

The Aesthetics of Violence in "Adult-oriented" Chinese Animation

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Abstract: Aesthetics of violence is a common film style and expression technique used in the creation of 'adult-oriented' Chinese animation and is also a form of artistic exploration of violence. The aesthetics of violence relies on the virtual world of animation, putting the bloody violence in a romantic and poetic veneer, highlighting the aesthetic feelings of the audience, and at the same time setting the values of animation as modern social values, turning animation into an allegorical "non-child" adult fable. By summarizing the connotations of the aesthetics of violence in adult-oriented animation, this paper explores the aesthetic function and expression of the aesthetics of violence in adult-oriented animation.

1. Introduction

Most Chinese animation is for children and should be for more than just children. It must be adult-oriented. Therefore, in recent years, Chinese animation has continued to explore the adult direction, with films such as *Da Hu Fa*, *The Monkey King: Hero Is Back*, *Nezha: Birth of the Demon Child*, etc., making their way into the film market "violent and adult-oriented." Swords, gun battles, explosions, disasters, blood, crying, death..... Audiences are enthralled when these strong, exciting words and shocking thrills become gorgeous images in adult-oriented animation. "Violence" and "beauty" coexist in harmony, and the film is a beautiful treat for the audience.

2. The Aesthetics of Violence in Chinese Animation in the Context

The "aesthetics of violence" has become an important element in contemporary art because it appeals to the subconscious. It is not by chance that unconscious formal interests are chosen to appreciate art; they are a common stream of consciousness running through the human mind, a primitive imaginative experience accumulated through countless human experiences [1]. Human appreciation and expression of the beauty of violence emerged early on. For example, the Zhou dynasty's musical dance *Dawu* graphically depicts scenes of fierce warfare and encapsulates the long battle process during which the Zhou dynasty replaced the Shang dynasty. Developing attacking movements into entertaining aesthetics reflects the laws of artistic development and the combination of force and beauty. Chinese martial arts blend the practical and aesthetic aspects of violent action

and are an example of the artistic aspects of violent action. The beauty of violence has always survived and developed in human cultural and entertainment life. For example, Chinese opera and Western theatre both have fight scenes. The actors' fighting movements in the theatre are already solidified and programmed, such as how to fight and dodge, including some martial arts performance tournaments seen in Chinese animation. The movements are all set in stone. Violence in theatre has been integrated into the narrative and completely turned into an aesthetic object in art. To this day, the beauty of violence has always held an important place in cinema, the most popular form of entertainment. As cinema's representation of violent beauty continues to evolve, the aesthetics of violence has also emerged.

As for the explanation of the aesthetics of violence, Hao Jian, a professor at the Beijing Film Academy, in his article "The Creation of the Formal Sense of "Aesthetics of Violence" and its Psychological Mechanism and Social Understanding," mentions that the term "aesthetics of violence" refers mainly to the formalistic interest in violence in cinema. The works related to the 'aesthetics of violence' share the common characteristic of turning violence or gore into a purely formal pleasure. It mainly exploits the formality of gunplay, martial arts action, killings, or other violent scenes and takes this formality to the point of beauty and splendor [2]. Violence and beauty coexist in harmony, and the atmosphere is beautiful, allowing one to overlook the bloody violence. The aesthetics of violence is meant to dull the violence and brutality of violent acts, and its trajectory is to depart from violence and sail toward beauty [3]. Both as a cinematic expression and aesthetic style, it embodies the aesthetic pursuit of violent content in cinema.

