

# Exploration of Pathways for Constructing Artistic Conception in Chinese Animated Films

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## Abstract

In the current globalized cultural landscape, animated films serve as a pivotal form of cultural art, carrying profound cultural significance. Chinese animated films once showcased a distinctive style in the global animation arena through their unique artistic expressions and profound cultural heritage. However, with the continuous evolution of the times, Chinese animated films face numerous challenges and must explore new pathways to construct unique artistic conceptions. Outstanding artistic conception in animated films can evoke emotional resonance among audiences and elevate the artistic value of the works. Traditional Chinese culture—including poetry, painting, and mythological legends—contains abundant resources for artistic conception. This study aims to analyze existing issues in the construction of artistic conception in Chinese animated films, excavate traditional cultural resources, and propose effective strategies to promote the innovative development of Chinese animated films in the new era, achieving cultural inheritance and artistic breakthroughs.

## Keywords

Chinese Animated Films, Artistic Conception, Construction Pathways

## 1. Introduction

With the rapid development of digital technology and the increasing prosperity of the cultural market, animated films have gained widespread popularity due to their unique artistic expressions. Globally, works produced by American studios such as Disney and Pixar, as well as Japan's Studio Ghibli, have garnered international acclaim for their compelling narratives, exquisite visuals, and profound artistic conception. In contrast, while Chinese animated films possess a deep-rooted traditional cultural foundation and distinctive artistic styles—exemplified by early masterpieces like *The Nine-Colored Deer*—there remains room for improvement

in the depth and breadth of artistic conception in contemporary works. This article examines the current status, challenges, and potential of artistic conception in Chinese animated films, explores pathways to construct artistic conception by drawing inspiration from traditional culture and integrating modern technologies, and proposes new ideas for creative practices. The goal is to advance the creation of Chinese animated films that embody Eastern charm while achieving international influence.

## **2. The Significance of Constructing Artistic Conception in Chinese Animated Films**

### **2.1. Inheriting and Promoting Traditional Culture**

The construction of artistic conception in Chinese cinema serves as a critical pathway for inheriting and promoting traditional culture. Originating from traditional Chinese aesthetics, artistic conception embodies the profound ancient wisdom regarding nature and human existence. When films successfully construct a distinctly Chinese artistic conception, elements of traditional culture—such as poetry, painting, and philosophical thought—are vividly showcased, allowing audiences to directly experience the inherent charm of traditional culture during their viewing (Zhang & Li, 2023). For instance, traditional cultural elements are often oversimplified or misrepresented in contemporary adaptations. The Yi Li (ceremonial bow), a ritual gesture embodying hierarchical respect in Confucian etiquette, is frequently reduced to a casual wave, stripping it of its nuanced socio-cultural significance. Similarly, the symbolic color coding of Peking Opera facial makeup—such as red denoting loyalty (hong lian) and white signifying treachery (bai lian)—is often exploited as decorative flair rather than deployed as culturally anchored semiotic tools for character development. Even the application of Wu Xing (Five Elements) philosophy—metal, wood, water, fire, and earth—remains largely superficial, prioritizing visual depictions of elemental motifs while neglecting their deeper philosophical interplay of mutual generation and restriction (xiang sheng xiang ke).

Many animated adaptations of classical narratives fail to contextualize the philosophical ideologies, value systems, or aesthetic sensibilities inherent to their source material. This disconnect results in underdeveloped artistic conceptions that lack cultural depth, ultimately depriving audiences of immersive engagement with traditional wisdom. For example, simplified retellings of folklore may preserve plot structures but omit the Daoist principles of harmony or Confucian ethics embedded in the original tales, reducing culturally rich narratives to aesthetically pleasing yet intellectually hollow spectacles.

