

On the Character Design of Monkey King in the Animated Film *The Monkey King: The Return of the King*

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Abstract: *The Monkey King: Hero Is Back* being a successful attempt of 3D computer animation in cinemas in inland China. As one of the main characters, the Monkey King has a direct connection with the success of the film. This paper aims to understand the inheritance and innovation of the Monkey King's character image in this animation by comparing the identity, image and character of the Monkey King with the image design of the Monkey King in previous artistic images.

Keywords: Animated Film; *The Monkey King: Hero is Back*; Monkey King; Character Design.

1. Introduction

Since the new century, the deconstruction of the story of "Journey to the West" and the reconstruction of the classic image of Monkey King have become the enthusiastic theme of many film and television works, including animation works. Every time the image of Monkey King is reshaped in film and television works, it can cause great controversy and response, which is closely related to the traditional culture and humanistic memory carried by its image. This paper aims to analyze the symbolic characteristics of the image of Monkey King in domestic animation, put forward the problems of the current animation industry and animation producers, and explore how to create a new image of animation in line with the public aesthetic requirements in the new era.

2. Overview of Animation Character Design

2.1. Definition of Animation Character Design

Animation character design is one of many artistic modeling methods, which refers to the comprehensive use of deformation, exaggeration, personification and other artistic techniques to design animation characters as visual images, with the purpose of giving every animation character appeal and vitality.

In animation works, animation character design is the soul of the work. A successful animation character design lays a good foundation for animation, and excellent character images also bring huge commercial value. For example, the lovely "blue fat" Doraemon and Astro Boy in Japan, Mickey Mouse and Disney Princess series in the United States, these characters not only leave a deep impression on the audience, but also get double profits from box office and derivative products[1].

2.2. Factors Affecting the Design of Animation Characters

2.2.1. The Influence of Script on the Character Design of Animation

The script is the basis of a play, whether it is a movie, TV series, or network dramas, cartoons, we must first study the script. We often say that the animation character design has a

great impact on the animation film, and the animation script has a great impact on the animation character. For example, in the animation "Lion Worker" adapted from the novel "Hamlet" by Disney, the prince and uncle in the script are the characters who are opposed to evil. We can obviously feel that the image of Simba, the prince of justice in the animation, has a strong physique, with yellow and red as the main color, and has a warm and strong worker's breath; Evil uncle "Scar" is slender and small, with dark red as the main color, giving people a sense of evil and wily. Therefore, it can be seen that the script has an important impact on the image of the character. For another example, in order to conform to the beautiful and kind image in the fairy tale script, Snow White in the classic Disney animation "Snow White", in addition to following the script's original black hair and white skin, the use of red, yellow, blue in the clothing of the three primary colors, giving people a sunny, cheerful feeling. In order to conform to the vicious image in the script, the queen used darker yellow, blue and black in the animation, giving people a depressing and uncomfortable feeling.

2.2.2. The Influence of Different Artistic Styles on Animation Character Design

In the design of animation characters, the overall artistic style of animation should also be considered.

The flat painting style used in traditional manual animation is completely different from paper-cut style, ink style, sketch style and silhouette style. Selection of different artistic styles, animation character design is also different, such as paper-cut style animation "Pig Bajie eat watermelon" in order to reflect the characteristics of paper-cut this folk art, the role in the shape of the use of hollow design, to the side and like the main, while according to the need to produce the side of the character, half side standard, and the action is also used to pose [2].

2.2.3. The Influence of Technological Progress on Animation Character Design

With the progress of science and technology, animation has also changed from the traditional flat animation to the now popular three-dimensional animation. American animation is currently more inclined to the development and production of 3D animation, using advanced technology to create different special effects, and Japan is now following the trend of 3D animation, such as 3D version of Doraemon. China has also

begun to attach importance to three-dimensional animation, and in recent years there have been *Turandot*, *King of the Qin Dynasty*, and *Monkey King: Monkey King Is Back*. 3D technology requires animation characters to be three-dimensional and real, which needs to take these characteristics into account in the character design stage.

