

New Chinese Style: A Case Study of Chinese Domestic Animated Films

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Abstract

As the Chinese domestic animated films expounds the practical significance of patriotism as an important narrative tool, this paper discussed Chinese domestic animated films from many aspects, combined with Chinese traditional culture to rewrite traditional stories. It analyzes about 39 typical local animated films and their artistic characteristics since the new era. Comparing with American 'Chinese-Style' animated films, domestic animation adheres to local characteristics, achieves high-quality dissemination through the synergy of globalization and localization, which explains Chinese cultural values and highlights ideological influence. As it provides theoretical and practical references for the sustainable development of local animated films in cultural inheritance, which contained the artistic innovation and international exchanges.

Keywords

New Chinese Style, China, Domestic Animated Film, Multi-Case Study.

1. Introduction

Patriotism, as an important narrative logic in Chinese domestic animated films, is primarily characterized by the sublation of traditional Chinese culture, promoting the values of loyalty, righteousness, filial piety, and integrity found in classical Chinese culture. Chinese domestic animated films highly affirm the cultural values of traditional Chinese culture, such as benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, and trust, emphasizing their positive significance for Chinese-style modernization. At the same time, the promotion of Marxist theory is also one of the key features of Chinese domestic animated films. As part of the sublation of traditional culture, domestic animated films strive to retain the essence while discarding the false, as seen in films like **Nezha**, which critiques and subverts traditional blind filial piety, reflecting the industry's commitment to basing its values on practical reality.

In the digital age, Chinese domestic animated films tend to further digitize important animated characters to adapt to the communication habits of social media. In terms of the branding and marketing of domestic animated films, the intervention of localized aesthetics has deeply influenced the production and dissemination of these films. Furthermore, the sublation of traditional culture in Chinese animated films occurs after the success of brand marketing. Research has analyzed the characteristics of brand marketing in domestic animated films, using **Pleasant Goat and Big Big Wolf: The Super Crazy Adventure** as a case study.

As part of the "Guochao" culture, the core connotation of domestic animated films is patriotism. "Guochao" refers to a cultural phenomenon and material cultural practice that showcases Chinese characteristics and traditional charm, as well as a cultural trend that incorporates traditional cultural elements, styles, and concepts into contemporary life. Based on this, this study deepens the case analysis of domestic animated films through narrative analysis, ultimately concluding that cross-media narrative helps Chinese domestic animated films reconstruct their communication models, influencing the further dissemination of these works.

Previous studies have pointed out that "interactive narration" is an important narrative technique in animated films, which fully mobilizes textual, visual, and auditory symbols, constructing multimodal discourse. This is significant for promoting the development of Chinese animated films. Meanwhile, as an important social phenomenon, the subcultures arising from animated films, such as Japan's "otaku" culture and the "mourning" culture, are subtly influencing China's younger generation, affecting their cultural values. Therefore, we should maintain a certain level of attention and vigilance toward these trends.

