elaborate, consisting of coiling their hair into a bun and wearing a beautiful, ornate headdress atop of it (Ren et al, 2006). The headdress is decorated with flowers, carvings or tassels. Usually, the more ornate the headdress, the more well-to-do the women is. The animation still clearly showcases the various headdresses worn by the women atop of their bun. From the stills, we see that complete

references were made to the clothing of the Chinese culture, specifically on one particular sub-culture of the Chinese—the Manchu.

Moving on from the clothing of the women in the Earth Kingdom, let us now look at the clothing for the men. We would analyze the clothes that Long Feng wears. As the head of the Dai Li and Grand Secretariat of the state, he is one of the main antagonists in the animation and featured prominently in Ba Sing Se.

Table 4.26: Earth Kingdom men hairstyles

Culture	Text	
	Visual	Verbal
Chinese	Direct reference	
S2E6		<i>No verbal text</i>
S2E19		



Long Feng is dressed like a high-ranking male court official of the Qing dynasty in China. His hair is braided up in single braid, called a queue braid, and hangs down his back. He is also dressed in a gown with a mandarin jacket. His hairstyle and dressing are traits of a Manchu man. They also braided their hair and along with their gowns, wore mandarin jackets fitted over them (Ren et al, 2006). Real Manchu attire however, used horse-hoof-shaped cuffs are to hold the outfit together. This reference is not made in the animation.

As such, looking at the clothes worn by the characters in Ba Sing Se, we see that they are mostly referenced from the clothes worn during the Manchu period. This intertextual depiction of the clothing pays homage to the long period of time when the Manchu had control of the Chinese empire.

4.1.2.3 Lifestyles

As emphasized repeatedly in this analysis, the main reference for the Earth Kingdom is from the Chinese culture. Therefore, there are a few practices in the lives of the Earth Kingdom people which are references to real cultural practices of the Chinese. Among the most prominent two are their usage of chopsticks as their primary eating utensil and the belief in pyro-osteomancy, a divination method using the bones of animals.

Table 4.27: Chopsticks


Culture	Text	
	Visual	Verbal
Chinese	Direct reference	
S2E2		<i>No verbal text</i>
S2E6		

In the first and second stills, we see characters in the animation using chopsticks to eat their meals. The usage of chopsticks has become synonymous with the Chinese people and Chinese food. Due to the cultural influences that ancient China has on Japan and Korea, these two countries use the chopsticks as their main eating utensils as well. Chopsticks were normally made from plain wood like bamboo, pine or cedar (Perkins, 1991). In

modern times, they were also made from various metals or plastic. The chopsticks are generally held in the right hand. The proper way to holding a pair of chopsticks is resting the lower stick on the fourth finger and the thumb, without moving it. The upper stick, which is moved up and down to pick food, is held between the thumb, and the index and middle fingers (Perkins, 1991). This manner of using chopsticks is reference accurately in the second still of Toph’s father holding a piece of food with his chopsticks.

Apart from their eating habits, there is another interesting reference that the producers of the animation made to the Chinese culture—the manner of fortune telling using pyro-osteomancy. Aang and his friends have their fortunes told using pyro-osteomancy when they came across a fortune teller, Aunt Wu in the Earth Kingdom.

Table 4.28: Pyro-osteomancy practice

Culture	Text	
	Visual	Verbal
Chinese S1E14	Direct reference 	Direct Reference Allusion <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px;"> <p>Wu This is the most reliable method of telling your fortune. The bones never lie. [Urging Aang to pick a bone.] Go on, pick one. [Aang takes one bone and they sit down.] Now throw it on the fire. [Aang tosses the bone into the fire.] The heat makes cracks in the bone and I read the bone</p> </div>



cracks to tell your destiny.

Cuts to a shot of the bone sitting in the fire. The camera zooms in on the bone as a large crack splinters down its side.



In the sequence of stills and the accompanying script, we see that Aunt Wu, the fortune teller, explaining how pyro-osteomancy works and instructing Aang on what to do. Her directions to him describe exactly how pyro-osteomancy was carried out in ancient

China long ago. The definition of pyro-osteomancy is “the interpretation of cracking of a bone that is heated” (Flad, 2008, p. 7). This divination method was carried out by fortune tellers in Northern China in the Late Shang period (ca. 1300–1050 BC) with animal bones or turtle or tortoise shell (Smith, 2010). These bones or shells were thrown into the fire and heated until cracks or holes appeared in them. Aunt Wu directs Aang to do the same when, after he picks up a bone, she says: “*Now throw it on the fire.*” When he did, she describes to him that “*The heat makes cracks in the bone*” and to tell his fortune, she would “*read the bone cracks to tell your destiny*”. In the same way, fortune tellers of pyro-osteomancy fished out the bones or shells that have cracked in the fire, as we have seen in the definition, and interpreted the bones that have cracked.

It is interesting that the producers inserted a reference of this long-forgotten Chinese practice into the animation. This reference strengthens the intertextual depiction of the Earth Kingdom to the Chinese empire down to the minute details of their lifestyle. It also shows that the amount of research done by the producers in regard to Chinese beliefs and superstition. Their choice of picking this very old fortune-telling method is one that is unique and mythical enough to suit the animation.

4.1.2.4 Summary: Earth

The Earth Kingdom is a great and noble kingdom, but they are also proud and stubborn. The references made to the Chinese people, their architecture, clothes and their lifestyle is rounded and whole, and reflects the authenticity of the chosen intertextual reference that was drawn from the Chinese in the formation of the Earth Kingdom in the animation.

4.1.3 Fire

The Fire Nation plays a prominent role in this animation as the overarching antagonist. First of all, they are the nation which is at war with all the other nations, leading up to the climax of the war in Season 3 of the animation. They started the war a 100 years ago when the then Fire Lord used powers from a passing comet to annihilate the Air Nomads, Aang's people. After destroying the Air Nomads, the Fire Nation continued to attack the Water Tribes and the Earth Kingdom. All the main antagonists throughout the animation are from the Fire Nation—Zuko, Azula and Fire Lord Ozai. Fire benders are a little different from benders of the other nations. They are able to pull fire out of thin air, unlike the other benders who can only bend when they are in the vicinity of their elements. The Fire Nation people are hot tempered and cruel, but immensely brave and loyal to their country.

With their fiery red color, the Fire Nation comes across as an intense and aggressive nation. In the animation, most of the Fire Nation's customs, practices and teachings are drawn from the Japanese and Chinese culture. The animators merge elements of these two cultures in creating this nation. It is also not a coincidence that these two nations hold a high esteem to fire, the sun and the color red, much like the Fire Nation itself. We would further discuss these references in the analysis.


In general, the Chinese people regard fire as a powerful element. It is one of the five elements in "Feng Shui", along with Water, Earth, Gold and Wood. The Japanese have a strong affiliation to heat as well, giving reverence to the main source of heat—the sun. The Japanese flag consists of a red sun in the middle of a white background. Like these two nations, the Fire Nation relies on fire and the sun for their well being. In the animation, fire benders draw their power and energy from the sun in order to create fire from their bodies. When a solar eclipse happened, the fire benders lost their abilities to bend fire. Along with

this reference, let us see what other references the Fire Nation draws from China and Japan in terms of the landscape, architecture, clothing and lifestyles.

4.1.3.1 Landscape and Architecture

Keeping up with their theme of fire, the Fire Nation is set in a place where the landscape is mostly volcanic. The soil there is dark due to the magma rich deposits and volcanoes are seen around the land. This volcanic land is referenced from Japan, a country which still has a few active volcanoes in their land. Although the specific location of the volcanoes in the Fire Nation homeland is not referenced specifically from any place in Japan, the presence of the volcanoes itself is indication from the fact that Japan, which comprises of mountainous islands located within the Pacific Rim of Fire, still has a few active volcanoes smoking away in their land. In fact, one-tenth of the world's still-active volcanoes are located in Japan (Perkins, 1991).

Table 4.29: Fire Nation capital

Culture	Text	
	Visual	Verbal
Japanese S3E11	Direct References 	Description <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px;"> <p><i>The scene changes to where Aang, Toph and Sokka are flying on Appa to the Caldera Volcano in the Fire Nation.</i></p> </div>



Japan is also the home of Mount Fuji, the largest volcano Japan and regarded as a sacred symbol in the country. Mount Fuji, like most of the mountains in Japan, is “shaped like a cone with a wide base” (Perkins, 1991, p. 373). This description describes exactly the Caldera Volcano of the Fire Nation shown in the first still that we see in Table 4.29. In the second still, we see that the Fire Nation capital is located in the middle of the crater of the volcano, which hints to us that the Caldera Volcano of the Fire Nation is a dormant volcano. The location of the Fire Nation capital and the name “Caldera” is a brilliant reference to the volcanic locations that were used in the Fire Nation.

The name of the capital, “Caldera Volcano” is a direct reference to a volcanic term. The word “caldera” used to describe the feature of a volcano when its crater has erupted and the land within it sinks. This sinking causes “large, basin-like” depressions in the middle of the volcano (Perkins, 1991, p. 373). These depressions are called “calderas”. In Japan, some calderas have beautiful lakes and are protected as national parks. In the animation, as soon in the second still, the caldera of the volcano is used as the nation’s capital.



With close observation, one realizes why the landscape and the terrain of the caldera is actually a perfect place for the Fire Nation capital. The sloped sides of the volcano

creates a natural barrier to protect their capital, as well as the climb that their enemies have to make before arriving in the capital, gives the Fire Nation a distinct advantage of attacking their enemies first. The landscape chosen by the producers to have the Fire Nation capital in is reflective of how creative the producers are in referencing the habitat of these people to their element. It would be unrealistic to have the Fire Nation living in actual fire, but to place them in a volcano is a perfect way to relate their place of living to the element of fire.

As mentioned, the Fire Nation is built upon a fusion of the Chinese and Japanese cultures. This is especially true in their architecture and designs of the buildings in the nation. Most of the buildings portrayed in the animation of the Fire Nation are the palace and certain highlighted structures like temples and schools. In terms of the architecture in the Fire Nation, most of them have very Chinese influences, similar to those in the Earth Kingdom.

