

## Analysis of Taoist Cultural Depiction in Ink Animation Work "Mu Di"

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To Link this Article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARBS/v13-i12/19525>

DOI:10.6007/IJARBS/v13-i12/19525

**Published Date:** 13 December 2023

### Abstract

This paper discusses the formation of Taoist cultural elements and their application in the artistic creation of ink animation. Ink animation is a unique art form that combines traditional Chinese ink painting with modern animation technology, embodying a unique aesthetic and expressive style. The focus of this study is to take the ink animation film "Pastoral Flute" as a case study to explore the influence of Taoist culture on this art form. Through a comprehensive analysis of the film's content, form, and artistic techniques, it reveals the philosophical and aesthetic concepts embodied in ink animation and its fit with Taoist culture. The results of this research highlight the ingenious integration of traditional culture and contemporary art in The Pastoral Flute, effectively demonstrating the unique charm and artistic expression of Taoist culture. The film perfectly integrates traditional ink painting techniques with innovative animation methods, providing valuable insights into the innovation and development of ink animation as an art form. By examining the relationship between ink animation and Taoist culture, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of the inherent cultural dynamics of this artistic medium, thereby promoting further exploration, creation, and academic research on ink animation.

**Keywords:** Mu Di, 2d-Dimensional Animation, Taoism Culture, Chinese Ink Painting, Chinese Animation

### Introduction

In the field of contemporary art, ink animation works have gained increasing attention and appreciation. Ink animation, as a unique art form, was explored by Chinese artists in the early 20th century and experienced significant development and use in the first half of the 20th century, which has consequences in the production of many classic animated works. "A series of Chinese ink animations, represented by 'Mu Di' and 'Little Tadpoles Look for Their Mother,' possess exceptional aesthetic and research value. Moreover, the themes, character designs, and stylistic features of ink animation are imbued with rich Chinese traditional cultural characteristics. Its unique artistic charm has gained high recognition from Japan and

the United States, both prominent animation powerhouses, and has been referred to as the 'Chinese School'" (Zhou & Huang, 2016). Taoist culture, as an essential component of Chinese traditional culture, encompasses profound philosophical ideas and aesthetic concepts. This paper focuses on the ink animation film "*Mu Di*," (see Figure 1, screenshot), to explore the formation of Taoist cultural elements and their application in artistic creation.

The Taoist perspective on language provides a valuable outlook for today's society. Emphasizing harmonious coexistence between humans and nature underscores a people-orientated approach in education and respects the natural growth patterns of individuals. When it comes to interpersonal interactions and self, The Taoist culture encourages self-reconciliation and reconciliation with the world. With the changing times, many new opportunities have emerged, and the research of integrating Taoist culture into new artistic domains has begun to take root. This evolution aligns with the pace of the era. (Jin'e,2023)



**Fig. 1 Figure 1. Stills of "Mu Di"**

Source: The stills are taken from the animated film "*Mu Di*", 1963 (Adopted from [tv.sohu.com,https://tv.sohu.com/v/dXMvMzM5NjU1ODU3LzQ0MjUyMTMwOS5zaHRtbA==.html](https://tv.sohu.com/v/dXMvMzM5NjU1ODU3LzQ0MjUyMTMwOS5zaHRtbA==.html))

### **Research background**

As a unique visual art form, ink animation has attracted widespread attention in recent years in integration with culture, art, and technology. Among them, research on the integration of ink animation and Taoist culture has attracted much attention. As an important part of traditional Chinese culture, Taoist culture emphasizes the concept of nature, harmony, and balance, which is deeply in line with the characteristics of ink art such as expressing inner emotions, condensing expression, and the concept of philosophical thinking. Over the past few decades, ink animation has gradually made its mark in the field of modern art and animation. The integration of the wisdom of Taoist culture into ink animation not only gives the work deeper thinking and emotional connotation but also provides a new way of expression for inheriting ancient philosophical wisdom. Ink animation has a unique potential