2. Case Studies: Representative Chinese Domestic Animated Films and Their Artistic Characteristics

Table 1. Main Masterpieces of Chinese domestic animated films

Movies	Years	Producers
Kuiba II	2013	Vasoon Animation Co.Ltd.
Boonie Bears: Homeward Journey	2013	Huaqiang Fantawild (Shenzhen) Animation Co.Ltd
Dragon Nest: Warriors' Dawn	2014	Mili Pictures
The Legend of Qin	2014	Sparkly Key Animation Studio
Kuiba III	2014	Vasoon Animation Co., Ltd.
One Hundred Thousand Bad Jokes	2014	Toonmax Media
Little Door Gods	2016	Light Chaser Animation
Big Fish & Begonia	2016	B&T LTD、ENLIGHT MEDIA
Throne of Elves	2016	Mili Pictures
Where's the Dragon?	2016	Detao Education Investment Co., Ltd.
Boonie Bears III	2016	Huaqiang Fantawild (Shenzhen) Animation Co.Ltd
Dahufa	2017	Nice Boat Animation
Tea Pets	2017	Light Chaser Animation
Tofu	2017	<i>Ants Animation Studios</i>
One Hundred Thousand Bad Jokes II	2017	<i>Toonmax Media Co.,Ltd</i>
The Wind Guardians	2018	<i>Huaqing legend (Beijing) Culture Media Co.,Ltd.</i>
Duck Duck Goose	2018	Wanda Media Co. Ltd Jiangsu Force Computer Animation Co., Ltd.
White Snake	2019	Light Chaser Animation、Warner Bros. Entertainment, Inc.
Ne Zha	2019	Beijing Enlight Media Co., Ltd、COLOROOM
The Legend of Hei	2019	Beijing Gene Animation Co., Ltd., etc
Boonie Bears: Blast into the Past	2019	Huaqiang Fantawild (Shenzhen) Animation Co.Ltd
Legend of Deification	2020	<i>Beijing Enlight Media Co., Ltd</i> 、COLOROOM
Mr. Miao	2020	<i>Beijing Enlight Pictures Co.,Ltd</i> 、COLOROOM
Boonie Bears: The Wild Life	2021	Huaqiang Fantawild (Shenzhen) Animation Co.Ltd
Realm of Terracotta	2021	Huaqiang Fantawild (Shenzhen) Animation Co.Ltd
Master Ji Gong	2021	Zhejiang Tiantai Hehe Film and Television Culture Media Co., Ltd
I Am What I Am	2021	Beijing Splendid Culture & Entertainment Co., Ltd.、Yi Animation Inc.
Me and My Winter Games	2022	Wonder Cat Animation
New Gods: Yang Jian	2022	Light Chaser Animation
Pleasant Goat and Big Big Wolf: Dunk for Future	2022	Creative Power Entertaining Co.Ltd
Run, Tiger Run!	2022	Soular Animation Studio
Boonie Bears: Back to Earth	2022	Huaqiang Fantawild (Shenzhen) Animation Co.Ltd
Deep Sea	2023	Beijing Shiyue Culture Media Co.,Ltd., COLOROOM
Boonie Bears: Guardian Code	2023	Huaqiang Fantawild (Shenzhen) Animation Co.Ltd
Oh My School!	2023	JOYSHIPPER
Chang An	2023	Light Chaser Animation

There are main masterpieces of Chinese domestic animated films, including the legend movies, and others. Since the beginning of the new era, approximately 39 representative Chinese domestic animated films have been released between 2013 and 2023. This study argues that these films often incorporate content from ancient Chinese myths and classical novels, showcasing distinct Chinese styles and characteristics. The development of Chinese animated films has gone through multiple stages of adjustment and growth. In the early years, domestic animated films primarily focused on genres such as fantasy and adventure. For instance, **The Battle of the Yuan Yang World** and **Kuiba 3: The Rise of the War God** are both closely related to ancient Chinese mythology. These films leverage profound classical cultural backgrounds to attract a large fanbase. Such works emphasize the importance of traditional Chinese cultural elements and demonstrate the growing internationalization of Chinese animation. **The Battle of the Yuan Yang World** vividly portrays the fantastical world of ancient Chinese people, while **Kuiba 3: The Rise of the War God** refines its storyline with more intricate details, leaving a lasting impact on the Chinese animation industry.

Following these, the **Boonie Bears** series combines humor, adventure, and warmth to create memorable characters such as "Boonie" and "Clever." Films like **Boonie Bears: The Wild Christmas** and **Boonie Bears: Back to Earth** continue to innovate, attracting family and child audiences. In terms of commercial performance, **Boonie Bears: Back to Earth** grossed approximately 977 million yuan, demonstrating the significant commercial potential of domestic animated films. At the same time, the **Boonie Bears** "New Year" series has become a key brand in China's film market's "Spring Festival block," with new releases almost every year sparking a fan frenzy. This shows that **Boonie Bears** has established a sustained brand effect.

