

Cultural and Traditional Symbols Beyond the Animated Form

Analysis on Nick Park's Film

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Abstract—As a traditional way of animation, stop-motion animation uses a camera to shoot a well-designed character prop model through continuous fine-tuning, and combines the captured photos to form a film. Nick Park's stop-motion film always insists on the beauty of the original ecological material, pursues and promotes the local national culture and artistic characteristics. Its unique character design, scene and prop design and artistic expression form have great influences in the UK and the world. Also, it has become a cultural symbol beyond the animated form.

Keywords—artistic expressions; character design; scene prop design; culture and traditional symbols

I. INTRODUCTION

In 1989, the TV premiere of stop-motion film "A Grand Day Out" directed by British director Nick Park set off a frenzy of love among the audience. The dream imagination, unique design and humor in the film won many praises. The story tells a series of humorous things that happened to the two protagonists, Wallace and Gromit, who made their own rocket launchers to find cheese of all tastes on the moon. And this interesting thing about finding cheese is related to the legends of the United Kingdom. In the legend of the United Kingdom, "Everybody knows the moon's made of cheese" (the moon is made of cheese), which is also the performance of national tradition and cultural connotation of Britain. In the coming decades, people's settings and images in Nick Park's series of stop-motion animated films enjoy popular supports. They have many followers around the world, and they have surpassed the existence of animated form, becoming the medium that spreads British culture and tradition.

II. THE UNIQUE ARTISTIC EXPRESSION IN NICK PARK'S FILM

Nick Park was born in Preston, England in 1958. He has created a number of excellent stop-motion animated films, including "Chicken Run", "Shaun the Sheep", "Wallace and Gromit" series, etc. These films are popular around the world. They are selected for the competition of the Oscars for six times, and they have won the awards for four times. On

November 25, 1997, Nick Park was awarded the British Empire Medal by the Queen of England.

A. Nick Park's Stop-motion Animation

Nick Park's stop-motion animation started with one of the series of "Wallace and Gromit" — "A Grand Day Out". In 1980, Nick Park, who studied animated film production at the National Film and Television School in the UK, began to create this film that would bring him great success in the future. In 1982, the founders of Aardman Animation, David Sproston and Peter Lord, came to the National Film and Television School to give lectures. They selected the two characters to play in the film, "Wallace and Gromit", and invited Nick Park to work for Aardman Animation. In 1985, Nick Park officially joined Aardman Animation, which influenced his life. Since then, he has directed and created a large number of clay animation series of stop-motion films. In 1993, "Wallace and Gromit — the Wrong Trousers" and "Wallace & Gromit — A Close Shave" were launched. In 2000, the first stop-motion animated film "Chicken Run" which makes character styling with actual size was created. In 2005, "Wallace & Gromit — the Curse of the Were-Rabbit" co-directed with Steve Box won the 78th Oscar for best animated feature film. In 2007, the clay animated series "Shaun the Sheep" of 6-7 minutes per episode was released. In 2008, Nick Park also directed the 30-minute short film "Wallace & Gromit — A Matter of Loaf and Death", which was also widely praised. These films are characterized with unique British style, relaxed and humorous characters. They have characters and scenes with a sense of "temperature" and "reality". Also, they have a large number of the audience and fans around the world. Aardman Animation he worked for became the world's top stop-motion animation company with clay materials.

Nick Park's experiments and explorations on clay animation, such as the design of styling and scenes, the application and research of materials and the development of unique artistic expressions of stop-motion animation, played an important role.

B. *Unique Artistic Value and Aesthetic Connotation*

Nick Park's film covers comprehensive forms of artistic expressions such as literature, drama, fine arts, design, architecture, music, and photography. In his films, he has incorporated a lot of crime and suspense elements. The short film "Wallace & Gromit — A Close Shave", "Wallace and Gromit — the Wrong Trousers", "Wallace & Gromit — A Matter of Loaf and Death", "Wallace & Gromit — the Curse of the Were-Rabbit", etc. have strong sense of horror film of the sixties and seventies from the design to the atmosphere, and then to the storyline. In the film, Nick Park has deeply portrayed the individual characteristics of the character, and the "styling" elements of the form, movement and expression. The film has both the texture of "real world" and the non-real world illusion.

