

The Main-melody Animation in Contemporary China: National Heroes and Evolution in Media Culture

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Abstract

With the advancement of the Reform and Opening-up policy in 1978, China experienced rapid social, economic, and cultural development. The diversification of cultural trends and values profoundly impacted traditional culture. Against this backdrop, the methods of transmitting and receiving ideology faced unprecedented challenges. Main-melody animation, as a crucial tool for disseminating national ideology, shoulders the mission of inheriting and promoting the core socialist values. This study, as part of a doctoral dissertation, employs qualitative analysis methods, using 76 Main-melody animations produced between 1949 and 2023 as the research sample group. Research objectives: 1) To explore the origins, definitions, and development of Main-melody animation in the context of social and political changes; 2) To analyze the portrayal of various hero archetypes in Main-melody animation and explore their socio-cultural value. The study employs historical document analysis and film content analysis as research tools. Data analysis is conducted through thematic analysis to identify hero archetypes and themes, and to examine their relationship with core socialist values.

Research results :1)The origins and development of Main-melody animation are closely linked to China's socio-political history, reflecting the evolution of national ideology and the dissemination of core socialist values. 2) The diverse portrayals of leaders, soldiers, and youth heroes in Main-melody animation highlight the socio-cultural value of different hero types and national ideology. The conclusion suggests that Main-melody animation holds a central position in modern Chinese media culture. Through the diverse representation of hero archetypes, it conveys core socialist values, educates and inspires the younger generation, and fosters national identity and cohesion.

Keywords: Main-melody Animation; National Heroes ; Cultural evolution; China.

Introduction

Under the Wave of Reform and Opening-Up: Comprehensive Rapid Development of Society, Economy, and Culture in China. Amidst the surge of reform and opening-up, China experienced comprehensive and rapid development in society, economy, and culture. With the establishment of a market economy system and the expansion of opening-up (Sun, 2020), diverse cultural trends and values began to flood in, exerting a profound influence on Chinese culture and the animation market. In response to this challenge, the Chinese government implemented a series of measures. For instance, in 2004, regulations were issued stipulating that foreign TV dramas broadcasted on each channel should not exceed 25% of the total daily broadcast time for TV dramas on that channel, and without approval from the State Administration of Radio, Film, and Television, foreign TV dramas could not be aired during

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prime time (19:00-22:00) (State Administration of Radio, 2004). These measures aimed to protect and promote China's excellent traditional culture while actively building a socialist core value system. In this context, "Main-melody" artistic works, especially Main-melody animation, have become crucial carriers for disseminating socialist core values and showcasing the Chinese spirit and strength.

Since the founding of New China in 1949, Main-melody animation, as a unique cultural phenomenon and artistic expression, has always been closely linked to the country's political and economic development and cultural policies (Lihua, 2000). From early propaganda films to today's high-quality animation productions, Main-melody animation has undergone a complex development process, evolving from simplicity to sophistication and from singularity to diversity. It not only records the changes in Chinese society and reflects the spirit of the times but also plays an irreplaceable role in promoting and disseminating socialist core values.

In contemporary China, the impact of economic globalization and the information age has diversified social values. In this context, passing on and promoting socialist core values among the younger generation has become a key task in social and cultural work ("Communist Youth League Central Committee Launches Campaign on Core Socialist Values for Youth," 2014). Main-melody animation, as a cultural communication medium that combines educational and entertainment functions, has become an important means of achieving this goal due to its unique artistic charm and social influence. However, research on Main-melody animation, especially regarding its development and impact within the context of contemporary Chinese social and cultural backgrounds, remains insufficiently systematic and in-depth.

Research Objectives

- 1.To study the origins, definitions, and developmental trajectory of Main-melody animation within the context of significant socio-political changes.
- 2.To analyze the portrayal of various hero archetypes in Main-melody animation, exploring their social and cultural values and the state ideology they represent.

Literature Review

In academic research exploring Main-melody animation, although the term "Main-melody animation" is widely used, its exact definition and its historical development remain an open area of discussion. Scholars' understandings of Main-melody animation show diversity, with notable differences in the definition of its starting point and scope.

