

# Analysis on Early Chinese Animation Film Music and Its Historical Status

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**Abstract**—Before 1949, Chinese animation film music develops quite far behind. Chinese animation film music experiences a long development history at early stage. It can be said that the creation of *Camels Offered Dance* is a milestone in the early stage of Chinese animation film music development. It realizes the transition from silence to sound in the early stage of Chinese animation film development, greatly enhancing the appeal of animation film. From 1935 when the first sound animation film appears to 1949 when the new China is founded, China's early animation film's musical elements get further enriched during the 14 years of extremely hard and bitter exploration and development. *Scenes of City Life*, an animation work created by He Luting, relies on its animation music to become a milestone film in China's animation film music history and it is the "first" Chinese animation film with composed score. Afterwards, *Princess Iron Fan*, an animation music created by Lu Zhongren, further pushes Chinese animation film music to a new development period. Animation film music is an important component of animation film. It meets audience's basic audio and visual needs during watching. The film music and animation film complement each other, improving the animation film's appeal and contributing to arousing audience's emotional resonance. This paper starts with various development phases of Chinese animation film music at early stage and combines with relevant features of Chinese animation film music at early stage in order to explore Chinese animation film music at early stage and its historical status.

**Keywords**—early Chinese animation film; features; music-picture relation; historical status

## I. INTRODUCTION

The time before 1949 is a development phase of Chinese animation film music. From 1935 to 1949, Chinese animation film takes a qualitative leap---from silent film to sound film. Besides, Chinese animation film achieves the transition from "accompanying" sound to combination of music and pictures. After carefully analyzing development history of Chinese animation film in these 14 years, we can find that early Chinese animation film mainly shows two features: The first feature is carrying special historical implication---the film is endowed with historical consciousness of the second sino-Japanese war and war of

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liberation in its own special way and plays an important historical function; the second feature is that animation film starts to be integrated with other image elements(script, pictures, vocal music etc.), providing rich and wonderful audio and visual experience. In general, early Chinese animation film combines images and sounds and reflects some social landscape in its own unique presentation form and through its own unique technique of expression, representing Chinese history's cultural mark of that period of time from multiple perspectives. As an important constituent of early Chinese animation film, the main significance of music lies in forming narrative elements of animation film and enriching animation film's pattern of manifestation and expressive force. Since 1935 when *Scenes of City Life*, an early Chinese animation film, applies music in animation film interruption, early Chinese animation film music gets significant development. For example, *Catch a Rat in the Hole*, an animation produced in 1948, and *Princess Iron Fan*, a later animation film, apply various patterns of manifestation of music-picture combination. *Princess Iron Fan* is the first feature length animation in China and it can be called the synthesizer of early Chinese animation film music. To explore connotation features, development history and historical status of early Chinese animation film music has dual significance: For one thing, it is representation of and analysis on early Chinese film music history and modern Chinese music history; for another thing, it is exploration on artistic history of early Chinese animation film.

## II. DEVELOPMENT HISTORY OF EARLY CHINESE ANIMATION FILM

Originally, Chinese animation film is derived from Shanghai. It is in about 20th century that foreign animation comes to Shanghai. According to the recall of Wan Laiming(a famous Chinese animation director), "As one of the main films of art action film, animation comes from Europe and America and arrives in China in the early 20th century after appearance of silent film."<sup>1</sup> Zhang Huilin thinks that American animation film comes to China in 1920s or so. The first batch of silent animation film coming to China is as follows: *Popeye*, *Miss Bobby*, *Jump Out of the Ink Bottle* and so on. Recreation ground in Shanghai at that time regards these animation films as an entertainment item (called

<sup>1</sup> Oral account of Wan Laiming, please see Sun Wukong and I for details.

“Raree show activity”) to show people. Accurate time of these animation films to arrive in China remains to be verified. However, it is undoubted that these foreign animation films truly arouse Chinese audience’s curiosity and attract a great batch of animation film fan’s creation desire at the same time. Since then, Chinese animation film creators start the long and twisted animation film creation road. As to research on early Chinese animation film history, we have to mention Wan brothers. Enlightened by western animation film thought, Wan brothers start the creation road of early Chinese animation film. By virtue of amazing perseverance, they create the first animation advertisement---*Shu Zhengdong Chinese Typewriter* (1922) in extremely poor environment (outdated imaging equipment). Wan brothers’ creative behavior can be called a milestone in Chinese animation film history, formally unfolding the prelude of Chinese animation film (silent) creation. In the following period of time, China uses different animation film technologies to create *Row Studio*<sup>2</sup> (the first true live synthesis animation film). In this animation film, Wan brothers use celluloid copy technique and coordinate image and background. Since then, Chinese animation film develops rapidly and animation film with diversified social significance appears, like *Yili Soft Drink* with advertising significance, *Paper Man Makes Trouble* with recreational significance and *The Hare and the Tortoise* as edutainment. What should be especially mentioned is a series of animation films which are created at that time based on saving the nation through the war, like *Countryman Quickly Wakes Up*, *Mourning History of the Nation*, *Cooperate with Absolute Sincerity* and so on. None of them fails to reflect distinct social value. Birth of these animation films marks that Chinese animation film starts to integrate with national history closely.

