



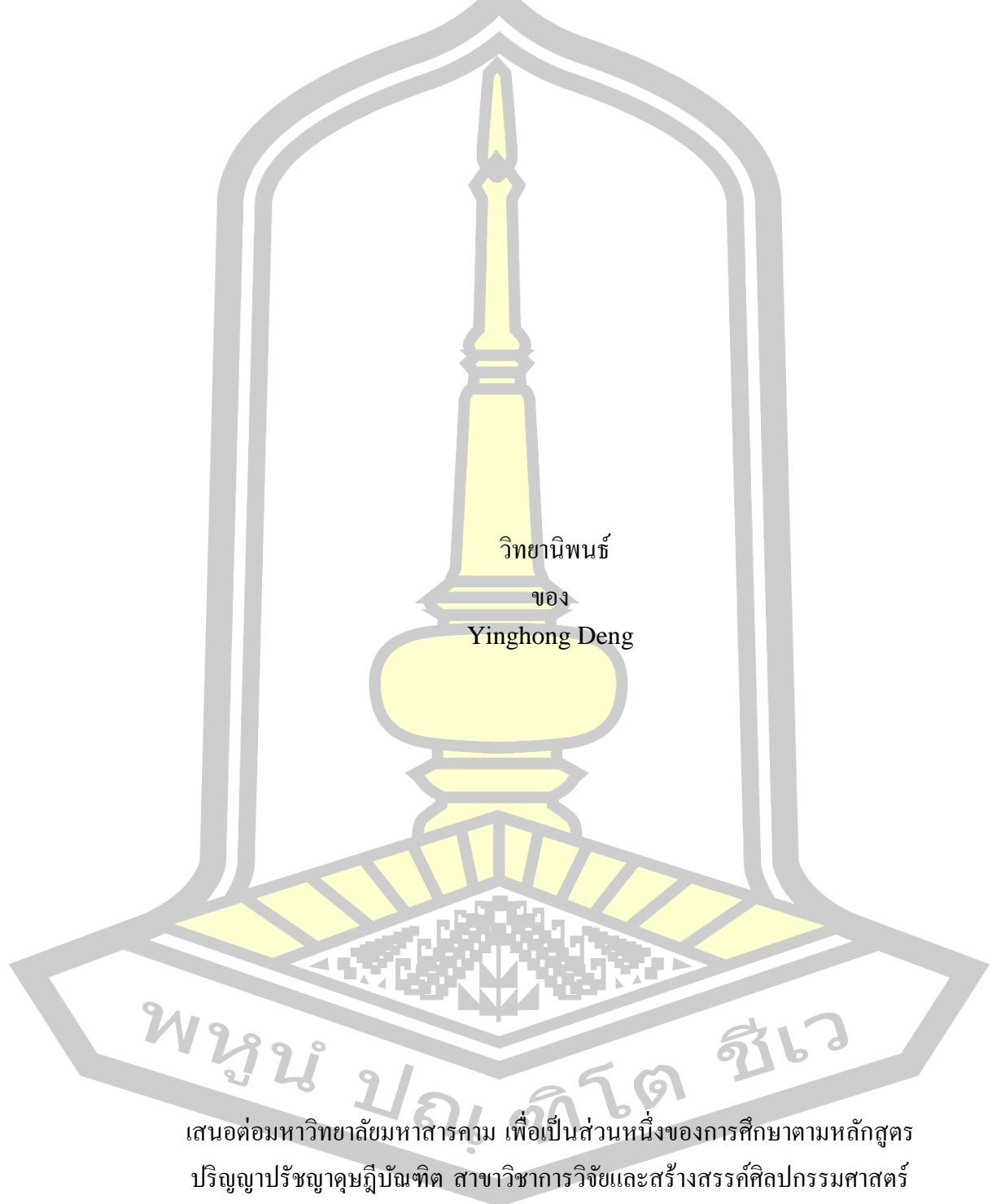
The Female Character in Chinese Animated Films: Gender and Negotiating Identity
in the Context of Reform and Opening-up of the Chinese Economy

Yinghong Deng

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements for
degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Fine and Applied Arts Research and Creation
December 2024

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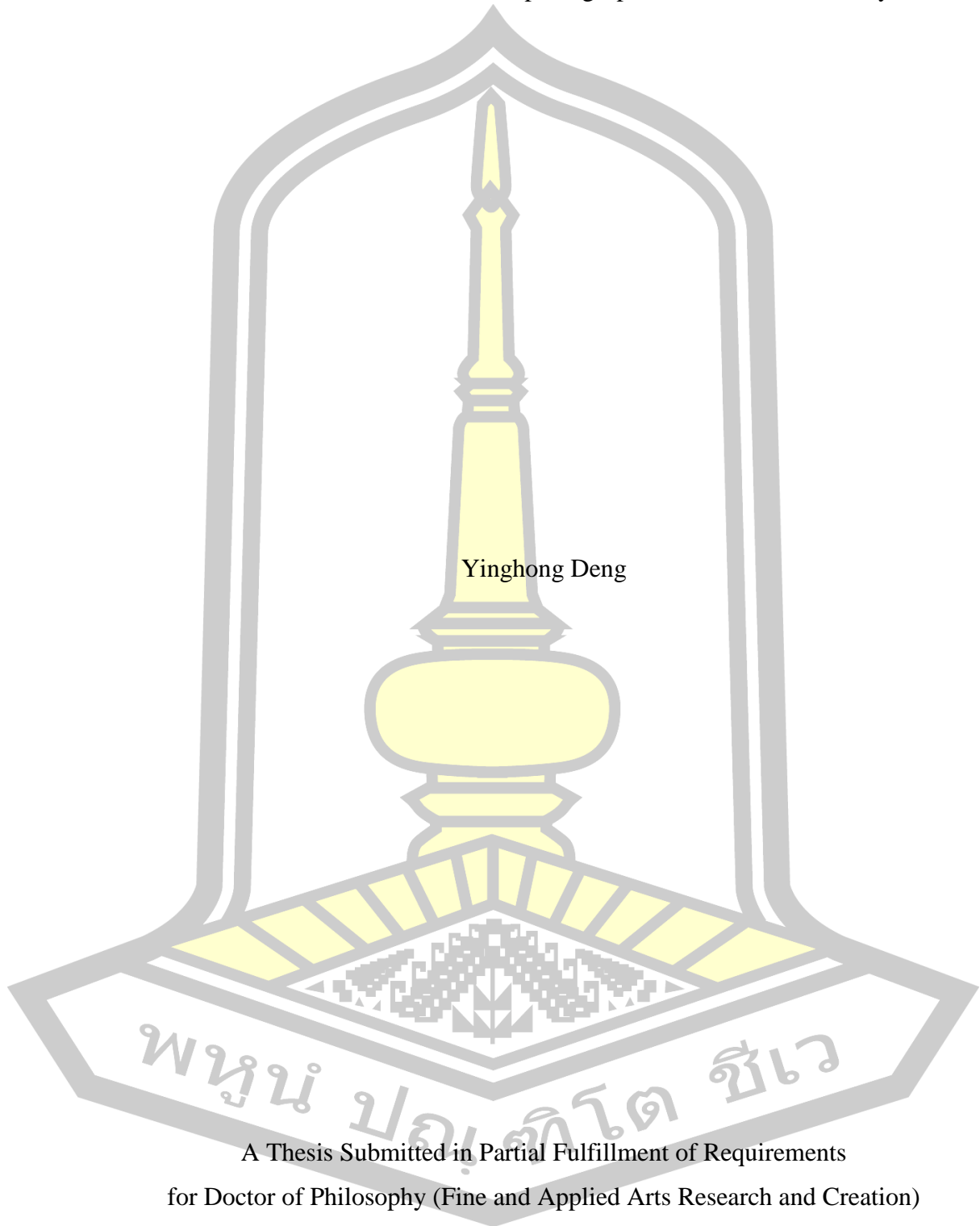
เสนอต่อมหาวิทยาลัยมหาสารคาม เพื่อเป็นส่วนหนึ่งของการศึกษาตามหลักสูตร
ปริญญาปรัชญาดุษฎีบัณฑิต สาขาวิชาการวิจัยและสร้างสรรค์ศิลปกรรมศาสตร์

ธันวาคม 2567

ลิขสิทธิ์เป็นของมหาวิทยาลัยมหาสารคาม

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Yinghong Deng



A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements
for Doctor of Philosophy (Fine and Applied Arts Research and Creation)

December 2024

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The examining committee has unanimously approved this Thesis, submitted by Ms. Yinghong Deng , as a partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy Fine and Applied Arts Research and Creation at Mahasarakham University

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DEGREE	Doctor of Philosophy	MAJOR	Fine and Applied Arts Research and Creation
UNIVERSITY	Maharakham University	YEAR	2024

ABSTRACT

This study is a qualitative research utilizing the concept of the traditional reinvention of things. There are three research objectives here: 1) to study the characteristics, connotations and historical development of clay Ni-ni-gou in Huaiyang, Henan Province, 2) to study the invention of clay Ni-ni-gou under the dual dimensions of artwork and social process, and 3) to create a design for clay Ni-ni-gou that conforms to the invention laws of the clay Ni-ni-gou tradition. This study is based on the clay Ni-ni-gou of Huaiyang District, Henan Province. By analyzing the history of the development of Ni-ni-gou, we analyze the changes in the re-invention of the Ni-ni-gou tradition, and thus draw conclusions to create new designs that conform to the context of rural revitalization.

The results of the study found that the clay sculpture art of Huaiyang Ni-ni-gou is an important part of folk art, which has a history of thousands of years, and the record of its existence can be traced back to the period of prehistoric civilization. The Ni-ni-gou, with its unique cultural connotations and rich forms of artistic expression, demonstrates the spirituality embedded in the Ni-ni-gou, which has a very important research value. For Huaiyang Ni-ni-gou, the changes of Ni-ni-gou being invented are analyzed from the perspectives of artwork and social process. In the dimension of artwork, the Ni-ni-gou have produced new inventions in shape, color, and content, which highlights its artistic value even more. The development of society promotes the transformation of artwork, and the transformation of artwork promotes the social process, both of which are based on each other. Whether the traditional invented Ni-ni-gou is adapted to the development of the current society, what is feasible and what is not feasible is analyzed, and what aspects are in line with the invention of the law of the Ni-ni-gou are further derived, which lays the foundation for the new design of the Ni-ni-gou, and finally the Ni-ni-gou under the strategy of rural revitalization is designed. New Design.

In the process of rural revitalization, this study explores rural cultural and artistic resources, uses the concept of traditional reinvention, preserves and disseminates rural traditional culture by means of new design, creates a new design

for Ni-ni-gou that conforms to the law of invention, and to a certain extent promotes the sustainable and coordinated development of the countryside, in the hope that it can provide some reference for rural revitalization with similar factors.

Keyword : Traditional invention, Social process, Huaiyang Ni-ni-gou, Innovative design



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As time passes by, two years of postgraduate study from 2021 to now will give an end to complete my master's degree at Mahasarakham University, Thailand. Looking back, there are so many mentors and friends who accompanied me, encouraged me, helped me, and left the most precious memories with me on the road of my study and growth.

After several months, through the process of collecting data, organizing and analyzing, researching and arguing, and repeatedly revising, the thesis has finally settled down, and in this process, I deeply feel the long academic road and the bumpy road of research. At the same time, I feel small and ashamed because of my lack of knowledge, and would like to express my deep admiration and high regards to professors, experts and scholars.

First of all, I would like to thank my supervisor, Dr. Yingfeng Li, for his valuable guidance and support throughout the completion of this paper. Mr. Yingfeng Li is very serious and responsible. He has been carefully guiding me during the writing of my thesis. He invested a lot of time and energy, patiently guided me to solve the problems encountered in thesis writing, keyed the format, changed the framework, changed the content, was very patient, and guided me to think and improve my thesis until the successful completion of the research and writing of this thesis, from which I learned to collect information from multiple channels, I know how to compare and analyze the information, and I appreciate the rigor of the language of the thesis. I would also like to thank all the teachers during the whole period of studying for my master's degree. Besides the teaching of professional knowledge, the teachers also pay great attention to the cultivation of students' habits and abilities, which will benefit me for the rest of my life. I would like to express my heartfelt thanks and highest respect.

Then, I would like to thank all the students I met at Mahasarakham University. I would like to thank my faculty secretary, Mr. PB, for picking us up at the airport when I first came to Thailand, explaining to us along the way and easing our anxiety of going to an unfamiliar country, my friends for helping me to get accommodated, familiarizing me with the school's environment, going through all kinds of post-enrollment paperwork and formalities as well as bringing me to meet my faculty, and my roommate, Ms. Shih

Wenjun, who stayed with me like a family member during my study period, and for urging me to study, discussing my thesis with each other and adjusting my thesis. During my study period, thanks to my roommate Shi Wenjun, who accompanied me like a family member, urged me to study, discussed the thesis with each other, adjusted the thesis, we kept communicating and studying during the master's degree, we encouraged each other to make progress, which gave me the courage and strength to persevere, thanks to the students in the same class, who helped each other and took part in all kinds of activities organized by the college, and harvested deep friendships in the course of getting along with each other time and time again, and I am very thankful to them for this.

Finally, I am very grateful to my family, we support me, encourage me and provide me with a good learning environment and living conditions. They are the ones who gave me the opportunity to receive an education, and their encouragement and support have been the driving force behind my continuous improvement.

All in all, I am very thankful for all the encounters in my life, and I cherish each and every one of them. I am grateful to all my relatives and friends who have really cared for me, although it is inconvenient to write all of them here, but your friendship will always be in my heart. In the process of thesis writing, I found myself in the academic aspects of the shortcomings of the thesis, although the end, but my academic pursuit is not the end. In the days to come, I will continue to work hard to improve and enrich my knowledge and experience, and double my efforts in work and study, so that I can achieve more results to repay them and society. I thank them once again and wish them a lifetime of happiness and well-being!

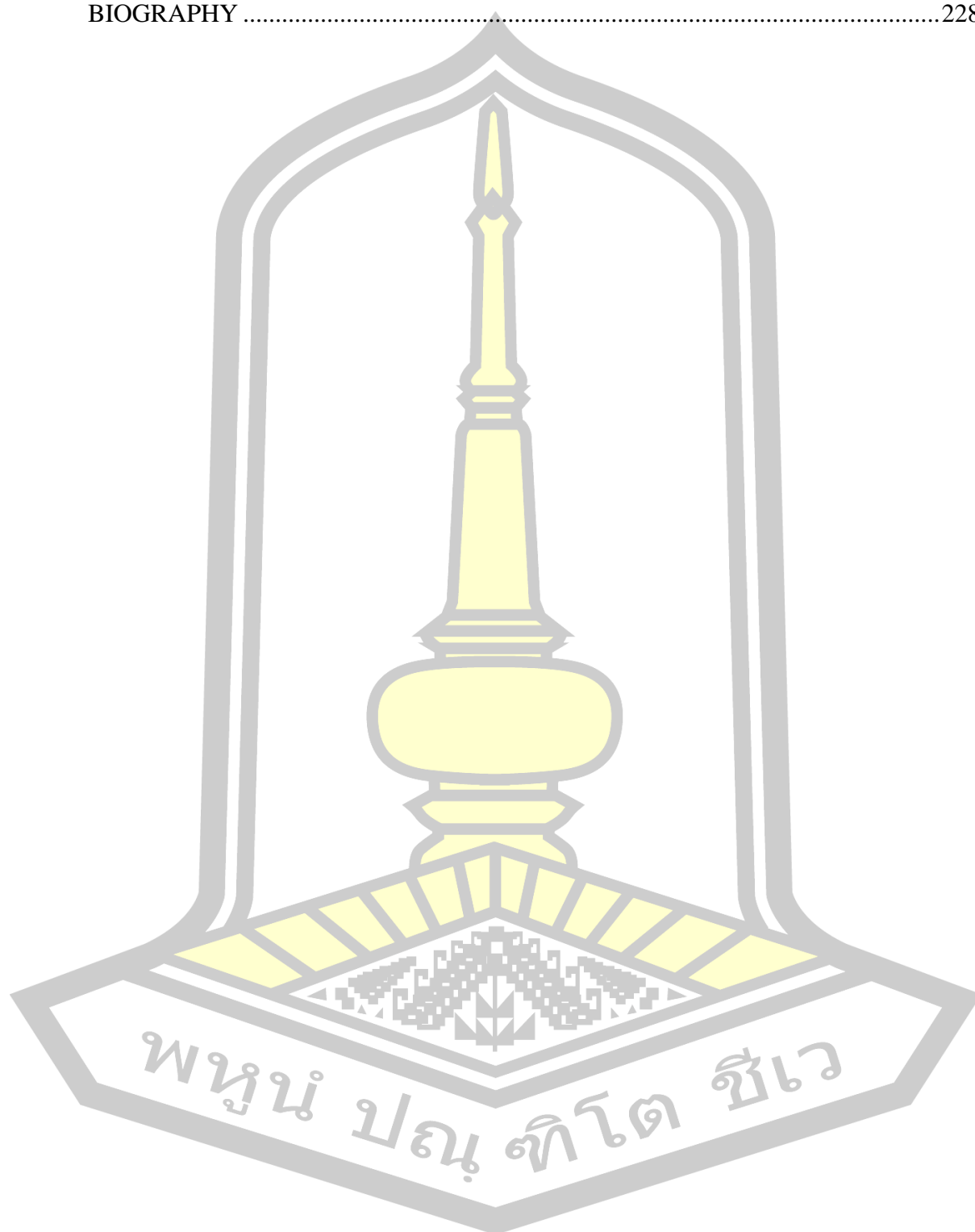
Yinghong Deng

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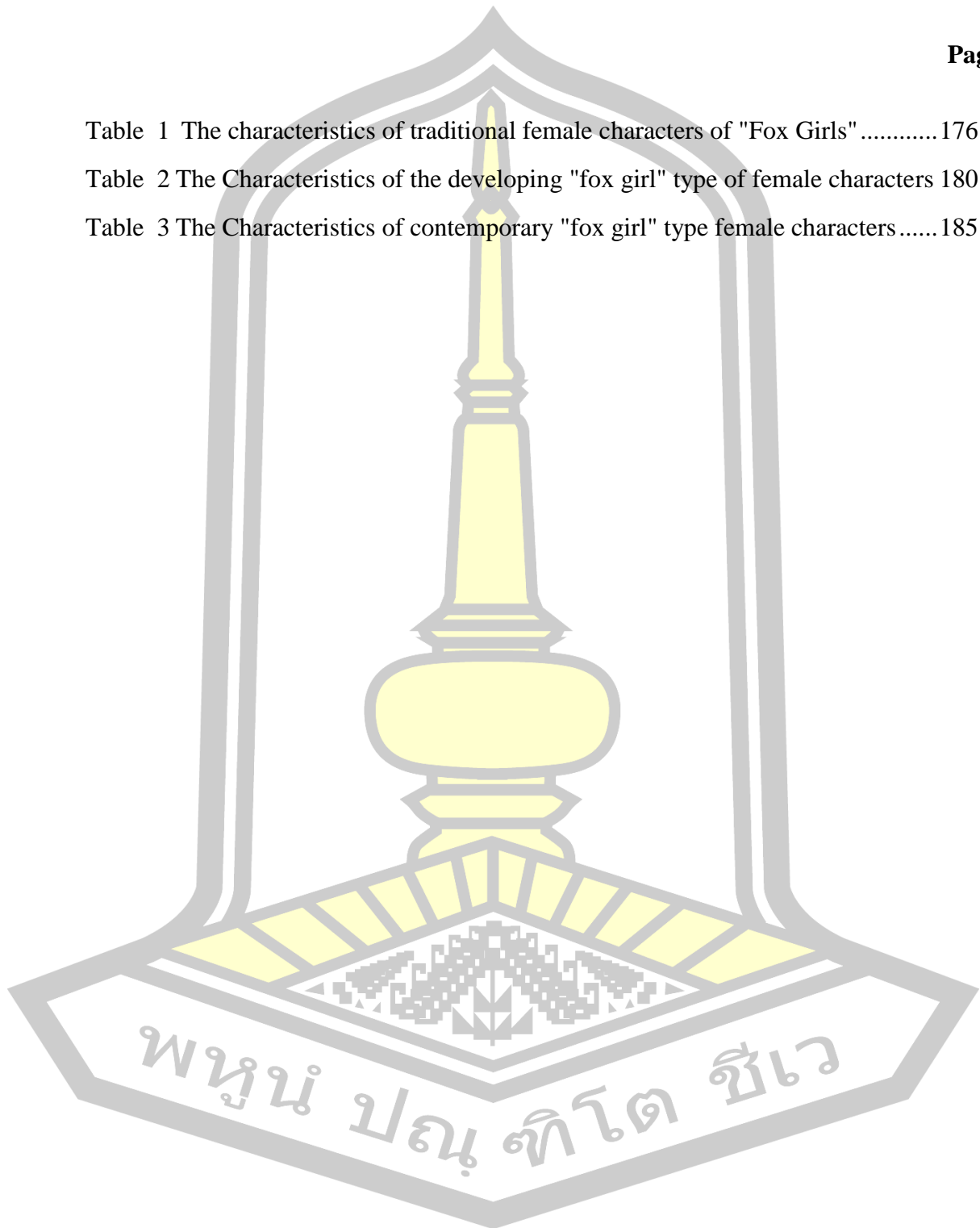
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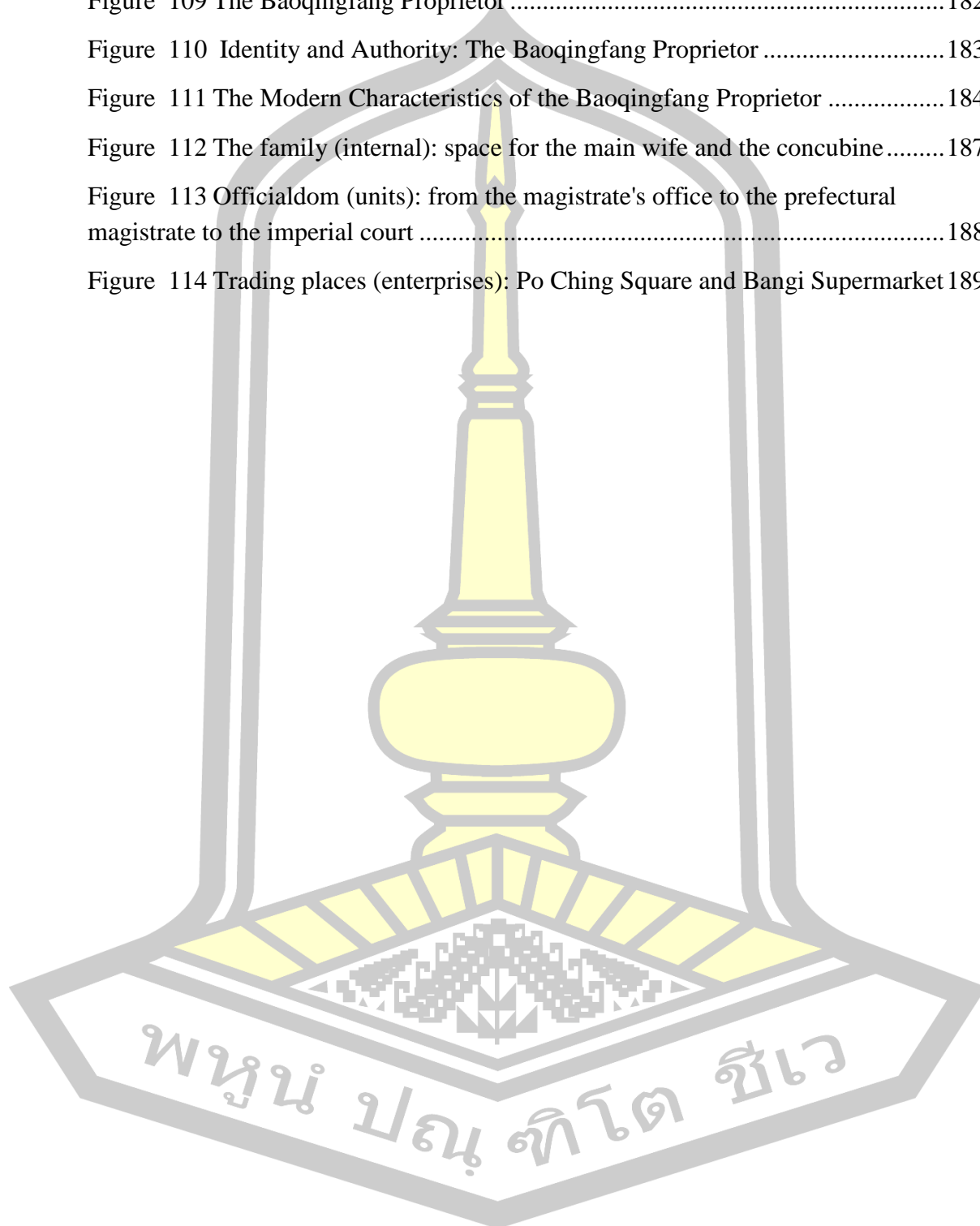
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CHAPTER I

Introduction

1. Background of Research (with Reference)

The female character is a Gender Role in the Social Construction of Countries and Regions, reflecting Social Expectations and Values, to demonstrate the socio-culturally defined Gender and the process of constructing Female Identity of the Country.

Female Character construction has deep cultural roots and distinctive manifestations of the Gender dimension in different countries and regions, and this Phenomenon is Globally pervasive. The common issues and experiences shared by national Female Character Constructions are often deeply rooted in tradition, Culture, and Social Structural Order, but vary from region to region.

In China, Chinese Women's identity is perpetuated through the Family, the Education System, the Government, and the Media. The Media a key role in this Negotiating Identity process, creating " Vital" Chinese Female Characters by shaping cultural myths in a seemingly "Realistic" veneer, which is reflected in movies and animation. They not only embody the values of a particular society and culture but also reveal the complexity and diversity of Gender Roles in society.

The Female Character in Chinese Animated Films is the text of this study. Fictional female characters in the media usually have the typical temperament most associated with Chinese women or attributed to women. The Female Character in Chinese Animated Films does not pursue the restoration of the real world. Unlike live-action films, the artist can directly use image symbols and artistic rhetoric to convey ideas, concepts, and emotions, which in turn affects human consciousness.

Despite the rapid development of the Chinese Animated film industry, the neglect of the construction of Female Characters in films is still a common problem, which contrasts with the situation of the United States, Japan and other animation powers in which Female Character occupies an important position, such as the stereotyping of females makes the multiple social identities and roles limited; the absence, neglect or marginalization of Female Subjects affects the lack of depth of the characterization; and the lack of female perspectives and female experiences resulting in an inadequate presentation of values that are difficult to resonate with. These problems are not conducive to the development of cultural diversity in the country's society, nor are they conducive to the dissemination of the country's image of women and its international influence. More importantly, the persistent solidification of Gender concepts will hinder the younger generation's correct perception of Gender concepts and Female Characters in Chinese Animated Films. There is an urgent need for us to break these shackles, to gradually improve the construction of The Female Character in Chinese Animated Films, and to promote the sustainable development of society.

Since China's economic reform and opening up¹, the Film has become an important medium for mapping Multicultural Society, making these female characters a tool for negotiating identity between "Self" and "Others", "Nation" and "Women", "Communicators" and "Audience", demonstrating the influence of women and men on Society and Culture. Gender and Negotiating Identity, have been Important Concepts in this study.

The relevance of Chinese Women and women in Chinese animated movies is a primary question for researchers to ponder. The history of the changes of Chinese Women has accompanied the past and present development of Chinese society. Men and women in social reality have continuously become the material for animated movies, recording the changes of Chinese Women in society. What kind of Female Character played in different periods of time in Chinese Women? In any society or country, there is a common expectation that men and women have different roles and functions. (Peng Kehong, 1989) The evolution of the screen image of Chinese women serves as a mirror image of society, projecting the gender imagination of males and females in different eras.

Especially since the Reform and Opening-up of the Chinese Economy, there has been a massive influx of foreign ideas and changes in people's ideologies and value systems. When the state realizes that some traditional cultures that denigrate and suppress women will seriously impede the process of building Chinese Women's modernization, it tends to influence people's view of Gender through the media, and animation and movies are one of the forms of mass media. How do these fictional female characters demonstrate the vitality of women of the times? The Researcher used the Concept of "Gender".

Gender is constructed by specific social and cultural contexts (Butler, 1990), and the ways in which men and women should exhibit gender traits are formed by the social structures and power dynamics of gender relations within society and culture (Connell, 1987). Gender roles are often influenced by various factors, including cultural norms, religious beliefs, and historical traditions. However, these roles are neither fixed nor universal and can vary significantly across different societies and cultures.

In some Specific Societies, women are the backbone of the community and are very brave, even participating in hunting and athletic competitions. This is the case with the indigenous societies of the Americas and the Maasai Culture² of East Africa. In such societies, society demands that females and males behave more closely to each other.

In the cultural consciousness of most Asian countries, males are expected to be the primary breadwinners and have more decision-making power, while females

¹ China's economic reform and opening up: China's economic reform and opening up refers to a series of policies implemented by the Chinese government in the late 1970s and early 1980s that aimed to modernize and liberalize the country's economy.

² The Maasai culture: a unique and rich part of the East African heritage, characterized by its focus on pastoralism, traditional dress, language, religion, social structure, rituals, and art. Despite the effects of modernization and globalization, they have a unique culture and way of life which has existed for centuries.

are expected to prioritize family and domestic responsibilities. Traditional male roles are defined as masculine and strong, while traditional females are defined as gentle, virtuous, and caring for the family, as determined by the Social Environment.

In ancient India, gender roles were often strictly defined and depended heavily on a person's caste and social status. The femininity of Indian females was often associated with traditional gender roles, where women were expected to be modest, cultured, and submissive to men and to perform domestic duties. Their femininity is often expressed through their dress, hairstyle, and behavior. But there are also examples of females who represent wisdom and strength challenging traditional gender roles and expectations and playing an important role in society. Examples include the ancient Indian epics of the Mahabharata³ and the Ramayana⁴.

Japanese society has historically been influenced by traditional cultural beliefs and modern social changes. With men holding most of the power in Japanese patriarchal society, females are expected to fulfill the traditional role of the virtuous wife and mother⁵, such as the mother of the protagonist in Totoro⁶, who is portrayed as a loving, kind, and patient mother figure who supports and teaches her children important life lessons. The character has become an iconic figure in Japanese pop culture, portraying the femininity of a strong and positive mother.

Thailand is influenced by specific cultural, religious, and social contexts. Historically, because of the strong Buddhist influence on Thai female characters, Thai animated films often portray femininity in a variety of ways, and in some cases, femininity is idealized as gentle, graceful, and nurturing, often associated with the traditional role of women as caretakers of the home and family. But gender norms and expectations in Thailand vary widely and do not always conform to the ideal of Western femininity. The concept of the 'tomboy' or girl who exhibits traditionally

³ The Mahabharata: The Mahabharata is a film adaptation of the ancient Indian epic of the same name, directed by Peter Brook. The film, released in 1989, presents a condensed version of the extensive narrative, focusing on the key events and characters of the story. It captures the essence of the epic's themes, including duty, righteousness, and the complexities of human nature and fate. The play's Bondu's wife, Gunti, known for her wisdom and strength, plays a vital role in the epic's plot.

⁴ The Ramayana: One of the most popular epics of Hinduism. The author is Valmiki. It mainly tells the story of Prince Rama, one of the most revered heroes in Hinduism. Rama was a handsome and brave prince, and his wife Shiva was one of the Hindu goddesses. The themes of the story are good and evil, loyalty and betrayal, courage and cowardice, truth and hypocrisy.

⁵ The virtuous wife and mother: The Chinese idiom 'virtuous wife and mother' is often used to describe a woman who not only excels in the family but is also virtuous, hardworking, kind, educated, knows how to manage the household, and cares for her husband and children. The term is very important in traditional culture and is considered to be an ideal female role. Its meaning can be extended to the modern world to describe a woman who excels in both her family and profession.

⁶ Totoro: Totoro is a Japanese animated film directed by Hayao Miyazaki and released in 1988. The film shows the harmonious relationship between nature and humans, as well as the themes of family, friendship, life, and death.

masculine characteristics is widely accepted in Thai culture and often appears in Thai Media (including Animated Films).

In China, on the other hand, it is generally accepted that men are in a dominant position in national politics and public social affairs, as well as in family relations, and the gender concept of male superiority over females has been in place since ancient times. But as history has progressed, females have experienced a gradual decline from a higher status to the current class of largely achieved equality, also reflecting the complexity and diversity of Chinese society and culture from the side.

Femininity is complex and multifaceted and can be expressed in different ways across cultures and periods. Its first dimension is the determination of femininity from the outside inward, that is, femininity defined by the social environment.

In Ancient China, women were the leaders of society, and the population gathered around them, with the bonds of the blood being established by the matriarchal lineage, reflecting the matriarchal form of organization. In ancient Chinese mythology, Nuwa⁷ creates humans reflects the importance of women's role in human reproduction. Nuwa's femininity is portrayed in the film as a divine woman who "be a motherly model of the nation", revealing the message of women's essential and even dominant social role in a matriarchal society. However, men's physical superiority, who often made outstanding contributions to production and warfare, led to a later transformation from a matriarchal to a patriarchal society. The status of the male rose, while that of the female tended to decline. The Book of Poetry⁸ describes how men and women are defined from birth as 'ZHANG'(spindle) and 'WA'(tile), and that women are not born with the same power, expectations, or responsibilities as men.

Ancient China was ruled by a feudal class for over 2,000 years, and feudal society demanded feminine ideals emphasizing Obedience, Chastity, and Modesty. These characteristics were seen as necessary to maintain social order and preserve traditional gender roles. "Polygamy"⁹ and "Male superiority and female inferiority"¹⁰ were the main gender relations during feudal China, and the "Three Obediences and

⁷ Nuwa: The goddess who created the world in ancient Chinese mythology, created human society, and established the marriage system; she is the God of Creation and Mother God who has been widely and long worshiped by the people.

⁸ The Book of Poetry: The Book of Poetry is the beginning of ancient Chinese poetry. The Book of Poetry describes, "If a boy is born, he will be given a jade. If a girl is born, give her the spindle on the spinning wheel." The moral of this line is that it is hoped that the boy born will be of high moral character and later become a great official, while the girl who plays with the spindle will grow up to be good at housework and become a virtuous wife and mother.

⁹ Polygamy: "Polygamy" refers to the fact that a man marries to two or more women at the same times.

¹⁰ Male superiority and female inferiority: the male-centered feudal ethics, which belongs to traditional feudal thought and old social customs. It reflects the high status of men and the inferior status of women in feudal society; Meanwhile, it reflects the one- sided understanding of male and female productivity in the ancient era of brute strength, emphasizing the social status of males to meet the needs of men in war and the consolidation of power.

Four Virtues¹¹ " and the " Three Cardinal Guides and Five Constant Virtues¹²" was the shackle that bound women. Social and cultural factors are reflected in the femininity of early animated films in the form of the demure wife who is submissive to her husband, the humble concubine who is dependent on the male, the beautiful princess waiting to be rescued, and the fairies who are ignored like ornaments.

The fall of the Qing dynasty marked the end of China's ultra-stable feudal society and the beginning of the turbulent and changing modern Chinese society, triggering the greatest ideological and value system changes in Chinese society ever. the end of the 19th century created a social atmosphere in which women reinvented their roles in society, in terms of both the cessation of foot binding and the promotion of women's studies. (Jiang Meihua, 2020) They were constructing their femininity, and society's perception of them was derived from the physical practices they exhibited. The still small group of intellectual women are not yet conscious and capable enough to individually guide the female role back to the subject of 'man' rather than 'man', and the main thread of 'masculinity' runs through the main thread running through the 'masculine character' was that of women's fashion for men, which became a distinctive feature of the early 20th century. (Jiang Meihua, 2020, p.17)

During the May Fourth New Culture Movement¹³ period, women, in the new historical and cultural context, not only discovered that women were equal to men as human beings—the "discovery of human beings"—but also gradually recognized that women and men were different kinds of human beings—the "discovery of women" (Jiang Meihua, 2020, p.36).

Chinese women experienced a modern transformation in their economic and educational roles, primarily exploring their role transitions and the diverse coexisting patterns of these transitions from the perspectives of new role expectations and new role performances. Evidently, they no longer suppressed themselves or imitated men but sought liberation from patriarchy and pursued political and professional emancipation as women, affirming that being women also qualified them as human beings (Bi Yao, 1935). This period marks the initial construction of modern female

¹¹ Three Obediences and Four Virtues: The three obediences and four virtues were one of the moral standards used to bind and oppress females in ancient China's feudal rituals. Based on the principle of the social division of labor between male responsibility for the outside and female responsibility for the inside, Confucian rituals regulated the morality, behavior, and cultivation of females throughout their lives.

¹² Three Cardinal Guides and Five Constant Virtues: The "Three Cardinal Guides", reflect a special moral relationship between ruler and subject, father and son, and husband and wife in feudal society. The "Five Constant Virtues", were codes of conduct used to regulate and govern the human relations between ruler and subject, father and son, brother, husband, and wife, and friend. These codes seriously hindered the development of female talents and were a fundamental manifestation of the inequality between males and females.

¹³ "May Fourth New Culture Movement": The May Fourth Movement, which occurred on May 4, 1919, in Beijing, was a patriotic movement primarily led by young students and widely supported by various segments of society, including the general public, citizens, and business and industrial sectors. It involved demonstrations, petitions, strikes, and violent confrontations with the government. This movement was a thorough expression of the Chinese people's opposition to imperialism and feudalism.

role models. However, it also shared the common limitations of a transitioning society. The genuine development of female personal consciousness was still predominantly among educated women, while the self-liberation awareness of the vast number of female workers and rural women remained to be developed.

An essential feature of femininity was their physical practice in the social institutional field, moving from domestic dependence to social independence. Especially during the Cultural Revolution, when Chinese animation became a propaganda tool for the government, most of the animated films produced during this period carried a political message. There are heroic female characters of the era defined by a specific society, showing robust, unyielding, and independent femininity.

During the period of China's economic reform and opening up, the vast majority of women played both domestic and social roles, in both urban and rural areas (Jiang Meihua, 2020, p.67). As social processes accelerated and the need for more subtle and complex female roles grew, media portrayals of female roles evolved, defined not only by gender or relationship to male roles. Not everyone who identifies as female exhibits feminine traits, and not everyone who identifies as male exhibits masculine traits. There is no shortage of female characters in films who dare to defy fate. For example, Hua Mulan, who takes the place of her father and joins the army, Liang Hongyu, who beats the drums to repel the Jin soldiers, and Mu Guiying, who sets out on a campaign; in the relationship between men and women, Zhu Yingtai, who pretends to be a man to pursue her studies, Red Wolf, her savage girlfriend, and White Lady, who boldly pursues love, to name but a few.

In the process of building a modern national state in Chinese society, artistic creation in the new medium ushered in its modern transformation. Modern intellectual creators began to re-examine past Chinese social and cultural changes with a modern view of history, humanity, and values. "Animated movies are significantly different than live-action movies since the expressions of emotions of the animated characters are not their own. They are manifested by the people who bring them to life. On the other hand, the decisions on how and what these characters can express emotionally are not arbitrary. " (Monica Garza, 2019)

The female shows what femininity looks like by expressing it to the external environment through her bodily practices, such as external movements, language, make-up, dress, etc., and internal perceptions, awareness, and personality. The second dimension is therefore the presentation of femininity from the inside to the outside, i.e. femininity constructed through bodily practices.

Over a long period of history, female characters have used their bodies to imprint perceptions of masculinity and femininity, including recognition of how women are influenced by their personal practical experiences and social expectations, as well as their relationships with others. Early representations were often stereotypical or one-dimensional, such as some generally recognized aspects of femininity including grace, gentleness, sensitivity, empathy, nurturing and emotional intelligence, and femininity was often seen in turn as the antithesis of masculinity. However, these stereotypes and societal expectations of femininity can vary greatly depending on cultural and historical contexts, and they may not reflect the diverse experiences and identities of all females.

In the animated film, a classic female character, Hua Mulan, dresses as a man to take her father's place in the army. Society defines men to fight in the army, while females are not allowed to. Therefore, she wears male clothes on her body and cannot appear as a female in the army. The military uniform has always represented male masculinity and male charm as an important part of body expression. The film portrays Hua Mulan as a strong and determined young woman who can overcome obstacles and prove herself in a male-dominated environment. She also exhibits a high level of martial arts, traits traditionally associated with masculinity and socially desirable expectations. She thus engages in body practices that are different from those of traditional females, gradually confusing others to the extent that they have no way of distinguishing whether Hua Mulan is male or female. Thus, Mulan engages in internal and external bodily practices that allow others to perceive her as a man. Cross-dressing as a man serves as a symbol of Self-gender construction and bodily practices.

On the one hand, the construction of behavior and language is one of the factors that contribute to gender differences. The creators use a variety of expressive techniques and expressions to construct different connotations of gender in the film through "suppressing and devaluing some elements, as well as elevating and valuing others, through personality building, thematic repetition, variations in voice and point of view, alternative portrayals" (Xiao Wei, 2000)

For example, transgender or non-binary individuals often experience a mismatch between their self-identified gender and their actual gender expression, leading to unique bodily practices that reflect their identities. Therefore, movies and animations can create characters with male and female characteristics or portray characters with no gender characteristics at all. A notable example is the Thai film *The Adventure of Iron Pussy* (2003), which is known as หัวใจทรมอง (Hua Jai Tor Ra Nong) in Thai. The film tells the story of a transgender secret agent, Iron Pussy, who uses her intelligence and martial arts skills to fight crime and corruption. Several transgender characters in the film explore themes of gender identity. Japanese animated film *"Spirited Away"* by the main character Haku. Haku is a character who is both male and female. He is a dragon who can transform into a human, and his gender is ambiguous. In the Chinese animated film *"Our Winter Olympics"*, according to the International Olympic Committee, the mascots cannot be gender specific, so in the animated film, the Bing Dwen Dwen and Shuey Rhon Rhon¹⁴ cannot "talk" but make "babbled" sounds.

On the other hand, Culture, and System are also important influencing factors of gender construction. "Animated characters are the objectification of the essence of human nature. Although animated characters do not have vivid life-like actors in live-action movies, they also have a character charm that cannot be underestimated, and are symbols of humanity." (Fu Lili, 2016, p. 1)

¹⁴ Bing Dwen Dwen and Shuey Rhon Rhon: They are the mascots of the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympic and Winter Paralympic Games respectively. The Bing Dwen Dwen combines the image of a panda with a super-energetic ice crystal shell, signifying the creation of the extraordinary and the exploration of the future. Shuey Rhon Rhon is based on a lantern, which is a perfect combination of the festive atmosphere and the symbolic meaning of "a bountiful year of snow".

Take the first animated films from the United States, Japan, and China. Although they all named their films after female characters, their impact on the countries and societies was not the same. The root causes lie in national cultural differences, differences in gender systems, and the issue of symbolization.

The first American animated film, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*¹⁵ (1937), was created during the Great Depression, a time of social unrest and turmoil. American society, which was still centered on the patriarchal system, desperately needed a "sincere, kind, and beautiful" female character to soothe people's restless hearts. This femininity set the direction of the female narrative in American Disney films, from *Snow White* to the 'Princess Series', which has become a symbol of Western gender cultural construction since the 20th century.

The first color animated film in Japanese cinema history is *The Legend of the White Snake Enchantress*¹⁶ (1958). The early Chinese myth of the White Snake came to Japan and became influential among the people. The film is based on the twisted love story of the 'White Snake Lady' who pursues free love between a man and a woman, breaking the mold of the Japanese children's audience and opening up the market for Japanese adult audiences. A kind of globalization of popular culture in the age of mass cultural communication and new media visual consumption.

Unlike China's first animated feature film *the Princess of Iron Fan*¹⁷ (1941), there is a significant difference in the gender narrative subject. The film is set during China's war period and, despite its female title, is essentially a male-dominated narrative structure intended to convey political intentions. 'Princess Iron Fan', like the other female character, the Fox Spirit¹⁸, is subordinate to the male character (the wife and concubine of the Bull Demon King). They are secondary characters, on-screen only to set up the powerful power of the righteous side and become objects of voyeuristic desire. The film takes on a cathartic function for the Chinese public, setting early Chinese animation on a path to awakening national consciousness and conveying the spirit of the nation. Culture and institutions became key elements in the gendered portrayal of Chinese women's social roles.

¹⁵ *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*: This is a 1937 American Disney animated film, the first color-animated feature film in the history of world cinema. Directed by David Hand, the film is based on the German fairy tale *Snow White* written by the Brothers Grimm. Winner of the 11th Academy Award: Honorary Academy Award.

¹⁶ *White Snake Enchantress*: *The White Snake Enchantress* was produced by Toei Animation in 1958, and directed by Taiji Yabushita (1903- 1986). It was the first feature-length animated film in Japanese cinema history and the first color animated film produced by Toei Animation Co. The film tells the love story of the White Snake Lady and Xu Xian.

¹⁷ *The Princess of Iron Fan*: The animated film "*The Princess of Iron Fan*" is China's first animated film and the first animated feature film in Asia. Directed by "Wan Brothers" Wan Laiming, Wan Guchan, Wan Chaochen, and Wan Dihuan, it was released in Shanghai, China in 1941. The film tells the story of Tang Monk, his master, and his disciples who went to the West to learn Buddhist scriptures, but were blocked by the Flame Mountain and borrowed plantain fans three times.

¹⁸ *Fox Spirit*: The secondary female character in the animated film *Princess Iron Fan*, also known as *Princess Jade Face*, is the concubine of the Bull Demon King. She is transformed from a fox into a vixen. The charming image in the film is in sharp contrast to *Princess Iron Fan*.

The construction of femininity in female characters in Chinese animated films has never been a personal idea or act of the designer; it has been shaped by many factors in the general environment of the Foundation of Chinese Society, which has shaped a diversity of Female Characters.

Then since the founding of New China, under the guarantee of state policies and organizations, influencing the identity of women in society and communities, as representative figures in the process of the social construction of women in New China are:

Mao Zedong¹⁹, in his book *The Problem of Women's Self-Reliance* (1919), argued that women were oppressed because of the feudal rituals of old China and the lack of women's economic status. During the period of socialist construction, Mao Zedong even graphically stated that women were "capable of holding up half the sky" and that Chinese women were a great human resource that must be exploited (Chairman Mao Zedong on Women, 1955). The Marriage Law of the People's Republic of China, the first law promulgated in the country, clearly stipulated that the feudal ideology of male superiority over females and the feudal system should be abolished and that equal rights between males and females should be guaranteed.

Deng Xiaoping²⁰, who, guided by Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong's theory of women's emancipation, combined with the practice of Chinese women's development at the primary stage of socialism, clearly proposed at the Third National Congress of Chinese Women a long-term policy for women's work during the period of building socialism. "Firstly, we should build the country diligently and thriftily, and secondly, we should manage our homes well and struggle to build socialism" (Deng Xiaoping's Selected Writings, 1994). Pioneering a new frontier of women's development in the period of China's economic reform and opening up.

Jiang Zemin²¹ put forward equality between men and women as a basic state policy, stating: " Females and males are both the driving force behind the advancement of human history and the creators of the material and spiritual civilization of society, and should have the same personality and dignity, the same rights and status. In the production of human beings themselves, women have a special value and make a special contribution. Respecting women and protecting them is an important sign of social progress, a legal norm, and a moral ethic that a civilized society should have." (Selected Writings of Jiang Zemin, 2006) This is a major breakthrough in the promotion of gender equality.

¹⁹ Mao Zedong: Proletarian revolutionist, strategist, and theorist, the main founder and leader of the Communist Party of China, the Chinese People's Liberation Army, and the People's Republic of China.

²⁰ Deng Xiaoping: He was a proletarian revolutionary, politician, military man, and diplomat, one of the main leaders of the Chinese Communist Party, the Chinese People's Liberation Army, and the People's Republic of China, the chief architect of China's socialist reform and opening up and modernization, and the founder of Deng Xiaoping's theory.

²¹ Jiang Zemin: He was a proletarian revolutionary, statesman, military man, and diplomat, an outstanding leader of the great cause of socialism with Chinese characteristics, and the main founder of the "Three Represents" important thought.

Hu Jintao²² stressed the need to adhere to the implementation of the scientific concept of development and promote women's cause in the process of promoting economic and social development. The core of the Scientific Outlook on Development on the development of women in China is to put people first, implement the basic state policy of gender equality as always, continuously promote gender equality and harmonious development of both sexes, improve the social status of women and promote their all-round development. (Hu Jintao's Selected Writings, vol. 1, 2016) He also emphasized that under the new historical conditions, women are required to be new females of the times with "self-respect, self-confidence, self-reliance and self-improvement". (Hu Jintao's Selected Writings, vol. 3, 2016)

Xi Jinping²³, who stressed at the high-level meeting of the United Nations General Assembly to commemorate the 25th anniversary of the Beijing World Conference on Women on 1 October 2020, put gender equality into practice; safeguarded women's rights and interests rose to national will; proposed to promote women's development in tandem with economic and social development; built a harmonious and inclusive social culture; and aligned with the world's women's development cause and strengthened cooperation in the global women's cause.

Since the founding of New China, and especially after the reform and opening up, the state has introduced a series of policies on the construction of society and women, which have greatly contributed to the development of the Chinese view of women. China's policy of reform and opening up is part of the process of modernization and globalization in the world. Both modernization and globalization embody a notion of 'progress'. To deepen reform, the first thing to do is to liberate the mind. (Bi Jinyue, 2018) Since the reform and opening up, we have seen the rapid development of China's economy, the increasing improvement in the living standards and people of the country, the penetration of modern lifestyles and values into all levels of society, the significant changes in the conditions of all social classes, and the improvement in the status of Chinese women in many aspects, all of which are attributed to the policy of reform and opening up. The author, therefore, chose the point of China's economic reform and opening up as the context for studying the female characters in Chinese animation.

In the context of China's economic reform and opening up, I will use the concept of "Negotiating Identity" to study the Identity construction process of female characters in Chinese animation through the dimensions of female characters & other characters, Chinese Society & Women's development, and the Information Disseminator & Information Receiver.

Looking back on the development of Chinese animated films, it was once classified as art education film, taking on the function of propaganda for the people

²² Hu Jintao: Hu Jintao, who was once the General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and President of the People's Republic of China, proposed a scientific concept of development that adheres to a people-centered, comprehensive, coordinated, and sustainable approach to development.

²³ Xi Jinping: He is currently the General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, Chairman of the Central Military Commission of the Communist Party of China, and Chairman of the People's Republic of China.

and the responsibility of education for children and youth. Especially before China's policy of reform and opening up, female characters were always belittled and long held a supporting or secondary role. Despite the collision of Eastern and Western ideas brought about by the reform and opening up, films with male characters as the main narrative subjects were still the mainstream of the masses.

Before China's Economy Reform and Opening-up (1941-1978):

"The Anti-Japanese War Period - The Founding of New China - Before the Implementation of Reform and Opening" Social Institutional Field and The Female Character.

After experiencing the embryonic stage, Chinese animation entered a period of difficult development during the "War of Resistance against Japan"²⁴. Social unrest, and the development of animation almost standstill. In this environment, the animation director took the camera as a weapon of propaganda and devoted themselves to the movement of National Salvation and Resistance against Japan.

In 1941, two female characters appeared on the screen for the first time in a Chinese animated film. The system field associated with women is the family social structure and gender concept of "Polygamy, the treatment of females as inferior to males" in feudal society. The female of the respective "wife and concubine" identities are expressed as traditionally reinforced femininity by the director, which conforms to the stereotyped cognition of the national people's perception of gender roles at that time. Another key characteristic of Chinese society at that time is private land ownership, which can be reflected in the plot that Monk Tang and his disciples needed to "borrow the props" when crossing the Flaming Mountain. In such a social field, the power relationship still remains specific.

At that time, Film was still a new product in China, attracting a large number of audiences to enter the cinema with curious eyes. Under the social environment, the cinema had become a place for the dissemination of new ideas, and many avant-garde young people had become the main audience group. The creator negotiates with the audience through the animated female characters, and the audience recognizes and satirizes the gender class identity in the film, which reflects the gradual germination of female consciousness in the current society from the side.

After the founding of New China, the Ministry of Culture established Shanghai Film Studio, which brought together a group of animation industry elites, including Tang Cheng²⁵, the first female animation director in China. Under the artistic policy of "let a hundred flowers blossom and a hundred schools of thought

²⁴ Period of the Anti-Japanese War: The Anti-Japanese War refers to a national all-out war in which China resisted Japanese aggression during World War II in the middle of the 20th century. It is known as the Second Sino-Japanese War or the Japanese War of Aggression against China internationally. The war started with the "September 18th Incident" in 1931, and ended on September 2, 1945, 14 years in total.

²⁵ Tang Cheng: The first female animation director in China, she played an important role in the creation of the internationally renowned Chinese ink cartoon "Baby Tadpoles Look for Their Mother ", "reed pipe " and "Lu Ling l". He served as assistant director and director of the animated film "The Monkey King", which was the most successful and award-winning film.

contend"²⁶, Chinese animated films entered the first prosperous period. Animation films of this period had various themes and reached a new height of the artistic level, forming the "Chinese School of Animation"²⁷, and many films were enjoyed internationally.

After the founding of The People's Republic of China, the status of female identity has obviously improved. However, animation films depicting the relationship between males and females have not broken away from the shackles of the traditionally male discourse system. The beauty and fairy in the male aesthetic paradigm are always with to be "rescued and peeks" of femininity.

In addition, During the Cultural Revolution²⁸. Film as a cultural carrier of socialist construction in a specific era, animation production institutions under the guidance of the concept of "used by the state to a tool of negotiating identity", female roles assume the responsibility of socialist ideological discourse construction. At the same time, the social status change of women's liberation in New China has also become the spiritual motivation that affects the initiative of film creation.

After China's Economic Reform and Opening (1978-2023):

"Exploration Stage-Advancement Stag-Deepening Stage" Social Institutional Field and the Female Character.

In the exploration period of China's Economy Reform and Opening-up, the media continued to expand, which set off the second prosperous period of animated films. Animation creators seized the opportunity to reform and open up and explored the socialization development of female characters.

After the Cultural Revolution, due to the changes in the social environment and main social values, the aesthetic needs of the public have undergone great changes. Animation creators are more open-minded. Especially in the fantasy world of female goblins, advanced gender culture has been greatly exported, strengthening the identity of the audience in the 1980s and affecting the present. Nowadays, people call sexy and seductive bad women "fox spirits"; and the popular face shape in the cosmetic surgery industry is called "The face shape of a snake spirit" (V-face). There is a negotiated cultural identity between the identity of female characters and the modern audience.

²⁶ "Let a hundred flowers blossom and a hundred schools of thought contend": On April 28, 1956, Mao Zedong proposed at the enlarged meeting of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee that "letting a hundred flowers blossom and a hundred schools of thought contend should become the policy of developing science and flourishing literature and art in China." "Let a hundred flowers blossom and a hundred schools of thought contend" is not only the basic principle of CPC leadership in literature and art, but also in scientific research. It still has profound guiding significance today.

²⁷ "Chinese School of Animation": During the period of the first prosperity and development of Chinese animation, the output of animation production institutions increased, and the creative staff reached an unprecedented level in both art and technical quality. Many films won awards in international film festivals, forming the Chinese animation school recognized by the world.

²⁸ "Cultural Revolution": The proletarian Cultural Revolution, in its full name, took place from May 1966 to October 1976. It was an internal disorder launched by the wrong leaders and used by counter-revolutionary groups to bring serious disasters to the Party, the state and the people of all ethnic groups, leaving a very painful lesson.

From the end of the 1980s to the end of the 1990s, the open policy environment led to the introduction of a large number of foreign cartoons, resulting in the loss of talent in domestic animation creation. At the same time, it catalyzed the introduction of government support policies and the transformation of animation institutions into commercial industrialization mode.

After the new century, globalization has promoted and accelerated the development of the economy and culture. The Chinese government has continuously strengthened its cultural policies, and animation creation talents have been supported by the state. Thanks to the relaxed creation environment, fresh female animation characters have been created, which has gained good benefits and international influence. In particular, in the past decade, the films featuring women have gradually reflected the cultural values and the spirit of The Times that the creators hope to convey.

In 2016, "Big Fish & Begonia"²⁹, an iconoclastic female-themed animated film full of Chinese cultural concepts, has been released. Not only received good reviews from critics in North America and achieved good box-office results in South Korea but also conveyed the subversion of the feminist world and the awakening of female consciousness. The film won the best Animated Feature Award at the 15th Budapest International Animation Film Festival and the third Animation Award of the Chinese Government Award for Culture and Arts. Chinese animation opened a new world, but also lead Chinese animation into internationalization of an important step.

In 2018, "SHe"³⁰, a stop-motion animation from China featuring female themes, was the only animated film invited to participate in the 24th World Philosophy Congress. Zhou Shengwei, the male director, said that the film is not about women's rights or male power, but about issues between class and society. Curtis L. Carter, former president of the International Society for Aesthetics and professor of philosophy at Marquette University spoke highly of it. It was a finalist at the 42nd Montreal International Film Festival; Nominated for the Golden Goblet Award for Best Animated Feature at the 21st Shanghai International Film Festival.

In 2021, "Green Snake"³¹ extends the feminist perspective to the subject and symbolic level, and explores the issues of gender and identity anxiety faced by

²⁹ Big Fish & Begonia: The film is B&T Culture Ltd, Beijing Enlight Pictures Co Ltd, and Horgos Colourful House Film Co Ltd, and is co-directed by Liang Xuan and Zhang Chun. The film tells the story of CHUN, a girl who is in charge of the growth of the begonia flower, and her efforts to revive the soul of a human boy "Kun" in order to repay her kindness. The story of the struggle of destinies that entwine each other.

³⁰ "SHe": A purely handmade stop-motion animated feature film representing a female subject directed by Zhou Shengwei. The film tells the story of an oppressed female shoe who takes revenge in a cigarette factory dominated by shoe monsters. In December 2018, the film was selected for the first Hainan Island International Film Festival.

³¹ "Green Snake": The film is an animated adventure film co-produced by Chasing Light Animation, Alibaba Pictures, and others, directed by Huang Jiakang and starring Tang Xiao Xi. The film is released in Mainland China on 23 July 2021. The film tells the story of Xiao Bai, who is crushed by Fa Hai under the Leifeng Pagoda after he flooded the mountain to save Xu Xian, and Xiao Qing, who enters the Xiu Luo City for an adventure to bring down the Leifeng Pagoda.

contemporary women in the adventure story based on fantasy hyperrealism (Chen Kehong, 2021).

Since their inception, female characters in Chinese animated films have been particularly 'present' and yet particularly 'absent'. This phenomenon coincides with the development of women in Chinese society. In the visual writing of animated films, the social reality of women has become a constant source of cinematic material, and the visual expressions of the times have recorded the transformation of the image of Chinese women on the screen. The characterization of female characters in Chinese animated films stems from the creators' 'self-identification' with the female characters, which makes them different from male characters or other characters.

To sum up, during the 40 years of China's economic reform and opening up, animated films, as a symbolic production of images, have closely linked personal will and commercial values with national sentiments. The construction of female identity has been transformed from the 'invisible' to the 'visible'. Female characters have been a driving force in the development of Chinese society and culture.

In light of the modern scientific and humanistic spirit, the modern Chinese elite intellectuals realized that the traditional culture that denigrated and repressed women would seriously hinder the process of building a modern Chinese nation-state. As a result, the excavation and rewriting of historical women, myths, legends, and literary masterpieces became an important part of modern film narratives, and female characters became symbols that were integrated by modern creators at different times according to different realities and life needs and were constantly decoded and created. They and their stories carry both the collective imagination and collective memory of their creators in relation to their gender groups, as well as their individual experiences and pursuits in the context of specific times.

We see that established gender stereotypes still exist. Female characters are often constrained by specific social circumstances and cultural forms, and there are issues of identity pluralism and gender differences. Faced with various intricate social structures and relationships, the government has given creators the requirement to create characters that are in keeping with the times, and current audiences are more interested in seeing female characters that meet the needs of society, and this is when female characters become a tool for negotiating identity. It can be said that through the dimensions of Female Characters & Other Characters, Chinese Society & Women's development, and the Information Disseminator & Information Receiver, female animated characters become a tool for self-gender identity, the Chinese view of women and the dissemination of advanced gender culture.

Media and Female Studies is an intersectional research field between communication studies and gender studies, which expands the research level and research content of communication studies with the dimension of gender studies, and also injects fresh topics into gender studies with the perspective of media communication. The topics of studies such as The Blue Book on Media and Women: A Report on the Development of Media and Women in China and Media Studies in a Gender Perspective reflect diverse research contents and research paths. Liu Liquan (2012) summarizes and compares the status of media and female research, pointing out that the most frequent topic in Chinese media and female research is the exploration of the image of females presented by the media, followed by the elaboration of gender concepts presented. The homogenization of research has

exposed many limitations in the vision of Chinese media and female studies. Despite this, most domestic research on female characters in animation and film tends to explore issues such as their Design, Image-making, or Symbolic and Representational Meanings, but rarely does it take a sociological or anthropological perspective to analyze how these characters reflect Social Changes, Class Structures, and other issues, and it has yet to find a study of the Negotiating Identity of female animated characters in the dimension of Gender. This is related to the fact that animation studies itself are still a young discipline, and the author will endeavor to synthesize the approaches of Sociology, Communication, Film Studies, Political Science, and other disciplinary fields to expand the current academic research on this issue.

Focusing on Chinese females and female animated characters, this study examines the changing female characters and the changing role of female animation. It considers the gender and the negotiating identity of female characters in Chinese animated films in the context of the changes in Chinese society, especially before and after China's Economy Reform and Opening-up, in an attempt to explore contemporary women and gender issues in a cross-media and cross-disciplinary comprehensive vision, re-examines the feminine view of gender philosophy, and outlines the changes in gender relations and social institutions in the course of Chinese society and its inner structure. This study will be an interesting academic issue.

It shows that "Gender", a study of the Gender construction and identity of female characters in Chinese animated films, outlines the changes in gender relations and gender institutions in Chinese social processes and their inner structure. The author will use Judith Butler's book 'Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity, ' and Prof. Raewyn Connell's book 'Gender in World Perspective' to analyze and elaborate; "Negotiating Identity" as negotiation and expression of gender Socialization of female characters in Chinese animated films, the author will use a combination of Ting-Toomey's theory of identity negotiation and Susie Scott's book 'Negotiating Identity: Symbolic Interactionist Approaches to Social Identity.'

The title of this study is 'The Female Character in Chinese Animated Films: Gender and Negotiating Identity in the Context of Reform and Opening-up of the Chinese Economy', which is a 'small place' for understanding gender issues in Chinese society. "This study will serve as an important window for domestic and international scholars to understand Chinese women and the structure of social relations in China through the 'animation lens'. This study will use qualitative research methods to describe and analyze Female Characters in Chinese Animation Films.

พหุ ม ประทีป ชีวะ

2. Purpose of Research / Objective

2.1 To study the Sociocultural History of Chinese Women and Chinese Animated Films, focusing on the Relationship between Chinese Women and Female Characters in Chinese Animated Films.

2.2 To study the Female Characters in Chinese Animated Films in the dimension of Gender in the context of Reform and Opening-up of the Chinese Economy.

2.3 To analytically study the Female Characters in Chinese Animated Films in the Negotiating Identity dimension of constructing Female Identity.

2.4 To study the Female Characters in Chinese Animated Films, the "Fox Girl", in the dimension of research unit analysis.

3. Research Questions

3.1 How do the changes in the Sociocultural History of Chinese Women influence and reflect on the portrayal of The Female Character in Chinese Animated Films?

3.2 How have Gender Perceptions Changed and Affected the Portrayal of Female Characters in Chinese Animated Films in the Context of Reform and Opening-up of the Chinese Economy?

3.3 How to Negotiating Identity of Female Characters in Chinese Animated Films in the Construction?

3.4 Choosing a specific Female Animated Character type, in this case, 'Fox Girl' - how does the study show the novelty and benefits of this research (from the point of view of the scientific research methodology) in terms of the dimensions of Gender and Negotiating Identity?

4. Definition of Terms

4.1 Female Character in Chinese Animated Films

Female Character in this study is a term used to describe the types of characters in artistic creations such as literary texts and films. These characters are often based on the female gender, but in modern creations, may sometimes include transgender, non-binary or other gender-identified characters.

The Female Character in Chinese Animated Films in this study refers to the female characters in Chinese animated feature films (including Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan) that have been publicly released from 1941 to 2023, as well as non-publicly released animated films that have won awards in film festivals or other professional competition sections, with an emphasis on the individual's personality and characteristics. Female Character in animated films not only refers to human beings, but can also be anthropomorphic figures of animals or objects. Ethnic Chinese Women Characters with "Chinese faces" are also included in that discussion. In

animated movies, they represent the Chinese Women of the country and are narrated from a female perspective.

4.2 Gender

Gender refers to the social, cultural and psychological traits, roles, behaviors and identities that a given society associates with individuals based on their perceived gender. Professor Raewyn Connell defined gender in the book "Gender In World Perspective" (2011): Gender is a special social construct. Gender is a specific form of social expression, and gender relations create a specific social structure. It varies in different cultures, societies and historical periods.

Gender is the first concept used by the researcher in this study. A Gender Perspective can reveal the Chinese Gender Order and the construction of Chinese Women by showing how the body and Gender Character, Identity and Gender Relations, and how Gender Performativity is performed through Female Characters in Chinese Animated Films.

4.3 Negotiating identity

Negotiating Identity can be defined as the process of negotiation in which an individual or group perceives, expresses, and reconstructs the identity of self or others in the process of social interaction, emphasizing the subject of the negotiation as well as the result of the negotiation. This process involves a multidimensional understanding of identity, including Cultural Identity, Social Identity, Gender Identity, etc., and is influenced by a variety of factors such as context, history, culture, and social structure.

In this study, Negotiating Identity is the second concept used by the researcher. Negotiating Identity is a necessary process in the identity construction of Chinese Women's Animation Female Characters. Negotiating between the State and the Disseminators in the dimension of Cultural Identity; Negotiating between the Artist and the Audience in the dimension of Social Identity; Negotiating between the self and the other in the dimension of Gender Identity.