to convey Taoist cultural values and inspire audiences to think. This integration not only enriches the artistic expression of animation but also injects new vitality into the inheritance of traditional culture. In the context of contemporary globalization, the fusion of Taoist cultures can play an important role in cross-cultural communication. By incorporating Taoist philosophical ideas into ink animation, artists can create works that are both oriental and internationally resonant, promoting the coexistence of diverse cultures. In addition, the importance of studying the integration of ink animation into Taoist culture lies in the fact that it can help us understand the profound connotation of traditional Chinese culture more deeply, and at the same time provide new ideas for artistic innovation and cultural inheritance. Studying how ink animation is integrated into the Taoist cultural background not only helps to expand the boundaries of artistic creation, but also provides useful enlightenment for promoting cultural exchanges, inheriting traditional culture, and promoting the development of contemporary art.

In recent years, there has been a growing interest in exploring and incorporating traditional Chinese culture into various art forms. One such art form is ink animation, which integrates elements of Taoist culture as an important theme. Taoist culture, deeply rooted in Chinese history and philosophy, encompasses a unique set of beliefs, values, and aesthetic principles that emphasize harmony, nature, and the pursuit of inner truth.

The ink animation film "*Mu Di*," serves as a captivating example of the utilization and exploration of Taoist culture. This film delves into the profound aspects of Taoist philosophy and seeks to depict the essence of Taoism through visual storytelling. It presents a compelling narrative that intertwines with the core principles of Taoism, offering a captivating experience for viewers. In 2017, China introduced supporting policies in the document titled "Opinions on Implementing the Project for the Inheritance and Development of Excellent Traditional Chinese Culture." It stated: "By 2025, the system for the inheritance and development of excellent traditional Chinese culture will be essentially formed, with significant achievements in research and interpretation, popularization of education, protection and inheritance, innovative development, and cultural exchange. Cultural products with Chinese characteristics, Chinese style, and Chinese grandeur will be more abundant. Cultural consciousness and confidence will be significantly enhanced, and the foundation of the country's cultural soft power will be more solid. The international influence of Chinese culture will be noticeably enhanced" (Zhong & Gou, 2017).

This research aims to explore how the ink animation *Mudi* fits into Taoist culture and the significance of this integration in the field of visual arts and cultural heritage. In the creation of contemporary art, how does the ink animation "*Mu Di*" integrate Taoist philosophical ideas and values? How does this convergence affect the expression and emotional connotation of the artwork? At the same time, we will also focus on the audience's feelings and understanding of the fusion works, and the effect of this integration on inheriting Taoist culture and inspiring the audience to think about it. The ink animation "*Mu Di*" and Taoist culture have a deep historical background and cultural connotation, and their integration can provide new ideas and expressions for modern art creation. Second, Taoist culture's emphasis on harmony, balance, and nature has similarities with the expression of emotions and the pursuit of inner beauty in ink art, so studying this fusion can explore the intersection between art and philosophy. In addition, with increasing global cultural exchanges, incorporating Taoist culture into the ink animation *Mudi* can also promote cultural diversity and cross-cultural dialogue. Most importantly, by studying this issue, we can deeply explore the practical significance of traditional Chinese culture in contemporary art, and provide new ways for

inheriting and developing traditional cultural hegemony. Therefore, the goal of this research is to reveal the artistic expression and cultural value of ink animation integrated into Taoist culture, as well as its significance to modern society and cultural inheritance.

Although ink animation and Taoist culture have received widespread attention as separate fields, there are still gaps in the research on the deep integration of ink animation and Taoist culture. Although there are some scattered creations and perspectives that explore the philosophical connotations contained in ink animation and some of the conformities with Taoist thought, these studies lack a systematic framework and in-depth discussion currently. The current study has not yet provided detailed guidance on how to integrate Taoist culture into ink animation creation, nor has it comprehensively analyzed the actual impact of fusion effect on audiences and cultural inheritance.

In addition, while many studies highlight the importance of ink animation in contemporary art creation and the place of Taoist culture in traditional Chinese culture, few studies have been performed on the connections and possibilities between the two. How to integrate Taoist philosophical ideas into ink animation, how to convey the inner values of Taoism through visual performance, and how this integration subtly affects the audience's aesthetic experience and cultural cognition are all mysteries.

