

# The Commercial Value and Industrialization of Animation Characters

Lingrui Dai

Tianjin polytechnic university School of computer science and technology, China.

---

## Abstract

Animation character is the soul of animation. A successful animated character not only has a strong artistic charm, but also contains rich commercial value and profit. At present, the animation industry in China develops rapidly, but the industrialization development is not perfect, but many problems still exist in the animation characters design. Through the analysis of the commercial value of animated characters, this paper summarizes the problems existing in the design of animated characters in China, and discusses the methods to solve the problems.

## Keywords

Animated characters; Industrialization; Commercial appeal; Animation peripheral derivatives; Personnel training.

---

## 1. Introduction

In today's society, the world economy and technology are developing at a rapid pace. With the advent of the digital media era, people are increasingly demanding on spiritual entertainment. Animation, being as the most direct, most vivid and the most comprehensive means of expression, has been widely used in a variety of commercial activities. Animation cannot be simplified just as cartoon, but a collective form of paintings, comics, films, digital media, photography, music, literature and many other art categories. Therefore, the creation of animation has become more complex and more extensive in its content. It has become a highly invested industry. The quality of an animation work often drives a relatively large economic float, making animators to be more cautious in the process of preparing and designing.

## 2. The Commercial Value of Animated Characters

Character design is the soul of an animated film, which plays a decisive role in supporting the whole animation. Excellent animation characters can deliver audiences a variety of attitudes towards life through its unique and exaggerated image, thus winning the love of people of all ages while bringing great commercial value. Having successful characters is the key to the success of a film. A successful animated character can lead to the development and the progress in the fields of spirit, culture, economy and other areas. With the passing of time and memory, the plots in the animation will gradually be forgotten, but characters with interesting and unique characteristics will stay forever in our memory. With an improvement on people's requirements for their spiritual life, the rigid and indifferent characters have bored the public while the new and interesting characters have become increasingly popular, gradually turned into a new cultural concept.

Often, animation requires for a large investment, in which the risk of it is equivalently high too. This needs us to capture the aesthetic taste of the audience when creating works. Especially when we design the characters, we need to integrate the design with the business closely. The designer not only has to design the characters that match with the audience's aesthetics, but also has to consider the added value an animated character can produce later. When an animated character successfully caters

to the tastes of audiences at different levels, it indicates its artistic success, and shows its great commercial influence. The commercialized operation has brought animation design into a virtuous circle.

The commercial appeal of animation characters is embodied in the box office, endorsements and animation products and other areas.

### 2.1 Box Office.

Compared with the real star market, which has been affected by aging, scandals and other factors that have led to declining the box office appeal, the animation stars can stay young forever. They have no scandal, and they are completely obeying the command, and there will be no default and other phenomena. These virtual animated stars have the vitality and box office appeal that make the real stars feel ashamed.

On June 27, 2009, the second bullet of the *Evangelical Soldier's New Theatre Edition* series, *Evangelical Soldier's New Theatre Edition: Broken* was released on a small scale in 120 cinemas in Japan, eventually mobilizing 2.94 million audiences, with a box office of more than 4 billion. At the same time, the work was also screened in Taiwan on October 16, 2009, Hong Kong on December 3, 2009 and in Beijing's China Film Archives on June 29, 2012. The animated film *Gospel Warrior of the New Century* has a large and loyal fan base, and it is also expected to get such a high box office.

Blue Fat Doraemon is also an animated star with great box office appeal. In 1979, when Japanese TV was first broadcasted, there was a surge of Doraemon in Japan. Since the introduction of China in 1991, there has been an irresistible whirlwind to the Doraemon. Since 1980, it has produced 34 theatre movies, and constantly creating new box office records.

### 2.2 Endorsements

When it comes to product endorsements, there is a very representative figure - *Astro Boy*, which is the masterpiece of Japanese animation and comic artist Takeshi Tezuka. When China introduced the cartoon in the 1980s, it did not pay the broadcasting fee, and the copyright of *Astro Boy* required CCTV to broadcast Casio's bundled advertisements while broadcasting the cartoon. With the popularity of *Astro Boy* in China, Casio has naturally become a well-known product, which can be said to be the most successful foreign brand at that time. Not only that, but the sensational effect of Casio advertising has even affected other areas of television programs.