Scholars generally agree that Main-melody animation is not only a tool for political propaganda, but also an art form that carries national ideology and reflects the mainstream values and cultural spirit of society (Lu, 2015). However scholars have more different views when discussing the historical starting point of Main-melody film and television works in China in depth. Some scholars believe that early animation works centred around themes such as revolution, war and heroic figures, such as Sanmao Wandering in 1935 (Miaomiao, 2022, P40-42) or the anti-war animations produced by the Wan Brothers after 1933 such as Aviation to Save the Nation, Quick Wake of the Nation, and A Painful History of the Nation (Meng, 2021), can be regarded as the Main-melody Animation's starting point. Liu Yunshan, a member of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee, the Secretariat of the Central Committee, and the Minister of the Central Propaganda Department, has also suggested that it

is in fact a misunderstanding to equate Main-melody with the themes of revolutionary history and heroes, and that Main-melody represents a kind of spirit, which can be embodied in a variety of themes (Television, 2010). Therefore, if the starting point of Main-melody film and television works is set in the war period, it will deviate from the core definition of Main-melody films by most scholars.

There are also a few scholars who believe that Main-melody films should be counted from 1987, the year when the concept of "Main-melody" was introduced. Obviously, this view ignores the fact that socialist ideology is a process of development (Yong, 2006), and that Main-melody films are films in line with socialist ideology, so they must be contemporary and developing. Scholar DuFang also puts forward such a point of view, although the name of Main-melody film and television appeared later, it has long been an existing genre of film and television drama (DuFang, 2015).

From the outside, the hero image portrayal in Main-melody animation is also one of the core contents of the research. From revolutionary heroes to exemplars of the times, from historical figures to contemporary ordinary people, the heroic images in Main-melody animation have evolved with the development of society and the needs of the times (Song Daolei & Zhou, 2016). These heroic images not only inherit the heroic culture of the Chinese nation, but also reflect the country's perception and moulding of heroic exemplars in the new era.

As for the social function and cultural significance of Main-melody animation, Main-melody animation, as a cultural communication medium, its social function and cultural significance should not be ignored. Through the telling and dissemination of heroic stories, Main-melody animations can not only educate and inspire the younger generation and promote positive energy, but also promote the construction of national identity and national cohesion (Jingping, 2023). These animations provide domestic and foreign audiences with a window into Chinese history, culture and values, while also promoting cultural inheritance and innovation.

In summary, this thesis aims to provide an in-depth study of the definition of Main-melody animation, its historical evolution and its heroic portrayal, as well as the social and cultural functions of this art form, in order to fill in the gaps in the existing literature and provide a more systematic theoretical framework and empirical analysis.

Research Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research methodology to delve into the development of Main-melody animation in contemporary China and its portrayal of heroes through interviews and observations. The study focuses on Main-melody animation works released between 1949 and 2023.

Source of Data

The data sources of this study mainly include Main-melody animation works, related literature, policy documents and news reports. The theoretical and empirical foundations of the study were constructed through extensive collection and screening of these sources.

Research Tools

This study employs content analysis as the primary research method to systematically code and analyze 76 Main-melody animation works released between 1949 and 2023. It provides an in-depth interpretation of their plot settings, character portrayals, themes, and values, and collects a wealth of first-hand data.

Data Collection

A wealth of primary data was collected through semi-structured interviews with animation directors, producers, education experts and animation viewers.

Data Analysis

The content analysis method was used to systematically collate and analyse the interviews and observation records, from which key themes and development trends were extracted to reveal the socio-cultural significance and developmental evolution of Main-melody animation.

Research Conceptual Framework



Figure 1: Research Conceptual Framework

Source: Table produced by Xie Yunnan, 2024

Research Findings

1. The origin and development of Main-melody animation in the context of socio-political change.

1.1 Main-melody animation origin and definition

It is found that the origin and evolution of Main-melody animation is a complex and multidimensional historical phenomenon, closely linked to socio-political and cultural changes in modern Chinese history. Main-melody films, under the unification of the Party and the State, fully embody the national ideology and promote mainstream values (Lianna, 2015). Main-melody animation is the centralised expression of national ideology and is guided by national ideology (Yilun, 2016). Its formation and development are necessarily in line with the socialist ideology which exists and unfolds at both political party and state levels (Shangli, 2006, P1).

