3 Inter/National Style and National Identity

Ink-Painting Animation in the Early 1960s

National style, as explained earlier, is prominent in Chinese animated films that use traditional Chinese artistic, literary, and cultural forms, materials, and techniques (such as Peking opera, papercutting and paperfolding, ink painting, folklore, classical literature) to construct a putatively pure, authentic, and unique Chinese national identity. This identity distinguishes Chinese animation from its counterparts in other countries—Japan and the United States in particular—and, more important, articulates nationalistic sentiments and national pride in defiance of foreign influence and dominance.

With its emphasis on national identity, Chinese essence, and Chineseness, the national style—promoted by mainstream animators, intellectuals, scholars, and the government—became the dominant metric for judging the merits of animated films in China beginning in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Many mainstream Chinese animators, often encouraged by the state, are preoccupied with creating national style films, believing that the unique style of Chinese animated film represents a monolithic and timeless Chinese national identity and asserting that this Chineseness brings Chinese animated film global recognition. In addition, researchers and scholars often lavish attention on "pure" national style films and analyze their formal and thematic uniqueness, neglecting and even denigrating the vast majority of animated films that do not conform to its conventions. Thus the discourse of the national style is dominant in the mainstream animated filmmaking industry and academia.

Conventional academic approaches to the national style are essentialist, static, and ahistorical in that they deploy formal or thematic uniqueness to represent a monolithic, timeless, and transcendental national identity. In *Uproar in Heaven* (*Danao tiangong,* 1961–1964), the legend of Monkey King marks the Chineseness of the story and the made-up face associated with Peking opera asserts the Chineseness of the animation's formal style. Ink-painting animation is another example of the formal uniqueness exemplified by the national style. To construct a distinct Chinese identity for international audiences, ink-painting animated film sequences were exhibited in the China Pavilion of the Shanghai World Expo in

2010. Zheng Dasheng, director of *A Harmonious China* (*Hexie Zhongguo*), the leitmotif film of the China Pavilion, uses computer-generated ink-painting animation to represent the nation and to accompany the film's narrative about China's rapid development. The use of ink-painting animation in the China Pavilion culminated in *Along the River during the Qingming Festival* (*Qingming shanghe tu*), in which animators adopted computer ink-painting techniques and animated a traditional painting by Zhang Zeduan from the Northern Song dynasty (960–1127). The conflation of national style and national identity may have its logic. However, it positions the national style in a timeless nation-bound vacuum and neglects the spatial-international and temporal-historical contingencies that gave rise to it.

Here I trace the origin of the national style in Chinese animation to the late 1950s and early 1960s, and situate its rise in its international and historical context. The national style was in sum a product of the Cold War. In the 1950s, Chinese animation and other literary and artistic forms were influenced by the Soviet style, which, of course, was far from the only international influence.[1] As Sino-Soviet relations began to deteriorate in the late 1950s, rising cultural nationalism was accompanied by calls to turn inward to Chinese tradition. In response to this shifting sociohistorical context, the national style was proposed as a guiding principle for Chinese animated filmmaking. Yet an alternative style of animation emerged at the same time, which I call the international style. International style films adopted more universal artistic forms such as cartoon and caricature, and featured content associated with the capitalist West, in particular the United States. The international style and the national style were born at the same time and coexisted during the late 1950s and early 1960s. However, the discourse of the national style came to overshadow the international in Chinese animation. By highlighting the coexistence and even contestation between the two styles in the late 1950s and early 1960s, this discussion expands the horizon of the national style, previously examined in isolation as the autonomous sine qua non of Chinese animation. The international and national styles, however, were not necessarily in opposition to each other and no clear-cut boundary separated them, In fact, the international style is arguably one of several national styles in Chinese animated filmmaking. National style is after all not one, but many.

A synchronic approach repositions the national style in the international context of the Cold War. A diachronic approach examines the evolution of the national style within socialist China. This chapter adopts a diachronic approach to demonstrate that the national style was neither stable nor fixed, that, over time, its definition changed in response to sociohistorical and political forces. For this discussion, I use the rise and fall of the first two ink-painting animated films produced in the early 1960s to illustrate the instability of the national style in socialist China. When the first, *Little Tadpoles Look for Mama* (*Xiao kedou zhao mama*),

was released in 1960, it was praised, celebrated, and considered as a perfect representation of the national style and a source of national pride. However, when the second, *The Herd Boy's Flute* (*Mudi*), was made in late 1963, it was criticized and banned. By this time, just three years later, the artistic form of ink painting was no longer considered representative of the national style. Exploring the rise and fall of the first two ink-painting animated films in the early 1960s, I argue that the conventional conflation between national style and national identity is problematic: concepts of national identity and national style, far from being fixed essential and timeless categories, are fluid, ever-changing, and historically contingent. This is especially true during the 1960s, a period of rapid change in the international and historical milieus.

Socialist Film Culture in the 1950s

The Chinese film industry underwent a drastic transformation in the late 1940s. After Beijing was taken over by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in January 1949, the Northeast Film Studio, the first film studio under the control of the Communist Party and located in Changchun, sent Tian Fang and others to Beijing to take over the film industry that was controlled by the Nationalists. On April 20, 1949, they established Peking Film Studio, which was renamed Beijing Film Studio on October 1, 1949. In a similar vein, after the CCP took control of Nanjing and Shanghai in April and May of 1949, the Northeast Film Studio sent Zhong Jingzhi and others to take over its film industries that had been under Nationalist control. In November 1949, the CCP established the Shanghai Film Studio.[2]

The early 1950s witnessed the nationalization of private studios. After 1949, the socialist state tolerated private film studios and even financially supported them and provided them with film stocks. These studios—such as Kunlun, Wenhua, Datong, and Guotai—also received loans from the People's Bank of Shanghai. They were, however, under much tighter state surveillance after the Korean War broke out in 1950 and during the Three and Five Anti-Campaigns, reform movements against "bourgeois habits" in 1951 and 1952. A campaign was soon launched to denounce *The Life of Wu Xun* (*Wu Xun zhuan,* 1950), a controversial film produced by Kunlun studio. Yan'an-spirited hard-liners called on the public to close down or take over Kunlun because of its ideological "mistakes." This inaugurated the nationalization of private film studios. In 1953, the last private studios were assimilated into the state-run Shanghai Film Studio. By 1953, the state and Yan'an hard-liners, who were inspired by the Soviet model, controlled all film production in mainland China.[3] Consequently, socialist realism, borrowed from the Soviet Union, was adopted as the dominant principle for cultural production in the 1950s.

From approximately 1956 to 1965, controls over the cultural scene eased, allowing it to diversify as socialist realism gave way to greater variety and flexibility. As a modest modification of the Yan'an dogma, in 1956 Chairman Mao proposed the slogan "Let a hundred flowers bloom, let a hundred schools of thought contend" to encourage debate and criticism of socialist culture and politics. Writers, filmmakers, and intellectuals were suspicious at first, but quickly responded with harsh condemnation of the new regime, which finally caused Mao and the government to crack down on the emerging dissidents. The CCP launched the Anti-Rightist Campaign in 1957, which labeled the Hundred Flowers critics as rightists and persecuted them.[4]

In 1958, Mao and the CCP launched the Great Leap Forward (1958–1960), which encouraged rapid production and technological innovation across a wide range of industries. Many films were produced to answer the call, but quality was inconsistent. With the deterioration of the Sino-Soviet relationship in the late 1950s, the CCP steered a course away from socialist realism. By 1958, it was advocating for "combining revolutionary realism and revolutionary romanticism." The two slogans coexisted for a while until socialist realism declined and disappeared from critical discourse by 1960. The slogan "combining revolutionary realism and revolutionary romanticism" enjoyed dominance during the 1960s and 1970s until it lost favor in 1979.[5] With the introduction of "combining revolutionary realism and revolutionary romanticism" in 1958, filmmakers were encouraged to go beyond the rigid dogma of socialist realism and experiment with new techniques and technologies to explore new modes of representation. Elements of "revolutionary romanticism," such as myth, folklore, legend, and fantasy, were allowed during this period. When the Great Leap Forward's disastrous effects on Chinese economy gave rise to the Great Famine (1959–1961), Mao temporarily retreated from center stage and loosened his ideological grip on arts and artists. As a result, the cultural scene was relatively relaxed in the early 1960s, giving rise to a diversity of arts and literature that did not follow the rigid doctrine of socialist realism.

The Revival of Traditional Art in the Early 1960s

The late 1950s and early 1960s witnessed a revival in traditional art related to the "elevation of (artistic) standards" under Mao. In his Yan'an Talks in 1942, Mao proposed the two concepts: "popularization of art" and "elevation of standards." "Popularization of art" meant that art should serve the needs of peasants, workers, and soldiers. Thus, art should not be elitist or abstract. "Elevation of standards" involved artists, including amateur peasant artists, improving their level of artistic taste and accomplishment. According to Mao, these two concepts were inextricable:

elevation of standards should be based on popularization of art, and popularization of art should lead to elevation of standards. Although Mao maintained that the two concepts were equally important, the historical record indicates that he valued popularization of art over elevation of standards.

