

# National confidence of domestic animated films: The game and symbiosis of multi-cultures

Qingzhan Gao

Yantai Gold College, Yantai, China  
17866506105@126.com

**Abstract:** *In the historical evolution of domestic animated films, "Nationalization" has consistently been a prominent theme. Examining the historical context reveals a persistent impact of foreign animation on domestic animated films, and an intrinsic link between the evolution of domestic animation and a history of multicultural interactions. Preliminary Chinese animated cinema emerged from the emulation of traditional forms like Peking Opera, shadow play, and drama, alongside the exploration of technical principles from animated films in the United States, Japan, the Soviet Union, and other nations. This evolution persisted until the establishment of the nation. By the 1950s, Chinese animation had begun to develop its distinct system, coinciding with a flourishing of national culture within the animation industry. In the 1980s, Chinese animation faced the influence of established animation systems in multiple nations. After experiencing a dip, domestic animated films reemerged at the turn of the century, showcasing their distinctive Oriental appeal following a brief phase of confusion and discovery. The interplay between national and diverse cultures infuses domestic animated films with renewed vigor.*

**Keywords:** *domestic animated films; national confidence; multi-culture; national culture*

## 1. Introduction

The fixed phrases "China" and "domestic" often firmly precede "animated films" in the history of Chinese animated films, marking their national development. However, as the seventh art form, the film inevitably incorporates the cultural connotations and forms of literature, drama, painting, music, dance, sculpture, and other arts, providing a typological expression. Animated films are not an exception to this rule. Such an art form that integrates video, painting, and literature cannot abandon all foreign influences and become a "pure Chinese animation". In addition to being "domestic," Chinese animated films, originating from the history of development and naturally influenced by foreign cultures, transform into a blend of "the other" and "the id".

## 2. Imitation and innovation: Technological advances from "The Studio" to "Princess Iron Fan."

### 2.1. Imitation: Chinese animated films start under the business model

Since their introduction into China, animated films have undergone a significant transformation from "imported products" to "local products." In the process of creation, "it carries the aesthetic concept, norms of conduct, and moral criteria that the animators want to convey, and its cultural spirit is still the national cultural gene pursued by the creators".<sup>[1]</sup> We can divide the study of the "other" elements in the early Chinese animation works into two stages. In the history of Chinese animation, the period spanning from 1922 to 1948 is considered the initial stage. But as early as 1918, the Wan brothers in the Disney animated film "Popeye" "jumped out of the ink bottle" and began under the influence of Chinese animation; until 1926, the Wan brothers' Disney animation creation meant traditional Chinese shadow play and Peking Opera, the combination of creating China's first animation short "Make Studio." This stage, Wan brothers to explore Disney animation techniques and creative techniques, is still in the most shallow stage of imitation.

Following the awakening of Chinese animation, it entered a period of rapid development and remarkable achievement, spanning from the commencement of the War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression to the establishment of the People's Republic of China. At this stage, Chinese animation continues to evolve through imitation and is becoming increasingly prevalent. In the previous stage, "Princess Iron Fan" was a typical example of Chinese animation. In terms of appearance and connotation,

this animated film has Chinese elements. In terms of appearance, both Princess Iron Fan and Sun Wukong are well-known characters from "Journey to the West". This work naturally informs the script, while the character modeling adheres to the traditional Chinese opera's character expression mode. The historical environment also shapes Princess Iron Fan's appearance in terms of connotation. The Monkey King's fighting spirit is exactly in line with that of the Chinese people in the War of Resistance against Japanese aggression. But on the performance of the animated film techniques, but also deeply influenced by Disney, the Monkey King character modeling draws lessons from the design of Mickey Mouse; fox modeling is a typical Hollywood image of classic female characters; and even on the choice of the title, it also borrowed the form of "Snow White" to attract attention. In general, this was a confrontation between foreign culture and local culture, and eventually, Disney's first technology made achievements in its shape, and the Chinese people's brave fighting spirit in the face of aggression was condensed into a god, together to create such an excellent film.

