

The "Childlike" Expression of Animated Picture Book Films

-- The film "Towards the Bright Side" as an example

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Abstract: There are many successful precedents for animated picture book films in the United Kingdom and the United States. As the first Chinese animated film adapted from picture books, *Towards the Bright Side* presents a romantic imaginary world and a warm realistic life for children in the structure of a collection, presenting "child-oriented" creative characteristics in terms of picture, story and thematic ideas. This paper uses the textual analysis of *Towards the Bright Side*, combined with Gestalt psychology, to explore the important role played by the psychology of visual art in the film. At the same time, through the analysis of the "child-oriented" creative theme shown in the film, the emotional value of the film is explored, explore the emotional value of this film and the development of Chinese children's animation films.

Keywords: Children's film, Illustrated book adaptation, Gestalt psychology, Child orientation.

1. Introduction

The film "Towards the Bright Side" was officially released in Mainland China cinemas on 15 January 2022. The film adopts the unit film format and consists of a collection of seven animated adaptations of original domestic picture books (*The Problem of Little Rabbit*, *The Girl with Fireflies*, *The Little Train*, *Old Man Kuai's Sugar Water Shop*, *General Hum and General Ha*, *Grandma's Blue Tin Cabinet Wheelchair* and *Winged Child's Sunday*), focusing on parent-child relationships, brotherhood and brotherhood, good neighbourhood love, growing up in a different place and other child development issues, giving children "Artistic nourishment with warmth, beauty and life details".

2. Research Entry Point: Creativity and Aesthetics

2.1. Creative features: back to children

As the first animated film adaptation of a picture book in China, "Towards the Bright Side" has made the textual leap from static "images" to dynamic "images". "The Question of the Rabbit" translates ink techniques into screen mirror language, achieving a poetic presentation of brushwork and ink interest. "Old Man's Sugar Water Shop" and "Winged Child's Sunday" have rendered strong regional cultural characteristics through the reconstruction of dialect dialogue and urban landscape symbols, completing the link from "Individual emotions" to "Collective memory". While "Little Train", and "Grandma's blue tin cupboard wheelchair" also highlights a distinct sense of authorship.

From picture books to film, the creative thinking and expressive techniques used in the process of cross-media reconstruction are of great value to the study of both illustrated books and animation art forms.

The use of visual perceptual principles and theories related to children's literature and children's films helps the author to analyse the visual text of *Towards the Bright Side* in depth. The theory of visual perception can outline the characteristics

of the development of contemporary outstanding children's picture books from the psychology of visual art and visual thinking, and the theory of visual perception analysis, such as graphic style, colour and light, provides theoretical support for the transfer of picture books to animated films, fully emphasising the control of the viewer's visual thinking and the shaping of receptive psychology in the adaptation of picture books to films.

The dynamics and rhythms of the illustrated book can construct a deep space for reflection in animated films. Throughout the history of cinematic art, it is possible to find dialogue possibilities for the graphic relationship in illustrated animated films. In the age of silent film, cinema was often seen as an extension of painting. The Italian ambassador Canushe once said: "Cinema, as a drama of the visuals of a plastic art, should show the meaningful stillness of painted figures when one stops showing it at any time" [1] The linguistic research also shows that the term of film at that time was not "screen play", which was heavy on storyline and drama, but "moving picture". The term "moving picture" was not a storied, dramatic "screen play" but a "moving picture". [2]

A consideration of the picture book film begins with a return to the study of the picture. This return is a demand made by the linguistic symbolism of the medium in the creation of cross-media art. It both highlights the overall creative process of pictorial art from conception to communication, and follows the lineage of the history of film art. It is a retrospective, a look back, and a breakthrough for future cross-media creations in multiple forms.

In children's paintings, children use their unique simplicity and poetic expression to make their paintings constitute a transcendence of the adult world, not limited by the rational space of thinking. [3] East China Normal University, 2007., but rather in a field of imagination. It has many points of convergence with primitive art, with its wild and simple strokes and the most straightforward expressions of emotion.