We first look at coronation podium in the Fire Nation palace. This is the outer area of the Fire Nation palace, where important events like funerals and coronations are held. The first still shows the podium when lighted in the night while the second shows it when it is dark.

Table 4.30: Fire Nation Palace

Culture	Text	
	Visual	Verbal
Chinese	Adaptation	
S2E7		<i>No verbal text</i>
S3E20		


As seen in these two pictures, the Fire Nation palace bears a slight semblance to the palace in the Earth Kingdom, although not as impressive. They both have the same basic architecture of the Chinese palaces in China—long walkways, elevated structure and the stairs leading up to the main building. Once again, this manner of elevating the structures is an ancient Chinese practice, one which was discussed in the palace of the Earth Kingdom in section **4.1.2.1 Landscape and Architecture** of **4.1.2 Earth**. They achieved this sense of dignity in the Fire Nation by building important buildings on high podiums. One example

of this architectural feature is seen in the three main halls of the Forbidden City in Beijing, whereby it is built on a three-story high podium. This reference is adapted into the buildings in the Earth Kingdom and Fire Nation, in which their palace buildings are always built on podiums and only accessible by stairs, as seen in the stills above.

Another similar feature that the Fire Nation buildings has with the Earth Kingdoms is the curled rooftops eaves, which is, again, an aforementioned reference to the Chinese architecture. The curled roof eaves in the Fire Nation are more elaborate than the Earth Kingdom. This particular type of curved beams is called the “crescent beam” (Cai & Lu, 2006). The Chinese people loved adorning their rooftops with not only practical, but beautiful, carved eaves and beams. In traditional Chinese crescent beams, they are carved with motifs of animals and birds which are deemed to be auspicious by the Chinese (Cai & Lu, 2006). This love is referenced into the buildings of the animation.

Approaching the palace grounds, we see that one featured area in the palace is the royal gardens.

Table 4.31: Fire Nation Palace gardens

Culture	Text	
	Visual	Verbal
Chinese Japanese S2E7	Adaptation 	Description <i>Cuts to shot of the Royal Gardens, two figures sitting by the edge of a large kidney-shaped pond.</i>

Like most palaces then and now, the Fire Nation have their own royal gardens. From the still seen above, the royal gardens looks a like peaceful, tranquil place. The Chinese and Japanese imperial family loved their gardens. Perhaps the most famous garden of the Chinese royalty is the Old Summer Palace (圆明园). Located outside Beijing, this garden was where the emperor held his court at the “beginning of each Chinese lunar New Year in early spring autumn” (Booth, 2004, p. 151). These gardens, already blessed with natural springs and hills, were further beautified by the various emperors who added gardens, bridges, pagodas and residences over the course of 150 years (Booth, 2004). They also sculpted the gardens after other natural scenic spots in China, adding rivers, waterfalls, lakes and islands to the gardens of the Old Summer Palace.

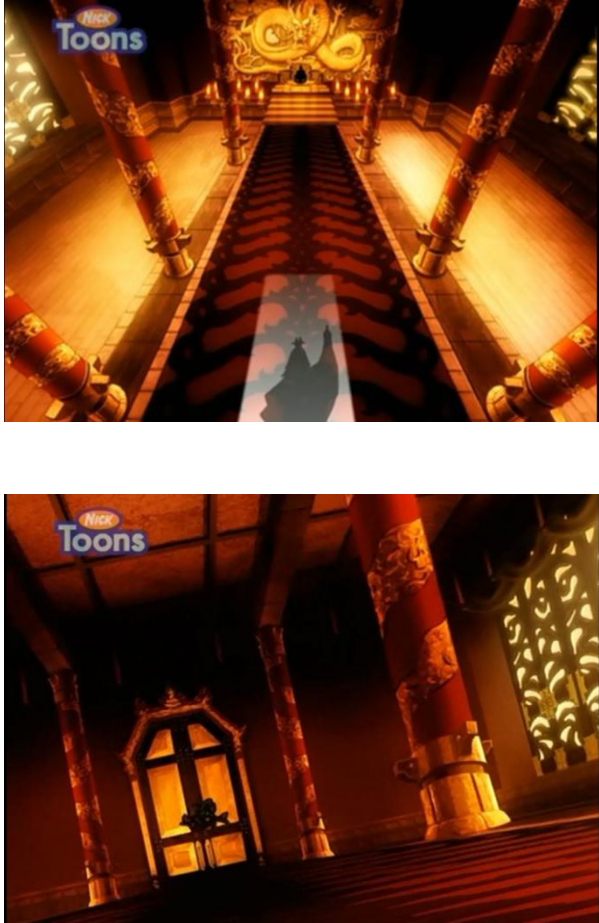
The Japanese also constructed their gardens with the natural beauty of nature in mind. The Japanese adore landscape gardening, which condenses the vastness of nature into

limited spaces and presents nature in a symbolic nature (Tazawa, Matsubara, Okuda & Nagahata, 1990). Unlike the Chinese who liked to enrich their gardens with additional landscapes and monuments, the Japanese had a more minimalistic approach to gardening. For them, a few trees and rocks were enough to represent nature symbolically.

From the animation still, we can deduct, based on the background of Chinese and Japanese gardens, that the garden in the palace of the Fire Nation is designed based on a combination of references adapted from the landscapes of the two cultures. There are minimal trees in the garden— just a willow tree by the waterside, as well as a tree that looks like an overgrown bonsai in the foreground. Apart from the lake, there are no additional waterfalls, streams or exotic plants in the garden. This beautiful simplicity is an element of a Japanese garden. The Chinese element in the garden comes from two little non-natural additions to the garden. Underneath the bonsai tree is a little shrine. Across the water from the willow tree, there is a pavilion. These two structures fill in the spaces of the garden and give a sense of tranquil purpose to be there.

Apart from the royal gardens, another significant area of the Fire Nation palace architecture is the throne room. Our first look at the throne room is when Avatar Roku, Aang predecessor, confronted the Fire Lord of that time, Fire Lord Sozin. He is the grandfather of Fire Lord Ozai. There are two unique features of the throne room which are worth analyzing. First of all, are the adorned pillars leading up to the throne of the Fire Lord.

Table 4.32: Fire Nation Palace throne room


Culture	Text	
	Visual	Verbal
Chinese S3E6	<p>Adaptation</p> 	<p><i>No verbal text</i></p>

In both the animation stills, the pillars are adorned with gold designs spiraling around them. Pillars themselves are important architectural features in buildings, regardless of the culture they represent. Most buildings have pillars to strengthen the structure and to hold up the roof of a building. In Chinese architecture, pillars are a salient feature as well. Usually, olden-day wooden Chinese pillars are rounded just like the ones in the still. Cai and Lu (2006) explain that to keep the base of the pillars from rotting, the Chinese

architects designed the pillars to be mounted on stone bases. The designs of these bases could range from designs of drums, to rounds baskets and vases (Cai & Lu, 2006). This particular reference to the Chinese design of the stone base of a pillar can be clearly seen in heavy-looking bases of the pillars in the second still.

Another prominent design one can observe from the pillars in the stills is the adornment on the pillars. The design on these particular pillars in the Fire Lord’s throne room looks like golden dragons coiling around the pillar. The dragon, a powerful mystical creature, has long been regarded as a symbol of greatness by the Chinese and the Japanese. This reference to the dragon is made in the following discussion.

Table 4.33: Dragons in the throne room

Culture	Text	
	Visual	Verbal
Chinese S3E6	Direct references 	<i>No verbal text</i>

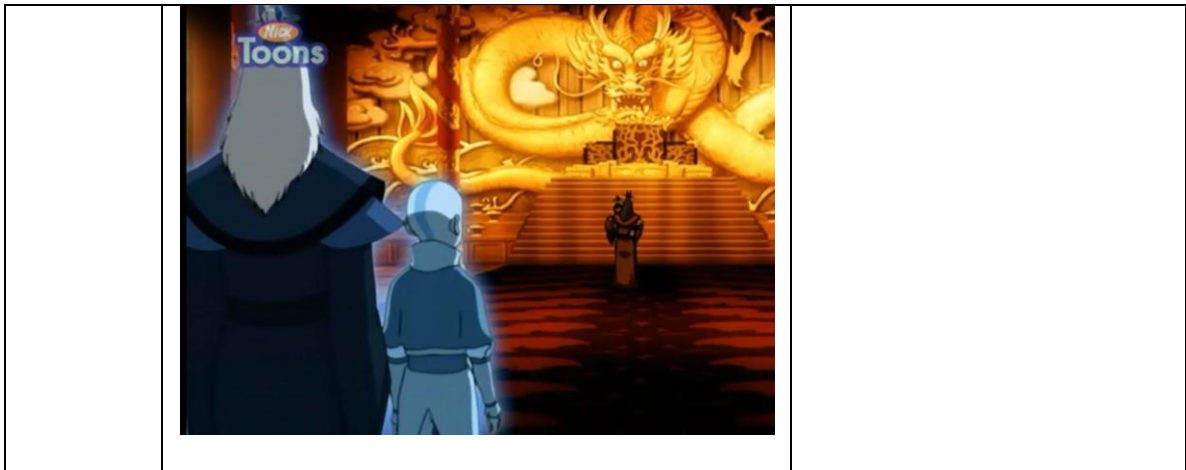



Table 4.34 shows the throne on which the Fire Lord sits upon. One of the most striking features of the throne room, as well as the most symbolic, is the presence of the dragon behind the throne where the Fire Lord sits. The dragon is gold in color, snarling and curled in a striking position. It cuts a figure of power and ferocity, perfect for complementing the authoritative ruler of a powerful country. The positioning of the dragon—right behind the throne, is referenced directly from the Chinese belief that the dragon symbolizes the Emperor of China. In fact, the throne of Chinese Emperors in feudal times was called the “Dragon Throne”. This reference obviously stands out in the stills of the Fire Lord’s throne.

