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THE COLLISION OF TRADITION AND MODERNITY: INTERPRETING THE CULTURAL CHARACTERISTICS OF CHINESE ANIMATED PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENTS

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ABSTRACT

The contemporary presentation and interpretation of traditional culture is an issue that requires continuous exploration and practice. This paper explores the mingling and collision of tradition and modernity in Chinese animated Public Service Announcements (PSAs), as well as the relationship between traditional culture's values and the problems modern society faces. This study employs the expression of traditional Chinese elements in contemporary animated PSAs through content analysis, focusing on animation's unique communicative features and contemporary relevance. These advertisements break the traditional propaganda mode to a certain extent, revealing the inheritance, transformation, and reproduction of traditional culture in modern society. Therefore, this paper explores both the presentation and cultural characteristics of traditional Chinese elements in contemporary animated PSAs, fights against cultural impact and expresses cultural confidence through disseminating traditional values, and finally summarises the use of visual style, storyline, and sound effects in animated PSAs.

1. Introduction

With the advance of economic globalization, modernization has become a worldwide trend and is current. At the same time, the status of traditional culture in daily life is gradually being replaced by new types of culture, and the transmission of traditional culture may face difficulties,

leading to the homogenization of culture. Accordingly, people may lose their sense of identity with their own cultures and identities, causing confusion, a sense of loss of identity, and affecting society's moral concepts and values. Furthermore, all 'modern' cultures of humankind have sprouted, nurtured, and emerged from the mother of traditions and have never fallen from the sky. The key to modernity lies in the critical inheritance of traditions (Su & Liu, 2005). Therefore, reforming and opening significantly impacted China's economic construction and was an excellent test of culture and art. Correspondingly, the development of diversified culture has inspired the advertising industry and academia to pay attention to Chinese traditional culture. Integrating traditional culture and modern digital art can, to a certain extent, realize the renewal of the form of traditional culture, enrich the content of digital art, and promote the new vitality of traditional culture (Yang, 2024). Animation is one of the common presentation forms of digital art, catering to modern society's high efficiency and multi-dimensional aesthetic demand. However, the development of the contemporary Chinese animation industry cannot be separated from supporting traditional Chinese culture in content and form. Moreover, the emergence of excellent animated films will become a powerful means of international dissemination of Chinese culture (Liu & Liu, 2024).

The performance of animated Public Service Announcements (PSAs) differs from other forms of PSAs in that they can express rational content through emotional forms, making the content more easily understood and accepted by the audience. Thus, this greatly influences people's social cognition, value orientation, behavioral standards, and cultural concepts. On that note, animated PSAs can convey information from the government or society and public welfare groups, which can be released to the public groups with both communication function and social responsibility. It is also not bound by the actual scene and can be thought through the subjective consciousness of dispersion. In addition, it is characterized by technology, media, and mass participation, demonstrating its potential to disseminate culture with Chinese characteristics and embody the spirit and ideas of Chinese characteristics (He, 2018). The design of animated PSAs is not a single didactic setting, not to mention the imposition of a concept and norms. However, it is a communication constructed in inheritance and innovation. This is to ensure that the audience, in the process of enjoying animated PSAs, obtains a pleasant aesthetic interest and then accepts, understands, and contemplates these connotations with traditional culture and national spirit. This has a positive significance on the innovation and inheritance of culture, the construction of spiritual civilization, and the development of society.

Developing Chinese animated PSAs is inseparable from China's unique cultural background. Traditional Chinese culture emphasizes the concepts of 'people-oriented' and 'harmonious coexistence,' which align with the value orientation of PSAs, providing a profound cultural foundation for PSAs (Liu & Lu, 2023). At the same time, the rapid development and changes in Chinese society also provide rich creative materials and expression space for PSAs. In line with this, traditional Chinese culture is an essential part of Chinese elements, and the expression of Chinese elements in Chinese animated PSAs can reflect their cultural characteristics in various ways. In 2006, the concept of 'Chinese elements' was first proposed in the advertising industry (Wang, 2017). For the sake of discourse, we shall refer to this idea as Chinese elements (CEs). CEs are an abstract concept with a wide range of content, which is a representative element and a combination of traditional Chinese symbols and spirits. This highlights the excellent traditional Chinese culture and expresses the Chinese people's individuality and stylistic characteristics. CEs as the main visual elements or the main spiritual appeal in advertising is an easily recognizable form of advertising with national emotions (Wang, 2017). As an integral part of advertising, PSAs need to move people with emotions due to the special nature of their conceptual transmission. Thus, integrating CEs into PSAs will resonate with the audience and better achieve the purpose of communication (Zhao, 2020). Additionally, incorporating CEs into the design of PSAs makes the advertisements easier to understand and recognize, enhancing national self-confidence and cultural identity (Zhang et al., 2024). Externally, it makes the advert more Chinese and Asian and differentiated (Qin, 2013). Note

that CEs are rich in artistic symbolism and can be used to express specific connotations and meanings in PSAs. It demonstrates national culture, makes it easier for the audience to resonate with them, and increases the publicity effect of PSAs.

