

A Comparative Study of Narrative Strategies in Healing Animation: A Case Study of Chinese and Japanese Animation

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Abstract: In the modern life with doubled pressure, the "healing system" has emerged as a way for people to seek spiritual relief, spiritual satisfaction, and pure self. Healing animations often have a direct impact on people's hearts, providing viewers with profound emotional resonance and emotional comfort. With the development of the animation industry and the increasing diversity of audience demands, animations from various countries have begun to explore the theme of "healing". Healing themed animations from various countries use unique narrative styles, combined with their own social, cultural, and aesthetic orientations, centered around everyday themes, adopting a small to big approach to introduce equal communication between characters, thereby redeeming each other, providing comfort and encouragement, and constructing new aesthetic orientations.

Keywords: Healing anime; Narrative structure; Artistic Aesthetics

1. Introduction

In the increasingly fierce social competition and the growing pressure of life, many people are bound to varying degrees in terms of spiritual and material aspects, living a "floating" and "free" life. Their individual identities have strong uncertainty in the "mobile" society. Individuals constantly generate energetic energy, assuming that biological energy is converted into psychological energy. When psychological energy accumulates to a certain extent, individuals will feel uncomfortable^[1], and at this time, they must take action to vent their discomfort. Therefore, the "healing system" has received widespread attention in the fields of art and culture, and many writers and artists have demonstrated the meaning and value of "healing" through their works. The demand for "healing" culture and "cute" and "healing" derivatives is becoming increasingly urgent. By reading and watching novels and film works with the theme of "healing", people are touched deep in their hearts, awakening their pursuit of truth, goodness, and beauty, and yearning for a simple, simple, and beautiful life^[2]. I hope to use beautiful things to dispel negative influences, comfort the soul, regulate emotions, and bring people a sustained and lasting sense of comfort and security^[3].

2. The connotation and characteristics of healing animation

The healing animation is based on sweet and cute images, creating a language style with affinity and infectiousness, thus triggering emotional resonance among the masses^[4]. This creates a strong contrast between ideals and reality, providing a cultural space for social groups to express their emotions and release them. During the process of enjoying the animation, the audience can feel a warm and comfortable state of mind, and enjoy a pleasant sense of satisfaction. This experience can nourish the soul, eliminate fatigue, and alleviate sadness, leaving people with tears in their eyes and a peaceful and warm atmosphere.

In a broad sense, "healing" animations have several significant characteristics. Firstly, the "healing series" animation centers around "people" and revolves around everyday themes. By depicting many small details in life, it showcases the state of real life and resonates with the audience. Secondly, the rhythm of such animations is usually relaxed, and there is no absolute distinction between good and evil characters. The plot is either light and plain, or through the contrast and contrast of the plot, it leads to equal communication between characters and mutual redemption. It can heal the wounds of the soul and provide encouragement and comfort during times of sadness, soothing the pain.

3. Narrative type and content structure

The narrative methods and forms of expression used in "healing" themed animations from different countries also have their own strengths. Whether in the presentation of images, language expression, music selection, or character shaping and scene setting, they are deeply imprinted with the cultural and aesthetic habits of their respective countries. Japanese works such as *Spirited Away* and *Eternal Garden of Violet* focus on beautiful and exquisite painting style, delicate emotions, and warm plot, conveying friendship, family affection, and harmonious coexistence between humans and nature. For example, Chinese works such as "Time Agent" (Season 1), "Deep Sea", and "30000 Miles in Chang'an" combine traditional Chinese art such as poetic ink painting with social aesthetics in daily life, conveying contemporary Chinese values and highlighting the profound cultural heritage of China. In the process of love and growth, draw the power of healing. This shows, it can be seen that through these animated works, not only can one appreciate the unique charm of cultural arts from various countries, but also feel the commonalities of human emotions.

3.1 Exquisite and Beautiful - Japanese Animation

In the post industrial era, the increasing work pressure has led to the gradual disappearance of traditional family functions. In the 1990s, Japan's foam economy led to fiscal deterioration, intensified competition and depressed social development. In the collapse of group society, the pace of urban life has accelerated, and people feel alienated in objectified interpersonal relationships, unable to find belonging and dependence in their families and groups, which leads to self loss and exacerbation of depression^[5]. Therefore, healing themes have become popular.