4.4 Femininity

Femininity is a concept that refers to the qualities, behaviors, and characteristics traditionally associated with females or women in a given culture or society. It is a social and cultural construct that varies across different societies and historical periods. The perception and understanding of femininity can be influenced by cultural norms, social expectations, and gender roles.

In this study, it is necessary to explore how femininity is constructed in China, and how the image of women constructed through female characters in Chinese animation films affects Chinese people's views on gender.

4.5 Chinese Women

The term "Chinese women" is a cultural term; like women in other countries, Chinese women are a diverse and multifaceted group with different backgrounds, experiences, and social roles, exhibiting a wide range of characteristics.

In this article, the Chinese women discussed are both bearers of traditional family roles and active participants in modern society. They continuously make

progress and breakthroughs in education, economy, and culture, striving to achieve self-worth and social value, while also facing the dual pressures of traditional concepts and modern challenges. Through ongoing identity negotiation and self-recognition, Chinese women, in the context of globalization, gradually shape a unique and diverse female image.

Specifically, early Chinese women were constrained by feudal ethics, which imposed strict gender roles and emphasized family and hierarchy. Educational opportunities for women were limited, confining them to family roles. In the modern era, women began to awaken to their individuality and challenge traditional norms. After the founding of the People's Republic of China, the state promoted gender equality, leading to desexualized femininity and collective participation in economic and political life. Since the economic reforms, Chinese women have pursued diverse development, focusing on personal growth and characteristics.

The essential differences between Chinese women and Chinese female characters lie in their forms of existence, identity representation, purposes, and impacts. However, they complement each other in promoting the understanding and recognition of female identity. They are connected through changes in social and cultural concepts, identity recognition of social roles, the development of female traits and gender perspectives, and the audience's aesthetic and value associations.

4.6 Gender Relations

Gender Relations exist within and between masculinity or Femininity and include a variety of connections that operate directly or indirectly and are produced and reshaped in the lifeworld. (Raewyn Connell, 2009) Gender Relations encompass multiple structures, and in the context of industrial and post-industrial societies in the age of globalization, Connell proposes the four dimensions or the four-structures model of gender relations.

In this study, the strengths of gender relations as an analytical tool lie in the holistic vision and systematic framework. Gender Relations and Gender Temperaments are key to the understanding of doing Gender.

4.7 Gender performativity

Gender performativity refers to the fact that gender identity is not fixed, but is "performed" and constructed by individuals through a series of behaviors and expressions in the social and cultural environment. Gender performativity emphasizes the socially constructed and fluid nature of gender identity, that is, gender identity is constantly being shaped and changed through interaction with others.

In Judith Butler's theory, Gender performativity is viewed as a social practice that reveals how gender identities are shaped by social norms and expectations and how they in turn influence these norms and expectations. Gender performativity theory challenges traditionally fixed and stereotypical images of gender identity. In this study, the concept of Gender performativity applies not only to The Female Character in Chinese Animated Films but also to the identity and expression of the director behind the screen:

For The Female Character in Chinese Animated Films, Gender performativity means that these characters are not simply defined as "women", but that their

identities and characteristics as women are presented and shaped through their actions, behavior, dress, and characterization.

For directors behind the screen, Gender performativity also applies to their identity and expression. When creating animated films, directors are not only influenced by their own Gender identity, but they also communicate and shape their understanding and perception of Gender through their work. Their work may reflect their unique understanding of Gender roles, or explore Gender topics through stories and characters, thus provoking the audience to think about and discuss Gender issues.

4.8 Gender Construction

Gender can be constructed, and gender is essentially the result of social construction. Some scholars argue that gender construction mainly includes the construction of social roles and the cultural construction of gender, where the construction of social roles refers to the difference in social roles due to the different social division of labor between males and females, and the cultural construction of gender refers to the behavioral norms of males and females being constructed according to the prevailing social culture, power structures, customs, etc. (Judith Butler, 1990)

'Gender Construction' in this study refers to the process of negotiating identities by exploring the practice of gender roles through both the construction of female roles and the cultural construction of animated female characters. The study also explores the important factors that influence gender construction, such as language, behavior, culture, and institutions.

4.9 'Fox Girl'

"Fox Girl" refers to the female "fox fairy", "fox demon" or "fox spirit". The Female Character in Chinese Animated Films refers to a female character in Chinese Animated Films who is a "fox transformed into a human being" with the combination of "human nature, fox characteristics, and female characteristics". "Fox Girl is an important bearer of Gender and identity in the medium and represents the construction of female identity in Chinese Women's animated films.

Among the Female Characters in Chinese Animated Films, 1) The Fox Girl screen image appears most frequently. According to statistics, during the 82 years of Chinese animation films, there have been eight Fox Girls in six Chinese animation films, including different identities, classes, and social structures. 2) The deepest cultural heritage. Tracing its roots back to the Chinese fox culture, it contains many important traditional concepts - secular and religious, ethical and philosophical, historical and aesthetic. 3) It has a wide popular base. They are visualized, virtualized, cute, and youthful, which makes the image of Fox Girl resonate with the audience and meet the aesthetic needs of modern audiences.

The researcher takes this special Female Character as the object of research unit analysis. All the Fox Girls in the films have one thing in common, they are all Chinese mythological texts. According to the chronological order of the film's release, each Fox Girl is introduced as follows:

1) The "Yu Mian" (Radiant) Princess: also known as the Jade Fox. The Princess of the Iron Fan (1941), is a film based on the story of Sun Xingzhe who borrows a banana fan three times from the classic Chinese novel Journey to the West.

It tells the story of the four monks and their disciples, who are on their way to the Western Paradise to obtain scriptures and are prevented from doing so by the banana fan on the Flaming Mountain. In the film, she is a secondary character, a fox transformed into a charming woman, covered in pearls and jewelry, who is very popular with the Bull Demon King and competes for favor with the Princess Iron Fan, who is eventually killed by Zhu Bajie.

2) The Beautiful “Fox Spirit” & The Old “Fox Spirit” : from The Legend of Sealed Book(1983), the film is based on some chapters of The Legend of the Ping Demon, the first full-length divine novel in Chinese history. The film tells the story of three foxes who steal an immortal elixir and transform into human beings. The old fox spirit is sinister and cunning, while the beautiful fox spirit is greedy for money and goods, and they have a mother-daughter relationship. They are good at exploiting human weaknesses, finding loopholes in the system, and cheating people out of their money. They also pretend to be fairy nuns and collude with the government to oppress the people and wreak havoc on the earth. Yuan Gong then guides the exceptionally gifted Egg Sang - a child who jumps out of an egg to practice the spells in the Book of Heaven and fight with the fox spirits to eliminate harm to the people.

3) Fox Spirit (Grandmother) : From "The Golden Monkey Subdues Demons" (1985), the film tells the story of Sun Wukong, who is crushed under the Five Elements Mountain by Rudrai and later rescued by the Tang Monk, who follows him to the West to get scriptures; in the process of getting scriptures, he encounters the White Bone Spirit on the way, and the Wukong thrice fights the civilians conjured up by the White Bone Spirit, so he is driven away by the Tang Monk, who is also captured by the White Bone Spirit; later, the Eight Ring asks the Wukong to come out to destroy the demon spirit and save his master. This character's appearance is only for Sun Wukong to use the identity of the White Bone Spirit's mother to outsmart the demon and advance the plot.

4) “Bao Qing Fang” Mistress: from White Snake (2019), “Bao Qing Fang” Mistress is a double-sided nine-tailed fox, both cute and sexy white fox girl image, has a double personality, is a serious businessman, all kinds of demons within a 300-mile radius needs to create personal magic treasure, will come to Baoqingfang trade. She is also a key character in the play, driving the storyline and seamlessly linking to the classical mythology of the "White Snake". In White Snake 2: Green Snake (2021), she is the original owner of Bao Qing Fang, whose real body is a nine-tailed fox with only eight tails for unknown reasons. Later, she came to Xiu Luo City for business and became the Boss Lady of Wan Yi Supermarket, telling Xiao Qing the key secret to leaving Xiu Luo City. Unpredictable and able to travel freely between Xiu Luo City and modern times.

5) “Xiao Jiu” : From Legend of Deification (2020), the film tells the story of Jiang Ziya, a disciple of Kunlun, who leads the gods to capture the nine-tailed demon fox "Sudaji" and win the battle of the gods. He is then relegated to the North Sea, where he is reviled by the world. Ten years later, he meets Xiao Jiu, the innocent girl captured by the fox demon, and together they search for the truth about everything that happened. Xiao Jiu was originally a virtuous girl, but the nine-tailed fox demon took advantage of the situation and embedded her body to become a fox demon.

6) **“Su Daji ” (Nine-tailed Fox Demon):** Xiaojiu became a fox girl who was embedded in her body by the Nine-tailed Fox Demon and thus became a fox girl who wreaked havoc on the country and the people. To help the fox clan to attain divine ascendancy, Nine Tails promised to help the Heavenly Father to start a battle to seal the gods but was later exterminated from her family for eternity. From innocent and lovely to charming and seductive, it was under the charm of Su Daji that King Zhou eventually became a tyrant and lost the Great Shang. Whether it is Su Daji or Xiao Jiu, her fate has been forced to be linked to the fox demon.

7) **Nine-tailed Fox (Female tavern owner) :** Shan Hai Jing's Goodbye Monster (2022), the film tells the story of Bai Ze, a divine doctor in Kunlun, and Yi, a Qilin boy, who embark on a journey of redemption and adventure together to unlock the secret of the Black Spirit. The nine-tailed fox in the play has an independent personality, has better interpersonal relationships, likes the male lead, Bai Ze, secretly helps Bai Ze and Yi, and ends up driving the plot forward.

4.10 Chinese Society

Chinese society is usually used to describe the social situation in China, from ancient times to modern times. The Chinese society in this study includes both ancient and modern aspects:

Ancient Chinese society can be traced back to the establishment of the Xia Dynasty in the 21st century BC until the fall of the Qing Dynasty (1912 AD), which was dominated by the feudal system and a strict social hierarchy. Women in Chinese feudal society were influenced by Confucianism, which restricted women's status and rights in some respects, and women played a secondary role in the family and society.

Modern Chinese society refers to the period from the fall of the Qing Dynasty (AD 1912) to the present, including the period of the Republic of China, the founding of the People's Republic of China, and the subsequent stages of development. Modern Chinese society adopts a republican system, and Marxist ideology is the guiding ideology of the Communist Party of China and affects China's political, economic, and social development. With the implementation of the reform and opening up policy, people's social status is no longer restricted by the strict feudal hierarchy, and the social division of labor is becoming more and more detailed. The government and society have been committed to promoting gender equality and creating a better development environment and opportunities for women.

4.11 China's Economy Reform and Opening-up

This study is based on the background of China's economic reform and opening up. China has entered a phase of reform and opening up, and its economy is developing rapidly. China's economic development has led to social and cultural development, bringing about more cultural exchange and innovation. At the same time, the reform and opening up was also important point in the development of Chinese women's minds.

4.12 Social System Field

The "Field" is spatial power. Power does not exist in an abstract form; all power operates in concrete fields. Only those forms of power that are arranged spatially are true power; power that is non-spatial, that unfolds in contingent relationships, or that is merely conceptual, is not the most enduring power.

In this study, the female characters of Chinese animation are discussed not only in terms of their periodicity and historical context, but also, more importantly, in terms of the form of the social field in which they are embedded - the field itself is as important as the female figures, or the representation of these female figures is directly related to the specific 'field'. The representation of these women is directly related to the specific 'field'. In short, contemporary females are generally characterized by their socialization, their full access to the social field, and their enjoyment of the same social rights as men. What needs to be analyzed in more depth are the different historical periods of female socialization and the specific shape of the social field in which they are embedded.

5. Scope of Research

5.1 Scope of Area

The overall study of this paper is based on all Chinese Animated Films released in Chinese theaters from 1941's "The Princess of Iron Fan" to the end of 2023, a total of 83 films (with a total number of 112 Female Characters), excluding Animated Films without the participation of key Female Characters in them, for example, 1979's "Ne Zha Follies in the Sea" in which only two maidservants with no lines were featured, and also excluding the complete resources that cannot be found on the Internet. animated movies that are not available on the Internet.

5.2 Scope of Time

The research is divided into periods:

Before the Reform and Opening-up of the Chinese Economy, with only one film from the 1940s and four films from the 1950s-60s;

After the Reform and Opening-up of the Chinese Economy, with seven films from the 1980s-90s and 75 films from the 21st century to the present. (No resources were found for Chinese animated films released in the 1970s)

One reason for the time division is that the researcher found that the Female Characters in these three time periods all show different characteristics of the era when doing the content analysis, the details of which are elaborated in the main text. Another reason is that I found from the research of animation scholars such as Sun Lijun³² and Zhou Chunhong³³ that "the 1920s and 1940s were the beginning of the

³² Sun Lijun: Vice President of Beijing Film Academy, Executive Director of China Animation Society, Vice Chairman of Beijing Filmmakers Association. He is a professor and supervisor of doctoral students. His major publications include Introduction to Animation, History of Chinese Animation, and Dictionary of Animation Art.

³³ Zhou Chunhong : Associate Professor, Northeast electric power university.

nationalization of Chinese animation films until the mid-1960s when the nationalization developed and matured into the first golden period; and after the Reform and Opening-up of the Chinese Economy, the 1980s was the second golden period of the nationalization of China's animation films, and after the 1990s nationalization began to lose its direction. nationalization began to lose its direction after the 1990s." On the basis of this theory, this paper takes "Before and after the Reform and Opening-up of the Chinese Economy" as an important time node to divide the time period.

The research spans 82 years of Chinese animated films from 1941 to 2023. The timeline is divided into two parts and four stages, with the Reform and Opening-up of the Chinese Economy as the dividing point:

PartI: Before the Reform and Opening-up of the Chinese Economy

First Stage: Sprouting Period (1941-1949)

Second Stage: Breakthrough Period (1949-1978)

PartII: After the Reform and Opening-up of the Chinese Economy

Third Stage: Exploratory Period (1978-2000)

Fourth Stage: Diversification Period (2000-2023)

5.3 Scope of Content

The core of the research content is to explore how China uses the media, especially female characters in Chinese animated films, to construct the country's female image and influence people's views on gender and women. We focus on how people gradually accept and identify with this image of national women in this media representation, and the impact this process has on social perceptions.

Based on this, the scope of the research content is female characters in Chinese animated films. There are many female characters in Chinese animated films. The author will choose the special group of "fox girl" as a representative unit for research. Female characters in live-action films are generally not addressed in this study.

The author will choose the special group of 'fox girl' as the unit analysis of the research. The main reason is:

Fox girls of female characters are the best representative of gender issues and identity negotiation issues in Chinese animation. The academic community has yet to find an example of the Chinese animated female characters Fox girl to analyze this issue.

Fox Girl appears the most. The changes before and after China's reform and opening up will send out messages worth paying attention to in different fox girl characters, and fox girls can only construct or display their gender identity within the existing power structure. At the same time, it also reflects the intricate social relationships in gender role socialization.

Each period has its "characteristics of the times", and these characteristics of the times are all reflected in the fox girl. The fox girl is not only the embodiment of "femininity", but also represents the mainstream cultural identity and aesthetic ideal of a period. This is a process of negotiation of people's "female" identity, and it also expresses their understanding of the mainstream of the "era" through the role of the fox girl. Fox Girl has the deepest cultural heritage. Studying the personality changes

of fox girls from the perspective of cultural identity can better understand and summarize the construction of femininity.

The fox girl during the Early Stages : Princess 'Yu Mian' (Beautiful-faced Fox Spirit) ; from Princess Iron Fan (1941)

The fox girl during the reform and opening up period : Fox Girl Mei'er (Pink Fox Spirit/Beautiful Fox Spirit) ; from The Book of Heaven (1983)

The fox girl during the period of comprehensively deepening reform and opening up : Baoqingfang Proprietor (Two-faced Fox Spirit/Nine-tailed Fox Immortal); from White Snake (2019), White Snake 2: The Green Snake (2021)

6. Research Methods (Summary)

6.1 Population

6.1.1 key Informant

Decision-maker groups: These include core members of the government, distribution organizations and film production companies. They promote the development of Chinese Animated Films, constitute a favorable environment for China's new-age society, and expand the influence and cultural value of The Female Character in Chinese Animated Films from all aspects.

1) Providers in governmental decision-making, the researcher mainly obtains relevant issued documents from the official websites of the state and government.

2) Key informants in distribution organizations and film production companies, the researcher mainly interviewed Ms. Ma Xinran, the brand director of Migrain Pictures. With its strong strength, influence, quality of works, market performance, innovation and technology strength as well as industry contribution and social responsibility, Migrain Pictures has become one of the authoritative distribution organizations and film production companies in China's animation film industry.

6.1.2 Casual Informant

Group of creators: including directors and scriptwriters of animated movies, as well as designers of female characters. They are influenced by national policy, social environment, market demand, and subjective factors to mold Female Characters relying on the story text. The interviewees will be able to provide a more comprehensive and in-depth understanding of this study and valuable research materials have been obtained.

1) The researcher interviewed a renowned art master, veteran animator, and director, Mr. Zhu Mingcan, a foundational figure in Taiwanese animation. With fifty years of experience in the animation industry, he studied under the same mentor as Hayao Miyazaki and is highly esteemed in both Taiwanese and Japanese animation circles. He has supervised excellent Chinese-language animated works such as "The Young Imperial Guards," "Yuan Long," and "I'm an Immortal."

2) Officially publicized interviews with Chinese animation film directors provided by official media platforms and channels (e.g., China Central Television (CCTV), local TV stations, and Chinese mainstream video websites): Shanghai Film Art Studio directors Lin Wenxiao, Qian Yunda, and Speed, animation cinematographer Duan Xiaoxuan; Light Chaser Animation director Qian Jiakang, author, and screenwriter Ge Jing, Director "Iron of the Universe".

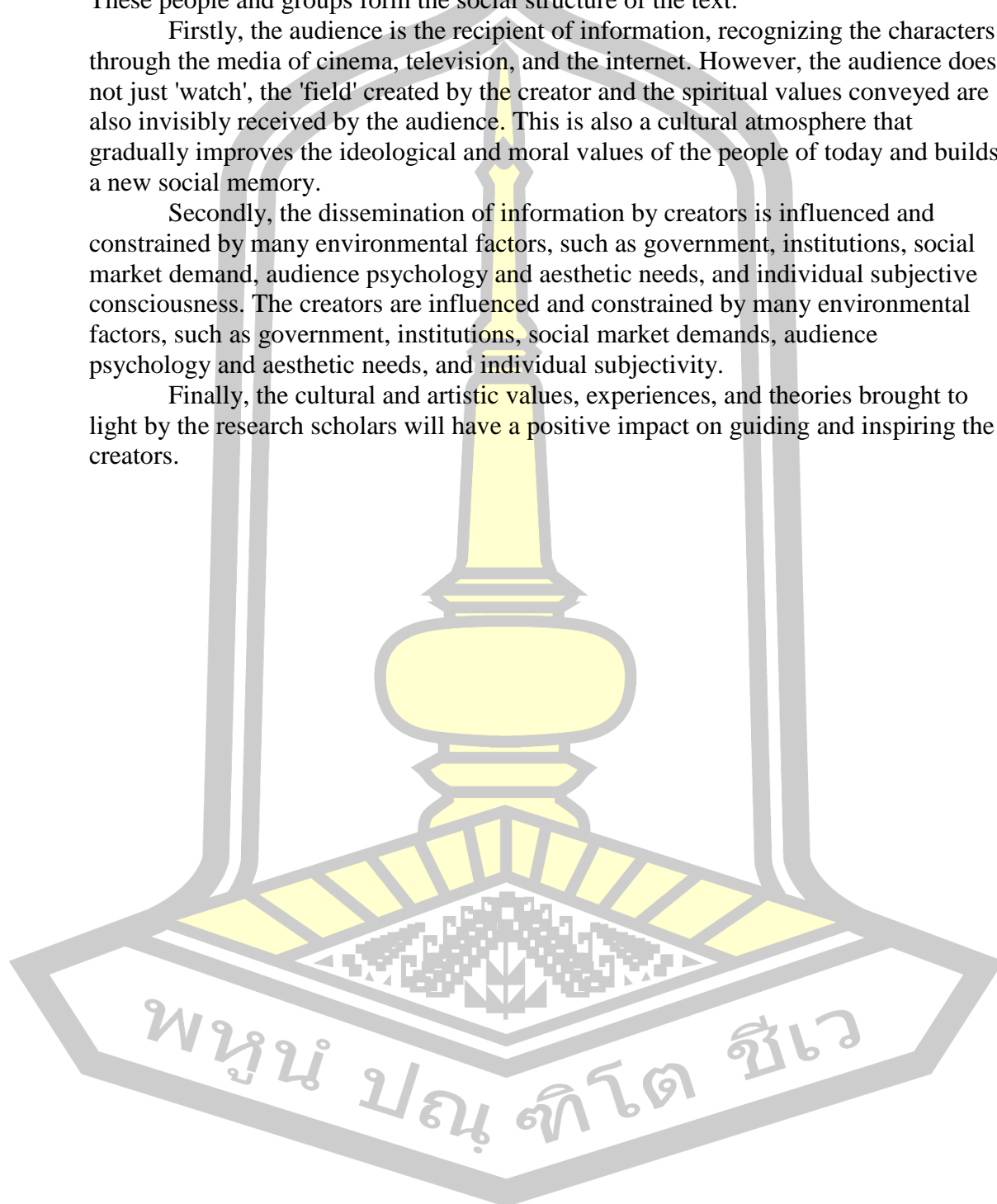
6.1.3 General Informant

Audience groups: including offline audiences and moviegoers commenting on the Internet. In terms of offline and online viewing environments and age groups, the main focus is on young people. 6.1.4 The connection between population and group
These people and groups form the social structure of the text.

Firstly, the audience is the recipient of information, recognizing the characters through the media of cinema, television, and the internet. However, the audience does not just 'watch', the 'field' created by the creator and the spiritual values conveyed are also invisibly received by the audience. This is also a cultural atmosphere that gradually improves the ideological and moral values of the people of today and builds a new social memory.

Secondly, the dissemination of information by creators is influenced and constrained by many environmental factors, such as government, institutions, social market demand, audience psychology and aesthetic needs, and individual subjective consciousness. The creators are influenced and constrained by many environmental factors, such as government, institutions, social market demands, audience psychology and aesthetic needs, and individual subjectivity.

Finally, the cultural and artistic values, experiences, and theories brought to light by the research scholars will have a positive impact on guiding and inspiring the creators.



6.2 Instrumentation

Picture and video recording (cameras, video recording equipment)

Voice record

Field notebook

6.3 Data Collection

6.3.1 Literature collection

Through ancient books, historical sources, and international conceptual works; Chinese and English literature was collected by CNKI, SCI-Hub database, Google Scholar, Baidu Scholar, and other academic resource platforms. Literature is collected in three directions: research text, research concept, and context.

6.3.2 Field work

My field research space is not a real and concrete place, but an Imagined Community, which connects related groups of people, and also takes China's Social System Field into full consideration. Based on this, my fieldwork will use observation and interview methods to study animated female characters in films as well as Chinese Female Characters.

First of all, through screening, I will focus on the three leading online video platforms in China: Youku, Tencent Video, and IQiyi ; fieldwork should also visit archive centers related to the texts to collect data, the China Film Museum, the Shanghai Film Museum, and the China Animation and Comic Museum will be the essential places to investigate the development of animation in China for the purpose of this research project. I will also interview Associate Professor **Gao Weihua** of the School of Animation and Digital Arts at the Communication University of China, as well as members of the China Film Group and core members of the film production companies, who will provide more in-depth research materials and information for my research.

Secondly, in order to gain a deeper understanding of female characters in China, I will be looking at Deng Yingchao, who was a pioneer of the Chinese female movement, and observing female characters in Chinese society by studying her, I will be visiting the Deng Yingchao Memorial Hall as well as interviewing researchers in the hall.

6.4 Data Analysis

First, the first data integration will be carried out based on the data collected in the research conceptual framework.

Second, the second data integration will be carried out according to the research purpose;

Finally, descriptive analysis will be used to analyze data by combining concepts and phenomena.

6.5 Research presentation

6.5.1 Full paper of research

-Descriptive analysis

6.5.2 Research article

-International research article, Scopus level

7. Literature Review

7.1 Literature related to the research text

The research text of this study is the female role in Chinese animated films. Through a deeper analysis of the definition of the female role in animation, it is more advantageous to find that the changes in the female animated characters can map the interconnectedness of various aspects of culture, female and gender, class system, and structural relations in Realistic society.

The female character in animated films is a specific gender role in Chinese animation, and various scholars have elaborated on its portrayal. By analyzing female characters in animated films, we can understand the layers of what constitutes a Chinese female animated character about Chinese women, as well as the relationship between the film medium and society, politics, and culture.

From the current literature, there are not many studies on female characters in animated films, which is related to the fact that animation studies are still a young subject. Because of this, it is necessary to give a brief overview of the current state of research at home and abroad in general.

Since the 21st century, society has been paying more and more attention to women. Research on the role of women has been a hot topic in Chinese academia, mainly in the fields of theatre, film and television art, world literature, Chinese literature, sociology, psychology, and so on. From the data collected, research on female animation characters is mainly focused on image design and animation theory, covering animated films.

7.1.1 In Chinese animated film historiography

Prof. Sun Lijun, Vice President of the Beijing Film Academy and Executive Director of the China Animation Society, divides and composes the 87-year history of animation in China into six time periods. They are the germination and birth of Chinese animation in the 1920s, early Chinese animation from(1931-1948), the founding of The People's Republic of China(1949-1977), after the China's Economy Reform and Opening-up (1978- 1988), after the China's Economy Reform and Opening-up (1989- 1999), and Chinese animation in the new century (2000-2009). The research covers the creation and exploration of animation in each period, representative works and typical characters and characteristics, successful experiences and lessons, and significant animation production units. Particular attention is paid to the creation and exploration of Chinese animation after 2000. Li Tie, a first-class Chinese Writers' Association writer, has likewise done these collations and studies in A History of Chinese Animation. These books are very informative and cover a wide range of topics, laying a solid foundation for studying the background of the creation of female animated characters.

Li Tao advocates the interpretation of the symbolic meaning of the animated image, systematically analyzing the classic images in American and Japanese commercial cartoons from two aspects: the symbolic production and dissemination of

the animated image and the cultural symbolism of the animated image. In addition, there is also an Introduction to Animation by Jia Fu and Lu Shengzhang and an Introduction to Animation by Nie Xin, as well as an Introduction to Modern Animation edited by Fang Xiaoxi, all of which are comprehensive overviews of Chinese animation films from the perspective of animation theory research. Academic papers include Lin Qing's on Chinese Animated Cinema, which takes classic animated films as samples and draws on theories of children's literature, traditional Chinese opera, and film narratology to analyze the art of storytelling in Chinese animated films and its causes. These studies provide a good basis for the author's study of Chinese animated films.

7.1.2 Thematic aspects of the study of animated characters.

Animated characters are the materialization of the essence of human nature. Although animated characters are not as vivid as the actors in live-action films, they have the same undervalued character appeal through the screenwriter's characterization, the animator's careful design, and the humanized symbolic plot. (Fu, Lili, 2016, p. 1) In terms of gender differences in characters, some scholars argue that male characters mainly highlight masculinity and female characters highlight softness; while in terms of dynamic differences, male and female dynamics are opposite in terms of walking and running postures. These characteristics are related to the division of labor and the evolutionary outcomes of human beings. (Liu Li and Liu Hong, 2009) In the patriarchal cultural context, most female characters in animation works are created by men and face the dilemma of gender role imbalance in mainstream animation. Feminism, as a new approach to criticism, can look at animation as a symbolic system as a way to examine the reproduction of women as symbols in animated works - in magical and science fiction fairy tales, female figures are ignored; in harem anime, female figures are consumed; in romantic love fairy tales, female figures are stereotyped. (Li Meng and Li Yanfang, 2014) The changing view of women in society reflects both the characteristics of the times and the state of society, and also affects the shaping of female characters in animation, and the development of the view of women brings about the evolution of the typology of female characters in animation. This will help domestic animation to improve its survival status in the world animation field. (Xu Yang, 2018)

An animated film is an art form that reflects human social life and meets the needs of spiritual life, and it is inseparable from human social life. For modern women, the dominant ideology encourages an independent spirit on the one hand and preaches that women should be both gentle and sexy on the other. However, the two opposing ideas coexist harmoniously in popular culture, making the issue of gender positioning more complex and challenging. (Jiang Ping, Li Mengru, 2020) In the case of mainstream American animated films, the female characters are constantly changing, and they are gradually transformed from male appendages into new-age women, making constant efforts to realize themselves, reflecting women's right to live and fight for social equality and justice, and increasing "human-centered" humanitarianism and social civilization. (Wu Yan, 2014); In Japan, another major anime country, female anime images have also changed: the number of female characters has increased; female physical images show a trend of diversification, but the mainstream is still a solidified gender temperament. The proportion of women in professional positions has increased, but there are still very few at the top of

management. Despite the overall improvement in the portrayal of women in Japanese anime over the past forty years, discrimination has not disappeared. Still, it has taken a more insidious form, in the name of entertainment and leisure, mixed in with hilarious and touching anime plots, allowing the audience to participate happily in utopian fantasies while inexorably re-establishing the patriarchal order.

7.1.3 Aspects of case studies of female animated characters.

When it comes to the portrayal of female characters in Chinese animation, some scholars point out that the portrayal of women in Chinese animation works lags behind the development of the times, and for a long time has been controlled by the visual presentation of a male-dominated society, appearing as a weak or subordinate figure. The portrayal of women in animated films can be analyzed from four perspectives: animation, women, aesthetic relationships, the gaze and the other, and the transformation of women from the other to the self; from the perspectives of shape, character, and symbols, we can analyze the realistic soil of the portrayal of women, totem worship and eco-feminism in each case, and interpret its social connotations. To create a representative female image of the times: pay attention to the expression of national elements, extract the beneficial elements of traditional national culture and combine them with the characteristics of the times for secondary creation, fit the aesthetic sensibility of the audience, and construct a female image with an oriental flavor; at the same time, it is necessary to enhance the symbolic design of female character modeling, highlight the typical character of female characters and give the female image an international flavor based on ethnicity. (Zhang Meifang, 2020)

The contrastive analysis method is an important research method for case study analysis. By comparing the female antagonist characters in American and Japanese animation films, the researcher provides some methods and thoughts for the design of original animation characters in China. In the face of globalization, it is clear that pure imitation and simple appropriation are undesirable, and that Chinese animation today is undergoing a historical process from 'de-Chinese' to 're-Chinese'. The way forward for Chinese animation is to build up the local values of Chinese culture. (Li Yinghui and Zuo Li, 2013)

Through the above brief overview of the historical lineage of female characters in Chinese animation, as well as summarising the directions, methods, and conclusions of previous scholars' research, we find that the portrayal of female characters in Chinese animation films involves several basic questions: what is the historical origin of female characters in Chinese animation films; what new character types have emerged from the historical origin; what constant elements and What cultural messages of history, time and society are conveyed between change and invariance; how do these cultural discourses reconstruct the subjective consciousness of women in Chinese society; what unique aesthetic approaches are used by animation to represent the subjective consciousness of Chinese women; what values and meanings are generated, and what future possibilities are foreseen. The first chapter of this thesis, therefore, attempts to focus on these questions.

7.2 Thematic Studies of Women/Gender in Ancient China

The theoretical exploration of the study of ancient women/gender history has been an important topic of sustained attention by Chinese scholars for many years. The study of women's history in ancient China is still mainly a cross-generational theme, providing a detailed historical and theoretical study of the lives and production of women throughout the dynasties. The study of women's history in ancient China is still based on intergenerational themes, with detailed theoretical studies of women's lives and production throughout the dynasties, including the concepts of "male superiority and female inferiority", "polygamy", "womanhood" and "beauty". The author's discussion is mainly based on Chen Dongyuan's 2017 book, *A History of Chinese Women's Lives*.

Qian represents Heaven and refers to the male; Kun represents Earth and refers to the female. Therefore, men should be strong; women should be feminine; men are active and women are passive. This concept of the yin and yang of Qian and Kun could not be that neat at first either until society was dominated by men and the concept came into being. This society is what is known as a patriarchal society. (Chen Dongyuan, 2017, p. 5) One of the most specific and unequal concepts in a patriarchal society is that women are not 'sons'. The son is the sense of nurturing and nurturing, the proper name for the man, the one who can carry on the family line. The woman is completely subordinate to the man, while the wife is expected to raise a husband and children; the man is the third party, the other, so women are subordinate to the other and have no independence of their own. (Chen Dongyuan, 2017, p. 5) The concept of male superiority over females is a product of a patriarchal society. The highest standard in a woman's life is to marry, and her social status is low; she listens to her father when she is not married, her husband when she is married, and her son when her husband is gone, and her family status is not high, and she is also bound by all kinds of customs, morals, dogmas, and beliefs. This result makes women increasingly less capable and inferior in status. (Chen Dong Yuan, 2017, p. 6)

Polygamy was a common practice in ancient times, already present at the time of plunder marriages, and the patriarchal organization was so focused on succession that commoners could buy concubines; in the noble class, the hierarchy of first and second wives was very strict. The matchmaking system was monogamous, and the numerous concubines were mere "backups" and "supplements" to the wife, with virtually no status. (Chen Dongyuan, 2017, p. 28)

After the increasing severity of rituals, women lived by the standard of extreme meekness. Women did not have to learn how to behave, they only wished to learn how to be daughters-in-law. The rationale for being a daughter-in-law had already been developed after the Warring States period. (Chen Dongyuan, 2017, p. 30)

The idea of "beauty" started as a simple one, with no sense of elaboration. From the lines of the poems, we can see that people focused on eyebrows, teeth, skin, eyes, physique, and body waist, all in great detail, and even more so in the Han and Wei periods. Later the focus was on what was worn, and it is clear that the idea of beauty was not the purely natural one that it used to be, from rustic to opulent, with more emphasis on decoration. Han was a transitional era, and Wei and Jin were the mature ones. (Chen Dongyuan, 2017, p. 61-63)

7.3 Research related to concepts

7.3.1 Gender

Gender is a cultural concept that refers specifically to the socioculturally shaped understanding of the differences between men and women and the group characteristics and ways of behaving that are feminine or masculine in society. Within a given social culture, both males and females develop their temperament and roles, as well as their position and role in the social sphere. (Gender refers to the expectations, demands, and evaluations that society places on both sexes and gender relations, and is often transmitted and reinforced in social institutions and the socialization of individuals. Gender as a social relationship is expressed in social organizations and institutions, such as the family, kinship, social division of labor, education, and polity, as well as in the subjective identification of both genders with their own identities. (Lu Gai, 2008) Gender is socially and culturally constructed and is neither an accidental result of biological sex nor a fixed expression like biological sex. If gender is a cultural meaning carried by biological functions, then it cannot in any way be considered to be consistent with biological sex. (Butler, 1999: 9- 10) The word gender itself means 'sex' and refers primarily to the lexical nature of nouns and pronouns in linguistics, which has since been developed by feminism to refer to the sex of the person.

In the 1940s, the French writer Simone de Beauvoir noted that 'women are not born, but rather formed gradually' (1998, p. 309), emphasizing that women are socially shaped as 'other', a product of social and cultural construction, distinguishing biological sex from acquired gender identity. Although Beauvoir did not explicitly formulate the concept of gender, she pointed out the asymmetrical relationship between natural gender and feminine consciousness, laying the foundation for the concept of gender, which was further developed and refined by subsequent scholars. Kate Millet (1999) also notes that "the domination between genders is deeply rooted in the fabric of our society." (1999, p.31) In her book *Sex, Gender and Society*, Ann Oakley distinguishes sex from gender, emphasizes that sex is biological, referring to the anatomical and psychological characteristics of masculinity and femininity in the biological sense, while gender is cultural, being socially constructed masculinity and femininity. (1985, p.158) According to sociologist Lucile Duberman, "biological sex is an identity that is perceived to be possessed at

birth, while gender roles that are perceived to be appropriate to a particular biological sex identity are acquired" (1975, p.27). The American scholar Gayle Rubin first introduced gender as a technical term. She defined gender as 'an acquired status that is constructed through psychological, cultural and social means'. (1975, p.179)

Gender is a process of gender construction based on biological sex. The construction of gender is closely linked not only to external factors such as economic and political development, social institutions, and welfare policies but also to class, race, religion, culture, and so on. The process of social gender fixation and reinforcement, which in turn becomes a social expectation, norm, and evaluation, is the process of gender role construction.

Although gender relates to both sides of the biological sex, it has a special significance for women. Women's gender roles are not biologically determined, but rather socially and culturally regulated; gender consciousness is not innate, but is

formed in response to the family environment and the relationship between parents and children; gender consciousness and gender behavior are both socially and culturally conditioned; biological status is not the master of women's destiny, and gender roles for men and women can be changed in the process of social and cultural transformation. (Wang Zheng, 1997) The formulation of gender theory challenges traditional 'biological determinism' and rejects the theoretical basis of gender inequality. It states that women's subordinate status is not a natural one, but a result of a particular sociocultural construction, permeated by a power relationship, and can therefore be changed in practice.

7.3.2 Negotiating Identity

Ting-Toomey (1993), an advocate of identity negotiation theory, believes that identity negotiation is the prerequisite for the success of cross-cultural communication. The theory of identity negotiation emphasizes that identity is the explanation mechanism of the cultural cross-communication process, and identity is regarded as "the reflective self-image of an individual who constructs, experiences and communicates in a specific interactive situation in a culture". Negotiation refers to "a process of transactional interaction in which individuals in a cross-cultural environment attempt to maintain, define, modify, challenge and/or support their and others' desired self-image". Negotiating identity refers to the process in which people agree on "who is who" in the relationship. Once these agreements are reached, people should be loyal to the identity they agree to. Therefore, the process of negotiating identity determines what people expect of each other, so negotiating identity provides an interpersonal "adhesive" that maintains relationships. The negotiating identity expounds the interpersonal communication process initiated by the individual and the society after reaching the preliminary work consensus. The communicative competence is reflected in the effective identity negotiation between the two parties in the new communicative plot, placing the "self" in the society for social interaction, behavior confirmation, and thus Self-verification, so that the "self" maintains a stable social image.

8. Concept, Theory and Conceptual framework

8.1 Concepts of Research

'Gender' for considering the study of female characters in Chinese animated films, this paper Outlines the evolution and internal structure of the social gender system in the course of Chinese society.

'Negotiating Identity' for the negotiation and expression in the construction of gender socialization of female characters in Chinese animated films.

8.2 Research Conceptual Framework

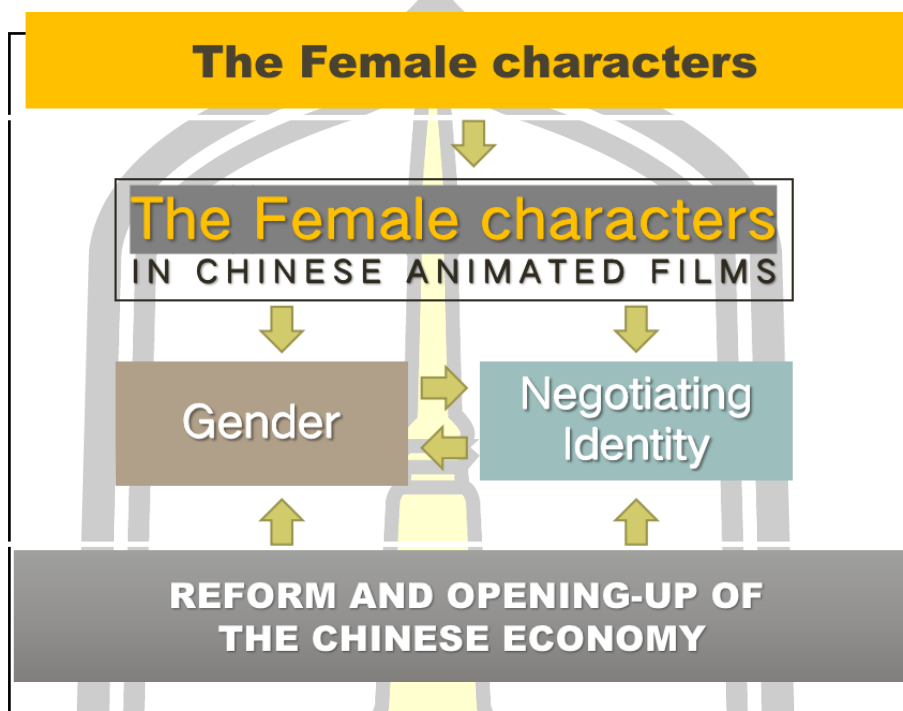


Figure 1 Research Conceptual Framework
Source : Yinghong Deng, February 20, 2023

9. Chapter structure

Chapter I: Introduction Chapter

Chapter II: The Social and Cultural History of Female Characters in the Interpretation of Chinese Animation Films

Chapter III: Female Characters in Chinese Animated Films from a Gender Perspective

Chapter IV: Multicultural Negotiating Identity of Chinese Animation Female Characters in the Context of Reform and Opening-up of the Chinese Economy

Chapter V: "Fox Girl", four female characters: A Case Study of Gender and Negotiating Identity

Chapter VI: Conclusion Chapter

10.Benefit of Research

10.1 Benefit for academic circle

The paper provides a research reference for researchers studying Chinese women or other similar cases..In China, there is a wealth of research in the field of media and gender, but not much in the area of female characters in animation, which is related to the fact that animation studies are still a young discipline. Most animation and film scholars have focused on the portrayal of female characters in Chinese animated films. They have analyzed the presentation and transformation of female characters in Chinese animated films from an artistic or feminist perspective. Fewer studies have dealt with gender culture, social relations systems, and social interaction, neglecting the meaning behind the cultural phenomenon. This study combines interdisciplinary and cross-cultural research methods, places the female role under study in the context of China's social system, especially China's Economy Reform and Opening-up, and provides a panoramic interpretation and explanation of it. The study of gender studies from the perspective of media communication is a fresh research theme.

10.2 Benefit for Society and community of research place

In Chinese animated films female characters attempt to build a female identity through the connection and integration of worldviews, building bridges with society and community, and a spiritual bond with consumers. More importantly, the 'Animated Perspective' through which young people learn about Chinese society will have a direct impact on their perceptions of 'Females' and Gender Perceptions, contributing to the development of a healthy and stable society and community.

10.3 In theory

This study will expand the theoretical boundaries of the concept between 'Text' and 'Concept'. In China, there is very little literature on gender and identity negotiation as research concepts. Therefore, this study will attempt to do so within a cross-media and cross-disciplinary integrated vision. In this way, the medium of expression of gender culture is enriched, the theoretical boundaries of gender are expanded, and the gender practices of the past are commandeered by contemporary society to construct an advanced view of gender culture in the new era, as well as to make a new contribution to the society of the new era. At the same time, it complements the theory of the concept of identity negotiation in terms of the cultural identity of female animated characters and the dimension of cultural identity and revisits the female perspective of gender philosophy.

CHAPTER II

Interpreting the Sociocultural History of Chinese Female Characters in Chinese Animated Films

Introduction

This chapter discusses the sociocultural history of Chinese women in the development process of Chinese society and the history of Chinese animated films. It examines how changes in the Sociocultural History of Chinese Women affect and reflect the portrayal of Female Characters in Chinese Animated Films. The chapter is in three parts:

The first part outlines the Sociocultural History of Chinese Women and studies the traits and characteristics of Chinese Women in four stages;

The second part summarises the changing characteristics of The Female Character in Chinese Animated Films from its development history;

The third part analyses the factors associated with Female Characters in Chinese Animated Films and Chinese Women.

It paves the way for studying Gender relations, Female Character construction, and Negotiating Identity. On this basis, researchers can explore the Gender of Female Characters in Chinese Animated Films more comprehensively and in-depth.

Part I. The Sociocultural History of Chinese Women

The Sociocultural History of Chinese Women in China is a complex, multidimensional narrative spanning thousands of years. Throughout history, Chinese Women have played a variety of essential identities and roles in the social, political, economic, and family arenas. However, as a necessary part of human civilization and culture, social thought, consciousness, and concepts have become essential aspects that have influenced and constructed women. This part of the research aims to systematically sort out this historical lineage, to study the social and cultural evolution of Chinese Women in the past and present from a multidisciplinary perspective, and to examine and analyze the social consciousness that has shaped women historically, which is essential for female studies.

1.1 Early Ancient Women (Before 1840 AD)

Before written records existed, early women can be traced back to the earliest stages of human settlement and social formation. Research scholars utilize archaeological findings and studies of human lifestyles to speculate and understand the earliest female characteristics and traits. However, due to data limitations,

research on prehistoric women remains uncertain and controversial. The period from the Xia, Shang, and Zhou dynasties to the end of the Qing Dynasty is commonly referred to as "Ancient China." Therefore, the status of ancient Chinese women also originated from the establishment of ancient China. In this article, we will explore the characteristics and evolution of women in three social periods of ancient China.

1.1.1 Primitive Society: Female Respect under Matriarchal Clan System

Primitive society is the earliest form of human society, where people lived mainly by gathering, hunting, and fishing. Men and women lived together in harmony and equality, without private ownership or class differentiation. Anatomical and physiological evidence proves that men and women were equal in society at that time, that men respected women, and that women were at least as important as men, if not more important than men, in the reproduction of human communities. (Li Yinhe, 2004, p.13) The centrality of women in the family and clan is not accidental but stems mainly from certain specific cultural and social structures of primitive societies.

The human consciousness in primitive societies was still in its infancy about fertility, observing that the earth grows plants and women give birth to children. However, it did not understand the cause-and-effect relationship between them. As a result, the world and women were endowed with mysterious powers, especially women's fertility, which provided a constant power source for the reproduction and development of the clans and enabled society to progress. Since life originated from women, they were given a very high status in primitive societies, and some of them were even regarded as God-like beings. This matriarchal social pattern is reflected in several cultures, such as the Babylonian Ishtar, the ancient Greek Gaia, and the ancient Egyptian Isis, all of which reflect the importance of women in society at that time.

According to the anthropologist J. J. Bachofen (2018), in primitive societies, there were unrestricted sexual relations between people (promiscuous marriages), which excluded the possibility of exact knowledge of the father, and therefore lineage could only be calculated according to the matriarchal lineage. This was the case at the beginning of all the peoples of antiquity. Although the history of China before the Zhou Dynasty is rather vague, from the historical data proved by modern sociologists, the only characteristic of the earliest matrilineal era of human beings is the phenomenon that "people know that there is a mother but not a father." (Chen Dongyuan, 2017, p. 19)

In this Social Structure, the tracing of blood ties relies mainly on the matrilineal line, with the child following the mother's family name and the clan to which the mother belongs, responsible for their upbringing and education. As a result, more attention is paid to the identity and role of the mother. For example, in the "Shangshu-Yao Dian"³⁴, it is said that Yao was born to his mother, Qingdu, who sensed the dragon; in the "Shijing-Daya-Dang"³⁵, it is said that "Wang Ji's sister" was

³⁴ Shangshu-Yao Dian: It is a record of the governmental codes during the administration of the sage king Emperor Yao in the ancient times.

³⁵ Shijing-Daya-Dang : It is a poem in ancient China's first general collection of poetry, the Book of Songs. The poet uses the past to satirize the present and warns of the historical lesson of the fall of the Yin dynasty.

the mother of Shang Tang; and in "The Classic of Mountains and Seas"³⁶, it is noted that Nuwa is the mythical figure who created mankind and patched up the heavens, and so on.

During the matri-clan period, men and women enjoyed a certain degree of equality despite the Gender division of labor. Men and women were usually in a relationship of interdependence and mutual support. This equality was a relative one based on Gender characteristics and social needs. Compared to the instability of male fishing and hunting activities, female gathering activities provided a more reliable guarantee for the clan's survival.

Women gradually mastered using fire in their labor, which played a significant role in cooking food, keeping out the cold, and defending against wild animals. More importantly, the use of fire has had a profound impact on the development of the human physique and society, and the images of the "fire god" in the Chinese Women's tradition are all depicted in the likeness of women.



Figure 2 Illustration of "Zhu Rong" the God of Fire

Source: Chen Siyu³⁷. Shan Hai Jing (2015). Tsinghua University Press, p.206

"Zhu Rong" is the god of fire in ancient Chinese mythology, representing the use of fire to illuminate the earth and bring light and warmth. In the "Classic of Mountains and Seas," "Zhu Rong of the South, with an animal body and a human face, rides on two dragons." According to the description in the book, it is very much like a female's appearance and disposition. However, the common perception as a male stems from the legend of the heavenly battle between him and Gong Gong. In later folklore, Zhu Rong sometimes appears as a woman, such as Lady Zhu Rong in Romance of the Three Kingdoms.

³⁶ The Classic of Mountains and Seas: It is an encyclopedia of ancient social life, showing ancient culture, recording the living conditions and people's thinking activities in the Great Wasteland Period, and providing helpful information for future generations.

³⁷ Chen Siyu : studied at the Academy of Fine Arts, Tsinghua University, then went to the School of Visual Arts in New York to further her studies. She was selected for the Mito Illustration Illustrated Book and now lives in Germany.

The production, development, and change of the primitive social system are "governed by two kinds of production." These two kinds of production are, as Engels puts it, "on the one hand, the production of the means of subsistence, i.e., clothing, food, shelter, and the tools necessary for this; and on the other hand, the production of mankind itself, i.e., "the reproduction of the species." (Jian Zhen, 1993, p. 78) The identity of the social status of men and women is precisely based on who dominates these two types of production. The critical role of women in material production, i.e., the economic status of women, is the objective basis for the high respect of women in primitive societies. Later, women were reduced to slavery precisely because they lost this important economic status.

1.1.2 Slave society: female subordination under the patriarchal clan system

Slave Society, as the first-class society in human history, marked a major change in the mode of social production and a fundamental reshaping of the power structure. The lofty position of women in history was not maintained permanently. At the end of primitive society, after the matrilineal and patrilineal coexistence of the bilineal era and the entry into the patriarchal clan, the status of women changed radically.

At this time, the social consciousness of human beings became clearer, and in the practice of production and observation of domesticated animals, people recognized the commonality of seeds and fertility. Thus, the mystery of female fertility was solved not as a mysterious force but as a natural phenomenon. This realization was a great revolution in the history of human thought but, unfortunately, led to a total devaluation of women's identity and status. Historian Gerda Lerner, in her book *The Creation of Patriarchy*(1987), says that when the male-dominated order was established, all women had to accept that men or male-dominated institutions were in control of women's sexuality and reproductive processes. Men, recognizing their role in procreation, no longer see women as gods but instead appoint themselves as such. They claim to be the creators of life, and women are only the nurturers of life. In this way, a system of gender inequality is established, and the concept of Gender in human society is skewed.

The emergence of civilization and the transition from hunter-gatherers to agricultural societies ended the institution of equality between men and women. Patriarchy was born and spread throughout the world. In patriarchal societies, men became the rulers, and humanity lost the gender balance of primitive cultures. The increase in productivity led to the emergence of private ownership and, eventually, the formation of the state. However, this social change did not come without a price. The emergence of private ownership further clarified and reinforced the dependent position of women.

In agricultural societies, land is the most crucial property and object of seizure and possession. As the embodiment of land, women were the most critical property and object of seizure and possession. As we can see, the earliest enslaved people were mainly enslaved women. On the one hand, women were usually oppressed and exploited and might lack freedom and autonomy. On the other hand, they might have the character traits of obedience, patience, and hard work, but they might also face psychological depression and frustration. With the rise of private ownership and the gradual centralization of wealth, men began to gain more wealth and power due to

their physical strength in war, hunting, and agricultural production. This led to the male-centered patriarchal clan system, in which men gradually assumed the dominant role in the Family and Society. (Jingping Zhang, 1991, p.30)

Although the clan society was democratic, the scope of democracy was narrowed to adult men. Women were excluded from the management of society, lost their property rights, and became subordinate to men. Women's activities were confined to the family, and they were responsible for household chores and child-rearing, while men monopolized the public affairs of society. This gender division of labor led to social stratification, and the differentiation of the roles of men and women became the root cause of gender inequality, reflecting the gender bias of the society at that time.

The division of roles between men and women is the logical and historical source of social stratification: private and public spheres, male domination of the outside, and female domination of the inside. This phenomenon of Gender inequality is fully reflected in the literature of the time. For example, the words "If you give birth to a boy, let him play with jade; if you give birth to a girl, let her play with spinning tools." in the Book of Songs - Xiao Ya - Deer Song³⁸ vividly depict the different societal expectations and treatments of men and women at that time.

During the long era of agricultural civilization, there were few fundamental changes in the status of women around the globe. On the contrary, as the patriarchal system continued to consolidate and develop, society and the family became more and more strict on women, and discriminatory attitudes towards them became more and more apparent. The Jewish Sacred Teaching compares women to the livestock of their male parents. At the same time, in ancient Greece, it was the norm to confine women to the boudoir, and in ancient Rome, a guardianship system was set up for women, declaring that "women are children who can never mature." Christian churches regarded women as the "gateway to the devil". Similarly, in Chinese culture, Confucius left behind the warning that "Only women who are not of good character or misbehavior and persons of low moral character, narrow-mindedness, and short-sightedness are challenging to bring up", which has been passed down through the ages.

Thus, Engels pointed out that the transition from matriarchy to patriarchy was a setback of world-historical significance for women. It marked the loss of women's independence, personality, rights, and subordination to men and the family. As an old Thai proverb says, "A woman is a buffalo, a man is a man" [phu ying pen khwaaj phu chaj pen khon], which reveals the passive and subordinate position of women in a patriarchal society.

In societies where men and women are equal, the Creator is often a woman or a pair of male and female gods and goddesses (e.g., Fig.3); in patriarchal societies, the Creator is primarily a man or an animal. The former are mostly believed to be made from the body; the latter are mostly believed to be made from something other than the body, such as clay.

³⁸ the Book of Songs - Xiao Ya - Deer Song: It was a song sung by the ancients at banquets.



Figure 3 Fuxi and Nüwa on Silk Painting

Source: <https://www.ximalaya.com/>

[Accessed on June 15th, 2023]

Silk painting of Fuxi and Nuwa unearthed from the Astana Tomb in Turpan, Xinjiang, in the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region Museum. According to the ancient Chinese ritual of the left-handed male and the right-handed female, Fuxi is on the left, holding a rule in his left hand, and Nuwa is on the right, holding a rule in her right hand, with a human head and a snake's body, and the snake's tail is intertwined. In ancient China, there was a saying that "heaven is round and earth is square," and Nuwa symbolizes heaven. Fuxi symbolizes the earth, demonstrating the deep insight into Gender, gender equality, and the identity and status of Chinese Women in ancient societies. Fuxi and Nuwa, as the symbols of the founding fathers of mankind, jointly created mankind and maintained social harmony and balance. The image of them embracing and copulating with each other embodies the intimate relationship between men and women and emphasizes their equal status in the reproduction of life.

At the same time, the details of the painting, in which Fuxi holds the rules, and Nüwa holds the regulations, emphasize the complementary and collaborative roles of men and women in society. Through delicate depictions and rich symbolic elements, the painting conveys the recognition and respect for gender equality and the value of women in ancient societies.

1.1.3 Feudal society: female constraints under the hierarchical clan system

Feudal society was one of the longest and most complex periods in Chinese history. During this period, people used agriculture as the main form of economy and developed a hierarchical and bureaucratic system based on land. Various factors affected women's qualities, and their status and position sometimes rose and sometimes fell, but in general, they were lower than those of men.

1) Women under the construction of the concept of "rites".

The pre-Qin traditional society has formed the mainstream view of women. The requirements, concepts, and consciousness of the society towards women were expressed through the "rites." "Ritual" is a synonym for the ideal order of society.

The Zhou Dynasty developed the "rites" system based on the Shang Dynasty, explicitly restricting women's participation in politics, emphasizing that "women have no official duties", and Confining women to household duties, reflecting the establishment of a male-dominated society and the normalization of Female Character.

There are five characteristics as follows:

a. "Husband and wife are gentle, aunt is kind, and the woman listens": human order under the ethical relationships.

During the Spring and Autumn Period, the concept of "propriety" gradually became the ideological consensus of the Central Plains society, in which the construction of the Female Character was particularly prominent. As can be seen from historical sources such as the Zuo Zhuan³⁹, the "rites" clearly defined the relationships and roles of family members, such as ruler and subject, father and son, brother, husband and wife, aunt and wife, etc. Female Characters were designed mainly because wives were required to fulfill them. The female Character is designed to be gentle and obedient to the husband, while the daughter-in-law should be submissive and respect her mother-in-law's opinion. This concept aims to build harmonious family relationships, requiring each family member to act according to the norms of "propriety", including the husband being gentle and righteous, the wife being gentle and decent, the mother-in-law being loving and receptive to advice, and the daughter-in-law being submissive and tactful. (Yuanyuan Ma, 2011, p28)

b. "Men and women should be treated differently.": Gender order under the requirements of the ritual system

During the Spring and Autumn period, the "rite" system clarified the hierarchy and roles of men and women, emphasizing the superiority of men over women while at the same time regulating interactions between the sexes and pursuing stability and harmony in the social order. However, this idea required both men and women to follow it together, and it was not only for women. For example, the Rites of Zhou stipulates that "the male dominates the outside and the female dominates the inside", which is not only a strict division of social roles between men and women but also a restriction on the Female Character's space for activities. In the Book of Rites, "Men do not enter the kitchen" further emphasizes the subordinate position of women in the family. Another example is Zuo Zhuan: "The differences and distinctions between men and women are important principles recognized by the laws of the land. I am afraid that it would be wrong to disrupt this normal order and balance between the Gender because of a certain female!" This sentence system emphasizes the distinction and boundaries between men and women, and if it is destroyed, it will affect the

³⁹ Zuo Zhuan : It was written by Zuo Qiu Ming during the Spring and Autumn Periods. It chronicles the major historical events of the Zhou Dynasty and the vassal states from A.D. (722 B.C.) to A.D. (468 B.C.) and is held in high esteem by later generations.

social order. At the same time, it implies that women should abide by the norms to maintain social stability and harmony.

Although the idea of "Men and women should be treated differently" was not theorized and detailed in the Spring and Autumn period as it was in the Warring States period, it had far-reaching influence as an ideological advocacy. Though difficult to fully realize in life, these rules of etiquette provided the basis for the subsequent theoretical promotion of Confucianism, which had a profound impact on Gender roles and behavioral norms in ancient Gender and also profoundly influenced women's identities and codes of conduct. (Yuanyuan Ma, 2011, p.29)

c. The "Concubinage System" represents a manifestation of the ritual hierarchy.

In the early years of the Western Zhou Dynasty, the first wife and concubine system determined the critical position of the mother in the succession of heirs. It embodied the core of the patriarchal system through strict ceremonial norms. The system was reflected in the treatment of women and the specifications for weddings and funerals, which emphasized the hierarchical difference between first wives and concubines and safeguarded the aristocracy's interests and the stability of the state. This system has become a significant lens through which to examine gender relations and power structures in ancient times and has shaped the status of Chinese women and the structure of the family in ancient times.

Concubinage exists in other countries of the world. Before the introduction of Christianity to Europe, polygamy existed in Europe, with a clear distinction between first and second wives. Ancient Greece also had concubines, and Polis sometimes took female slaves as concubines. However, it was dishonorable to cohabit with a first wife with a concubine; the first-born was a citizen, and the concubine was a freeman. However, the distinction between the first wife and the concubine is unclear in the Israeli matrimonial system. Those who marry with a dowry are considered first wives, and those who marry without a dowry are concubines, but have equal status in the family. Firstborns enjoyed equal rights, but concubines and outlaws had a lower status. The Jewish system of concubinage is based on the Babylonian Talmud, which states that a person who is formally betrothed is a first wife, and a person who is not betrothed is a concubine. The Jerusalem Talmud, however, holds that concubines should also be given marriage certificates, which do not include post-divorce arrangements. Thailand once practiced polygamy, with a distinction between the first wife and the concubine. While the first wife is married by parental order, concubines are categorised into two distinct groups: good concubines and lowly concubines. Good concubines are non-purchased female companions, whereas lowly concubines are purchased female slaves.

d. The idea of "filial piety of mother": its manifestation in rituals and social opinion

In traditional Chinese culture, the status of "mother" is particularly honored, not simply because of the notion of "male superiority over female", but also because of the influence of filial piety and the ethical order of the eldest and youngest.



Figure 4 Statue of Fu Hao

Source: <https://www.baidu.com/>

[Accessed on December 11th, 2023]

Fu Hao, the wife of King Wuding of the Shang Dynasty, is the first female military commander in Chinese Women's history, mentioned more than 200 times in Yinxu oracle bones. Her beauty, tenderness, and fierce intelligence made her a key player in the Shang dynasty, participating in rituals and making military decisions, demonstrating the leadership and decisiveness of Female Character in ancient times, and exemplifying the idea of motherhood and the importance of motherhood.

The idea of motherhood formed during the Western Zhou Dynasty inherited and developed by Confucian filial piety, made the status of "mother" high in feudal society. Although the principle of "male superiority and female inferiority" was adopted among peers, the principle of "seniority" was adopted among different generations, which made "honoring mothers" and "male superiority and female inferiority" go hand in hand. This makes "honoring the mother" and "respecting the mother" go hand in hand with "respecting the male and inferiority of the female". This idea is not only reflected in the ritual system and social opinion of filial piety to the mother but also affects the political field, resulting in the Queen Mother as a woman often intervening in politics and conflict with the male system. As the basis for the development of Confucianism, the ritual provisions related to women in the Zhou Dynasty shaped the ideological origins of traditional femininity and profoundly influenced later generations.

e. "Three Obediences and Four Virtues": Confucian concepts of femininity under the notion of propriety

The Three Obediences and Four Virtues is one of the Confucian concepts of women in ancient China. According to the principle of "the difference between inside and outside (i.e. the social division of labor between men and women)", Confucian rituals regulate women's morality, behavior and cultivation throughout their lives. The "Three Obediences and Four Virtues" was put forward by Ban Zhao, a famous talented woman of the Eastern Han Dynasty, who asked women to use the "Three

Obediences" and "Four Virtues" to honor men in their thoughts and abide by the The "Three Obediences and the Four Virtues" require women to honor men in their minds and abide by the duties of women in their behavior. "Three from the four virtues" also led to some phenomena, in the creation of words, explain the meaning of words, often appear in the content of male superiority and female inferiority. In the oracle bone inscriptions that began to appear in the Shang Dynasty, the concern for women was also demonstrated in the expression of words, such as the oracle bone inscriptions of the word "female", whose earliest source is a female kneeling posture, as a hieroglyphic inheritance.



Figure 5 Oracle character for "female".

Source: <https://baijiahao.baidu.com/>

[Accessed on June 18th, 2023]

The Dictionary of Oracle Bones explains, "The pictograph 'female' depicts a person with bent knees and two hands interlocked. Usually, women were more active indoors, and their bent knees and interlocked hands were common postures when living indoors." Thus, we use this posture as a female trait to distinguish the male traits of those who farm for a living.

2) From the pre-Qin to the Sui and Tang dynasties, the status of women was relatively high.

During the Zhou Dynasty, women participated in foreign affairs management, state affairs, and social activities. They had a specific political status, contrary to the earlier idea of restricting women's political participation. During the Spring and Autumn Period and the Warring States Period, the political situation pushed the phenomenon of the involvement of women in politics more prominently. Pre-Qin women contributed to politics, economy, culture, and religion. For example, Tai Si, Mi Yue, and Zhao Fei Yan were active in politics. The negative evaluation of women's participation in politics by public opinion reflects the common phenomenon of women's interference in politics in reality.

The Qin Dynasty rebuilt the social order, in which a series of measures were taken to guide the concept of the female character, to advocate a concept of the female character endorsed by the state power, to regulate female behavior by law, to rectify customs that were not in line with the patriarchal system, and to honor chaste women

in the name of the state, all of which together shaped and influenced the Female Character. All of these measures reflect the idea of humanism endorsed by the state power and highlight the central role of law in this process, which is in line with the legalist concept of governance.

In the early Han Dynasty, the status of women was high, and the concept of chastity was relatively weak. After Emperor Wu of the Han Dynasty, Confucianism was established, and Dong Zhongshu put forward the theory of "male superiority and female inferiority". At the same time, Emperor Xuan of the Han Dynasty strengthened the concept of innocence in the form of law. During the Eastern Han Dynasty, the Baihu Tong and the Women's Commandments further advocated the idea of "three subordinates" for women, reinforcing women's subordinate status in the family and society and profoundly influencing Gender at that time and in later generations.



Figure 6 Painted Female Kneeling Figurine (Cultural Relics)

Source: <https://www.sina.com.cn/>

[Accessed on June 19th, 2023]

The Han Dynasty female figurines in the picture show women's elegance at that time, with elegant faces and exquisite costumes, reflecting the ethical norms and cultural characteristics under feudal autocracy. Their facial features include goose-egg face, willow leaf eyebrows, etc., and their postures are elegant and light, wearing the deep clothing system of the Han Dynasty, adopting the "triple clothing" stacking method, highlighting the charm of women. It is one of the most well-preserved cultural relics with the most elegant posture, the most exquisite make-up, and the most beautiful look, showing the image of hard-working women in the Western Han Dynasty and reflecting the sense of innocence and aesthetic concepts of women in that time.