In his book *Painting in the People's Republic of China,* Arnold Chang proposes three distinct periods: 1949 to 1956 as a period of popularization, 1958 to 1965 as a period of elevation of standards, and 1966 to 1971 as an era of popularization. According to Chang, popularization and elevation of standards centered on issues such as choice of artistic styles and the status of professional artists. Professional artists included ink-painting artists who were educated before 1949 and found it more difficult than younger artists to adapt to the style that the Communist Party advocated. During the period of popularization, the Party encouraged realistic styles, such as Soviet socialist realism, as well as figure painting, and amateur folk art. Furthermore, it disparaged landscape and bird-and-flower painting, criticizing and even persecuting professional artists (see also discussion in chapter 4). However, during the elevation of standards period, landscape and bird-and-flower paintings enjoyed a notable comeback, along with improvement in the status of professional artists.[6]

Elevation of standards and the revival of traditional art between 1958 and 1965 began with Mao's Hundred Flowers Campaign in January 1956, which encouraged artistic and intellectual diversity. Soviet socialist realism, which was the dominant model after Mao's Yan'an Talks, acceded to a more sinicized style. Consequently, traditional art forms flourished, including traditional ink painting (*guohua*). In the fall of 1956, a *People's Daily* editorial titled "Develop the Art of *Guohua*" announced the Communist Party's new policy concerning traditional ink painting: "*Guohua* is part of the precious heritage of our country's national arts; it has a long history and rich tradition. Over time, painters have expressed the magnificence of the rivers and mountains of our motherland and the living conditions of the people during each period."[7]

Under this new policy, opponents of traditional ink painting were considered enemies of the nation. Detractors were criticized, and even persecuted during the Anti-Rightist Campaign in 1957 and 1958. For example, Jiang Feng (1910–1982), an influential artist and leader in China's art world, was a staunch opponent of traditional ink painting and strong advocate for Soviet and Western arts instead in accordance with the Yan'an tradition. He was denounced by his political and artistic rival Cai Ruohong (1910–2002), a proponent of traditional ink painting. With Mao's acquiescence, Jiang Feng was labeled a rightist and purged from the art world in 1958. Cai Ruohong remained China's most influential art leader until he was ousted in 1967, when Yan'an hard-liners returned to power.[8]

Besides the revival of traditional ink painting, the late 1950s also saw a similar quest for tradition, past, and Chineseness in the field of film. In the 1961 article

"Elevating Chinese Film Art to a Higher Level" ("Ba woguo dianying yishu tigao dao yige gengxin de shuiping"), Minister of the Bureau of Culture Xia Yan (1900–1995) argued that contemporary filmmaking lacked both artistic excellence and range in subject matter, genre, and style. He emphasized the importance of artistic forms:

> For the past twelve years, we have produced many good films loved by the masses. However, among these films, only a few were excellent, and most of them were just mediocre. The main problem for these mediocre films was that they did not have a high artistic level. Although they had politically correct content, they did not have "a perfect artistic form" to transmit political messages to the masses.[9]

Because Xia Yan advocated the elevation of standards, films from the late 1950s broke with the Soviet model of socialist realism. Filmmakers began to explore a wider range of artistic forms that were regarded as genuinely Chinese, such as musicals, ethnic minority films, and traditional heritage.

According to Paul Clark, the early 1960s, which he calls the period of "cultural thaw," witnessed the Communist Party's relaxation of ideological control on filmmaking. This gave rise to a greater variety of film styles and subject matter. Clark notes, "The general relaxation in Chinese political life was paralleled in a wider range of film subjects and a more ready recognition that films not only educated, but also entertained."[10] In other words, films were more than ideological tools; they had the potential to be entertaining. In a 1962 essay, Qu Baiyin argued that Chinese films were constrained by three gods: theme, structure, and struggle. He highlighted the need to cater to different audiences and their tastes, rather than being limited by the principle of popularization's exclusive focus on workers, peasants, and soldiers. Qu wrote: "This magic power of the god of structure has the unexpected effect that the blind can understand [the films] by listening and the deaf by looking, but those who are neither blind nor deaf find them totally uninteresting."[11] Filmmakers went beyond the norm of serving workers, peasants, and soldiers, and began to consider more sophisticated audiences.

The Black Crow Incident: Animated Sino-Soviet Encounter and National Style and Identity

China's deteriorating relationship with the Soviet Union and the responding surge of nationalism partially contributed to the inward turn and revival of traditional arts in the late 1950s and early 1960s. After 1957, Mao demonstrated an implicit

rejection of Soviet literary models.[12] Border disputes with the Soviet Union led Mao to officially part with Soviet doctrines in 1960. At the same time, border clashes with India and Mao's war in Tibet in 1959 increased China's international isolation. International crises fostered the rise of nationalism in China and encouraged the people to seek out their national heritage and assert their national identity in the field of representation. Traditional artistic forms, such as ink painting, were considered politically correct on the grounds that they were "essentially" Chinese. In addition, the disastrous Great Leap Forward and subsequent Great Famine resulted in internal agricultural and economic crises, which led to criticism of Mao. Occupied with these international and domestic crises, Mao temporarily retreated and loosened his control over intellectuals and artists.

The development of Chinese animation did not take place in a vacuum, but was always closely related to the international context. Before 1949, Chinese animated films were influenced by the West, as demonstrated by the Wan brothers' animated films. During the 1950s, Chinese animated films had a kinship with the Soviet Union. In the 1950s, the Shanghai Animation Film Studio sent young animators Wang Shuchen, He Yumen, and Hu Jinqing to the Soviet Union to learn animation techniques and discuss the possibility of a Sino-Soviet coproduction of the animated film *Nezha Makes Havoc in the Sea* (*Nezha naohai,* 1959).[13] At the same time, Soviet animated films, such as *The Fisherman and the Goldfish* (1950), *The Grandfather and His Grandson* (1950), *The Story of the Yellow Crane* (1950), and *Christmas Eve* (1951), were dubbed into Chinese and released in China.[14] Chinese animators even considered Soviet animated films such as *The Golden Antelope* (1954) the "animation bible" of the Shanghai Animation Film Studio and encouraged emulation of such films.[15] Soviet animated films at that time were renowned for realism in that they integrated Disney's verisimilitude style with Russian folk culture and the use of rotoscoping.

In many mainstream histories of Chinese animation, it is said that in 1956, China received its first international award for animation at the Venice International Children's Film Festival for *Why Is the Crow Black* (*Wuya weishenme shi hei de,* 1955), the first Chinese color cel-animated film. However, some international judges initially regarded it as a product of the Soviet Union rather than China. Extremely frustrated and ashamed, Chinese animators felt the need to establish a uniquely Chinese national style. At that time, the Sino-Soviet relationship was already deteriorating and nationalism was on the rise. Thus, the creation of a national style was not only an aesthetic issue, but also a political one. Having learned a lesson from the black crow incident, Te Wei, then president of the Shanghai Animation Film Studio, proposed to develop a national style in Chinese animated filmmaking. He and his colleagues began their artistic experimentation and produced the cel-animated film *The Conceited General* (*Jiaoao de jiangjun,* 1956),

which is regarded as inaugurating the grand exploration of the national style in Chinese animation.[16]

Why Is the Crow Black was regarded as a negative example in history of Chinese animation due to its alleged Soviet connection. It was accused of imitating Soviet animated films such as *The Little Gray Neck* (1956) and widely demonized by the artistic community at that time. Qian Jiajun, director of *Why Is the Crow Black,* felt humiliated after he was told that the international jurors mistook the film for a Soviet production. Domestic criticism soon followed: *Why Is the Crow Black* was a failure because it imitated Soviet animation and was not characteristically Chinese.[17] The fate of this film illustrates Chinese animation's obsession with evincing a pure national style and identity. In this case, a national aesthetic style was closely associated with nationalism and political conformity. Decades have since passed and Cold War ideology has waned, but the stigma associated with this film persists today in Chinese articles, books, and websites. The historical record decries *Why Is the Crow Black* as the contaminated past and prehistory of Chinese animation that needed to be overcome. They celebrate *The Conceited General* for initiating "authentic" Chinese animation and for serving as a model for the future of Chinese animation. This argument about the rise of the national style in the late 1950s is a widely accepted "truth" in historical accounts of Chinese animation.

However, the background story behind the allegation about the Soviet connection in the reception of *Why Is the Crow Black* was probably fabricated. Such a fabrication could undermine the entire mainstream narrative of the birth of the national style. To begin with, the allegation was based on a rumor. It was said that the international jury members' remarks were reported to the Shanghai Animation Film Studio through the Chinese Embassy in Venice.[18] It is unprofessional and unlikely that a juror for such a prominent international film festival would comment publicly like this. Even if they spoke privately about the film, it is questionable that what they said would be overheard, transmitted to the Chinese Embassy in an official manner, and then communicated to the Shanghai Animation Film Studio with so much fanfare.

Sean Macdonald checked the database at the Historical Archive of the Foundation for the Venice Biennale and found that *Why Is the Crow Black* did not win an award at the Venice International Children's Film Festival. The Chinese film that did win an award was the puppet-animated *The Magic Brush* (*Shenbi*, 1955).[19] I emailed the Historical Archives of Contemporary Arts about this in early July 2017. Elena Oselladore, the person in charge, replied that *Why Is the Crow Black* was presented at the Venice International Children's Film Festival under the Italian title *Perché il corvo è nero* on August 16, 1956. From what they could find in their archive, the film did not win any award there. She also provided me with a document of the international jurors that year: M. Jean Bonoit-Lévy (France),

Professor Antonin M. Brousil (Czech), Dr. Luciano Emmer (Italy), and Mrs. Mary Field (Great Britain). I tried to locate these people, with the hope of conducting interviews with them about the alleged Soviet connection of the film, but they have passed away. These new findings, although they still need to be further verified, challenge the foundational myth of the mainstream narratives about the birth of the national style.

Additionally, *The Conceited General* is depicted in the national style discourse as a prompt response to the disgrace of *Why Is the Crow Black*. It was claimed as a triumph of an authentic Chinese film over a contaminated Soviet production. However, according to senior animator Pu Jiaxiang (1932–), director Te Wei and his colleagues started the production of *The Conceited General* in early 1955. When the preparation work was almost finished, Te Wei fell ill and the film's production was suspended. To fulfill the state's annual production quota (approximately thirty to forty films, each ten minutes long), the Shanghai Animation Film Studio ordered the team of *The Conceited General* to work on a new project titled *Why Is the Crow Black,* which was designed and directed by Qian Jiajun.

By the time *Why Is the Crow Black* was completed in 1955, Te Wei had recovered and resumed the production of *The Conceited General.* Because the film was based on the well-known Chinese expression "to sharpen the spear just before battle," or "making last-minute preparations that are too late" (*linzhen moqiang*), Te Wei proposed to "explore national style" in producing this film, but the slogan was not proposed specifically in response to the alleged national humiliation of *Why Is the Crow Black.* To highlight the Chineseness of *The Conceited General,* Peking opera masks and makeup were used to portray the human characters. *Why Is the Crow Black* was said to have received the international award from Venice in August 1956, and *The Conceited General* was almost completed by late 1956. It is obvious that the making of the film *The Conceited General* and Te Wei's advocacy for a national style had no obvious connection with the allegation that *Why Is the Crow Black* had Soviet connections.[20] The film *Why Is the Crow Black* was probably used by some as a straw man and a demonized Other to construct the grand narrative of the rise of the national style in the late 1950s.

