

# *The Long Season: Northeastern Memory in Transmedia Narrative Practice*

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**Abstract:** *The Long Season*, a film and television production that resonates with many audiences who are passionate about Northeastern culture as well as nostalgic for memories of their homeland, comes from the adaptation of the novel *Winter's Edge*. The success of this cross-media narrative practice comes from the full interpretation of the text and the high evaluation of the audience. Even though cross-media narrative itself has many risks of being adapted or even misunderstood, it is undoubtedly a move worth supporting from the perspective of the multifaceted nature of cultural presentation and the gradually increasing dissemination power of cultural products. Relying on the text space, the remembered and imagined Northeast is relatively well expressed in the process of film and television practice, which in turn promotes the renaissance of Northeast literature. Through the precipitation of history and the narration of words, *The Long Season* attempts to tell a cosy tale of suspense to the public with a more intimate tone across the medium. Behind such a story is the film and television practice of the Northeast Renaissance - the story of China continues to be told, about the Northeast, about the pulse of the times, and about every lovely individual stirring in his or her destiny.

**Keywords:** Transmedia narratives; *The long season*; Film and television practice; Northeast Renaissance.

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## 1. Introduction

The emergence of the concept of “Northeast Renaissance” is more like a call for the return of discourse in the declining Northeast. At the beginning of the 21st century, the Northeast became a place of public concern as many Northeastern writers wrote about their homeland based on their fathers’ and their own memories. A series of terms with funny colours, such as “two-people turn”, “big gold chain”, “disco hall” and “Northeast barbecue”, seem to be the most popular and popular terms in every undeveloped country. A series of terms with funny colours such as “Erluo”, “big gold chains”, “disco dance halls”, “Northeast barbecue” and so on seem to be the stereotypes of every group of people who have never been to Northeast China. It is not until more and more writers in Northeast China write about their memories of Northeast China that readers can learn more about the “real face” of Northeast China - not only is it funny, but Northeast China is also serious. After the process of relocation of the centre of economic gravity, the decline of Northeast China has even become the theme of “Northeast China text”, whether it is family, friendship, or love are filled with sadness. This emotion is serious, but also comes from the powerlessness of individuals who are unable to fight against destiny as the wheels of the times stick to them. This sense of powerlessness not only from the individual itself, but also from the decline of the Northeast. From the “eldest son of the Republic” to a batch after batch of northerners out of the northeast, in the witness of time, the northeast has become a cold unattended north.

Northeast China is undoubtedly abstract in the narrative space of novels or articles. In Yu Xiaoqian’s novel *The Blade of Winter* (the original adaptation of *The Long Season*), Shen Mo, as a tragic character, takes on the reader’s infinite imagination, not to mention other characters. In the poem written by Wang Yang, the author can contemplate the connection between the words, but he can’t cast the bright

sunlight on his face. If you only read the words, the Northeast is probably a cold, grey-toned place. Quite the contrary, in the film and television “*The Long Season*”, there are mostly yellowish colours and other warm tones presented. The endless cornfields, clean streets, and rich Northeastern cuisine all make Northeast come alive. This also allows viewers to slowly shed their stereotypes of Northeastern culture. The figurative food that the audience can’t get between the lines is all found in director Xin Shuang’s camera.

As a summary of the Northeast Renaissance, the TV series *The Long Season* invited Ban Yu, a representative writer of this wave, to act as the literary planner and revise the outline of the script. (Ka Sheng, 2023) Similar to the previous works of the “New Northeast Writers Group” represented by Shuang Xuetao, Ban Yu, and Zheng Zhi, *The Long Season* employs the following three core categories in its narrative structure: factory/layoff, murder/suspense, and father’s generation/children’s generation. *The Long Season* takes the layoff of Birch Steel in 1998 as the backdrop of the story, and the murder of a dead body as the story clue, interlacing the two timelines of 1997/1998 and 2016, to show the destiny of the father’s generation, represented by Wang Zhong, and the son’s generation, represented by Wang Yang.

The Northeast narrative in *The Long Season* is more like a prose poem. Four chapters divide the film into four parts, a narrative structure that is the result of references to literary works. The act of rarely placing the chapters in the context of film and television discourse makes the film instead imbued with a romantic and logical character. A simple story of a mysterious murder case buried for eighteen years becomes a thorn in everyone’s heart in the film, and this thorn is also a figurative interpretation of the “long season”. In the long eighteen years, the changes in the Northeast is the handwriting of the times, when history comes forward, to the ordinary little people, the Northeast began her long season. It is also such a social background based on historical change that film and television producers are able to make more

genuine use of cross-media narratives to introduce and even awaken the cultural memory of Northeast China.

## 2. From Medium to Medium: It is not the Platform That Is Crossed, But the Way of Thinking About the Text

Transmedia Storytelling (TMS) is an advanced content creation concept first proposed in 2003 by Henry Jenkins, a professor of media studies at the University of Southern California. According to Jenkins, transmedia storytelling is the process of decentralised, holistic storytelling through multiple delivery channels in order to create a holistic entertainment experience. Ideally, each medium can contribute to the storytelling with its unique strengths. Jenkins illuminates, “The relationship lies in continuity.” In the past, what we thought of as continuity in storytelling existed in the same medium, i.e., the formation of textual “intertextuality” in the same medium, as in the case of serialised drama, which is a typical textual structure of continuity. However, if this continuity is extended to a variety of media, then “intertextuality” is formed between different media, which also becomes “cross-media narrative”.

