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Digital Translation and Cultural Regeneration: The Modern Expression of Traditional Symbols in the Animated Film Door Gods

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Abstract: Against the backdrop of the digital era, the inheritance and innovation of traditional culture face both opportunities and challenges brought by technological advancements. This paper takes the animated film Door Gods as its subject, focusing on how it achieves the modern translation of traditional cultural elements such as folk culture, opera art, and woodblock New Year paintings through digital means like ultra-high-definition (UHD) technology and 3D animation. The study finds that the film preserves the spiritual core of traditional culture while expanding its reach in a form aligned with contemporary aesthetics by dynamically reshaping the Door God figures, integrating stylized Peking Opera performances, and restoring the visual symbols of New Year paintings. This paper aims to provide a practical paradigm for the digital innovation of traditional culture, supporting the nationalization and internationalization of Chinese animated cinema.

Keywords: Door Gods; Traditional Culture; Digital Translation; Cultural Regeneration

1. Introduction

The iteration of digital technology has provided new pathways for disseminating traditional culture. Animated films, leveraging their strengths in visual storytelling, have become significant carriers of cultural inheritance. 1"In Chinese animated films, folk culture is often manifested through concrete folk symbols." The animation Door Gods centers on folk culture, integrating elements of Peking Opera and woodblock New Year paintings, achieving innovative expression of traditional symbols through digital technology. [1] This research focuses on the digital presentation strategies of traditional cultural elements within this film,

analyzing their specific application in character design, scene setting, and narrative structure, exploring the mechanisms for integrating digital technology with cultural inheritance, and providing theoretical and practical references for similar creative endeavors.

The animated film Door Gods premiered on October 28, 2023. Professor Sun Lijun from the Beijing Film Academy served as the chief director, and Zhang Chunjing, Chairman of Beijing Shengshi Shunjing Culture Media Co, Ltd., was the executive director. It was jointly produced by several domestic universities and industry associations. The film received a nomination for "Best Animated Film" at the 37th China Film Golden Rooster Awards and won the "Urban Foundation Gold Award" at the 2024 Busan International Art Festival, becoming one of the internationally recognized representative works of Chinese animation.[2]

2. Door Gods: The Genealogy and Cultural Significance of Traditional Symbols

The animated film Door Gods focuses on the traditional Door God figures Qin Qiong and Yuchi Gong, using a humorous narrative to depict their story of safeguarding human peace. Rooted in the social context of the traditional Chinese Spring Festival, the film conveys the Eastern philosophy of "unity and symbiosis" through the interactions, conflicts, and collaborations between the Door Gods.[3] Centered on Chinese traditional culture, the film presents traditional folk culture (Door Gods), opera elements, and woodblock New Year painting elements through multi-layered digitalization in artistic design, narrative techniques, and technological innovation, revealing profound cultural significance.

As shown in Table 1:

2.1 Folk Cultural Elements

Folk culture, as a vital component of Chinese

traditional culture, carries profound national sentiment and values. "As a vast and complex cultural system, folklore showcases the rich customs and practices of various regions.[4]Therefore, the use of folklore in film can more conveniently and vividly display and highlight the background of the film story.2" Door Gods skillfully selects folk legends related to the Door Gods, such as the story of Qin Qiong and Yuchi Gong protecting Emperor Taizong of Tang and their evolution into the Door God custom, integrating them into a modern animated narrative.[5] Through exquisite visuals and vivid storytelling, the film revitalizes ancient folk legends. "Historical narratives are divided into two dimensions: experiential narrative and fictional narrative. Experiential narrative is based on historical facts, focusing on constructing a complete and authentic story framework; while fictional narrative uses historical facts as a creative foundation, employing artistic expression to construct interesting audiovisual imagery, ultimately achieving cultural exploration from surface to depth.3"

