

PROCEEDINGS ARTICLE

Research on the Construction of Female Images in Chinese Animated Films

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ABSTRACT

Nowadays, Chinese animated film has developed rapidly, and has made great progress in film expression, artistic form presentation, dynamic characterization of characters, etc. In addition, the female images in Chinese animated films have unique aesthetic characteristics and cultural connotation, and are changing with the development of the times. However, in recent years, there are few animated films with women as the main images. Besides, these animated films have the characteristics of simplification and stereotype in the shaping and construction of female images. Female image is an important part of animated films. By sorting out the female image characteristics in Chinese animated films, this study expounds the stereotyped creation phenomenon of animated films with female as the theme, analyzes the causes of the deviation of female image shaping, and explores the specific measures to construct diversified female images, in order to provide creation reference for the current animated films with the female as theme.

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1. INTRODUCTION

With the rapid development of digital media technology and people's growing demand for spiritual culture, the film and television animation industry all over the world is booming today, and Chinese animation has also entered a new era of rapid development. From the enlightenment era of Chinese shadow puppetry to the first audio animation "Rickshaw Boy" created by Wan brothers in China, to the birth of the world-famous animation "The sky" in the middle of the 20th century, and then to "Nezha", which has entered the top five box office in Chinese film history, "Jiang Ziya" and "white snake" have begun to occupy a place in the film market, and the development of Chinese animation has entered a mature period. However, behind this prosperous scene, the lack of animated works with the female as theme cannot be ignored. Throughout Europe, America, Japan and South Korea, there are many animated films with female as theme, which are constantly enriched in image depiction, but also endowed with new value connotation, and

continuously output and spread in the form of cultural symbols. However, development of Chinese animated films with female as theme in recent years presents the phenomenon of following a set routine. In addition, there are few animated films, and animated films have the characteristics of simplification and stereotype in female image and character.

2. CHARACTERISTICS OF FEMALE IMAGES IN CHINESE ANIMATED FILMS

In the long development of Chinese animated films, films with women as the main images are not the mainstream of the whole film market, and do not occupy the main position in Chinese animated films. The female image characteristics in animated films are also more one-sided and unitary.

First, female is the dependent image centered on patriarchy. Simone de Beauvoir pointed out in the book "The Second Sex" [1]: "It is the patriarchy of a woman staying at home, which determines that she is

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emotional, introverted and introverted." It is under the guidance of male consciousness that women's "internality" is formed, believing that women are generated and endowed, not born. It was especially true in the traditional feudal society. Women depended on their father, husband and son and did not have the ability of self-independence. Such female images could also be seen in traditional animated films, such as China's first full-length animated film "Princess Iron Fan". Inspired by Disney's "Snow White", Wan brothers organized the shooting of the animated film "Princess Iron Fan" with national characteristics. Although the film title is "Princess Iron Fan", the actual protagonists are still Tang Monk and apprentices. In the plot setting, the reason why Princess Iron Fan lent palm-leaf fan is that she needs to save her husband Bull Demon King and gives up her strong character. In the "Golden Conch", the female protagonist is diligent and hard-working to help the young people cook and work, highlighting the characteristics of kindness, blandness and virtue. In the later two love films "Princess Peacock" and "Butterfly Spring", the protagonists do not pursue love actively, but still are eager for the rescue of the prince or become a butterfly. These females show the second sexual characteristics of women in the patriarchal society.

Second, it is the exaggerated image of female villains. The female images in Chinese animated films not only have the characteristics of kindness and virtue, but also have the evil. For example, Su Daji in Chinese animation is often masked with exaggerated awl face and sharp voice. For another example, in "Pleasant Goat and Big Big Wolf", Wolnie is hot-tempered and sometimes takes Wolffy to vent their anger. In the modeling, Wolnie is masked with dramatic eyeliner and dressed in the Queen's dress. Then, the image of hen-pecked husband is highlighted. In the modeling design of the villain snake mother in "White Snake", black red or black purple is used to render character and present a negative image. Such a dramatic image will make the villain's heart clear at a glance and show the traditional social civilizing idea.

