

From Ethnographic Documentaries to Ethnographic Animation: The Change in the Production Methods and Influencing Factors of Chinese Minority Themed Animations

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Abstract - China is a multi-ethnic country. Each ethnic minority group has different cultural characteristics. The stories, myths, and legends of ethnic minorities also provide material and inspiration for the creation of Chinese documentaries and animations. With the influence of postmodernism and the borrowing of international practice projects, various new attempts have been made in the shooting methods of Chinese minority documentaries after 2000. These new attempts have strengthened the initiative of ethnic minorities as cultural subjects in the production of ethnographic documentaries. Meanwhile, in animation, the concept of Ethnographic Animation and the method of working with ethnic minorities have also attracted more attention from scholars.

Keywords - ethnographic animation, ethnographic documentaries, influencing factors, Chinese minority, participatory design

I. INTRODUCTION

Chinese ethnic minorities refer to 55 ethnic minority groups other than the main ethnic group (Han). After the founding of the People's Republic of China (1949), in order to promote national unity and eliminate ethnic barriers, the new government introduced a number of ethnic minority policies and encouraged studies and artistic creation of minorities. From 1956 to the end of the 1980s, Shanghai Animation Film Studios (basically for the Han people) produced a number of ethnic animated films such as Wood Girl (1956), A Zhuangjin (1959), Diao Long Ji (1959), Chang Fa Mei (1963) and so on.

In the 90s, the number of ethnic minority-themed animations dropped dramatically. The reason for this is that on the one hand because some ethnic minority areas are remote and the economic and technological education in remote minority areas lags behind urban areas, which also leads to the development of culture and art in a depressed and passive

state. On the other hand, because of the influence of mainstream culture from Europe and America, China's animation creation is pursuing internationalisation and modernisation in terms of subject matter and artistic style to meet the tastes of the public after China's reform and opening up policy [1]. It can be seen that the Chinese urban population (mainly Han) holds the right to speak in the animation for the Chinese minority. China's remote ethnic minorities do not have the ability to independently make their own animation. After entering the 21st century, as the heritage of ethnic culture has been valued, and some Chinese filmmakers have explored theories and practices of ethnographic films, animation with ethnic minorities as the theme has seen new developments.

Compared with the development of minority-themed animation, ethnographic documentary has been in a good state of development. The ethnographic documentary in the early days of the founding of the People's Republic of China was dominated by the political propaganda of the war of liberation. For example, The Red Flag Swept through the West Wind (1950) and The Song of Southwest China (1950) as well as, The Light Shines on Tibet (1952).

The documentary of ethnic minorities in the 1980s after the end of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) focused on geography, human customs and economic construction such as the Mosuo Customs (1981), Celebration of Birth (1985), and Baikuyao (1987). In the 1990s, ethnographic documentary began to pay attention to the ethnic minority's daily life and cultural protection. For example, The Family in Northern Tibet (1991), The Last Shanshen (1993), The Wa People (1997) and so on.

After 2000, filmmakers and researchers of ethnographic documentary had begun to explore the community video of ethnic minority members and carried out a series of projects (e.g. Community Image Education, the Eye of the Village) to encourage the members (including the Miao) to use



photographic techniques to create ethnographic documentaries. Therefore reviewing the practice and method of designing with community members in minority-themed animation and an ethnographic documentary would provide practical experience for the research in theory and practice. At the same time, the study of the concepts of post-colonialism and Participatory Design would help to analyse the problems faced by remote minorities in cultural heritage and enhance their participation rights and cultural discourse in animation and animation production.

II. USING POST-COLONIALISM TO ANALYSE THE INFLUENCE OF MAINSTREAM CULTURE ON CHINESE MINORITIES

In the discussion of motion pictures as a means of communicating ethnography, Jay Ruby proposed that the emphasis here is not on the exploration of the world through the camera but rather on the presentation through the film of an anthropological view or statement about the world [2]. That is to say the filmmakers' attitude and position in relation to the subject are represented in the film. In recent years, some ethnographic document projects (e.g. Navajo Film Project, the Eye of the Village) have been inspired and influenced by the concept of post-colonialism [3], allowing ethnic minority groups to construct narration of films as authors and describe their cultural behaviors and to express cultural perspectives. Therefore, this section uses the concept of post-colonialism to analyse the influence of mainstream culture on Chinese minorities.