Based on the “New Northeast Writing”, Xin Shuang has pushed forward the previous types of narratives. For example, in the use of some visual elements, Xin Shuang avoids the cold and stern symbols of the Northeast. Previous media interviews with Xin Shuang mention this point: “When he thinks of Northeast China, he first remembers the golden trees under the autumn sun, the sky is extraordinarily high and blue, and the weather isn't too cold, so people can walk outdoors in their jackets. ‘It's a north-east that I remember as particularly bright, where people are very active.’” (Wang Yan, 2023)

*The Long Season* is based on the original novel Winter's Edge - in the original novel, Shen Mo is an extremely dark girl after a tragic childhood. However, in the film and television, she becomes an innocent figure, and the narrative angle focuses even more on the suffering she has gone through. In this way, the audience's sympathy for her seems more profound. In the novel, Wang Yang's death was planned by Shen Mo, while in the film his death was an accidental suicide. The two different personas and plots allow readers and audiences to have a comprehensive knowledge and sobriety in the process of understanding the period background behind this murder or mystery. If the “intertextuality” of Jenkins's cross-media narrative lies in the construction of textual resonance in different media narratives, then in the cross-media narrative perspective of *The Long Season*, the “intertextuality” is the construction of the audience's memory of Northeast culture. At the end of the twentieth century in Northeast China, uncertainty became a threat to the safety and security of life in the atmosphere of a sinking social rhythm. In an environment where the surveillance system was imperfect and the genetic testing system was just beginning to be briefly described, social instability could even become history buried by the current of the times.

## 3. From Glory to Renaissance: The Return of The Three Musketeers of The Northeast After a Splendid Group Walk

Northeast's “brilliance” can not be separated from the force

of the times. From the first day of heavy industry into the Northeast, the name of the “eldest son of the Republic” seems to have become a glowing business card recording the city's railways, factories, and the new face of the workers' group. Under the flood of history, with the reform of state-owned enterprises, workers laid off. People who used to hold iron rice bowls lost their jobs and even their original family ecological balance overnight, and many details about family changes were buried in the ambiguous transition of that era. Under the background of the collective sinking of destiny and society, they, as the father generation of “*The Long Season*”, go deep into every aspect of the lower strata of society to continue their ordinary lives. It is also based on such “father generation” story material, there is a “sub belt” narrative story basis.

In recent years, there have been a lot of masterpieces on the subject of Northeast China. In terms of novels, there are the works of “three masters” - Ban Yu, Shuang Xuetao and Zheng Zhi; in terms of films, there are “*The Piano of Steel*” and “*Fireworks of the Day*”; and in terms of music, there are “*Coyote*”, “*Disco*” and “*Desert River Dance*”. disco” and “*Desert River Ballroom*”; and in terms of TV dramas, “*Moses on the Plain*”, “*In the World of Man*” and “*Old Northeast Story - Ligong*”. Among them, TV dramas, as the most popular entertainment products, have pushed the Northeast theme further into the audience's view on a wide scale. (Han Haoyue, 2023) The three writers known as the Three Musketeers of the Northeast Renaissance: Shuang Xuetao, Zheng Zhi, and Ban Yu are the “sub-generation” from the perspective of the narrator. They know too much about this transitional and unfamiliar period, because it was precisely the real experience of their fathers - they want to let the historical witnesses briefly tell the truth through their words. As a result, the text about the Northeast was presented to the public. Before this, people stayed in the “glory” and “decline” of Northeast China, but now they can see in the words of the “Three Musketeers” how the people of Northeast China in the transition era are how “bumpy”, “pathos” or “positive and bright” through this “long season”. The Northeast Renaissance Perhaps the intention of Northeast Renaissance is not to let the audience groups or even overseas audiences see the hope of “rejuvenation”, but to let more readers or interested people open the door to the truest impression of Northeast China through the construction of stories and the arrangement of words.

In the history of literature and art in the Northeast, there is no lack of outstanding literary figures: a group of literary youths exiled from the Northeast to Guannai who started literary creation together spontaneously under the impetus of the left-wing literary movement. Their works were written in a rough and grandiose style, reflecting the customs and folklore of the Northeast and displaying a strong local colour. Among this group are Xiao Jun, Xiao Hong, Shu Qun, Duanmu Hongliang, etc. Their representative works include Xiao Hong's “*Legend of the Hulan River*” and “*The Field of Life and Death*”, and Xiao Jun's “*The Countryside in August*”. Their writings are still selected as textbooks and teaching materials for language learning. The literature of Northeast China and the literature of Northeast China nowadays have coincidentally recorded the characteristics of one side of the soil and water, but the difference is that the special nature of the environment of the times has created the position and bias of the words. The Northeast in both arenas provides the audience with an image of what the Northeast looks like, a

firm impression that rises up in the reader's mind. It is this hardened image of the Northeast that has made many audiences willing to spend more time with the memories and traumas written by the new Northeast writers' group.