In fact, both films were indebted to the Soviet Union for their animation techniques. Soviet animated films were renowned for their realism and rotoscoping, which created very smooth character movement on film. The two Chinese films adopted a realist approach for animating the movement of characters. When the project of *The Conceited General* began in early 1955, animators invited actors and actresses to make a live-action film to which they could refer. Their use of sophisticated, detailed, and realistic backgrounds was also reminiscent of Soviet style at the time. Both films drew on traditional Chinese stories, *Why Is the Crow Black* on the tale of *hanhao niao* (a bird too lazy to build its nest who ends up homeless

and frozen in the winter) and *The Conceited General* on the proverb *linzhen moqiang*. The difference between them is that whereas *The Conceited General* features human characters that can easily be identified as Chinese (Peking opera masks, costumes, buildings), *Why Is the Crow Black* revolves around unclothed animals living in a forest, which cannot be easily represented or identified as Chinese. Precisely because it did not look specifically Chinese, the film was then charged with Soviet influence. The reliance on folklore for motif, the meticulous realist style, and the smooth movement all made some people suspect that Soviet influence was prominent in this film.

The on-screen and off-screen story of *Why Is the Crow Black* ironically became an allegory for the status of the film itself in history of Chinese animation. The plot is about a conceited crow who is very beautiful and has a sweet voice. She becomes overly proud of herself and distances herself from other birds. When the other birds are busy building their nests, the crow laughs at them and shows off her beauty and golden voice. When winter arrives, the crow has no place to stay. Suddenly she sees a fire and flies close to it to warm herself. The fire burns her and turns her colorful feathers black and her sweet voice husky. Off-screen, the film itself experiences the same downward trajectory. At first it was considered a beautiful film worthy of international recognition, but it catches fire from nowhere and turns into a denigrated "black crow" due to alleged Soviet influence. No matter how beautiful and great an animated film may be, it will become a black crow if it fails to represent properly the essence of (red) China. The black crow functions as a metaphor for marginalized animated films that do not conform to the national or nationalistic paradigm.[21]

Defending the national elements in *Why Is the Crow Black,* Pu Jiaxiang points out that the image of the crow is based on the phoenix, a legendary bird in Chinese tradition. The pink breast of the crow draws inspiration from *dudou,* a kind of traditional underwear for Chinese women and children. Also, the crow's dancing around the bonfire is based on the traditional bonfire dance of Yi ethnic minorities in China. The landscape stems from the "mountains and rivers" (*shanshui*) style and the trees depicted are the pine trees popular in traditional Chinese painting rather than the silver birch trees characteristic of Russia. The use of warm colors, which Chinese tradition considers auspicious, also adds to the Chineseness of this film.[22] Pu Jiaxiang thus forcefully argues that *Why Is the Crow Black* is an authentic Chinese animated film, rather than broaching the possibility and legitimacy of cross-cultural influence: even if *Why Is the Crow Black* was influenced by the Soviet style, what is the fuss about it? Pu's argument reflects a preoccupation in Chinese animation with a pure national style that marginalizes and even demonizes the international dimension, a view that continues to prevail. This view

makes it shameful for Chinese animators to produce an inauthentic Chinese film "contaminated" by foreign influences.

In the Soviet Union in the 1940s and early 1950s, Soviet animators produced many animated films that did not necessarily represent Soviet identity. For example, China was the subject of *China in Flames* (1925), the first animated feature film in Soviet Union. *The Story of the Yellow Crane* (1950), *The Three Brothers of the Liu Family* (1953), and *The Royal Sword that Slaughters the Dragon* (1953) were all based on Chinese legends and portrayed Chinese characters in recognizable Chinese landscapes. *The Golden Antelope*, the so-called Soviet animation bible for Chinese animators, was based on an Indian legend and exuberant with Indian flavor. These films did not incite the Soviet people to accuse Soviet animation of being inauthentically Soviet. All this cultural borrowing and appropriation did not damage the identity or reputation of Soviet animation, but rather made it more Soviet. In addition, in terms of its realist style, Soviet animation was heavily influenced by Disney, despite the ideological barriers between the socialist and capitalist camps. The Disney influence did not undermine the credibility and national identity of Soviet animation, nor did it cause a fanfare among the Soviet people such as that of the black crow incident in China.

In 1962, Chinese animators produced the film *The Little Stream* (*Xiao xiliu*), which is about an anthropomorphic stream's journey to the sea. One year later, the Soviets released the animated film *Flow, Little Stream* (1963), which looked almost identical to the Chinese film. How do we explain such similarities when the two countries had parted ways? Were Soviet animators guilty of "imitating" a Chinese animated film?[23] Animation is an international art form, and great artistic works can absorb and indigenize other cultures, transcend national boundaries, and appeal to audiences around the world. Coevality and cross-referencing, rather than influence and indebtedness, exist in artistic and cultural production throughout the world.

The controversy over national identity and *Why Is the Crow Black* illustrates the overwhelming importance of the idea of a pure national style in Chinese animation. The film functioned as the demonized Other that Chinese animation needed to negate and overcome. Many mainstream narratives say that shortly after the black crow incident, animators turned to traditional art forms and legends and produced cel animation, papercutting animation, paperfolding animation, puppet animation, ink-painting animation, and other kinds of national style films, such as *The Conceited General* (cel), *Peacock Princess* (puppet, 1963), *Pigsy Eats Watermelon* (*Zhu Bajie chi xigua,* papercutting, 1958), *The Fishing Boy* (*Yutong,* papercutting, 1959), and *Uproar in Heaven* (cel).

In this context, Te Wei published in 1960 the influential essay "Creating National Animated Films" ("Chuangzao minzu de meishu dianying"), in which

he denounced the practice of following a single (Soviet) model and encouraged animators to make a national style out of an originally foreign and modern medium. Te Wei stressed the importance of ink-painting animated films for developing a national style: "Ink-painting as well as papercutting animated films are the touchstone for our success in creating a national style animation."[24] It comes as no surprise that the Shanghai Animation Film Studio produced two ink-painting animated films, the pinnacle of national style according to Te Wei.[25] In addition to ink-painting animation, Chinese animators experimented with other traditional artistic forms such as papercutting, paperfolding, puppet, and Peking opera. The late 1950s and early 1960s witnessed the rise of the national style in Chinese animated filmmaking. Animation was not alone in this artistic movement; the national style was also advocated for live-action filmmaking and other artistic productions at the time.

Animated Sino-West Encounter: Recontextualizing the Rise of the Inter/National Style

If *The Conceited General* represents the beginning of the national style, *Why Is the Crow Black* marks the end of the international style (the Soviet style in particular) in conventional histories of Chinese animation. In light of the massive production of national style films since 1956, the national style seemed to have triumphed over the international style once and for all and dominated the animated scene in the late 1950s and early 1960s. There is no denying that the Soviet style lost its influence after the black crow incident, but the national style was not the sole guiding principle and did not have a monopoly on animated filmmaking activities at the time. As the national style was rising from the ashes of Soviet influence, another international style came into being, coexisted with, and competed with the national style. Of course, this iteration of the international style was no longer a product of Sino-Soviet cultural exchange, but rather an outcome of the imagined Sino-West encounter during the Cold War. In any case, the international style was not eliminated. It simply fell under the shadow of the national style.

As the biggest enemy of communist countries, the capitalist West and the United States in particular were regarded as absent from social reality and cinematic representation in socialist China due to presumed Cold War isolationism. Michael Berry points out that the practical reason for this cinematic absence was that Chinese filmmakers could not afford to hire American actors and travel abroad to shoot on location in the United States. The main reason, however, was ideological: America was regarded as China's principal enemy, and representations of capitalist America were unacceptable in socialist China.[26]

When live-action film failed to represent the Other, animation seized the opportunity to overrepresent the capitalist West on screen. Never in the history of Chinese animation have as many animated films directly portraying the capitalist West been produced as during the late 1950s and early 1960s. The era of the national style featuring the apparent Chinese past and artistic tradition across temporal borders ironically turned out to be the golden age of international-motif animation (*guoji ticai pian*) featuring the capitalist West across geopolitical and ideological borders. Although national style films conventionally turned to traditional Chinese literature, folklore, and legend for content and subject matter, international-motif films focused on current events unfolding in the capitalist West. National style films were supposed to use traditional Chinese art forms such as ink painting, papercutting, paperfolding, and Peking opera, whereas international-motif animated films deployed a more de-sinicized, international, and even modernist style to mark the exoticness and Otherness of the form. In other words, national style films were characterized by an emphasis on prescribed Chineseness, and international-motif films demonstrated a distance from, if not a complete erasure of, conventional Chineseness in terms of form and content. These were the two poles on the spectrum of Chinese animation during the late 1950s and early 1960s. Foregrounding the (co)existence of international-motif animation during these years expands the horizon of the national style, which is routinely treated as a timeless, static, and pure image isolated from the specific international and domestic contexts in which it emerged.

International-motif films became prominent as a new genre of animation during the Great Leap Forward. Animated filmmaking is labor-intensive and time-consuming, because animators need to make thousands of drawings, which are photographed and animated frame by frame. Accordingly, animation is often regarded by Chinese animators as unsuitable for portraying news and current events: hot events cool off before an animated film can be completed. Given the temporal requirements of animated filmmaking, Chinese animated films often revolve around folklore, legends, fables, and fairy tales, which are fantastic and timeless stories rooted in the past. To answer the needs of the Great Leap Forward, Chinese animators began making animated films more quickly so that they could respond to domestic and international events, the goal being to mobilize the masses to participate in political campaigns and indoctrinate them in Communist ideology and principles.

Catching up with the United Kingdom (*Gan Yingguo,* 1958) was made in response to the Communist Party's slogan of "catching up with the United Kingdom in fifteen years" and was seen to announce the arrival of the new genre.[27] These films adopted a minimalist style featuring simplified outlines and backgrounds to expedite their production and rapidly respond to political demands. They

frequently drew on the visual style of cartoons, caricature, and posters, and used still pictures, photos, and even tables to save time. Passionate voiceover narration, slogans, and mood music reinforced explicit political messages. Unlike ordinary animated films that targeted children only, these films were aimed at both children and adults who could understand the sophisticated political messages.

The golden age of the national style during the late 1950s and early 1960s also witnessed a boom in international-motif animation. *Lobsters* (*Longxia,* 1959), a puppet-animated film, was about the persecution of communists in the United States. *Who Sings the Best* (*Shei chang de zuihao,* 1958) featured the miserable lives of two orphaned white children in the United States. *The Pigeon* (*Gezi,* 1960) revolved around American military bases in Italy. *The Little Guests of the Sun* (*Taiyang de xiao keren,* 1961) contrasted the dreary lives of American children with the happy lives of children in socialist countries. *The Dream of Gold* (*Huangjin meng,* 1963) delineated the greed and evils of capitalist countries in the West. The early 1960s in particular witnessed the rise of international-motif animation that revolved around American imperialism.[28] In these films, Western adults were demonized as evil imperialists, but children, whether white or black, were represented sympathetically and positively as victims of or rebels against capitalism and imperialism, yearning for the sunny made-in-China socialist paradise that welcomes all children around the world.

