

The study of the cross-media communication of 'Journey to the West'

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Abstract: "Journey to the West" is one of the four great classical novels of China, and its stories are widely loved and talked about. The characters in the novel have been artistically processed and created to form many classic artistic images. Through various media, the classic stories of "Journey to the West" have been reinterpreted for people. The cross-media interpretation of "Journey to the West" reflects the full integration of communication theory and practice, and the emergence of various media has created conditions for the cross-media communication of "Journey to the West." Starting from an overview of communication theory, this paper analyzes the feasibility of "Journey to the West" from the functions of various media in communication, and looks forward to the creative development of this artistic content in reality.

Keywords: Journey to the West, Cross-Media, Communication

1. Introduction

The magical novel "Journey to the West," woven from history and imagination, myth and reality, has always been a beloved literary work in China, exerting a significant influence on Chinese culture and even world culture. It serves as a source of inspiration for writers and artists through the ages. The media presentations of the novel reflect the development and changes of the times. With the advancement of technology and the diversification of new media, more media communication methods have been created for "Journey to the West." The media representation of "Journey to the West" varies greatly in different periods of development. The story has evolved from episodes told by storytellers to adaptations in storybooks, dramas, comic books, movies, TV series, dance performances, animations, comics, stage plays, and now to online and mobile games. The cross-media communication of the "Journey to the West" narrative has undergone the development of various media forms, and it is precisely the interpretation of these various forms that has allowed "Journey to the West" to remain vibrant and popular among readers and audiences for thousands of years.

2. Research on the cross-media communication of "Journey to the West"

2.1. The Role of Cross-Media Communication

In the field of communication studies, the subjects of media communication have become increasingly diverse with the development of the times. Media communication is aimed at the general public, and different recipients have varying responses to different media methods. In the traditional media communication process, communication was one-way, and people had few options to choose from, leading to a dependency on the communication methods by the media communication subjects. However, in today's era of diversified media development, people have more choices and can even participate in media interaction. The choices of media communication subjects influence the methods of media communication, and media forms also impact people's lifestyles, ways of cognition, and behaviors. A mutual influence is formed between media communication and media subjects, and the social effects produced are becoming increasingly profound [1].

2.2. Media communication channels

The advancement of science and technology has provided new means for media communication. Communication media range from newspapers, magazines, radio, film, television, mobile phones, and the internet, with communication methods evolving from singular to integrated, from stationary to mobile, and from one-way to two-way. The communication methods have become more personalized, even allowing the audience to participate in the story and engage in interaction.

Looking at the development of media communication, the communication channels of "Journey to the West" can be mainly divided into four stages: the stage of oral communication, the stage of written communication, the stage of film and television communication, and the stage of online communication.

The story of the Journey to the West originates from the experiences of the Tang Dynasty monk Xuanzang, who traveled a long distance to the West to obtain sacred texts, and it has been widely circulated among the people. The folk tales of Xuanzang's journey to obtain the scriptures were spread more and more widely, becoming more and more fantastic with each telling. The journey from the Tang Dynasty to the Tianzhu (India) was long, and the difficulties encountered along the way were insurmountable for ordinary people, which sparked the rich imagination of later generations, leading to the fictionalization and mythologization of the story. With the development of Yuan Dynasty variety shows and ballad arts, the religious color of the Journey to the West stories gradually weakened, evolving into tales of Tang Seng and his disciples subduing demons and evil spirits. From the "Great Tang Records on the Western Regions" written by Xuanzang and compiled by Bian ji during the Tang Dynasty, which records that the Western Liang state had only women and no men, to the story of the Lion King abducting a princess as his wife and bearing male children, to the "Biography of the Tripitaka Master of the Great Ci' en Monastery of the Great Tang Dynasty" written by Hui li and Yanjing, and then to the "Taiping Guang ji" published in the Song Dynasty, which also collected and recorded the anecdotes of Xuanzang's journey for the scriptures. In the Southern Opera of the Song and Yuan dynasties, there was "Chen Guang Rui, the Monk Drifting on the River," and in Wu Chang ling's variety show "Tang San Zang's Journey to the West to Obtain the Scriptures," there were already four disciples traveling together to obtain the scriptures, adding some imagined plots and stories. In the Song Dynasty's published storybook "The Great Tang Tripitaka's Poetic Dialogues on Obtaining the Scriptures," there was already the Monkey Pilgrim transforming into a scholar in white, claiming to be the "King of the Eighty Thousand Copper-headed and Iron-fore headed Monkeys in the Purple Cloud Cave of Flower-Fruit Mountain" and the "Sand God"; in the variety shows "The God of the Second Rank Locks up the Great Sage Equal to Heaven" and "Journey to the West" at the turn of the Yuan and Ming dynasties, the origin of Sun Wukong was depicted; in the early Ming Dynasty, the Korean Chinese language textbook "Park Tongsa's Fables" mentioned the "Journey to the West in Plain Talk," which summarized and retold the "Contest of Spells in the Kingdom of Che chi" episode, very similar to Chapter 46 of "Journey to the West"; in the Ming Dynasty's "Yongle Encyclopedia," Volume 13139, there is "Dreaming of Beheading the Dragon of the Jing River," which is essentially the same as Chapter 10 of "Journey to the West" [2]. Wu Cheng' en then integrated all previous versions, organizing and creating the hundred-chapter long novel "Journey to the West," which stabilized the content of the novel and made it the basis for various forms of art.

