

# A Study of Communication Modes and Aesthetics in the Development of Chinese Animation

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**Abstract:** *With the development of Chinese animation, Chinese animation has changed a lot in terms of communication methods and aesthetic research, etc. It's also attracted a lot of attention. Chinese animation is also exploring innovation as technology advances, and has achieved promising results. This paper is based on the development of Chinese animation in the current era of smart media. Reviewed the spread of Chinese animation, issues such as the study of aesthetics are also analyzed. After analyzing it, it is clear that: the development of Chinese animation has gone through theater dissemination in terms of dissemination methods, television transmission, network communication. New media communications, content to be disseminated at each stage, all have to be closely related to the context of the times. The study of aesthetics also contributes to the mode of communication. The development of Chinese animation cannot be separated from the development of contemporary technology. But in such a large and redundant environment, relying on Chinese animation to tell a good Chinese story. The responsibility of spreading China's outstanding culture is still very great. We need to continually improve our overall capabilities, promoting development.*

**Keywords:** *Chinese animation; Mode of communication; Aesthetic research; Excellent Chinese culture; Innovation and development*

## 1. Introduction

Chinese animation has been developing for nearly 100 years. In the history of Chinese animation, it's not all smooth sailing, but rather ups and downs. The development of Chinese animation has gone through ups and downs and continuous attempts, and Chinese animation has gradually become an industry with its own style and cultural characteristics. In the past hundred years, the dissemination of Chinese animation has also experienced a radical change, from black and white silent films to cinema viewing with excellent audio-visual effects, and from a single mode of dissemination to the all-round multi-platform dissemination in the age of smart media, Chinese animation has great potential for development! In addition, Chinese animation aesthetics has made new breakthroughs in the choice of subject matter, presentation of themes, narrative style, character modelling, scene setting, audio-visual language, editing structure, scene scheduling, character portrayal, etc. The "Chinese School of Animation" has also gained a significant position in aesthetics. When analysing Chinese animation works, we will find that the aesthetic style of the "Chinese School of Animation" has been continuously inherited and innovated.

## 2. The Origin and Development of Chinese Animation

In ancient China, there were similar explorations of "light" and "shadow". Whether it was the horse lanterns that appeared in the folklore of the Song Dynasty or the shadow theatre that appeared in the Tang Dynasty, they were the predecessors of the development of Chinese animation. The development of Chinese animation can be traced back to the beginning of the 20th century, but it wasn't until the 1950s that it began to really take off.

In the early 1900s and 1950s, Chinese animation production was mainly hand-drawn and had great educational value. In 1918, the first animation production company in China, Datong Film Manufacturing Factory, was opened in Shanghai and produced the first Chinese animation film, *Dako Temple Fair*. From the 1950s to the 1980s, Chinese animation production began to emerge in a big way, and the fields involved were gradually diversified, and the development of Chinese animation embarked on a fast track. In 1956, the Shanghai Fine Arts Film Studio produced *Tadpole Looking for*

Mother, an animated film that is still popular today and has received unanimous acclaim both at home and abroad. During the same period, Chinese animation began to focus on technical improvements, adopting new production methods and techniques such as the use of colour and animated puppets. After the reform and opening up, Chinese animation began to expand to the international market. In 1984, Shanghai Fine Arts Film Studio produced "The Greatest Show on Earth", an animated film that gained great international fame and became one of the masterpieces of Chinese animation. During this period, Chinese animation production gradually matured and covered a wider range of fields, such as TV animation and cinema animation. After entering the 21st century, Chinese animation production began to usher in new development opportunities. Just in 2015, the domestic animation film *The Return of the Great Sage* achieved extremely high box office in China, becoming a new chapter in the Chinese animation market. At the same time, with the development of science and technology, Chinese animation production has also begun to inject digital production technology, taking a new step forward in terms of content, quality and international influence.

