

Artistic Rebirth in Cross-Media Translation: Aesthetic Innovation and Ontological Persistence in Drama Adapted from Films

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Abstract: Driven by the dual impetus of media convergence and digital intelligence technological innovation, drama adapted from films has become an important trend in contemporary theatrical creation. Taking transmedia storytelling theory as the framework, this paper analyzes the artistic practice path of film-to-drama adaptation from three dimensions—transformation of narrative language, innovation of technical means, and reconstruction of aesthetic experience—combining typical cases such as *Life of Pi* and *The Shawshank Redemption*. The study finds that successful cross-media adaptation requires achieving a dual balance: on the one hand, leveraging digital technology to break through the boundaries of stage expression while adhering to the ontological characteristics of drama—"liveness" and "hypotheticality"; on the other hand, inheriting the core spirit of the original works while realizing artistic rebirth through the unique spatial narrative and physical expression of drama. This creative practice not only injects new vitality into the theater industry but also promotes the construction and innovation of the "disciplinary, academic, and discourse" three major systems of Chinese theater and film studies.

Keywords: Transmedia Adaptation; Drama Adapted from Films; Aesthetic Innovation; Digital Intelligence Technology.

1. Introduction

As homologous yet divergent audio-visual arts, drama and film have a history of mutual learning that almost coincides with the birth of film. In recent years, with the successive adaptation of Chinese and foreign films such as *The Eternal Wave* and *New Dragon Gate Inn* onto the stage, the cross-media adaptation of films into dramas has experienced explosive growth, forming a new phase where "films infuse vitality into stage art". This phenomenon not only responds to the call for "the interdisciplinary construction of Theater and Film Studies" proposed by Central Academy of Drama and other universities, but also aligns with the development direction of "integration of culture and technology" in the 14th Five-Year Plan.

However, adapting films into dramas is not a simple artistic reproduction, but a challenging process of creative transformation. Films, leveraging the flexibility of lens language and the advantage of temporal-spatial switching, can create realistic narrative effects; while dramas, restricted by the physical boundaries of stage space, need to activate the audience's imagination through hypothetical artistic means. How to resolve the expressive differences between the two art forms and achieve effective translation from the silver screen to the stage? How to adhere to the artistic ontology of drama while utilizing the commercial value of film IPs? These questions have become core issues in current theatrical creation and academic research, and also constitute the starting point of this study.

2. Transformation of Narrative Language in Film-to-Drama Adaptation: From Cinematic Logic to Theatrical Logic

2.1. Reconstruction Strategies of Spatial Narrative

2.1.1. Scene Condensation and Temporal-Spatial Juxtaposition: Narrative Adaptation for Traditional Stages

Films construct multi-dimensional narrative spaces through techniques such as long shots, close-ups, and tracking shots, while dramas need to transform this fluid spatial experience into visible expressions on a fixed stage. *Lu Ding Ji* (The Deer and the Cauldron) staged by Shanghai Dramatic Arts Centre provides a classic example: the creators used movable city wall props to simulate the shot splicing in films. In the scene of capturing Oboi, through the three-dimensional scheduling of actors lifted by black-clad performers, the slow-motion shots and close-ups in the film were transformed into physical narrative on the stage, enabling the audience to grasp the plot rhythm through spatial perception. This transformation is not a mechanical reproduction of film space, but a reconstruction based on the characteristics of the stage—converting the "shot montage" of films into the "spatial montage" of dramas, and expanding the narrative dimension through methods such as scene segmentation and multi-area parallel performances. Furthermore, through the unique immersive experience of the stage, familiar life scenes generate new resonances in the theater, realizing the natural transformation of artistic forms. [1]