Similarly, the aesthetics of violence is a common expressive technique in animation and is one of the main narrative modes in Chinese animation. The aesthetics of violence is played out even more in adult-oriented animation. For example, in *Nezha: Birth of the Demon Child*, when Taiyi goes to meet Li Jing and his wife for the first time, Nezha's mother smashes an apple, knocking Taiyi and his mount off their feet, and suddenly a rock hits Taiyi Real from a height and hits him on the A rock suddenly smashes into Taiyi's head from a height and Taiyi's reality is bruised and battered. The film's exaggerated and witty treatment of Taiyi's character's movements, expressions, and language allows the audience to see him hurt and only find it amusing, with the violence once again weakened and left to function as entertainment. In the scene in " *Monkey King: Hero Is Back*" where the Great Sage fights Chaos, in the mournful and wailing music, the cape flies in the wind, and the Great Sage draws the golden hoop stick from his ear, at this time Chaos attacks the Great Sage, the Great Sage with a technique of anger the golden hoop stick cuts Chaos into pieces, the after-effect of the golden hoop stick cuts a deep crack in the ground, the Great Sage once again transforms into a meteor, quickly bounces towards Chaos, giving Chaos a final blow. This poetic violence is a delight to the eyes and body of Chinese animation, and the final blow of the Great Sage is like a great cannonball of spectacle and entertainment that shocks and dazzles. Chinese animation only sees the film shaping up as a memorable character, with the violence becoming a purely visual treat, downplaying the gory, brutal nature of the film.

3. The Aesthetic Function of the Aesthetics of Violence in Adulting Chinese Animation

Both violence and beauty have their roots in human beings, and violence is an instinct of human beings as creatures. Human beings are innately aggressive in the same way as Freud's I instinct and must find an outlet for it. However, in a civilized social order, violent aggression is strictly forbidden. Therefore, the aggressive nature of human beings can only be given vent to by watching violent fights and fierce confrontations [4]. At the same time, with the development of material and spiritual civilization, people's aesthetic demands are also increasing, and even when watching violent confrontations, the audience is demanding a good fight, not only watching but also enjoying and

appreciating and the sense of beauty has diverted people's attention from violence itself. Violence and aesthetics of unity are also present in adult Chinese animation. Audiences are excited by the collision of racing cars and fierce armed fights because these scenes stimulate the audience's desire to attack. They are excited to see the flare of life force, causing the audience's adrenaline to soar because these resonances allow them to feel the beauty of violence.

The aesthetics of violence is the aestheticization of violent images using aesthetics, not that violence itself is beautiful, but that animation uses various artistic techniques to render violence as beautiful. The reason why "violence" has long been a subject of artworks and has become an aesthetic object and a popular one is that the aesthetics of violence have their unique aesthetic function.

3.1. Expression of Violent Impulses

As mentioned earlier, violence is a biological instinct in human beings. For Christian Metz, the deeper psychological structure of the viewer is first and foremost expressed in the "state of entry." The so-called "state of entry" in adult animation is because the animation satisfies all the unconscious desires hidden in the viewer's heart. A virtual world is created by the animation, where the viewer is, on the one hand, aware that he or she is watching an animation and that everything on the screen is an illusion, and on the other hand, because most of the protagonists chosen for adult animation are "ordinary people." For example, *Monkey King: Hero Is Back* starts as an ordinary monkey who has lost his magic powers; the protagonist in *Legend of Deification* is relegated to the lower realms, and in *New Gods: Nezha Reborn*, the protagonist is an ordinary middle-aged boy, and the audience is immersed in the characters created for them by the animation, taking everything in the film as reality. According to Metz, the film's combination of reality and fantasy gives the audience a sense of 'daydreaming.' The audience enters the film in an adult animation and daydreams of becoming a hero or a Superman, breaking through all the difficulties in the film, using violence to punish evil and eradicate all the black forces. When the "ego" breaks through the constraints of the "self," the most primitive desires of the heart are given vent to, and the pressure of everyday life is released.

3.2. Satisfying the Psychological Need for Freshness, Excitement, and "Aesthetic Tremors."

As Zhang Boqing and Zhang Wei put it in *Film Audience Studies*: "Contemporary art psychology believes that there is also an internal drive for exploration in the deep human psyche, which manifests itself as a desire to explore new things and new factors, or in plain words, curiosity" [5]. Real life is always boring and not as colorful as the animated world. Reality is always boring, but the animated world will give the audience a fresh visual experience. Violent beauty allows the audience to appreciate the tense narrative style of violent beauty and the passionate and violent exciting action scenes. The animation is rendered through artistic techniques, especially the digital special effects technology makes the violent beauty more stylized and spectacle, which greatly satisfies the audience's aesthetic psychology of freshness.

