Strategies on Optimizing the Development of China’s Animation Industry

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Abstract—This paper firstly reviewed the history of the spreading of Chinese animations overseas briefly. Then this paper described the present situation of the communication of Chinese animations overseas and analyzed the current problems. Finally, considering the changes in modern world, this paper put forward some strategies on optimizing the development of China’s animation industry, for the final purpose of spreading Chinese animations to western countries.

Keywords—Chinese animation, culture, communication

I. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF SPREADING CHINESE ANIMATION ABROAD

According to The Report of The 19th CPC National Congress, “culture is the soul of a country and a nation. Cultural prosperity will bring good luck and strength to a nation. Without cultural confidence and cultural prosperity, there would be no great rejuvenation of China.”[1] In the new media era, developed countries export their cultural values and ideologies to developing countries by animations, which influence the younger generation. Therefore, to take active actions, enrich Chinese culture and strengthen cultural confidence is related to the great rejuvenation of China. General Secretary Xi pointed out, “Be good at telling Chinese stories is the mission of the Time.” This means that telling good Chinese stories and spreading excellent Chinese culture are related to the shaping of China’s image and the promotion of China’s soft power. Animation is the abstraction and refinement of the real world, which entertain the public while disseminating certain ideology, value and culture imperceptibly. Because of its unique expressive way, special appetency and extensive communication channels, it can break through the language barrier and serve as an important carrier of culture dissemination.

In the age of mass media, the audience gradually becomes consumers of service and products related to animation. With the popularity of IP films, the innovation of IP+VR mode, the increase of authorized IP derivatives and the emergence of new entertainment concept, the development of Chinese animation is not merely the development of animation film and video but the development of animation industry. “The agenda-setting theory of communication emphasizes the influence of media on the audience. Animations not only disseminate cultural values, but also shape the audience’s aesthetic standards, cultural habits and consumer behavior.”[2] To break the imbalance of cultural dissemination nowadays, broadcasting Chinese excellent animations in western countries will play an important role in the dissemination of Chinese culture, the development of China’s animation industry and the rise of China’s economy.

II. THE HISTORY OF THE SPREADING OF CHINA’S ANIMATIONS AND CURRENT PROBLEMS OF SPREADING CHINESE ANIMATIONS OVERSEAS

A. The History of the Spreading of China’s Animations

Originally China’s animations were regarded as an art exclusively. Therefore, animations were elaborately designed and enjoyed by a certain group of people. The input on animation is huge but output is small. After the founding of People’s Republic of China, animations served as an education form for children and teenagers. And for political reason, Chinese animation imitated Soviet animation in many ways. Thus, benefit was not considered during the designing and development of Chinese animations. With the development of reform and opening up and market economy, China’s animations had to bear its own profits and losses, and had to consider profits.

In the early 1990s, in response to China’s sluggish box office, the Ministry of Radio, Film and Television issued a document in 1994, permitting the introduction of 10 films per year that basically reflected the achievements of world civilization and the achievements of contemporary films. After China joined the WTO in 2001, the film market was forced to further open, box office was saved, but European and American films were worshiped. When the planned economy was combined with market economy, China’s social structure, industrial system, economic system were undergoing changes, and people’s cultural concepts, consumption concepts, and values changed too. The original ideas of elitism and collectivism quietly changed into individualism and consumerism. Facing so many changes, Chinese animations producer didn’t know how to convey Chinese culture in animations, so they tried to intimate European and American films. When loads of western films flooded into Chinese market and influenced Chinese teenagers with their value and culture, Chinese animations producers keep the idea of disseminating Chinese culture by Chinese animations all the time. Since 2004, Chinese government has issued several relevant policies for effective dissemination of Chinese culture overseas. In 2007, Commerce Ministry and other six ministries and commissions issued the Catalogue of Guidance on the Export of Cultural Products and Services, which states that “any company identified as a ‘key enterprise in animation products’ must own intellectual property rights, reflect the characteristics of Chinese culture, and have potential international markets to expand.”[3] From 2004 to 2016, the cross-cultural communication of Chinese animations has developed by leaps and bounds, and 22 films had won 25 awards in film festivals.
ous. The cross cultural communication of Chinese animation finally greeted its spring.

Though many Chinese animations have been broadcast abroad, more European, American and Japanese animations have entered China. The output of Chinese animations is seriously unbalanced with the input of foreign animations. “In 2004, a cartoon magazine asked the public for ‘20 favorite cartoon characters’. The final result showed that only one Chinese cartoon image, Monkey King, is included.”[4] Chinese first computer-3d animated film “Thru The Moebius Strip” with a total cost of 130 million Yuan, grossed less than 5 million Yuan nationwide. In the same year, the global box office of “Cars” reached $460 million and 21.46 million Yuan in mainland China. Although the famous animations Mulan and Kung Fu Panda made use of Chinese story and many Chinese elements, their aim was to display American culture, which had nothing to do with disseminating Chinese culture.

B. Current Problems of Spreading Chinese Animations Overseas

There are some outstanding problems in spreading Chinese animations overseas:

First, the target audience group is small and animation is limited to the purpose of education. Chinese animation is targeted at children aged 3-15. The design of animations is to show children or teenagers traditional virtue, culture and value. But animation in western countries means more than education. It is a good entertainment for adults. Thus, the limitation of target group and goal of animation production will influence the scope of cross-cultural communication of Chinese animation.