## ***2.2. Innovation: the absorption and countermeasures of American and Japanese animation***

Early Chinese animated films had a profound influence on Japanese animated films. With the outbreak of World War II, the United States had cut off the animation output to Japan, so Japan's animation input at that time could only rely on China. The Princess Iron Fan was released in China in 1941, and was introduced to Japan in 1942, and was translated as Journey to the West. During that period, Japan was solely producing animated short films and had no output of animated feature films. Therefore, this Chinese animated film became the first animated feature film to be shown in the history of Japanese film, which was limited to animated short films, enjoyed the charm of animated feature films and greatly promoted the development of Japanese animation industry.

The overseas exchange of Chinese animation also began during this period, and the object of overseas exchange was Japan. In addition to the export of Chinese animated films to Japan to promote the development of the Japanese animation industry, some Japanese animators during this period also worked in Chinese film companies. During the Liberation War after the Japanese surrender, the Northeast Film Company, which had not yet reorganized the Changchun Film Studio, included several Japanese animation experts.

## **3. Cooperation and exploration: Identity positioning under the influence of "Why the Raven is Black"**

### ***3.1. Cooperation: the trend of Chinese animated films under the influence of current politics***

After the founding of new China, the Peoples Republic of China has experienced a long process of "starting all over again" and "starting a business again" due to the domestic development situation and the international political environment. The action works produced by the famous Wan brothers during the Anti-Japanese War have little to do with the inheritance of animated films after the founding of new China. Although after the founding of the Peoples Republic of China, the animated film artists returned to Shanghai for the development of the animation career, but in the social environment of that time, the tide of The Times also profoundly affected the trend of the film. During this period, Chinese animated films began to learn from the Soviet Union.

After 1949, China began a huge road of "de-Hollywood" film creation and instead began the film movement of "one-sided" to learn from the Soviet Union. All film forms, including animated films, began a fundamental change and embarked on the road of nationalization under the influence of the Soviet model. Under the guidance of the "one-sided" political tendency, the domestic film market vigorously embraced Soviet films, which had a significant impact on the development of Chinese animated films.

While receiving the comprehensive support of the Soviet Union, Chinese animated films unconsciously chose the Soviet model in terms of creative ideas, forms and techniques. During this period, the Soviet animated films were highly positive. In 1952, "Article report" pointed out that Soviet cartoons were completely different from American films that corrupt children and make children degenerate. Soviet films cultivated the next generation with noble moral qualities and healthy aesthetic viewpoints.<sup>[2]</sup>It can be seen that the deep influence of Soviet animated films on Chinese animated films is heavy.

### ***3.2. Exploration: Road exploration of the national animation art spirit***

After the founding of new China, stimulate the Chinese film artists deeply realize to explore the source of the national animation film art spirit is in the 1956 the seventh Venice international film festival on a "awards", this year, China submitted the Shanghai art film studio, Li Keruo, Qian Jiajun as director, as a screenwriter animation film "why the crow is black". The film won the 7th Venice International Childrens Film Festival in 1956, but it was also the film, whose international premiere was mistaken for a Soviet film, which made Chinese film artists realize the importance of the "national road" and the importance of national characteristics." Art films, like other literature and art, must have their own national characteristics. Without a distinct national form and national style, there can be no originality.<sup>[3]</sup>After 1950, Twei put forward "exploring the road of national form", again put forward the slogan of "national style".

Chinese animated film artists are truly aware that the development of Chinese animated films should adhere to their national characteristics and follow the Chinese road. It can be said that this year, Chinese animated films began to awaken the consciousness of national animated films and gradually found their identity positioning in the study and introspection. The soul of Chinese animated films was presented on the road of exploring the national animation art.

## **4. Transformation and low tide: the self-construction reflection brought about by "The Lotus Lantern"**

### ***4.1. Transformation: The development dilemma of Chinese animation under the animation processing mode***

With the arrival of reform and opening up, Chinas cultural environment has become more relaxed. Under the stimulation of marketization and commercialization, Chinese animation has produced close communication with the animation of other countries in the world; the external connections and internal links have developed in coordination, and the Chinese animation film industry has begun its intertwined internal growth.

