

УДК 766.05:7.049.1  
(510):004.928:  
[316.613.4:791.43

DOI:10.30857/2617-  
0272.2023.4.3.

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## EMOTIONAL DESIGN OF CHINESE ANIMATION IMAGE BASED ON AUDIENCE'S PSYCHOLOGICAL LEVEL

**Purpose.** Study the underlying logic of shaping the image of Chinese animation with the help of emotional design, on the basis of respecting and understanding the transformation of audience's psychological needs. Starting from the psychological level of Chinese animation audience, analyze the aesthetic tendency and characteristics of Chinese animation image-building.

**Methodology.** In the way of combining theory with demonstration, the relationship between the psychological transformation of animation audience and animation image is deeply discussed. It includes case analysis and comparative analysis.

**Results.** Animation creation is deeply influenced by the audience's psychology and emotion. On the basis of understanding the audience's aesthetic experience, have been analyzed the different emotional needs of Chinese animation images in the audience's instinctive level, behavioral level and reflective level, which are embodied in the tendency of "popularization", the combination of realism and freehand brushwork. By comparing the successful and classic animation images, have been researched the internal emotional connection between the audience and the animation images, indicating a tendency for future creation of animated images.

**Scientific novelty.** In terms of studying the image of Chinese animation, this paper proposes to correspond the three levels of emotional design theory to different levels of emotional needs of animation audiences, and focuses on summarizing new phenomena in animation image from the perspective of audience psychology.

**Practical significance.** Relying on the emotional design of animation images caused by the psychological needs of the audience, this paper makes an in-depth analysis of Chinese animation image design, providing new ideas for the design and creation of animation images, opening up a new situation for the animation market in China and creating new animation images for more audiences.

**Keywords:** Chinese culture, visual design, animation, emotional connection, aesthetic experience, animation trends.

**Introduction.** At present, the creation, dissemination and acceptance of animation are based on the needs of the audience and emphasize people-oriented. Audience is the embodiment of the value of animation works and the foundation of the existence of animation industry. Among them, animation image, as the soul of animation works, is a key link in animation design and creation. The relationship between animation art, animation image and audience emotion is very close and inseparable. In this paper, we introduce emotional design to help creators better analyze the emotional needs of animation images from the psychological level of the audience, and give animation images more spiritual connotations.

**Analysis of previous researches.** The scientific research related to this article mainly focuses on the following two aspects.

The first is the audience's psychological needs and animation design. In the field of psychology, "humanistic psychology" represented by Abraham Harold Maslow and Carl Ransom Rogers appeared in 1950s, which adhered to the principle of "people-oriented", studied the needs of normal people such as motivation, desire and emotion, explored the value and essence of human beings, and carried forward the potential and self-realization of human nature. The emergence of "cognitive psychology school" founded by Jean Piaget focuses on the study of people's cognitive way of information. In the field of communication,

Frankfurt School's "clamped audience" changed to Birmingham School's "active audience" in the 1960s. From the analysis of the process of audience acceptance after 1980s, it can be seen that the development of communication has changed from the theory of "communicator-centered" to the theory of "audience-centered", the status of the audience has been continuously valued and improved, the satisfaction of the audience's needs has become the purpose of communication, and the audience has become "the starting point and destination of artistic creation" [1].

The same is true in the fields of art and aesthetics. Reception aesthetics, represented by German *Hans Robert Jauss* and *Wolfgang Iser*, and hermeneutics, represented by *Hans-Georg Gadamer*, have risen, and it is art that has been paid constant attention to in the dimension of reception. *M.H. Abrams*, an American scholar, summed up the order of artistic elements, namely, the world, artists, works of art and recipients, in his book *Mirrors and Lights: Tradition of Romantic Theoretical Criticism* [2].

It can be seen that the focus of the development of western art theory has changed from emphasizing the "imitation" of artistic creation to emphasizing the trend change of the receiver's artistic acceptance theory. The above research affirms the important position of the audience and explains the importance of studying the audience's psychology accordingly. China scholars *Li Ming* and *Geng Shuai* respectively discussed the importance of audience's psychological needs for animation creation. Analyzing the experiences of animation audience at different levels and dimensions can improve animation creation's in-depth understanding of animation audience [3], transform audience's psychological needs into animation creation goals, and provide animation audience with spiritual needs of technology and art, humanity and rationality [4].

*An Peibin* analyzed the relationship between animation image design and audience psychology of different ages. He divided the audience into three groups: children, teenagers

and adults, and combined with developmental psychology, Freud's personality theory and other related knowledge systems and theoretical achievements, put forward that children, teenagers and adults have different reactions to character color, which provided reference for animation image modeling design [5].

