

Applied Research on Animation in the Popularity of Marxism Take the Example of Animated Public Service Announcements of *Meng Wa* Series

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Abstract

As an artistic form welcomed and appreciated by people, the animation is able to bear the weight of rich content, value orientation, and humanistic feelings, which is favorable for the communication of Chinese culture and the spread of various of ideas. As early as the National Anti-Japanese War and the War of Liberation, Chinese pioneers of animation had used this unique artistic form to awake the Chinese people under oppression and call for defiance, and this approach had achieved extraordinary propaganda effects. With the rapid development of information network as well as science and technology, the animation industry features digitization, diversity, interactivity, popularity, effectiveness, and network communication. Animation has become one of the main media for people to acquire knowledge, exchange information, and enjoy more entertainment. Therefore, it is necessary and feasible to use animation to promote the popularization of Marxism. Given that, we hope to base ourselves on the analysis of *Meng Wa* Series to seek effective ways for the promotion of the popularization of Marxism using animation suitable for the new circumstances.

Keywords: animation; the popularization of Marxism; spread; *Meng Wa*

Introduction

The popularity of Marxism refers to the extent to which people understand and master Marxism and then make it an internalized psychic weapon used to transform both subjective and objective worlds (Li, 2018). In modern China, to vigorously advance the popularity of Marxism is to promote further the latest achievements of the sinicization of Marxism. The specific way to realize the goal is to provide people with explanation and instruction of Marxist theory in a people-centered manner, with plain words and welcome methods, aiming to have it better understood and accepted by more members of CPC and more Chinese people and thus transformed into people's ideas and values. Nowadays, the major challenge faced by the popularity of Marxism is its slow spread in comparison with the advancement of Marxist theory. The reason why this challenge exists is that Marxist theory is more like a concept, which makes it hard to massively spread because of its weak connection with people's real lives. As an artistic form welcomed and appreciated by people, the animation, however, is able to bear the weight of rich content, value orientation, and humanistic feelings, which is favorable for the communication of Chinese culture and the spread of various ideas. As early as the National Anti-Japanese War and the War of

Liberation, Chinese pioneers of animation had used this unique artistic form to awake the Chinese people under oppression and call for defiance, and this approach had achieved extraordinary propaganda effects. The cartoonist Wan Guchan once said, this artistic form vitalizes the artistic images designed by myself, and the interesting Chinese legends that have been passed down for thousands of years can be more magical and marvelous due to this artistic form. In addition, animation empowers cultural education and scientific history more vivid and accessible (Li, 2018). With the rapid development of information networks as well as science and technology, the animation industry features digitization, diversity, interactivity, popularity, effectiveness, and network communication. Animation has become one of the main media for people to acquire knowledge, exchange information, and enjoy more entertainment. Therefore, it is necessary and feasible to use animation to promote the popularization of Marxism.

Given that, animation can be described as a powerful tool for the popularization of Marxism to spread across the country. Animated PSAs of *Meng Wa* Series is a great success of the popularization of Marxism in the form of animation. The reason why the Publicity Department of the Communist Party of China and China Network Television cooperate and launch this Series is that it can promote Chinese socialist core values better. At the same time, it plays a

significant role in effectively passing the latest theoretical achievements of the sinicization of Marxism on massive people in China. Thanks to this animation Series, those theoretical achievements are no longer abstract, rational, or esoteric but vivid, concrete, and tangible. The telecast of this Series on CCTV struck a chord with many audiences whose responses were strong. Then the widespread of it on platforms such as television, mobile phone, and the network made Meng Wa a well-known cartoon star and meanwhile the representative of the Chinese dream.