In addition to the dissemination through books and stage performances, with the emergence of film technology, "Journey to the West" was quickly adapted for the screen. Early films of "Journey to the West" were mainly published and distributed by the Shaw Brothers film company. The earliest was "Sun Wukong Fights the Golden Leopard," produced by the Tianyi Film Company established in Shanghai in 1926. Later, the Shaw Brothers produced four "Journey to the West" series films in the 1960s: "Journey to the West" and "Princess Iron Fan" in 1966, "Spider Cave" in 1967, and "Kingdom of Women" in 1968. In 1941, brothers Wan Laiming and Wan Guchan directed and filmed the animated film "Princess Iron Fan" on the theme of the Journey to the West, and in 1958, Wan Guchan directed the paper-cut animation "Piggy Eats Watermelon." Since then, the story of the Journey to the West has been continuously filmed into movies and animations. In addition to those mainly produced by the Shaw Brothers, Stephen Chow later used absurd techniques, drawing on postmodernism and the latest scientific "wormhole" theory, to make the "A Chinese Odyssey" and "Journey to the West: Conquering the Demons" series of films based on the story of the Journey to the West. In recent years, films such as "Journey to the West: The Demons Strike Back" (2014),

and those using 3D technology like "Monkey King: Hero Is Back" (2015) and "Journey to the West: The Three Fights Against the White Bone Spirit" (2016) have reinterpreted and re-examined the story of the Journey to the West, bringing a different experience to the audience [3].

In East Asia, the Japanese have adapted "Journey to the West" the most times, turning the novel into films and animations and becoming a major producer of Journey to the West story products, creating a series of TV dramas, animations, and various other artistic forms. American film companies have also participated in producing films based on the story of "Journey to the West," such as *The Lost Empire* (commonly known as the "American Journey to the West"), *The Forbidden Kingdom*, and *Dragon Ball Evolution*. The 2015 Sino-American co-production "Badlands" further pushed the trend of adapting "Journey to the West" to a climax.

The novel has also been adapted into TV series many times both domestically and internationally, with Mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Japan all producing their own versions of "Journey to the West." As early as 1974, Hong Kong's TVB produced a TV series featuring Chen Zhenhua as Tang San Zang, Ruan Ling Tao as Sun Wukong, and Mei En as Zhu Bajie. Taiwan's first adaptation was in 1983 by Ju ying with "Chinese Mythological Stories - Journey to the West," which was well received by audiences. The earliest TV series produced in Mainland China was in 1986, and the sequel in 1999 has become a classic. Japan started airing its "Journey to the West" series in 1978, which consisted of 26 episodes. It was later adapted into an English version by the British Broadcasting Corporation and aired in the UK and Australia in 1979 under the title "Monkey." Since then, Japan, Mainland China, and Hong Kong and Taiwan have used new technologies to produce the series multiple times.

In addition to movies and TV series, the story has also been adapted into comics, with Japan being the most developed in this regard. The 52-episode animated series "Journey to the West," led by CCTV, has brought wonderful childhood memories to children and has been a major source of spiritual sustenance and visual feast during their holidays. The film "Princess Iron Fan" is a feature-length animation co-directed by the Wan brothers, produced by the United China Film Company in 1941, and was the first feature-length animated film in Asia at the time. It has also been adapted into animated films by directors from both sides of the Taiwan Strait multiple times. In Taiwan, the story of the Journey to the West was adapted by Huang Jun Xiong into a TV puppet show.