After the Second World War, Asia and Africa began a huge national liberation storm, and the colonies became independent one after another. As of 1990, nearly 100 of the world's 180 colonised countries had declared independence after World War II, including 27 in Asia, 48 in Africa, 10 in Latin America and 11 in Oceania [4]. As the imperialist forces gradually disintegrated and the independence movements around the world advanced, the colonised people began to reflect and express the problematic and contested tension between imperial language and local experience. Meanwhile, anti-colonial struggle has generated intellectual debate. Therefore, under the interaction of imperialism culture and indigenous cultural practices, the birth and development of post-colonial literature and post-colonial theory were promoted [5].

Since the 1970s, post-colonial criticism has challenged questions of the nature of anthropological knowledge. The issue of the responsibility of the ethnographer has been subjected to post-colonial scrutiny from various aspects (political and ideological), regardless of whether its criticism comes from the previously colonised state or from the former Western colonists themselves [6]. The criticism includes a debate on colonialism, concerning the authoritative Western attitude towards others' history, the control of political units, and the introduction of social and knowledge models [7].

After constant progression and increasingly conscious development of post-colonialism, what we are first concerned about is anti-colonialism, followed by its scope which is not limited to revealing Western imperialist ideology. Particularly evident in today's issues within specific regions/districts, post-colonialism has a broader meaning of criticism on the right of speech between the mainstream cultural groups and the marginal groups. For example, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak used post-colonial theory to explore the concept of Subalternity. In *Can the Subaltern Speak?* [8] She disclosed that the multiple oppressed conditions of Indian women were restrained by western white-centred and local male discourse. Their image was distorted and vilified and they cannot send forth their own voice, consequentially becoming a group of characterised by 'not-speakingness'.

Similarly, it became clear that there was an 'Internal Orientalism' the core of its argument being whether the class of 'the other' within China - women, ethnic minorities and peasants - is reflected in dominant representations. This argument is also the focus of American scholar Louisa Schein's observations. In *Minority Rules: The Miao and the feminine in China's cultural politics*, Schein (2000:108-110) summarised that the Chinese society had gradually formed both inside and outside nationalism: for the inside, the emphasis is on the distinction between Han and non-Han, with the latter for the impoverished and conservative (i.e. opinions and values) group that needs help and transformation; for the outside, it is a combination of Chinese nationalism against Western imperialist colonial aggression. The impact of modern Western culture on China dated back to the First Opium War, also known as the First Anglo-Chinese War in 1840. The Opium War ended the closed-door policy which had been implemented in China for a period of time (1723-1840). Since then, the traditional self-sufficient feudal economy has been forcibly incorporated into the world capitalist economy [9]. China's traditional agricultural society and monarchy were gradually retreating and disintegrating in the face of Western imperial military forces, technology and capital. Since then, Chinese people's understanding of Western culture and technology has gone through the process of ignorance and gradual understanding to fanatic pursuit [10].

Urban people (mainly Han Chinese) began to access these cultural products through modern media and began to become influenced by the mainstream European and American cultural ideas. Since then, urban Han people's living habits have gradually become westernised. For example, a Han wedding with its complex processes and boisterous atmosphere was gradually replaced by a relatively quiet and simple Western-style wedding. For another example, the suit has become standard in the Chinese urban workplace. This also confirms the concept of deterritorialism proposed by some European scholars in the study of

deterritorialism and globalization. The main features of deterritorialism are manifested in spreading culture through modern means of science and technology [11], as well as an invasion of strong culture on marginal culture, making local cultural characteristics tend to homogeneity [12].