The second is the emotional expression of animation image design. In his book *Emotional Design* [6], *Donald Norman* expounded the three-level concept of emotional design, including instinct, behavior and reflection, which represents the three operational levels of the brain. The first level of emotion is innate, belonging to an innate emotion in the subconscious, which appeared earlier than thinking and understanding. The second level is the "behavior level", which uses actions such as touching to interact with products to stimulate the behavior pattern of the brain. The third level is the reflection level, which is an extension of the intuitive level of emotion and can affect the audience's emotional feelings for a long time. In emotional design, the level of reflection is an emotion beyond other levels, and the audience can get a stable emotional experience in the process of reflection and interaction with animation. *Michael Martes*, an American scholar, used charcoal drawing in his book *Power: Animation Sketch and Character Design* [7] to show various scenes and angles of character sketch, which provided a lot of inspiration and reference materials for the personification of image design. China scholar *Li Chaoyang* [8] mainly discusses the expression strategy of Chinese animation. From the perspective of "nationalization", it concludes that Chinese animation can seek the development path of "artistic conception", and puts forward the choices of modernity and transcendence of Chinese traditional culture, nationalization and noumenon of animation. Scholars *Zhou Guozhen* and *Fang Xin* discussed the relationship between emotional design and animation image design from the macro level, analyzed the animated literary script and character shaping, and explored the realization

path of emotional design in animated character design [9]. *Fang Xin* made a preliminary discussion on the emotional expression and characteristics in the graphics, structure, materials and colors of the animation images, and comprehensively analyzed the factors influencing the emotional modeling of the animation images from the dimensions of plot, personality, nationality, background of the times, modeling style and commercial value [10], calling on people to pay attention to the emotional expression of the characters. Taking the animated film *NeZha* as an example, *Liu Yeling* deeply analyzed the inheritance and innovation of the classic image of *Nezha* in the article "Role, Plot and Theme: Narrative Aesthetic Analysis of the animated film «NeZha: I Am The Destiny»" [11], and affirmed his image design and role performance logic. At the same time, it also reveals the social problems that are easy to appear in real life, such as family communication, children's mental health and family order. Starting from the emotional needs of the audience, it causes the audience to reflect and recall after watching the movie, which is also a big reason for the success of this film.

**Statement of the problem.** Scholars have gradually noticed the importance of audience psychological needs for animation creation and called for people to pay attention to the emotional expression of animated characters, but there is a lack of research on the relationship between animation image shaping and audience emotional needs. This paper introduces *Donald's* emotional design as the theoretical basis to explore the emotional needs of Chinese animation image shaping.

**Results of the research.** Audience psychology belongs to the category of psychology, which refers to the sum of a series of psychological factors produced by the audience in the process of accepting, spreading and understanding media information, including psychological activities on the material level and psychological needs on the spiritual level. The psychology of animation audience refers to a series of psychological

activities produced by animation audience in the process of watching animation, including the needs of the audience in sensory, aesthetic and spiritual aspects. *The Dictionary of Psychology* provides the following explanation for emotion: "In the process of human cognition, the stimuli of the surrounding environment have a certain signal effect on people, causing a relatively stable attitude and experience, including the psychological state of emotions... Emotion is the attitude experience of people about whether objective things meet their own needs" [12]. The combination of emotion and design forms a new word: emotional design. Emotional design is a design method that appears to provide the audience with a better emotional experience. It can be combined with *Maslow's* theory of human needs, and emotional design corresponds to the highest level of needs in the "need for self realization". The introduction of emotional design in the process of animation image design is aimed at making some elements in animation trigger emotional fluctuations of animation audience. An animated work that can reasonably use the method of emotional design should first impress the audience at the visual and auditory levels, then make the audience recall their own experiences through the shaping of animation images, and finally make the audience feel appeased or gain some emotional experiences.

Based on *Donald's* emotional design theory, this paper analyzes the emotional needs of Chinese animation images from the audience's instinct level, behavior level and reflection level.

**1. The Emotional Demand of Chinese Animation Images at the Level of Audience Instinct.** The theorist *Laura Murrya* once pointed out that among the many experiences that movies bring to the audience, the most obvious and direct one is the pleasure of watching and being watched [13]. As a special film and television art, animated film is also the same. At the instinctive level, the first image of human perception is usually the direct meaning

of the perceived object, mainly bringing sensory stimulation. It can quickly judge whether it is good or bad, safe or dangerous, and send appropriate signals to human muscles. For animation audiences, the first intuitive response is the visual effect of animation, reflected in the shaping of animation image, which is the authentic expression of shape, color and movement.

