

Chinese Animation: An Effective Vehicle for Enhancing Cultural Confidence of University Students

--Based on a Questionnaire Survey Among More Than 2,000 Undergraduate Students

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ABSTRACT

Cultural confidence of contemporary college students relates closely to the construction of socialist cultural power and the realization of the Chinese dream. In today's society, however, many college students lack cultural confidence, which should be attached to great importance. Compared with the current prevailing path of training college students, Chinese animation features unique advantages, which can effectively enhance college students' cultural confidence by broadening the ways and means and complementing the modes of cultivating college students' cultural confidence.

Keywords: college students, cultural confidence, Chinese animation

1. INTRODUCTION

General Secretary Xi Jinping pointed out, "Strengthening cultural self-confidence is a major issue concerning the rise and fall of the nation's fortunes, cultural security, and national spiritual independence." College students' cultural self-confidence concerns the development and great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation^[1]. It is also indispensable for the personal development of college students in terms of establishing correct values and promoting all-around development.

There are already extensive studies on the current situation of cultural self-confidence among college students. Jihai Zheng (2014) proposes that in the new media era, some college students demonstrate a lack of cultural self-confidence^[2]; Based on the background of economic globalization and the continuous development of virtual space, Jiawei Ren, Xiangyu Sun, and Jing Liu (2018) argue that college students in the new era suffer from a lack of cultural self-confidence, and some of them lack an overall cognition of Chinese traditional culture and fail to have a deeper involvement in advanced contemporary culture. In addition, some students also blindly identify with the foreign culture^[3]. Fengchen Guo (2018) argues that college students face a multi-cultural impact. The multiple and mixed cultural characteristics are likely to lead to students' unbalanced choice between

local and foreign cultures, thus gradually depriving them of cultural self-confidence and cultural self-awareness^[4]. This shows that in today's society, it is widely acknowledged that some college students have weak cultural confidence, and it is urgent to enhance the cultural confidence of contemporary college students. Therefore, training and enhancing the cultural self-confidence of university students is a topic that we cannot ignore.

There are currently several ways to develop cultural confidence in college students. Among them, Chinese calligraphy, drama, Chinese painting, and quality films are all of the great value in fostering cultural confidence. Qian Sun (2021) argues that Chinese calligraphy, as an art, is closely associated with cultural confidence and is essential to building cultural confidence in the Chinese nation^[5]. Zhen Xu and Baosheng Wang (2021) believe that intangible cultural heritage paper-cutting, one of the important components of excellent Chinese traditional culture and the key genre of Chinese folk art, provides a precious cultural resource for enhancing cultural confidence^[6]. According to Hui He and Liwei Bo (2019), the film can stimulate value resonance between audiences and creators depending on cultural confidence^[7]. Wei Yan (2018), on the other hand, believes that television drama, the most approachable, inclusive, and permeable literary form, is superior in building and promoting cultural

confidence^[8]. In this light, numerous art forms serve as important cultural resources for enhancing cultural confidence, and art has a vital role in cultivating and promoting cultural confidence.

As a new communication carrier in the field of culture, Chinese animation has gradually become a dominant artistic expression, and it is being widely used to inherit and interpret more and more excellent traditional cultures. Yiyang Zhao (2020) suggests that animation reflects human consciousness and thinking, and it is a necessary cultural need for people with possible far-reaching and lasting effects^[9]. In turn, studying the relationship between Chinese animation and the enhancement of college students' cultural confidence may provide new ideas for exploring a new effective way to cultivate cultural confidence. In order to accurately and objectively investigate whether Chinese animation can effectively enhance the cultural confidence of college students, the author designs a survey questionnaire on how Chinese animation enhances the cultural confidence of college students based on various research results concerning cultural confidence and Chinese animation, as well as the actual study and life of college students. By analyzing the survey results, the author proves that Chinese animation is effective in enhancing the cultural confidence of college students and has unique advantages. In addition, the author also proposes suggestions for the cultivation of college students' cultural confidence and the development of Chinese animation.