### **2.2. Elevating the Artistic Value of Animated Films**

The construction of artistic conception plays a pivotal role in enhancing the artistic value of Chinese animated films. By crafting unique atmospheres and evoking emotional resonance, artistic conception transforms animated films from mere

entertainment into works of profound artistic depth. This process elevates the aesthetic standards of animation across visual composition, musical scoring, and narrative design. Through meticulously designed artistic conceptions, creators can convey nuanced and complex emotions, provoking profound contemplation among audiences. For instance, the use of solitude and stillness in a scene may symbolize a protagonist's internal growth and struggles, while grandiose landscapes might visually amplify a hero's heroic ethos. Such richness and depth in artistic expression enable Chinese animated films to distinguish themselves in the global animation landscape, merging Eastern philosophical depth with universal storytelling appeal.

### **3. Current Status of Artistic Conception Construction in Chinese Animated Films**

#### **3.1. Superficial Exploration of Traditional Cultural Resources**

Despite China's millennia of history and rich cultural heritage, which provide a profound foundation for constructing artistic conception in animated films, many contemporary works remain limited to superficial engagement with traditional elements. While some films incorporate symbols such as mythological figures or traditional costumes, these often serve as fragmented aesthetic additions rather than vehicles for deeper cultural or philosophical exploration (Fan, 2024). Moreover, foreign audiences, due to a lack of in-depth interpretation of the cultural connotations behind specific Chinese elements, find it difficult to understand the profound meanings. As a result, Chinese animation struggles to provide a deep cultural experience to foreign audiences, fails to achieve effective cultural dissemination, and has difficulty in shaping its influence in the international market.

#### **3.2. Insufficient Integration of Technology and Artistry**

Although advancements in digital technology have elevated the visual quality of Chinese animated films, the synergy between technical execution and artistic intent remains suboptimal. Many productions prioritize technical spectacle—such as intricate special effects and hyper-realistic rendering—at the expense of conveying emotional or philosophical depth. For instance, over-reliance on visually dazzling but narratively hollow sequences often dilutes the thematic resonance of the artistic conception. Conversely, some artistically innovative ideas remain unrealized due to technical limitations, creating an imbalance that hinders the harmonious fusion of form and meaning. This disconnect undermines the potential of animated films to achieve the nuanced, audience-resonant artistic conceptions demanded by high-quality storytelling.

#### **3.3. Disjointed Narrative and Atmospheric Synergy**

Narrative coherence is essential for anchoring artistic conception in animated films. However, a notable disconnect persists between story execution and atmosphere creation in many Chinese works. On one hand, simplistic plots with weak

logical progression or emotional engagement fail to provide a structural foundation for meaningful artistic conception, resulting in hollow or disjointed atmospheres. On the other hand, films overly focused on visual or symbolic abstraction often suffer from chaotic storytelling and poor pacing, alienating audiences rather than immersing them in the intended ambiance. The failure to organically integrate narrative and atmosphere prevents viewers from experiencing the full emotional or philosophical impact of the constructed artistic conception (Wang & Zhang, 2024).

### 3.4. Shortage of Interdisciplinary Talent

The construction of artistic conception in Chinese animation requires interdisciplinary professionals who possess deep cultural literacy, artistic sensitivity, and technical proficiency. However, the industry currently faces a critical talent gap. In academic settings, animation curricula disproportionately emphasize technical training over courses in traditional aesthetics, philosophy, or cultural studies, producing graduates ill-equipped to address the complexities of artistic conception. Within the industry, the lack of robust talent development programs and incentive mechanisms further exacerbates this shortage, stifling innovation and hindering the creation of culturally resonant animated works. Addressing this deficit is crucial for advancing the sophistication and global competitiveness of Chinese animated films.

## 4. Strategies for Constructing Artistic Conception in Chinese Animated Films

### 4.1. In-Depth Exploration of Traditional Cultural Essence

To construct a distinctive and profound artistic conception, Chinese animated films must prioritize deep engagement with traditional cultural heritage (Li, 2024). A paradigm of this approach is Chang An (2023), which situates its narrative within the culturally flourishing Tang Dynasty. The film unfolds through the perspective of Gao Shi, interweaving the lives and legends of iconic poets such as Li Bai, Du Fu, and Wang Wei (Figure 1). Adhering to the principle of “preserving historical authenticity in major events while allowing creative liberty in details” (da shi bu xu, xiao shi bu ju), the production team meticulously researched historical records, conducted field studies, and consulted scholars to craft a narrative that balances historical fidelity with artistic innovation. This rigorous engagement with cultural roots establishes a robust foundation for the film’s artistic conception, enabling audiences to viscerally experience the era’s cultural grandeur.

