Analysis of the Emotional Needs
of Contemporary Chinese Animation Audience

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Abstract. This paper analyzes the emotional needs of the animation audience, divides the emotional needs of the audience into three levels: emotional resonance, emotional comfort and emotional release, and discusses the emotional resonance between the animation characters and the audience, the type of animation and the emotional comfort of the audience, the theme of animation and the emotional release of the audience according to the questionnaire survey. From the changes and development of Chinese animation films in recent years, we can see the changes in the emotional needs of Chinese animation audiences for animation films, from seeking perfect heroes to seeking ordinary heroes now, from seeking ideological education to seeking spiritual comfort now, from seeking sensory stimulation to seeking aesthetic experience now.

Keywords: Chinese animation · audience · Emotional needs · Animated characters · Animation type · Animation theme

1 Introduction

Emotion is a subjective experience generated from people's attitude towards objective things, and it is a unique high-level and complex experience [1]. Emotion can be divided into moral emotion, rational emotion and aesthetic emotion [2]. Among them, aesthetic emotion refers to the subjective experience and attitude formed by the subject's satisfaction of the aesthetic object's spiritual needs and introspection [3]. When people carry out aesthetic activities of animation, aesthetic emotion is also an inevitable stage. Without the involvement of aesthetic emotion, aesthetic activities are incomplete. Therefore, emotional needs are the basis of watching animation and treating animation with an aesthetic attitude. The audience's love for animation mainly comes from the audience's emotional satisfaction in animation viewing. The audience can relieve the pressure, ease the mood, balance the emotion, resonate and identify with the characters by choosing the animated films to watch, thus achieving the purification and sublimation of the emotion.

Abraham H. Maslow, a humanistic psychologist, believes that human needs are developed at different levels, namely the famous "demand hierarchy theory", which includes five needs, namely, physiological needs, security needs, social needs, respect needs and self-realization needs [4]. Maslow expanded the five-stage model to eight

levels, including cognitive needs, aesthetic needs and transcendence needs [5]. These needs are met in order from low to high. Only when the low-level needs are met can they be met at a higher level. The audience's perception of animation also generally conforms to the level and order of human psychological needs. Based on this, this paper intends to analyze the emotional needs of the animation audience. According to Maslow's theoretical logic of the hierarchy of needs, the emotional needs of the audience are mainly divided into three levels: emotional resonance, emotional comfort, and emotional release. According to the questionnaire survey, the emotional resonance between the animation characters and the audience, the emotional comfort between the animation types and the audience, and the emotional release between the animation theme and the audience are discussed.

2 Emotional Resonance Between Animated Characters and Audiences

One of the most important purposes for audience to watch animation is to obtain emotional recognition. The recognition of character behavior, emotion and fate will eventually be converted into emotional resonance for the character. Therefore, the success of animation role setting is the key to whether the audience can produce emotional resonance. As an individual, it is difficult for the audience to get rid of and change their real situation in real life. Therefore, it is unavoidable for the audience to have various psychological differences in the exchange with the social environment. In order to achieve the balance of their own psychology, they must seek some psychological compensation from reality or the media, and the psychological needs of the audience for "alternative satisfaction" emerge as the times require [6]. In terms of the audience's emotional needs for watching the animation, there are mainly two kinds of emotional satisfaction: first, the audience feels that they are in a better situation than the suffering protagonist in the animation, so that they have a higher self-evaluation of themselves and obtain a sense of superiority and achievement; The other is that the audience imagines the characters in the animation as their own through psychological projection, and imagines the achievements of the characters in the animation as their own achievements, thus obtaining a sense of achievement psychologically.

With the development of the times, contemporary animation has gradually begun to move towards full-age and adulthood. The richness of the role relationship in the works has exceeded the previous dualistic role setting, and more works for adults appear in the form of "family reunion". The complexity and reality of the character, destiny, personality, growth background, social status, and family relationship of the character make it possible for people of different ages to find their own emotional projection in the film, while the "diversity" of the character becomes possible through the "polysemy" interpretation of the audience. According to the author's survey on "Chinese audiences' favorite animated character setting" (Fig. 1), although the proportion of audiences who choose traditional positive role images such as "kind and brave" is still high, there are not a few who choose "adorkable and cute", "humorous and funny" and other audiences with some qualitative flaws. It shows that today's audiences no longer need to be so perfect about the image of the positive characters in the film, but hope to add some humanization
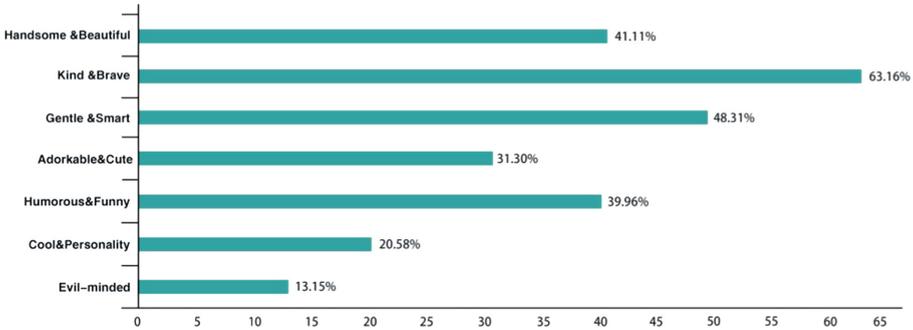
Fig. 1. Chinese audiences' favorite animation character setting