Healing movies originated in Japan and gradually expanded their scope in space and time. The root of this lies in the fact that the contradictions of modernity that arise in modern society cannot be resolved by themselves, and those who are bound by modern society can only rely on entertainment and brief relaxation to numb themselves. Nowadays, "healing" has become an important theme in film and television works. Influenced by traditional natural views and the culture of mourning, Japanese healing anime is usually characterized by warm and soothing music language, clear and natural visual style, and gentle and restrained plot. By returning to the countryside, exploring the spirit of all things, and expressing subtle sadness, it seeks sincere friendship, strong family affection, and vague love, showing beautiful warmth and bringing purification and enlightenment to people's hearts.

For example, Chihiro in "Spirited Away" is a microcosm of an ordinary Japanese child. She and her family mistakenly enter a "different world". Originally cold and lonely, she embarks on a fantasy journey, where she meets many interesting characters, influences her inner world, gains love and warmth, deep friendships, and passes them on to others. The film portrays a recognition of social life and relationships: the key to unlocking the potential of life lies in communication, cooperation, and mutual assistance with society. Mutual assistance and care are the keys to breaking loneliness and finding oneself. This is an adventure story set in a realm of divine seclusion, depicting not the confrontation between justice and evil, but how to survive, cultivate human friendship, and use one's own wisdom to tackle various challenges in a society where good and evil are intertwined^[6]. Bai Long was the first friend Qianxun met in this fantastical world who reached out to lend a helping hand, giving her the confidence to face life and difficulties. In his interactions with Grandpa Boiler and Ah Ling, Chihiro deeply experienced the warmth of friendship. Therefore, after being "cured", Chihiro's indifferent heart became filled with enthusiasm, and she began to try to care for others such as Faceless Man, Fang Baobao, and later, to warm and remind each other with Bai Long, to redeem and grow together. The audience gradually shifted from sympathy towards the characters to an appreciative attitude, ultimately achieving emotional resonance of emotion and joy, thus obtaining similar emotional experiences. For example, from the perspective of an ordinary individual, it is not limited to setting the character as an ordinary person, but more importantly emphasizes the character's self exploration and growth struggle^[7]. When facing confusion and perplexity in life, emphasize the contradictions and conflicts between the current self and self-development.

For example, the love healing anti war anime "Eternal Garden of Violet" adopts a linear narrative and is widely recognized by audiences for its touching story, beautiful art style, and moving music. When the female protagonist Violet was young, due to her amazing combat talent, she was found by the brother of the male protagonist Gilbert Bugambia and given to him as a "combat weapon" during the war. Faced with this helpless, eccentric, and low cognitive level little girl, the lieutenant did not treat her as a tool, but gave her a name with a beautiful meaning - "Eternal Beauty and Love" in the violet language, hoping that she would no longer be a tool but a person who lived up to her name, independent and autonomous. In addition, she was taught to read and write, and taken to the market. In military life, Violet, who has high combat effectiveness learning ability but low cognitive ability and

high mechanical obedience, often receives the care of her lieutenant. She also frequently participates in multiple battles with her lieutenant and has achieved excellent results on the battlefield. As time passed, their relationship gradually heated up, and Gilbert even became a devout presence in Violet's heart. However, in the final battle, both of them were seriously injured. The lieutenant pushed her away from the collapsed city wall at a critical moment, leaving Violet with the words 'live well, gain freedom, I truly... love you'. In the depths of Weil's heart, the word 'love' has been echoing, although she does not fully understand its meaning, but she understands its importance. Thus, the entire plot revolves around "love" as the main theme, presenting a profound and touching emotional atmosphere. After the end of the war, Violet came to work at the automatic handwriting doll company run by the junior colonel to write letters on behalf of him. At first, Violet didn't understand the ways of the world, and the letters were too straightforward or cold, which made the client feel embarrassed and even furious. However, as Violet came into contact with people around her who needed to write letters, she gradually understood their innermost emotions and began to understand the complexity and diversity of the world. Through the correspondence between the two countries, the annual letter she wrote for her daughter's birthday to her seriously ill mother, helping to restore literature at the planetarium, and writing scripts for playwright Oscar's daughter, the animation portrays the protagonist's contradictory growth process. In imperfection and instability, it gives the audience a profound and timeless beauty that has not been polished or concealed. The affection between parents and children, brother and sister, love between men and women, and friendship between friends have all left profound marks in her heart. These emotional bonds made her expression richer, and the emptiness in her heart seemed to be filled and nourished. At the end of the animation, Violet finally realizes the true meaning of love and also achieves self redemption. She wrote herself a letter full of emotions towards the world, firmly believing that the lieutenant still lives in a corner of the world and has not left her. At the same time, she sincerely thanked the lieutenant for bringing her such a different life, allowing her to feel the true meaning of "love" and understand the lieutenant's feelings for her back then. This animation does not spend a lot of space depicting the cruel scenes of war. The beginning is the scene after the war ends, and the middle part only interweaves memories of the war period, mainly focusing on how people can bravely overcome their grief, support each other, provide warmth, and face a new life after the war^[8]. The distinct layering and depth of the plot allow the audience to recognize the good and evil, family, friendship, love, and dignity in the human heart, triggering resonance with the animated characters, and walking out of darkness like the protagonist of the story to find beauty and happiness.

