

## Analysis on Chinese-style Animation Films' Pioneering with Film Big Fish & Begonia

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**Abstract:** The Chinese-style animation has become a hot topic in China's animation film market in recent years. It is also the dream of Chinese animation fans. From the great upsurge in film watching and mixed market responses of film Big Fish & Begonia, the paper analyzes the essential factors necessary for a successful animation film and explores the orientation of Chinese-style animation and how Chinese-style animation goes through the pioneering period to ushers in the thriving spring of Chinese animation.

### 1. Introduction

Big Fish & Begonia (hereinafter referred to as Big Fish), as a representative Chinese animation film, has moved audiences at home and abroad deeply with its exquisite Chinese style, but also caused considerable controversy due to its intricate plot & logic. Finally, the film grossed ¥0.56 billion at the domestic box office and \$ 0.1 billion in the overseas market, and thus became a successful representative of Chinese-style animation films. Observing the film longitudinally, we can see the film, from its original idea to the output, has met and overcome many difficulties, and is pioneering in many aspects as a Chinese animation film. In the program cooperation with Guangzhou Mingdong Educational Consulting Co., Ltd., a famous animation company in China, we have many perceptions of the difficulties in the tortuous development road of domestic animation. Analyzing the gains and losses of an excellent film work released has great reference significance for the development of China's animation films.

### 2. The Selection of Subject Accounts for 20% of Success

#### 2.1 The New World View and Story Idea

The film creates a brand new universe, the world of the divine. It forms an independent mythological system. Inspired by Zhuang Zi (the respectful name of Zhuang Zhou, a famous representative person of Taoists in China)'s Carefree Journey -- "There was a fish named Kun in the sea of the north. It was so big that its body could cover thousands of kilometers", the film creates a world of the divine containing the Taoist philosophy that the human should conform to the will of Heaven, follow the laws of nature, understand all things on earth, leave life and death out of consideration; the one rebelling against the god must pay the price.

#### 2.2 Seek Echoes through Market Survey

The birth and development of human civilization was accompanied with mysterious fantasy stories, such as the magic world in the west, the universe of Zeus in Greek, the kingdom of Pharaoh in Egypt, and so on. The stories happened in the space beyond the world of mortal life and came from the imagination of people when looking up at stars, and sometimes you even can't tell whether they were real or just the fantasy. China has many myths with a broad range of topics, such as The Classic of Mountains and Rivers (Chinese mythology) recording various odd people and monsters. In recent years, people have reproduced the magic world in films with the help of modern special-effect techniques. More and more Chinese-style animation subjects with IP have been dug

up by scriptwriters and are enjoying great popularity in netizens.

### **2.3 Creation is the Painful Childbirth**

The creation of film relies on the talented creators. Each film was born from a magic beam in the mind of scriptwriter and director. Once there is the suitable soil, the beam will germinate, grow, send up trunks and branches, and finally become full of luxuriant foliage and bear a story with the full plot. As everyone knows, China never lacks qualified film makers, but does lack good story tellers. It's hard to tell absorbing stories to attract more audiences to cinemas to pay for the story. Disney's Zootopia and Pixar's Coco offered exemplary models for us.

Big Fish's plot causes considerable confusion and controversy. Its weak story line and confusing plot setting stemmed from the complicated content the director intended to express. It is like a dish looking delicious but tasted undercooked or impure. The director failed to control the overall structure of story properly and thus left many flaws. Hope Big Fish 2 can remedy them.

### **3. Stirring in Audiences with True Feelings Accounts for 20% of Success**

A moving film shall have touching details so that it can strike a responsive chord in the hearts of audiences. The film The Lion King shows unique emotions and displays the life and growth in nature; Toy Story 3 tells about the family ties between the abandoning and the abandoned and considers the universal value as the soul of film; Big Fish tells a story about a girl who pays out continuously to accompany and guard a fish and finally sees it off after it grows up, just like a mother sees her girl off in the wedding, which finds echoes in and connections with the audience.

Big Fish has many touching dialogues, such as "believe me that we will meet again someday, and I will become the wind and rain embracing and accompanying you in this world"; "I have never regretted it since I met you to now linking my life with yours"; "it doesn't matter whether you are right or wrong only if you have the heart of gold".