2.1.2. Technological Empowerment for Spatial Expansion: Integration of Virtual and Physical Realities

From the digital exploration six years ago to the establishment of the Key Laboratory of Intelligent Theatre Art Space in 2021, the professional development of digital drama has quietly unfolded. The concept of "Intelligent Art Space" proposed by Hao Rong, president of the Central Academy of Drama, provides a new path for the innovation of spatial narrative. When talking about the connotation of digital drama, Hao Rong points out that digital drama is not merely a pile-up of technologies, but a rethinking of the essence of theatrical art. Supported by virtual simulation technology, the stage can real-time project digital scenes through LED screens, realizing the superposition of virtual space and physical space, which not only retains the liveness of drama but also absorbs the flexibility of film's temporal and spatial transformation. The virtual world constructed by digital technology in films has been converted into tangible physical installations in the stage play *Life of Pi*. At the center of the stage stands a large rotating disc; combined with the gauze projection equipment suspended above, it projects the changes of seawater onto the floor, achieving dynamic waves. When the actor playing Pi makes rowing movements, he/she must adjust body balance in accordance with the movement rhythm of the lifeboat on the disc. The friction sound of wooden planks and the sound of oars hitting water form an auditory experience, making the drift at sea more realistic. This coordination between the human body and machinery transforms the virtual space of the film into a perceptible on-site experience, [2] which not only avoids the technical difficulties of stage reproduction but also strengthens the metaphorical expression of the story.

2.2. Media Conversion of Emotional Expression

2.2.1. Transformation of Technologized Emotion into Bodily Expression

The emotional transmission of films relies on technical means such as close-ups and background music, while the emotional resonance of dramas stems from the on-site empathy between actors and the audience. The adaptation of the original film by Huang Ying's stage play *Crossroads* is quite enlightening: the original film features a narrative thread where a new female tenant moves next door to the male protagonist. The two clash due to differences in living habits and throw paper balls at each other's rooms. This scene is presented through multiple shot edits in the film; on the stage, however, the comedic setup of "being separated by a wall" is retained. The two actors stand on both sides with their backs to the audience, throwing paper balls toward the same direction symbolizing the wall. Adopting a mindset similar to film editing on the stage, it allows the audience to piece together the complete scene through imagination. [3]

2.2.2. Construction of a Living Emotional Field: The Emotional Advantages of Dramatic Ontology

The core of this transformation lies in grasping the essential differences between the two art forms: film is "recorded emotion," with emotional tension enhanced through post-production; drama is "occurring emotion," relying on actors' real-time performances and the audience's on-site feedback to form an emotional closed loop. Therefore, adapting films into dramas requires stripping away the technologized emotional expressions of the original works and returning to the "living"

nature of drama—constructing a unique theatrical emotional field through rhythmic processing of lines, symbolic design of body movements, eye contact between actors and the audience, and other means.

3. Stage Innovation Empowered by Digital Intelligence Technology: Boundary Expansion and Aesthetic Upgrading

3.1. Lightweight Transformation of Production Technology

3.1.1. Virtual Simulation and Exposed Application: Technical Reconstruction of Stage Scene

Virtual production provides panoramic digital virtual scenes for film and television production. [4] It synthesizes virtual scenes in real time through LED walls, allowing actors to obtain real spatial perception and performance feedback during filming. When this technology is transplanted to the theatrical stage, it not only reduces the production and transportation costs of large props but also expands the expressive boundaries of the stage. For example, the stage play *World on a Wire* has creatively adopted "exposed virtual reality technology" in its adaptation of the eponymous film: a green screen shooting area is directly set up on the stage, where actors wear masks to perform exaggeratedly. The real-time shot footage, after digital synthesis, is alternately presented on the large screen with classic shots from the original film. This "technology-exposing" approach not only allows the audience to witness the construction process of virtual scenes but also enables them to shuttle repeatedly between "stage reality" and "screen virtuality" through the perspective switching of VR glasses, perfectly echoing the philosophical inquiry into "truth and virtuality" in the original film. Through this method, Director Li Jianjun has proven that virtual reality technology is not merely a tool for scene reproduction but can also become an organic part of theatrical narrative, achieving an elevation from "technological empowerment" to "artistic

3.1.2. Auxiliary Application of AIGC: Creation Norms and Boundary Definition

Generative Artificial Intelligence (AIGC) provides new ideas for adaptation creation. By analyzing the narrative structure, character relationships, and stylistic characteristics of the original film, AIGC can assist creators in generating stage blocking plans, lighting and sound design suggestions, and even optimizing line expressions. However, it is important to note that technology should serve as an auxiliary tool rather than replacing creators' aesthetic judgment and artistic thinking.