In order to provide audiences with a more vivid artistic form, "Journey to the West" was adapted into a musical drama titled "Monkey: Journey to the West" by Chinese-American director Chen Shih-Cheng. The production combines Chinese acrobatics, anime, martial arts, and Broadway-style musicals. The music was composed by Damon Albarn and Jamie Hewlett, the creators of "Gorillaz." The play was performed at the Manchester International Festival (2007) and the Lincoln Center in New York (2008), receiving acclaim from audiences. The Guangzhou Acrobatic Troupe, based on the classic chapters of "Journey to the West" and traditional acrobatic skills as the performance method, integrated modern stage design to officially launch a new form of stage acrobatic drama in 2006. The play has no dialogue, relying solely on stage design and acrobatic skills to concretely display the plot of "Journey to the West" [3]. The play has toured Europe, America, and other countries around the world, winning numerous awards in the arts category. In addition to these, other forms of artistic drama such as puppet shows, shadow plays, and children's program dramas have also recreated the various character images and classic plotlines of the story of the Journey to the West.

The development of modern media has injected new vitality into this classic Chinese novel, "Journey to the West," which has also been adapted into video and online games. Tencent has developed "QQ Games," while NetEase has provided a series of games such as "Dream Westward Journey," "New Westward Journey," and "Westward Journey Mobile." Other companies have also offered similar games, such as "Creation Westward Journey," "Journey to the West: The Legend of the Demon Seal," and "Glorious Westward Journey." These interactive games, which allow players to participate, play a subtle role in promoting the story of the Journey to the West and spreading Chinese civilization, enabling people to understand the story unconsciously.

With the development of society, the dissemination of "Journey to the West" has transformed from text to images, animations, films and television, and online games, greatly enriching the cultural horizons of the public. It has realized the practical exploration and development of media communication, allowing the

world to understand China, Chinese culture, and spirit. Cross-media communication can highlight the advantages of media communication, integrate resources between different media carriers, enhance cooperation and interaction between media, and provide deconstructive interpretations and expressions of the same work.

2.3. The impact of media communication

The transformation of media communication methods affects not only the development of cultural and artistic forms but also, more significantly, the influence in the realm of ideology. With the development of cross-media communication, the creative expression of story content can greatly trigger the public's thinking about the story itself and deeply explore the realistic reflections conveyed by the art itself [4].

"Journey to the West" is the most familiar novel to the Chinese people. Since the 1986 television adaptation of the same-name novel was broadcast, it is reported that the series has the highest rebroadcast rate to date and has become a must-have feast for Chinese children during holidays. Regarding "Journey to the West," it has a main storyline, and the cross-media communication, coupled with the addition of postmodernist thought, allows directors and writers to choose different aspects and perspectives for interpretation, enriching the story's meaning and making the characterization more expressive and infectious. Art comes from life, and cross-media communication takes advantage of the public's media selection habits, enriching and creating textual and visual content through creative expression. In 1995, the film "A Chinese Odyssey," invested in by Stephen Chow's and Xi'an Film Studio, was released. This movie does not tell the story of Tang Seng and his disciples obtaining the true scriptures after many hardships but uses deconstructionist techniques from postmodernism, in a form of "nonsense," using the characters from "Journey to the West" to tell a love story that transcends time and space, with only the character names being related to "Journey to the West." It is hard to imagine that the now-popular "A Chinese Odyssey" was actually met with a very cold market response when it was released in 1995, and audiences did not appreciate this new type of comedy. It was not until 1997 when "A Chinese Odyssey" was broadcast on CCTV's movie channel that it cultivated a group of "A Chinese Odyssey" fans, and later, with the help of online platforms such as BBS and QQ chat networks, the movie became popular in colleges and universities. The rapid rise in popularity of "A Chinese Odyssey" largely relied on new media. The new media interpretation fully inspired the public's level of participation, allowing the public to accept new media communication methods and to make reasonable development suggestions, testing the effectiveness of cross-media communication through the market [5].

3. The feasibility of cross-media communication of "Journey to the West"

3.1. The transitional continuity of "Journey to the West" from traditional to modern media

The development of technology has provided new methods for communication media, and has also given "Journey to the West" new choices in cross-media communication. It can be said that the emergence of each new medium has provided new methods for its dissemination, bringing new vitality and expressive techniques to this classical masterpiece. As one of the four great classical novels, "Journey to the West" has a very long heritage, and its plot and characters have become deeply rooted in people's hearts. The initial dissemination of the text content has already gained good reputation, and subsequent animations have also demonstrated different styles, with shadow puppet styles, ink wash styles, and traditional animation styles all providing visual enjoyment. The dissemination through film and television media has brought "Journey to the West" to the screen, allowing people to understand the story content through television and movie viewing. Cross-media communication has enriched the plot of "Journey to the West," and adapters are bold in innovation, with the market response being very positive. New versions of "Journey to the West" continue to be released, especially the dissemination through film media, which has brought "Journey to the West" to the international stage, spreading overseas and allowing people from other countries to have a further understanding of China's ancient mythological stories. The transition from traditional to modern methods is very natural, and from the public's reaction, cross-media communication can promote innovative practices in culture and art [6].