As domestic animation matures, more thought-provoking animated films have emerged. Works like **Big Fish & Begonia** and **White Snake: Origin** fully incorporate Chinese traditional cultural elements, while also creatively reworking them. Although not all of these films have achieved both critical and commercial success, their release reflects the continuous improvement of the domestic animation industry's artistic standards. These films are gradually showcasing the unique charm of Chinese animated films on the global stage. After 2020, with the release of films like **Nezha: Birth of the Demon Child** and **Jiang Ziya**, China's animation market entered a new peak. **Nezha: Birth of the Demon Child** broke the 5 billion yuan mark at the box office, setting a benchmark for Chinese animated films. Through its modern reinterpretation of traditional Chinese mythology and impressive animation, the film has attracted a large audience, prompting a rediscovery of its artistic value. At the same time, **The King's Avatar: The Movie** and **New Gods: Yang Jian** also show the continued efforts of Chinese animation in diversifying its narratives and visuals.

Entering 2022, Chinese animated films began to focus more on diversified themes and continued to make breakthroughs in visual effects and technical presentations. For example, the film **Deep Sea** gained a box office of approximately 919 million yuan due to its deep exploration of both visual and emotional layers. Films like **Boonie Bears: My "Bear Heart"** and **New Gods: Yang Jian** also displayed the enduring market appeal of domestic animated films to varying degrees. Especially during the Spring Festival and summer seasons, animated films further consolidated their position in the market through innovative approaches and relentless promotion. Overall, in recent years, Chinese animated films have made continuous breakthroughs in both technology and content. They have not only achieved remarkable results in the domestic market but also gained attention in the global market. For instance, **Chang'an Thirty Thousand Miles**, with its grand narrative, received widespread acclaim from both audiences and critics.

Among the masterpieces of Chinese domestic animated movies, some of them revealed that Chinese history could enlighten the innovators to do more about the historical narratives, while

it could cope with the issues that storytelling might be more suitable for the film-making. For instance, on the narratives of White Snake, it sets an interesting plot into the movie. During the process, their feelings quickly heated up, but the girl's identity as a snake demon was gradually revealed. In terms of the cross-cultural or inter-media narratives, domestic animated movies would like to show the high intention to make some creative changes. Finally, it could offer sufficient materials for the followers on the basis of fan culture, which would like to call for the loyalty of domestic animated movies.

3. Discussion: Cross-Media Narratives and Cross-Cultural Communication in Chinese Domestic Animated Films

When discussing the characteristics of cross-media narrative, it is necessary to address the "commonality," "uniqueness," and "borrowed elements" of films. Currently, there is limited research on the media and narrative aspects of domestic Chinese animated films, making the typological study of Chinese animation somewhat underdeveloped. From a conceptual historical perspective, Henry Jenkins' 2006 work **Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide** introduced the characteristics of cross-media narrative. At the same time, the cross-media narrative process in domestic animated films is also influenced by the application of digital and intelligent technologies.

From the perspective of concept definition, the understanding of cross-media narrative is closely related to fields such as art studies and communication studies. Cross-media narratives characterized by space are constructed through narrative methods that represent spatial relationships. According to narrative theory, cross-media narratives, stimulated by various "new media" emerging on the internet, have led to multiple forms of narration. This narrative style tends to abandon or terminate the linear sequence of time, instead pursuing simultaneity in space. From the perspective of text as a narrative medium, the realization of spatial effects requires transcending the temporality of narrative. Some international studies also explore the differences and connections between film and art in terms of images (both dynamic and static) as well as audience experience and behavior. Digital technology has gradually blurred these distinctions, as different viewing environments lead to varied narrative structures and audience expectations. These studies also discuss new forms of image practices brought about by digital technology, such as "iPhonography," "cinemagraphs," "mashups," and "machinima," and how they change modes of creation and distribution (Burgin, 2020). In the era of media convergence, the blending of images and texts allows cross-media narratives to occur between time-based and space-based art forms, conveying artistic meanings that cannot be fully expressed by a single medium. In the discussion of the boundaries between media and hypermedia, the emergence of new media has largely deconstructed the expressive forms of art, leading to the appearance of hypermedia narratives. For example, some scholars have found that the gradual maturity of the metaverse ecosystem provides possibilities for research on the perceptual dimensions of cross-media narratives. Cross-media narrative not only calls for immersion but also aims to awaken full sensory perception, progressing through the stages of "hermeneutic context" and "embodied immersion." This process shows a connection between aesthetic significance and embodied perception.

