

# National Image Construction in Minority Theme Animation and Cigarette Painting Research

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**Objectives:** Playing an important role in the history of Chinese animation art, the minority theme animation not only contains strong national spirit and historical tradition, but also has a close relation with social-historical evolution and the characteristics of its historical stage during its development, thus making ontology language more abundant in social changes. In this paper, the development of minority theme animation is described macroscopically according to the statistics and analysis on the output, theme and object of Chinese minority animation. The "pluralistic integration" theory-based systematic analysis on the relationship between minority theme animation and Chinese social-economical development, national literature and art, ethnic policy, ethnic culture, etc. helps us to outline the national image of new China. In the development of Chinese animation, tobacco advertising is often involved in the form of anime painting. In this context, the presented cultural phenomenon and value should attract the attention of scholars.

**Key words:** minority theme animation, social change, national image, cigarette painting, construction

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What is "minority theme animation"? The discussion on this issue is the premise of this paper for exploration and analysis. "Minority" in "Modern Chinese Dictionary" is interpreted as: "The ethnic group other than the ethnic group with the largest population in a multinational country"<sup>1</sup>, while in English, "ethnic group" and "minority" is respectively translated as "ethnic group" and "national minority". Naran Bilik says that: "Recently, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the State Ethnic Affairs Commission of our country are increasingly using ethnic group to replace nation-alit, especially, the former name of the State Ethnic

Affairs Commission is the State Nationality

Affairs Commission"<sup>2</sup>, thus indicating that the academic circles and government departments are increasingly using "ethnic group" to refer to minorities.

"Animation is the art endowing things with life"<sup>3</sup>. In English, the word "animation" is derived from the Latin root "anima", with the meaning of "soul", which can be extended to the meaning of making something live. Animation with multiple attributes can not only represent the existing facts, but also display historical phenomena and problems in the past, without the limitation of time and space, thus the induction of the concept "minority theme animation" should not only fully consider the

cultural characteristics and emotional belonging contained in ethnic group theory, but also reflect the national subjectivity of national unity. Therefore, "minority theme animation" in this paper refers to the animation forms taking minority culture, natural landscape, folk customs, life and production as performance objects, which needs to explain the living conditions of ethnic minorities, traditional culture, folk art and popular sayings in detail, and convey the national will, ethnic policies and historical care to the audience in a unique way. Cigarette painting was known as "western painting" from the 1920s to the 1960s, and the common themes of tobacco painting mainly include myths, folklore, folk customs, scenic spots and so on. The patterns of cigarette painting were presented in cartoon art forms, such as animation and cartoons. To some extent, cigarette painting is closely combined with the development of minority animation.

"National image is the international community's overall perception, evaluation and emotion on a particular country, with its specific content keeping stable, changing and updating in the common construction of subject and object"<sup>4</sup>, thus indicating that national image is the recognition and judgement formed by a country's development history, system, politics, science and technology, culture and nation in the field of self or otherness consciousness, whose early studies mainly concentrate on the fields of communication and international relations. Prof. Boulding says that as the result from a series of information inputs and outputs, national image is the combination of a country's self-cognition and other actors' cognition on it in international system <sup>5</sup>, which elaborates the essential attributes and main characteristics of national image, including the following three points: First, national image as a comprehensive concept belongs to the issues in consciousness field; second, national image has the multi-

dimensional constituent elements; third, national image is closely related to self-cognition, cognition of others and information dissemination. Guan Wenhui, a scholar, says that national image as a complex is the general evaluation and identification on the country itself, state behavior, national activities and achievements by the external and internal public of the country <sup>6</sup>, which sets the boundary of national image, analyzes and explains its constituent elements, thus providing not only the theoretical basis for relevant studies, but also the theoretical reference for national image construction. Prof. Cheng Manli believes that as a kind of subjective consciousness concentratedly embodying the national spirit and will, national image is formed by extracting the modern elements integrated into historical and traditional cultures, which is the shining point in the spiritual temperament of a country or a nation <sup>7</sup>. This view with more profound and specific discussion on "national image" is of methodological significance.