3. The Presentation Process of Sun Wukong Animation Image

3.1. Germination and Exploration Period: The Monkey King Born in the War

The earliest cartoon image of Sun Wukong in China is based on the first modern Chinese animated feature film "Princess Iron Fan" produced by Wan Brothers in 1941. The film was born at the time of the outbreak of the Anti-Japanese War and the survival of the nation, and the narrative in the film naturally injected the metaphor of national justice and struggle. Sun Wukong's brave and unafraid spirit of struggle in the film brought a little national confidence and comfort to the Chinese people who were in a national disaster at that time. At the same time, in terms of character image, drawing on the popular American culture Disney animation style at that time, the Monkey King was designed as an animal shape with hairy face and Lei Gong mouth, which was mainly depicted by curves, single line outline, white gloves, humorous, lovely and not losing a sense of justice image, a bit like Mickey Mouse wearing a hat and wearing a tiger-skin skirt. In this period, Sun Wukong's animated images initially integrated Chinese and Western cultural elements, while some deliberately imitated Disney's animal image style, with the most primitive "monkey" characteristics, and more political implications were added to the portrayal of character scenes[3]. It is worth recognizing that animation art at that time paid attention to reality, paid attention to the expression of people's inner needs, enjoyed both elegance and custom, had a broad mass base, and met the needs of different strata of audiences, which was significantly different from the characteristics of the younger age group of Chinese animation later on. The film was the first long animation in China and Asia at that time, and it can be said that Chinese animation reached a world-class height as soon as it appeared.

3.2. Maturity and Prosperity: Heroic National Heroes

China ended the war-torn era and set up special film and television studios after the establishment of New China. Therefore, the animation images of Sun Wukong during this period were mainly produced by Shanghai Fine Arts Film Studio, which reached a peak in quantity and quality. During this period, there were as many as 9 animation works containing the image of Sun Wukong, and several new animation types full of national characteristics appeared, such as paper cuttings and puppet films. The Monkey King in *Uproar in Heaven*, produced during this period, has become a classic image in Chinese animation works and a basic template that has been used continuously since then. The film draws on traditional Chinese decorative arts such as woodcuts, paper-cuts, Peking Opera and New Year pictures, with strong colors and spectacular scenes. The facial features of the Monkey King are more refined and smooth, and the traditional decorative colors of red, yellow, green and blue are adopted. Combined with the facial makeup of Beijing Opera and the features of New Year pictures, the image of the

Monkey King is depicted wearing a soft hat, waist tiger skin, long legs and thin arms. In the film, the dialogue of Sun Wukong adopts the Chinese characters of Beijing Opera, sometimes with intonation and sometimes with flat narration. In the sound and fighting, Beijing Opera music is used to strengthen the beating of traditional Musical Instruments such as drums and gongs. The image of Sun Wukong is vividly depicted with full character. Just as Zhang Guangyu said in the article "Trying to talk about the art of art films", "the use of dramatic techniques to create characters for actors", this typical characteristic symbol has laid the historical status of Sun Wukong's animation image[4].

The film presents a strong flavor of Chinese Oriental culture and Oriental wisdom, which is regarded by foreign film critics as a story comparable to the Bible and Greek mythology. The unique traditional art style of the animation design is unique in the international animation industry. The image of Sun Wukong is deeply rooted in the hearts of the Chinese people, and almost becomes the standard image of the Monkey King. The image of Sun Wukong in *Uproar in Heaven* is undoubtedly one of the representative works of Chinese animation "Chinese School".

3.3. Diversified Development Period: Multi-party Exploration under the Impact of The Times

In the middle and late 1980s, the monopoly of Shanghai American Film Studio in Chinese animation creation was broken, and more and more new animation production departments appeared in China, thus breaking the monopoly pattern of Shanghai art film studio. At the same time, the diversity of creators also brings the diversity of animation content and modeling. After the older generation of creators such as Wan Laiming gradually faded out from the animation field, the classic animation image of Sun Wukong also gradually disappeared in the creation field. Coupled with the gradual opening up of the country, a large number of cartoons from Japan and the United States began to be introduced, which changed the audience's aesthetic preferences, etc., making the image of Sun Wukong in this period present different forms of diversified development.

At this time, animation evolved more into children's animation, both the subject matter of animation and the shape of animation were so weak, weak and lifeless. During this period, various forms of foreign animation, such as Western animation and Japanese animation, came into the Chinese people's vision. These animations were beautifully produced, humorous or sincere and touching, fully reflecting their own cultural characteristics. The rich and exquisite animation production opened the eyes of Chinese people, and the aesthetic taste of animation of the public changed accordingly. The form of "edutainment" in domestic animation, the market positioning of young children, and the shoddiness of the production level caused Chinese animation to fall into a long-term low period, and Sun Wukong, as a classic animation image, also fell into a blank stage during this period. In 2004's "After A Chinese Journey to the West", the image of Sun Wukong was changed beyond recognition, completely without the appearance of a monkey, but replaced by a cynical and cool boy cartoon character. The story broke the religious taboo in the original work, and won the love of young people in the Internet era with the form of modern stories. However, this mutant image of Sun Wukong completely imitates the cartoon image of Sun Wukong in the Japanese animation style

"Dragon Ball" and "Journey to the West", and has not been recognized by a larger group. After several setbacks in the animation image of Monkey King, Monkey King 3D was created again in 2012 with the help of the traditional classic image of Monkey King. The film invited the internationally renowned film and television technology company Technicolor Group to produce it, striving to reproduce the brilliant era of Monkey King animation and tell the Chinese story to the world.