Liu Yunshan, a member of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, once pointed out that it is a misunderstanding to equate Main-melody with revolutionary historical themes and the themes of heroes and models, and that Main-melody represents a kind of spirit, which can be embodied in a variety of themes. (Television, 2010) The main-melody represents a spirit that can be embodied in various themes (Television, 2010). Therefore, animation of red revolutionary themes before 1931 should not be included in the historical development stage of Main-melody animation, because these early works, although important, do not fully meet the later national ideological requirements. The origins of Main-melody animation should therefore be linked to the socialist ideology that emerged after the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, and its development is dynamic and needs to be examined and understood in a wider historical

context. The origins of Main-melody animation should not be confined to 1987 or the 1930s but should be traced back to the founding of the new China in 1949 and the ensuing formation of the socialist ideology.

Although the term "Main-melody" emerged later, its spirit and substance existed long ago and was embodied in the corresponding stage of history. (DuFang, 2015) Main-melody animations are defined as those that emphasise nationalism, patriotism, or promote the mainstream values and policies of government and society. Therefore, Main-melody animation is a film genre that fully embodies national ideology and promotes mainstream values under the leadership of the party and the state, and its core lies in representing the ideology of the state. Therefore, the historical development of Main-melody animation should be counted from the founding of New China in 1949, as its core lies in representing the ideology of the state.

1.2 Developments in the broader context of socio-political change

Combining the understanding of the definition of Main-melody Animation and based on the events that had a significant impact on Main-melody Animation, this study explicitly takes the founding of New China in 1949 as the starting point of the historical development of Main-melody Animation, and divides the development history of Main-melody Animation in China into five key periods. Animation's development history is divided into five key periods: the formation period of Main-melody Animation (1949-1978), the stagnation of Main-melody Animation (1978-1994), the turning period of Main-melody Animation (1995-2004), and the transition period of Main-melody Animation (1995-2004). 2004), and Main-melody Animation Redevelopment Period (2005-2024).

1.2.1 Formative period 1949-1978

During the formative period of 1949-1978, Main-melody Animation in China experienced initial development. During this period, in the early years of New China's founding, there were major socio-economic challenges, collectivist values were promoted, and the people were unified in their thinking and in their need for the same interests. Against this backdrop, national heroes had to fit the political paradigm, with soldiers, workers, peasants, public security officers, and cadres as the main representatives, embodying the qualities of hard work, selflessness, and fearlessness of sacrifice. 1963, Mao Zedong called on the whole nation to learn from the spirit of Lei Feng, whose core concept is "always carrying others in his heart but not himself". was birthed here." (Shan, 2019) . This political context influenced cultural development, with Main-melody Animation featuring characters of proletarian workers, students, and peasants, such as Little Sisters of the Prairie Heroes (1964), The Little Eight Roads (1973), Little Heroes of the Ludangs (1977), and Shan Saekai Zai (1978). The theme of animation revolves around the social development of the country, such as Singing the Total Route (1958), Long Live the Great Leap Forward (1958), and Red Army Bridge (1958) (Zhou, 2020).

This period was also the time when the "Chinese School" was formed, and Chinese animation, such as paper-cut film, puppet film, ink film, etc., showed distinctive national characteristics and marks of the times. 1965 animated film "Red Scarf", the militia modeling borrowed from the style of Chinese shadow puppets, whose joints move in the same way as shadow puppets, with vivid images and traditional aesthetics, which made these heroes not only the protagonists of the story, but also the propagators of national culture. These animated heroes not only become the protagonists of the story, but also the disseminators of national culture.

1.2.2 Periods of stagnation

In 1978, China entered a period of reform and rapid economic development. Despite producing over 200 animated films between 1978 and 1988 and the emergence of classics such as "The Nine-Colored Deer," "Snow Kid," and "Feelings of Mountains and Waters," there was a notable absence of Main-melody Animation. This stagnation can be attributed to several factors:

Firstly, during the Cultural Revolution, the creation of animation was heavily restricted, severing connections with global animation and leading to artistic isolation. After the reform and opening up, international exchanges resumed, broadening the horizons of animators and production units. They were exposed to various styles, such as the Yugoslav Zagreb School of Animated Films, which influenced Chinese animation's artistic characteristics (Zhu & Rosen, 2010).

Secondly, post-Cultural Revolution, creative thought within animation production became more dynamic. Animators pursued lighthearted and entertaining forms, striving to break away from politicized and slogan-driven creations through questioning, discussion, suggestions, and criticism.