*Haier brothers* is a giant animated cartoon produced by Beijing Red Leaf Computer Animation Company and Haier Group, a well-known Chinese enterprise, with a joint investment of more than 6 million yuan over a period of more than ten years. The hero of the story, Haier Brothers, is the brand image of Haier Group. After broadcasting in the United States, Singapore and other countries, *Haier Brothers* is welcomed by children and even parents because of its rich and healthy content. The indirect benefits of Haier Group are self-evident.

### 2.3 Animation Peripheral Products

Become the most profitable part of the animation industry, which is also the largest part of the operating space. In the 1990s, the domestic animated film *Transformers*, which introduced free of charge, was soon broadcast by various TV stations and became popular. But how can we expect *Transformers* to earn 600 million yuan from China by relying on its derivatives.

In the United States, animation and its derivatives have an annual output value of more than \$5 billion. In the field of animation, Disney not only created well-known animation images such as Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck, but also established Disneyland centered on characters and stories in animation. At the same time, Disney provides a new business concept for the world, that is, based on animation works, sales of its related products, and it forms a complete and huge animation industry chain through the combination of both sides.

Disneyland is located in some of the most prosperous urban areas in the world. It attracts tens of millions of tourists from all over the world every year. Its benefits are incalculable. The success of

Disneyland depends entirely on the cultural connotations accumulated in Walt Disney's classic cartoons. It is not only the amusement facilities there that attract tourists, but also the animation characters who dream of being with them.

*Pleasant Goat and Big Big Wolf* produced by Guangdong Original Power Culture Communication Co., Ltd. is a successful case of domestic derivatives development. With the broadcast of cartoons on various TV stations, the original story of *Pleasant Goat and Big Big Wolf* has been adapted into comic books of the same name. Since 2007, the national sales have exceeded 2 million copies, with sales value exceeding 20 million yuan. There are many kinds of derivatives developed on the theme of *Pleasant Goat and Big Big Wolf*, including audio-visual books, plush dolls, toys and gifts, stationery and clothing, food, daily necessities, and animation derivatives such as QQ, MSN expression, mobile phone tablecloth, screen saver, multimedia, etc. It becomes a successful work of Chinese animation derivatives.

### **3. The Problems of Animation Character Design in the Development of Animation Industry in China**

China's animation industry was affected by the planned economy in the early stage of development, and the production and distribution of animation works were greatly imprisoned. Especially in the 1990s, China's local animation was seriously impacted by foreign animation, and domestic animation almost disappeared from the market. Serious facts make us realize that animation must be industrialized in order to promote the rapid and good development of domestic animation in terms of quality and output. Since the beginning of the 21st century, China has increased its investment in animation, and colleges and universities have set up animation majors. At the same time, The State Administration of Radio Film and Television of China and the General Administration of Press and Publication of China have approved the establishment of more than 40 national animation industry bases and research and development bases, and the animation industry has developed rapidly. Despite the gradual maturity of the level and technology of animation character design in China, more problems emerge with the rapid development.

#### **3.1 Lack of Animated Stars**

In the process of animation industrialization, if you want to make profits through derivatives, you must have animation stars. Mickey Mouse, Donald Duck and the characters in Disney Animation have not only become spokespersons in various fields, but also gold-lettered signs of Disneyland, attracting countless tourists. Now every animation in Disney will have its animated characters performing in Disneyland to show unlimited vitality. In Japan, there are many animation stars, such as Chi-bi Maruko, Crayon Shin-Chan, Detective Conan, as well as pirates with different backgrounds in *One Piece*, all kinds of sports stars in *Touch*, *Slam Dunk*, *Captain Tsubasa* and *The Prince of Tennis*, no matter in which field there is no lack of animation stars.

In the history of animation in China, there have been some well-known animation stars, such as Monkey King, Shuke and Beita, Black cat Sheriff, Calabash Brothers and so on. But with the decline of Chinese animation and the popularity of foreign animation, it is difficult for Chinese children to find native Chinese animation stars.

#### **3.2 Animation Image is not Suitable for Derivatives**

At present, China's main animation peripheral products are books and audio-visual products. Because many Chinese animations did not consider the development of its derivatives at the beginning of creation, it is difficult for its animation image to produce value in toys, clothing and other aspects. Many Chinese animated films, such as the movie *Heaven drop piggy* and *Mad for Music*, can only be cut into a series of comic books, which can be called the Chinese characteristic peripheral products. It can be seen that the form of Japanese animation and peripheral derivatives are diverse, while Chinese animation has a single form and thinking, so its peripheral derivatives are also single.