The original "Uproar in Heaven" underwent 3D special effects treatment, re-dubbing, editing, gorgeous colors, more exquisite details, and gorgeous special effects, but because the audience was already familiar with the image of Sun Wukong in the earlier "Uproar in Heaven", the film did not cause much market sensation. So far, the image of Sun Wukong in Chinese animation has evolved from a simple initial form that imitated Disney's style in the early days and contained political appeals to one of the masterpieces of the "Chinese School" full of traditional elements, reaching the peak of the image and then declining. Since 1990, the Monkey King's image has been in chaos and forgotten by the world. The Monkey King seems to experience a cycle of reincarnation and is waiting for the arrival of another classic image[5].

4. The Role Image Analysis of Sun Wukong in Monkey King: Hero Is Back

4.1. Background of Monkey King: Hero Is Back

The story of this film takes place in the tenth life of the Tang monk, at this time the Tang monk is still young, the common name Jiang Liuer, playing in the streets; Wukong is still pressed in the Wuxing mountain, and hates and resentful of the Tathagata, holding the slim hope that he can escape and turn over; The world evolved to the Tang capital Chang 'an era, the city often attacked the mountain demon, a chance, Jiang Liuer strayed into the Wuxing Mountain, unlocked the hero charm, and began a strange adventure. In this story, Sun Wukong once made a big noise in heaven, was pressed under the Wuxing Mountain by the Tathagatur Buddha for more than four hundred years, and accidentally escaped from the cave because Jiang Liuer (small Tang monk) unlocked the seal of repression, but he lost his magic power, his personality was manic and depressed, and he looked at the light work and name, and just wanted to go back to the Flower Fruit Mountain to live an ordinary life, and because of the heart of gratitude, he reluctantly escorted Jiang Liuer back to Chang 'an, and had to fight with the mountain demon along the way. Be in a mess. Later, Wukong broke away from the Dharma seal, awakened the golden cudgel, painful flat all demons, Monkey King returned.

4.2. Features of the Monkey King in Monkey King: Monkey King Is Back

In terms of shape, the Monkey King in Monkey King is Back can not be called the "Monkey King". In Monkey King: Hero is Back, Monkey King's face is designed to be very long, more like a gorilla, his face has obvious decree stripes, messy brown hair, is a typical middle-aged uncle image. According to the inner change process of Monkey King, the design team designed three sets of costumes: The first set of costumes is at the beginning of the film, pressed in front of the Wuzhishan

Mountain, when the Monkey King is wearing a red cloak and armor, the spirit is in high spirits, and there are two long feathers in the headdress, which is exaggerated and gorgeous. This costume is to pay tribute to the Monkey King in Heaven and evoke the classic image of Monkey King in people's hearts; The second costume consisted of a ragged yellow cloth and a pair of coarse blue-gray trousers[6]. Used in the Wuzhishan seal, set off the powerless and weak of the Great saint to lose his magic; The third set is used when the hero and the villain fight, clear and strong, clear lines, gorgeous clothing, representing their own affirmation and courage to defeat the evil determination. In the design of the costume of the Great saint, the design elements of the Tang Dynasty armor were referenced and absorbed.

Chinese classical masterpieces are the precious cultural heritage of all mankind, and their literary and artistic values have always had a profound influence on the history of the whole Chinese nation. In these famous literary works, there are many typical images that have left an indelible impression on readers. The animation artists of our country through their wisdom and sweat have created the text images on these papers into a lifelike and true and full animated characters.

Monkey King: Monkey King is Back is adapted from Journey to the West, one of the four classical literary classics in China, in which the classic images of Sun Wukong, Tang Monk and Zhu Bajie are also deeply rooted in people's hearts, and Sun Wukong has always been the most favorite artistic image of Chinese people. The return of another in inheriting classic image of sun wukong, the monkey, tang's monk monk image and so on basic character, were carried out on the role modelling and the role set subversion and breakthrough of different interpretation of the same image.

