

HEALINGA Brief Analysis on the Artistic Features and Functions of Animal Characters in Healing Animation

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ABSTRACT. As an art type with a typical missionary function, healing animation has become an essential creative type with its unique spiritual soothing feature. The healing animation that soothes our minds and gives us persistent comfort can leave audiences in a positive mood and spiritual solace. Today, all kinds of animal characters are increasing in animation; the shaping of characters plays a vital role in contributing to healing animation. This article analyzed the artistic features and functions of animals in animation works of healing systems and interpreted the roles of these animals, aiming at laying the foundation for making more touching animation works.

1. ANIMATION'S FEATURES AND VALUE

1.1. The origin of Healing Animation

Originating from religious ceremonies, the term cure, with its original meaning of curing physical pain, was widely used in Japan in the 1990s. It mainly aimed at supporting those who suffered from mental exhaustion, such as depression, in relieving their mental stress. Healing animation is a new type of animation emerging in recent years. Its current concept is to build warm, pure, sad, soothing and healing cartoon images. The current pace makes people impetuous and unstable. Living in the contemporary society, people face intensive pressure, the emergence of healing animation enables us to find a peaceful living atmosphere and to further cater to the needs of audiences, making them feel peace and warmth. In this sense, healing animation has a considerable market and social demand.

1.2. The features and value of Healing Animation

The overall style of the animation and the pace of the story are closely related to its ability to heal people [1]. Healing animation has no dark elements and aims to inspire people with real-life stories. It focuses on making audience's tensions be soothed by the animation through simple life trivia and animation. Meanwhile, it does not contain apparent erotic information, including violence, sadness, despair or pedantry. It emotionally resonates with audiences, from teenagers to young adults, and exerts a subtle influence.

Theme selection in healing animation is also closer to daily life. Yoshifumi Kondô's work *Whisper of the Heart*

is about an enterprising girl who loves reading, works hard and tries to catch up with her favorite person. It is all about the most common daily life, with no grand scenes of ups and downs, and only some stories of sweet first love met when they borrowed books from the library. Daily stories can heal audiences, letting them find their own stories similar to the hero.

The two plot styles of healing animation are: daily relaxation and courage to regain confidence. The former focuses on the leisure atmosphere, pure environment, and warm interpersonal interaction. It aims at making audiences feel the beauty contrary to the complexity and darkness of real-life events, and the soul can be redeemed. The latter gives viewers hope through the process of inner transformation of the role.

Compared to the usual episodic animation. The animation rhythm of the healing system is more soothing, while the plot is more lyrical and has warm and lyrical lines. The extensive use of inner monologue and narration of healing animated characters is an essential component that plays an auxiliary role in shaping characters and paving plots.

In terms of color system, the animation of the healing system primarily uses bright colors. For instance, in Natsume's *Book of Friends*, the reassuring colors represent different symbolic meaning. For example, green can purify people's hearts, orange can warm people's hearts, pink symbolizes love, blue can broaden one's mood, and transparent colors of clear pool water frequently appear, constitute this typical healing animation.

Healing animation has a unique value. In the contemporary society, the fast pace of life makes everyone bear enormous pressure and burden. Impetuosity is spreading to society, and the accumulated pressure must be urgently relieved. Living and working in the contemporary society people face

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intensive pressure. Healing animation can positively influence its viewers through a refreshing visual effect, unique imagination, technological means and ups and downs of animation. Tough character-building in animation gives viewers psychological vent, convey the optimistic quality of bravely pursuing self in adversity to the viewers, and lead them to embrace life with heart by changing roles. This kind of animation was created to respond the needs of society, the market and people's hearts, which is popular in Japan, and has further brought the "healing culture" to the whole world [2].

2. CHARACTERISTICS AND FUNCTIONS OF ANIMAL CHARACTERS IN HEALING ANIMATION

There is an increasing use of animal characters in in the healing animation increasing. Knowing that building characters plays an important role in ... ; unlike the animal characters in traditional works, the animal images in the healing system focus on "healing".

