

The Research on the Development of Chinese Animation Nationalization in View of Chinese Marxist Art Theory

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Abstract

As a comprehensive art and a branch of film arts, the Chinese animation, with a short history, has been influenced by the Marxist art theory in different periods of China. The Chinese animation takes on various art forms in different political, cultural, social and economic environments of different times, but literary and art workers have never stopped the exploration and practice of its nationalization. Today, the Chinese animation faces new opportunities and challenges in the new era of socialism with Chinese characters, so we should base ourselves on the reality to seek a new road suitable for the development of the Chinese animation.

Key words: Chinese Marxist Art Theory; Animation; Nationalization

Introduction

An animation is a cultural form popular among the people and the national culture has been providing sufficient nutrition for the growth of this comprehensive art. In order to maintain its long-term vitality, it is necessary to draw nutrition from the fine traditional culture of the nation and make use of the unique artistic ways of thinking, artistic forms, and artistic techniques of the nation to reflect people's life, express the spirit of the nation and present distinctive national characteristics. Countries with developed animation industries outstrip others because of their distinctive features in animation, so only by highlighting our national characteristics in animation, can Chinese animation get a place in the world (Zhang Ying, 2012). Thanks to nationalization, Chinese animation once took a place in the world, and the Chinese Marxist art theory has been indispensable in the nationalization of Chinese animation.

The Chinese Marxist art theory suitable for the development of Chinese art formed when literary and art workers applied the basic principles of Marxism in solving issues on Chinese art practice and on the theory of Chinese art. It is essential in the nationalization of the Marxist theory of art how to learn from and draw experience from cultural and artistic achievements in the rest of the world, together with the Chinese art tradition, to promote the development of national art.

The Chinese animation, with rich content, value, orientation, and humanism helps satisfy people's spiritual and cultural needs and benefits the prosperity of society. It also plays an important role in the improvement of national cultural soft power, the guidance of socialist values, and the rejuvenation and prosperity of the Chinese national culture. Therefore, it is of far-reaching significance to combine the development of Chinese animation nationalization with the study of Marxist art theory.

Chapter 1 The Chinese Marxist Art Theory Points out the Direction for the Development of Chinese Animation Nationalization

As early as the 1920s, animation was used in the fields like an advertisement, education, and publicity. The Wan brothers (Wan Laiming, Wan Guchan, Wan Chaochen, Wan Dihuan, pioneers of Chinese cartoons) said in the article *A talk on Wan's cartoon*: "The cartoon is not only used as a comedy to be enjoyed by the ordinary people but as a weapon to promote science by educators." In the late 1920s when the Japanese stepped up their economic aggression and territorial aggression against China and instigated September 18 Incident, the January 28th Incident, Jinan Massacre, etc., the Chinese nation was in extreme misery. To save our nation, the pioneers of animation made use of the unique form to awake the people and call them to fight against the enemy and finally achieved the extraordinary publicity effect (Li Tie, 2017). At this point, the Marxist art theory, an important part of Marxism, has been accepted by progressive writers and artists to analyze and solve Chinese literary and artistic issues. At *The Speech at the*

Founding Conference of Chinese Literature and Art Association on November 22th in 1936, Chairman Mao Zedong put forward the idea of "having both literary and military skills", called for "organizing" to "create literature and art for the masses of the people, and in the first place for the workers and peasants", to "promote literature and art of the Soviet Union and develop the anti-Japanese-oriented literature and art" in the struggle for the independence and liberation of the Chinese nation (Mao Zedong, 1992). During the War of Resistance against Japan, cartoons were an important form of propaganda means of "national defense film".