factors to the characters more or less, so as to make them more real. In real life, each of us has some ideals and ambitions more or less, but under the pressure of reality, most of us choose to compromise or give up. Therefore, the characters with obvious shortcomings in the role modeling can bring the audience a sense of life and reality, so that the audience can get resonance and recognition in the emotional care of the role. In the new media era, the audience has formed a skeptical and critical mode of thinking through various media, and the over-idealized role will bring the audience a strong rebellious mentality. Therefore, all kinds of characters drawn from real life, diverse personalities, and the fate with great contrast are a kind of re-creation of traditional animation concepts.

3   Animation Type and Emotional Comfort of Audience

As Barry Langford said in his book, no matter the producer, audience or scholar of the film needs the film type [7]. As a bridge between producers and audiences, film types also facilitate researchers to classify films with similar narrative programs or drama elements for analysis and discussion. The "type" of animation refers to the category, type or form of animation films formed by different themes or techniques. For the Chinese animation market, the emotional type of animation is to cater to different audiences, that is, the emotional demand for animation content. In the era of media development and information explosion, the life rhythm of the audience is accelerated, the pressure of life is increased, and the pursuit of material makes people often feel the beauty of life, forming a collective psychological "regression" phenomenon [8]. Under the influence of psychological defense mechanism, the audience will instead seek emotional comfort, escape, and recall in the animation to reduce their anxiety. According to the author's survey on "types of animation emotion popular with Chinese audiences" (Fig. 2), The most popular and representative types of animation emotion in the contemporary era are humor, warmth, healing, adventure, stimulation, striving, inspiring, youth and love, which respectively correspond to the different emotional needs of the audience. The number of people who choose "humorous and funny" is the largest. It can be seen that "humorous and funny" animation, as a variant of comedy, has become the main emotional needs of the audience in the entertainment era.
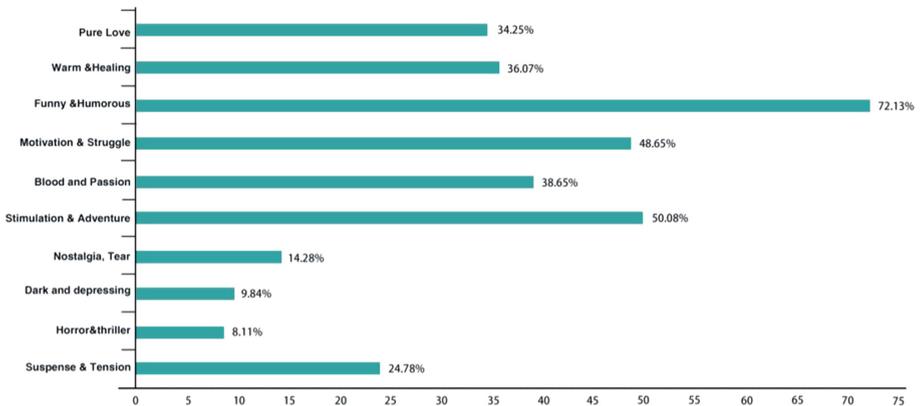
Fig. 2. Chinese audiences' favorite emotional types of animation

Entertainment is a non-utilitarian activity for human beings to obtain happiness beyond the basic survival and production life [6]. Animation has existed as an entertainment method and tool since the beginning of its development. Today, China is in the stage of rapid economic development. While improving production efficiency, people's physical and mental health are under long-term high pressure. The human nature's needs for happiness and entertainment are more difficult to meet than before. In the field of animation emotion, humorous animation has become the most popular type of animation. The exaggerated expressiveness of animation has become one of the best ways to express comedy effects. Any audio-visual wonders that cannot be realized in real life can be expressed in the form of animation. The comic effect brought by the deformed shape, exaggerated action and subversive plot has always been an important manifestation of the artistic charm of animation.

In recent years, heart-warming and healing animations have begun to flourish. Although the majority of "heart-warming and healing" animations are Japanese animations, the demand of Chinese animation audiences is not small, and its demand exceeds that of many other emotional types of animations. Among the audience groups of Chinese animation, people aged between 16 and 35 are the main audience group of "Healing" animation. With the "post 90s" and "post 00s" gradually entering the society, facing more and more heavy learning and career pressure, the demand for warm healing animation is increasing, but the Chinese animation market has not responded in time. Now, the emotional needs embodied by them are gradually being paid attention to by the animation market, and the commercial value it contains will promote the future development of Chinese animation.