2.1. Characteristics of Animal roles

2.1.1. Type of Animal roles

In current animated films, many "actors" play the leading role, and animators have processed their actions and emotions. In this case, their animal characters are closer to the existing animal images that are closer to life. With the change in modern lifestyle, more animals are welcomed in human life and families , which makes the relationship between people and animation closer. Exaggerated facial expressions and behaviors that living animal figures do not possess, can be better represented in animation. It not only adds more interest to the viewers, but also renders the vitality and appeal of pictures and enhances the emotional communication between viewers and animation [3].

Chi's Sweet Home tells the daily life of a black and gray striped kitten named Chi. Each episode is only 3-10 minutes long, while each of them has millions of hits on various internet platforms. This story took place in an ordinary family with the cat Chi. The warm daily life between Chi and his (or her) human family is an authentic portrayal of daily life. The peaceful and lovely pet activities have aroused the resonance of many cat lovers. . Chi's Sweet home is a brand-new healing animation. It is regarded as a light sketch for everyone's entertainment in the current numerous somewhat hardcore works. The animators keep their most prominent features in portraying the main character, the kitten, the cute points that the animators intentionally left. These points will give the audiences a strong sense of familiarity and remind them of their warm interaction with their pets, and thus reducing their tension. Characters close to life will reduce the audience's defensive psychology and arouse the audience's resonance [1].

2.1.2. Appearance design of Animal characters

Appearance and texture are significant in healing animation. Oscar Best Animated Short Film Piper is about a story of a newborn little standpiper. The spherical appearance and soft fluff together form a lovely protagonist image. When the sea breeze blows, the plush on the character swings with it. The chubby body, wide eyes, and ignorant and sleepy eyes looking at the seaside make audiences directly feel the cuteness of this animal character. The same is true for the Oscar-nominated short film Bilby, which features the unique rabbit-eared kangaroo in Australia. The story tells that this rabbit-eared kangaroo meets a bird in an inland area full of crisis. Bunny-eared kangaroos are all gray blue, with fluffy ears hanging gracefully on both sides, and round eyes carefully looking at the surrounding environment. The ruddy nose makes them look even more playful. The bird's image is docile and well-behaved, its whole body is white with no mottled hair, and its two big eyes occupy half of the area of a spherical body. These two exciting animal images make the whole picture flexible and rich. More importantly, having them one big and one small make the picture balanced and orderly. The sleek shape and plush texture are typical image features that make the audience relax and appease their emotions. In animation, the breeze flicks the fluff of the characters, and the audience's restless emotions can be soothed by the wind, immersing people in it [4].

2.1.3. Role setting of Animal characters

Healing animation is also unique in role setting of animal character. Harmless and docile characters can amplify the healing feeling brought by the story. The animation Shirokuma Cafe mainly tells the exciting and healing daily life of selling cute things between Shirokuma and his friends Penguin, Panda and regular guests. Shirokuma, the owner of the coffee shop, is smart, reliable and good at cooking, with a gentle and humble personality. Other animal characters also have personality characteristics, for example, being calm, playful, or humorous. In healing animation, aggressive personality characteristics are mostly avoided to be built in animal characters so that they are bland and warm, with a sweet aftertaste. One important feature of animal characters is being soft. The protagonist has no obvious sharpness, and the harmless character can better attract audiences so these beautiful characters can influence them .

2.1.4. Color setting of Animal characters

The colors of animal characters can bring different feelings to audiences. Bright colors excite and active people, while dark or low-bright colors create a dark and less active atmosphere.