### **3. The change of communication in the course of development of Chinese animation**

With the passage of time and cultural integration, China's animation has been influenced by animation powers from the United States, Japan and other animation countries. The animation on the television communication platform has changed greatly in terms of communication methods, content and creative style.

#### **3.1. Modes of dissemination**

China's animation dissemination methods have experienced: cinema dissemination, television dissemination, network dissemination, new media dissemination, international dissemination and other ways. From the 1950s to the early 1970s, Chinese animation spread in the form of films, of which the most representative ones, such as "Tadpole Looking for Mother" and "The Big Trouble in the Palace of Heaven", were successful and became classics. After the 70's and 80's, with the popularity of television as a mass media tool in China, Chinese animation also took this platform and started the journey of Chinese animation's television communication. In the mid-1990s, the Internet became popular in China, and by 2000, Chinese animation began to be disseminated on major video websites, and online dissemination gained momentum. With the development of the Internet and technology, Chinese animation has entered the era of new media. Relying on the Internet, short videos, live broadcasts and other forms as a means of dissemination have made the dissemination of Chinese animation more diversified and flexible, and also increased the interaction between the audience and the content. In recent years, Chinese animation has broadened its development space and linked with the international to achieve international dissemination. <sup>[1]</sup>

#### **3.2. Dissemination content**

The changes in the content of Chinese animation communication reflect the changes in Chinese society and the development of the Chinese animation industry. From a predominance of information and education to a focus on spiritual enjoyment and experience, from traditional hand-painting to technological masterpieces. While Chinese animation is groping its way forward, it is also spreading and promoting the excellent culture of China.

1926. China's first animated film, *The Big Fool's Drawing Room*. It opened the first page of Chinese animation history. The 1961 film is also known as the pinnacle of China's animated films. From the early days of domestic cartoons, it seems that its subject matter and content are mainly characterised by these features: First. Most are taken and adapted from Chinese mythology; Secondly. The main focus is to tell stories with Chinese characteristics using animals as the main characters. Chinese animation chooses its themes from folk tales, myths and legends, fairy tales and fables. There are also reflections of life, observations of the present. Animated works with realism. The older generation of animators who focused on children's issues through entertaining and educational animation, For example, "Little Carp Jumps Dragon Gate"<sup>[1]</sup>; and likewise expressing the prevailing values of the times, *The Greatest Showman* is an echo of the socialist promotion of the spirit of the anti-feudal dynasty; *Ne Zha Poses in the Sea* and *The Golden Monkey Subdues the Demons* are contemporary reflections on the Cultural Revolution. With the advancement of technology, more diversified web animation content, covering life, societies、 Youth and many other aspects.

Chinese animation creation has also always adhered to the tradition of national painting. China has an inexhaustible supply of animated films, have an inexhaustible supply. From Painting to Sculpture, From Paper Cutting to Shadow, There are countless outstanding national folk arts. Borrowing from excellent traditional culture and purifying the real life of Benshi, Making Chinese animated films look authentically Chinese. Example: The Three Monks draws on Chinese theatre styles; The General of Jiao Wei is performed in the style of Peking Opera; The Fisherman's Boy, Paper cut-outs such as The Cow's Grievance draw on the appearance of Chinese shadow and folk paper cut-outs.

### **3.3. Creative style**

The changes in the creative style of Chinese animation reflect the development of Chinese animation, from its inception to maturity, from the initial influence of the United States, Japan and other countries to the formation of its own unique style. Chinese animation continues to explore, practice and innovate on the way forward, forming a "Chinese animation" with distinctive characteristics.

From the beginning of the 20th century to the 1980s, Chinese animation was mainly based on traditional Chinese hand-drawing, but during this period, due to the influence of foreign animation culture, Chinese animation works were characterised by the styles of European and American animation and Japanese animation. From the 1980s to the 1990s, China's animation creation entered a golden age, during which a series of classic animation works with profound ideological connotations and unique aesthetic styles appeared. Focusing on storytelling and characterisation, these works have invested a lot of energy in shaping their characters, and have brought a vivid and representative image of the characters to the public. From the early 21st century to the present, Chinese animation has begun to focus on diversified styles of communication and forms of expression. Among them, the proportion of Chinese excellent traditional culture is gradually increasing, and Chinese animation takes audio-visual language as a carrier, embedding Chinese excellent traditional culture into animation, which has become a unique style characteristic of Chinese animation telling Chinese stories and spreading Chinese excellent traditional culture.

