



The return and revival of Chinese style animation

-- Take " Yao-Chinese Folktales" as an example

Yuhao Liu

School of Journalism and Communication, China Xi'an International Studies University,
Shaanxi, Xi'an, 710018, China

3115812928@qq.com

Abstract. This paper starts with the text analysis of the short collection of Chinese-style art animation " Yao-Chinese Folktales ", and considers how Chinese-style animation displays the Chinese philosophical thinking of Chinese-style animation through narrative and thinking modes and successfully shapes the Oriental aesthetic implication from four dimensions, namely narrative structure and character image shaping, animation thinking and modeling design, symbol and metaphor, and film value definition.

Keywords: narrative structure, image building, symbolic metaphor, audio-visual language, cultural connotation, aesthetic implication, value definition.

1 Introduction

On January 1, 2023, Shanghai Art Film Studio and Bilibili co-produced the animated short collection " Yao-Chinese Folktales " as the year's opening hit the whole Internet, its emotional resonance with the audience and the unique artistic style of Shanghai Art Film Studio several times on Weibo hot search, only three episodes played and obtained a 9.3 Douban, B station 9.9 super high score. The film " Yao-Chinese Folktales " uses a unit drama model similar to Netflix's "Love Death Robot", each episode has a different style, and its story is completely different. The film uses eight picture styles such as two-dimensional, paper-cut and ink painting to interpret Chinese aesthetics from multiple perspectives based on China's excellent traditional culture. While cutting into real life, it brings strong thinking to the audience. The first episode of " Yao-Chinese Folktales ", "Summer of Monsters" (Nobody), as the opening work, its practical significance is that the monster society with extremely absurd elements cleverly maps the social animal culture in real life, so as to trigger people's thinking about real life.(Fan K.K, 2021)^[4]

2 About Narrative Structure and Character Image Shaping

As an animated short film, *Summer of Monsters* is short in terms of media form. As a result, the film lacks a strong sense of inclusion due to its length of film and few contradictions and turns, and it is difficult to form a stereotypical plot of Hollywood movies, resulting in a low sense of identity between the film audience and the story characters. The problems such as poor narrative ability, single creation form and limited imagination are always the shortcomings of Chinese comics creation. The short film "*Summer of Monsters*" follows the story structure of "transition".(Wang A, 2023)^[6]The film is divided into 2 minutes, 4 minutes, 6 minutes, 10 minutes, 14 minutes and 16 minutes, and explains the fuse of events, the emergence of oppression and contradiction, the escalation of characters' evil consciousness, the awakening of characters' good consciousness, the turning point of oppression and contradiction, and the end of oppression and contradiction respectively. The main line of the film is to ambush Monkey King and his companions to prepare the trap before and after the work, in the film to prepare the trap as the "starting", and at the end of the film, the arrival of the four Tang monk masters and disciples is the "combination" of the story, the "cheng" and "turn" in the film mainly exist in the mood changes of the pig demon. The tragic death of the crow, the simple wish of the mother, the work experience of being squeezed, the worship and yearning for Wukong and his companions. The ending of the film is unexpectedly reversed, which uses Monkey King's "stick" to drive the audience from a warm world into the cruel and cold-blooded demon world, and then Monkey King's hand to pull the audience back to the warm world. Let the audience in the experience of the warm world is no longer a simple warmth, but our real life with cruelty as the tone, but there are warm moments of the real world. This not only gives the audience a strong and huge identity in the narrative structure, but also enables the audience to provide sufficient critical consciousness while watching the film.