But China's modernised development and the level of European and American cultural impact on region are not balanced. China has a vast territory and complex terrain, and the difference of development between regions has existed since ancient times. In modern times, with the deepening of China's colonisation, the unbalanced development between the Eastern coastal areas and the Central and Western regions has rapidly expanded. When the new China was founded, the regional economic structure was seriously deformed. More than 70% of the industry is concentrated in the Eastern coastal strips that account for less than 12% of China's territory. In addition to Wuhan, Chongqing and a few other cities that were Western imperialist settlements, there are almost no modern industries in the vast mainland, especially in remote and minority areas [13].

Therefore, some ethnic minorities still maintain traditional living habits, which are different from the mainstream culture and have gradually attracted the attention of mainstream cultural groups through the Han media reports (e.g. newspaper, TV and online videos). Given the current specific situation of ethnic minorities in China (i.e. minority cultural identities have undergone certain changes under the influence of mainstream culture), it is essential to draw attention to the value of studying minority cultural identities and practices, otherwise they will be assimilated or overwhelmed in the social environment of westernisation and globalisation.

On July 5, 2009, the State Council issued the 'Opinions on Several Prosperities for Further Prospering and Developing Minority Cultures,' which was the first document by the State Council on the cultural work of ethnic minorities in the 60 years since the founding of New China. This is a major measure to strengthen ethnic work. It would further promote the comprehensive, coordinated and sustainable development of ethnic areas and further consolidate the ethnic relations of equality, solidarity and harmony. The document includes the importance and concern for minority cultural development to enhance the cultural identity of the Chinese minorities. Strengthening the study of cultural identity of ethnic minorities effectively helps us more clearly understand the issues they encounter in terms of cultural inheritance, and support ethnic minority people to convey their own voices.

III. THE CHANGE OF MARGINAL MIAO MINORITY'S CULTURAL IDENTITY

The geographical distribution of the population of all ethnic minorities in China has gradually been formed in the historical process of the past millennium. The basic

geographical pattern of ethnic minority areas were generally stabilised in the end of the Qing Dynasty and the Republic of China. Han people are mainly distributed in the east, the ethnic minorities are mainly distributed in the southwestern region; the Han nationality is mainly distributed in the Central Plains and the coastal areas, and the ethnic minorities are mainly distributed in the frontier.

Due to China's modernisation starting with coastal cities, this unsynchronised development became an obvious barrier between coastal and inland areas of Han areas and ethnic minority areas in terms of economic and modern development, especially in some remote ethnic minority areas with extreme agricultural environments (e.g. Longhorn Miao area).

The extreme agricultural conditions (i.e. the Karst Landform that consists of soluble rocks mainly distributed in Guizhou, China. Precipitation causes erosion of this kind of rock and it is therefore not conducive to the development of agriculture) and self-sufficiency of the traditional agricultural production model led to productivity and economic poverty [14]. In recent years, in order to improve the situation regarding development disparity, the Chinese government began to establish construction of transportation and network systems in rural and remote ethnic minority areas and formulated relevant policies to enhance the local economy in terms of modernisation [15].

At the same time, the different levels of economic development between mainstream culture and their own economy are known by ethnic minorities through the network and television media. Under the stimulation of the mainstream culture and in the pursuit of economic development, ethnic minority's own cultural identity has also undergone some changes and fluctuations.

Take Longhorn Miao as an example, as one of the least-populated ethnic branches in China, the Longhorn Miao people live in the mountains of southwest Guizhou. From the beginning of the 1990s, the Chinese government gradually implemented a policy of cultural protection, tourism and economic development in the Longhorn Miao area. The culture of the Longhorn Miao area shows the coexistence of recession, revival and reconstruction under the combined action of the shock of mainstream culture and the government's minority policy.

Longhorn Miao call themselves Meng Rong. Han scholars in the 1990s came to call them Longhorn Miao because their hair tied with a Longhorn-shaped wooden comb, and this distinguished them from different branches of Miao People. At present, they prefer to introduce themselves with the name Longhorn Miao (Interview with the Longhorn Miao people by author and Miao students, March 28, 2018). Longhorn Miao live in the mountains about 2000 meters above sea

level, and are located in 12 villages; they amount to around 4,000 people. Longjia village is the only village that has a road linking the outside world to the Longhorn Miao area.