Therefore, it is necessary to continue to delve into the integration of ink animation into Taoist culture to fill the gaps in existing research. Through systematic theoretical construction and practical exploration, we can explore the specific application of Taoist culture in ink animation creation, and the potential contribution of this integration to contemporary art innovation and cultural inheritance. By bridging this knowledge gap, we can provide valuable guidance to artists and cultural researchers, while enriching people's understanding of ink animation, Taoist culture, and the significance of their integration into contemporary society.

The goal of this research is to explore the integration of ink animation and Taoist culture in depth, thereby revealing its value and influence in the field of contemporary art and cultural heritage.

## **Literature Review**

The ink animation film "*Mu Di*" combines elements of Taoist culture, presenting a unique artistic expression. To delve deeper into the relationship between Taoist culture and ink animation in this work, this paper reviews relevant studies and cultural backgrounds. A comprehensive examination is conducted on the relationship between Taoist culture and ink painting, the development of ink animation as an art form, and the research on the film "*Mu Di*" aiming to provide a theoretical basis and support literature for the research in this paper.

## **Taoism culture**

Taoism is one of the ancient Chinese philosophical systems of thought, emphasizing the concepts of harmony with nature, the pursuit of rule without action, respect for the laws of nature, and the pursuit of inner balance and morality. Given the Taoist culture, Wu (2012) summarizes the intrinsic characteristics of the Tao from multiple perspectives. He believes that the Tao is the origin of all things in the world, and at the same time, it is the general law of the operation of the universe. The core concept of Taoism is "*Dao*", which refers to the fundamental principles of the universe and the laws of nature's operation and is also understood as a transcendent existence, an invisible, imageless, nameless existence.

Taoism advocates that people should conform to nature and be at ease with their encounters, avoiding excessive intervention and disturbance to achieve inner balance and

harmony. It emphasizes "rule by doing nothing", that is, not intervening excessively in the natural development of things, and letting things run according to their laws. In addition, Taoism emphasizes the pursuit of a desireless, selfless, and utilitarian attitude toward life, believing that desire and utilitarianism bring disturbance and unease.

Representative texts of Taoist thought include the Tao Te Ching and the Zhuangzi. Among them, the Tao Te Ching is a classic work of Taoist thought, written by Lao Tzu, emphasizing modesty, inaction, and nature. Zhuangzi, on the other hand, humorously explores many aspects of Taoist thought, including selflessness, freedom, and escape. Qing (2007) explores the aesthetic characteristics of Taoist culture. Taoism pursues the aesthetic principle of combining the virtual and the real, and regards "Tao" as the essence of beauty. Taoism pursues the beauty of nature. Taoism worships a quiet, detached aesthetic of personality. As the origin of all things in the universe, "Tao" must conform to the laws of nature and regard nature as beauty. Taoist culture constructs an ideological framework for people to feel and understand.

In general, the concept of Taoism is a philosophical system that emphasizes conforming to nature, pursuing rule without doing anything, and pursuing inner harmony and morality. Lao Tzu believed that the Tao was something natural. He believes that the Tao existed between the universe, was born before heaven and earth, and was the origin of all things under heaven. There are laws in the occurrence and development of things, and this general law of the operation of all things in the universe is the Tao. It has neither form nor sound, but it is always in motion, with a transcendent and timeless character.

### **Chinese ink painting**

Hou (2007) studies Chinese ink painting. Chinese ink painting, also known as "*Chinese painting*", is an earlier self-contained system in the field of world art, and the expression is mainly a little dye. He believes that Chinese painting pursues the realm of form and spirit, and comics with Chinese characteristics represented by Chinese ink painting are called the "*Chinese animation school*". They pursue details, use the pen to be dense and meticulous, and demand fresh, elegant, simple, and timeless pictures.