Ensuring Accessibility of Culturally Specific Elements to International Audiences, The film strategically contextualizes its numerous historical figures and events through narrative techniques that enhance cross-cultural comprehension. By adopting the growth trajectory and experiences of the protagonist Gao Shi as a narrative anchor, it employs a linear storytelling structure to incrementally introduce the stories of other poets. This approach allows audiences unfamiliar with

Chinese history—particularly international viewers—to follow the plot coherently.

To further bridge cultural gaps, the film integrates concise textual annotations and voiceover narration at pivotal moments (e.g., opening sequences, key plot points). These interventions clarify essential historical contexts and cultural concepts, such as: The imperial examination system of the Tang Dynasty, which shaped scholarly pursuits and social hierarchies; The literati social culture, including poetic gatherings (yaji) and the symbolic role of wine in artistic expression (Wang & Ding, 2023).

By balancing narrative immersion with didactic clarity, the film transforms culturally dense material into an accessible yet authentic cinematic experience, ensuring its dual appeal to domestic and global audiences.

The film's character design exemplifies culturally informed craftsmanship. Figures adopt Tang-style aesthetics inspired by Tang paintings and figurines, with robust upper-body proportions reflecting the dynasty's martial ethos. Protagonists like Gao Shi and Li Bai underwent dozens of design iterations, with meticulous attention to costumes, facial hair, skin textures, and even equine companions. Gao Shi embodies resilience and pragmatism—virtues emblematic of traditional Confucian values—while Li Bai's free-spirited demeanor captures the romanticism of Tang poetry. These historically grounded characterizations immerse viewers in the cultural psyche of ancient China.



**Figure 1.** Character Illustration of “Chang’an Thirty Thousand Li”.

Scene construction further demonstrates the film's cultural depth. Forty-eight Tang poems are visually reinterpreted, with the Qiang Jin Jiu (“Invitation to Wine”) sequence standing out as a two-year labor of artistic synthesis. As Li Bai recites “Though gold and silver scatter, they return anew,” spilled wine transforms into water, cranes emerge, and poets ascend to celestial realms—a visual metaphor for the poem's cosmic imagery. This sequence transcends mere illustration, encapsulating the Tang Dynasty's bold romanticism.

The film employs traditional Chinese artistic techniques to enhance temporal

and spatial storytelling:

- Two-dimensional scroll aesthetics visualize the passage of time, evoking the contemplative mood of classical landscape painting.
- Soundtrack integration of guqin (zither) and pipa (lute) complements poetic recitations, creating a multisensory cultural tapestry.

By harmonizing visual, auditory, and narrative elements, Chang An constructs an artistic conception that immerses audiences in the Tang Dynasty's splendor while showcasing the transformative potential of culturally rooted animation.

## 4.2. Deep Integration of Technology and Artistry

As technology becomes the dominant driver in Chinese animated film production, artistic vision risks being overshadowed by technical spectacle. The proliferation of excessive visual effects and hyper-detailed rendering is eroding the medium's unique expressive power and cultural resonance (He, 2024).

In Jiang Ziya (2020), the Kunlun Mountain sequence exemplifies this tension. The production team employed dynamic hair rendering technology for 8 million strands and a nanoscale particle system for mist effects, investing over ¥20 million in a single scene. However, while audiences were inundated with luminous ribbons and floating crystals, the philosophical debate on “saving the multitude versus saving the individual” was reduced to ambient noise. The pursuit of technical perfection transformed what should have been a thought-provoking sequence into a disjointed collage of visual excess. A similar issue arises in *New Gods: Yang Jian* (2022), where a 3000-particle explosion during the “Mountain-Splitting” climax fragmented the emotional core of Hyper-detailed rendering is also reshaping the artistic DNA of animation. Jian's quest to rescue his mother into incoherent visual fragments (Figure 2).