During the Sui and Tang Dynasties, due to the influence of the Huization trend, the masculinization of women's clothing is one of the manifestations of social openness. Women dressed as men became a social trend, the pursuit of lightweight, free, lively, bright effect, that is, the manifestation of the great Tang weather, but also "some kind of awakening of women's consciousness, but also to the traditional patriarchal society is a kind of challenge". This is reflected in a large number of murals in tombs in Shaanxi and other places, as well as in silk paintings unearthed in Astana, Turpan, and Xinjiang, which show that women in the Tang Dynasty, and even

the whole society, had a different Gender consciousness from that of the Northern and Southern Dynasties and even the Tang Dynasty onwards. (pictured)



Figure 7 A female horse-riding figurine dressed as a man (Cultural Relics)

Source: <https://www.sohu.com/>

[Accessed on June 19th, 2023]

Princess Yongtai's tomb unearthed a female dressed as a man riding a horse figurine artifacts, more illustrative of the external image of the Sheng Tang women's characteristics. The woman is wearing lapel clothes, head high and chest, hands for holding a harness, and is ready to travel. The prevalence of hu clothing⁴⁰ and women dressed in men's clothing in this scene and the process reflects since the Wei Jin and North and South Dynasties, hu-han cultural exchanges and fusion, the Tang open and tolerant social psychology, the inherent hu mentality of the royal family, the Tang Dynasty, women's aesthetic tastes and changes in the political events, the impact of ethnic relations on the social mores.



Figure 8 Painted figurine of a lady with two buns, Tang Dynasty (Cultural Relics)

Source: <https://www.sina.com.cn/>

⁴⁰ hu clothing : It is now generally recognized as a collective term for the costumes of all ethnic minorities except the Han Chinese and includes extra-territorial costumes from Persia and India. It is characterized by narrow-sleeved, tight-fitting robes or short garments on the upper body, leather belts around the waist, and long pants and leather boots on the lower body, making it easy to work and move around.

[Accessed on June 19th, 2023]

Tang Dynasty female figurines reflect the secular life of the time. Elegance is unique to the female figurines of the Sheng Tang Dynasty. This prosperous, confident, contented, and atmospheric look reflects the spirit of an era. The full-bodied modeling can be said to be writing God with form, writing the charm and temperament of the history and culture of the Sheng Tang Dynasty. From ancient times to the present, every dynasty has its mainstream aesthetics. When mainstream aesthetics become the body anxiety of most women, our inner self-identity tends to be negative. The concept of "fat and thin" is more about understanding and tolerance of the diversity of women's beauty, which tells us that beauty is not one-dimensional but has various forms and ways of expression.

Women in the Sui and Tang dynasties had greater freedom and choice in dress, marriage, and education, which was a reaction to the drastic changes in the social structure of the time. For example, women in the Sui and Tang dynasties could wear loose and comfortable hu clothes instead of foot-binding, headscarves, and skirts; women were free to fall in love, divorce, remarry, and even have more than one lover; and women were allowed to receive an education and engage in activities such as literature and art, such as Xue Tao, and Yu Xuanji, both of whom were outstanding poets.

The Sui and Tang Dynasties were also the only periods in Chinese history with female emperors. Wu Zetian, one of the most famous and controversial Chinese Women in history, ruled China for nearly half a century, from Empress to Emperor, introducing a series of reforms, promoting many wise and capable men and women, and fostering socio-economic and cultural development.

The Tang Dynasty was the heyday of feudal society in China, inheriting the greatness of the two Han dynasties, and was characterized by multi-ethnic integration, openness to the outside world, and an eclectic mix of national cultures. Li Zehou (2022), thinker, philosopher and member of the International Academy of Philosophy in Paris, also said in his book *The Course of Beauty* that the Tang Dynasty was the most open society since the Wei, Jin, and North and South Dynasties, and that everyone here was a flesh-and-blood self.

Thus, the Tang Dynasty was an era that was more liberal than the preceding dynasties and unrivaled by the following dynasties. As a result, women were given the right to education in this period when education was widely spread. At the same time, women's education was influenced by the freedom of society, and they dared to break through the constraints of the rules and regulations. They dared to socialize without being confined to the so-called feudal rites and rituals of "a woman's lack of talent is a virtue."

3) During the Song, Yuan, Ming, and Qing Dynasties, the status of women was relatively low.

The prevalence of rationalistic thought in the Song Dynasty reinforced some traditional Gender concepts. These concepts were widely disseminated in the Song Dynasty, exposing women to more restrictions and prejudices in the family and society. For example, in ancient rituals, clear rules said that men were mainly responsible for affairs outside the home, while women were primarily responsible for affairs inside the house. Another example is that men were usually not allowed to enter the kitchen because that was where women were supposed to be. An old saying

also says, "Only women and little people are hard to get along with." This does not directly state that men and women are not equal, but it does reveal a particular prejudice against women.

From the Song Dynasty onwards, the custom of foot-binding gradually became prevalent, causing women to suffer great physical pain, restricting their ability to engage in social activities, and creating the idea that it was a shame not to have one's feet bound. During the Ming Dynasty, foot binding peaked; women's tiny feet were greatly sought after and became an essential criterion for marriage. During the Qing Dynasty, the practice of foot-binding spread to all levels of society, even affecting ethnic minorities, and became a major bad habit of the old society, causing severe physical and mental harm to women.



Figure 9 Women of Han Chinese with foot-binding in the late Qing Dynasty

Source: <https://www.sohu.com/>

[Accessed on June 19th, 2023]

Footbinding was a decorative vice in feudal China, where the patriarchal society believed that the posture of small-footed women was more in line with the temperament of ancient Chinese women and that smaller feet were more in line with the aesthetics of the time.

During the Song, Yuan, Ming, and Qing dynasties, women were restricted and oppressed in the political, economic, cultural, and religious spheres. For example, during the Yuan Dynasty, the Mongols ruled and brutally exploited and oppressed the Han Chinese people, and women were subjected to slavery and violation; during the Ming Dynasty, monogamy was practiced, and women were forbidden to remarry or leave their families, thus strengthening male power and patriarchy; during the Qing Dynasty, the Manchus ruled and implemented the policy of merging the Manchus and the Han Chinese, and Han women were required to change to the cheongsam dress and the Manchurian bun. The Manchu rule in the Qing Dynasty led to the policy of merging the Han and Manchu communities, which required Han women to wear cheongsams and buns.

Women in feudal society dressed well, reflecting social status and family honor, and were influenced by social norms and cultural traditions. Female Characters often played family roles and possessed traditional female qualities but were limited by social and family constraints and lacked autonomy and personal development.

Women are limited in their education and social participation, are expected to be good wives and mothers, are dependent on their husbands and families, have low social status, and are dominated by male authority. In contrast, men dominate social, family, and economic activities.



Figure 10 The family structure of a large merchant family in the late Qing dynasty

Source: <https://www.sohu.com/>

[Accessed on June 19th, 2023]

According to the Qing Law, the husband had absolute sovereignty over the family and was the owner and disposer of all property. At that time, women, whether original wives or concubines, were subordinate to their husbands and did not have any freedom or independence.

Feng Youlan, a renowned contemporary Chinese philosopher, argued that Confucianism in feudal society formed a strict moral code and code of conduct for women, limiting their self-development and pursuits. He emphasized the passive position of women in the realm of thought and culture and the obstacles this position posed to women's personal growth.

Educator Chen Dongyuan (2015) similarly argued that feudal society's ethical and moral concepts exceptionally constrained women, leaving them in a passive position in social life.

Fei Xiaotong, a renowned contemporary sociologist and honorary president of the Central University for Nationalities, once pointed out in his writings that women were often regarded as subordinate to men under the feudal system, and their social status was severely restricted. He stressed the unequal status of women in the family and society and criticized the deprivation of women's rights and interests under this system.

1.1.4 Characteristics of Changing Female Character in Ancient China

Ancient Chinese Women, deeply influenced by the mode of production, social system, and cultural traditions, gradually demonstrated being hardworking, obedient, and virtuous. They were usually expected to bring stability and harmony to the family and society, so they often showed soft, considerate, and humble behavior.

As society evolves, the status and role of the Female characters have gone through a process from relative respect to gradual marginalization. The influence of Confucianism has further reinforced the social constraints and Gender stereotypes of Females and, at the same time, reflected the evolution of the social perception of Gender relations and the status of Females. However, this does not mean that they are devoid of initiative or ability, especially when dealing with family matters or coping with life's challenges, and sometimes they show resilience, wisdom, and creativity.

1.2 The transformation of women in modern times (late Qing Dynasty-1949)

Modern society is one of the most transformative periods in Chinese history and an era of dramatic social change, cultural collision, and ideological upheaval. At that time, China was faced with imperialist aggression and feudalism corruption and gradually degenerated into a semi-colonial and semi-feudal society, with its people living in dire straits. During this period, a series of democratic revolutionary movements with far-reaching effects took place in China, such as the Xinhai Revolution, the May Fourth Movement, the New Culture Movement, and the New Democratic Revolution. All of these movements dealt with the Gender issue and emphasized the need for a female stance. The two phases in which women have been more prominent in modern society are manifested in the period of the Revolution of 1911 and the May Fourth Movement.

1.2.1 The period of the Revolution of 1911: the central theme of women's "male characteristics."

During the Revolution of 1911, the most striking aspect of Female Character change was the positioning of females in political roles, which set the central theme of Female Character change in other roles. Under the power struggles of neighboring countries and the dynasty's decline, saving the country became the highest goal of Female Character for a generation of intellectual women. As Ms. He Xiangning⁴¹ exclaimed, "Women, like men, are equally human; women must not stand idly by and watch the rise and fall of the nation but must take up their responsibilities!"⁴² Modern female revolutionary Qiu Jin⁴³'s poem reads, "If we advocate equality between men and women, then both men and women should take up the responsibility of resisting foreign enemies and saving the country, whether it is to endure hardship, to rescue people in distress or to clear up national crises."⁴⁴

The intellectual women who stayed in Japan during this period became the driving force behind the change in Female Character. They aspired to break away from the traditional constraints and pursue a life like that of men, but due to the social structure and concepts of the time, they had not yet developed a clear sense of self and

⁴¹ He Xiangning : (1878-1972), female, famous political activist, pioneer of women's rights movement, one of the main founders of the Democratic Revolution. She was the wife of Liao Zhongkai, a pioneer of China's democratic revolution. She made significant contributions to the revolutionary cause by adhering to the belief that "the spirit will not die".

⁴² He Xiangning, "To My Compatriot Sisters," Jiangsu, June 1903

⁴³ Qiu Jin: (1875-1907), advocate of feminism and women's studies in China. She advocated women's rights, women's studies and women's self-reliance, and opposed the constraints imposed on women by feudal rites.

⁴⁴ Qiu Jin, "To the Sisters," Chinese Women's Newspaper, No. 1, 1907.

the ability to lead independently. They often took men as their role targets, which led to the concept of "equality between men and women" being misinterpreted as an imitation of men rather than true equality and autonomy. Female pioneers like Qiu Jin detested the traditional Female Character and pursued a masculine lifestyle, becoming role models for women's liberation. This phenomenon reflects the masculinity of Female Characters in the changing roles of women during the Xinhai Revolution. Also, it reveals the complexity and contradictions in their pursuit of self-identity and social status.



Figure 11 Qiu Jin's male attire

Source: <https://www.sohu.com/>

[Accessed on June 20th, 2023]

Qiu Jin prefers to dress in men's clothes, and her unusual dress and mannerisms of a famous scholar: "Her hair was up in a bun on her head, her feet were in thick boots, she wore a green cloth robe, and her face was not powdered with grease." Qiu Jin's dress and mannerisms show her challenge to the patriarchal society and the traditional notion that men are superior to women.

Despite the changes in Female Character during the Xinhai Revolution, the "male character" still dominates. Women relied on men for propaganda, advocacy, and organization, and most only played exemplary roles as participants. The establishment of women's schools relied mainly on men. Except for a few women's schools that focused on fostering women's dominance, most still followed the traditional education model of "raising children with their husbands" and "being a good wife and a good mother." Women were often in a supporting role.

Female Characters have difficulty realizing true self-emancipation in their family and economic roles and are still dependent on men. Although women are generally progressive, their autonomy and independence are still insufficient due to the male-dominated social structure. This characteristic is related to women's overall lack of self-awareness, the fact that women's overall cultural quality has been deposited for thousands of years, and the fact that Chinese Women's Female Character has just begun the process of modernization. (Jiang Meihua, 2020, p19).

1.2.2 The May Fourth Movement: The Changing Female Character of "Self-Discovery"

"The May Fourth Movement" was the beginning of China's new democratic revolution, which significantly contributed to the emancipation of the Chinese people. People began to realize that women have independent thoughts and actions and should enjoy equal rights and status as men. On the other hand, people began to pay attention to the Gender differences between Females and Males and began to explore the characteristics and roles of different genders.

The May Fourth period saw the "discovery of man" and the "discovery of woman" mentioned simultaneously. While highlighting the former, the "discovery of woman" not only emphasized that women and men were equal human beings but also began to discuss that women and men were not the same. At the same time as highlighting the former, "female discovery" not only emphasizes that women and men are equal but also begins to discuss that women and men are not the same. (Jiang Meihua, 2020, p36)

The May Fourth Movement also promoted epochal changes in women's status, demonstrated women's unremitting efforts and remarkable achievements in pursuing self-worth and rights, and profoundly revealed the close connection between Gender equality and social progress. For example, Song Qingling⁴⁵, one of the female activists of the May Fourth Movement, was actively involved in the May Fourth Movement. She actively participated in the May Fourth Movement and was essential to China's modern history. Song advocated that women should receive modern education and strive for equal social status, and the women's liberation movement she championed opened the way for the development of Chinese Women. At the same time, she also emphasized the differences between women and men in terms of Gender characteristics and advocated a unique role for women in society.



Figure 12 Dr Sun Zhongshan with his wife, Song Qingling. (1924)

Source: <http://culture.taiwan.cn/>

Song Qingling followed Sun Zhongshan and devoted herself to the revolution and the establishment of the national united front against Japan. In 1949, she attended

⁴⁵ Song Qingling: (1893-1981), State Honorary President of the People's Republic of China, known worldwide as one of the great women of the twentieth century.

the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) as an invited delegate and served as Vice-Chairperson of the CPPCC. After founding New China, she contributed to national unity and the cause of women and children and was honored with the title of State Honorary President. Inheriting the legacy of Dr Sun Yat-sen, she made great efforts to founding the new Chinese Women and was known as the "Mother of the Nation" and the "Jewel of the Nation" and one of the most remarkable women of the 20th century. Zhou Enlai praised her as stubborn, strong, dignified, and elegant.

During the May Fourth New Culture Movement, women began to come into contact with and absorb advanced Western ideas, such as feminism and the concept of equality, and gradually awakened to their sense of self. They are no longer satisfied with their traditional roles and begin challenging the old norms, displaying strong individuality and a spirit of resistance, pursuing their values and rights, and actively participating in social activities to fight for their rights and interests. Regarding marriage, women have become more open-minded and attach importance to the right to choose. They not only pursue personal liberation but are also concerned about the fate of the country and the nation, injecting new vigor into the progress and development of Chinese society.

1.3 The development of modern women (1949-1978)

After the founding of New China, the Government paid great attention to women's rights and interests and ensured, through laws and policies, that women participated in society on an equal footing and enjoyed fair treatment. This not only changed women's social status but also profoundly affected social concepts and people's psychology and promoted society's overall progress.

Mao Zedong further analyzed in the Report that women's oppression was not only linked to the private ownership system but also inextricably linked to women's role in social production. With the intervention of political forces, the gender policy of "equality between men and women" began to be implemented, and Chinese Women began to participate in economic and political life. The image and temperament of women in this period were very different from traditional femininity.

The "Iron Girl" praises the spirit of carrying heavy burdens on iron shoulders and not being afraid of suffering or death. (Jin Yihong, 2006, p. 169-193) It later evolved into the idea that there is no difference between men and women. It initiated a movement in which women challenged the traditional Gender division of labor and even physical limits. They took on the most challenging and tricky labor tasks, doing work previously considered unsuitable for women. The Iron Maidens were a product of their own time, liberated through labor and exemplary in their sacrifice for personal gain.

The image of women in this era is the product of a high degree of politicization.

First of all, they were de-gendered. The Gender division of labor advocated by mainstream values completely erased the differences between men and women, unthinkingly pursuing "men and women are the same", resulting in the de-gendering of the industry, with women engaging in the same kind of labor as men, the same kind of labor as men, and even surpassing the achievements of men, which is why a large

number of female tractor drivers, pilots and other images of women in labor emerged in this period.

Secondly, the traditional female Gender has disappeared; women in appearance, dress, and character show a tendency to men. They mostly have short hair, wearing monotonous colors, a single style of clothing, a big grin, spirited personalities, and a style of action; the excellent image of women is primarily neutral or even male temperament, tough, strong, sturdy, and stout.

Finally, women as individuals also disappeared. The Iron Maidens sacrificed themselves and devoted themselves to others, sacrificing their small families for the common good and making notable contributions to the cause of collectivism.



Figure 13 Chinese Women between 1949-1978

Source: <http://www.baidu.cn/>

[Accessed on July 19th, 2023]

- ① Liaoning: New China's First Female Train Driver (1950);
- ② Nanchong, Sichuan: Petroleum Exploration Worker (1958);
- ③ Beijing: First Female Pilots of the Air Force (1962);
- ④ Lechang, Guangdong: Announcer at a Cable Broadcasting Station (1973).

As can be seen from the pictures, from the late 1950s to the 1970s, women's groups named "Iron Girl", "Mulan", "Mu Guiying" etc., were formed. Women's labor collectives named "Iron Girl," "Hua Mulan," "Mu Guiying," and so on emerged with great force. They drove electric locomotives, managed oil extraction equipment in oilfields, worked with electricity on high-voltage lines, and explored deep wells in coal mines. They once broke through the inherent Gender boundaries of the industry, and their perseverance, hard work, independence, and pursuit of equality enhanced their abilities and confidence as never before.

1.4 Contemporary Trends in Women's Diversity (1978-present)

Under the Reform and Opening-up of the Chinese Economy, Chinese Women are gradually moving towards a differentiated society, with the market progressively replacing the state as the leading provider and distributor of resources. The development of the market economy has made it possible for individuals to achieve

success through struggle, and the economic transformation has led to a significant change in women's values.

Female Women in this period are no longer confined to traditional Character expectations, and diverse, pluralistic, and individualized images of women are gradually emerging; many women are beginning to step out of the home, and their focus no longer rests solely on the family; more women are beginning to pursue personal success and the realization of their social values.

The emergence of many "strong women" has changed the Female Character and temperament. There are strong women in the countryside who have worked hard to become rich and led the rich to become rich, women entrepreneurs who have gone into business, women athletes and scientists who have made achievements in their professional fields, and women elites in the political sphere. They are all leaders in their respective fields. Women in this period did not break the traditional Gender division of labor and did not deliberately emphasize the same jobs as men.

In terms of Female Characters, female characteristics and femininity have returned, highlighting the gentle character and delicate dress of women, and character traits favoring femininity have also returned, with traditional feminine qualities such as beauty and understanding being reflected despite the presence of a strong and capable female temperament in women.

The responsibilities and duties assumed by the traditional Female Character of the period began to return to the expectations of the Female Character, and the role of the family was recognized as an essential attribute that a Female Character should possess. Chizuko Ueno, a theorist, says that with the disappearance of the people's commune and the establishment of the family as a production unit, domestic labor, which had once been collectivized, returned to the private sphere. The phrase "like an iron man outside the home, like a woman at home" is a reflection of the socio-economic life of this period.

With the advent of the consumer era, women's Gender roles are changing accordingly, and social culture since the mid-1990s has placed greater emphasis on "men and women are not the same." Female Characters in this period not only pursue personal career achievement but also pursue the success of the family role, which can be said to "get out of the hall, get down from the kitchen."

In terms of image, they are fashionable and beautiful, independent, self-confident, thoughtful and pursuing, and their femininity is constantly being strengthened. With successful careers and happy families, they are the perfect combination of "female elites" and "women".

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Figure 14 Changes in Chinese Women since Reform and Opening-up of the Chinese Economy

Source: <http://www.baidu.cn/>
[Accessed on July 23th, 2023]

- ① In the 1970s, Chinese Women's unit collective community life portraits
- ② In the 1980s, women began to pursue individuality in the context of the transformation of the market economy, and it was famous for Chinese women to wear polyester flower dresses.
- ③ Chinese Women who blossomed during the period of comprehensive deepening of economic reform from the 1990s to the early 21st century;
- ④ Chinese Women who are more independent, self-confident, and self-reliant today and who have gained more equal rights.

During this period, "science and technology are the first productive forces" became the strong voice of the times, and intellectuals became the cultural heroes of an era. Many distinctive qualities have emerged in the portrayal of female intellectuals.

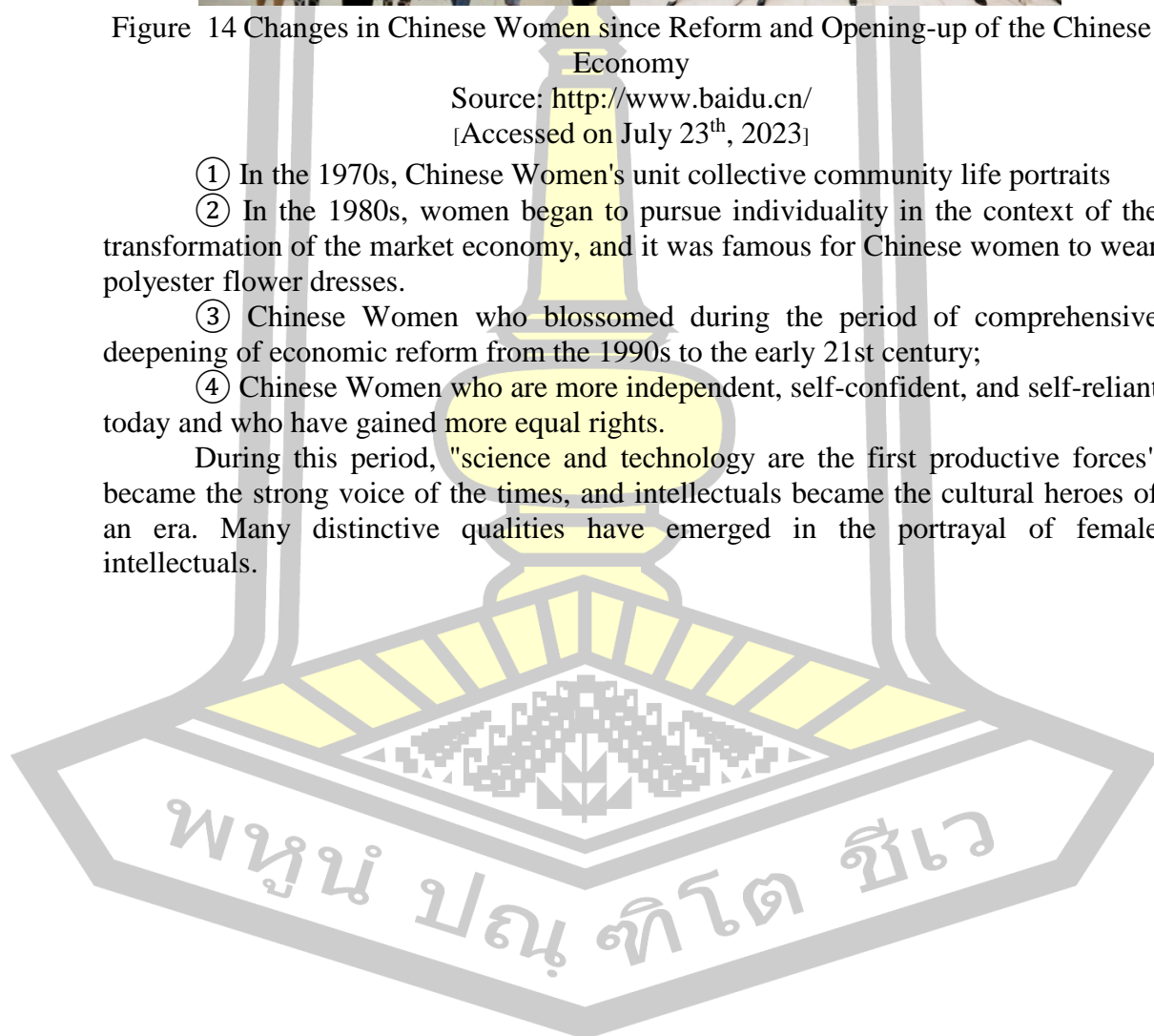




Figure 15 After the Reform and Opening-up of the Chinese Economy, Chinese Women who have gradually integrated with international standards.

Source: <http://www.baidu.cn/>

[Accessed on July 25th, 2023]

① At the beginning of the Reform and opening up of the Chinese Economy, Chinese Women were still inexperienced in international exchanges and showed shyness and a lack of self-confidence.

② In 2014, female student Dong Mingzhu, chairwoman of Gree Electric Appliances in Zhuhai, China, spoke at the Shijie Economic Forum, reflecting her resilience, spirit of innovation, sense of responsibility and leadership.

③ 2020 Fox China Outstanding Women's Forum, Chinese Women embodied the power of self-confidence and self-respect, cooperation and support, openness and inclusiveness of the new era of women.

④ In 2023, Madam Peng Liyuan, wife of the State President, attended the UNESCO Children and Women's Education Award Ceremony, demonstrating the glamour and influence of Chinese Women's national image on the international stage.





Figure 16 China's family structure changes from a "three-member family" to a "five-member family."

Source: <http://www.baidu.cn/>
[Accessed on July 25th, 2023]

In 1982, China established family planning as a basic national policy and enshrined it in its Constitution; in 2021, it promoted age-appropriate marriage and optimal parenthood, and a couple could have three children. With the policy's relaxation, family structure changes have helped build more harmonious and equal social relations. The Reform and Opening-up of the Chinese Economy policy has promoted equality between men and women, a change in the division of family roles, and an increase in Female Character self-identity and self-confidence.

1.5 Characteristics of the Development of Chinese Women's Gender Roles

According to the development of the image of the Female Character at four different stages, it can be seen that the Female Character does not change towards a particular role or image in a single, linear way; on the contrary, the typical image of the Female Character in different historical periods varies and shows different value orientations. The image of the Female Character is a product of the times, an objective reflection of the social form, which reflects the situation of our society in various historical periods, reflecting social and cultural changes, which is the result of the joint influence and interaction of new things, new concepts and traditional culture in the society. The development and changes in society have constantly changed and enriched Female Gender roles and given them new contemporary characteristics and connotations; at the same time, the image of the Female Character has also evolved with the changes of the times and has reflected the social patterns and styles of each period.

Part II. The Development of Female Character in Chinese Animated Films

Modern animation originated in France in 1877 with the invention of the optical cinema machine by Emile Reynaud. French film historians have designated this invention as the year of the birth of animation. Subsequently, French animator Emile Cole's stop-motion filming technique promoted animation development in the world. With the development of animation technology and increased work, animation film gradually became popular in the modern capitalist world. The Female Character in Chinese Animated Films was introduced to China during the Republic of China (R.O.C.) period. The following is an overview of the development of Chinese animated films from the introduction of animation during the R.O.C. period to the hundred years after the Reform and Opening-up of the Chinese Economy and the characteristics of the development of Female Characters in Chinese Animated Films.

2.1 The Female Character in Chinese Animated Films in the Early Years

There are no records of characters in the early works, and many of them are difficult to trace. Female Characters in the surviving early animated films are few and far between, and women appear in the films as supporting roles to assist the development of the film's storyline. For example, in May 1939, Qian Jiajun and his young artists created "Nongjiajia", the theme of which was to propagate patriotic resistance against the Japanese, telling the story of a grandfather of a farming family who fought against the invaders with his daughter and grandson in a resourceful and courageous manner. The animation films at that time did not pay attention to the study of gender issues and Female Character portrayal.

2.1.1 Background to the development of early Chinese animation films

The early stage of Chinese animation film was at the time of the national anti-Japanese salvation movement; in order to inspire the whole nation to fight against the Japanese and improve national self-confidence, the people of China began to use animation to propagate the anti-Japanese. Most of the animation themes were anti-war, with themes that "propagated patriotism and called for anti-imperialist struggles, while others were deafening and intended to change the weak and rise up for self-improvement". (Man Lanmin oral account, recorded by Wan Guohun, 1986, p71) The choice of subject matter also differed from that of the West, and the ideological content and art form were completely different from that of later animation works.

In the available literature, the researcher defines the time of Chinese Animated Films with Female Characters in Chinese Animated Films in the true sense of the word as starting from the first full-length sound animated film in China, Princess Iron Fan, in 1941. Only then did the older generation of animation artists really study Female characters in animated films. Female characters made a breakthrough from nothing to something, and they also used female characters as the title of the animated film.

Even though the Princess of Iron Fan is a commercial animated film operated completely industrially, this film was born under such a social environment and also added the theme of anti-Japanese resistance, "the whole nation united against the Japanese invaders and fought for the final victory of the war of resistance," and "the selection of the theme of Princess Iron Fan was influenced by The theme of Princess

Iron Fan was influenced by Disney's Snow White, in which the Monkey King and his companions symbolize the "people" and call for unity to fight against the Bull Demon King and ultimately achieve victory." (Man Lanmin oral account, recorded by Wan Guohun, 1986, p90). And this theme runs through the production of almost every animated film of the period.

2.1.2 Early Chinese Animated Films with Female Characters as Key Characters

For a long time, the portrayal of Female Characters in Chinese animation has been influenced by traditional thinking, which takes conventional women as the central image, so the status and voice of Female Characters in animation works are relatively low, which leads to certain limitations of the character images presented in animation works. Female Character in Chinese Animation "From absence to the emergence of traditional subordinate image; the phenomenon of "absence" of Female Character in Chinese Animation began to be changed after the release of Princess Iron Fan in 1941" (Xu Nanming, 2005).

"The Princess of Iron Fan" (1941) is the first Chinese animated feature film, since then Chinese animated films have begun to pay attention to the portrayal of Female Characters to do their own national characteristics of the "Princess" animated film. "The Princess of Iron Fan" from the title of the film should be around the Princess Iron Fan to start the story, but the film is mainly about the Tang Monk teacher and disciples four people to go to the West to fetch the scriptures through the Flaming Mountain by the fire block, the Monkey King in the hands of Princess Iron Fan and the King of the Ox Demons, the wisdom of the capture of the fan to go to extinguish the flame of the mountain story.

Female Characters in the film include Princess Iron Fan (the wife of the King Bull Demon), Princess "Yu Mian" Fox (the concubine of the King Bull Demon) and two maids of honor, whose roles reflect the situation of females in the traditional society at the time of the screenplay's creation, and the marital relationship and status of the patriarchal society. Under the historical and social background of that time, the actions of Princess Iron Fan and the relationships of the characters in the film seem logical.



Figure 17 Princess Iron Fan (L),

Figure 18 Princess "Yu Mian" Fox (R)

Source: <https://www.iqiyi.com/> "The Princess of Iron Fan" (1941), Video screenshots
[Accessed on February 12th, 2023]

The two princesses in the film are quite different in appearance. Princess Iron Fan's dangling eyes give the audience the impression that her face is not good, and her modeling is more realistic than Princess "Yu Mian" Fox, lacking the delicate image characteristics favored by male aesthetics. She is dressed in heavy pigmented clothes, which are simple and lacking in layers, while Princess "Yu Mian" Fox brocade and jade are very bright and shiny. The contrast between the two figures reflects the situation of traditional women in marriage at that time and the deep-rooted influence of Confucian women in social life nowadays.

Princess Iron Fan is portrayed as a Female Character with absolute power. Originally supposed to be the protagonist, she was designed as a villainous character to better highlight the Tang Monk and his party as positive characters. Princess Iron Fan is an animated film based on excerpts from the four masterpieces Journey to the West. The original text refers to Princess Iron Fan as the Iron Fan Fairy, also known as the Rakshasa Woman. Rakshasa is synonymous with evil, which justifies her identity as a villain.



Figure 19 Princess Iron Fan fights with the Monkey King in a battle robe (L)
Figure 20 Princess Iron Fan submits to her husband, King Bull Demon, and gives up her banana fan. (R)

Source: <https://www.iqiyi.com/> "The Princess of Iron Fan" (1941), Video screenshots [Accessed on February 12th, 2023]

This set of images shows the Monkey King borrowing a banana fan, with Princess Iron Fan wearing a more capable top and bottom, and chasing the Monkey King with a sword, threatening to "avenge my son". When Piggy pretends to be the Bull Demon King to cheat the banana fan, Princess Iron Fan reveals her second face, which conceals her arrogant and domineering side in front of the Monkey King. Singing and dancing to please King Bull and pouring wine for him shows that she wants to compete with the Princess "Yu Mian" Fox for her husband's favor. When the Bull Demon King asks for the banana fan, she gives it to him without asking for a reason, thus reflecting the Confucian notion of "the inferiority of the superior" and "the husband's master and the wife's subordination".

The Female Characters in Chinese Animated Films in the early period paid less attention to the portrayal of Female Characters and more attention to the development of the storyline and the deeper meaning behind the film. The creative concepts of this period bear the imprint of the times and also play a positive role in enlightening the content.

2.2 Female characters in Chinese animated films in the early years of the People's Republic of China

The founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949 fundamentally changed the status and existence of Chinese Women, providing legal protection for women's political participation, equal employment and education. In order to improve the cultural literacy of Chinese Women as soon as possible and to meet the demand for a labor force in the country's economic construction, the Party and the government also formulated and implemented a series of policies and measures conducive to the development of women. As a result, more and more women are stepping out of the home and into society, where they receive an education and use their social work to realize their value, improve their status and win social acceptance.

2.2.1 Formation of the "Chinese School" of Animation

During the founding of the People's Republic of China, the Northeast Film Studio mainly created Chinese animated films. Then, its art film team moved to Shanghai, where the founders of Chinese animation, such as Wan Lai Ming, Wan Ku Toad, and Wan Chao Chuan, gathered. On April 1, 1957, the Ministry of Culture established the Shanghai Film Studio, which gathered a group of elites in the animation industry, including female directors Tang Cheng and Lin Wen Xiao.

Under the national policy of "let a hundred flowers blossom and a hundred schools of thought contend", Chinese animation films entered the first period of prosperity. During this period, animated films were made on various subjects and forms, and their artistic level reached a new height, forming the art style of the "Chinese School", and several films gained international fame. During this period, Female Characters were weakened in the animated films, and Female Characters appeared in a relatively low percentage, such as the dancers, musicians and other Female Characters in "The Proud General".

Most of the animated films produced by the "Chinese School" are mainly educational and entertaining, serving the growth and education of young people. For example, "Tadpole Looking for Mum", "Thank You Kitten", "Kitten Fishing", "Why is the Crow Black", etc. Most cartoon characters were animals without prominent gender characteristics, and the problem of setting the characters' gender was also avoided. Until after the 1960s, domestic animated films broke through the limitations of animal characters in the setting of characters, and most of them used human beings as characters and drew them in a realistic style. However, the limitations of teaching and entertainment still limited the creation of plots.

2.2.2 Breakthrough Female Character in Animation

Since founding the People's Republic of China, China has undergone tremendous political, economic, and social changes, especially in women's social status and living conditions. China strongly advocates equality between men and women. As women's status has dramatically improved, women in China have also significantly improved their spiritual and emotional levels. They not only pursue their independence but also begin to pursue their value, and the image of Female Characters presented in China's animation films is also gradually changing.

Despite the increase in the number and frequency of Female Characters in animated films, they are mainly characterless and impersonal. In most classic animated films, Female Characters are traditionally simple and good, and their personalities are seldom shown. There are hardly any characters like "The Monkey

King" or "Nezha" who have unique personalities and control over their own destinies. In the 1958 film *A Strong Brocade*, the 1963 film *The Peacock Princess*, and *The Golden Conch*, for example, the status of Female Characters was emphasized, with the number of scenes doubling in comparison to previous Chinese Women animated films.

However, there are some problems, for example, even when the subject of love between men and women is represented, it can still be seen that the main focus is on highlighting the qualities of the male protagonist, and the Female Character is only portrayed as the female protagonist as she should be, lacking an independent personality and in need of the male protagonist's help and protection. The image of the Female Character in this period is different, when they appear alone, they are the embodiment of beauty and wisdom, in but the perspective of the male gaze is still clearly visible - The female Character becomes an object for viewing and peeping in it; however, when the love of the male and female protagonists is hampered, Female Character is powerless and can only wait for the male protagonist to solve the problem. Such a characterisation makes the Female Character portrayed as weak and incompetent.

In 1963, the *Peacock Princess* was slandered by a treacherous minister and could only leave the kingdom in disgrace, waiting for the prince to pursue and save her before she could get a happy ending; in the same year, the love between the conch girl and the fisherman in the *Golden Conch* was obstructed by the Goddess of the Sea, but the fisherman was not afraid to bravely pursue his love and finally got together with the conch girl. Female Characters were portrayed in cartoons during this period as objects to be protected, which in turn labeled them as "weak."



Figure 21 Princess Peacock (L)

Source: <https://www.iqiyi.com/> "The Princess Peacock" (1963), Video screenshots

Figure 22 Conch girl (R)

Source: <https://www.iqiyi.com/> "The Golden Conch " (1963), Video screenshots
[Accessed on February 21th, 2023]

As can be seen from the pictures, the outward appearance of Female Characters in this period is more beautifully portrayed, and the costumes are more

beautifully styled. The costumes of Female Characters used traditional patterns and ethnic dresses. The dress design of Princess Peacock is originated from Dai Peacock Dance, its skirt has the pattern on the peacock's feather, when Princess Peacock dances the skirt turns up like the peacock opens the screen beautifully. The costumes of the Female Characters in *Golden Conch* adopt the art of paper-cutting, and its openwork design gives the characters' costumes a sense of hierarchy. The carved blouse has a plum blossom pattern, and the striped openwork at the hem of the skirt expresses the layered relationship of the skirt folds. Analyzed from a visual point of view, the animation producers of the time paid attention to the image design of Female Characters. They integrated traditional culture with animation, which is especially obvious in the costumes and styling.

In 1965, Shanghai Fine Arts Film Studio portrayed two brave female protagonists. It launched a female-oriented animated film, *Little Sisters of the Prairie Heroes*, in which the image of Female Characters in animated films was broken through and presented more diversified character traits. The movie tells the true story of two young Mongolian girls, Longmei and Yurong, who braved the wind and snow to rescue the commune's sheep and portrays the image of the brave sisters who fought with the wind and snow, protected the sheep, and ultimately overcame the natural difficulties.



Figure 23 Prairie Sisters

Source: <http://www.baidu.cn/> "Heroic Sisters of the Prairie " (1965)

[Accessed on February 23th, 2023]

In this movie, the girls wear traditional Mongolian costumes, showing the nation's actual state vividly and graphically. The colors of the costumes are full of Chinese national characteristics, and at the same time, they are fused with the dress style of the horse-herding people, presenting a unique national character. The girls' smiles are full of kindness and simplicity, and their sincere performance deeply touched the audience. Characters are realistic, the film is not only a documentary of events, but also a realistic image of the characters, and character modeling fusion of ethnic colors, smooth lines and simple image of a more realistic ethnic style. The film

is female-oriented, showing the bravery and commitment of the protagonist, breaking through the stereotypical image of female characters who are mainly weak.

Since the 1960s, the number and diversity of Female Characters in animated films have developed and broken through. On the one hand, animated films have been used as a way to convey ideological education. On the other hand, their modeling is close to real life and highly artistic and nationalistic, which expresses the inner emotions of Chinese Women in the face of intimacy, love, and friendship in the best possible way. To a certain extent, this meets the audience's expectations of character modeling, and it also plays a good role in the theme of animated films as a means of education and fun.

During the decade of the Cultural Revolution from 1966 to 1976, the creation and production of movies throughout the country were devastated, and all works based on myths, fairy tales, and folk tales were forbidden to be filmed. "During the Cultural Revolution, the Gang of Four destroyed the literary and artistic endeavors while vigorously promoting the creative principle of "Three Outstanding"⁴⁶ to guide the literary and artistic creation at that time. (Yan Hui & Suo Yabin, 2005, p.33) Chinese animated movies were almost in a desperate situation.

The works of this period could only reflect the class struggle. The little heroes had to "stand on high slopes" and "sing in high tones." The little children became little adults, and the formulation and conceptualization went to the extreme" (Chen Huangmei, 1989, p.142), which completely violated the law of animation film creation.

Chinese Women also lost their feminine characteristics of "daughter", "mother" and "wife" during this period. Under the influence of state power and patriarchal society, women began to take men as the standard, and even appeared to be "masculinized". Representative works of this period include Little Sentinels of the East China Sea, Bamboo Shoots Growing in the House, and The Story of the Big Scullery. The identities of the characters in these works truly reflect the state of social development at that time: people from all walks of life unilaterally pursued "equality between men and women," disregarding Gender differences between men and women and forming a structural pattern of "homogeneity between men and women."

2.3 The Female Character in Chinese Animated Films after the Reform and Opening-up of the Chinese Economy

The State has formulated and promulgated a series of laws and regulations, and women's legitimate rights and interests are well protected. Under the guarantee of these systems, the number of animation works with female themes in Chinese Women's animation also gradually increased along with the social development of this period.

2.3.1 The Second "Blossoming" of Chinese Animated Films

With the passing of the "Cultural Revolution", Chinese animation began to recover. Reform and opening up of the Chinese Economy, the continuous expansion of the medium set off the second boom of animation movies. During the Reform and

⁴⁶ Three Outstanding: Specifically, it refers to highlighting the positive characters among all the characters, the heroic characters among the positive characters, and the main heroic characters among the heroic characters.

Opening-up of the Chinese Economy, the rapid development of Chinese animation Films ushered in the opportunity for growth again. At this stage, Chinese animation's research on national style shaping was more in-depth, and the "Chinese Economy" was more mature. Female Characters were portrayed more attentively in the animation works at that time, and the parts allocated to female characters in the scripts of the animation films were also increased.

It is still clear that most of these women were created by male artists. They carried the male fantasy of "women" at that time and were constructed in multiple ways in myths, fairy tales, folk tales, etc.: girls were pure and positive; mothers and wives were kind and devoted; princesses and old women were portrayed as beautiful according to the themes of different movies. Princesses and old women are portrayed as beautiful and evil depending on the theme of the movie. They are suppressed by male prejudice and do not reflect the true meaning of Female Character in society.

Reform and Opening-up of the Chinese Economy brought about a collision of Eastern and Western cultural ideologies, and people's understanding of Gender consciousness gradually changed, and the status of women naturally changed. This change is inseparable from Western feminist thinking. Furthermore, after the Cultural Revolution, due to changes in the social environment and the main values of society, the aesthetic demand for public movie-watching changed dramatically, prompting the creators of animation to open their minds gradually.

In terms of character, Female Characters gradually shed their soft and solid image. They began to have self-consciousness and were able to face and solve problems. During this period, the portrayal of Female Characters showed a multidimensional image, no longer confined to the traditional image of gentleness and kindness, with brave and independent qualities.

2.3.2 Exploratory Female Characters

Since the Reform and Opening-up of the Chinese Economy, the image of Female Characters in Chinese Animation has been gradually enriched, Female Characters in this period are usually portrayed with the keywords "courage" and "independence", and they have become an important force to drive the development of the story, and they are no longer dependent or marginalized to male characters. They are no longer dependent on male characters or marginalized characters. They have their own goals and pursuits, and overcome difficulties and challenges through their own efforts and wisdom. This reflects society's expectations of the Female Character and its praise and glorification of the reality of the Female Character, and conveys the expectation of social harmony, while at the same time, the portrayal of both sexes' roles is gradually becoming more and more balanced.

For example, the kind and courageous sister of the Heavenly Maiden in *The Huo Tong* (1984) helps Mingzha to take back the fire from the demon. Ga Mei, the daughter of the tribal headman in *Lotus Lantern* (1999), is stalwart, stubborn, and wild, rebelling against the god Erlang Shen and bravely helping Shenxiang escape from the Heavenly Palace. Female Characters, which are constantly being explored by artists, reflect society's changing expectations towards women, express the beauty of human nature through Female Characters in animation, and use them to promote the concepts of truth, goodness, beauty, and love.



Figure 24 Sister Tiannu and Mingza, (L)

Source: <https://www.iqiyi.com/> "The Huo Tong " (1984), Video screenshots
[Accessed on February 21th, 2023]

Figure 25 Ga Mei and Chen Xiang, (R)

Source: <https://www.iqiyi.com/> "Lotus Lantern " (1999), Video screenshots
[Accessed on February 21th, 2023]

Analyzed from the perspective of image shaping, the clothing and styling of Female Characters at this time are more inclined to reflect the ethnic style. The characters' costumes in "Butterfly Spring" are derived from the traditional costumes of the Bai ethnic group in Yunnan, using simple color blocks to summarize the complex patterns, but retaining the waistcoat-style upper shirt and the two sleeves in white. The main background of "The Huo Tong" is the Hani tribe, and the costumes of its characters are a simplified representation of the traditional Hani tribe costumes, which do not embody specific colored threads and silver ornaments, but express the ethnic characteristics of the Hani tribe from the top and the bottom of the skirt. The animation films in this period drew on the characteristics of national costumes to portray the characters due to the subject matter. They used simple color block decoration to pass on the national culture.



Figure 26 Ethnic Bai girl, (L)

Source: <https://www.iqiyi.com/> "Butterfly Spring" (1983), Video screenshots
[Accessed on February 21th, 2023]

Figure 27 Sister Tian Nv, (R)

Source: <https://www.iqiyi.com/> "The Huo Tong" (1984), Video screenshots
[Accessed on February 21th, 2023]

At the same time, several successful "personality independent" villainess snake scorpion goblin characters emerged. However, people's concepts are still stuck

in the myths and legends, "evil charm, woe to the country and suffering people" female goblin image; reform and Opening-up of the Chinese Economy has brought about a clash of ideas between the East and the West, and influenced the creative consciousness of animation directors. The same influence on the animation director's creative consciousness, can be said to be more avant-garde and bold in the design. This is an attempt to transcend the male mentality: "a rebellion against the suppressed emotions of women who men have oppressed for thousands of years", which has a positive Gender significance. The female consciousness is transformed from "passive" to "active" through the female body.



Figure 28 In the 1980s, villainous female characters
Source: <https://www.iqiyi.com/> [Accessed on February 21th, 2023]

"The Legend of Sealed Book" (1983), Video screenshots
"Monkey King Conquers Demons" (1985), Video screenshots
"Calabash Brothers" (1986), Video screenshots

2.4 The Female Character in Chinese Animated Films in the 21st Century

Entering the 21st century, the government's supportive policies have made China's animation industry embark on the road of healthy and steady development, gained good economic and social benefits, and produced good international influence.

2.4.1 Chinese Animation Movies in the Internet Environment

Between 2001 and 2004, the state introduced a series of policies to help the development of cultural entrepreneurship, and from 2004 to 2012, the state further supported the animation industry, and with the development of science and technology and digital technology, Chinese animated films have been able to develop better. With the development of technology and digital technology, Chinese animated films have been able to develop better. The digital production of animated films and

the diversification of the audience's viewing needs have made the portrayal of Female Characters rich, diversified, and complex.

At the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first century, under the pressure of the influx of foreign animated films into China, Chinese animated films could only make up for the gap in quality in terms of quantity in order to stabilize the market, and due to the low quality of animated films as a whole, practitioners felt that they were not strong enough. However, with the development of the Internet, Chinese animated films have gradually attracted the attention and expectations of viewers after warming up on the Internet, laying a good foundation for the subsequent broadcasting effect.

This effective marketing model has given producers the courage and freedom to break through the restrictions on scripts, characters, and effects, including the portrayal of Female Characters. As a result, Chinese animated films in recent years have not only paid attention to patriotic sentiments and national righteousness but also focused on the characterization of the characters themselves. In particular, female-oriented animated films have gradually reflected the cultural values and the spirit of the times that their creators wish to convey.

2.4.2 Diverse Female Character

Female Characters present a more diversified and three-dimensional image and are no longer limited by traditional Gender role stereotypes. They may be the story's central characters, with strong personal charisma and influence, possessing their own goals and pursuits. In terms of appearance and image, Female Characters may be more modernized and diversified, reflecting the recognition and pursuit of Gender equality and personality development in contemporary society.

In Chinese Women's animated films, the image of women has become increasingly flexible and varied, reflecting the portrayal of social development and change. Since the new century, Female Characters in animation are no longer delicate and helpless but fight side by side with their partners, possessing courage and an adventurous spirit while maintaining a gentle appearance and a strong and brave heart. These images represent the free development of contemporary women, shouldering responsibility and accountability and having the courage to choose the direction of their own lives.

In 2006, in the first domestic martial arts animation movie, "The Warrior," Innocent Qian'er, her character, although a little stubborn, had time with the male protagonist to produce a gap, but ultimately, misunderstandings were dissolved, and shoulder-to-shoulder combat. In the same year, it was determined by the Central Propaganda Department as the key domestic animation tribute film for the 60th anniversary of the founding of the country, "The Magic Aster", in which the elder sister, Dalan, is lazy, and the younger sister, Xiaolan, is hardworking, highlighting the theme of labor through the contrast between the two twin sisters, and the theme of labor, which not only changes the world, but also changes the human beings themselves.

In 2009, the smart, clever, cute and full of bravery and wisdom Little Drolma in "Elf Girl Zhuoma" is the embodiment of the old antelope and the protector of the Tibetan antelope. In order to protect the plateau animals and a group of bad guys, they start the fight through all kinds of severe tests and finally defeat the demon king to lead the Tibetan antelope group back to the Emerald Island of the Dream Lake. Little

Drolma has a certain influence on children's minds and has a large number of pediatric fans.

Thanks to the development of the Internet era, the calm and intelligent female goddess Jing Xin in 2011's "kuiba" still maintains her rationality as the most important way of dealing with people after her previous values have been shattered. Chun, who has the audacity to go against the rules of the "god" world in 2016's "Big Fish & Begonia"; Su Xi, who constantly fights against destiny in 2018's "The Wind Guardians"; and Xiao Qing, who grows stronger and stronger after going through thousands of risks due to her obsession with sisterhood in 2021's "White Snake 2: Green Snake", who grows stronger through thousands of dangers due to her obsession with sisterhood; and Can Su, a depressed girl who accomplishes her own salvation in the illusory world of the "Deep Sea" in 2023.

The change in Female Characters in Chinese Animation is closely related to the process of globalization. Under the influence of Western culture and modern civilization, Chinese Women have undergone changes in their thoughts and behaviors, which are reflected in the animation.

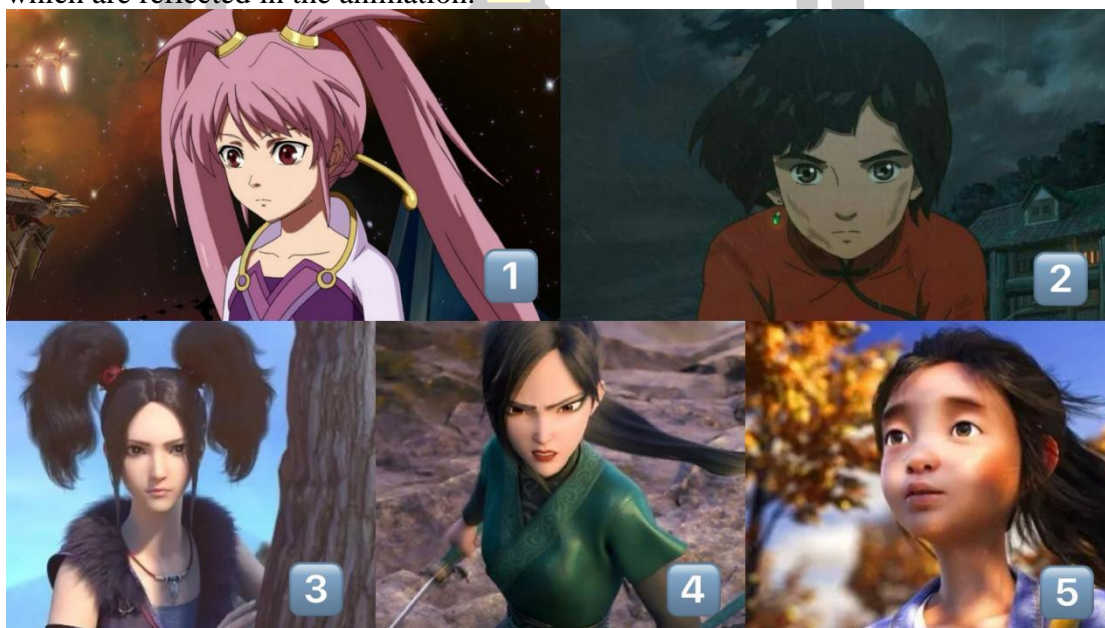


Figure 29 Diverse Female Character

Source: <https://www.iqiyi.com/> [Accessed on February 21th, 2023]

- ① "kuiba" (2011), Jing Xin, Video screenshots
- ② "Big Fish & Begonia" (2016), Chun, Video screenshots
- ③ "The Wind Guardians"(2018), Su Xi, Video screenshots
- ④ "White Snake 2: Green Snake"(2021), Xiao Qing, Video screenshots
- ⑤ "Deep Sea"(2023),Can Su, Video screenshots

Analyzed from the perspective of image shaping, the clothing and styling of Female Characters at this time are more inclined to reflect the ethnic style. The characters' costumes in "Elf Girl Zhuoma" originated from the traditional costumes of the Tibetan people, with a fresh and soft robe style with bright colors and decorated with embroidery, weaving, beading, and other crafts. With environmental protection, survival, and harmony as the main background of the national fantasy animation "The

"Magic Aster", the costumes of its characters are also quite ethnic; the heroine's clothes are mainly red, as well as the simplified representation of ethnic patterns, which reflect each other in a very colorful way. The look of Chun in "Big Fish & Begonia" is a typical Chinese image of a schoolgirl in the Republican period, with slightly shorter bangs on the right side of the hairstyle and the left side as long as the earlobes, paired with a jade earring, which highlights the elegant temperament and distinctive personality. The short hair with angled bangs and the student clothes symbolize the advanced thinking of the student group, and the red blouse and gray bustier skirt highlight the simplicity and resilience of the Chinese national spirit. The animated films of this period drew on the characteristics of national costumes due to the theme, and the Female Character combined traditional costumes with modern aesthetics to express a more attractive female image from the visual image.



Figure 30 Ethnic style of female characters

Source: <https://www.iqiyi.com/> [Accessed on February 21th, 2023]

"Elf Girl Zhuoma" (2009), Chun, Video screenshots

"The Magic Aster" (2009), Xiao Lan&Da Lan, Video screenshots

"Big Fish & Begonia" (2016), Chun, Video screenshots

Chinese animation has been influenced by foreign productions while developing in national styles. During this process, domestic animation production could not meet the growing demand for film and television. At the same time, foreign science fiction, realistic themes, and colorful painting styles gradually dominated the market, such as incorporating elements from online games, martial arts, and cyberpunk styles. During this period, the influx of foreign women's thinking stimulated Female characters' self-consciousness, and they began to pursue their self-worth, no longer confined to the roles of family and love.

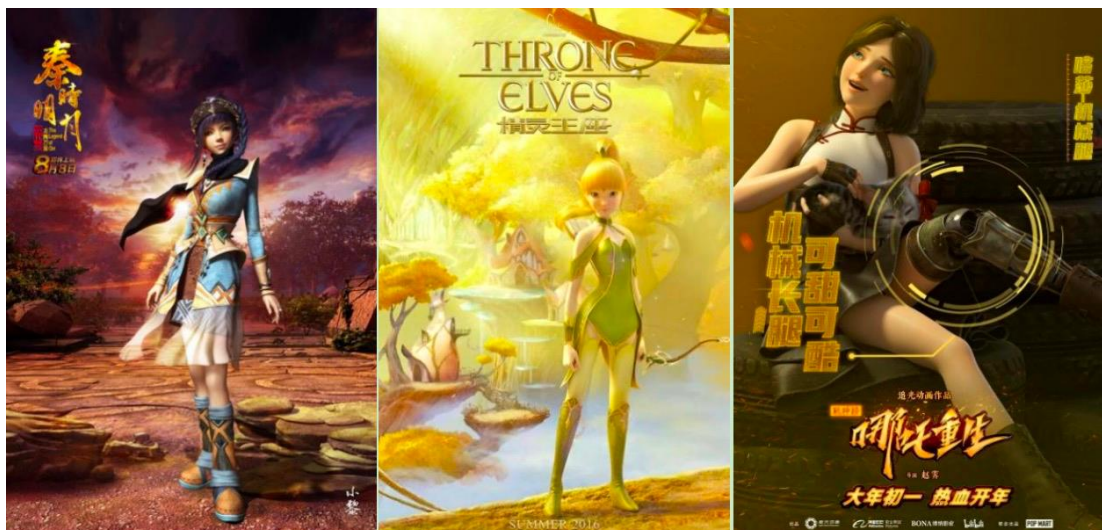


Figure 31 Female characters that integrate Chinese and Western cultures

Source: <https://www.baidu.com/> [Accessed on September 11th, 2023]

3D Martial Arts Animation Film "The Legend of Qin" (2014), XiaoLi, Movie Posters
Online Game adapted Animated Film "Throne of Elves" (2016), Yali, Movie Posters
"Oriental Punk" style Animated Film "New Gods : Nezha Reborn" (2021), Kasha,
Movie Posters

By analyzing representative Chinese animation works, it can be found that the character traits of a character are inextricably linked to the social environment in which they live as well as their cultural heritage. In animation works, the image of a Female Character is, to a certain extent, combined with and influenced by the image of the Male Character. Animation reflects the character traits through the portrayal of the characters and shows different personality traits through the interaction and communication between the characters. The transformation of the Female Character in Chinese Women's animation is a reflection of social expectations and realistic portrayal of women, which involves multiple factors, including the transformation of the Female Character, the expected imagination, the return of femininity, and the enhancement of the subjective consciousness, and at the core of it is the pursuit of the development of the times and the society.

Part III. An Analysis of the Factors Associating The Female Character in Chinese Animated Films with Chinese Women

Since the implementation of Reform and Opening-up of the Chinese Economy, the current cultural context reflects the gradual bridging of the boundaries between mainstream, elite, and popular culture, which makes the relationship between art and life increasingly close in people's lives entirely of aesthetic style. At the same time, the performance of art for the image is gradually converging with the audience's identity. The Creator's expression of a particular image is not the result of fabrication and imagination but is rooted in the historical context, the art of mainstream values.

"The moving images we see on the screen are a medium, a reproduction, in which each image, or series of images, is made by people for a particular economic or cultural purpose, and they are also interpreted by people in a particular way; these images express ideas of thought, ways of seeing and thinking, ways of acting and

feeling. They represent culture, but they are not real and objective. They are produced, distributed and accepted. They are both a work of imaginative creation and an economic instrument." (Robert Cockerell , 2004, p. 209) This quote from Cockerell also applies to the representation of images in animated films.

Female Characters in animated films are artistic creations by artists based on their personal understanding and social experience under the framework of the national cultural policy. The animators design the character modeling, but many factors work together to construct the image of women. In this section, the researcher analyzes the factors that influence the construction of The Female Character in Chinese Animated Films and summarizes the intertextual relationship between Chinese Women and the Female Character in Chinese Animated Films.

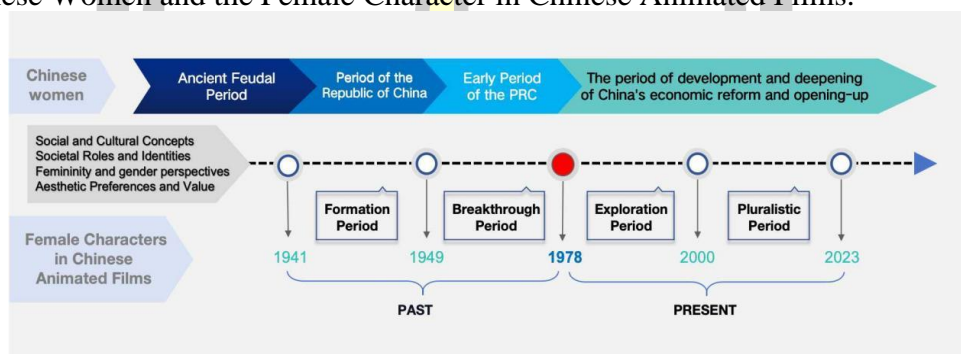


Figure 32 Intertextual relationship diagram

Source: drawn by Author

The images show that Reform and Opening up of the Chinese Economy are important nodes in this study. The development of the Chinese Economy has driven the process of social and cultural development, which has brought about more cultural exchanges and artistic innovations, as well as the notion of emancipation of people's minds. It is also an important node in the development of Chinese women.

3.1 Changes in social and cultural attitudes

In the traditional cultural atmosphere, women are often regarded as subordinate or subservient to men and lack independent social status. However, the Reform and Opening-up of the Chinese Economy have led to a change in traditional attitudes and an improvement in the status of Chinese Women and have pushed Chinese society toward greater equality and inclusiveness.

Chinese society has been exposed to more cultures and ideologies from the West and other regions. These external cultural elements have directly influenced animation film creators' portrayal of women, leading to new, more contemporary concepts of women, which have dialogued and exchanged with traditional Chinese cultural concepts.

For example, changes in the characters' appearance, costumes, and behavioral movements:

The female characters in Chinese animated films may present traditional Chinese costumes and hairstyles, such as opera costumes and cheongsams, in some of the early animated films, and these conventional costumes and looks reflect the respect and inheritance of traditional Chinese culture. Behavior and actions are consistent with conventional ideas and perceptions of Gender roles, e.g., traditional beauties are expected to walk slowly and gracefully, displaying a calm and unhurried

demeanor. Old ladies are usually depicted with slightly bent backs, but this does not detract from the ease and calmness they walk.



Figure 33 Foxgirl and Foxmother characters

Source: <http://www.baidu.cn/> "The Legend of Sealed Book" (1983)

[Accessed on September 25th, 2023]

Mr. Qian Yunda (2022), the co-director of *The Legend of Sealed Book*, once mentioned in an interview that the characters in the film had a very wide range of shapes, absorbing various forms of folk art, such as toys, door paintings, New Year's Paintings, and comic strips. Among them, the fox modeling design is very special, and the fox mother is like the Beijing opera inside the face like, with big black eyes in the "eight" word, a pair of tricky small eyes; the fox female is sometimes very bewitching, coiled bun, phoenix eyes, cherry mouth, face, but also smeared with two pieces of red, like the Peking Opera inside the role of the Dan⁴⁷.

After the Reform and Opening-up of the Chinese Economy, the appearance and dress of some Female Characters have been influenced by modern fashion, presenting a more fashionable and contemporary image, such as Western-style clothing, fashionable hairstyles and makeup. Such modern elements reflect the pursuit of fashion and individualization in contemporary Chinese society.

⁴⁷ Interview with Yunda Qian, co-director of *The Legend of Sealed Book*, 2022, <https://www.bilibili.com/video/>



Figure 34 Baoqingfang Proprietor
Source: "White Snake" (2019) , Video screenshots
[Accessed on September 25th, 2023]

The overall look is filled with a strong secondary culture of modern pop culture. Her outfit is mainly big red with big green, a combination of bold and stylish colors, leaving a lasting impression. Her makeup is also unique, with thick eyeshadow that seems to give off the energy of a small fox in addition to a hint of flirtation. In addition, she holds a pipe in a flirtatious pose, a seemingly age-inappropriate behavior that adds to her mystique instead of making people feel out of place. The image design of the "Bao Qing Fang" Proprietor is full of contrasts.

Cui Di (2021), the movie's producer, said in an interview that Baoqingfang Mistress is a very mysterious character in the first movie. On one side of her is the image of a twelve-year-old girl, and on the other side is a thousand-year-old fox demon. In the film, it is very important to bear a very important position, receiving the young audience's favorite⁴⁸.

Overall, Baoqingfang Proprietor's costume design was very successful, with a strong contrast between maturity and youthfulness. This visual contrast created a powerful feeling and left a deep impression on the audience. For this reason, the internet has seen a craze for imitating Baoqingfang Proprietor's make-up, which is quite popular.



Figure 35 Young girls today are keen to imitate the make-up of female characters.

Source: <http://www.baidu.cn/>
[Accessed on September 25th, 2023]

⁴⁸ Tencent video film channel official account film review interviews,2021,<https://v.qq.com/>

This shows that after the Reform and Opening-up of the Chinese Economy, the cultural environment of Chinese society has gradually become open and diversified, and the introduction of Western and foreign cultures has injected new vigor and elements into Chinese culture. This cultural exchange and collision promotes the integration and change of Chinese culture and leaves a deep mark on animation character design. Modern animation character design has become more and more diversified and avant-garde. At the same time, commercialized animation works and IP image marketing have also promoted the popularity and imitation of animation characters, making these characters an essential element in consumer culture.

3.2 Identity Perception of Social Roles

There is some connection or mutual influence between The Female Character in Chinese Animated Films and female identity. Specifically, this connection can be described as how the portrayal of Female Characters in animated films reflects or influences women's perception of their own identity and identification in reality. Female Characters in animated films are often an artistic reproduction of the image of women. The characters, behaviors, and values shown by these characters will affect the audience's perception and understanding of the Female Character's identity to a certain extent. For example, a brave and independent Female Character may inspire the audience to recognize and respect female strength. At the same time, a gentle and kind Female Character may make the audience cherish and appreciate female tenderness and delicacy more.

In traditional societies, female characters are often confined to the domestic and private spheres and have relatively homogenous social roles. This social role is also reflected in animated films, where the Female Character is often portrayed as an object needing protection by male characters and as a "wife and mother" responsible for caring for the family, children, and husband. However, with the development of modern society, the status of Female Characters in terms of occupation and social roles has also changed. Since the Reform and Opening-up of the Chinese Economy, with the development of the social economy and the improvement of women's status, women have started to play an essential role in various fields of society. Animated films have also gradually begun to show the diversity and complexity of female characters. Some animated films may present images of women in various professions, such as doctors, lawyers, scientists, etc., showing the independence and autonomy of women in society.

We are familiar with the classic images of "Lady Yin" (Nezha's mother) and "Sansheng Mum" (Chenxiang's mother), which share the qualities and manifestations of traditional Chinese "female virtues", but due to the limitations of society and culture and the times, these women have little independent thinking of their own. They are idealized as "male-dominated women" in society. However, due to the limitations of society and culture and the times, these women have almost no independent thoughts of their own and are idealized in a society of "male-dominated and female-subordinate." there is also the typical "male-dominated and female-dominated" family structure in "Big Headed Son and Little Headed Dad". The mother of Big Headed Son does not even have a real name, but always appears under the code name of "Apron Mum". Female Character, which stands for "good wife and

good mother", is the ideal state of women in the minds of men in Chinese Women's society.