2. RESEARCH DESIGN AND DATA SAMPLE

To investigate the relationship between Chinese animation and college students' cultural confidence, the author adopts a questionnaire survey among Chinese undergraduates and postgraduates. Liu Peng, Bo Peng & Wentao Wu indicate that undergraduate students in different grades have different characteristics^[10]. Therefore, the questionnaire provides a more accurate understanding of the grade distribution of the undergraduates surveyed, which have been divided into four different grades: freshman, sophomore, junior and senior. The time frame of the survey spans from May 25, 2021, to June 10, 2021, on the online platform. A total of 2075 questionnaires have been sent out, with 2040 valid questionnaires received, representing a valid return rate of 98%. The survey sample comes from 29 provinces (municipalities directly under the Central Government), among which the provinces (municipalities directly under the Central Government) with more completed questionnaires are Tianjin, Hebei, Beijing, Shanxi, and Shandong. The basic composition of the sample is shown in the following table.

Table 1 Distribution of genders and grades

Gender	Percentage (%)	
Male	62.4%	
Female	37.6%	
Educational level		Number of students
Undergraduates	Freshman	298
	Sophomore	785
	Junior	701
	Senior	203
Postgraduates		53

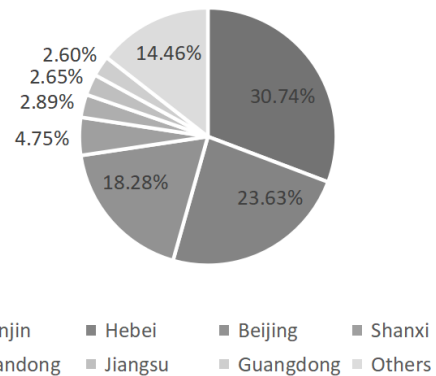


Figure 1 Regional distribution

Firstly, to prove the practical necessity of enhancing the cultural confidence of college students in various ways, questions 6, 8, 14, and 16 are designed to understand the current state of college students' cultural confidence and investigate students' current lack of cultural confidence. Secondly, to verify the positive relationship between Chinese animation and the enhancement of college students' cultural confidence, and provide a practical basis for broadening the path of cultivating college students' cultural confidence, the questionnaire sets out questions 15, 17, 20, 21 and 22 to investigate whether Chinese animation can enhance college students' cultural confidence. Thirdly, the questionnaire analyzes the unique advantages of Chinese animation in enhancing the college students' cultural confidence through questions 9, 10, and 13, aiming to draw the attention of the society to this regard. Fourthly, as there are still many shortcomings in the current development of Chinese animation, the questionnaire further investigates why Chinese animation attracts college students as well as what college students think about how Chinese animation should be developed through questions 7, 11, and 19. The author will make suggestions accordingly to facilitate Chinese animation's ability to help college students enhance their cultural confidence.

3. ANALYSIS OF THE SURVEY RESULTS

3.1. Analysis of college students' cultural confidence

At present, college students' lack of cultural confidence has received widespread attention and research, and scholars such as Jihai Zheng, Jiawei Ren,

and Fengchen Guo have reported on this issue. In this context, the author investigates how much college students know about Chinese excellent traditional culture, new democratic revolutionary culture, and advanced socialist culture, and further studies the specific situation of college students' cultural deficiency to evaluate their cultural confidence^[11]. The author selects a five-point scale method for the survey, with figures from 1 to 5 indicating a gradual increase in understanding.