The use of the dragon is played out many times in relation to the Fire Nation in the animation. Like the Chinese people, the Fire Nation people hold the dragon in high regard because of its symbolism to power and fire. Section **4.1.3.3 Lifestyles** would discuss and analyze in further detail how the dragon is referenced into the lifestyles of the people of the Fire Nation.

Aside from the palace, other buildings carry references to the architectural design of the Chinese culture as well. The following are other Fire Nation architectural features and structures that Aang and his friends come in contact with along their travels. The first are

elaborate door knockers that Sokka comes across when visiting his sword master, Master Piandao.

Table 4.34: Door knockers

Culture	Text	
	Visual	Verbal
Chinese S3E4	<p>Direct references</p> 	<p><i>No verbal text</i></p>


The front gate of Master Piandao’s house looks large, heavy and ornamented. The grandness of his gate is befitting to his status as a rich, highly respected swordsman of his community. Since the olden times, in the Chinese community, the front gates of the building have been “a symbol of the social and financial status of an individual” (Cai & Lu, 2006, p. 136). The gates would be in relation to one’s status in the community—from the strongest and heaviest gates of the imperial palace to the plain wooden gates of a common civilian. This reference is perfectly captured in the front gates of Master Piandao’s house.

In the door knockers of his gate, we once again see the symbolism of the dragon. According to Chinese beliefs, the dragon is a protector of the people and bringer of good luck. Having a statue or an image of them outside a house means protection and good fortune would come would come upon the house. In fact, even now in the Chinese

community, dragons are still featured in paintings, carvings, embellishment and decoration. This reference to this Chinese belief is featured in the ornamentation of the Fire Nation people in the animation.

Finally, the last structure analyzed is the Fire Sage’s temple. This is the temple where Avatar Roku asks Aang to meet him to tell him more about being an Avatar and to warn him about the plans of the Fire Nation harnessing the powers of a passing comet to end the war. The temple, like the imperial palace of the Fire Nation, is located on a volcano, once again keeping up with the theme of keeping the significant buildings of the Fire Nation where there are symbolisms of fire.

Table 4.35: Fire Sage’s temple

Culture	Text	
	Visual	Verbal
Chinese S1E8	Direct reference 	<i>No verbal text</i>



In the movie stills, one can see that the Fire Sage temple is an exact replica of a Chinese pagoda. As mentioned earlier in the architecture of the Earth Kingdom, again in section **4.1.2.1 Landscape and Architecture**, the pagoda is an ancient Buddhist building that is used to keep the bone relics of Buddha and other revered monks (Cai & Lu, 2006). It is also a place where monks come to worship and meditate. In China, there are still thousands of pagodas, built since ancient times. Pagodas were first built with wood, but they did not last long. Because of that, they were constructed with brick, and subsequently copper and steel (Cai & Lu, 2006). The Fire Sage temple is a distinctly influenced by the Yellow Crane Tower which is located in the Hubei province of China. The producers thought that “the curling flame-like corners were perfect for Fire Nation architecture” (Konietzko & DiMartino, 2010, p. 52).


With the discussion on the architecture of the Fire Nation, it is evident that most of them are referenced from the architecture of the Chinese culture. The subsequent sections would reveal how the Japanese culture comes into play in the Fire Nation.



4.1.3.2 Clothing

This section shall discuss the clothing worn by the Fire Nation citizens. As mentioned above, in the analysis of the architecture of the Fire Nation, the outcome of it was that the intertextual references were primarily from the Chinese culture. But for the clothes worn by the Fire Nation characters, the characters are shown to wear clothes which are drawn from Japanese influences. There is also a small reference to the national clothing of Korea, the *hanbok*.

In Japan, clothes are generally known as *wafuku*. The most popular of *wafuku* is perhaps the kimono, the traditional Japanese clothing. The kimono basically consists of straight-panels of cloth sewn together (Perkins, 1991). These panels, including the panels for the sleeves, are wrapped around the body and tied with an *obi* (sash). One of the features of Japanese clothing is that the left side is always folded over the right (Perkins, 1991).

Table 4.36: Fire Nation clothing

Culture	Text	
	Visual	Verbal
Japanese S1E3	Adaptation 	<i>No verbal text</i>

S3E6		
S3E11		


This traditional Japanese style of clothing is the style referenced to in dressing the citizens of the Fire Nation. Their clothes consist of mostly folding panels of cloth over their bodies and securing it with sashes in the middle. In the stills, we see Zuko and various members of his family dressed in clothing like these. Although they are not dressed in exact kimonos, the style of their clothing has the same concept as kimonos—straight panels cloths, folded over each other and secured with a sash. Their clothes are adapted references from authentic Japanese clothes.

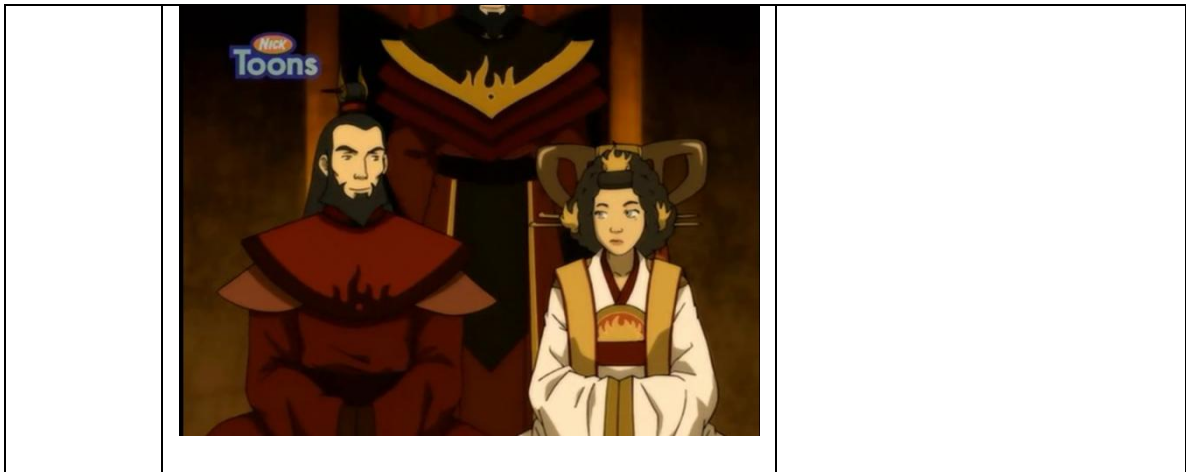
Atop the kimono, Japanese soldiers wore a *kataginu*, “a sleeveless upper garment with large shoulders that protected the upper body” (Perkins, 1991, p. 54). It was part of the traditional armor of Japanese samurai. In the Fire Nation, the *kataginu* is worn over their kimonos as well. In the first still, Zuko is wearing a thick, stiff *kataginu* as he is out

hunting the Avatar. He could get into fights anytime and needed the protection it provides. In the second still, Zuko and Azula are wearing more delicate looking *kataginus*, seemingly made out of softer material. This is because they are at back home in their palace and safe from harm. They do not need the tougher *kataginu* to protect themselves. The final still shows Fire Lord Ozai in his royal robes. His *kataginu* is bigger; more layered and embellished and more regal as he is an important person in the Fire Nation. Thus, it can be observed that the references made to the Japanese clothing are not only adapted to creating a form of clothing for the Fire Nation characters, these references were adapted to fit into the situation where the characters find themselves in as well.

Aside from Japanese inspired clothes, the producers also turned to Korea for inspiration. The following are stills from Avatar Roku's wedding with Ta Min, his childhood sweetheart.

Table 4.37: Fire Nation clothing


Culture	Text	
	Visual	Verbal
Korean S3E6	Direct reference 	<i>No verbal text</i>



Ta Min's wedding dress is a *hanbok*, the traditional garment of Korea. She is wearing a woman's *hanbok*. The standard *hanbok* consists of the upper garments or the *jeogori* (coat) that falls below the waist and the bottom *baji* (pants), which is quite narrow (Yoo, 2005). There is also the *chima*, which is a long skirt, and the knee-high Korean *durumagi* (overcoat) (Yoo, 2005, p. 123). There are ceremonial *hanboks* and regular *hanboks*. In weddings, the ceremonial *hanbok*, the one Ta Min is wearing, is worn with the *durumagi* overcoat. Although Ta Min is not shown in full-length, only her upper torso, it is enough for someone who has seen a *hanbok* before to identify that the reference of her wedding dress comes from Korea.

Finally, one of the more interesting references made in the animation to the Chinese culture is the mask that Zuko wears when he is his alter-ego—the Blue Spirit.

Table 4.38: Zuko's mask

Culture	Text	
	Visual	Verbal
Chinese S1E13	Adaptation 	<i>No verbal text</i>



Zuko dons this mask when he wants to conceal his identity as the crown prince of the Fire Nation. This mask is specifically referenced from the mask of Dragon King Nuo (DiMartino and Konietzko, 2010, p. 62). In creating a mask for Zuko, Konietzko wanted the mask to “seem a bit creepy and supernatural”. After researching a number of masks from Asia, he “found the mask of Dragon King Nuo from Chinese drama” to be the perfect one. The original mask was too intricate for the animation, but Konietzko (2010, p. 62) “streamlined the image while trying to retain the graphic power of the visage”. The definite choice of reference for this mask is testament to the intertextuality used in the animation.

4.1.3.3 Lifestyles

As specified above, the Fire Nation is a combination of references from the Chinese and Japanese cultures. As such, some of the lifestyles portrayed in the animation are somewhat a fusion culture as well, with the characters following certain aspects of both Chinese and Japanese practices.

In one of the episodes, Aang, dressed in Fire Nation clothing, finds himself mistaken for a student of a Fire Nation school. He brought back to the school and made to attend classes. In the classroom, Aang is taught a Fire Nation practice that is taken from the Japanese culture—bowing. Bowing as a greeting has been, and still is, a cultural gesture of the Japanese so iconic that it has almost become a racial stereotype.