The cultural background of Chinese animated PSAs has a long history and is deeply influenced by traditional Chinese culture and modern social changes. As the combination of CEs and animated PSAs becomes closer and closer, the use of CEs in animated PSAs is becoming increasingly widespread. Thus, this paper takes some representative animated PSAs in recent years as examples to discuss how animated PSAs reflect the problems and challenges of modern society and what cultural connotations, values, and meanings are embedded in them. It explores how CEs can be utilized in animated PSAs in a way that collides and integrates the traditional and the modern to explore their design methods further. Although the form of animated PSAs reflects the unique aesthetic interests of traditional Chinese culture and has a profound cultural inheritance, it also restricts its creation with different positive and negative influences. Through an in-depth analysis of the advantages and shortcomings of animated PSAs, it has become a challenge worth thinking about how to preserve, develop, and innovate them, as well as transform traditional culture into an art that modern people can accept and appreciate.

2. Literature Review

Modern society's rapid development and diversification have brought new values, and traditional culture needs to be inherited and reinterpreted under such impact. People in China often feel the impact and collision brought by different cultural values, which influence and change the way of life and thinking of the Chinese people. Metaphorically, culture-specific nature puts the inheritance and development of Chinese culture at an impasse (Zhu, 2017). In animation, elements of traditional culture are given new meanings and interpretations to suit the needs and aesthetics of modern audiences. With the changing aesthetic demands of the audience, animation creators need to grasp the contemporary social and cultural psychology and strengthen the attractiveness of the storyline and art form. At present, the main problem of Chinese animation lies in the lack of vividness in storytelling. Most of the works are like the 'reproduction' of traditional cultural resources, with insufficient adaptation and originality (Chen et al., 2021).

Contemporary Chinese animation is a successful attempt at the development of Chinese animation using characters from traditional literature as protagonists, creating and imagining many different styles and genres. This also includes adapting to the aesthetics of contemporary audiences and combining excellent production with traditional Chinese cultural elements (Zhang & Xi, 2021). Although some animation creators have borrowed traditional cultural elements for their animation creations, the simple 'fetishism' style of borrowing lacks in-depth research and analysis of the historical origins of national cultural elements. Consequently, it cannot reflect the cultural taste, cultural value, and aesthetic level of animation as a cultural commodity, which is inevitably empty and without vitality. It will be empty and lifeless.

2.1 The Role of Animated PSAs

PSAs are advertising tools aimed at solving social problems and promoting the harmonious development of society. Through disseminating information beneficial to society's progress and promoting a green, healthy, and positive lifestyle, PSAs play a vital role in constructing spiritual civilization. Notably, PSAs are advertisements sponsored by government agencies or other organizations to promote causes and activities generally considered beneficial to society. In turn, PSA acts as a free advertising service that aims to change public attitudes and behaviors by raising awareness of issues of public interest. Furthermore, PSA loads social functions and plays an essential role in national image marketing. Building on this, systematic and distinctive social PSA helps to build national soft power, enhance national image and social influence, set up an in-depth image of national citizenship and harmonious society, and transmit positive social energy. In other words,

it is a social marketing communication technique consisting of short, informative advertisements to raise public awareness and influence behavioral change. Bai (2022) emphasized that traditional CEs can significantly enhance the quality of PSAs by highlighting China's cultural values and aesthetic characteristics. This innovative application helps convey messages capable of resonating globally. Based on the above analysis of the status of research on Chinese traditional culture in PSAs, it is evident that the application of traditional culture in CEs in advertisements is becoming more and more valuable.