From the aspect of character image shaping, the background of the film is a monster society with absurd elements, and for the audience, it is difficult to make the audience have a strong sense of substitution, and the reason why the film has a strong sense of substitution and identity is because the characters in the story have humanity. The work of the little pig demon in the film resonates with the mood of the workers in the real society, thus enhancing the audience's sense of substitution. In the first part of the film at the beginning of 10 seconds, the lines of the part of the daily work and life of words such as patrol, lazy sleep, meetings, so that the audience has a mild identity of the pig demon; In the second and third parts, the correct actions of the Little pig's demon are regarded as provocation by the leaders, they are punished for desertion, and the pressure of the upper level is transferred to the lower level people, which makes the audience realize that the Little Pig's demon is just like the audience watching the movie. In the fourth part, in order to cook the Tang monk meat to buy condiment on the village, heard from the crow of the Tang monk master and apprentice a line of rumors, after Mr. Storytelling has been verified, and let him more surprised is that Monkey King and other disciples turned out to be monsters, and the magic, this is the pig to really start the starting point of psychological transformation. When the pig demon returned home after buying materials and bought steamed buns for his mother and family, he tried to be

proud that his boss attached importance to his work outside, and his mother cared about the pig to drink more water, and the audience was firmly bound to the role of the pig demon. From this part of the plot, it not only supports the warm structure of the whole story, but also shows the audience a cruel world view, and makes the audience realize from the characterization that "I" is "piggy demon" and "piggy demon" is "me". Compared with other domestic animations, whether it is *Monkey King: Hero Is Back*, *The Devil of Nezha*, *The Assassin 567*, or *The Bad Man in the River's Lake*, the themes of the above outstanding Chinese cartoons are all based on the adaptation of the myth or the emptiness of the text, but the connection between the literary value and the reality dimension is shallow, and even lacks humanistic care. The "Summer of Little Monsters" takes the Chinese myth "Journey to the West" as the story background, prioritizing the script, with the theme "Nobody" as the center, so that people will issue "Is this really a journey to the West?" At the same time, reflecting on the real world.

3 About Animation Thinking and Modeling Design

In today's era, China's animation industry has entered the era of "comprehensive 3D", and the contrast between various animation manufacturers is often the fidelity of the model and the explosion of the visual effect, and even the phenomenon of only doing a good job of the model and visual effect while ignoring the main story line. Shanghai Art Film Studio once put forward the factory motto of "don't imitate others, don't repeat yourself", on this basis, the predecessors led by artist Xu Jingda created different styles of animation such as ink painting and paper cutting.(Chen Ling, 2020)^[3].

The character performance of the animation in this film is different from the popular character performance in the market at present in that its action performance design does not carry out too much perspective. Taking "Little Pig Demon" as the protagonist of the stage play, the audience can calmly and calmly observe the emotion brought by its detailed movements and shots. As the opening work of Shanghai Art Film Studio this year, the constructive significance it provides to the contemporary Japanese drama lies in that the picture presentation in the film does not need to show the high and accurate perspective accuracy and painting accuracy, but more attention should be paid to whether the character performance conforms to the whole system of the drama, and whether the whole performance system conforms to the whole style of the work.

For example, some pictures do not use more perspective effect, or even too many exquisite details, only through a flat panoramic scene, the use of bamboo as the foreground shelter, to separate the bottom class workers such as frogs from the bottom class staff management such as bear boss, so that they form two completely different worlds. It briefly and accurately describes the emotion that the director wants to express to the audience and the difference between the bottom class workers and the management in the story. Although such a design is out of the mainstream contemporary evaluation system, its simple and uncomplicated design is well designed and vivid.

In terms of character image design, this film adheres to the Chinese painting art since the Han and Tang dynasties to write the spirit in form, and usually uses line modeling as the main body size to distinguish the class and powerful of the monster. Among

them, the most obvious and three-dimensional use of the method of imagination is the haggard performance of the little monsters after overtime.