Longhorn Miao have maintained a close relationship with their territory and family name, so that their religious beliefs and rituals have been passed down from generation to generation; life customs, eating habits, and clothing characteristics have maintained their primary character. Thus, there is a connection with place and people living locally that is important to the Longhorn Miao people.

With the absence of mass media intervention, their cultural heritage is mainly based on word of mouth - the Miao oral language is a medium to organise folk songs and other cultural activities. In such a closed culture of internal circular transmission and with the lack of influence of the outside world, the production mode, religious beliefs and living customs of the cultural main body have maintained a stable pattern for a long time.

During the 20th century and for 90 years later, with the accelerated development of China's modernisation, Longhorn Miao culture also began to change. According to interviews with villagers, the new generation of Longhorn Miao began to re-examine their own lives and various aspects of Longhorn Miao (Interview with the Longhorn Miao people by author and Miao students, March 28, 2018).

Television, newspapers and Internet connection in some areas could help Miao people to understand the outside world. Meanwhile, the intervention of mass media not only greatly expanded the ways of communication and cultural transmission, but more importantly, they brought Miao people into a time and space that is completely different from that of their previous living mode of hundreds of years. Under the influence of information society and the dominant culture, it is inevitable that Longhorn Miao people generate a psychological change and make new demands on their own culture and life. Higher income jobs and a more multiplex city life results in a large number of young Longhorn Miao people no longer being willing to live the traditional farming life but living between the city and the village, what migrant workers see and hear became a 'window' for other young Longhorn Miao people to understand city life.

Young generations of Longhorn Miao people work in the city and far away from their original cultural environment, which lead to Longhorn Miao living habits, costumes, folk songs, musical instruments, etc. not being retained by young generations of Longhorn Miao people. Meanwhile, while these young Longhorn Miao people have been gradually adapting to city life, their ethnic cultural characteristics are continuing to fade. For instance, compared with Guge (Miao traditional folk songs), today's popular music is more welcomed by the young Longhorn Miao people, which

means that very few young Longhorn Miao people can accurately sing Guge (Interview with the Longhorn Miao young man by author and Miao students, April 30, 2018). But at the same time, other external forces have contributed to revival and reconstruction on Longhorn Miao culture.

These external influences on the Longhorn Miao people are mostly the Guizhou government and tourism. The intervention of these two groups has shown Longhorn Miao culture to be unique and special, and their culture is now understood by more people. On the other hand, it also contributed to a change in Longhorn Miao identity, with a re-integration of their culture [16].

First, the intervention of these two external forces of government and tourism put interactional pressure on development of Miao culture. Application of different methodologies led to different results. They conducted different types of publicity which led to Longhorn Miao culture being seen as complex and diverse according to the differing values in various areas of current contemporary society.

In 1998, the Suojia Ecological Museum (living museum) in Longhorn Miao village brought the Longhorn Miao and its culture into public view. People living in the hustle and bustle of the city saw the distinctive characteristics of the Longhorn Miao as a completely distinctive culture.

In addition, because the Longhorn Miao has no written word, some of their histories has not been recorded (i.e. their migratory history), which further increases people's cultural imagination of the Longhorn Miao. For example, with the increasing news report of Longhorn Miao after 90 years, there are a variety of explanations about their Longhorn-shaped wooden comb. Han Media's documentaries such as China's Mysterious Minority Longhorn Miao (Looking at the World, 2019), Let's take a look at the mystery of Longhorn Miao! (China News, 2017) and Western China Tourism: Guizhou Suojia Longhorn Miao Villages Tour (Chongqing TV, 2010) emphasises the legend of the Longhorn.

Second, the intervention of these two kinds of external forces had a significant impact on Longhorn Miao culture and cultural identity. Longhorn Miao people began to realise the great value of their own traditions and to re-explore some aspects of their traditional culture previously neglected. For example, to attract foreign tourists, traditional hand weaving techniques have been revived. Young Longhorn Miao women dress and perform in traditional costume. Previously, such traditional costumes were worn only on special occasions or during festivals; now, wearing traditional costume and tying hair back into a bun has become a feature of the show, whenever a tour group visits the village.

