

Analysis on the Application of Ink Painting Techniques in the Animation “Little Tadpoles Looking for Their Mother”

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Abstract: “Little Tadpoles Looking for their Mother” is inspired by Qi Baishi’s paintings, showing the unique charm of ink painting and the profound heritage of Chinese style. Technically, the animation created a new art form of ink animation by combining traditional ink painting with modern animation. While maintaining Qi Baishi’s artistic style, the creative team made necessary innovative adjustments, such as “improved” freehand brushwork and “red flowers and green leaves” color, which not only retains the essence of traditional ink, but also ADAPTS to modern aesthetic needs. In addition, “Little Tadpoles Looking for their Mother” also embodies Qi Baishi’s dialectical thinking of the aesthetic concept of “between similarity and unsimilarity”, and achieves the artistic effect of “similarity in spirit” by simplifying the image and strengthening the charm. This not only shows the traditional aesthetic pursuit of “portraying God” and “writing God in form” in Chinese painting, but also reflects the idea of the harmony of Yin and Yang in Chinese traditional cultural philosophy.

Keywords: Ink animation; Brushwork; Similarity and non-similarity; Qi Baishi

1. Creation Background

Ink animation is a model of Chinese animation in the exploration of nationalization, is a great innovation. It produces the effect of shade change through the fusion of water and ink. Lines are traced on celluloid to fill in the color, then shot frame by frame and played continuously to produce animation effects.

Ink painting was born in the early 1960s when “a hundred flowers bloom and a hundred schools of thought contend.” At the China Fine Arts Film Exhibition, Vice Premier Chen Yi said: “If you can move Qi Baishi’s painting, it will be even better.” Gong Chengbo. History of Chinese Animation [M]. Beijing: China Radio, Film and Television Press, 2015:83.] Thus, Shanghai Art Film Studio began to try the production of ink animation, the representative figures are Wei, Qian Jiajun and so on. Qian Jiajun’s self-statement on ink animation: “If you talk about ink animation, you have to start from an accidental opportunity in the 1960s. It was the spring of 1960, after Vice Premier Chen Yi visited the art film exhibition, the factory surged a wave of trial production of ink animation. I’m the chief technician of the cartoon, so it’s my duty. After a period of experimentation, several fragments of ink animation samples were made. Later, when we drew “Little Tadpoles Looking for their Mother”, Tewe was the art director and I was the technical director. This is the first color ink cartoon in China, and also a new style of animation art in the world.”

After repeated experiments, combined with previous ink animation samples, Shanghai Art Film Studio created China’s first ink animation Tadpoles Looking for their Mother in 1961, based on several paintings by Mr. Qi Baishi. Compared with the pre-production animation sample, the film is richer in content and more complete in form. “Little Tadpoles Looking for their Mother” is based on Fang Huizhen, Sheng Lusde works of children’s story book adaptation. The story describes the frog mother in the pond gave birth to a group of tadpoles, tadpoles do not know the mother’s looks, see the chicken called mother, also want to find their mother. On the way to meet the shrimp, goldfish, crabs and catfish, according to the characteristics they provide, after twists and turns and finally find the mother, swim home together, and then the tadpoles slowly become small frogs. The plot of the short film is full of childlike interest and has certain educational significance.

2. Characteristics of animation creation

From the point of view of the animation theme, “Little Tadpoles looking for their mother” shows the love of mother and son,

focusing on the transmission of emotions. The organic combination of Chinese ink painting, folk music and animation reflects a strong national style. In this film, Tewe skillfully integrates his cognition of animation ontology and personal artistic ideals, and expresses his humanistic and artistic feelings in the form of ink animation: “We must create national style, mark the new of the nation, establish national differences, and must climb the artistic peak of the proletariat with the style of ‘original one’ in the international film world.” Sun Lijun, Yin Na. Tewe’s animation creation [J]. Film Arts, 2011(02):93-97.

In the design of the script, the plot is concentrated and tightly linked, and it makes people unforgettable by focusing on the portrayal of the characters. The tadpoles find their mother through fragmented information, and they misidentify time and time again until they finally understand that they can’t just look at the surface of things or a single feature, but must understand things as a whole. This experience tells us that when we look at things, we must think comprehensively, and cannot draw conclusions only from appearances and one-sided characteristics.

In terms of character performance, in order to better show the characteristics of animals, the creator cleverly uses the changes in the formation and the fast and slow rhythm when the tadpoles swim to convey the delicate emotions of the characters. [Li Jiang. Research on the creative design of animation Characters and animation Shapes [M]. Beijing: China Commercial Press, 2019:187.] To show the dynamic and speed of its swimming through the smooth movement law, it can well reflect the emotional changes, like chickens talking to tadpoles with curiosity, and the movements are lively and cute; The posture of grandpa shrimp is leisurely, the movement is relaxed; Goldfish shuttle in the water grass, elegant and elegant shape; The crab is naive and has a sense of weight; Catfish dynamic soft, these characters in the creator’s pen to show vitality and vitality, but also a good display of Qi Baishi painting style.

3. Application of brushwork techniques

Ink animation is inspired by Chinese ink painting. According to its genre, ink painting can be divided into landscapes, figures, animals, flowers and birds, customs and religions. The technique classification is mainly divided into freehand brushwork and fine brushwork. Chinese ink painting does not pursue realism, but artistic conception. Chinese ink painters advocate “the intention of the brush first” and emphasize “writing God in form”. In the animated short film “Little Tadpoles Looking for their Mother”, the main characters of the tadpoles are from Mr. Qi Baishi’s work “Frogs in Ten Miles out of the mountain Spring”, and the other small animals are from the images of Mr. Qi Baishi’s works “Frogs” and “Shrimp”.