Figure 36 Female characters with the traditional image of "good wife and good mother"

Source: <https://www.iqiyi.com/>
[Accessed on September 25th, 2023]

"Legend of Nezha" (2003), Lady Yin, Video screenshots

"Lotus Lantern " (1999), Sansheng Mum, Video screenshots

"Big Headed Son and Little Headed Dad" (1995), Apron Mum, Video screenshots

With the change in cultural attitudes, Female Characters with the same "mother" status may display more independent, strong, and autonomous character traits, which is in line with the values of women's pursuit of self-realization and equal rights in modern society. These roles may display self-confidence, decisiveness, and leadership, reflecting a renewed awareness and understanding of Female Character in contemporary society.



Figure 37 Nezha's Mother " Lady Yin" (2019)

Source: <https://www.sohu.com/>
[Accessed on September 25th, 2023]

In the film, Lady Yin, Nezha's mother, turns her image from previous versions into a heroine. In the eyes of the public, Lady Yin is a kind and gentle woman, but in this new version of Nezha, she has changed her image of being a soft and gentle woman. She walks with a domineering posture, and she is often a shocking, unconventional woman who dares to complain to the gods in the temple of the Goddess of Mercy for not letting her give birth to Nezha with a chicken leg in one hand and her back crossed in the other, which is a world of difference between the traditional woman's character and the traditional woman's character. Compared to the image of a woman who can only raise her children at home, viewers prefer this Lady Yin, who can both keep the house and fight monsters with her husband outside.

3.3 Femininity and the Development of Gender Perspective

In traditional Gender concepts, men are often seen as representatives of masculinity and bravery, while women are more often given feminine and introverted qualities. This concept is also reflected in animated films. For example, early Female Characters tend to appear as aids and foils to the male characters.

With the diversification of culture and the awakening of women's consciousness, people's perception of Gender roles has also changed, and women have begun to pursue the realization of self-worth and an independent lifestyle. This change is reflected in film and television dramas, which makes portraying women's image more focused on showing women's independence, self-confidence, and strength, no longer just a single stereotype. (Z.J. Liu & L.H. Huang, 2022, p.57-59) Gradually, when gender equality became more popular and deeply rooted in people's hearts, animated films began to break traditional gender stereotypes. Female Characters in modern animated films have the ability and intelligence comparable to male characters and play an indispensable role in the story. This change reflects the progress and openness of the society and the audience's acceptance and recognition of a more equal and diverse Gender concept.

For example, in *White Snake 2: Green Snake* (2021), which shows the main character Qing's different understanding of love and survival, director Huang Jiakang (2021), when talking about how to express his emotions from a female perspective during the creative process, said, "In fact, at the beginning of making the film, the team discussed some of the thoughts of females almost every day, and analyzed modern Female Character's thoughts and perceptions. As an animator, I often like observing what the women around me think. Although I am a male director, I am more emotional and good at expressing emotions. Plus, the first, "White Snake" (2019), is more fairy tale, ancient style, just like many audience feedback white snake story is a bit unrealistic, do not believe. Indeed, in the beginning, we pursued a romanticized fairy tale, and in the second film, we preferred to go to the other extreme and discuss some real-life emotions and challenges from a woman's point of view."⁴⁹

⁴⁹ Animation Director Interview Programme, 2021, <https://www.bilibili.com/>

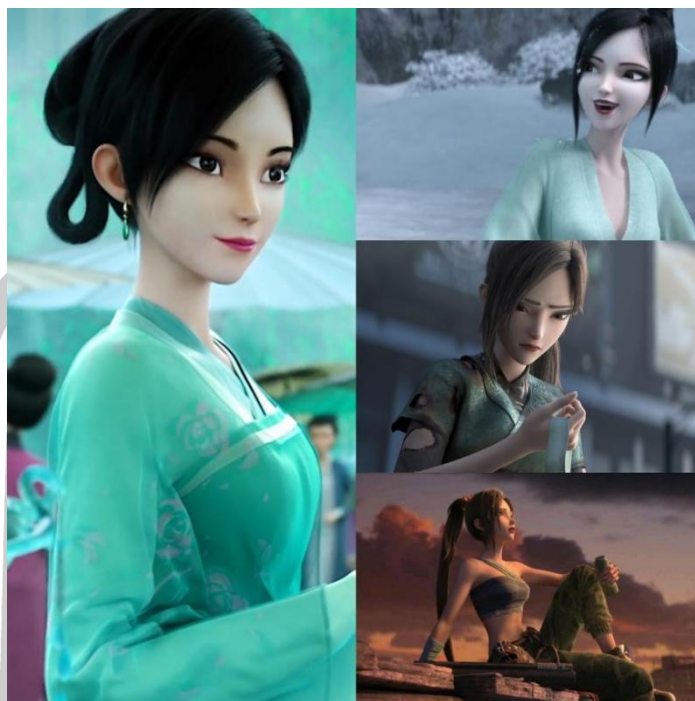
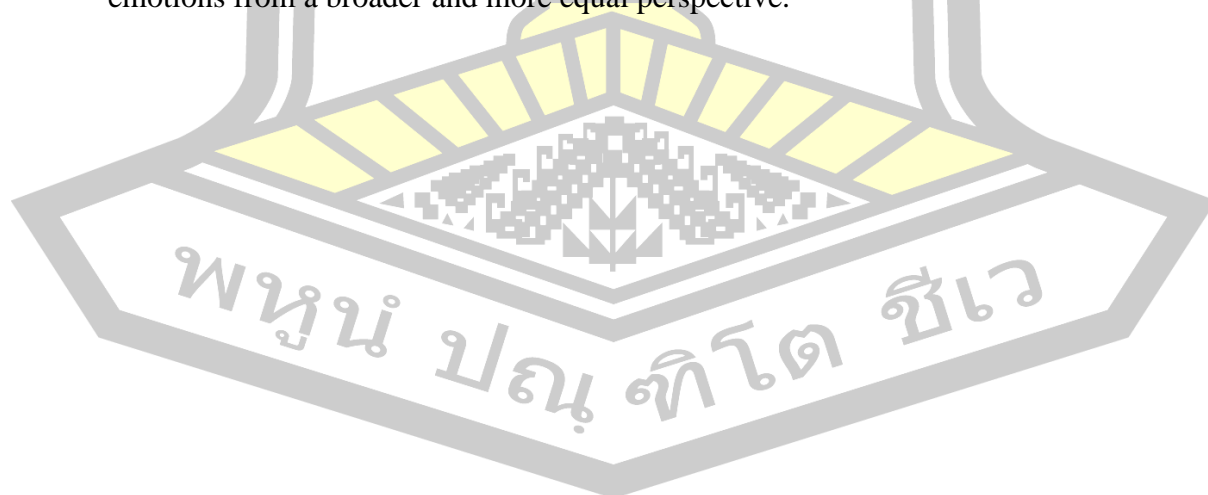


Figure 38 XiaoQing (2021) Video screenshots

Source: <https://www.iqiyi.com/>

[Accessed on September 25th, 2023]

Unlike early animation, the modern male director tries to break through the traditional Gender perspective when creating female-oriented works and deeply explores women's emotions and real-life challenges. By discussing and analyzing the thoughts and perceptions of modern women daily, his team strives to express emotions from a woman's point of view, showing a more realistic and profound view of women. This is an in-depth exploration of women's emotions and a challenge and renewal of the concept of Gender to encourage viewers to look at Gender and emotions from a broader and more equal perspective.



3.4 Audience's Aesthetic Concepts and Values

Under different cultural backgrounds, the concepts and aesthetics of film and television creation will change accordingly. As the cultural atmosphere becomes more open and diversified, the concepts and aesthetics of film and television creation also pay more attention to individualization and diversification, providing more space and opportunities for the portrayal and presentation of Female Characters. Female Characters begin to have richer characters and connotations, no longer a single stereotype of beauty, gentleness, kindness, etc. but show the diversity and uniqueness of female beauty.

In a patriarchal cultural system, a woman's beauty is defined by a man. Whether it is the ancient Greek myth that Hera, Athena, the goddess of wisdom, and Aphrodite, the goddess of love and beauty, negotiated with Zeus for the golden apple representing the "most beautiful", or in the film adapted from the fairy tale Snow White, in which the Evil Queen holds a mirror in a man's low voice to answer the question of who is the most beautiful woman in the world (Sun Shaoxian, 2000), it is complex to see that the male perspective in examining the multiple dimensions of women's beauty is not the same as that of the female perspective. (Sun Shaoxian, 2000), it is easy to see that while the male perspective is of interest when examining the multiple dimensions of women's beauty, it reflects people's everyday aesthetic needs and values deep down at its core. As Pan Daozheng (2008) points out, in the cultural tradition dominated by patriarchal thinking, the imagination of female beauty always has the distinctive quality of male aesthetic desire. Men are not only the subject of aesthetics, but also alienated as the aesthetic masters of women's beauty. In contrast, women gradually become the aesthetic objects and subordinates of men (Wu, 2003), and women's right to speak about their beauty is almost deprived. Worse still, the long-term unidirectional aesthetic system has caused women to internalize male aesthetic standards as the norms and guidelines for adjusting their make-up, dress, appearance, and body posture (Zhou, 1991).

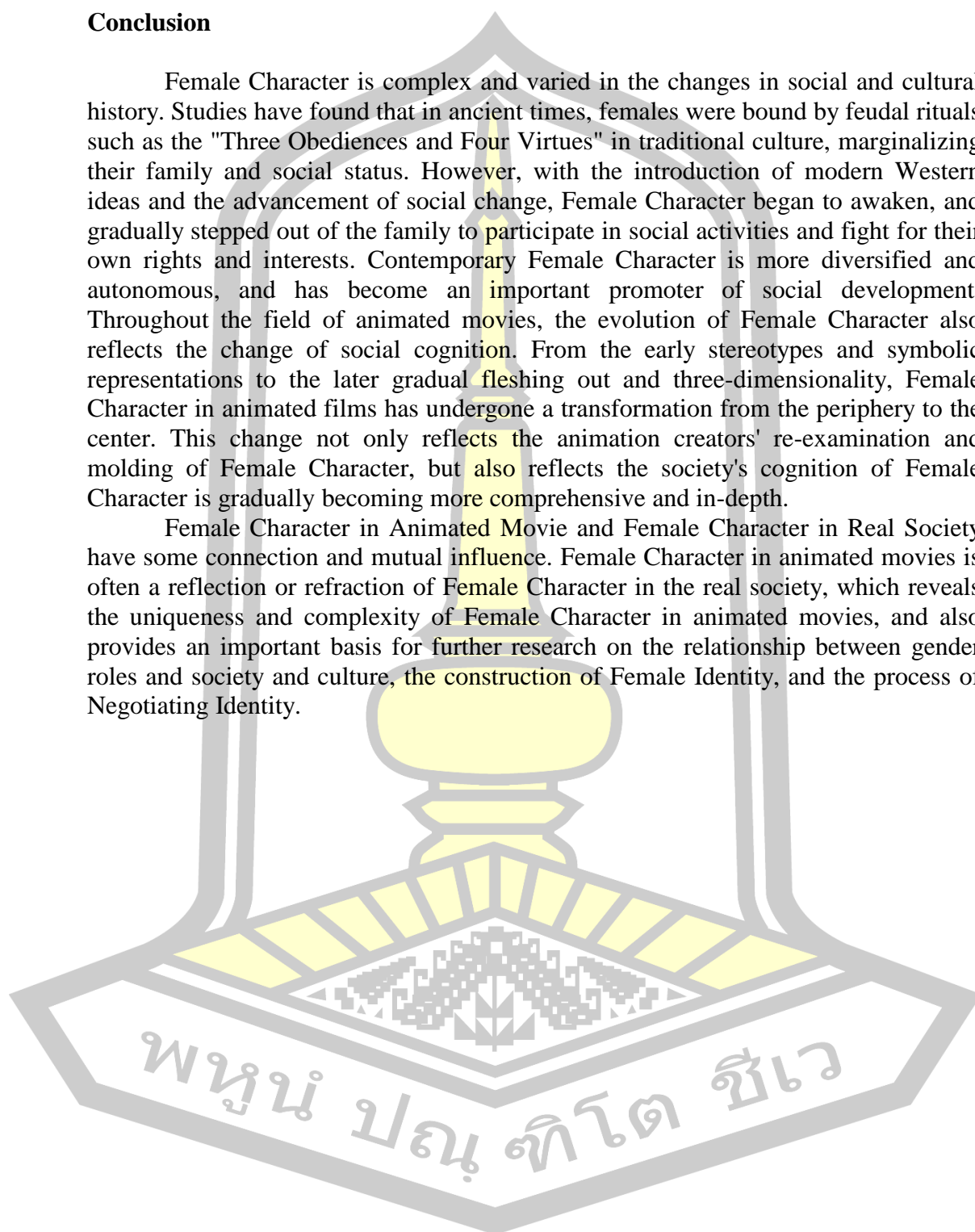
Throughout the evolution of The Female Character in Chinese Animated Films, we can observe the transformation of their image. From the accompanying and supporting beauty of the 1940s to the 1960s to the heroic beauty of the 1970s, to the complex and highly attractive, even sinister or cunning, unique charms of the 1980s, and finally to the virtuous and elegant of the 1990s, there has been a significant change in people's perception of beauty. Since the 21st century, people's aesthetic preferences have further diversified and become more inclusive, and their knowledge of female beauty has become broader and more profound.

The Female Character in Chinese Animated Films is the most significant feature that the creators have responded to the outstanding qualities of women in real society in the form of art, which can be said to reflect the spirit of the social era with a "virtual real" identity, and continuously influence the concepts and consciousness of modern people.

Conclusion

Female Character is complex and varied in the changes in social and cultural history. Studies have found that in ancient times, females were bound by feudal rituals such as the "Three Obediences and Four Virtues" in traditional culture, marginalizing their family and social status. However, with the introduction of modern Western ideas and the advancement of social change, Female Character began to awaken, and gradually stepped out of the family to participate in social activities and fight for their own rights and interests. Contemporary Female Character is more diversified and autonomous, and has become an important promoter of social development. Throughout the field of animated movies, the evolution of Female Character also reflects the change of social cognition. From the early stereotypes and symbolic representations to the later gradual fleshing out and three-dimensionality, Female Character in animated films has undergone a transformation from the periphery to the center. This change not only reflects the animation creators' re-examination and molding of Female Character, but also reflects the society's cognition of Female Character is gradually becoming more comprehensive and in-depth.

Female Character in Animated Movie and Female Character in Real Society have some connection and mutual influence. Female Character in animated movies is often a reflection or refraction of Female Character in the real society, which reveals the uniqueness and complexity of Female Character in animated movies, and also provides an important basis for further research on the relationship between gender roles and society and culture, the construction of Female Identity, and the process of Negotiating Identity.



CHAPTER III

Female Characters in Chinese Animated Films from a Gender Perspective

Introduction

This chapter focuses on the issue of subject shaping of The Female Character in Chinese Animated Films from the dimension of gender, outlining the Gender performances of Female Character in Chinese Animated Films in the context of Reform and Opening-up of the Chinese Economy, as well as the Gender performativity in the construction of the character.

According to the research objectives of this chapter, the research issues are divided into three parts.

The first part is Social Shaping and Animation Expression of Gender Issues. Starting from the origin of gender issues, it reveals the relationship between Gender and role modeling.

The second part is about the Gender Performance of Female Characters in Chinese Animated Films during the Reform and Opening-up of the Chinese Economy. Focusing on the relationship between body and gender roles, identity, and Gender under the change of Chinese Female Characters in animation.

The third part analyses the Gender performativity of The Female Characters in Chinese Animated Films. It includes three dimensions of Gender performativity: discourse, theatre, and ritual. The research in this chapter will contribute to the Negotiating Identity of The Female Character in Chinese Animated Films Constructed and also lay the foundation for the case study in Chapter 5.

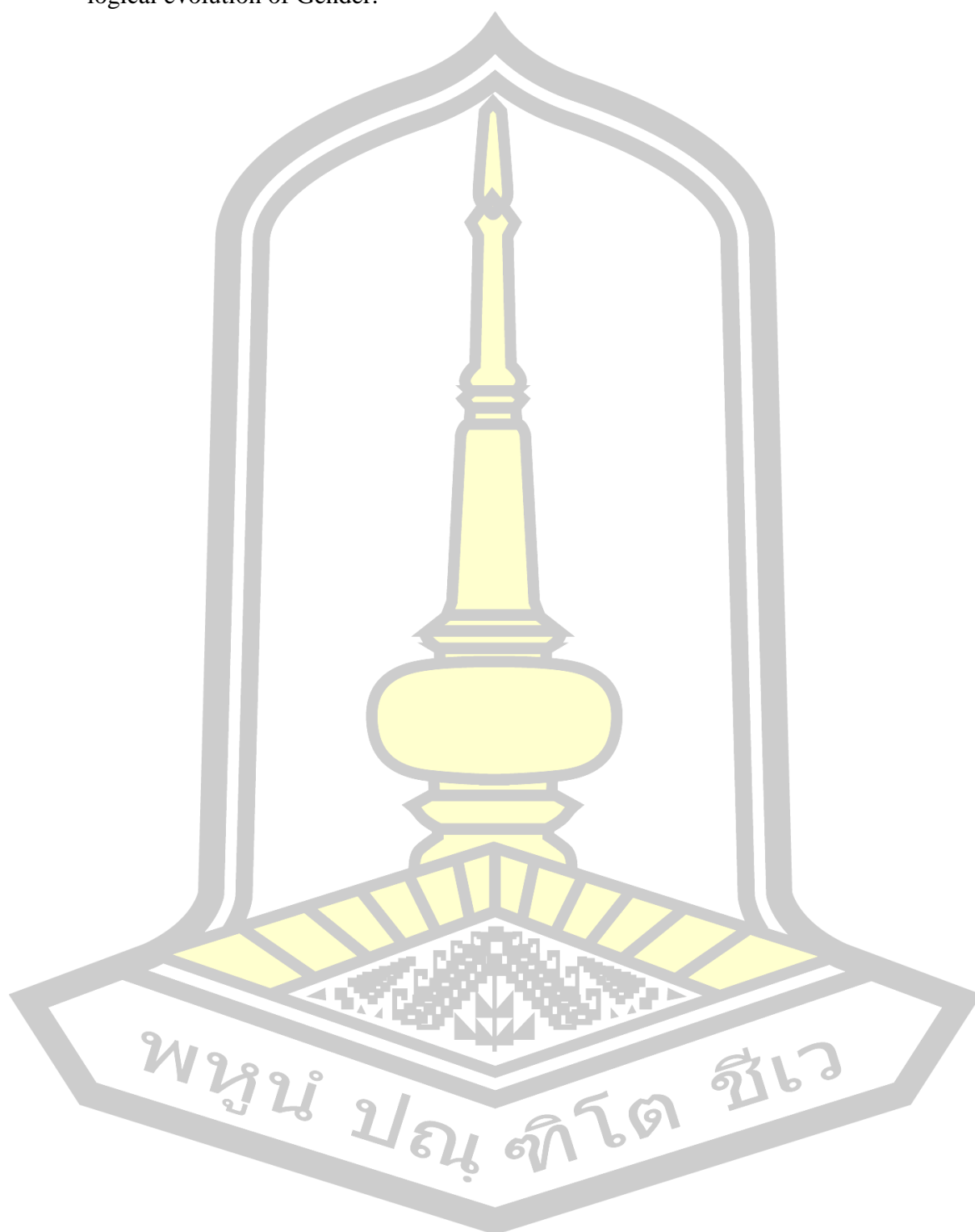
Part I. Social Shaping and Animation Expression of Gender Issue

This section will explore gender issues and gender studies, emphasizing the role of society and people in different societies in shaping Gender roles and traits, as well as the influence of societal cultures, traditions, values, and expectations on individual Gender identities and behaviors. So how are they presented in the medium, especially in Chinese animated films? How are they expressed? Revealing the relationship between Gender and animated characterisation.

1.1 Origin of Gender Issues

From the end of the 18th century to the 1960s, the academic study of Gender was named "Feminism", because at that time, both at the level of social practice and at the level of theory, scholars and social activists addressed the issue of obtaining equal social status for women. Then, from the 1960s to 1970s, scholars focused on formulating the distinction between Sex/Gender, considered a natural characteristic of Sex and Gender, which is regarded as a social and cultural characteristic. The exploration of Gender has evolved from "female" to a more open perspective. In other

words, the move from women's issues to gender studies can also be described as a logical evolution of Gender.



The three traditional schools of feminism have their characteristics: liberal feminism advocates gender justice and opposes discrimination against women; radical feminism focuses on gender differences between men and women and explores the causes of such differences. Radical liberals advocate breaking down gender stereotypes, emphasizing "masculinity" and "femininity" in Gender, and expanding the boundaries and possibilities of Gender roles, while radical culturalists underline that women should be female/feminine in terms of "femininity"; and Marxist and socialist feminisms believe that women's oppression stems from patriarchal culture and socialism. Oppression stems from the interplay of patriarchal culture and the capitalist system. These three schools of thought shed light on the problems faced by women from different perspectives.

Suppose the three traditional schools of thought are at the macro level. In that case, Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory is at the micro level of the argument from female (sex) to femininity (gender), arguing that biological gender determines social gender. At the same time, it also defines the social hierarchy of the two sexes. In terms of psychological outcomes, men are always "active." Women are "passive", and in civilized societies, "Women are also always morally marginalized, among other things, because they are women who are inherently "lacking" (in male sexuality)." (Sigmund Freud, 2000, p. 80).

So, the famous French thinker Simone de Beauvoir rejected and criticized this view, and she explored the socially constructed nature of women as the Other from an existentialist background. "Women are not born destined, but are shaped by the environment." She argues that there is no such thing as an unchanging essence of, no such thing as "femininity", and no such thing as "eternal femininity", which is the idealized image of in men's minds, but that the reason why is inferior to men in every way is due to, to society, that is to say, to these male establishments. In other words, it is caused by the male establishment, whereby the man who dominates every aspect of the resources constrains the woman to become a "Second Sex. "A woman cannot be defined by her consciousness of her femininity. The very language of psychoanalysis, which internalizes the unconscious and all mental life, envisages that the drama of the individual takes place internally" (Simone de Beauvoir, 2011, p71-72)

Fundamentally, Beauvoir's exploration of Gender revolves around the relationship between the existential self and the Other. She points out that this historical error has created a position of "otherness"—the absolute "other"—for women. "The Other. In the relationship between the sexes, the man themselves as the itself; while women are named as others.

However, along with the infiltration of postmodernist thinking, postmodern gender scholars have fundamentally subverted this dichotomous mode of thinking, and although the traditional school of Gender is committed to explaining women's oppression and the search for a path to emancipation, its paradigm is still confined to the struggle within the center of masculinity.

To this end, we can summarise the characteristics of postmodernist Gender to include:

1) **Multiplicity:** Gender is not a simple binary categorisation, but has multiple dimensions and possibilities. Traditionally, gender has been categorised as male and female, but this binary categorisation fails to encompass the gender identities and experiences of all people. Multiplicity theory views Gender as a continuous and

diverse spectrum including, but not limited to, male, female, intersex, asexual, and transgender.

2) **Diversity:** Gender expression and identity are diverse. People identify and express Gender in different ways, and different cultures, social groups and individuals may have different experiences of Gender identity. The concept of Diversity emphasises respect for and acceptance of all forms of gender identity and expression, and avoids simplification and dualisation of Gender.

3) **Differences:** Physical, psychological, social, and cultural differences between the Genders. Gender differences may manifest themselves in physical characteristics, gender roles, social status, power distribution, etc.

1.2 The Social Shaping of Gender and its Gender Performativity

It was within the postmodernist mindset that Judith Butler's theory of Gender germinated and grew, starting with the dilemma posed by the biological sex /Gender dichotomy and calling it Gender Trouble. In Butler's theory, "Gender is not a noun or a set of free-flowing attributes. Gender is an action that constructs that identity it implies, not just a reproduction exercised by a subject who existed before it." The definition of the concept of Gender in her book *Gender Trouble - Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* is undoubtedly a reversal of the previous concept of Gender. In Butler's definition, Gender is formed by "performativity". This theory provides a new perspective on understanding gender identity and Gender relations.

Gender Performativity Theory suggests that "Gender is the result of being disciplined by the power of discourse under the rules of human society". The emphasis is more on the process, on society's attempt to mold you into a specific "character", which is coercive and repetitive. That is to say; Gender is formed in a discourse of commanding or coercive instructions, such as "what gender you are," "what you have to do," "what you can't do," etc. These discourses are repeated over and over again as you grow up until you are molded into socially accepted "Gender Roles".

For example, when a baby girl is born, the doctor declares the child's Gender to be female. In this case, the word "female" is a Gender image, and the child is labeled as "female." Then, the child's parents and the surrounding environment will unconsciously repeat and reinforce the words and behaviours corresponding to "female", for example, teaching girls to be gentle, buying pink clothes, dolls, and so on. Whenever some behaviors or preferences do not correspond to Gender, they are forced to be corrected by those around them, such as being told that a girl's hair is too short or that she plays too wild, etc. These are the so-called disciplinary actions. These are the so-called disciplinary actions, constantly correcting the girl's behavior and the person's quest for a sense of "belonging," which will slowly and actively move toward Gender identity. The same process of gender identity is true for men. Butler differs from Beauvoir in that she argues that there is no way to construct Gender from biological sex and deconstructs the basic categories of "sex" and "gender." She argues that in Beauvoir's theory, there is no way to prove that "a subject who becomes 'female' must be a biological 'woman'."

Butler does not explicitly offer a conceptual definition of performativity but instead allows the face of performativity to emerge gradually in an ongoing deconstruction of Gender and Sex. Butler argues that "it is difficult to say what drill

is, simply because my views on what "drilliness" might mean have changed over time (Judith Butler, 2009, p8) She has said that "Gender is not a singular act but a repetition, a ritual" (Judith Butler, 2009, p8) and that she is not a "single act" (Judith Butler, 2009, p8). At the same time, she said, "My theory is a little shaky; sometimes I understand manipulation as linguistic, and sometimes I set it up as dramatic. " (Judith Butler, 2009, p19). Thus, between Butler's lines, the message is revealed that drill as an act has three dimensions: Linguistic, Dramatic, and Ritual.

1) The Linguistic Dimension of Gender performativity

Butler argues that discourse is capable of fulfilling the function of producing Gender. Take, for example, the baby girl mentioned earlier. The newborn baby has not been subjected to any Gender performativity, so "baby girl" is only the judgment of doctors, parents, and others, not the actual Gender of the baby. But because it is declared "female," subsequent performances are based on the Female Gender performativity standards. These standards are instilled through discourse, directly or indirectly, as the baby girl grows up until the baby identifies as a woman and gradually lives as a woman should. So, Gender is created by discourse, from the initial declaration of the baby's Gender to the subsequent inculcation of the rules of Gender.

This situation is very unfavorable for minorities such as homosexuals and transgender people because Gender performativity is mandatory, and they may be "punished by Gender" for it.

However, Butler also argues that "because of the pluralistic and unstable nature of discourse itself, the constructed Gender should also be characterised by pluralism and instability". That is to say, discourse has a specific space for interpretation, and the same sentence can be expressed and understood differently by different people. Hence, the Gender roles shaped through discourse are not the same for everyone or remain the same throughout one's life.

2) The Theatrical Dimension of Gender Performativity

Butler once admitted that her theory wavered somewhat, sometimes understanding manipulation as linguistic and sometimes as dramatic. Over time, and as her theorizing has evolved, she has seen the two as correlative, appearing in staggered succession. Suppose the linguistic dimension explains how language acts on gender roles. In that case, the dramatic dimension focuses on performativity as an act, whereas Gender results from the interpretation and expression of actions. When we bring 'woman' into a continuous, dynamic, and interpretative process may not be a fixed, unchanging 'fact of nature' but rather a 'cultural performance.' It may not be a fixed, unchanging "natural fact" but a "cultural performance."

In the theatre dimension, Butler develops and defends the concept of Gender parody. Theatre is an ancient cultural form, and in Butler's case, parody refers to the imitation and performance of gender roles and expressions. Still, this parody is an 'archetype' in its own right, as well as a cultural derivative designed to challenge gender stereotypes or gender norms. Butler's reference to "cross-dressing," for example, as a socio-cultural phenomenon, is not merely concerned with changes in make-up and appearance in cross-dressing or cross-dressing, nor does it promote a playful lifestyle. On the contrary, the word 'easy' in 'cross-dressing' is emphasised, as it means 'change' or 'shift', meaning that Gender can be displaced or redefined.

For example, there is a person whose anatomical sex is male but whose Gender performativity is female. However, there is an inconsistency between his biological sex and his Gender identity, and at the same time, there is an inconsistency between his Gender identity and his gender performance. This raises an important question: how do we define Gender? Is it based on biological constructs? Or is it based on an individual's internal identity? Or is it based on external observations of Gender?



This example also sheds light on our understanding of the body. Traditionally, the body has been thought of as fixed and unchanging. Still, through behaviors such as "disguised" performance, we are beginning to realize that the body is, in fact, a malleable and changeable boundary. This boundary is not only about biological sex but also Gender and gender performance. This leads us to consider that Gender is not a single, fixed trait but is shaped by social and cultural factors and is a dynamic, multifaceted construct.

3) The Ritual Dimension of Gender Performativity

While discourse can create Gender and instill rules, it still requires a person to put those rules into practice to have an effect. That is to say, manipulation is based on practice and needs to be practiced repeatedly until it becomes the default habit. We can think of this as a series of repeated behaviors and rituals in our daily lives, which together construct and cement our Gender identity.

As a person grows up, they participate in many Gender performativity rituals. For example, a little girl may have been brought up in pink or blue dresses, and most of her toys are dolls or princesses. Her hair may be tied back in braids or bows, and all these external decorations and dresses emphasize and reinforce her identity as a 'girl.'

At school, she may be taught to behave "like a girl," e.g., be gentle, quiet, and attentive. This comes not only from teachers but also from observation and imitation among classmates. She will see how other girls are expected to behave and try to conform to these expectations.

As she ages, she will continue participating in more Gender performativity rituals. For example, she may be encouraged to learn "girl-friendly" skills such as cooking and handicrafts. In social situations, she may be told how to relate to the opposite sex and express her femininity.

These manipulative rituals are not a one-time event but recurring and repeated over and over again. Each repetition consolidates and reinforces her Gender identity. After repeated, enforced corrections, people eventually learn to make their behavior conform to the Gender norm and identify with it, rarely thinking anymore about why they behave the way they do. Therefore, Gender is produced as a result of the repeated emphasis on behaviors in the culture and rules of the society, guided by discourses that make gender behaviors repeatedly displayed, even under coercion, and in the performances of behaviors that eventually form what Gender is supposed to be like, such as feminine softness, masculine rigidity, and so on.

However, these manipulative rituals are not entirely determined by the individual. They are influenced and shaped by various authoritative institutions, such as family, school, and society. Through channels such as education, cultural practices, and the media, these institutions transmit specific Gender norms and expectations to individuals and encourage them to behave by these norms and expectations.

1.3 The Relationship between Gender and Role Modelling

Butler's theory of Gender performativity teaches us that Gender is not something we are born with, nor is it simply a biological trait, but something we acquire through constant performance, imitation, and learning. This performance requires constant repetition and reinforcement for both us and others to believe and accept our Gender identity. This kind of performance is not something we do

intentionally. Still, it is influenced by society and culture, shaped unconsciously by multiple factors such as social structure, cultural practices, and values. It can be seen that the impact of her theory on the view of Gender is subversive, challenging traditional notions of Gender, redefining the concept of Gender, and prompting a re-examination of how Gender is socially constructed and performed.

The development and impact of gender theory can prompt people to revisit and adjust their views of Gender. In turn, individual and societal perspectives on Gender can influence the understanding and acceptance of Gender theory by emphasizing the diversity and fluidity of Gender, leading to greater tolerance and acceptance of different expressions and identities of Gender. Betty Friedan's (1965) famous book, *The Feminine Mystique*, is an example of this. She argues that the media has been very influential in propagating traditional ways of feminization. She suggests that in 1950s America, magazines played a crucial role in convincing women that being feminine meant dedicating one's life to being a housewife and mother. Female Character was told that playing this role would give them a "sense of feminine glamour." However, in conversations with some women in the early 1960s, Friedan found that many homemakers were far from satisfied or even knew how to express their pain. In this context, the role of the housewife was restrictive, as they risked being considered "unwomanly."

In this particular Chinese Society, then, we are placed in a social environment full of Gender stereotypes from the moment we are born as individuals. Men are expected to be strong, decisive, and rational, while women are expected to be gentle, delicate, and emotional. These expectations are not innate but are a product of society and culture. Through various channels such as family, school, and media, we constantly receive information about gender roles, thus forming a specific perception of Gender.

As a unique cultural medium, Chinese animated film plays a remarkable role in characterizing and reflecting Gender concepts. It is a crystallization of artistic creation and a mirror image of society and culture. Through delicate, animated characters and imaginative stories, Chinese animated films profoundly reveal the plurality and complexity of Gender roles while carrying specific backgrounds and values of society and culture. In the unique cultural medium of Chinese animated films, the social shaping of Gender is vividly and profoundly presented.

On the 19th of August 2018, an animated film from China, "She," was screened at the China National Convention Center in Beijing as the only Chinese film invited to the 24th World Congress of Philosophy, exchanging and interacting with top philosophers worldwide. The film was nominated for Best Animated Feature at the 21st Shanghai International Film Festival, selected for the New Talent section of the 24th Paris Tricky Cinema Festival, and nominated for the Animated Feature Film of the Year at the 13th Chinese Youth Image Forum, and won more than 30 awards from domestic and international film festivals and festivals.

"She" (2018) is a Stop-Motion Animation film handcrafted by young Chinese male director Zhou Shengwei⁵⁰ over six years.

⁵⁰ Zhou Shengwei : Chinese mainland male director, graduated from Peking University College of Arts, his main works include *She*. In June 2020, with the film *Art is Dead*, he was selected as a finalist in the Drama Feature Competition Unit of the 14th FIRST Youth Film Festival.

The film is framed in a world where Gender determines everything: in a "male shoe" (man) society where "female shoes" (woman) are not allowed to work, the work and ruling class are all male shoes and female shoes are locked in a fertility prison, with the only mission being to reproduce. Newborn babies are all female, and the vast majority of them are immediately subjected to gender reassignment surgery at birth, brainwashing them from body and mind into male shoes. To provide for her only daughter, a mother with "high heels" has to disguise herself in a "sex change" to enter the world of male shoes. After many challenges, she discovers the plant power within herself and her daughter and begins rebelling against the entire male-shoe society.



Figure 39 Record of the World Philosophy Conference Film Release

Source: <http://www.tup.tsinghua.edu.cn/>

[Accessed on July 12th, 2023]

After the screening of the film at the 24th World Congress of Philosophy, Curtis L. Carter, former President of the International Society of Aesthetics and Professor of Philosophy at Marquette University, and Peng Feng, Professor of the School of Art at Peking University, spoke with director Zhou Shengwei. Prof. Carter commented, "She is a work of creative genius. In addition to being a film, it is more of a contemporary art, and I can feel its intense energy."

The film presents female subjects and explores Gender, power struggles, and body metaphors uniquely. Director Zhou Shengwei mentioned in an interview that a large area of darkness can bring out a little light in the world, and there are two lights in the film. The first is "Instinct": a mother's instinct to protect her child is an instinct for the continuation of life, and this is not a part of humanism but pure life energy. The second is "Civilization's Indoctrination": the sequence in which the mother in high heels sees herself in the mirror is an awakening of self-awareness. Society regulates human behavior, bodies, Gender, and Rights.



Figure 40 "She" Art Exhibition" interview with Director

Source: <https://www.sohu.com/>

[Accessed on July 13th, 2023]

From 13-27 August 2018, "Will Your Shoes Eat You? -- "She" Art Exhibition" was presented at Broadway Cinema Centre in Beijing, and crossover artist and director Zhou Shengwei was interviewed on Gender writing at the event. In the interview, the director said that more and more Chinese Women who have been abused or suppressed are choosing to stand up for themselves. In "She", there is a long section that side by side shows the abuses, discrimination, suppression and harassment suffered by women in the workplace: "The green leaves of women's high-heeled shoes are nibbled by cigarette maggots, the monster of the bottle cap tears the leather, and tongues lick the cherries! In this episode, I use large close-ups and strong contrast image composition to bring the audience strong emotional stimulation with the visual touch of soft plants and cold steel opposing and tearing each other." The director hopes that through this plot, the audience will be able to experience the helplessness, pain, and despair that women feel when they are subjected to aggression and harassment, and thus change the attitude of some people who treat these issues in a cloudy manner.

At the same time, the director in this film attaches importance to the "anthropomorphization of the object." By placing the metaphor of the human being in the object, the film frees the human being and the object from the stable relationship between the subject and the object. The body in the film, the "shoe," is liberated from its prop nature to become a symbol of the symbolic reference, and the object used, the "thing," takes on a life of its own.



Figure 41 Female characters and male characters (movie posters)

Source: <https://www.163.com>

[Accessed on July 13th, 2023]

Looking at it in further detail, Gender is presented in this animated film in two main ways:

1) It reveals externally how Gender is constructed through norms and expectations.

"She" shows a society made up entirely of shoes, where the color (women are represented by red/high heels and men by black/leather shoes) and type (the contrast between the strong and the weak, and the different depictions of male and female roles) Gender roles are strictly differentiated. This setting directly reflects Butler's view of Gender as socially constructed, i.e., that Gender Identity is not a natural manifestation of sex. Still, repetitive behaviors and expressions maintain and consolidate a socially constructed performance. Furthermore, the social system in the film emphasizes the strict binary opposition of Gender and keeps it by denying women power and autonomy.

2) It explores Gender role manipulation, transformation, and individuality internally.

In the film, the high-heeled mother has to disguise herself in the role of a leather shoe (male) to survive and protect her daughter, rebelling against Gender norms, which can be seen as Gender performativity. Her behavior challenges traditional Gender norms and boundaries and demonstrates the malleability and fluidity of gender identity. As the story develops, the high-heeled mother and her daughter gradually discover the phylogenetic force within themselves, which can be interpreted as an exploration of Gender integration and transcending traditional Gender roles. In particular, the fragment in which the high-heeled mother sees herself in the mirror exemplifies the process of individuals constructing and maintaining Gender performativity to build and maintain Gender identities and, at the same time, demonstrates the awakening of self-consciousness and in-depth reflection on Gender roles.

In addition, director Zhou Shengwei has received bipolar feedback from many viewers. He understands, "Your frequency is still different from others, but there must be a similar frequency to you to give feedback. Everyone is different; it was your loneliness alone; now it's all the loneliness based on this work that is starting to resonate." After watching the film, a Douban user sent a private message to the director, expressing how he had found resonance in the film, which didn't have a single line of dialogue, after being an alien for so long. This feedback made the director "feel wonderful."

Through the medium of artworks, people can gain a deeper understanding and awareness of the existence and impact of Gender differences in society, and both male and female audiences may have strong empathy or aversion to the same artwork. In this process, the medium can serve as a bridge to connect audiences of different genders and promote understanding and respect between the Genders.

"Each of us is born into a constantly unfolding narrative of gender difference, a narrative that shapes and defines the range of possibilities and functionality of our role identities, our actions, our self-concepts, etc., and through which each of us generates imagery of masculinity and femaleness with strong emotional overtones, the illusions that we create, life stories, romantic love, and paradoxical antagonisms we create may all focus on the male and female complex." (Polly Young & Eisendorff, 2003, p.37) Narratives about Gender identity begin at the beginning of each person's

life, and all kinds of representations about Gender identity have been continuously strengthened in all types of narrative art. Animated films, however, choose and construct female characters through sophisticated communication and interaction and incorporate the idea of identity in them.

The classic Female Character "Hua Mulan" is a heroine portrayed through literature, art, and images. The character of Hua Mulan is derived from the ancient Chinese folk song "Mulan's Story," which describes Hua Mulan's triumphant return to China after fighting on behalf of her father in the army. The image of Hua Mulan has crossed national and cultural boundaries. She is known and admired by people at home and abroad for her bravery, resilience, and selflessness. Her legend is essential in Chinese culture and has a broad global impact, making her a globally recognized hero. More than just a virtual character, her image symbolizes courage, wisdom, and sacrifice that inspires people worldwide to keep moving forward.



Figure 42 Female Character of Mulan in the Media

Source: <https://www.baidu.com/>

[Accessed on July 16th, 2023]

- ① Artwork: Mulan Sculpture
- ② Live-Action Film: *Mulan* (2020)
- ③ American Disney Animated Film: *Mulan* (1998)
- ④ Chinese Animated Film: *Kung Fu Mulan* (2020)

In these animated film works, we can both see the continuation of traditional gender roles and find challenges and breakthroughs to Gender stereotypes. In this process, Female Character plays a crucial role as an important narrative element and cultural symbol. Female Characterisation and Gender Representation not only provide the audience with entertainment and aesthetic enjoyment, but also reflect society's perceptions of female identity and Gender roles, and they influence the audience's perceptions and attitudes towards Gender in a subtle way.

Part II. Gender Expression of The Female Character in Chinese Animated Films in the Context of Reform and Opening-up of the Chinese Economy

Influenced by postmodernist thinking, Gender Studies gradually became accepted and understood in the 1980s. During this period, the Reform and Opening-up of the Chinese Economy had just begun, which not only set off a massive wave in the economic field but also triggered profound changes in the cultural and social levels.

With the influx of advanced Western gender theories and concepts, there was a sharp contrast and collision with the traditional Chinese gender culture, which provided fertile soil for the emergence of gender studies in China.

The wave of emancipation has also profoundly affected the creative ecology of culture and art, ushering in unprecedented changes in the Chinese animation film industry. This change has driven the innovation of technology and the renewal of creative concepts. In the past, bound by traditional social concepts and innovative environments, Female Characters in animated films were often portrayed as traditional and subordinate images, and their character traits, behavior, and life trajectories were usually dominated by male characters.

However, with the deepening of Reform and Opening-up of the Chinese Economy and the intermingling of Western cultures, animation creators have begun to reflect on and try to break this inherent Gender role model. The Reform and Opening-up of the Chinese Economy, combined with the impact of Western culture and the awakening of local culture, gave animation creators new perspectives and inspiration. They began to explore the new positioning of Female Characters in their films, trying to create three-dimensional images with independent personalities, complex emotions, and rich inner worlds. These female characters are no longer straightforward accompaniments; they have become the pivotal force driving the plot development, showing the diversified values of females on the social and personal levels.

Such a shift not only reflects respect for the status of women but also a heightened awareness of Gender Equality in Society. As a popular cultural product, Animated Films, through their wide dissemination and influence, have promoted the public's understanding of and thinking about Gender equality. At the same time, the creation process of animated films also shows the subtle relationship between art and reality.

Although portraying male and female Characters in Animated Films is not a simple copy of real-life male and female groups, they create and imagine based on reality. This Creation and Imagination draws on the Characteristics, Behaviors, and Social Characters of natural Male and Female Character groups but is not entirely limited by reality. The creators' subjective will, cultural background, aesthetic concepts, and other factors play an essential role in characterization, making animated films' male and female characters more colorful and deep.

Therefore, in discussing the Gender Representation of Female Characters in Chinese Animated Films, the researcher focuses on gender perceptions before and after the Reform and Opening-up of the Chinese Economy, pondering which gender perceptions have changed and which have been preserved. Exploring the relationship between the Body and Gender Roles, Identity and Gender Relations reveals the changes in social change and Gender Concepts.

2.1 Body and Gender Roles

Gender Roles refer to a set of behavioral norms corresponding to one's Gender that an individual acquires through imitative learning in socialization. These norms reflect the different expectations and standards of the socio-cultural system regarding male or female behavior. This includes the various attitudes, emotions, personality traits, and patterns of social behavior held by men and women. Gender roles are

patterns of behavior consistent with social norms, based on innate biological Gender, and shaped by the acquired environment and self-concept in later social life.

Masculinity and Femininity are specific manifestations of Gender Roles. Masculinity usually refers to personality and psychological traits that should be achievement-oriented, focused on accomplishing tasks, or behaviourally oriented in men. This includes strength, courage, tenacity, perseverance, masculinity, and honor. Conversely, women are categorized as having a character and psychology that is compassionate, supple, reserved, well-behaved, affectionate, gentle, non-aggressive, etc. Women who are rich in these traits are often referred to as Feminine.

Societal and cultural requirements for masculinity and femininity are different. There is a tendency to expect Female Characters and Male Characters to behave in a manner consistent with this, and the consequence of this entrenched Gender is that it reinforces traditional patterns of Gender roles. For example, the long-standing conventional concepts of "male superiority," "male supremacy," and "male dominance," which position men in the public sphere and women in the private sphere, have become part of the traditional culture, creating a deep-rooted and backward conventional culture. This has become part of traditional culture, forming a deep-rooted and backward traditional cultural concept. It constructs and reproduces stereotypical masculinity and femininity through social psychology, the process of human socialization, the mass media, and consumer culture, and rationalizes and legitimizes unequal Gender ideologies, which are passed on from generation to generation.

The human body is a vital field in which to display the social culture of a specific historical period, especially gender culture. Gender is not only innate but also constructed by social culture. It can be seen as a representation, and the body is a mirror to promote gender representation. Through the different presentations of the bodies of the two sexes, people can see the natural division of males and females in physiological structure and the close relationship between gender identity and social ideology. (Bryan S. Turner, 2000)

When we talk about the expressive nature of the Body and Gender Roles, we should once again return to the theories of Beauvoir, who, after all, rejected the idea of a 'congenital woman' more radically. Similarly, the Body is not a monolith in Beauvoir, and she emphasizes that "the Body is a situation" to show that the Body is also the result of Social and Cultural Construction. Here, the term 'situation' is influenced by Sartre, where the situation is a constructed relationship between me and the world, i.e., I am in the situation, but the situation is not external. Moreover, my relation to the world is also my relation to the Body and the Body to the world. In this way, the Body, in Beauvoir's case, does not lie in the meaning it carries on its surface. As a medium for dealing with the world, the Body is simultaneously a unity of externality and interiority. Since the Body is in a situation, at the same time, the Body is in the situation.

How does the Body express and display its inner qualities, emotions, identity, and Gender roles through appearance, movement, and speech? In animated films, Gender Roles are often expressed through visual elements such as appearance, dress, and make-up, as well as non-visual elements such as their/their behavioral movements, words, and mental activities, which together constitute the character's bodily expressiveness and convey its Gender Role message to the Audience.

The film version of "Hundred Thousand Cold Jokes" (2014), co-directed by Lu Hengyu and Li Shujie. In the film, the director portrayed Ne Zha in a way that subverted all previous character versions, leaving countless viewers to wonder about Ne Zha's Gender.

One of the main characters in the film, Ne Zha, was born to a mother who carried her child for three years and six months. He was born in his adult form with a chance to reset his form. Previously, he was a Tai Yi Zhen Shi and Ling Zhu Zi disciple. In the story, Ne Zha and everyone else embarks on a journey to save the Earth again to reverse the misrepresentation of time and space. Based on such a surreal and hypothetical "situation," it seems logical that the director has positioned Ne Zha's image as a spoof.



Figure 43 Nezha's Femininity

Source: "Hundred Thousand Cold Jokes"(2014),Video screenshots

[Accessed on June 11th, 2023]

Nezha's femininity is clear: pill hair, dark blue hair colour, blue eyes, beautiful, lively, cute and expressive, with a sweet and soft voice of speaking.



Figure 44 Nezha's Masculinity

Source: "Hundred Thousand Cold Jokes"(2014),Video screenshots
[Accessed on June 11th, 2023]

Gender performativity was applied to Ne Zha's image, creating a new, subversive "King Kong Barbie" with a loli voice and loli face.

In the film, the director designed Nezha to be born a male, with an older man's face and voice, and to be tall, lanky and strong, wearing a red belly-band and a red headband, with an exaggerated muscular body. His father, Li Jing, was unhappy with his son's appearance and tried to enforce Nezha's gender role on him: the lolicon-faced form of Nezha was transformed from the adult form of a man with a man's face to a young girl's femininity.



Figure 45 Nezha's language, behavior, and movements

Source: "Hundred Thousand Cold Jokes"(2014),Video screenshots
[Accessed on June 11th, 2023]

With the face of a cute loli and the body of a muscular man, Ne Zha is strong but also lively and cute; although he is tough and strong, his head is beautiful and tender. What gives the audience even more visual contrast is Nezha's behavior; the character's performance includes both "bear hugs" and "mountain presses," and in a sweet, girlish voice, he says: "Daddy, I'm a real man. "

The character of Ne Zha combines a subversive combination of physical characteristics and Gender roles. This visual solid contrast breaks down the traditional boundaries of gender roles and reveals that the body is not the sole determinant of Gender.

The phenomenon of "cross-dressing" is also found in the film of Hua Mulan, another Female Character who is a household name. Wearing men's clothes as an actual bodily practice constitutes a condition for identifying with Gender roles through the body.

The femininity displayed by Hua Mulan is unique and complex. Although the body is the vehicle of femininity, femininity is not directly determined by the body. Femininity is more a matter of socio-cultural expectations and shaping women's identities than solely on the body's physical characteristics.

In 2020, Kung Fu Mulan, an animated film directed by Liao Guanghua, was released, bringing the image of the heroine Hua Mulan to the animated film screen again. The film was adapted based on the original: Mulan dreamed of being a warrior since she was a child, but she suffered repeated blows after joining the army on her father's behalf. As a famous "Problematic" soldier in the military, she is highly skilled in martial arts and is even more brutal than the men around her. In a lone mission to infiltrate the enemy camp, she was trapped in a heavy siege; it was challenging, in the complexity of the danger, to get out and defend the family and country and ultimately truly understand the meaning of "chivalry, for the country for the people."



Figure 46 Mulan

Source: "Kung Fu Mulan"(2020), Video screenshots
[Accessed on March 14th, 2022]

She wears a suit of armor, raises her eyebrows, and stares angrily, showing her disdain for the enemy's "manliness." Mulan in the film is not only the Mulan who said, "Who said women are inferior to men," but also the new Mulan with new values of swimming against the current, who not only shoulders the heavy responsibility of peace and security of the country but also faces her value of life and actively realizes her dreams.

Unlike the Disney version of Mulan, the director Liao Guanghua said in his online media that they made this animation to correct the "Westerners' unfounded assumptions about Mulan" and interpreted the story of the classic Chinese character from the perspective of a contemporary Chinese, and based on retaining Mulan's loyal and brave traits, they gave a brand new identity setting and character personality to China's first animated Mulan, aiming to provide a new and exciting experience for Mulan. Based on retaining Mulan's loyal and courageous qualities gives China's first animated Mulan a brand-new identity and personality, aiming to tell the audience an

authentic Chinese Mulan story full of family and national sentiments but also full of new ideas.

An online viewer⁵¹ (2020) has also written that the film's adaptation of Mulan's character and story is more "daring" than Disney's. On the one hand, it strengthens the spirit of chivalry already embodied in the folklore of Hua Mulan. On the other hand, the adaptation enhances the spirit of chivalry embodied in the story of Hua Mulan in folklore. On the other hand, it gives the characters of Hua Mulan and the other characters some more modern characteristics. Both of these will make the film more accessible to contemporary audiences.

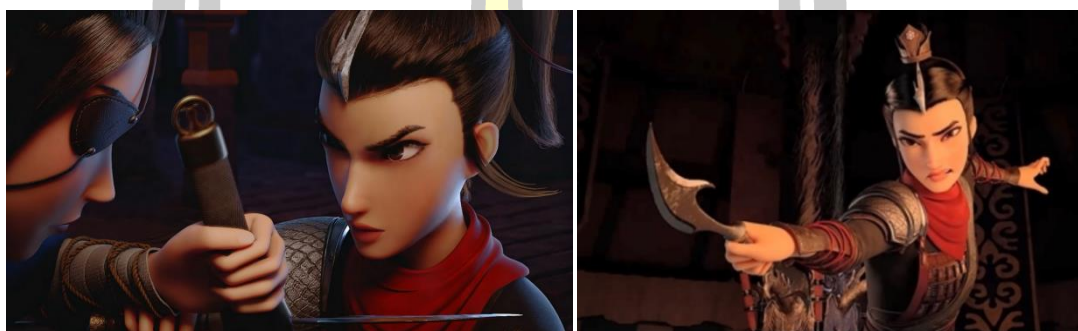


Figure 47 Heroine Mulan

Source: "Kung Fu Mulan"(2020), Video screenshots
[Accessed on March 14th, 2022]

In the story of Mulan, the Body is an important vehicle to show her Gender role and character traits. Through animation, the director can see Mulan's body image more freely so as to see her Gender role and character traits more accurately. As shown in the picture, Mulan possesses agile movements and a determined gaze; her tall and slender figure, coupled with her sleek styling, allows the director to vividly portray Mulan as a chivalrous female hero through these detailed aspects.

In terms of the film's innovation, Mulan on the battlefield is de-gendered or even masculinized. The director retained Mulan's original physical features, such as her tall and slender figure and sleek styling, and incorporated modern aesthetic elements. For instance, the film predominantly features Chinese traditional martial arts moves that exude masculinity, embodying a serious yet entertaining martial arts aesthetic. Additionally, the director employed various shot compositions to create fast-paced and gorgeous visual effects. This combination not only makes Mulan's image more in line with the aesthetic preferences of modern audiences, but also adds new artistic charm to the film. The director successfully bridged the gap between this traditional image of Mulan and modern audiences through the detailed portrayal of the body and the integration of modern aesthetic elements.

The femininity displayed by Mulan encompasses many aspects, including straightforwardness, openness, courage, determination, self-confidence, independence, wisdom, and perseverance.

Firstly, she does not adhere to traditional female images and does not hide her true emotions, daring to speak her feelings and thoughts openly. This straightforward

⁵¹ Source: <https://baijiahao.baidu.com/>, 2020.

and open personality has enabled her to earn the respect and friendship of others in the military camp. As a woman, she also demonstrates tremendous courage and determination in a male-dominated war environment. She not only substituted for her father in the military, but also performed brilliantly on the battlefield, fighting bravely to defend her country. This courage and determination shattered the traditional stereotype of women being weak and dependent.

Secondly, she refused to accept the traditional fate of women and chose to prove her abilities and value through military service. She maintained her independence and autonomy in the military camp, never relying on others and bravely facing difficulties and challenges. Apart from courage and determination, Mulan also exhibited wisdom and strategy. She could cleverly deal with various complex situations, using her wisdom and strategy to solve problems and accomplish tasks.

Finally, she demonstrated great perseverance and resilience during her military service and battles. She never gave up on her beliefs and goals despite various difficulties and challenges. This perseverance and resilience are also indispensable parts of Mulan's femininity.

In animated films, we see a constant stream of Gender defiant characters. Their performances break the binary Gender code assigned to them by their creators. For example, the male characters Jing Tianming and Xiang Shaoyu in *The Legend of Qin* (2014), set in the Qin Dynasty, and the female character Pei XII in *Chang An* (2023), set in the Tang Dynasty. Judging from the reaction to the film's release, "Man Dressed as a Woman" by Jing Tianming and Xiang Shaoyu and "Woman Dressed as a Man" by Pei XII were the most talked about and discussed by the audience. Some netizens even said it was "stunning." Gender is a human style formed by the continuous stylization of the body, and such physical behavior is repeated in a highly stereotyped regulatory framework. It implies a construction of meaning that is dramatically and historically contextualized. Gender identity and identification are constructed precisely in the repetitive action of stylization. (Judith Butler, 2009, p46)

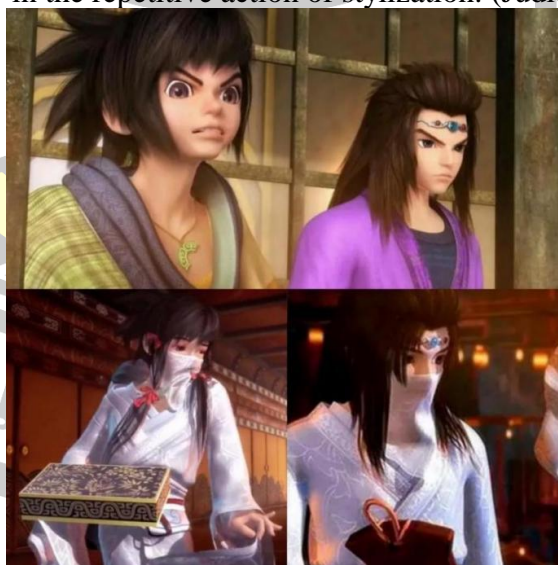


Figure 48 Jing Tianming and Xiang Shaoyu in female costumes

Source: "The Legend of Qin"(2014), Video screenshots

[Accessed on April 25th, 2023]

The two characters, Jing Tian Ming and Xiang Shaoyu, had to hide their identities on the mirage to avoid being discovered by the enemy, and the men disguised as women to blend in with the team of attendants delivering medicinal herbs. Therefore, the female counterpart partner also deliberately explains to the two that they should play more like women. In the movie, the three followed the team side by side, unified with a deep coat as the Shang, lapel around the lapel multi-layer, hem part of the fat; waist wrapped very tight, lapel corner sewing a silk belt tied at the waist. They have very different temperaments but produce very different visual effects.



Figure 49 2 men and 1 woman mixed into the team
Source: "The Legend of Qin"(2014), Video screenshots
[Accessed on April 25th, 2023]

Shi Lan (female), Jing Tianming (male), and Xiang Shaoyu (male) all dressed in attendant's clothes and mixed into the team. Tianming is a quirky and sunny boy, but he looks more suited to female attire, which is aptly described by the phrase, "the eyebrows are divine, the posture is moving," and between the glance back and the eyes up, he has a charming look, not much less than the Female Character (Shilan). Hercules" Shaoyu, based on the historical Western Chu king Xiang Yu, is a valiant warrior who establishes his masculinity immediately upon entering the scene. While he may not be so good at and enjoy wearing women's clothes, with a little bit of a stretch in the middle, and a relatively weaker physical performance, his masculinity is not questioned because he wears women's robes, and his body can't help but follow the pace of the women's walks in the women's clothes.

In another work, a group of literati during the Tang Dynasty, including Li Bai, Gao Shi, and Du Fu, spend their time in Chang'an with passion and grandeur. Pei XII, on the other hand, is a unique presence among these friends. Her appearance added a bright color to this history. She was by Li Bai's side and accompanied him through many unforgettable times. Although Pei XII's history is limited, she becomes a vivid character in the work of Chang An (2023).



Figure 50 Pei XII

Source: "Chang An"(2023), Video screenshots
[Accessed on April 29th, 2023]

Her beauty, intelligence, and courageous character all keep the audience interested in her. After competing with Gao Shi in a sword fight, her female identity is revealed, culminating in a sad poem expressing her attitude and emotions towards world affairs.



Figure 51 Pei XII on Unrecognised Identity and Identity

Source: "Chang An"(2023), Video screenshots
[Accessed on April 29th, 2023]

Gao Shi was unappreciated and had no way to serve his country, while Pei XII was a great poet and swordsman, but she didn't even have a chance to start. It doesn't matter if her archetype was a great general in history or not, and it doesn't matter if

she shines in the plot; she's a fictional character who epitomizes the countless, buried women in history who were confirmed.

In addition, clothing, as an external symbolic sign, can also define gender identity. The variable materials make clothing highly malleable, and its closeness to the skin makes it, to a certain extent, an extension of the body through which the materiality of the body is externalized and manifested.

By wrapping, shaping, and decorating the body, gendered and stylized clothing functions as a tattoo for the body. When the body accepts clothing, it also agrees with the cultural meanings behind the clothing, becoming a carrier and interpretation object of social culture. By imposing certain stylized and gendered constraints on the body, clothing endows the body with particular social and cultural meanings, making the constrained body a product of cultural shaping and discipline.

We can see that animated films are a mirror reflecting society, culture, the body, and differences. They illustrate and reflect the inverted representations that occur, being both transparent and opaque, providing both reality and fiction of these representations. In animated films, the mirror occasionally tilts, offering insights that seem difficult to understand or challenge our self-awareness. Gender in animation is distorted; truth becomes fiction, waistlines shrink, mermaids grow long legs, princesses lower their eyes, and evil women stare at us, "facing the audience's gaze with their gaze" (Bell, 1995, p.116). Although gender is plastic, it is tangible. The body has transcended being merely a body, becoming a component of "social relations" (Moore and Casper, 2015, p.5).

2.2 Identity and Gender Relations

Identity is expressed through intrinsic and extrinsic means such as the body, language, symbols, objects, and the environment. (Jane Robertson, Craig McDaniel, 2012, p.51) Women are both individuals and an essential part of a social group. Due to the influence of a patriarchal society, women's identity has always been as the "other" of men's subjective ideology, and they have always been in a position of oppression, whether in the family or social, political, and cultural life. Whether in China or the West, the human world is a patriarchal society in which the interests of men are the primary criterion of value, and women have only been constantly constructed. When the term female identity is discussed in today's social context, it refers more to a social and cultural identity.

Identity is a way of inferring meanings from the world and from other selves. It is interactive, it can be performative and is always fluid. It attaches itself to culture and nationhood, to place and past, to self and other. Its malleability means that it is often problematic to define, just as animation is; there is a refusal to be fixed that resonates through identity theory and permeates the animated world. (Jane Batkin, 2017, p.2) Identities can be shaped and understood in animation as in live-action films.

"If we recognize the existence of a complete, self-contained female subject, something one calls the 'self,' and try to rely on this assumption about the nature of the feminine to enter into the historical process, then we will find that this assumption is reckless and irresponsible. Indeed, as a concept, the specificity of female essence rests precisely on the assumption of male as a universal position. Therefore, the male always shows greater aggressiveness in the process of essentializing or particularizing

the female." (Xie Xizhang, 1996) This passage speaks to the Gender position in the world of images especially those film and television dramas with male narratives. Many movie and TV drama texts, in their view of the emotions of both genders, represent women in love from a male stance. Based on this Gender stance, the promotion of the female subject is, in fact, very weak, and her identity is often in a trend of crisis.

The same is true for animated films, where gender relations are represented as mother and son, husband and wife, lovers in the private sphere, and partners or superiors and subordinates in the social sphere. They are not limited to being the original vase and can be said to have gradually gained a certain status. However, looking at the industry as a whole, Female Characters are still in the predicament of being ignored or consumed, stereotyped or demonized. Female Characters in the male-dominated team do not play a fundamental role (or even a positive role) but only highlight the heroism of the male protagonist as a companion or as a symbol of "family" or "family love" exists.

A Gender Perspective on the Female Character Princess Iron Fan in The Princess Iron Fan (1941). The film's Princess Iron Fan design comes from traditional Chinese society. Traditional Chinese Women emphasize the importance of the "Three Obediences and Four Virtues," and the Female Character is only a daughter, a wife, and a mother. The female character is defined in terms of human relations as a tool for reproduction and a property of the father or husband.

Princess Iron Fan, as the wife of King Bull, is a "model" in terms of the "Three Principles" and "Four Virtues." As a married couple, in the face of her husband looking for a new love, Princess Iron Fan will be in the heart of the resentment and anger turned into helplessness, not with her husband, quietly waiting for her husband to return to their own side. Princess Iron Fan has both beauty and wisdom, which is reflected in the Monkey King's search for her to borrow a fan, but she ultimately loses to the Monkey King's transformation into the Bull Demon King.

This is because the Monkey King captured Princess Iron Fan's Achilles' heel, which was his love for the King Bull. When the Ox Demon King was captured, Princess Iron Fan still tried her best to save him. The spirit of sacrifice embodied in the figure of Princess Iron Fan is her identification with the Gender given to her by the patriarchal society.

Viewed in the contemporary wave of women's liberation, Princess Iron Fan's encounter is also an accurate portrayal of the emotional relationship between the characters in society at that time. In *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir, a famous French critic of Female Characters, mentions that every writer, when depicting women, illuminates the ethical principles and peculiar concepts that he or she upholds and that in the characters, there is often a rift between the author's worldview and his or her personal dreams. The same applies when interpreting animated films.

After the Reform and Opening-up of the Chinese Economy, the Chinese film industry flourished, and many films reflecting the parent-child and husband-wife relationships of modern families emerged. These works have enriched the audience's audio-visual experience and deeply reflected the impact of social changes on family relationships.

On September 23, 2014, CCTV's first animated film "The Secret Plan of Big Headed Son and Little Headed Dad" premiere was held. Big Headed Son, Little

Headed Dad, and Apron Mom, a joyful and cozy family of three, epitomizes the traditional Chinese family and has accompanied the childhood of four generations of viewers from the 80s, 90s, 00s, and 10s. Under the guidance of the national cultural policy, the "New Big Head Son" film series has been delivering the current social values to the people of China.

Since 2014, Yangshi Animation Co., Ltd. has released five consecutive animated films, fully proving the audience's love and recognition of this national IP in terms of excellent box office results, outstanding word-of-mouth reviews, and social influence.



Figure 52 Film Premiere Event

Source: Photographed by (chinanews.com.cn) reporter Ma Haiyan

[Accessed on August 29th, 2023]

In *Big Headed Son and Little Headed Dad 2: One Day to Become a Success*, released in 2016, the topic of "growing up and becoming a success" not only reflects the characteristics of contemporary Chinese family education but also reveals the complexity of identity and power relations within the family and at the social level. In the movie, Apron Mom and Little Head Dad represent two different educational philosophies, and their identities as parents are behind these two philosophies. The apron mom's concept of "one-day success" is, in fact, a manifestation of power, as she tries to shape her child's future through her educational style and expectations so that the child will meet her expectations. On the other hand, Little Headed Dad tries to challenge this power by insisting on a happy education and making the child feel loved and cared for. This power struggle does not only exist within the family; behind different educational philosophies, they often represent various social classes, cultural backgrounds, and values. The movie profoundly reflects on the social reality. It explores the contradictions between contemporary parents and their children's education and growth, allowing the audience to think about the meaning of growth in empathy.

Released in 2023, the first part of Big Head Son's sister story "Cotton Floss and YunDuo Mom," directed by female director Xu Zheng⁵² and scripted by Ge

⁵² Xu Zheng : Female, Associate Professor of Beijing Film Academy, Animation Director, Member of China Filmmakers Association.

