

Exploring the Essence of the Rise of Motion Comics in the Information Age

Zhiyong Zeng

Shandong Vocational College of Industry, Zibo, Shandong 255000, China

Abstract: *This article explores the essence of the rise of Motion comics by analyzing the historical background and technological conditions. In recent years, with the rapid development of mobile internet, the animation industry has also ushered in unprecedented development opportunities, with "Motion comics" characterized by short, flat, and fast gradually developing and growing. However, for a long time, people have had a vague understanding of Motion comics, only seeing them as a product of the fusion of old-fashioned animation and comics. However, this article proposes a different viewpoint. In the article, dynamic comics are a unique form of animation rooted in the decline of traditional animation and comics, and are rooted in the emergence of information technology. The article innovatively proposes that Motion comics are developed based on strip-type comics, the technology of Motion Graphics, and short videos.*

Keywords: Motion Comics; Strip-type Comics; Motion Graphics; Short Video.

1. INTRODUCTION

Chinese animation art has undergone continuous development and growth from the birth of the "Wan Brothers" era, through the age of Chinese cartoon, reform and opening up. Until now, animation has become more active on many mobile internet platforms, meeting the aesthetic needs of generations of the public. However, with the decline of traditional video websites such as Youku and iQiyi and the rise of platforms such as Tiktok, BiLiBiLi and Kuai Kan, "Motion comics" characterized by short, flat and fast are gradually growing as a native animation form in the soil of mobile Internet, which has gradually attracted the attention of the academic community.

2. THE OVERVIEW OF MOTION COMICS

Motion Comics generally refer to a form of Comics that incorporates some dynamic elements and simple dubbing. It is between animation and Comics, and is a transitional form of the two. It does not require readers to supplement elements outside the screen like Comics, nor does it require tedious processes and huge costs like animation. On the contrary, it is simple, lightweight, and highly narrative, making it a simple animation similar to a storyboard format. But as a new form of anime, motion comics seem to be inherently controversial. Many scholars believe that as an extremely low fidelity form of animation, motion comics have significant controversy over its independent significance; However, some scholars hold different opinions. Lei Chen, from the School of Fine Arts at Tsinghua University, proposed that when we look back at history, we will find that before the official appearance of motion comics, the art form of animation had a history of almost a hundred years, while the art form of comics is even older.

If we consider motion comics as an intermediate form between animation and comics, which have a long history, why did this intermediate form emerge more than a hundred years later? He believes that motion comics have unique characteristics and are a free-form narrative technique that has emerged in the information society. The research also believes that motion comics are more suitable for the current era background, as they contain enormous development potential and occupy an increasingly important position in the closed-loop of the animation industry.

3. THE DILEMMA OF COMICS AND 2D ANIMATION

Animation and comics, as two narrative forms of animation, have a glorious history of over a hundred years. Modern animated images emerged at the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries, while the history of comics is even older. These two ancient forms of art began to interweave closely over a hundred years later. Firstly, Japanese manga artist Takeshi Tezuka changed the narrative form of comics, introducing the camera movement and scenery of movies (animations) into comics for the first time, thereby enhancing the expressive power of comics and creating the era of new style comics later on. With the release of the Iron Arm Astro Boy TV version of the anime adapted from manga (1963), it was the first in Japan to achieve an industry chain that first tested the market through manga and then adapted into animation, which quickly influenced the world. In China, the concept of pan entertainment was officially proposed by Tencent in 2011. Afterwards, Tencent focused on building a fan economy centered on IP, combining the animation industry with IP such as literature, film and television, and games to achieve seamless integration. In today's animation industry, the production of comics and manga animation, as the source of IP, play a crucial role in the entire industry chain structure with IP as the core.

Chinese Animation Film Box Office Rankings				
Rank	Title	Box Office of RMB (Billion)	Score of Douban	Release Date
1	Nezha: Birth of the Demon Child	50.36	8.4	26-Jul-19
2	Legend of Deification	16.03	6.6	1-Oct-20
3	Boonie Bears: Back To Earth	9.78	6.5	1-Feb-22
4	Monkey King: Hero Is Back	9.56	8.3	10-Jul-15
5	Boonie Bears: Blast into the Past	7.17	6.6	5-Feb-19
6	Boonie Bears: The Big Shrink	6.06	6.8	16-Feb-18
7	Boonie Bears: The Wild Life	5.95	6.3	12-Feb-21
8	Green Snake	5.80	6.8	23-Jul-21
9	Big Fish & Begonia	5.65	7.0	8-Jul-16
10	New Gods: Yang Jian	5.55	7.1	19-Aug-22

