

Study on the Emergence and Audience Preference of Chinese Drama Costume Revised by Network Novels

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Abstract: Recently, TV dramas reedited by network novels have become the main content of Chinese popular culture. Based on analyzing the phenomenon of its high communication influence, the cross-media narration of the works greatly affects its communication. This study adopts the case study method, combined with the text analysis of TV dramas. This paper finds that the adaptation of online novels to film and television works is more prominent in artistic expression. This paper depicts that online novels adapt film and television works, as it may focus on the diversity of media texts through cross-media narration study.

Key Words: Audience, Chinese Drama Costume, Network Novel, Drama Study

1. Introduction

Chinese costume dramas always focus on expressing ancient social life in content, as they have distinct cultural communication functions (Luo & Liu, 2021). The classical cultural atmosphere constructed by them bears certain functions in costume dramas, although there is still room for discussion on the integration of the cultural atmosphere of costume dramas and the overall characteristics of the works. In terms of aesthetic expectations, audience preferences can be guided and shaped by excellent costume dramas or television works, as effects of television dramas on support have been calculated well (Slater, Rouner, & Long, 2006).

Ancient costume dramas adapted from online novels or TV dramas adapted from online novels have become a new popular kind of work in the film and television industry. Because of their IP traffic and fan effect, ancient costume film and television works adapted from online novels not only satisfy the audience's curiosity about historical customs, but also satisfy the plot fantasy generated by the public based on modern thinking, which increasingly show its unique advantages in the market. This study starts from the audience's perspective, as it then focuses on the audience's preference to explore the key points that the audience cares about. This paper aims to provide audience data analysis support for the future online adaptation of ancient costume TV dramas, while it may grasp the audience's preference from the source and promote the development of such projects in the market. As an applied study, this study mainly extracts the main strategies of cross-cultural communication of Chinese film and television dramas from the perspective of text analysis to Chinese costume dramas at the methodological level, while it could analyze the specific communication

paths that may affect the audience. As far as the TV dramas adapted from online novels are concerned, different types of costume dramas, such as "*Startling by Each Step*", "*Empresses in the Palace*", and "*To the Sky Kingdom*", have either changed or retained the original narrative structure in the process of cross-media communication, with them presenting a diversified form. In addition, this paper believes that promoting the adaptation of film and television dramas of online novels could be meaningful, what will help spread the excellent traditional Chinese culture to the audience, while it could build the image of China in the new era in the new media space, and transmit the mainstream values of socialism with Chinese characteristics.

2. Literature review

2.1 Research on Chinese costume dramas

Before reviewing the research literature on Chinese costume dramas, this paper reveals that the current Chinese costume dramas can be divided into two categories at the content level. The first is the TV dramas relying on history. The second is a TV series that has no history (Cai&Wen, 2018). In addition, there are more detailed classification methods. These classification methods are based on the basic model of typology, with them highlighting the importance of the main narrative clues, such as plot drama, fairy tale drama, a fantasy drama, etc. The academic research on Chinese costume dramas could be classified according to several models: the first is the discussion on Chinese costume second category is the study of the artistic effect and literariness of TV dramas; The third is the framework analysis of

content. The fourth category is the study of audience cognitive impact.

From the perspective of content, the Chinese costume drama has formed a set of narrative modes. While the audience expressed a strong demand for genre films, the costume dramas are also trying to meet the audience's requirements for similarity and difference. For example, costume dramas strive to create characters that transcend stereotypes. The TV series "*Empresses in the Palace*" is adapted from the online novel "*Empresses in the Palace*". The characters in the play, such as *Zhen Huan*, *Shen Meizhuang*, *An Lingrong*, and others characters (Jin & You, 2013), have carried out the image construction in line with the historical background based on the aerial history. This characterization strategy makes the audience both familiar and unfamiliar, realizing the "separation effect" emphasized by the film and television art (Wang, 2022).

From the plot level, the costume drama does not use formulaic plots but uses science fiction materials such as "crossing" to enhance the narrative effect. At the same time, from the perspective of books and film, and television, the TV series "*Startling by Each Step*" highlights the personalized appeal of the audience with the help of the theme, and realizes the ingenious combination of "good" (Ding, 2018). At the same time, plot reversal is also constantly used in TV dramas. The TV series "*Story of Yanxi Palace*" is also an ancient costume drama that puts the past behind the scenes, in which the role of the queen, who is portrayed as "Mary Sue", was murdered by a conspiracy of many people. The characters such as *Erqing* have constantly experienced the reversal from the positive to the negative, which has strengthened the narrative tension.