Jing⁵³, is the first animation of a female protagonist with realistic themes in China and is a rare animated movie on the screen that shows the relationship between mothers and daughters in the new era. The film aims to present a positive image of Chinese girls, with the character of "Cotton Floss" symbolizing a new generation of dreamy, innovative, and confident girls, and taking her as a perspective to show the story of mutual support and mutual growth between mothers and daughters, which highlights the plurality of Gender identities in the construction of society. The two-way emotional support between her and her mother, "YunDuo Mom," demonstrates the complementary and symbiotic relationship between Gender roles in modern society. The film emphasizes that Gender should not be a shackle restricting individual development but a driving force for mutual understanding, growth, and the pursuit of dreams. This harmonious blend of identity and Gender relationships not only enriches the diversity of characters but also provides the audience with a profound revelation about Gender identity and self-realization.



Figure 53 Movie Talk: Viewing Parent-Child Relationship through Animation

Source: <https://ent.yynet.com>

[Accessed on August 29th, 2023]

In the program, Ge Jing introduced to the general audience that Cotton Floss is a particularly typical modern Chinese little girl with very open eyes and a great interest in high technology. It breaks through the limitations of traditional girls' interests and shows the diversity and freedom of modern children in their Gender identity.

Ge Jing further said that the movie's setting of mom and daughter was inspired by her observation of the modern mother-daughter relationship. After the film, many parents commented that seeing Mama Yunduo was like looking in the mirror. In this regard, Ge Jing said, "Women who wear multiple hats like Yunduo's mom are prevalent in life. She is a wife, a mother, and a daughter, and she has her dreams, but she often has to face the decision between her career and her family. Each multi-tasking Female Character is a role model for their children." This role modeling role

⁵³ Ge Jing : Female, Associate Professor, Graduate Tutor, Director of Animation Planning Program, Animation School of Beijing Film Academy. Chinese children's literature writer, member of Chinese Writers Association.

not only emphasizes the critical role of mothers in their children's identity but also reflects the complexity and interaction of Gender relations in modern society. Through self-improvement and self-growth, parents can model positive, healthy, and harmoniously developed family roles for their children.

From the big movie series "New Big Head Son" to the hot debate of "Cotton Floss and YunDuo Mother," it takes social issues in daily life as the discourse object. It explains how people construct identity, maintain social relations, and form rights relations through media and communication. The former focuses on gender relations and growth issues in traditional Chinese family education. At the same time, the latter profoundly explores women's diverse identities and autonomy in society through realistic themes and female perspectives, reflecting the increasing attention of society to gender equality and women's self-identity construction. This change not only enriches the themes of animated films but also provides a new perspective for understanding and promoting the equal development of gender relations.

From traditional motherhood and wifehood to modern womanhood, the following shift in Gender relations has occurred: from dependence to independence. Traditionally, women's identity tends to depend on men, while modern women focus more on personal freedom and autonomy. This shift reflects the trend toward equalization of Gender relations. From singularity to plurality. Female Characters used to be confined within the family, whereas modern women can play a role in multiple spheres, such as family, career, and society. This diversification trend has enriched the connotation and extension of the Female Character from passive to active. Traditional female Characters tend to passively accept social expectations and evaluations of their roles. In contrast, modern Female Characters are more proactive in shaping their role image and pursuing personal values and achievements. This initiative reflects the awakening and enhancement of contemporary women's self-awareness.

Therefore, the researcher concludes that, at the gender level, creators and researchers have made the following two adjustments to adapt it to the aesthetic needs of contemporary people.

1) **Deepen gender role awareness:** creators need to deeply understand the complexity and diversity of Gender roles, avoid binary labels, pay attention to the diversity of emotional expressions, values, and behavioral choices, and present the characters realistically and vividly.

2) **Promote Gender Equality Awareness:** Creators and researchers should work together to actively advocate the concept of Gender equality through media communication, guide the audience to view gender roles with an open and tolerant mindset, and promote the innovation and progress of animated films in the portrayal of gender roles.

Part III. Gender Performativity in the Construction of Female Character in Chinese Animated Films

Judith Butler proposed the theory of gender performativity, emphasizing that gender is not determined by pre-existing, fixed identities but is constructed and maintained through social practices, behaviors, and cultural expressions. All genders are produced and shaped through specific social practices and artistic expressions. Butler placed gender in a continuously changing temporal and spatial context, viewing it as a process, temporary and repetitive. Performativity, as a kind of parody, is situated between the dual constraints of reality and fiction, neither a complete imitation of reality nor a complete identification with fiction, but possessing specific characteristics of "fluidity" and "generation." This behavior can be summarized as "linguistic, theatrical, and ritual dimensions."

In the linguistic dimension, gender is viewed as a speech act. Individuals can express and shape their gender identity through language, writing, and other symbolic systems. In this dimension, gender is not predetermined but constructed by individuals through language and behavior in social interactions.

In the theatrical dimension, gender performativity is seen as the result of various behavioral interpretations and expressions. This suggests that gender can be displaced and transformed, following or challenging existing gender norms and expectations. Individuals can present different gender images in various social occasions and roles, thereby challenging and changing society's stereotypical views of gender.

In the ritual dimension, gender performativity is formed through repetition and invocation. This implies that in certain social rituals and customs, specific gender norms and expectations are continuously repeated and reinforced.

However, in inappropriate circumstances, such repetition and citation can also resist and challenge existing gender norms, thereby initiating social change.

Then, how are gender roles constructed in animated films? The theory of gender performativity can provide us with new perspectives and methods to understand gender construction. It emphasizes that gender is a dynamic and multi-faceted process of construction, jointly determined by multiple forces such as individuals, society, and culture. By understanding the three dimensions of gender performativity, we can gain a deeper understanding of how gender is shaped, maintained, and transformed.

This performativity is reflected in the female characters on the screen and the behind-the-scenes directors who construct these characters. To this end, the author interviewed Mr. Zhu Mingcan⁵⁴, a renowned Taiwanese art master, veteran animator,

⁵⁴ Zhu Mingcan: A senior figure in the Chinese film and television industry, Zhu Mingcan is a renowned Taiwanese artistic master, veteran animator, director, and the founder of Taiwan's animation industry. With over 50 years of experience in the animation industry and having studied under the same master as Hayao Miyazaki, he enjoys a prestigious reputation in Taiwan's and

director, and the founder of Taiwan's animation industry. With his over 50 years of experience in the animation industry, we hope we can find the performative characteristics in character construction.



Figure 54 Interview with Mr. Zhu Mingcan, Senior Director and Original Artist
Source: Provided by the author
[Accessed on May 24th, 2023]

Mr. Zhu believes that in character design, the original drawing designer plays a very crucial role; his personal experience, environment, cognition, degree of education, etc., will affect the designer's understanding and identification of the character, which is like a deconstructing and reconstructing process, which relates to how we can portray a natural and charismatic character.

"When designing characters, we need to break traditional stereotypes and give them more room to express themselves. In the past, society had clear expectations and norms for male and female roles, which were constantly reinforced and passed down, creating traditional differences in gender role design. But now, it's different. The gender characteristics of our characters are becoming blurred and more diverse. Male characters can show tenderness and emotions, while female characters can show strength and power. This change makes the characters more real and closer to today's youth. The essence of these characters' personalities is non-fixed, especially in the medium of animation, which highlights this even more. Let's make that clear."

When designing each character, the process of deconstruction and reconstruction is a continuous cycle for concept artists. By deeply deconstructing the character concept, concept artists can better understand the character and reconstruct it into a vivid and realistic image by fusing cultural connotations and visual presentations. Meanwhile, verification and adjustment are crucial to ensure that the character coordinates well with the entire animation work and its other characters. For

Japan's animation circles. In 2018, he joined Zhongying Niannian (Beijing) Culture Media Co., Ltd. as the chief producer, and in 2023, he joined Shenfan Animation as a consultant. He has supervised several Chinese animation works such as "Shaonian Gexing," "Yuanlong," and "Wo Shi Da Shenxian."

instance, the protagonist Nezha in the animated film "Nezha: Birth of the Demon Child," which ranks first in box office among Chinese animated films, is a typical example. The director aimed to create a character that audiences would initially hold biases against but gradually come to accept. To achieve this "breaking stereotypes" effect, the designer went through more than 100 revisions, ultimately selecting the "demonic" Nezha from a hundred choices.

When discussing the construction of gender roles, Mr. Zhu also has his understanding.

"I'll focus on the character's inner world and growth journey. A character's gender identity is often shaped by a combination of factors like their upbringing, social experiences, and personal emotions. By deeply understanding the character's backstory, I can explore their unique personality traits and behavioral patterns, creating a gender-specific and fluid character. In my design, I'll pay more attention to integrating environmental elements with the character's design, reinforcing the character through repetition and emphasis. For example, I'll consider the character's era, region, and cultural background, choosing costumes and props that align with these elements. I'll also focus on the character's identity, status, and relationships in society, showing their interactions and conflicts in the social environment, enhancing the character's immersion and credibility."

Gender is constructed through a series of expressions in society and culture. Artists try to observe the interpersonal exchanges, social practices, verbal communications, and situational interactions of Gender roles through an inner perspective to analyze how they achieve Negotiating Identity in film and television creation and to realize the construction and identification of Identity. It can be said that Gender performativity is the concrete embodiment and formation process of Identity in the Gender dimension.

In 2003, *The Butterfly Lovers: Leon and Jo*, an animated film directed by Cai Mingqin⁵⁵ and based on the poignant love story of Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai in Chinese folklore, was released. *The Butterfly Lovers: Leon and Jo* is one of the four extraordinary love stories of ancient Chinese folklore, one of China's most fascinating oral heritage arts and national intangible cultural heritages, and one of the Chinese folk legends that has had a wide impact on the world.

The film begins with a narration and subtitles: "In the late Eastern Jin Dynasty, the social customs were conservative, and women were inferior to men. Well-bred young ladies were confined to their homes, adhering to the principles of obedience to father, husband, and son and observing the four virtues of purity, modesty, decency, and diligence. Since it was believed that women's virtue lay in their lack of talent, girls were not allowed to appear publicly. Consequently, they could not attend school with boys. Additionally, there was a rigid class system, where "the upper class had no poor, and the lower class had no aristocrats." The concept of family status was deeply ingrained." This sets the scene for a period where gender discrimination, educational inequality, and rigid class structures prevailed.

Within this context, the director created a fictional yet vivid female character named Zhu Yingtai. She is a lively, intelligent, bold-minded woman with a slight

⁵⁵ Cai Mingqin: Famous animation director in Taiwan. He has 30 years of experience in animation and has won the 17th Golden Horse Award for Excellent Mandarin Cartoon.

"masculine" touch. Zhu Yingtai represents a challenge to the gender social order and a break with gender stereotypes. Her story showcases women's desire for freedom, equality, and education under traditional constraints.

Zhu Yingtai was born into a scholarly family, nurtured by a cultural atmosphere from a young age, and her identity as a "noble girl" gradually took shape, evolving into her unique femininity through socialization by society and her parents. She possesses the tenderness of an ancient lady, seemingly as graceful as water, and the rebelliousness of a woman whose ambitions exceed the sky and dares to challenge traditional norms, creating a blend of traditional and independent femininity. She is a woman who is both traditional and independent.

To pursue an education, she persuaded her family to disguise her as a man and attend school. She made her intentions clear to her father by letting down her hair to reveal her true self. Despite societal norms and logic that advised her father against allowing his daughter to study, Zhu Yingtai was adamant. Eventually, her father relented and agreed to her request to attend school in disguise. Zhu Yingtai and her maid dressed as schoolboys and embarked on their journey to school.

Zhu Yingtai's dressing as a man challenged the stereotypes and expectations of female societal roles at that time. In traditional concepts, the body is seen as a gender symbol, and gender determines social roles and status. When dressed as a man, Zhu Yingtai was perceived as "male" by others. By altering her bodily symbols, such as tying her hair, wearing men's clothing, and behaving masculinely, Zhu Yingtai crafted her "male" identity and entered the school. By changing her bodily symbols, such as tying her hair and wearing male attire, Zhu Yingtai displayed her masculinity and crafted her "male" identity, allowing her to enter the school and obtain the right to education alongside other males.



Figure 55 Zhu Yingtai, who disguised herself as a man to enter the school
Source: "The Butterfly Lovers: Leon and Jo" (2003), Video screenshots, <https://v.pptv.com/>, [Accessed on July 6th, 2023]

As depicted in the picture, Zhu Yingtai sits on the shore, lifts her pant legs, and interacts with her male classmates naturally and harmoniously. Her actions and behavior challenge the traditional perception of gentle and virtuous femininity, deconstructing and reshaping the male classmates' perceived roles through her bodily expressions. This provides us with a fresh perspective to reassess and reevaluate the dynamics between gender and gender roles.

To enhance the drama and entertainment value of the film, the director incorporated a particular segment where Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai perform a

drama together, hailed by many viewers as a "Famous scene⁵⁶." Zhu Yingtai portrays a woman offering sacrifices to the river god, whereas Liang Shanbo assumes the role of the woman's fiancé.

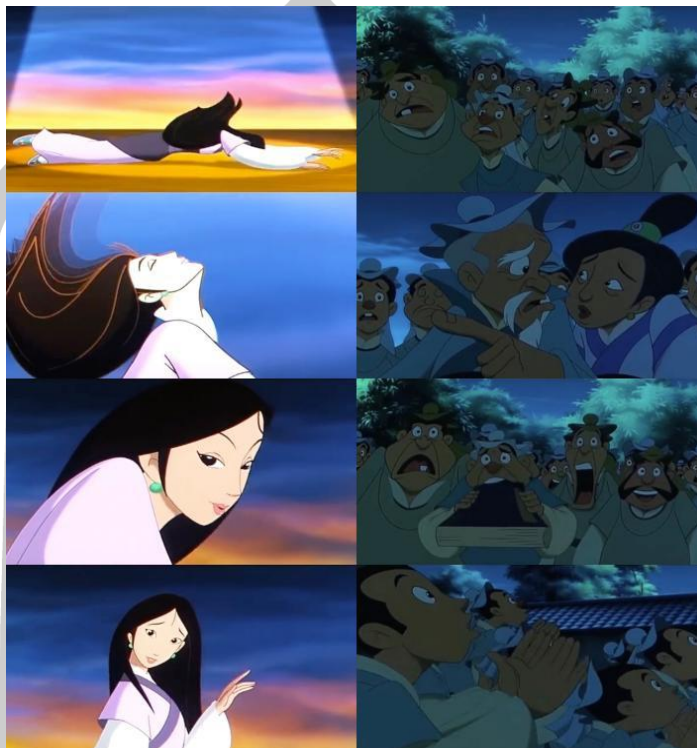


Figure 56 Zhu Yingtai, who disguised herself as a man to enter the school
Source: "The Butterfly Lovers: Leon and Jo" (2003), Video screenshots,
<https://www.bilibili.com/> [Accessed on July 6th, 2023]

In the foreground area, the "Male Character," played by the "Male Student" Zhu Yingtai, impresses the audience with her appearance and behavior, and it is the director who understands and constructs her role and identity. Judging from the audience's reaction, there was a strong contrast between the "he" in life and the "she" on stage, and the changes in Zhu Yingtai's demeanor surprised the audience. "More than a woman!" "Wow, it's so beautiful; maybe it's a woman!" The director's "performativity" with the characters' bodies, behaviors, and words, where Gender is not fixed but can be reshaped and redefined by society.

⁵⁶ Famous scene: Initially from Japanese (kana: めいばめん), it has since spread widely in Internet culture—the most classic bridge of movie and television works. Simply put, it is impressive.



Figure 57 On-stage performance and off-stage audience reaction
Source: "The Butterfly Lovers: Leon and Jo" (2003), Video screenshots

When the "male and female actors" on the stage performed the "kiss goodbye" ceremony in the face of life and death, the teacher downstage pointed at the two people on the stage and said, "Look, it's only now that you're getting into the act!" ; the crowd cooed, "It's too much of an act. I want a kiss, too!" On the stage, the ritual of sacrificing to the river god was going on, and the actor playing the priest read viciously against the lines, "Women! The greatest use of your lives is to be offered to the river god as wives. As the saying goes, only women are hard to raise!" Here, through language, drama, and ritual, we see the attitudes and perceptions of the patriarchal society towards women revealed in the animated movie.



Figure 58 Zhu Yingtai eschews script to argue with man on stage
Source: "The Butterfly Lovers : Leon and Jo" (2003), Video screenshots,
<https://www.bilibili.com/>, [Accessed on July 6th, 2023]

(The most exciting scene on the stage) Zhu Yingtai abandoned the script and lines, argued with the man on the stage, defended the identity and status of women, and was recognized by everyone.

On the stage, Zhu Yingtai, enraged by the priest's words, disregarded her role as a male character and boldly confronted them. She passionately argued, "Why are women deemed useless? Men are human, and women are human too. Why should women endure such unfair treatment under the patriarchal system?" Everyone in attendance implicitly agreed with the notion that "it's written in the books," which underscores the profoundly ingrained gender bias favoring men over women in society.

As the priest continued, "It is said that women are the root of evil. In ancient times, women like Daji in the Yin Dynasty, King of Zhou You of Shang Dynasty, to please Baosi, teased the lords and burned the beacon. Didn't these kingdoms fall due to women?" This sentiment garnered nods of agreement from the audience: "Absolutely, women are the bane of nations!"

Undeterred by the challenge, Zhu Yingtai firmly and calmly retorted, "Those corrupt rulers indulged in wealth and beauty, neglecting the well-being of their subjects, thus provoking divine wrath and public resentment that led to the loss of their imperial power. How can women be blamed for this? Nüwa patched the sky and created mankind, Lei Zu invented sericulture, and Mencius's mother relocated three times to provide a better environment for her child's education. Who says women are a curse or useless?" The audience applauded heartily, expressing their agreement. In the animated film, the director's portrayal of the character "Zhu Yingtai" through this "play-within-a-play" sequence challenges the traditional gender bias favoring men over women. It profoundly reveals the prejudices and unequal gender relations faced by women in ancient society while showcasing their value through evidence, ultimately leading to the recognition of their identity.

The animated film "The Butterfly Lovers : Leon and Jo" (2003) looks at the construction of Female Character identities through external and internal performativity at the levels of behavior, language, appearance, power relations, culture, and institutions, arguing that their experiences embody what Butler describes as Gender fluidity and non-essential attributes. In the process of constructing Gender, the characters' actions are governed by gender norms; their bodies are inscribed in the culture symbolized by dress, and unequal power relations invariably exacerbate the impact of Gender performativity.

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Conclusion

Animated films show diversity in portraying Female Characters and conveying the concept of Gender. They have demonstrated women's diversity, strength, intelligence, and independence through their carefully portrayed female figures, emphasizing the concept of Gender equality. At the same time, some works explore women's inner world and life experiences from a feminist perspective, showing their resilience and courage in pursuing themselves and facing challenges. However, there are also some animated films that are influenced by traditional patriarchal concepts and show prejudice and stereotypes in depicting Female Characters and gender relations. Nonetheless, animated films have triggered in-depth thinking and discussion of gender issues among viewers through the presentation of gender conflicts and contradictions, helping to promote Gender equality and the building of a harmonious society.



CHAPTER IV

Negotiating Identity in the Construction of Female Characters in Chinese animated film in the Context of Reform and Opening-up of the Chinese Economy

Introduction

After the founding of the People's Republic of China, the production of animated films increased day by day as government-led film studios began to be set up at the local level. Since the Reform and Opening-up of the Chinese Economy, fundamental changes have occurred in China's national and international situations. In particular, the domestic economic reforms and progress in social and cultural needs have changed the transformation of the country's cultural industry in terms of content and form. Modern cultural sectors such as film, television, and animation have gradually risen and developed rapidly, becoming an essential part of the cultural industry, creating realistic conditions for portraying The Female Characters in Chinese Animated Films.

This chapter will explain the changes in The Female Character in Chinese Animated Films in various aspects since the Reform and Opening-up of the Chinese Economy from the perspective of national identity negotiation. Changes in national policies, creators, and audiences will be the focus of this chapter. The chapter will discuss the national female characterization of female characters in Chinese animated films, the Negotiation of identity between the government and creators and audiences, and the relationship between female characters in Chinese animated films and the government.

The researcher analyses in two parts.

Part I : The Female Character in Chinese Animated Films on Negotiating Identity within China

Part II : The Female Character in Chinese Animated Films in Connection with Other Domains.

Part I. Influence of The Female Character in Chinese Animated Films in Negotiating Identity within China

Negotiating Identity involves female characters in animated films and the creator and viewer communities, all of which are inextricably linked to the Chinese government. It is a common creative motivation for creators to express their cultural and Gender identities through the Female Characters they create. Audience groups may identify with, understand, or reflect on their perceptions and Gender identities through the Female Character in the film. The government might also be influenced by the portrayal of Female Characters in the films to influence its perception and positioning of Gender roles in society. Their development has accompanied the evolution of Chinese culture.

These Female Characters are not only images in artworks but also media for artists to disseminate their social and cultural concepts. The Chinese government often uses Female Characters in some animated films to demonstrate the influence of

its ideology on the creators and its unique way of interpreting Gender and Female Culture. When the national government shapes the country's female image, the video works are not only displayed on various domestic social and cultural communication platforms, but also represent the country in international cross-cultural exchanges. Therefore, The Female Character in Chinese Animated Films is not only an artistic and cultural feature, but also the embodiment of the country's ideology and social and cultural influence, and it is also of great representativeness and significance to the international community.

The Female Character in Chinese Animated Films is a symbol of the country's society and culture and also a way of reflecting and transmitting Chinese cultural concepts. They carry the knowledge, values, and concepts of Chinese Women and Gender in Chinese society and culture. The Female Character in Chinese Animated Films can show the recognition and construction of the status and identity of Chinese Women in Chinese society and culture. These characters may present different characteristics and images, reflecting the plurality and complexity of Chinese Women in Chinese society and culture. At the same time, they not only serve as a kind of inheritance and continuation of Chinese culture but also reflect the development and innovation of China in the field of media and Gender intersectional studies. On this basis, they also take Chinese culture as their mother body and devote themselves to the contemporary mission of building a community of human destiny.

1.1 National and Local Policies Fostering Chinese Animation Films

1.1.1 Cultural policy background

Under a planned economy, China's cultural products and services were almost entirely incorporated into the traditional "cultural undertaking" development model and provided by the government in an "all-inclusive" manner. Since the Reform and Opening-up of the Chinese Economy, the transformation of the economic system from plan to market has naturally called for the reform of the cultural system, and the formation and improvement of new cultural policies that are compatible with the laws of the market economy and the laws of cultural construction, in order to give better play to the supportive, guiding and promotional roles of cultural policies.

Accompanying the Reform and Opening-up of the Chinese Economy process, China has actively explored and practiced formulating and improving cultural policies and has achieved remarkable results, which have strongly promoted the prosperity and flourishing of culture and provided strong policy support for the development of the animation film industry. This has not only promoted the prosperity of culture but also provided strong policy support for the development of the animation film industry. At the same time, the State also actively encourages party governments across the country to formulate and improve cultural policies that align with local realities, further promoting the diversified development of the animated film industry.

As early as the Ministry of Culture's Report on Some Economic Policies for the Cultural Sector, the new term "cultural economy" appeared. Obviously, these new concepts and policies of the national cultural management authorities reflect the latest development trend in China's cultural field and conform to the internal logic and requirements of artistic development in the context of the transition from plan to market. In the Cultural Industry Revitalisation Plan and the Opinions on Accelerating the Development of Foreign Cultural Trade issued by the State Council successively, it is clear that film and television production, digital content, animation, and other

industries are the main focuses of the State Council, and that the State Council will intensify its support, improve the industrial policy system, and realize leapfrog development. It also calls for upgrading film production capacity and expanding production, distribution, and broadcasting. It also promotes the focus on cultural export support, increases financial and tax support, strengthens financial services, and improves service guarantees.

The Female Character in the Chinese Animated Film industry has ushered in unprecedented development opportunities under the strategic guidance of integrated development of culture and economy. Strong policy support has been provided for shaping rich and diversified Female Characters in Chinese Animated Films and promoting the industry's diversified development.

1.1.2 Specific support measures and their impact

A. Supportive Policies

In 2003, the animation industry was listed as a critical cultural industry supported by the State Administration of Radio, Film, and Television (SARFT). In 2004, SARFT issued the Opinions on the Development of China's Film, Television, and Animation Industry to the whole country, which basically outlined a brand-new map of the domestic animation industry in the three aspects of institutional management, market operation, and creative research. 2006, the General Office of the State Council forwarded the Notice of Several Opinions of Promoting the Development of China's Animation Industry to the Ministry of Finance and other departments. Notice on Several Opinions on Promoting the Development of China's Animation Industry", insisting on the prosperity and development of advanced socialist culture and the construction of a harmonious society, combining the laws of market economy and cultural development, meeting the people's artistic needs, and constructing a new pattern for the development of the animation industry.

From 1 January 2009, the Administrative Measures for the Recognition of Animation Enterprises (for Trial Implementation) issued by the Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of Finance, and the State Administration of Taxation came into effect. After that, the Ministry of Finance and the State Administration of Taxation jointly issued the Circular on Issues Concerning Relevant Taxation Policies for Supporting the Development of Animation and Comic Industry, which made it clear that animation and comics enterprises accredited by the Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of Finance, and the State Administration of Taxation would enjoy preferential tax policies in respect of value-added tax (VAT), enterprise income tax (EIT), business tax (BT), import customs duty (Duty on imports) and import-related VAT (VAT). Moreover, the relevant enterprises recognized by the Ministry of Culture can also enjoy various support and preferential loan policies for the animation industry.

In 2008-2009, the Ministry of Culture implemented the "Original Animation Support Programme" for two years, investing a total of 21 million yuan to support 101 and 108 projects and teams, especially in 2009, with the strong support of the central government, the "Original Animation Support Programme" was awarded to 17 provinces, municipalities and central units across the country. In particular, in 2009, with the strong support of the central government, the "Original Animation Support Programme" was granted to 17 provinces, municipalities, and central government units across the country, basically covering the major regions of China's animation industry development.

In 2013, the Film Bureau of the State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film, and Television issued the "9 Measures to Promote the Development of Domestic Animated Films" to increase support for the creation of animated films in the existing 15 million yuan of creative support funds for film scripts each year. This includes increasing funding support, scriptwriting support, publicity and promotion, increasing or transferring awards, coordinating scheduling, overseas promotion, and the establishment of an animated film producers' branch.



In 2021, the China Film Bureau mentioned in the "14th Five-Year Plan" that it would vigorously support animation films that highlight the spirit of the Chinese nation and the oriental aesthetic style to satisfy the audience's demand for movies, especially that of the youth, and to educate and guide the youth to improve the level of aesthetics and build up their cultural self-confidence.

Regulatory Policies

From July 1, 2004, China began to implement a system of planning for domestic television animation themes. It decided that the State Administration of Radio, Film and Television and provincial radio, film, and television administrations would manage them at two levels and implement a two-phase reporting system for annual domestic animation theme planning.

Starting from January 1, 2005, radio and television administrations at the provincial level and above began to set up specialized animation review agencies to accept the review and licensing of domestically produced animated films under their jurisdiction and to implement the method of recommending excellent domestically produced animated films for broadcasting.

From July 1, 2005, all domestic, co-produced, and imported animated films broadcast in China will only be aired on TV stations after they have been examined and approved by the radio and TV administrations and issued with an Animated Film Distribution License. Animated films must be examined and approved by the Film Censorship Committee of the General Administration of the PRC to obtain a Film Public Showing License before they can be shown in cinemas and broadcast directly on TV stations.

During this period, the state also issued the Development Plan for the Film and Television Animation Industry during the Tenth Five-Year Plan, the Notice on Strengthening the Introduction and Management of Animated Films, and the Specific Measures for the Development of China's Film and Television Animation Creation and Development. This has played a role in promoting the development of China's animation industry and standardizing the market order.



Figure 59 Film exhibition license

Source: <https://www.sohu.com/>

[Accessed on August 19th, 2023]

In China, a licensing system is required for the shooting and production of motion pictures. Only companies and enterprises (including film and television culture companies) with a Cinematography License or a Cinematography License (Single Film) can shoot and produce a film. Then comes the film censorship. According to Article 27 of Chapter 3 of the Regulations on Film Administration, "Film Censorship," a film production unit shall, after the completion of the film production, report to the film censorship organization for censorship, and a film importation unit shall, after going through the procedures for the temporary importation of films, report to the film censorship organization for censorship, that is, the SARFT, which will give an opinion on the film within 30 days. Within 30 days, it will give its opinion on the review. If it passes once, it will send the reviewing party a copy of the "Decision on Film Review" and the "License for Public Showing of Motion Pictures" (as shown in the picture above). Finally, the film can be released as long as it completes the technical review before release.

Among other things, the organizational structure is determined by the Film Censorship Committee, which is organized by China's State Administration of Radio, Film and Television (SARFT). These members are not all officials of the State Administration of Radio, Film, and Television but come from all walks of life. In addition to special members from the Ministry of Education, the Supreme People's Procuratorate, the Missionary Department of the All-China Federation of Trade Unions, and the Press Office of the Supreme People's Court, there are also scholars in the academic world, as well as film directors. Beijing Film Academy Professor Zhang Xianmin said: "Some special areas of the film will ask that part of the specialized members to appear. For example, we all know that the protection of minors task is given to the Women's Federation. The film about minors by the Women's Federation representatives of the broadcaster may come, or the broadcaster may be the first to send the film to the Women's Federation to see the Women's Federation agree to the broadcaster's experts try. " (China Culture Media Network, 2013)

The Censorship Board follows the "prohibited content" principle in the Regulations on Film Administration. Yin Hong, director of the Center for Film and Television Communication Research at Tsinghua University, pointed out that there is "uncertainty" in the censors' understanding and application of the licensing conditions, which has led to frequent disputes over the same film among the commissioners. Take the original animated film "Deep Sea" as an example of the bumpy road of censorship. The movie is about the deep sea nightmares of young girls, large unknown creatures in the deep sea, and several Western elements of the setting; in the absence of a clear classification system, part of the content can not cover the entire age level of the crowd.

From the audit point of view, since there is this layer of potential passive situation exists, the audit barrier is bound to be taken into account, but if you want to completely "modify" these elements of the film to fit the current situation of domestic theaters, it is the same as let the "Deep Sea" to make it again. From the distant future to the 2023 Spring Festival, whether controversy exists or not, director Tian Xiaopeng has made an attempt worthy of people's appreciation and respect. In the story, he also pays attention to the social reality, the sensitive and delicate hearts of adolescent girls, and the loneliness in people's hearts, which in itself is a sign of social conscience.

Whether it is the national or local government, tax, industry, financing support for new policies have brought a positive impact on China's animation film industry, obviously making the establishment of numerous animation industry bases around the country as well as animation production companies, attracting talented people to join the animation film industry, providing capital to people with creativity and ability to create a suitable environment for the animation industry to develop. Lay the foundation for the development of the animation industry.

At the same time, we also see that the state is increasingly standardizing and improving the regulatory system for Chinese animation films. These new policies of support and standardization show that the state and local governments are identifying themselves with Chinese animation films. The images of the characters in Chinese animation films represent the overall image of the country and the nation, and they are spreading the Chinese culture and the image of the Chinese nation to the Chinese interior and the international community.

1.2 Influence of Directors and Creator Groups on Female Character Construction

1.2.1 The Female Creative Community

Studying the Negotiating Identity of Female Characters in Chinese Animation, in addition to the need to investigate and analyze the female characters in Chinese animation works in the context of Chinese society, examining the female creative community as one of the essential objects that can provide a more in-depth and comprehensive perspective. Gender imbalance exists in the film and animation industry due to historical, cultural, and professional characteristics and requirements. With social influence as the criterion of consideration, the introduction of Gender perspective, and historical and cultural representativeness as the essential basis, the authors chose three Chinese female animation directors from different periods in China in the context of the Reform and Opening-up of the Chinese Economy.

Tang Cheng: China's First Female Animation Director

Tang Cheng (1919-1986), China's first female animation film director, was nurtured by art since childhood. After the liberation of Shanghai in 1949, she walked out from her family and went to Jiefang Daily to register with the Shanghai Artists Association. She then joined the Shanghai Fine Arts Studio in 1950 to launch her career in fine art films.

With her diligence and talent, she went from knowing nothing to working independently as an animation designer and administrative team leader, to becoming one of the collective choreographers and directors of several productions, especially in "The Radish is Back", where she excelled and won international awards. She also participated in China's first ink animation film "Tadpole Looking for Mother", and from 1961 to 1964, Tang Cheng tied with Wan Lai Ming as director in China's large-scale color animation film "The Greatest Show on Earth". (Li Baochuan and Shuang Xiaoping, 2012, p. 87) In 1965, she co-directed the color animation Little Sisters of the Prairie Heroes with Qian Yunda. After the Cultural Revolution, she restarted ink animation filming and completed Deer Bells with Wu Qiang, which became the final chapter of her directing career.

With her delicate and lyrical artistic style, she has made outstanding contributions to the cause of Chinese art films and is known as a rarely seen introverted artist.



Figure 60 China Film Channel CCTV-6 "Movie Characters": Tang Cheng

Source: <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/> The researchers took screenshots from the video
[Accessed on August 19th, 2023]

According to the recollections of veteran artists of Shanghai Fine Arts Studio, Duan Xiaoxuan (cinematographer), Yan Shanchun (director), and Qian Yunda (director), Tang Cheng was a very easy-going, simple, and elegant comrade. At that time, she was appointed the executive director of "Baby Tadpoles Look for Their Mother"⁵⁷ (1960)". As a female director, she is more delicate in her artistic style and presentation. Her profound attainments in Chinese painting are conducive to grasping this subject matter, and she can accurately capture the charm and essence of ink painting. She is adept at applying what she has learned in her production practice. "Tadpole Looking for Mother" attracted the audience with its unique charm as soon as it was released.

The 1960s promoted collective choreography and direction and opposed the idea of fame and fortune. Due to historical reasons, although she did a lot of specific directing work, Tang Cheng did not sign her name as the executive director, and the audience only saw her name in the animation designers. It is also seen from the side that this female director is gentle, treats people with modesty, and does things

⁵⁷ "Baby Tadpoles Look for Their Mother": The first Chinese ink animation film was produced by Shanghai Fine Arts Film Studio in 1960 and directed by Te Wei, Qian Jiajun, and Tang Cheng. It won the Honorary Award of the 17th Cannes International Film Festival in France; the Children's Film Award of the 4th Annecy International Animated Film Festival in France; the Silver Sail Award for Short Films of the 14th Locarno International Film Festival in Switzerland; the First Prize of the 3rd Zagreb International Animated Film Festival of Yugoslavia; the Second Prize of the 4th International Children's and Young People's Festival of the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris, France; and the Best Fine Arts Film Award of the 1st Hundred Flowers Award for Chinese Cinema.

carefully and calmly. This kind of temperament and connotation from the inside out has much to do with her family origin.

Lin Wenxiao: A Female Animation Director Who Continuously Refines and Perfects Her Craft

Lin Wenxiao (1935-2023) was a national-level animation designer and director of Shanghai Fine Arts Film Studio, who entered the art film group of Shanghai Film Studio in 1953, and started the path of animation creation in her life. 1955, she began to take part in the animation design of "The Proud General"⁵⁸, and during this period, the creative attitude of the older generation of animation artists in their repeated refinement and improvement had brought great influences to Lin Wenxiao. Lin Wenshaw was greatly influenced by the older generation of animation artists' creative attitude of repeated refinement and excellence. After that, she took her predecessors as her role model and participated in the animation design of 23 animated movies. Representative works include "Baby Tadpoles Look for Their Mother", "Mu Di", "The Monkey King" and so on.

Animation is the ideal and pursuit of Ms. Lin Wenxiao's life. She has witnessed and participated in many "firsts" in Chinese animation: the first color animation feature film, the first ink animation feature film, and the first widescreen animation feature film, etc. Women will incorporate their experiences and emotions into their creations when creating animation. When creating animation, women always integrate their personal experiences and emotions into their creations. This is the case with Lin Wenxiao, who does not stick to the rules and is never satisfied with the status quo in her creations. She expresses the feelings of the characters with meticulous movements. She gently integrates "truth, goodness, and beauty" into her animation works, sowing the seeds of beauty in children's hearts.

⁵⁸ The Proud General : They were presented by Shanghai Film Studio in 1956. It was directed by Te Wei and Li Keqi, with Qian Jiajun as the chief designer and cartoonist Hua Junwu as the screenwriter. To "explore the road of national forms and knock on the door of comedy style," the movie borrowed the art of Peking Opera face painting to tell the story of a victorious general who is complacent and neglects the art of martial arts and military tactics, and is finally captured alive by the enemy.



Figure 61 Witness Interview Series Episode 2: Lin Wenxiao

Source: <https://www.iqiyi.com/> The researchers took screenshots from the video.
[Accessed on August 19th, 2023]

In the interview, she said, "After the script of *The Snow Child* was submitted to the literary team of the American Film Institute, it was widely recognized by my colleagues. They thought it was a suitable script for me to make and recommended it to me. After I saw it, I found the script's theme profound and subtle, skillfully conveying the noble spirit of self-sacrifice through natural phenomena rather than directly instilling a certain idea. I've always enjoyed more lyrical stories that deal with delicate emotional scenes, so I was happy to take on this book."

"I come from a background of original design and have some experience in characterization. For example, I paid special attention to strengthening the emotional bond between mother and son in this scene. Directing is about making vivid and lively characters through delicate details while at the same time integrating the whole picture and skillfully using subplots to present my ideas accurately. When designing the character roles, the characters are virtual, and the story is fictional. Still, the ideological theme it elaborates on is realistic and real to express the characters' emotions. To convey emotions well and communicate well, she will reinforce her behavior and actions in character and perform to complete the movement/action, which the audience will understand when they watch it."

Su Da: An Animation Female Director Pursuing Excellence

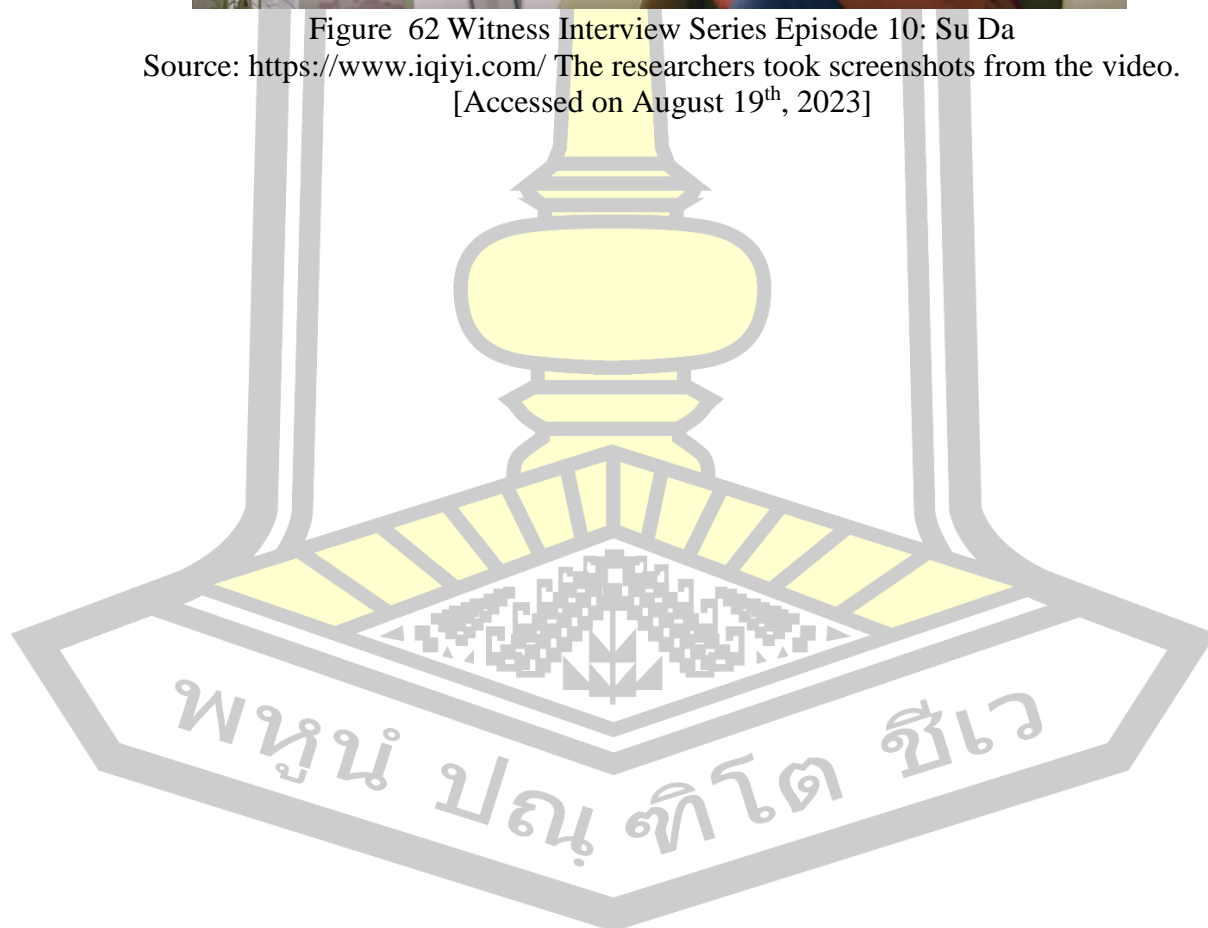
Suda (1972-) is a Chinese female director, the first female director of Shanghai Fine Arts Film Studio since April 2018, and a member of the 14th Shanghai Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC). In 2009, the Central Propaganda Department awarded her animated film *Big Ears Tutu* the 11th "Five One Project" Award for Spiritual Civilization Construction, adding an indispensable color to the history of China's original animation. In 2012, *Big Ears Tutu 3D* won the Outstanding Achievement Award for Animation at the Hawaii International Film Festival and the Best Animated Film Award at the China-Australia Film Festival. 2017, the animated film *Big Ears Tutu's Gourmet Rhapsody* won the Best Art Film Award at the 31st Golden Rooster Awards for Chinese Cinema. 2021, the animated film *Big Ears Tutu's Overlord* won the Best Art Film Award at the 31st

Golden Rooster Awards for Chinese Cinema. On October 1, 2021, the animated film "Big Ears Tutu's Tyrannosaurus Rex in Action" was released in theaters. In December 2020, he was awarded "Advanced Worker of National Press, Publication, Broadcasting, Film and Television System" to be honored.



Figure 62 Witness Interview Series Episode 10: Su Da

Source: <https://www.iqiyi.com/> The researchers took screenshots from the video.
[Accessed on August 19th, 2023]



In the interview, Soda said, "When creating a movie, you have to have roots, not only in Chinese culture but also in the lives of the Chinese people today. We have used the innocence of children and Chinese aesthetics to participate in the childhood memories of a generation of young viewers. Women are very delicate in their emotions, and their observation points are also very delicate. For example, I write down interesting things about my own children and use them in my creations. Tutu's prototype is my son so that the audience can feel what the creators want to convey from it, which is the original intention of our creation." "A lot of viewers also gave feedback that it was very close to their lives." "It's important to convey the values, and our creation carries a lot of social responsibility, such as combining many international advanced parenting concepts into the film; not only do the children learn something, but also the parents have a reflection, and we hope to have a positive impact on society." "The charm of animation is that it is particularly inclusive; so many things can be given to it, and it has a worldwide common language."

In another interview, Speed also talked about "her power" in animation and her unique perspective as a female director. "I think that we female animators can always communicate with art with the female feelings buried deep in our hearts. With the most sincere love in our souls, we create an art world for children that is both illusory and real, interesting and rational, and provide children with vital life enlightenment." But at the same time, she also said that in the process of creation, she rarely thinks about her Gender and only starts from her heart. Motherhood has brought her diverse perspectives. "I'm also a mom and innately have a passion for creating, including us screenwriters, who are surrounded by a lot of material from being a parent of a child, and so choose what's right for me to create."

Women shape their identities and create challenging works in animated films. Tang Cheng approaches art creation with personal growth experiences and female experiences. At the same time, Lin Wenxiao expresses that storytelling should be accompanied by a sense of truth and a sense of femininity. Soda said that the unique emotional perspectives in animation creation should emphasize women's feelings and social responsibility. Through their different "voices," they are working together to shape and Negotiating Identity, creating challenging and deep works.

1.2.2 Creative direction under the policy guidance

Since the early 2000s, there has been a proliferation of support programs around the animation industry, with leaders ranging from local governments to industry associations and later film companies and video platforms. These support programs have influenced the creative direction of the creator community, providing not only tax incentives and property support but, in some cases, financial support in the form of investment for companies and projects, mostly advancing on a single theme.

A. Ministry of Culture of the People's Republic of China: Animation and Comic Support Program for Promoting Socialist Core Values

In order to implement the spirit of General Secretary Xi Jinping's series of speeches, cultivate and practice socialist core values, carry forward the excellent traditional Chinese culture, and flourish the creation of animation and cartoons, the Department of Cultural Industry of the Ministry of Culture, with the support of the central government, has launched the Animation and Cartoon Supporting Program for

Carrying Forward the Socialist Core Values since 2014. The program takes "outstanding social benefits, promoting socialist core values, disseminating contemporary Chinese values, embodying the spirit of Chinese culture, and thematic content in line with the culture of the people and culture to educate the people" as the selection criteria. After the declaration of localities, expert recommendation, and careful study, a certain amount of financial support is arranged to produce and create the selected projects and promote their transmission. In addition, it will utilize various forms of promotion to focus on publicity, promotion, and project docking for the chosen projects and provide counseling to improve the selected creative projects.

For example, the animated film "The Adventure of Afanti", which was selected for the project of "Animation Support Program for Promoting Socialist Core Values" in 2015, responds to the national strategic policy of "One Belt, One Road, Culture First", and intends to positively disseminate the regional cultural kernel of Kashgar and Xinjiang through the image of Afanti, who is a household name, as a wise man. The film responds to the national policy of "One Belt, One Road, Culture First" and aims to positively spread the unique regional culture of Kashgar and Xinjiang through the image of Afanti, a household name and wise man. The movie tells the story of the city of grapes, where the hero Afanti and the heroine Gulixian live, suddenly encountered a landslide and water shortage crisis, for the sake of the people, Afanti and his partners embarked on an adventurous journey to look for water sources.



Figure 63 Movie poster of "The Adventure of Afanti" (2018)

Source: <https://image.baidu.com/>

[Accessed on August 19th, 2023]

The animated film "The Adventure of Afanti" (2018) is a legacy and expansion of Shanghai Fine Arts Film Studio's excellent classic series of puppet animated films, The Story of Avanti, co-produced by Shanghai Fine Arts Film Studio in collaboration with several enterprises, including Miguel Pictures.



Figure 64 Interview with Ms. Ma Xinran, Brand Director of Miguel Films

Source: Provided by the author. on August 19, 2023

In this interview, Director Ma introduced us to the fact that "The Strange Adventures of Avanti" has been converted from stop-motion animation to 3D animation, and the delicacy of each character has been dramatically improved. The character image continues the 1979 "The Story of Avanti" styling setting features, including the character's national clothing styles, unique ornaments, and accessories such as small cloth bags; while the character physique, Avanti and Master Bayi still maintain the classic combination of one thin, one fat, one tall and one short. We will be based on the modern audience's aesthetic tendencies of the role of moderate improvement to perform the more vivid role; Afanti's eyebrows are more suitable for a three-dimensional performance of the changes, easy to make more in line with the character of the performance, reflecting his characteristics of the wise man. However, while retaining the "old flavor," "new elements" have been added. For example, the appearance of the female protagonist, "the first lady of the city of grapes," Gulixian, for the film to add new points of interest so that the film is more in line with the current aesthetic needs and young people's hobby of viewing so that the film as a whole is more enduring, more full!





Figure 65 Poster of the heroine, Guli Fairy
 Source: <https://image.baidu.com/>
 [Accessed on August 19th, 2023]

When talking about the character traits of the female lead in the movie, Director Ma said, "She is delicate, cute, agile, and full of a sense of justice. Small shortcomings are still there, relatively straight-talking, with a cynical little temper. In the movie her "must kill" is high altitude walking Dawaz, but also on the adventure journey Avanti's help." Overall, the family movie is just a demand; the creative team will adhere to the original intention of the animators, who are keen on the laws of the animation market, to create a good animation that works with educational functions and spreads positive energy. I believe that the development of the industry as a whole will tend to improve in the future.

B. Local Government: 2023 "Artistic Creation - Future" China Youth Animation Film Week and China Animation Talent Rising Star Program

On April 26-27, 2023, the first domestic program focusing on supporting animation talents from creativity to entrepreneurship was released on the website of the CPC Hangzhou Municipal Party Committee and Municipal Government - 2023 "Artistic Creation - Future" China Youth Animation Film Week and China Animation Talent Rising Star Program. China Youth Animation Film Week 2023 and China Animation Talent Rising Star Program were held in Hangzhou. From the two dimensions of animation talent (project) evaluation and promotion and animation industry exchanges and seminars, the network of animation film industry big names together to communicate, think, and discuss the future of Chinese animation films.



Figure 66 Opening ceremony and forum activities

Source: <https://www.hangzhou.gov.cn/>

[Accessed on August 22th, 2023]

C. China Film Directors Guild: CFDG China Young Film Directors Support Program

In 2015, the CFDG Chinese Young Film Directors Support Program (and "Green Onion Program"), a large-scale talent support platform for excavating and cultivating young directors, was guided by the State Film Bureau and hosted by the Chinese Film Directors' Association (CFDA). As the program's initiator, director Li Shaohong, president of the China Film Directors' Guild, said the program has been in progress for eight years. At the same time, it has been actively expanding overseas channels to promote young Chinese film directors' featured film projects that meet the country's requirements in the international arena.



Figure 67 The director negotiates with the students on the production of the animation project.

Source: <https://mp.weixin.qq.com>

[Accessed on August 22th, 2023]

2023 In the 8th Green Onion Program Director's Camp, animation director Liu Jian, Dean of the School of Animation and Games at China Academy of Art, communicated with trainee Xu Jingwei and negotiated the production of the animation project together.

Director Liu Jian thought that the strengths of (participant Xu Jingwei's) work are still undeniable: the picture itself can convey a lot of information, and the

characters' emotions are very immersive so that most people can resonate with them after watching it. At the same time, he suggested that students could try to increase the complexity of the script's narrative, such as the relationship between characters or between characters of different Gender, in order to present more powerful things. Xu Jingwei talked about how his mentor, Liu Jian, gave him a lot of advice on the production side, the script side, the character side, including the production process, what kind of sound it is, and so on.

D. Tencent Video (Enterprise): China Young Animation Directors Support Program

In 2021, the first "Chinese Young Animation Directors Support Program" was held in Shanghai, with many animation industry leaders attending the event to discuss the pain points and opportunities of the domestic animation industry. Yuanyuan, head of Tencent's online video platform operation department and animation channel, said she hoped this program could help young directors with funding, creation, and operation. At the same time, the program will solve the practical problems encountered by excellent animation projects in a series of aspects such as script, production, investment and financing, publicity and distribution, exhibition, etc., from the elements of content creation, commercialization direction, and user preference data support, so as to help promote good works to enter the excellent market and meet the suitable audience.



Figure 68 The first "Chinese Young Animation Directors Support Program"

Source: <https://www.hangzhou.gov.cn/>
[Accessed on August 22th, 2023]

The "Chinese Young Animation Directors Support Program" provides suitable soil for the creativity and imagination of young animators, combines industry resources to help newcomers, and injects new vitality into domestic animation. As a platform, Tencent Video will continue to create an equal, open, and inclusive multicultural space for users and partners and work with partners to promote the prosperity of domestic animation.



Figure 69 Poster for the work of female animation director Zhao Yucheng

Source: <https://www.youth.cn/>

[Accessed on August 22th, 2023]

Female animation director Zhao Yucheng said she also hopes to prove to the outside world that female animators are burning their youth and blood to add to the Chinese Women's animation career through her appearance. Adherence to the original intention, maintaining curiosity about new things, and personalized expression of creation, talent, sharpness, and courage are the qualities of modern female animation directors.

The study shows that the state and the government have set the development direction for the animation movie industry through policy formulation and implementation, providing a broader space for development and more possibilities for the portrayal of Female Characters. The Female Character in Chinese Animated Films creators, guided by the policy framework to determine the creative direction and content, also pay more attention to the Female Character in Chinese Animated Films, try to break traditional Gender stereotypes, and shape more and more profound and independent Chinese Women images through practice.

At the same time, this kind of top-down Negotiating process has been echoed by industry associations and film and television companies, which have promoted the diversified portrayal of Gender Characters by guiding and supporting artist-creators and encouraging them/them to show more Female Perspectives and Female Stories in their works. This kind of cooperation and exchange also promotes the sharing of resources and transferring of experiences within the industry, which provides more inspiration and creativity for the Negotiating Identity. This is also a horizontal consultation process.

As the country pays attention to women's rights, female creators have elevated their status in the animation industry, portraying real, three-dimensional Female Characters from their own perspectives and actively speaking out to promote Gender equality. Policies and industry trends have also changed the audience's perception and acceptance of Female Characters, enhancing the viewing value of animated movies and society's attention to female topics.

1.2.3 Emotional Expression of Women in Chinese Animated Films under the Background of Reform and Opening-up of the Chinese Economy

The researchers selected two Chinese Animated Films with women as the main narratives, Heroic Sisters of the Prairie (1965) and The Magic Aster (2009),

because they capture the changes in social and cultural characteristics and expression of women's emotions in the two historical phases before and after Reform and Opening-up of the Chinese Economy, respectively, and reflect the expectations and shaping of Female Character in Chinese Economy at that time, as well as the ways in which the state and government constructed the image of women in the national nation through Female Character in Animated Films after the founding of the new China. Female Characters in Animated Films construct the female image of the national country.

National Sentiment: Heroic Sisters of the Prairie (1965)

The Little Sisters of the Prairie Heroes is one of the most influential images of China's social and cultural scene in the 1960s, and they are regarded as the symbol of an era. The institutional field associated with this image is the People's Commune⁵⁹, and the related historical event is the Great Leap Forward. The "Great Leap Forward"⁶⁰ period is a controversial and complex phase in Chinese history. Its stereotypical imagery is often absurd, ludicrous and incomprehensible, but the story of the Little Sisters of the Prairie Heroes reveals that there is not only one side to this history. In fact, the Great Leap Forward was an extremely complex period, which had some positive effects, particularly on women's social attitudes, as the concept of "socialization of domestic work" was widely promoted, and women began to participate more in social production and public activities. The socialization of domestic work was widely promoted during this period, and women began to participate more in social production and public activities.



Figure 70 During the people's commune period, both the means of production and the means of subsistence were collectively owned.

Source: <https://www.163.com/>
[Accessed on August 28th, 2023]

⁵⁹ People's Commune: After the founding of the People's Republic of China, a social grass-roots organization and a grass-roots regime were established to promote the development of the collective economy in rural areas. It applies the principle of "one big, two communal," i.e., it is significant in scale and highly communal, and the means of production and living of the peasants are collectively owned so that they can all work together to develop their production and improve their standard of living.

⁶⁰ "Great Leap Forward": The "Great Leap Forward" campaign refers to the mass movement in economic construction carried out throughout the country from 1958 to 1960, characterized by achieving high targets for industrial and agricultural production. The campaign was a severe setback for the Communist Party of China in its exploration of the road to socialist construction, and the lessons learned from it are of great relevance to the subsequent Reform and Opening-up of the Chinese Economy and modernization.

The new institutional form that emerged during the "Great Leap Forward" was the people's commune. After the Reform and Opening-up of the Chinese Economy, the people's commune was basically rejected, but it had its own historical reasons for its emergence, and it lasted from its emergence in 1958 until 1982, when the Chinese government announced the dissolution of the people's commune (in fact, it was basically disbanded from 1978, when the system of responsibility for joint production and contracting in the countryside came into force). In other words, it existed as a very important institutional form of Chinese society for a period of 20 years.

Based on this, and considering the historical and political environment in which Chinese Women served as directors, it is understandable that the animation films created by the first generation of female animation directors prior to the Reform and Opening-up of the Chinese Economy coincided with the dominant political and artistic ideologies of the time. Dissecting the films allows us to see the diverse identities played by women in terms of revolutionary ethics, social construction and Gender identity. Thus, as the animated film *Little Sisters of the Grassland Heroes* demonstrates, the expression of women's emotions in the film is the result of a dynamic negotiation between various ideologies, institutions, artistic styles, and personal choices.

The true story of two young Mongolian girls, Longmei and Yurong, who braved the wind and snow and rescued Gongdu's flock of sheep in Damao Banner, Ulanqab League, Inner Mongolia, 60 years ago. In those years, their story spread throughout the country from the Inner Mongolian steppe. It became synonymous with the spirit of "Collectivism" since the founding of the People's Republic of China.



Figure 71 People's Daily publishes the handwritten inscription of the Chairman of Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region.

Source: <https://tv.cctv.com/> [Accessed on August 28th, 2023]

On 12 March 1964, the People's Daily, the official media of the Chinese state government, published a lengthy newsletter, "One Day and One Night in a Blizzard," which was reprinted in many newspapers and radio broadcasts on the same day, reporting in detail on the heroism of the two sisters, Longmei and Yurong. On 13

March, Ulanhu, who was the chairman of the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region at that time, inscribed an inscription in his own handwriting, "The little sisters, Longmei and Yurong, are the revolutionary successors of the people of the herding area who have grown up under the education of Mao Zedong's ideological leadership. Mao Zedong Thought education grew under the revolutionary successor. Youths of all ethnic groups in our region should strive to learn from their exemplary behavior and noble qualities!" With this, the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region Party Committee made a decision to award Longmei and Yurong the glorious title of "Little Sisters of the Grassland Heroes." On 14 March, Inner Mongolia Daily published a long newsletter, "Little Sisters of the Grassland Heroes." On 20 March, the Central Committee of the Communist Youth League wrote a letter to commend the noble behavior of the sisters and, at the same time, warmly congratulated them on joining the Chinese Junior Pioneers. Chinese Young Pioneers.

Since then, Longmei and Yurong have become household names as the Little Sisters of the Grassland Heroes. Their story is not only often seen in all kinds of reports and primary school textbooks but also has been compiled into a Beijing opera, dance drama, cartoons, films, etc., reflecting their influence in the country. Different times there are different spirits of the times. The spirit of patriotism and collectivism embodied in the "Little Sisters of the Prairie Heroes" has inspired millions of young people to strive for excellence and has influenced several generations of Chinese people.



Figure 72 Poster of the animated film "Heroic Sisters of the Prairie" (1965)

Source: <https://movie.douban.com/>

[Accessed on August 28th, 2023]

In 1964, the animated film "Little Sisters of the Prairie Heroes" by the director Qian Yunda, Tang Cheng (female), character designer Dai Tielang, Shanghai Fine Arts Film Studio produced China's first strictly simulation of the animated film "Little Sisters of the Prairie Heroes".

This film profoundly impacted the history of art cinema and deeply affected the hearts and minds of children and teenagers of that generation. In the film, the Little Sisters have a strong fear of hard work, are not afraid of tiredness, and have a collective spirit of dedication to care for the collective property. In the harsh environment of the blizzard, their first consideration is not personal safety, but how to

protect the flock of the commune. The belief of "learning from Lei Feng" and "loving the collective and the country" gave them strong power, and the film also showed the different character traits of the two heroes in the portrayal of the two little sisters in a very delicate way. The elder sister is meticulous and calm, and she calms down to think of solutions in times of crisis. The younger sister reveals childishness in her tone, but her character is brave and stubborn.

Coupled with the film's use of colour and depiction of the environment, the producers have used the creative technique of animation exaggeration to its fullest extent in the film, leaving a deep impression on the audience, all of which are key factors in the film's success.



Figure 73 Character pictures of the two sisters, Longmei and Yurong

Source: <https://www.iqiyi.com/>, Video screenshots

[Accessed on August 28th, 2023]

The film's co-director, Mr Qian Yunda, said: "In 1964, when Longmei and Yurong saved the sheep in Inner Mongolia, we sent He Yumen and Hu Tonglun to interview them, and they came back to write a script called The Red Flowers of the Snowy Plains. The script they wrote was a fairy tale in which they fought with an eagle, danced with a lamb, and were captured by an eagle in the sky. The script was passed at the factory and then handed over to us. (Fu Guangchao, 2022, p250)



Figure 74 Director Qian Yunda's creative experience

Source: <https://www.ixigua.com/>

[Accessed on August 28th, 2023]

Director Qian said, "We (Qian Yunda and Tang Cheng) took the script and took the film crew together to the pastoral area to pick up the scenery, and we went to 2 this in total, three months each time. The creators were running in the snow and ice, herding sheep with the herdsman. She (female director Tang Cheng) did not have any

special requirements, and we are doing the same thing after an in-depth interview with Long Mei and Yu Rong in Inner Mongolia. The spirit of these two little sisters touched us all at once, and we felt that it was wrong to make their story into a fairy tale, and that we should show their real images and experiences. We discussed and decided not to adopt the fairy tale style of presentation, and the stylists designed the animation film based on their real images."

At that time, it was not our intention to make a realistic film, nor was it an assignment, but we had this feeling in our lives, and we felt that only in this form could we express our inner feelings. So we decided not to use the original script, and on the basis of Malachimov's reportage, we eventually produced China's first realistic animated film, *Little Sisters of the Prairie Heroes*. (Fu Guangchao, 2022, p250-251)

The spirit of self-sacrifice shown by the two sisters in defense of the collective property, although many people can no longer understand or even question it now, is undeniably a spirit that is a sense of commitment to the collective and to the nation, as Chairman Mao said, "One has to have a little spirit." This spirit is an important factor that has sustained the Chinese nation through thick and thin and has always been able to maintain its unique position on the world stage.

Apart from this, some bad voices in society are against this film. The film's story is derived from reality, but there is a vast difference from reality. The characters in the animation are portrayed in a more idealized way. However, such a thematic refinement may have been unavoidable and "only right" at that particular time in history. Due to the specific political atmosphere and literary policy during the Cultural Revolution, the model theatre became an important object of study and imitation. To meet the requirements of the literary policy at the time, Shanghai was asked to re-shoot or adjust *Little Sisters of the Prairie Heroes* to better reflect the theme of class struggle.

Qian Yunda said in an interview: "Cultural Revolution" to learn the model theatre. Beijing Song and Dance Drama Theatre rehearsed a Tongxiang theme of the "Children of the Grassland" to make it into a song and dance film. We here in Shanghai said, look at other people's "Children of the Grassland" in the class struggle, then your "Little Sisters of the Grassland Heroes" is only with the natural struggle, not with the fight; there is no class enemy ah. So we were told to remake it, to find the class enemy. Then we went to Inner Mongolia and spent more than a month in each place, herding sheep, working with the herdsmen, and doing interviews. They said, "We don't have any class enemies here. After a few months, we came back, and we felt that we couldn't write this script. But there was nothing we could do about it. We had to give an explanation when we came back. We said that there was no class enemy in local life, so if we were to do something about it, it wouldn't be the story of Long Mei and Yu Rong, so we would have to create another film, and we would have to think about it more slowly. Then, the matter came to nothing. (Fu Guangchao, 2022, p251)

Mr Qian's account of how *Little Sisters of the Prairie Heroes* was asked to be remade during the Cultural Revolution reflects artists' creative dilemmas and challenges in a particular political climate and literary policy. By portraying the symbolic Female Character and displaying her spiritual qualities, the artist engaged in Negotiating Identity with the state and the government to achieve harmony between artistic creation and policy. This process not only reflects the wisdom and courage of

the artists but also provides us with a window to understand the context and significance of the creation of literary works in a particular historical period.

Ethnic Spirit: The Magic Aster (2009)

The Magic Aster opens up a new business model, not only showing traditional Chinese virtues and national spirit but also making remarkable achievements in art. The animation works represented by this film have significantly contributed to exploring the operation mode of the animation industry and promoting the rapid development of the domestic animation industry. They are of great value both in terms of artistry and commerciality.

In 2008, Shanghai Fine Arts Film Studio decided to present the classic children's drama "The Magic Aster" in the form of an animated film on the big screen, and the animated film "The Magic Aster" was released in 2009, which was identified by the Ministry of Propaganda of the People's Republic of China as a key domestic animation film to celebrate the 60th anniversary of the founding of the country. With an investment of 15 million RMB, the film took three years to complete and was described by the media as a "dream team production" made up of all the strengths of the US film studio.

In 2009, the film won the Best Art Film of the 27th Golden Rooster Award of Chinese Film, the Excellent Animation Film Award of the 13th Chinese Film Huabiao Award, and the First China Top Ten Most Valuable Film and Television Animation Works Award. In 2012, it won the Best Animated Film Award at the First China Culture and Arts Government Award for Animation, and it has also won good results at the Shanghai Television Festival, Sichuan Television Festival, China Jilin International Animation Exhibition, Xiamen International Animation Festival, and China Cultural Heritage Animation Competition, and so on.



Figure 75 Animated film "The Magic Aster" holds premiere in Beijing

Source: <http://www.sina.com.cn/>

[Accessed on September 11th, 2023]

On 16th June 2009, the premiere of the animated film "The Magic Aster" was held in Beijing. The Film Bureau of the State Administration of Radio, Film and Television (SARFT), leaders of the film production and film parties, as well as voice

actors Chen Hao and Li Yang, attended the premiere. Pictured are the speeches of the leaders of the State Administration of Radio, Film and Television, Shanghai Fine Arts Film Studio, and China Film Group, as well as a group photo of the guests.

In the original film, the core of the story is the dichotomy between hard work and courage, and laziness and cowardice. Nowadays, as times change and society develops, director Yao Guanghua believes that it is not enough to use this as the core of the story, and that a breakthrough is needed in adapting the classic. After much discussion and negotiation, the new animated film "Maranatha" will continue the fairy tale style of fairy tale theatre, deepen the theme, adjust the structure, and incorporate the new concepts of environmental protection, survival, and harmony with the virtual nature of animation on the basis of the original. Make this cinema film have a big pattern in the global context, carry out three aspects of innovation: theme update, character update, and consciousness update.