Figure 1: Box Office Rankings of Domestic Animation Movies in China

With the advent of the information age and the gradual rise of the mobile internet, smartphones have become the main tool for people's daily communication. 5G communication technology has made information exchange more convenient, and comics, which had previously dominated paper media, have had to shift online and gradually evolved into comic strips and soaring short videos to seize market share. At the same time, two-dimensional animation has also achieved digital production, but it only converts handmade celluloid sheets into digital layers. Compared to exquisite 3D animation, its production process always relies on tedious frame by frame drawing, and the pursuit of visual effects relies on high additional costs. From 2015 to 2022, among the top ten box office animated films in China, only "Big Fish and Begonia" ranked second to last with a box office of 565 million yuan, while the rest were all 3D animations. As a result, the decline of comics and two-dimensional animation seems inevitable. At the same time, dynamic comics combine the advantages of animation and comics, showing strong vitality gradually.

4. THE ESSENCE OF MOTION COMICS

The concept of motion comics is quite broad, and it is a product of the fusion of comics and animation boundaries, with blurred boundaries with low fidelity animation and micro animation. The author refers to it with a more tolerant attitude as the use of low-cost means to reduce visual effects to meet the narrative expression of anime forms. This form is not necessarily related to the duration of a single episode, but it does not prevent the current market for motion comics from generally focusing on 3-5 minutes. This form perfectly meets the common needs of creators and audiences in the context of the information age: for creators, motion comics, as the intermediate state between animation and comics, although not as good as visual effects, are more than enough. The most important thing is that their production costs are low, their cycles are short, and their technical requirements are low. In the face of today's rapidly developing and rapidly changing internet environment, it greatly liberates the production efficiency of animation, Improved hot spot fit, lowered production barriers, and provided strong support for the content creation of independent animators. This form of anime can also serve as a preliminary project to accumulate market feedback and expand fan base for subsequent high-fidelity anime versions or theater movies; For the audience, this form of animation also meets the habit of daily fragmentation watching, and because the production cycle is short and the content is more suitable for the hot spots of the times, it can almost achieve daily change, thus making the stickiness of chasing the diffuse stronger.

In the early research on motion comics in China, it was referred to as the simplified form of flash animation, namely motion graphic, emphasizing its technical attributes, the possibility of using graphic animation technology to achieve picture motion in addition to frame by frame technology. But the subsequent flash animations gradually separated from comic labels in reality. Subsequently, works such as "Shan Hai Shi" and "Long Song Xing" emerged, and these graphic animation techniques were applied to motion comic works in narrative expression, achieving great success in the market. As users shift from computers to mobile devices, the horizontal screen mode of motion comics is gradually shifting to vertical screen mode. If early motion comics were more like a low fidelity animation, then today's more mature motion comics emphasize their content attributes, which are based on the dynamism of comic content. For more mature innovative models (represented by "Kuaikan"), the study refers to them as "New motion Comics" or "True motion Comics". This "New motion Comics" is not based on traditional animation frame reduction and simplification, but more on the development of strip composition, motion graphic technology, and short video mode, and is a product of the integration of the three. motion Comics works have abandoned the pursuit of action realism in animation and instead used motion graphic technology to advance towards the basic action mode. These basic dynamics (whether it is camera dynamics, action dynamics, or sound dynamics) are only intended to meet the dynamic communication at low costs, thereby more efficiently transforming narrative content into short video mode, and more quickly meeting the short, flat, and Fast consumer demand. Its essence is a product of the pursuit of "productivity liberation" based on the new soil of the "information age".

4.1 The Composition Form of Strip-type Comics

Strip-type comics is a variation of traditional page scrolling on mobile devices, replacing the flipping reading of traditional page scrolling with downward sliding of fingers, making it more suitable for the reading experience of modern audiences. And thus developed a unique narrative grammar called 'Strip-type comics'. Firstly, the visual guidance mode guided by the combination of shots and images in the page manga is simplified into a more straightforward linear narrative mode with downward sliding. Based on this, according to the distribution density and blank space on the screen composition, special expressions can be made for the story rhythm and information that needs to be focused. The static design of the strip can also express unique story artistic conception, which is used to imitate the effects of movie shots. For example, in the work "Gu Wei Nan Ting", the split frame gradually slides downwards from the hotel building to a gray white hand ringing bell on a black background. In addition, various visual elements in the strip are also inherited by dynamic comics, such as abstract text, dynamic lines, split frame, and so on. The emergence of strip manga gave comics the initial attributes of a mobile phone. Cultivated user habits and laid the foundation for the birth of the new dynamic anime (Kuankan mode).