Thirdly, most directors at the time came from an art background, focusing on artistic expression but often lacking in-depth content exploration, thus neglecting the core of animation. Te Wei criticized this by saying, "Directors explore various forms of art but lack overall conception in their creations, affecting the artistic quality of the films."

Fourthly, the influx of overseas commercial animations into the Chinese market after the reform posed significant challenges to domestic animation, especially those imbued with national values. The market gradually became dominated by foreign animations (Shuping, 2002). This not only constrained domestic animation development but also threatened the dissemination of Chinese culture and values, leading to Main-melody Animation's stagnation.

1.2.3 Period of transition

From January 1, 1995, the state abolished the policy of unified purchase and sale of art films, domestic animation to the market, production units need to be self-financing, economic efficiency has become the primary goal of this turn of events has broken the traditional mode of production, animation industry has gradually made a clear distinction between art animation and commercial animation, cinema animation and animated films on television(Huilin, 2014). With the reform and opening up, a large number of foreign animations such as Baseball Heroes, American Girl Soldier, and Detective Conan flooded into the Chinese market. In 1991, 66.7 per cent of the animated films broadcast in Beijing were foreign-produced, with 50 per cent of them coming from Disney(Shuping, 2002) In 1991, 66.7 per cent of the animated films shown in Beijing were foreign productions, 50 per cent of which came from Disney (Shuping, 2002). These animations have had a profound impact on young people, becoming their idols and influencing dress and behaviour(Yemin, 2018) .

The Chinese government, aware of the need to strengthen the guidance of young people's values to ensure cultural heritage and ideological stability, has introduced a series of policies to control the content of animation. In 2000, it was stipulated that television stations could not broadcast more than 25 per cent of the total airtime of children's programmes with imported animation.(State Administration of Radio, 2000) In 2004, television stations were required to broadcast no more than 25 percent of their total airtime on foreign films and television dramas and no more than 15 percent of their total airtime on other foreign

programmes, and no more than 15 percent of their total airtime on prime time without approval (State Administration of Radio, 2004). (State Administration of Radio, 2004) The Chinese government adopted these measures during this period. These measures, through which the Chinese government provided a healthier and more positive environment, marked the redevelopment of animation and Main-melody Animation in China during this period.

1.2.4 Period of redevelopment

The redevelopment period of Main-melody Animation is set between 2005 and 2024, and the notable landmark of this period is the birth of Little Soldier Zhang Ga in 2005, which pioneered the creation of Chinese animation with realist themes (Lijun, 2018). In the same year, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CPC) and the State Council put forward a number of opinions on deepening the reform of the cultural system, emphasising the formation of a perfect cultural innovation system (Yongfeng, 2006). In 2008, the state strengthened the protection policy for domestic animation, requiring animation channels to broadcast domestic animation films during prime time (State Administration of Radio, 2008), which significantly increased the broadcast rate and influence of domestic animation.

Under the support of the policy, a series of Main-melody theme animations were released one after another, such as "The Long March of the Little Red Army", "Guerrilla Soldiers", "The Red Division of Justice", etc., which were loved by the audience, highlighting the influence and development of Main-melody Animation in the new era. In 2007, "Shining Red Star" became the first Main-melody Animation film to go into the cinema, opening the way for this genre to go to the big screen. melody Animation film, which opened the way for this type of film to go to the big screen. With the support of policies, a number of anti-war and patriotic animations have appeared, such as New Tunnel War (2009), The Story of Lei Feng (2010), and Passionate Rescue of Hot-Blooded Lei Feng Man (2016) (Chen, 2021). In addition, the image of independent female heroes has also gradually appeared in Main-melody Animation, such as Zhao Yiman (2021), which enriches the type of hero image. In 2010, Liu Yunshan emphasised in a symposium on film and television creation that "*Main-melody represents a kind of spirit, which is not only embodied in revolutionary and historical themes, but also in all kinds of themes. not only revolutionary and historical themes, but also all kinds of themes*" (State Administration of Radio, 2010). (State Administration of Radio, 2010) In 2022, the state further clarified the requirements for film and television works with Main-melody themes, insisting on the correct political direction and value orientation (Agency, 2022).