The Big Bad Fox and Other Tales depicts three warm, loving and funny French humorous stories. The story is about a group of fun-loving, just and kind-hearted little animals with poor intelligence living a small farm. All the animal characters are with warm colors, including orange

and white fox shapes, brown and yellow hens, and pale-yellow chickens, matched with green trees in the background.. Additionally, one of the best-animated film nominated for the 68th Academy Awards, *Ait Bear and Saina Mouse*, tells the story of Saina, a little mouse who lived in an orphanage since childhood and met Ait, the big bear, after escaping from the underground rat country. After experiencing various storms, they became good friends through thick and thin. In the film, a lighter shade of colour has been used to differentiate it from the usual lightness of colour, and the light taupe and tan outline the main characters of mice and bears. The elegant watercolor style warms the animation with soft temperaments. Even in the dark picture, the animator tries to avoid the dark tone while adding a warm light source to the protagonist to soften the depression and dullness caused by the dark tone, making the picture breathable harmonious.

Colors can affect audiences' mood. Using soft and bright colors in healing animation can create a positive atmosphere, thus affecting audiences' feelings, so that they can be cured and encouraged by direct picture effects [5].

2.2. The role of animals

2.2.1. Emotional regulation of Animal roles

Healing animation plays a critical role in regulating emotion of audiences. Psychologists found that companionship with animals can significantly relieve human mental stress [6]. "Animal doctors" and "animal teachers" exist in many formal medical institutions and schools. Similarly, in the classic healing animation *Natsume's Book of Friends*, the protagonists Natsume and the cat teacher Madara support each other and experience fear and separation. The animator turned the devil into a *maneki-Neko* and added an exciting character image to its personality. On the premise of keeping the essential structural characteristics of animals, the characters can be plumper and easily accepted by audiences by endowing the characters with personality and emotion.

Ait Bear and Sena Mouse, a French animation in watercolor style, is an animal revolution for children and, simultaneously, a social proposition story for adults. For children, it is a fantasy adventure between bears and mice, and the harvest is sincere friendship. At the same time, adults can feel the warmth between the characters, and also understand the deep meaning and complex social connections behind the film. The film gives people a warm and soothing feeling, and the most important thing is that different age groups have various thoughts and interpretations of this animated work, making audiences gain completely different experiences. Healing animation specialises in using cute animal characters as an entry point, and as the storyline unfolds, it points to a deeper core, which brings different viewing experiences and gains different psychological activities for audiences of different ages.

2.2.2. The selection of Roles in Animal characters

Healing animation can, to some extent, build a communication bridge between special groups and make audiences reconcile with their imperfect selves. The short film *The Power of Empathy* is adapted from Brené Brown's speech on empathy. There are three animal characters in this film with each of them representing different meaning; the bear represents empathy, the elk represents compassion while the fox represents someone in need of help. In this short story, the straightforward bear climbs into the cave and keeps company with the fox. He said nothing but hugged the fox and made the fox feel that the bear understood her situation. This story plot is also a hand extended to those special groups with depression in real life, whether it is understanding, tolerance or love. In the face of partners who cannot get out of trouble, the best help is companionship with understanding [7].

The Meaning of Sorrow is an abstract animation based on a philosophical poem. It tells audiences that the existence of small emotions is universal. Sad emotions can enable them to have a clear understanding and show their vulnerabilities. Then one needs to admit and tolerate it and thus become clear, frank, and natural about it. We should bravely reconcile with our imperfect selves and the imperfect world, face the occurrence with a bigger vision, and be confident and optimistic. In addition to a soothing and harmonious movie-watching experience that healing animation can bring to its audiences, it can also make audiences recognize the depressed people around us and understand them with tolerance. Meanwhile, people can reconcile with the inner self, find a new attitude towards life, and embrace the imperfect self.

Combined with the above analysis, animal roles present different characters. In healing animation, characters are more round and lovely, and closer to the healing image in audiences' mind. Moreover, roles are more positive, gentle, and harmless in character, and bright and lively colors and warm and elegant *Mo Landi* colors are used in color setting to make the picture effect more unified and harmonious. More importantly, these animal images possess warm and inspiring power to encourage audiences moving forward in their life during their hard time and struggles, lightening the warm flame in their chests. Influential animation works can also face a larger group of audiences and become a real joy work. When dealing with different types of animation, we should grasp their commonalities, and analyze the differences in commonalities and the characteristics of different styles of animation in order to make more excellent animation works.

