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CONSTRUCTION OF SOVIET CULTURAL IDENTITY THROUGH CHILDREN'S MEDIA

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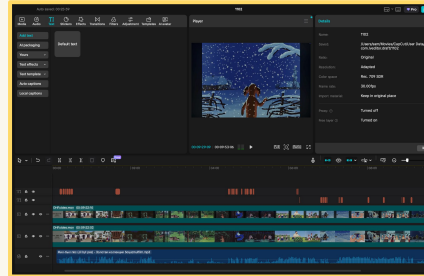


INTRODUCTION

What can we learn about a society by studying its children's media? Children's cartoons are the first form of televised media we are exposed to, and they have the potential to shape a generation, instilling in us empathy for one another, and teaching social responsibility. This project analyzes Soviet children's cartoons as cultural artifacts that reveal the social values, moral expectations, and ideological norms the USSR sought to instill in children. Focusing on *Cheburashka* (1971) and *There Once Lived a Dog* (1982), I examined how themes of collectivism, reciprocity, community belonging, and moral duty are embedded into animated narratives which may at first glance appear simple. By reading children's media as a form of soft socialization, this project explores how the Soviet Union used animation to construct a shared vision of childhood, citizenship, and cultural identity.

PROTOTYPE

For the prototype stage, I created an interactive ArcGIS StoryMap that integrates translated video clips, thematic analysis, historical context, and visual storytelling. The prototype of this project is a website which utilizes digital humanities tools, primarily an interactive ArcGIS StoryMap. This includes original translations and subtitles of both films using CapCut, plot summaries and cultural interpretations, a comparative analysis of both cartoons, relevant historical context, and embedded media, still frames, and historical imagery.



This website is a prototype meant to represent an ideal project. In its full form, the final project would include a larger corpus of cartoons, expanded coverage of republic-specific folklore, and comparative sections. The prototype showcases the foundational approach, demonstrating how children's animation can be used to study culture, identity, and ideology.

METHODOLOGY

To conduct this research, I selected two canonical Soviet cartoons and created my own English subtitles directly from the original Russian dialogue. Translating these films line by line allowed for close engagement with idioms, humor, and culturally specific language that are often flattened in existing translations. I opted to translate myself because many publicly available translation tools failed to accurately convey the meanings of certain dialogue, offering flat and literal translation instead.

This process functioned both as a technical step and as an interpretive method that highlighted moral cues and emotional nuances. After subtitling, I produced detailed plot summaries and conducted thematic readings of each film, identifying recurring motifs such as mutual aid, gratitude, and community responsibility. In combining translation, close reading, and contextual analysis, I was able to situate the sources within a broader historical context of folk culture and ideological messaging.