Since 2005, the Chinese government has introduced a series of policies and funding to provide strong support for domestic animation innovation, and Main-melody animation has opened a brilliant chapter in the new century.

2. Heroisation in Main-melody animation.

The portrayal of heroes in Main-melody animation directly maps Chinese social and cultural values and national ideology. The history of the hero concept can be traced back to the Western Zhou Dynasty, from ancient mythological heroes, sage heroes, heroes of the Three Kingdoms to contemporary heroes (Jingping, 2023). This paper focuses on the definition of hero after the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949. With social and cultural changes, chivalrous heroes in novels and mythological heroes in films and television have gradually appeared, but the definition of heroes has evolved with social practices. According to Chen Huapeng, heroes are those who are of high moral character or successful in their

careers, who contribute to society and make a significant impact(Song Daolei&Zhou, 2016) . Yu Xinqiao further pointed out that heroes are people's heroes or national heroes who fight bravely and are not afraid of sacrifices to safeguard the interests of the state and people(Jingyuan, 2022) .

The study found that although scholars have different definitions of heroes, it is generally agreed that heroes possess the excellent quality of altruism, i.e., sacrificing their personal interests and even their lives for the interests of the country, the nation and the people. Therefore, based on the concept of hero and the definition of Main-melody Animation, mythological heroes and martial arts heroes are out of the scope of this study. Since the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, the definition of a hero has been closely related to the political and cultural direction of the country. Heroes in animation are no longer just legendary figures, but key mediums for conveying socialist values, the spirit of revolution and the idea of modern China.

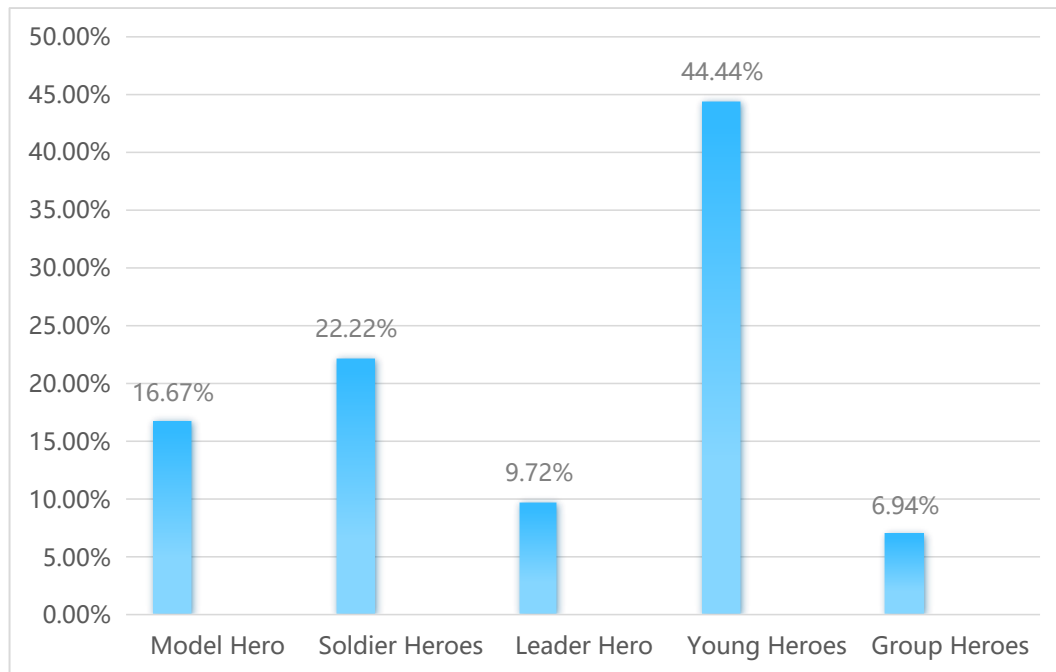


Table1: Analysis of 76 Main-melody animations
Source:Table produced by Xie Yannan ,2024

Through the statistics and analyses of 76 Main-melody Animations, the categories of heroic portrayal and their proportions are sorted out as follows: Group heroes: about 6.94%. By depicting the people or the collective as the protagonist, collectivism and group heroism are emphasised, reflecting the socialist principle of emphasising collective interests over individual interests. Teenage heroes: about 44.44 per cent. Through the courage and wisdom of teenage characters, showing their roles in the nation's major historical moments, conveying the vitality of youth and the hope of the future. Leader heroes: about 9.72 per cent. To reinforce the idea that leaders are closely linked to the destiny of the nation by showing the state of mind and leadership of historical leaders. Soldier heroes: about 22.22 per cent. Embodying sacrifice

and bravery, emphasising the heroism of defending the country, and praising national security and the noble spirit of the military. Model heroes: about 16.67 per cent. Showcases individuals who have made outstanding contributions in various fields, inspiring viewers to pursue excellence and dedication.