The image design of the characters in the film draws from the materials of Chinese painting, door god painting and murals, and mostly adopts the colors of blue, green, red, white and black commonly used in folk painting, and attaches great importance to the matching of clothing colors and characters' identities. Most of the monsters use dark light, while the Tang Monk and his party in the imagination of the Piglet Demon are changed into bright and lively colors, and the colors of the Wolf's head and bear's head are both cyan and black, while the colors of other monsters significantly weaken their dark properties, reflecting the characters' personality and identity through colors. Therefore, the audience can quickly know the good and evil of the characters in the picture, and through the special design of the characters, the audience can subconsciously accept the background of the story. Such plot design skills are exactly the ingenuity of Shanghai Art Film Studio.(Bobrowska, O. 2023)^[2].

4 About Symbols and Metaphors

In terms of plot content, the metaphors contained in various symbols in the film can also be seen everywhere, including the oppression from the middle class, the mutual persecution between the bottom classes, and the mutual control of ideas, which further reflects the world of monsters like our human world.(Wu S. 2020)^[9].

4.1 Oppression From the Middle Class

In Langlang Mountain, the oppression of the middle class against the bottom class is carried out throughout the film. As a middle class leader, what Xiong does is only to require his subordinates to do obedient work, and as a leader, he does not allow his subordinates to disobey his orders even if he is wrong and his subordinates are right. As a member of the middle class, just because his men did not fully invest in their work, he gave them small shoes, and used the superior king's "this pot must be clean" to oppress people at the bottom. In the Wolf adult's body only a sentence "king changed his mind" will be the efforts of the small demons in an instant, and even the original king drew the cake "can drink a spoonful of Tang monk broth" has been erased. What is implied by several symbols in this office is that in the real society, the middle-level department is the communication bridge between the upper level and the lower level, and plays the role of uploading and distributing. However, the middle-level department also monopolizes the interpretation right of the information issued by the upper level, and the middle-level department wants to maintain its own authority while monopolizing the interpretation right. They do not care whether the work issued by the upper leadership can be better completed, their whole mind is used to regulate the subordinates and oppress the bottom. And as the bottom people, will be ordered to work by the middle department, and even will be eaten dry.

4.2 The Persecution of the Lower Classes Against Each Other

The mutual persecution between the bottom can also be seen everywhere in Langlang Mountain. At the beginning of the film, the pig demon is beaten in the face by the raven monster just because he is stealing a lie-in. In order to make the arrows more stable, the Piglet can strip the crow's feathers; When the superiors give the characters that neither of them can finish, they start to prey on ordinary mortals. The above few seemingly simple and funny examples are enough to show the mutual persecution in Langlang Mountain. Several symbols in this office vividly and vividly reflect that in the real society, as the bottom class, they have no real respect for each other, and they may even "pull hair and drink blood" around their peers in order to have the least chance of promotion. When the superiors assign tasks that they cannot complete, they will transfer the oppression brought by the upper class to people lower than them.

4.3 The Mutual Control of Ideas

As a whole, the Nangsan monster community is afraid of others thinking differently. When the little pig demon found that the arrow could not hit the target, the crow monster told the little pig demon not to do much, according to the requirements of the bear leader; When the Piggies make better weapons, the Bear Master cracks down on the Piggies' innovative solutions; When the raven monster saw the wrong trap, the Wolf Lord dragged the raven monster away and ate it; When Little pig demon wanted to leave Langlang Mountain, Mother pig told little pig demon not to dream. What the symbols here are metaphorical is that in the real society, everyone does not like people who think differently from themselves, and they like to be with people who think the same. They hope that others can listen to their opinions so as to control others, only in this way can they obtain a certain sense of security and certainty. When a person is at the same level or class as others, once a person stands out among them, their words will become invisible hands pulling the enlightened person down, and they will not change, they only want to control that person's thoughts and hinder the success of others.