In the late 1970s, with the opening of the Chinese market, foreign animated films entered the Chinese market, especially in Japan. As China's geographical neighborhood, in this period of animated film imports, Japan has a unique opportunity: first enter the Chinese market, followed by American animation, carrying a lot of derivatives of American animated films into the Chinese market, and quickly the Chinese animation market established a great advantage. In addition to the dumping of cultural works, China also actively introduced animated film experts from different countries to give lectures in China during this period. For example, the Japanese animation film director studied animated films in China before the founding of the new China and then brought them back to Japan. After the founding of New China, he returned to Shanghai Art Film Studio. Another famous filmmaker, director of Romanian Studio Aristide Moore, also visited Shanghai Art Film Studio for communication.<sup>[4]</sup>

Another factor that has profoundly influenced the development of Chinese animated films is the establishment of foreign film institutions in the Chinese mainland. The matter is that foreign film institutions have set up factories in the Chinese mainland, and China's animation film industry has suddenly become a processor of foreign animation film institutions. The original domestic animation production agencies have also gradually turned to foreign animation and become the processing plants of foreign animation organizations. In contact with foreign animation agencies brought by the new technology, China's animation market has achieved certain development and produced the idea of transformation, but from the long-term point of view, Chinese animation agencies to foreign animation production agencies caused a huge brain drain to China's animation industry and further caused the economic landslide. Under the impact of foreign animated films, the "national school" has shown a trend of "turmoil".

### ***4.2. Low tide: the misreading of the "other" culture***

In 1999, the Chinese mainland released Chang Guangxi directed the animated film "Lotus Lamp." This is the fifth animated feature after the founding of the People's Republic of China, the first four respectively "The Monkey King," "Nezha Conquers the Dragon King," "Heaven Book Strange Tan," and "Golden Monkey Drop Demon." The film is the largest investment in five films, the longest one. This animated film, based on Chinese folk mythology, caused a certain sensation in Chinese society at that

time, firmly occupying the top of the annual box office and boosting the morale of animated films. But in general, this animated film also reflects the concerns of Chinese animated films.

The character modeling in "Lotus Lantern" still has the style of foreign animation. In the film, the character Liu Aloes has the typical characteristics of the Japanese boy anime, while the little monkey has an obvious Disney style, and the design of the story development and plot structure also shows the imitation of the Disney style. The Lotus Lantern also has the awakening of national consciousness, and it is eager to integrate Chinese cultural elements into it. It shows the connection between fairy tales and the culture of filial piety and traditional family happiness, but it shows a sense of powerlessness in the dialogue. Although the monotonous and pale language structure is in line with the tone of children, it is not appealing, and it is difficult to make the audience feel it.

## **5. Inheritance and integration: the nationalization of "Monkey King: Hero is Back" and "The demon child is born"**

### ***5.1. Inheritance: the modernization of traditional national cultural values***

The development of Chinese animated films in the 21st century has led to a relatively mature trend in the animated film market, resulting in the emergence of various types of animated films in the public eye. As technical advancements continue to progress, the style of animated films has evolved significantly from their early forms. Although they still contain elements of drama, the combination with CG technology gives them a strong flavor of The Times. After a long process of precipitation, Monkey King: Hero is Back, directed by Tian Xiaopeng, caused a sensation in the Chinese animated film market as soon as it was released. Such an animated film based on traditional Chinese fairy tales and experiencing the skills of The Times has been released and has become a "popular" phenomenon work.

Animated film is a barometer of national spirit and social reality, but also an artistic representation of social culture under a specific time and space.<sup>[5]</sup> Chinese animated films have obvious characteristics of The Times. In 1961, Uproar in Heaven was released, in which the Monkey King made the hell, wrote off the life and death book, stole the old gentleman elixir, kicked the Bagua furnace and so on. It showed the unyielding fighting spirit of the working people under the environment at that time, and encouraged the people who came from the oppression to overcome natural disasters bravely and overcome difficulties at home and abroad.