**Figure 2.** “New Gods: Nezha”—splitting the mountain to save his mother.

Realm of Terracotta (2021) spent two years developing a “Qin Dynasty Terracotta Skin Restoration System” to replicate ceramic textures at 0.01 mm precision. Yet this mechanical mimicry reduced culturally rich terracotta figures into sterile 3D scans, stripping them of their potential to convey Eastern aesthetic symbolism. In contrast, Studio Ghibli's *The Tale of the Princess Kaguya* (2013) employed



rough, ink-wash brushstrokes to poignantly embody the Japanese aesthetic of *mono no aware* (the pathos of impermanence). A Beijing International Film Festival survey (2023) revealed that 78% of viewers perceive recent Chinese animations as “increasingly resembling game CGI, devoid of the vitality inherent in hand-drawn artistry.”

Traditional animation styles are rapidly declining amid technological homogenization. Shanghai Animation Film Studio’s ink-wash masterpiece *Feelings of Mountains and Waters* (1988), celebrated by the International Animated Film Association for its *tianren heyi* (harmony between humanity and nature) achieved through minimalist brushwork, finds few successors today. Among recent works, only the “Goose Mountain” episode of *Yao-Chinese Folktales* (2023) continues such aesthetic exploration. Instead, 83% of domestic 3D animations now adopt “Next-Generation Rendering” techniques, achieving Hollywood-grade muscle textures and fabric simulations but losing the *xieyi* (freehand expressiveness) that defines Chinese artistic tradition—the delicate balance between representation and abstraction.

Technology should serve as a catalyst for artistic expression, not a constraint on creative imagination. Successful integrations (He, 2024), such as *Deep Sea* (2023)’s pioneering “particle ink-wash” technique to construct ethereal dreamscapes, and *Three Thousand Miles from Chang’an* (2023)’s revival of Tang Dynasty aesthetics through 2D brushwork, demonstrate that Chinese animation can transcend techno-fetishism. By subordinating technical prowess to artistic vision, these works achieve a synthesis of Eastern aesthetic philosophy and modern sensory impact—a paradigm for constructing culturally resonant artistic conceptions.

## **5. Strengthening Narrative-Environment Synergy in Animation**

### **5.1. The Criticality of Theme-Environment Cohesion**

In animated filmmaking, the synergy between narrative themes and environmental *yijing* (artistic conception) is pivotal for emotional resonance. Environmental transformations—such as depicting ecological decay transitioning to rebirth in eco-themed animations—can visually mirror humanity’s redemptive journey toward nature. Similarly, synchronizing character psychology with scenographic lighting enables the concretization of abstract emotions, as seen in *Wolf Children* (2012), where shifting weather patterns externalize protagonists’ internal struggles.

### **5.2. Narrative Disjunction as a Creative Impediment**

A recurring challenge lies in thematic dissonance caused by fragmented storytelling. Jiang Ziya (2020) exemplifies this flaw: its abrupt thematic shifts—from “divine heroism” to “cosmic order critique” and back to “messianic salvation”—create jarring character arcs. Despite the Kunlun Mountain sequence’s technical bril-

liance (e.g., nanoscale cloud simulations), Jiang Ziya's ideological reversal lacks narrative scaffolding, rendering his transformation implausible. While environmental VFX amplify dramatic tension (e.g., celestial machinery symbolizing rigid destiny), the disconnect between spectacle and character development results in thematic contradictions. This dissonance stems from conflicting creative agendas: reconciling anti-deterministic philosophy with commercial pacing demands. Overreliance on technical extravagance, underdeveloped character motivations, and forced integrations of mythos with modern values collectively hinder audience empathy.

