



Cultural reconstruction and innovative expression of Chinese animated films in recent 5 years

Hu Yang

Lanzhou Univ, Sch Chinese Languages&Literatures, Lanzhou, 730000, Gansu, Peoples R
China

Email:178441191@qq.com

Abstract. Over the past five years, Chinese animated films have made significant strides in blending traditional cultural elements with contemporary values, creating works that resonate both artistically and commercially. This study examines the cultural reconstruction and innovative expressions in these films, analyzing their narrative themes, character development, and world-building. By exploring films such as "Jiang Ziya," "White Snake," and "Nezha," this paper highlights how filmmakers reimagine classic myths and historical tales to reflect modern sensibilities. These efforts not only enhance the global appeal of Chinese animation but also reinforce the cultural identity and values of contemporary China.

Keywords: animated films; Traditional culture; Cultural reconstruction; Innovation.

1 Introduction

Chinese animated films boast a rich history, tracing back to pioneers like the Wan brothers, creators of China's inaugural animated film, "Uproar in the Studio," in 1926. Over the years, classics like "Uproar in the Studio," "Prince Nezha's Triumph Against Dragon King," and "Baby Tadpoles Look for Their Mother" have captivated audiences with their timeless narratives and exquisite artistry, laying the groundwork for the renowned "Chinese School" of animation. In recent years, as China's animation industry and artistic standards have advanced, filmmakers have consciously merged traditional culture with contemporary values, exploring how to showcase Chinese culture globally through innovative expression. Animated films, as potent vehicles for cross-cultural communication, play a pivotal role in this endeavor. Hence, studying the cultural reconstruction and innovative expression in Chinese animated films of the past five years holds profound significance.

2 Telling Chinese Stories Well: Inheritance and innovation of traditional Chinese themes

China has accumulated rich cultural treasures in its 5,000 years of history and culture, leaving behind a series of myths and legends, folk stories, historical stories and other rich resources. They not only have a huge audience, but also have high aesthetic value, which is an important source for film workers to adapt and create. The development of Chinese animated films reflects the profound changes and progress of national culture and art. From early exploration to modern innovation, this process is not only the transformation of technology and artistic style but also the evolution of cultural ideas and values.[1]

Films like "Legend of Deification," "White Snake," and "Chang' an" are prime examples. "Legend of Deification" reinterprets the classic "Fengshen Yanyi" by focusing on Jiang Ziya's story post-great war, challenging traditional narratives of justice and destiny. "White Snake" offers a fresh take on the legend by delving into the prequel of the famous love story, emphasizing themes of love and rebellion against societal norms. "Chang' an" uses 48 Tang poems to vividly recreate historical Chang' an, exploring the lives and fates of famous poets, thus merging literary heritage with visual storytelling.

"Legend of Deification": This film shifts the focus from the epic battles of "Fengshen Yanyi" to the internal struggles of its protagonist. Jiang Ziya's journey after the war highlights his moral dilemmas and the questioning of divine justice. The character's evolution from a revered general to a compassionate figure who defies the gods adds depth to the narrative, making it relatable to modern viewers.

"White Snake": By exploring the origins of the legendary romance between the white snake and her human lover, this film emphasizes themes of freedom and self-determination. The narrative's focus on personal choice and societal defiance resonates with contemporary audiences, offering a fresh perspective on a well-known tale.

"Chang' an": Through the lens of Tang dynasty poetry, this film weaves together the lives of historical figures, presenting a cultural tapestry that reflects the era's grandeur and complexity. The poetic interludes and the portrayal of the poets' personal journeys bring a historical period to life, engaging viewers with its rich cultural context. In addition, "Gift Wang Lun", "Seeing Meng Haoran Off from Yellow Crane Tower", "Farewell Dong Da" and "Leaving The White King's Town At Dawn" these familiar poems are also represented in the film. The cross-media emotional maintenance between the film works and the audience awakens the cultural memory deep in the audience's emotions and makes the culture come alive again. [2]

These films demonstrate how traditional stories can be revitalized through innovative narrative techniques and contemporary values, appealing to modern audiences and creating excellent works that meet the values of the main body and the needs of The Times. By merging traditional themes with innovative storytelling, Chinese animated films are not only preserving cultural heritage but also making it relevant to today's audience. This blend of the old and new fosters a deeper appreciation for Chinese culture and its evolving narratives.