Another kind of view believes that national image as the deep embodiment on comprehensive state power is also its organic component <sup>8</sup>. The widely accepted view of American political scientist Boulding says that national image as an important part of a country's "soft power" can embody a country's comprehensive strength and influence, while this kind of "soft power" summarized by Joseph Nye refers to "cultural influence, ideological influence and the influences of institutional arrangements and foreign affairs" <sup>9</sup>, thus indicating that national image as an important component of national strength has been widely recognized by the academic circles

## QUANTITY ANALYSIS ON CHINESE MINORITY THEME ANIMATION

Until now, there are about 99 animations produced during the more than sixty years of animation creation on Chinese minority (Figure 1), mainly in the forms of TV

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animation series, animation movies, animation short films.

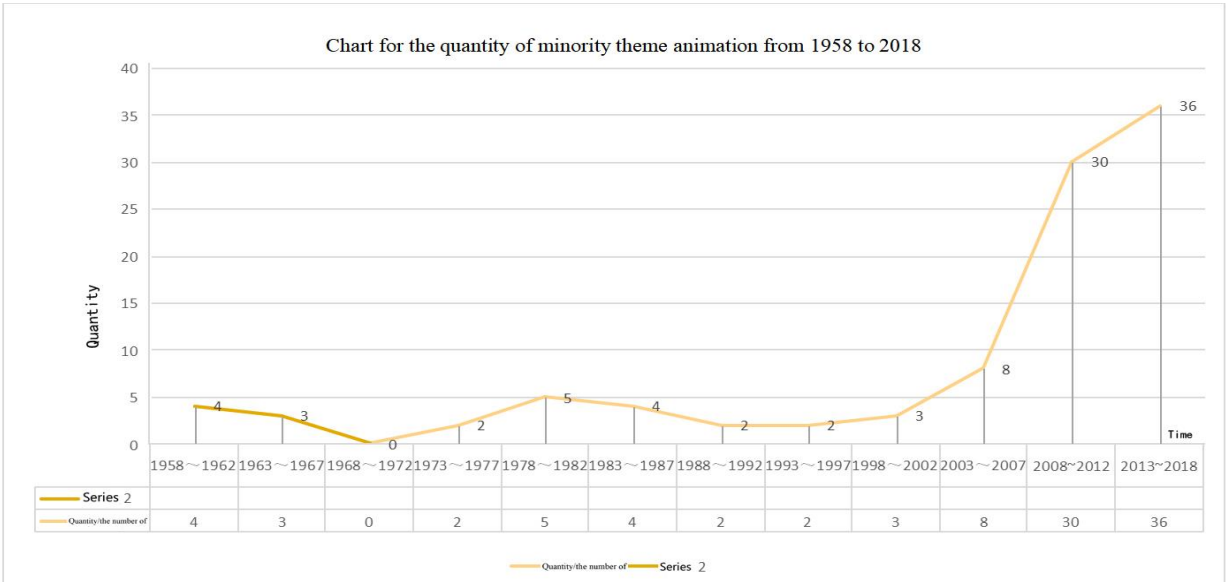


Figure 1Statistical table for the quantity of minority theme animation production in China

Output statistics and analysis

From the founding of the People's Republic of China to the reform and opening-up, there are only 9 Chinese minority animations created from the perspectives of national unity, national policy, national identity and so on. From the reform and opening up to 1999, the transformation of minority animation production mechanism from "planned production" to "market operation" had pushed the minority theme animation production to make great progress than that before the reform and opening-up, with 15 animations created during this period, showing the increasing trend of quantity of animation works.

The entering of the New Century, especially WTO, has promoted the raid development of cultural undertakings and industries in our country, thus making the animation industry stand out as the core component of cultural and creative industries. The prosperity in this industry based on the support of the state and governments at all levels has resulted in the rapid development of minority themeanimation films in our country, with 75

films produced according to the statistics.

In conclusion, the quantity analysis on minority theme animation production shows the totally different development trends before and after the reform and opening-up.