3.2. Cross-Media Extension of Communication Forms

3.2.1. Online-Offline Synergy: Breakthrough and Expansion of Communication Patterns

The innovation of film-to-drama adaptations is reflected not only in stage presentation but also extended to the communication link. With the support of 5G information technology and blockchain certification technology, theatrical performances can achieve simultaneous online and offline communication: offline audiences experience on-site empathy, while online audiences participate through multi-camera live streaming, bullet screen interactions, and other

methods, forming a communication pattern of a "super entertainment space." This innovation in communication form not only absorbs the mass communication advantages of films but also retains the niche aesthetic characteristics of dramas, enabling adapted works to break through the limitations of theater space and reach a broader audience.

3.2.2. Academic Reference and Discourse Communication: Functional Upgrading of Cultural Carriers

The "Marxism and Theatrical Life" lecture classroom at the Central Academy of Drama offers an academic reference for cross-media communication. This model deeply integrates ideological and political theory with theatrical performance, constructing a "Ideology and Politics + Art" situated teaching approach. Meanwhile, relying on new media technologies, the academy promotes the outcomes of stage teaching through online communication and short video creation, popularizing art education and expanding the social influence of theatrical works.

This communication innovation aligns with the idea of "constructing a discourse system for theatre and film criticism" proposed by Professor Gu Chunfang of Peking University. Through cross-media communication, drama becomes not merely an artistic work, but also a cultural carrier that stimulates social discussion, promoting the popularization and modernization of theatrical critical discourse.

4. The Game Between Commercial Logic and Artistic Ontology: Boundaries and Persistence in Adaptation

4.1. Rational Transformation of IP Value and Alertness to Over-Consumption

4.1.1. Commercial Advantages and Market Risks of IP Adaptation

In the current internet context, the concept of IP has further generalized beyond the copyright of works such as literature, film, and animation. Any intangible asset with cultural value and commercial development potential can be regarded as an IP. [5] The inherent audience base and commercial value of film IPs are important drivers for their adaptation into dramas. Mature film IPs can reduce the market risks of theatrical creation and attract more audiences to theaters, which is of positive significance for the market-oriented development of the drama industry. However, it is crucial to remain vigilant: excessive pursuit of IP traffic may lead to the loss of dramatic ontology — some adapted works mechanically replicate film plots and visual elements to cater to audience expectations, neglecting the artistic innovation of drama and ultimately becoming mere "stage replicas of IPs."

4.1.2. Insights from Successful Cases: The Core Logic of Creative Transformation

The successful adaptation of the Yue Opera *New Dragon Gate Inn* offers valuable experiences: instead of confining itself to the martial arts narrative of the original film, the creators fully leveraged the artistic characteristics of Yue Opera's "female xiaosheng tradition," endowing the story with a new artistic expression through unique singing styles and body language. Meanwhile, on the basis of retaining the core conflicts of the original work, they integrated contemporary aesthetic concepts, making the adapted work

not only identifiable as an IP but also possessing the independence of drama. This practice confirms a core viewpoint: the key to adapting films into dramas lies not in "being faithful to the original work" but in "creatively interpreting the spirit of the original," achieving a balance between commercial value and artistic value. It neither serves as a simple reproduction nor arbitrarily dissolves the core temperament of the work in the name of "innovation." [6]

