

On the Development of Chinese Cultural and Creative Industry Through “King of the Forest” and “The Lion King”

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Abstract—Through study of the development and successful experience of commercial animation in the United States and Japan, and comparison of the currently popular domestic animation movies, this paper discusses the ways and methods of domestic animation movies creation, and tries to provide a new idea for the sustainable development of Chinese cultural and creative industry park. By comparing the story content and plot of the two cartoons, the similarities and differences of animation image design, the creation methods and techniques, the paper combs the key elements of animation creation from the artistic field to the commercial field, and the core of symbol rewriting. It analyzes and studies the cultural industry from the angle of symbol characteristics and cultural connotation by comprehensively applying the research method of organic unity of time characteristics and cultural characteristics. It believes that the cultural industry is symbol production. Similar themes can be rewritten with necessary cultural symbols according to the social environment and ideological trend. Classical themes can be applied repeatedly and can achieve commercial success.

Keywords—Commercial Animation; Cultural and Creative Industry, Cultural Symbols; Cultural and Creative Products

I. INTRODUCTION

While the world’s cultural and creative industries are flourishing, Chinese animators are also making their continuous efforts to explore this industry. The recent popular movie *Ne Zha* won several titles such as its box office, reputation and attention one after another within a week of its release. By August 16, 2019, its box office had exceeded 3.8 billion yuan. It has created the highest box office record in the history of Chinese animation film and has become a myth. The author believes that the Chinese animation film is blooming, which started from the 1926 advertisement short film *Shu Zhen Chinese Typewriter* and has its ups and downs of hundreds of years. Taking Japanese animated series *King of the Forest* and American animation film *The Lion King* as examples, this paper discusses the rewriting of animation film content, symbolic significance and the design of its derivatives in cultural and creative industries, and further provides reference paths and methods for Chinese cultural and creative industries.

II. INSPIRATION FROM ANIMATION’S TRANSFORMATION FROM ART TO COMMERCE

China was once one of the major animation film countries with good reputation. In 1941, the Wan Brothers’ long film *Princess Iron Fan* influenced Japanese animator Osamu Tezuka and inspired him to create adult animation. Then produced films such as *Conquers* and *the Dragon King*, *Quick-witted Goat*, *Xiao Li Yu Tiao Long Men*, *The Magical Pen*, *San ge heshang* and the first ink animation *Little Tadpole Looking for Mother*. In the past 40 years, 46 Chinese cartoons have won 78 international film awards.

However, China’s original animations have gradually lost their creative power with the development of commerce and the increasingly rich means of communication. Some animation companies have no corresponding return on their huge investment, and their industrial operation is not satisfactory. Excellent animators have become cheap labor. What is more serious is that Malaysia and Thailand are attracting the attention of foreign animation producers with lower processing prices than those of China. If the existing problems are not solved, the qualification to earn low processing fees will maybe be lost in the future.

In different cultural areas and different times, the creation of animation films of the same type needs to highlight different cultural demands and give consideration to the historical process and aesthetics of human development. China’s early animation films came to the world under the influence of western animation films. Later influenced by the creative ideas from the Soviet Union, they had a clear political character, thus forming the biggest difference from the entertainment shown by American animation films[1]. *King of the Forest* is the representative work of Osamu Tezuka, the father of modern Japanese cartoonists. The comic *King of the Forest* was serialized in 1950, adapted into color TV animation in 1965. Its theater version was released in 1997, and a special commemorative version was launched in 2009 to commemorate the 80th anniversary of the birth of author Osamu Tezuka. From its 1950’ s comic to 2009’ s theater edition, its artistic form changed from comic to animation, from TV edition to film edition, but people’s enthusiasm for it lasted for 60 years. Based on its tortuous and wonderful stories

and pleasing pictures, the work impresses people, and even its reverence and love for life are eternal themes. *The Lion King*, an animation film produced by Disney Company in 1994, operated through commerce and won two awards, including the 1995 Oscar, the world's best original music and the best movie song, becoming one of Disney Company's most successful animation films. Based on *King of the Forest* and *Hamlet*, the story, starting with the birth of the small lion Simba, tells the change and reproduction of an ethnic group between two generations. The film endows animals with human character, positive values, outstanding heroes' bravery, good fighting and a sense of responsibility, making the film a great commercial success. In the Internet era, similar stories are constantly remade and often updated, with unexpected success. *The Lion King*, produced by US Walter Disney Film Company in 2019 and directed by Jon Favreau, is known as the "real lion version" without a "virtual shooting" through hand-painted or computer animation technology. CG animation represents old content by new forms and its many shots have their female counterparts in the "animation version". The film is a huge carrier of American national spirit and values, and its commercial value far exceeds its artistic value.