The fascinating emotional expressions and pictorial combinations embodied therein led artists such as Matisse,

Picasso and Juan Miró to appreciate the expressive character of children's painting and to return intentionally to its original purity. In this return, the unique experiences and feelings of childhood give a renewed call to experience to the adult creator. Thus, *Towards the Bright Side*, a film dedicated to children, embodies both the artistic and experiential pursuits of its creators, with a double space of meaning and artistic appeal.

2.2. Aesthetic characteristics: understanding children

The film enriches children's aesthetic experience through the interplay of perceptual, imaginative, emotional and comprehension activities, which complement and corroborate each other and ultimately constitute a wonderful aesthetic experience. The basic activities of the aesthetic experience are linked to the structure of the film.

First, starting from 'perception', from simple sensations to complex perceptions, the films stimulate aesthetic experiences in a heterogeneous isomorphism way. Each short film is warmly coloured in its scenes and characters, with a soothing soundtrack, giving the viewer a warm, soft experience from the beginning of the film.

The pleasant sensations of physiognomy as the basis and starting point of aesthetic experience lead the viewer to perception, i.e. the grasp of the totality of a complete image composed of different features of things - shape, colour, light, space, tension, etc. - and the various meanings and emotional expressiveness of this complete image [4]

Perception as an active, positive reflection is governed by 'expectations' and 'schemas'. Past experiences accumulate in people's minds as 'schemas', and specific expectations determine their choice of schema. The images of the characters in the films are closely related to children's visual images and conform to children's aesthetic expectations. Take *The Rabbit's Problem* and *The Firefly Girl* as examples, the images of the rabbit, the girl and the brown bear in the short films conform to the symbolic and childish nature of children's drawings. [5]

The next stage of aesthetic experience is imagination and emotion, which interact with each other as mediators and drivers. The creative imagination comes from the emotions that the creator of art and experiences, and the reproduction of images comes from the structural patterns of emotion itself.

With the exception of Chapter 6, *Grandma's Blue Tin Cabinet Wheelchair*, and Chapter 7, *Winged Child's Sunday*, which are set in a purely realistic story, the other five short films are full of imaginative passion, depicting the world of imagination to the audience. With deep insight and emotional perception, the creators are close to children's non-linear, out-of-the-box thinking and develop a distorted, multi-dimensional aesthetic imagination of the world around them.

According to Susan Lange, the grasp of artistic form is a form of understanding, a higher mental activity permeated with emotion and will. It is the nature of art to present emotions figuratively for our understanding. [6]

Understanding constitutes the final stage of aesthetic experience. The film is rich in vivid and realistic undertones beyond fantasy, guiding the viewer step by step to understand and grasp the main idea of childish innocence and true beauty, and to place their feelings of beauty in the world in a sincere story.

3. Overview: Features of the Film Adaptation

The naive theory holds that children form concepts accordingly to their experiences and use these concepts to explain facts and phenomena in their lives. It is evident that children's theories are not fragmented knowledge, neither are they random and chaotic, but have an internal logic. [7]

When the audience enjoys *Towards the Bright Side* through the four stages of perception-imagination-emotion-understanding, the inner emotional structure of the film fits with the outer artistic form, and at the same time, the outer structure of the film becomes more vital, so that the inner mind moves harmoniously in the rhythm of beauty, thus forming a pleasant and moving aesthetic experience. From static pictures to moving images, the film's childlike adaptation is reflected in the following ways:

(1) From reproduction to representation, the principle of simplification is fully applied: the film generally adopts the principle of simplification to highlight the characters' image characteristics. The film imitates the way children observe the world, reverting to children's drawing techniques. The characters' outlines are mainly made up of geometric shapes, enlarging the features of the five senses, such as large heads, round eyes and Szechuan lines, so that the film is fully childish and childlike.