Statistics and analysis on production organization

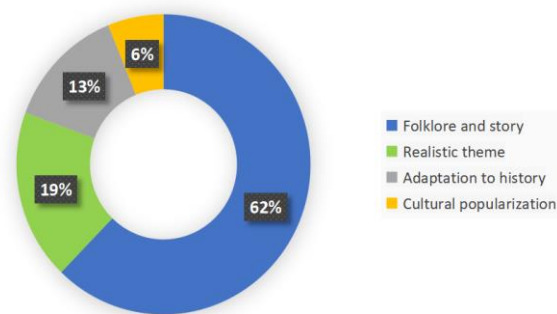
From 1958 to 1978, Shanghai Animation Film Studio as the main producer of animation films on minority theme in China accounted for 95.8%, and there were only a few other producers. The great change in producers of Chinese minority theme animation since the entering of the New Century has driven the production of 75 animations on Chinese minority, in which, 36 animations produced by commercial animation companies account for about 48%; 16 animations created by colleges and universities account for about 21.3%; 10 animations produced by the TV station account for about 13.3%; 6 animations produced by government departments account for about 8%; 3 animations by Shanghai Animation Film Studio account for 4%; other producers account for 5.4%. During this period, the improvement of production

organizations for minority theme animation in our country has changed the production pattern from "monopoly" production by Shanghai Animation Film Studio, Changchun Animation Film Studio and so on into the diversified production by companies, film studios, universities, TV stations and free creators.

As a whole, the statistics on the number of production organizations of Chinese minority theme animation from 1958 to 2018 show that commercial companies account for 39%, Shanghai Art Film Studio accounts for 27%, colleges and universities account for 17%, government and TV stations account for 14%, and others account for 3%.

### Measurement and analysis on creative theme

After the founding of new China, the minority theme animation in China with relatively concentrated creative themes and performance subjects is mainly characterized by focusing on national demands through the animation art performance of minority traditional culture (Figure 2).



**Figure 2**  
**Distribution for types of animation themes on ethnic minority**

The results of data statistics show that there are 62 animations taking the myths, legends and folktales of ethnic minorities as themes, accounting for about 62%, while 18 animations taking revolutionary history and heroism film (realistic theme) as themes account for about 19%, and about 13 animated films adapted from historical figures or events of ethnic minorities account for about 13%.

### Analysis on performance object of minority theme animation

There are more than 20 ethnic groups as the main objects involved in minority theme animation of New China such as Zhuang, Bai, Mongolian, Dong, Dai, Uygur, Kazak and Miao, in which the Mongolian nationality has 30 animations on its own ethnic theme, the Zhuang nationality has 13, the Zang nationality has 9, the Uygur nationality has 8, the Dai nationality has 5, the Bai nationality has 4, the Manchu and Miao nationalities have 3, the Dong nationality has 2, and other nationalities have 22 in total. In addition, there are 3 animated films on multi-national themes (Figure 3).