Chairman Mao formally put forward "the localization of Marxism in China" on the Sixth Plenary Session of the Sixth Central Committee in October 1938. As an important component of Mao Zedong Thought and a result of the localization of Marxist theory of art, Mao Zedong Thought on literature and art marks the establishment of the systematic Chinese Marxist art theory. *The Talks at the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art* delivered by Chairman Mao in 1942 is an important sign that Chinese Marxist art theory has reached an advanced state, which has far-reaching significance in the localization of Marxist art theory in China (Song Jianlin, & Chen Feilong, 2011). As Chinese Marxist art develops further, the exploration of artistic style with Chinese characteristics and national features has begun in the Chinese film field.

In 1956, Chairman Mao proposed the basic policy of developing socialist art and scientific culture --"Let a hundred flowers bloom and a hundred schools of thought contend". Later this year, he pointed out in *Chairman Mao's Talk to Music Workers* that "the basic principles of art have their commonness, but the forms of expression should be diversified with national forms and styles." (Literary Works of Mao Zedong. (2002). ed. by Party Documents Research Office of the CPC Central Committee. Beijing: Central Party Literature Press, p. 146.) These literature policies and art theories gave artists plenty of room to create. In addition, the first color animation film in China *Why is the crow black* that was also the first Chinese animation film to be awarded internationally had been mistaken as a Soviet work by some judges of the Venice International Film Festival. It exposed the problem that the Chinese artists drew too much from others in the animation art creation. Gradually, the Chinese artists made it clear that absorbing foreign art mainly lay in the introduction of its technology and experience. And we must use our national style to express our social life so that it could adapt to the national aesthetics. Therefore, the cartoonist Te Wei, with the slogan of "creating our national style", directed *The Proud General* in 1956, pioneering the Chinese cartoons with the national style. Since then, creating the Chinese animation with our national style has been pursued conscience by all animation creators and the Chinese animation has begun its nationalization.

After 1960, under the guidance of "adjustment, consolidation, enrichment, improvement", the Chinese literature and art field worked to explore the law of art development, carry forward art democracy, and encourage artists to emancipate their minds and make innovations, as a result of which, the socialist literature and art undertakings boosted prosperously. During this period, with the sound development of Chinese animation creation and the creation

of excellent works, the nationalization of Chinese animation has reached a developed state. Many works including *The Monkey King*, ink animation *Baby Tadpoles Look for Their Mother* and *The Cowherd Plays the Flute*, and paper-cutting animation *The Golden Conch* have become the classics that cannot be surpassed up to now. With distinct national features and profound cultural deposits, all of them were acclaimed internationally. After the Third Plenary Session of the Eleventh Central Committee, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CPC) proposed to adhere to the "Four Basic Principles," and "the Double-Hundred Policy" and abandoned the slogan "Literature and art are subordinate to politics". Instead, the Central Committee put forward the general direction of literature and art in the new age-- "serve the people, serve the socialism". Since then, Chinese animation film has entered a new period of prosperity. Works like *NaZha Riots the Seas*, *Snipe -Clam Grapple*, *The Three Laughing Monks*, *The Nine-Colored Deer* made great breakthroughs in themes, contents, art forms, and production techniques. All of them not only followed the traditional art form but also absorbed the modern expression techniques from abroad. As a result, Chinese animation has taken a step further on the road of nationalization and has ushered in a new peak.