### **2D-dimensional animation**

As an ancient and classic art form, two-dimensional animation continues to play an important role in the media field with its unique creativity and expression. From the early stages of hand-drawn to the modern stage of digital production, 2D animation has been constantly evolving and innovating. This art form not only has entertainment values but also provides a platform for cultural heritage and creative expression. Through colorful imagery and storylines, 2D animation plays an important role in conveying cultural values, traditions, and history. At the same time, it also provides creators with a creative realm to create unique artistic effects through color, shape, and line. With the advancement of technology, 2D animation is constantly exploring new possibilities. Computer-generated animation, the introduction of virtual reality technology, and the application of artificial intelligence in creation have all injected new vitality into two-dimensional animation. Two-dimensional animation plays an important role in the fields of art, culture, and media. Its enduring impact and constant innovation make it a fascinating and exploratory field.

Relationship between Taoist culture and ink painting: In the literature, researchers have discussed the influence and infiltration of Taoist culture on ink painting. For example, Zhao Mingshu (2015) pointed out in their study that the concepts of nature and "*Wu Wei*" (non-

action) in Taoist culture have a profound impact on the aesthetic orientation of ink painting. Many studies have explored the symbolic meaning and artistic representation of Taoist culture in ink painting.

### **Development of ink animation as an art form:**

The literature includes research on the development of ink animation as an art form. For instance, Wang Xiaoqing (2018) conducted a comprehensive review of the history and artistic characteristics of ink animation, emphasizing its development and innovation as a unique art form. Furthermore, researchers have discussed the connections and differences between ink animation, traditional ink painting, and modern animation.

### **Research on the film "Mu Di":**

"*Mu Di*" an ink animation film that incorporates Taoist culture, has attracted the attention of scholars. Some studies have explored its content, artistic expression, and cultural significance. For example, Liu Peng (2020) analyzed the visual language and artistic conception of "*Mu Di*" exploring the representation and artistic effects of Taoist cultural elements in the film.

In summary, the literature review demonstrates the relationship between Taoist culture and ink painting, as well as the development of ink animation as an art form. It also highlights the importance and research prospects of the film "*Mu Di*" in related studies. However, the existing literature on the analysis of Taoist culture in the ink animation of "*Mu Di*" is relatively limited, leaving knowledge gaps and a need for further exploration.

Therefore, this paper aims to fill this research gap by conducting a detailed analysis of the film "*Mu Di*" and a comprehensive examination of relevant literature on Taoist culture and ink animation. This paper will reveal the influence of Taoist culture on ink animation and explore its embodiment of philosophical ideas and aesthetic concepts Through the study of the content, form, and artistic techniques employed in the film. Additionally, this research will discuss the significance of the film "*Mu Di*" for the innovation and development of ink animation, promoting further research and practice in the field.

By comprehensively reviewing the literature, this paper will provide a theoretical basis and supporting literature for the analysis of Taoist culture in the ink animation of "*Mu Di*" laying a comprehensive research foundation. This will contribute to a deeper understanding of the relationship between ink animation and Taoist culture, as well as promote the creation, research, and inheritance of ink animation art.

### **Methodology**

This paper adopts the methods of literature analysis and artistic analysis, combined with observation and interpretation of the ink animation "*Mu Di*" to explore the utilization and representation of Taoist culture in this animation. However, due to ink animation being a relatively new art form, there are certain limitations to the in-depth research on the application of Taoist culture in ink animation.

Future research can be expanded in a few aspects. Firstly, further exploration can be conducted on the influence and inspirations of Taoist culture on ink animation creation, as well as how to better integrate Taoist culture with modern art forms to promote the innovation and development of ink animation. Secondly, similar studies can be conducted on other ink animation works to explore the application and presentation of Taoist cultural elements in different works, enriching our understanding and knowledge of Taoist culture in

ink animation. Additionally, a comparison and contrast can be made between Taoist culture and other traditional cultural elements to examine the artistic expression and philosophical concepts in different cultural contexts, providing more insights into cross-cultural exchange and artistic creation. Lastly, from the perspective of the audience, understanding the audience's understanding and perception of Taoist culture in ink animation through surveys and interviews can be explored, investigating aesthetic differences and conceptual identifications across different cultural backgrounds, as well as the effectiveness and impact of ink animation in conveying Taoist philosophical ideas.