3 Reconstructing the Classic Image: the Innovative Expression of the Rebellious Spirit

A new generation of young moviegoers have grown up to know Nezha mainly from the myth and legend "Prince Nezha's Triumph Against Dragon King" and the animation *The Legend of Nezha*. As a result, Nezha is known to the public as a righteous, brave, innocent and kind-hearted child with two updos on his head. The character in *Nezha: Birth of the Demon Child* changes the public's perception of Nezha, creating an irreverent and rebellious mixed-world monster wearing a smoky eye. Far from helping the people bring down the demons, Nezha often engages in evil and delights in playing tricks on them, causing the people of Chentang Pass to flee in fear when they see him. It is such an image of Nezha, just the opposite of people's imagination, that conveys the contemporary young people's pursuit of self-awareness and self-independence. The sentence "My life is by me, not by heaven" resonates with countless audiences. In the treatment of family relations, this version of Nezha deleted Nezha's suicide and patricide of the rebellious spirit of the plot, the film *Li Jing* husband and wife will be busy because of the neglect of child care and feel self-blame, after learning that Nezha will be killed by lightning at the age of 3, Li Jing resolutely decided to kill Nezha and other plot Settings, More to meet the audience's acceptance psychology, moved by the love of relatives in this film, the end of the story, Neha saves the fate of Chentanguan village, the harvest of affection, friendship and the admiration of the villagers, enriched the surface Nezha unrepentant, in fact, the character image of kindness, also fits the audience value orientation for family harmony and happy life.

As one of the "New Shenbang" series of light-chasing animation films, *"New Gods: Nezha Reborn"* breaks the traditional time and space framework of *"Shang and Zhou Feng Shen"* and creates a punk world full of future science and technology. The story is set in Donghai City during the Republic of China. As the reincarnation of Nezha, the protagonist Li Yunxiang becomes a young man wearing a ponytail and wearing a leather coat who loves motorcycles. In the traditional story, Nezha is born with an anti-bone personality. He runs into the Dragon Palace, suffers from skin cramps, kills a boy by accident, and returns his father by bone. He performs a series of rebellious acts to rebel against authority and the restraints of traditional feudal morality and ethics, reflecting the need for struggle in the feudal era. The fast-paced editing, coupled with modern rock and electronic music, creates a visual impact of conflict and conflict that sets the tone of rebellion. With the further development of the plot, Li Yunxiang is dissatisfied with the oppression of power and destroys the water valve, which is a rebellion against the unfair distribution of social resources. In the face of Li Fu's accusation that his "mouth is worse than his heart", Li Yunxiang insists on himself and does not obey, which is a rebellion against the parental system. In the face of the strong threat of the De family, Li Yunxiang wants to defeat the Dragon King by getting rid of the god power of Nezha and rely on himself. This the fight against their own fate, the pursuit of self-value. The film focuses the characters rebellion on social conflicts, family relations and self-worth, and innovatively expresses the connotation of the spirit of rebellion, making traditional stories close to the needs of reality in the new era and brimming with new vitality.

4 Reconstruction of the World View: New Creation

In the contemporary context, Worldview is people's general view and fundamental view of the whole world. The meaning of animation worldview is the setting of the world environment in which the characters live, which is specifically divided into time setting, spatial structure, values, etc. It is a preliminary work in the animation production process and is the responsibility of the screenwriter. In order to ensure the smooth development of the story, it is necessary to have a reasonable and complete worldview.

The actions of the characters are limited by the setting of the world view. Only in this way can the audience have a psychological identification with the characters' behaviors and results during the viewing process.[3]

In 1926, the Wan brothers created China's first animated film "Up-rop in the Studio". In the 1990s, the golden age of the development of Chinese animated films, they created a series of excellent works that are well known at home and abroad, such as "Up-rop in the Studio", "Prince Nezha's Triumph Against Dragon King", "Baby Tadpoles Look for Their Mother" and so on. Formed a "Chinese School" with Chinese aesthetic characteristics. The films of this period consciously incorporated traditional Chinese arts, such as ink painting, paper cutting and shadow play, into the films, which have high aesthetic value. [4] However, in terms of world outlook, these films mainly continued established story framework in the story text, without major changes and innovations. It was not until 2015 that *Monkey King: Hero Is Back*, based on the story of *Journey to the West*, made a creative adaptation, which set off the upsurge of "New Chinese comics". Subsequently, excellent films such as "Big Fish and Begonia" and "Dahufa" appeared in Chinese animated films, refreshing the audience's understanding of domestic animated films and opening a new door for the reconstruction of world outlook in animated films. In the current era, the new film creators focus on the trend of The Times. They have created a series of excellent works in line with the values of the subject and the aesthetics of The Times, which reconstruct the world view in the original text from the new context and cultural standpoint:

4.1 Reconstruction in Time

White Snake sets the story line in the past lives of Bai and Xu Xian. It fictionalizes the two characters, Xiao Bai and Xu Xuan, and deletes the role of Fa Hai, who obstructs their relationship. Instead, the story focuses on the course of their emotional development, breaking the original text that Bai met Xu Xian to repay her gratitude. The adapted story expresses the values of free love and women's self-discovery and growth. *New Gods: Nezha Reborn* also reconstructs the time setting of *Prince Nezha's Triumph Against Dragon King*, setting the story in the Republic of China period and constructing the De, Li, Song and Shun families of Donghai City based on the four families that existed in the history of the Republic of China: Kong, Song, Jiang and Chen. The four families control the flow of resources in Donghai City, which leads to intensified social conflicts, and the escalating conflict between the three sons Ao Bing orbly robbed Li Yunxiang's motorcycle, which finally stimulates the god Nezha in Li Yunxiang's body, completing the early stage of the story.