As the market economy developed, Chinese animation began to transform. Due to the one-sided pursuit of economic interests, excessive indifference to the cultural programs, and ignorance of the law of the development of art, Chinese animation deviated from the original road of nationalization and declined seriously. Since 2004, CPC and the government have endeavored to promote the growth of the animation industry. Through these efforts, animation has been reconsidered as one industry. In October 2011, the Sixth Plenary of the Seventeenth Central Committee reviewed and adopted *the Decision of the CPC Central Committee on Deepening the Reform of Cultural System and Promoting the Development and Prosperity of Socialist Culture*. Since the Eighteenth National Congress of the CPC, the Chinese President Xi Jinping has held the symposiums of literal and artwork and the symposiums of philosophy social science work and attended the national conference on ideological publicity work, pointing out the direction of the cultural construction in the new age. The Chinese animation film has been exploring aspects including art, technique, and narration, taking the essence of the traditional culture and discarding its dross. The domestic animation films like *Monkey King: Hero Is Back* in 2015 and *Big Fish & Begonia* in 2016 amazed viewers, which became an important turning point in the history of Chinese animation. In 2019, "being committed to guiding cultural construction with socialist core values" was put forward in the Fourth Plenary Session of the Nineteenth Central Committee. In 2020, the Communiqué of the Fifth Plenary Session of the Nineteen Central Committee said, "We should strengthen cultural confidence and be committed to guiding cultural construction with socialist core values and promote socialist cultural-ethical progress. It is our mission to hold high the banner of Marxism and socialism with Chinese characteristics, raise people's spirits, foster a new generation capable of shouldering the mission of national rejuvenation, develop a great socialist culture and present a multi-dimensional China to the world. Through these

efforts, we should try to promote the alignment of meeting people's cultural needs and enhancing people's spiritual strength to promote the construction of socialist cultural power." Under the guidance of these policies, measures, and theories, Chinese animation has entered a new stage of benign development and artists have deepened their exploration of its nationalization. The big success at the box office of domestic animation films like *Nezha: Birth of the Demon Child* and *White Snake* has proved that homemade animation films have become an unstoppable trend among the young.

Chapter 2 The Development Path of Chinese Animation Nationalization in the New Age

In the new era of socialism with Chinese characteristics, Chinese animation is confronted with new opportunities and challenges, and it has a hard, long journey to go before nationalization. For the long-term development, the Chinese animation should be based on China's reality and take effective ways to make the voice of China heard.

1. Guiding the Creation of Animation with the Socialist Core Values

The Creation of Animation should be consistent with the spirit of the times. David Berlinski stressed that art originates from the "universal spirit of the times" and the art is the "intuitive understanding" of the times." Consequently, only by promoting socialist core values of works and carrying forward the positive energy of works, can we establish correct, exact, and clear principles of artistic creation meeting the needs of the era (Li Wenning, 2021).

At present, China has achieved its First Centenary Goal and is forging ahead with its Second Centenary Goal. The Chinese animation should be aimed at building a cultural power and promoting positive energy guided by the socialist core values and based on the times. The creators should shoulder their mission, regard the socialist core value system as the basic value orientation of their creation, publicize the national spirit with patriotism as its core and the spirit of the times with reform and innovation as its core, and guide people to establish the correct outlook on the world, life, value, and ethics. These goals are conducive to cultivating a new socialist civilization, resisting cultural infiltration and erosion of hostile forces, and shaping our national image.

2. Follow the Law of the Development of Art, Adhere to the People-Center Principle

The development of art is not a complete inheritance of the previous art. Each era has its own social life and aesthetic concept, so we should follow the law of development of the art. The Artists in the new era should always adhere to the "people-centered" principle when creating, analyze the audience's needs and the development trend of art to meet people's new aesthetic needs so that domestic animation with cultural and artistic connotations, at the same time, can withstand the test of the market to achieve economic and social benefits.

3. Inherit and Carry Forward the Traditional Culture, Incorporate the Traditional Culture Element to Works Creatively

The past few decades have seen many classic animation films incorporate the traditional cultural elements, which sets a good example for us. For example, the appearance of Sun Wukong (the Monkey King) in *The Monkey King* (Figure 1, from the Internet) draws on types of facial makeup in operas and folk printmaking; its lines are borrowed from folk paintings and folk woodcuts with simple lines and a combination of square and round; the color is bright and decorative mainly dominated by red, yellow, and green; the film scenario design is inspired by ancient architecture and frescoes. The animation films like *The Golden Conch* and *The Boy on the Fish Bowl* draw on paper-cutting, the art of shadow play, and other art forms, injecting vitality into the flat, static art. And *Baby Tadpoles Look for Their Mother* (Figure 2, from the Internet) and *The Cowherd Plays the Flute* incorporate the Chinese Brush Painting. These works have become classics in the history of the development of Chinese animation nationalization and have been known in the world.



