Opportunities and Challenges—The Influence of New Media Context on the Film and Television of Children's Literature

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Abstract. Today, Information and communication technology have thoroughly infiltrated every corner of human lives. It seems unwittingly that the new media technology revolution has given rise to structural changes in society. With adaptation of the literary works into film and television works becoming gradually valued, it has become a trend of social development, let alone the extensive impact on the adaptation of children’s literature. As we all know, literature provides affluent material for images, and compared with adults, it is much easier for children to comprehend pictures than words. Then, with the emergence and promotion of new media platform, how people comprehend the reading materials and what they will react towards those have been greatly affected. To put it in simple words, adapted film and television works in turn beget a favorable secondary promotion and back nurture children's literature itself. While at the same time, it concerns us and should be noticed that those adapted film and television works also broadly impact children’s attention span along with their actual communication ability in some negative senses. With all respect, it would be necessary to actively face up the challenge and grasp the opportunities so as to revive children’s literature at the time. Aside from that, we should also undertake the responsibility to set the relationship between literature works and those adapted films and television works into a more harmonious mode so that a win-win situation will be achieved.

Introduction

Marshall McLuhan, the father of the media in Canada, put forward “the medium is the message” in his masterpiece “Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man.” He explained that people’s influence on the utilization of media exceeds the impact caused by specific contents on the mass.

As far as today's "image age" is concerned, new media has emerged as an ecological environment which embraces our lives in all aspects. "Digital," "Interactive," "Interconnected," "Social," "Mobile" and so on are well explain it. What followed was a fresh expression of cultural forms and the increasing popularity of acceptance and recognition.

The Film and Television Fever back Nurture Children’s Literature

Several scholars have suggested that the creation of both literary works and film along with television works cannot be separated from the shaping and restriction of specific time discourses. The film and television adaptation of literary works are also constrained by the cultural thoughts or trends of the times, namely, the "cultural context." Served as a mirror, each cultural context at its deepest level reflects what was happening then. With which, we can easily get across the certain time.

In the 1990s, it was hailed as the “era of reading pictures,” and the rising tendency of film and television culture with the help of the mass media quickly encircled people's lives and occupied a significant position.

Obviously, it is much easier for children to comprehend pictures than words, owing to which, the adaptation of children's literature turns out to be particularly vital. It should be noted that numerous classic film works in history derived from certain literary works. According to global statistics, in
the past 100 years, the number of adapted films has accounted for a large proportion of film production, approximately 17% to 50% of the total film.

For instance, our well-known American film giant, Disney is particularly keen on adapting literary works. Starting with the animated film "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs" released in 1937, Disney has created a total of 58 animated feature films. More than half of them are adaptations of classic literary works, and the economic and social impacts created by these animated films are incalculable, and their appeal and influence affected tens of billions of viewers of all ages worldwide.

There certainly is the truth that the film and television adaptations of children's literature are capable to offer children's literature opportunities to be further developed in the new media context, which promisingly helps to spread the literature in a more extensive degree and strongly appeals to a wider audience so that literature will display a new vitality.

In 2018, the distinguished children's literature writer Zheng Yuanjie's fairy tale, "Taming the Rabbit" was successfully adapted into a short film. The writer himself claimed that this is the closest one of his film and television works to the original. Scored 8.3 points in Douban, this film was selected as the 5th Douban Film Annual List. Meanwhile, as the one and only short film rooted in children's literature, it was finally listed for the short film competition unit of 21st Shanghai International Film Festival.

Thanks to this, the sales of this fairy tale story increased by nearly 30% both in online and offline channels. The subsequent spread via the film has propitiously made this original works the most widely recognized one in a most convenient and rapid way, which has in turn completed a powerful back nurture. Then the corresponding derivative products are launched, which is about to bring new progresses and opportunities to boost the creative passion of children's literature writers and further accelerate the promotion of offline reading upon literary works.

Additionally, the film adaptation of children's literature works is also of great significance for cultivating young children's interests in Chinese outstanding literature and profound culture, inheriting the fine traditions of the nation, molding the common psychological structure of the nation, as well as shaping the common values of the nation.

Children and young people represent the future of the country and the nation. While unfortunately our current children's cultural carriers including original children's picture books, children's publications; children's TV series along with children's movies are in a feeble marginalized position, and even foreign-adapted Chinese-themed film and television works are more prevailing globally.

Though, back home, as a matter of fact, the finely classic adaptation of children's literature in China are also can be listed. For example, "Big Head Son and Little Head Dad," the animation series adapted from the famous children's novel written by Zheng Chunhua, which has been produced for a total of 656 episodes of cartoons by Shanghai Oriental Animation Company and CCTV Children's Channel in 1995, 2002 and 2018 respectively. This work focusing on the ordinary life of the general public, is identified as the "down to earth" cartoon, has won the audience's preferences and affirmation, and gained both fame and fortune in the film market and publishing market.