Moreover, in the violent scenes of adult-oriented animation, the tense and exciting action scenes and the ups and downs of the storyline stimulate the audience's attention, as well as the dangerous explosion effects, fire, earthquake, etc., the virtual world shaped by animation makes the audience immersive, even if the violence in the animation makes the people in the drama suffer, but still, the audience is attracted by the shocking effects inside. In particular, when sitting in the IMAX cinema, it is as if you are in a world built by animation. All the images are "at your fingertips" when an arrow is shot at the camera from afar, and the audience feels the arrow is coming toward them. The audience experiences the fear of 'death' and then the safety of escape in this similar scenario. The audience's psyche repeatedly shifts between 'tension' and 'relaxation' and receives a unique 'aesthetic tremor.'

3.3. For Audio-visual and Aesthetic Pleasure

Animation itself has a basis for aesthetic pleasure; the audience's delight in sound, preference for color, feeling for images, devotion to the plot, exaggeration of performances, etc., all qualities of animation provide an essential element of aesthetic entertainment. In terms of aesthetic sensuality alone, many violent scenes in adult animation provide aesthetic pleasure. The gorgeous images, the carefully constructed scenarios, the witty dialogue, the cunning and mischievous narratives, the brilliant digital effects, etc., create a visual spectacle and a rich audio-visual language that stimulates the senses as never before.

3.4. Acknowledgment of the Beauty of Humanity and its Power

Violence can destroy harmony and tranquility, but sometimes it is a means of defending justice. Audiences' judgments about the nature of violence in adult-oriented Chinese animation are directly related to the perpetrators of violence and its reasons, and the beauty of violence is closely linked to goodness and justice. In most adult-oriented animation, the narrative of violence tends to follow the principle of 'violence against violence.' Negative characters are often abusive and violent, bullying the weak or violent power, etc., while the positive characters are full of justice and defy power. Only when the characters' violence follows the requirements of truth, goodness, and morality is the audience inspired to recognize and appreciate the ethics of such violence. Much of the violence in adult-oriented animation in recent years comes from martial arts culture, which embodies the ideal personality in the folk cultural psyche. In addition to their superior skills, martial arts warriors have a set of moral codes of the jungle. The code of martial arts is centered on 'righteousness,' which is the moral righteousness of the kung-fu world in the smallest sense and the greater righteousness of the world in the largest sense. Like Jiang Ziya in the Legend of Deification anime, his feat of smashing the Heavenly Staircase, a symbol of divine domination, with his strength also shatters how the control of the heavens manipulates and deceives the world. The audience feels the beauty of the chivalrous character in the act of chivalry, but also the beauty of humanity and the acknowledgment of man's power.

4. The Expression Techniques of Violence Aesthetics in Adult Chinese Animation

4.1. Spectacularizing of Action Scenes

Adult-oriented animation is constantly trying to engage the audience through the depiction of violent scenes or to make a deeper point. Audiences increasingly demand violence as an aesthetic object. To increase the spectacle of the film, it is necessary to increase the spectacle of the action scenes, allowing for a more innovative expression of kinetic and aesthetic sensations to stimulate the audience's senses. To increase the kinetic aesthetics of violence, firstly, the aesthetics of violence is designed to increase the spectacle of action, borrowing from the aesthetics of dance so that the violent action has a real sense of striking and an exquisite ornamental quality. The film still presents the audience with violence, but this kind of violent action allows the audience to associate with the harmony and beauty of dance. Secondly, the use of slow-motion is a very common expression of violence. When violent action has a dance element, the slow-motion or freeze-frame technique can express the poetry and romance, which allows the audience to see the process of the action, but also allows the audience to slow down the emotional rhythm at an extremely tense moment to appreciate the dance-like beauty of the action, to feel the subtlety of the changes in the action, and at the same time to lengthen the aesthetic expectation [6]. Thirdly, the rapid splicing of multiple shots, in animation, the rapid combination of short shots is undoubtedly more suitable for expressing the speed

and kinetic effect of movement than general shots, and the number of shots directly affects the overall effect and the formation of the rhythm of the film. A large number of short shot flashes gives the action a powerful amount of information, and the intensive performance of the action makes the audience experience the overwhelming thrill while also increasing the tension and tension.