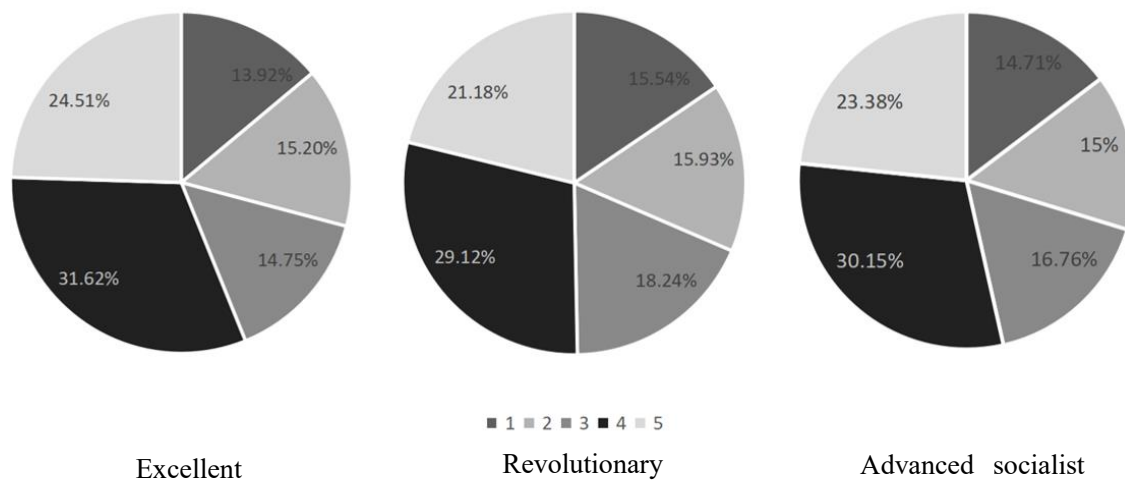


Figure 2 College students' understanding of excellent traditional culture, revolutionary culture, and advanced socialist culture (Figures 1 to 5 indicate a gradual increase in understanding)

According to the survey, 43.87%, 49.71%, and 46.47% of the students get a score of 4 or less for their understanding of the excellent traditional culture, revolutionary culture, and advanced socialist culture. Generally speaking, relatively few students have a higher understanding of these cultures, and nearly half of them have less understanding of these cultures. It is evident that some college students lack cultural confidence and have a shallow understanding of culture. Therefore, there is an urgent practical necessity to cultivate and enhance college students' cultural confidence.

Some college students have no overall knowledge of the excellent Chinese traditional culture, revolutionary culture, and advanced socialist culture, and have relatively weak cultural confidence. Besides, foreign animation, as one of the carriers of foreign culture, may also affect students' state of cultural confidence in the course of dissemination and interaction. With the popularity of the Internet, college students are exposed to a large number of foreign animations. If students have immature psychology and values, they will find it difficult to make rational judgments, distinguish among the foreign cultures carried by many foreign animations, and even develop blind worship. The questionnaire investigates the emotions, values, and behavior of college students while watching foreign animation. The survey data shows that 40.29% of students want to know more about the culture of other countries, 44.36% express their love for the culture of other countries, 40.49% approve of

the values of other countries, 28.77% even agree with the superiority of Western culture, and 18.97% disapprove of the excellent traditional culture of the Chinese nation. At the same time, 24.07% of college students hope that there will be more excellent productions in China. It can be seen that foreign animation promotes cultural exchange and mutual appreciation and pushes Chinese animation to catch up, but it may also hurt college students' cultural confidence. If students fail to make rational judgments and discrimination and lack firm cultural confidence in domestic culture, they may be influenced by foreign animations, resulting in endorsing the values of other countries and the superiority of Western culture, which in turn may weaken their cultural confidence. Therefore, it is necessary to strengthen the cultivation and enhancement of college students' cultural confidence against the possible negative effects and infiltration of foreign culture into college students.

3.2. Chinese animation's influence on college students' cultural confidence

This study investigates whether Chinese animation enhances college students' cultural confidence, hoping to use this popular art form to broaden the ways and means of cultivating students' cultural confidence, thereby improving contemporary college students' cultural confidence.

In the questionnaire, students were asked whether

they feel their cultural self-confidence has been enhanced after watching an outstanding Chinese animation. A total of 33.38% of the students find watching an outstanding Chinese animation very helpful in enhancing their cultural confidence, 38.28% of the students find it very helpful, and only 5.98% of students think it is not helpful. According to the survey data, it can be intuitively seen that Chinese animation enhances college students' cultural confidence.

By analyzing the survey data, Chinese animation can enhance the college students' cultural confidence, which is reflected in the following aspects.