Second, the producers of Chinese animations lack international vision and neglect the difference between Chinese and western culture during the process of spreading Chinese animations to western countries. Statistics show that Chinese animations are popular in Japan but not in western countries. Many Chinese animated films are released in European and American countries, but only a few can win praise and good box office result, such as “Monkey King: Hero Is Back”, “Big Fish & Begonia”, “The Dream of Jinsha” and “Legend of a Rabbit”.

Third, Chinese animation imitates foreign animations and is lack of Chinese characteristics. As is mentioned, Chinese animations imitated from Soviet, and then Japan, and western countries. They didn’t show Chinese features for foreign audience. Those successful examples mentioned above all employ some Chinese elements and show certain Chinese cultures. For example, Monkey King is Chinese hero in the famous traditional novel Journey to the West. The animation, “Legend of a Rabbit”, chose a traditional Chinese toy Tu Erye as the protagonist and delivered Chinese traditional virtues such as honesty, bravery, and keeping one’s word.

Forth, the producers of Chinese animations lack the consciousness of building cultural industry. For certain reasons in history, Chinese animation industry mainly focuses on the production of animated movies and television, a few of which are based on the most popular comics, such as “Little Fox, a Matchmaker”, “Under One Man”, “Dead Brother” and so on. From the 21st century, although there are some derivatives like toys, stationery, clothing and props resulting from Chinese imitation from European, American and Japanese animation industry, the catalogue of derivatives is few and Chinese awareness of property rights is weak. China’s animation derivatives are limited, and their target groups are mainly concentrated on children, so the depth and breadth of market exploration is not enough. Operators in animation industry do not have a clear consciousness of property rights or brand awareness. The established brand has not been well protected, which affects the marketing of derivatives. In the final analysis, animation industry operators didn’t cultivate industrial awareness on the early stage of animation production, or develop the industrial chain simultaneously, so they missed the good opportunities on the stages of financing, cross-cultural communication of animation, and marketing.

III. STRATEGIES ON OPTIMIZING THE DEVELOPMENT OF CHINA’S ANIMATION

A. Enlarge the Target Audience

The correct target of audience will affect the development of the animation industry and the spreading of Chinese animation to western countries. The emergence of Hollywood animated films, Japanese animated games and VR experience all indicates that animation is not exclusive to children, but also a way for teenagers and even adults to relieve pressure and relax. Therefore, the target of audience should be enlarged to adults, so that Chinese animations will be accepted by more audience abroad.

B. Combine Traditional Culture with Modern Fashion

The successful operation of Disney land is the expansion of animation to life, and the extension of audiences from children to adults. Therefore, in the new cultural context, besides enlarging the target audience, animation producers should combine traditional culture with modern fashion, such as fashionable clothing, sports, architecture, weapons, music and catchwords, so as to cater to more potential consumers.

C. Make Full Use of Chinese Elements and Display Chinese Characteristics

Many foreigners admire Chinese culture and Chinese culture is attractive and magic for them. China has long history and deep culture, such as TCM, kung fu, Chinese philosophy, etc. which need them to discover. To make Chinese animation become the carrier to disseminate Chinese culture overseas, its design and production should grasp the curiosity of foreign audiences. Therefore, the producers of animation should choose typical Chinese elements and give full play to the sound and image effects of film and television, so as to create fantastic animations with Chinese colour.

D. Recognize the Differences Between China and the West World and Seek Universal Values

Cultural communication does not mean the opposition between eastern and western cultures, but rather the realization of
multicultural harmony and unity. “‘Harmony with difference’ is the trend and destination of inter-national culture development. ‘Blindly objecting to differences’ is likely to blind our eyes and hinder the healthy development of our national culture.”[5] In the process of designing and creating animations, the common emotional experience and universal values of human beings should be chosen, so that Chinese animation can be accepted by the audience in the multicultural context.

E. Establish Cultural Industry Consciousness

Because of globalization Chinese animation industry is inevitably affected by the global animation industry and has to transform from artistic creation to cultural industry. As a unique branch of the cultural industry, animation is a comprehensive industry which combines animation art, cultural communication and commercial development, with the features of large investment, time-consuming, slow effect and high risk. For this reason, if the animation industry is developed as an art, only depending on the box office and audience rating, it cannot be maintained for long time. However if it is regarded as cultural industry and is developed comprehensively, it will reflect new features: more potential derivatives, wide range of influence, long period of efficiency, and high returns.

F. Focus on Multi-industries Combination and IP Development

Nowadays, with the globalization of economy, science, technology and information, the combination of industries has become a common phenomenon. To develop, Chinese animation industry should also be combined with industries in different fields so as to cope with the complex market environment, relieve the financing pressure, share the market risk, make full use of advantages among different industries, establish and guarantee the effective operation of complete industrial chain, and ultimately achieve the maximization of business interests.

An important link in the animation industry chain is the multi-dimensional ecological operation to guarantee the maximum dissemination of animation brands. Therefore, in the early stage of animation creation, we should have brand awareness and cultivate high-quality animation IP. When the animation film and television works are released in public, the multi-dimensional ecological operation based on the authorized IP derivative should be started simultaneously. In addition to toys, clothing, commodities and other derivatives, IP authorization can also be extended to games, comics, theme parks and so on. The operation of derivatives is also expanding the brand awareness, thereby accelerating the creation and dissemination of animation, and realizing the dissemination of Chinese culture.

IV. PROSPECT

China’s animation industry is developing vigorously. Only by solving current problems and opening up an international market can it play the role of disseminating Chinese culture. At the same time, attracting foreign audiences with Chinese culture will bring a broader market for China’s animation industry as well. Thus a dynamic virtuous circle will be formed.

REFERENCES