Table 4.39: Bowing in the Fire Nation

Culture	Text	
	Visual	Verbal
Japanese Chinese S3E2	Direct reference Adaptation  	Description Allusion <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin-bottom: 10px;"> <p>Kwan Your etiquette is terrible. In the homeland, we bow to our elders. <i>[Walks in front of her desk.] Like so. [Bows.]</i></p> </div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px;"> <p>Aang Sorry, ma'am. <i>Bows to her. She taps his hands to correct him.</i></p> </div>


As seen in the exchange, Aang, not being a Fire Nation citizen, does not know he has to bow. His classroom teacher, Madame Kwan notices this and reprimands him immediately. She uses the word “etiquette”, which is defined as “the customary code of polite behavior in society” by the Oxford dictionary (2014). She scolds him by using the word “terrible”, to stress how impolite it is to not know how to bow. To the Fire Nation citizens, it is extremely important to bow before their elders. This social etiquette is one practiced by the Japanese as well.

Madam Kwan first demonstrates to him how to bow and corrects him when Aang does it wrongly. It is extremely important to her that he gets it correctly. Although the exact gesture of bowing is different from how the Japanese do it, but the reference is obviously there. The Japanese bow with their hands straight out at their sides, not with their fist under their upright palm, like in the Fire Nation.

It is not only the Japanese that bow as a sign of respect. The Chinese of the Qing dynasty also took bowing to each other as a form of greeting. Their bow was known as *gongshou* and was carried out with the both hands folded in front, with the left hand cupping the fist of the right hand in front of their chest (Yang, 2009). It was the most common etiquette of male greeting, especially when meeting friends. Once again, these related Asian cultural references are adapted and slipped into the animation.

Another cultural reference made in the animation is the practice of calligraphy. In the animation, all the writing featured is written in traditional Chinese calligraphy. This gives the animation a sense of “Asian-ness” and authenticity to the Asian references. The Chinese calligraphy used in the whole animation meant that all the nations in the animation wrote in Chinese characters. But the importance of calligraphy is only highlighted Fire Nation, when Master Piandao teaches Sokka that calligraphy is important in learning swordsmanship.

Table 4.40: Calligraphy

Culture	Text	
	Visual	Verbal
Chinese	Direct references	Description
S3E4	 <p>The visual section contains three panels illustrating calligraphy practice. The top panel is a close-up of Piandao's hands dipping a brush into an ink tray. The middle panel shows Piandao at a desk flattening a piece of paper. The bottom panel shows Piandao handing a brush to Sokka's hand.</p>	<p><i>Cut to a close up of Piandao's hand holding a calligraphy brush and dipping it into a tray of ink, carefully holding his sleeve with the other hand.</i></p> <p>The warrior practices a variety of arts to keep his mind sharp and fluid. [Flattens out a piece of paper on the table.]</p> <p>Piandao The first you will learn is calligraphy. [Cut to his hands as Piandao delicately hands a brush to Sokka] Write your name.</p>

When audiences are first introduced to Master Piandao, he is shown to be getting ready to write calligraphy, having already ground the ink stick on the ink stone. In the first still, he dips his brush into the ground ink. Pulling back his sleeve, he proceeds to start writing in the second still. There is a reason to why Master Piandao is shown to be writing calligraphy when he is first introduced as a character.



Chinese calligraphy has been around for 4000 years and is an art form which is highly respected by the Chinese. If one is good calligrapher, it means that he or she is cultured and learned. During the Imperial Chinese era, good calligraphy skills were crucial for anyone wanting to sit for the Imperial examinations (Davies, 2008). By showing Master Piandao writing calligraphy, it portrays him as a wise, cultured, intelligent man; a man worthy of teaching sword fighting. The intertextual reference to this art is maximized in building character of Master Piandao in the animation

In calligraphy, emphasis is placed not only on the skill of the calligrapher, but also the choice of paper, the types of brush and the quality of the ink that is used. Each stroke of the brush is controlled by the flexibility of the calligrapher, including the concentration of the ink on the paper (Davies, 2008). Thus the equipment used in calligraphy is an important aspect as well. Its importance is shown in the close-up of the first still, in which it shows the ink and the brushes of Master Piandao. This importance is shown again in the third still, where Master Piandao sets out his collection of brushes and straightens his paper while he tells Sokka the importance of calligraphy. The final still shows the close-up of Master Piandao handing Sokka a brush. These close-ups highlight the references made to the importance of the calligraphy equipment.

Among the Fire Nation lifestyles, another practice that stands out is tea drinking, especially in Uncle Iroh, who is constantly drinking or talking about tea. Started by the Chinese, the practice of tea drinking has spread to its neighboring countries like Japan,

Korea and now, all over the world. Tong (2010), calls China the “homeland of tea”. It was the Chinese who discovered this fragrant leaf about four or five thousand years ago, and took the lead in planting, producing, marketing and drinking tea (Tong, 2010).

Table 4.41: Tea drinking


Culture	Text	
	Visual	Verbal
Chinese	Direct reference	<i>No verbal text</i>
S2E8		
S2E9		



In the series of stills above, Uncle Iroh, the tea-loving uncle of Zuko, is seen pouring tea, being handed tea, and drinking tea in various locations, at various points of time. He is usually found drinking tea with other characters in the animation, dispensing valuable advice at the same time. Uncle Iroh's tea drinking habits is a testament to the tea drinking habits of the Chinese people, who love tea. Tong (2010), in his book *Chinese Tea: A Cultural History and Drinking Guide*, claims that the Chinese people drink tea to relieve thirst, to sober up, to help digestion, to refresh themselves and to stay awake. The many benefits of tea mean that it can be drunk anytime, anywhere. Thus, tea drinking is not only a tradition in the lives of the Chinese, but also a culture. This is referenced perfectly in Uncle Iroh's lifestyle.

Tea is not only a beverage to be enjoyed as it is. To the Chinese, tea drinking is much more than that. It is an art. Cultured Chinese recognize and appreciate tea drinking as a lifestyle, a spiritual pleasure (Tong, 2010). This reasoning comes from the fact that tea tastes better in its aftertaste, a sweet fragrance following the initial bitterness after savoring. This is in harmony with the Buddhist teaching of happiness after suffering (Tong, 2010). With this depth in the knowledge of tea, Uncle Iroh is indignant with Zuko's lack of appreciation of it, as seen in Table 4.42

Table 4.42: Uncle Iroh and Zuko on tea

Culture	Text	
	Visual	Verbal
Chinese	Direct reference	Allusion
S2E14		<p><i>Cut to frontal view of Iroh and Zuko. Iroh takes a sip from his cup, but his face contorts in disgust.</i></p> <p>Iroh Blech! This tea is nothing more than hot leaf juice!</p> <p>Zuko Uncle, that's what <i>all</i> tea is.</p> <p>Iroh [<i>Angrily.</i>] How could a member of my own family say something so horrible?</p>

Zuko’s appreciation of tea is humorously shallow compared to his uncles’. When Uncle Iroh is disgusted with the quality of the tea they were served, he exclaims “*This tea is nothing more than hot leaf juice!*”. To which Zuko replies: “*Uncle, that's what **all** tea is.*” To Zuko, tea is nothing more than hot water flavored with some leaves. His uncle, horrified with what he said, angrily asks: “*How could a member of my own family say something so horrible?*” Uncle Iroh is a true connoisseur of tea and he is indignant that Zuko does not see

how significant tea is. Using the word “horrible”, expresses Uncle Iroh’s reaction to hearing something shocking and unpleasant uttered by his nephew.

In direct reference to the reality of tea drinking, there really is much more to tea than “hot leaf juice”. According to Tong (2010), there are 6 different kinds of tea in China—green tea, oolong tea, black tea, yellow tea, dark tea and white tea. Each of these types of tea has their own preparation and brewing methods. Within each different kind of tea, they are further divided into different variants of classification.

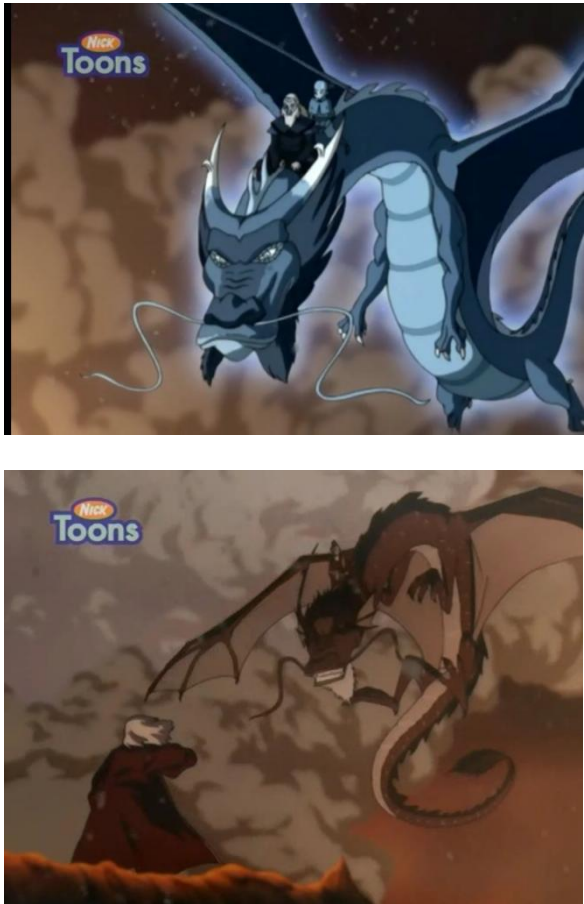
Moving on from the physical aspect of tea, let us now briefly look into the philosophy of tea drinking. Tong (2010) writes about tea in high regard, calling it the “*friend of meditation*” because it keeps “*the heart immersed in profound tranquility*”. Not only that, tea also inspires the imagination, brightens up people’s life, and brings them to towards wisdom (Tong, 2010). In the animation, while having tea with other characters in the animation, Uncle Iroh also dispenses wise words and advice to them, telling them what to do and keeping them in perspective with their task at hand. This wisdom that he portrays while having a cup of tea in his hand is a reference to the wisdom that comes with the practice of tea drinking. As a result of his tea-drinking advice, the lives of the other characters are brightened as well. All these profound aspects of tea are aptly referenced to in the animation in what Uncle Iroh understands and appreciates about tea.