## **4. Aesthetics in the Development of Chinese Animation**

The study of Chinese animation aesthetics in terms of modeling expression, color application, artistic style, narrative structure has played a contributing role in promoting the development of Chinese animation, and also provided theoretical support for the artistic creation of Chinese animation, which has a great influence on enhancing the artistic level and creativity of Chinese animation works.

### **4.1. Stylistic expression**

Chinese animation aesthetics research focuses on the exploration of animation modeling expression. Through the study of character design, scene arrangement, props matching and other aspects, it makes the image of animation works more vivid and interesting, and resonates with the audience. The in-depth study of aesthetic research on the modelling language of animation can enrich the visual experience of animation works and enhance the viewing experience. The nationalised animation creation concept advocated by Shanghai Mei Film Studio made the animation creation of that period branded with a strong national art style, and the character design was mainly reflected in the simulation and application of the programmed facial features and movements of the theatrical characters. For example, the character design of the Monkey King in the three animated films "Pigs Eating Watermelon", "The Great Pandemonium", and "Princess Iron Fan" includes images from both folk Chinese New Year's Paintings and Peking Opera. In particular, the Monkey King character of "The Palace of Heaven" is simple and lovely, with a red peach face, green eyebrows and gold eye rings, yellow coat, blue cape and black boots, of colourful characteristics.

### **4.2. Use of colours**

Chinese animation aesthetics research focuses on the importance of the use of colour in animation works. Through the use and matching of colours, different moods and atmospheres can be expressed, enhancing the expressive power of the animation work. The exploration of aesthetic research in the use of colour has led to a more colourful visual presentation of Chinese animation works. The setting is more oriental, beautiful and fantastical. In the mature period of the development of the "Chinese School

of Animation", the character modeling and the use of colours as well as the scene design tends to be more concise and clear. For example, the character design in *Three Monks* uses a few simple and clear lines to outline the features and limbs, the three monks are also dressed in three simple colours, red, yellow and blue, without any other combinations, so that the overall tone is very distinct. <sup>[4]</sup>There is a lot of white space in the scenes, and the environments are almost always characterised by sketches, giving the viewer a sense of a distant mood.

#### **4.3. Artistic style**

The choice of subject matter for the "Chinese School of Animation" series still adheres to the nationalised creative purpose and characteristics. The main types of material include idioms and fables, folklore and fairy tales, historical literature, real life, ethnic minorities and other subjects. China's traditional cultural resources provide first-hand material for the creation of animated films. The choice of subject matter completes the first step of the narrative, and it is more important to refine the theme of the subject matter itself, and the animated expression of the thematic connotation is the purpose of the animated film. The "Chinese School of Animation" series has a broader and deeper thematic presentation due to its rich choice of subjects. It mainly embodies the following thematic features: entertaining storytelling, promotion of traditional ethics and morals, presentation of the national spirit and human nature, realistic concern for daily life, and philosophical expression of humanistic sentiments. <sup>[3]</sup>

#### **4.4. Narrative structure**

The diversified artistic structure of Chinese animation builds a unique framework for animation and contains unique artistic beauty. The narrative paradigm of the "Chinese School of Animation" is the most central part of the narrative language. The common narrative style in this period was mainly narrator-type storytelling, while the narrative structure mainly embodied conventional linear theatre structure, repetitive narrative structure and so on. While the former narrative structure emphasises causal connections and plot setting, the latter mainly shows different variations in repetition to portray characters and highlight themes. The study of narrative techniques, pacing and plot construction can improve the storytelling and impact of animated works. The exploration of aesthetic research in narrative structure makes Chinese animation works more tense and attractive.