Character design plays a very important role in a film, and the creation of a successful character can even make the audience impressed by the whole film. Since the animated short film Princess Iron Fan began to appear in the 1940s, there have been no less than a dozen kinds of Monkey King's animation images. Among them, the most classic one is the Monkey King with a heart-shaped face in Uproar in Heaven (see Figure 1). Designed by Zhang Guangyu and modified by Yan Dingxian, the image of Sun Wukong draws heavily on the opera elements of Oriental charm, and integrates Sun Wukong's omnipotent skills with the image of Peking Opera martial arts. No matter from the facial image, body structure or clothing accessories, the character of Sun Wukong who is good at fighting and loves to fight is vividly displayed. Many other works that came out later also retained these features, especially in "Lotus Lantern", Sun Wukong's facial shape hardly changed much (see Figure 2). In "Monkey King: Hero is Back", the creators of this image of Sun Wukong have been completely subverted, no matter in the character shape or character personality, and the previous classic Sun Wukong shape is different. For example, the film no longer uses a heart-shaped face and yellow eyes with obvious opera colors in the facial modeling of Sun Wukong, but elongates the facial outline and adds wrinkles, making the character look thin and vicissitudes of life. The overall image is a gibbon shape with long arms and big feet, and the image is more adult than before. The original leopard print dress, Beijing Opera red pants, official boots (later changed to monk shoes in film and television animation) and other costumes have all disappeared. In addition to retaining the yellow monk's clothes, after all, this feature contains the evolution of Sun Wukong from beast to Buddha, which is to boldly choose the

collision of the current popular yellow and blue complementary colors to match the clothes and pants, which is in line with today's aesthetic, so that many young and middle-aged audiences can remember deeply and enjoy. In addition.[7]



Figure 1. The Monkey King in Monkey King



Figure 2. The figure of Sun Wukong in Lotus Lantern

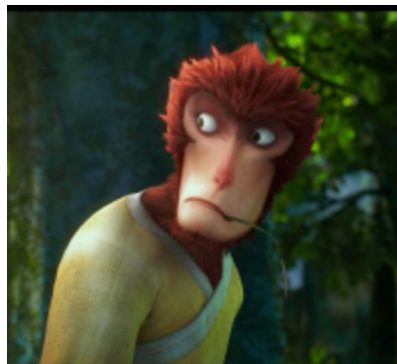


Figure 3. Monkey King in Monkey King: Hero Is Back

4.3. Role analysis of Sun Wukong in Monkey King: Hero Is Back

4.3.1. Inheritance of Character Design Nationalization

In the character design of this play, there are many elements in line with Chinese nationality. Such as modeling design: Chinese White dragon image design (still the traditional Chinese dragon as the main body of image design), pig Wuneng design (still the fat head and big ears), Master Jiang Liuer design (typical Chinese master design), Even the way Sun Wukong is dressed when he "unlocks" the Monkey King still continues the characteristics of the original book for this particular character - the armor of China's cold weapons era and its signature plume; In terms of language dialogue: when Jiang Liuer met Sun Wukong, he preached the great legend of Sun Wukong with a unique Chinese rhythm in the tone of storytelling; Movement dynamics: The Monkey King and the Tota king, the four Heavenly Kings, Erlang God struggle, their classic movement dynamics; Music: The opening and climax of the film followed the classic folk music such as "Running will Ling" and "Xiaodaohui Overture".

In terms of character personality, Sun Wukong's personality characteristics still have the characteristics of openness and impatience, which is similar to the previous artistic creation, especially the movie shows at the beginning of the Journey to the West, Sun Wukong has vast powers... Treat imperial power as nothing the most emotional and sexual reflects the freedom of human nature, the character characteristics of insisting on what you like and rebelling against what you hate.

This can not only facilitate the audience's understanding of the play so that they can enter the character's world faster, but also reflect the creator's respect for the original work from another perspective.

4.3.2. Innovation in Character Design

The image of Sun Wukong in the play has been further adapted and innovated on the basis of the original character setting, no matter from its identity and behavior, external image characteristics and internal personality characteristics. First, the identity and behavior of the protagonist Sun Wukong have changed a lot compared with the original. From the surface, it is also the confrontation between magic and magic, from the monkey that is directly pressed down the Wuxing Mountain (cannot produce physical movement, forced Sun Wukong "zazen"), into the "seal" of its own power although it can move freely within a limited range (solves the physical displacement, but the contest between its own ability and imprisonment), greatly eliminating the display of ability. It increases the difficulty of Sun Wukong "coming out of the mountain"[8].

And because you can move, you can encounter a series of events after, reflecting the importance of "power" to Sun Wukong.

From the process of fighting against the Great Demon King again and again, Sun Wukong's decadent attitude toward "power blocked" to the increasingly strong desire for "power recovery" has been changed, which has strengthened the great change of Sun Wukong's final "transformation into a butterfly", thus more prominent the theme of "return".