The analysis shows that the proportion of teenage heroes portrayed in Main-melody Animation is the highest, reflecting the powerful infectiousness and sense of agency of teenage heroes' images in conveying revolutionary and patriotic emotions. Meanwhile, group heroes emphasise the importance of collective strength and group heroism. Leader heroes, soldier heroes and model heroes, on the other hand, show the heroic behaviours and spirituality of individuals in a specific historical context from different perspectives, which together constitute the rich and diverse hero images in Main-melody Animation.

2.1 Adolescent heroes

The portrayal of teenage heroes takes centre stage in Main-melody Animation creations, reflecting a unique perspective on historical events and a deep understanding of youthful qualities. Set against the backdrop of the Revolutionary War, this type of animation not only recreates significant moments in history, but also tells vibrant and courageous stories through the eyes of youth. Teenage characters are portrayed as forthright, witty, brave and lively, demonstrating their wisdom and courage in the face of challenges.

Little Soldier Zhang Ga is a typical representative of this theme. The group of teenage heroes in the animation, with Zhang Ga as the protagonist, shows their spiritual qualities that have been honed and grown in adversity. Through the stories of these characters, viewers see the courage, wisdom and growth of young people in times of national crisis, highlighting the close integration of personal growth and social responsibility. These works place teenage heroes in the context of revolutionary practices and tell how they actively participate in the revolution, overcome their own shortcomings and eventually become outstanding teenage heroes.

The portrayal of teenage heroes in Main-melody Animation emphasises integrity, wisdom and courage, and conveys the resilience of teenagers in the face of difficulties through a storyline full of youthful characteristics. This not only provides positive role models for youth audiences, but also enriches the artistic connotation and cultural value of Main-melody Animation. Through delicate narrative and emotional expression, these works allow viewers to feel the weight of history and the significance of personal struggle. Therefore, such animations not only have important educational significance, but also demonstrate profound value at the cultural level, providing spiritual nourishment and inspiration for young people and the general audience.



Figure 2: Portrayal of Little Heroes in the Animated Film
"Little Soldier Zhang Ga" (2007)
Source:Scene from "Little Soldier Zhang Ga" by Xie Yannan ,2024

2.2 Leader Heroes

In the statistical analysis of 76 Main-melody Animation, the category of leader-hero portrayal accounts for about 9.72%. This data shows that among Main-melody Animation, works that use grand historical events as the background and express the spirit of leaders through collective or individual narratives occupy a certain proportion. These animations are artistically created on the basis of ensuring historical authenticity, not only showing the style and great character of the leaders, but also "civilianising" their images and "normalising" their emotions, so as to enhance their authenticity and credibility. Through detailed narrative, this kind of animation shows the ideological state, wisdom, spiritual temperament and strong infectious force and cohesion of the leaders and heroes, and at the same time demonstrates their decision-making wisdom and personal charisma in major historical events.



Figure 3: Leader portrayal in the animated film "Four Crossings of the Red River"
Source:Scene from "Four Crossings of the Red River" by Xie Yannan ,2024

"Chairman Mao in the Fragrant Hills" and "Four Crossings of the Red River" are typical examples of works that show a multi-dimensional image of the leader's role by accurately recreating historical details and depicting the leader's down-to-earth side. In these works, the leader is not only a revolutionary leader, but also an ordinary person with rich emotions and daily life. By showing the behaviour and words of the leaders in their daily lives, these animations successfully combine the great spirit of the leaders with humane qualities, making the audience feel the deep emotional connection between the leaders and the masses.