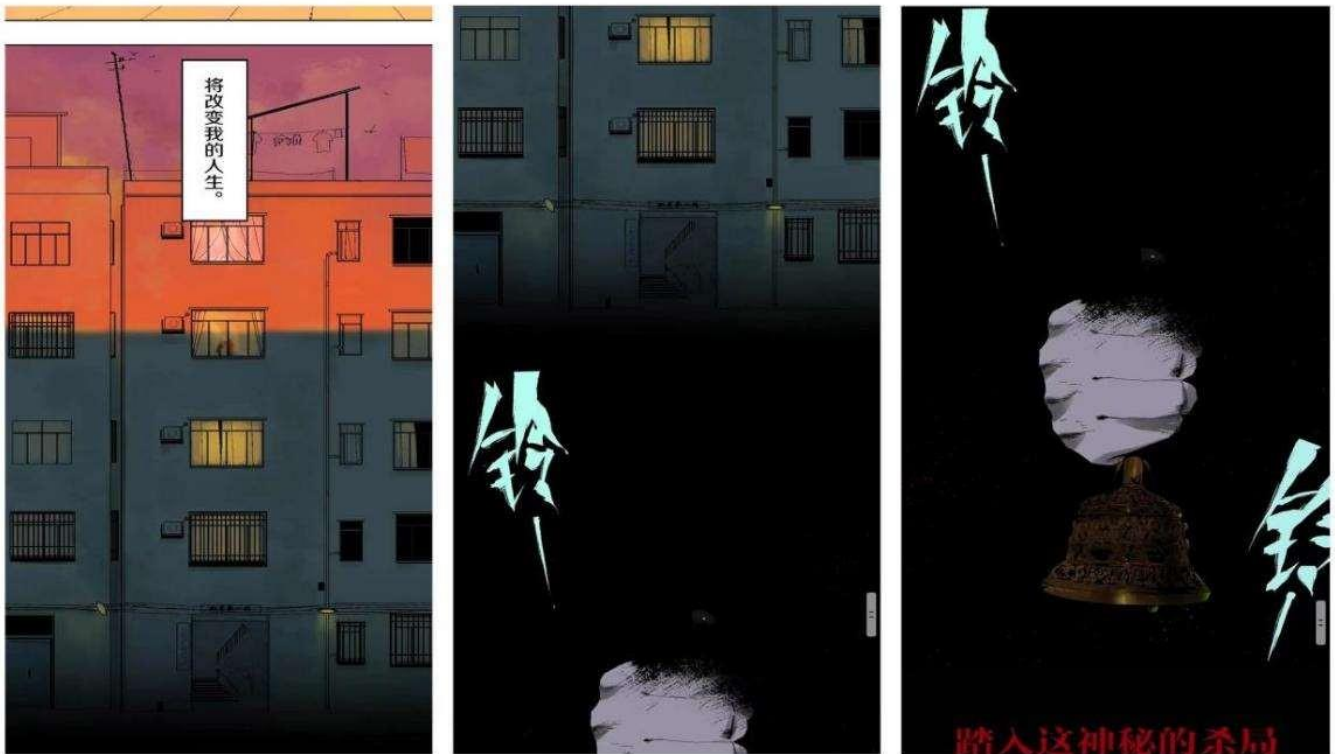


Figure 2: Screenshot of the Strip-type Comics of 'Gu Wei Nan Ting'

4.2 The Technology of Motion Graphic

Motion graphic animation is a form of artistic expression that integrates graphic design language and animation technology principles. Motion graphics animation has a strong interest and spread, and its technical implementation is relatively simple. Before the rise of dynamic comics, motion graphic animation technology had already been widely applied in many fields such as science popularization, publicity, and course development. However, no corresponding results have been achieved in narrative type animations. Under the background of the fast-paced era, the motion graphic animation pursues concise information transmission. In the movement graphic animation, the picture is only a supplement to the sound transmission information. Therefore, in the visual design, people tend to pursue symbolic, extremely simplified and abstraction processing, and show a congenital deficiency in detail expression. In contrast, narrative 2D animations require more visual details to support, and still use flash and other related technologies, such as "Pleasant Goat and Big Wolf". The dynamic anime produced by layering the content of the strip and then using MG technology is compatible with the advantages of both. It is neither as cumbersome as Flash animation, nor as simple as regular MG animation. In fact, there are many similarities between Flash animation technology and AE motion graphics animation production technology. Both are based on keyframes for animation production, but the functionality of AE is much more powerful:

Firstly, AE motion graphic animation can edit both vector and bitmap style graphic materials, and has deformation and distortion functions. The production of simple actions does not require tedious frame by frame drawing, and can manipulate the deformation of individual layer materials by creating new control points, thereby achieving dynamic expression of limbs and other features. In contrast, Flash relies more on frame by frame technology and vector graphics.

Secondly, AE motion graphics animation technology has strong adjust ability for the rhythm of actions, requiring only key frames in the front and back ends. The rhythm of the action can be adjusted in real-time based on the motion curve. Eliminating the tedious process of key framing in flash greatly compensates for the rigidity of flash animation actions, and the action effect is easy to modify, greatly improving production efficiency.

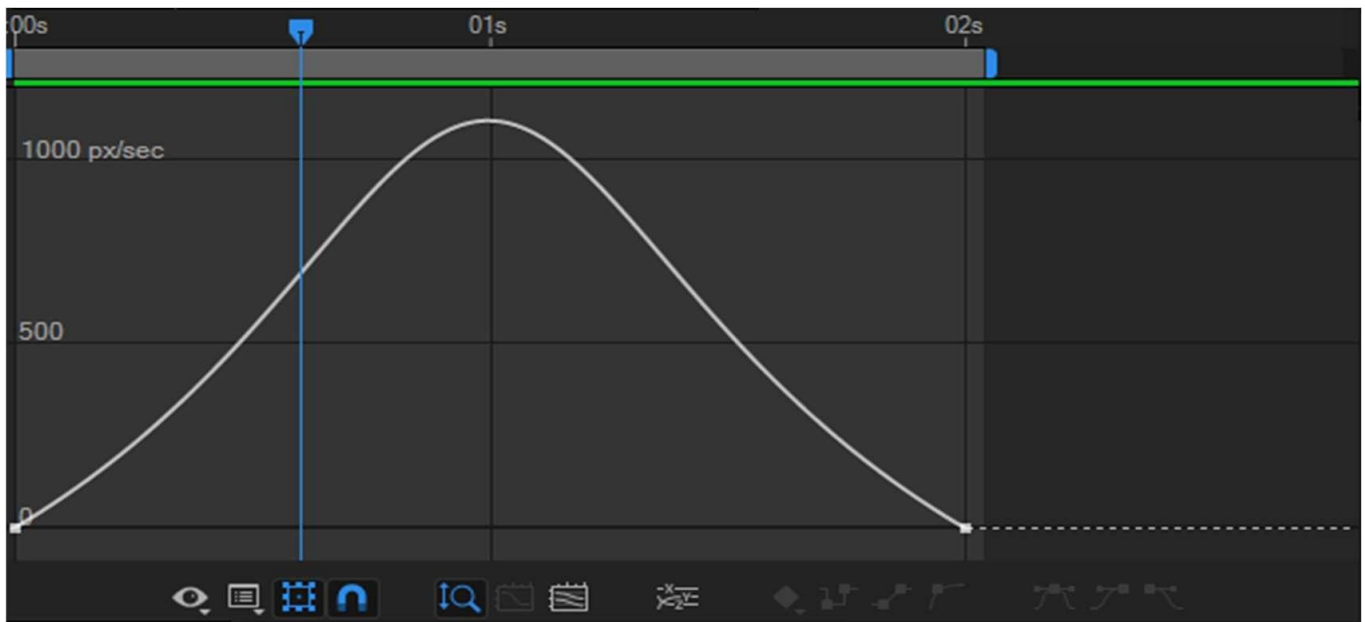


Figure 3: The Editing of AE Graph Motion Curve

Overall, the integration of strip manga and MG technology not only meets the implementation requirements of basic actions in animation, but also saves time and effort in the production process, making it very suitable for the implementation of basic actions such as dynamic comics. During the production process, the original anime material is first drawn and layered using Ps, and then imported into AE software to achieve animation production through key frames, control points, and layer motion. The application of MG technology is the technical prerequisite for the emergence of "New motion Comics".