"Monkey King: Hero is Back" is a subversive creation, creating a completely different image of "The Great King of Heaven," just like opening the "two veins of the governor" of Chinese animated films, and Chinese animated films began the "road of revival." In 2019, "Ne Zha," and 40 years ago, "Nezha Conquers the Dragon King" is based on "the Investiture of the Gods," but also formed a meaningful contrast. In "Ne Zha," the director transforms the spirit of resistance to the patriarchal power into fighting the innate "destiny of heaven." This powerful image in the traditional text, in which Zha has always been a "fighter" full of resistance spirit, attracts the audience with Zha's resistance spirit. One of the most typical is "cut meat and mother, bone and father" fragments, which is a different text with powerful images and the traditional ideas of the most intense conflict. The most intense break between Zha and traditional Confucianism comes from the conflict between him and Li Jing. However, the dramatic climax of "removing the bones and returning the father" is almost without dramatic presentation. In every classical text, there is no concrete, confrontational and progressive dramatic conflict between Zha and his father.<sup>[6]</sup> However, in "Ne Zha," the contradiction between Zha and his father is transferred to Zha and Aobing, and a more complex, more three-dimensional and more level character relationship is constructed between the two. This rewriting of the narrative level, on the one hand of the other, enhances the visibility and attraction of the film, and on the other hand, promotes the modern transformation of the story theme. In "Ne Zha" in "Father and Son Break," the core conflict is replaced by the story of Zha and Aobing's growth, resulting in a happy family. The film portrays a strict father, who, despite his brief words, creates a successful father image. The father is composed and composed within, clearly loving his children but not expressing it well. Meanwhile, the mother is optimistic and cheerful, always wanting to make her children happy. This is a typical expression of a contemporary Chinese family, and it resonates well with the audience, making it easier for them to accept the family's growth story.

### ***5.2. Integration: Establishment of a cultural image under the influence of globalization***

"The history of civilization of five thousand years has endowed China with rich and profound national cultural resources. The absorption of national culture and the display of national characteristics have

always been the development road of domestic animated films." [7]In order to go to the world, domestic animated films must adhere to the cultural core of the nation and adhere to their own cultural identity.

Almost every nation in the world takes several original fairy tales as the supporting clue for the rise and development of culture and civilization. The fairy tales of each nation also contain a unique way of understanding, knowledge structure and cultural background of the nation, so these fairy tales are often challenging to understand for people outside the nation to understand. But in the history of the development of human civilization, the mutual learning and integration of civilizations and culture is a big background. "Ne Zha" presents a charming Oriental visual wonder with a Chinese cultural implication. Despite the film's focus on international communication, it reveals several multifaceted shortcomings and issues. However, when viewed from a broader perspective, it highlights the local subject's self-confidence, their positive and active nature, and the essence of their culture. It also highlights the unique elements that contribute to a reasonable transformation after effective global transmission. These elements aim to promote global culture, mutual learning among civilizations, and the fundamental dialogue style, all of which are essential for fostering global coexistence.

The development of Chinese animation film should adhere to the "national identity" and "cultural identity," conform to the requirements of the contemporary aesthetic and spirit culture, combine the audio-visual language and aesthetic expression, take care of the people's psychological demands, realize the traditional cultural values for the animation film kernel, express the characteristics of technology channels, realize the innovation of Chinese animation film expression. At the same time, domestic animated films, in the process of going to the world, also need to stick to their national identity, focus on the world's different ethnic acceptance way and accept characteristics, absorb the "other" culture, internalize into the form of Chinese animated films, promote Chinese animated film stands in the world animation film.

## 6. Conclusion

China is the only civilization of the four ancient civilizations that has never been inherited. Since the flame of civilization was ignited, the Chinese nation has experienced the invasion of large and small unclear, whether cultural, war or economic, but the Chinese nation has shown its strong mind of inclusiveness. Neither the five random China in the feudal period nor the eight-power Allied Forces invasion of China since modern times nor the Japanese war of aggression destroyed the Chinese nation, but let the Chinese nation in the war of new and growing. Domestic animation has achieved vigorous development, constantly absorbing foreign culture and internalizing it into their style, out of an ethnicity of animation manufacturing road.

## References

- [1] Peng Ling. (2007). *Introduction to Animation*. Shanghai: Shanghai Jiao Tong University Press.
- [2] Sinnikin. Translation by Chen Dekang. (1952). *Soviet cartoons*. Wen Wei Po.
- [3] Te Wei. (1963). *Creating films of the art of the nation*. Fine Arts, (Z3).
- [4] Han Peng. (2016). *Classical value and interpretation—On the Chinese animated films before the transformation*. Contemporary film, (09).
- [5] Rao Shuguang, Chang Lingli. (2017). *The Culture and Aesthetics of Chinese Animated Films in the Internet Era*, Chinese Literature and Art Review, (1 2): 34.
- [6] Liu Qi. (2019). *Ne Zha: Mirror Structure and Cultural reconstruction*. Film Art, (05): 47.
- [7] Wang Huaqing. (2017). *Analysis of the Image characteristics of Chinese animation*. Film Literature, (18): 102.