However, due to the limitation of technology, the early animation creation methods were relatively simple, relying only on hand-drawn animation to create animations, using exaggerated anthropomorphic expressions and actions to shape animated images, and expressing the real emotional activities of the characters in an abstract way. This kind of animation art is often difficult to bring the audience a sense of participation and immersion. With the update and iteration of animation technology and the change of aesthetic concept, animation audiences put forward higher requirements for animation art: a more realistic animation world, a more figurative and three-dimensional role image. The simulation trend of animation satisfies people's psychological nature of pursuing truth, and is also used by the audience to preliminarily judge aesthetic standards. The audience's viewing mode has changed from one-way and

static passive acceptance to interactive and experiential active output. In recent years, the animation team in China has become more and more aware of the importance of authenticity in the animation world, which is not only reflected in the shaping of external form, but also in the expression of internal character. For example, in the animation film "*I Am What I Am*" (Fig. 1) released in December 2021, the creative team used various technical means to simulate the details of human hair, skin and pupils in the real world. Although many viewers were dissatisfied with the "oriental face under western aesthetics" in the figure design, on the whole, the audience could intuitively feel that this is the real "*A Juan*" teenager living around us. In character, it is no longer the image of "truth, goodness and beauty" in the previous animation, but it has the character of most ordinary people. The appearance is very ordinary, but the heart is very strong. With its own strength and wisdom, it finally won the victory. There are always some unsurprising shortcomings in these civilian heroes. Some of them are lonely, some are timid and some are selfish. In short, they are not as perfect as traditional animation images. However, it is these popular cartoon characters that make the distance between them and the current animation audience smaller and smaller.



**Fig. 1.** The main characters in the animation film "*I Am What I Am*", Director: Sun Haipeng, China, 2021 [16]

Therefore, the emotional demand of Chinese animation images at the instinctive level of the audience is mainly reflected in the fact that the animation images tend to shape the real image of ordinary people, showing a tendency of "popularization".

**2. The Emotional Demand of Chinese Animation Images at the Level of Audience Behavior.** Behavior level is where most human behaviors lie, which is closely related to usage. At this stage of behavior level, more attention is paid to the realization of functions. The four elements of function, understandability, ease of use and feeling are indispensable for an excellent emotional design of behavior level. Then, the behavior level is reflected in the animation "product", such as whether the audience can accept this animation, whether the animated film is applauded and popular, and whether the animated work has entertainment, commercial and cultural value.

First of all, due to the differences of aesthetic individuals, different audiences have different attitudes and opportunities when appreciating animation works, and the aesthetic activities are also different, which promotes the development of animation works to present different styles and diverse values. In the process of watching, the audience will mobilize their own emotions and emotions to judge whether the animation works are beautiful or not, thus producing a more subjective emotional experience. In this process, the audience may empathize with the characters in the animated film, and this feeling and memory will evolve into new aesthetic feelings and experiences with the growth of the audience. Secondly, the development of Chinese animation can't be separated from Chinese traditional culture. The animation works with Chinese style have always taken root and sprouted on the basis of Chinese traditional culture. The theme, script, role, scene and core of the animation works are deeply influenced by Confucian traditional culture, and the audience in China is increasingly aware of the rich history of Chinese traditional culture for 5,000 years. Then, in Chinese animation works,

on the one hand, the creation of animation images continuously absorbs the essence of traditional art, on the other hand, it conforms to the inheritance and inheritance of traditional culture that the audience is proud of. Since the 1960s, *Shanghai Fine Arts Film Studio* has produced the first Chinese Ink Animation "*Baby Tadpoles Look for Their Mother*" (Fig. 2), which is artistically taken from the images of fish and shrimp of *Qi Baishi*, a famous painter in China. Even though the production process of ink animation is tedious and time-consuming, the early animation pioneers still produced a number of excellent ink animation films. The shepherd boy and buffalo in "*Buffalo Boy and the Flute*" (Fig. 3), the deer and little girl in "*Deer Bell*" (Fig. 4), the mountains and rivers and huts in "*Feelings of Mountains and Waters*" (Fig. 5) and other images with China characteristics are beautiful, flexible and full of poetry. The opening stunning lion dance image in "*I Am What I Am*" (Fig. 6) tells the lion dance culture in the form of freehand brushwork ink, which is full of rhythm and enhances the appeal, tension and cultural value of the whole animation. These excellent animated films are the embodiment of China's traditional aesthetic style in animation art, and also the perfect expression of China's profound traditional culture.