### 5.3. Tripartite Strategy for Synergistic Storytelling

To resolve these issues, a three-pronged narrative framework is proposed:

#### 1) Thematic Anchoring

Establish Jiang Ziya's evolving understanding of "goodness" as the narrative spine: Phase 1 (Blind Obedience): Visualize Kunlun's oppressive order through mechanized celestial gears. Phase 2 (Ideological Crisis): Symbolize cognitive dissonance via Beihai's chaotic fluid dynamics. Phase 3 (Epistemological Awakening): Metaphorize moral clarity through disintegrating "destiny locks" and destabilized Kunlun cloud strata.

#### 2) Environmental Semiotics

Leverage scenographic elements as psychological proxies: Kunlun Machinery: Industrial gears embody systemic oppression. Ice Fractures: Cracking glacial formations externalize Jiang Ziya's breaking ideological constraints. Fluid Dynamics: Turbulent Beihai currents mirror cognitive disorientation.

#### 3) Streamlined Storytelling

Narrative Focus: Prioritize Jiang Ziya's bond with Xiao Jiu (**Figure 3**), using shared trials (blizzard survival, memory exploration) to organically build trust. Philosophical Payoff: Condense action sequences into symbolic confrontations (destiny lock duel, celestial gear battle) that dramatize ideological conflict. Scenic Economy: Eliminate tangential subplots (e.g., Four Unlike's resurrection) to concentrate emotional and thematic momentum.

By aligning environmental semiotics with character arcs and distilling narrative excess, this framework enables yijing to emerge as an active narrative force rather than passive backdrop. The Kunlun finale—where collapsing gears synchronize with Jiang Ziya's rejection of determinism—demonstrates how environmental storytelling can crystallize thematic intent through audiovisual unity.

## 6. Enhancing Professional Talent Development

### 6.1. Curriculum Optimization in Higher Education

Higher education institutions, as pivotal hubs for professional training, must prioritize curriculum reform to cultivate animators capable of artistic conception construction (Liu, 2023). Key measures include: Cultural Literacy Enhancement: Increase course weightings on traditional culture and aesthetic theory, such as





**Figure 3.** Jiang Ziya and Xiao Jiu.

History of Chinese Aesthetics, Classical Literary Appreciation, and Studies in Traditional Art Forms, to deepen students' understanding of cultural heritage and artistic philosophy. Technical-Artistic Integration: Beyond software training, emphasize the fusion of digital tools with artistic vision. For instance, in Animated Scene Design courses, require students to reconstruct scenes inspired by traditional Chinese landscape painting (shanshui), utilizing 3D modeling and real-time rendering to achieve yijing-driven environments.

Interdisciplinary Expansion: Introduce cross-domain courses like Animation-Music Synergy and Animation-Literature Integration to broaden creative perspectives, ensuring graduates can meet the dual demands of cultural depth and technical sophistication in modern Chinese animation (Yang, 2024).

## 6.2. Industry-Academia Collaborative Training

The animation sector should implement systematic upskilling initiatives:

Expert-Led Workshops: Conduct in-house training workshops led by seasoned animators and artists. For directors and art designers, organize masterclasses on Eastern Aesthetic Embodiment in Animation, deconstructing exemplary cases like *White Snake* (2019) and *Ne Zha* (2019). Creative Competitions: Host industry-wide contests with categories like Best Artistic Conception in Chinese Animation, incentivizing innovation in culturally grounded storytelling. Thematic Symposia: Facilitate forums addressing sectoral challenges (e.g., “Balancing Commercial Viability with Cultural Authenticity”) to spark solutions-oriented dialogue.

## 7. Conclusion

The construction of artistic conception in Chinese cinema holds profound significance for cultural preservation and global artistic discourse. While recent advancements in films like *Chang An* (2023) and *Deep Sea* (2023) demonstrate progress, persistent challenges—shallow cultural excavation, disjointed techno-artistic integration—demand strategic interventions. By deepening traditional cultural engagement, fostering technology-artistry symbiosis, strengthening narrative-en-

vironment synergy, and cultivating interdisciplinary talent, Chinese animation will undoubtedly construct more captivating and profound artistic conceptions. As these films harness yijing as their aesthetic core, they are poised to illuminate global screens with China's unique storytelling ethos, transmitting its aesthetic philosophy and cultural richness to worldwide audiences.

## Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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