Table 1. Typological Analysis of Traditional Symbols in Door Gods

Symbol Type	Formal Characteristics	Cultural Connotation	Typical Case
Folk Belief Symbol	Qin Qiong/Yuchi Gong figures; Exorcism weapons (Mace/Whip)	Folk ethics of safeguarding peace, judging good and evil	Weapon symbolism in Door God confrontation scenes
Opera Art Symbol	Peking Opera facial makeup (Red face/Black face); Stylized movements (Liangxiang, /Yunshou)	Visual coding of character traits; Aesthetic concept of blending reality and illusion	Coordination of Peking Opera percussion and movements in fight scenes
Folk Visual Symbol	Woodblock New Year painting colors (Red/Green/Gold); Symmetrical composition	Sense of festive ritual; Collective psychology of auspicious meaning	New Year painting-style spatial layout in courtyard scenes

In terms of art design, it builds upon the classic New Year painting depictions of Door Gods, incorporating the stylized performance characteristics of Peking Opera martial male roles (Wusheng), and flexibly utilizes sound, visuals, and cinematography to deliver a unique viewing experience. [6] For instance, the character designs retain the core historical features – Qin Qiong's fair complexion and Yuchi Gong's dark skin – and Peking Opera elements, while blending the majesty of military generals with traditional New Year painting styles, making the characters more appealing, historically resonant, and aligned with modern aesthetics. The film conveys the core cultural significance of Door Gods warding off evil and safeguarding homes through the characters, while also offering a deeper symbolic interpretation of their protective function from a modern perspective. Furthermore, the film's visual presentation of Door God New Year paintings is particularly crucial. The red wooden doors, couplets, and Door God painting backgrounds in the scenes, emphasizing red as the dominant color, fully evoke the festive atmosphere of the New Year. The film also uses New Year painting scenes on either side of the gate to drive the narrative, reflecting the traditional concept of Door Gods exorcising evil and protecting homes. This design approach resonates with early records about Door Gods in texts like the Book of Rites (《LiJi》) and Classic of Mountains and Seas (《ShanHaiJing》).

As shown in Figure 1:

Figure 1. Poster of the Animated Film Door Gods

The film's ending employs a combination of live-action footage and animated scenes, metaphorically suggesting the continuation and innovation of traditional culture in modern society. This technique echoes the evolution of the folk Door God function – from a mere symbol of exorcism to a modern expression of "unity and collaboration" (e.g., "A single thread cannot make a cord; a single tree cannot make a forest"). This illustrates the vitality of folk legends in contemporary times. The film's reshaped Door God images retain the original meaning of warding off evil while also conveying modern concepts of protecting families and unity and collaboration, enriching

the connotation of traditional mythology.

2.2 Opera Cultural Elements

Door Gods extensively utilizes opera elements, fully showcasing the unique charm of traditional Chinese opera. It provides audiences with rich audiovisual enjoyment, enhances the film's artistry, and offers new methods for the inheritance and development of traditional culture. The digital translation of Peking Opera elements is reflected in the following five aspects:

Character Design: Character designs draw on Peking Opera facial makeup techniques. The Door Gods' red/black faces, eyebrows, and beards are painted according to facial makeup styles, using bright colors and exaggerated patterns to express personality and emotions, making the characters distinct and memorable. Additionally, character elements like Kaogi (flags on the back) and armor patterns replicate Peking Opera costumes, with 8K technology enhancing the three-dimensionality and color saturation of the textures.

Action Design: "In the opera performance system, a rich repertoire of specialized performance conventions has evolved based on differences in role types (Sheng, Dan, Jing, Mo, Chou), dramatic situations (e.g., night battles/water fights/rescues from execution), and dramatic motivations (e.g., vengeance/righteous combat/competition)."4 The character movements in Door Gods reference stylized actions like "Liangxiang" (striking a pose) and "Wuda Chengshi" (martial arts conventions). Through rhythm control in 3D animation, such as action pauses synchronized with percussion beats, this presentation restores the aesthetic of blending reality and illusion in opera. For example, Door God fight scenes employ stylized Peking Opera martial actions like "Ci" (thrust), "Dang" (block), and "Bo" (parry), emphasizing action details, force, angles, and rhythm, making the fights more stage-like, visually engaging, and dramatic. As shown in Figure 2:

Figure 2. Character Fight Action Design in Door Gods

Music Application: Accompaniment using instruments like the Jinghu (Peking Opera fiddle) and Bangu (Peking Opera drum) synchronizes with fight scenes, constructing an "audiovisual symbiosis" opera atmosphere. The score incorporates Peking Opera singing styles and percussion, including Jinghu, Bangu, large and small gongs, and cymbals. These instruments are used throughout scenes like character movement and fighting, creating a strong opera ambiance and precisely highlighting character actions and emotions through rhythmic variations.