Ethnic distribution of minority theme animated films in China from 1958 to 2018

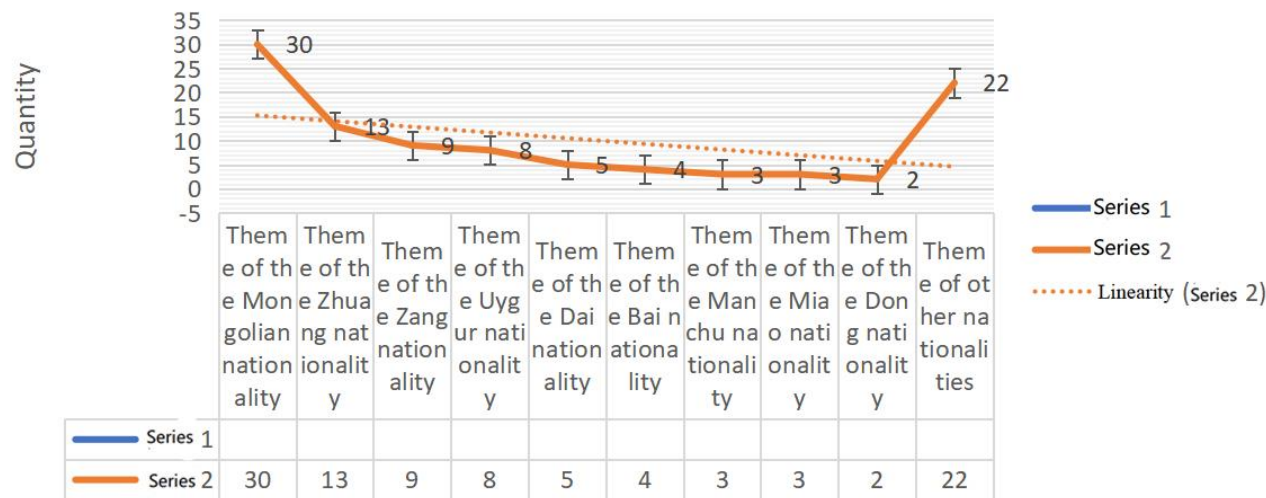


Figure 3 Ethnic distribution of minority theme animation in China

ANALYSIS ON NATIONAL IMAGE OF MINORITY THEME ANIMATION IN THE CONTEXT OF SOCIAL CHANGE

In this paper, the historical theory is used to explore the path and expression form of minority theme animation participating in national image construction by placing the concepts of minority theme animation and national image construction, and the tension between state behavior and artistic creation in the historical context of new China's social development, so as to clarify the relationship between minority theme animation and national image in China.

National cultural consciousness and national image construction

After the founding of new China, the demands for the propaganda of ethnic minorities' prosperous life and national ethnic policy have endowed the minority animations with special task, so as to earnestly promote the great unity of all ethnic groups in the country and create a good national image of new China, which mainly includes the following aspects: First, publicize the social system and ethnic policies of new China under the theme of great unity of all ethnic groups.

Second, display the prosperous image of new China by describing the traditional culture, the harmonious and civilized life of ethnic minorities. Third, create a good national image of unity and fraternity among all nationalities through the spread of Chinese minority theme animation. In addition, the administration modes of "merging government administration with enterprise management, and the mandatory production" under the planned economy system of the government have pushed the animation artists to undertake the mission of displaying the spiritual outlook and national unity of new China as the labors in state system.

In 1957, the animation nationalization has begun to be developed since the slogan of "exploring the road of national style" proposed by the famous animation director Te Wei. How to realize domestic animation nationalization? How to display the unique aesthetic style of China by extracting and use the essence from China's traditional culture and art, which has become the hot topic of animation artists' discussion. In the above background, the older generation of animation artists in China have begun to study the abundant and diverse minority cultures with long history by



familiarizing the connotation and characteristics of minority culture through field investigation, so as to integrate the folk art, traditional culture and traditional aesthetics of ethnic groups into animation creation, thus resulting in the appearance of paper folding, ink-water drawing, puppets, shadow play and other animation forms. Meanwhile, the production of a batch of national animated films with wide influence in international animation circles and distinctive national characteristics have been made an important contribution to the formation of "Chinese Animation School", and also provided new thinking for national image construction.

During this period, the minority theme animations with the creative ideas focusing on national unity, state construction, class struggle and other aspects are mostly presented by metaphor, adaptation, recording and other means, which can be classified into the following categories: The first is class struggle. In this kind of works, the reflection of social reality contradiction through identity characteristics requires the roles with antagonistic relationship between the good and the evil in narrative to have distinctive class stand, so as to push forward the plot development by taking oppression and resistance as the internal driving forces, while the usual victory of the oppressed in the end of the film can arouse the audience's sympathy for the oppressed and hatred of the oppressed. For example, the "Wood Girl" created on the basis of Mongolian folklore skillfully integrates folk songs, folk crafts, local conditions and customs of ethnic minorities, in which, the sharp contrast between the wisdom of the masses and the decay of the Prince is presented by describing the clever shepherd Butler and the foolish Prince to propose ingenious solutions to the problems, while this animation with the characteristics of the times and regions expresses the director's private emotion and class stand, and embodies class attribute. As the typical description of class struggle in real society by using metaphorical