There are also a number of Chinese animations, such as "*White Snake: The Origin*" (Fig. 7), which absorb the traditional elements of Chinese painting in visual design, use freehand brushwork to create artistic conception to express emotions, and convey infinite artistic conception through limited images. The subtle ancient images such as hairpins, skirts, paper umbrellas and flower screens add empty inspiration and transparency to the picture. Another example is the ingenious design in the animation image space of "*NeZha: I Am The Destiny*" (Fig. 8). The images of snow-capped mountains, waterfalls, mountains and lakes presented in the picture of mountains and rivers show the freehand brushwork style of China's animation to the audience, and show the aesthetic style of

describing the spirit with form and having both form and spirit. The use of traditional images such as immortals, demons and dragons in China's traditional mythology in *NeZha* has also realized the representation of China's aesthetics, and displayed the classical beauty of China while being close to the feelings of

modern audiences, which undoubtedly made animation an effective and unique carrier of China's excellent traditional culture. After the modern expression and deduction of various images in folk stories, the animated audience undoubtedly gained a brand-new viewing experience and aesthetic experience.



**Fig. 2.** Fragment of the tape "*Baby Tadpoles Look for Their Mother*", Director: Te Wei et al., China, 1960 [17]



**Fig. 3.** Fragment of the tape "*Buffalo Boy and the Flute*", Director: Te Wei et al., China, 1963 [18]



**Fig. 4.** Fragment of the tape "*Deer Bell*", Director: Tang Chen et al., China, 1982 [19]



**Fig. 5.** Fragment of the tape "*Feelings of Mountains and Waters*", Director: Te Wei et al., China, 1988 [20]

Therefore, the emotional needs of Chinese animation images at the level of audience behavior are mainly reflected in the inheritance and innovation of traditional Chinese culture, the increase of classical aesthetic imagery, and the emergence of fantasy themed animation images.

**3. The Emotional Demand of Chinese Animation Images at the Level of Audience Reflection.** The level of reflection is a complex emotion which is interwoven with many factors such as deeper emotion, consciousness, understanding, personal experience and

cultural background due to the function of the first two levels. The reflection level in animation shows that the audience gets emotional satisfaction and spiritual resonance from the animation works. Animation image is the soul of animation works, whether it can win the love of the audience depends on whether the animation image conforms to the mainstream aesthetic consciousness of the current society and the connotation of The Times. With the development of modern technology and the birth of new media, art has become more popular and everyday. On the basis of



considering the audience's aesthetic condition and emotional needs, the image modeling in the current animation works is gradually developing in the direction of "examining the ugly". The concept of "judging ugliness" is more of a broader and inclusive aesthetic ability, and more inclined to express the attitude of irony,

subversion and reflection on the traditional aesthetic. "Examining ugliness" can bring the audience a novel experience on the senses, subversion and innovation on the aesthetic, cause strong emotional conflicts and contradictions, and finally present diversified styles in the animation market.



Fig. 6. Opening animation of "I Am What I Am", Director: Sun Haipeng, China, 2021 [21]



Fig. 7. Fragment of the tape "White Snake: The Origin", Director: Zhao Ji et al., China, 2019 [22]



Fig. 8. Fragment of the tape "NeZha: I Am The Destiny", Director: Yu Yang, China, 2019 [23]

The animation market in China has been innovated by the change of public aesthetic consciousness, and the main images set in animation works are closely related to the characteristics of ugliness appreciation. The image of the Monkey King (Fig. 9) in *"The Monkey King"* released in 1961 and *"Monkey King: Hero is Back"* released in 2015, and the image of Nezha (Fig. 10) in 1979 and 2019 are in sharp contrast, all of which reflect the trend of "judging ugliness". It is not difficult to see that the Monkey King, created in 1961, completely conforms to the image of the Monkey King with Chinese aesthetics, with facial depiction in traditional operas, strong and

bright clothing color matching and slender and symmetrical body proportion. It is an animation image with a delicate face, bright spirits, wit and courage and a "lofty" style. In 2015, the Monkey King was created as an "ugly" image with a horse-faced monkey body, a long nose and fine eyes and wild animals, and the character setting even subverted the traditional text [14].

