

"Transformation" of Sun Wukong Inside and Outside the Painting

A Study of Sun Wukong in Art Works Since the Establishment of People's Republic of China

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ABSTRACT

The "transformation" of Sun Wukong in fine art works is the manifestation of aesthetic ideology. As a well-known mythical character, Sun Wukong's image is an important topic of art creation, which plays an important role in the construction of national cultural image, art creation and art education. Since the 1950s and 1960s, Sun Wukong had been very active. This article analyzes and thinks about the "transformation" of Sun Wukong in art works from the "plasticity" of Sun Wukong since the founding of the People's Republic of China. The typical works that represent the image of Sun Wukong since the founding of the People's Republic are analyzed with the research methods of literature, semiotics and culturology. Also, this paper explores the cultural metaphor and motivation behind the "transformation" of Sun Wukong in different periods, so as to provide theoretical support for the artistic creation, application and development of the theme of Sun Wukong.

Keywords: since the establishment of People's Republic of China, fine art works, the sculpture transformation of Sun Wukong, innovation

I. INTRODUCTION

As a well-known mythical hero of the Chinese nation for hundreds of years, art works of Sun Wukong emerge in endlessly. The value of Sun Wukong's image is not only reflected in literature, art, but also in the culture. The image of Sun Wukong contains profound cultural connotation. The image of Sun Wukong can be called "cultural ape" from the perspective of human culture. [1]

Since the 20th century, the controversy on the image prototype of Sun Wukong is most famous for the divergence of views between Lu Xun and Hu Shi. Lu Xun pointed out that the image of Sun Wukong came from the native land, which could be traced back to the image of "wuzhiqi" in Chinese mythology [2]. Contrary to Lu Xun's view, Hu Shi believed that the image of Sun Wukong originated from the image of "Hanuman", the Indian God monkey. Based on the differences between native mythology and foreign mythology, there is the third view that Sun Wukong is the "half-blood monkey" [3]. Xiao Bing has made a summary of the views on half-blood monkey. "In short, Sun Wukong, which was finally completed in Wu Chengen's hands, is not only a composite model, but

also an independent image; in this typical image, there are both traditional, inherited, transplanted, foreign factors, and more creative, local elements." [4] It is believed that the archetype of Sun Wukong is not only the shadow of the water monster "wuzhiqi" in Chinese mythology, but also influenced by Indian mythology. It is of great significance to study the image of Sun Wukong. On the one hand, it promotes the artistic recreation of the novel "Journey to the West". On the other hand, it promotes the excavation and research of the national culture hidden behind the image of Sun Wukong.

In the Later Han Dynasty and Five Dynasties, the historical facts of Xuanzang going on a pilgrimage for buddhist scriptures had been compiled into a storybook of "Poetry on Xuanzang going on a pilgrimage for buddhist scriptures in the Tang Dynasty", in which the monkey walker was added to the story of Xuanzang's Buddhist Scripture collection, demons subduing and eliminating. Subsequently, "monkey walker" evolved continuously in the zaju of "Journey to the West" and the ordinary words of "Journey to the West", and became the protagonist Sun Wukong in the novel of "Journey to the West". The image of Sun Wukong is formed in the art works with monkey head, tiger skin skirt, golden cudgel and tight hoop curse.

II. "TRANSFORMATION" AND "THINKING CHANGE" OF THE IMAGE OF SUN WUKONG IN ART WORKS

Since the founding of the People's Republic of China, it emphasized that "art serves workers, peasants and soldiers". Reviewing the core of Mao Zedong's speech, "art is the art of popularization and serves the masses". In the 1950s and 1960s, the image of Sun Wukong was very active. In the myth "Journey to the West", the image of Sun Wukong was changeable and imaginative. In the early days of new China, Sun Wukong was a typical representative of anti-feudal superstition. Since the founding of the People's Republic of China, the image of Sun Wukong in art works has been active and changed, and its "transformation" corresponds to the complex interwoven relationship among tradition, aesthetics and politics. It includes the shaping of the image of Sun Wukong, the establishment of national identity, and the generation of class background. Sun Wukong's image, character and the subtlety are deeply rooted in the hearts of the people through the art styles that the people are happy to see and hear.