Both CEs and PSAs are complementary and inseparable. Hence, applying CEs in animated PSAs can reflect the collision of values and concepts of traditional culture in contemporary society. Through the reinterpretation and reproduction of traditional values, animated PSAs can trigger viewers to consider the significance and value of these values in modern society, thus achieving the purpose of guiding viewers to change their behaviors and concepts. Moreover, using Chinese element symbols in creating PSAs is conducive to resonating with the audience and better realizing the communication effect. Zhang (2007) suggested how to construct a new relationship between CEs and the creative expression of advertisements: how to bring CEs into line with modern elements, the return of CEs, and how to selectively apply CEs in advertisements with different industry characteristics. Meanwhile, Chen (2007) analysed and compared the advertisement contents of specific cases, specifying that for Chinese local advertisements to create advertisements with local characteristics, they must use the excellent cultural elements of China's own nation. Similarly, Yang (2013) explained the significance of CEs and the concept of openness in advertising and included some specific cases of creative expression. The combination of PSAs with CEs came later than the combination of CEs with other types of advertisements, but the effect produced is brilliant. As a crucial form of inculcating mainstream social values, PSAs should constantly realize the process of innovation in the form of popularity, and the animation form of contemporary PSAs undoubtedly brings new enlightenment to public service propaganda.

With the rapid development of networks and science and technology, digital technology and the continuous development of society are driven to inject animation and PSA with new vitality beyond the traditional to ensure that animation and PSA can be smoothly combined, and thus, animated PSA comes into being. Regarding animated PSA design, related research has demonstrated a multi-perspective and disciplinary analysis trend, and the research issues and perspectives are more subtle and specific. For example, Yun and Kim (2005) explored the essential role of animated PSAs in aesthetic acceptance, and compared with traditional PSAs, animated PSAs have their unique expressive language, reflecting their unique regularity, universal applicability, and richer expression. On the other hand, from its advantages of low-cost development, convenient production, and intense creativity, animated PSAs are more conducive to creating and disseminating content (He, 2018). Xu and Qi (2020) analyzed the more profound significance and connotation of animated PSAs by studying animation in PSAs. They endowed animated PSAs with a new vitality and visual infectiousness to help the audience deeply understand the core values and themes conveyed. Liu (2014) conducted a systematic and detailed study on the development of animated PSAs, elaborated on the history of animated PSAs, clearly analyzed the whole development of the current form, and put forward several characteristics of animated PSAs. In addition, the author analyzed the shortcomings and obstacles in developing animated PSAs and proposed constructive opinions on these shortcomings. The Chinese element is a unique abstract element that can profoundly represent and recognize China, and it has a unique and innovative significance in animated PSAs.

2.2 The Reproduction of Traditional Culture in Contemporary Animation and PSAs

Reviewing the development of Chinese animation PSAs, the dissemination of local cultural connotations is generally not high, and the history of the development of Chinese PSAs combined with CEs of traditional culture is relatively short. This leads to the practical effect of the specific use of CEs in PSAs not being apparent. At the present stage, most research focuses on animation and

PSAs, and there is still much room for exploration in the theoretical research on the cultural interpretation of traditional Chinese culture in contemporary animation PSAs. Early animated short films such as *The Monkey King* (1961) were not confined to the production framework of the time in the choice of theme and had a robust national style and aesthetic characteristics. In addition, this kind of animation contains national spiritual and cultural connotations, such as China's unique philosophical outlook, values, and morals. However, some traditional animation works are overloaded with visual symbols of CEs to cater to the international market. Nevertheless, they are not rooted in the local cultural soil and do not fully express the spiritual core of Chinese culture, which leads to a one-sided perception of Chinese culture by both domestic and foreign audiences (Xia & Xu, 2021).

Since the new century, China has been facing many old problems and new situations during the period of social transformation. PSAs, which involve various dimensions of citizens' social life and spiritual civilization, have played the role of 'cavalry' during this period (Yuan, 2015). Correspondingly, animated PSAs are no longer a new phenomenon. In different periods of communication media, various communication media will present different forms due to their characteristics. Prior to the emergence of electronic communication media in China, the primary expression of animated advertisements was cartoons. Its most excellent characteristic is 'metaphorical,' and the use of animation in print media takes advantage of its ironic and humorous nature to create a profound and transcendent realm, where audiences will have their understanding after watching the advertisements and thus be able to create a long-lasting feeling of reminiscence (An, 2021). Although it can be carried through newspapers, magazines, outdoor advertising boards, and other carriers, it is easy to formalize, and its appeal to the public is relatively weak. In recent years, communication channels have been expanded, the flexible art of animation has been combined with the rapidly developing new media, and animation is easy to integrate with various carriers seamlessly. Consequently, animation has also entered PSAs with a new attitude. Under the leadership and promotion of animation and cultural creative industries worldwide, animation PSAs increasingly highlight their unique charm. Chinese PSAs focus on drawing on the essence of traditional culture, using ink, paper-cutting, clay sculpture, and other art forms to present a more three-dimensional presentation of the excellent traditional virtues of the Chinese nation and the themes of the times in the new era (Yuan, 2015). Therefore, this paper will analyze some representative animated PSAs regarding their artistic creation and cultural dissemination purposes, with 'socialist core values' as the connotation and traditional CEs as the skeleton.