The development of new online media provides diverse channels for the dissemination of "Journey to the West," enriching the forms and means of communication. Therefore, the cross-media communication of "Journey to the West" based on the internet has great development space. Especially in online game design, the rich plot and diverse characters of "Journey to the West" have strong plasticity in netizen design, and have the characteristic of continuity. This not only arouses the interest and participation enthusiasm of players but also integrates educational and entertaining elements, achieving great enrichment in game design and unifying cultural dissemination with economic benefits. Games themed on "Journey to the West," such as "Dream Westward Journey," "QQ Westward Journey," and "Westward Journey World," not only bring people the joy of gaming but also allow players to understand "Journey to the West" through the re-creation of game scenes and story situations. The cross-media communication of online game design is greatly loved by the public, thus becoming a very effective form of communication. Its social impact and cultural influence spread rapidly, and the dissemination through online games has great operational flexibility in language content, enabling effective cross-media, cross-language, and cross-cultural communication on an international scale [7].

3.2. "Journey to the West" aligns with innovative concepts in cross-media communication in terms of content

The emergence of new media has also given "Journey to the West" new expressive techniques in its communication content, and the content itself features innovative characteristics. The story of "Journey to the West" has overall coherence, and each individual story can also be innovatively interpreted, providing rich material for cross-media communication. Especially in the design of screen images, people can gain more new interpretations of the story through association and innovation, fully expressing the story content and emotional values [8]. Cross-media communication should not be limited to the current state of development; it should always pursue innovation. The presentation of the story content in "Journey to the West" is also being enriched. The box office success of "Monkey King: Hero Is Back" in 2015 was a great affirmation of cross-media communication. The big-screen interpretation of domestic animation can bring more artistic enjoyment to the public in terms of visual and emotional experience, allowing classical stories to have more expressive forms.

The many innovative cases of "Journey to the West" in cross-media communication have provided important practical support for domestic media communication research. Successful cases of cross-media communication have not only established a high level of confidence for the inheritance of traditional culture but also provided many innovative ideas for the practice of cross-media communication. There are also typical examples of cross-media communication of "Journey to the West" both domestically and internationally. In 2008, to warm up for the Beijing Olympics, the British Broadcasting Corporation launched a two-minute promotional film "East Journey" on its official website. The plot is designed such that Sun Wukong, Zhu Bajie, and Sha Wujing overcome difficulties and obstacles, subdue demons and monsters along the way, and finally return to China to light the Olympic cauldron at the National Stadium "Bird's Nest." This story design is very much in line with the theme and meets the effect of Chinese traditional cultural propaganda. To expand the effect of Olympic propaganda materials, the video is edited into segments of different durations to express the theme of the Olympics, which are integrated into the design of Olympic programs and disseminated through various client platforms such as television, radio, the internet, and mobile phones. The images of Sun Wukong, Zhu Bajie, and Sha Wujing were also used as friendly ambassadors for the Beijing Olympics, promoting the influence of the Olympic Games [9].

3.3. The adaptability of the communication subjects of "Journey to the West" in cross-media acceptance is strong

The communication subjects of "Journey to the West" are extremely broad, and people of different age groups have a very high level of awareness of "Journey to the West." Cross-media communication methods affect a variety of sensory experiences for the public. People are willing to engage with new artistic forms and content to enhance their cultural sensibility and enrich their perspectives on cultural interpretation. Under the conditions of informatization and networking, various media methods are exceptionally active, and these cross-media communication methods are commonly encountered and flexibly used in daily life.

Therefore, in terms of adaptability, cross-media communication methods have great development potential [10].

