

# The Reproduction and Contemporary Value of Chinese Classic Animated Films

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**Abstract:** This paper discusses the evolution, cultural characteristics, and value of Chinese classic animated films in contemporary society. By analyzing the origin, development, and classic works of Chinese animation, this paper aims to reveal how these works have influenced China's cultural heritage and modern animation industry. This paper describes the uniqueness of Chinese animated films in terms of artistic expression, storytelling, and cultural connotation, and how they adapt to the challenges of the new era to find their place and value again.

**Keywords:** Domestic film; Animated film; Cultural innovation; Cultural fusion

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## 1. Introduction

The progress of Chinese animated films was hindered by a heavy reliance on traditional narratives and conservative forms, posing challenges in capturing the interest of modern audiences. This is in sharp contrast to the continuous innovation and integration of multicultural elements in the United States, Japan, South Korea, and other countries. However, in recent years, Chinese animated films such as *Monkey King: Monkey King is Back* and *Ne Zha* have shown a remarkable shift, retaining the best of traditional culture while innovating in narrative and visual representation. This change shows the active efforts of Chinese animated films in catching up with international trends and adapting to the needs of modern audiences, marking that Chinese animated films have entered a new stage of development and are better integrated into global cultural competition.

## 2. The development of Chinese animated films

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.

## 2.1. The development of early animated films

Chinese animated films back then mainly focused on short fables and animated representations of traditional culture. *The Wan Brothers' Camel Dance* is the first sound animation in China, marking the initial maturity of Chinese animation. Early Chinese animation was influenced by foreign works such as Disney's *Snow White* but relied more on local Chinese cultural elements and stories. Works of this period, such as *Princess Iron Fan* and *Zhu Bajie Mange La Pastèque*, although relatively simple in technology and expression, were enough to attract audiences at that time, demonstrating the unique charm of Chinese animation<sup>[1]</sup>.

## 2.2. Representative works of the classic period and their characteristics

Animated films of classic Chinese folklore like *Havoc in Heaven* and *Monkey King Conquers the Demon*, are examples of innovation on the basis of inheriting tradition. These works preserve the essence of the traditional story while incorporating a more intricate plot and nuanced character development. They not only demonstrated the advanced level of their time in technology but also reached new heights in artistic expression. The animated works of this period achieved great success both at home and abroad and became classics of Chinese animated films<sup>[2]</sup>.

## 2.3. Changes in the animation industry after the economic reform

Upon the economic reform and the deepening of cultural exchanges, attempts were made to introduce Chinese animated films into the international market. Works like *Lotus Light* and *Nezha Conquers the Dragon King* retained the essence of traditional Chinese culture while introducing narrative methods and visual elements of Western animation. Works of this period began to focus more on themes like personal growth and adventure, as well as the integration and innovation of cultural elements. Although animation works of this period encountered some challenges, these attempts paved the way for the modernization and internationalization of Chinese animated films. Since this period, Chinese animation has not only upheld traditional elements but also continuously explored new paths of international integration<sup>[3]</sup>.

# 3. The artistic characteristics of classic animated films

## 3.1. Integration and innovation of traditional cultural elements

Chinese animated films show remarkable characteristics and depth in the integration and innovation of traditional cultural elements. This feature has been fully reflected in the works of recent years, of which the success of *Ne Zha* is an excellent example<sup>[4]</sup>. Instead of relying solely on the original plot of the classic folklore *Ne Zha: The Enchantment of the Gods*, elements of a Western literary work *The Prince and the Pauper* were incorporated into the film. The result of this convergence is a multilayered, complex narrative structure that shows greater innovation and depth in character setting and plot development. In the film version, the character and image of Ne Zha are quite different from those depicted in the traditional versions. In the film, Ne Zha is no longer a beautiful teenage hero, but a “magic child” with a strange appearance and a stubborn personality, which adds more complexity and a human side to the character<sup>[5]</sup>. Ao Bing, the third prince of the Dragon King in the film, who was originally a villain, is given more positive qualities and depth. This shift in character setting reflects the in-depth interpretation and re-creation of traditional stories<sup>[6]</sup>.

In addition, the narrative structure and themes in the film also reflect a deep cultural integration. The exchange of fates between Ne Zha and Ao Bing is similar to the experiences of the protagonists in *The Prince and the Pauper*, demonstrating a kind of reversal of fortune and misadventure. This narrative technique not only adds more drama and depth to the story but also makes the relationship between the characters more complex

and diversified. Through this structure, the film explores deep themes such as fate, choice, and personality. This transforms the story from a mere form of entertainment into an artistic creation with profound meaning and cultural significance <sup>[7]</sup>.

Overall, the success of *Ne Zha* shows the great potential of Chinese animated films in integrating and innovating traditional cultural elements. By combining story elements from different cultures and innovative narrative methods, these works not only enrich the artistic expression of Chinese animated films but also provide a more colorful visual and emotional experience for the audience. This cultural integration and innovation play a crucial role in contemporary Chinese animated films, laying a solid foundation for their success on the international stage <sup>[8]</sup>.

### 3.2. Evolution of animation technology and artistic style

The evolution of Chinese animated films in animation technology and artistic style not only reflects the achievements of technological advancement but also the evolution of cultural ideas and artistic expressions. The evolution of Chinese animation from its early days of hand-drawing to the current sophisticated production techniques involving digital technology reflects a significant leap from tradition to modernity. Early Chinese animations such as *Princess Iron Fan* and *Havoc in Heaven* mainly used hand-drawn animation techniques. Despite their technical simplicity, they were extremely captivating in terms of artistic expression and cultural communication. Their success lies in their ability to profoundly present the essence of traditional Chinese culture through simple visual expression <sup>[9]</sup>.