With the appearance of the New Year pictures of "Rebellion Against Heaven", especially the image of Sun Wukong has become a classic in the history of Chinese art in the 20th century, people are keen on constantly shaping and interpreting various themes of Sun Wukong's image changes. The "changes" of the image of Sun Wukong in "Rebellion Against Heaven" reflect the characteristics of the times and the change of thought in this stage. When talking about the creation of "Rebellion Against Heaven", Liu Jiyou said: "I have liked the story of "Journey to the West" for a long time. The characters in the story are very vivid and have personalities. I especially like Sun Wukong. He has deep human nature, and his resistance to the feudal forces is lively." In the early days of the founding of the People's Republic of China, the myth "Journey to the West" publicized the significance of anti-feudalism. Sun Wukong was even given the title of "hero of peasant uprising". Then, people can understand the "change" of the image of Sun Wukong and the background of Liu Jiyou's creation of the art works of "Rebellion Against Heaven". Liu Jiyou conceived and created a series of New Year pictures of "Rebellion Against Heaven" from 1955 to 1956. According to records, when Liu Jiyou created "Rebellion Against Heaven", he did not stretch the frame when he painted it on silk to avoid deformation. When he painted, he was also very religious. He took a bath and changed clothes before painting, and began to write until his heart was still. He devoted a lot of effort to the creation of this set of works. Eight scenes were created in the paintings of "Rebellion Against Heaven", including "defeated troops from heaven" ("Fig. 1"), "stealing flat peach" and "Supervisor for Heavenly Horses". In terms

of plot selection and performance, "Rebellion Against Heaven" focused on the description of the characters' inner feelings and the static performance of the contradictory development, highlighting the heroic image of Sun Wukong fighting against the gods. "Rebellion Against Heaven" has been highly praised by people from all walks of life. The depiction of the characters, especially the image of Sun Wukong, is characterized by the use of traditional line drawing techniques, the combination of meticulous color setting and realistic character modeling techniques, with distinctive features of the times.



Fig. 1. Liu Jiyou's "Rebellion Against Heaven", 1956.

In China in the 1950s and 1960s, class struggle was the standard to measure everything. On the one hand, the new literature and art is popular and serves the workers, peasants and soldiers. On the other hand, the art "forms" that originate from life and are higher than life are not only related to personal aesthetic tastes, but also related to popular aesthetics and politically-oriented art forms. The principle of "art serving the mass, workers, peasants and soldiers" has become the primary standard guiding Chinese art creation since the founding of the People's Republic of China. According to Mao Zedong's literary line that "art comes from life and is higher than life", art should play a role in transforming and improving thought. New Year pictures, prints, and comic strips are the main forms of art creation in this stage, which conforms to the aesthetic taste of the public.

III. "TRANSFORMATION" AND "MEANING CHANGE" OF THE IMAGE OF SUN WUKONG IN ART WORKS

The research on the image of Sun Wukong began in the late 1970s and early 1980s with the proposal of reform and opening up policy and the transformation of culture and art. In 1979, Deng Xiaoping made a congratulatory speech to the Fourth Congress of Chinese literary and art workers, and proposed that literary and artistic workers should make the creation

according to their own characteristics and development laws. At that time, people were not completely out of the confinement of the "extreme left", and the literary and artistic circles successively launched positive debates on the issues of humanitarianism, human nature, the relationship between literature and art and politics. In 1982, He Manzi published the paper "liberating art from the frame of Sociology — on the social content of the novel Journey to the west", which caused the academic circles to study the image of Sun Wukong. This paper studied the aesthetic artistic characteristics of Sun Wukong, excavated the aesthetic meaning behind its image, and found out the significance of the "transformation" of the image of Sun Wukong in a deeper and broader cultural background. The profound significance and change of the image of Sun Wukong in the development of Chinese mythology culture is embodied in the philosophical implication, mythical imagination, cultural psychology and the concept of gods and demons in journey to the West. Influenced by the ideological trend of the Ming Dynasty, the mythical role of Sun Wukong has the life value of exploring, excavating and returning to "self". "The process of going on a pilgrimage for Buddhist scriptures in "Journey to the West" can be seen as the process of challenging people's faith, will and heart, as well as the process of fight and sublimation. It breaks the mystery and rigor of the three religions, sublimates the freedom mentality beyond religion, and makes the novel full of humor and interest." [5]

With the awakening of national spiritual consciousness in the new era, the artistic works and aesthetic creation of the image of Sun Wukong have become the embodiment of national potential consciousness and rational pursuit of the times. The art works of the image of Sun Wukong have made great achievements and artistic creation value. Since the smashing of the "Gang of Four", especially since the Third Plenary Session of the Eleventh Central Committee, China's socialist history has changed and turned. Art creation revived again, especially the comic strips in art works set off a creative upsurge from the late 1970s to the early 1980s. From the political reflection on the "Cultural Revolution" to the ideological reflection on the "left" deviation in the socialist period, and then to the cultural reflection on the accumulation of national cultural psychology, "being reflective" [6] is the high condensation of ideology in the new era.



Fig. 2. Illustration of Tiananmen poem copy: white bone under the heavy stick, 1979.