In portraying leaders and heroes, these Main-melody Animations adopt a down-to-earth approach to characters' costumes, actions and expressions, reconstructing their personalities in a humane way, and portraying their characters using the technique of video spectacle. Focusing on the design of visual elements and adopting "popular" and "genre" narrative strategies, they present the image of civilian heroes from a human point of view, bringing the leaders closer to the audience. Generally speaking, these animations attach importance to historical authenticity and artistic creativity, and make the image of the leader more three-dimensional and intimate through humanised portrayal. Showing the personal charisma and social responsibility of the leaders and heroes enriches the artistic expression of Main-melody Animation, provides audiences with profound historical experience and spiritual enlightenment, and embodies the deep connection between the leaders and the people.

2.3 Military heroes

In Main-melody Animation, the image of military heroes occupies an important position, accounting for about 22.22 per cent. With war and military as the theme, these works profoundly depict the military heroes in the war of resistance, who are not only the heroes of history, but also the "guardians" in the hearts of the people, such as *The Most Lovable People*, *Soldier Shunliu: The King of Soldiers*, *People's Heroes*, and *Lin Hai Xue Yuan*.

By depicting ordinary soldiers and people in the revolutionary era, these animations show the firm revolutionary faith and idealistic beliefs of military heroes, as well as the great spiritual strength and lofty state of mind they display in life and death situations. The images of soldiers usually wear red military uniforms or camouflage uniforms, with national faces, strong physiques and firm gazes, reflecting the pursuit of revolutionary faith and romanticism.

These works highlight the authenticity of military heroes through humanised portrayal, making them not only revolutionary fighters, but also flesh-and-blood and emotional human beings. This way of portrayal makes the image of military heroes more three-dimensional and triggers the emotional resonance of the audience. On the whole, military heroes in Main-melody Animation not only reproduce the glorious image of historical heroes, but also deepen their humanised qualities, demonstrating the great spirit and aesthetic value.



Figure 4: Portrayal of soldiers in the animated film "The Loveliest of Them All
Source:Scene from "The Loveliest Man" by Xie Yannan ,2024

2.4 Exemplary heroes

In the 76 Main-melody Animation works, the portrayal of exemplary heroes covers a wide range of social strata, such as workers, farmers and grass-roots cadres, and expands to include scientists, astronauts and other characters who have made outstanding contributions in their respective fields. These characters shed their blood for the construction of the motherland in difficult environments, demonstrating the qualities of kindness, diligence, perseverance, and the spirit of doing one's duty and serving the people. Their progressive ideas and courageous dedication represent the future direction of society, form an important part of the foundation of the Chinese nation, and demonstrate the power of finding extraordinary achievements in ordinary positions. For example, "The Soul of the Army - Stories of the Ten Heroic Models of the Chinese People's Liberation Army", "Lei Feng", "Jiao Yulu", "Red Beginnings - From Jinggangshan to Ruijin", and so on.



Figure 5: Exemplary portrayal in the animated film Jiao Yulu
Source:https://www.sohu.com/a/510317082_121106991

Through realistic portrayal, Jiao Yulu in the animation shows the image of a grassroots cadre who works for the welfare of the people, is close to the people's livelihood and works diligently. His story embodies the poetic treatment of exemplary heroes, with both realistic portrayal and romanticism, making the audience feel the beauty of romantic heroism.

Through the multi-dimensional presentation of exemplary heroes, Main-melody Animation's works not only provide audiences with profound historical experience and spiritual enlightenment, but also make positive contributions to the construction of socialist spiritual civilisation. Through careful artistic creation, these works demonstrate the exemplary role of model heroes in the construction of socialism and convey a profound understanding of dedication, courage and beauty.

Discussion

In this study, the development of Main-melody animation in contemporary China and its role in society and culture, especially the portrayal of heroes and the transmission of ideology, are explored in depth. By comparing with the scholars' views mentioned in the literature review, it is found that this study provides new insights and in-depth analyses in several key aspects.

Firstly, regarding the origins of Main-melody animation, this paper clearly states that it should be defined from the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, which is different from some scholars, such as Meng (2021) and Du Fang (2015), who have proposed that it started in the 1930s. The study emphasises the close connection between Main-melody animation and the political history of the country, rather than just as an artistic or cultural phenomenon.

Second, this study clarifies the definition of Main-melody animation, and makes up for the part of Chinese animation history concerning Main-melody animation by sorting out the history of Main-melody animation based on the background factors of Main-melody animation's emergence, and in conjunction with the development of national processes. This systematic historical framework provides an important perspective for understanding the evolution of Main-melody animation.