Set in the "decadent" capitalist West, these international-motif animated films demonstrated an international and even modernist style that was radically different from the national style. In terms of form, they adopted a more universal style that deemphasized national identity and downplayed Chineseness. Take, for instance, the cel-animated film *The Dream of Gold,* in which caricature was used to portray the protagonists without any ethnic markers. Its minimalist style had a blank background and several characters made of simple lines, reminiscent of UPA's (United Productions of America) modernist style during the 1950s. Fast motion and movement, squash and stretch techniques, and plasmatic and violent transformations of body forms between humans and nonhuman objects, which were characteristic of early Disney shorts and the Fleischers, were used prominently in this and other international-motif films.[29] In sharp contrast, national style films, best represented by ink-painting animation, demonstrated stillness and stiffness, with minimal or no plasmatic movement or change of body forms. Due to the national style's kinship with traditional Chinese arts, the films represent an idealized image of pure Chineseness. With Western landscapes, buildings, costumes, and characters, international-motif films conveyed an exoticness and Otherness that were intensified by their difference from the Chinese settings seen in national style films. Western music, such as jazz, reinforced exoticness.

International motif (content) and international style (form) work together to mark the distinctiveness of this new genre from the national style.

I use international style, which includes both form (nontraditional Chinese and more universal art forms) and content (international motif), to refer to this new genre of animation that differed from the national style. Chineseness was out of the question in international style films, because they demonstrated foreignness and exoticness (*yang*) in contrast to the seemingly indigenousness (*tu*) of national style films. Ironically, although national style films won international awards abroad at international film festivals, international style films targeted the domestic Chinese audience with their ideological messages. The cliché storylines about the evils of imperialism and the wretched life of ordinary people (especially children) living in the capitalist West made it obvious to audiences that the films were communist propaganda. In this sense, the international style films, no matter how international they are, are still Chinese and can even be regarded as an alternative national style at that time. I therefore reframe the late 1950s and early 1960s as the era of the inter/national style. The slash connects and separates the two styles at the same time, suggesting that the two styles overlapped even as they differed.

Unlike the collective criticism and abandonment of the Soviet style in the wake of the black crow incident, during the late 1950s and early 1960s, the international style (in relation to the West) was not the object of criticism or attack. Animators and critics welcomed the international style as a new genre of animation for portraying one particular subject matter. To better criticize the capitalist West, unusual and even transgressive artistic forms, such as the modernist style as opposed to the realism favored by the CCP, representational modes (plasmaticness and the transformation of body forms characteristic of early Disney shorts and the Fleischers), and forbidden content (the capitalist West) were tolerated, sanctioned, and approved.[30] Despite the lack of controversy similar to the black crow incident, competition between the national style and the international style took place on the discursive level. I now demonstrate how the two styles contended with each other, with the former triumphing over the latter, through a close reading of *The Fishing Boy,* a film long regarded as exemplary of the pure national style.

The Textual Exorcism of the International Style: Rereading *The Fishing Boy*

The Fishing Boy takes place in a northern fishing village on the eve of the Boxer Rebellion, a peasant uprising in 1900 that aimed to erase foreign influences in China during the last years of the Qing dynasty (1644–1912). When an old fisherman is

at sea fishing on a stormy night, he retrieves a white jade fish pot decorated with the images of a fishing boy, a lotus flower, and a pair of golden fish. At night, the images on the pot come to life. When the boy on the pot goes fishing in the pot, the golden fish splashes drops of water onto the table that are magically transformed into luminous pearls. The next morning the old fisherman sells the pearls in the marketplace and shares the secret with other villagers. The foreign priest from a church passes by and overhears the secret. He conspires with a local Chinese magistrate, arrests the old fisherman, and tries to take the pot from him. In a fit of fury, the old fisherman smashes the pot on the ground so that it will not fall into the hands of foreign devils and their collaborators. The fishing boy comes back to life, creates havoc in the court, and throws the priest into the sea. The pieces of the broken pot gather themselves back together and the pot becomes whole again.

As a film commemorating the tenth anniversary of the founding of socialist China, *The Fishing Boy* has long been regarded as a canonical national style film. Its director Wan Guchan used the traditional Chinese art form of papercutting to animate the characters. In order to create an authentic image of a Chinese fisher boy, the animators went to Mount Putuo and drew inspiration from the "golden boy and jade girl" (*jintong yunü*), who appear in Buddhist stories as immortal children in-waiting at a divine mansion. Chinese animators went fishing with fishermen on Ant Island on stormy days. They also visited nursing homes and talked to fishermen in their seventies and eighties to learn about life in the "old" society.[31] The image of the fishing boy also was based on the *bunt takefu* style in Peking opera (*duanda wusheng*), in which a male actor playing a martial role wears shorts, carries weapons, and is exceptionally agile. The old fisherman in the animated film was inspired by the image of underground heroes (*jianghu haohan*) in the Chinese martial arts tradition. Chinese animators and critics lavished praise on the authentic Chineseness of the images of the fishing boy and old fisherman.

Rather than celebrating the film as pure national style, I reread it as an allegory of the contestation between the national style and the international style. It features two oppositional groups of characters in the film: the magic fishing boy and the old fisherman (positive) are pitted against the foreign priest and the local Chinese magistrate (negative). The positive characters are portrayed in accordance with principles of the national style, but the negative ones closer to the international style, which charges them with exoticness and Otherness. The priest is portrayed as a typical foreign devil, with an exaggerated aquiline nose and thick beard. The local magistrate is snobbish, slavish to the foreign priest, and does not resemble his Chinese compatriots. With his downward slanting eyebrows, extremely small eyes, well-trimmed mustache, and gaunt and distorted face, he resembles the Fu Manchu caricature of a Chinese man that appears in orientalist narratives. He is de-sinicized and exoticized. The conflict and fight between the

two groups, which is conventionally interpreted from the perspective of nationalism and anti-imperialism, can be reread as a power struggle and rivalry between the national style and the international style.

The fishing boy is a figure of animation. In the beginning, he is a static image decorating the fishing pot. At night he comes to life and goes fishing, which requires that he be literally animated. The old fisherman and the foreign priest's fight over the fishing pot is not simply about the precious pearls it produces. It is also about the magical power of animation that brings static images to life. If the old fisherman represents the principle of the national style and the foreign priest the international style, their fight over the ownership of the pot and the fishing boy can be reread as an allegory of the power struggle between the national style and the international style for dominance in animation.

By the end of the film, the national style triumphs and the international style is exorcized. In rebutting the foreign priest's claim that the magic pot was made in his country, the old fisherman declares that the image of the fishing boy is an authentic Chinese boy and thus the pot must have been made in China. The old fisherman's justification is strikingly similar to the rationale about the national style. That is, the image should be a unique marker of national identity, and in line with this theory, the pot only could have been produced in China because it features an image of an authentic Chinese boy. Defending the pure Chineseness of the image, the fisherman's reasoning eliminates the possibility of cross-cultural imagination and representation. Thus, it is impossible for the West to produce an authentic image of a Chinese fishing boy. For the image to be authentic, it must be created by the Chinese in China.

The fisherman's argument, however, is challenged by the image of the foreign priest himself. If China can produce an image of a foreign priest, other countries might produce an image of a Chinese fishing boy. When the old fisherman smashes the pot, the fishing boy emerges from the broken pieces and returns to life. It is up to him to choose a side and his true master. He uses his fishing tackle to disrupt the court and punish the negative characters. He hooks the magistrate's cap and places it on the head of a dog, insulting the magistrate as being a dog official (*gouguan*). The fishing boy's act of throwing the priest into the sea is not simply a colonial patricide, it is also an artistic exorcism of the international style as embodied by the priest. Here animation assumes a life of its own and chooses the national style as its true master. It comes as no surprise because the fishing boy, a figure of animation, originates from a static image rooted in traditional Chinese art, just like the kinship between the national style in film and traditional Chinese art and culture.

The film's textual exorcism of the international style epitomizes institutional and official discourses that espoused the national style and suppressed the inter-

national. Of course, oppositional voices questioning the validity of the national style remained, but they were soon marginalized in mainstream animated filmmaking.[32] Although attacks on the international style never reached the level of the black crow incident, there was no collective or official advocacy for it either. The international style was tolerated, slighted, and ignored, yet it coexisted with the national style as an undercurrent that interrupted its monopoly and dominance.

Having done so synchronically, I now examine the national style diachronically to analyze its unstable and changing definition over time. I use the first two ink-painting animated films as a case study because ink-painting animation was one of the highest achievements of the national style in the early 1960s. First, however, background information about ink-painting animation and its unique aesthetic contribution to the national style is in order.

Aesthetics of Absence: Theorizing Chinese Ink-Painting Animation

The most common way to make animated films is "single line and flat color" (*danxian pingtu*) in cel animation, which allows for separate pictures to be matched perfectly with each other by controlling outlines and colors. Animators usually draw images with slight variations on transparent celluloid. The transparency of cels makes it easier for animators to match the outlines on different cels to create smooth movement. Animators also can draw the background on a separate cel and superimpose other cels onto it, so the background on every single cel does not have to be redrawn. This method creates an exceedingly flat and well-controlled visual effect, which contrasts dramatically with ink-painting animation.

Unlike traditional cel animation, ink-painting animated film features a visual style based on what I call the aesthetics of absence. This characterization relates to the fact that ink-painting animated film does not have the typical single-line-and-flat-color form, due to the ink wash or splashing, graded ink tonalities, and ink diffusion. Ink-painting animation usually adopts a minimalist style and significant use of empty space (*liubai*), which therefore becomes the visual focus. This technique of empty space differs from traditional Western oil painting that relies "presence" that builds up layers of oil on the canvas. Chinese animators and intellectuals thus use ink-painting animation to specify Chinese identity in film, an art form typically recognized as imported from the West.

Aesthetics of absence refers not only to formal characteristics, but also to themes and motifs of representative works. The concept of absence defines the origin of Chinese ink-painting animation. The first ink-painting animated film in history, *Little Tadpoles Look for Mama*, drew its inspiration from a well-known

Qi Baishi (1864–1957) ink painting called *Frogs Croaking out of a Spring for Ten Miles* (*Wa sheng shili chu shanquan*), which revolves around the theme of absence and negative inference (see figure 3.1). At a dinner, the renowned author Lao She asked Qi Baishi whether he could paint something that was invisible in the painting but whose presence could still be perceived. Qi Baishi thought for three days and finally worked out this painting, which was mounted as a hanging scroll and done entirely in ink monochrome. A mountain spring is flanked by rocks, and tadpoles are positioned on the surface of water. The exaggerated size of the tadpoles increases their prominence. Given their tadpole state, this prominence implies the proximity of parent frogs. Thus, the parent frogs may be absent from the painting, but they are suggested by the tadpoles swimming downstream toward the viewer.