The combination of ethnic culture and tourism has promoted economic benefits for the local community, and has publicised the ethnic culture. But the cultural performance here is disjointed from the Longhorn Miao's real lives. From this perspective, this so-called cultural revival of today's Longhorn Miao traditions is actually a kind of rediscovery of cultural behaviors under the stimulation from mainstream culture, and there is still a potential crisis of cultural decline underneath.

Again the praise and curiosity of outsiders have become a factor that stimulates the Longhorn Miao people to pay attention to their cultural perspective. However, in the impoverished Longhorn Miao area, Longhorn Miao's thinking on their own culture only stays at the level of economic value. This so-called attention and thinking led to traditional Longhorn Miao customs or cultural events being continually faked and tampered with by attracting visitors, in order to meet the fantasies and aesthetic expectations of mainstream cultural groups. Therefore, in order to make them fundamentally realise the value of cultural inheritance, more effort may be needed in cultivating their ethnic consciousness and enhancing ethnic cultural identity.

Like the famous Chinese writer, Feng Jikai, said, 'a clear strategy of cultural developing relies on a cultural self-awareness, in this way social civilisation can be guaranteed' [17]. Identity can be divided into two tiers, that is, personal identity, and collective identity or social identity, as shown by Sheldon Stryker, Timothy Joseph Owens and Robert W. White [18].

Based on the two concepts above, it can be seen that cultural identity covers different levels of identity. At the individual level, cultural identity affects people's collective and self-identity, and then affects the formation of the individual's identity in society. Cultural identity promotes the integration of social and collective cohesion and the formation of certain types of cultural groups.

With the continuous impact of globalisation on mainstream culture, the Longhorn Miao people gradually produced a variety of viewpoints on cultural psychology as well as cultural identity. Before the establishment of Internet systems, Longhorn Miao's communication was only conducted between the Longhorn Miao's twelve villages (Interview with the headmaster of Longjia Primary School, March 30 2018). However, because the Longhorn Miao have been living in the mountains away from the urban areas, as well as maintaining a traditional farming economic model, this made them become a marginal group who were left behind by the rapid process of modernisation. The establishment and popularization of the Internet have caused various changes in the use of traditional media as well as in people's daily lives [19]. Especially after 90 years, some Longhorn Miao begun to realise this gap and rethink their own culture and life.

Fang Lili, a Chinese researcher, mentioned in her notes on the investigation of a Miao village that under the impact of a strong culture, the weak culture was covered up. When the Miao people's right to subsistence was not solved, no one thought of their right to speak or the right to protect their own culture. They only wanted to get rid of their own cultural subject and integrate into a strong cultural subject as soon as possible [20]. Since the 1990s, because the Longhorn Miao has been increasingly reported in the media and tourists began to enter the Longhorn Miao area, they started to use the characteristic of their culture to conduct business activities mentioned above. While the cognition of their own culture is still in a passive state, they now rely on external recognition or even curiosity to confirm the particulars of their own culture.

Currently, thanks to the joint efforts of the government and local people with insight, the young generation of Longhorn Miao has achieved development on improving Miao consciousness cultural heritage. For example, in 2004, with the support of the government and a social charity, Longjia Primary School was established. In the school, all of the teachers are Longhorn Miao people and they conduct bilingual (Miao and Han) education. In addition, there is a provision for students that they must wear traditional costume once a week. Longjia Primary School helps more Longhorn Miao children, especially Longhorn Miao girls, to complete primary school education. However, the education of the local primary school is unable to meet the need of all ages, so that some of the young people will still choose to go to vocational school to learn some skills or to work in the city with their parents for a livelihood (Interview with the headmaster of Longjia Primary School, March 30 2018). Therefore, improving young Longhorn Miao's passion for understanding their culture and history still needs some time. That also means the current research of Longhorn Miao culture still need support and cooperation from external forces.

