

Research on Subversive Adaptation from Domestic Classic Originals to Animations by Using Films “Ne Zha” and “Monkey King: Hero is Back” as Examples.

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ABSTRACT. : *The adaptation of domestic animation films to classic IP has become a trend, and the film adaptation has made great achievements by virtue of its original works and a considerable number of fans, such as “NE ZHA” and “Monkey King: Hero is Back” which are two representative films. These kind of films adapt the original works to a great extent, and have a strong value of innovation in the times. Their subversive adaptation not only contains a new interpretation of the IP meaning of the classic animation in contemporary film thinking, but also provides a summative thinking on the law of IP adaptation. This article takes “NE ZHA” and “Monkey King: Hero is Back” two works as examples, and discusses them from three aspects: the characters, the use of language and the theme of the story.*

KEYWORDS: *animation adaptation original intellectual property “ip movies” “ne zha” “monkey king: hero is back”*

1. The popularity of “IP adaption” in the world of animated movies.

IP movies are related to the English abbreviation of intellectual property rights. For IP Movies, a novel, a featured character, or even a song or a name can be the creative content attached to IP Movie. With the vigorous development of the domestic film industry, more and more IP works have been put on the screen and known by the audience, such as “See You Tomorrow” “Tiny times” “Go Away Mr. Tumour” etcetera.

Such IP movies usually have a considerable number of “original fans” and high topic popularity as the basis of the box office, and are usually easy to achieve good results after release.

In recent years, the adaptation of domestic classic originals into animations has been popular frequently. Based on the modern perspective, the filmmakers have attracted a large number of loyal fans with their new interpretation of the classic IP animation. IP movies have made great achievements in public praise and box office, such as “Monkey King: Hero is Back”(2015), “Big Fish & Begonia”(2016), “White Snake”(2019), and “NE ZHA”(2019), whose box office is 4.97 billion. Based on ancient mythological stories and mythological characters, these IP movies are usually artistically recreated.

At present, the popular domestic IP animated films mainly rely on two adaptation methods, one is directly adapted from animation to film like “Pleasant Goat and Big Big Wolf” series; another one is the adaptation of classic characters from novels and plays, such as “Monkey King: Hero is Back” and “NE ZHA”. [1] This article takes the second form of adaptation as the research object and uses “Monkey King: Hero is Back” and “NE ZHA” as two representative examples to analyze the subversive adaptation in the process of creation from three aspects: the characters, the use of language and the theme of the story.

2. Study the Adaptation Law of Domestic “Ip Adaption” Animation Films.

After the release of the two films “Monkey King: Hero is Back” and “NE ZHA”, they respectively ranked the tenth and the first place in the annual box office of mainland films with the box office revenue of 956 million yuan and 4.97 billion yuan, becoming the “popular hit” of animated films in that year and triggering the Internet craze. Netizens make different types of emojis from the characters in the movie, which are widely used on the Internet. The classic sentences of the characters in the movie also become the titles of many WeChat official accounts and many other public channels. In a unified view of the two IP animation films successfully adapted, it can be found that they have similar characteristics of adaptation: subversive treatment of the original work, mixing the elements of modernity and subversive aesthetic thinking, forming a new and unique style. With the

rebellious character image, the network language expression and the problem handling way beyond the conventional thinking, the work breaks the stereotype thinking in the traditional version.

2.1 Character Image-- Rebellious But Educational

We often have a visual first impression of a classic image on screen, which is called the “Primacy Effect” in psychology. Primacy effect refers to the initial impression formed by a person's first contact with another person. It is a person's perception of other people's external characteristics, and then obtains the understanding of his motivation, emotion, intention and other aspects, and finally forms the impression of this person. Once a person's first impression is formed, it will affect people's interpretation of a series of his behaviors. [2] From a psychological point of view, people's initial impression of a person will have a great impact on the later interpretation of the behavior of the recognized individual. In the cinema, the viewers meet the characters on the film screen for the first time, and the external image of the film characters, as the most intuitive witness factor, will directly affect the viewers' speculation about the fate of the characters and the development of the story.