From the perspective of the environment, the highly saturated color "Arbor" from Korean dramas was once the standard configuration of Chinese costume dramas. As a kind of color mixing action, color "Arbor" affected the application of color in TV dramas, and then affected the audience's perception of the content of TV dramas. The innovative application of "Morandi" in the TV series "*Story of Yanxi Palace*" made the audience refreshing. In the process of film and television adaptation of classic works such as the legend of the *White Snake* and the *Journey to the West*, some of the film and television adaptation texts adopt centrifugal narrative or centripetal narrative. In a word, more descriptive and theoretical chapters have been involved here (Nelson, 1997: 10), as the pre-eminence of TV drama consumption in China contrasts sharply now (Zhu, Keane, & Bai, 2008: 2).

2.2 Study on TV Drama Audience

As a branch of communication research, audience research has deeply influenced the content of television research. Early television audience research believed that the relationship between communicators and audiences was unidirectional, and audiences were regarded as information receivers without initiative. Hall's research on coding and decoding reconstructed the relationship between communicators and audiences from a perspective and put forward a positive and productive audience view.

The introduction of audience research theory in this study can not only improve the academic rationality of this study but also provide a reference for further investigation of the attributes and characteristics of the audience of TV dramas.

At present, in the context of media convergence, the position of the audience has changed greatly. Some scholars have proposed that the user concept has replaced the audience concept. The audience of TV dramas has more active initiative, and even plays the role of a content creator. For example, the popularity of the TV series "*Empresses in the Palace*" cannot be separated from the audience's secondary creation. The positive response of the audience of the TV series is not only reflected in the bullet screen, comments, and other interactive content in the online broadcast of the series, but also in the relevant comments in various online communities after watching the drama. Focusing on teleplay works, the audience has produced a large number of high-quality audio-visual and graphic works, such as plot decryption and character interpretation, through a short video and other channels, even topping "*Philosophy of Zhen Huan*", to enhance the discussion of topics related to teleplay.

A careful review of the existing literature can reveal the emergence of many terms such as new audience research, audience ethnography, reception analysis, etc., which are of high academic historical significance. These terms are mostly affected by the changes in the field of audience research in the 1980s. They not only include the simplification of reality, but also include the results of the changes in the macro context, and return to the fold of history. Audience ethnography emphasizes the use of ethnographic methods, and the acceptance and analysis of audience ethnography only deal with the value orientation of the audience, but more with the traditional audience research paradigm of communication research. This paradigm adheres to criticism, and the research focus has changed from media discourse to media consumption.

The issue of an audience has always been one of the core issues of communication research, and the development history of communication research is also the history of the change of audience concepts. This study has clarified the key points, connotations, and characteristics of the audience research of TV dramas through careful reading of classic literature clarified the differences between different terms, and combined with the development of the text of TV dramas, inspected its new direction of development in the contemporary era. This study believes that the new audience research that originated in the 1980s has a great impact on this paper. It innovatively introduces the qualitative framework of ethnography into the study of communication. In the era of mass media, the role of the audience of TV dramas has changed. Media decentralization and audience empowerment have further enhanced the subjective status of the audience. In the face of the current situation of mass media with multiple channels, the audience is both the receiver and the communicator, and the boundaries between the two sides of transmission and reception have gradually disappeared.

3. Findings

The text analysis of TV series generally starts from three fields, namely text symbol, text structure, and text style. With this interpretation, the text of TV series is not limited to the pictures and characters in TV series, but also includes TV score, TV dance, and so on. As an art symbol, the text of the TV series is not pursuing the traditional artistic creation paradigm in recent art creation and tends to be disordered, and the meaning is full of ambiguity. This study combines different types of TV texts and analyzes representative contemporary TV dramas according to the basic viewpoints of western literary theory, emphasizing the decentralization and deconstruction of text analysis.