(2) Bringing together light and colour to imagine fantastical spaces: the film makes full use of the medium of the screen, allowing light to have a narrative and representational function, rather than being a static projection of objects in a picture. As a symbol of hope and light, the light fully engages the viewer's emotions, allowing them to experience the love and beauty of life in the light of brightness. At the same time, the film's colours are close to children's drawing habits, with large flat monochrome areas occupying the visual space and dominated by warm tones, making the images a colourful and soft visual experience for the viewer.

(3) Love and beauty as the guide, rendering delicate realistic undertones: the film does not just present children with fantasy and imagination, but gradually returns to reality as the story progresses, capturing the undertones of love and beauty in real life stories. The adaptation of a true story shows the deep love and spirituality of a generation, conveying a deep concern in its simplicity and warmth.

4. Conclusion: The Future of Chinese Animated Picture Book Films

Towards the Bright Side is a gift of love and emotion that children receive when they enter the cinema and face the screen. However, because it is the first illustrated animation in China, the film also needs to go further in its screen adaptation and storytelling. Will the film leave a deeper mark on audiences and evoke a wider resonance?

4.1. Format: The Hidden Worries of Short Film Collections

Throughout the years, the "collection" has become a major mode of film creation, and the widespread attention generated by the "Mine and I" trilogy reflects the intervention of the art of short films in theatrical cinema. The success of a collection of films is dependent on the intrinsic logic of each chapter and section. However, in *Towards the Bright Side*, there is no

unified narrative thread in the chapters, and the jump in time and space between chapters tends to create an emotional disconnect for the audience. On the other hand, the narrative strategy of the film's "collection" also reflects the weakness of the production in polishing the text of the story.

It is undeniable that short films are also more relevant to children because of their length. However, as today's children are growing up in a mediated age, with an explosion of information and a flood of information, they are becoming adults to a certain extent. Neil Bozeman argues that the crisis of visual grammar in the new modern media has led to a lack of literacy in childhood education: "Because the visual medium speaks primarily in terms of visual images rather than symbolic words, it does not require of its readers a special literacy that can only be acquired through immersion in time, as does the print medium. The "book", representing the print medium, is a metaphor with a special connotation, and its fundamental reference is in fact to a deep thinking capacity of the human being, and thus to a deep individuality and self." [8]

Similarly, film, as a medium that requires the viewer to be immersed in the screen for long periods of time, also places higher demands and expectations on the viewer's ability to appreciate and understand. When children's lives are already filled with short, flat and fast images, it is more important for films to play their role as a medium and a cultural responsibility, giving back to children excellent works with a high level of cultural heritage, artistic cultivation and creativity.

4.2. Content: Digging deeper into the text

In addition, the appeal of picture books lies not only in the presentation of the story, but also in the multi-dimensional transformation of graphic relationships and ideational spaces for the reader. However, the film does not make full use of the medium of cinema in its adaptation, and the overall production is conservative, with many of the stories in the film being only briefly told.

The creator has taken into account the receptiveness of children and has been overly restrained in his handling of the characters' emotions. In *The Little Train*, for example, the author omits the pain and struggle of the boy's inner reconstruction process and focuses instead on the pursuit of light. On the one hand, this is in keeping with the main theme of the film: to create with sincerity, to present beauty and to bring love and beauty to children. But on the other hand, this

omission or obscuring is also worth reconsidering.

In "Towards the Bright Side" we can see the many efforts made by the creators to "give the most precious things to children", but simplicity, simplicity and sincerity are always the first level of access to children.

China's children's films have been developing rapidly over the past two years, with a total of 98 films produced between 2007 and 2008, an average of nearly 50 films per year. [9] With the reform of the film system and the lowering of the threshold of entry, the number of children's films has shown a rapid increase.

But as of now, there are still relatively few high-quality children's films in China. *Towards the Bright Side* is an innovation and a breakthrough, and it shows the creative stance and attitude of children's films in China. If adult creators get close to children, see what children see and feel what children feel, the distance between the two in terms of beauty will surely narrow.

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