Interpretation of the Content and Form of the Animated PSAs of Meng Wa Series

A. Bearer of Bountiful Content, Value Orientation, and Emotional Identity

The *Meng Wa* Series comes from popular stories and well-designed images, and it is a concentration of the basic philosophy of Chinese socialist core values. Eight parts make up this Series, the first of which is an overview, and the rests are respectively *The Country Is Home*, *Benevolence as Soul*, *Diligence Is Root*, *Thrift Nurtures Virtue*, *Integrity Makes Perfect*, *Filial Piety First*, and *Harmony Is Precious*. The seven different parts vividly explain the socialist core values in different ways and angles, and in turn, they work as a whole to express the common aspirations of the people with the cohesion of positive energy. In comparison with complex content, the easier one makes itself more understandable and memorable. Meanwhile, the content of this Series is derived from reality, expressing true feelings and showing the people's purest and most sincere understanding of the socialist core values, which are prone to be internalized to people's routine lifestyle and mode of behavior. Take the second part *The Country Is Home* as an example, and we cannot see any empty and useless lectures or deterrent lessons. All we can generalize is the simplest sentence "A country embraces millions of homes and homes only exist after the country does." It is plain but profoundly embodies the patriotic feelings of the Chinese people. This episode on one hand conveys the national spirit with patriotism as the core and the overall country-supreme concept, which motivates people to resolutely safeguard the interests of society and the country, thus enhancing people's sense of duty and responsibility to our country, society, and our nation; on the other hand, it also conveys the idea of the co-construction of the home and country, which means the country gives every home the strongest backing. In conclusion, that the country and homes are closely related and mutually dependent makes patriotism a sublimation of love for home. Then we take the last part *Harmony Is Precious* for example. Harmony is the basic philosophy of Chinese culture, and a metaphor is used to reflect the harmony between man and man, man and nature, as well as man and society in the new era with the harmonious coexistence of nature. Another episode *Diligence Is Root* is also meaningful. It tells stories of industrious people who live a happy life with their hard-working quality from three aspects: clothes, food, and transportation that are close to people's routine life. We believe that in the future, our Chinese people will realize the great Chinese dream with our diligent nature.

B. Fruit of Extraordinary Traditional Chinese Culture with

Innovative and Various Performances

As the blood of the nation and the unique spiritual identity, the excellent traditional Chinese culture has the power to stimulate the sense of identity and resonance of Chinese people no matter how far and fast time has gone. That is because, with the function of national cohesion, the traditional Chinese culture lays a solid foundation for promoting the popularization of Marxism. Thanks to the bonding effect of Chinese culture, the whole nation can unite as one rather than dispersing. So how does the traditional Chinese culture work? It is the basic spirit of it that can make a difference beyond the boundary of areas, classes, races, eras, etc. All Chinese people unite as a whole family to be inspired by this spirit to work for the common interests of the group (Zhou, 2013). Therefore, the aesthetic elements and intelligent power obtained from the excellent traditional Chinese culture, in combination with animation that people are delighted to hear and see, are prone to be accepted by people and are in conformity with people's aesthetic orientation. In general, the traditional Chinese culture can provide valuable guidance, and energize the popularization of Marxism.

The first traditional Chinese element the animated PSAs of *Meng Wa* Series borrows is the Chinese national animation style. According to different contents, it integrates various traditional Chinese art forms such as paper-cutting, painted sculptures, ink paintings, peasant paintings, and so on. With three-dimensional technical means, it presents a flat effect of two-dimensional surface and meets the aesthetic needs of the public with highly-decorated and beautiful scenes. In terms of our protagonist Meng Wa (Figure 1), she is derived from a painted clay doll by Tianjin clay figurine Zhang and completely fits traditional Chinese aesthetics. Her plump and ruddy face, arched brows, crescent eyes, and rounded figure make her charmingly naïve when she makes a bow with hands folded in front. As for her costume, it is a traditional Chinese costume dotted with flowers and is mainly red. All the features are symbols of Chinese lucky dolls. In addition to the figure, plenty of art forms are adopted in the animation scenes to act in cooperation with contents, thus achieving the perfect unity of contents and forms. For example, paper-cutting can be mostly seen in the overview part and in *Diligence Is Root*, and the artistic expression of peasant paintings runs through *Thrift Nurtures Virtue* and *Benevolence As Soul*, while in *Harmony Is Precious*, the ink paintings convey harmonious artistic conception beauty.