### **4. International Level of Film Making Accounts for 20% of Success**

Big Fish uses an excellent aesthetic language and each picture can be used as the desktop wallpaper. The delicate and beautiful frames show a strong style of Miyazaki Hayao, but Chinese animation's diligent attitude revealed from the film is respectable. However, since even the background shows the delicately pretty enclosing house which is a traditional architecture factor, why don't design roles with unique Chinese-style characteristics? In Big Fish, each character shows the strong style of Miyazaki Hayao and many scenes are very similar to those in My Neighbor Totoro and Spirited Away. Probably because Miyazaki Hayao's works have been deeply rooted among audiences, and the film painters all grew up accompanied by his films and thus affected by his style inevitably. Thus it can be seen that creating a Chinese-style leading role in animations still has a long way to go. The animation figure Mulan created by Disney shows a strong Chinese style; Calabash Brothers and Sun Wukong were created by the artists of the older generation. How to design a Chinese-style animation image in the new times is an important task for our generation.

The film presents perfect audiovisual effects, so audiences can enjoy an audiovisual feast in cinemas. A film essentially is a process of dream making, which attracts audiences into the dream to enjoy it within two hours. A film must start from a powerful conception. Big Fish actually creates a grand dreamworld in which a flock of big fish is flying in the sky, universe, clouds and mountains and brings audiences into the imaginary space by soaring across the space and the time

### **5. Building a Core Team of Animation Accounts for 20%**

The animation making team is the guarantee of high effects in the film, ensuring the audio and visual effects of pictures. Members of core team control the trend of plot and complete the whole creation using the collective wisdom. How to retain and dig out the vigor of Chinese-style animation?

(1) Symbolization of animation character shapes. In the 1960s, *Havoc in Heaven* and *Little Nezha Fights Great Dragon Kings* featured with the facial makeup, movements and music of Peking Opera in design have enjoyed great prestige in the world and been worshiped by the world of Japanese animation. In recent years, Japanese and American animations have been rising and Miyazaki Hayao's style has been prevailing, while Chinese animation lost its way and shows many signs of imitation. In *Big Fish*, the character shapes with a strong Japanese animation style and some scene settings may lead audiences into the world of Miyazaki Hayao easily.

(2) Chinese-style setting of scene. *Big Fish* shows a Chinese-style factor of enclosing houses common in Fujian Province, China, arousing the thoughts and feelings of Chinese style. The reproduction of enclosing houses accompanied with red lanterns, habitable rooms and fields shows clearly the scenes of the mortal world. The meticulous painting style stands up to careful watching. Seeing such scenes directly into the daily life environment of the divine, it's hard for audiences to feel the divine's difference from the mortal because they still look like ordinary human beings. So, how to highlight the vigor and power of the divine? Compared with honest, dutiful and brave Kun, Chun seems like a fairy descending to the world.

(3) The design of plot is an important factor to verify whether a story can succeed or not. Although the plot can be considered as the baby of director, it should meet the values of the majority rather than imposing the director's intention on audiences. The film has had mixed reviews from audiences whose disputes are focusing on whether Chun should take her own way and thus results in her homeland's destruction. If the scriptwriter designed a happy or less bruising end, the effect will be better than the tragic end.

## **6. Marketing Accounts for 20% of Success**

The successful marketing is very important for a film, and it is the last step attracting audiences into cinemas. *Big Fish* did well in its marketing.

(1) The idea of film is publicized and supported with music, posters and MV.

*Big Fish*'s theme song had been ranking first in Sina's music list continuously for one month and attracted a large number of audiences to download and listen to. The press conference of theme song won a lot of popularity through new prominent signers in the music circle. The online click rates of song reached more than 20 million.

(2) Presale of derivatives. As many as 2000 categories of goods were sold in shopping websites Tmall and Taobao, and the sales volume reached ¥50 million within two weeks after the film was released.

(3) The emphasis on internet communication and the cooperation with various merchants for mutual benefits. Before the release, the film issued many background posters of fabulous Chinese style which attracted a great number of online downloads and thus stimulated audiences' appetites greatly.

(4) The focus on the cooperation with cinema chain and the public praise from audiences. The praise and recommendation from audiences attracted more audiences to cinemas.

## **7. Conclusion**

Although with some small flaws, *Big Fish* is successful in current Chinese-style animations in terms of box office and overseas market. It is a milestone in the development of Chinese-style animation, telling the world China has the ability to make an exquisite animation film. The film can't be compared with Disney and Japanese animations in terms of details and plot, but through it, we can see a lot of animation film makers are leading Chinese animation going through the difficult pioneering period of Chinese-style animation confirmedly. Let's look forward to the bright future of Chinese-style animation which will come soon.

## **Acknowledgement**

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