Director Yao Guanghua mentioned that if the theme values of the original "The Magic Aster" were "hardworking, simple and brave," then the current large-scale animated cinema film "The Magic Aster" has added thematic elements such as "tolerance." The animated film "The Magic Aster," standing in a new angle, a new height, re-structuring the story, enhances the inner tension of the film, so that "The Magic Aster", a story that many people are already familiar with, to add new content, character roles to increase the role of the opposite role of the vine demon, so that the original by the hard work, laziness as the main contradiction of the play, to the good, evil as the main contradiction of the play. Another example is that the cat in the original film was a product of that era, and destroying it was the next best thing to do, and making it good was the best thing to do. Therefore, in this film version, the old cat has changed from the original play's ten evil villains to a character being used by the bad guys.

At the same time, Wang Tianyun, vice president of SIFF Group, also mentioned when introducing the creation of the film that he wanted to make "The Magic Aster," a national fantasy animated film, "We plan to make Malanja go out of the country, so when we make the character models, we also incorporate both Chinese and Western elements. When watching the film, the audience pays more attention to the "magical power" of "The Magic Aster", and at the same time accepts the film's theme of bravery, hard work, kindness and forgiveness in a subtle way."





Figure 76 Poster of the animated film "The Magic Aster"

Source: <http://www.sina.com.cn/>

[Accessed on September 14th, 2023]

The animated film "The Magic Aster" takes "putting fantasy into the depth of emotion" as its creative concept, highlights the function of film, the perspective of film, the narrative style of film, the imagination of animated film, and combines watchability, infectiousness, and market appeal into one, to reinvent Maranatha.

In terms of the story script, Wang Tianyun, Vice President of Shanghai Film Group, believes: "Adapting classics is something that is done all over the world; Disney's The Lion King is adapted from Hamlet. This time, when the script of 'The Magic Aster' was being written, more than ten drafts were revised in the hope that it would be innovative while inheriting the classics. It's not about eating the old favorites, but about making the classics available to today's audience in a new way." In order to make a breakthrough on the basis of the original, the synopsis of the new cinema animation film "The Magic Aster" has been revised more than 20 times, and the script has been discussed repeatedly and revised more than ten times by the director, producer, screenwriter and literary consultant. After much improvement, the story of the new "The Magic Aster" has expanded the story connotation and enhanced the dramatic conflict on the basis of the original, while the character roles and the intention of the whole drama have made a significant breakthrough.

In terms of artistic style, the continuation of the fairy tale style of fairy tale theatre, with the virtual nature of animation, film narrative techniques, and camera language, gives full play to the whimsical imagination and into the Oriental sense of mystery. In the modeling design, it should be in line with the overall style, namely, the characteristics of fairy tales. It is designed for children, so it should not be too

adult or realistic but should have the simplicity, elegance, and charming appearance of the protagonist at first sight. Character modeling forces the exclusion of Japanese and Korean styles with the purpose of stressing national characteristics to join the aesthetic awareness of the new era. Character modeling highlights its character, modeling, and plays to be suitable for animation operations, with an emphasis on the shape of the body language and facial expression, leaving room for performance. Although the character modeling is simple, there should be local features, complexity, and detailed portrayal. Animal modeling should also be unified with the characters, style, personality, and fairy tale characteristics and suitable for animation. Character color design coordination, in contrast, is heavy but does not lose local brightness, and the scenes complement each other. The main props of the design of the marjoram should spend some effort to open and close the process as creatively as possible aesthetics and consider the production three-dimensional.

In terms of characterization, action features, and linguistic characteristics, the animated film "The Magic Aster" has also accommodated new contemporary features and concepts in order to flesh out the characterization. The story of the new "The Magic Aster" goes beyond the environmental protection, anti-monopoly theme, not letting any one species survive alone, not let any one species to survive alone also can not destroy any one species, even if the villain like the vine demon, so the ending we let the vine demon has the right to survive, but also to limit. At the same time, according to the characteristics of the animated film, make full use of the relevant technical advantages, give full play to the advantages of the United States film studio, cinema animation film "The Magic Aster" more visual impact, so that the film in the story, imagination, watchability, and other aspects have been extremely high.



Figure 77 Xiaolan and Dalan female characters

Source: <https://www.iqiyi.com/>

[Accessed on September 14th, 2023]

The female characters of the new animated film "The Magic Aster", Xiaolan and Dalan, are twins. From the picture, it can be seen that the sisters have the same appearance, but their characters are completely opposite. Sister Xiaolan is hard-working, kind, lively, and wise, daring to love and hate, understanding, and yearning for innocent and beautiful love; sister Dalan is lazy, vain, selfish, cowardly, and loves to play some smart tricks to take advantage of some small advantages. There is a

difference in the femininity they present, which is also an important vivid characteristic of the Female Character in the play.

The setting of such a Female Character is unprecedented in Chinese Women's animation films, which gives it more space for imagination and play. In the design of the screenplay, in addition to the general requirements such as continuous, smooth, clear narrative, compositional tension, etc., the overall style of the compositional design with decorative meanings, and the imagination of the fairy tale. As a film, of course, consider the multi-camera, in order to strengthen the use of film language, to see the combination of the two, to avoid the stage-style composition, the characters of the plastic appearance of the action, these elements should be considered to have joined. In-camera and out-of-camera movement should be used cleverly in favor of scene expansion and dynamism.

In terms of music design, due to the adaptation of children's theatre, it is particularly important that the music style of the film, as a film, should be inherited from the classics and transcend the classics. In the framework of the overall artistic style of music creation, it is childish, humorous, relaxed, beautiful, extraordinary, and rich in imagination. Oriental ethnic, and cultural heritage, combined with the popular modern elements of the notes, will be woven to convey the truth, goodness, and beauty of the melody. One of the theme songs should be easy to pop and sing. The voice actors and theme song singers gathered the hottest popular idols from both sides of the Taiwan Strait and three places, and the all-star line-up became the most luxurious dream team of Chinese domestic animation films at that time.

As a classic children's theatre that has been performed for 50 years and has been welcomed by generations of children and teenagers, The Magic Aster not only unites the creative talents of countless artists but also has a wide range of market value. Through the stage performance, this work not only demonstrates the sincerity, kindness and diligence of the Chinese nation, but also continues to Negotiating Identity in its interaction with the audience.

When Malanja was adapted into an animated film, the process once again became an opportunity for the artists to Negotiating Identity. With the help of the modern medium of animated film, they gave the work new cultural significance and contemporary value, further consolidating and expanding its cultural identity. Then, when it was identified by China's State Propaganda Department as a key domestic animation tribute film to celebrate the 60th anniversary of the founding of the nation in 2009, the launch of the animated film Malanhua also symbolised a Negotiating Identity between the artists, the nation and the audience. Through this work, the artists not only expressed their respect and love for traditional classics, but also demonstrated their commitment and commitment to the development of Chinese animation.

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expressed their respect and love for traditional classics and demonstrated their commitment to the development of Chinese animation.

Overall, through the guidance of national policies, the support of industry associations and film and television companies, and the practice of creators, an image of Chinese Women that conforms to modern values has been gradually constructed, promoting the development of the animated film industry and fostering discussion of Gender equality and women's topics in society.

Part II. The connection of female characters in Chinese animated films with other realms

2.1 Audience Perception and Evaluation

The widespread recognition of the film by the audience is not only an affirmation of the quality of the film, but also an acknowledgement of the artist's identity and value, which further reinforces the artist's position and influence in the field of culture and the arts.

The article employs a combination of participant observation and interviews for audience group data collection. From May 2023 to August 2023, the researcher came into contact with audience members in some areas of China through participating in film viewing activities or events related to film festivals and animation art festivals. Through the arrangement of these events, the researcher further built trust with the audience members, maintained communication channels, and eventually conducted interviews.

Taking this as an entry point, the researcher started to conduct interviews with animation film viewers in a snowballing manner. Given that it is difficult to find suitable research samples to understand the perception and evaluation of The Female Character in Chinese Animated Films by viewers in different cities and regions. In this fieldwork, the author interviewed and audio-recorded five viewers from five cities and regions in China. Before the interviews, the researcher informed the interviewees of the purpose of the study and signed an informed consent form. Each interview lasted 10 to 15 minutes. The structure of the interviews was semi-open-ended, and in addition to research-related questions, the researcher also paid attention to the self-representation and problem interpretation of both male and female audience members. Statistically, the average age of the five interviewees was 30 years old and contained two male and three female viewers.

2.1.1 Negotiation of the boundary between “femininity and identity” in the audience’s cognitive dimension

The interviews revealed that the Female Character construction of Identity is not monolithic, fixed, and distinctly borderline, but rather a process of plurality, fluidity, and continuous Negotiating Identity that arises from communication practices. Modern audiences hold an open, inclusive, and pluralistic attitude toward Gender in animated films. They appreciate independent, robust, diverse, and complex images of women and expect these images to convey positive, upbeat values. For example, viewers expressed their opinions about the impressive Female Character in the animated film:

Male audience member A thought, "She is not just a Female Character, but more like a strong, independent warrior and leader. Calm and collected, smart and wise, strong and independent fighting elite." Male Audience Member B thought, "She

is brave, smart, self-sacrificing, and strong, transforming from a caring daughter to a valiant female warrior." Female viewer A thought, "At that time, her eyes were tinged with guilt and determination. If I were to describe her in 4 words, they would be 'persistent', 'brave', 'kind' and 'innocent'." Female Audience Member B thought, "She is brave, responsible, independent, and strong in order to find a job and survive in this world of magic and fantasy." Female Audience Member C thought, "She is simply the Queen, beautiful and powerful at the same time. Brave, independent, real and beautiful." (Interviews May-August 2023)

To further explain the audience's perceptions and evaluations of The Female Character in Chinese Animated Films, this paper develops two sets of typological classifications to distinguish the different orientations of The Female Character in Chinese Animated Films in the construction of identity. The first category is "highlight-weaken" identity boundary negotiation, which explains how the Female Character negotiates Gender and role in different identities. The second type is the negotiation of "strengthen-lighten" Gender, which outlines how femininity is strategically blurred or highlighted under the Gender framework. (As shown in the figure)

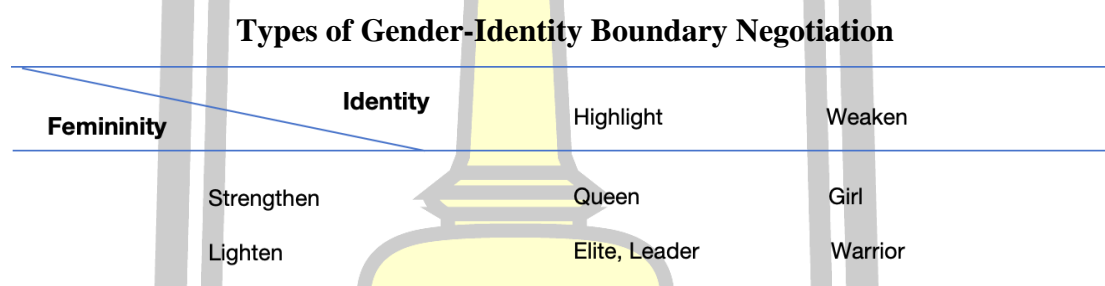


Figure 78 Four Types of Gender-Identity Boundary Negotiation

Source: drawn by Author

The study found that the "queen" identity, while incorporating Gender into the construction of self-identity, also highlights femininity. Gender-neutral identities such as "elite" and "leader" seek to legitimize the identity by blurring gender characteristics. From the perspective of Negotiating Identity, the identity of the "young girl" highlights the marginalized identity of the Female Character in terms of power and status, while the identity of the "warrior" has a dual aspect of exterior and interior, which, on the one hand, represents Female Character's attempts to integrate into the mainstream discourse of the society, and, on the other hand, shows Female Character's attempts to integrate into the mainstream discourse of the society from within. On the one hand, it represents the Female Character's attempt to integrate into the mainstream discourse of society, and on the other hand, it also shows the Female Character's discourse practice of building up her femininity from the inside out and attempting to break through the established Gender binary framework.

This division of gender and identity boundaries is not black and white; they are intertwined and interlinked, which is the result of the dynamic transformation of Gender roles in a particular society and culture. For example, although the identification of "girl" and "warrior" are different in terms of Gender, they are both acquiescence and reproduction of the patriarchal system and masculinity. The "elite", "leader" and "queen", on the other hand, can be seen as attempts to challenge and break through the established dominant discourses and power relations.

2.1.2 Interactive and Empathic Negotiating Identity in the Emotional Dimension of the Audience

Audience feedback plays an indispensable role in artistic creation. It not only provides a reflective mirror for the creator, revealing the image and effect of the work in the audience's eyes but also provides a constant source of inspiration for the creator, stimulating the creator to make new attempts and innovations.

The negotiated interaction between the audience and the creator will be shown in the following four forms:

1) Direct feedback and comments: Audiences will directly express their views and expectations of animated films through social media, online platforms, film reviews, emails, or on-site questions.

From the interviews and surveys, the researcher found that most of the respondents agree that Female Character in Chinese Films can influence their values or attitudes towards life, but male and female viewers will identify with these Female Characters from different perspectives; in short, viewers have different expectations for constructing Female Character in Chinese Animated Films.

For example, male viewer A thinks: "Women should be the protagonists of their own lives; they have their inner worlds, they face their feelings, they have their ideas, they have their reluctance and aspirations, they have their own good and bad sides, and they have their right to choose. I hope that the creators will lose their stereotypes of women and not label women and that the portrayal of female characters will allow the audience to see more different female characters and the inner world of female characters with unique charisma and character traits. Females will help each other instead of just being competitive, and more and more Female Character creators will be involved in creating characters." (Interview, May-August 2023)

Female viewer C, on the other hand, believes, "With the changing times and the step-by-step progress of social concepts, it's no longer limited to the traditional standards; it will be the standards that show the women of the new era who will have their independent personalities, backstories, and motivations, and also have more diverse character traits like independence, strength, intelligence, bravery, and so on. They will have their careers, pursuits, values, and lifestyles and will be the characters that drive the story. Creators should get to know and listen to women from all walks of life." (Interviews May-August 2023)

2) Box office and ratings: Box office and ratings manifest the audience's direct support for animated films and are an essential indicator of the work's success. The audience's recognition and love for the portrayal of Female characters will directly affect their willingness to watch the film and box office performance. For example, as of 11 December 2023, the Chinese animated film box office list TOP 13 (as shown):

Ranking	Title	Cumulative box office takings (million yuan)	Release Date
1	Nezha: Birth of the Demon Child	5036	26/7/2019
2	Chang An	1825	8/7/2023
3	Legend of Deification	1603	1/10/2020
4	Boonie Bears: Guardian Code	1496	22/1/2023
5	Boonie Bears: Back To Earth	978	1/2/2022
6	Monkey King: Hero Is Back	957	10/7/2015
7	Deep Sea	920	22/1/2023
8	Boonie Bears: Blast into the Past	718	5/2/2019
9	Boonie Bears: The Big Shrink	606	16/2/2018
10	Boonie Bears: The Wild Life	597	12/2/2021
11	Green Snake	580	23/7/2021
12	Big Fish & Begonia	574	8/7/2016
13	New Gods: Yang Jian	556.5	19/8/2022

Figure 79 Chinese animated film box office list TOP 13 (As of December 11, 2023)

Source: ENDATA、DengtaBigdata、2023 China Film Market Data Insight Report (drawn by Author)

3) Social media interactions: Viewers will share their views and feelings about animated films on social media and express their concerns and recognition of Female Character portrayal through likes, comments, retweets, or topic discussions. These interactions can give creators direct feedback and help them understand the audience's expectations of Female Character portrayal. For example, since the animated film "Big Fish & Begonia" (2016) was released at home and abroad, 590,000 people have participated in ratings on Douban, with 9,576 comments and 488 discussions; 650,000 people have participated in rating interactions on the Cat's Eye platform; and 6.8,000 people have participated in ratings and comments on IMDB.

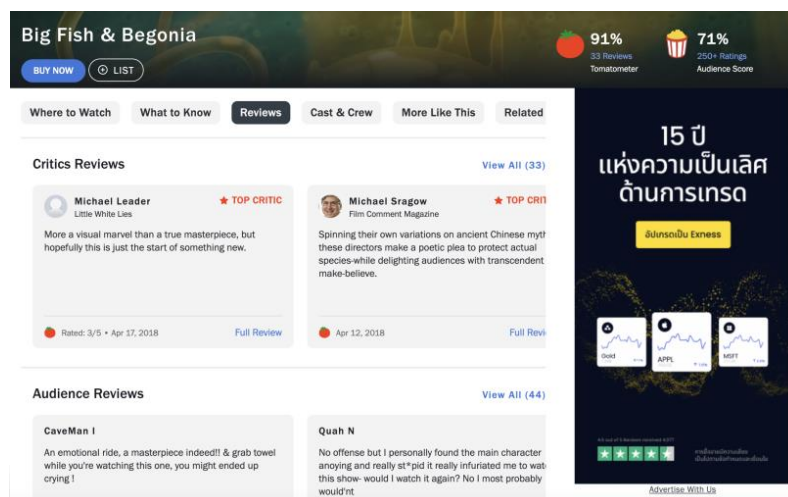


Figure 80 Critics Reviews and Audience Reviews on Rotten Tomatoes

Source: <https://www.rottentomatoes.com/>
[Accessed on May 28th, 2024]

4) Behavioural Patterns Mapping: The audience's behavioral patterns, such as self-organized promotional activities, character emulation, cosplay, purchase, as well as a collection of related character derivatives, etc., can also reflect their identities of the characters from the side.



Figure 81 Girl Cosplays Male Character

Source: <https://www.douyin.com/>
[Accessed on May 28th, 2024]

The pictures show that females in modern society display themselves acting out their favorite animation characters in terms of consciousness, body, and behavior through role-playing on specific occasions (e.g., anime festivals, film events, etc.), with Female Character playing a male animation character or Male Character playing a female animation character, both of which are common phenomena in the scene of anime events. These behaviors reflect that the audience has found a character similar to themselves in the animation work or has seen the qualities they aspire to in character, thus creating a strong emotional resonance. These behaviors not only show the audience's identity and emotional projection of the characters but also reflect specific characteristics of the current social culture. Their/their pursuit of individuality

and self-expression and the community culture of tolerance and sharing constitute the richness, colorfulness, and plurality of the culture of modern society. At the same time, these behaviors have a positive role in promoting the development of the animation industry.

2.2 Intercultural communications

The Female Character in Chinese Animated Films needs to consider the perception and acceptance of Female Characters in different cultures when facing the international market. In the process of cross-cultural communication, Chinese Animated Films need to gain a deeper understanding of other cultures' expectations and perceptions of The Female Character in Chinese Animated Films to better Negotiating Identity and ensure that The Female Character in Chinese Animated Films correctly understood and accepted in cross-cultural communication.

There are four methods for cross-cultural communication of the image of Chinese Women constructed through the medium of The Female Character in Chinese Animated Films:

Classical Story Adaptation: Drawing on foreign ideas and creativity to create Chinese Women Characters. Take the story of Hua Mulan, a household name, for example. Starting from the Mulan Rhetoric during the Northern and Southern Dynasties, it has been adapted many times, not only deeply rooted in Chinese culture, but also adapted into an animated film by international companies such as Disney, which has succeeded in spreading the bravery, resilience, and wisdom of Chinese Women all over the world. Through the international medium of film, such stories have allowed global audiences to understand and appreciate the unique charms of traditional Chinese Female Characters.

Disney released an animated sequel to Mulan in 2005. In it, the emperor summons Mulan and Li Xiang to escort three princesses to a neighboring country to make peace when they are about to get married. This setting is consistent with ancient Chinese historical facts, such as that the central dynasties often maintained relations with remote minority regimes by making peace.

However, unlike traditional stories of marrying for peace, at the end of the movie, in a distant foreign country, the three princesses marry the three soldiers, and Mulan marries Li Xiang, ushering in a happy ending. In this continuation of the story, the Western concept of "freedom of marriage" is subtly introduced, which aligns with the idea of equality between men and women embedded in the Chinese "Mulan" narrative, adding a novel element to the story.

Disney's adaptation and continuation of the Chinese "Mulan" matriarchal narrative not only integrates American values such as "individual heroism" and "freedom of marriage" but also, to a certain extent, reflects the influence of feminism in the West. In addition to incorporating American values such as "individual heroism" and "freedom of marriage," it reflects, to some extent, the rise of feminism in the West.

Disney created fourteen princesses, and its early creations were mainly characterized by kindness, weakness, and beauty, such as Snow White, Cinderella, Sleeping Beauty, etc. In these princess-themed stories, the prince plays the role of "saviour of the princesses", or in other words, the love of the prince is crucial to the happy ending of the story, and only the love of the prince can save the princesses who

have suffered all kinds of misfortunes. In other words, the love of the prince is crucial to the story's happy ending, and only the love of the prince can save the princess from all kinds of misfortune. This model of storytelling reflects the traditional patriarchal society's mindset that "men are strong and women are weak."

With the advent of feminist thinking and the feminist movement, Disney's creation of the image of the princess has also changed, "The Princess and the Frog" in which Princess Tiana helps the prince to break the curse from frogs back to humans; "Beauty and the Beast" in which the princess's true love makes the "beast" back to the "prince"! "..... The change of the story model from "the love of the prince to save the princess" to "the true love of men and women to break the curse" is the initial development of the idea of equal rights for men and women in the American society under the influence of the feminist trend. It is the initial embodiment of the concept of equal rights for men and women in American society under the influence of feminist thinking.

In the 1998 version of *Mulan*, the idea of equal rights for men and women was given a new meaning; in the past, in Disney's film narratives related to princesses, "love" is an essential element, no matter how the story model is changed, focusing on male and female love of the emotional line of the creation mode is the barrier that it has not been able to break. The 1998 version of *Mulan* was released to break this tradition. The 1998 version of "Mulan" breaks this tradition. Mulan's love narrative of joining the army on behalf of her father replaces the simple love between a man and a woman. Mulan's love for Li Xiang becomes a stroke of genius at the film's end, and the dual narratives of love and affection make the story more fulfilling. Women in this film can not only obtain love through their strength but also use their efforts to maintain family love, serve the country, and win glory for the family.

In the second part of "Mulan" in 2005, Mulan helps three princesses to find true love and refuses to marry them, which reflects the idea of women's mutual assistance in feminist thinking. In the context of the rise of feminist movement, "Mulan", a traditional Chinese heroine, has been fully exploited by Disney, which not only profoundly interprets the western society's perception of feminism, but also fully satisfies the Chinese audience's interest in "Mulan". The 1998 version of "Mulan" and its sequel in 2005 have become animation classics that "integrate China and the West."

Cultural Element Integration: Absorbing the characteristics of some foreign cultural elements and adding them to The Female Character in Chinese Animated Films. With the in-depth development of globalization, exchanges and integration between different cultures have become increasingly frequent, which not only enriches the connotation of culture but also promotes the innovation and development of culture. The diversified presentation of animation and film is the most intuitive and vivid embodiment of integrating cultural elements in cross-cultural communication. They are like a bridge connecting the cultures of different regions, nationalities, and countries, allowing people to feel the charm and power of culture in their appreciation and experience. The mutual absorption, borrowing, and fusion of different cultures in animated films eventually reach a new cultural form. For example, the fantasy adventure animated films "Bicycle Boy," "New Gods: Nezha Reborn," "Deep Sea," and "A mission bestowed by heaven." have incorporated elements of network culture, fashionable pop elements, and Western punk style into their characters' costumes,

lines and props, achieving the purpose of enhancing the characters' charisma and conforming to the aesthetics of the contemporary public. This is precisely a model of how traditional culture can mingle with modern culture and foreign cultural elements. "A Mission Bestowed by Heaven" film can be said to have done a new kind of deconstruction of the era, incorporating a dramatic narrative in an empty background, adding a large number of cultural elements in the audio-visual aesthetics, oriental fantasy nourished in the wasteland aesthetics of the Steam Cyber, and the elements of the five elements of magic and mechanical AI intertwined and touched.



Figure 82 Special: Directors and screenwriters share his creative inspirations

Source: <https://www.163.com/>

[Accessed on May 29th, 2024]

The female character Nuwa is not a Western princess waiting to be rescued by a knight but a "Chinese princess" with a slingshot to save her family. In addition, Nuwa's slingshot corresponds to the five elements of "gold, wood, water, fire, and earth" in the director's setting, and she fights against the mechanical world controlled by the "other races." When viewers look at Nuwa, who shoots fireworks with her slingshot across the desert, they feel as if they have seen themselves in their childhood with endless fantasies.

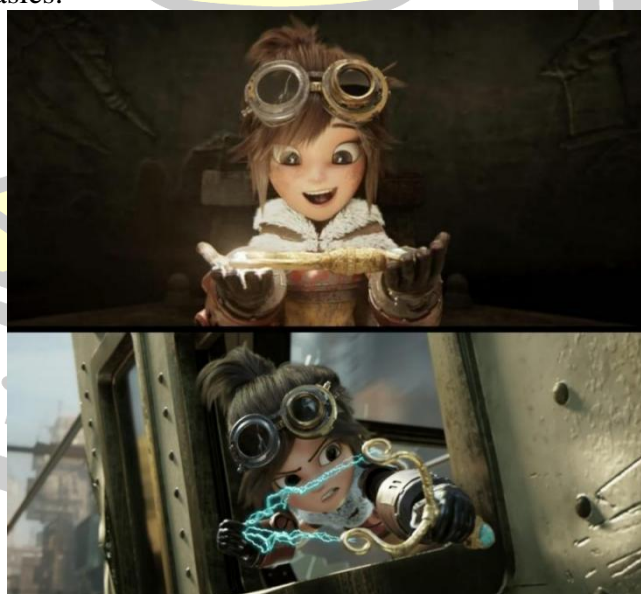


Figure 83 Human little girl Nuwa, a female character

Source: "A Mission Bestowed by Heaven" Video screenshots

[Accessed on May 29th, 2024]

In terms of character design, the director blends the tradition of creating the most familiar mythological characters in the minds of Chinese audiences while giving them an utterly unconventional characterization. To save her people and her grandfather, the heroine Nuwa forms a team of unconventional heroes with the self-proclaimed clever monkey "Empty" and A dragon that changes fate "Pulao." The three of them delve into the world of other races, undergoing trials of Negotiating Identity and demonstrating the power of female bravery and self-redemption.

3) Cultural Symbol Utilization: The Female Character in Chinese Animated Films, which represents the cultural symbols of Chinese Women, is adjusted to have international characteristics in order to be displayed in international dance. As the global development of Chinese animation films continues to deepen, cultural symbols representing national, ethnic, and regional cultures blossom in film and animation works with the distinctive features of Chinese national culture. For example, the most influential Chinese cultural symbols are dragons, phoenixes, calligraphy, Chinese paintings, shadow puppets, Chinese martial arts, cheongsam, and countless others. From the current development of the Chinese animation film market, many traditional Chinese cultural symbols are used in film and television animation works based on Chinese myths, legends, and folk tales, successfully leading the public aesthetics to the excellent traditional Chinese culture.

For example, in the animated film "New Gods: Nezha Reborn", several women are dressed in cheongsam outfits. As one of China's traditional costumes and an important cultural symbol, the Cheongsam has a unique charm and profound cultural connotation. It originated as a traditional garment for Manchu women in the Qing Dynasty. The beginning of cheongsam fashion is widely believed to be in the 20th century during the Republican period, and it flourished in the 1930s and 1940s as a Representative of Chinese Women's Clothing.



Figure 84 The Symbol of "Cheongsam" in the Film

Source: "New Gods: Nezha Reborn" Video screenshots, <https://www.iqiyi.com/>
[Accessed on May 28th, 2024]

The design of the cheongsam pays attention to the smoothness of the lines and the curves of the body, such as the standing neckline, disc buttons, embroidery, etc., which makes the cheongsam not only practical but also an important garment to show the elegance, modesty, and softness of Chinese Women. This harmonious unity of inner and outer beauty aligns with the aesthetic concept of "both inner and outer beauty" in traditional Chinese culture.

For example, in the animated film "New Gods: Yang," the "Luoshen Fu"⁶¹ Flying Dance⁶² is the most memorable scene for most viewers: the pavilion of

⁶¹ Luoshen Fu: Luo Shen Fu is one of the masterpieces of ancient Chinese literature. It is the work of Cao Zhi, a literary scholar of Cao Wei during the Three Kingdoms period. With his outstanding literary talent and rough life experiences, Cao Zhi created this work full of romantic colors and profound emotions. With the theme of man and god falling in love, the fugue describes a dreamy encounter and parting between the author and Luo Shen.

Yingzhou⁶³ clouds, which is quite characteristic of the region, is visually impactful. In the Fairy Music Workshop, a group of fairies leapt in the air and danced out the "Luoshen Fu", surprisingly presenting the stunning wonders of Dunhuang frescoes in the flying sky, which is a stroke of genius. Not only did Yang Jian become intoxicated with it, but also the audience inside and outside of the screen were in total praise, and netizens could not help but exclaim, "This is the first time to see Dunhuang frescoes come alive in animated films!"



Figure 85 Female Character, Wan Luo, Flying Dance

Source: "New Gods : Yang" Video screenshots, <https://www.iqiyi.com/>
[Accessed on May 28th, 2024]

Director Zhao Ji said: "Originally, this scene was not there, but in Dunhuang picking, into the cave is like entering another world, feel the imagination of the ancient artists, so there is inspiration, the ancient gods and goddesses of the court banquet, there is a dance there is music there are musical instruments to play themselves."

Producer Lu Hei also revealed at the scene the production of this scene of hardship, flying dance nymphs on the body of the ribbon transformed into flower petals. The difficulty of CG production requirements is quite large, and in the air weightlessness of the physical form but also maintaining the beauty of the situation is a huge challenge.

Through the efforts of many Chinese animators behind the scenes, the "Luoshen Fu" Flying Dance was finally perfectly presented on the big screen. This beautiful, soft song and dance upgraded the audience's romantic imagination of the flying sky. The magnificent beauty of the Orient, the sound of pipa drums, the visual and auditory double shock.

⁶² Flying Dance: As one of the critical business cards of Chinese Women's culture to the world, Chinese Women mainly dance it, and the dancers show the softness, elegance, and mystery of Feitian through their fluttering dresses, flying ribbons, and light dance posture. In the dance, the dancers skilfully use their eyes, posture, and other body language to convey the charm and emotion of the kabuki skyscrapers in the Dunhuang frescoes, thus reflecting the physical beauty of the flying skyscrapers in the Dunhuang frescoes.

⁶³ Yingzhou: It is one of the five immortal mountains mentioned in the Classic of Mountains and Rivers. In the animated film, the Yingzhou Immortal Mountain is inspired by the Dunhuang Crescent Moon Spring, and the use of three-dimensional animation technology subverts people's conventional imagination of the Immortal Mountain and the towering pavilions in the desert oasis are very visually impactful.

4) International Exchanges, Cooperation, and Production: Adoption of the styles and characteristics of foreign Female Characters, such as appearance, behavioral expressions, and personality traits. Chinese animation films often engage in extensive exchanges and cooperation with international counterparts in creation and production. Such cooperation involves not only the exchange of technology, artistic style, and narrative techniques but also an in-depth exploration of the identity and performance of Chinese Women. Through exchanges with outstanding foreign animation film production teams, we can better understand and learn from the international community's perceptions and expressions of Female Characters, thus effectively negotiating the portrayal of females between countries and regions. The proportion of co-productions in the film industry is gradually increasing, and heterogeneous and cross-local cultural pluralism has become the norm.

For example, the Chinese-foreign co-produced animated film "Over the Moon" is directed by director Glen Keane⁶⁴, who won the 90th Academy Award for Best Animated Short Film, co-written by Chinese director-writer Alice Wu and Audrey Wells, and co-produced by DreamWorks Animation SKG, Netflix, Pearl Studio, CMC Inc and CMC Pictures is a co-production of DreamWorks Animation SKG, Netflix, Pearl Studio, CMC Inc and CMC Pictures. It tells the story of Fifi, a young girl who goes to the Moon to meet Chang'e⁶⁵.

As a co-produced animation film, "Over the Moon" no longer focuses on a single display of classical Chinese culture but uses folklore as a source of material, supplemented by modern Chinese cultural life for secondary creation: in addition to the Phoenix Legend and square dance, there are also technological and cultural elements representing China's advanced scientific level, such as the magnetic levitation train, Chang'e Project and Jade Rabbit - a more diversified expression and a more precise contemporary direction. -With a more diversified expression and a more precise orientation to the times, "Over the Moon" continuously tries to integrate Chinese and foreign cultural perspectives, collide Chinese and Western cultural connotations, and find a way to make Chinese elements the core of the film, which is conducive to the globalization of communication.

⁶⁴ Glen Keane: American animator, writer, and illustrator. He has designed character animation for classic animated films such as *The Little Mermaid* and *Magic Hair*, and his animated short film *Dear Basketball* won the "Best Animated Short Film Award" at the 90th Oscars.

⁶⁵ Chang'e: A character from ancient Chinese mythology. Legend has it that Chang'e ascended to the Moon Palace after stealing Yi's immortality pill. The image of Chang'e has always been one of the cathartic motifs for the literati to express their pursuit of life and convey their religious feelings; it is also an artistic image that combines the meaning of mankind's original concepts of life and death, the aesthetics of the Chinese Female Character, and the aestheticised interpretation of the role assigned to Female Women in love and marriage, and it has a wide range of cultural connotations.



Figure 86 Poster of the Chinese-foreign animated film "Over the Moon"

Source: <http://movie.mtime.com/>

[Accessed on May 28th, 2024]

Female Character Chang'e subverts her previous serene and dignified look, showing that she has the style of a queen, a singer, and a strong sportsman, and even her personality and temperament are a combination of melancholy and gentleness. In addition to the classical beauty of the Orient and its traditional costumes, she also has an outgoing Western personality, wearing flashy clothes and singing and dancing on the lonely moon. She will have breakdowns, loss, superstar style, evil, incomprehension, etc. Initially, I thought that Chang'e would play a supporting role in the story's development, but the director placed Chang'e in the film's second half to become the central heroine with a lot of weight.



Figure 87 Animated film "Over the Moon", Video screenshots

Source: <http://movie.mtime.com/>

[Accessed on May 28th, 2024]

From the film, the researcher observed that the Chinese and foreign creative teams effectively cooperated and negotiated on the two aspects of the character's diversity and complexity and the awakening and growth of self-consciousness.

On the one hand, the director's portrayal of Chang'e is more inclined to Western aesthetics, and the character image may be more inclined to a Westernised image of a Chinese person. Her costumes and styling, although incorporating Chinese elements, are also more international in their overall style.

On the other hand, the director pays more attention to the modern interpretation and reinvention of Chang'e's character, giving her more affluent character traits and emotional layers. For example, new story threads and plot developments are introduced to make Chang'e's story more colorful. In the story, Chang'e transforms eternal waiting and sadness into bravely facing loneliness and rediscovering hope. With the help of Fei Fei and Xiao Qing, she finds the "token" to reunite with Hou Yi, but Hou Yi's brief appearance makes her realize that she is not alone, even after losing the love of her life.

In the end, Chang'e lets go of her obsession with the past and bravely moves on to a new life, presenting a strong and independent woman.

Not only Chang'e, the film's heroine Fei Fei and other characters together, "Over the Moon" has become the first Chinese-foreign co-produced animated feature film to reach the Oscar stage to compete for the final crown.

A. Internationally recognized. In addition to being nominated for the Academy Award for "Best Animated Feature Film," it was also nominated for the first Critics' Choice Super Award for "Best Animated Film," "Best Voice Actress in an Animated Film, Best Animated Special Effects," "Best Animated Director," "Best Animated Music," "Best Storyboard," "Best Voice-Over (Animated Feature)," "Best Screenplay (Animated Feature)" and "Best Animated Film" at the 48th Annie Awards. Best Screenplay (Animated Feature Film)" and six other nominations.

B. The awakening and popularisation of female consciousness. The Chinese and foreign cooperative animated films spread the awakening and popularisation of female consciousness by portraying diverse Female Characters.

C. Promoted cultural exchange and integration.

2.3 Female Characters in Animated Films in a Global Perspective

Under the background of globalization, animated films have also paid attention to the topic of identity construction from a global perspective in the portrayal of female characters to reflect better and respond to the international community's concerns and to think about the construction of women. Through their stories, the complexity and diversity of Female Characters can be understood more deeply, providing richer perspectives and ideas for the study of Female Characters.

Nominated for Best Animated Feature Film at the 95th Academy Awards and Best Animated Feature Film in the Motion Picture category at the 80th Golden Globe Awards for American Movies and Television, and winner of Best Animated Feature Film at the 27th Golden Satellite Awards for American Movies and Television, Best Animated Feature Film at the 76th BAFTA Awards and other international awards,

"TURNING RED," as the first animated feature film of Pixar Animation Studios⁶⁶ in the United States to be directed by a female director of Chinese descent, Zhiyu Shi⁶⁷, as well as the first feature film to feature a female director of Chinese descent. As the first animated feature film directed by a Chinese female director, Zhiyu Shi, at Pixar Animation Studios and the first animated film featuring a Chinese girl as the protagonist, it not only injects new vitality into animated films, but also provides new ideas and directions for the portrayal of The Female Character in Chinese Animated Films.



Figure 88 Xiao Mei and her "Chinese" family environment

Source: "Turning Red" Video screenshots, <http://movie.mtime.com/>
[Accessed on June 11th, 2024]

The animated film's protagonist is a thirteen-year-old Chinese-Canadian girl named Mei Lin Li. This setting already places her in the discussion of The Female Characters in Chinese Animated Films. Although she lives in Canada, her Chinese identity and the background of her story are closely linked to Chinese culture. The image of Mei Lin Li not only represents the experience of an Chinese girl growing up in a foreign country but also reflects the heritage and integration of Chinese culture in the context of globalization. This cultural representation makes her a Female Character worth exploring.

⁶⁶ Pixar Animation Studios: The United States Walt Disney Company's computer animation studio representative works are "Star Wars," "Toy Story" series, "Monster Power," "Finding Nemo" and so on.

⁶⁷ Zhiyu Shi: Canadian animation director and screenwriter. In 2018, he directed his first short film, Baby Bao, which won the Best Animated Short Film award at the 91st Academy Awards. On 11 March 2022, he directed the animated family comedy film Turning Red, which was released.



Figure 89 Female Character Xiao Mei's "Turning" Identity
 Source: "Turning Red" Video screenshots, <http://movie.mtime.com/>
 [Accessed on June 11th, 2024]

Analyzed from the perspective of women's narrative: Xiaomei in the film will fantastically reveal her inner "little monster" whenever she loses control of her emotions at the onset of puberty - from a human being to a red panda, the phenomenon of "turning red" can be interpreted as breaking away from the original cultural order, implying the generation of a new identity. The phenomenon of "turning red" can be construed as breaking away from the original cultural order, signifying the creation of a new identity. As the story develops, Xiaomei is gradually able to control whether or not she transforms. As a result, she gains the attention and affection of more classmates and friends, further validating the acceptance and recognition of the new identity in the "generation."

Analyzed from the deep structure of cultural identity: "turning red" is also a metaphor for the collision between individual self-identity, ethnic and cultural identity. Red is the base colour of Chinese cultural genes, and the flow and mixing of identities is reflected in Xiao Mei's "turning red". The film also explores the intergenerational relationship and cultural identity between Chinese mothers and daughters by revealing that the ability to change color has been passed down from one generation to the next through female ancestors. The typical female characters of the eccentric school bully and the strict "tiger mother" reflect the common perception and imagination of Chinese mothers and daughters in North American Society.

Analyzed from the perspective of female creators : the creators do not limit the story to a binary confrontation between individual freedom in modern society and the cultural constraints of traditional family clans. Instead, a more inclusive vision shows Xiaomei's negotiation in the face of cultural conflict. In the end, Xiao Mei chooses to accept and integrate her inner "monster," which is not only a recognition of her own identity but also a reconstruction of her Chinese cultural identity.

Similarly, as a Chinese-American female director and writer, Alice Wu⁶⁸ also uses animated films to tell Chinese mythological stories in the context of globalization by creating the film *Over the Moon* (2020).

From a Global Perspective, Chinese-American female directors Shi Zhiyu and Alice Wu, who skilfully combine traditional Chinese mythological narratives with cross-cultural elements, have injected new cultural connotations into Female Characters. Shi Zhiyu's *Turning Red* shows a Chinese girl's identity confusion and self-discovery amid globalization. At the same time, Alice Wu's *Over the Moon* presents a courageous, independent, and intelligent woman to the global audience through a traditional Chinese mythological story. The works of the two directors reflect not only clear cultural concepts but also profound thoughts on Female Character portrayal, demonstrating the unique charm and self-worth of Chinese-American women in the context of globalization.

Conclusion

The social structure and values have profoundly changed with the deepening of Reform and Opening-up of the Chinese Economy. Chinese animated films have also ushered in opportunities for vigorous development. On the one hand, China constructs the national female image and influences people's view of Gender and women through the media, in this case, *The Female Character in Chinese Animated Films*. On the other hand, people are gradually accepting and identifying with this image of national femininity in this media presentation and negotiating the impact of the interactive process on social perceptions. Therefore, since the communication medium of *The Female Character in Chinese Animated Films* has established a relationship with the state internally, the social relationships with people and other groups, which include the Chinese government and the local government, the community of creators, and the audience, this new set of relationships has led to various forms of social interactions.

In this context, the female character in Chinese animated films has been interestingly used in identity negotiation. The Negotiating Identity of the government is that Chinese Women in Animated Films are gradually breaking away from traditional Characters in Chinese Animated Films is slowly breaking away from traditional stereotypes and are used to represent a new image of women as independent, autonomous, optimistic, and pluralistic. Negotiating Identity with other audiences or domains, *The Female Character in Chinese Animated Films* can also disseminate the cultural identity of the "Chinese national female image" to China and other parts of the world.

⁶⁸ Alice Wu: Chinese-American female film director and screenwriter. 2020 co-writer of the animated film *Fly Me to the Moon* with Audrey Wells.

CHAPTER V

“Fox Girl”, three female characters: A Case Study of Gender and Negotiating Identity

Introduction

The Female Character in Chinese Animated Films has been an indispensable part of almost every film since the birth of the first officially released animated film in China in 1941. It was also from that time that "Fox Girl," a typical and unique Female Character in animation, began to appear in the public's cultural field of vision. "Fox Girl" is a Female Character who is a "fox transformed into a human being" (animal fox roles are excluded from the scope of the study); they have unique cultural identities, distinctive gender identifiers, a broad mass base, and characteristics that resonate with the changing roles and times.

This chapter begins by analyzing the three Female Characters of Fox Girl. It then combines the theoretical categories of Gender and Negotiating Identity and explores the representational practices of the construction of the female subject in different periods in the context of the Reform and Opening up of the Chinese Economy, thus presenting the epochal Interpretations, Historical Changes, and Synchronic Structure of the gender system in China.

It is divided into Five Main Parts:

Part I: "Fox Girl": Bearer of Gender and Identity in the Media

Part II: "Fox Girl": Historical and Cultural Traceability

Part III: Three "Fox Girl" Characters and Their Textual Interpretations in the Context of Reform and Opening-up of the Chinese Economy

Part IV: The "Fox Girl" in the Field of Social System

Part V: The "Fox Girl" and the Times: Gender and Negotiating Identity

Part I. "Fox Girl": Bearers of Gender and Identity in the Media

The traditional definition of "Fox Girl" refers to the mythological fox spirit that can change its form and possess a woman's body to control her movements. Originating from traditional Chinese culture and folklore, they are often depicted as Female Characters with extraordinary powers and vixen-like characteristics. "The fox carries several extremely important traditional concepts - secular and religious, ethical and philosophical, historical and aesthetic - which has enabled it to develop into a unique and rich cultural phenomenon over a long period." (Li Jianguo, 2002)

1.1 The "Fox Girl" in the Mass Media

In the mass media, the "Fox Girl" character is mainly presented in the following Five Forms:

1) Literary works:

Literary works of Chinese and Western cultures are based on the existence of "the fox" as an animal in the natural society, as a specific depiction of the object of literary processing, which is the same point in the fox culture of China and the West. However, in Asian culture, the fox is not only a simple animal but also has a mysterious color behind it, often called "Fox Fairy"⁶⁹ and "Fox Spirit"⁷⁰, and most of them appear as Female Characters, for example, "Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio"⁷¹, which is one of the most prolific works of literature in Fox Female Character. In other countries, such as Japan and Korea, although the image of the Fox Girl may be different, they are also often depicted as beings with mystical powers and complex emotional entanglements with humans. In Western culture, on the other hand, foxes are not characterized as Spirits but are simply animals like chickens, ducks, fish, and geese. In "Aesop's Fables," foxes are unusual animals, appearing as prominent subjects or depreciated objects.

2) Film and Television:

Fox Girl figures are also often introduced in international film and television productions, whether in Hollywood fantasy films or Asian anime adaptations, where they are presented in different cultural contexts and story threads. For example, Rosalee Calvert (fuchsbau) in the 2011 American suspense TV series "Grimm"; Lisa, the heroine of the Hungarian 2015 fantasy comedy film Fox Fairy Lisa "Liza, a rókatündér," who pursues true love and breaks her cursed destiny; and "Yobi, the Five Tailed Fox," the South Korean 2007 animated fantasy film, in which a fox girl, equivalent to a 10-year-old human child, is introduced as the Main Character of the Film.

⁶⁹ Fox Fairy : The term derives from the mystifying imagery of fox fairies in Chinese culture, especially in folklore and literature, where fox fairies are often depicted as fox spirits with supernatural powers, sometimes in the form of beautiful women.

⁷⁰ Fox Spirit : It can refer either to a fox spirit or monster with supernatural powers or to a spirit or symbol represented by the fox itself.

⁷¹ Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio: It is a collection of short stories written in the literary language by the Chinese novelist Pu Songling during the Qing Dynasty, the earliest copy of which was circulated during the Kangxi period of the Qing Dynasty. They either expose the darkness of feudal rule, attack the corruption of the imperial examination system, or rebel against the bondage of feudal rites with rich and profound ideological contents. The works depicting the theme of love are the most numerous in the book, and they express the strong spirit of anti-feudalism. Some of these works show the author's ideal love through the love between a flower demon, a fox charm, and a human being.



Figure 90 "Grimm" (2011), Rosalee Calvert (fuchsbau)

Figure 91 Poster of the Hungarian film "Liza, a rókatündér" (2015)

Figure 92 Poster of the Korean animated film "Yubi, the Five Tailed Fox" (2007)

Source: <https://image.baidu.com/>

[Accessed on March 15th, 2024]

Fox Girls are more abundant in Chinese fantasy Films and TV dramas, often depicted as beautiful Female Characters with mysterious powers and the ability to change forms. For example, the Female Character of Su Daji (a nine-tailed fox demon) from the Romance of the "Legend of Deification"⁷² alone has been reimagined in several Film and TV series. They have captivated audiences with their gorgeous costumes, exquisite make-up and outstanding acting skills.



⁷² Legend of Deification : It is a long novel written by Xu Zhonglin (controversial) in the Ming Dynasty. It is a 100-episode story about King Wu's conquest of the Zhou Dynasty. The work is well known for the stories of Nezha haunting the East China Sea, Jiang Taigong meeting King Wen, and Daji designing to harm Bi Gan.

Figure 93 The Fox Girl Character "Suda Ji" in many Chinese Film and Television.

Source: <https://image.baidu.com/>
[Accessed on March 15th, 2024]

3) Anime and games:

In the field of anime, Fox Girl figures are especially popular. They appear in the secondary world in a cute and youthful state, and have become the favourite of many anime fans. Fox Girls are often depicted in anime as characters with superpowers and bravery, and their stories are full of fantasy and adventure elements.

In the gaming field, fox girl images are also widely available. From role-playing games to action-adventure games, fox girl have attracted a large number of players with their unique images and gameplay. They appear as the main characters or important roles in the game, adding more interesting and challenging to the game.

For example, Daji, the female mage character in "Honor of Kings" ; "Tamamo-no-Mae," the female character in "Fate/Grand Order" and "Onmyoji" ; Tushan Susu, the female character in "Fox Fairy Xiao Hongniang", and other "Fox Girl" characters in the 2D World are also games and anime works.



Figure 94 Daji, the female mage character in "Honor of Kings"

Figure 95 "Tamamo-no-Mae," the female character in "Fate/Grand Order"

Figure 96 "Tamamo-no-Mae," the female character in "Onmyoji"

Figure 97 Tushan Susu, in "Fox Fairy Xiao Hongniang"

Source: <https://image.baidu.com/>
[Accessed on March 19th, 2024]

4) Network and trend culture:

The Fox Girl image also occupies a place in the network and trend culture. On online platforms, fox girl characters have become hot topics and objects of discussion. Fans express their support and love for fox girl characters through social media by sharing their favourite feelings, creating homoerotic works, and participating in online activities. This interaction not only deepens fans' knowledge and emotional commitment to the characters, but also promotes the spread and influence of Fox Girl Characters in online culture. As the Fox Girl Character's influence in online culture continues to expand, more and more brands and companies are seeking cross-border cooperation with the Fox Girl Character. For example, launching Fox girl-themed peripheral merchandise and blind boxes. These co-operations not only bring more exposure and commercial value to the brands, but also provide more possibilities and opportunities for the development of Fox Girl Characters in network culture.

5) Culture and Tourism Dissemination:

In China, there are precedents of Fox Girls crossing the border with tourism and culture. As early as 2018, Tencent Animation reached a cooperation with the "Fox Fairy Matchmaker Xiao Hongniang," and its Fox Girl character "Tushan Susu" in the "Fox Fairy Xiao Hongniang" was awarded the official status of "Hangzhou animation bus image messenger." Tushan Susu's presence in Hangzhou not only

promotes and protects beautiful love but also promotes the creation of the city's animation characteristics and culture to a certain extent.



Figure 98 The female character is given an official identity by the local government

Source: <https://china.com.cn>

[Accessed on March 20th, 2024]

The No. 51 loop bus around West Lake is covered with animated cartoon images, allowing tourists to enjoy the scenic spots of West Lake together with "Tushan Susu". This Susu-themed bus is not only designed to look like a fox demon theme from the outside but also filled with various magical fox demon elements inside the cabin, completely breaking through the "dimension wall" of animation.

Since 2021, this work has embarked on a journey to explore the Chinese traditional culture. It has traveled across five provinces in China, diving deep into six historical cities such as Hangzhou, Suzhou, and Nanjing, tracing the roots of Chinese classical love stories. It has witnessed the purity and beauty of countless love stories, perfectly concluding this cultural journey. "Fox Fairy Xiao Hongniang" has not only enriched its story content in this unique way but also allowed audiences to appreciate the profoundness of Chinese culture and the eternal charm of love while enjoying the fun of animation.

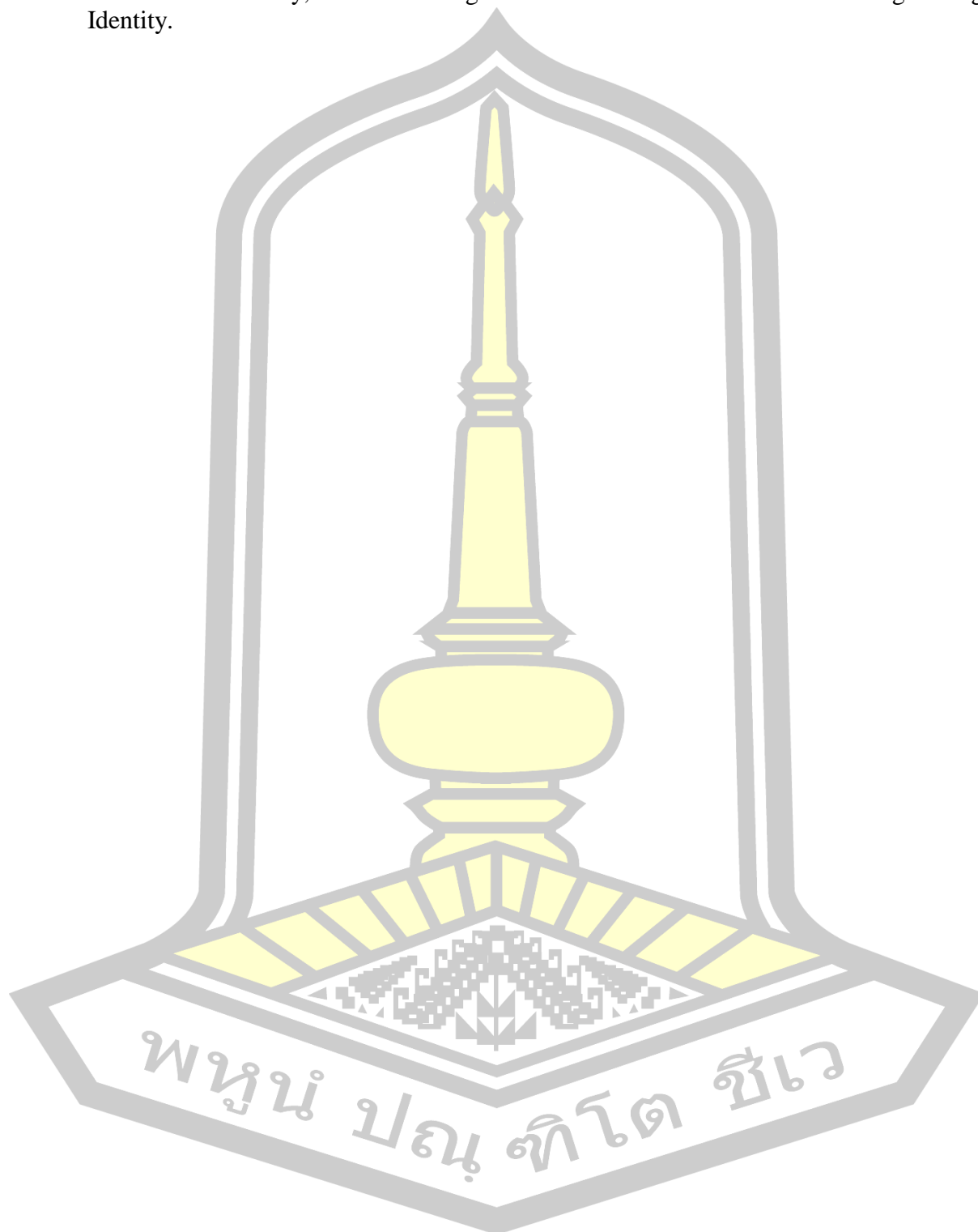
The Fox Girl in the media has attracted much attention in its unique way. Not only does it display feminine qualities, but it also incorporates mystical and supernatural elements, forming an aesthetic pursuit that is traditional and innovative. By portraying the Fox Girl character, the media has reinterpreted and expanded her Gender Character, thus breaking the stereotypical image of the conventional Female Character. As a cultural symbol, the identity of the Fox Girl reflects the values and social concepts of different cultures, which not only enriches the media content but also promotes, to a certain extent, the society's re-conceptualization and evaluation of the image of women.

1.2 Uniqueness of the Fox Girl

In Chinese animated films, fox girls are usually depicted as female characters "transformed from foxes into humans," and their personality traits are uniquely charming.

The Reform and Opening-up of the Chinese Economy have played an essential role in promoting the development of the Chinese animation film industry. The integration of tradition and modernity, as well as the attractiveness of the storyline and other reasons, have led to the diversification of Fox Girl characters in Chinese animation films. They can be good and wise or evil and destructive. This

diversity makes the fox-demon character carry more symbolic meanings regarding Gender and Identity, thus becoming a suitable carrier for Gender and Negotiating Identity.



Specifically, the Researcher chose the "Fox Girl" Character as the unit of study for four main criteria of "Uniqueness":

Unique Cultural Identity. The "fox" image is deeply rooted in cultural traditions. For example, traditional Chinese culture has the "auspicious fox culture" associated with totem worship and the "demonic fox culture" rooted in folklore and religion. They play a significant role in Chinese mythology, legends, literary works, and film and television productions, often portrayed as mystical creatures with the power to transform and the ability to take on human form, particularly as beautiful female figures. Through their stories, people can gain a deeper understanding of China's multifaceted cultural dimensions, thereby influencing people's perceptions, consciousness, and sense of identity. Therefore, when compared horizontally with other female characters of the "demon" identity, such as dragons, snakes, cats, etc., the fox girl stands slightly ahead regarding cultural influence, historical status, and narrative richness.

Prominent Gender Identity. The character of the fox spirit is most prominently manifested as a female image. According to records in "Xuan Zhong Ji," foxes can transform their gender at will during their cultivation process, but their "spirituality" in culture seems more socially defined as female. This may be because the beauty and charm of the fox spirit after transformation are more easily captivating, thereby shaping the stereotype that fox spirits are predominantly female. According to statistics⁷³, among Chinese animated films, there are eight female fox girls and one male fox spirit (excluding animal characters with the appearance and characteristics of biological foxes) appearing in six films. Their narrative texts are based on Chinese mythology themes, prominently showcasing the diversity and complexity of gender roles, gender relations, and gender systems.

Extensive popular support. The "fox demons" theme boasts many creative materials and vast popular support. As an essential component of the "fox demon" theme, fox girls are deeply loved. It can be said that while audiences may never have seen a real biological fox in person, they have been too familiar with the image of "fox demons" since ancient times. Presented in a visual, virtual, adorable, and youthful state, they possess complex human nature and emotions while being imbued with imagination and romance. Compared vertically with other non-demonic female characters, such as princesses, mothers, children, etc., it is difficult for them to simultaneously achieve the flexibility and freedom of fox girl characters in terms of fantasy, inclusiveness, and emotional depth. This extensive mass appeal enables the fox girl image to resonate better with audiences in animated films, as its portrayal and presentation align with the aesthetic preferences of modern viewers.

Character Evolution and Resonance with the times: Changes of the times not only affect the social structure and ideological concepts but also directly affect individual role positioning and behavioral patterns, and the promotion of character change needs to take social and cultural factors into account and reach consensus through communication and negotiation. The evolution of the image of "Fox Girl" from submissive to rebellious maps the social progress and the change of Gender

⁷³ Statistical basis: edited by Prof Sun Lijun, Director of China Animation Research Institute, Beijing Film Academy, 2018, A History of Chinese Animation, Beijing: The Commercial Press

concepts, which is of great significance to the promotion of Gender equality, and at the same time, injects new vitality into film and television creation, showing the profound connotation of the close connection between Role Change and Social Culture.

In summary, by integrating the four factors of cultural dimension, social dimension, target audience, and historical background, researchers have chosen Fox Girls as a representative to conduct a unit analysis study on the negotiation identity and gender among female characters in Chinese animated films against the context of China's economic reform and opening-up.

Part II. "Fox Girl": Historical and Cultural Traceability

Foxes are natural creatures, but they have been attached with many special symbolic meanings in ancient Chinese culture. From the Chinese fox culture, unique and charming fox girl character images have been bred, carrying rich and diversified cultural representations and symbolic meanings, creating the complexity and plasticity of fox girl characters, which not only show women's beauty, intelligence and independent spirit but also reflect the artists' deep reflection and criticism of women's status, qualities and concepts. These images of fox women not only show women's beauty, wisdom, and independent spirit but also reflect the artist's deep reflection and criticism of women's status, characteristics, and concepts.

2.1 Comparison of the Cultural Identity of "Fox" in China and Japan

There is no shortage of legendary tales and other Cultural Products about fox demons in Chinese and Japanese culture. According to the German Hans.Jörg.uther, On the Legend of the Fox and its Study, "Foxes, as animals of gods or demons, also appear in the fairy tales of China, Korea and Japan. The behavioral and psychological characteristics of such animals are rooted in the belief that foxes can turn into an attractive woman." (Fan Zhengsheng, 2003, p17-19) It can be seen that the feminization tendency of foxes is universal in the East Asian Cultural Circle.

Most current comparative studies of Chinese and Japanese fox girls are confined to the image of the fox demon or the field of Film and Animation. The Researcher interprets the flux of the image of the fox demon in China and Japan and its Cultural Connotations from the perspective of Gender to reveal the traditional view of femininity in China and Japan as well as their Cultural Identities.

1) Feminisation and Demonisation of the Chinese Fox Image

Fox Culture is a very special Cultural Phenomenon in the history of Chinese Society. The fox originated in China as a primitive totemic belief. The famous Chinese Cultural Historian Cen Jiawu (1986) wrote "The History of Totemic Art", in which he mentioned that ancient clans in China worshipped white foxes, bears, tigers, and other animals as the totems and idols of their clans (p.113-120) This spirit fox, which existed in the impression of the ancient primitive people, is the starting point of all Fox Culture.

In Chinese classical literature, the fox, as a classic literary figure, has undergone significant transformation in its symbolic meaning over the course of literary development, evolving from an initial animal imagery to a female demon that represents seduction and vice.

As early as the period of totem worship, the image of the fox spirit appeared. The first record of the fox in China is described in the Classic of The "Classic of

Mountains and Seas-The Classic of the Southern Mountains" : "On the mountain of Qingqiu, there are beasts, whose shape are like foxes but with nine tails, and their sounds like that of a baby. They can eat people but the foxes' meat can protect people from evil influences." (Translated by Fang Tao, 2009, p. 5)

The nine-tailed fox stands out from its ordinary brethren with its unique characteristics of possessing multiple tails or wings, lending it an even more formidable and uncanny appearance. The frequent sightings of foxes in people's daily lives and work and their enigmatic movements and suspicious dispositions fostered a profound sense of mystery around these creatures. This mystery, in turn, propelled foxes into the realm of mystical animals, ultimately giving birth to the concept of the nine-tailed fox as a "deity."

This rare nine-tailed fox was once revered as a "creature of good fortune," akin to dragons, phoenixes, turtles, and unicorns (Li Jianguo, 2000), embodying the symbol of auspiciousness that commanded widespread respect and devotion from the public. By the Han Dynasty, the esteemed status of the fox spirit was further underscored as the nine-tailed fox was depicted alongside toads, white rabbits, and three-legged crows, etched beside the Western Queen Mother of the West as a symbol of good luck and prosperity. This placement underscores the exceptional position held by the fox spirit in ancient Chinese mythology.

Li Binghai (1995) points out that "the fox image in pre-Qin literature is either a portrayal of the male spouse, or an embodiment of the monarch and power, or a support for the emotion of homesickness." The fox represents a monarch with status, and those who hold power in pre-Qin are basically men, so the fox image appears positively. This is consistent with the direction of history. Therefore, the literature before the Qin and Han dynasties also held a positive attitude towards the fox spirit;. However, some cultural works write about the fox's cunning and suspicion, and there is no depiction of its confusion and harm to people. After the Qin and Han dynasties, fox imagery gradually began to be demonized, but at this time, the image of the fox was not limited to women; the image of male foxes also appeared occasionally.

The idea of foxes transforming people, especially women, became popular during the Wei and Jin Dynasties. It is said in the Volume 12 of the book "Anecdotes About Spirits and Immortals" that "A thousand-year-old fox can turn into a beautiful girl. (translated by Ma Yinqin, Zhou Guangrong,2009, P219)." The femininity of the fox was made clear, and the "fox spirit," which confused people with the image of a beautiful woman, began to appear widely in literary works.

In the Tang and Song dynasties, the fox demon feminization tendency was more obvious, and it gradually formed a representative "fox spirit" image. During the Yuan, Ming, and Qing Dynasties, the image of foxes and demons appeared more widely in literary creations. The Taiping Guangji⁷⁴ recorded a variety of demonized foxes of both sexes, showing the regionalization, religiosity, and feminization of the fox image, which had a profound impact on the development of the fox girl afterward. Su Daji, who compelled the king in "The Feudal Reign of the Gods", is a representative of the demonised identity of the fox. Fox became the main character of

⁷⁴ The Taiping Guangji: It is the first collection of documentary novels in ancient Chinese. The book has the most significant proportion of stories about gods and monsters, which belong to stories of a strange nature and represent the mainstream of Chinese literary stories.

the story with the image of demonized beauty. The book *Strange Tales from the Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio*⁷⁵, written by Pu Songling, is a representative of this kind. The "fox girls" in this book are not only clever but also have comparable kindness and benevolence. Many of them are full of talent, and their senses of humor are far better than those of men (Ma Ruifang, 1995).

To this day, although it is difficult for folklore to conceive new folklore concepts of foxes and demons, we can still see the foxes and demons in all kinds of creative works. The critical point is that fox girls are not unique individuals in a group of demons like the Sun Wukong⁷⁶ (Monkey King) or Bai Suzhen⁷⁷ (Lady White Snake), but they existed as a group in the fantasy world of ancient China. From the Xia Dynasty to the Qing Dynasty, the breadth of the fox-demon legend and its rich cultural heritage that can accommodate a wide variety of positions undoubtedly provide creators with a broad and free space to play. This is something that other spirits in the ancient Chinese fantasy world, be they dragons and phoenixes or monkeys and white snakes, can hardly match.

In the case of Chinese animated films, whether it's the three symbolic, stylized fox spirits (the old fox spirit, the beautiful fox spirit, and the male fox spirit) in the *Legend of Sealed Book*; the dual-faced fox spirit in *White Snake*, who possesses both a fox and a girl's face; or Xiao Jiu in the *Legend of Deification*, where a human girl is bound together with the fox spirit's essence... to some extent, artists continually and consistently imbue the fox demon characters with new meanings, endowing them with more modern feminine qualities.

2) Overview of Japanese Fox Spirit (Kitsune) Culture

In Japanese folklore, the image of the fox is very common. Fox legends are closely linked to Japan's "Inari faith"⁷⁸. Because foxes prey on field mice, protecting crops, they are worshipped in Japan as messengers of the agricultural deity. Inari shrines, dedicated to the fox deity, are quite prevalent across Japan. The fox deity, also known as O-Inari, is worshipped by people praying for abundant harvests.

As various cultures interacted with each other, people added many characteristics to the image of the fox, and the image of the fox became increasingly complex. In Zuo Xie Song's "Hundred Monsters Scrolls," foxes are broadly classified into two types: wild foxes (やこ) and good foxes (ぜんこ). The wild fox is a fox demon that people dislike because it knows spells, can bring disaster to people, and is

⁷⁵ the *Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio*: a collection of classical Chinese stories written by Pu Songling during the Qing Dynasty, featuring supernatural tales and allegories that reflect societal issues and human nature.