Firstly, Chinese animation can inherit excellent Chinese traditional culture and revitalize it with new

forms. It can also enhance college students' cultural confidence by deepening their understanding and learning of excellent Chinese traditional culture. 97.11% of college students believe that Chinese animation can effectively disseminate and promote excellent traditional culture, revolutionary culture, and advanced socialist culture, and that shows that Chinese animation's role in disseminating and promoting the above-mentioned cultures has been recognized and supported by college students, and it should make further efforts to achieve more success. The questionnaire set up five aspects to investigate how students feel after watching a Chinese animation featuring Chinese traditional culture, and the specific data are shown in Table 2.

Table 2 College students' feelings after watching a Chinese animation featuring elements of excellent Chinese traditional culture

Conformity After-viewing perception	Strongly agree	Relatively agree	Slightly disagree	Disagree
Become interested in the traditional culture involved in the film	38.77%	35.1%	21.42%	4.71%
Deepen their love for domestic culture and history	41.57%	37.89%	17.94%	2.6%
Become more motivated to learn about traditional culture	41.96%	34.41%	19.95%	3.68%
Be proud of the excellent traditional culture of the Chinese nation	45.78%	31.37%	18.87%	3.97%
Develop a sense of responsibility to carry forward the culture of the nation	43.58%	33.87%	18.63%	3.92%

According to the data, after watching Chinese animation with relevant factors, most students would have a deeper understanding of traditional culture and Chinese history, deepen their love for these cultures, and strengthen their pride and responsibility for the excellent traditional culture, which creates favorable conditions for college students to cultivate cultural confidence. In addition, Chinese animation builds a bridge between college students and excellent Chinese traditional culture, allowing them to come into contact with the values embedded in excellent traditional culture, which facilitates the cultivation of good personality and moral quality as well as establishes the correct value guidance for the cultivation of cultural confidence.

Secondly, Chinese animation enables college students to identify and distinguish foreign cultures more rationally. In the questionnaire, a total of 97.11% of college students believe that they can identify and distinguish foreign cultures more rationally after watching domestic animation. That is because by watching Chinese animation, students can have a better understanding and deeper love for their own culture,

deepen their recognition of Chinese culture and form a comprehensive knowledge of traditional culture. In this way, college students can constantly improve their judgment and discriminatory ability, avoid the phenomenon of overblowing and blind worship when facing Western culture, and effectively prevent the infiltration of foreign culture with their protective barrier. By doing so, the students can strongly accelerate their establishment of firmer cultural confidence.

Thirdly, cultural soft power ties in closely with cultural confidence, and the rise of Chinese animation represents the enhancement of cultural soft power, which also manifests and enhances cultural confidence [12]. According to the results of the questionnaire survey, 80.1% of college students think that the rise of Chinese animation indicates the improvement of cultural soft power, while only 1.81% of college students have a negative attitude towards it. Obviously, college students agree that "the rise of Chinese animation represents the improvement of China's cultural soft power." As a part of the construction of cultural soft power, the high-quality development of Chinese animation can promote the

improvement of China's cultural soft power, which in turn supports and guarantees the improvement of students' cultural confidence. As Chinese animation keeps improving in quality and quantity, more excellent works will be produced, and Chinese animation will further "go abroad." Spreading Chinese stories and voices and expanding the influence of Chinese animation in the world are also conducive to the exchange and mutual appreciation of world civilizations, allowing the world to better understand China, thus providing a practical basis for the consolidation of cultural confidence among college students.

3.3. Chinese animation's unique advantages in enhancing the cultural confidence of college students

Compared with other existing ways and means of building cultural confidence, Chinese animation has unique advantages. The questionnaire investigated what advantages Chinese animation has over other forms in spreading and promoting excellent traditional culture, revolutionary culture, and advanced socialist culture. In this multiple-choice question, 67.65% of college students find Chinese animation more attractive to young people, 63.24% of them believe that Chinese animation has various expression methods, 55.98% find Chinese animation more popular, and 37.45% hold the view that Chinese animation is more expressive. According to the survey data, Chinese animation is highly interesting and attractive, featuring a wide range of expressions and strong expressive power. It can tell grand truths and ideological values in plain language, rendering them easier for college students to understand and accept with less resentment or even resistance. Chinese animation is also highly popular and requires little intelligence, thinking ability, or comprehension, allowing students of all levels to watch and understand its content and gain more cultural confidence regardless of their knowledge level. Therefore, Chinese animation may serve as an extension of the classes and complement the cultivation mode of college students' cultural confidence. In addition, the second section of this paper investigates "how college students feel after watching a Chinese animation featuring excellent traditional Chinese culture." By analyzing the data, it is clear that what college students learn while watching Chinese animation is not comprehensive and systematic theoretical knowledge. Compared with other dominant ways of cultivating college students' cultural confidence, Chinese animation works more as a "key" and "switch" as a cultural resource, aiming at stimulating college students' interest in traditional culture, deepening their love for Chinese culture and history, and enhancing their sense of responsibility and pride. As a result, it paves the way for subsequent theoretical studies and allows students to further strengthen their cultural confidence.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