artistic way, the "Inscription of Dragons" shows the laboring people's hardworking, wisdom and fighting spirit of fearing no power. The second is description of living state. In the 1950s and 1960s, the creative themes of carrying forward the people's laboring, living conditions and the spirit of no fear of difficulties were brought by the demand for China's socialist construction to the cultural construction field, and so was the creation of minority theme animation. When describing the living conditions of ethnic minorities in this kind of minority theme animation, the optimistic facing to the difficulties in life also reposes people's yearning for a better life. For example, in the animation "A Zhuang Brocade", with the agreement on recovery of the lost brocade by the three sons, when facing the difficulties, the eldest son and the second son choose to give up, while only the youngest son goes through all the hardships to find the brocade, so as to realize his mother's wishes, which presents the traditional Chinese filial piety thought. At the same time, the large presence of mother Da Bu's weaving scenes in this animation, especially the description of hard-working scenes, and the turning of beautiful pictures in Zhuang brocade into reality, tell the audience that only through hard work can we get a happy life, which is a praise for the hard work and love of life of the laboring people, and also a response to the new China's booming production and construction in the era. The third is the praise of realistic theme. This kind of animations with realistic value mainly describes the typical deeds and advanced characters in the new China's minority society for promotion. Based on the true story of rescuing the sheep in the wind and snow by two Mongolian girls named Long Mei and Yu Rong from the DarhanMuminggan Joint Banner of Wulanchabu League in Inner Mongolia, the representative animation "The Heroic Little Sisters on the Grassland" is created to truly reproduce the scene of the little sisters fighting against snowstorm to protect their collective property, with the praise on their amazing perseverance in spite of difficulties and their

lofty spirit of fearing no sacrifice for the protection of collective property. Moreover, the more prominent "collective consciousness" in this animated film indicates that: on the one hand, it should adhere to the unity of collective interests and individual interests; on the other hand, individual interests should be subordinated to collective interests when there is a contradiction between the two, which reflects the values at the state level. The fourth is the praise on close relationship between military and civilian, which refers to the love of the minority people for the PLA mainly described in this kind of animation. The representative animation "Two Little Peacocks" directed by Yan Dingxian narrates a folk story of the Dai nationality in Xishuangbanna, Yunnan Province. In the story, the eggs picked up by the little red guard Yan La and his younger brother Ai Zhapeng in the Dai nationality are going to be hatched for sending to the PLA, but two little peacocks are finally hatched, and then the grandpa Bo Jing'en narrates the status and symbolic significance of peacock in the hearts of the Dai people when explaining the reason, thus drawing out the story of the PLA helping the Dai people to become the master of their own. Besides the display of geographical features, traditional festivals and cultural beliefs of the Dai nationality, this animation is also beneficial to strengthen the unity and progress of all ethnic groups by showing the position of the PLA among the minority people, thus writing a new chapter for the "fish-water relationship between military and civilian" in new China.

In the period of "Cultural Revolution", the minority theme animations in our country are characterized by single overall consciousness, monotonous artistic style, less output of works, in which the "Flying Horses" and other animations directed by Jin Xi and Liu Huiyi have representativeness. The large amount of descriptions on folk songs, dance and love in minority theme animation embodies the superiority of national policy in our country

from a certain perspective, so as to enrich the connotation of national image, and gradually realize the transformation to the subjectivity concept of national image of multinational unity.

### **The outlining of multi-dimensional national image under social change**

After the implementation of the reform and opening-up policy in China, the gradual disappearance of the factors affecting the creation of minority theme animation for a long time with the social transformation has led to the changes in cultural expression in minority theme animation. After entering the new period, the animation artists' second-time attention on decorative arts, folk stories, folk arts, puppets, paper cutting and other art forms of ethnic minorities has promoted the diversified development of minority theme animation creation, as well as the establishment of the Chinese minority animation paradigm. At the same time, the full playing to the artistic characteristics of minority theme animated films and its prominent achievements in the exploration of nationalization have made the national style and aesthetics become more and more mature.

During the new historical period of the reform and opening-up after the Third Plenary Session of the Eleventh Central Committee, the gradual recovery of minority animation production in China is mainly reflected by the eagerness of animation artists relieved from the long-term depression in spiritual world during the "Cultural Revolution" to display China's new spiritual outlook by using animation, as well as the self-exploration and the value reconstruction, which is mainly because of the following aspects: First, China's entering of the new period of reform and opening-up and socialist modernization construction has politically guaranteed the development of Chinese minority theme animation. Then, a series of policies are issued by the state to support cultural and art development. Finally, the further emancipation of animation artists' mind has further strengthened their subjective

initiative. In this stage of historical development, the great changes in production, creation and spread of minority animated films with the change of the times have also changed the expression of minority theme animation to national image.