4.4 The Thinking Distinction Between Strong and Weak

In this film, whether it is the small demon or the big demon shown in the picture, they are always the middle and bottom class in the western world, only the Tang Monk and the king in the film can be regarded as the upper class. As the upper king said that a small demon also had a chance to drink a spoonful of Tang monk broth, the bottom of the small demon worked hard for the king, and then the king said that it was changed to roast and eat, the small demon had no chance to drink soup, but they could only act as if nothing happened and continue to work. When the pig demon turned to kindness to inform the way to meet the Tang monk and his entourage, he was beaten to death by Monkey King.(Aiqing W, 2024) ^[1]Although he won three life-saving hairs from Monkey King at the end of the film, he eventually not only failed to join the Tang Monk's team, but also lost the Langlang Mountain monster group that he relied on, and finally lost both. The implication here is the weakling mentality of all the low-level ordinary

employees in real life. They put themselves in the position of the weak, want everything but dare not take the initiative to seize, only hope that the opportunity can automatically find the door; They get what they want by seeking upward, and dare not rebel even if they are deceived by the upper leadership; They want everything around them to be stable, they dare not take any risks, and they are even more afraid of losing what little they have. On the contrary, as a strong Monkey King, his skill is hard to learn, his ruyi golden stick is stolen from the dragon Palace, and the immortal peach he ate is stolen, and these are in stark contrast to the ordinary bottom class.

5 On the Value Definition of " Yao-Chinese Folktales "

On January 10, 2023, a topic # Parents bombarded China's strange stories # topped the Weibo hot search list, causing the attention and discussion of the majority of netizens. The cause of this incident is that a person claiming to be a parent, because his child was scared to cry when watching " Yao-Chinese Folktales ", so he posted an angry accusation that "China Legend" has no educational significance and will cause psychological shadow to the child. He starts with "cartoons are for children", thinks that the film is naive, forcibly funny, satirizes the reality of our society, and finally raises the question to the value question, asking "Why do our cartoons always have such problems?"

As we all know, only when the art production meets the aesthetic needs of the society, the work of art will give people artistic enjoyment. (Liang Y, 2023)^[5]The so-called domestic animation, Chinese cartoon or cartoon such film and television works are collectively referred to as art films in our country. The explanation of the Chinese Encyclopedia film volume is that this is a special kind of film, which is the general name of animation, puppet film and paper cutting. (Sun N, 2023)^[7]Compared with other related art categories, fine arts occupy the highest position in China's animated films. As one of the art forms of film and television, the content of animation is for children, but also for teenagers and adults. As an animation, it can be educational, but it doesn't have to be. Animation works can satirize reality, can be black humor, and even can be meaningless. And all of this all the content, is the need for the audience to distinguish. Danner believes that the factors determining the value of works of art lie in the basic characteristics reflected in the work and the degree of benefit of the characteristics to people. The more obvious the basic characteristics of the work are, the more concentrated the effect is, the higher the artistic value will be. Representing the return and revival of Chinese art animation led by Shanghai Art Film Studio, the work " Yao-Chinese Folktales " has made a perfect answer to contemporary Chinese animation, both from the design of animation thinking and the expression of Chinese philosophical thinking. It tells the sadness of contemporary Chinese young people in real life, and also tells people that "there are geese cages everywhere in life. There are goose hills outside the goose cage." Such an excellent, true, black, humorous, thoughtful, realistic work with love and affection is a milestone work of Chinese style animation in China, and its intrinsic value is worth more thinking and aftertaste.(Mugica, J.L, 2021)^[8]

6 Conclusion

In general, " Yao-Chinese Folktales " combines Chinese animation with traditional culture, so that the connotation and external presentation of the work show humanistic care and Oriental aesthetic implications. Through a variety of art styles such as paper-cut, sketch and ink painting, " Yao-Chinese Folktales " tells Chinese horror, famous stories, and people in the street. These stories range from ancient stories to science fiction imagination, from the theme of life to human nature thinking, not only the picture quality is very good, the character setting is more heart-piercing, and its educational significance is full. In today's animation market filled with Japanese and American styles, " Yao-Chinese Folktales " tells people that Chinese style is all-encompassing, no matter how the form changes, it is essentially China's own story, Chinese style animation tells its own story in a Chinese way, which is China's own way of thinking, but also the way Chinese people understand the world.

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