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A Study of Villains in Modern Chinese Animated Films

Hanzhang Meng[1*]

[1] Anime Character Design, Osaka Seikei University, Japan; International College, Krirk University, Bangkok, Thailand

Email Address

727579229@qq.com (Hanzhang Meng)
*Correspondence: 727579229@qq.com

Abstract:

As an art form of virtual narrative, animated films have become a popular mode of artistic expression in the modern era of big data on the Internet. Compared to Japan and the United States, Chinese animation films did not have a smooth start. But with the continuous output of excellent works in recent years, Chinese animation has begun to have excellent animation films with Chinese characteristics. Where there is light, there is shadow, and where there is good, there is evil. In many works of art, the villain acts as a plot driver of conflict and a supporting symbol in shaping the character of the protagonist. In recent times, villains have become more and more important to audiences, and the number of Disney films with villains as protagonists has been increasing, with *Wreck-It Ralph*, *Despicable Me* and *The League of Villains* being some of the best-received films released in recent years. What they all have in common is that they have taken the concept of "evil" and made it bold and innovative. This thesis will take Chinese animated films as its research theme, combine Freudian Psychoanalytic Psychology and Xunzi's Doctrine of Evil Human Nature, analyse the image design, character traits, background settings and existential significance of Chinese film villains in recent years for generalization. It will also summarize the shortcomings in the hope of serving as a reference for future designers of animated villains.

1. Introduction

Good and evil in the real world is a difficult concept to define. Good and evil are like a ruler, standing at either end of the scale. And between absolute good and absolute evil, there is a gray area that cannot be identified. Most of us have survived on the gray area so far. Confucius said that people are not saints. Even the best of us have some selfishness to a certain extent, and these seven emotions and six sensory pleasures are the most primitive of human nature. However, in a virtual narrative work of art like an animated film, the good guys are often righteous and upright. Even today, many villains in Chinese animated films still have the word evil written on

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their faces. The villains' goals are almost identical: revenge, sabotage, world domination, and so on.

The good in good people is the same, but the evil in bad people is completely different. In the age of the internet, people can watch the news and see the worst in human beings beyond their perception. It has to be admitted that an hour and 30 minutes is the most common length of a film as a narrative art. To tell a new story frame in this limited time is inherently difficult. It is even more difficult to portray a character in a narrative story. For this reason many creators either spend most of this time portraying the main character, or they cut out certain storylines to shorten the length. How to enrich the villain from there is both a challenge and a learning curve.

This paper combines Freudian psychoanalytic psychology, Xunzi' s Xunzi's Doctrine of Evil Human Nature, and other literature on animated villains with a combined analysis of modern Chinese animated films, creating a questionnaire with animated villains as the research topic, and combining some of the variables in the questionnaire for data analysis. In documenting the costume, character, purpose, and existential significance of animated film villains as the focus of the evaluation. More hypotheses, research values and innovations are presented in the arguments presented by the previous researcher.

2. Freudian Psychoanalytic Psychology, Xunzi's Doctrine of Evil Human Nature for the Psychological Interpretation of Villains

Freudian [11] spiritual psychology does a good job of breaking up the concept of good guys and bad guys and reducing them to ordinary humans. The bad guy part of the villain is perfectly understood in psychology as a release of the original desire (LIbido [12]), and the three areas of "ego", "self" and "superego" [3] at the heart of Freud' s theory are repeatedly referred to. These three spheres are repeatedly referred to, and the antinomian tends to abandon the ego as a constraint to the utmost in the realm of the ego. The original human desire is analyzed in psychology and spirituality. The trilogy of sexuality places the original human desire at the heart of the entire text, concluding that the starting point of the human goal is "sex" as its source. Sex here is not simply sex in the sense of sexuality, but more of desire.

In China, Xunzi' s Doctrine of Evil Human Nature was undoubtedly like a bombshell that impacted the thinking of the era, but a closer reading of the theories put forward by Xunzi reveals that many points point to the doctrine of human nature as summarized by the Chinese Confucians of that era, interpreting evil as a desire of human nature as well. It is the nature of man to love what is good for him and hate what is bad for him. [4] It is in the nature of man to prefer what is good for him and to hate what is bad for him. It is the human condition to be unsatisfied for years and years.[5] [5] It is the inherent desire of all men to remain unsatisfied for generations. That a gentleman and a villain are the same, regardless of their qualifications, nature, intelligence or talents.[6] [6] All human beings are the same, whether they are a gentleman or a villain, in terms of their qualifications, character and ability to master their talents.