From a deep perspective, the suppression of the nature of freedom has become the self-cultivation and growth of Sun Wukong. For Sun Wukong, it is also the growth and self-improvement of self-understanding, and the prototype in the novel only gets the perfection and maturity of character after the process of meeting Tang Monk and learning scriptures. However, when Sun Wukong and Tang Monk met and were rescued under the Wuxing Mountain, they were still "wild and difficult to tame", and did not essentially "improve" their own "cultivation" and sufficient understanding of their own shortcomings (arrogance, willfulness, ego).

However, in this work, the arrogant temperament of Sun Wukong is shown more at the beginning, and the change process of his self-understanding growth is compressed into a very short time range, that is, in the process of Jiang Liu Er (that is, Tang Monk) opening the seal to save Sun Wukong, it is realized, causing changes in his own inner nature, and finally successfully breaking the seal.

Second, Sun Wukong's physiognographic features have undergone great changes. Sun Wukong's IP (Intellectual Property) and "heart of heart face" have been closely related for a long time.

As we all know, the image of Sun Wukong first appeared in Wu Chengen's novel Journey to the West, a character with great personality that does not exist in the real world. Since then, there have been a series of setting and development of

the image of Sun Wukong, among which the most famous is the design of Sun Wukong in the classic two-dimensional cartoon "The Monkey King" in the 1960s by Mr. Yan Dingxian. And since this work, as long as the character design of Sun Wukong is involved, no matter in animation, comics, films, graphic design and other fields, Both the near-life-size image and the simplified version are clearly influenced by its shape.

In this play, we find that the face shape of the new version has undergone great changes, from the original round face designed by Mr. Zhang Guangyu and the peach face designed by Mr. Yan Dingxian to a more angular rectangular face. Through the angular treatment, the post-80s creators show their understanding of the character's unruly personality, and the character's personality is outwarded to the facial lines. And exaggerate it appropriately. In the modern era of personality and thinness for beauty, this not only explains Wukong's personality, but also greatly meets the aesthetic requirements of modern audiences.

Third, the concept of the character of Sun Wukong has also changed greatly. In the original "Journey to the West" text, Sun Wukong mainly shows the "monkey", "human" and "divine". If the previous design has a lot of interpretation of the image's ontology - "monkey" - optimistic, frank, curious and animal, for example, in the original book, "Wukong listened to Bodhi's sermon," he was happy to scratch his ears and smile. Can not help the hands of the dance, the feet of the dance "; The legendary character of "divinity", such as Jiang Liuer's description and yearning for "Sun Wukong" as an ordinary person before he met me, reflects the legend of Sun Wukong from the side. So, in the new film, the creator is more emphasis on the "human" level. For example, Sun Wukong's facial features are directly adjusted on the basis of human facial features, so that the image is between human and monkey. The ratio of the head and body of the character is close to that of the real person. In the appearance after the final transformation, the processing method of the camera's back further weakens the monkey character and emphasizes the "human nature". In the current era of humanism as the mainstream trend of thought, it is consistent with the public aesthetic. In character, on the basis of hating evil and simply jumping away, it adds more "human" characteristics, which is also different from the previous artistic image. For example, when the river was chattering, the expression of unbearable, and the reaction of the river's anger; In the process of contact, Jiang Liuer and other people want to be close and pretend to be distant. In the climax of the story, the various expressions of Sun Wukong returning to the river with first aid are completely the expressions and actions of a young Chinese man with obvious standards. This echoes the theme of the story "the growth of the heart", that is, the temper and growth of Sun Wukong's heart, from the initial contempt for the laws

of survival in human society, do not take into account each other, how to do what you want to experience human hardship to help others from the heart to make positive efforts for each other, which is what the author wants to express. And obviously, such a theme is more closely related to "human nature."

5. Peroration

Monkey King: Hero is Back not only combines China's long-standing traditional culture, but also absorbs the essence of foreign animated films, such as American Hollywood animation and Japanese animation. A large part of the reason why many classic images in the United States and Japan can endure is that they do not set cartoons as "exclusive" for children, but expand the scope of the audience to a greater extent, to achieve a kind of effect suitable for all ages. "Monkey King: Hero Is Back" has made many post-80s and post-90s young people find the image of Monkey King in their childhood and inspired the resonance of the audience. Freud believes that: "The mark of childhood is generally the premise and basis of personality development. From this sense, animation culture has social influence beyond the age level." Monkey King: Hero is Back breaks through the limitations of China's long-standing position of film animation as a tool to educate children.

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