⁷⁶ Sun Wukong: The character from the Chinese classical novel 'Journey to the West', Sun Wukong, is naturally intelligent, lively, loyal, and has a strong sense of justice. In folk culture, he represents wit and bravery.

⁷⁷ Bai Suzhen: The female protagonist in the Chinese folk tale 'Legend of the White Snake'.

⁷⁸ Inari faith: Inari faith holds a significant place in Japanese social and folk culture and is a representative folk belief. The earliest records are associated with a story of a rice cake transforming into a white bird and flying to the mountaintop. Since the medieval period, foxes have been regarded as messengers of the Inari deity, and Inari faith gradually spread across the nation, symbolizing wealth and being revered by the business community.

sometimes seen as the embodiment of lust and evil. However, there are wild foxes that do not harm humans, and there are good foxes with bad behavior, with the nine-tailed fox as their final form of cultivation.

The earliest record of a fox demon in Japan is found in the *Nihon Reiyoshi* (The Record of the Spirits of Japan) in the 13th year of the Hirohito era (822), which contains the story of a man who takes a fox girl as his wife in the second volume of the first book. During the Edo period, the artist Sekien Toriyama completed a series of works, *Gazu Hyakki Yagyo* (The Illustrated Night Parade of a Hundred Demons), in the fifth year of the Yasunaga period (1776), which recorded the phenomenon of fox fire⁷⁹, a manifestation of the fox demon's illusions. In the twelfth year of Tenpo (1841), a collection of Japanese strange stories signed by Momoyaman Ebun Hyakuran contains an account of Katsushiba in its third volume. Matsushita is a famous Japanese fox girl who is said to be the mother of the great yin and yang master Abe Haruaki. A collection of talks written in the Heian period of Japan, the *Imago no Monogatari* Collection, contains several legendary stories of fox demons who charmed people but failed to do so. (Wang Yaqian, 2021, p52-53)

In Japanese cultural legends, the image of fox demons is also ubiquitous, including foxes that take human form and those that retain their original biological appearance. In Japanese classical literature, male foxes only exist in stories featuring naturally male foxes and in a handful of stories where they "transform into humans." As the great demon in traditional Japanese mythology, Tamamo-no-Mae is recorded as being able to appear both male and female. It is said that when Tamamo-no-Mae seduced Emperor Toba, she appeared as a seductive woman. Still, after Abe, no Seimei uncovered her true identity, she transformed into a man and fought him, ultimately losing and becoming a Stone of Death.

The fox stories related to the Inari faith in Japan often involve two themes: "foxes repaying favors" and "fox women becoming wives." Fox stories generally center around female images, and Japanese classical literature is replete with the tendency of negative culture, so foxes are often presented in female (i.e., negative) images. For example, the two most well-known fox demon legends in Japan, Tamamo-no-Mae, and Abe no Seimei's mother, Kuzuha, are presented in the image of beautiful young women.

Thus, it is evident that foxes hold a significant place in Japanese culture, especially in yokai (supernatural being) culture. Although animated films like *My Neighbor Totoro* do not feature fox characters, the elements of foxes frequently appear, reflecting the profound influence of foxes in Japanese culture. Anthropomorphized fox characters are widely present in many Japanese animations, such as *Inuyasha*, *Natsume's Book of Friends*, and *Koi Iroha*. These characters reflect people's affection for and humanization of foxes. This worship and portrayal of foxes

⁷⁹ Fox Fire: Fox fire was initially a phenomenon of burning gas in the air emitted from the mouth of a fox in the early legends of demons and monsters. Foxfire was originally a phenomenon in early demonic legends in which a gas exhaled from the mouth of a fox burned in the air and was later passed down as a means for demonic foxes to attack their opponents and make them hallucinate.

illustrate the emotional shift in Japanese attitudes towards foxes and the Inari deity, fulfilling the diverse needs of the public in an entertainment-oriented society.

2.2 Gender Perspectives Reflected on the Role of the Fox Demon in China and Japan

In China, the image of the fox demon is deeply rooted in people's hearts and has become an essential character in folklore. In Japan, foxes are honored and worshipped as messengers of the Inari faith and have become unique symbols in Japanese culture. Under the complex interweaving of culture, history, and society, both Chinese and Japanese fox girl characters have had a profound impact on the concepts of their respective societies, and the Gender concepts they reflect are multi-layered and multi-dimensional.

1) Gender Relations of Male superiority and female inferiority

China and Japan share similar historical and cultural backgrounds, and women in both countries have experienced oppression under feudal patriarchy. The oppression and control exerted by men over women reflect the similarities in the patriarchal societies of traditional China and Japan. Under the gender hierarchy of Male superiority and female inferiority, women's status declined, and they became mere reproductive tools, subordinate to men. Women were placed in roles of serving men and bearing and raising heirs, and these roles became the primary moral standards for women. In this context of life and cultural tradition, women in China and Japan, both part of the East Asian cultural sphere, experienced similar changes in social status. Cases like Daji and Fujiwara no Tokuko, who were blamed for political turmoil due to their favored status, directly challenged the male-dominated order and rebelled against mainstream male ideologies.

The physiological attribute of foxes being prolific and having many offspring gives the fox imagery characteristics of fertility worship. Foxes are seen as passionate, and when they transform into human form, they retain these traits. The precedent of equating foxes with prostitutes deepened the perception of foxes as symbols of lust. With the deepening of Confucian thought, sexual restraint became the mainstream. Men projected their sexual fantasies onto women, attributing "fox spirit" characteristics to women who had no social voice, satisfying themselves while simultaneously remaining wary of women for being supposedly dangerous "fox spirits." The gradual feminization of the fox image is, in fact, a distortion and transformation of the female image by a male-dominated social culture. Men, while indulging in their desires for women, projected their lust onto demonized women to maintain the tradition of abstinence. This is an inevitable product of the male supremacy ideology in patriarchal societies.

2) Cultural Differences in Gender Construction

There are commonalities in the personification of fox girl images between China and Japan, as they are endowed with human emotions and intelligence and become pivotal characters in stories. However, notable differences emerge in shaping gender roles between the two countries.

In Chinese fox spirit stories, foxes are predominantly portrayed as females who often use their beauty to seduce men and drain their life essence, showcasing the stereotyping and bias against female characters from a male perspective. These tales tend to be male-centric, emphasizing the male protagonists' victimization and eventual

triumph, reflecting the suppression of female power and autonomy in a patriarchal society.

Japanese fox spirit tales, on the other hand, present a different gender perspective. While some fox spirits also act mischievously, some are imbued with divinity and revered as gods in Japanese culture. In the storytelling, Japanese fox spirit tales often unfold from a female perspective, emphasizing the fox's role as a mother and female character, such as in narratives of separation between fox mothers and their children, manifesting concern and respect for female roles. While these stories also embody the national psyche of good triumphing over evil, they more prominently showcase the strength and independence of female power, providing psychological compensation and solace for women. This reflects a more tolerant and accepting attitude towards female characters in Japanese culture.

Part III: Three "Fox Girl" Characters and Their Textual Interpretations⁸⁰ in the Context of Reform and Opening-up of the Chinese Economy

The Female Character in Chinese Animated Films was once categorized as a fine art educational film, assuming the function of propaganda to the people and the responsibility of educating children and teenagers, especially before the Reform and Opening-up of the Chinese Economy, the Female Character has constantly been belittled, in a supporting or secondary position, and even though the Reform and Opening-up of the Chinese Economy have brought about the collision of East and West, the films with the Male Character as the main body of the narration remain the mainstream of the general public.

The Gender temperament of the Female Character has been changing with the times and has gradually reflected the cultural values and spirit of the times that the creators want to convey. The character of "Fox Girl" tries to establish a spiritual bond with the consumers by integrating cultural identity and gender roles.

The dramatic theorist and educator George P. Baker (2004) in "Dramatic Technique" divides the characters in plays into three types: first, Conceptual Characters, who serve as mouthpieces for particular viewpoints and are not given detailed personalities by the creators; second, Stereotypical Characters, who have distinct and easily recognizable traits even to the less observant audience members; and third, Individualized Characters, also known as round characters, who are often multi-faceted and complex, with their personalities carefully crafted by the creators to highlight their charm. (p.83)

Based on this, the researcher divides the "fox girl" characters in Chinese animated films into three types and stages: 1) the Representative of Conceptualized Character, "Princess 'Yu Mian' (Beautiful-faced Fox Spirit) " who appeared before

⁸⁰ Textual Interpretations: Textual interpretation refers to the process of transforming the original text into stage or screen images that can be directly perceived and understood by the audience through the creation and performance of directors, actors, or other artists.

the Reform and Opening-up of the Chinese Economy; 2) the Representative of Typed Character, "Mei'er," who appeared at the beginning of the Reform and Opening-up of the Chinese Economy; 3) the Representative of Personalized Character, "Baoqingfang Proprietor," who appeared after the Reform and Opening-up of the Chinese Economy. When these three figures are interpreted through different texts, the variances in their Elements of Meaning Expression shape how people attribute contemporary connotations to the signifier "woman."

3.1 Conceptualized Character: the Princess 'Yu Mian' (Beautiful-faced Fox Spirit) - 1940s

Princess 'Yu Mian', the first "Fox Girl" character in Chinese animated cinema, hails from "The Princess Iron Fan," China's and Asia's first animated feature film released in 1941. She is the sole "Fox Girl" figure to emerge before China's economic reform and opening-up. Based on the classical Chinese mythological novel "Journey to the West," specifically the tale of "Monkey King Borrows the Bamboo Fan Three Times," the film highlights the indomitable spirit of Tang Sanzang and his disciples as they bravely battle against Bull Demon King and Princess Iron Fan, ultimately emerging victorious on their journey to the West to retrieve Buddhist sutras.



Figure 99 The Wan Brothers, the directors of Princess Iron Fan

Source: "Havoc in Heaven: A Treasure of Chinese Animated Film Art" (2015), P:6.

Wan Laiming (middle), Wan Guchan (right), and Wan Chaochen (left), the directors of *Princess Iron Fan*, discussed the production of animated films. The film featured novel designs, and the character modeling absorbed the characteristics of Chinese opera art modeling, endowing each important character with distinctive personality traits and thereby imbuing it with rich ethnic characteristics.

The Princess 'Yu Mian' is a conceptualized character appearing only on the movie screen as a marginalized villain. She only appears in some specific situations, and the characterization of the role is vague, more to set off the strength of the righteous side or contrast with the protagonist. She cannot dominate or advance the changes and development of the plot, but through the identity of the Gender

Character, it can help the audience quickly identify this female, constructing a Female Character of the "Fox Spirit" Symbol.

1) The Dual Identity of Concubine and Fox Spirit

In the context of the traditional solid family ethics of the family of King Bull, why did the family choose the "fox spirit" as a third-party concubine? As we have learned from the previous section, it concerns the image of the fox demon presented in Chinese fox culture. Princess Jade Face is both a fox demon and a concubine, and the combination of these two identities seems arbitrary but has a certain rationality and inevitability.

From the name, it can be seen that Princess Jade Face has a pretty face, with large eyes, a high nose, and three-dimensional features that are often considered the hallmarks of female beauty. The enchanting figure suggests the softness and voluptuous beauty of the female body, a curvaceous beauty that is usually extremely attractive in the eyes of men. Combined with exquisite hairstyles, makeup, and gorgeous clothes, these elements reinforce the female "Body," she is highly unsuitable for wives but highly suitable for concubines, and this kind of existence perfectly resolves the moral dilemma between lustful pleasures and family ethics, and finds a reasonable excuse for men's lustfulness and indulgence.



Figure 100 The Princess 'Yu Mian'

Source: <https://image.baidu.com/>

[Accessed on December 30th, 2022]

She captivates audiences with her singing and dancing prowess on screen, adeptly revealing vulnerabilities that make her the epitome of male desire. In stark contrast to Princess Iron Fan, a paragon of virtue, motherhood, kindness, and charity, Princess Jade Face embodies the antithesis of traditional feminine ideals, exquisitely portraying the essence of a "concubine" in traditional society. This portrayal resonates deeply with the contemporary Chinese female audience's conventional aesthetic appreciation of the "concubine" archetype.

2) Depiction of the Traditional "Fox Girl" Character

Under the lens, the Bull Demon King greatly favors Princess 'Yu Mian'. While coexisting with his legitimate wife, she contrasts sharply with her. In her triangular relationship with the Bull Demon King and Princess Iron Fan, she demonstrates an emotional relationship of vying for a favor, the gender power relationship of "male superiority and female inferiority," and the production relationship of the "wife and

concubine" family structure, which constitutes the morphological perfection of gender relations from the male perspective. Her intersection with Tang Sanzang and his disciples merely showcases the male-dominated power in the hostile relationship and displays the feminine quality embodied in the "fox spirit" archetype.



Figure 101 Gender Relations of Princess 'Yu Mian' to Other Characters

Source: <https://image.baidu.com/>
[Accessed on December 30th, 2023]



Table 1 The characteristics of traditional female characters of "Fox Girls"

Traditional	Characteristics of the fox girl female characters
Physical description	With slender brows, charming eyes, and delicate features, she exudes a captivating charm. Her angular face and fashionable style make her a man's dream lover.
Personality traits	Observant and adaptive, she uses sadness to win sympathy and shows fragility to trigger protection from dominant men.
Behavior	Using her charm, she irresistibly attracts men through flirtatious eyes and smiles. She leverages male psychology, making them give willingly. She's free-spirited yet graceful in social settings.
Dialogue design	"Does my makeup look good?" "You should go back to the banana cave to avoid that shameless woman constantly sending people to invite you and bully me! (Crying)" "Drink less tonight, or you'll be too sleepy to wake up."
Femininity	Charming, Seductive, Adaptive, Emotional, Free-spirited, Graceful.

This animated movie is intended for an audience of all ages and has spiritual values such as defiance, self-redemption, and salvation of all beings. Although the subtitle at the movie's beginning indicates that the work is "made to cultivate children's mentality," this is only a means to make it easier to distribute and screen under the particular circumstances at that time. This shows that the director's creative concept is based on mainstream ideology.

At the same time, it reflects that the social public's stereotypical and traditional ideas about women are still alive and well.

Movies were still a novelty in China then, and their targeting of an all-ages audience attracted many viewers who entered theaters with a curious eye. In the social environment of the time, theaters had already become a place for disseminating new ideas. Many avant-garde young people became the mainstream audience, and the character of the fox spirit was undoubtedly the object of their satire.

3.2 Typed Character - Mei'er (Pink fox spirit) -1980s

Mei'er originates from the Chinese animated film "The Legend of Sealed Book" (1983), which is adapted from select chapters of "Ping Yao Zhuan," China's first full-length novel of gods and demons. The film aims to convey the theme of "punishing evil and promoting good"⁸¹, narrating the story of the young protagonist "Dan Sheng"⁸² and his master, Yuan Gong, as they engage in a wits and bravery battle

⁸¹ punishing evil and promoting good : In Confucian culture, "punishing evil and promoting virtue" is regarded as a crucial principle for social governance and personal cultivation. Confucianism emphasizes guiding people towards goodness through education, ritual law, and moral restraint, while at the same time imposing severe punishments for evil deeds.

⁸² Dan Sheng : The protagonist of "Tian Shu Qi Tan" (The Legend of Secret Book) is Dan Sheng, the disciple of the immortal Yuan Gong, who was born from a swan egg and imbued with the divine secrets of "Tian Shu" (Book of Heaven), granting him immense magical powers. Innocent, wise, and brave, he engages in a battle of wits and courage against three cunning fox fairies.

against three fox fairies, all while striving to bring prosperity to the people⁸³. Among these three fox fairies, who have devoured immortal pills to take human form, the mother figure is treacherous and cunning, the girl loves to flaunt her beauty, and the younger brother is insatiably greedy. Portrayed as the antagonists, these three fox fairies serve as pivotal characters threading through the entire narrative.



Figure 102 Documentary - "Witness" - Interview with Director Qian Yunda

Source: <https://v.qq.com/>, Video screenshots

[Accessed on May 17th, 2024]

Mr. Qian Yunda, the director, describes the character styling in this way: we will create such a character that has flaws in the performance, but has characteristics and character. The character modeling in "Tianshu Qiantan" is to absorb all kinds of art, toys, door paintings, New Year's paintings, comic strips and other art styles of painting, each character has its own characteristics, the magistrate has the appearance of the magistrate, the prefect has the appearance of the prefect, the little emperor, the land bailiffs are not the same, not the same as the other people, different from themselves! . This is also our attitude and spirit at that time, do not repeat others, do not repeat themselves.

Mei'er, being one of the three fox fairies, represents a stereotyped character. Overall, the creators have placed the fox fairy characters within the archetype of "seductive and evil," yet each of the three fox fairies possesses distinct traits: greed for wealth, obsession with beauty, and insatiable appetite. Evolving from the traditional image of the "fox spirit," they respectively embody three primary human desires: wealth, beauty, and food, thereby infusing more "humanity" into reflection and constructing a humanized symbol of the "fox fairy."

⁸³ They are sourced from the director's printed manuscript of "The Legend of Sealed Book" from the collection of Kongzang Animation Archive, 2021.



Figure 103 Mei'er

Source: <https://www.bilibili.com/video/>, Video screenshots

[Accessed on December 30th, 2023]

The Pink Fox Spirit Mei'er is designed as an incredibly enchanting young woman adorned with an elaborate hairdo. Her eyes resemble a phoenix's, her lips are like cherry blossoms, and her face is shaped like a melon seed. Two large blushes adorn her cheeks, making her resemble a Peking Opera flower role. As she elegantly raises her orchid fingers, twists her slender waist like a willow branch, and postures coquettishly with exaggerated gestures, she exudes a unique charm that captivates all.

1) The Dichotomous Identities of "Beauty and Ugliness" and "Good and Evil"

From the two storylines of "main plot and subplot," the conflict between the male protagonist, Eggy, and the fox spirit represents the main plot, while the class conflict serves as the subplot. In the main plot, the male protagonist symbolizes kindness and justice; the fox spirit embodies evil, a beautiful yet cunning existence that can transform into human form and possesses human intelligence and emotions. This dichotomy of "beauty and ugliness" and "good and evil" is revealed. Is the true evil the fox spirit? Not really. After some reflection, one can easily see that the true evil lies within the bureaucratic class: jealousy and suspicion among masters and disciples, the magistrate collecting wealth, the perfect lusting after beauty, and the young emperor's indifference. The director uses the identity of the "fox spirit" to connect a hierarchical order from top to bottom, exposing the ugliness of human nature.



Figure 104 Expression of gender relations

Source: <https://www.bilibili.com/video/>

[Accessed on **December 30th**, 2023]

2) The Development of "Fox Girl" Character Traits

The films reflect a sense of social "class." Despite having no merits, they possess a consciousness of rebellion, refusing to accept lowliness and humility.

On one hand, they are pitiful beings lacking a "self." They steal elixirs to gain the identity of "ordinary people" but only know how to deceive others to survive; they do not proactively harm others, yet are manipulated by bureaucrats to fulfill others' desires for power. At the bottom of the power structure, the county magistrate uses the fox girls' help to exploit the people's wealth through magic. The middle layer of power, the provincial governor, monopolizes power through marriage; the young emperor possesses supreme power.

On the other hand, they are "women of status" in the eyes of the "others." They are adept at exploiting human weaknesses in emotional relationships, discovering loopholes in the system to seek and create a theory for their victory, and placing themselves above gods and deities. Their identity transforms and gradually develops: from occupying a temple as a fox goddess to being worshipped in folk beliefs as the Taoist Nine Heavens Lady to gaining supreme discourse power in the palace as the national teacher. They thrive in turbulent times, handle situations quickly, and rise step by step from local to central control, becoming women with authority. It can be said that this is an attempt to surpass men psychologically, reflecting "the rebelliousness generated by women's oppression by men for thousands of years," indirectly showing the awakening of female consciousness.

Table 2 The Characteristics of the developing "fox girl" type of female characters

Transitional	Characteristics of the fox girl female characters
Physical description	Inspired by the delicate makeup of Peking Opera's dan roles, the fox girl has captivating beauty, fair skin, a graceful figure, and enchanting eyes. Her sweet, gentle voice can melt hearts.
Personality traits	Cunning and versatile, she is adept at reading people's minds. She manipulates others with her beauty and wisdom, acting decisively and using any means necessary to achieve her goals.
Behavior	Filled with temptation, she lures greedy fools with her beauty, manipulates them with words, and creates illusions to confuse them, leaving them unable to discern the truth.
Dialogue design	"Little master, please open the door!" "He wants money later, secret." "What if Dansheng comes?" "We see emperor, you stay."
Femininity	Seductive, Cunning, Temptation



Figure 105 Gender rights relations

Source: <https://www.bilibili.com/video/>

[Accessed on December 30th, 2023]

At the beginning of the Reform and Opening-up of the Chinese Economy, when the turmoil of the Cultural Revolution had just subsided, animation in China began to recover, and a second period of prosperity was about to start with the "blossoming of a hundred flowers." Under such a social background, the animated movie "The Legend of Sealed Book" reflected reality and satirized the corrupt old society in a form suitable for both young and old. Its bold and innovative steps could be said to have surpassed that era. This animated movie is a group portrait of feudal society, using the director's requirement of "strange, interesting and beautiful" to tell a

story from the heavenly court to the court, to the government offices, and then to the people, including monks, officials, commoners, and other people, amid the declining social environment, more and more highlights the world of people.

3.3 Personalized Character: Baoqingfang Proprietor (Modern Fox Spirit) - the 21st Century

The Baoqingfang Proprietor from the 2019 film "White Snake" and its sequel "Green Snake", is a dual-faced white fox girl who is both cute and sexy. This character is primarily inspired by Xin Shisiniang from Pu Songling's "Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio", embodying Confucian, Buddhist, and Taoist cultures as a millennia-old fox spirit. The eerie and playful dual-faced Baoqingfang Proprietor appears only three times in the film. Still, her scenes are significant and plentiful, driving the plot forward and seamlessly integrating the classical myth of the "Legend of the White Snake." She appears twice as a critical turning point character, and once in a post-credits scene, she wraps up the story and sets up the sequel.



Figure 106 The Director talks about the Female Characters in the Film

Source: <https://www.ixigua.com/>, "Film and Television Hall of Fame" column

Director Huang Jiakang once candidly shared that when crafting the first installment of "White Snake," the team was particularly fond of the fox spirit character. Initially, there weren't many preconceived notions behind designing Baoqingfang Proprietor; the intention was to create an entertaining and engaging character without deliberately aiming to portray a specific archetype. To everyone's surprise, the character resonated deeply with audiences. In fact, not only the viewers but also the creative team cherished her deeply. As an independently created character within the film, she served multiple purposes and inspired us to envision countless possibilities for her development. Naturally, we also looked forward to receiving more audience feedback to refine her further. In the sequel, we expanded her role, and the results speak for themselves. The audience has embraced Baoqingfang Proprietor's personality: independent and formidable, mysterious yet free-spirited, capable of both virtue and vice, relishing in breaking the rules, and unfettered by conventional love-hate narratives.

The Baoqingfang Proprietor is a well-rounded, personalized character, unique among fox girls. Her dual faces—youthful and stern—shift seamlessly, creating a

complex character with a rich inner world and dynamic emotional changes. This multifaceted fox girl image aligns with modern viewers' aesthetic tastes and gender expectations. By reflecting more on "female" consciousness, the fox girl symbol is reconstructed once again.



Figure 107 The Baoqingfang Proprietor

Source: <https://www.bilibili.com/video/>
[Accessed on **December 30th**, 2023]

The stereotype of the fox spirit as the ultimate seductress is well-established, but the Baoqingfang Proprietor showcases feminine beauty and emphasizes a blend of traditional and modern femininity. Her distinctive fox-shaped eyes and ability to transform her appearance seamlessly from a beautiful and alluring human face to a fearsome monster underscore her captivating visual impact. Clad in a striking red and green ensemble that eschews vulgarity, she exudes an air of leisurely elegance, walking with a graceful sway that suggests a detachment from the mundane and a mastery over her surroundings. Her casual yet intentional attire adds to this impression, making her appear to stand above the fray while having a profound grasp of everything within her realm.

Furthermore, the Baoqingfang Proprietor resonates with modern audiences' aesthetic preferences. For those who admire voices, her voice actress, Zheng Xiaopu, imbues the character with a seductive timbre that reflects her complex, aged soul, possibly thousands of years old, marked by tragedy and hardship. Similarly, for those who appreciate legs, despite her petite stature, the Proprietor boasts long legs that steal the screen, garnering a devoted fan base. She embodies the harmonious coexistence of sexiness and cuteness, a quality she showcases effortlessly.

Crucially, alongside her feminine charm, the Proprietor is also imbued with a formidable strength that serves as the pinnacle of the director's characterization.

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Figure 108 Identity and Authority: The Baoqingfang Proprietor

Source: <https://www.bilibili.com/video/>

[Accessed on **December 30th**, 2023]

The Power of Authority: Despite the lack of exposition on her origins or even her name, in the first installment of "White Snake," she is introduced as the proprietress of Baoqingfang, a forge renowned for crafting mystical artifacts for demons, earning her the title of Baoqingfang Proprietor. From her very first appearance, she wields supreme influence and formidable strength. In the sequel, "Green Snake," she assumes the role of the "Master of Time and Space," freely navigating the demonic realm of Asura and possessing knowledge of others' identities, though she chooses to remain silent. Her pipe, a constant accessory, symbolizes her esteemed status and refined tastes, representing her social standing and discernment.

The Power of Words: Throughout the series, the Baoqingfang Proprietor utters lines that leave a lasting impression on viewers. For instance, "The way of heaven dictates that a loss accompanies every gain; such is the reality, where every acquisition necessitates a sacrifice." "Young one, I too was young, reckless, and indulgent, and yet I carry many regrets to this day." "Young one, I can assist you." Despite being an unconventional fox girl, she adheres to a clear set of principles and boundaries. She is a paradoxical blend of mystery and bravado, worldliness and maturity, detachment and wisdom, where all seemingly contradictory traits coexist harmoniously within her.

2) Features of the Modern "Fox Girl": Baoqingfang Proprietor

Firstly, the modern fox girl embodies the trend towards adult-oriented content in Chinese animated films. The seductive image of the Baoqingfang Proprietor undoubtedly aligns with popular aesthetics, tailored to what contemporary males might consider an "ideal type." In today's society, men often appreciate a certain level of "exposure" to beauty, with stunning backs, alluring figures, long legs, delicate feet, and even fleeting glimpses beneath skirts, sparking boundless imagination among male viewers. Combined with her exquisite features, sweet voice, captivating gaze, graceful figure, light-footed gait, and perpetual flirtatious appearance in a seemingly

slipping miniskirt, she entices every entranced audience member and garners admiration from female viewers alike.

Secondly, she metaphorically represents the masked personas that navigate society. The Baoqingfang Proprietor effortlessly alternates between her fox-like visage and a childlike loli appearance during conversations. Under her fox mask, she stands and walks with a natural fox-like grace, revealing her most authentic self. When transformed into the loli form, her words seem meticulously crafted, thoughtful yet casual, akin to a detached observer wearing a mask. Through her character, the director prompts reflection: in a complex society, survival necessitates an understanding of social norms, often leading individuals to wear masks and conceal their true selves, making their intentions elusive. However, beneath these masks, the authentic self can quickly become lost, raising questions about whether we can rediscover our former selves once the masks are removed—a question that each individual must ponder deeply.

Thirdly, from a gender perspective, despite her seemingly petite and fragile appearance, this fox girl is astonished by her influence over the creatures in her workshop, who willingly work for her. Her little fox companion possesses extraordinary abilities, such as swapping identities and transforming humans into demons and vice versa. This depiction challenges societal stereotypes about women, granting her greater discourse power. Power, it seems, often manifests in gendered forms, though this power structure usually remains invisible when discussing "gender relations."

Lastly, the modern fox girl seamlessly bridges China's mythical world and is continually being reinterpreted. As a guest commentator on a film review program noted, in the interconnected universe of Chinese mythology, there must be a figure who can traverse worlds and hold the overarching narrative in their grasp—a role that the Baoqingfang Proprietor aptly fulfills. Her origins as a fox, specifically a nine-tailed fox, trace back to Chinese mythology, linking her to stories like the "Investiture of the Gods," which can be connected to the tale of Nezha. It's almost as if she possesses an omniscient knowledge spanning centuries. In the sequel to "White Snake," "Green Snake," she instantly recognizes the protagonists and freely navigates the demonic realm of Asura, further solidifying her role as a cosmic connector.



Figure 109 The Modern Characteristics of the Baoqingfang Proprietor

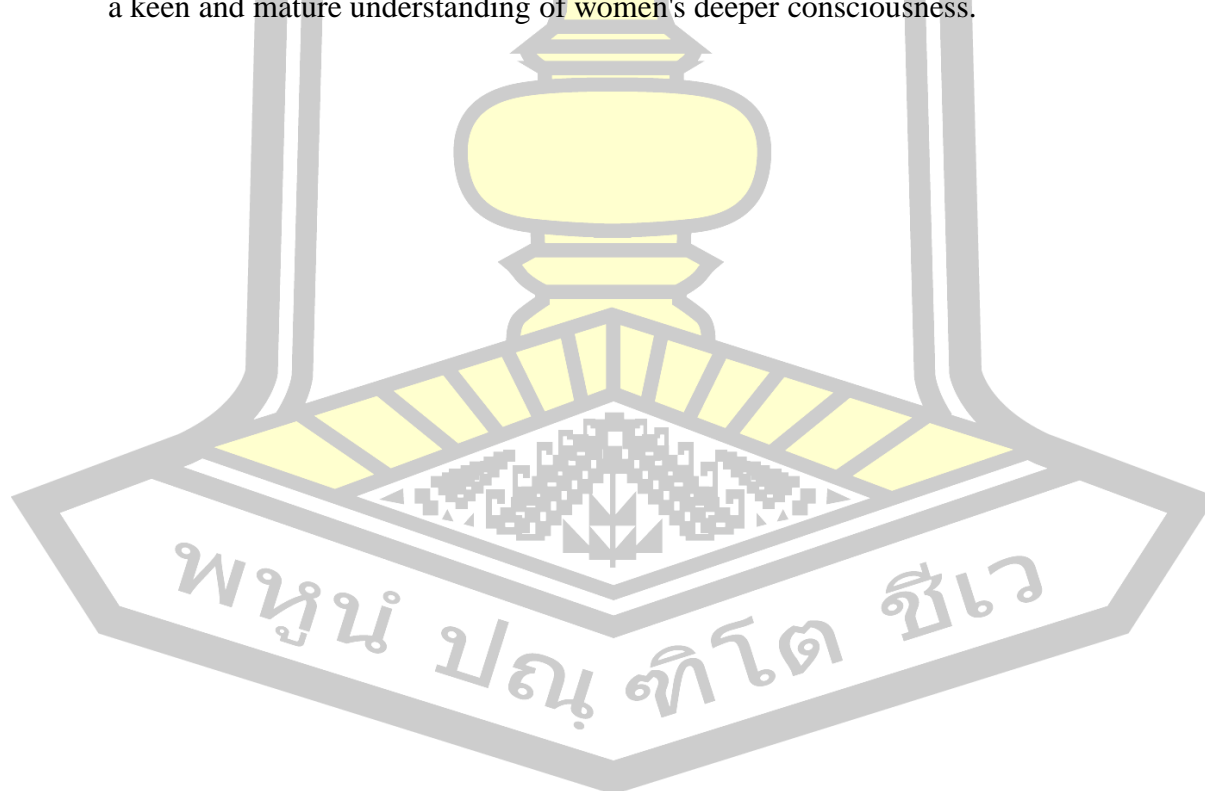
Source: <https://www.bilibili.com/video/>

[Accessed on December 30th, 2023]

Table 3 The Characteristics of contemporary "fox girl" type female characters

Modern	Characteristics of the fox girl female characters
Physical description	Unique features, charming yet mysterious, her style reflects modern elegance.
Personality traits	She possesses an irresistible charm and wit. She is innerly strong, independent, and confident, never relying on others for validation. She is also mischievous and enjoys teasing others with her sharp intelligence and cunning strategies.
Behavior	She's elegant yet daring, resourceful in challenging situations, charming in social settings, yet guarded with her thoughts.
Dialogue design	"Oh, a guest is coming." "It is something you yearn for but cannot put down. It is the idea of all kinds of grievances in your heart, called obsession." "In the world of business, there are gains and losses. Can you give me what I want?"
Femininity	Charismatic, Confident, Intelligent, Independent, Resilient, Dynamic

With the advancement of the times, the awakening of independent female consciousness within social structures is also reflected in films and television dramas. Pursuing female independence and self-improvement, a fundamental right, represents a keen and mature understanding of women's deeper consciousness.



Part IV. The "Fox Girl" in the Field of Social System

All three fox female characters are females in gender construction. It can be said that the difference between contemporary women and modern women in China is that the former are fully socialized while the latter were only in the process of “surfacing” among the whole stages of “surfacing history” and would be pulled back to families by strong inertia. Traditional Chinese women belonged to families and the traditional gender division of labor is “men managing external matters while women taking care of families”. Women were not allowed to step into the social and public areas outside their families. According to Dai Jinhua (2007), if a woman enters the social field, she must wear makeup, like Hua Mulan who masqueraded herself as a man, or like Mu Guiying existing as a special legend. (p4-9)

4.1 Princess 'Yu Mian' (Beautiful-faced Fox Spirit): 'The War of Resistance' and the 'Feudal Family'

The institutional field associated with this fox girl character is the feudal family system, and the relevant historical event is the "War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression." In the 1940s, China was amidst the War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression. During that time, the country was relatively backward and passive in politics, economics, culture, and military affairs. Chinese animated films emerged in such a challenging environment. Wan Laiming, the lead creator of the animated film "The Princess of Iron Fan," once said, "From the moment Chinese animation appeared, it diverged from Western animation in terms of subject matter. In a troubled China, we did not have time for jokes. To awaken our compatriots, we produced over 20 short films reflecting the lives of oppressed and toiling people and inspiring the Chinese to resist Japanese aggression." (1986, p.90-91) It can be seen that the creators prioritized the spiritual value of their works over formal beauty, such as scenery and color.

The animated film "The Princess of Iron Fan" is based on the long mythological novel "Journey to the West," embodying spiritual values such as resistance, self-redemption, and salvation of all beings. Therefore, this animated film was intended for audiences of all ages. Although the film begins with subtitles stating that it is "made to cultivate children's minds," this was merely a tactic to facilitate distribution and screening under the particular circumstances of the time. The Wan brothers initially created "The Princess of Iron Fan" to compare it to the 1937 American animated film "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs." Despite animation technology being an imported concept, Chinese creators demonstrated considerable confidence. Wan Laiming said, "The film's overarching theme of 'calling on the entire nation to unite and defeat the invaders' is still very evident."

From 1937 to 1949, China was in the period of the National War of Resistance and War of Liberation. The wars made the development of Chinese animation very difficult. Under such context, "Wan Bros" (Wan Laiming, Wan Guchan, Wan Chochen, and Wan Dihuan), pioneers of Chinese animation, stood unswervingly to take the camera as a weapon of propaganda and devoted themselves to the movement of National Salvation and Resistance against Japan. Inspired by "Snow White," Disney's first animated feature movie, they were determined to bring traditional

Chinese myths to the stage of global animation, which resulted in the appearance of the first "Fox Girl" character in a Chinese animated film on the screens of cinemas.

The respective "wife and concubine" identities of Princess Iron Fan and Princess 'Yu Mian' are understood as traditional reinforced femininity, reflecting the inner structure and relationship of a feudal family in the old society: polygamy and the treatment of females as inferior to males. At that time, another critical characteristic of Chinese society was private land ownership, reflected in the plot, where Monk Tang and his disciples needed to "borrow road" from Prince Iron Fan when crossing Flaming Mountain. In such a social field, the power relationship remains specific.

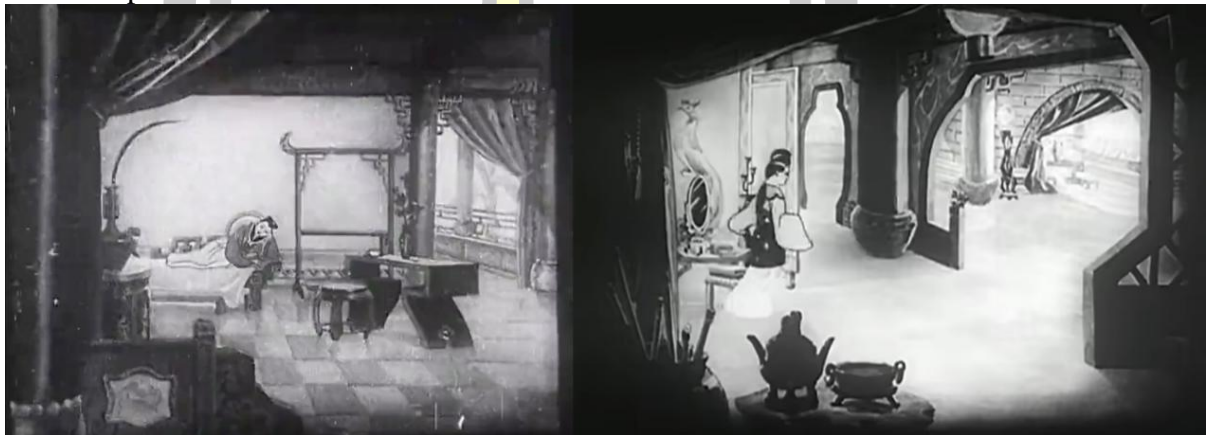


Figure 110 The family (internal): space for the main wife and the concubine

Source: <https://www.bilibili.com/video/>

[Accessed on December 30th, 2023]

4.2 Fox Girl Mei'er: "Period of Change" and "Officialdom"

This fox girl character is intertwined with a significant period of social transformation in China, namely economic reform and opening up. The 1970s to 1980s were a time when progressive intellectuals⁸⁴ were particularly valued. The arena of activity was the "officialdom," both local and central, which can also be understood as the workplace, encompassing units and institutions.

The concept of "danwei" (unit) held special significance in the 1980s. Deeply influenced by the planned economy system and a highly centralized management structure, Danwei's organizational structure and social relations exhibited unique and distinct characteristics. These danwei were often comprehensive entities integrating political, economic, and social functions. Their internal organizational structures were relatively fixed, generally implementing vertical leadership and comprising several functional departments with clear divisions of labor and responsibilities.

In the 1980s, the danwei became the fundamental unit of people's social lives in China. Work, study, and daily life intimately connect to the danwei, forming a tight-knit social relationship network. Members within the danwei typically had solid connections and interactions, and their social relationships were relatively stable. At

⁸⁴ Intellectuals: are intellectuals who can think independently and whose job is to expound or apply knowledge. Intellectuals as a political concept and a relatively independent social class will exist for a certain period. This article means that after the fox girl learns the heavenly book to obtain certain spells, she utilizes the spells to get a convenient role identity.

the same time, the danwei maintained close ties and interactions with other social organizations, collectively shaping China's social organizational structure during that era. Equally important, the "danwei system" in the initial stage of reform and opening-up had distinct Chinese characteristics, offering a sense of "reliance in life's journey," where domestic chores were to a large extent (though not entirely) taken up by the danwei, thereby significantly emancipating women from their domestic roles.

As far as fox girls are concerned, as females, they represent a field symbolizing male power. The three fox spirits form a unit-based group with clear divisions of labor. The fox mother is the leader of this group, responsible for finance and power, and strategically plans how to seek benefits, thereby striving for the most significant rights for this collective; the fox girl is in charge of beauty, using her advantages to excel in the workplace; the fox brother is responsible for greed, and although he often fails, he can still follow instructions and contribute to this group. "The Legend of Sealed Book" highlights the identity of the fox girl in this era ("period of change") and this field ("officialdom"), with a particular emphasis on gender bias. Utilizing the fox girl's acquisition of the celestial book and her subsequent "rapid rise" in officialdom reveals human weaknesses. It satirizes the phenomenon of female intellectuals being relatively disadvantaged in the workplace compared to males in reality.



Figure 111 Officialdom (units): from the magistrate's office to the prefectural magistrate to the imperial court

Source: <https://www.bilibili.com/video/>

[Accessed on December 30th, 2023]

4.3 Baoqingfang Proprietor (Nine-Tailed Fox): "Globalization" and "Bao Qing Fang"

The primary sphere of activity for this fox girl character is Baoqingfang, which served as a dual-purpose trading venue catering to humans and demons in the first film. When conducting transactions with humans, Baoqingfang appeared as an ordinary traditional medicine shop; however, when dealing with demons, it transformed into a workshop crafting magical artifacts for them. In the second film, she becomes the female owner of Wanyi Supermarket, responsible for providing supplies and "exchanging" obsessions for the beings within the city of demons. This reflects private enterprises in contemporary society. Since China's reform and opening up, the country has actively participated in globalization. The transformation and development of enterprises are also symbols of the "globalization" era, embodying modernity, openness, and diversity. Most importantly, they signify "opportunity" - a capable individual can realize their value here while facing challenges, particularly for women.

Despite her seemingly petite and frail appearance, the Baoqingfang Proprietor is astonished by her ability to have all the little demons in her workshop willingly and methodically work for her. The fact that this little fox can manage such a vast organization indicates her extraordinary strength. Moreover, she can transplant flowers and change the course of events, as well as transform humans into demons and vice versa. This setting shatters society's stereotypical perceptions of women and grants them a more equal voice alongside men. The feminine quality of "strong women assisting weaker men" is embodied through this fox girl character.



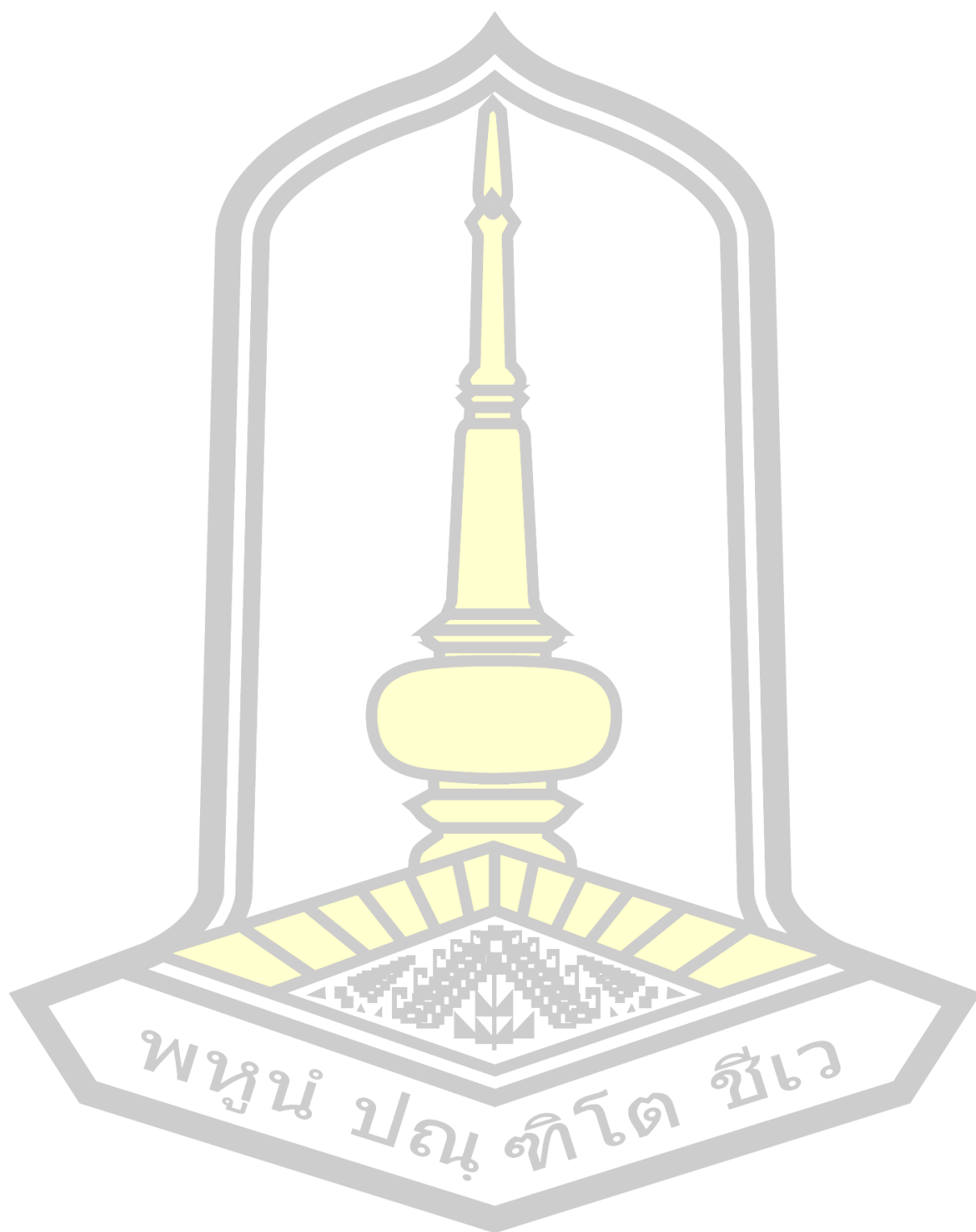
Figure 112 Trading places (enterprises): Po Ching Square and Bangi Supermarket

Source: <https://www.bilibili.com/video/>

[Accessed on December 30th, 2023]

More importantly, the narrative of corporate life focuses on the "Office" as a space of corporate power and decision-making, thus casting the fox girl as a "Manager" rather than a "Worker." The characters are portrayed as "Managers" rather than "Laborers".

The three Fox Girls Characters reveal how Female Characters negotiate their way beyond the shackles of the traditional Gender division of labor in different social contexts to demonstrate the new image and status of contemporary women in the process of Socialization. These characters are vivid examples of Gender Construction, reflecting social change through film and television and guiding the public's awareness and understanding of Gender Equality.



Part V. The "Fox Girl" and the Times: Gender and Negotiating Identity

"Identity" refers to "the introspective self-concept or self-image acquired from Family, Gender, Culture, Race and Socialization, and the explanatory mechanism in the process of cross-cultural communication" (Gudykunst 2014 : 212). "Negotiation" is a process of communication and interaction, through which individuals in cross-cultural situations attempt to maintain, clarify, develop, challenge or support the ideal images of their own or others (Ting Toomey, 2007:40). "Identity negotiation" means the management of identities in different circumstances, answering questions such as "who am I" and "where am I from".

The three "Fox Girl" Characters represent the mainstream understanding of women in Chinese Society across three historical periods, intricately linked to China's economic reform and opening-up. Each period bears its unique "epochal character," manifested through female personas constructed through bodily representations. The Fox Girls embody "femininity" and reflect the mainstream cultural identity and aesthetic ideals of their respective times. They are a testament to the negotiation process of "female" identity and, through these characters, express the dominant cognitive approach to the "era."

Princess 'YuMian' portrays not only "female" narratives but also the intricate relationship between gender politics and class politics. From the perspective of women's position within the social structure, there exists a duality: on the one hand, the class attributes of traditional women are often determined by men (fathers and husbands); on the other hand, once assimilated into a particular social class, they can also embody the subjectivity of that class. This shared duality made it a prevalent cultural phenomenon for women to represent class identities before the reform and opening-up.

The era of the Pink Fox Girl is that of the "intellectuals." In the 1980s, intellectuals were the most prominent characters in literature and art. "The Legend of Sealed Book" in the 1980s was not primarily viewed through the lens of women's issues but rather as a matter of class. In her persona, the negotiation between the "femininity" embedded in traditional gender ideologies and the self-imagination of the middle class converges.

Baoqingfang Proprietor is not just a female character but also embodies the image of the petite bourgeoisie. In her Baoqingfang, "class" is explicitly present, where people gain what they desire while sacrificing something precious. Her immense power, yet her choice to remain in Baoqingfang, not pursue immortality or dominate one side, and live a life guided by her whims aligns with the popular imagination of the petite bourgeoisie and their lifestyle. Meanwhile, the instability and ambiguity of this "new class" in Chinese society make it more fitting to be presented through a female face.

In essence, these three female images represent the epochal characteristics of three distinct periods, reflecting the gender expectations of the mass society in each era. This identity recognition is Gender-Specific and class-oriented, forming a meaningful interplay between Class Identity and Female Identity.

Conclusion

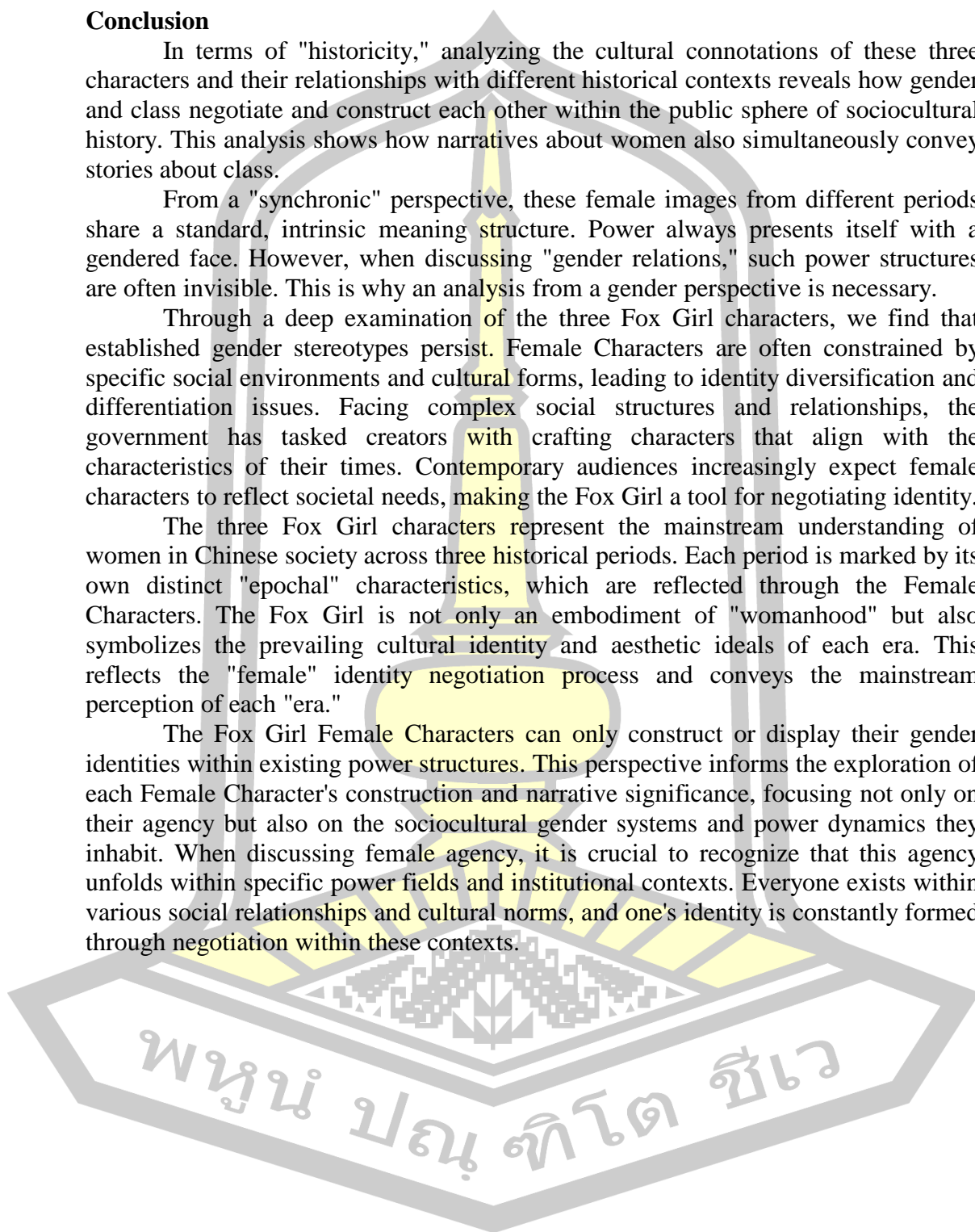
In terms of "historicity," analyzing the cultural connotations of these three characters and their relationships with different historical contexts reveals how gender and class negotiate and construct each other within the public sphere of sociocultural history. This analysis shows how narratives about women also simultaneously convey stories about class.

From a "synchronic" perspective, these female images from different periods share a standard, intrinsic meaning structure. Power always presents itself with a gendered face. However, when discussing "gender relations," such power structures are often invisible. This is why an analysis from a gender perspective is necessary.

Through a deep examination of the three Fox Girl characters, we find that established gender stereotypes persist. Female Characters are often constrained by specific social environments and cultural forms, leading to identity diversification and differentiation issues. Facing complex social structures and relationships, the government has tasked creators with crafting characters that align with the characteristics of their times. Contemporary audiences increasingly expect female characters to reflect societal needs, making the Fox Girl a tool for negotiating identity.

The three Fox Girl characters represent the mainstream understanding of women in Chinese society across three historical periods. Each period is marked by its own distinct "epochal" characteristics, which are reflected through the Female Characters. The Fox Girl is not only an embodiment of "womanhood" but also symbolizes the prevailing cultural identity and aesthetic ideals of each era. This reflects the "female" identity negotiation process and conveys the mainstream perception of each "era."

The Fox Girl Female Characters can only construct or display their gender identities within existing power structures. This perspective informs the exploration of each Female Character's construction and narrative significance, focusing not only on their agency but also on the sociocultural gender systems and power dynamics they inhabit. When discussing female agency, it is crucial to recognize that this agency unfolds within specific power fields and institutional contexts. Everyone exists within various social relationships and cultural norms, and one's identity is constantly formed through negotiation within these contexts.



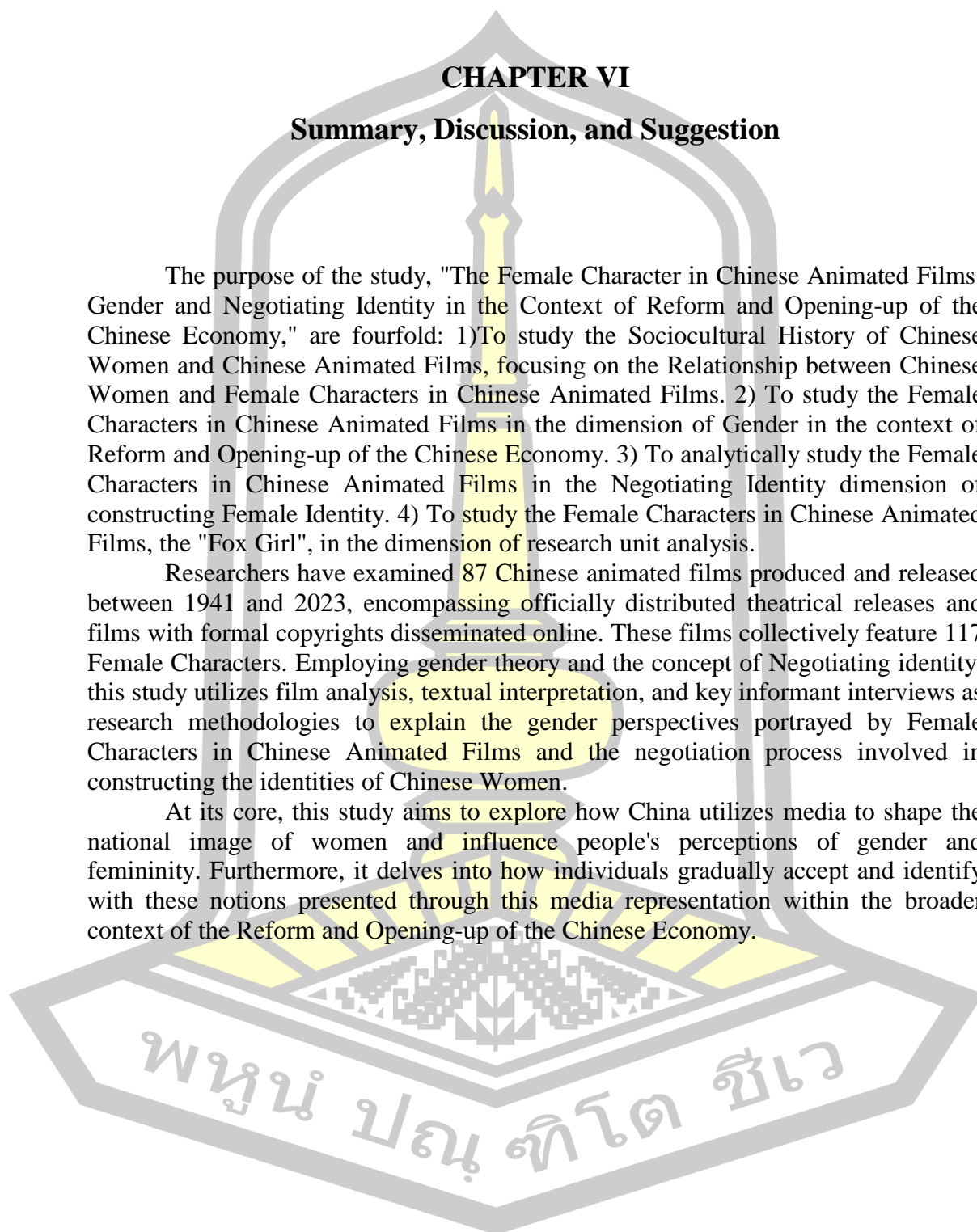
CHAPTER VI

Summary, Discussion, and Suggestion

The purpose of the study, "The Female Character in Chinese Animated Films: Gender and Negotiating Identity in the Context of Reform and Opening-up of the Chinese Economy," are fourfold: 1) To study the Sociocultural History of Chinese Women and Chinese Animated Films, focusing on the Relationship between Chinese Women and Female Characters in Chinese Animated Films. 2) To study the Female Characters in Chinese Animated Films in the dimension of Gender in the context of Reform and Opening-up of the Chinese Economy. 3) To analytically study the Female Characters in Chinese Animated Films in the Negotiating Identity dimension of constructing Female Identity. 4) To study the Female Characters in Chinese Animated Films, the "Fox Girl", in the dimension of research unit analysis.

Researchers have examined 87 Chinese animated films produced and released between 1941 and 2023, encompassing officially distributed theatrical releases and films with formal copyrights disseminated online. These films collectively feature 117 Female Characters. Employing gender theory and the concept of Negotiating identity, this study utilizes film analysis, textual interpretation, and key informant interviews as research methodologies to explain the gender perspectives portrayed by Female Characters in Chinese Animated Films and the negotiation process involved in constructing the identities of Chinese Women.

At its core, this study aims to explore how China utilizes media to shape the national image of women and influence people's perceptions of gender and femininity. Furthermore, it delves into how individuals gradually accept and identify with these notions presented through this media representation within the broader context of the Reform and Opening-up of the Chinese Economy.



Part I. Summary of Research Results

1.1 Interpreting the Sociocultural History of the Female Character in Chinese Animated Films

Interpreting the Sociocultural History of the Female Character in Chinese Animated Films to address Research Objective 1: To study the Sociocultural History of Chinese Women and Chinese Animated Films, with a particular focus on the Relationship between Chinese Women and the Female Characters in Chinese Animated Films.

Researchers have delved into the evolution of sociocultural dynamics of Chinese Women and the developmental characteristics of the Female Character in Chinese Animated Films, adopting a multidisciplinary lens that integrates sociology, history, and cultural studies. Their findings reveal a necessary interconnection and mutual influence between these two domains. The Female Characters in animated films mirror or refract the sociocultural perceptions of women in actual society while also underscoring their uniqueness and complexity within the cinematic context.

Chinese Women have demonstrated a complex and diverse trajectory throughout their Sociocultural History. The study highlights several key insights:

In early times, Chinese Women were constrained by feudal ethics and patriarchal norms, emphasizing the societal division of labor as "men rule outside, women manage inside." This gender hierarchy was reinforced by Confucian principles, positioning women in subordinate roles within both the family and society.

With the influx of Western ideologies and the progression of social reforms, female consciousness began to awaken, and contemporary women challenged these archaic norms, exhibiting robust individuality and a rebellious spirit.

Under the influence of political interventions, the gender policy advocating "equality between men and women" spurred modern Chinese Women to engage in economic and political life actively. This led to a de-gendering of femininity, with women adopting masculine traits in appearance, attire, and personality. Individual women integrated into the collective, becoming a vital force driving social development.

Especially after the Reform and Opening-up of the Chinese Economy, Chinese Women's values underwent a shift, embracing diversity in pursuit. The image of the powerful woman diversified, yet there remained a respect for traditional gender roles. Women began to focus on their individual identities, with domestic roles remaining significant, embodying the characteristic of "cultivating both inner and outer strength."

Based on the analysis of these four stages of Female Character evolution, researchers can conclude that:

The Female Character does not transform linearly toward a singular, predetermined archetype or image. Instead, the quintessential qualities of Female Characters vary across different historical periods, showcasing diverse value orientations. It can be said that the Female Character in Chinese society evolves alongside the times, reflecting societal formations and cultural shifts. It is a product of the interplay between societal novelties, emerging ideologies, and traditional cultural norms.

In animated film studies, the evolution of the Female Character in Chinese Animated Films has progressed from being a stereotyped symbol to a nuanced and multidimensional persona, moving from the periphery to the center and transitioning from "invisible" to "visible." This transformation signifies a gradual shift towards a more holistic and profound understanding of women.

Researchers can definitively outline the characteristics and developmental patterns of the Female Character in Chinese Animated Films as follows:

The Embryonic Stage of the Female Character in Chinese Animated Films: Early Chinese animated films paid limited attention to the development of Female Characters within their narratives, with directors prioritizing the progression of storylines and the underlying meanings behind them. Constrained by traditional ideologies, Female Characters were often absent or relegated to subordinate roles initially. Although there was some improvement after "Princess Iron Fan," their overall status and discourse power remained restricted, with limited character portrayals.

The Breakthrough Stage of the Female Character in Chinese Animated Films: On one hand, the number of Female Characters increased, but many lacked distinct personalities, exuding traditional beauty without independence, as seen in "Peacock Princess" and "The Golden Conch Shell." Despite increased screen time, they often existed under the male gaze, lacking self-identity. On the other hand, political influence during the Cultural Revolution led to a "masculinization" of Female Characters, such as in "The Little Sentinel of the East Sea," where formal "gender equality" was pursued while gender differences were overlooked.

The Exploratory Stage of the Female Character in Chinese Animated Films: Following the Reform and Opening-up of the Chinese Economy, Female Characters gradually became more diverse, with "bravery" and "independence" as prominent traits. They emerged as driving forces in the story, no longer dependent on or marginalized by male characters. These portrayals showcased female aspirations and pursuits, conveyed societal aspirations, and celebrated real-life women, promoting gender role balance.

The Diversified Stage of the Female Character in Chinese Animated Films: Female Characters exhibited a more diverse and multidimensional image, transcending traditional gender stereotypes. The most notable change compared to pre-Reform and Opening-up eras is that Female Characters now serve as central figures in films, possessing strong individual charisma and influence. Their appearances, personalities, and behaviors are modern and multifaceted, reflecting the pursuit of gender equality and Negotiating identity.

From this, researchers, through analyzing the Female Characters in Chinese Animated Films across the four stages above, can conclude:

In terms of character development, the personalities of these characters are deeply influenced by their social environment and cultural heritage. The interweaving of Female and Male Characters co-shapes their images and narratives. Regarding social structural relationships, animation directors, through character interactions, showcase diverse personalities against national development and cultural policies, conveying values and perspectives on gender. The evolution of Female Characters mirrors societal expectations and realities, encompassing shaping, imagination, the

return of femininity, and the enhancement of subjectivity, serving as a microcosm of artistic expression and societal progress.

More importantly, researchers have discovered that the characteristics of the Female Character in Chinese Animated Films correlate with or are attributed to the typical temperaments and traits of Chinese Women. These Female Characters in Chinese Animated Films are media novelties intertwined with China's social transformations and cultural policy contexts, linked to the Reform and Opening-up of the Chinese Economy. In other words, from 1941 to the present, the state has used the medium of Female Characters in Chinese Animated Films to convey the temperament and characteristics of Chinese Women, providing entertainment and satisfying viewing needs while influencing people's consciousness and perceptions.

There are four pivotal interconnected factors at play here:

1) Changes in Social and Cultural Concepts: Social and cultural changes have significantly influenced the portrayal of animated characters. From traditional Chinese attire and gender norms to incorporating modern fashion elements post-reform, female characters have become increasingly diverse. This shift reflects China's evolving pursuit of fashion, individuality, and changing values.

2) Shifts in Social Role Recognition: As society progresses, female roles in animated films have transitioned from traditional domestic roles to diverse professional identities, such as doctors, police officers, and soldiers, highlighting their independence. This change reflects a profound shift in recognizing women's social roles, promoting respect and acknowledgment of gender equality.

3) Development of Female Traits and Gender Perceptions: Traditionally, men were seen as vital and women as gentle, often depicted as supporting male characters in animation. With cultural diversity and female awakening, gender role perceptions have shifted towards women's independence. Modern animation breaks traditional gender stereotypes, portraying women as independent and confident, standing alongside men. This transformation signifies societal progress and evolving gender perceptions.

4) Changing Aesthetic Perceptions of Audiences: The space for female character development has expanded across different cultural backgrounds, with more diverse and rich personalities. People's perception of beauty has evolved from the secondary beauty of the 40s-60s, the heroic charm of the 70s, the complexity of the 80s, and the grace of the 90s to the diverse inclusivity of the 21st century. This shift in beauty standards has made female characters more multifaceted, reflecting a broader and deeper societal understanding of women's beauty.

Thus, a prominent feature of the Female Character in Chinese Animated Films is that creators artistically mirror the salient traits of women in actual society, essentially using a "virtual reality" identity to reflect the zeitgeist and continuously influence modern people's perceptions and ideologies.

1.2 Exploring the Female Character in Chinese Animated Films through a Gender Lens

Examining the gender representation of the Female Character in Chinese Animated Films against China's Reform and Opening-up of the Chinese Economy aims to address Research Objective 2: To study Female Characters in Chinese Animated Films in the dimension of Gender within this historical context.