Figure 3.1. Absent frogs in *Frogs Croaking out of a Spring for Ten Miles,* Qi Baishi, 1951.

Little Tadpoles Look for Mama highlights the theme of absent parent frogs in featuring a group of newborn tadpoles who are looking for their absent mother. During their journey, they make friends with chickens and shrimp and mistakenly call the animals "mother." The mother frog's absence triggers the movement of narration and animation. When the tadpoles first meet a golden fish and take her as their mother, the movement of narration and animation almost stops. Because the mother frog is still absent, however, the tadpoles continue their journey and the narration and animation continue their movement. These repeated cycles of stop-motion allow the tadpoles to find their mother, the ultimate source of power that bestows them with the life-anima demonstrated by their movement. Only after the tadpoles do find her does the movement of narration and animation draw to a close.

Thus the mother frog is central despite her absence. That she is absent opens up the space of signification, because the tadpoles are searching not only for their physical mother but also for the meaning of the word "frog," that is, who they are. After the shrimp tells them that their mother has big eyes and then they see a golden fish, they think it is their mother. The fish explains that their mother has a white belly. The tadpoles then meet a crab with a white belly and again think they have found their mother. After the crab tells them that their mother has four legs, the tadpoles turn to a turtle and call it mother, and the story repeats itself. The movement of the tadpoles

is therefore a chain of signification in which the meaning of the absent frog is constantly differed and deferred. This chain of iterative difference and deferment leads the tadpoles finally to construct the meaning of the word "frog."

Four ink-painting animated films were made and each one revolves around the theme of absence and loss. The second, *The Herd Boy's Flute,* is about a herd boy's anxiety about loss, which his dream about losing his beloved water buffalo makes evident. The third, *The Deer Bell* (*Lu ling,* 1982), recounts how a girl loses a fawn. A girl living in the forest rescues a fawn that is escaping from an animal predator. They become friends and spend time together. The girl hangs a bell around the fawn's neck so she knows where it is. In the end, she suffers a painful loss when the fawn returns to its parents. The fourth film, *Feelings of Mountain and River* (*Shanshui qing,* 1988), involve a boy's loss of his music teacher when the master chooses to depart from the boy's world.

Reinforcing the theme of absence and loss is the erasure of speech and dialogue in ink-painting animated film. In typical cel-animated films at that time, dialogue and speech are an integral part of the work. Music also features prominently to advance the narrative. In ink-painting animated film, however, absence of speech is the norm. In these four films, no characters in the diegesis or film's story speak. *Little Tadpoles Look for Mama* has a female voiceover but its characters do not speak.[33] Given the characters' silence, music and musical sounds play a pivotal role in these films: flute music in *The Herd Boy's Flute,* the bell in *Deer Bell,* and zither music in *Feelings of Mountain and River.* Music provides clues for tracing the absent love object. In Qi Baishi's *Frogs Croaking out of a Spring for Ten Miles,* from which *Little Tadpoles Look for Mama* originates, it is also the croaking of the frogs, inaudible but evoked by the painting, that provides traces of frogs who are under the water and hence unseen.

Although the method of ink painting by handheld brush is widely known, the actual technique of ink-painting animation has been a national secret since then. Relying on spontaneous ink wash or splashing, graded ink tonalities, and ink diffusion on absorbent mulberry paper, Chinese ink paintings are difficult to control and almost impossible to reproduce. This raises the question of how to reproduce the saturation of ink on film without outlines and flat color. According to Mochinaga Tadahito's speculation, the secret of Chinese ink-painting animation might be in the use of photography, for which China's first animation camerawoman Duan Xiaoxuan was responsible.[34] Animators still needed pencils and cels to draw several duplicates of the object to be animated, probably with the help of stencils to control the edges. Each duplicate would have had different ink gradations. The animation photographer Duan Xiaoxuan and her colleagues first shot these pictures one by one, and then superimposed them to create the effect of ink diffusion. They also might have adjusted the lens to take out-of-focus photos,

which, if properly superimposed with in-focus photos, would resemble the effect of ink diffusion. Finding the best combination of cels and the most appropriate photographic techniques would have been painstaking work that required considerable patience. The photographers also must have an artistic sense of pictorial qualities and composition. Usually only a still background such as a landscape was an authentic ink painting unmediated by photography, because animators superimposed it onto other cels and did not need to animate it.

It is said that the process of producing an ink-painting animated film was so complex and time-consuming that in the same amount of time animators could have produced four to five single-line-and-flat-color works of the same length. In addition to the time required, ink-painting animated films are costly. Few animators and studios today are interested in making them because they are no longer profitable. Ink-painting animation has become nearly extinct as an art form in China. The current fervor for using this form to construct a distinct national identity, such as the use of computer ink-painting animation in the China Pavilion of the Shanghai Expo in 2010, brought it to the center of attention. However, the computer-generated hypervisibility of ink-painting animation belies the very absence of this form, much like the role of the panda, an animal threatened with extinction, in promoting Chinese identity on the global stage.

The fourth ink-painting animated film, *Feelings of Mountain and River*, marked the final splendor of this form. With a touch of sadness, this film takes an introspective look into the fate of ink-painting animation. In the film, a retired musician travels through mountains and along rivers. When he falls sick, a young boy who operates a ferry boat takes care of him. During his recovery, the musician teaches the boy how to play the zither. When the old man departs, he gives his treasured zither to the boy, hoping that his disciple will pass on his music. The film expresses the hope of its director Te Wei and his colleagues that the art of ink-painting animation will be handed down from generation to generation, especially as the masters were aging out of the artistic scene. No ink-painting animated films followed *Feelings of Mountain and River,* however.[35] The theme of absence and loss that pervaded ink-painting animated film became the fate of the form itself.

From Ink Painting to Ink-Painting Animation

Given its political significance at a time of national and international crises, the production of ink-painting animated films was supported by the government when leaders sympathized with traditional Chinese arts and did not subscribe to the radical Yan'an-Soviet model. At the end of 1959, the Shanghai Animation Film Studio, following the example of many art exhibitions at that time, held its

"Exhibition of Chinese Animated films" in Beijing, Shanghai, and other major cities. On January 31, 1960, Chen Yi (1901–1972), then foreign minister, visited the exhibition and extended his congratulations on behalf of the central government and State Council. He expressed his hope for this artistic form and exclaimed, "It would be great if you could animate Qi Baishi's ink paintings!"[36] These words encouraged Chinese animators to begin their exploration. When Chen Yi later learned that the Shanghai Animation Film Studio had made several experimental ink-painting animation segments, he marveled at its success and encouraged animators to keep up the good work. Chen Yi assured them, "You should continue your experiment. I will use the resources of the whole country to support you."[37] Considering Chen Yi's significant role in political and artistic circles, his interest was important in ensuring government support for ink-painting animated film at that time.

Supported by Chen Yi and the socialist state, animators decided, for political and artistic reasons, to animate the ink paintings of Qi Baishi. Qi Baishi was the only traditional ink-painting artist to be protected and lionized by the Communist Party. In 1953, the Party had awarded him the honorary title Artist of the People. The same year, he became chairman of the Chinese Artists Association. Like Mao, Qi Baishi grew up in Hunan province, born into a poor peasant family and later working as a carpenter. His lower-class background protected him to some extent in socialist China. In his art, he did not focus on the sublime and monumental objects such as mountains, rivers, cliffs, and pines that are prominent in traditional ink paintings. Instead, he modeled his paintings on daily objects in rural life, such as shrimp, crabs, and mice. By sketching from life, Qi Baishi's paintings coincidentally echoed the Party's call for reforming traditional ink painting. Given Qi Baishi's class, artistic, and political status, it is no surprise that animators, encouraged by Chen Yi, decided to model *Little Tadpoles Look for Mama* on his paintings right after Qi's death in 1957.

Several years later, riding on the success of *Little Tadpoles Look for Mama,* Chinese animators decided to animate the paintings of Li Keran (1907–1989). A student of Qi Baishi, Li Keran was from the countryside of Jiangsu province. He began his career by studying Western oil painting under Liu Haisu (1896–1994), a well-known painter, retreating to the wartime capital Chongqing during the war, where he began to paint herd boys and water buffalo. After 1949, he launched his career by teaching at the Central Academy of Fine Arts, where he began to learn ink painting from Qi Baishi and Huang Binhong. During the Anti-Rightist Campaign against Jiang Feng, Li Keran testified against him, having sided with Cai Ruohong. Also, like Qi Baishi's paintings, Li Keran's herd boy paintings were influenced by his observations of rural life, thus providing a perfect example of the CCP's call for "sketching from life." Li Keran consciously adapted his paintings to

the Party's message. In echoing the policy, Li Keran maintained that "entering life deeply [*shenru shenghuo*] is the prerequisite for reforming *guohua.*"[38]

More important, Li Keran consciously aligned his ink paintings with contemporary thought in order to make them more politically correct. In a poem titled "Self-Mockery" ("Zichao"), Lu Xun expresses his care and devotion for China's children: "head bowed, like a willing ox I serve the children" (*fushou gan wei ruzi niu*). In his Yan'an Talks, Mao used Lu Xun's expression of "willing ox that serves the children" (*ruzi niu*) to urge artists and writers to serve the masses. Echoing Mao, Guo Moruo wrote a poem titled "Ode to the Water Buffalo" ("Shuiniu zan") the same year. While using the water buffalo as subject matter for his paintings during his stay in Chongqing in 1941, Li Keran inscribed the lines of Guo Moruo's ode in his paintings. He also composed poems in praise of the water buffalo and included those poems in his paintings.

Landscape is an indispensable element in Li Keran's water buffalo paintings. Landscape was regarded as one of the Four Olds (*sijiu,* which are Old Customs, Old Culture, Old Habits, and Old Ideas) and was severely criticized during the period of popularization. Li Keran defended his landscape paintings within the framework of national identity: "What does landscape [*shanshui*] mean? It means territory [*jiangshan*], the territory of our motherland . . . We paint landscape to memorialize the land of our motherland. This is why landscape painting has nationalistic meanings."[39] It is no surprise that after the death of Qi Baishi, Li Keran's paintings, partly for their nationalistic sentiment, became the prototype of *The Herd Boy's Flute,* the second ink-painting animated film in China.