Likewise, children's movies and cartoons such as "Xiaobing Zhangga," "Sparkling Red Star," "Yulai Little Hero" and other well-known ones are all originated from the recognized children's literature works. These film and television works express their respect for the young heroes. The belief in firmness and justice has influenced generations by generations.

To put it simply, it is the rich imagination and subtle artistic connotation of the original children's literature writers that the ones which nurture the adequate development of children's literature and television. Plus, the original book provides a blueprint for the film's adaptation with a certain thickness and depth of life; on the other hand, the group of writers rooted in local cultural communication was keen on picturing the lives of the people and the shaping of national pride. It has also brought positive impact on film and television works, which made the audience more benefited and inspired.
Despite that, we have also noticed an inevitable problem which raised upon the contemporary children books and plays, most of these works revealed a sense of preaching. In particular, the contents are ultimately related to how to correct children’s behavioral habits, offering guidance to solve emotional problems as well as keep their mental in good shape.

It seems that most of the authors have put the children’s preferences aside and then reach out something else, which leaded the works off the track. While, at this point, several same typed works of the United States and European counties are obviously far superior to ours at home.

Universally, the expression of truth, goodness, beauty and love are the source to nourish children’s work. Though how to create an entertaining work finely combining pure visual joy as well as proper spiritual lecture in line with the development of the times turns to be a tough problem for practitioners in the field, which requires lots of brains to overcome.

The Diversified Media has changed the Reading Habits among the Audience

From the perspective of sociology, people's ability to utilize language and words plays a key role for their ontological socialization. And reading itself is the essential approach of school education and the most effective way of personal socialization.

McLuhan believes that the media worked as an extension of our mind. Our consciousness is a fixed asset of our personal energy, which shapes the cognitive experience of each of us. Therefore, as results along with its causes appearing synchronously, the medium and message could be regarded as an inseparable pair, that is, the medium is the message.

So far, the concept of new media has been elevated to a high level, and amount of experts and scholars are willing to adopt the perspective and standards of new media to measure whether the traditional media industry can survive or transform.

And with the development science and technology, the visual art techniques have improved extensively, especially by using the digital technology, more potential has been gushed out. Hence, the more vivid performance as well as the breathtaking effects would bring the mass an unprecedented height for visual pursuits.

Digital Reading Enhances the Sense of Identification of the Audience

When it comes to the traditional paper reading, it is all about reading actual printed texts. By decoding the inter-line passages of the actual books in the hand, the reader will arise their unconstrained imagination and react distinctly with their own approaches. That helps explain why numbers of readers are obsessed with paper books simply for pursuing this flat, static, linear thinking reading experience.

Just like what Douglas Vipers, Bernard Berel, and Franklin R. Brandshaw proposed, social environments (social groups conflicts and personal situations), methods of book distribution, differences in diverse publications as well as readers, along with other factors such as propensity and other communication influences would greatly influence people's reading behavior. In order to define the effects of reading upon the social and political environment, they came up with that the mass communication including printing, broadcasting together with films serves for interests of policy makers, and because of that, this world will work as they like at home and aboard.

Coincidently, as times changes, digital technology and multimedia have deeply affected people's lives. Reading behavior has gradually evolved into a diversified form including reading, listening as well as watching, and even offered a more interactive way to engage readers.

At present, people are living a fast pace life and have more fragmentation time. Many people would read multiple books at the same time. Then portable digital books came in handy.

Then accompanied by the hatching of a diversified media platform, people's reading habits have changed dramatically. From traditional paper reading to multi-screen digital reading, from text reading to image reading, which thoroughly affected lower grade children to some extent.

However, the graphical reading method rather offers children a more independent and autonomy way. For example, “Preschool Pictorial,” the most favored children book at home, added digital reading pens as an additional reading method in 2011, with which younger readers can choose what
contents they prefer to read, it not only enhances the interaction and participation of younger readers, but also succeeds to free their parents to the auxiliary position in the process of reading.

Speaking of which, under the management of the Central Committee of the Communist Youth League, “Preschool Pictorial” was published in May 1982. At the end of 2010, the announcement issued by the National Press and Publication Administration’s National New Publications Distribution Data Survey Center showed that the Preschool Pictorial magazine had a monthly circulation of more than 1.7 million, and its influence was unmatched by other publications. Such data also prove that digital methods have grown into a preferred choice for readers.