Scenes and Space: Scene design references Peking Opera stage presentation methods. The film initially presents the Door Gods performing against a flat rice paper background, gradually transitioning them into a three-dimensional space. This creates a spatial effect similar to an opera stage, breaking the fixed spatial sense of traditional animation and enhancing the layering and dramatic effect of the visuals.

Integration and Innovation: Door Gods combines opera elements with modern animation technology, finding new avenues for showcasing traditional art. While employing 8K UHD technology to restore the traditional visual style of New Year paintings, the film integrates the rhythm and performance conventions of Peking Opera. This combination preserves the core of traditional culture while imbuing it with new vitality through modern technology.

2.3 Woodblock New Year Paintings: Folk Art Elements

Door Gods deeply integrates elements of traditional Chinese woodblock New Year paintings into the film's visual style, character design, and storytelling through the combination of technology and art, showcasing rich Eastern aesthetic characteristics. [7] The film deeply integrates New Year painting features from visual style to narrative logic. At the visual level, it employs typical New Year painting colors like red, green, and gold, outlines character contours with bold lines, and uses 8K technology to restore details such as paper wrinkles and ink diffusion, preserving a handcrafted texture. At the compositional level: Symmetrical scene designs, such as the Door Gods confronting each other left and right, echo the folk custom of "pasting Door Gods in pairs." Dynamic visuals transform static balance into narrative tension. Symbolic function: The transformation of the

Door God image from "New Year painting" to "animated character" achieves a narrative upgrade of traditional symbols. Furthermore, Door Gods meticulously distills elements from New Year paintings, Peking Opera, and folklore, combining them with 8K technology and modern narrative methods, successfully promoting the "breaking boundaries" ("Poquan") dissemination and reception of traditional aesthetics. The film not only reproduces the visual forms of traditional culture but also endows it with contemporary vitality through vivid dynamic storytelling, providing an innovative example for the contemporary inheritance of traditional culture and validating the effectiveness of the "technology-assisted cultural presentation" creative concept.

3. Technical Means for the Digital Presentation of Traditional Cultural Elements in the Animated Film Door Gods

Centering on 8K UHD technology and combining it with 3D animation, stylized Peking Opera performances, and scenes blending reality and virtuality, Door Gods achieves the digital presentation of woodblock New Year paintings, folk symbols, and traditional philosophies. The film not only restores the visual symbols of traditional culture but also endows them with dynamic narrative functions through technology, providing a new model for the dissemination of contemporary traditional culture.

3.1 UHD Technology: Extreme Restoration of Symbol Details and Texture Enhancement

Door Gods achieves a refined digital presentation of traditional cultural elements through 8K UHD technology. The core advantage of this technology lies in its extremely high resolution, capable of capturing and presenting extremely minute details within the frame.

The film uses 8K UHD technology to accurately restore the paper texture, engraved lines, and printing effects of woodblock New Year paintings. For example, the texture of armor scales on characters and the wrinkles and ink diffusion on New Year painting paper are delicately rendered. This preserves the handcrafted quality of traditional New Year paintings while enhancing visual impact through ultra-high-definition imagery, making the characters more vivid and the decorative beauty of traditional New Year paintings more vibrant.

The film adopts traditional New Year painting colors like red, green, and gold, and uses bold lines to outline flat character contours. 8K technology further enhances the three-dimensionality of armor scales and the luster variations of gold thread decorations, while more accurately restoring color saturation and contrast, making the visuals more vivid, realistic, and layered. For instance, the strong contrast details like the Door Gods' red and black faces are particularly vivid and prominent in 8K footage.