The communication subjects of "Journey to the West" not only transcend the limitations of time and space but also have very strong adaptability, allowing Chinese elements to be fully realized in the scope of global cultural exchanges. With the diversified development of cultural exchanges, people's demands for culture are also more intense, and the presentation in different forms is to meet the satisfaction of various cultural needs. Compared to other types of traditional cultural content, "Journey to the West" has a more prominent heritage, and cultural recipients of different age groups can discuss the content, form, and cultural implications of "Journey to the West" in detail. It can be seen that in the communication and exchange of traditional culture, "Journey to the West" can play a very important role [11]. In terms of cross-regional and cross-cultural exchanges, "Journey to the West" has become a unique cultural symbol of China. This cultural symbol can enhance the soft power of our country's competition with other nations in cultural exchanges. The cross-border transmission of culture is highly representative in demonstrating soft power. In cross-border media communication, the propaganda sector should also reflect on its own shortcomings. For the innovative communication of content of the same type as "Journey to the West," the methods, types, and popularity of media communication forms used by foreign media are superior to those domestically. Moreover, they surpass us in terms of production teams and communication channels. All of this requires domestic media professionals to make greater explorations and efforts to enhance our cross-media communication capabilities, thereby expanding the influence of the dissemination of local culture.

4. Future directions for 'Journey to the West' Cross-Media communication

4.1. Prospects for the content of "Journey to the west" Cross-Media communication

We should maintain a positive and optimistic attitude towards the development of "Journey to the West" cross-media communication. Judging by the current cultural market development, the cross-media communication of "Journey to the West" has not only promoted Chinese culture but also undertaken the important task of "bringing Chinese culture to the world." In terms of content innovation and development, it is necessary to adapt to the very active thinking and creative abilities of modern people. By mastering existing materials and fully exerting imagination and artistic creativity, more content can be brought to cross-media communication. "Journey to the West" cross-media communication has a wealth of content to choose from, and by expanding communication channels, methods, and value influence, it aims to present a diverse range of artistic content [12].

Indeed, the current cross-media communication of "Journey to the West" is rich and diverse in form and content. However, we should adopt a rational way of thinking when it comes to the content of its communication. The inheritance and innovation of traditional cultural content should be measured to a certain extent. It is not advisable to pander to sensationalism by making vulgar adaptations for the sake of attracting attention. Cross-media communication should recognize the connotative nature of culture itself; the essence and fundamental content of culture must not be lost and should be preserved and highlighted with emphasis. For traditional cultural classics like "Journey to the West," the important messages conveyed by their cultural spirit are unity, determination to move forward, and an unyielding, unwavering spirit towards set goals. This is the core of the story. The four main characters in the story have particularly distinct personalities, and their characteristics are highly representative. In cross-media communication, the personalities of the characters can be amplified to highlight the plot and spiritual essence. The story content can be creatively developed with the help of modern literary theory and modern scientific theory, using the integrative nature of different cultures to create new artistic achievements through creative expression. Therefore, in cross-media communication, thinking about the content should not be limited. Artistic creation should be carried out on the basis of grasping the basic principles and scales, in order to achieve good communication effects in the market.

4.2. Prospects for the cross-media communication methods of "Journey to the West"

Cross-media communication methods are diverse. Building on the four developmental stages mentioned earlier, with the influence of online communication as a new cross-media communication method, it is

possible to innovate in form and enhance the promotion and dissemination of cultural content. "Journey to the West" has new opportunities and room for expansion in the form of web series. Web series are fast-paced television dramas with accelerated production rhythms and improved media communication efficiency. Moreover, people have a great curiosity about story content. The content of the Journey to the West itself is attractive, and the Monkey King's ability to ascend to heaven and earth and transform in countless ways stimulates people's imagination. Incorporating these plot elements into the story, cross-media communication is bound to achieve very good market results, and cultural arts can also be better promoted. Regarding the development of cross-media communication methods, people can appreciate from different perspectives, and the information they obtain will also vary. Innovation in cross-media communication methods should not only conform to the advantages of technological development but also adapt to the public's media choices, psychological characteristics, and usage habits. Convenient, efficient, and high-quality cross-media communication methods can produce good communication effects.

5. Conclusion

In summary, the cross-media communication of "Journey to the West" should have a broad prospect. By subjecting the communication subjects and market effects to testing, the practical value of cross-media communication can be enhanced, the expressiveness of art and the influence of cross-media communication can be deepened, and the multi-level development of cross-media communication can be achieved. Taking "Journey to the West" as a successful model of cross-media communication, it provides more reference schemes for the inheritance of China's traditional culture, allowing the essence of traditional culture to be passed down. This promotes the great development and prosperity of China's culture, forming cultural brands and symbols with international influence. Thinking in innovative ways of cross-media communication, using modern information technology, online media, and other means to enrich the content and forms of cross-media communication, realizing the multiple values of culture through technological development, and promoting the value presentation of technology through cultural effects. In the practical consideration of cross-media communication, explore a long-term path more suitable for its development, with the aim of promoting and enhancing Chinese traditional culture, and on the basis of using new media, allowing ancient stories to shine with new vitality.

6. References

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