3. Methodology

This paper adopts the methods of literature research and content analysis to observe and interpret animation and PSAs from a creative perspective, exploring the use and reproduction of traditional Chinese culture in contemporary animated PSAs. In contrast, CEs are the concrete embodiment and extension of traditional culture in real life. When classifying CEs at the early stage of the research, through studying a substantial number of literatures, the relevant concepts in this literature are refined, summarised, and classified through relevant animation cases. This paper selects representative Chinese animated PSAs between 2015 and 2025 as analysis samples, combining the dimensions of visual style, storyline, and music performance to conduct research, highlighting their cultural characteristics and communication strategies, as provided in Table 1. They are used as the theoretical background and basis of this paper to finally obtain the specific application and cultural expression of CEs in animation PSAs. When researching and analysing the relevant literature, to ensure the scientificity of the research, we have increased the breadth, width, and depth of the scope of references and selected the valuable, relevant information required in this paper from many aspects. This aims to comprehensively grasp the relationship between traditional Chinese culture and modern society. At the same time, drawing on the experience of previous studies, we will broaden our research ideas, further grasp the connotation and value of

CEs, reflect the value of CEs in animated PSAs or increase the amount of use of CEs, ensure that animated PSAs have Chinese uniqueness, ensure the lasting value of animated PSAs, and ensure the embodiment of the value of CEs.

Table 1

Classification of CEs in animation

Categorisation	Element Type	Specific examples
Visual Style	Ink and Wash Style	<i>Protecting Cultural Relics</i> (2021)
	Paper-cutting Style	<i>Seventy Years of Endeavour, Reaching the Chinese Dream Together</i> (2019)
	Clay Sculpture	<i>Meng wa</i> (2015)
Character Design	Mythological Prototype	e.g., Nezha, the Monkey King <i>National Security: Walking with You</i> (2024)
	Weapons and Equipment	e.g., Wind and Fire Wheels, Fire Pointed Guns, Golden Cudgels <i>National Security: Walking with You</i> (2024)
Storyline	Historical Tales	<i>The Long Song of the Yue Girl</i> (2020)
	Traditional Thought	e.g., Harmony between man and nature <i>The Confession of a Plastic Bag</i> (2023)
Musical Effects	Nursery Rhymes	<i>Meng wa</i> (2015)
	Chinese opera	<i>The Long Song of the Yue Girl</i> (2020)

CEs are a concept that has been introduced previously in the academic world. In 2004, the concept was first introduced in the advertising industry and emphasized the close relationship between CEs and advertising creativity. However, at that time, CEs were only viewed from a cultural perspective, and some works and papers related to CEs appeared later. Chen (2010) discussed the relationship between CEs and advertising creativity, branding, PSA, advertising design, and other fields. This includes as well as the creative path of CEs in advertising creativity, explaining in detail the specific use of CEs in advertising and quickly achieving results. Nonetheless, local Chinese enterprises have made relatively little use of CEs and have not understood and utilized the value of CEs in depth. This paper analyses some animated PSAs with national spirit and cultural connotations. It analyses their related thematic contents to understand the CEs in animated PSAs more accurately and clearly. Through visual style, storyline, and musical effect, the presentation of animated PSAs is analyzed in detail, highlighting the unique atmosphere of traditional Chinese culture. It also reflects the cultural characteristics of the nationalization of elements and animation of forms to explore the impact of modern society on traditional culture.

4. Traditional Cultural Expressions in Animated PSAs

4.1 Visual style

Contemporary animated PSAs use the visual style of traditional Chinese culture to demonstrate the charm and values of traditional Chinese culture through images, colors, lines, characters, and other aspects of the performance. In line with this, it is also combined with modern society, presenting a unique aesthetic effect and cultural cognition. Moreover, CEs also influence animation techniques, which have been inherited and developed in contemporary animated PSAs, offering contemporary animated PSAs a unique artistic charm and expression.