3.1 “Improved” freehand pen

As we all know, “Little Tadpoles Looking for their mother” is not painted by Qi Baishi frame by frame, but the Shanghai Art Film Studio organized the painter to create a frame-by-frame blueprint of Qi Baishi’s painting style. There are some differences between animation art and traditional Chinese painting art. The purpose of this animation produced by Shanghai Art Film Studio is to promote Chinese-style animation, so catering to the public aesthetic is the first issue that artists in Shanghai should consider. From the strokes of frogs, goldfish, crabs and catfish in the animation, it can be seen that Shangmi painter has made some “improved” changes in the pen. Its main realization is mainly in two aspects: first, the brushstrokes are slightly weakened in the sense of hierarchy, and the pen pays more attention to the fullness of the outline to reflect the cute image of animals in the animation design, such as “Little Tadpoles looking for their mother.

Ma (1960, 15min 18sec, Tewe as art director, Qian Jiajun as technical director) and Qi Baishi’s works, as shown in Figure 3.1. Therefore, the effect of stacking white space between the strokes has been weakened on the basis of Qi Baishi’s painting style. Second, the degree of change in the color of the ink is also weakened by weakening the calligraphy properties of the pen. The ancient culture



Figure 3.1 Screenshot of Little Tadpoles Looking for their Mother (left) compared with Qi Baishi’s painting (right)

attached great importance to the cultivation of calligraphy in Chinese paintings, but the audience of “Little Tadpoles Looking for their mother” was ordinary people, and the artistic aesthetic level of the public in the 1950s and 1960s was not yet very high. For animation, the public’s aesthetic tends to be more two-dimensional flat stick figure style, such as “Why the Crow is black”, “The Proud General”, etc., simple lines and rich colors.

3.2 Application of “red flowers and green leaves”

This animation scene uses the color of red flowers and green leaves before Qi Baishi’s “age change method”. The scene is aquatic algae and reed, lotus, etc., so the color is mainly in cyanine color, and the lotus and moss spots are embellished with carmine or western red. Qi Baishi’s change from “red flower and green leaf” to “red flower and ink leaf” caused him to lose the market of calligraphy and painting in his old age. He wrote in his poem: “Before working the chopsticks, he first picked a pen, and the painting is now worthless.” “As cold as snow, the swallow is worthless.” Nevertheless, he wrote in his poem: “Laughing down this man is really me, the more no one knows the more peaceful”; “The eagle worm is easy to know, a hundred years of public opinion of its own period.” The reason why Qi Baishi painting few people interested in the situation, the main reason is that he was in his fifties when he was obsessed with the eight mountains, the color does not need flowers, ivy yellow, etc., although the ink is good, but the cold escape has, the wealth is insufficient. The animation style is the same without using the “red flower and ink leaf” color method after the “decline and change method” is also to meet the market to the maximum extent.

4. Embodiment of dialectical thinking of “similarity and non-similarity”

Mr. Qi Baishi’s painting themes mainly include flowers and birds, landscapes and figures. Mr. Qi Baishi thinks: “The beauty of painting lies between similarity and non-similarity, too much like kitsch, not like deception.”

Therefore, how to integrate ink painting techniques into animation creation has become the focus, and Teweï advocates that the aesthetics of “between similarity and unsimilarity” of ink painting be integrated into animation creation. Through learning the techniques of Chinese painting, we can better express the false, solid and dark of ink painting, and combine the painting language of animation to better present the implication of ink painting animation.

The animation production team adheres to Qi Baishi’s artistic concept of “similarity and non-similarity” in the creation. When dealing with the relationship between “form” and “God”, painters abandoned the closeness of form and chose the fit of God. For example, a frog’s body markings are integrated into two strokes of ink, and a walking fish uses a pit-pen to outline its swimming posture. In addition, the color is very bold, and the tadpoles are painted red, which contrasts with reality. Chinese painting pays attention to “portraying God” and “writing God in form”. Chinese traditional philosophy always follows the simple dialectics, and the traditional aesthetic also strives to achieve the state of harmony between Yin and Yang. “Like” and “not like” are two contradictory. From a scientific point of view, the mottling on the back of the frog into two pieces of color, tadpoles into red phenomenon is not valid, this is the biggest “dissimilarity”, but the rhythm of the pen and frog jumping and swimming posture capture quite accurate, to achieve the “divine resemblance” effect. It can be seen that the painters adhere to the aesthetic point of view of “image modeling”.

To sum up, “Little Tadpoles Looking for their Mother” is not only a successful attempt of Chinese animation, but also a confident manifestation of Chinese culture. The application of ink painting techniques in animation not only retains the characteristics of Qi Baishi’s painting style, but also ADAPTS to the aesthetic needs of the public. At the same time, the animation also embodies Qi Baishi’s aesthetic concept of “between similarity and non-similarity”, and achieves the effect of “spirit similarity” through highly generalized brush and bold color, showing the pursuit of traditional Chinese philosophy and aesthetics. The combination of traditional art and animation shows the charm and vitality of Chinese national culture, and also opens up a new way for the development of Chinese animation.

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