3.2 3D Animation Technology: Narrative Translation through Symbol Dynamization

"Chinese cultural symbols use contemporary Chinese animated films as a dissemination medium, constructing inter-sign signification at the expressive level, inter-mediality at the transmission level, and inter-subjectivity in meaning generation."5 Door Gods employs 3D hand-painted techniques, aiming to align with the flat decorative nature of woodblock New Year paintings. The creative team, through the deep integration of 3D animation technology and traditional cultural elements, realized the digital presentation of Door God culture, New Year painting art, and Peking Opera conventions. While preserving the essence of traditional culture, it revitalizes them with modern animation technology.

Advantages in Color and Line: 3D animation possesses unique advantages in handling color and line, effectively restoring traditional artistic styles. The film utilizes the vibrant color schemes of traditional Chinese New Year paintings. 3D technology fully demonstrates the layering and richness of colors, such as the vivid contrast between red and black faces. Its concise and powerful line style simulates the engraved feel of woodblock prints, conveying the simplicity and vitality of traditional art (e.g., details of character armor, weapons, costumes).

Action and Rhythm Performance: Character action design borrows from Peking Opera conventions like "Liangxiang" and "Zouwei" (stage movement). Fight scenes are synchronized with Peking Opera percussion beats and singing styles, enhancing the sense of rhythm and tension. 3D animation can smoothly present the detailed movements of Peking Opera martial arts, accurately depicting force, angles, and rhythm. It also uses camera choreography and rhythm control to create a sense of rhythm

akin to opera performances (e.g., stage steps, gestures), making the performances more dramatic.

Blending Reality and Virtuality in Narrative: In the film's ending, the team uses 8K live-action filming to juxtapose real scenes (e.g., residential courtyards) with the animated virtual world. The interaction between real people and animated Door Gods breaks the boundaries of traditional animated narratives. This metaphorically represents the transformation of New Year paintings from static to dynamic and symbolizes the continuation of traditional culture in contemporary times. The detailed texture of real bricks and tiles contrasts sharply with the flat style of the animated characters, intensifying the effect of the collision between reality and virtuality and profoundly expressing the theme of "traditional spirit illuminating reality." This approach facilitates the inheritance of traditional cultural elements in the digital world, attracts younger audiences, and provides new possibilities for cultural innovation and expression. The film combines traditional cultural elements with a modern story (e.g., a dispute sparked by a falling leaf, humorous fighting, the live-action ending), conveying traditional wisdom and modern values of "unity and collaboration."

4. Paths of Cultural Regeneration of Traditional Symbols: From Meaning Extension to Identity Construction

Door Gods' reshaping of the traditional Door God image is manifested not only in the extreme presentation of details through technology but also in the infusion of contemporary vitality into traditional culture through narrative reconstruction and artistic fusion. Using 8K visuals as its foundation, 3D planar aesthetics as its carrier, and Peking Opera rhythm as its performance framework, the film builds a bridge between tradition and modernity, offering a profound and comprehensive Chinese solution for cultural inheritance in a globalized context. The success of Door Gods validates the effectiveness of the "technology-assisted

cultural presentation" concept and opens new paths for the nationalization and internationalization of Chinese animation.

4.1 Analysis of Traditional Door God Image Characteristics

The traditional Door God image has a long history. Its earliest origins can be traced back to the mythical figures Shen Shu and Yu Lei in the Classic of Mountains and Seas, depicted as fierce and terrifying (bare-chested, with curly beards and tiger whiskers, holding peachwood swords or reed ropes), embodying ancient nature worship and exorcism beliefs (peachwood wards off evil, tigers symbolize driving away ghosts, forming the "peach charm/custom). After the Tang Dynasty, Door God images gradually became historical figures, with "Martial Door Gods" represented by Qin Qiong and Yuchi Gong becoming mainstream (influenced by novels like Romance of the Sui and Tang and Journey to the West). [8] Their depictions are mostly of majestic military attire (bright armor, holding whips/maces or golden hammers, glaring eyes). The design in Door Gods stems from this. Additionally, there are Civil Door Gods (e.g., Wei Zheng, Bao Zheng, Wen Tianxiang, symbolizing integrity and justice) and Door Gods of Blessing (, e. g, the Three Star Gods of Fortune, Prosperity, and Longevity, symbolizing auspiciousness). This paper focuses on Martial Door Gods.