Finally, as briefly discussed earlier on in this analysis, the reference to dragons is made to repeatedly in the Fire Nation. This is due to its significance to the Chinese and Japanese people, and also to the element of Fire. Unlike the West which associates the dragon with evil, the Chinese regard the dragon as a power for good. In Chinese mythology, the dragon “wards off wandering evil spirits, brings prosperity and good fortune, and signifies greatness, goodness, and blessings” (Davies, 2008, p. 112). The dragon also brings

rain and floods, an important power to the ancient Chinese who were primarily an agrarian society.

An archetypal Chinese dragon, according to Davies (2008), is an animal which is long and scaly like a snake, with deer horns, camel head, devil eyes, eagle claws, tiger paws and oxen ears. In the animation, the dragons that are portrayed are the typical Chinese dragons. This direct reference is such an obvious one that it cannot be ignored.

Table 4.43: Dragons

Culture	Text	
	Visual	Verbal
Chinese S3E6	<p>Direct reference</p> 	<p><i>No verbal text</i></p>

S3E13



Among the prominent dragons in the animation is Fang, the good friend and animal spirit guide of Avatar Roku, shown in the first still. The dragon is also the ride of Fire Lord Sozin, shown in the second still. Another two major dragons in the animation are Ran and Shaw, two ancient dragons who teach Zuko and Aang to draw their fire bending not from rage, but from vitality and joy of the spirit. They are shown in the two final stills.

The Fire Nation is the perfect nation to show love for the dragon, in keeping up with the theme of fire and flame, as well as ultimate power. For the Chinese, the love that they have for the dragon stems from the legend that Emperor Huang Di, the first Emperor of China was immortalized as a dragon. This legend led the Chinese people call themselves “descendants of the dragon” (龙的传人) (Davies, 2008). The numerous dragon references

made in the animation, especially the visual reference is homage to the love of this mythical beast.

4.1.3.4 Summary: Fire

The Fire Nation is really a fusion of the Japanese and Chinese cultures. In reality, these two cultures do share a lot in common as the Japanese culture has its roots in the Chinese culture. Both nations are strong, resourceful and hardworking, yet proud and unyielding at the same time. Drawing references from them in terms of landscape and architecture, clothing and lifestyles builds the perfect powerful nation that remained as the main antagonist in the animation for all three seasons.

4.1.4 Air

The Air Nomads are a very important group of people in the animation, not only because Aang, the Avatar, is one of them, but because they are a group of people that were totally wiped out by the Fire Nation at the beginning of the war. Aang is the last survivor of the Air Nomads, hence the title of this series—“The Last Airbender”. Because these people have been lost to war, there is a limited portrayal of them in the animation. The animators usually feature the Air Nomads in Aang’s flashbacks to when he was an air novice living in the Southern Air Temple. Throughout the course of the series, the various characters, namely Aang and his group of friends, visit the different Air Temples, usually to find them uninhabited, or inhabited with other people who are not Air Nomads.

The Air Nomads takes on heavy references from the Tibetan and Bhutanese cultures from the north-east of the Himalayas in China. These cultures are synonymous with their relationship with the Buddhist religion and their teachings. Buddhism made its way into China from India around AD (Cai & Lu, 2006). Since then, it has taken root in the hearts of


the Chinese people, with Han Buddhism being the main type of Buddhism practiced by the people in China. Buddhism in Tibet is known as Tibetan Buddhism. Tibet and Bhutan is the pinnacle of Buddhism in terms of their architecture and their way of life. As such, the whole culture of the Air Nomads is built upon these cultures, not only in the landscape of their homeland and the architecture of their buildings, the way they dress, but also in their devotion to their religion, philosophies and their way of life.

4.1.4.1 Landscape and architecture

In the animation, the Air Temples of the Air Nomads are located in the North, South, East and West of the world that the characters live in. Thus, these Air Temples are known as the Southern Air Temple, the Northern Air Temple, the Eastern Air Temple and the Western Air Temple, depending on where they are. The Air Temples are always built on mountaintops, accessible only with the flying bison that the Air Nomads breed. Like the Himalayan mountain range where Tibet and Bhutan are located, all the Air Temples are located on mountains or mountain ranges as well. The Air Nomads build their temples on the mountain tops just like how the Tibetan and Bhutanese Buddhist monks build their monasteries atop the Himalayas.

The first Air Temple that Aang and his friends visit is the Southern Air Temple, the home temple of Aang. He grew up here with his fellow Air Nomad novices and the monks who mentored them. In the same way, young boys are brought up to be monks in Buddhist temples, like the Shaolin monks who are brought up in the Shaolin monastery on Shaoshi Mountain, a part of Mount Songshan, the middle of the “five sacred mountains” of China (Fang et al, 2001, p. 187).

Table 4.44: Southern Air Temple

Culture	Text									
	Visual	Verbal								
<p>Tibetan</p> <p>S1E3</p>	<p>Adaptations</p> 	<p>Description</p> <table border="1" data-bbox="1084 451 1442 606"> <tr> <td data-bbox="1084 451 1170 606"></td> <td data-bbox="1170 451 1442 606"><i>Cut to a wider shot as Appa races past and ascends up to some mountains.</i></td> </tr> </table> <table border="1" data-bbox="1084 611 1442 766"> <tr> <td data-bbox="1084 611 1170 766">Aang</td> <td data-bbox="1170 611 1442 766">[Excited.] The Patola Mountain range! We're almost there!</td> </tr> </table> <p data-bbox="1084 850 1442 1224"><i>An overview shot follows Appa's flight up the mountain and through the clouds. Appa turns out of sight behind the flank of a mountain. The camera view shifts and Appa is seen emerging from behind that flank and turns further upwards.</i></p> <table border="1" data-bbox="1084 1270 1442 1757"> <tr> <td data-bbox="1084 1270 1170 1757"></td> <td data-bbox="1170 1270 1442 1757"><i>The camera switches to a further off view of Appa as he flies over the rocks and into the sky again. He flies over a last ridge that is covered with trees. The camera pans up to reveal a large temple as Appa floats toward it.</i></td> </tr> </table> <table border="1" data-bbox="1084 1761 1442 1871"> <tr> <td data-bbox="1084 1761 1170 1871">Aang</td> <td data-bbox="1170 1761 1442 1871">[Voice-over.] There it is. The Southern Air Temple.</td> </tr> </table>		<i>Cut to a wider shot as Appa races past and ascends up to some mountains.</i>	Aang	[Excited.] The Patola Mountain range! We're almost there!		<i>The camera switches to a further off view of Appa as he flies over the rocks and into the sky again. He flies over a last ridge that is covered with trees. The camera pans up to reveal a large temple as Appa floats toward it.</i>	Aang	[Voice-over.] There it is. The Southern Air Temple.
	<i>Cut to a wider shot as Appa races past and ascends up to some mountains.</i>									
Aang	[Excited.] The Patola Mountain range! We're almost there!									
	<i>The camera switches to a further off view of Appa as he flies over the rocks and into the sky again. He flies over a last ridge that is covered with trees. The camera pans up to reveal a large temple as Appa floats toward it.</i>									
Aang	[Voice-over.] There it is. The Southern Air Temple.									

As they approach the Southern Air Temple, there are numerous descriptions of Appa, Aang's flying bison, flying up and weaving through the mountain tops, giving an idea of how high the temple is. Appa "*races past and ascends up to some mountains.*" as well as "*flies over the rocks and into the sky again*". The camera also follows Appa's "*flight up the mountain and through the clouds*". All these descriptions in the script, the usage of words like "*ascends*", "*into the sky*", "*flight up*" and "*through the clouds*" as well as the visuals showing Appa weaving through the clouds and mountain tops highlight the height of the Air Temple's location.

Approaching the Southern Air Temple, Aang excitedly exclaims, "*the Patola mountain range!*". One is immediately reminded of the Himalayan mountain range, where the highest peak of our world, Everest, is located. The Himalayan range stretches from Afghanistan to China, a solid wall of mountains 1800 miles long. The Himalayan range not only houses Mount Everest, but over a hundred of other shorter mountains. Similarly, in the animation, the Patola mountains range comprises of many other mountains as well. Aang and his friends need to fly up into the sky and weave through a series of mountains before they actually come to the temple. Again, the descriptions of how Appa "*races past and ascends up to some mountains*" as well as his "*flight up the mountain and through the clouds*" in the script showcases the references to the high altitudes of the Himalayan Mountain range.




Another prominent reference made to the Tibetan culture as well as their landscape is the name "Patola" in the animation. This name is referenced from the Patola Palace, which is the palace where the Dalai Lama resides in Lhasa, the capital of Tibet (Worldmark Encyclopedia, 1998). This palace is one of the landmarks in Lhasa, with massive granite wall, 13 floors and about 177 meters tall (Fang et al, 2001, p. 153). With the grandeur of

Patola palace, it is not surprising that this structure is paid homage to in naming the mountain range of Aang's.

Moving on from the Southern Air Temple, the characters visit other Air Temples around their world. Apart from the Southern Air Temple, there is also the Northern Air Temple, Eastern Air Temple and Western Air temple. Similarly to the Southern Air Temple, these other temples are located on highland areas like mountains or cliffs. Michael Dante DiMartino and Bryan Konietzko describe the Air Nomads as being “a reclusive, monastic society” thus they “built their Air Temple at high altitudes, in very remote locations” (DiMartino and Konietzko, 2010, p. 46). There is a proverb in Chinese which goes: “*All the famous mountains under the sky are populated with monks*” (Cai & Lu, 2006). This saying reflects exactly the location of the Air Temples and the Air Nomads monks that live there.