With the progress of technology and the change of cultural concepts, Chinese animated films begin to incorporate more modern elements and technologies. The incorporation of digital animation, in particular, has enriched these works, creating visually stunning and impactful effects. Films like *Jiang Ziya* not only retain the essence of traditional Chinese stories but also adopt modern narrative methods and visual styles. Drawing inspiration from the narrative approaches seen in Hollywood animated films, such as incorporating elements from road films, these works introduce a fresh and innovative storytelling method <sup>[10]</sup>. These efforts elevated *Jiang Ziya* to new heights in terms of narrative depth and visual presentation. The film adeptly portrayed intricate character relationships and emotional entanglements, while also showcasing a grand and expansive worldview. In addition, *Jiang Ziya*'s innovative approach to visual art is also commendable <sup>[11]</sup>. The colors, character design, and scene construction in the film reflect a modern interpretation of traditional Chinese aesthetics while incorporating the dynamic sense and fluidity of Western animated films. This integration not only shows progress at the technical level but also realizes innovation in artistic expression, making Chinese animated films more appealing to international audiences. All in all, the evolution of Chinese animated films in terms of animation technology and artistic style is not only the result of technological advancement but also the embodiment of cultural confidence and an innovative spirit. This evolution not only broadened the scope of artistic expression but also made it possible to tell more in-depth and multi-dimensional stories. Consequently, Chinese animated films have secured a unique position in the international market <sup>[12]</sup>.

### 3.3. Storytelling and thematic depth

Chinese animated films have evolved tremendously in terms of storytelling and thematic depth over the years, among which *Monkey King: Hero is Back* stands as a shining benchmark. The film is more than just a retelling of the classic Journey to the West; it goes beyond by incorporating the matriarchal theme of reincarnation and rebirth. This addition constructs a more intricate and philosophical framework for the story. This in-depth theme exploration makes *Monkey King: Hero Is Back* transcend the narrative scope of traditional animated

films and enter a deeper artistic field. By combining the legend of Sun Wukong with the theme of reincarnation, the creators not only reinterpreted the famous character but also introduced more complexity and depth to the plot <sup>[13]</sup>. The character of Sun Wukong is no longer a single-dimensional hero but a complex character that struggles between fate and self-recognition. This deep characterization allows the story to go beyond superficial adventures and battles and to touch on deeper themes of humanity, self-identity, and destiny. In addition, by introducing the element of reincarnation into the story, *Monkey King: Hero is Back* also explores the relationship between man and the universe, life and death, and the past and the future, providing audiences with a new understanding of traditional stories. This philosophical depth not only enriches the story but also enables the film to transcend age and cultural boundaries and resonate with a global audience <sup>[14]</sup>. Major advances in storytelling and thematic depth can be seen through works like *Monkey King: Monkey King is Back*. This not only shows the artistic maturity and depth of Chinese animated films but also reflects the confidence and innovation of Chinese culture in the context of globalization. Through such works, Chinese animated films have not only become an important medium for telling Chinese stories but also an important channel for conveying Chinese voices in global cultural exchanges <sup>[15]</sup>.

#### 4. Cultural significance and contemporary value

While inheriting traditional culture, Chinese animated films have achieved cultural refreshment and innovation. Contemporary works such as *Ne Zha* and *Jiang Ziya* not only reinterpreted classic Chinese legends by blending traditional stories with modern elements, but also introduced new perspectives in storytelling, characterization, and thematic depth. This innovation infuses traditional culture with new vitality in the contemporary context, preserving its original charm while aligning with the aesthetic and thought preferences of modern audiences. These works not only help spread Chinese cultural heritage but also showcase the modern interpretation and innovative approaches of Chinese culture to the world <sup>[16]</sup>.

Chinese animated films play an extremely important role in promoting international cultural exchanges. With their growing influence on a global scale, these works have become important points of connection between Chinese and other cultures around the world <sup>[17]</sup>. The multi-cultural elements and universal themes in the works make Chinese culture more accessible and understandable to international audiences. The international success of *Monkey King: Hero is Back* not only highlights the global appeal of Chinese stories but also facilitates the dissemination of Chinese stories in the international market. This, in turn, fosters mutual understanding and respect among audiences with diverse cultural backgrounds <sup>[18]</sup>.

Chinese animated films have had a significant and far-reaching influence on the modern animation industry. Their innovations in artistic style, narrative mode, and technology application have not only propelled the growth of China's animation industry but also left an impact on the global animation industry <sup>[19]</sup>. These innovations have inspired domestic and foreign animators to explore the fusion of traditional culture and modern technology. In doing so, they have contributed to the advancement of both animation art and technology, ultimately elevating the standing and influence of animated films within the global cultural industry. The success of Chinese animated films signifies more than just a triumph for Chinese animation art; it represents a notable elevation of its status on the global cultural stage <sup>[20]</sup>.

#### 5. Summary

The development and achievements of Chinese animated films are vivid manifestations of Chinese cultural innovation and globalization. These works not only achieve remarkable artistic heights but also demonstrate

significant potential in cultural communication and international exchange. Through innovative interpretations of traditional stories and the use of modern technology, Chinese animated films have not only successfully captured the interest of both domestic and international audiences but also popularized Chinese culture on a global scale. This influence is not only reflected in artistic expression but also the contribution to global cultural diversity and the promotion of international cultural understanding. The progress of Chinese animated films serves as a manifestation of Chinese cultural self-confidence and stands as a symbol of China's increasing influence in global cultural exchanges. As Chinese animation continues to develop, its influence on the global culture stage will become increasingly prominent, leading to greater contributions to global cultural diversity and artistic innovation.

## Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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