Animation, as a mass communication culture, is both art and technology. Some researchers have proposed that Chinese animation should be based on local culture and traditional cultural resources of folk literature for reference and integration, and innovation, so as to turn animation from art to commerce, just as the "Chinese school" do in history. The "Chinese School" pursues a relaxed and humorous mood of joy without lewdness and pleasant aesthetic experience. It is different from the entertainment supremacy of Disney Company in the United States. However, scholars have also put forward different views on the educational function of the "Chinese School". In the article *Education for Fun or Education Without Fun*—Should Chinese animation carry out education to the end, Gao Hong and Zhu Ming say that education for fun is a double-edged sword and can hinder entertainment and fail to achieve the function and purpose of education. It is better to express the ideas in the film so that the audience can appreciate them by themselves, just like retaining the lingering fragrance through drinking slowly. If it makes people feel tasteless, no one will regard your film as good tea, but it will become "box office poison". Japan is both a major producer and consumer of animation. Hayao Miyazaki once said: I made *Spirited Away* in the hope that the children who watched the movie will want to watch the movie again with their children when they grow up and get old. People of different ages can get different tastes or insights from it and will never be tired of watching it. These ideas have made Japan's animation film develop rapidly. Japan's animation film has experienced nearly a hundred years of development, evolving from the initial educational attribute to the commercial attribute and the social attribute, and finally endowing animation with political attribute, becoming Japan's cultural image ambassador, the so-called "animation diplomacy" [2]. In history, *Gertie the Dinosaur* is the first commercial animation film from a pure artistic work to an artistic industry. Getty has also become the first animation image with economic value protected by copyright. It is a new symbol of commercial

animation in the artistic industry. Animation image must have symbolic character from art to commerce.

III. SYMBOLIC ANALYSIS ON ANIMATION IMAGES

One day in 1986, on its front page the U.S. newspaper *Bake Field in California* published a picture of Mickey Mouse welcoming the pope and the bereaved family of the drowning child, causing excitement of public sentiment and even threatening bombs. "Mickey Mouse has always been a symbol of joy, beauty, sincerity and kindness. Turning a blind eye to the sad events of the same page has seriously damaged the public's emotion and morality, which involves communication issues, and more importantly, semiotics of animation images[3]." Jacobson, a representative of the Prague School of Linguistics, has clearly pointed out that "the most social, abundant and appropriate symbol system in human society is obviously based on vision and hearing". Animation images convey direct meaning messages through shape-building and story narration, and also convey cultural messages through audience acceptance. Symbolism of animation image is the key point to measure the success of commercial animation. Its unique visual symbols span countries and nationalities and are most easily understood and communicated. In animation film, humor, funny, melancholy and other symbols are often used to increase the "reading saturation" of animation stories with its unforgettable visual interest, special expressions and forms.

Animation image is a typical symbol collection, a connection between image and cultural characteristics, and the reality of cartoon fiction and imagination. The United States and Japan are two major animation film countries in the world, each with many excellent works and rich production experience. However, a good animation film has not only exquisite production strength but also rich connotation. Animation works without profound meaning are not excellent animations. Only by adding cultural accomplishment and appeal can the works be endowed with stronger vitality. The early Chinese animation art used the strength of the whole country to create a "Chinese school" with distinctive national style and vivid animation image symbols. Nan Huaijin, a master of Chinese national learning, once described the qualities that Chinese should possess: Buddha is the heart, Tao is the bone, and Confucianism is the expression. Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism are traditional Chinese cultural symbols. Animation works convert text symbols into visual symbols. Japanese animation master Oshii Mamoru Oshii believes more extremely: "Images themselves contain rich information. Each viewer has his own way of understanding images, while texts limit the richness of this understanding". Table 1 shows the conversion from text symbols to visual symbols in the image symbol pairs of *King of the Forest* and *The Lion King*.