4   Animation Theme and Audience's Emotional Release

The story theme of animation corresponds to the curiosity of the audience about the unknown world, and different types of animation meet the different curiosity of the audience. The spiritual pressure brought by modern society needs to be effectively released through a channel [9]. However, because our curiosity and desire are always suppressed

by social ethics in our daily life, the audience can only understand the unknown areas through other ways, so as to resolve the tension when being suppressed and obtain emotional release. And those stimulating themes that make the audience have strong curiosity have become the wide choice of the audience. According to the author's survey of "Chinese audiences' favorite animation story themes" (Fig. 3), the audience who choose the youth campus theme, science fiction theme, and fantasy fairy tale account for a high proportion of the total audience, and the fantasy experience of the unknown field and the magic world has become one of the main purposes of today's animation audience.

Fantasy animation includes animation themes such as "Science Fiction", "Fantasy Film" and "Magic Film". The virtual characters, environments and special effects of animated films can meet the different requirements of different audiences and make them indulge in the real audio-visual experience. High-tech new media animation can more perfectly realize dreams that cannot be realized in real life. The "curiosity psychology" of animation audiences makes them have a strong interest and curiosity about things that will not happen in real life. At present, the only "IP" of science fiction in China is *The three body problem.* Most of China's science fiction animation lacks reasonable logic and world view to support the development of animation, resulting in the animation works turning to aerial reality, making it difficult for the audience to understand and accept. Nowadays, China's fantasy animation is a big one. From the perspective of fantasy animation film creation, the level of this type of animation film in China's animation market is also uneven. *Nezha: Birth of the Demon Child* has achieved the first place at the box office of domestic animation films, but *Big Fish and Begonia* has weak points and weak story in the internal world view of animation. At present, the popular fantasy animation in the animation market includes such streaming media animation dramas
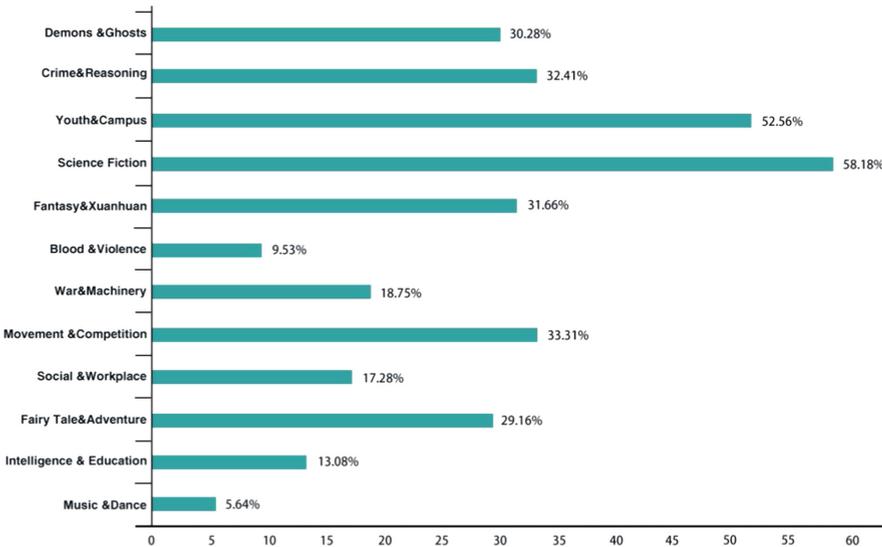

Fig. 3. Chinese audiences' favorite animation story themes

as *Yao-Chinese Folktales, Fog Hill of Five Elements* and *Doula Continent*, while the audience group of fantasy animation on the streaming media platform is older, and the creation of animation is also more adult, to meet different audience groups of different media.

The "Youth Campus" theme animation mainly focuses on the campus life as the story theme of animation works, mainly with friendship, love, adventure, and funny as the main elements. Students in adolescence tend to choose youth and campus themes that are more similar to their living and growing environment, and project their experiences and emotions into the characters by watching animation, and follow the characters to experience youth and campus life different from reality. Therefore, the animation works of youth and campus themes can better echo the students' current situation, problems, inner desire and other psychological activities, and can more resonate and release youth.

5   Conclusion

Although the development of animation art originates from the creator, it cannot be separated from the audience. Audience endows the value of animation works and the foundation of animation industry. For the emotional analysis and research of contemporary Chinese animation audience, this paper only attempts to explore from three aspects of emotional resonance, emotional comfort and emotional release, and analyze the aesthetic tendency and taste of contemporary Chinese animation audience. From the changes and development of Chinese animation films in recent years, we can see the changes in the emotional needs of Chinese animation audiences for animation films, from seeking perfect heroes to seeking ordinary heroes now, from seeking ideological education to seeking spiritual comfort now, from seeking sensory stimulation to seeking aesthetic experience now.

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