4.2. Persistence and Innovation of Dramatic Ontology

4.2.1. Liveness and Theatricality: Core Traits of Dramatic Ontology

Drama is inherently "the art of liveness," and its core charm lies in the real-time interaction between actors and the audience, the unique atmosphere of the stage space, and the activation of imagination through the art of theatricality. No matter what technological means are adopted in adapting films into dramas, this core trait must not be deviated from. As demonstrated in the creation of *World on a Wire*, the "virtualized" stage treatment that exposes technical methods complements the contemporary themes explored in the work, such as "truth and illusion" and "technology and human nature," forming an intertextuality that inspires the audience to feel and reflect. [7] This in-depth integration of technology and philosophy precisely strengthens the ontological value of drama as a "public space for contemplation."

4.2.2. Technology Serves Content: Practical Paths for Safeguarding Ontology

Guangming Net commented that the "unique strength" of drama lies in its ability to interpret all things in the world through simple props and actors' bodies. This "artistic theatricality" is precisely the essential feature that distinguishes drama from film. The creation of *Panda Return* also adheres to this principle: the application of digital twin and AR technologies always serves the ecological theme of "a community with a shared future for all life." The scene of the virtual panda's extinction is transformed into a powerful emotional impact through technical means, enabling the audience to deepen their understanding of ecological protection during the on-site experience rather than merely pursuing visual spectacle.

4.2.3. Adaptation of the "Three Capabilities" Standard: Competency Requirements for Adaptors

The Central Academy of Drama emphasizes the "Three Capabilities" standard in teacher training — the ability to stand on the "lecture platform" (research capability), the "teaching platform" (teaching capability), and the "stage" (creative capability). This standard is equally applicable to adaptation creation: adaptors must possess the research capability to conduct in-depth studies on the original film, the professional competence to master the laws of theatrical creation, and the innovative capacity to organically integrate these two aspects. In today's era of rapid development of digital intelligence technology, drama should further uphold its ontological characteristics, treating technology as a tool to enhance the on-site experience rather than a means to replace it. Only in this way can film-to-drama adaptations achieve true artistic regeneration and avoid becoming mere vassals of technology.

5. Conclusion and Outlook

Since their inception, theatre and film have maintained a

close relationship of coexistence and interaction. Against the background of creators working across both fields and increasingly frequent two-way exchanges, the mutual infiltration of narrative concepts between theatre and film has become almost inevitable. [8] As an important practice of cross-media creation, film-to-theatre adaptation has not only driven the market-oriented development of the theatre industry but also promoted the interdisciplinary integration of Theatre and Film Studies. By analyzing the practical paths in three dimensions—the transformation of narrative language, technological empowerment and innovation, and the balance between commerce and art—this paper reveals the core logic of cross-media adaptation: successful adaptation lies in transformation rather than duplication, and innovation rather than imitation. It requires a balance between the narrative advantages of film and the ontological characteristics of theatre.

From the perspective of disciplinary development, the practice of adapting films into theatrical works provides vivid cases for the Three-System Construction in Theatre and Film Studies: in terms of the disciplinary system, it promotes the interdisciplinary integration of cross-media art; in terms of the academic system, it enriches theoretical research on cross-media narration; and in terms of the discourse system, it constructs innovative theatrical expressions with Chinese characteristics. Looking to the future, with the continuous development of digital intelligence technology and the advancement of the goal of building a strong country through education, film-to-theatre adaptation should further strengthen the creative philosophy of combining moral integrity and artistic excellence. It should integrate the spirit of educators with the ideal of art for the people, emphasizing both technological innovation and formal exploration while upholding cultural connotations and spiritual values. Meanwhile, it is necessary to strengthen interdisciplinary research and international exchanges, promote Chinese

theatrical adaptation works to the world, and contribute artistic strength to the building of a community with a shared future for mankind.

Acknowledgments

We would like to express our sincere gratitude to the supervisors for their valuable advice and guidance.

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