In terms of research practices, studies on cross-media narrative often start from different types of films and expand through case studies. Notably, foreign scholars have traced the history of cross-media narratives as far back as the 1920s and 1930s, using Disney as a case study to analyze how the company used characters across various media such as comics, cartoons, and merchandise to construct a story world. These studies discuss how key industrial practices and cultural influences of that period contributed to the rise and popularization of cross-media story worlds. They also analyze the relationship between consumer culture and "world-

building," as well as how brand licensing and story world expansion were facilitated through "intertextuality" and "immersion," using the comprehensive control and authorization of characters to achieve cross-media world-building, cross-promotion, and audience engagement (Freeman, M., 2017).

Furthermore, by examining how image combinations complicate a film's narrative flow through collage and layering, and how cross-media narratives are driven by media users and fans who expand stories through different symbolic systems and historical media practices, scholars aim to further study the construction of cross-media story worlds (Christie & van den Oever, 2018). For Chinese animated films, the methods and strategies of cross-media narrative are also fully applied in the artistic expression of the works. In essence, cross-media narrative is a special narrative approach, and in the process of filmmaking, the use of cross-media narrative methods is particularly reflected in the use of multimodal discourse such as images and texts (Schiller, 2018). In analyses of cross-media narrative, studies tend to use multimodal discourse texts, including films, as examples to illustrate the characteristics of cross-media narrative and analyze its specific use in different types of film texts, such as animated films. As one of the most important categories of digital media arts, digital cinema prominently features cross-media characteristics in both audiovisual forms and narrative content. In terms of audiovisual form, the aesthetic distance between subject and object is further reduced; in terms of narrative content, the recipient shifts from a passive one-way output to an active participant. Moreover, with the development of AIGC (AI-generated content), some studies take a new perspective based on technological correlations, using powerful multimodal language models like GPT-4 and video generation AIGC technologies to discuss interactive narrative methodologies and their expressive paradigms. These studies focus on analyzing the fusion of films and games, exploring how this convergence leads to a more diversified and innovative narrative experience. "Global starts as local, but not all local is ultimately global". Previous studies have compared how *Mulan* and *Kung Fu Panda* use "Chinese style," emphasizing the importance and reflection of global localization. However, for animated films that market "Chinese style," the American values they promote differ from the social and cultural needs of China. Thus, producing animated films with distinct Chinese characteristics is of significant necessity. From a comparative literature perspective, cultural differences between China and the U.S. directly and specifically affect the distribution of *Mulan* and *Kung Fu Panda*. Consequently, there may be some cultural misinterpretations in the process of cross-cultural communication.

As the core content of animated films, narrative deeply reflects the influence of ideology. Therefore, sticking to a development path for animated films with Chinese characteristics is a matter of significant importance in terms of the dissemination of values. On one hand, modern Chinese animations such as *Pleasant Goat and Big Big Wolf* have almost stripped away the content of Chinese classical novels, building rich modern narratives based on the story of "wolves eating sheep," thereby achieving cross-cultural communication. On the other hand, Chinese domestic animated films that express traditional aesthetic styles, such as *Nezha* and *Monkey King: Hero is Back*, use more diverse visual techniques to spread Chinese culture. Overall, the cross-cultural communication of domestic animated films, through the dual wings of globalization and localization, has achieved high-quality cross-cultural dissemination.

4. Conclusion

Chinese domestic films adhere to the narrative logic of patriotism in cultural values, actively inherit and innovate Chinese traditional culture, which could integrate Marxist creative concepts. In the course of development, it has gone through different stages and presented a variety of themes and styles. From the early fantasy adventure to the gradual diversification and maturity, many representative works have emerged, as it also achieved high commercial

grades and artistic achievements, which have shown strong potential and brand effect in economic operations. In terms of inter-media narrative, Chinese animated films have shown new characteristics under the impact of technology in the digital age. In inter-media communication, compared with foreign animated films that applied 'Chinese-style' as a path with Chinese characteristics, relying on the combination of globalization and localization to achieve high-quality communication, which is of great significance to the dissemination of Chinese culture and values, as it also lays the foundation for the further development of animated films and provides multi-faceted thinking directions.

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