The most significant feature of Xunzi' s Doctrine of Evil Human Nature is that Xunzi confronts human desire, concluding that it is natural for human nature to pursue desire. And the analysis of the evil in the villain is itself expressing the pursuit of desire in the most naked way. And qualifications, nature, intelligence, and talent, in turn, prove that the positive villains are being subsumed as human beings. How is cleverness and cunning not an affirmation of intelligence? The villain is self-centred

and does things to satisfy his own desires, often illustrating man's desire for his own self.

There are cultural differences between countries, and this leads to many people having different views on good and evil. To take the law for example, while the laws of each country are binding, the penalties are not the same. Chinese law has zero tolerance for prostitution, gambling and drugs, and the severity of the punishment makes it absolutely difficult to do similar things in China. However, in other countries, there are countries where prostitution, gambling and drugs are treated differently from China, and there are even countries where murder is not even punished. Such cultural variability certainly enriches the concept of humanity, complicating and blurring the boundaries between good and evil.

Experiments on human nature, such as Professor Philip's Stanford Prison Experiment, have often been shamefully described, confirming the inferiority of human beings when they gain power. It is not surprising that the goodness of human nature can be easily eroded by evil, for man is inherently good and evil as a whole. The Japanese World of Wonder often features similar experiments on human nature, and although it is a virtual framework for the story, the viewer invests themselves in the characters being experimented on in the episode. And questions are raised as to how the viewer would act if these experiments were real.

Psychopathology and the theory of sexual evil can be said to justify the villain's behaviour, providing a more objective explanation in terms of self-interest and lust, thus allowing the villain to put the symbol of "bad" into a rational human analysis. Animated villains, on the other hand, can only take a few parts of the villain as a method of artistic presentation. The following arguments are presented and argued from the different perspectives of other researchers.

3. The Most Common Patterns in Animated Villains

3.1. The advantages of animated villain face-painting

The term facetiousness is undoubtedly the term that appears most frequently in papers examining the villainous genre. Facialisation, as the name suggests, enables one to tell at a glance between a decent character and a villainous one. The villainous characters are usually characterized by their righteousness, their good looks, and their extraordinary presence, even if they are mute, and the audience will decide at first glance that such characters are the good guys. The villain, on the other hand, is cunning, malicious, with crooked eyes and an evil smile, and the audience will also decide at first glance that he is a bad person. This phenomenon can be explained by the phrase "the heart of the matter", and it is a concept that is often found in Japanese and American animation films. In the Japanese film "A Thousand and One" directed by Hayao Miyazaki and in the American animated film "Despicable Me" directed by Chris, Gru is also put on the big screen as the face of a villain.

In villainy essays, face-painting is undoubtedly used by scholars to criticize the creator's creative singularity. Instead, the author would like to follow up this concept with an objective analysis of the problem of the face villain. Firstly the villain in the face model does not need to be emotionally linked to the audience, and in the narrative this type of villain does not require a great deal of time to analyse the villain's behaviour and psychology. In many animations, there are inevitably interactions between the protagonist and multiple supporting characters, and having to portray each character would inevitably fragment the narrative. And in the hour and 30 minute time limit of an animated film, it is even more difficult to portray each

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character in depth. Faceted villains therefore reduce the time it takes for the audience to understand the plausibility of the villain's actions, which stand out as evil and therefore an obstacle to the protagonist, are defeated, set off some of the protagonist's character and approach to things that can be described as simple and clear, and do not require a more emotional connection with the audience. The face villain is therefore arguably the most direct and quickest mode of plot conflict. Another point is that the face villain is the outcast in the treatment of events in animation, and highlighting the qualities of the protagonist is the most significant aspect of this type of villain. The downside, however, is that modern Chinese animated films use face-painting for all villains, and this approach can leave the viewer with less of an idea of the background to the story to continue to think about, and can even lower the overall anticipation of the story.

As an example, the 2022 sci-fi animated film "Punch Out", being a technological animation, has no shortage of futuristic technology and perfectly combines this feature with Chinese elements. However the three main villains in the production are all facetious bad guy faces, with Sha Wushe (Figure 1) able to dosage enhance himself and therefore causing the most hindrance to the main group. Zha Mukun (Figure 2), the son of a police chief, is motivated to be a policeman, but his costume is very different from that of a policeman. His influence on the protagonists is that he reports the whereabouts of the protagonists to Lian Wu. Lian Mu (Figure 3), the head of the villains behind the entire film, can be seen acting ruthlessly in his scenes with the supporting character. However, when the protagonists are taking the ship, he leaves them to fend for themselves, as he always does in the opposite direction. Later on, he tells Zha Mukun to get a gun and kill his father, and tells everyone about his evil plan when the wall of heaven is completely closed. It is here that this production is criticized, with a villain who is ruthless, but whose plausibility is unrecognizable. Instead, the villain's actions are too perfunctory and the ultimate failure too haphazard. This is where the criticism of the faceless, patterned villain comes in.

| *Figure 1.* Sha Wu. | *Figure 2.* Zha Mukun. | *Figure 3.* Lian Wu. |

The author has done a survey report on animated villains, and one of the variables proposed: having the participants design the villain. The data was as follows:

Table 1. Data.