It can be seen that in recent years, Japanese healing anime has increasingly focused on the mutual redemption between characters. Unlike before, the protagonist is no longer a flawless and exceptionally capable individual, but rather possesses certain personality flaws that require the warmth and support of the group. In the story, a supportive relationship is formed between the protagonist and other characters. The narrative path of healing anime has shifted from relying solely on external forces to mutual support and warmth transmission.

3.2 Subtle and timeless - Chinese animation

With the rapid development of the economy in the 21st century, people's pace of life is accelerating day by day. The popularity of internet buzzwords such as "996", "007", and "involution" seems to cast a shadow of "negative energy" over the entire social mood, highlighting the depressed mentality of society. However, in such a social environment, the healing culture of "social positive energy" has emerged and quickly become a "decompression valve" for relieving pressure in today's media and cultural communication.

The domestically produced "healing series" animation, nourished by excellent traditional Chinese culture, reflects the current social situation, endows the era with significance and practical value, shapes a content form of health and goodness, creates poetry and distant places, and aesthetically pleasing daily life with a common sense of society.

For example, "Time Agent" (Season 1) adopts a series narrative style and is presented in the form of a collection of unit dramas, with each event occupying one or two episodes. Although it also revolves around emotional themes such as family, love, and friendship, it does not mean that the "healing" animation does not have misunderstandings or conflicts. It draws inspiration from real-life events such as the workplace, the Wenchuan earthquake, child trafficking, and other hot news. It blends a relaxed daily atmosphere with a tense plot rhythm, leading to equal communication between characters, emotional comfort between hearts, and emotional resonance among audiences. It showcases the creativity and narrative ability of Chinese animation teams. There is a unit based on the Wenchuan earthquake. In the process of urban-rural transformation, the client's attachment to local life, memories of youth, and the innocent and romantic campus basketball game, friendship between childhood sweethearts, and family love between mother and son are used as the story background. People who

lost their lives in the earthquake convey their love and responsibility, rendering the visual space and emotions. Also, EMMA, who works overtime, has been subjected to unfair treatment in the workplace. These grievances and troubles were told a well intentioned "lie" after receiving a phone call from home. Later, her parents came from their hometown to replenish their supplies, help her tidy up her room, and quietly return home to not disturb her work. Their love for their children was unrewarded, and through delicate depictions of trivial matters, the animation successfully created vivid and specific character images and scene segments^[9]. As the plot narrative progresses, the audience observes the characters for a long time, thus accumulating profound emotions. This emotion gradually creates a psychological assimilation with the characters in the audience, forming a healing force.