There are numerous Buddhist monasteries in Tibet and Bhutan which are normally built in high, hard-to-access places on the mountain side. This choice of location is due to the desire of the monks to study the dharma and to meditate. For this, they need a tranquil, serene place. An example of a Buddhist temple built in the Himalayan mountain range is Rongbuk Gompa. This is the highest monastery in the world and situated at near Everest's north-side base camp (Davies, 2008). Apart from Rongbuk Gompa in Tibet, there is also Takstang (Tiger's Lair), a holy building in Bhutan which is built on precipitous rock ledges on the mountaintops (Palin, 2004). These buildings are exactly what the Air Temples are in the animation—holy, religious structures that are built high up into the mountains where monks dwell to meditate and conduct their daily routines. All the Air Temples in Aang's world are references to these high-up Buddhism temples in different parts of China.




Table 4.45: Other Air Temples

Culture	Text	
	Visual	Verbal
Tibetan	<p>Direct references Adaptation</p> <p>S1E17 Northern Air Temple</p>  <p>S2E16 Eastern Air Temple</p>  <p>Bhutanese</p> <p>S3E12 Western Air Temple</p> 	<p><i>No verbal text</i></p>

In the animation stills above, we see that all the Air Temples are built on mountaintops, close to the clouds and sky. Out of the four Air Temples, there is a noticeable difference in the Western Air Temple, both in its location and the architecture. While all the other Air Temples were located on sky-high mountain tops, the Western Air Temple is suspended upside down from cliffs. As for the architecture, the Southern, Northern and Eastern have spiraling buildings reach up to the sky. In contrast, Western Air Temple, apart from being upside down, has a slightly different architecture. The producers modeled the pointed tip and squarish designs of the temple roofs to the roof styles of Bhutanese monasteries (DiMartino and Konietzko, 2010, p. 415).

Apart from the external architecture, the inner architecture reflects the references made to the temples in Bhutan and Tibet as well. Not only are these references made from temples in Bhutan and Tibet, but also from most Buddhist Temples everywhere around the world. Among the most prominent references made in terms of the internal architecture of the temples are to the murals on the walls of the Air Temples as well as the statues of the monks and deities in their grounds.




Table 4.46: Air Temple murals

Culture	Text	
	Visual	Verbal
Tibetan	Direct reference	Description
S1E17		<p><i>Katara walks up to Aang, who is looking at a painted wall with pipes going through it.</i></p>
S3E14	 	<p><i>[Cut to an aerial shot of the group.] I learned from the monks, but the original airbenders were the sky bison.</i></p> <p>Aang <i>[Camera pans above to show a mural of three sky bison. Aang then leans back to look at Appa.]</i></p>

Painted by the temple monks and nuns, these murals mentioned in the script and seen in the stills reminisce of the *thangka* paintings found on the walls of the temples in Tibet and Bhutan and in the grottoes in China. They can also be found in the Shaolin Monastery on Shaoshi Mountain. In the monastery, there is a hall called the Thousand-Buddha Hall. This is the largest hall in the monastery and on three of its walls, there are colorful murals covering an area of over 300m². These murals were painted by Wu Daozi, a famous painter from the Tang Dynasty (Fang et al, 2001, p. 187). The murals in the animation are direct references to these ancient Buddhist paintings. Although the murals on the walls of the Air Temples have faded due to age and weather, making them less vibrant as the real *thangka* paintings, these murals consists of the same elements of the murals on the walls of the temples in our world. The murals express the way of life of the Air Nomads and the teachings that they follow.

The statues that stand in the grounds of the temples are also adapted references to the Buddhist architecture into the animation. Buddhist temples around the world have long carved statues of Buddha in various positions and placed them around their temples. In the case of the Air Nomads, this practice is referenced, but instead of the statue of Buddha, the statues are those of esteemed monks of the community instead.

Table 4.47: Air Temple statues

Culture	Text	
	Visual	Verbal
Tibetan	Adaptation	Description Allusion
S1E3		<p><i>Aang bows to the statue of an elderly man with a mustache and a distinct round necklace sitting in lotus with his fists bumped to each other in front of him, while the camera zooms in on it.</i></p>
S1E17		
S2E19		



S3E13



The statues of the monks above are large and carved out of stone. They are placed in and around the Air Temples. Buddhists statues are revered in the same way as well. An example of a huge statue of Buddha can be found in the Yungang grottoes in the Yungang caves. Statues were also carved into the northern slope of Mount Wuzhou more than 1500 years ago. Each of these statues are at least 43ft (13m) tall and come in various positions and expressions (Booth, 2004). Another example would be the Buddha statues from the Longmen caves. There are 9 of the statues, with the tallest standing at almost 59 ft (18m) high (Booth, 2004).

These statues of the monks in the Air Temples are usually in standing and sitting positions very similar to the ones we see in Buddhist temples. The statues of the monks and nuns are always seen in meditating postures, sitting down with their legs crossed in the “lotus” position in yoga. This is the posture that Buddha is commonly seen in, meditating in the middle of his lotus flower.

Table 4.48: Air Temple statues

Culture	Text	
	Visual	Verbal
Tibetan	Direct reference	
S2E19		<i>No verbal text</i>
S3E13		

Apart from being seated, some of the statues are in standing positions as well. In this position, they are usually lined in individual indentations in the walls as seen in the photos. In Davies's book, there is a picture of ornamental statues of Buddha lined up in niches in the walls. Davies describes them as "a row of golden Buddha statues, set in decorative niches, are surrounded by countless tiny niches, many with statues inside" (Davies, 2008, p. 141). This description fits the placing of the figure behind Aang in the first picture, whereby the statues of the monks or deities are placed in niches in the walls. In


the second picture, the statues are also embedded into the wall of the temple, similar to the architecture described by Davies in the Chinese temples.

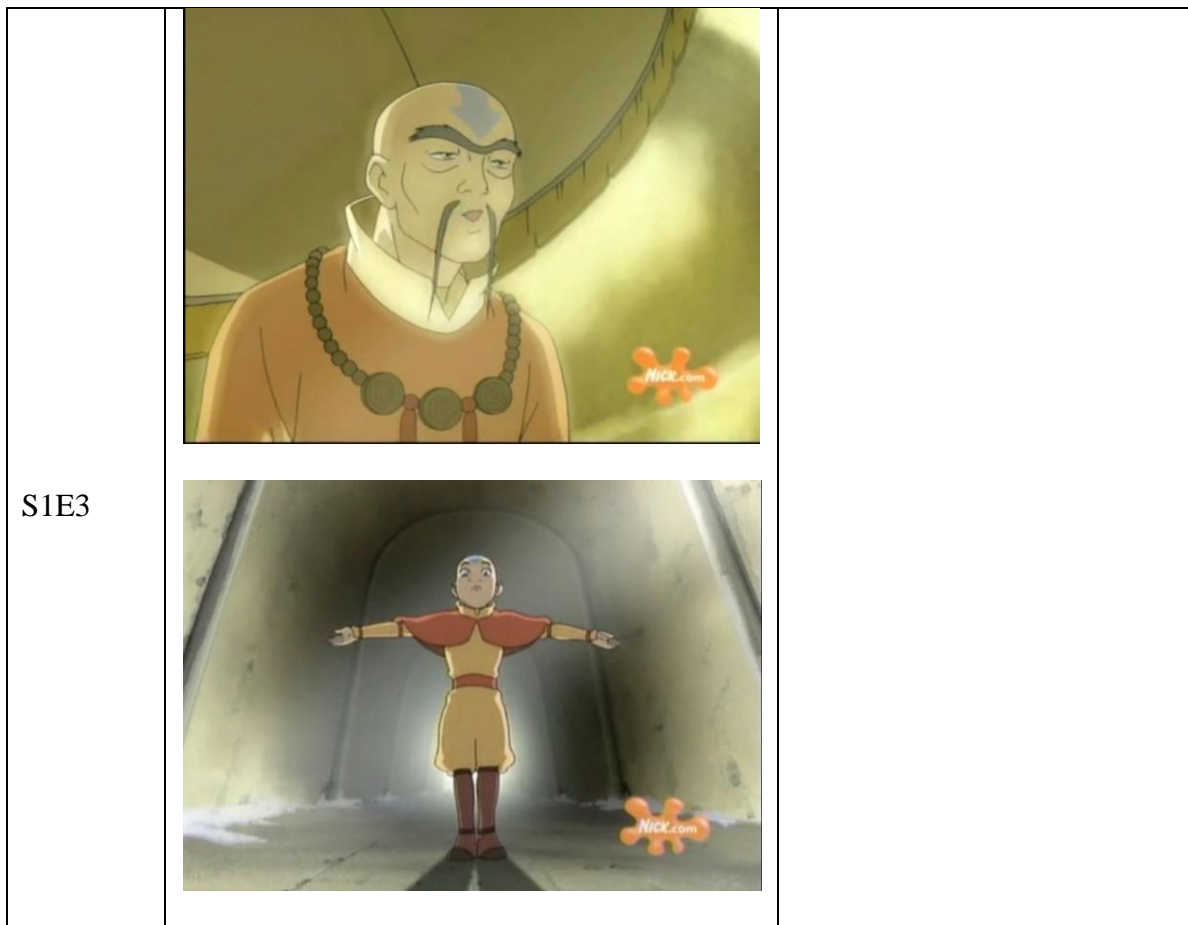
Thus, the landscape of the Air Nomads are referenced from the high mountaintops of the Tibetan and Bhutanese temples on the Himalayan mountain range, while the architecture of the Air Temples are directly referenced from how Buddhist temples are designed.

4.1.4.2 Clothing

As discussed above, the main reference for the Air Nomads is taken from the community of the Buddhist monks. Following that, the costumes of the Air Nomad characters are based on the sandy colored robes that most Buddhist monks are accustomed to wear. This reference is strengthened by Konietzko (2010), who said that he was “inspired by Shaolin monk garb” when designing the clothes.