The above is the explanation and analysis of the basic state of the Longhorn Miao. This early understanding of minority people would help us to throw light on the question of what we are going to investigating. American anthropologist David Fetterman claimed that an early understanding of the basic state of an ethnic minority would help researchers and focus on specific issues in fieldwork [21]. Of course, outside researchers and filmmaker who work with minority must have a better understanding of post-colonialism, orientalism and ethnological cooperation in order to ensure their rights are respected in the study. In the study, it is necessary to distinguish between their natural cultural state and the packaged or reconstructed culture, so that minority's culture can be accurately interpreted.

IV. THE DEVELOPMENT OF MIONRITY THEMED LIVE ACTION DOCUMENTARY:TAKING MIAO DOCUMENTARIES AS AN EXAMPLE

Since the 1960s, the increasing decolonisation of the world and the experience of post-colonialist culture have been the basis of the birth and development of indigenous documentaries. For example, in Kerstin Knopf's *Decolonising the Lens of Power*,

The decolonisation of media chiefly involves raising indigenous voices and creating self-controlled media in the process of asserting indigenous identity, cultural values, historical and contemporary experience. As well as this, it involves contesting the grand Western narratives of indigenous history, ethnography and sociology. In this way, indigenous filmmakers strive to work against assimilation through Western media discourse and against the appropriation of indigenous discourse [22].

In recent years a proposition of Miao's own identity, cultural values, history, status quo and demands of breaking the cultural imaginary of mainstream group or Han group, became more prominent in Miao documentaries. The following discusses this by analysing the development of the Miao documentary, contrasting the differences between the Han filmed documentary and Miao indigenous documentaries.

The earliest Miao image appeared in the national ethnographic documentary in 1940. In order to cooperate in confronting World War II, praising minority people and reporting the story of war, the Chinese Film Studio filmed the documentary *Minzuwangshui* (Long Live the Nation, 1940) which addressed World War II as film material. The film includes Miao people who join the army and fight alongside Han soldiers.

After the end of World War II, the establishment of new China caused a major change in China's social structure, some of the most significant being the national relations and national policy changes. How to deal with the relationships between the various ethnic groups and how to promote national reunion was the primary problem central government needed to face. In this context, some films about the propaganda of the Communist Party's national policy and liberation of ethnic minority areas were produced after the release.

Especially, *Miao Family in Kaili* (1952) is a documentary of that time, which chiefly reflects Miao people under the leadership of the new government to conduct land reform and showing ethnic minorities enjoy life with a right of land after the liberation. The film's protagonist is a pair of Miao brothers. The film has utilised certain footage to record the entire land allocation process in land reform. Therefore,

documentaries that included Miao images in the 1940s and 1970s mainly reflected the needs of Chinese nationalism (confronting the colonial aggression of Western imperialism) mentioned by Schein and the political propaganda of China. Nevertheless, Miao culture, life and perspectives were not fully demonstrated in the national documentary during this period. From the beginning of the reform and opening-up policy (1979), and with the rise of tourism, Chinese ethnography began to realise the record of cultural life and traditional culture of the minority. On Chinese news and local programmes' (e.g. China News Service and Taiwan Discovery Division) official website, we can see that they have produced several ethnic minority documentaries featuring the Miao people. Although this period of Miao themed documentaries weakened the government's political propaganda, the official description and emphasis on their alien culture virtually strengthened a rendering of the 'otherness' of the ethnic minority, making the ethnic minority documentaries more like alien character illustrations.

For example, *Visiting Eco-Museum without Wall: Longhorn Miao Wear Totems In Their Hair* (2017) is a documentary which was filmed by Chinese News Service, from the angle of a documentary to analyse the Longhorn Miao and the name reflects the city people's curiosity towards the Longhorn Miao people and seeing them as 'other.' For example, the documentary had portrayed some close-up shots to depict the horn-shaped hairstyle of Longhorn Miao women; the narration said that 'every woman in the village has a huge horn-shaped bun on their head'. However, they have this hairstyle only during festivals (Interview with the Longhorn Miao people by author and Miao students, 22 April 2018). Obviously, the documentary lacks the representation of their real lives and voices, it places emphasis on the cultural differences which made Longhorn Miao people and their culture objectified.