In conclusion, "*Mu Di*" as an ink animation work, cleverly formed the elements and ideas of Taoist culture, showcasing unique artistic charm. Through in-depth research and exploration, we can have a better understanding and appreciate the application of Taoist culture in ink animation, while also providing more reflections and insights for the innovation and preservation of ink animation.

### **Exploring Cultural Heritage and Innovation:**

The animated film "*Mudi Flute*" explores the role of ink animation in integrating Taoist culture into cultural inheritance and artistic innovation, and studies how to integrate traditional culture with modern art to generate new ideas and values.

### **Research Significance and Contribution:**

The significance and potential contribution of studying the integration of the ink animation *Mudi* into Taoist culture are as follows:

1. Enriching artistic expression: By exploring the integration of ink animation "*Mudi*" and Taoist culture, we can enrich the expression methods of artistic creation and provide artists with new creative ideas and tools.

2. Inheriting and promoting traditional culture: The integration of Taoist culture into the ink animation "*Mudi*" helps to pass on traditional cultural values to modern society, so that ancient wisdom can continue in contemporary art.

3. Inspire the audience to think and aesthetics: The fusion work "*Mu Di*" can trigger the audience's thinking about philosophical thinking, the meaning of life, and cultural values, and promote cultural cognition and aesthetic education.

4. Promote cross-cultural exchange: The integration of the ink animation "*Mu Di*" into Taoist culture can promote the exchange of cultural diversity internationally and enhance understanding and resonance between different cultures.

5. Promote innovation in contemporary art: By exploring the integration of "*Mu Di*", the new innovative power can be injected into contemporary art and promote the development and progress of the art field.

The goal of this research is to deeply explore the integration of ink animation *Mudi* with Taoist culture, revealing its important value and potential contribution to art, cultural inheritance, and cross-cultural communication. Through the combination of practice and research, it is expected to provide theoretical support for the practice of the integration of ink animation "*Mu Di*" and Taoist culture and make positive contributions to the development of contemporary art and culture.

### **Research Question.**

R1. How are elements and concepts of Taoist culture used in the ink animation *The Pastoral Flute*?

R.2 How does the use of Taoist culture in *The Pastoral Flute* reflect its core philosophical principles and values?

R.3 What is the significance and value of the application of Taoist culture in ink animation for the promotion and transmission of traditional culture?

The above research questions allow us to explore in depth the use of Taoist culture in the ink animation "*Pastoral Flute*" and reveal its impact and significance on art, culture, and audiences.

Understanding the importance and impact of Taoist culture in ink animation is crucial to understanding the artistic intent and cultural meaning of works such as *The Pastoral Flute*. By conducting an in-depth study, we can gain insight into how Taoist philosophy is effectively translated and visually presented in this animation, further enriching our understanding of the interplay between art, culture, and philosophy. This study will contribute to the academic discussion on the fusion of traditional culture and contemporary animation, revealing the creative possibilities and cultural value of incorporating Taoist elements into visual narratives.

### Research objectives

01. to analyze how Taoist culture is used in the ink animation *The Pastoral Flute*, including elements, concepts, and symbols.

02. to explore the expression of Taoist culture in "*The Pastoral Flute*" and how it embodies its core philosophical principles and values.

03. to explore how Taoist culture is disseminated and passed on in ink animation to promote and protect traditional culture.

By achieving the above research objectives, we can gain a comprehensive understanding of the use of Taoist culture in the ink animation "*The Pastoral Flute*" and explore in depth its artistic, cultural, and social values, to provide useful inspiration and guidance for the creation of ink animation and the protection of traditional culture