Ink and wash, or ink painting, is a form of expression of Chinese painting, generally referring to paintings made with water and ink (Yu, 2022). The most peculiar and magical thing about it is the spiritual realm of its art. The composition of Chinese painting is flexible, not bound by the limitations of time and space, and can present all kinds of time and space in a picture, obtaining special

aesthetic feelings. The ink painting technique breaks the usual 'single line painting' form of animation lines and adds poetic expression effects to the composition of static images or the grouping of shots (Sun, 2021), such as leaving white space and writing. Early Chinese animation creators introduced ink and wash elements into their practice. Since then, ink and wash animation has established a worldwide reputation as the 'Chinese School of Animation,' and the aesthetic traditions accumulated in the creation of films have been used to this day. The two are inextricably linked. Accordingly, ink painting conveys the advertisement's message to the audience and presents the spirit hidden in the advertisement to the audience. It can increase the advertisement's cultural heritage and enhance the audience's sense of identification with traditional culture to ensure that they can correctly understand the creator's intention. Li (2012) discussed and analysed, through specific cases, how to better integrate ink animation with TV commercials and maximize their artistic value. The author also mentioned that the development of modern ink animation with traditional CEs will play a positive role in promoting the significant development and prosperity of socialist culture and in strengthening China's soft power. In the animated PSA *Protecting Guard Cultural Relics*, the scene adopts the freehand style of traditional Chinese ink painting (Figure 1), such as ink rendering, ink gradient, and other techniques. This makes the picture present a classical and profound artistic effect. The lines of the outer contours use the outlining techniques of ink painting, such as the lightness of the brush and the depth of the ink used to express the form and texture of the objects. *Guard Cultural Relics* captures small moments in a grand historical context, deconstructs serious themes in a light-hearted way, and endeavours to bring the restoration of cultural relics that carry the spirit of craftsmanship closer to our daily lives. However, with the rapid development of the culture industry in modern society, traditional culture faces the challenges of commercialization and marketization. Some traditional cultural elements have been adapted and distorted to meet market demands, which may lead to the superficiality and commercialization of traditional culture.

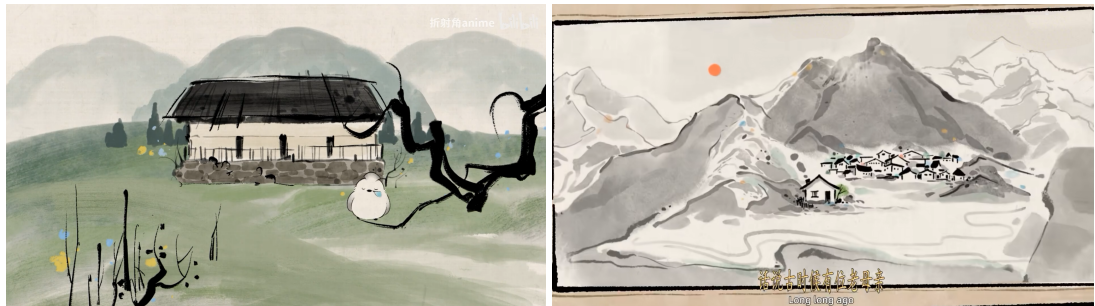


Figure 1. The stills of the utilization of ink painting in the animated PSA *Guard Cultural Relics*

Chinese paper cutting is a traditional folk art that is significant in Chinese culture. Skilled artisans use scissors or knives to cut shapes, symbols, and patterns from a sheet of paper, carefully cutting into various designs and patterns. The most common forms of paper cuttings are window flowers and ceremonial flowers, to name a few. The colors are bright and bright, with solid contrast, expressing the Chinese people's prayers for the future and gratitude for a better life. Visually, paper-cutting offers people a sense of transparency, which belongs to the art of hollowing out, and is a good material for the creative design of advertisements. Zhang's (2023) study indicated that the artistic form and emotional connotation of paper-cutting culture can increase the content and emotional connotation of advertising creativity. It also enhances the artistic infectious force of advertisements and the effect of product promotion and disseminates enthusiastic visual feelings to the audience to ensure that the audience can feel the thoughts and emotions expressed in the advertisements through the colors under the solid visual impact. Paper-cutting culture is a treasure of traditional culture, and its design and use in advertising creativity have excellent potential. The paper-cutting