Since 2007, with the development of China's modernisation and the influence of post-modernism and post-colonialism, the subject and shooting techniques of the minority documentary tended to be personalised and diversified. At the same time, the documentary paid more attention to the expression of cultural ideology of minority, exploration of minority's perspectives, and revelation of living environment [3].

Xingcunzhiyan (The Eye of the Village, 2007) project was co-sponsored by the Landscape Conservation Centre and the rural communities in the southwest mountainous region of China, to record the life environment of ethnic minorities and express their concerns and prospects for environmental change from their own perspective. In this project, the young Wenshan Miao man, Hou Wentao, filmed an indigenous documentary *Hemp Weaving and Miao people* (2009). Hou Wentao, used simple lens language and a long hemp thread as a clue, recording a close relationship between the hemp

and Miao in his hometown village.

Hou Wentao, not only recorded the complex production process of hemp clothes, but also as a young Miao person, he visited the elderly people and understood the meaning of hemp in Wenshan Miao's perspective. Compared with official or Han made Miao documentaries, the Miao indigenous documentary clearly highlights the expression of cultural details and connotation behind the cultural phenomenon and represents a strong sense of ethnic identity.

However, for some Miao who live in remote mountainous areas, they do not have the economic and technological conditions necessary to film a documentary themselves, and the current impact of mainstream culture causes some young people to lack interest in inheriting their own rich traditional culture.

This reflects the problem of digital divide in China's minority regions. Digital divide is defined as the gap between those who have and those who do not have access to computers and the Internet. It has been a central issue on the academic and political agenda of new media development [23]. Having encountered inequitable access to digital technology between such regions, Nicholas Negroponte (1998) argued that because the development of the digital world has a 'leapfrogging' characteristic, the poor can also enjoy digital life rapidly. Developing countries can develop their telecommunications and internet services by accepting existing technologies. However, Negroponte's views were optimistic. The causes of digital divide in minority areas are complex, including poverty, lack of educational resources, and complex terrain in ethnic minority areas, as investments for infrastructure construction are expected to be huge [24]. Therefore, for this situation, there is a need for some external force to provide filming knowledge and technical support, and to cooperate with Miao people. Particularly, in the role of coordinator, to systematically consolidate and record their culture and help Miao people to convey the proposition of the culture, as well as improve young Miao people's cultural self-confidence and cultural identity.

V. THE ESTABLISHMENT OF CONTACT BETWEEN ANIMATION AND CHINESE MINORITIES

Within China, there are 55 different ethnic minorities in addition to Han people that live in different regions of the country; each has their own unique customs, traditions and culture. The images of ethnic minorities have also been involved in some animations that are produced by Chinese animation studios, such as the Shanghai Animation Film Studio. However, these animations are not all about ethnic minorities' culture and lives; some of them are also meant to support political propaganda.

The earliest ethnic minority-themed animations in China were made after the founding of New China. These animations were created by the new government to promote the unity of the minority populations and combine political and ideological propaganda into animation. On April 25, 1956, Mao Zedong emphasised in The Ten Major Relations that,

We must do a good job in the relationship between the Han and the ethnic minorities, consolidate the unity of all ethnic groups, and work together to build a great socialist motherland [25].

Therefore, influenced by politics and ideology, the earliest ethnic minority-themed animations mostly merged with new government's policy of promoting national unity and Mao Zedong's ideological propaganda.

Shanghai Animation Studio produced 10 animated ethnic minority short films from the founding of New China to the end of the Cultural Revolution (1960-1976). These included The Golden Wild Goose (1976), The Two Big Signs (1978) and Shanyazi (1978), which involves Mongolian, Zhuang, Dai and Tibetan minorities. Nevertheless, these animations were dominated by Mao Zedong's political influences and portrayed the new government as battling against the negative old forces or propaganda of the Socialist People's Commune System in the early days.

Ethnic minority-themed animations continued from the end of the Cultural Revolution (1976) to 1988. This was typical of the era, with most animations depicting ethnic minority folklore or myths; whilst there was a definite shift away from political propaganda, these animations still lack the representation of perspectives of ethnic minority people, and no ethnic minority people participated in the process of production.