Further, in terms of heroic images in Main-melody animation, not only was the evolution from revolutionary heroes to role models of the times confirmed, but data analysis also revealed the special role of adolescent heroic images in conveying youthful vigour and hope, which has received less attention in previous studies.

Finally, the socio-cultural function of Main-melody animation is further explored, especially how to reflect and promote socialist core values through artistic innovation and diverse themes in the context of globalisation and cultural pluralism. This has been mentioned in the literature by scholars such as Jingping (2023), but the importance of Main-melody animation as a bridge of cultural communication is demonstrated through more specific cases and analyses. This study provides new perspectives and in-depth understanding of Main-melody animation based on confirmation of existing research findings, especially insights in understanding its historical beginnings, heroic image-making, and socio-cultural functions.

Conclusion

By clearly defining the concept of Main-melody Animation and reviewing its developmental history, this study reveals the multiple social, economic, and cultural factors influencing its evolution. Since the Reform and Opening-up in 1978, the Chinese animation market has experienced unprecedented prosperity, yet the production of Main-melody Animation has remained relatively small, mainly focusing on allegorical and mythological themes. This paper explores the complex reasons behind this phenomenon and identifies several key factors:

Firstly, most directors hail from the Shanghai Animation Film Studio, and they tend to prioritize artistic expression over delving into the deeper connotations of Main-melody themes. Secondly, following the Cultural Revolution, the unblocking of domestic animation creation and the resumption of international exchanges exposed Chinese animators to various global artistic styles. This inclination towards artistic exploration led to a certain neglect of the social significance of Main-melody Animation. Thirdly, post-Cultural Revolution artists sought to move away from politicization and slogans, pursuing instead lighthearted, vivid, and enjoyable artistic expressions. Fourthly, the economic reforms and fierce competition from foreign animations brought by the Reform and Opening-up allowed foreign animations to dominate the Chinese market, resulting in the near disappearance of animations that promoted mainstream values during this period.

Through a systematic analysis of Main-melody Animation works produced between 1949 and 2023, this study categorizes the hero images into four major types: teenage heroes, military heroes, leader heroes, and exemplary heroes, highlighting the profound impact of Main-melody Animation as a tool for disseminating socialist core values.

The origins and development of Main-melody Animation are closely intertwined with China's political and economic history. These works not only document social changes but also reflect the spirit of the times and national policies. The hero images, ranging from revolutionary heroes to contemporary role models and from historical figures to ordinary people, inherit the heroic culture of the Chinese nation and reflect the country's recognition and shaping of new-era hero archetypes. Through these heroic stories, Main-melody Animation educates and inspires the younger generation, promotes positive energy, and fosters national identity and cohesion.

In conclusion, as a unique cultural phenomenon and form of artistic expression, Main-melody Animation holds a core position in modern Chinese media culture due to its profound socio-cultural significance and function. With further research, the theories and practices surrounding Main-melody Animation will continue to be enriched and refined.

Suggestion

1. General Recommendation Suggestion

In future research, the following aspects are suggested to further deepen and expand the exploration of Main-melody animation in contemporary China. Firstly, a more in-depth study can be conducted on how technological innovations affect the narrative and audience acceptance of Main-melody animation. For example, we can explore the application of Virtual Reality (VR), Augmented Reality (AR) and Artificial Intelligence (AI) technologies in animation production, and analyse how these technologies can help Main-melody animation convey socialist core values more effectively and enhance audience immersion experience. In

addition, considering the multicultural context, the study can focus on how Main-melody animation deals with and presents gender and cultural diversity, and explore the portrayal of female and ethnic minority heroes and their impact on society and culture.

2. Suggestion for further research

Further research should also focus on how Main-melody animations disseminate Chinese culture in the context of globalisation, analyse how these animated works are accepted by international audiences from different cultural backgrounds, and explore how international cultural exchange and understanding can be enhanced through Main-melody animations. This includes analysing how Main-melody animation can tell China's unique historical stories and showcase the country's image while maintaining its artistic charm and universal cultural appeal. Through these studies, strategic advice can be provided for the internationalisation of China's animation industry, while also contributing Chinese voices and perspectives to global cultural diversity.

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