4.1. Deficiencies and their causes in Chinese animation

Chinese animation still has many deficiencies and has relatively few outstanding works, which limits Chinese animation's ability to enhance college students' cultural confidence to a certain extent. Firstly, apart from a small number of good works, most Chinese animations generally suffer from a mediocre plot. Some animations started with good plots and gained high ratings, but later on, the plots grew more and more sloppy and failed to carry out the high standards to the end, resulting in a poor level of plots. Secondly, Chinese animation has witnessed a high degree of homogenization in terms of subject matter. Most animations belong to the genres of ancient style, fantasy, and fairy tales, while fewer works are based on science fiction and history.

Recently some Chinese animations tend to adapt ancient Chinese myths, and those with poor adaptation seldom show innovation and appear clichéd. Thirdly, the characters in Chinese animation lack flesh and blood. Chinese animation has yet to improve its overall character-building level, and many animated characters are single-minded and lack proper charisma, failing to present a three-dimensional character image. Fourthly, many Chinese animations are exclusively for children, and under-aged animations dominate the market. These animations are simple in drawing style and plot and are only suitable for children and teenagers. In contrast, fewer animations have been produced for college students with more mature plots, failing to meet the needs of college students and other adults.

Chinese animation has historical and practical reasons for its lack of overall quality. In the middle of the last century, China promulgated the policy of "art films should serve children," which laid down the childish orientation of most animations. From the 1960s to the 1980s, Chinese animation also lagged because of the unpopularity of color television in China, leading to a gradual gap between the development level of Chinese animation and foreign animation. Compared with foreign animation with uninterrupted development, Chinese animation is weaker in all aspects and remains infantile in its development. At present, China has not yet perfected its animation classification policy, and its animation needs to cater to different aged audiences, which restricts its plot and prevents some outstanding animations from reaching adult audiences. In the face of strict animation auditing, it is difficult for animators to show all their creative ideas, leaving some of the images or plots lacking in expressive strength. In short, Chinese animation still has a long way to go in its development.

4.2. Suggestions for Chinese animation's further development

At present, Chinese animation is relatively weak in terms of overall competitiveness, and animation with Chinese characteristics is still at an early stage of exploration, requiring a long and tortuous development process. The mismatch between Chinese animation and college students' needs requires strengthening its ability

to enhance college students' cultural confidence. To this end, it is essential to focus on improving the quality of Chinese animation so that more college students can find different ways to develop cultural confidence. This questionnaire provides a series of questions designed to facilitate and support Chinese animation's quality development in the future. In the survey, all students were asked "Why a Chinese animation attracts you to watch it," and the results are shown in the figure below.