At the level of scene colours, many works have borrowed and absorbed traditional Chinese paintings. Although traditional Chinese paintings are a long time away from now, and the choice of production tools and materials is different, the beauty of the far-reaching and ethereal and quiet and profound mood of ink and wash animation is still very clear at the scene level. The latter draws on the former's use of white space at the level of composition, not only different in the way of drawing, the latter's white space makes the animation have a simulation of the realistic effect at the same time also has a written Chinese painting mood, the former pays more attention to the scene of the expression of the writing. <sup>[2]</sup>

At the level of film language use, the "Chinese School of Animation" in the overall film language style is mostly based on panoramic narrative, the angle of parallax, the lens is mostly fixed lens, the movement of the lens is almost rare, the use of the lens of the concept is relatively simple, mainly for the shooting of the concept of the service of the painting. Although the cinematic language is used in a simpler way, this simple approach to camera design is matched by a decorative animation style that achieves a high degree of unity. This creative concept of matching form and content styles with each other has also been carried over into the practice of lens design for animation creation in the new century.

In terms of sound and picture structure, the sound and picture style of the "Chinese School of Animation" mainly adopts the method of integrating sound and picture, and mainly uses narrative montage at the level of image structure. The creation of animation films in the new century, especially the classic masterpieces, have mostly inherited the audio-visual style and creative concepts of the "Chinese School of Animation" at the level of cinematography. However, there are new breakthroughs in cinematography, such as follow-up shots, hand-held photography, the increase of fast-paced push-pull panning shots and close-ups, and the use of long shots. This kind of colourful camera design is the best linguistic match for the portrayal of the characters and the expression of character and emotion. A variety of montage styles are used in the structure of the images, with an increased use of expressive montage styles on top of narrative montage, resulting in lyricism, contrast, and symbolism.

Some other ways of language in modern cinema have also been borrowed, such as the use of jumping axes and mirroring, techniques mainly used to portray the psychology of the characters.

At the level of narrative language, the "Chinese School of Animation" series of works on the choice of subject matter and presentation of the theme, most of them are based on national themes, historical literature adaptation, myths and folklore, etc., integrating the themes of edutainment, moral education and humanistic concern. Narrative mode and narrative structure are mostly based on linear narrative, and the structure is rich and diversified, including linear theatre structure, repetitive and paragraph structure, parallel structure and layer structure, and the unique prose poem structure is unique to the "Chinese Animation School".

## 5. Conclusions

The dissemination of Chinese animation has changed dramatically, mainly influenced by a number of factors such as technological progress, market demand and the policy environment. When traditional TV media gradually lost its core attraction, new media platforms became the main animation dissemination channels. This mode of communication provides more opportunities for diversified animation creation and accelerates the development of China's animation industry. This method of distribution not only facilitates the audience, but also provides a broader market and source of income for animation production companies. These changes have had a profound impact on the Chinese animation industry and audiences. The diversity of distribution methods has led to more choices for viewers and a booming animation market. At the same time, wider dissemination channels and technical means enable excellent animation works to be discovered and promoted more easily, promoting the improvement of animation creation level. In addition, the changes in the mode of communication have also promoted the internationalisation of China's animation industry and enhanced the recognition and competitiveness of Chinese works globally.

In the new century, while drawing on and inheriting the aesthetic style of the "Chinese School of Animation", Chinese animation films should also continue to deeply absorb the essence of traditional Chinese culture and national art, and on the basis of the characteristics of animation creation, and in conjunction with the characteristics of the times and the development of the society, provide useful paths for the transformation of traditional Chinese culture in the contemporary era. It is also necessary to absorb the experience of foreign animation creation art, and at the same time cross the text limitations, fully absorb the novel, film, theatre, opera and other artistic characteristics, to open up the new century Chinese animation film innovation attempts, so as to build up the new century for the construction of a new "Chinese school of animation" to accumulate creative experience and make good academic preparations.

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