Finally, it is the female image with the rise of independent consciousness. In recent years, due to the development of feminism, the public began to pay more attention to the stories of women, and more and more animation works focusing on women or showing women's unique charm have been launched one after another. From 2017 to 2020, the frequency and importance of female roles were prominent, and the proportion of works described from the first perspective of women was further expanded. For example, the brave and steadfast girl "Chun" in "Big

Fish & Begonia" is willing to repay the kindness of human teenager "Kun" and exchange half of her life with the witch. Although Chun's personality characteristics are criticized by the audience, its controversy also shows the complexity of the heroine's personality and the creator's multifaceted value discussion on the role. Subsequently, in Chinese cartoon "Scissor Seven", which was launched in 2018, they created a group of highly popular women with different identities but distinct personality characteristics. They chose to stand up and give full play to their strengths to protect their homes in times of crisis. In these animated films, female characters have more independent and complete personalities, break through the shackles of tradition, and show plump and diversified female image characteristics.

3. STEREOTYPED CREATION PHENOMENON IN ANIMATED FILMS WITH FEMALE AS THEME

In the development process of animated films with female as theme, female characters are also changing from single personality characteristics to diversified personality characteristics. However, the stereotyped characteristics of female images can still be found in a large number of animated films. Women with different growth environment, professional background and even skin color and height may be shaped in the same way, which cannot highlight the characteristics of different styles and temperament.

First, female character design is formulaic. In character design, the lovely and beautiful appearance corresponds to the good character, and the ugly and cunning shape corresponds to the evil, without reversal and transformation, showing an extreme binary opposition. In the design of hairstyle and facial features, it follows the principle that the face is the index of the heart. The positive characters are usually kind-hearted, fresh and pleasant, using light makeup and soft facial features, while dark makeup and facial features with uncoordinated proportions are used to shape the rebel images. In terms of costumes and props, when expressing the image of kind-hearted women, the costumes are in high bright colors, and the setting of the scene is also dominated by warm colors to reflect the warm atmosphere. In the performance of evil images of women, cloaks and cool colors with strong contrast are often used, and the overall scene also presents a dark atmosphere. In this way, the extreme externalized image shaping enables the viewers to discover the good and bad of the role at a glance, which is not only not conducive to the

creation of an emotional role, but also not conducive to the rational development of the later plot.

The second is the stylized shooting of women's stories. Independent women in modern society have a strong sense of autonomy. They are no longer just attached to the family and eager for equality and growth. If the creation of women in animated films still copy the character settings in traditional stories and do not carry out realistic adaptation, it will inevitably be divorced from current values. However, adaptation does not mean making things up. For example, in the Disney animated film "Hua Mulan", Hua Mulan joined the army for her father in the selected Chinese folk story, but a story of women constantly surpassing herself and growing up in difficulties is added to the core of the animation. Therefore, in the process of creating Chinese films, it is necessary to constantly tap women's self-consciousness, rather than simply copy the traditional stories mechanically.

4. REASONS FOR DEVIATION OF FEMALE IMAGE SHAPING IN ANIMATED FILMS

With the development of times and the improvement of social civilization, the social attitude towards women has also changed constantly. In the feudal society, "lack of talent in a woman is a virtue, and it is required to serve both the husband and the child at home." Such requirements have become shackles to women's survival and development. The femininity of modern society is no longer attached to the patriarchal society, but has a place in the workplace, and also a job that can support herself, which has become a common picture of modern society. Animated film is the epitome and reflection of modern society, presenting different social backgrounds and characters in life. Nowadays, many animated films ignore the development and changes of the times and present the female image in the cultural context of feudal tradition, leading to the phenomenon of female aphasia in animated films. The reasons for this aphasia and deviation are also diverse.