Martial Door Gods represent authority and power: wearing bright armor, wielding weapons (Qin Qiong holds a mace, Yuchi Gong holds a whip), appearing imposing. Costume details (Kaogi, armor patterns) draw from Peking Opera stage design. The primary colors are red, green, and gold, creating striking contrast.

As shown in Table 2:

The evolution of the traditional Door God image from mythical monsters to historical figures and then to symbols of blessing reflects people's enduring hope for peace and auspiciousness and embodies the inclusive vitality of traditional Chinese culture.

Table 2. Systematic Analysis Table of Martial Door God Image Characteristics

Analysis Dimension	Core Characteristics	Cultural Symbol Interpretation	Artistic Expression Form
Form Characteristics	Brightarmor, wieldingweapons	Qin Qiong's mace (symbolizingintegrity), Yuchi Gong's whip (symbolizing martial power)	Enhancedmetallic texture for majesty
	Kaogidecoration,	Transplantation of Peking Opera	8K technology highlights 3D

	intricate patterns	stage elements (symbolizing divine authority)	carved details
Color System	Primarycolors: Red, Green, Gold	Red (auspiciousness), Green (vitality), Gold (nobility)	High saturation contrast enhances visual impact
Posture & Composition	Riding horse / Standing posture	Dynamic martial deterrence (riding) vs Static guarding (standing)	Expression of power in 2D plane
	Posted symmetrically left & right	Cosmology of Yin-Yang balance / Stability of gate guarding	Digital continuation of woodblock composition rules
Carrier Form	Woodblock New Year Paintings	Material carrier of folk art	Decorative aesthetic of bold lines + flat color blocks
Performative Ele	Peking Opera	Facial makeup symbolism: Loyalty & Courage (Red),	Externalization of character through color metaphor
	Opera "Liangxiang" posture	Theatrical tension of stage performance	Dynamic frame freeze enhances sense of ritual

4.2 Identity Regeneration: Visual Construction of Cultural Confidence

Door Gods closely integrates technological innovation with artistic presentation, reshaping traditional Door God culture, woodblock New Year painting art, and Peking Opera elements from multiple angles, endowing traditional culture with contemporary vitality.[9] This is mainly reflected in the following aspects:

Character Affability and Humorization: To align with modern young audiences' aesthetics, the film discards the serious and rigid traditional image of Door Gods. It uses exaggerated animation techniques (e.g., body contortions during fights, comical expressions) and humorous plots (e.g., the absurd premise of a dispute over a fallen leaf), giving the characters strong comedic effect. This contrastive treatment dissolves cultural distance, making the Door Gods more relatable.

Narrative Deconstruction and Humanization: The film breaks the old setting of Door Gods as "absolute authorities." [10] It portrays Qin Qiong and Yuchi Gong as flawed ordinary individuals (e.g., fighting over status, ultimately ending up disheveled and even being torn up and discarded), making their images fuller and more humanized. The amusing story (leaf dispute, Peking Opera-style fighting) alters the ingrained impression of majestic Door Gods, closing the distance with young audiences.

Aesthetic Rebirth Empowered by Technology: 8K technology meticulously restores the visual details and essence of traditional New Year paintings. The film is not a simple replica; through careful drawing and compositional design, it fully showcases the beauty of traditional art.

4.3 Aesthetic Value: Tension and Boundaries in Digital Translation

The aesthetic value of Door Gods lies in its use of digital technology for the creative transformation of traditional aesthetics. The film is neither a simple copy of traditional culture nor a mere showcase of technology. Instead, through the fusion of technology and art, traditional elements like New Year paintings and Peking Opera undergo transformation, reconstruction, and sublimation within the digital medium. This digital presentation provides audiences with audiovisual experiences and emotional resonance aligned with modern aesthetics, effectively balancing technology and humanity (e.g., 8K lenses capturing the handmade imperfections of New Year paintings, blending Peking Opera percussion with electronic rhythms). Traditional culture thus ceases to be a static exhibit in a museum; it comes alive in the digital world, achieving interaction with the audience. Door Gods' practice of "innovating within inheritance, sublimating aesthetics within innovation" offers a valuable reference paradigm for traditional culture adapting to modern society.