A batch of minority theme animations with great influence at home and abroad created after the reform and opening-up can be classified into the following categories: The first is the description of laboring people. The "Tale of Avanti" puppet animation series with 14 clips created on the basis of Avanti's story in Xinjiang folklore presents the great wisdom of Avanti through the humorous visual image of Afanti riding donkey backwards and the narrative language, in which the characteristics of hating evil, optimistic attitude and strong sense of justice make Avanti a well-known star of the Uygur people in China with a large number of fans around the world. The description of the Uygur laboring people's long-term struggle against the reactionary ruling class and feudal secular ideas in this film also shows the director's praise for the laboring people in the new period. The second is the description of heroes. This kind of films always wins the audience's respect and praise on protagonist's suffering for the people's happy life that is difficult for ordinary people to do, and the achievement of final success, so as to reflect heroes' ability and courage to take responsibility. In the above way, the "Star of Dragon Tooth" narrates the story of Sang, that is, a young man of the Miao nationality successfully makes up the sky after going through all kinds of hardships, which can arouse audience's recognition and thinking of a certain viewpoint in the narrative process of animation with ups and downs. The third is the writing on pursuit for human freedom, which shows the director's desire and appeal for the description and liberation of human nature through the vivid presentation of tortuous story. The "Butterfly Spring" adapted from the folklore of the Bai nationality narrates the love story of Xiang Lang and Die Mei who finally

become the beautiful butterflies and fly freely together after being killed by the King Yu. From the perspective of creative theme, as an animated film full of tragedy, this film with its created hazy and implicit beauty of sadness uses story narration to reveal people's yearning and pursuit for equality, freedom, love and a better life, and shows the rich and unique cultural aesthetic connotation. In a word, Chinese minority theme animation has made new progress in theme content, art form, technical means and development mode during this period.

In the late 1990s, with the only three animations of "Ginseng Kingdom", "Story of Horse-Head String Instrument" and "Hongshifeng", the development of minority theme animation in China comes to a crisis under the attack of "industrial animation production mode" in foreign countries, showing the "confused, wandering", even stagnant states. Then, the animation circles show the tendency of Europe, the United States, Japan and South Korea taking the lead, with the animation industrial development and animation creation in our country gotten lost again, especially under the guidance of the concept "tradition is backwardness", with the unestablished new norms and value system, the national spirit expression mode, the aesthetic features and the artistic production experience, which have been formed for a long time in China's creation of minority theme animation, are abandoned without thinking, thus making the development of minority theme animation in China fall into a downturn. With the attention of national leaders and government departments paid to this phenomenon, the "Report on the development of China's animation film industry" was submitted to the government in the National Animation Joint Conference held by in Oct, 1990, which motivates the animation artists to revitalize the national animation again, so as to get rid of this embarrassing situation, thus the development of minority theme animation once again arouses the concern and discussion of the industry, and then the creation of minority theme animation has



gradually returned to the artist's vision.

### **National image under new aesthetic characteristics**

Since 21st century, the great progress in economy, culture and education of minority areas in China has pushed the traditional culture of ethnic minorities to move towards modernization, with the works of "Color Yunnan", "Liuzhou Kristeva", "Story of Zhuang Brocade" and others as representative. The minority theme animation short films created by animation majors in colleges and universities have obvious characteristics in artistic form, narrative theme and innovation, such as the "Rice Grain ZiZi" created by Beijing Film Academy, the "Visiting of Mother and son to the Horizon" created by Guangxi Arts University, and the "Boishan" created by Guizhou University. Meanwhile, the popularity of the increasingly emerging animation websites, animation satellite TV and animation competitions, especially the Flash animation, among college students, Vanguard Animation and animation amateurs, has promoted the animation creation, exhibition and broadcasting activities to be alive. Based on the concept of individuality and uniqueness of film creation, the artistic animation short films with minority themes created by youth animation creation group have won international awards. During this period, in the context of the rise of national animation, the commercial animated films on Chinese minority as beautiful scenery are popular with the audience and has been winning awards at the domestic and foreign film festivals. For example, "The Tibetan Dog" has been named in the Annecy International Animated Film Festival, and "The Warriors" has won the Huabiao Film Awards and Golden Rooster Award.