Options	Subtotal	Proportion	
With a tragic backstory	93		31%
Good looking, cute and charming	91		30.33%
Ruthless and vicious	96		32%
Human evil at its best	101		33.67%
Mediocre/ugly looking	24		8%
Powerful intelligence and destructive power	165		55%

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On the contrary, a good man	42	14%
Different position from the protagonist	76	25.33%
Unwavering conviction	97	32.33%
Other	1	0.33%
This question is valid for the number of people who filled in the question	300	

Figure 4. List.
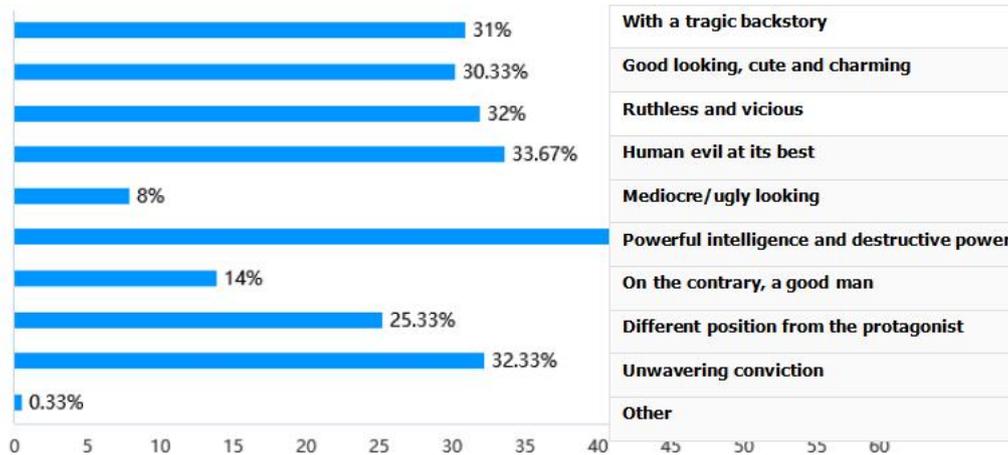
As in Table 1 and Figure 4, the face is the mediocre/ugly looking one, but 300 people chose this less often. In contrast, good-looking, cute and charming were the majority. This option is multiple choice (up to 3 choices). But it also indirectly proves that modern people are no longer satisfied with villains who are just ugly and cunning. Powerful and intelligent villains, even if they are handsome and cute, are an innovation.

3.2. Reasonableness of the villain's behaviour

With the proliferation of productions, audiences have long been familiar with the behavior patterns of villains. The villain who wants to conquer the world and destroy it has become boring. The focus of the audience is on why the villain has such a goal. If this is not handled properly, then it is bound to become incomprehensible to the audience. For example, White Snake Origins is an adaptation of the story of the White Snake 500 years before, and the overall structure of the story carries on from top to bottom. The final resolution of some of the villains is also beyond imagination. However, there are points where the plausibility of the villains is called into question, and where the White Snake's master, the Snake Mother (Figure 5). In terms of costume, she is mainly dressed in crimson, demonic and aggressive, with a face of a bad guy, but in the early stages she is concerned about the community, even when the community is wondering about the betrayal of the White Snake, she is not directly angry, and when the Green Snake proposes to break the hair of the soul scales (when the time comes, she will die of poison), she shows the reluctance of the audience to be able to appreciate, and after the Green Snake goes out to send Chang Pan (another snake demon) to monitor, which can be In conclusion, she is cautious, but has feelings for her people.

However, after joining forces with the White Snake and the Green Snake to defeat the Master of the State, the snakes rose up to slaughter the humans. The Snake Mother suddenly absorbs her own pack's cultivation, and her blackening can be said to be

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unpredictable. There are three challenges: 1) the sudden blackening of the Mother of the Snakes, which is unprecedented; 2) it is incomprehensible that the Mother of Serpents chose to absorb her own people when she had no enemy to fight against. In human terms, the mother's sudden self-interest is incomprehensible. 3) the mother did not start absorbing from the white snake, which made the white snake fight with it later.