### Discussions

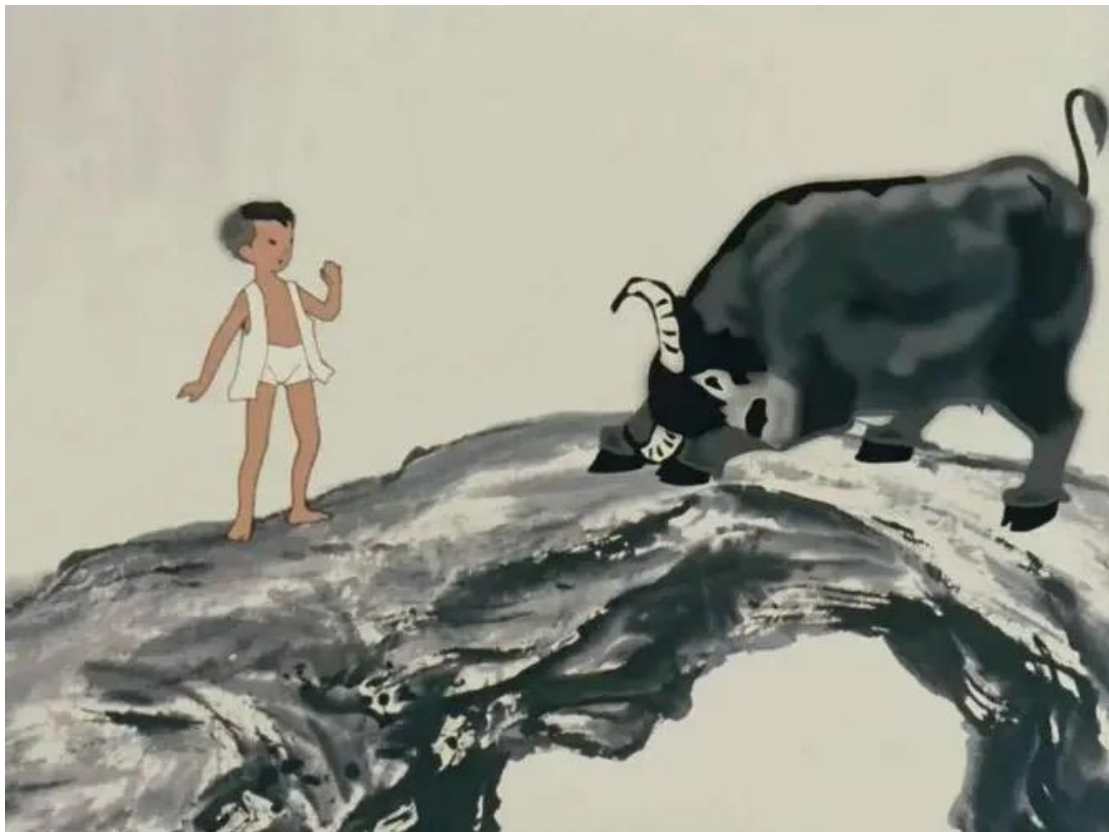
Taoist culture is fully reflected and utilized in "*Mu Di*". Firstly, the natural landscapes and environments in the animation present the concept of nature in Taoist philosophy. Through the technique of ink portrayals, elements such as mountains, clouds, and flowing water as depicted in Figure 2 represent the harmony and coexistence of nature and humans. This concept of nature aligns with the Taoist cultural idea of the "*unity of heaven and man*" emphasizing the fusion and interaction between humans and nature. The characters in the animation embody the life philosophy of Taoist culture, and the shepherd represents a simple and natural attitude toward life, pursuing inner tranquillity and peace of mind. He establishes deep emotional connections with animals, showcasing the harmonious coexistence between humans and the natural world. This life philosophy echoes the Taoist concepts of "*non-action*" and "*tranquillity and non-interference*" encouraging people to let go of desires and seek inner tranquillity and the authenticity of nature. Additionally, the artistic techniques in the animation also draw from the aesthetic ideals of Taoist culture. The gradual ink transitions and water ripple effects create an atmosphere of tranquillity and change, aligning with the Taoist concepts of "*non-action*" and "*natural flow*". The simplicity and abstractness of the visuals emphasize the audience's imagination and perception of details, resonating with the Taoist aesthetic pursuit of "*emptiness*" and "*nothingness*." As shown in Figure 3. The stone bridge is depicted in black, while the background is presented in blank form. Although it is not drawn realistically, the audience can still perceive its sense of space.