4.2. Stylization of Violence

The aesthetic representation of violent films shows a fixed stylized tendency to form a labeled norm of formal expression. The aesthetics of violence is to tap into the formal aesthetics of violent scenes, like *Da Hu Fa*, where two Peanuts men are caught in a private meeting and shot in the head by Master Gyan; the set even gives a close-up of the head falling and rolling to the ground. Considering that these scenes may touch the bottom line of social morality and industry norms, the production has stylized the bright red blood, replacing it with high purity blue or green according to the rank of the characters, and visually differentiating the intense action scenes such as the shooting and fighting with the scattered scenes of Chinese ink painting, defocusing the bloody scenes with blurred focus, and bringing out the cruelty and indifference of the real world with exaggerated anthropomorphic dynamics. With vibrant colors and stylized shapes, violence, and beauty are presented parallel, and the audience experiences an omnipresent sense of tension.

4.3. The Romanticization of Violent Aesthetics

Poetic romance is what the aesthetics of violence in Chinese animation seeks to express, to increase the splendor of the images on the one hand, and to stir up romantic feelings in the audience on the other, to put a veil of warmth over the violence, or more precisely, to lead the violence into romance. In a clip from the Chinese animation "White Snake": The wind blows leaves everywhere, and Xiao Bai and A Xuan are walking in a silent forest. Their hair and bodies flutter together. This poetic violence makes Chinese animation pleasing to the eye, with beautiful images, lyrical techniques, romantic moods, and poetic settings, truly a perfect combination of force and beauty. Chinese animation is also aesthetic while appreciating violence. Examples of this 'poetic violence' abound in Chinese animation, and the poetic oriental charm enchants the audience. Creating a romantic atmosphere undoubtedly adds to the beauty of the audio-visual experience and will dilute the violence to highlight the beauty.

4.4. The Comedization of Violence

Humor, playfulness, and slapstick are also expressions of the violent aesthetic. Animation excels at this; the audience perceives cartoons as light-hearted, humorous, and laugh-out-loud funny. Exaggerated distortion is a common technique used in animation to deal with violence, and this common comedic technique can be a good way to dissipate violence. The most common is a punch that flattens the opponent's head, shakes it down, and the flattened head springs back to normal like rubber. Alternatively, the characters themselves are full of comedic elements. In animation, there is no shortage of comedic characters, like Tai Yi Zhen Ren in *The Nezha Reborn*, the Great God of Tang Yuan in *Monkey King: Hero Is Back*, and the Master of Bao Qing Fang in *White Snake*, to name but a few, whose use of violence is consistently accompanied by an extremely absurd and comical style of music throughout, coupled with the animation's exaggerated and comedic treatment of the characters' emotions, language and movements, making the violence loses its brutal and bloody meaning in the comic atmosphere, leaving only a symbolic and theatrical component. Their violence is presented as a vaudeville-style stage, where violence loses its authenticity and is reduced to farcical comedy. Sometimes in animation, violence exists only for the sake of the comic narrative.

4.5. The Realization of Violence

Direct violence is also an expression of the aesthetics of violence. Like director Stanley Kubrick's films, *A Clockwork Orange*, his violence is devoid of the division between good and evil, the pretense of grace and the thrill of entertainment, and what comes to the fore is pure violence, occurring as naturally as a thirst for water. In adult-oriented Chinese animation, director Liu Jian has a similar approach to violence, as in his works *Sting Me* and *Big World*, where violence is everywhere, without the visual impact and rhythmic shifting in the form of slow-motion and fast editing, eliminating fancy fight scenes and romanticized plots and heroic character treatments, and using slow long shots to restore the pain of violence itself. The violence sets a tragic tone of sorrow and despair for the animation and completes the author's critical expression of society. The realization of violence is also a characteristic of adult-oriented animation.

5. Summary

Violence has long been an aesthetic paradigm in adult-oriented animation, while the appreciation of violence is also a physical need and instinct. The aesthetics of violence shows violence while also dissipating it and give the viewer the right to moral criticism, allowing them to watch while de-stressing their daily lives. The aesthetics of violence package violence in a way that brings people a unique visual and psychological aesthetic experience. The need for pleasure satisfaction in consumer society requires that the representation of violence in artworks does not stop at the point of objective writing; only its formalized and stylized treatment can stimulate people's increasingly numb nerves and increasingly 'coarse' aesthetic senses and satisfy people's increasingly difficult appetite for appreciation.

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