Huo Tong (1984) is a paper cut animation adaptation of a Hani minority myth and also is a representative work of the Shanghai Art Studio following the Cultural Revolution. This cartoon depicts the Hani juvenile Mingzha overcoming all hardships to recapture kindling which belongs to the village from the hands of the demon, and sacrifice himself into a fireball in order to bring light to Hani people. The story of Huo Tong is folklore from the Hani elders' oral records [26].

However, according to interviews with Hani people, this animation has wrongly portrayed some costumes and props. For example, a Hani person said that the protagonist's sabre in the animation is the Tujia people's knife and not the Hani's Sabre (Email interview with Nong Jian who from Hani people by author, June 20, 2017). Therefore, although this animation emphasises the representation of oral traditions of ethnic minorities, it is still worth discussing the correctness of animation design.

After entering into the 21st century, some local Han animation studios have also produced a few animations based on the background of ethnic minorities such as 60 episodes of children's animation *Smart Jiaying* (2015) which is about a fairy tale of the Buyi people. However, choice of theme (folklore or myth) and production method are almost similar with the minority animation produced by Shanghai Art Studio a decade after the Cultural Revolution.

However, it is worth mentioning that the animated film *The Hunter and the Skeleton*, which was completed by Tibetan director Gentsu Gyatso (Tibetan) for four years (2008-2011), is a positive case for ethnic minorities to elaborate their own national myths. The film tells of a folktale which is widely spread in the Tibetan area: a hunter who went hunting in the mountains, met a skeleton and became its prey. In 2003, Gentsu Gyatso travelled through Tibet to study traditional Tibetan architecture and Tibetan Buddhist wall paintings. The short film combined *Tangka* (traditional Tibetan paintings with embroidery) and a score that combines native Tibetan music with modern influences. The animation part was completed with the guidance of the teacher of Southwest Minzu University, Zhou Zhou.

In 2018, the author combined Participatory Design with Miao people to complete the ethnographic animation *Longhorn Miao's Love Songs*. This work uses animation to record and display the ancient songs of the Changjiao Miao and the culture of marriage customs. In the practice process, ethnographic animation handed over the discourse power of cultural interpretation to local community residents, in order that the ethnic minority's oral cultural content and their voices are accurately expressed in the animation. The locals were thus able to enhance the ethnic minority and public's concerns of ethnic minority's excellent traditional cultures by eliminating outside's misunderstandings and prejudices on their culture (especially oral cultural). Participatory Design can be an effective cross-cultural collaboration method that can be applied to the production of ethnographic animation. This means that ethnic minorities are no longer passive subjects, but as a researcher and animator, they actually participate in the complete practice from fieldwork to animation production.

Animation can be made with either hand rendered art, computer-generated imagery, or a combination of techniques [27]. Therefore, ethnic minority participants used the ethnographic fieldwork methods and multiple animation techniques (including hand-drawn animation and computer animation) to create and animate the content of oral culture based on their own understanding and artistic style. Simultaneously, the collection, analysis and adoption of the feedbacks of community members in practice can enhance the reliability of the cultural information conveyed by the animation and more clearly reflect the collective cultural memories and cultural views of the ethnic minority group.

This also highlights that the advantages of using animation to record and represent ethnic minorities are not only reflected in the reproduction of certain content, but also reflected in the realisation of their real perspectives in the animation through participatory design.

VI. CONCLUSIONS

Reviewing the development of Chinese minority documentaries and minority-themed animations shows that they have been influenced by political, economic, and academic trends of thought in different periods. Under the influence of postmodernism, ethnographic documentaries began to support indigenous films and encouraged ethnic minorities to record their national culture and living environment on camera.

In recent years, as animated documentaries have gained attention, the application of animation to record and express the themes of ethnic minorities has also been included in the discussion of scholars. The author's animation work, *Longhorn Miao's Love Songs*, realizes the application of participatory design in the production of animation and making animation record the oral culture of ethnic minorities. The practice has proved that, under the premise of respecting culture, allowing those minority groups to have full rights to interpret their own culture and actively express their views, which will make the content of ethnic minority-themed animations more objective and realistic.

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