4.3 The Mode of Short Video

Short videos refer to video formats that are generally available within 5 minutes on mobile devices. After 2015, with the support of capital, short videos experienced explosive growth in 2018, with user scale and market share reaching a height and social impact that no other media form had in the past. The development of 5G has played a role in driving the waves, allowing people to freely browse short videos anytime and anywhere. In 2020, the COVID-19 broke out, blocking the development of all walks of life, but the online development was in full swing. The epidemic triggered the expression of the isolated people at home, which led to the large-scale growth of short video users in China.

Short videos have brought about a revolution in the development of information visualization. People are no longer satisfied with fragmentation graphic information on the network or looking for it in long videos, but instead pursue a receiving method that is more conducive to their own ingestion of key information. At the same time, the era of mass production of media content has begun. By producing content through short videos, a considerable return on traffic can be obtained at a lower cost. After that, short videos represented by Tiktok and Kuaikan involve various industries and become indispensable public platform facilities in society.

With the acceleration of the social rhythm, the appreciation of narrative works has also added a lot of utilitarian nature. The public is no longer satisfied with the lengthy film and television narrative, but prefers to use fragmentation time to absorb the essence of the story with the shortest amount of information. In this context, narrative short videos mainly featuring mini plots have also emerged, with various movie and TV series commentary accounts, original short story accounts, sand sculpture animation accounts, new IP accounts, etc. all attempting to gain a share in the chaotic short video field.



Figure 4: Screenshot of Motion Comic Works on The App of Short Video

Due to the low production cost and short production cycle of motion comic type animations, which can keep up with the trend of the times and are more suitable for the dissemination of short videos, they have gradually developed and matured. The "Kuaikan" combines the interface layout of short videos to launch the concept of "Manju". Kuaikan explains that "Manju" is approximately equivalent to manga+video+radio drama. Therefore, the "Kuaikan Manga" app has been officially renamed as "Kuaikan", and a professional manga producer team has been formed to create the largest manga manufacturing factory in history, and to achieve full manga of its own IP. At the same time, watch the march short video and get traffic on the Tiktok app by making use of home-made dramas-----"Manju". Due to the short production cycle of Manju (Motion Comics), which can last for more than a week, the annual output can reach several times that of ordinary anime dramas. Motion comics are suitable for the dissemination of short videos, which also require rich original or adapted content. It can be said that short videos provide a soil for the development and growth of motion comics.

5. CONCLUSION

Motion comics are not old low fidelity animations, but is a fusion of strip manga, MG technology, and short videos. This narrative method is guided by low cost and short cycle, utilizing "technological progress" and "action simplification" to break through the inherent constraints of narrative animation production, overcoming the shortcomings of comics and traditional two-dimensional animation, and greatly liberating the productivity of animation. In the new soil of mobile internet, terminals and modes are constantly developing, motion comics, which may seem like low fidelity animations but also old low-level composites, are in line with the current trend of development with a new posture. The liberation of productivity based on the new soil has broken the "slow work leads to meticulous work" and has become the most distinctive label and essential attribute of motion comics.

REFERENCES

- [1] L.Chen . Looking at the Development Trends of Animation Forms in the Information Age from the Rise of Dynamic Comics [J]. Decoration, 2014 (12): 19-21.
- [2] J.C.Huang . On the relationship between early experimental animation technology and the late 19th century trends in Europe [J]. Literary Review, 2017 (08): 114-118.
- [3] J.X.Chen , Q. Liang . Exploration and Enlightenment of the Operation Model of the Pan Entertainment Industry Chain for Animation and Entertainment Enterprises - Taking Aofei Entertainment as an Example [J]. Modern Business, 2021 (22): 39-41.
- [4] Q.X.Jing, T.T.Wang . Interventional thinking on new comic expression techniques based on animation creation [J]. Art Review, 2022 (13): 79-81.
- [5] B.W.Tang . "Cross border integration", motion graphics design in the context of new media [J]. TV Guide, 2018 (14): 180-181.
- [6] Y.Zhao . Analysis of MG Animation Aesthetic Characteristics from the Perspective of information visualization [J]. Art Grand View, 2021 (07): 148-149.

- [7] F.Gao , J.Wu . Review and Prospect of Short Video Development in China [J]. Publishing and Distribution Research, 2022 (03): 47-54.
- [8] B.Xu . From manga to manga, take a look at what you've lost [EB/OL] [11 August 2021] <https://baijiahao.baidu.com/s?id=1707809431146380290&wfr=spider&for=pc>.