4.2 Reconstruction in Space

Green Snake a fictional space independent of the original story text -- the city of Xiuluo. "All sentient beings in the world are obsessed, aggressive, and fall into the Xiuluo Road". Xiuluo City is a place where tradition and modernity blend, with Chinese pavilions and abandoned factories full of the sense of doom. Xiaoqing has experienced the companionship and betrayal of friends and lovers through the constant struggle with people, monsters and monsters, and finally gained the awakening of female independent consciousness and individual growth. [5] In *Nezha: Birth of the Demon Child*, Taiyi Zhenren's magic talisman "Mountain and River State Map" has beautiful scenery of sun, moon, mountains and rivers. It is a space independent of the entire narrative space, where Taiyi Zha teaches exercises to Nezha and leads him to good, and never gets angry even when Nezha plays tricks on him. It is also here that Li Jing and his wife falsely claim that Nezha is the reincarnation of a spirit pearl, inspiring Nezha's inner justice and kindness and setting the stage for the rest of the story.

4.3 Reconstruction of Values

Chinese animated film stories are mostly based on myths and legends and folk tales, in which the protagonists are also gods with "heroism" or people with superior abilities, but the films deify the subjects of these stories. The story of "Legend of Deification" is set when Jiang Ziya is demoted to a pedestal, and Jiang Ziya is no longer the lofty fairy figure who works well in mythic stories. Instead, he becomes a "mortal" who is casually dressed, often unshaved and obsessed with cleanliness in life. He is not full of morality, ethics and order, but he truly does "everything is for the people". It realizes the symbiosis of the three realms of man, demon and God, and completes the reconstruction of self-belief and redemption of others. This setting accords with the value identification and emotional resonance of modern people.

5 Conclusions

In the past five years, Chinese animated films have dug deep into the classic myths and legends and history and culture in terms of subject matter, innovatively integrated traditional subjects with modern spirit, and created a series of excellent works that are popular and popular, making the classic images glow with new spirit in the new era, and winning the love and praise of the audience. It has realized the commercial and artistic success of Chinese animated films, driven the trend of "the rise of Chinese cartoons", and attracted more literary and artistic creators to join the deep cultivation of traditional culture and the creation of animated films. Although Chinese animated films still have many shortcomings in text narration, visual communication, production technology and overseas publicity, on the whole, Chinese animated films have made great breakthroughs in both content innovation and quantity growth. It is believed that in the future, with the continuous innovation of domestic animated films, excellent traditional culture will continue to become an important force, bringing more development space and vitality to the development of domestic animation.

References

1. Feng L. (2024). The Reproduction and Contemporary Value of Chinese Classic Animated-Films. *Scientific and Social Research*,2024(01). DOI: 10.26689/ssr.v6i1.6035.
2. Xiaolin Y, Zhaoyu D. (2023). Thirty Thousand Miles in Chang 'an: A Novel Narrative of fashion and Poetry in the Flourishing Tang Dynasty. *Film Review*,2023(17):21-26. DOI: 10.16583/j.cnki.52-1014/j.2023.17.023.
3. Song K. (2021) Narrative Reconstruction: An Exploration of Chinese traditional IP animated Films in Recent Years. *Contemporary Film*,2021(1):160-164. Retrieved from https://kns.cnki.net/kcms2/article/abstract?v=FruxrO_GJXKj6HZR4MqyutZNPiOM0yjv42RkUzJknccQC2sVdwcxzlGDf9znOpkmAL5I0FC9I5hhL5oi0VP3oEoINFKbdbTkUVtoFbuDnHnDYVQK03OyZSsQHKSSOqO6uIpbGr27PAmCNeFxnVn39w==&uniplatform=NZKPT&language=CHS.
4. Pan J. (2021) Theoretical System Construction of "New Chinese School of Animation". *Research of Ethnic Arts*,2021,34(01):14-21. Retrieved from https://kns.cnki.net/kcms2/article/abstract?v=FruxrO_GJXLFO6dXtPtXnFZ2F1tdrWL-Nrx-J0y8Q3yLJxII MASUNkA8xkfaD1jUFq7FB0NT92uiTtCRahyA5M5ch03EvTVumtzRqpuULYJv0fD1XqRPhioIqmmA0SETBPd7w2txCIOcN6J-qsevQ==&uniplatform=NZKPT&language=CHS.
5. Hu J.Y., Tian X. H.(2023).A study on the narrative space of the animated film White Snake 2: Green Snake Robbery . *Drama House*,2023(19):149-151. Retrieved from https://kns.cnki.net/kcms2/article/abstract?v=FruxrO_GJXL Fh2 YRJ o jgZ ZA6 5d5ry 4ulj2 hmfl HkHfb_daXSfIDLYmJp49MXK9PNj7iVoWTMjY5yq1383vzFa8MWMRRAPeny6L-t1m mH mASE vvEbNeptJi-x4wOx8MWFfEbjA9a8KPVbm71IgVxfA==&uniplatform=NZKPT&language=CHS.

Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>), which permits any noncommercial use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.