style usually uses modern digital animation production technology, such as computer animation and 2D animation, and combines traditional paper-cutting art elements. Through digital technology, the lines and patterns of the paper-cutting style can be expressed more flexibly, making the picture more vivid and expressive. Yu (2021) explored and analysed the current situation of paper-cutting applications in advertisement design, discussed its significance in advertisement design, highlighted the artistic characteristics of paper-cutting in advertisement design, and analysed some of the application practice works. Chinese paper-cutting animation presents strong regional characteristics and characteristics of the times. Its formation and development reflect the change of art combined with technology, the adaptation to real life, the development of national art and culture, as well as the inevitability of the historical choice (Wang & Sun, 2023). From the picture of the animated PSA *Seventy Years of Endeavour, Reaching the Chinese Dream Together* (Figure 2), it can be observed that the colors are designed using solid color blocks in the art of paper-cutting, which are bright and vivid, making the picture more visually impactful and attractive. The background and character patterns are simple and rhythmic. It reflects the unique beauty of paper-cutting, and the visual symbols of traditional culture are expressed visually infectious, blending modern and traditional elements in the visual effect, making the picture more layered and richer. Additionally, modern elements, such as modern architecture and fashionable clothes, are integrated into the scene and character design, making the picture more contemporary and modern. However, the expression of paper-cut animation is relatively fixed. It is challenging to demonstrate complex movements and details, which may lead to limited expression and the dissemination effect not being as good as other animation forms with more visual impact.



Figure 2. The stills of the utilization of paper-cutting in the animated PSA *Seventy Years of Endeavour Reaching the Chinese Dream Together*

4.2 Character Design

The clay sculpture is one of the traditional representatives of Chinese image, which is shaped into thousands of images with clay, mainly animals and figures, both plain and colored. 'Clay Figurine Zhang' clay sculpture represents ancient Chinese folk traditional handmade art, works focusing on the shape of the carving, modeling appropriate exaggeration, sophisticated performance techniques, pure and simple colors, deep. In foreign countries, claymation has been explored early and, nowadays, is developing at a high speed in the field of film and television. Meanwhile, in China, it went from being a static artwork on the street for people to appreciate to moving to the screen to make a fantastic, animated film and television. It has reached a broader stage in realizing its value (Gao, 2015). Claymation focuses on the movability and expressiveness of the model. It expresses the character's emotions and actions through the flexible model. This way of expression also influences the production method of claymation to a certain extent, making it pay more attention to the plasticity and expressiveness of the model. Claymation-style animation PSAs usually use traditional claymation production techniques to produce characters and props. They usually integrate traditional cultural elements, such as traditional festivals and customs, when expressing cultural connotations. However, at the same time, they will also be reinterpreted and expressed through modern perspectives to ensure that the works align with modern society's expression and aesthetic needs. Clay sculpture can learn from the successful experience of claymation when looking for its own positioning and market demand and absorb the essence of it

to provide a reference for its development. The main character of the animated PSA, Meng wa, is created from a clay sculpture by Mudman Zhang (Figure 3), with a Chinese red dress, rounded body, and face. Regardless of whether it is from a pattern or between the eyebrows, it expresses traditional culture very well, figuratively, vividly, and closer to people's lives. The clay characters in the animation retain the texture and handmade traces of traditional clay sculpture. In addition, modern technology is used to increase the smoothness and expressiveness of the animation. Gao (2015), through understanding the creation process of clay figurines and the connotation of PSAs, analyzing the innovative application of clay sculpture in the era of modern digital technology, conducted a case study on the animated PSA Meng wa and exploring the feasibility of using clay sculpture in PSAs. It can be observed that the exploration of clay sculpture for the new field of PSAs is successful. Animated PSA Meng wa is specially created and launched by the Propaganda Bureau of the Central Propaganda Department and China Network Television, fused with other art forms. It is dominated by the Chinese style image as well as the expression of traditional Chinese cultural symbols such as ink painting, paper-cutting, and clay sculpture, which is more innovative and enriching for the CEs in the design, dissemination, and acceptance connotation. As the acceptance of such animation advertisements is affected by personal preferences and viewing habits, the degree of acceptance varies among viewers.