Researchers employ the concept of Gender to unpack the issues surrounding the subjectivity and internal structure of Female Characters in Chinese animated films, with a particular focus on the process of gender performance in their construction. This endeavor reveals the intricate relationship between Gender and the construction of Female Characters.

The evolution of gender studies, commencing in the late 18th century, has traversed from feminism to postmodern gender theories. Initially, feminism sought women's equality, introducing the distinction between Sex and Gender. While psychoanalytic theories emphasize the determination of Gender by Sex, existentialist perspectives contend that female identity is socially constructed. Postmodern gender studies, on the other hand, dismantle binary oppositions and underscore that Gender is constructed through societal and cultural discourses.

Researchers conclude that gender studies have shifted from binary oppositions towards embracing diversity, pluralism, and difference. This shift offers fresh perspectives and theoretical foundations for understanding the Female Character in Chinese Animated Films.

Influenced by postmodernist ideologies, gender studies gradually gained widespread acceptance and understanding in the 1980s. During this period, the curtain of China's Reform and Opening-up of the Chinese Economy had just risen, unleashing significant waves in the economic realm and profound transformations within culture and society. The collision between Western gender theories and traditional Chinese culture fueled the renovation of gender perspectives.

Concurrently, the primary objective of China's Reform and Opening-up was to emancipate the mind, significantly elevating the status of Chinese Women in society and granting them more excellent voice and agency. This societal shift, influenced by national policies, profoundly impacted the evolution of Chinese animated films and their creative ideologies. The portrayal of Female Characters underwent a fundamental transformation, shifting from traditional subordinate roles to independent, diverse, and multi-faceted images. **It can be argued that the Reform and Opening-up of the Chinese Economy provided a crucial context for studying the Female Character in Chinese Animated Films.**

As a prevalent form of popular culture, Chinese animated films play a prominent role in shaping characters and reflecting gender perceptions. This manifests primarily in two dimensions:

Externally, they reveal how society constructs Gender Roles through norms and expectations.

Films, as a medium, utilize visuals, plotlines, and character interactions to profoundly expose how societal norms and expectations mold Gender Roles, reinforce gender stereotypes, mirror Gender Relations and power structures, and stimulate widespread reflection on gender issues.

Internally, they engage in Gender Performativity, transformation, and individual exploration.

Animated films transcend traditional gender frameworks, utilizing fictional worlds as stages to showcase the dynamic exploration of Gender Roles, internal conflicts, and cross-boundary integrations. They challenge gender boundaries, foster an understanding of the complexity of gender identity, serve as vital platforms for

reflecting on gender rigidities and advocating for gender diversity, and encourage individuals to pursue authentic and diverse gender expressions and self-actualization. Thus, researchers examine the relationship between "performativity" and character creation from a gender perspective. For instance, by studying the "performativity" traits of Female Characters in Chinese Animated Films through film analysis, textual interpretation, and interviews, it can be discovered that these characters construct gender cognition through language, subvert stereotypes within cinematic narratives, and reinforce gender identity through rites of passage and identity negotiation. These aspects collectively contribute to the dynamic process of gender formation. This is a form of Gender Performativity. This phenomenon shows how directors use Gender Performativity to shape female characters within texts, thereby conveying gender perspectives.



Under the Reform and Opening-up of the Chinese Economy, the Gender Representations of the Female Character in Chinese Animated Films can be analyzed within two interconnected and complementary dimensions of internal structures: 1) Body and Gender Role; 2) Identity and Gender Relations. These two aspects are interrelated and complementary, forming a comprehensive framework for the gender representations of female characters.

1) Body and Gender Role

The expressivity of the body serves as a conduit for conveying a character's gender identity. As products of sociocultural construction, Gender Roles are materialized in animated films through bodily expressivity. These films utilize visual elements such as appearance, attire, and makeup, along with non-visual elements like behavior and dialogue, to collectively construct the bodily expressivity of characters. This profoundly communicates and reinforces societal expectations and norms associated with Gender Roles, revealing the essence of the body as a product of social and cultural construction. Within animated films, we often encounter characters that engage in gender defiance, whose performances shatter the binary gender codes assigned to them by creators.

For instance, the character of Nezha in "Ten Thousand Jokes" exhibits Femininity, while Mulan in "Kung Fu Mulan" portrays Masculinity. These examples demonstrate how animated films challenge traditional gender norms and offer nuanced portrayals of Gender Roles.

2) Identity and Gender Relations

The interactivity, performativity, and fluidity of identity jointly shape and profoundly influence the dynamic balance of power relations, production relations, and emotional ties within Gender Relations. Interactivity constructs identity, influencing gendered power dynamics; performativity showcases identity, shaping Gender Roles; and fluidity challenges fixed boundaries, Negotiating identity shifts. These characteristics collectively act upon Gender Relations.

In Chinese Animated Films, the traditional "mother" archetype, marked by kindness, diligence, and selfless dedication, epitomizes societal expectations of Gender Roles. In power relations, identity is intimately tied to traditional expectations and the distribution of authority, manifested in supporting husbands and contributing to the family. In production relations, identity is intertwined with domestic and social production, as mothers are household managers and vital labor forces. In emotional relations, identity is a bond for emotional transmission and interaction. Symbolically, the "mother" identity represents the continuation and transmission of life.

Examples include Mama Zhang Xiaoli in "The Big Ear Tu Tu: Food Fantasy" and Apron Mom in "The Big Head Son and Little Head Dad."

The newly reconstructed identity of the modern "mother" is depicted through media as embodying the strength and wisdom of modern women, emphasizing autonomy and independence. This marks a trend towards gender relations' equalization and the awakening of modern women's self-awareness.

Examples include Cloud Mom in "Happy Mom and Girl 1: Sweetheart On Mission" and Lady Yin in "Nezha: Birth of the Demon Child."

Thus, in animated films, we can see both the continuation of traditional gender roles and the challenges and breakthroughs against gender stereotypes. Female

Characters serve as critical narrative elements and Cultural Symbols, playing pivotal roles. Their creation and Gender Representations provide not only entertainment and aesthetic enjoyment for the audience but also reflect societal perceptions of Female Identity and Gender Roles. Moreover, they subtly influence the audience's Understanding and Attitudes toward Gender Perspectives.

1.3 Negotiating Identity in the Construction of Female Characters in Chinese Animated Films in the Context of the Reform and Opening-up of the Chinese Economy

This section analyzes the process of negotiating the identity of Female Characters in Chinese Animated Films, aiming to answer research objective 3: analyzing Female Characters in Chinese animated films from the bargaining dimension of identity constructed by women. Researchers use the concept of negotiating identity to explain the construction process of Female Characters in Chinese animated films since the Reform and Opening-up of the Chinese Economy, demonstrating the national female image, the negotiation of identity between the government, creators, and audiences, and the relationship between Female Characters in Chinese animated films and the government.

Through social and human analysis, the study reveals the subjects and processes of negotiating identity:

Firstly, the impact of internal identity negotiation in China is mainly divided into 1) the support of national and local policies for Chinese animated films, 2) the influence of directors and creators on the construction of Female Characters, revealing top-down negotiations:

The Chinese government guides the animation industry through policies and cultural support, influencing the shaping of Female Characters and conveying ideology and gender culture. Under the guidance of policies, creators express cultural and gender identity through female characters, constructing unique artistic images. Audiences interpret these characters, engaging in identity recognition and reflection. Industry associations and film companies actively respond, promoting female perspectives and stories, achieving resource sharing and experience exchange within the industry, and forming a multi-dimensional negotiation mechanism.

Secondly, analyzing the interaction and connection with other fields mainly includes 1) audience perception and evaluation, 2) cross-cultural communication, 3) Female Characters in animated films from a global perspective, revealing multiple aspects related to negotiating identity. These aspects enrich the research content of animated films and provide new perspectives and ideas for understanding complex issues such as gender roles and identity.

Additionally, this paper develops two typological classifications to distinguish the different orientations in the identity construction of Female Characters in Chinese Animated Films. These classifications are:

The first type is **"Highlight-Weaken" identity boundary negotiation**, which explains how Female Characters negotiate the relationship between gender and roles within different identity recognitions.

The second type is **"Strengthen-Lighten" gender performativity negotiation**, which outlines how femininity is strategically blurred or highlighted within the gender framework.

The negotiation and interaction between audiences and creators can be manifested in the following four forms:

A. Direct feedback and comments: Researchers found from interviews and surveys that most respondents agree that Female Characters in Chinese films can influence their values or life attitudes. However, male and female audiences have different perspectives on identifying with Female Characters and have different expectations for gender role construction.

B. Box office and ratings: Box office and ratings are direct expressions of audience support for animated films and are directly related to the film's success. The audience's identification with and affection for the Female Characters directly influences their willingness to watch the film and its box office performance.

C. Social media interaction: Audiences express their identification with characters through interactions such as likes, comments, shares, or topic discussions, providing feedback to creators.

D. Behavioral pattern interaction: Audience behaviors, such as spontaneously organizing promotional activities, character imitation, cosplay, purchasing, and collecting related character merchandise, reflect a high degree of identification with the characters and social resonance.

Thus, the Audience is no longer a passive receiver of Information but becomes an active participant in Gender Construction. They internalize Values through Participation, Discussion, and Feedback while forming a shared understanding and recognition, creating an "Imagined Community." Audiences become active participants in Social Gender Construction, experiencing character stories through watching Films and realizing Spiritual Values in their lives. This interaction strengthens National Identity and Social Cohesion and opens new paths for modern gender communication.

Based on this, researchers have summarized the adjustments made to the female characters in Chinese animated films following the Reform and Opening-up of the Chinese Economy. Four methods have emerged as vehicles for the cross-cultural dissemination of the image of Chinese women constructed through these films:

Classical Story Adaptation: Drawing inspiration from foreign ideas and creativity, female Chinese characters are crafted with a distinctly Chinese flair. Take the ubiquitous story of Mulan, originating from the "Ballad of Mulan" during the Northern and Southern Dynasties. It has undergone numerous adaptations, becoming deeply entrenched in Chinese culture. It has even been adapted into animated films by international companies like Disney, successfully conveying Chinese women's bravery, resilience, and wisdom to a global audience. Through the international medium of film, this type of storytelling enables global viewers to understand and appreciate the unique charm of traditional Chinese female roles.

2) Cultural Element Integration: Incorporating foreign cultural elements' features into Chinese animated films' female characters. The diverse presentations in animation and film are the most intuitive and vivid manifestations of cultural element integration in cross-cultural communication. The mutual absorption, borrowing, and fusion of different cultures in animated films ultimately lead to a new artistic form. For instance, fantasy adventure animated films like "New Gods: Nezha Reborn," "Deep Sea," and "Mission of Heaven" integrate internet culture, fashion trends, and

Western punk styles into character costumes, dialogues, and props, exemplifying the blending of traditional culture with modern and foreign cultural elements.

3) **Cultural Symbol Utilization:** Adjusting the female characters in Chinese animated films, which embody cultural symbols of Chinese women, to possess international characteristics, enabling them to shine on the global stage. Observing the current development of the Chinese animated film market, numerous works based on Chinese mythology and folklore employ abundant traditional Chinese cultural symbols, successfully guiding popular aesthetics toward the essence of Chinese culture. An example is the diverse cheongsam symbols featured in "New Gods: Nezha Reborn."

4) **International Exchange, Collaboration, and Production:** Adopting the styles and characteristics of foreign female characters, such as appearance, behavior, and personality traits. International exchanges facilitate a deeper understanding and borrowing of international perceptions and expressions of female characters, thereby effectively negotiating identity among nations and regions regarding female imagery. The proportion of co-productions in the film industry is gradually increasing, with heterogeneous and cross-cultural fusion becoming the norm.

Researchers have summarized the results of negotiating identity in four aspects:

1) Deepening cultural identity and gender recognition: Female characters in Chinese animated films have become essential media for spreading social and cultural concepts and gender cognition, deepening the audience's understanding and recognition of cultural and gender identities.

2) Disseminating national ideology: By portraying Female Characters in animated films, the government successfully conveys its ideology and unique interpretation of gender culture, enhancing national cultural influence and international image.

3) Showcasing sociocultural diversity: These Female Characters display the diversity and complexity of Chinese sociocultural perspectives on women, promoting social-cultural diversity and inclusiveness.

4) Constructing a mission of cultural integration: In the context of cross-cultural communication, Female Characters in Chinese Animated Films symbolize Chinese culture and act as cultural bridges to help build a community with a shared future for mankind.

In conclusion, researchers can summarize New Knowledge:

1) **Female Characters in Chinese Animated Films become new social relationship bonds.** Since these characters, as a medium of communication, have established relationships within the country, including with the Chinese government, local governments, creators, and audiences, this new set of relationships has led to various forms of social interaction. Female Characters in Chinese Animated Films become new social relationship bonds.

2) **Female Characters in Chinese Animated Films act as cultural ambassadors and focal points of identity negotiation, showcasing the "national female image of China."** In this context, Female Characters in Chinese Animated Films have been interestingly used in the role of identity negotiation. The Government's identity negotiation is that Female Characters in Chinese Animated Films gradually break away from traditional stereotypes and are used to represent

1.4 “Fox Spirit”, three female characters: A Case Study of Gender and Negotiating Identity

This unit analysis of the "Fox Girl" female character aims to address the fourth objective by examining her representation as a pivotal figure in negotiating gender and identity within the context of China's economic Reform and Opening-up. By integrating cultural, social, audience demographics, and historical background dimensions, researchers have chosen the "Fox Girl" as an emblematic example of how Chinese Women are portrayed in The Female Character in Chinese Animated Films.

The analysis highlights four key attributes:

Unique Cultural Identity: The "Fox Girl" uniquely blends animalistic, supernatural, and feminine traits. Unlike characters like Sun Wukong (Monkey King) or Bai Suzhen (White Snake), who represent individual species within the realm of the supernatural, Fox Girls exist as a collective in the fantasy world. Their bodily and cultural versatility offers creators boundless imagination and carries profound cultural significance, unmatched by dragons, phoenixes, monkeys, or snakes.

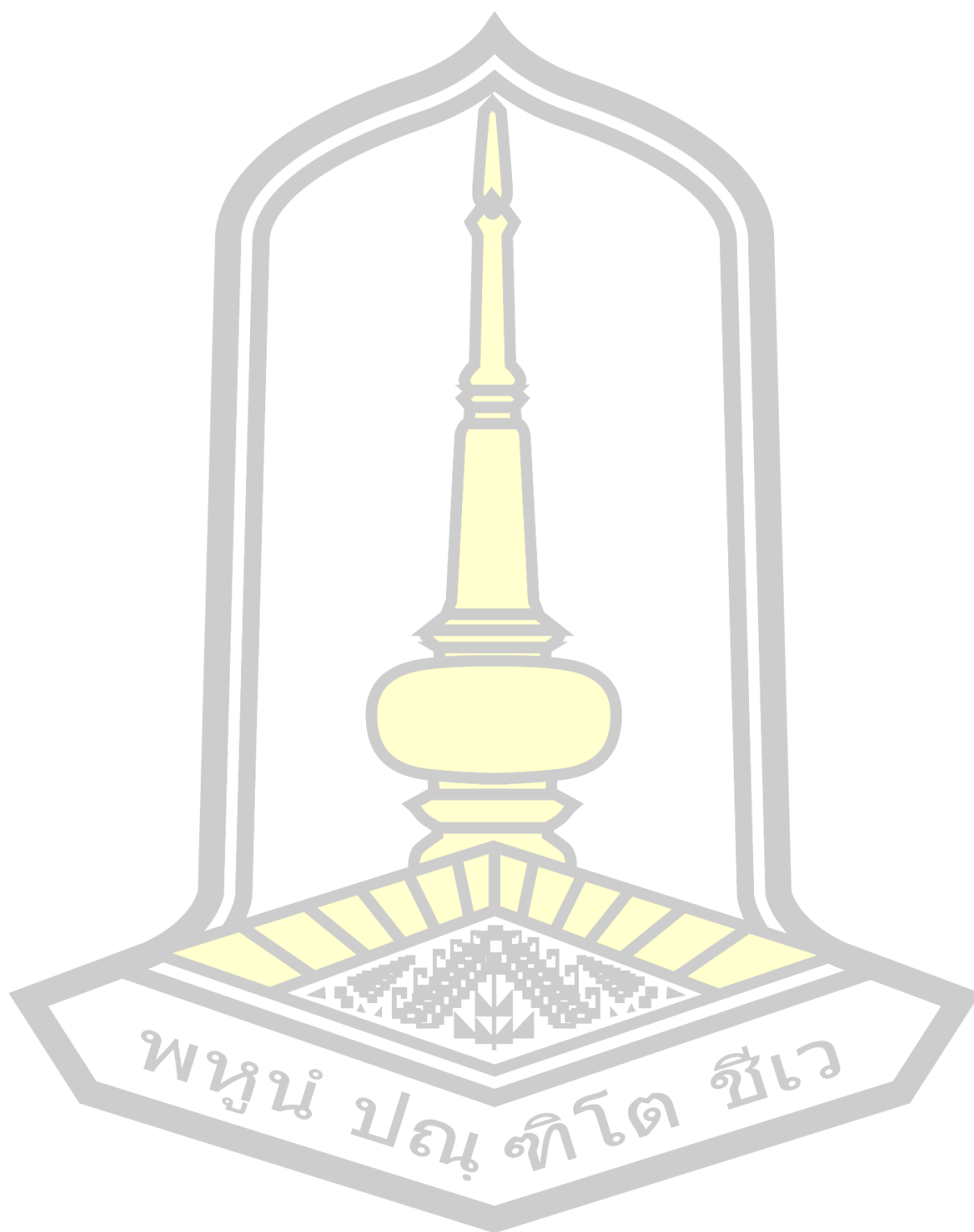
Prominent Gender Identity: The fox spirit character is predominantly depicted as female, rooted in societal perceptions of "femininity," despite the versatility of gender transformation noted in texts like the "Xuanzhong Ji." This association stems from the allure and beauty associated with their transformations, fostering a stereotype of fox spirits being overwhelmingly female. In Chinese animated films, the portrayal of female "Fox Girls" surpasses that of males, marking a distinct gender marker.

Broad Mass Appeal: The "Fox Demon" theme, with its rich creative palette and profound mass appeal, captivates audiences through its versatility and emotional resonance, catering to modern aesthetic preferences. Non-demonic female characters struggle to match the agility and emotional depth of Fox Girls, who simultaneously excel in fantasy, inclusivity, and emotional resonance.

Character Evolution and Resonance with the times: The transformation of societal structures and values over time necessitates the evolution of individual roles negotiated within the broader sociocultural context. The "Fox Girl" evolution from obedience to rebellion mirrors advancements in gender perspectives, promoting equality and ushering in innovations in film and television creation. This profound intersection of character development and sociocultural history underscores the intricate dance between role transformations and societal evolution.

By examining these aspects, we gain insights into how the "Fox Girl" is a microcosm for the broader narrative of Chinese Women's evolving gender and identity negotiations within the transformative landscape of China's economic Reform and Opening-up.

Using the Reform and Opening-up of the Chinese Economy as a timeline marker and based on dramatist George P. Baker's classification of characters into three types—conceptual, stereotypical, and individualized—researchers analyze three "Fox Girl" characters. By integrating gender and negotiating identity theories, the study explores the expressive practices of female subject construction during different periods in the context of China's economic reforms. This approach reveals the contemporary interpretations, historical transformations, and synchronic structures of China's gender system.



Through an in-depth analysis of the three "Fox Girl" characters, researchers conclude:

The three Fox Girls represent the mainstream understanding of women in different historical periods of Chinese society, each embodying distinct "era-specific" characteristics. These characteristics manifest through the female figures, with the Fox Girl representing not only "women" but also each era's mainstream cultural identity and aesthetic ideals. From a "historical" perspective, these characters' cultural meanings are closely tied to their historical contexts, showcasing the negotiation and construction of gender and class in the public sphere, where women's stories intertwine with class narratives. In a "synchronic" sense, the female images from these periods share an inherent structural meaning. This reflects the negotiation process of the "female" identity, expressing the mainstream perception of the "era" through the Fox Girl characters.

The female identity of the Fox Girl characters can only be constructed or displayed within the existing power structures. From this angle, while exploring each female image's constructive and narrative connotations and focusing on their subjective practices, the study also pays attention to the gender systems and power fields they inhabit. When discussing female subjectivity, it is essential to recognize the specific power fields and institutional forms within which these practices unfold. Everyone exists within various social relations and cultural habits, constantly negotiating with them to form their subjectivity.

The key findings of this study are as follows: Before the Reform and Opening-up of the Chinese Economy, gender concepts were deeply influenced by traditional social structures and feudal ideologies. This was prominently manifested in the patriarchal notions of male superiority and female inferiority, the feudal nature of family structures and marriage systems, clear social gender roles, and unequal educational opportunities. After the Reform and Opening-up of the Chinese Economy, influenced by foreign cultures and changing audience aesthetic demands, the complex social structures and relationships necessitated negotiation and interaction among the state, creators, and audience through the medium of female characters.

The government mandates that creators develop characters embodying the era's spirit. As audiences watch these films, the "field" created by the filmmakers and the conveyed spiritual values and gender concepts are subconsciously received by the viewers. This unique cultural atmosphere gradually influences the people's current thoughts and moral values.

Analyzing the changes before and after the Reform and Opening-up, researchers have identified what has remained constant and what has changed in this phenomenon:

- 1) The gender concepts depicted by The Female Character in Chinese Animated Films have evolved with societal progress. They have shifted from being constrained by male superiority and female inferiority to challenging traditional gender roles and ultimately showcasing the diversity and complexity of modern women. The development of female consciousness in these characters has also transformed over time, moving from demonization and feminization to gradually shedding traditional gender stereotypes, eventually becoming more multidimensional

and diverse, reflecting the journey of female consciousness from nascence to awakening and development.

2) The innovative reconstruction of traditional culture and modern aesthetics through *The Female Character in Chinese Animated Films* has remained consistent. These characters serve as vehicles for negotiating gender and class, maintaining a close relationship with their sociocultural contexts. Regardless of the era, the gendered nature of power structures is not overlooked, and the importance of social gender analysis persists.

Through these observations, this study reveals that the evolving depiction of gender in Chinese animated films reflects broader societal changes while maintaining an ongoing negotiation with traditional cultural values.

Part II. Discussion of Research Results

In discussing the study's findings, the researcher would like to raise questions about roles and responsibilities. *The Female Character in Chinese Animated Films* through the lens of Gender Studies and the study's contribution to the academic and educational communities of interdisciplinary research are as follows.

2.1 The Female Character in Chinese Animated Films as Social and Cultural Research Information

As an essential carrier of mass media culture and art, Chinese animated films play an important informational role in conveying cultural information, responding to social changes, and constructing gender concepts.

Chinese animated films are a widely distributed and far-reaching movie genre. *The Female Character in Chinese Animated Films* has continued from 1941 to the present since it was introduced to China in the 1920s, especially after the Reform and opening up of the Chinese Economy, and it has been receiving attention from movie fans. The female characters in Chinese animated films have a specific representation and influence on the identity of "Chinese women," making them popular for a long time.

A movie is a medium that influences people's ideology, emotional resonance, and value identity. Communication expert Marshall McLuhan (1964) proposed that "the medium is the message" and "the medium is an extension of the human being," emphasizing the importance of the medium itself to human society and culture. Béla Balázs, a film expert, discussed in depth the characteristics of film as a medium, arguing that film is a visible and direct tool for expressing the physical heart, capable of conveying richer and more direct emotions and thoughts than words. J.P. Meyer, an expert in the field of film sociology, emphasized the role of film in disseminating social concepts and reflecting social changes and considered film an essential window for understanding social and cultural changes.

The meaning of cinema as a site of cultural interpretation results from human cultural and historical interpretive activity. According to Cahoon Lawrence E., an expert in American philosophy, the meaning of a movie is not produced singularly or apart from human intervention but rather is generated by the filmmaker and the viewer/interpreter together through interpretation and construction. This process of generating meaning is similar to the generation of cultural meaning in that it is

pluralistic, contingent, and dependent on historical human acts of interpretation and construction. (Cahoone, 1988:247-248).

If we consider The Female Character in Chinese Animated Films as a "constructed woman" using the concepts of Gender and Negotiating Identity, we can more clearly explain the role of The Female Character in Chinese Animated Films as a message for social and cultural research, and reveal the concepts of Gender, social change, and cultural values behind them.

Therefore, it is essential to emphasize social and cultural contexts in film studies regardless of genre. The researchers applied this view of roles and responsibilities to analyze The Female Character in Chinese Animated Films and concluded that the context of the Reform and Opening-up of the Chinese Economy played an important role.

1) Roles and duties that provide fun and fulfill human psychological needs

The Female Character in Chinese Animated Films not only satisfies the audience's need for fun but also assumes the role and responsibility of satisfying multi-level psychological needs. This study reveals the new roles played by The Female Character in Chinese Animated Films in the context of Reform and Opening up of the Chinese Economy—not only as a vehicle for entertainment but also as a link for new social relations and a focal point for Negotiating Identity.

First, the Female Character in Chinese Animated Films is linked to new social relations in the context of the Reform and Opening-up of the Chinese Economy. Dai Jinhua, an expert in Chinese film and cultural studies, points out that in the past, in mainstream commercial movies, women were often placed in the position of being watched and gazed at, serving functions, values, or meanings associated with men, lacking autonomy and subjectivity. With the help of Laura Mulvey's theory of "gaze," she emphasizes that the male perspective makes the female image almost inevitably become the object of the male gaze, and the inequality between Gender leads to the objectification of the female image on the screen and the loss of three-dimensionality and depth.

In contrast, after the Reform and Opening-up of the Chinese Economy, The Female Character in Chinese Animated Films gradually got rid of the passive image and showed more initiative and independence. This change contrasts with Mulvey's view, reflecting the shift in society's perception of Female Character. According to Chinese scholar Lili Fu, The Female Character in Chinese Animated Films becomes a bridge of emotional communication through humanized design and touches the audience's heart. They show diverse role changes and promote Gender equality and diversity; they also present a diverse social structure and show the complex interactions of role relationships.

Second, The Female Character in Chinese Animated Films serves as a cultural messenger and a focal point for Negotiating Identity, presenting the "National image of Chinese Women" to the world. This aligns with the views of postmodern feminist scholars such as Li Yinhe. In her writings, Li Yinhe emphasizes the positive value of female differences and challenges the traditional division of Gender roles and stereotypes. The Female Character in Chinese Animated Films, by gradually breaking away from traditional stereotypes and presenting a new image of independent, autonomous, positive, and diversified women, has not only aroused a broad resonance in China but also spread the unique cultural Identity of "China's

national female image" to the world. This process is not only a process of Negotiating Identity at home and abroad but also an essential manifestation of the enhancement of Chinese Women's cultural soft power. Sharon Kinsella, a sociologist specializing in Japanese animation culture, argues that Female Characters in animation often take on the role of mediating cultural identities, especially in the context of a rapidly developing society.

In addition, this study further validates the common understanding in culture and sociology that artworks have an unignorable social influence as recorders and transmitters of social and cultural changes. The Female Character in Chinese Animated Films, with its unique artistic expression and profound social connotation, has become a bridge connecting the past and the future, the local and the world, contributing to cultural diversity and Gender equality in China and the world.

2) Recording the "Sociocultural History" of Female Characters

Researchers have found that in addition to providing entertainment, the image and development of The Female Character in Chinese Animated Films can also be seen as an essential recorder of "sociocultural history" in which these characters "tell the story" of social change and the evolution of cultural perceptions through the issues, backgrounds, and atmospheres of the films. These characters "tell the story" of social change and cultural evolution through the movie's problems, contexts, and atmospheres. David Buckingham (2013), an expert on media education in the UK, mentioned in his study of children and youth media that characterization in media (including Female Characters in animation) can be a witness to social and cultural change.

The Female Character in Chinese Animated Films usually reflects various social and cultural issues, such as Gender Roles, Social Expectations, Family Concepts, and Personal Growth. Chinese scholars Jiang Ping and Li Mengru (2020) further explain that for modern women, the mainstream consciousness encourages that women should have an independent spirit on the one hand, while on the other hand, it preaches that women should be both gentle and sexy. However, the two opposing views coexist harmoniously in popular culture, making the issue of Gender orientation more complex and challenging.

2.2 The Contribution of the Study of Female Characters in Chinese Animated Films to Gender and Media Studies

In previous studies on female characters in Chinese animated films, most research has focused on the media information these characters carry and their portrayal. As a form of popular culture, Chinese animated films not only represent the image of women in societal culture but also reflect modern societal cultural gender perceptions. Therefore, researchers have evidently concentrated on the intersection of media and gender. This study views female characters in Chinese animated films as a medium through which to observe and analyze how China constructs the national image of women, and further investigates how these images influence public perceptions of gender and women.

However, how many people truly consider "Chinese animated films" as an important medium for exploring the characteristics of female roles and constructing Chinese female identities? Hence, **this study is considered to "open boundaries" between the "new" media form—"animated films"—and the study of "modern"**

gender concepts, especially when we view female characters in Chinese animated films as modern carriers of gender concepts. The goal is to provide a new starting point for research in this field.

This research contributes to the intersection of gender and media studies because it reveals how a nation shapes and conveys social gender perceptions through media and how these perceptions, in turn, influence society and culture. At the same time, this type of research is also a gripping "cultural action," uncovering how culture originates from the masses and how it influences the masses through the medium of popular consumer culture.

The Female Character in Chinese Animated Films is a gender study that provides a more comprehensive understanding of the Negotiation Identity of the State, the Creator (individual), and the Disseminator (group), the interactions between culture and the masses, and the position and role of Gender in them.

In terms of methodology, this kind of research is interdisciplinary, requiring the integration of theories and methods from several disciplines, including film studies, cultural studies, sociology, linguistics, and Gender studies. For example, through the concept of film studies, we can analyze the way Female Character is presented in the visual and narrative structure; through the lens of cultural studies, we can explore the cultural meaning and social context behind the image of Female Character; through the theories of sociology, we can understand Female Character's position and role in the social structure; and gender studies provides us with the analytical tools to analyze Female Character's gender identity and Gender relations.

If we regard female characters in Chinese animated films as "gender expression types" and apply the concepts related to gender and identity negotiation, especially Judith Butler's methodology of "gender performativity," it can more clearly explain the role of female characters in Chinese animated films as the "constructed image of Chinese women."

Butler explains that performativity, as a parodic behavior, is ontologically unstable. It is caught in the double constraints of reality and fiction, neither a complete imitation of reality nor a total identification with fiction, but possessing specific characteristics of "shifting" and "generating." This includes the performativity of power consciousness, the body, and public discourse. Therefore, Butler believes that studying its connotations and extensions must be combined with specific social and cultural backgrounds (contexts). With this perspective on gender roles and responsibilities, when researchers apply it to analyze the constructed image of Chinese women, they conclude that female characters in Chinese animated films play a significant role.

In summary, this research is not only valuable for understanding gender concepts in the socio-cultural changes of China. Female characters in Chinese animated films are not merely representations of cultural products but also recorders of socio-cultural changes. While reflecting social attitudes and cultural values, they also provide critical perspectives for understanding the interactions between the state and individuals, communicators and audiences, as well as culture and the masses.

Part III. Research Suggestions

3.1 The Suggestion for Academic Circle

Firstly, as an essential component of the cultural industry, Chinese animated films have made remarkable progress in creative technology and narrative depth in recent years, particularly in portraying female characters. These characters bear rich cultural connotations and reflect the complexities of societal gender concept shifts and identities, holding high academic research value. Although scholars have explored female characters from feminist and cultural critical perspectives, research on them remains inadequate compared to that on male characters. Therefore, it is suggested that academia broaden its horizons, deepen the study of gender and identity negotiation mechanisms in female characters, and employ interdisciplinary methods to reveal their unique values and social significance comprehensively.

Secondly, against China's economic reform and opening-up, this paper explores the gender and identity negotiation of female characters in Chinese animated films, expanding the scope and content of media and gender intersectional research and providing a new perspective for social and cultural studies. Nowadays, many media forms (such as live-action films, television, advertising, novels, music, drama, etc.) similarly confront issues of gender stereotypes and identity recognition. Therefore, regarding research content and methodology, this paper can also serve as a model for gender and identity studies in other media forms. It is hoped that future researchers will continue to delve into these issues.

3.2 The Suggestion for the Animated Film Industry

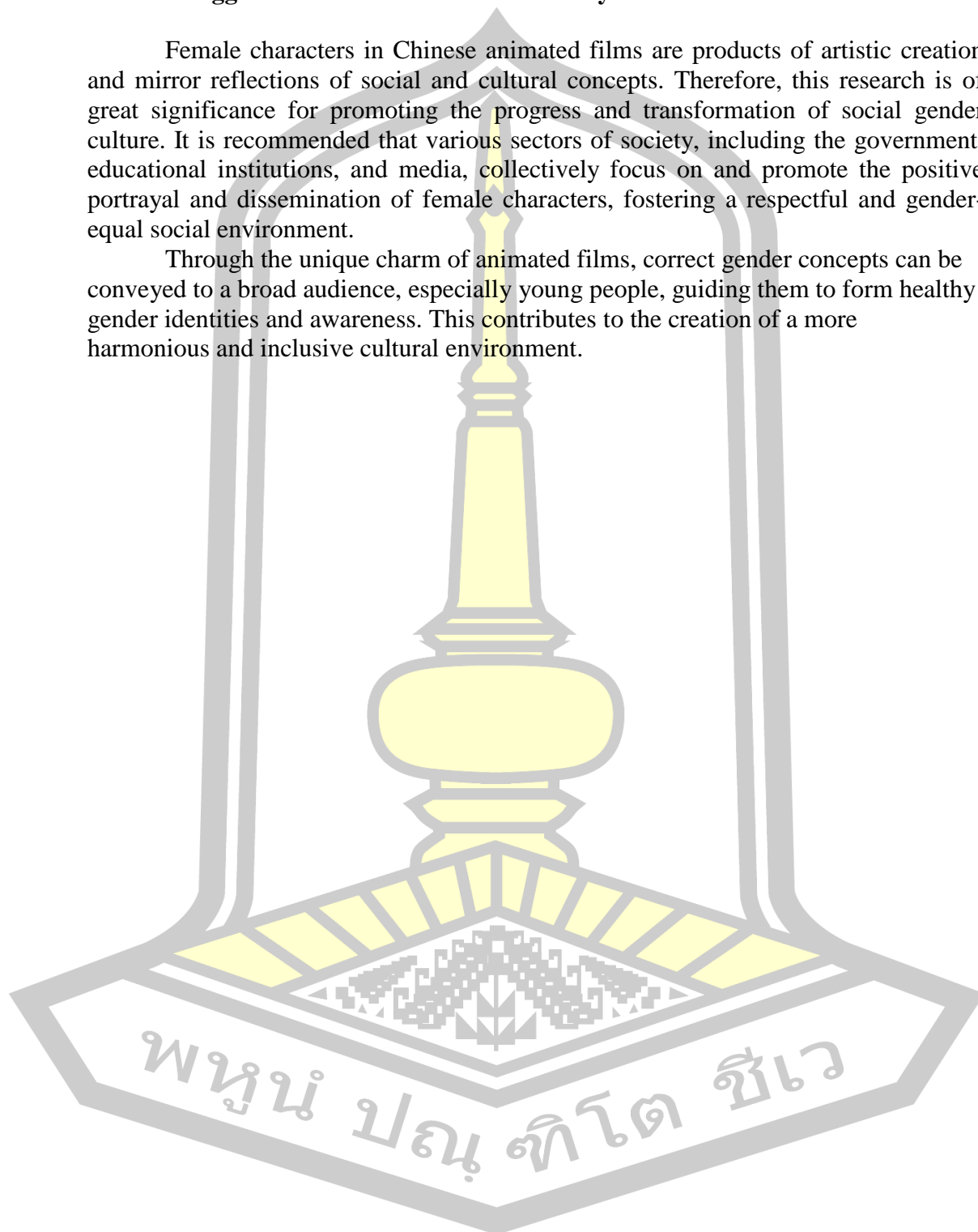
From the industry development perspective, this research can provide theoretical support and strategic guidance for the creation practices of Chinese animated films. Specifically, it is recommended that animation production teams pay more attention to the construction of female characters during the creation process. Instead of replicating traditional gender role templates, efforts should be made to create female characters with distinctive personalities, complex emotions, and independent wills. This enriches the narrative layers of animated works, enhances their appeal, and promotes the audience's understanding and acceptance of gender equality.

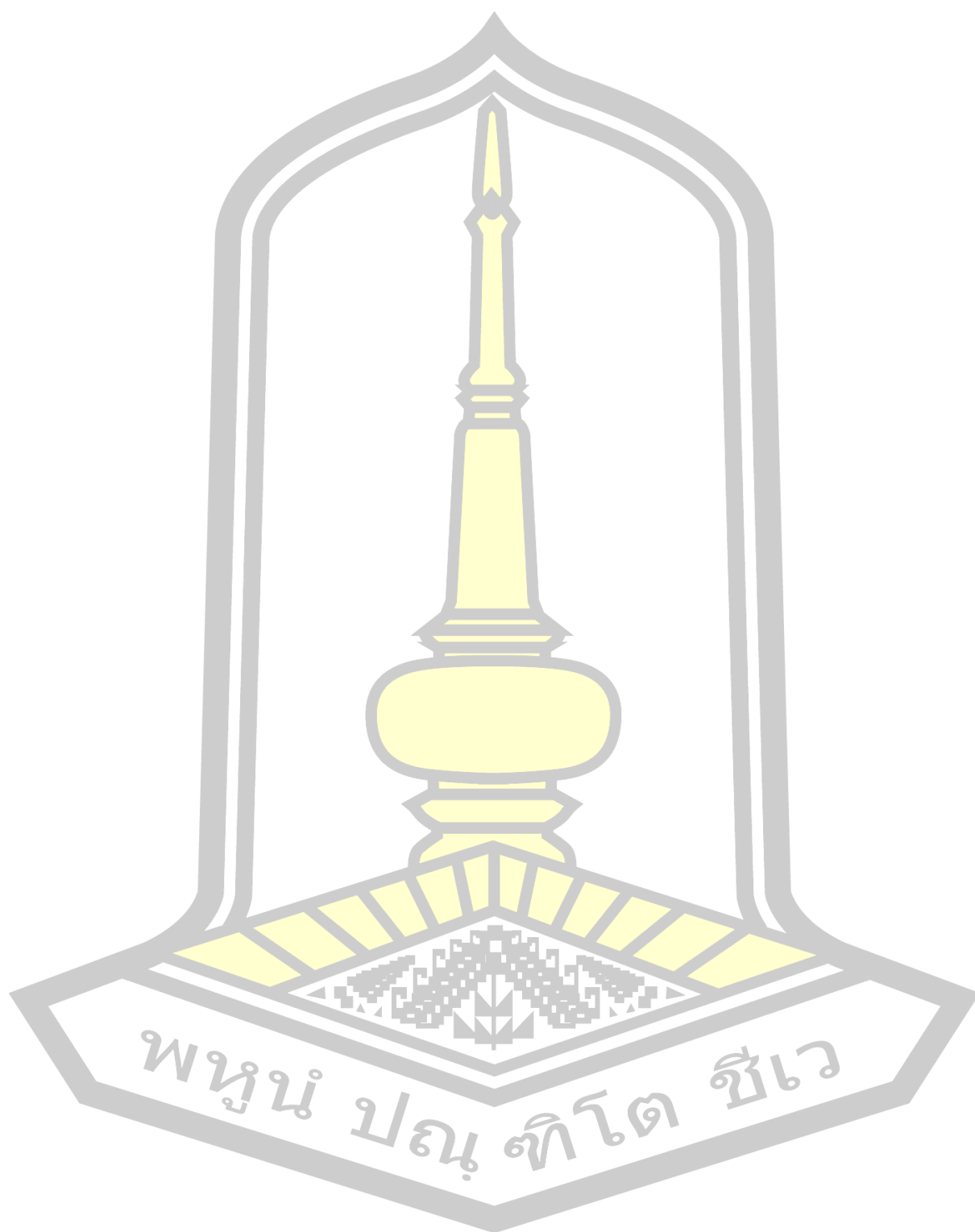
Additionally, the animated film industry can draw on the findings of this research to develop more scientifically sound marketing strategies, using female characters as critical elements to attract audiences, predominantly female viewers. By combining online and offline methods, the promotion and marketing of female characters can be strengthened, increasing public attention and affection for female animated characters.

3.3 The Suggestion to the Cultural Community

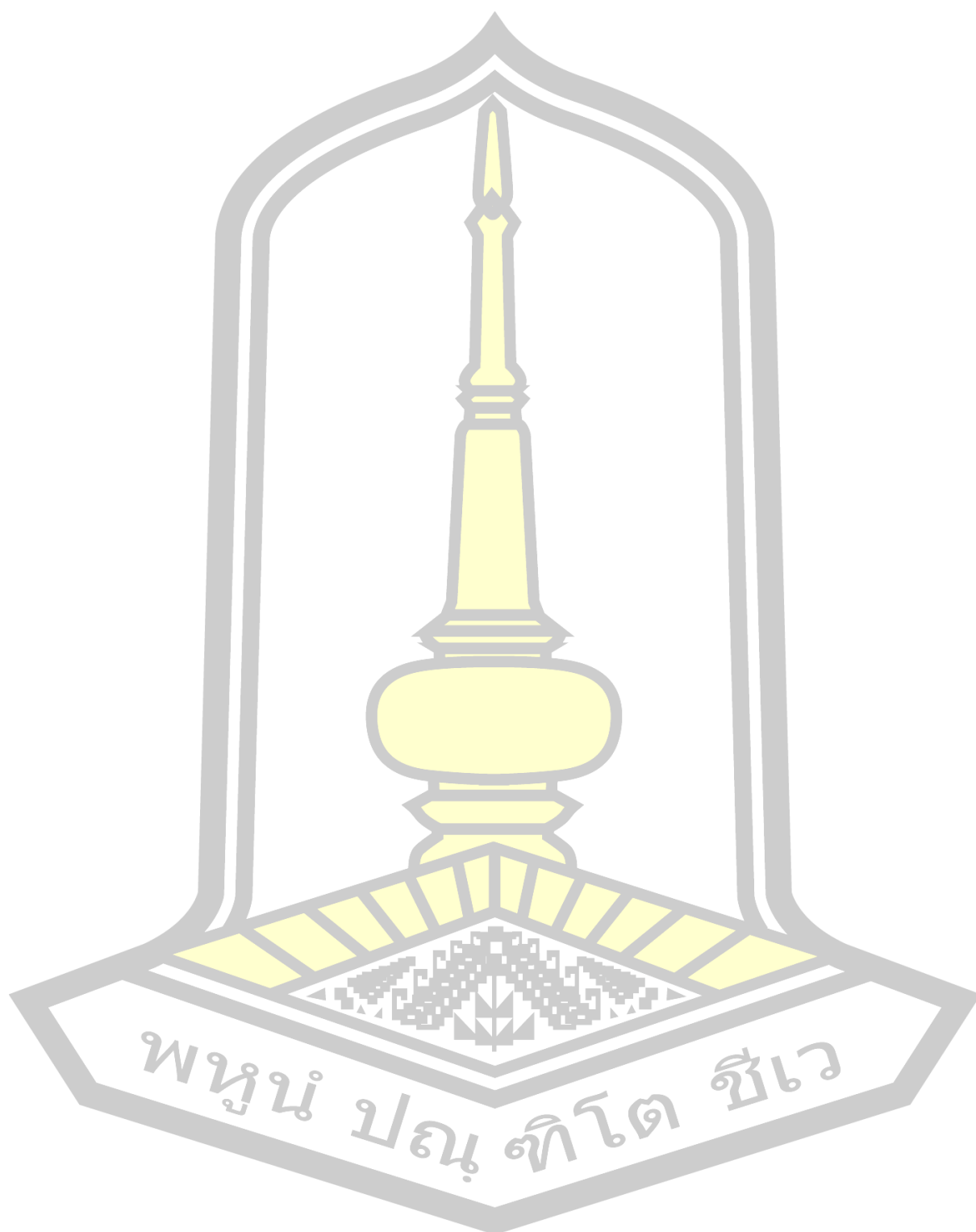
Female characters in Chinese animated films are products of artistic creation and mirror reflections of social and cultural concepts. Therefore, this research is of great significance for promoting the progress and transformation of social gender culture. It is recommended that various sectors of society, including the government, educational institutions, and media, collectively focus on and promote the positive portrayal and dissemination of female characters, fostering a respectful and gender-equal social environment.

Through the unique charm of animated films, correct gender concepts can be conveyed to a broad audience, especially young people, guiding them to form healthy gender identities and awareness. This contributes to the creation of a more harmonious and inclusive cultural environment.



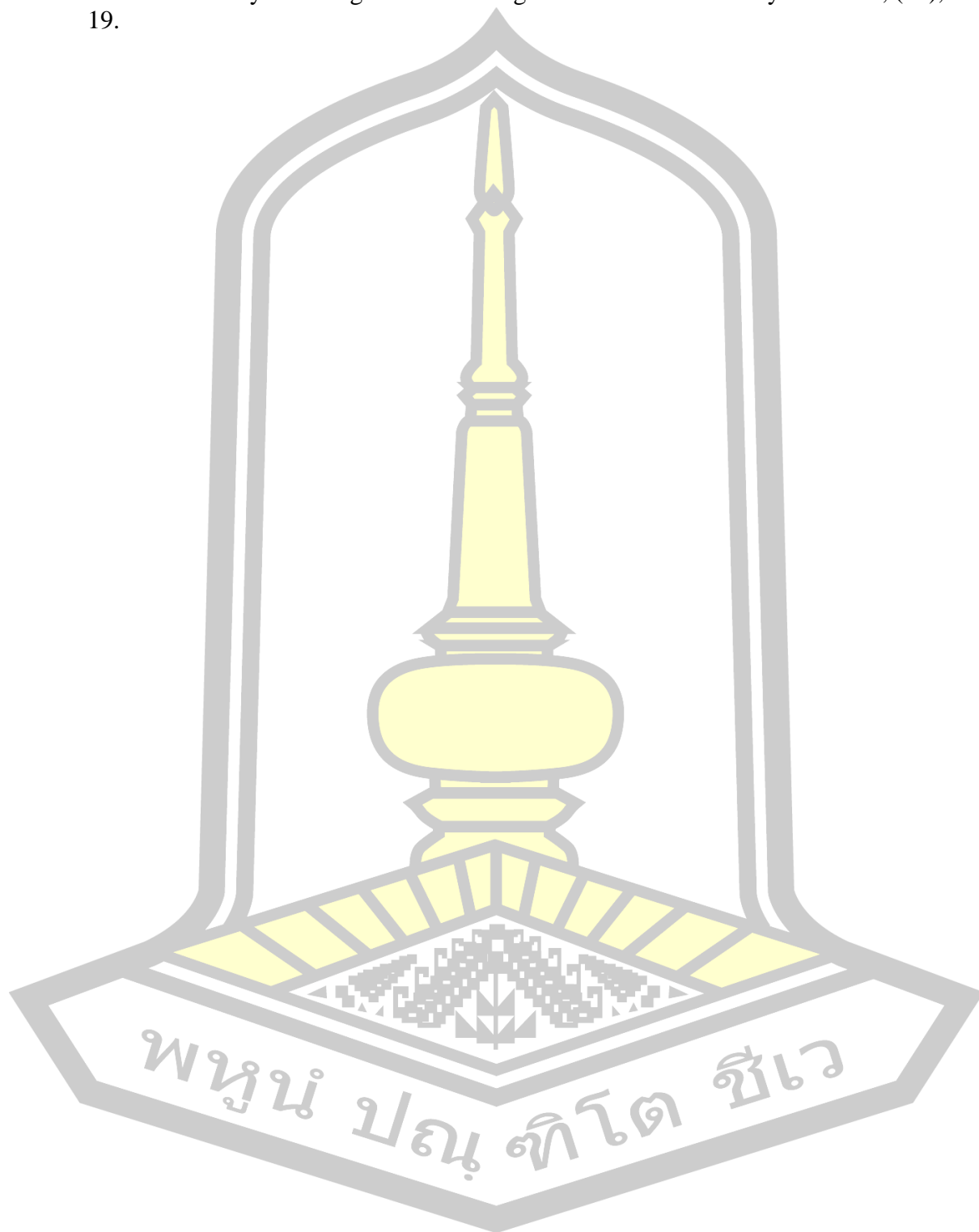


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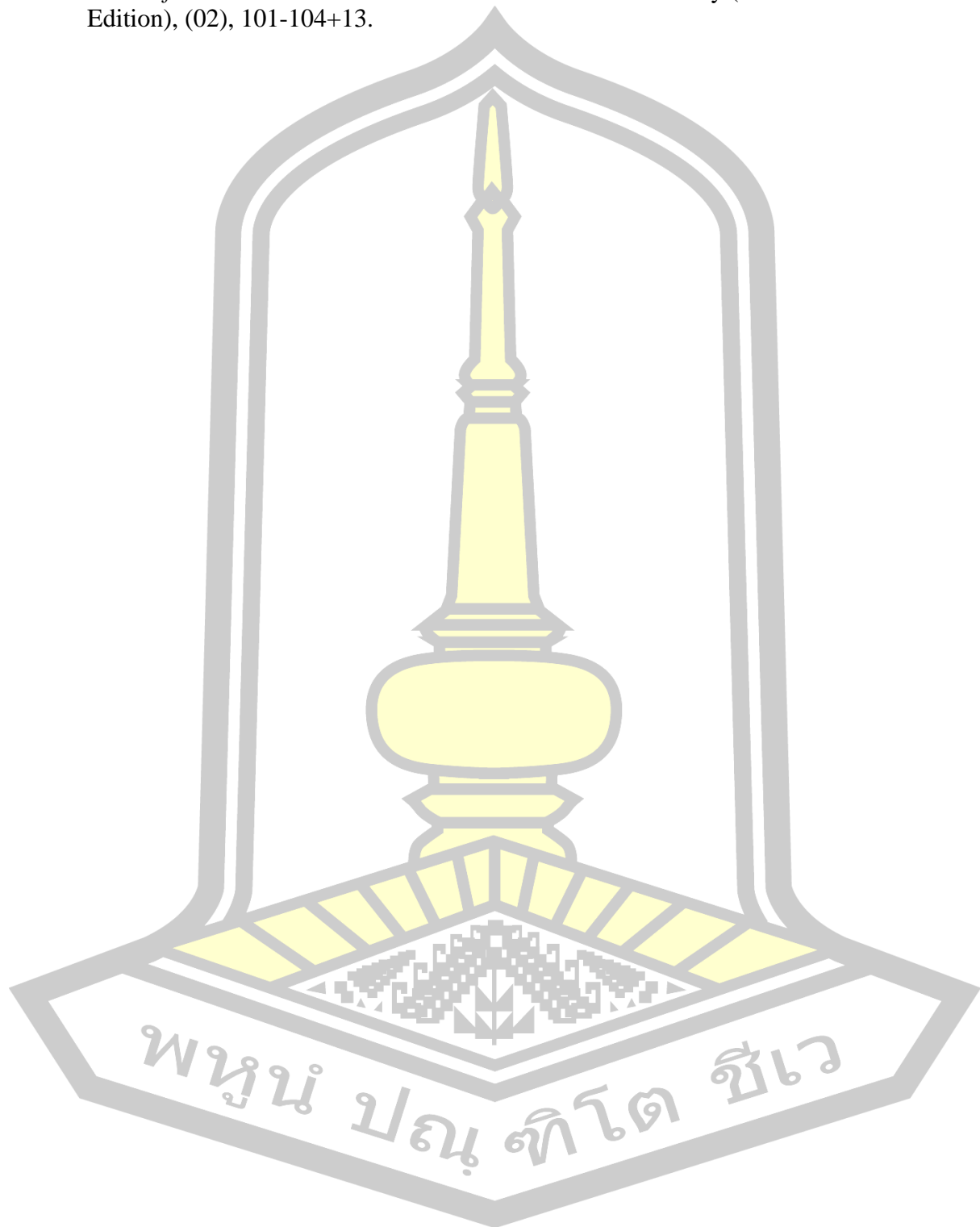
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Personal Interviews

Mr. Zhu Mingcan

May 24. 2023: Interview

Location: Chengdu, Sichuan, China

A veteran in the Chinese film and television industry, he is a renowned Taiwanese artistic master, senior concept artist, director, and pioneer in Taiwanese animation. With fifty years of experience in the animation industry, he trained under the same master as Hayao Miyazaki and has a distinguished reputation in Taiwanese and Japanese animation circles. 2018, he joined China Film Year Year (Beijing) Cultural Media Co., Ltd. as the Executive Producer. In 2023, he became an advisor at Shenfan Animation. He has overseen Chinese animated works such as Youth Song, Yuan Long, and I Am a Great Immortal.

Ms. Ma Xinran

October 31. 2023: Interview

Location: Shanghai, China

Ma Xinran, Brand Director at Mili Pictures. Mili Pictures is an international professional company dedicated to planning, production, investment, operation, management, introduction, distribution, licensing, and developing and selling derivative products for films and animations. The company is headquartered in Los Angeles, USA, with a distribution center in Shanghai, China, and a production center in Suzhou. Significant works include animated films such as Dragon Nest · Warriors'dawn (2014), The Three Pigs and the Lamp (2015), Star Core (2015), Throne of Elves (2016), The Adventure of Afanti (2018), Xiao Qian (2019) and Tig tige (2020).

Mr. Ye Xiaodong. 2023: Interview, General Manager of Chengdu Zifei Film Technology Co., Ltd.

Audience (A). 2024: Interview, Male, 32 years old, Nanchang, Jiangxi Province, China

Audience (B). 2024: Interview, Male, 26 years old, Changsha, Hunan Province, China

Audience (C). 2024: Interview, Female, 26 years old, Taining, Fujian Province, China

Audience (D). 2024: Interview, Female, 32 years old, Wuhan, Hubei Province, China

Audience (E). 2024: Interview, Female, 27 years old, Chongqing, Sichuan Province, China

Catalogue of Female Characters and Works in Chinese Animated Films (1941-2023)
(Compiled by the Author)

Time	Title	Director	Female Characters	Production Company
1941	The Princess of Iron Fan	Wan Laiming、Wan Guchan、Wan Chaochen、Wan Dihuan	Princess Iron Fan、Princess 'YuMian '	China United Pictures Corporation, Xinhua United Pictures Corporation
1958	A Zhuang brocade	Qian Jiajun	Dabu、the Little Fairy	Shanghai Animation Film Studio
1963	Golden conch	Wan Guchan	Conch girl、Sea Goddess	Shanghai Animation Film Studio
1963	Kong Que Gong Zhu	Jin Xi	Nanmanona	Shanghai Animation Film Studio
1965	Heroic Sisters of the Prairie	Qian Yunda、Tang Cheng	Long Mei、Yu Rong	Shanghai Animation Film Studio
1983	The Legend of Sealed Book	Wang Shuchen、Qian Yunda	Old Fox Spirit、Mei'er(Pink Fox Spirit)	Shanghai Animation Film Studio
1984	Huo Tong	Wang Bairong	Heavenly Maiden Sister、Mother Mingzha	Shanghai Animation Film Studio
1985	Monkey King Conquers Demons	Te Wei、Yan Dingxian、Lin Wenxiao	White Bone Spirit、Grandma Fox	Shanghai Animation Film Studio
1991	Flower in the Mirror	Zhaohong、Zou Qin	Tang Xiaoshan	Shanghai Animation Film Studio
1993	Lu Nu	Yan Dingxian、Lin Wenxiao	Lu Nu	Shanghai Animation Film Studio

1997	A Chinese Ghost Story: The Tsui Hark Animation	Chen Weiwen	Xiao Qian、Xiao Die、Xiao Lan	Film Studio Limited
1999	Lotus Lantern	Chang Guangxi	Sansheng Mum、GaMei	Shanghai Animation Film Studio, Shanghai TV Station
2003	The Butterfly Lovers: Leon and Jo	Cai Mingqin	Zhu Yingtai	Shanghai Animation Film Studio, Taiwan Central Film Industry Co. LTD

Catalogue of Chinese Animated Films Directed by Female Directors (1941-2023)
(Compiled by the Author)

Year	Director	Title	Female Characters	Style	Running Time
1947	Chen Boer	Dream of an Emperor		Puppet Animation	20 min
1961-1964	Tang Cheng (co-director)	The Monkey King	Seven Fairies、Queen Mother	2D Animation	120 min
1964	Tang Cheng (co-director)	Heroic Sisters of the Prairie	Long Mei、Yu Rong	2D Animation	40 min
1985	Lin Wenxia (co-director)	Monkey King Conquers Demons	White Bone Spirit、Grandma Fox	2D Animation	90 min
1993	Lin Wenxia (co-director)	Lu Nu	Lu Nu	2D Animation	30 min
2012	Su Da (co-director)	The Monkey King 3D	Seven Fairies、Queen Mother	3D Animation	88 min
2015	Lei Junlin	Teenage Mao ZeDong	Yaomei (Little Sister)	3D Animation	86 min
2017	Su Da	Big Ear Tutu: A Feast of Food Fantasies	Tutu's Mother	3D Animation	91 min
2021	Su Da	Big Ear Tutu: The Tyrannosaurus Rex in Action	Tutu's Mother	3D Animation	85 min

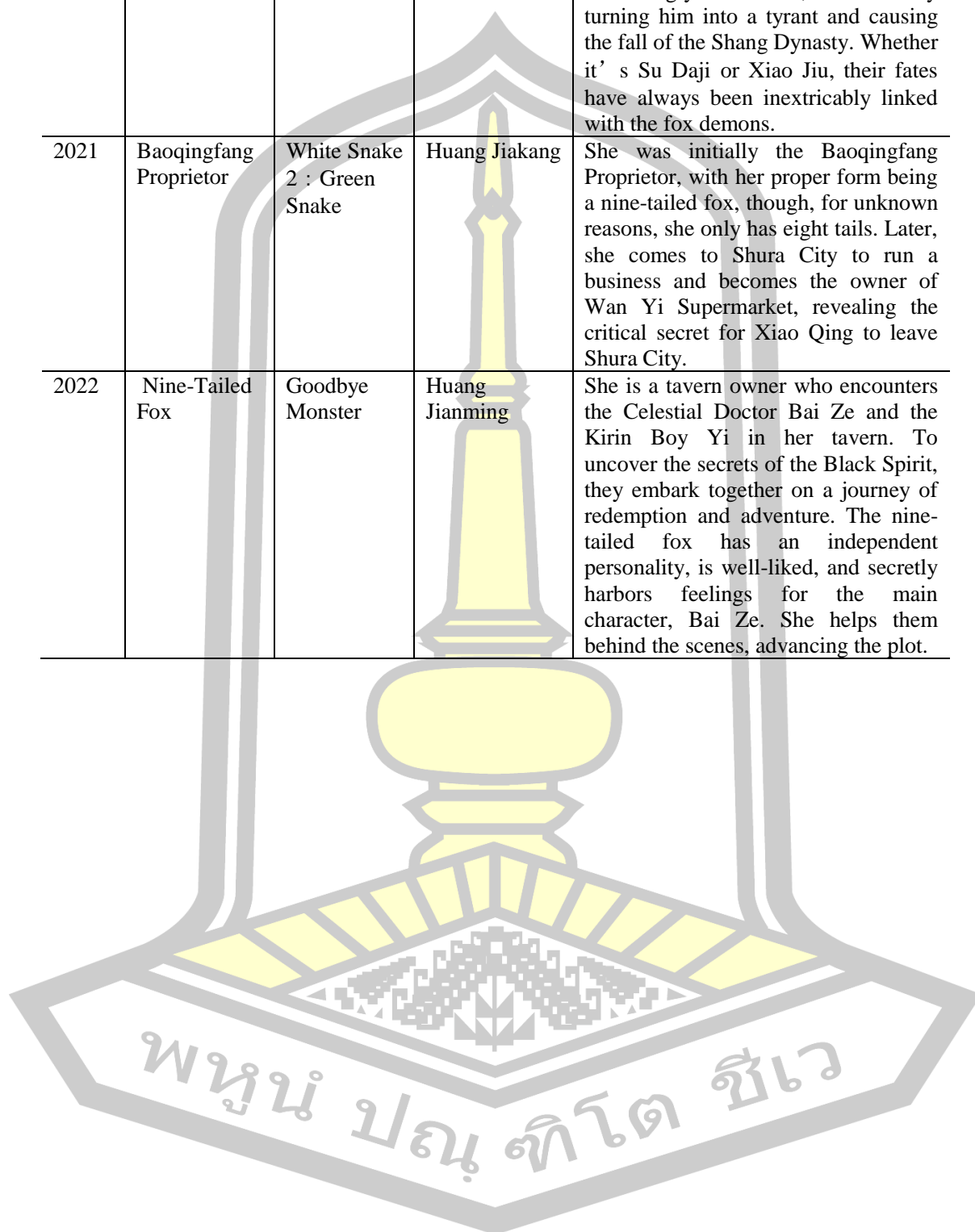
Fox Girls: An Introduction to Female Characters in Chinese Animated Films (1941-2023)

(Compiled by the Author)

Time	Fox Girl	Title	Director	Details
1941	Princess "YuMian"	The Princess of Iron Fan	Wan Laiming, Wan Guchan, Wan Chaochen, Wan Dihuan	She is a secondary character, a fox spirit, the daughter of the Ten Thousand Years Fox King, also known as Princess Jade Countenance. She is the second wife (concubine) of the Bull Demon King and resides in the Mo Yun Cave of Jilei Mountain. Adorned with jewels and radiance, she is greatly favored by the Bull Demon King and constantly competes for his affection with Princess Iron Fan (the legitimate wife).
1983	Old Fox Spirit (Fox Mother)	The Legend of Sealed Book	Wang Shuchen, Qian Yunda	She is one of the main antagonists, leading the beautiful fox spirit (Mei'er) and the one-legged fox spirit (Aguai). She leads them in stealing the Heavenly Books, learning the spell of the Wordless Heavenly Book, conspiring with the government, and causing harm to the common people. Ultimately, she fails in a confrontation with Egg-sheng and his disciples in the imperial palace and receives the punishment she deserves.
1983	Beautiful Fox Spirit (Mei'er)	The Legend of Sealed Book	Wang Shuchen, Qian Yunda	She is one of the main antagonists, a fox spirit transformed into a human form known as "Fox Girl." She disguises herself as a deity to gain, causing harm to people in all directions. Along with the old fox spirit and the one-legged fox spirit, she steals the Heavenly Books and learns the spells from them. The district magistrate marries her to gain power and wealth, and the young emperor marries her for her beauty. In the end, Yuan Gong and Egg-sheng deal with her.

1985	Grandma Fox Spirit	Monkey King Conquers Demons	Te Wei, Yan Dingxian, Lin Wenxiao	She is a secondary character, appearing only to allow Sun Wukong to use her identity (as the White Bone Spirit's mother) to outwit the White Bone Spirit and advance the plot. The film tells the story of Tang Seng and his disciples encountering the White Bone Spirit on their journey to obtain the scriptures and how Sun Wukong defeats the White Bone Spirit three times.
2019	Baoqingfang Proprietor	White Snake 1	Huang Jiakang, Zhao Ji	She is an independent character, the Baoqingfang Proprietor, a thousand-year-old fox demon. With a cute and seductive appearance, she is a two-faced fox who always smiles. Her two faces exhibit different expressions. She manages the mysterious Baoqing Workshop, which is responsible for crafting magical artifacts, and possesses the ability to alter the world and transform humans into demons and demons into humans.
2020	Xiao Jiu	Legend of Deification	Cheng Teng, Li Wei	Xiao Jiu was originally a virtuous young woman forced to marry King Zhou at a young age. Later, a nine-tailed fox demon took advantage of her vulnerability and possessed her body, turning her into a fox demon. Unlike the enchanting and seductive fox demons, she appears brave and stubborn but still longs for warmth deep down. She becomes a sacrificial victim in the Investiture of the Gods war. On the one hand, she is strong and resilient, enduring hardships without ever giving up on proving herself; on the other hand, beneath her stubborn exterior, she also harbors a heart that believes in warmth.
2020	Su Daji (the Nine-Tailed Fox Demon)	Legend of Deification	Cheng Teng, Li Wei	Xiao Jiu, having been possessed by a nine-tailed fox demon, became a disastrous fox woman who brought calamity to the country. The nine-tailed fox, seeking to help the fox tribe ascend to godhood and unite the Three Realms, agreed to assist the Celestial Lord in launching the Investiture of the Gods war. However, afterward, the fox tribe faced extermination and was doomed to eternal reincarnation. From being pure and adorable to becoming cold and alluring, Su Daji's

				enchantment led King Zhou to become increasingly restless, ultimately turning him into a tyrant and causing the fall of the Shang Dynasty. Whether it's Su Daji or Xiao Jiu, their fates have always been inextricably linked with the fox demons.
2021	Baoqingfang Proprietor	White Snake 2 : Green Snake	Huang Jiakang	She was initially the Baoqingfang Proprietor, with her proper form being a nine-tailed fox, though, for unknown reasons, she only has eight tails. Later, she comes to Shura City to run a business and becomes the owner of Wan Yi Supermarket, revealing the critical secret for Xiao Qing to leave Shura City.
2022	Nine-Tailed Fox	Goodbye Monster	Huang Jianming	She is a tavern owner who encounters the Celestial Doctor Bai Ze and the Kirin Boy Yi in her tavern. To uncover the secrets of the Black Spirit, they embark together on a journey of redemption and adventure. The nine-tailed fox has an independent personality, is well-liked, and secretly harbors feelings for the main character, Bai Ze. She helps them behind the scenes, advancing the plot.



BIOGRAPHY

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EDUCATION 2009 - 2012 : Three-year college in fine arts education from
Xinxiang College
2012 - 2014 :Received bachelor's degree in fine arts education
from Zhoukou Normal University
2021 - 2024: Received master's degree in Fine and Applied
Art Research and Creation, Faculty of Fine-Applied Arts

พูน ปณ ทิโต ชีเว