In addition to the original symbols of children's figure, red Chinese-style chest covering and double bun, Nezha boldly created the image of "ugly Nezha" and created a rebellious teenager with dark eyes, ferocious expression, irregular teeth, two bun, bare clothes and hands in his pockets [15].



**Fig. 9.** Comparison of the Monkey King's image in *"The Monkey King"* (1961) and *"Monkey King: Hero is Back"* (2015) [23; 24]



**Fig. 10.** Comparison of Nezha's image in *"Prince Nezha's Triumph Against Dragon King"* (1979) and *"NeZha: I Am The Destiny"* (2019) [25; 26]



From the psychological point of view, people have the characteristics of pursuing the trend and being curious about the external world. Therefore, new ideas and new contents should be explored in animation. In this case, "judging ugliness" has become a new means of animation image design. Under the impact of the same truth, goodness and beauty and family style in animation works, the audience will inevitably have aesthetic fatigue and expect to see unique images and stories. Undoubtedly, the image of "judging ugliness" has brought a brand-new emotional experience to the audience.

Therefore, the emotional demand of Chinese animation images at the level of audience reflection is mainly reflected in the "ugliness appreciation" of image modeling, which conforms to the audience's pursuit of fresh and exciting visual images, embodies the pleasure people get by disassembling classic authority and lofty images in the new era, and shows the improvement of the freedom and

acceptance of ordinary audiences with the right to speak in modern society.

**Conclusions.** Emotion can be the creative source of animation art, animation art is a way of expression and catharsis of emotion, and emotional resonance is an ideal state between audience and animation art. Successful animation image-building is not only a collection of artistic expression and emotional expression, but also a perfect combination of vivid external image and full inner emotion.

According to *Donald Norman*, an American cognitive psychologist, when we analyze the psychological activities and emotional needs of animation audience in the process of watching movies, we find from the instinctive level, behavioral level and reflective level that the psychological activities of the audience have changed from sensory stimulation at the first contact to the recognition of aesthetic behavior, and finally, after reflection and aftertaste, they have risen to thoughtful and deep emotional experience.

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## ЕМОЦІЙНИЙ ДИЗАЙН КИТАЙСЬКОГО АНІМАЦІЙНОГО ОБРАЗУ З ВРАХУВАННЯМ ПСИХОЛОГІЇ АУДИТОРІЇ

**Мета:** вивчити основну логіку формування образу китайської анімації за допомогою емоційного дизайну на основі розуміння трансформації психології аудиторії. Враховуючи вплив на емоції аудиторії китайської анімації, проаналізувати тенденції та особливості побудови іміджу китайської анімації.

**Методологія.** Застосовано комплексний підхід для теоретичного аналізу зв'язку між психологічною трансформацією анімаційної аудиторії та анімаційним зображенням. Використано порівняльний аналіз китайських анімаційних образів.

**Результати.** Виявлено вплив психології та емоцій аудиторії на створення анімації. На основі розуміння естетичного досвіду аудиторії було проаналізовано зв'язок китайських анімаційних зображень та емоційного стану аудиторії на трьох рівнях: підсвідомому, поведінковому і рефлексійному, які втілені в тенденціях «популяризації», поєднання реалізму та малюнка від руки. Шляхом порівняння існуючих анімаційних образів встановлено емоційний зв'язок між аудиторією та анімаційними образами, що і визначає майбутні напрями створення анімаційних зображень.

**Наукова новизна.** У контексті вивчення образів китайської анімації надано пропозиції щодо відповідності трьом рівням теорії емоційного дизайну та різним рівням емоційних потреб анімаційної аудиторії. Зосереджено увагу на узагальненні нових явищ в анімаційному зображенні з точки зору психології аудиторії.

**Практичне значення.** Спираючись на емоційний дизайн анімаційних зображень, зумовлений психологічними потребами аудиторії, наведено результати поглибленого аналізу китайського дизайну анімаційних зображень та надано пропозиції щодо створення образів в анімації.

**Ключові слова:** китайська культура, візуальний дизайн, анімація, емоційний зв'язок, естетичний досвід, тенденції анімації.

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**Цитування за ДСТУ:** Chen L., Khynevych R. Emotional Design of Chinese Animation Image Based on Audience's Psychological Level. *Art and Design*. 2023. №4(24). С. 33–44.

[https://doi.org/  
10.30857/2617-  
0272.2023.4.3](https://doi.org/10.30857/2617-0272.2023.4.3)

**Citation APA:** Chen, L., Khynevych, R. (2023). Emotional Design of Chinese Animation Image Based on Audience's Psychological Level. *Art and Design*. 4(24). 33–44.