The Development of Modern Media has Evolved the Operation Mode

As we all know, a person's experience is limited, it is impossible and sometimes unnecessary to grasp every single thing by themselves when it comes to knowledge and skills. Thus, reading literary works and viewing images have turn out to be a universal and effective way to absorb knowledge and acquire indirect experience. During the time they read, the audience mobilizes all of their cultural deposits (including knowledge structure, emotional awareness, moral values, etc.) so as to enhance understanding, supplement or replace their existing cognitive systems.

Upon this, Microsoft experts forecast that almost all major newspapers in the world will abandon the printed version in 2019. And until to 2020, 90% of books, newspapers, magazines and other paper media will be published in e-books; the Washington Post predicts around 2035, paper media will perish, and the latest media platform will undertake the responsibility of disseminating culture.

In the past few years, accompanied by advanced shooting methods, innovative marketing methods and promotion platforms, the film adaptation of children's literature has been injected with fresh blood and vitality.

Take the children movie “The Secret of the Magic Gourd" as an example, it won the 16th Golden Rooster Award for Best Children's Film and gained a certain social recognition. Adapted from the last long fairy tale written by Zhang Tianyi, this movie was made public by Walt Disney Company, Hong Kong Xiantao Film Entertainment Co., Ltd. together with China Film Group Corporation in 2017. Soon afterwards, Guangming.com claimed that this children's film is a surprise pack which mixed with the fairy tales of the 1950s, the mainstream values of the 1970s, the performance characteristics of the 80s, the shooting styles of the 1990s along with the 21st century computer animation technology, which is more suitable for the taste of the domestic audience.

The film uses digital technology and live-action reality shots to present this compelling story on the screen, retaining the original spirit and ethical ideas while giving the audience a pure visual joy. This is the first time that the issuer China Film Group Corporation promoted children's film and television production via adopting marketing methods.

Nevertheless, as a matter of fact, Disney still grasps the initiative, and they crave for good results in the Chinese mainland market. Fortunately, as it had hoped, "The Secret of the Magic Gourd" has gained more than 20 million yuan at the box office. However, it still far from fully achieving the benefits it should have, such as, derivative products should still be more appealing.

Then until 2015, beyond any expectations, the animated film "Monkey King: Hero Is Back," which was adapted from "Journey to the West," has earned the highest grossing at home with its wonderful film production technology, creative art expression together with prime market-oriented operation mode. This film as the hit movie of the year also won the Best Art Film of the 30th China Film Golden Rooster Award and the Outstanding Feature Film of the 16th China Film Hua Biao Award.

After releasing for only three days, it has surpassed the box office of the 100 million, and eventually ranked 10th in the 2015 Chinese box office with 936 million yuan. This is the highest honor for children movies. The People’s Daily pointed out that the film is a rare phenomenon-level work of Chinese animated films in the past decades.

Compared with the original mythology "Journey to the West," Monkey King is more likely a human both inside and outside; and as for the gluttonous pig, its chubby image feels rather lovely than that in the classic TV series, let alone the cute landlord the dwarf. It seems that the characters are constantly approaching the younger audience’s interests.
However, every coin has two sides. As digital reading becomes more and more prevailing, some children educators showed their concerns about that, compared with the children who read actual books, children who sit in front of television and screen for all day would be far behind in terms of language expression and thinking depth.

When children watch film and television works, their visual stimulating dominates the whole thinking system and hinder their speed to process information in a passive way. This is different from the text input of book reading. For those who read books, they are required to record and comprehend those messages by thinking deeper and imaging further upon the contents they learned. Thus, they can keep them in mind for a long time. Even when reading the graphic books, the children would picture some key plots to remind them of the whole story. This whole process is must be done by the children themselves. Such a process is very helpful for children to form independent thinking and strengthen their concentration.

On the contrast, spending long time in front of screen is in a quite unfavorable condition to shape children's mental health. Because of this, it is indeed a concern to be eased in the new future.

Actually, every new thing will have such obstacles to hinder the progress. In order to better meet the needs of children and the general public by presenting more engaging works, the creators of children's literature and the editors of film and television adaption works tried so hard to actively expand and perfect the corresponding programs with various advanced techniques and marketing model.

Conclusion

In a word, diversified media has built the best integration platform for literature together with film and television, which turns out to be a win-win situation by effectively grafting children's literature and children's movies. A large number of classic children's literature works wait to be adapted into movies so as to be widely known among thousands of households. This extraordinary efficiency and high coverage rate is beyond the reach of traditional publications.

Children's movies need to rely on the power of classic and traditional children's literature to provide a vast source of material to compensate for its weak intention. Hence, it is must be done to prosper children's literature creation by encouraging more literary creation masters devoting their time and energy in children's creations; on the other hand, we must better adapt to market demand and industrial development. I hope that the film and television path of children's literature will be able to rejuvenate as soon as possible.

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