**Figure 2. Stills of "Mu Di"**

Source: The stills are taken from the animated film "Mu Di", 1963 (Adopted from tv.sohu.com,<https://tv.sohu.com/v/dXMvMzM5NjU1ODU3LzQ0MjUyMTMwOS5zaHRtbA==.html>)



**Figure 3. Stills of "Mu Di"**

Source: The stills are taken from the animated film "Mu Di", 1963 (Adopted from [tv.sohu.com,https://tv.sohu.com/v/dXMvMzM5NjU1ODU3LzQ0MjUyMTMwOS5zaHRtbA==.html](https://tv.sohu.com/v/dXMvMzM5NjU1ODU3LzQ0MjUyMTMwOS5zaHRtbA==.html))

## **Conclusion**

This paper reveals the influence and manifestation of Taoist culture on ink animation art through the study and application of Taoist culture in the ink animation "*Mu Di*". Through the analysis of the animation's content, form, and artistic techniques, we discovered that "*Mu Di*" successfully integrates the philosophical and aesthetic ideas of Taoist culture into ink animation, presenting a unique artistic charm. The animation presents the concept of nature in Taoist culture by merging natural landscapes and human figures through ink painting, conveying the idea of harmonious coexistence between nature and humans. Also, the characters in the animation embody the worldview of Taoist culture, emphasizing simplicity, inner tranquillity, and the harmonious coexistence of humans and nature. Additionally, the artistic techniques of the animation also draw on the aesthetic ideas of Taoist culture, emphasizing the audience's imagination and perceptiveness through simplicity and abstraction.

The research indicates that the application of Taoist culture in "*Mu Di*" holds significant importance in ink animation art. It not only enriches the expressive forms and artistic techniques of ink animation but also showcases the unique charm and artistic expression of Chinese traditional culture. Moreover, it inspires humanistic care and lifestyles in contemporary society, encouraging people to pursue inner tranquillity and the authenticity of nature. However, further research and expansion are needed regarding the study of Taoist culture in ink animation. Future studies could explore the diversity and manifestations of Taoist cultural elements in different works, deepening the understanding of the relationship between Taoist culture and ink animation. Additionally, a comparative analysis of Taoist culture with other traditional cultures can broaden the perspective of cross-cultural artistic exchange.

In conclusion, the application of Taoist culture in the ink animation "*Mu Di*" is a successful practice that provides new ideas and examples for the innovation and development of ink animation. Through further research and exploration, it help to understand better and appreciate the application of Taoist culture in ink animation, offering more inspiration and references for creators and researchers in related fields. This also contributes to the inheritance and promotion of Chinese traditional culture, enhancing cultural confidence and identity.

Chinese ink animation "*Mu Di*" has formed its unique artistic style by combining the heritage of traditional Chinese culture and paving the way through the research of the predecessors. It is inherited and evolved step by step by generations of artists with time and sweat. They have poured their artistic cultivation and professional knowledge into it, which has given rise to the status and popularity of Chinese ink animation in the world nowadays. Now there is no lack of various innovative forms of artistic expression, but traditional art is unique to our country, Chinese characteristics of culture are a business card in the international arena. If we can't continue the good inheritance, maybe shortly, the figure of ink animation will fade away with us. Ink animation is the memories and efforts of the previous generations, and it is also a shining treasure in the long river of history. In the contemporary era of rapid development of science and technology, we should not forget the traditional culture, bearing in mind the shock brought to us by ink painting in the history of

Chinese art, and should not let this traditional craft disappear. We should carry forward the spirit of oriental aesthetics embodied in Chinese ink painting, and shoulder the important responsibility of inheriting the cultural tradition of the Chinese nation. Let the Chinese cultural tradition stand in the forest of world art. To create a broader prospect for ink painting. From the script, color, characters, and background design project Taoist philosophical culture, so that Taoist culture with a new look in today's society, with the times, constantly updated, the results of this paper are engaged in the study of Taoist literature, Taoist literature into the animation researchers to provide theoretical references, and to promote the use of traditional Chinese culture in the new media technology.

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