### **3.3 The Market Orientation of Animation Works is not Comprehensive**

Nowadays, there is no real youth animation market in China, most of the animation works are younger, and they are oriented to children and preschool education. However, the main consumer group of entertainment business is young people, young people have greater consumption capacity, great impulse and freedom in consumption, they have the ability to buy animation derivatives, it is the most powerful consumer in the animation market. On the other hand, the young children do not have the ability to distinguish the authenticity of animation derivatives, thus enabling pirated products to gain access to the market. And young people's ability to distinguish between brand and authenticity helps the market resist counterfeit products around animation.

## **4. Solutions to Problems in the Design of Animated Characters in China**

Although there are many problems in animation character design in China, the development trend of animation is good. China has 400 million teenagers directly or indirectly related to the animation industry. According to relevant data, the current domestic animation program broadcasting volume is more than 280,000 minutes per year, minus more than 30,000 minutes of actual production capacity, the annual market gap is as high as 250,000 minutes. However, due to various reasons, Chinese animation has stagnated for many years, and there is obvious lack of experience in animation production and management. Nowadays, China's animation market is not standardized, the animation industry chain is seriously missing, and the development of animation derivatives, the greatest benefit point, is particularly serious. In this process, how to create excellent animation characters is more important. We should start with the root causes of the above problems and find out the countermeasures to solve the problems according to the actual situation of China's animation market.

### **4.1 Changing Traditional Concept and Broadening the Position of Audience**

To change the problems in Chinese animation character design, we must first change the traditional concept and find new breakthroughs in the audience group positioning. Break the single model of the young audience; pay more attention to the youth group, the college students and the working, they have more time and money to consume animation derivatives. In the character design, we should broaden the adult market positioning, design animated characters that can be accepted and liked by people of different ages and levels of consumption, and expand the market for animation derivatives.

### **4.2 Market Research and Preliminary Conception of Perfecting Role Design**

Disney President once said, "Every time we decide on the story of the next film, we have to go through market research again and again. When the film is about to be finished, we will invite hundreds of children to watch it with us. Through their reflection, we will test and modify the film, and strive to achieve the best." Only with such intentions as Disney can we design popular animation characters and make excellent animation products. For China's national conditions, we must invest more in the early stage of role design: before the character design, we should first identify the audience and conduct a large-scale market research; we should also design questionnaires or hold symposiums to fully understand the audience's preferences and needs, then analyze and organize them; after obtaining the most direct survey results, we will design roles according to the needs of consumers. In the design process, we should also take account of the development of animation derivatives, such as whether the role design is suitable for dolls, or for printing clothes wholesale and so on. Only in this way can the designed characters be recognized and accepted by the majority of the audience, be loved by everyone, occupy the market, and thus be further disseminated.

### **4.3 Attaching Importance to Talent Training**

Animation character design is a professional design work, which emphasizes the scientific and systematic learning process and the combination of learning and practice. As a highly productive industry, animation needs animation character designers to have high comprehensive quality. Besides excellent creativity, animation also has high requirements on communication, expression,

collaboration, planning and management. With the development of animation industry, the demand for animation talents is increasing, and animation character design has gradually become an independent and important hot industry.

At present, the cultivation of animation talents in China, especially the animation character design talents are basically in the process of exploration in the development direction of education specialty and the training mode of talents. There is a lack of systematization and pertinence, and there is a lack of clarity in training objectives and a serious phenomenon of "homogenization". Now, China's animation talents are mainly concentrated in the medium-term link, namely, the animation processing industry, while the pre-planning and creation of animation, as well as some high-end talents are extremely scarce. For example, there is a great shortage of talents engaged in professional CG director, production, scriptwriter, director, styling and art design. How to accurately grasp the development opportunities of animation industry, renew ideas, strengthen the cultivation of innovative animation character design talents, and improve students' practical and innovative abilities is the top priority for the cultivation of animation professionals in Colleges and universities.

To sum up, animation character design not only plays a vital role in the success or failure of an animation work, but also plays a decisive role in the industrialization of animation work. With the continuous development of China's animation industry, the level of animation character design needs to be improved urgently. Nowadays, the problems and difficulties that we are facing are not solved in a short time. We need the vast number of animation workers to constantly explore, work together, sum up experience, and work together for the development and expansion of China's animation industry.