The presentation of animation is subordinate to the social direction and environment, accompanied by certain commercial attributes. In the context of globalization, animation in all countries has developed rapidly. In terms of output, China's animated film output has entered the stage of accelerated development since 2015. Except 2017, the average annual output of animated films from 2015 to 2019

was 51. Although the number is large, the quality is really unsatisfactory, and the market is an important channel to examine the input and output of film production. From 2016 to 2020, there were 33% - 45% of Chinese animated films with box office less than 10 million yuan, and even 70.6% in 2020. Therefore, animated production companies begin to cater to the preferences of the audience and the market trend. Through the recommendation of big data, they begin to imitate, copy and derive successful animation cases. However, there is no core of independent character, and a large number of rough and shoddy animated films are born. In order to catch up with the release progress, they blindly follow the wind direction of the market, and the character image modeling does not conform to the story structure, which is common that the situation does not meet the social background. At the same time, Chinese animation industry blindly follows the female design in foreign films and has not carried out localization reform. The audience's aesthetics will inevitably have a change with different cultural environments. The animated films created with flow and IP are eager to enter the international market, lack of fine playwright and characters. The scenes in the animation directly apply the template, and the stories directly copy the foreign story structure. Such animation adaptation will inevitably lead to the simplification and emptiness of the characters in the animation.

On the other hand, Chinese animation still pays less attention to female characters than male characters, which is because women have formed a certain thinking set of different gender status of men and women in the context of traditional patriarchal culture. When choosing jobs, they prefer to choose relatively stable and safe jobs, such as teachers and nurses. In the process of educating their children, girls are taught to be clever and sensible, and boys should be brave and enterprising. When the public is generally trapped in this collective unconscious thought, with the rapid development of technology and dissemination of new media, the previous women's movement cannot fundamentally change this tradition accumulated for many years in the face of the widespread mass unconsciousness and new media. In this collective unconsciousness, art creators will portray women as the image expected by the public. Then it will be output in the form of animated film. The animated film mentioned above is a presentation of social and cultural consciousness. In this way, the stereotyped female image created in the collective unconscious is output in the form of secondary film and television with the presentation of animated film, which intensifies the stereotyped

phenomenon of contemporary female image. As a result, there is an inevitable dilemma that "as an individual, women have disappeared, and is only as cut parts, living in the aesthetic activities dominated by male culture".

5. CONSTRUCTING DIVERSIFIED FEMALE ANIMATION IMAGES

Stereotyped construction methods are widely used in film, animation and other cultural and art industries. For example, among most cartoon images, the princess is beautiful, helpless and passive. At the same time, she wants to be rescued and hopes to live a happy life through marriage with men. However, with the continuous excavation of women's consciousness in recent years and being endowed with new significance and value, the construction of women's image in animation in various countries is also developing in a diversified direction. For example, Disney Company shot the film "Frozen". The image shaping of the heroine in it conforms to the value trend of the new era. The heroine in Japan's "The Girl Who Leapt Through Time" accidentally obtains the ability to cross time and space, and uses this ability to constantly solve contradictions and problems in life for people around him, and bravely face the new era and the future. In several films such as "Big Fish & Begonia" released in 2016 and "white snake" released in 2019, it can be seen that the creators begin to consciously polish the female images, which win a good box office and reputation. Therefore, the female images in the film need to change constantly and give meaning to the new era. Further efforts are needed to shape the female roles with independent ideology, diversified personality and localization on the basis of combining the national culture.

5.1. Exploring the Richness of Female Roles and Spreading Aesthetic Diversity

In shaping the character of the role, female characters with flesh and blood and rich emotions can not only show women's tenacity and courage, but also perform women's confusion under pressure. In addition to perfect female characters, characters with certain shortcomings are closer to life and reality, which can stimulate the resonance of viewers. In terms of clothing and modeling, it is suggested to learn from the characteristics of traditional clothing and spread local culture. It is required not to stay on the surface of clothing from other countries. Japanese animation often implants kimonos into animation characters for cultural promotion. For the costume design of Chinese

female characters, it is necessary to draw design sources from national costumes. The costumes of the Chinese nation include not only costumes of Han nationality, but also the styles of different dynasties and nationalities. Such rich localized creative resources are the sources of inspiration for creators, which can be selected and applied. In terms of character modeling, hairstyle and makeup, it also needs localized design. The application of European and American characters such as big eyes, white and curly hair in Chinese traditional stories will produce a sense of abrupt contradiction.