The TV series *"Starting by Each Step"* adopts the common narrative method of "crossing", which connects the identities of modern people and ancient people. Ruoxi, who passed through the Qing Dynasty, is the heroine of the play. She has been educated and edified by contemporary culture, and knows that history has a clear direction for the fate of people and things. As she has experienced a free life in the new era, *Ruoxi* has a significant resistance to the feudal society. She interacted with the male protagonist, Fourth Master, during the transition from breaking into history to integrating into history. Therefore, under the appearance of costume dramas, the TV series *"Starting by Each Step"* constructs the core of idol dramas. As far as audience research is concerned, the success of the TV series *"Starting by Each Step"* is related to the psychological appeal of the young audience. For example, in the second episode, *Ruoxi* meets the male supporting role of Fourteen, and the lively figure of the girl chases the rabbit happily, which is similar to the youth narrative of modern idol dramas.

The TV series *"Empress in the Palace"* is adapted from an online novel. The work highlights the growth history of the heroine *Zhen Huan*. Through the reconstruction of the character image, the TV series has made a great effort to adapt and re-create the online novel. The TV series *"Empress in the Palace"* takes the imperial-harem issue as the narrative center and describes the story of the young girl *Zhen Huan* growing up as the Empress Dowager. During the period, the TV series sets the turning point of the narrative as the chapter of "Return to the Palace", presents two life experiences of *Zhen Huan*. The weak point of the young girl *Zhen Huan* in the early stage is emotion. Her love for the emperor has become the key factor in her first defeat. *Zhen Huan*, who put down her weakness, gave up her freedom after returning to the palace. He won the success of the imperial harem issue.

The TV series *"To the Sky Kingdom"* belongs to the TV series adapted from network novels in type, and is also related to the Chinese Drama Costume in content in narrative characteristics. The differentiation of character types follows the narrative mode of contemporary dramas. For example, the portrayal of *Su Jin's* role is highly consistent with the portrayal of a "bad woman" in contemporary TV dramas. *Sujin* is a bell-guarding gong e, who stirs up a rift between the male and female protagonists, *Bai Jian* and *Ye Hua*. These narrative techniques completely follow the description of the

triangular love story in modern idol dramas. Based on text analysis, this paper finds that the TV series has carried out complex polyphonic narration around the love triangle story, and completed the replantation of the content of the traditional idol drama with the path of fairy tale drama.

The popularity of costume dramas adapted from online novels in China often depends on the independent dissemination of fans. In this context, it will be beneficial to make up for the possible cultural discount problem by paying attention to the construction of IP communication influence of online novels. The cultural identity hidden in the group psychology is behind the spread mode of ancient costume dramas. Therefore, promoting the further spread of TV dramas reflecting the core socialist values is related to strengthening cultural confidence. The popularity of costume TV dramas is closely related to the social psychology of youth groups. At present, cultural research has formed a set of theories and discourses on the production, circulation, and consumption of popular culture. These theoretical resources have gradually become classics and become common sense, and finally become the starting point for audiences to enter the field of communication to interpret the meaning of popular culture. Cross-media narration comprehensively represents the content of the original text symbols, conveys the original text through centrifugal narrative or centripetal narrative, while it realizes cultural identity through the spiritual core of ancient costume dramas. Especially on cross-cultural communication, distinctiveness of food culture among Korean, Chinese and Thai TV drama has been overestimated here (Kim, Agrusa, & Chon, 2014; Kim et al, 2012), but Chinese transnational networking with self-help and sharing have been underestimated (Hu, 2005).

4. Conclusion & Discussion

The media environment continues to change, and the spread of online novels is far less influential than videos or short videos. After leaving the era of mass media, the audience generally enters the era of online media. The cross-media narration of online novels, or supra-media storytelling, shows a diversified trend due to the characteristics of media. The research of Chinese scholars on cross-media narrative is mostly from the perspective of media science and narratology, breaking the rules, crossing and connecting, and exploring the possibility and legitimacy of the media narrative. Tracing back to the theoretical source of cross-media narration, this method can create a unified and resonant communication experience. In relation to television cultural studies academics (Gerbner, 1980), the adaptation of film and television works, as a re-media content, is based on the special way that new media reshape the old media, focusing on the content connection of film and television adaptation, focusing on the availability of media to talk about cross-media narration. This study is based on the basic point of online novel adaptation of film and television works, discusses the narrative beyond literature and typical language media, and advocates further exploration of non-language media. The online novel

adaptation of film and television works reflects the human eternity and value sublimity of Chinese culture. Western literature takes religion and God as the yardstick, and online novel adaptation works combine multiple advantages, comprehensively reflecting the diversity of artworks.

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