TABLE I. COMPARISON OF IMAGE SYMBOLS BETWEEN KING OF THE FOREST AND THE LION KING

Film name	Main characters	Result	Symbols	Color	Plastic arts	Style	Communication form
<i>King of the Forest</i> 1965 edition, 1989 Edition, 1997 Theatre Edition, 2009 Special Commemorative Edition	Leo (son)	King of the Forest	Leaders, inspirations	White	Character wireframe, single-line flat coating, appropriate vignetting; The background is freehand and has space.	Cartoon, personification, Based on comics, aestheticism, warmth and pure and bright colors	1. Comics 2. TV 3. Movies Mobile Games
	Panga (Father)	Die for saving his wife	Leaders, heroism	White			
<i>The Lion King</i> Animation version	Simba (Prince)	The Lion King	The Growth of Heroes	Yellow	The role dimension is plump and realistic. Realistic background and strong sense of space	Publicity, personification, Happy corners of the mouth up, exaggerated colors, strong visual impact	1. Movies 2. TV version of "Adventures of Peng Peng Ding Man" Game
	Mufasa (King)	Framed and died by his younger brother.	Kings and Heroes	Yellow and brown			
	Scar(uncle)	Reap the fruits of one's actions	Sinister and crafty	Dull red			
<i>The Lion King</i> CG version	Simba (Prince)	The Lion King	The Growth of Heroes	Yellow and gray	Simulation modeling loses the humor and aesthetic feeling peculiar to animation.	Realistic, No personification of joy, realistic colors, gray- tone, documentary style	1. Movies 2. Games
	Mufasa (King)	Framed and died by his younger brother.	Kings and Heroes	Yellow and gray			
	Scar(uncle)	Reap the fruits of one's actions	Sinister and crafty	Brown and gray			

From the above table, it can be seen that the main roles are all aimed at becoming leaders and heroes, but the symbols are different. The white lion Leo is inspirational and the yellow lion Simba symbolizes heroes and their growth. In contrast, *The Lion King* emphasizes personal heroism more than *King of the Forest*. Usually, warm yellow is a symbol of happiness, warmth and peace. Yellow strongly foils Simba's enthusiasm and vitality. The dark red scar is in a sinister corner. White is a symbol of purity in the west and a symbol of dreariness, widowhood and coldness in China, while Japan, which is also an eastern country, advocates white and the beauty of "mourning for things". Japanese scholar Meiyuan Meng pointed out that "forest belief in the soul of Japanese" is the core spirit of Japanese religious thought and the pillar of Japanese spiritual thought structure[4]. The White Lion's inspirational construction has won praise and love worldwide.

It can also be seen from the above table that the white lion Leo, born out of cartoons, and the yellow lion Simba of the animated version are both anthropomorphic shapes, with anthropomorphic expressions and emotional personification, showing the deep meaning of human social life by animal images. *The Lion King* of CG Edition (Real Lion Edition) is a continuation of the extended value of the animated version, or a squeeze of the surplus value[5]. According to the survey, its main audience is young people in their 30s, and from 1994 to 2019 the film is sales of "feelings" for many people. In terms of color, shape and style, the simulation degree is very high. It basically restores the plot and scene of the animated version of

The Lion King. However, the realistic animation style portrays the attributes of animals. Too lifelike technology makes CG movies lose the symbolic and symbolic features of the animated version, as shown in Figures 1, 2 and 3. By the use of animated animal images and symbolism, expressions of human weaknesses can effectively reduce the aversion that satire may bring to the audience, and can effectively avoid the audience's common sense of cliches.

M.Thomas Inge wrote in the conclusion of his *Comic Book Culture*: "Cartoons bring generations of people to the continuous social and philosophical problems expressed by symbols. Our visual emotion endows life with various dramatic conflicts so that we can instead solve the unsatisfied desires in our hearts[6]". Animation creation and appreciation are symbol coding and decoding activities based on rich imagination. Social and cultural information and industrial value are exchanged here. Theodore.T, former editor-in-chief of *Semiotics* magazine, once pointed out: "Symbol is a kind of information, and the subject studied by semiotics is the exchange of all kinds of information." The symbolism of animation image has the dual value of culture and commerce today. Analyzing successful cases is helpful to the sound development of animation industry in our country. Could *Na Zha* achieve such good public praise and benefits if the animation film were reproduced in a real-life version? Anyway, the symbolic nature of the original picture of *Na Zha* has contributed indelibly to the tone and box office success of the whole movie.