The villain, Xiao Dao (Figure 6, wears a purple Taoist robe and appears at first as the bodyguard of the Master of the State, powerful, with the look of the Invincible Eastern and speaking like a eunuch, a face villain. The villain is a strong, powerful, eunuch-like figure who speaks like a eunuch, but is eventually defeated by the anti-White Snake when she absorbs the White Snake' s pearl hairpin. The implausibility lies in the fact that in his 3rd appearance he sends someone to report to his master, giving the impression that he is loyal to the Master of the State and goes to capture the White Snake for this reason. But in his 4th appearance, he is again trying to capture the White Snake and strengthen himself. The original words "Using snakes that have become demons to refine my master' s Taiyin True Power, one is worth 10,000. So I reported to master that you had gone to the snake-catching village, and seeing as the time was near for Master to reach that village, I came to get you myself, so why should I share a piece of the pie with master?" However, the plot suddenly becomes incomprehensible for the reason that he specifically called the master to the snake village. His own reasoning in stating that he sought out the Master of the State to go to the snake village also fails to make sense. Although in the plot, which eventually leads to the Snake Mother sending the pack to battle the Master of the State due to suspicion of a traitor, his narrative also allows White Snake and Green Snake to learn where the Master of the State is headed. The author questions 2 things: 1) he could have strengthened himself by going to catch the White Snake on his own without informing his master; 2) Assuming his master arrived at the snake-catching village and ended up not finding the White Snake and the others, he would have become suspicious of the young Taoist, which logically does not do the young Taoist any good. These two villainous episodes are therefore where the villain' s behaviour does not make sense in this excellent work.
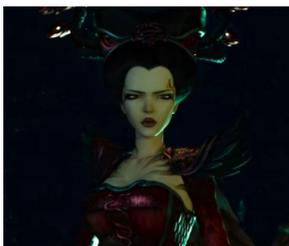

Figure 5. *Mother Snake.*   **Figure 6.** *The Young Taoist.*   **Figure 7.** *Feng Xi.*

Another production, released in 2019, The Battle of Luo Xiaohei, portrays three main characters at a duration of 1 hour and 30 minutes, representing Feng Xi, who has developed a hatred for humans after being robbed of his territory by them. He also represents the white paper-like Luo Xiaohei , who has been robbed of his home by humans. Infinity, who wishes to make peace between goblins and humans. The author uses the growth of Luo Xiaohei as the core of the film, while both Feng Xi and Infinity are more subtly portrayed. Feng Xi (Figure 7), as the goblin who helps Luo Xiaohei in the beginning, saves him from the humans and, through less than 15 minutes of drama, manages to get Luo Xiaohei to join him willingly. The human who attacked Luo Xiaohei at the beginning left the audience in doubt, behaving in an

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overly rigid and manipulated manner, paving the way for Wind Breath' s villainous identity later on. As the plot progresses, Wu Xian gradually transforms from villain to the good at the beginning, and Feng Xi subtly transforms from the good to villain. These transitions are not sudden, but layer upon layer. The first layer of transformation in the plot is when Feng Xi, as the villain, takes the powers of the other goblins so that he can defeat Wu Xian, and the opening padding of the three humans when they attack Wu Xian to retrieve Xiaohei opens up in this encounter. Feng Xi also goes from being able to accept humans at first to hating them and even doing so outright after having their home taken away from them. The character' s feelings of hatred are irreconcilable, and Feng Xi's destruction of humans is not a spur-of-the-moment move from approaching Luo Xiaohei with a purpose at the beginning to taking over Luo' s domain. And Feng Xi does not stop at anything to achieve his goal; he knows he is at fault, but never stops because of it. When he is defeated at the end, he is willing to die, and this character is very well portrayed. Throughout, Feng Xi is a villain, but not a bad one.

4. Conclusions

The richness and realism of a character' s portrayal affects the audience' s ability to see things from that character' s perspective in the same way. This is not limited to the protagonist, but even more so to the villain. In narrative terms, when the audience is integrated into the character, even if the character does not speak, but only body language, it can drive the audience' s emotions. The above views are the author's extended views after reading the arguments in other papers in the literature. Times are changing, audiences are growing up, and villains are gradually changing from the concept of evil. It is not that audiences are sick of the single-minded approach of face and pattern, but that modern audiences recognize that villains are also human beings and have more expectations of the purpose, the ultimate goal, of their actions. The line between good and evil is becoming increasingly blurred these days. Therefore, whether the villain is good or evil, the impact on the plot, the impact on the protagonist, and the ability to provide an emotional connection to the audience are all challenges that the creators need to address.

Conflicts of Interest

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[11] Sigmund Freud (1856-1939): psychoanalyst and master of psychology. His masterpieces include The Analysis of Dreams, Three Essays on Sexuality, and Introduction to Psychoanalysis.

[12] In biology, the term 'libido' is commonly used to describe the real physiological needs of humans and animals. In academic circles, sexual hunger is referred to as Libido or "proto-desire".