In terms of role selection, creators should not only prefer white young and thin girls. In recent years, due to the rendering of the media, the public begin to be blindly obsessed with the female image of being white young and thin, and even regard it as the beauty. As the image builder of animation works, it is suggested to avoid this trend. First of all, beauty is diversified, not single. The naive beauty of children, the pure beauty of girls, the mature beauty of adult women and the late beauty of elderly women are the representatives and incarnations of beauty. The audiences of animated films are not only adults, but also underage children. When instilling the concept of beauty, it is necessary to focus more on the highlighting of spiritual beauty or contradictory character, not just on appearance, nor female images according to the aesthetic standards catered to current people. The shaping of images should be rooted in national culture rather than the extreme aesthetic orientation in a short period of time.

5.2. Improving Cultivation of Professional Talents and Constructing the Personality Charm of Females

The root of creating female animated films is to cultivate talents and build industrial development. Chinese animation production companies and production teams are still lacking for the whole animation market. Although major universities have set up animation majors, they are talents majoring in painting skills and special effects production, and there are very few screenwriters for animation story scripts. Writers and screenwriters with a certain level are unwilling to engage in the creation of animation story scripts because of certain prejudice and lack of understanding of the animation industry, which is precisely an important link in the animation industry chain. At the same time, to tell female stories and create works based on women, it is suggested to actively explore the participation of female screenwriters and female animation creators, and

explore the richness of female roles from the perspective of women. The lack of animated films with female as theme is caused by many reasons. The first is the historical problem of feudal society. In feudal society, women's position in the family is generally subordinate. Therefore, there are relatively few traditional stories with female theme. In addition, women's due education and equal opportunities to read and recognize characters have only gradually formed in modern times. Only a few female writers, female screenwriters and even female directors have appeared in recent years. Therefore, these reasons lead to the lack of female works and the lack of female creators. However, the animation film market urgently needs art works from a female perspective, rather than works of female theme written only from a male perspective.

At the same time, absorbing foreign creation methods does not mean directly applying the blueprint of foreign women's growth stories. The creation of animated films requires a certain story script, the screenwriter's overall mastery of the story, and the realistic adaptation of the characters. The first is the story script. The Chinese nation has a long cultural history. On this basis, there are countless national stories, novels and poems, containing inexhaustible source of inspiration for creators to adapt from traditional national works. However, the creation of traditional national stories or traditional folk images should be based on the present, not only copy the stories for the preparation of modern scripts, but also take into account the real social problems and modern values in social life. Secondly, in terms of character shaping, it is suggested to not only shape a single image of the binary opposition between justice and evil, but also excavate the human nature and shape the plump and diverse characters. Only in this way can the audience have a sense of substitution, empathy with the role, experience the charm contained in the role and convey the values of the story itself. Thirdly, creators can learn from the characterization, but can't copy the story core of

European and American countries. Western films advocate the concept of personal heroism. The protagonist first experiences the difficulties in life, and then has the super ability that ordinary people can't reach, in order to support justice, fight against evil forces and save the earth. If all creators use this story structure for characterization and fall into the inherent creative thinking, Chinese female animation films need to be rooted in the nation, tap the rich charm of women, highlight the unique style of women and construct the deep value of women.

6. CONCLUSION

Today, with the vigorous development of China's animation industry, it is necessary to increase animation works with female themes to enrich the diversified needs of the market. At the moment when women's consciousness continues to penetrate into all fields, it is necessary to abandon stereotype and simplification in the shaping of women's character; it is suggested to be close to reality and the current in the creation of story background; it is required to output diversified aesthetic concepts in values; and it is better to break the stereotyped description of women from a single male perspective. All the above are urgent problems for creators. Spreading the unique charm and value of women, eliminating the prejudice and differences between the sexes, and creating modern female animation works with the spirit of the times are of great significance to promote the development of Chinese animation and improve national image and cultural exchange.

REFERENCES

- [1] Simone de Beauvoir. *The Second Sex* [M], translated by Kelu Zheng. Shanghai Translation Publishing House, 2011. (in Chinese)