Figure 3. The stills of the utilization of clay sculpture in the animated PSA Meng wa

Chinese mythology has a long history and is integral to Chinese culture. Rich and imaginative mythological stories have provided constant creative inspiration for many animations works (Guo, 2024). Through bold imagination and adaptation, animation creators bring mythological characters to life on the screen. In the early days, China's mythological animation works focused on constructing and disseminating the excellent traditional Chinese culture, emphasizing the spirit of collectivism in the theme and demonstrating programmatic characteristics in the presentation method with relatively flat characterization (Liu & Yang, 2021). Nowadays, animation creators are generally concerned about the modern transformation of mythological resources and how balancing realistic concern and traditional culture in the remodelling of characters has become an important direction of creation (Guo, 2024). In the animated PSA for the *National Security: Walking with You* campaign, the two representative mythological figures of Qitian Da Sheng and Ne Zha, with their deep cultural heritage and distinctive image characteristics, have become a crucial vehicle for spreading the concept of national security. In the animated PSA for 'National Security: Walking with You,' the ingenious use of the mythical characters of Qitian Da Sheng and Nezha, as well as CEs such as weaponry, enhance the visual appeal and cultural impact of the adverts as well as make them both culturally meaningful and educational. By combining traditional myths with modern public welfare themes and conveying the concept of national security with images and elements familiar to viewers, the advertisement enhances the communication effect and gives traditional culture a new vitality in the new era. It allows viewers to appreciate the wonderful animation and, at the same time, deeply realize the importance of safeguarding national security and the responsibility that everyone should bear.



Figure 4. The stills of the utilization of clay sculpture in the animated PSA *Even Nezha Has to Go Through Security Checks*

4.3 Storyline and musical effects

A vivid and exciting storyline can attract the audience's attention and help establish an emotional connection between the audience and the content of the advertisement. Animated PSAs can highlight traditional culture's charm and values through a vivid and exciting storyline, make it easier for viewers to understand and accept the messages conveyed in the advertisement, and stimulate their interest in and recognition of traditional culture. Additionally, sound effects are also crucial in animated PSAs. Through suitable background music, dubbing, and sound effects, a sound environment in line with the traditional cultural atmosphere can be created to enhance the advertisement's artistic sense and cultural connotation. Moreover, it can arouse the audience's emotional resonance and engage them more in the advertisement content.

The creation of Chinese animated PSAs has entered a new stage. When creating an advertisement, it is necessary first to clarify the content and theme, reveal the core idea with the help of hints and other techniques, use psychology to let the audience perceive the central idea, and simultaneously ensure that the content is accurate and credible. The plot design should be novel and unique, focusing on the expression of ideas to stimulate the spirit of innovation and enhance the storytelling and aesthetic value of the advert (Li & Liu, 2022). Reviewing the development history of China's PSAs, we can view that in various periods, thematic PSAs produced combined with special hot social issues are endless, and they all have a substantial stage or timeliness. Regardless of which theme demands or which period of PSAs, animated PSAs are an important part of them. A few years ago, in response to promoting the central theme of society and the realization of the 'Chinese Dream,' the animated PSA *Meng wa* could be observed everywhere on the streets, inside and outside the screen. Although the overall storyline of *Meng wa* is complete, the story is simple, has few transitions, does not require deep thinking, can only fulfil the basic narrative function, and cannot extend the absence of the role of indoctrination. In contrast, *The Long Song of the Yue Girl* attracts attention with its unique creativity and profound cultural heritage. Inspired by the early experience of Mr. Yin Guifang, the 'Emperor of Yueju Opera,' it incorporates the classics of Yueju Opera, selects real stories in the development of Yueju Opera, and presents scenes full of historical weight. It metaphorically refers to the difficulty of traditional cultural inheritance and calls for people to pay attention to and protect traditional culture. The details of the film strictly follow the historical truth, allowing the audience to deeply understand the significance of protecting traditional culture. *The Confession of a Plastic Ba* explores environmental protection from a unique perspective, using the idea of 'unity of heaven and man' and 'the law of nature' to convey the story of the harm to the environment from the production of the plastic bag to its disposal. This triggers the audience's reflection on environmental protection and makes the concept of environmental protection more culturally embedded and convincing. This story is closer to people's lives and is more likely to resonate with viewers' emotions (Xia & Xu, 2021).

Therefore, the theme selection of contemporary animated PSAs should have traditional cultural elements and themes of modern social concerns. The extent to which traditional culture can be accepted and loved by contemporary people depends on whether it can satisfy people's spiritual needs and emotional interests.