Figure 1: The Designed Character Image of Meng Wa

Source of the figure:

http://zhuanti.ycw.gov.cn/html/node_309489.htm

The second element is the implication, which enhances people's emotional identity. Meng Wa refers to the self-identity of every Chinese who is rustic, kind, industrious, and hard-working, to the identity of the Party's leadership, and to that of the Party's cause. Paper-cutting is one of the most important folk arts in China, and people enjoy sticking paper cuttings on doors, windows, and walls on festive days, especially on traditional festivals in order to embrace auspicious start, give blessings, and eliminate evil things. The adoption of this art form heralds good days for us to realize our Chinese dream. In the animation scenes, there are such auspicious emblems as plum blossoms and magpies which blesses people with "radiance with joy", and red lanterns and doorposts which bring auspice and good fortune (Figure 2). All the traditional elements have become schemas that are easily accepted by the public and abstract ideas have become symbols of figurative communication, resonating with the audiences.



Figure 2: An Image from the Overview Part of *Meng Wa* Series

Source of the figure:

http://www.china.com.cn/v/zhuanti/node_7218298.htm

Thirdly, in terms of narration, the use of ballads makes it easy to understand for people and concise in form as well. The overview of the *Meng Wa* Series has simple and coherent scenes, with ballads running through the entire narrative. Besides, the joyful music and trisyllabic verses give the work a strong sense of rhythm and order in both visual and auditory senses. In China, the ballad is folk music that belongs to the traditional Chinese culture, and it also carries the weight of children's entertainment and dreams of a better life. The ballad rhythms well accord with the level and oblique tones (a rhythm principle of Chinese culture), and is catchy, accessible, and easy to remember so that both elders and children can catch it. All the features above contribute to its spread measurably. In just fifty-eight words, the Series condenses the connotation of the socialist core values, combining complexity with simplicity and conveying principles in a ducky way.

Media Convergence to Speed Up the Spread of the Popularization of Marxism in All Respects

With the rapid development of information networks and science and technology, earth-shaking differences occur in people's way of life, cultural awareness, and the contents and forms of previous communication media. The revolution in the media sector has changed people's usual way of reading, movie-watching habits, and entertainment tools. Therefore, under the trend of integrated media development, the *Meng Wa* Series is an innovative visual expression to promote Chinese socialist core values and the great Chinese dream because of the joint efforts of traditional television media and new media networks in disseminating this work, which in every respect benefits the spread of the popularization of Marxism.

The animated PSAs of *Meng Wa* Series are widely disseminated through mobile phones, computers, television, radio, and other multi-terminal carriers, and have attracted great attention from all walks of life. *Meng Wa* Series has also been included in the "Illustration of Our Values" program aiming to promote and broadcast our animations. When the program starts, 34 satellite televisions across the country broadcast it at a frequency of 5-12 times a day, with an average monthly broadcasting time of more than 100 minutes. Even in the CCTV Online Spring Festival Gala, the image of Meng Wa achieves further popularization because of its debut on this Gala as well as the host's introduction and promotion.

The integrated development of media has expanded the coverage of audiences and the total number has increased, the result of which is that more and more people have accepted Marxism. Due to the reposts, sharing, people's interaction, and other functions of many carriers of media, the potential communication team of the popularization of Marxism has also expanded. At the same time, more and more channels that can play the animations provide the spread of Marxism with broader platforms, and the resulting diversified platforms offer Marxism opportunities to diversification, thus enriching the forms that the popularization of Marxism can apply to spread across the country.

How to Advance the Spread of the Popularization of Marxism with Animations under the New Circumstances

Under the new situation of accelerated development of media convergence, information is spreading explosively, bringing both opportunities and challenges to the popularization of Marxism. Modern netizens are younger than those of the old times and this trend is going to continue. Given that, they are prone to be deceived by external factors such as extremist information due to their unstable thoughts and irrational activities. Adding to those problems, they can be easily negatively affected by wrong thoughts at home and abroad. Coupled with the vast and complex information on the Internet, the influence of the popularization of Marxism will be diluted. There is a typical sentence said by British theorist Eagleton, "There is an interesting phenomenon today: people who have never read a single word of Marx's writings dare to laugh at him." Yes, the social environment is the foundation of the transmission of works. To promote the popularization of Marxism, we must deeply analyze and accurately know the social environment well (Yan, 2012). Under the new situation of highly developed media convergence, the environment for the

popularization of Marxism has changed a lot, so we need to update every method according to certain aspects so that we will find a more effective way to promote the popularization of Marxism by utilizing animations.