In previous animation films, the character image and the character's fate are basically consistent, and the appearance of the character itself basically represents the fate of the character. The animated film “Nezha” made in 1979 is the first time for character “Nezha” appearing as the leading role in the domestic animated films. As the overture of the classic IP “Nezha” in movies, “Nezha” in the old movie is a classic little hero with eyes slanting a bit upwardly, wearing a smooth metal ring on the shoulders, wearing a long red brocade on his arms, stepping on the fire wheels, and holding a sharp spear in hand. So we can see the external image of Nezha is valiant and heroic, and there is not much contrast between the external image and the fate of the characters, which is consistent with the narrative strategy. But the Nezha here in “NE ZHA”(2019) has a series of amusing signs, including smoky eyes, an upturned nose, freckles and “pot lid” bangs. However, it is such an image that seems to have some negative side, but that who finally defeated the self and issued the explosive roar of “I am the master of my own destiny”. At the same time, the film designed two distinct images of Nezha before and after his transformation. These two images are complementary to each other and form a strong visual reversal on the surface, while in the deeper character design, it is a hint to the “circle design” of the character. Although Nezha seems uninhibited, he is still a character who craves love and warmth. Through this kind of role design, we can convey to the audience the indeterminacy of good and evil, and no one is born with the value orientation of perfect good or perfect evil, which makes the character design more full of humanistic care.

Not only has the image setting of the leading role changed dramatically, but also the image of the supporting role has been greatly subverted. The classic image of Tang Monk in the movie and TV series is established by the CCTV TV series “Journey to the West”(1986), The adaptation of CCTV version of “Journey to the West” is faithful to the original work. Tang Monk has a peaceful appearance, a magnificent and dignified appearance, and as the reincarnation of golden cicada, Tang Monk is the representative of civilization and intellectual rights.[3] In the movie “Monkey King: Hero is Back”(2015), the redeemer of the Monkey King, Tang Monk, did not appear as a monk in the traditional sense, but chose the first identity “Jiang Liu-er” in the 10th reincarnation of Tang Monk as a role actor to explore new possibilities of Tang Monk's image. The childlike image of Tang Monk deconstructs the public for the tang monk “preacher” stereotype, and completes the subversive reconstruction of Tang Monk's screen image. At the end of the film, Jiang Liu-err is buried in the rock, only a weak little hand is exposed and pasted on the rock. The Monkey King reaches out his big hand and holds it together with Jiang Liu-er's hand. At that moment, Jiang Liu-er's death arouses Monkey King's buried passion, helps the Monkey King to complete the spiritual transformation, and enables him to fight to the end with Jiang Liu-er's wishes.

2.2 The Use of Language--Personality Construction of Characters

On the choice of movie language, we should not only make the movie language resonate with the young audience through the modern subversive adaptation, but also make the language serve for the image of the characters and the whole movie, and use the language to create a fuller character, so that the audience can understand the truth of the movie in the process of watching the movie and get meaningful enlightenment. In the “NE ZHA”(1979) and the CCTV version of “Journey to the West”, in a greater sense, the “language” of film and television helps the characters to shape the identity of “preacher”, and the heroic characters are born with the task of saving the lives. The “language” only has the sense of mission of “big but empty”, lacking the humanistic care for the characters themselves, unable to close the psychological distance with the audience and obtain the effective resonance of the audience. In the “NE ZHA”(2019) and “Monkey King: Hero is Back”(2015), the modern network language is an important feature of its subversive adaptation. The “keeping common touch” dialogue settings of the characters not only make the audience laugh, but also fit with the spiritual world of the

current audience, so that the audience can naturally accept the language to help shape the character. For example, the dialogue between Jiang Liu-er and the Monkey King, Jiang Liu-er asked “Are the Four Heavenly Kings brothers?” “They are sisters”, answered the Monkey King. Through this way of dialogue with subversive contrast, more possibilities are given to the characters. Jiang Liu-er's image which is full of worship for the Great Sage(the Monkey King), leaps above the screen. And a depressed and frustrated “Great Sage” who has few words in that frustrating period, also makes the audience have deeper empathy through this playful way.

In the context of modern adaptation, the success of domestic IP adaptation animation must consider many factors, and strive to find the resonance between the film and the modern audience. It is undoubtedly that working hard on the language with a distinctive mark of the times is a good point to start. The mainstream audience of Chinese films is undergoing great changes. The emerging audiences born in the 1980s and 1990s, who are good at network language and narrative methods, gradually constitute the main part of the audience of films in the 'Internet + era.’[4] It is no doubt that the distance between the film and the audience is closed by choosing the network language popular with young people and doing modern creative subversion to the traditional animation language. In the context of traditional Chinese culture, if the intrinsic cause of individual's deviant behavior is only the personality, then it is lack of humanistic foundation.[5] Therefore, the seemingly deviant language of the adapted characters actually implies the social motivation on the humanistic level. For example in the “NE ZHA”(2019) “I don't have anything to do in the house but went over the walls and smash the cans. I've been back and forth thousands of times and now am badly tired .”, this rhymes immediately aroused a heated discussion among the audience after its released because of its approachable manners, comparing with the serious lines in the old movie that “Father, I'm going to give yours things back to you, I will not trouble you”. The new lines challenge the authority, emphasize the individual consciousness, and subvert more in line with the contemporary network aesthetic context. The use of such subversive language, to some extent, eliminates the factor of “violence”, so as to achieve the purpose that the film tries to weaken the viewer's watching pressure in a humorous way.