### III. ANALYSIS ON DEVELOPMENT HISTORY OF EARLY CHINESE ANIMATION FILM MUSIC AND ITS FEATURES

#### A. Development History of Animation Film Music

Xu Baogeng, a film writer and theorist, points out: People’s ears and eyes are connected, based on which people always hope to use ears and eyes simultaneously and to coordinate multiple sense organs in work in order to create “all-round sensual pleasure”<sup>3</sup>. As a kind of artwork created by human, it is the same to artistic pursuit of music and picture beauty in animation film. In 1930s, foreign animation film creators try pursuing and creating the kind of animation film which can bring comprehensive visual and audio experience to audience. This film creation thought quickly influences development direction of Chinese animation film. Foreign sound film brings giant market pressure on China’s silent film. Therefore, early Chinese animation film creators start to try creating sound animation in order to step out of the market dilemma. Facing the same outdated technique and equipment, Wan brothers continuously explore and conduct experiments and gradually master recording technology,

laying the foundation for creating animation films combining music and pictures. In 1935, Wan brothers create *Camels Offered Dance*, the first early Chinese sound animation film. Like this, early Chinese animation film develops into a new historical phase---the era of music-picture combination.

#### B. Features of Early Animation Film Music

Through exploration on development history of early Chinese animation film music, we find that the course of early Chinese animation film to develop from silent to sound and from sound to music-picture combination is also a transitional process from “sound” to “music”. In the 14 years from 1935 to 1949, there are about 20 sound animation films produced in China, and they mainly fall into the following three types.

1) *Commercial film*: Commercial film is a great type of early Chinese film. It is not animation film in the full sense. Usually, animation clips are inserted into the feature film(called video-in-video). For instance, sound or silent animation clips are inserted in *The Burning of the Red Lotus Temple* (1928), *Vanilla Beauty* (1933), *Street Angel* (1936) and so on. It should be pointed out that music animation clip in *Scenes of City Life*<sup>4</sup>, a musical comedy produced in 1935, can be called the representative of early Chinese animation film music composed by He Luting(Musical notation is shown below).

The image displays musical notation for a scene from 'Scenes of City Life'. It consists of three systems of staves. The first system is labeled 'Marching speed' and features a treble clef staff with a key signature of one flat and a 2/4 time signature. It includes a first ending bracket labeled 'I.' and a 'Trbn.' (Trumpet) part. The second system continues the melody with a 'VI.' (Violin) part. The third system is labeled 'Synchronous music-picture rhyme' and shows a 'Trbn.' part with a rhythmic pattern that syncs with the visual elements of the scene.

Animation film clip is different from animation film, but its important contribution to early Chinese animation film music is non-negligible. Interlude music of *Scenes of City Life* as shown above is concise and light. The music and the film’s animation images bring out the best in each other. At the same time, insertion time of this interlude music is worth studying. The interlude content is: Li Menghua(the hero) and Zhang Xiaoyun(the heroine) see an animation short film when watching a film in the cinema. The scene is similar to another scene when Li Menghua holds the gift and goes to Zhang Xiaoyun’s home and runs into Wang Junsan, a

<sup>2</sup> Wan Laiming, Mei Xuechou, “Wan Brothers” Animation Design and Shoot, Released by the Great Wall Film Company.

<sup>3</sup> Xu Baogen, Film Lecture Notes.

<sup>4</sup> Written and Directed by Yuan Muzhi, Art Design and Animation Rendering by Wan Brothers.

businessman. The animation insert accompanied by the music truly represents scenes of life of figures in the film through the "video-in-video" technique and reveals film roles' traits of character through virtual and exaggeration (performance characteristics of animation) technique. Film animation mainly adopts narrative repetition technique to endow the leading role of the film with comedy effect of "seeing his/her own clumsy mind". Zhu Tianwei, a film music theorist, comments: "He Luting creates vivid and jocular music for this animation insert." This animation film insert is significant for development of early Chinese animation film music: usher in the creation pattern of early Chinese animation film and provide operational experience (reference) for film animation music creation. It is worthwhile to point out that since *Camels Offered Dance*, a sound animation work produced in the same year with this animation music clip, loses its video, this animation music created by He Luting actually becomes the first early Chinese "animation film" music.