A. Principles to Apply

People who popularize Marxism and animation producers should do as follows. First of all, they must have a high degree of responsibility and always adhere to the use of Marxist theory to guide the practice of animation art. Secondly, the creation of animations should be based on the people-centered principle and hold fast to artistic integrity with value guiding. Thirdly, artistic principles run through the entire creation. The specific requirements are: the creation of animations should meet people's aesthetic needs; the spirit of images should conform with socialist core values; the content of stories needs to reflect the theme and spirit of the times, and visual aesthetics is also to be ensured. Only to have these requirements completed can the animation as a carrier of the spread of Marxism attract as many audiences as possible.

B. Spreading Fields of Animation

As an ideology, Marxist theory faces difficulties during its popularization and spread. The main challenges are as follows. First, the popularization of Marxism is equated with theoretical preaching. If we leave the theory itself behind, we will fail to highlight the stature, scientificity, and authority, but simply using the theory makes the process boring and less fascinating and leads to a bad effect. Second, particular stories being isolated from the real world are too much for the images and their nature, so people will have a strange and unfamiliar feeling of them. Third, too much pursuit of eye-catching stories will grasp the last instead of the essence, which is too superficial to play the role of inspiration, guidance, and leadership (Li, 2018). All the challenges require animation producers to think in multiple directions when they are creating work.

a. Vigorously develop new media animation to promote the popularization of Marxism on the basis of traditional media. New media animation mainly refers to an original limited animation form that is disseminated and displayed in the form of digital short films, mainly through video-sharing websites and mobile media platforms. New media animation has the characteristics of digitization, diversity, interactivity, popularity, effectiveness, and network dissemination (Li, 2013). Therefore, new media animation is often short and concise, with lively and diverse forms, marvelously powerful influence and speed of dissemination, and is a mighty tool for the popularization of Marxism.

b. In terms of the creation of animation itself, do a good job in three aspects: plot setting, character building, and artistic value delivering. As for the plot, the plot setting should be short and concise, the content should be easy for people to understand, and it should avoid empty preaching and sterile arguments. In addition, we must pay attention to the popularization and differentiation of multiple content systems. Popularization means that the content is in line with public interests, and can arouse the public's common experience and value recognition. As for differentiation, it focuses

on customization according to different content favorite by people of different ages, occupations, and cultural backgrounds. When it comes to character building, every figure should be close to reality, real life, and the people with a distinctive personality, representativeness, and should conform to the core socialist values. From the perspective of artistic value, it is necessary to deeply dig the essence of traditional culture, gather people's strength, strengthen people's cultural self-confidence, and carry forward the Chinese spirit to the future.

c. Create and publicize hit products of animation in all aspects. The most fundamental form of creating hit products of animation is serialization, which stands for brand and fans effect. Fandom is relatively stable and loyal to their beloved products, and the cultural activities of fans who hold the nature of media are of significance to "reproduce" and "re-promote" those products. Therefore, fans can be helpful for producers to achieve the zero-cost promotion of the brand and extension of content. The promotion of *Meng Wa* is a good example. As a huge success in the animated PSAs field, the *Meng Wa* Series has made its protagonist Meng Wa a wildly known star. The upgraded 3D product of Meng Wa then comes out. In 2015, the lunar Chinese New Year of the Sheep, Meng Wa was invited to serve as a virtual host of the online Spring Festival Gala broadcasting to the world. In 2019, the *Meng Wa* (cartoon version) was released. In this cartoon, instead of the trisyllabic verses, all we can see are various kinds of stories, since the words representing the socialist core values are too abstract for children to understand. For example, the core philosophy of the Double Ninth Festival part is filial piety; the spirit of Heirloom part is righteousness; the excellence of the Procrastination part is being responsible and full of duty; the virtue of Class Cadres part is self-discipline, and so on. Through vivid stories, the cartoon subtly teaches children the connotation of the core socialist values and also promotes the popularization of Marxism among the infant and young crowds.

Conclusion

In conclusion, sometimes the mandatory promotion of the popularization of Marxism will gain the opposite effect. Instead, the artistic form of animation has the ability to exert a subtle influence on the advancement of the promotion. Thanks to the rapid development of information networks as well as science and technology, and the continuously accelerated process of media convergence, the environment for the popularization of Marxism is also changing. Meanwhile, it is important for people who work for the popularization of Marxism to find an adaptive way to accommodate the changing environment and enhance the great progress into a new and high level.

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