Fig.1. Leo in *King of the Forest*



Fig.2. Simba in *The Lion King*

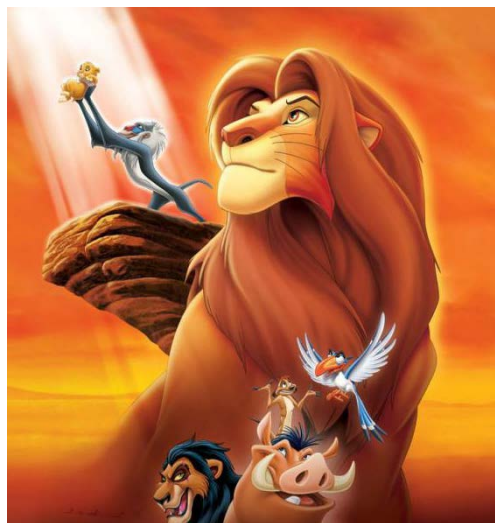


Fig.3. Simba in real lion version *The Lion King*

IV. ANIMATION DERIVATIVE PRODUCTS AND DESIGNS

The original form of animation is to meet people’s aesthetic consciousness and spiritual needs. The United States and Japan skillfully use animation image symbols as both content and tools for commercial operations. The first Disneyland Park, which was opened in Los Angeles on the west coast of the United States in July 1955, marked the expansion of The Walt Disney Company’s business scope from pure film and television cultural products to related subculture industries. Cultural historians call the park an important historical event affecting mankind in the 20th century. In July 2005, The Walt Disney Company authorized Feld Entertainment, the world’s largest live performance production company, to produce the “Disney Ice Show”, which attracted more than 100 million viewers. Mickey Mouse’s commercial value made The Walt Disney Company famous during the Great Depression. More than 3 million Mickey Mouse watches have been branded in two years. Mickey Mouse and Mickey Minnie trolley made Lionel company achieve a profit of more than \$6 million from a loss of more than \$3 million in only four months[7]. Slightly

different from the United States, the number of cartoons created in Japan is amazing. All animations take comic strips as their pioneers.

King of the Forest and *The Lion King* have the same lasting vitality as the two classic animation works in the stage of animation development. Although the two animation films take forest animals as the main characters, different cultural backgrounds have caused different thoughts. *King of the Forest* takes harmony between man and nature as its theme and shares the earth’s resources. *The Lion King* is advocates positive heroism that justice triumphs over evil and leads people to a bright future. The animation TV series, movies and mobile games, which are adapted from the cartoons of the original book *King of the Forest*, is a rewriting of cultural symbols. The market-oriented operation of the derivative products of its animation images is the conversion of cultural symbols to industrial symbols. In June 1994, the animation film *The Lion King* was the only animation film in movie history to enter the top 10 in box office, with a total box office revenue of more than 750 million US dollars, related derivatives revenue of

more than 1 billion US dollars, and about 20 million US dollars in videotape revenue. Different countries have different cultural resources. In the era of text creation, museum display of ancient civilizations and media dissemination of folk stories are the capital that cultural resource countries are proud of. However, in the era of cultural industrialization, the production of industrial symbols accepted by the target audience through reference and rewriting has reversed the culture of cultural resource countries and changed the market owner status of the countries to which cultural resources were originally affiliated. This also objectively confirms the “idea of a palimpsest of history”[8].

Some people say that the domestic animation industry is featured by “a first-class painting skill, a second-class story and a third-class operation”. The development of industrial chain needs factors of intelligence, innovation, information, management, and policy. And market-oriented content production and research and development of consumer acceptance factors need to be shared by the audience. Every excellent work has a certain group of fans, who express their love for the film by creating “fan” works a second time, and attract more fans through “fan” works, who are not only their fans but also fans of the original works. After this year’s release of the “real lion” version of *The Lion King*, YouTube users uploaded their own cartoon “fan” of *The Lion King*, which fully illustrates the importance of story and management. In the cultural industry market, the previous channel priority has changed to content priority. The story of animation images goes hand in hand with social thinking, which has always represented the aesthetic trend of mainstream people and is also a portrayal of social philosophy.

V. CONCLUSION

The Complete Works of Bakhtin edited by Qian Zhongwen wrote: “The ideological field is consistent with the symbolic field. Where there are symbols, there are artistic forms. The meaning of symbols belongs to the whole ideological field “. As far as *King of the Forest* and *The Lion King* are concerned, no matter where the story text comes from, its output is the cultural values and ideology of the country. Japanese animation

takes Japanese culture as the center, and its theme diversity has the characteristics of global commonness and low price. Its island nature determines the martial spirit and mourning consciousness of animation. As an immigrant country, the United States, with its diverse races and cultures, advocates free individual heroism and optimistic and confident attitude towards life, which has a deep impression in its animation works. The domestic animation film *Na Zha* is about to be released in North America. The crowdfunding for the toy Garage Kits in the movie has also greatly exceeded expectations, giving great encouragement to the Chinese writers. The animation industry is a cultural industry and symbol production. Similar themes can be rewritten with necessary cultural symbols according to the social environment and ideological trend. Classical themes can be applied repeatedly and can achieve commercial success.

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