All the objects designed and produced in Nick Park's films are like handicrafts. With unique simple, clumsy and exaggerated expression, the film can show the real world filled with various rules. The audience can feel his thoughts with emotional logic. As one of the important symbols of stop-motion animation, Nick Park makes full use of the material in his hand — clay to create a simple, natural, three-dimensional, dreamy artistic atmosphere. He can create and reveal the personalized features of the characters with wonderful performances. When the current cold machine and technology dominates the screen, the simplicity and authenticity of a clay fingerprint with a body temperature is always remembered.

III. THE CHARACTERS IN NICK PARK'S FILM AND THE "REAL" BEAUTY REPRODUCED BY SCENE DESIGN

"Animated character styling is designed to give each character a unique artistic appeal and vivid vitality."¹ The most essential feature of the "real" beauty of animated characters is to have vivid vitality and emotion, to fully express the humanistic spirit, and to have unique national cultural values and connotations.

A. *Character Styling Design and Feature Moulding in Nick Park's Films*

The animated character styling made of clay material is popular with its simple artistic features. The special clay material will make the character's exaggerated deformation have enjoyment and typicality than the traditional two-dimensional or three-dimensional computer animation.

In Nick Park's "Wallace and Gromit" series, Wallace presents the overall design with exaggerated facial features, simple and colorful costumes, and black big shoes. The design of the head, such as the eyes, nose, ears, etc., is created by using circular design elements. This cartoon-like symbolic character visual image highlights the image of British courtesy and gentleman. BBC News described Wallace and Gromit as the "most famous and popular stars in the UK", who even represented and enhanced the British image more than any officially appointed image

spokesperson. Each model in the film "Shaun the Sheep" takes 16 weeks from design to production, sharing 354 character models (116 sheep), more than 1000 eyes, more than 2,500 ankles, and more than 3,000 differently shaped mouths. And they are to express the different shapes of the character. A total of 1475 shots, 549,777 frames were taken, and 122,375 frames were eventually used. Shaun's "wool" in the film is wrapped in light and thin artificial hair on the model, the visual effect is very close to real wool. The design of the farmer is simplified, with a green leather jacket outside the yellow sweater. The lower body is paired with blue jeans, and the feet are worn with heavy water boots. These simple character styling designs truly depict the artistic expression characteristics conformed to the public aesthetics. The seemingly rough clay is embossed, but it reflects the most simple texture expression, showing clearly visible fingerprint. With humorous and funny expression design, it shows the "real" beauty of the hand-made clay animated film, fully demonstrating the special texture and artistic charm of the clay material, satisfying the audience's aesthetic experience and aesthetic taste.

People are in contact with the clay, and people are in contact with the camera. The feeling of intimacy, realism and temperature exhibited by the person and the person can't be expressible by other means of making animated films.

B. *Scene and Prop Design in Nick Park's Film*

Most of the scenes in the stop-motion animated film are created by the scene designers against the background of the story. Combining the scenes of real life, the designer uses the analog design or the reduced version design to make the creation with hands. Good scene design and production can greatly enhance the visual effect of the film, making the development of the plot more rich and compact. The true reproduction of the scene in the Nick Park's animated film provides endless possibilities for the authenticity of the film. "Chicken Run", "Shaun the Sheep", "Wallace and Gromit", "Wallace & Gromit — the Curse of the Were-Rabbit", "Wallace & Gromit — A Matter of Loaf and Death" are extremely complicated and exquisite, showing the realism and reflecting the unique sense of clay. And the overall layout is small. The details of the clothing are all amazing, full of childlike and wise.

Nick Park's film is a perfect combination of original beauty and texture of British humor and clay material. This is also reflected in the design and production of scenes and props. For example, in the "Wallace and Gromit" series, Wallace has painstakingly designed a machine to help people get up. The purpose of this machine is to properly tilt the bed in the bedroom on the second floor. Wallace can slide directly from the bed to the chair in the restaurant at the first floor. Wallace can wear his clothes accurately while slipping. For the very common and simple thing of getting up and dressing, the film has designed such a particularly complicated and precise machine, which seems ridiculous, but it is really impressive. Nick Park and Steve Box co-directed "Wallace & Gromit — the Curse of the Were-Rabbit". The film was produced by 30 animators and 250 staff members over a two-year period. The overall design of

¹ Wu Guanying. Animation styling design [M]. Beijing: Tsinghua University Press, 2005: 3.

a vegetable orchard in the film requires producing more than 700 vegetables and fruits, and more than 100 kinds of leaves. 2.8 tons of clay is used in this film. The whole scene is beautifully designed and realistic. At the same time, it shows the unique texture of clay and other materials. All the details are full of wisdom, subtle humor and romance.