In this period, the aesthetic characteristics have gradually transformed from single aesthetic into the diversified development of traditional theme, documentary aesthetic style and native language dialogue. The first is the development of Chinese minority theme

animation in the exploration on internationalization. Since entering the WTO, the "implementation rules of SARFT on the" going out "project of radio, film and television" issued by the State Administration of radio and television (SARFT) has provided more relaxed environment for the creation and development of minority theme animations, in which, as a new attempt, "The Tibetan Dog" adapted from Yang Zhijun's novel "Tibetan mastiff" is co-produced by China and Japan, with Mr. Kojimamasa, Yuki from Japan as the director. The second is the more extensive creative themes, especially the changes of ecology, culture and life encountered in the economic and social development of ethnic minorities in China have also become their focus. The story narration of the "Tibetan Dog" with humorous plot makes people realize the truth of harmony between man and nature. People's consideration of living space for "Tibetan antelope" has driven the animation artists to create the animation series "Tibetan antelope" by taking this as the prototype, which tells the story of a kind and brave Tibetan boy Ge Sang and his sister Sai Zhen fighting against the natural environment and dangerous poachers to protect the little Tibetan antelope, while finally the little Tibetan antelope gets rid of danger and safely backs to its father and mother. In this animation series, the narration of the bad ecological environment for Tibetan antelope in a more direct narrative way has aroused the attention to this group, and this animation has won the 27th China TV Golden Eagle Award. These two minority animations with focus on natural-ecological environment and human nature have broken through the praise of traditional narration and individualistic heroism. The animation "Color Yunnan" endowed with the label of "tourism and economic value" in planning and creation passes on the characteristic culture of Yunnan ethnic minorities to the world by taking folk legends, costumes, folk crafts, places of interest and festivals in local areas as its creation materials and performance objects, which is popular with all circles. Undoubtedly,

the "Color Yunnan" arouses people's attention to regional culture by using animation art to introduce the abundant tourism resources in Yunnan. At the same time, the minority theme animations with various attractive features created by Guangxi Arts University, Beijing Film Academy, Jiangnan University, Inner Mongolia University and other colleges and universities also have good sense of innovation and have won many awards in important competitions at home and abroad. In the animated short film "Picture in Heart", the Thang-ga manufacturing process taken as the creative background is integrated into story narration to add interest to the narrative of film by vividly showing the Thang-ga production process. The final point is the diversified path for the development of minority theme animation in China. The emergence of the Internet and mobile media makes the initiative of minority animation released unprecedentedly. For example, taking the traditional culture of ethnic minorities in Yunnan as creative background, a series of animated images designed by Yunnan Network are made into a series of "good netizens" emoji, thus introducing and promoting the national culture in a more popular way. Meanwhile, the national guidance of literature and art policy of "carrying forward the melody of the times" has pushed the creation of minority theme animated film to develop towards the melody of the times, with more attention paid to the integration of minority theme animation development with the outlining of national image from the perspectives of inheritance and spread of traditional culture of ethnic minorities, the rise of the Chinese nation, etc.

## CONCLUSIONS

With its inseparable connection with literary thoughts, concepts and ethnic policies in different historical periods of new China reflected by its development process and ontology language, Chinese minority theme animation records the development process of

new China to reflect the changes in traditional culture and national identity of ethnic minorities, and constitute the common cultural psychology, values and thinking mode of the Chinese nation. What's more, it uses a special artistic form to display the development history and social reality of new China with the characteristics of the times, the state behavior and activities, and the national image outlined by the propagation of self-construction or the assistance of others' vision, thus it can be said that the cultural representation of "pluralistic integration" and the idea of harmonious unity of the Chinese nation are deepened by Chinese minority theme animation during its development and evolution.

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## AUTHOR DECLARATION

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