In addition, many domestic healing animations set the space in urban environments, adapting the coldness of urban architecture to the warmth presented between characters, thus better showcasing the setbacks and real life in front of the camera. For example, 'Deep Sea', set against the backdrop of dazzling dreams, presents a narrative pattern that goes from revealing psychological trauma to healing^[10]. Suffering from depression, Shen Su went through a magnificent and fantastical life journey after mistakenly entering the dreamlike deep sea world. Eventually, he reconciled with himself and achieved self healing. In fact, there are many types of characters in healing anime, but they can mainly be classified into two categories: healers and healed^[11]. Therapists refer to animated characters who are able to heal the emotional wounds of others, while the healed refer to animated characters who have undergone the process of spiritual healing. In animation, healers often have personalities that are enthusiastic, outgoing, and friendly, shining with beautiful radiance. Due to the death of a loved one, tense interpersonal relationships, tragic fate, or other unexpected setbacks, the cured person may experience psychological trauma. Their personality traits are characterized by introversion, isolation, pessimism, and indifference, which can easily lead to negative emotions such as sadness, worry, anxiety, and irritability. But the two main characters in "Deep Sea" are actually "healed ones" who have similar experiences. The protagonist, Shen Su, is insecure and cowardly because of the restructuring of his childhood family and the lack of parental love for a long time. He desperately desires "love" in his heart, while Nanhe once lived in endless darkness like Shen Su. Behind the "clown" is a frustrated painter, which is also why he can deeply understand Shen Su's hidden "fake smile" in his heart. Perhaps due to mutual understanding, after meeting and communicating, a deep friendship is established. With the rescue and assistance of Nanhe, the psychological trauma of Cansu was healed. When Nanhe, who acted as a 'healer', gave care to the ginseng, he also received comfort and warmth in turn.

The 5000 year history of civilization has endowed China with rich and profound national cultural resources, and the absorption of national culture and the display of national characteristics have always been the development path of domestic animated films^[12]. For example, "Chang'an 30000 Li" adopts a reverse linear narrative, with the prosperous Tang Dynasty poetry and literature as the narrative background. Through Gao Shi's memories, it cleverly connects dozens of "top tier" poets at that time, such as Li Bai, Du Fu, and Wang Wei, with the past of the Tang Dynasty they lived in, demonstrating the sense of destiny contained in traditional Chinese culture. By examining and recalling Li Bai, Gao Shi is actually examining his own inner self and exploring the path of his own growth. The interaction between Li Bai and Gao Shi demonstrated a profound friendship. Gao Shi and Li Bai, one with an introverted personality and the other with an outgoing personality, both had the ideal of serving the country, but neither was able to achieve it. The setbacks and difficulties experienced by Li Bai, as well as the setbacks faced by Gao Shi in his daily life, also allow us to withdraw from distant history and reflect on our own life path through their stories. Chang'an 30000 Miles brings an empathetic sense of character immersion to the audience. Young people are moved by the magnificent scenery of the Tang Dynasty's prosperous era and the gorgeous beauty of poetry, just as the traditional verse "Da Peng rises with the wind in one day, soaring up ninety thousand miles"^[13] flows with the poetic charm of Chinese cultural genes, reflecting the dreams and pursuits of the people today, and awakening deep emotional resonance in the hearts of young people. Middle aged people sigh due to the ever-changing world and continuous exploration, while elderly people lament due to their belief that mountains and seas will eventually return. Just like Li Bai's weathered poem 'The light boat has crossed ten thousand mountains'^[14], achieving reconciliation with the former self. This outstanding animated work allows the audience to see their inner world through culture and story. It is known that those souls who have been hurt in the past can find healing medicine in poetry.

From the above, it can be seen that healing anime is not just a bowl of entertaining chicken soup or a relaxing and pleasant scenery, but a bitter but healing medicine that can heal emotional wounds. Animation does not deliberately pursue plot climax, fight scenes, and human preaching. Instead, through simple and direct dialogues between characters, it delves into the delicate and sincere emotional states that people tend to overlook in their daily lives. These emotions are often difficult to express accurately in emotional communication.

4. Conclusion

Healing anime, with its unique appeal to beauty and broad audience base, has gradually become an indispensable part of the animation market. The portrayal of 'non heroic' characters in heartwarming and healing anime is an exploration of ordinary people's lives, and appropriately expresses the affirmation of the value of ordinary people [15]. Healing anime usually revolves around the narrative logic of "self dilemma, self struggle, and self realization". By showcasing ordinary or even vulnerable characters and their daily stories, it triggers a sense of immersion in the audience, inspiring them to bravely face setbacks and traumas, overcome obstacles, and discover and understand their true selves. The expression and transmission of such emotions make the audience deeply feel the power of love and the warmth of being healed.

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