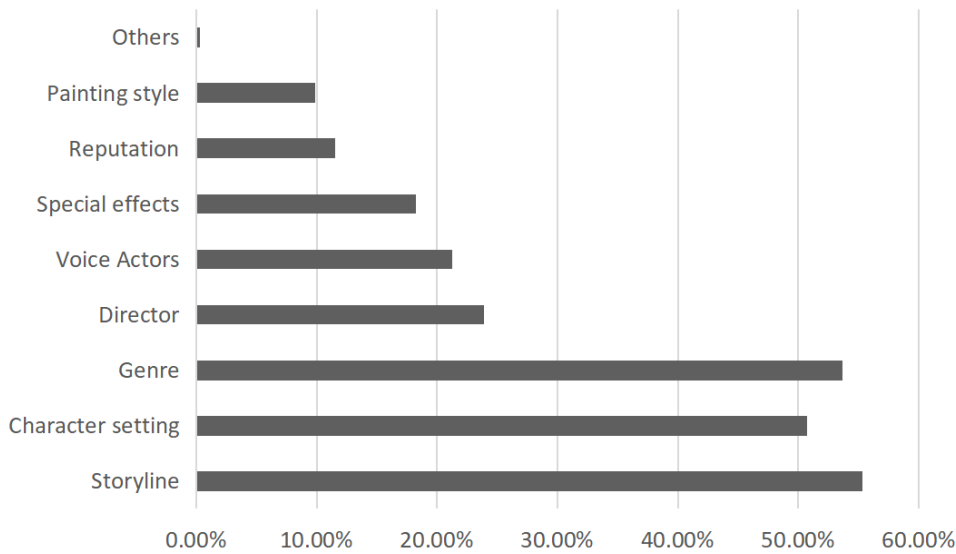


Figure 3 What attracts college students to watch Chinese animation

According to the above figure, the top three factors are storyline, genre, and character setting. The data show that an animation's storyline relates to its attractiveness to college students. The first step is to work on the storyline to utilize Chinese animation as a unique form to enhance college students' cultural confidence. As a key factor in determining the animation quality, the story and plot can convey the audience's cultural connotation, thought and emotion, and value concept. Animation creators should observe the reality and dig out more realistic stories, and integrate imagination boldly to create more possibilities for Chinese animation's development. Chinese animation should always strive for a more moving storyline.

Chinese animation should identify the market positioning, produce works that better meet the market demand, and continue to seek new themes for self-innovation to infect the audience in different ways. In the ancient style, fantasy, and other popular themes, Chinese animation could keep innovating and create more excellent works by getting out of the dilemma of sticking to the same. Chinese animation should break the routine and try science fiction, history, reality, and other cold subjects. There are fewer works in these subjects, and Chinese animation can make great achievements to further meet different audiences' preferences and prosper the animation market.

Character setting is also an important factor that contributes to the quality of Chinese animation. Besides chic appearance, the unique inner character also needs to be invested in shaping animated characters. Real-life is a natural reservoir of material in which creators can find inspiration for character design. Characters who move people's hearts more are conducive to deepening college students' impression of Chinese animation, and the words and behaviors of positive characters in animation can also guide college students' psychology and behavior well and contribute to enhancing their cultural confidence.

Chinese animation can better attract college students' attention with a rich story, market-adapted subject matter, and excellent character settings. As the core of Chinese animation, these three factors determine whether the animation can become a masterpiece. If there is only a famous voice actor or excellent painting style, Chinese animation eventually only has a gorgeous appearance, but no solid core. Meanwhile, the voice actors, special effects, painting style, and other elements should not be neglected. It is necessary to strengthen the training of high-level voice actors and emphasize the use of new technology in animation production to enhance visual perception. Chinese animation should keep improving the painting style, breaking out of the shackles of Japanese and American animation styles, and creating a painting style that meets the public aesthetics and has Chinese

characteristics. In this way, Chinese animation can better develop in all aspects, improve its comprehensive competitiveness and strengthen the cultural confidence of college students better.

5. CONCLUSION

At present, foreign culture affects the state of college students' cultural confidence, and some of them have weak cultural confidence. This study conducted a series of questionnaires to confirm that Chinese animation can emotionally arouse college students' love for Chinese culture, consolidate their recognition of Chinese values, and promote their active learning, spreading and promoting excellent Chinese culture, which serves to enhance and cultivate college students' cultural confidence from many aspects. With its distinctive advantages and good development trend, Chinese animation can effectively enhance college students' cultural confidence. Due to some historical and practical reasons, Chinese animation leaves much room for development. Chinese animation should be refined rather than abundant, and the quantity should be gradually improved after ensuring high quality first. According to the data reflected by the questionnaire, this study puts forward suggestions for the high-quality development of Chinese animation, contributing to broadening the approach of cultivating cultural confidence among college students and further improving Chinese animation's role in enhancing college students' cultural confidence.

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