Despite a revival of traditional art in the early 1960s in response to the relative relaxation of cultural control, artists were still restricted in their ability to practice it because it was simultaneously revived, reviled, and reformed. Hence, Zhou Yang, an influential writer and Communist leader of writers and artists explains:

> We attach much importance to tradition, but this does not mean that we will go back to ancient times . . . We should inherit and develop our tradition on the basis of a new ideology. Our literature and art should inculcate communism, not feudal or bourgeois thought in our people.[40]

Zhou Yang encouraged artists to adopt new content while adhering to national or traditional forms. Whereas artistic forms "express the style and vigor of the nation," content "expresses the people and thoughts of the new age."[41] In the early 1950s, revolution and class struggle were the new content. Although the cultural thaw of the early 1960s diminished it politically, the Communist Party continued to advocate for political ideals. Furthermore, the Party's split with the Soviet Union did not mean that it abandoned realism. Against pure expressionism

and abstraction, it encouraged realism in ink painting, urging artists to imitate real life by adopting the Western technique of "sketching from life." In his discussion of Qi Baishi, for instance, Cai Ruohong opposed the practice of slavishly imitating ancient masters.[42] At the same time, he also denounced the practice of pure and abstract creation detached from real life, such as the literati paintings that inherited the style of Ming loyalists and the Eight Eccentric Painters of Yangzhou. Qi Baishi's paintings, which were based on his observation of daily life, provided a middle ground between the two extremes. Qi Baishi's artistic motto was "between representational and nonrepresentational." Qi Baishi believed that if painting is too representational, it degenerates into mere artifice and, if it is too nonrepresentational, it threatens to deceive the entire world.[43] In glorifying Qi Baishi's propensity for real life, Zhou Yang said that Qi Baishi's paintings were based on realism:

> Qi Baishi is an artist of the people. . . . He is from the people and has "flesh and blood" ties with the people. He has absorbed the essence of folk art. It is because he is from the people that his painting and his artistic principles are based on realism.[44]

The first two ink-painting animated films, *Little Tadpoles Look for Mama* and *The Herd Boy's Flute,* were created in a sociohistorical context of revival of traditional artistic form, construction of national identity, and shifting international and domestic dynamics. This context gave rise to national style, but also limited its development. I now explore the historical contingencies of national style by examining the rise and fall of the two ink-painting animated films in the early 1960s. This discussion substantiates my point that the concepts of national style and national identity are not stable and immutable categories, but are fluid, changing, and historically contingent, especially during the tumultuous decades of socialist China.

Intended Audience: From Children to Adults

The intended audience for animated films was usually children. Immediately after the People's Republic of China was founded in 1949, the Cultural Bureau presented the policy that "animated films should serve children" and "reflect children's life."[45] Animated films were thus regarded as children's films, which were closely related to children's literature, music, art, and drama. Three types of animated films served children and reflected children's life at that time. The first, narrative realism, features children protagonists and truthfully depicts their lives. *Heroic Little Sisters of the Grassland* (*Caoyuan yingxiong xiao jiemei,* 1965), for example, drew

on the true story of two Mongolian girls who almost lost their lives trying to save their commune's sheep in 1964. The second typecasts children as protagonists, but also incorporates fantastic elements. In *Ginseng Baby* (*Renshen wawa,* 1961), a ginseng root transforms into a baby and helps a peasant boy in his fight against a landlord. The third type includes fairy tales featuring anthropomorphic animals. In *Little Carp Jump over Dragon Gate* (*Xiao liyu tiao longmen,* 1958), for example, little carp speak and behave like humans. Their grandmother tells them a legend about carp that can jump over dragon gate to become dragons. After hearing it, the little carp are determined to find the dragon gate. They swim upstream and happily jump over what appears to be the gate, but actually turns out to be Dragon Gate Dam (Longmen shuiku), which was built across the Caohe in Hebei province during the Great Leap Forward.

During the Maoist era, the CCP often changed its policies toward animated films. When the Yan'an-Soviet trend dominated the cultural scene during the period of popularization, only the first two film genres survived—narrative realism and child protagonist. When political control tightened with the rise of ultra-leftism, only narrative realism survived. For example, animated films produced from 1964 to 1976 mostly belonged to the narrative realism genre, as I argue in chapter 4.

The third type, fairy tales relying on anthropomorphism, was the most controversial. For many years, few if any dared to state an opinion. In 1964, the Cultural Bureau acknowledged it, but quickly denounced and severely criticized it during the period of popularization.[46] The first and sometimes second type of animation showcased the CCP's general preference for human action and real life over animals and fantasy. This resonates with Arnold Chang's argument that during the period of popularization, figure painting dominated and landscape and bird-and-flower painting appeared only rarely. In addition, the Party preferred animated films in the current political context. Essentially, all three types were influenced by the political themes of the time in which they were produced: the spirit of self-sacrifice and heroism of *Heroic Little Sisters of the Grassland,* class struggle with landlords in *Ginseng Baby,* and China's modernization during the Great Leap Forward in *Little Carp Jump over Dragon Gate.* This served the CCP's interest in not only educating children but also propagating communist ideology.

Little Tadpoles Look for Mama, adapted from a children's fairy tale written by Fang Huizhen and Sheng Lude, belonged to the third film type. In contrast, *The Herd Boy's Flute* appealed to sophisticated adults. In the early 1960s, filmmakers became more concerned with the elevation of standards and extending the range of audiences beyond workers, peasants, and soldiers. Although the norm for animated films was serving children and reflecting their lives, in the relatively relaxed environment of the early 1960s animators began to make animated films for

more sophisticated audiences. As animators experimented with a greater variety of artistic forms, such as ink-painting and papercutting animation, their audience gradually diversified.[47] In an essay in 1960, Te Wei wrote, "With the multiplication of forms and subject matter, we widened our audience. Animated film is not only an important instrument to educate our children and bring up communist successors, but also a popular medium loved by both adults and children."[48] In 1984, he reiterated this idea and emphasized the importance of the intended audience:

> Animated films mainly serve children, but we can still make a few films especially for adults. . . . Before making an animated film, we should first decide whether we mainly target children, adults, or both. Otherwise, our films will not be appropriate for both children and adults. Children cannot understand it, and adults will find it too boring.[49]

Te Wei later admitted that *The Herd Boy's Flute* targeted adults rather than children: "Animated films mainly serve children, but we can also make a few animated films especially for adults. In the past we made *The Herd Boy's Flute* and *The Dream of Gold,* but children cannot understand them. They were designed for adults."[50] *The Herd Boy's Flute* was fated to suffer harsher censorship than films targeting children. With an adult audience in mind, it was artistically experimental and even transgressive by the standards of the early 1960s, factors that contributed to its ban in 1964.

Subject Matter: From Politicized Tadpoles to Idealized Herd Boy

The period of elevation of standards and revival of traditional art (1958–1965) may have ended earlier than 1965. Arnold Chang himself is aware of the problem of periodization and points out that he can only loosely categorize the years between 1958 and 1965 as the period of elevation of standards: "it is impossible, of course, to pinpoint, to the precise year, the terminal dates of any given period."[51] Similarly, Paul Clark argues that the categorization of 1966 to 1976 as the Cultural Revolution is based on a political perspective. Clark contends that the culture of the Cultural Revolution actually began in 1964, during the Four Clean-Ups Campaign (Siqing yundong) related to Shanghai films. This campaign targeted leaders in the film industry, Xia Yan and Chen Huangmei, and began with the criticism of several Shanghai films such as *Early Spring in February* (*Zaochun eryue*, 1963). Produced during the elevation of standards period, the films faced difficulties after ideological control tightened during the years of popularization.

In 1964 animation's national style also began a downturn. The CCP fully supported *Little Tadpoles Look for Mama.* By the time it was ready for release in 1960, Beijing had severed ties with Moscow and nationalism was on the rise. Given its so-called national style, *Little Tadpoles Look for Mama* was released in conjunction with the eleventh annual celebration of National Day in Shanghai.

By the time *The Herd Boy's Flute* was released in 1964, national style as represented by the artistic form of ink painting had become the denigrated Other. Shanghai Animation Film Studio had begun production on *The Herd Boy's Flute* in 1961, and thus the film's design was associated with the idea of elevation of standards prominent at that time. By 1964, the Cultural Revolution had begun changing the political circumstances. Thus *The Herd Boy's Flute* faced a new definition of national style and national identity when it was released. Artistic form was no longer the principal constituent, but rather political subject matter and revolutionary action.[52] Therefore, the discussion that follows centers on the subject matter differences between *Little Tadpoles Look for Mama* and *The Herd Boy's Flute.*

Little Tadpoles Look for Mama is a fairy tale about a group of tadpoles looking for their mother and is meant to appeal to children. *The Herd Boy's Flute* targets an adult audience with beautiful flute music played by the boy.[53] While herding his water buffalo, the boy falls asleep and dreams that he loses it. He asks a fisherman, a woodcutter, and other herd boys if they know its whereabouts. It turns out that the sound of a waterfall leads his buffalo astray. Despite the boy's efforts to coax it to return, the water buffalo refuses. The boy grows frustrated and rests in a bamboo grove. Suddenly he hears an exquisite sound coming from a bamboo. He finds the bamboo and makes a flute from it. His flute playing attracts all the animals in the forest. At this moment, the herd boy wakes up. He then plays his flute, and his water buffalo returns to him. He rides the buffalo home, all the while playing his flute. The film is so subtle that children may not understand its nuances. For example, when the herd boy falls asleep, two fallen leaves are transformed into butterflies, alluding to Zhuangzi's dream of becoming a butterfly.[54] Accordingly, *The Herd Boy's Flute* does not belong to any of the three recognized types of animated films for children. With its dreamlike qualities, it belongs to what might be called the fourth type, which further deviates from those types favored by the CCP.

Subject matter played a vital role in ink-painting animated film. Given the specificity of the artistic form, ink-painting animated films called for subject matter different from that of cel-animated films. As veteran female animator Tang Cheng explains,

> Because of the limitations of the form, many subjects are not suitable for ink-painting animated films. To make an ink-painting animated film, we need good subject matter, which is very difficult to obtain, because it calls

> for the kind of characters, background, and atmosphere that fit in well with ink paintings.[55]

Accordingly, the subject matter of ink-painting animated films should draw on the themes of ink paintings. Both *Little Tadpoles Look for Mama* and *The Herd Boy's Flute* were successful in choosing subjects suitable for ink painting. How they differed was in the way they related their subject matter to their times. *Little Tadpoles Look for Mama* was grounded in the political reality of the 1960s, and the idealized world of *The Herd Boy's Flute* transcended its contemporary political context.