3. THE SPECIFIC GROUP OF LEARNERS

The following challenges and suggestions put forward by this article primarily targets a specific group of Chinese learners, which are the Grade-one students in primary school who have been exposed to English learning since

preschool. Although it is not their first-time encountering English in Grade 1, insufficient English learning time together with traditional language teaching methods – rote and exam-oriented learning – result in poor proficiency in using English in daily life. More importantly, English as a foreign language in China means that the input and output of the language mostly happen in a classroom environment.

4. THE PROSPECT OF DOMESTIC HEALING ANIMATION

Domestic and healing animation *The Battle of Luo Xiao Hei Zhan Ji* has maintained its Douban (a Chinese online platform) score of 9.6 points during the ten years since its initial release, ranking first among domestic animation dramas. This animation tells the story of a cat with a human personality, who named as Luo Xiaohei. He has a strong talent but he did not know his actual ability as a cat demon when he was young. He lived carefree in the forest depths since childhood. Due to the destruction of human beings, he was forced to embark on a journey to find a new home. A series of fantastic stories happened when Xiaohei visited his cousin and grandfather in the countryside. This animation has a grand worldview where human beings, demons, and immortals live together on the earth. Its painting style is unique. A few strokes depict the image of a black kitten with simple lines, taking the route of aesthetic Chinese style. The picture is fresh, delicate, bright, and warm and depicts the whole world with casual brushstrokes and simple colors.

Ali, the hot IP image of the healing system in China is cute, warm and children friendly. Since 2006, stories about Ali have been serialized on the Internet and in magazines, appearing in fairy tale picture books and animated short films. Ali's publications have exceeded 3 million sales so far, and tens of millions of registered fans are online. Stories related to Ali are based on tapping the softness and strength in audiences, centering on the themes of affection, love and friendship, with warm style and thought-provoking power.

With the rapid development of domestic animation, we need to increase the influence and acceptance of Chinese animation in line with the psychology of the market and its audiences. We need to change the traditional social understanding of animation being only for children to an increasing industrialization, thus, to be competitive in the global animation market.

At present, the development of healing animation in China has integrated new media technology. *Meng Ya Xiong* is a three-dimensional healing animation, which mainly tells the interactions between the members of the bear family and the breeder's uncle. As a plant elf, the protagonist of this story directly exposes himself to a human vision for some particular reason and becomes a simple, honest, and lovely bear image. The protagonist is naive and simple, with a small bud on his head. He likes to take care of people, and always inadvertently bursts into heart-warming golden sentences. The three-dimensional texture makes the character more real, showing a vivid character image. Such a cute image is especially popular within young children's groups, and derivatives related to

budding bears sell like hotcakes. As a result, a series of ironic and heart-warming daily stories were born, and they were stories with tears in their laughter. In order to promote industrialization of healing animation in China's context, in-depth research studies need to be conducted on the topic of healing animation, contextualizing it with Chinese sociocultural conditions. It is also important to combine the development of modern science and technology to create a modern healing animation with Chinese characteristics. Only by understanding the social significance of healing animation and figuring out its development trend as well as the creative basis of psychological theory, we can industrialize and also localize healing animation in China.

5. CONCLUSION

To sum up, healing cartoons are popular because of its role setting and storylines. Whether the characters are deeply rooted in audiences' mind, whether they are accepted by people, and whether they have the function of healing their audiences, are the main feature of the character creation of this kind of animation, and is also one of the largest characteristics of healing animations. In general, it conveys warmth and emotion by creating a character that meets people's fantasy, to heal the loneliness and dissatisfaction of audiences.

Healing animation has a great social value by bringing not only a new art type combining artistry, technology, and commerciality, but also by being a powerful psychological treatment to express the viewer's inner suppressed emotion and giving warmth to the heart and evoke the true goodness and beauty inside. In this regard, studying healing animation has a long-term significance, and it is worthwhile for us to continue to investigate and explore around relevant topics .

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