Figure 1: From the cartoon *The Monkey King*, from the Internet : https://www.sohu.com/a/252641854_79648



Figure 2: From the cartoon, *Baby Tadpoles Look for Their Mother*, from the Internet <https://www.163.com/dy/article/F0NJD37G05258K7A.html>

As the network information technology and computer technology advance continuously, the form of animation has changed and people's demand for animation has upgraded. In the past, the camera language of Chinese animation was relatively simple and the narrative rhythm was slow. Most plots were straightforward, ignoring the conflict, which was clearly unable to meet the public's

aesthetic needs. Therefore, while inheriting the traditional culture, we must transform and carry forward the excellent traditional culture creatively. In terms of content, we cannot simply rewrite the folklores and fairy tales, but extract the stories that accord with the aesthetics, concepts, and outlooks of the age. In addition, pay attention to the twists and turns of the plot, add comedian elements and deduct didactic words. As for the form, it should be subordinate to the content. Computer-based production can be combined with art forms such as painting, paper-cutting, shadow play, and ink painting to make up for its monotony and overcome its shortcomings. Showing off skills simply but neglecting the connotation to arouse sensory stimulation should be avoided. What's more, breakthroughs in the camera language and performance practices should be made like adding more contrasts and changes as well as controlling the rhythm of the film better. Through these efforts, we can make the Chinese animation novel, interesting and attractive, meeting the spiritual and cultural needs of the people of the new era.

1. Be Equipped with Perspective of Internationalization, Play Our Part in the National Image Shaping and Culture Going Global

Chinese animation cannot be made behind closed doors in its nationalization. Instead, it should keep up with the development of the art of animation and animation industry in the world. In the report of the 19th CPC National Congress, President Xi Jinping proposed to improve the ability to engage in international communication so as to tell China's stories well, make the voice of China heard, and present a true, multi-dimensional, and panoramic view of China to the world. For the development of Chinese animation art, it is necessary for us to have an international vision and bear the responsibility of nationalization and internationalization. Therefore, while inheriting the excellent traditional Chinese culture, we should based on the spirit and trend of the times, make efforts to keep the domestic animation in line with international standards with vision and creative ideas. President Xi has stressed repeatedly that to make the voice of China heard is not to convey our outlooks, ideas, and logic with our way of thinking, of expression, and of communication, but in easy-to-understand words and in a way that is acceptable to foreigners. Therefore, how to achieve cross-cultural communication in the international market and avoid cultural discounts to present the Chinese culture in a comprehensive way should be considered and solved in the nationalization of Chinese animation in the future.

2. Cultivate Well-Rounded Talents Professional in Animation

As a high knowledge-, intelligent-, creativity-intensive industry, animation has an urgent need for talents, so training excellent animators is the prerequisite for China to grow as a great animation power. As animation covers much knowledge of various subjects, the high-quality talents should be professional in animation, be passionate about art, be good at management, and be dedicated to the job. What's more, an excellent animator should apply the Marxist theory into practice well. He/ She is able to guide artistic

creation by Marxist art theory, and in turn, enriches the Marxist art theory by experience and advanced theory.

Conclusion

As we were hit by COVID-19 from the beginning of 2020, our cultural consumption demand grew and upgraded. Amid the cultural construction in the new age, domestic animation developed vigorously through deepening reform, improving quality and efficiency, promoting cooperation, and many other ways innovatively. According to the data released by China Film Administration, in 2020, China's film box office surpassed North America for the first time, ranking first in the world.

The development of Chinese animation will continue its nationalization instead of seizing the market share in the future. It will work to keep up with the times and lead the trend of times to play a greater role in shaping our national image and achieving the rejuvenation and prosperity of the Chinese culture.

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