IV. UNIQUE TRADITIONAL CULTURAL DISPLAY AND PLOT SETTING IN NICK PARK'S FILM

In Nick Park's films, the plot setting, the character and scene design, and the action design emphasize the persistence and development of the characteristics of the national personality. The special forms of artistic expression not only reflect the humor effect with British characteristics, but also contain the unique national cultural elements and unique national cultural characteristics of the UK. His works exude unique artistic expression. At the same time, the unique national culture of Britain has been recognized and endorsed globally.

A. *British Humor Plot Setting*

British humor is introverted, silent, weird, and embarrassing. It is embodied in the film, which mainly includes scene humor and language humor. The so-called situational humor refers to the humorous component set in a specific situation. For example, in the "Wallace & Gromit — the Curse of the Were-Rabbit", the "spoofing noise" between the two dogs in the fighting process belongs to the scene humor. Language humor is expressed as the witted language design, or through the extension and exaggeration of semantic meaning, it can achieve the humorous effect of the evolution and distortion of meaning. For example, in "Wallace & Gromit — the Curse of the Were-Rabbit", when Mrs. Mulch pushed her big pumpkin to desperately avoid the rabbit monster, everyone kept calling "Come back!". When the danger came, the rabbit monster began to chase Mrs. Mulch, Mulch turned and ran towards everyone, everyone shouted: "Go away!" This similar language design in the whole film makes the audience feel the unique British humor from time to time.

Nick Park often designs a large number of humorous plots that occur in specific situations, and uses self-deprecating failures, embarrassment and self-satisfaction to highlight the unique characteristics of British humor. For example, in the movie "Wallace & Gromit — a Close Shave", Princeton repeatedly "played" Wallace and Gromit. In "Shaun the Sheep", the farmer did get an ice cream without doing a good job. However, he did not eat the ice cream in the end, but got himself mud. In the "Wallace and Gromit" series without the narration, Nick Park has set a large number of unique British humorous performances to attract the audience, satisfying the emotional needs of the audience. Comparing the differences and summarizing the design techniques, it shows the cultural value and connotation of British culture.

As a native of England, Nick Park accurately grasps the unique humorous style of the British, and digs deeply into the nationality of British animation, making the film beyond

its own role story form, allowing the audience to further understand the traditional British national culture in the movie.

B. *The Embodiment of the Relationship Between Master and Servant in British Traditional Culture*

Before the 19th century, there was always an unequal relationship between the British servants and the masters. Until the late 19th century, the relationship between the master and the servant changed, and the free and equal employment relationship began to be established. As an authentic Englishman, Nick Park is very aware of the influence of the relationship between the master and the servant in the development of the British nation, which is fully demonstrated in his films.

The plot setting in the film "Wallace & Gromit — A Matter of Loaf and Death" reflect this point. When Wallace fell in love with the baker's death bane Piella Bakewell, he was completely unaware of the coming danger step by step. After his loyal partner, Gromit knowing Piella Bakewell's conspiracy, Gromit tried every means to rescue the owner, and even made the personal testing of poison. It can be said that Gromit is Wallace's most loyal servant. In the daily life, the relationship of "brothers", the mutual comfort for each other in the loss of love, and the partnerships embodied everywhere made the relationship between the two roles subtle and harmonious. Britain's unique harmonious master-servant relationship is implicit between them. In the "Shaun the Sheep" series, it tells the story of human beings and animals. The most vivid design is the master-servant relationship between dogs, sheep and humans. The most loyal "servant" in the film is Bitzer. It is loyal, duty, obey the master, and occasionally participate in the young sheep Shaun's crazy plan. Sometimes, it would do something ridiculous behind the back of the master. The whole film presents the relationship between master and servant with humor everywhere.

The setting in Nick Park's film reflects the insistence on the British nationality, excavating the unique artistic personality of British animated films. He uses the idea of stop-motion animation to explore the values of the nation, and the "nationality" will get a broader cognitive space and thinking space through stop-motion animation design and production.

V. CONCLUSION

Nick Park is good at drawing nutrients from the elements of national traditional culture. He takes daily life elements as a reference, comprehensively applies various elements, and creatively makes the innovation creation, and grasps the characteristics that can directly perceive real physical form of stop-motion animation. It has transcended the constraints and limitations of the form. The natural simplicity and unique and realistic material expression leave another visual beauty to the audience, and it is full of unique artistic charm.

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