Table 4.49: Air Nomad clothing


Culture	Text	
	Visual	Verbal
Tibetan S1E12	<p>Direct reference</p> 	<p><i>No verbal text</i></p>



Akin to the community of Buddhist monks, the coloring of the clothes worn by the Air Bender monks are similar in shades, but in different designs, depending on the status of the monks. The original reason for the sandy-colored robes of the monks stemmed from the habit of the clothes being made out of “discarded material, yellowed with age and pieced together” (Bowker, 1997, p. 652). Over time, the robes evolved into the shades we see today—yellow, brown and orange. They are usually made out of cotton, and wrapped around the body to protect it from the natural elements (Bowker, 1997).

Apart from referencing the clothing choices of the Air Nomads to the Buddhist monks, another practice that was referenced by the Air Nomads to the monks is the practice of shaving their heads. In Buddhist monasteries, monks keep their heads bald even from a young age. They keep their heads shaved up till the day of their death.

Table 4.50: Shaved heads of the Air Nomads

Culture	Text	
	Visual	Verbal
Tibetan S1E12	<p>Direct reference</p> 	<p><i>No verbal text</i></p>

The first still shows Aang and his fellow Air Bender acolytes with their shaved heads. The second still shows the elder monks of the Southern Air Bending community. They have shaved heads as well. The absence of hair on their heads represents the purity of the lifestyle monks have chosen to pursue. Buddhist monks are moderated by “renunciation standards: clothes are worn, the hair and beard are shaved, nails are trimmed and the body is kept clean” (Bowker, 1997, p. 651). These moderations practiced by the monks are referenced perfectly in the animation.

In terms of their hair and clothes, the Air Nomads are almost perfect examples of how the Buddhist monks dress in their daily lives.



4.1.4.3 Lifestyles

The lifestyles of the Air Nomads are heavily grounded in their religious teachings and their beliefs. The way they view life and the practices they follow are based on the lifelong teachings that they had in the Air Temples. In the same way, the lifestyles of Buddhist monks have a sound grounding in their religion as well. Buddhist monks who are brought up in the temple are drilled in the teachings and meditation of Buddha from a young age and they hold on to it for life.

Aang, with his peaceful religious upbringing by the monks in the Air Temples, carries a practice with him that is directly referenced from the lifestyle of the Buddhist monks—meditation. For Buddhists, meditation is like prayer in other religious traditions. It is one of the ways they worship, apart from doing good deeds and holding fast to their teachings.

When Aang faces a particularly hard challenge which he does not know how to deal with, he would sit down with crossed legs of the “lotus position” and meditate upon it. A prominent instance of this is when Aang is faced with the dilemma of ending the life of Fire Lord Ozai. Aang’s dilemma stems from his reluctance to defeat and kill Fire Lord Ozai, who plans to wage war on their land and destroy all the other nations. Everyone, including Zuko, the Fire Lord’s own son, is adamant about Aang finishing the Fire Lord once and for all. But Aang, with his peaceful upbringing and his love of all living things, is extremely unwilling to do so. To come to peace with the decision that he has to make and to ask for guidance from his past lives, the previous Avatars, Aang meditates.

Table 4.51: Meditation

Culture	Text	
	Visual	Verbal
Buddhist	Direct reference	Description
S3E18		<p><i>Aang meditates at the beach house porch in front of four candles, some berries, a plate of fruit, and a small cup of water. Momo flies in front of Aang.</i></p>
S3E19		<p>Aang [Frontal view of Aang with Momo in the foreground, his back to the camera.] I wish I had some help right now. I wish I had Roku. [Suddenly realizes something.] I do have Roku! [Takes a deep breath and starts meditating.]</p>

In the first still, he meditates on the verandah of the beach house he is staying at. This instance is when he is at war with himself over the decision of killing the Fire Lord. According to O' Neal & Jones (2007), Buddhist monks meditate to calm their mind. Meditation focuses and prepares the mind to receive a divine form of knowledge or insight. This is an intense mental requirement and the monk has to concentrate deeply on his thoughts with minimal distraction. Therefore, many Buddhists seek out quiet and private places to meditate (O' Neal & Jones, 2007). In direct reference to this practice, Aang

distances himself from his friends when he is meditating. He goes to a dark, quiet verandah to gather his thoughts and to seek a higher insight on how to solve his dilemma.


In the second still, Aang is shown to be meditating in a forest. His thoughts are still unsettled and he voices his need for help to his pet, Momo. While talking, he realizes that by meditating, he could request guidance from his past lives, other Avatars that have come before him. In the script, Aang says that “*I wish I had Roku*”. Roku was the Fire Nation Avatar before Aang. With his sudden realization that he could contact him by mediating, he exclaims “*I do have Roku!*” and immediately resumes his mediation. Seeking guidance from past respected figures is a feature of Buddhist mediation as well. Buddhists meditate on the qualities of enlightened bodhisattvas to respect them and to learn from them (O’ Neal & Jones, 2007). Bodhisattvas are figures in the Buddhist faith that have achieved enlightenment but turned away from nirvana (paradise) to help others. This feature of meditation is reference in Aang seeking out the wisdom of past Avatars to help him.

With the dilemma of whether or not he should end the Fire Lord’s life, it also reveals the philosophy that Aang, as a monk, lives by. He is adamant about preserving life and not killing any fellow living thing. This teaching is directly referenced from the Buddhist teachings of the Five Precepts. The Five Precepts are—not to kill, not to steal, not to overindulge in activities involving the senses, not to lie and not to drink alcohol to access (O’ Neal & Jones, 2007, p. 97). If he takes away the Fire Lord’s life, Aang would be violating the First Precept.

As Aang meditates, his past lives from the Fire Nation, Earth Kingdom and Water Tribes appear to offer him their advice about his dilemma. He rejects all the advice that they give him, as all the past Avatars counsel him to end the life of the Fire Lord. His meditation finally brings forth Avatar Yang Chen, a fellow Air Nomad Avatar. Aang is very glad to see her as he feels that a fellow Air Nomad would understand and sympathize

with his condition. The following stills and script is their conversation about what Aang should do.

Table 4.52: Air Nomad beliefs

Culture	Text	
	Visual	Verbal
Buddhist	Adaptation	Allusion
S3E19		<p><i>Fade to close-up of Aang meditating. Cut back to frontal view as the spirit of Avatar Yangchen, a female Air Nomad Avatar, appears before him.</i></p> <p>Yangchen [Side view.] I am Avatar Yangchen, young airbender.</p> <p>Aang Avatar Yangchen, [Close-up of Aang.] the monks always taught me that all life is sacred. Even the life of the tiniest spider-fly caught in its own web.</p> <p>Yangchen [Close-up side view.] Yes. All life is sacred.</p> <p>Aang [Frontal view. Smiles.] I know, I'm even a vegetarian. I've</p>

			<p>always tried to solve my problems by being quick or clever. And I've only had to use violence for necessary defense. And I've certainly never used it to take a life.</p>
		<p>Yangchen</p>	<p><i>[Cut to behind Aang as the camera pans up to show Yangchen.]</i> Avatar Aang, I know that you're a gentle spirit, and the monks have taught you well, but this isn't about you. <i>[Close-up side view of Aang.]</i> This is about the world.</p>
		<p>Aang</p>	<p>But the monks taught me that I had to detach myself from the world so my spirit could be free.</p>
		<p>Yangchen</p>	<p><i>[Side view of Aang and Yangchen. Camera pans slowly to the right.]</i> Many great and wise Air Nomads have detached themselves and achieved</p>

		spiritual enlightenment, [Close-up.] but the Avatar can never do it.
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Analyzing what Aang says to Avatar Yang Chen, it is obvious that the way of life that he is taught as a young monk in the temple is an allusion to the Buddhist teachings in our world. This intertextuality plays out in Aang’s conversation with Avatar Yang Chen.

In Buddhism, the ultimate goal of life is to achieve nirvana, a state of enlightenment in Paradise. To achieve this, the central principal of Buddhism states that “one must behave in a moral way, avoid harmful actions, and train and purify the mind” (O’ Neal & Jones, 2007, p. 113). They should also honor and follow the Eightfold part and the Five Percepts, which were mentioned above. To the Buddhists, all life is sacred; not only human lives but the lives of animals as well, from the smallest ant to the largest beast. This is the first percept taught in the Five Percepts. In fact, in keeping with the First Percept of “Not to kill”, some Buddhists are vegetarians, so that they do not need to harm animals when seeking out sustenance.

Aang’s plea to Avatar Yang Chen reflects this teaching exactly. He tells her that he was taught by the monks, who are experts in the teaching of their beliefs that life should be protected and not harmed. He claims that “*all life is sacred*”, in reference to the teaching of the First Percept of “Not to Kill”. Aang also emphasizes that the sanctity of life is not just for humans, but extends to animals as well, “*even the life of the tiniest spider-fly caught in its own web.*” In another reference to the Buddhist faith of protecting life, Aang lives as a vegetarian, to which he exclaims to Avatar Yang Chen: “*I’m even a vegetarian*”. Avatar Yang Chen, being an Air Nomad nun, agrees to what Aang is saying when she says: “*Yes. All life is sacred*”.

As they continue, Aang tells Avatar Yang Chen the manner he employs when solving problems. He says that *“And I’ve only had to use violence for necessary defense. And I’ve certainly never used it to take a life.”* Once again, using the word “never”, he emphasizes how much he refrains from killing to hold true to his beliefs. The teaching of the First Precept of “Not to Kill” is again alluded here, to highlight how much the Air Nomads follow the teachings of Buddhism. Avatar Yang Chen once again validates Aang’s anguish of not killing by saying *“Avatar Aang, I know that you’re a gentle spirit, and the monks have taught you well...”* She acknowledges that Aang was taught well by the monks and that he is of a gentle spirit, a nature that is advocated by Buddhism.