Door Gods uses digital technology to innovatively transform the formal beauty of traditional cultural elements. The film integrates the symmetrical layouts, vibrant colors, rhythmic lines of traditional art with dynamic visual design, creating a visual style that possesses both classical charm and modern vitality.

Symmetrical Composition: Scene design strictly follows the symmetrical patterns of traditional Door God New Year paintings (e.g., the gate guarded by Door Gods, courtyard architecture

shots, Qin Qiong and Yuchi Gong confronting each other, patterns on either side of the gate). This symmetry conforms to the folk custom of "pasting Door Gods in pairs" while activating static balance through dynamic visuals (e.g., weapons and patterns echoing left and right during confrontation, strengthening the symbol of protection).

Planar Decoration, Color & Line: Utilizing a combination of 3D modeling and 2D hand-painting, the film employs large color blocks, bold lines, and minimized perspective to restore the decorative style of woodblock New Year paintings. For instance, character armor patterns are presented as color block assemblies, retaining a sense of simplicity, while enhanced with light and shadow for three-dimensionality.

Rhythmic Sense of Stylized Movement: Incorporating Peking Opera conventions like "Liangxiang," "Yunshou," and "Zoubian" into character design, and exaggerating them through animation techniques to strengthen rhythm (e.g., fights synchronized with Peking Opera percussion, with measured cadence, reproducing the aesthetic of blending reality and illusion in opera). Smooth animation technology enhances the spectacle of fight scenes.

Door Gods' innovative processing of traditional cultural elements using digital technology not only provides modern avenues for expressing traditional aesthetics but also significantly elevates the aesthetic value of traditional culture.

Dynamization and Formal Innovation: 3D hand-painting restores the planar composition and bold line style of woodblock New Year paintings while adding dynamic effects (e.g., fluttering robe corners, weapon swing trajectories), bringing the images to life. Line expression (e.g., the cadence and turns in weapon swings) mimics the knife techniques of woodblock carving. Action bridging technology balances static and dynamic elements, forming a unique style combining traditional charm with modern rhythm.

Character Humanization and Emotional Resonance: Reshaping the Door Gods from symbols of exorcism and protection into characters with distinct personalities (e.g., the humorous leaf dispute plot, showing emotions like joy, anger, sorrow). Audiences no longer feel only awe but can also develop emotional empathy, closing the distance to the cultural symbols.

Modern Interpretation and Preservation of Traditional Aesthetics: The film demonstrates that woodblock New Year paintings, Peking Opera movements, etc., are not outdated relics but cultural genes that can be transformed into modern aesthetic languages (e.g., interpreting the planar style of New Year paintings as "minimalist aesthetics," stylized opera movements as representatives of "Eastern rhythm"). This promotes their revival among younger generations. Simultaneously, the precise recording of traditional elements through 8K technology provides a digital preservation pathway for endangered crafts like woodblock carving, ensuring their perpetual transmission without relying on fragile physical objects.

5. Conclusion

The animated film Door Gods achieves the digital translation of traditional cultural elements like folk legends, opera, and New Year paintings through technologies such as 8K UHD and 3D animation. Its innovation lies in using technology as a means, not an end, preserving the core of traditional aesthetics while endowing cultural symbols with modern narrative functions and emotional warmth. The research indicates that the digital inheritance of traditional culture requires balancing "precise restoration" with "innovative expression." It is necessary to activate the vitality of traditional symbols through technological means while avoiding the dissolution of cultural connotations by technology. Future research could expand to cross-work comparisons (e.g., differences in technical paths between Door Gods and Monkey King: Hero is Back) or focus on audience reception mechanisms, exploring the impact mechanisms of digital presentation on cultural identity, to provide more targeted strategies for the "cultural export" of Chinese animation.

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