Animated PSAs are the expression of the storyline and contain concerns and thoughts about social issues, as well as guidance and advocacy of public behavior. Music plays a significant role in animated PSAs, which can enhance the realism and dramatic effect of the picture and help the audience better understand and feel the storyline. By choosing the right music, animation PSAs can make the animation more vivid and exciting and, at the same time, can convey deeper emotions and meanings. For example, simple nursery rhymes with various contents and the Yueju Opera singing with a long rhythm can create a strong Chinese flavor for the PSAs. The theme of the animated PSA *Meng wa* is also expressed in the form of catchy nursery rhymes, whose cheerful background music and 'three words' are easy to understand and focus on rhyme and meter. This quickly captures the audience's sensitivity to childhood memories and creates a sense of long-forgotten affinity to ensure that they excitedly and obediently follow the chanting of the familiar cultural form of the 'Chinese dream.' This offers people a sense of affinity and the psychological impulse to 'work hard together' (Mao, 2016). The music of Yueju Opera, which is used in *The Long Song of the Yue Girl*, vividly demonstrates the cultural features of the Jiangnan region through its unique singing, instruments, and melodies. The singing of the Yueju Opera often carries the flavor of the Jiangnan dialect, and this unique language style makes the music closer to the local cultural characteristics. However, the understanding and acceptance of nursery rhymes and operas vary among audiences from different regions and cultural backgrounds. This may lead to some audiences not being able to understand the cultural connotations of the advertisements, and over-reliance on traditional music forms may lead to a lack of innovation in the advertisements, which makes it challenging to attract the audience's attention and resonate with them.

5. Conclusion

In the current context of globalization, the competition in the international animation market is getting increasingly intense, which is a competition on the economic level and a critical step in exporting a country's culture and establishing national cultural confidence. Notably, modernization requires a cultural form that is not just an extension of a single cultural form but a modernized conceptual system with a broad vision that combines the best of the past, present, and future (Zhang, 2008). As a crucial form of animation communication, animated PSAs play a unique role in cultural expression and value guidance. The core of animated PSAs lies in promoting theoretical research through humanistic care and cultural self-confidence, as well as the in-depth exploration of the innovative expression of 'traditional Chinese culture' in animated PSAs. Through analyzing some animated PSAs, this paper concludes that using CEs to express the success of animated PSAs makes the advertising industry aware of the importance of regaining traditional culture. It is reported that the samples of each type of animated PSA are closely related to contemporary society, interpret modernity and excellent traditional Chinese culture in depth, infect the audience simultaneously, and bring fresh breath and positive energy to lead people in cultural expression and innovation. In the multiple discourse systems of cultural expression in animated PSAs, cultural expression in animated PSAs is summarized with the effective communication of 'traditional Chinese culture' as the core.

Contemporary Chinese animated PSAs have used modern narrative techniques and production technology, successfully combined traditional cultural themes with production, and formed a new creative style. It uses the Internet platform to promote publicity and collect opinions. It has quickly gained widespread attention and praise in the new media platform, which side by side proves that Chinese animated PSAs have, to a certain extent, satisfied and adapted to the audience's spiritual needs and emotional interests and achieved a benign closed loop for the post-production of the

animation. Nonetheless, some things could be improved in the picture processing and the plot content setting. Most works are limited to historical reconstruction and reproduction, and the plot content needs more novelty and innovation. This may make the audience feel that the works they have observed are very similar and lack freshness and attraction, leading to emotional fatigue and boredom. This aesthetic fatigue will reduce the audience's interest and participation in the work, affecting the dissemination effect and social influence. Therefore, works with traditional themes should be rooted in the national cultural soil and created to stimulate the audience's sense of cultural identity. Furthermore, such works should also pay attention to the innovation and diversification of plot content to avoid over-reliance on historical reconstruction and reproduction and to enhance their attractiveness and influence. Other than that, contemporary Chinese animated PSAs should combine traditional Chinese culture and contemporary social reality to maintain the freshness and creativity of the works and avoid falling into the stereotypes and patterns of creation. In this way, the works can have rich cultural connotations and more excellent cultural value. Only by accurately grasping the spiritual and cultural connotations of the nation can we realize the integration and development of tradition and modernity. In addition, with the gradual increase in people's dependence on the Internet, the future creation of animated PSAs should also follow the trend of the times. Thus, we need to pay attention to the current social hotspots and problems, echo the needs of the times, and provide diversified themes and content. It is recommended to use new media forms, such as short videos, to guide the values of youth groups in a way that interests them, interacts with and participates with the audience, enhances their sense of participation and experience, and establishes cultural confidence. Therefore, balancing respect for traditional culture and the development needs of modern society and guiding young people to establish correct values requires further thinking.

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