In terms of political reflection, the art creation of Sun Wukong in the new era is to convey the aesthetic intention of promoting humanity. With the "meaning change" of the image of Sun Wukong in the art works, this paper makes a deep reflection on the history, the inhumane treatment during the "Cultural Revolution" period, and the human rights and dignity. The art works on the image of Sun Wukong in the new period ("Fig. 2") show a strong reflection. Cultural reflection refers to the reflection on the feudal remains such as God-making culture and privilege doctrine during the ten-year turmoil period. Under this creative concept, the artistic works of the image of Sun Wukong are the reflection on the feudal residual thoughts and the criticism and reflection on the traditional aesthetic culture or aesthetic concept. "Introspection mainly refers to the reflection on the historical process of the existence of ethnic groups, exposing the accumulation of feudal backward consciousness, and rescuing the real human nature that has been suppressed and distorted for a long time." [7] As the awakening of humanistic spirit and aesthetic consciousness of art creators in the new period, reflection has become the creative mission of art creators in the historical process. It is precisely because of the guidance of this "reflective" creative concept that the art works of the image of Sun Wukong reflect the artistic characteristics and ideological meaning of the new era.

IV. "TRANSFORMATION" AND "NEW CHANGE" OF THE IMAGE OF SUN WUKONG IN ART WORKS

With the advent of the new era and the development of cultural exchanges between China and foreign countries, the archetype of the image of Sun Wukong has attracted the attention of academic circles again. The most significant characteristics of the national spirit and cultural significance of the image of Sun

Wukong in the new era are cultural diversity and foreign cultural exchange. "The Belt and Road Initiative" between China and the world is a platform for China's cultural exchange and output. The "transformation" of the image of Sun Wukong in art works, as a new artistic image with universal consensus in "the Belt and Road Initiative", shoulders the mission of cultural and artistic communication. The image of Sun Wukong in "Journey to the West" has experienced hundreds of years of evolution and dissemination, and has become the symbol of the classic image of Chinese culture. In ancient times, the Belt and Road was the main road linking the Eurasian continent, and an important hub for commodity circulation and cultural exchange between Asia and Europe. Sun Wukong in the fine arts became an image with exclusive cultural significance on this land. Chinese culture wants to go abroad to spread its own culture. The image of Sun Wukong in art works is the representative of traditional culture and occupies an important position in the communication system of Chinese culture. It should be the pioneer of the new image of Chinese art going abroad. The image of Sun Wukong in art works combines the communication value of culture, national spirit and the artistic creation concept of "the Belt and Road" in the new era.

Art is a form of expression. How the image of Sun Wukong in art works in the new era reflects the spiritual outlook of an era, condenses the aesthetic model of the times, and becomes an artistic image with universal cultural significance of the times are problems needed to be considered in artistic creation to show Chinese style on the world art stage. Guided by the spirit of general secretary Xi Jinping's series speech, China's mainstream art creation has been achieved in the following aspects: "cultivating and practicing the socialist core values", "adhering to people-oriented creative guidance", "inheriting and carrying forward the fine traditional Chinese culture", and "telling China's story". The theme creation of Sun Wukong's new image runs through the style and spirit of the times, showing the national style and cultural confidence of contemporary Chinese art.



Fig. 3. Poster of "Monkey King: Hero Is Back", 2015.

In the innovation of art works in the new era, there are many art works that keep pace with the times and coexist with science fiction. The recreation of the image of Sun Wukong takes the lead in animation film and television works. The image of Sun Wukong ("Fig. 3") in "Monkey King: Hero Is Back" uses three-dimensional technology to transform the traditional modeling and traditional costumes by means of realistic and decorative techniques, creating a new image of Sun Wukong and re-interpreting the story of Sun Wukong. The "new change" of the image of Sun Wukong in art works cannot be separated from the nourishment of traditional culture and art. On the basis of profound national spirit and cultural tradition, the image of Sun Wukong in the new era has the characteristics of independence and cooperation. The innovation of the image of Sun Wukong in contemporary art works is the manifestation of China's economy, culture, art development and national spirit.

V. CONCLUSION

Since the new China, the image of Sun Wukong has gone from reflecting the essence to surpassing the essence, thus completing the shaping of the image of Sun Wukong in the art creation of "self" again. With the change of the context of the times, it shows the distinctive characteristics of the times whether in the creative thinking, expression techniques, artistic language, or in the perspective and performance content selection, etc. This paper presents people's spiritual and psychological needs for the image of Sun Wukong since the founding of the People's Republic of China, analyzes the changes of the image art creation of Sun Wukong, and expounds the importance of the image art creation of Sun Wukong. And in the new era under the multicultural context, the mythical Sun Wukong image has the characteristics and prospects of symbolizing the

national cultural spirit, inspiring the thinking of art creation and creating new values.

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