2) *Promotional film*: Modern China experiences a period of social turmoil. Under the background of safeguarding national territory and combating survival crisis, early Chinese animation film and music scream for national "survival and liberation" in a unique pattern of manifestation. Animation film music of this period reveals distinct social function: character of publicity. A great batch of excellent animation film music works appear. As to sound animation film music works broadcasting anti-Japanese war, based on the current existed case record, there is *Second Episode of Anti-Japanese Songs*, a collection of a part of music works which includes three works: *The River All Red*, *Back Home and Ballad of the Great Wall*, *Anti-Japanese Slogans Cartoon and Song of the Anti-Japanese War including He Luting's Collecting Winter Clothing and March of the Volunteers*. It is worthwhile to point out that *March of the Volunteers* is the representative among numerous anti-Japanese war music, which combines cartoon animation and activity screen, interpreting the main body content of *March of the Volunteers* completely and deeply. Take *Second Episode of Anti-Japanese Songs* as an example. As a promotional film with anti-Japanese war theme shot by early Chinese film studio, it has distinct social significance and it is very significant in encouraging the whole nation to fight against the enemy. It includes *The River All Red and Ballad of the Great Wall*, two songs. The main style of *The River All Red* is performing the song twice in picture making. The first performance is matched with fixed picture: Take liner notes as the main visual window and the singer shows himself/herself, clearly showing the singer's facial expression and psychological mentality. At the same time, there is a small circle on the animation image and it moves with changes of the rhyme of the music, creating a strong rhythm. The second performance is chorus. Watching the animation image, the appearance and spirit are combined. Its composition of picture is bold and unconstrained with rough lines, bringing out the fighting scene of "Chinese

military officers" and "Japanese samurai" incisively and vividly. Analyzing from the work's music and picture technology, its animation image increases the work's dynamic and brings out the best in each other with lyrics, sending out a vigorous and remote atmosphere of anti-Japanese war songs. Analyzing from the work's music and picture style, Chinese ink painting technique with a long history is used in picture making and figure images show a dramatic style as whole. Shi Cu<sup>5</sup> comments: "This work's whole animation picture is formed on the basis of Yue Fei's *The River All Red*. Relying on it, it has distinct national color. Its background adopts techniques of Chinese ink painting, displaying distinct national style.

3) *Documentary animation film music*: In this period, Chinese animation creators also develop some animation films and music with documentary theme. One representative is *Everlasting Regret*, a puppet documentary. The work falls into five parts. It is long color documentary film telling the three points of life. At the same time, it is incorporated into *A View of China*, a grand documentary, with two kinds of dialogue: English version and French version. This work's music takes Kun Opera as its keynote. Character shape and costume design show ingenuity, returning to the ancients and displaying a kind of distant and vigorous style.

In general, early Chinese animation film music experiences a systematic development period. Although silent animation film still exists at that time, music displays its unique function in the "sound" form unconsciously in animation film. Music brings vividness and strong appeal to animation film, attracting a great batch of animation film creators to assiduously seek combination of animation film and music. Therefore, this period can be called the beginning of early Chinese animation film music development.

#### IV. ANALYSIS ON HISTORICAL STATUS OF EARLY CHINESE ANIMATION FILM MUSIC

As to early Chinese animation film music, we mainly research the works produced from 1935 to 1949. In these 14 years, China's political environment, cultural environment, economic environment and social environment are in a dynamic changing process. Thus, we should consider the current complex social and cultural environment when analyzing animation film music works of this period. It is undoubted that animation film music continuously grows and develops in the music system mainly consisting of traditional music and fresh music under the complex social and cultural environment of this period, having non-negligible cultural significance and historical status.

##### A. Analyzing from the Perspective of Cultural Development

Early Chinese animation film represents a course of development of Chinese music culture and opens up a brand new way to develop music art. Proper combination of music with commercial film, promotional film and documentary

<sup>5</sup> Please see Shi Cu's Animation and Cartoon for details.

film greatly pushes forward the transition of animation film from monolithic "visual sense" to diversified "visual and audio sense", further enriching figure images in animation film. In today's view, early Chinese animation film music is rather immature. However, it contributes to combination of animation film and music and fills up the gap of early Chinese animation film vocal music and brings more excellent aesthetic experience to audience.

#### *B. Analyzing from the Perspective of Social Value*

Based on social value analysis, early Chinese animation film music displays distinct social value and promotes anti-fascist spirit and liberation spirit. As already mentioned above, early Chinese animation film music starts to develop and extend its social value. In those eventful years, a great batch of excellent animation film music appears, like *The River All Red*, *Happy Farmhouse*, and *Emperor Dream* and so on. The animation film music becomes an important means to promote anti-fascist spirit and liberation spirit.

#### *C. Analyzing from the Perspective of Art Form*

Based on art form analysis, early Chinese animation film music realizes initial exploration into combination of music and animation and gradually integrates music into animation film, becoming one of the important manifestation patterns of the following animation film. For example, *Iron* is an early Chinese animation film. Based on the perspective of long animation film's art history, this film pushes animation film music to a new height of artistic form with refined and unique structure and strong sense of picture.

### V. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, early Chinese animation film experiences the transition from silent to sound and animation film music also experiences a circuitous and long development process. Early Chinese animation film music has important historical status. It further improves animation film's expressive force and will open up a fresh development path for musical art as well.

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