As Aang continues to argue out his case with her, the conversation takes an interesting turn. Even as Avatar Yang Chen acknowledges Aang’s gentle nature, she reminds him that *“this isn’t about you. This is about the world”*. Confused, Aang tells her that he was taught by the monks *“to detach myself from the world so my spirit could be free”*. Avatar Yang Chen agrees that *“Many great and wise Air Nomads have detached themselves and achieved spiritual enlightenment...”* This manner of achieving spiritual enlightenment is again an allusion from Buddhism’s central principal. It states that in order to achieve nirvana, a person must not only behave in a morally ethical way, but also purify the mind (O’ Neal & Jones, 2007). Purifying the mind means detaching themselves from the world, like how Siddhartha Gautama, the founder of Buddhism did when he achieved enlightenment. But in Aang’s case as the Avatar, he has a duty to protect the world that they live in. This means that he has to let go of any spiritual beliefs he has that would prevent him from carrying out his duty to defend their world.

4.1.4.4 Summary: Air

In terms of the Air Nomads, the culture is obviously referenced wholly from Buddhism and nations which have a strong affinity with it, like Tibet and Bhutan. The landscape and architecture of the Air Nomads are almost exact replicas of temples one would see on a trip to the temples high up in the mountains of the Himalayan mountain range or other mountains in China. The clothing of the Air Nomads is also specifically referenced to the robes of Buddhist monks as well, right down to the way they are wrapped around the body. The shaved heads of the Air Nomad monks are referenced to the Buddhist monks as well. Finally, the lifestyle and teachings of the Air Nomads is a strong allusion to the Buddhist teachings that in our world.

4.2 Intertextuality in the *Avatar: The Last Airbender*

From the analysis above, one realizes the authenticity of the cultures that were referenced when incorporated into *Avatar: The Last Airbender*. The intertextuality expressed in it is not just a minor reference here and there to a certain culture, but is a holistic adaptation of the cultures from our world in terms of the landscape and architecture, clothing and lifestyles to the fictional nations in the animation.

The intertextuality is expressed in the visual and textual aspects, appearing simultaneously in the animation. In the data, it is presented in the form of stills and the script of the animation. Expressing them in both manners emphasizes the intertextuality in the animation, making it more prevalent and accessible to the viewers. By combining the both visual and textual elements, audiences are reached out through sight and sound, moving towards having a deeper understanding and appreciation of the references that were present in the animation.

The choice of references made to the cultures also helps set the tone for the expression of the Nations in the animation. For example, the more culturally advanced Northern Water Tribe is based on the culture-rich city of Venice, as opposed to the sheltered Southern Water Tribe, which was based on a backward little Inuit village. The mighty and steadfast Earth Kingdom, with its strong walls and proud people, is an allusion to China, with her strong walls and her headstrong citizens. The power hungry and aggressive aspect of the Fire Nation is a tribute to Japan, a nation once known for her thirst of conquering of her neighboring countries. In contrast, the peace-advocating Buddhist monks of the Himalayan mountain range were used as models for the peace-loving monks of the Air Nomads.

Thus, intertextuality is not just referencing elements that have been seen or have appeared before in other texts, but it is used as a form of expression for the current text based on the initial knowledge that one already has on the previous text. Because we know of the landscapes and architecture, clothing, lifestyles and cultures of our world, we see the co-relation of why certain cultures were used to form particular nations in the animation. The mood and tone of the nations of the animation is dependent on what we already know from the nations in our world. The knowledge of pre-text influences the comprehension, appreciation and interpretation of the current text.

4.3 Summary

In this chapter, I have presented how intertextuality was manifested in the animation by discussing the references made in the Four Nations from the cultures of our world. By means of visual and textual analysis, I have looked at how visual references were made in direct references and adaptation while textual reference was made in descriptions and allusions.

In answering the first research question, the cultures that were referred to in creating *Avatar* are the Chinese, Japanese, Tibetan, Bhutanese, Inuit and Native American cultures. The second research question is answered in presenting the data in a visual and textual form. These two aspects reveal that the references were presented to the audience not only through sight, but also through sound, strengthening the intertextuality involved.

Apart from that, I discussed the significance of intertextuality in the animation, how it shapes the appreciation and understanding of the nations in *Avatar: The Last Airbender* based on the initial knowledge of the cultures in our world.

In the subsequent chapter, I would be concluding this study and discussing the further research that could be conducted in this area.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

5.0 Introduction

I would be concluding this study in this final part of my dissertation. This section of the study would include the limitations faced by the researcher in conducting this study, as well as further researches that could be conducted along this line of the study.

5.1 Summary of research

This dissertation is primarily a study of intertextuality in the animation *Avatar: The Last Airbender*. This animation was created and produced by Michael Dante DiMartino and Bryan Konietzko and aired under Nickelodeon. It consists of three seasons titled Water, Earth and Fire. In the first chapter, I introduced the research, as well as stated the research questions along with the objectives, and significance of this study.

In the **Literature Review**, I discussed the literature related to this study. I reviewed the existing literature on intertextuality, animation and *Avatar: The Last Airbender*. I have also presented and discussed the studies that have been done in intertextuality, animation, intertextuality in animation and also studies on *Avatar*. The review on the literature revealed that there is a gap in the study of intertextuality in *Avatar: The Last Airbender*. The literature also revealed that studies of intertextuality in animation were usually general discussions about a certain aspect of reference in a particular animation. Studies which looked at specific cultural references adapted into animation in terms of the visual and textual cues were rare. Thus, through the review of the existing literature, this study is proven to fill in an existing gap in the literature of intertextuality, animation and *Avatar: The Last Airbender*.

In Chapter 3, the **Methodology**, I presented and discussed the methodology that I used to analyze the data in this study. I stated that the theoretical framework adopted in this study is the concept of intertextuality. Further on, I also explained how I collected the data and selected them from the animation. The data consisted of captured animation stills and extracts from the script of the animation. The research design constructed to analyze the data was a design in which the data could be analyzed from both the visual and textual aspects of intertextuality. Both these aspects could complement each other, or be looked at individually. The research design analyzes the visual data in terms of direct references and/or adaptation while the textual data is analyzed in the term of description and/or allusion. This research design is created specifically by the researcher for the nature of this research because there was a lack of systematic designs that could analyze the data of this research.

The analysis was done in Chapter 4. Each nation in the animation was analyzed separately for their intertextuality beginning with the Water Tribes, followed by the Earth Kingdom, the Fire Nation and finally the Air Nomads. Using the research design, the intertextuality of the Four Nations was analyzed based on the landscape and architecture of the nation, the clothing that the characters wear, as well as the lifestyles that they practice. Each intertextual reference made was linked to the references that applied to them from our world. The results from the analysis of the data are able to answer the research questions raised at the beginning of this study. The first research question is answered by identifying the cultures used to build the Four Nations. These cultures include the Inuit culture, Native American culture, the Chinese culture, the Japanese culture and the Tibetan Buddhist culture. The second research question is answered through analyzing the data using the research design. The intertextuality is realized in the animation through expressing and exhibiting it through visual and textual cues in the animation.

5.2 Discussion

This research has been able to answer the research questions of identifying the cultures used as reference in the animation and showing how these references were portrayed. These references are the intertextuality that was realized in the animation. The intertextuality portrayed is not just in the form of visual cues, but textual cues as well.

Cultures from our world like the Chinese, Japanese, Inuit, Native American and Tibetan Buddhist cultures were adapted to create and frame the cultures in the animation. The references made to the landscape and architecture, clothing and lifestyles were holistically accurate portrayals, born out of the interest that the producers have to the Asian cultures and their exposure to it. This exposure once again reinforces the concept of intertextuality, whereby knowledge is shared and transferred, even if it changes form. In the case of *Avatar*, living, breathing, existing cultures were captured in the form of animated stills and script, providing a visual and textual exhibit of the intertextuality.

Even though *Avatar* is just a children's animation, the thought that has been given to producing authentic references to specific cultures must be mentioned. This authenticity is one of the reasons why *Avatar* is such a successful animation. Not only is the plot of the story exciting, but its richness of storytelling is manifested in its visual and textual portrayals. Using references from the cultures in our world gives a sense of familiarity to the audience, but adapting them into whole different nations creates a sense of originality to them.

In finding a satisfactory research design to answer the research questions of this study, the researcher created a research design that is new in the field of intertextuality. This research design is able to analyze intertextuality in the data from both the visual and textual point of views. It is able to look at the visual and textual data both simultaneously or individually. This design is in the form of a table, making it a straightforward manner of

presenting the data and analyzing it. This research design could be referred to or adapted for use in other researches similar to the one conducted.

5.3 Limitations

One of the main limitations faced in this research was narrowing down the scale of the intertextuality that could be found in the animation. *Avatar: The Last Airbender* is an intertextual gold mine, not just in terms of what was discussed and analyzed in this study, but also in the term of— the bending styles of the different nations, the animal hybrids in the animation and plotlines of the animation which reminisce of certain socio-political happenings in our world. To study the intertextuality of the whole animation would be a massive task that would be too wide for the scope of this study.

5.4 Further research/ Recommendation

Referring back to the limitations of the study, further research could be conducted on the areas of intertextuality that were not covered in this study. A more comprehensive intertextual analysis could be done on the whole animation, from the direct intertextuality seen in the visual and textual cues, to the more connotative intertextuality in certain portrayals of the plotlines and characters in the animation.

This research on intertextuality can be expanded to other works of Michael Dante DiMartino and Bryan Konietzko like *The Legend of Korra*, the sequel to *Avatar: The Last Airbender*. The sequel is filled with intertextual references too, some similar to *Avatar*, but in different variations of time periods. Some other references are new and not found in *Avatar*. Korra's first two seasons have been aired on Nickelodeon, with the third season coming up soon.

The study of intertextuality in animation could also be conducted on other animation from other networks, animated movies and also animation from different countries, like the anime culture from Japan. Each animation has different degrees and variation of intertextuality, and maybe even different ways of expressing the same intertextuality. Studies could also be conducted in comparing the intertextuality exhibited within two similar animations. All these are aspects that could be considered in looking at intertextuality within animation.

5.5 Summary

In this conclusion of my dissertation, I have given a brief summary of what is has been about and provided a closing statement of the validity and contribution of this study. I have also expressed the limitations faced when conducting this study as well as discussed the direction other researches can take should they be interested in conducting further studies in this area.

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