At first sight, *Little Tadpoles Look for Mama* depicts a fairytale world and makes no political references. Animators first present a lotus pond and then pan the camera from left to right so that spectators can view the full picture, as if viewing a handscroll (from right to left) from an opposite direction. They create a minimalist background with one or two weeds, daffodils, lotus leaves, and undulating lines to suggest the water. Throughout the film, the visual effect of ink painting is prominent, especially compared with animated films made following the principle of a single line and flat color. For example, although animators depict all the tadpoles with dabs of ink, they use gradation of ink tonality within each tadpole, making the tail lighter than the head. Toward the end of each tadpole's tail, the ink tonality becomes lighter, as if melding into the water. One of the tadpoles is red, likely signifying the leader.

Nevertheless, the film's ending accords with the political trend in the early 1960s. When the little tadpoles find their mother and become frogs, the female voiceover gives the children a lesson: "Little frogs are ambitious. They are determined to eat all harmful insects to protect our agricultural plants." This didactic message is propaganda, because agricultural plants became especially important during the Great Famine. Beginning in 1955, animals were politicized and classified as friends or enemies. From 1958 to 1962, Mao launched the Four Pests Campaign to exterminate rats, mosquitoes, flies, and sparrows. Rats and sparrows were included because they ate grain seeds and disrupted agriculture.[56] On the other hand, the campaign regarded other animals as friends and encouraged people to protect them. The frog is a good animal. Science education films (*kejiaopian*) at the time advocated the protection of frogs and tadpoles to safeguard agricultural production.

Furthermore, the female voiceover conveys political authority. Film scholars point out that the disembodied voiceover symbolizes truth, power, and knowledge. According to Mary Ann Doane, "It is precisely because the voice is not localizable, because it cannot be yoked to a body, that it is capable of interpreting the image, producing its truth."[57] In documentary films, the voiceover is usually male, symbolizing the possession of knowledge and the unchallenged authority of

interpretation. *Little Tadpoles Look for Mama* adopts a female voiceover because the film is for children, and the female voiceover is associated with a mother or teacher figure who tells (bedtime) stories to children. In this case, the film's female voiceover does not dilute its authority. On the contrary, its authority is reinforced, because the voice is that of Zhang Ruifang, a famous actress who played the revolutionary heroine in live-action feature films. The narrator's gender identity was thus subordinate to her political identity. The female voiceover makes the film less abstract and easier for children to understand. At the same time, the familiar, affirmative, enthusiastic, and high-pitched female voiceover immediately reminded the audience of the popular revolutionary films, thus emphasizing revolutionary sentiments otherwise absent in this film.

Similar to *Little Tadpoles Look for Mama, The Herd Boy's Flute* follows the hand scroll tradition with the camera's panning to suggest the unfolding of the background—a stream flanked by willow trees. All the background frames of the film were drawn by Fang Jizhong, a well-known painter from the Chang'an School of Painting, which was active during the late 1950s and early 1960s. The herd boy is cel-animated with the regular method of single line and flat color, and the water buffalo is made with the ink-painting animation method. Depicted in ink monochrome, the buffalo's horns are indicated by two boldly curved lines that converge to form a crescent, bold vertical lines indicating the horn's grooves. The water buffalo's body displays the effects of ink diffusion, and the area around its mouth and eyes is defined by lighter ink tonality. The depiction of the water buffalo generally follows Li Keran's style (see figures 3.2 and 3.3). However, the more spontaneous appearance of Li Keran's water buffalo is attributable to his working on absorbent mulberry paper with ink, whereas animators used pencils, cels, and photography to create the effect of diffusion.

Unlike *Little Tadpoles Look for Mama, The Herd Boy's Flute* has no voiceover, thus focusing attention on pictorial quality. Whereas *Little Tadpoles Look for Mama* takes place in the enclosed space of the pond, *The Herd Boy's Flute* crosses an expanse of space that includes willow trees, streams, mountains, waterfalls, forests, and bamboo groves. *Little Tadpoles Look for Mama* adopts a linear temporality with an ending that suggests narrative closure. *The Herd Boy's Flute* disrupts such linearity by juxtaposing dream and reality, and draws attention to the fluidity of narration. In terms of compositional complexity, *The Herd Boy's Flute* is more sophisticated than *Little Tadpoles Look for Mama* because it incorporates landscape, bird-and-flower painting, and figures, whereas *Little Tadpoles Look for Mama* features only animals and plants.

Although figure painting during the Mao era was likely to have obvious political connotations related to human action, the political associations of landscape and bird-and-flower paintings were subtler. In an influential article published in

Figure 3.2. A still of boy with flute from *The Herd Boy's Flute,* 1963.

Figure 3.3. Li Keran's painting of water buffalo and herd boys.

1960, Chen Yude contended that landscape and bird-and-flower paintings did not simply represent the objective world, but also suggested the painters' political position. He argued that landscape and bird-and-flower paintings of proletarian artists usually encompassed revolutionary optimism and expressed the artists' love for their motherland and the people. Qi Baishi's paintings, which were based on real life, were such an example. In contrast, bourgeois landscape and bird-and-flower paintings were usually associated with escapism, decadence, and pessimism, and contained a reactionary message.[58] *Little Tadpoles Look for Mama* converged with Chen Yude's argument in a subtle way. Although *The Herd Boy's Flute* had a human character and therefore was more likely to have political connotations than *Little Tadpoles Look for Mama,* it nonetheless deviated from Chen Yude's contention by depicting a transcendental world reminiscent of traditional ox-herding paintings that had no real connection with the political realities of the mid-1960s.

Scarlett Ju-yu Jang dates the beginning of oxen as a subject for painting to Han Huang (723–787) and other Tang dynasty painters. During that time, herd boys were not represented because the emphasis was on form-likeness of animals. In the Song dynasty (960–1279), depictions of ox-herding and a herd boy became popular. Scholar officials began to project their ideal of Confucian eremitism onto ox-herding paintings and to express their desire for "turning away from big cities and from involvement in governmental affairs to live in the mountains or in the countryside."[59] As Richard Barnhart and Catherine Barnhart contend, "From the late eleventh century on, buffalo herd boys exemplify for many scholars and officials the simple life far away from ceremony, ritual, and social obligation."[60] For example, Song dynasty scholar-official Cui Yan (1057–1126) wrote a poem to accompany an ox-herding painting that expresses his longing for a pastoral life:

> High position and fame are unreal after all; where am I to settle for the rest of my life? While the green grass is still long, I am going to herd my oxen and sheep . . . Playing a flute on the back of an ox in the northern wind, I am a hale old man who does not care about worldly affairs.[61]

These ancient ox-herding paintings also influenced Li Keran, who named some of his paintings after them. His *Five Oxen* (*Wuniu tu*) is named after Han Huang's *Five Oxen,* and his *Ox-Herding in the Four Seasons* (*Siji muniu tu*) is named after Yan Ciping's *Ox-Herding in the Four Seasons.* The style and sentiments of ancient ox-herding paintings reappeared in Li Keran's paintings and the ink-painting animated film *The Herd Boy's Flute.*

Before I continue discussing animators' appropriation of ancient paintings to project national identity in *The Herd Boy's Flute,* I need to point out that the ancientness and Chineseness of this film is constructed, that the film is modern and

even Western. For instance, it did not wholly follow the method of ink-painting animation, because the herd boy was cel-animated with modern technology. In addition, the film's music combined Chinese flute music with Western orchestra. National style was thus a blend and did not emerge from cultural purity. This film's relation to ancient ox-herding paintings further demonstrates how animators appropriated traditional art from the past to construct national style in the present, an aesthetic practice that was replete with political stakes during the 1960s.

In terms of composition and pictorial qualities, the depiction of the herd boy and his water buffalo in each frame is reminiscent of ox-herding paintings by court artists in the Song dynasty. According to *Xuanhe Painting Catalogue* (*Xuanhe huapu*), these ox-herding paintings have six themes: herd boy playing a flute, ox drinking water, ox bathing and herd boy returning home from ox-herding, oxen fighting, ox and calf, and ox crossing river. *The Herd Boy's Flute* includes all except oxen fighting and ox and calf.

In addition, the composition of the frame is similar to that of ancient ox-herding paintings. Comparing one frame of *The Herd Boy's Flute* with Li Di's *Buffaloes and Herd Boys in Rainstorm*, it appears that the trees in the background occupy half of the frame and form a diagonal across it with the herd boys positioned on that diagonal (see figures 3.4 and 3.5). In both frames, the herd boy and water buffalo are positioned near the bottom of the frame and move horizontally across it. The proportions of the background, herd boy, and water buffalo are similar. In both frames, neither the figures nor the background is dominant. With these balanced proportions, animators and the ancient artist Li Di create a bucolic image in which humans and nature coexist in balance and harmony.

Figure 3.4. Full-frame still of boy, buffalo, and trees from *The Herd Boy's Flute,* 1963.

Figure 3.5. *Buffaloes and Herd Boys in Rainstorm* (hanging scroll; ink and color on silk), by Li Di (ca. 1163–1225).

Furthermore, Song dynasty ox-herding paintings attached much importance to landscape. During the Northern Song dynasty, artists portrayed a "whole world of ox-herding" by depicting a holistic landscape background, whereas those in the Southern Song dynasty represented "small corners of the world in which the motifs of ox-herding are the focus of the composition."[62] Cinematography integrates the two types in *The Herd Boy's Flute.* In the beginning of the film, the camera pans from left to right to show a panorama of the landscape with a stream flanked by willow trees.[63] The camera then zooms in and focuses on a corner of the stream. Next it cuts to a closer view of the herd boy and his water buffalo with a dissolve. The camera continues to cut in more closely until viewers finally have a close-up of the water buffalo and herd boy. Through cinematography, viewers move from "the whole world" to a "smaller corner" of ox-herding paintings.