2.3 The Theme of the Story-- the Deconstruction of Traditional Authority

The adaptation of “NE ZHA”(1979) is faithful to the original work, and its theme is more bearing the traditional Chinese ethical and religious thoughts. Nezha is portrayed as a collectivism hero, while the collectivism hero is tragic and heroic. With dignity and integrity, Nezha completes the redemption with the sacrifice of life.[6]The film emphasizes the collectivism belief and worships for heroes who sacrifice for the collective. In the “NE ZHA”(2019) , the theme of the film has completed a leap forward subversion. The film deconstructs the invisible “right and wrong” order: the “good” and “evil” are not totally opposites but can be transformed to one another, like Nezha and Aobai changed from enemies to partners who are fighting side by side. In the “NE ZHA”(1979), the “good” and “evil” are very hostile, Li Jing, the father of Nezha, is a symbol of patriarchy in feudal dynasty. Nezha's growth history is a history of fighting against the monarchy and patriarchy. Especially in the section of “cut off his own flesh and give it back to his father”, we can see that in the face of patriarchal oppression, the film chooses to solve the conflict with a kind of self destructive resistance, which contains strong feelings of self sacrifice. However, the “NE ZHA”(2019) completes the subversion of the plot. Li Jing, Nezha's father, is more like the image of “good but strict” father in the general sense. Even though he is seemingly strict with Nezha, he will kneel down under the gate of heaven for Nezha and bear the damage for him with his chest. The “NE ZHA”(1979) puts Nezha in the position of absolute justice. Nezha is the savior for the people of Chentang town, and completes the emotional expression of “self sacrifice” advocates in the film with the tragic plot of sacrificing Nezha one person to save the whole Chentang town.The “NE ZHA”(2019) emphasizes the personal choice of “I am the master of my own destiny”, Nezha came to the world as a magic pill and suffered from the natural calamity due to his resistance to the fate. The God asked him to be the spokesman of evil, but he said “No” to the God. The terrible thunder struck Nezha and Aobing heavily. They said “If we can't swallow it, then give it back to him.” That heavy throw is the resistance to the unfair fate, to the awakening of self-consciousness, and to the soul stirring of changing life against the fate.

The CCTV version of “Journey to the West” is against the power and violence. Monkey King and his party protecting the Tang Monk to learn from the West, shows the strong confidence and great courage of the working people to overcome difficulties in the struggle. The film shows the Monkey King's “monkey nature” incisively and vividly: he caused trouble in heaven, refused to obey the discipline, and had a weak sense of obedience. A large part of the reason for his accompanying Tang Monk to go to the west to fetch scriptures is that he was forced to be bound by the restraint curse.[7] However, in the “Monkey King: Hero is Back”(2015), because of the Monkey King's care for Jiang Liu-er from the bottom of his heart, the Monkey King took the initiative to play the role of savior, which reflects the theme of “human nature” in the film. Heroes also have a lot of frustration. The “Monkey King: Hero is Back”(2015) completely breaks the heroism of the Monkey King in the

traditional original works, instead, it uses most of the space to describe the Great Sage's depression and frustration. When facing the incompetence of magic power, the Monkey King is depressed, just like us when we are hit in life; when the Monkey King treats the Jiang Liu-er as a child, he is soft, and similar to our mood of protecting the weak in life; when the Great Sage falls, he will try to get up again, just like we do in real life. The adaptation of the "Monkey King: Hero is Back" pays more attention to the expression of human nature and strives to provide realistic care for the contemporary life, which has the significance and value of modernity.

3. Conclusion

This article mainly analyzes the characters, the use of language and the theme of the story. From the analysis, it can be seen that the excellent domestic animation movies adaption of originals with intellectual property can break out of the shackles on the basis of respecting the tradition, make a subversive adaptation of the conventional traditional story, give more possibilities to the story, convey the valuable sense of freedom, and provide for the future adaptation of classic IP animation movies. It still needs the joint efforts of academia to promote the innovative adaptation of IP animation films so as to promote the innovative adaptation of IP animation films and obtain the continuous development momentum of domestic animation films.

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