The Herd Boy's Flute and ancient ox-herding paintings also share lyrical and atmospheric qualities. In *The Herd Boy's Flute,* the water buffalo does not have any rope or halter, as in ancient ox-herding paintings, suggesting the idea of unbridled

freedom. The herd boy lives a leisured life, enjoying nature to his heart's content, much like a hermit in the Song dynasty. The appearance of the fisherman and woodcutter in the film further reinforces the notion of eremitism, because in the paintings of the Song dynasty, the herd boy, fisherman, and woodcutter symbolize lofty scholars in "temporary retreats in nature."[64] The herd boy is not simply a child. In the tradition of ox-herding painting, he stands in for adults. He addresses an adult public and conveys disillusionment and disappointment with the adult world. As Richard and Catherine Barnhart point out,

> That the figures in ox-herding pictures need not be children—and as often as not they seem to be at least young adults—suggests, we believe, that childhood itself is not the central concern of ox-herding pictures. Poems about herd boys are often equally ambiguous regarding the age of the "boy."[65]

In terms of storytelling, *The Herd Boy's Flute* can be regarded as animated linked pictures (*lianhuan hua*), making it reminiscent of Chan (or Zen) Buddhist serial paintings of ox-herding. During the twelfth century, Chan monks composed a series of ox-herding pictures to help Chan masters teach their students. The earliest series of twelve ox-herding pictures is attributed to the monk Qingju Haosheng (active in the 1050s). Similar series of ox-herding pictures appeared later, but only two remain: one by Kuoan Shiyuan and the other by Puming (both were active in the 1150s).[66] In the twentieth century, Japanese woodblock artist Tomikichiro Tokuriki (1902–2000) created a set of ten ox-herding pictures (see figure 3.6). The story is simple. The herd boy loses his water buffalo and goes looking for it. First he sees the footprints of the water buffalo and then its body. He captures the water buffalo, tames it, and herds it. Then he rides on it and returns home. He forgets about the water buffalo and then forgets about himself as well. Everything returns to its origin. Finally, the herd boy goes to the marketplace and spreads Buddhist teachings to save his people.

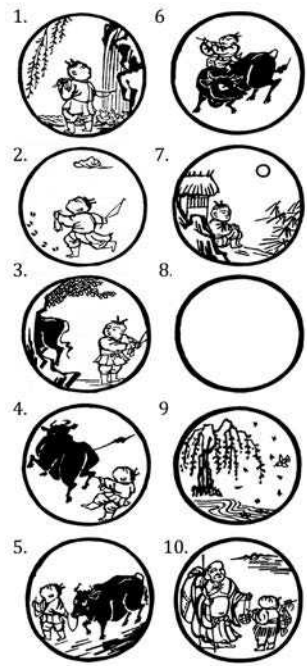

Figure 3.6. Series of ten ox-herding pictures, Tomikichiro Tokuriki (1902–2000).

These ox-herding paintings, which revolve around the loss, recovery, and taming of an ox (with slight variations), impart the Chan ideal of self-cultivation and enlightenment. Ox-herding is an important Chan metaphor that can be traced back to classical Buddhist scriptures. The ox represents the self; the human has Buddha nature within. Self-cultivation is like herding an ox. By taming the ox, the herd boy controls his own wayward animalistic desires and achieves enlightenment.[67]

The Herd Boy's Flute also revolves around the loss and recovery of the water buffalo. The herd boy tames the animal and achieves self-cultivation and enlightenment through flute music, not through ropes and whips characteristic of Chan paintings. In the "bathing" sequence, the buffalo does not want to go into the water—no matter how much the herd boy urges it to move by splashing water on its head. It is only because of the flute music that the water buffalo obeys the boy. In the dream sequence, the water buffalo is attracted by the sound of a waterfall and reluctant to return to the herd boy. Again, the herd boy's flute music tames the water buffalo. *The Herd Boy's Flute* thus represents the hierarchy between art and nature. Art stems from nature—the boy uses bamboo to make a flute—but it is higher than nature, because flute music triumphs over the waterfall's natural music and brings back the water buffalo. The positioning of nature as subordinate to an imagined artistic world resonates with the fundamental tenets of Chan, namely "the unreality of the phenomenal world," which is further suggested by the allusion to Zhuangzi's dream of being a butterfly.[68] In this sense, *The Herd Boy's Flute* suggests a transcendence of reality, a message that is not conveyed through language but by the mood and sentiments generated by visual and aural arts such as painting and music.

The Herd Boy's Flute is associated with Chan ox-herding paintings not only in terms of its story and ambience, but also in terms of formal composition (see figure 3.7). In all these ox-herding paintings, the herd boy rides a water buffalo and plays the flute. Chan artists chose the water buffalo instead of another kind of ox such as the yellow ox, because the Chan master, Changqing Daan, lived for thirty years at Mount Wei (Weishan), where he did nothing but tend water buffalo. Eventually the color of the water buffalo became white, suggesting the achievement of enlightenment.[69] More important, unlike courtly ox-herding paintings that emphasize the landscape background, Chan ox-herding paintings emphasize the story and figures because they began as pedagogical tools. Chan masters depicted the background in a minimalist and sketchy style. In later Chan ox-herding paintings, the background becomes a void. Although landscape plays a vital role throughout *The Herd Boy's Flute,* images are at moments presented similarly to the Chan paintings. For example, in one film still the background disappears when the water buffalo fords the river.

Figure 3.7. One of the ten ox-herding paintings by Kuoan (active in the 1150s).

The depiction of the herd boy in the animated film was closely associated with traditional ox-herding paintings; it came to differ markedly from the typical representation of the Maoist herd boy in the mid-1960s. The typical Maoist herd boy was best exemplified by Wang Erxiao, the protagonist in a children's linked-picture book titled *Wang Erxiao the Herd Boy* (*Wang Erxiao fangniulang,* 1964). Produced in the same year as *The Herd Boy's Flute, Wang Erxiao the Herd Boy* was written by Xing Ye and illustrated by Yang Yonglian. Drawing on a true story, the book features Wang Erxiao, a poor peasant boy and member of the Communist Children's League. He stands sentry for the Eighth Route Army while herding his oxen. Japanese soldiers arrive at Wang's village and ask him to be their guide. Wang leads these Japanese soldiers into the Eighth Route Army's ring of encirclement. The outraged Japanese soldiers kill Wang, but are killed in turn by the Eighth Route Army. Partly because of its propaganda value to the regime, the story became so popular that it was reproduced in *The Story of Wang Erxiao* (*Wang Erxiao de gushi*) in 1965.

On the cover of the 1965 edition, the human figure is dominant and the background is insignificant (see figure 3.8). In the pose of a national hero, Wang Erxiao stands on top of a rock and ferociously gazes into the distance on the lookout for enemies. He holds a red-tasseled spear in his right hand, the weapon of Communist Children's League members. In his left hand, he grabs an ox horn, which functions as an instrument to alert his oxen or fellow Communists. The two

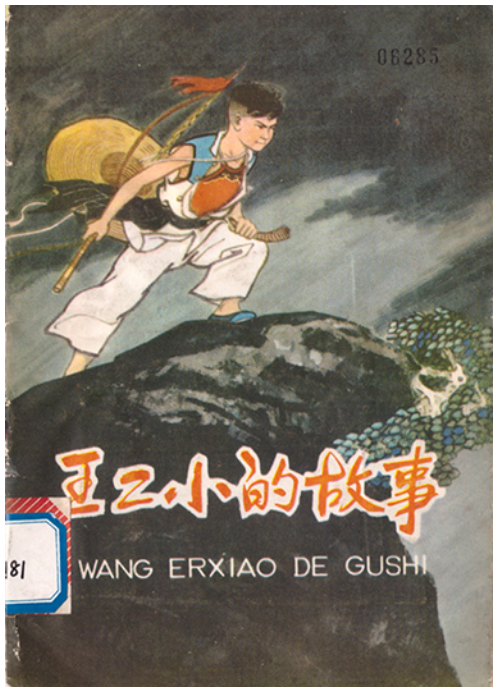

Figure 3.8. Cover picture of *The Story of Wang Erxiao* (1965).

objects indicate Wang's double identity: a herd boy and a little soldier of the Communist Party. The oxen's absence downplays Wang's identity as a herd boy but highlights his political identity as a member of the Communist Children's League. His herd boy identity is thus a mere suggestion of his peasant class background, which allowed for his sanctification by the Party. The absence of a landscape or other background in the cover picture emphasizes the story's human action. The rock in the foreground is a stage prop that functions to lower the level of our view and increase Wang's monumentality. Wang's spear tassel and his vest are red. The characters of the title are also depicted in red, suggesting the story's revolutionary theme. In sharp contrast, revolutionary red seldom appears in *The Herd Boy's Flute,* which is dominated by cool colors, such as green, blue, white, and black. Unlike the soft and relaxed herd boy in the ink-painting animated film, Wang Erxiao is not a melodious flute player, but instead an alert and ferocious soldier who is ready for battle. He is not a fictional figure in an idealized pastoral world but instead inspired by a real person anchored in revolutionary reality.

The portrayal of Wang Erxiao was typical of the style of children's books during the Cultural Revolution. In her studies of children's picture story books (serial-picture books or linked pictures) that were popular in 1973, Eileen Polley Blumenthal observes that in terms of subject matter, fantastic folk tales and legends popular in 1959 were no longer available.[70] Instead, revolutionary people and their life stories dominated in 1973 (see chapter 4). Examining the cover pictures of 230 children's books, Blumenthal concludes,

> It is striking that almost every cover shows people: only 4 of the 230 covers are landscapes or seascapes without human figures. The scenes are from

> everyday life, and they are all realistic in both subject and artistic style. There are no elements of fantasy in these illustrations; the humorous adventures of animals which were popular in old China are not depicted.[71]

She further points out that the majority of these covers depict a single (usually Han) individual. The singling out of a heroic individual demonstrates the pedagogical and ideological function of these books: to provide children with an exemplary model to emulate. Comparing *Wang Erxiao the Herd Boy* with picture books of the early 1970s, it is apparent that *Wang Erxiao the Herd Boy* survived and even flourished when the Cultural Revolution unfolded in the mid-1960s. In sharp contrast, *The Herd Boy's Flute,* which was not like the Maoist depiction of herd boys, was banned in 1964 for its apolitical and escapist tendencies and released again only in 1979.

The rise and fall of the two ink-painting animated films demonstrate the shifting definitions of national identity partly driven by shifting politics. By the mid-1960s, the construction of national identity was no longer associated with traditional artistic forms such as ink painting, but instead more with national heroes rooted in revolutionary sociohistorical realities of the present. As a result, during the height of the Cultural Revolution in the late 1960s and 1970s, political correctness of subject matter became the new norm for articulating national identity. During this period, the so-called national style of the early 1960s became the enemy in the construction of national identity. This is because traditional ink painting, which stood for China's unique essence in the early 1960s, came to be regarded as old, conservative, escapist, feudal, and reactionary. As a result, the form of ink-painting animated film was denounced.[72] Therefore, the conventional conflation of national style and national identity is static and ahistorical because the concepts are fluid, ever-changing, and historically contingent, especially during the tumultuous 1960s and 1970s.