The "Northeast Renaissance" brought about by the different moods has made the text full of narratives - the people of Northeast China in the 1990s, after undergoing changes, entered a "chaotic" mode of life. After the changes in the 1990s, the people of Northeast China entered a "chaotic" mode of life, a mode that coincides with the suspense in the film. The roaring trains and golden cornfields highlight the former glory of the region, but in reality, the factory where Wang is located is facing a crisis of closure, the employees are in fear of being laid off, and the factory manager and the Hong Kong businessman are in collusion, preparing to run away with the money, the pains of change are occurring, and the people, the factory, and the region can only lose their ability to resist in the throes of the pains slowly. (Wang Fuqin & Pan Yue, 2023) It is also this kind of solemn and confused ecology that has a special resonance with today's young people who are trapped in the present situation. Today's young people are faced with job hunting, layoffs, house purchases, and many other unsatisfactory aspects of life, and this temporary instability allows them to understand the mentality of the "father's generation" in the "Northeast Renaissance" without any difficulty. This is also the practical significance of the text and the "renaissance".

We can discuss redemption at both the content and conceptual levels, as in *The Long Season*, which cleanses the stigma of laid-off workers. Traditional market-oriented narratives often refer to layoffs as the result of the double defects of Northeast China's workers: the defects of the planned economic system and the defects of Northeast China's regional culture, which are commonly expressed as laziness, conservatism, ignorance, and boorishness, etc. This neo-liberal narrative has become more and more prevalent in recent years, including *The Long Season*. This neo-liberal rhetoric, with the emergence of the "Northeast Renaissance" in recent years, including *The Long Season*, is no longer worth mentioning. As Zhang Huiyu points out in her article "In the Name of Suspense: Visible "Trauma" and Return to the 90s", "The 'revisiting' of the 90s in *The Long Season* gives a clear 'value' judgement to the story of workers' layoffs. The 'value' judgement is that the righteous, the good and the honest are laid off, and the powerful class represented by the factory manager (power) and the fake Hong Kong businessman (capital) are the bad guys who embezzled and misappropriated the public funds, and this kind of narrative rewrites the 1990s with the 'big pot rice', 'people overwork', 'reduction of staff, and 'reduction of staff', and so on. ' and 'staff reduction and efficiency' as the dominant tone of the reform discourse in the 1990s, showing a rethinking and revisiting of the 1990s narrative after 2010. (Zhang Huiyu, 2023)

#### 4. From Autumn to Winter: Through the Golden Cornfields, The Train Heads to The Future of the North East

*The Long Season* is set in autumn. Golden leaves, crisp winds, clean streets and two dresses to wear. The production crew said autumn is almost the most transient season in the Northeast. Describing the season as "long" is more of a

romantic qualifier for what is generally perceived as the shortest season. The "long" here refers more to the eighteen years of waiting and suffering that Wang Rong (the film's protagonist) endures after the murder. The short time concept of autumn becomes the longest winter of Wang's life. This kind of Northeast breaks the traditional perception of Northeast China. On the contrary, Northeast China is also very warm and has a bright cultural vein.

In the film, memories of the Northeast are presented in many elements. The steam train that passes through the cornfields, with its long chirping sound coming from afar - a train carries not only the workers who rely on it for food, but also the railway that leads to all directions and the social characteristics of a city and a factory. In the context of the heavy industry era in the northeast, a factory is a city, the development of the factory is the development of the city itself. The slogan "factory as home" was never an empty phrase in those days. Therefore, the Birch Forest of Northeast China in the drama is also the Birch Forest of the Birch Steel Factory. When one batch of workers had to be laid off after another, it also meant that the city of Birchwood was about to go downhill. In addition, the sweet and sour meat, the amount of ginger and white vinegar, the cold orange stalks and barbecued meat and other elements of Northeast China's cuisine are all presented in the rustling of ordinary life. The groundedness of Northeast China is unique to its people: tough women who are not afraid of difficulties, and Northeastern men who really fight against things.

Cornfields as far as the eye can see are a frequent sight in the film. In the beginning of the film, young Master Wang drives the train with ease. In the middle of the film, Wang Xiang is seen circling the cornfield with the driver of the listed car. On top of that, he repeatedly thinks of his younger self riding his bicycle through the cornfield missing Wang Yang. At the end of the film, in the director's artistically manipulated scenario, the aged Wang Yang chases after the young Master Wang who is driving the train and shouts for him to look forward, don't look back. The golden and oily green of the cornfield sets off the tenacity of life. Eighteen long years of the times sink in, and the individual does not give up the pursuit of the truth after experiencing the changes. The cornfield remains unchanged, and the persistence for the truth and continuity of life make Wang Zhong's life synonymous with brightness. Such brightness, like the vivid cornfield, is rooted in the land and grows upwards.

The fate of small characters floats in *The Long Season*, and the director patiently dissects the fissure of the field in the span of time, rising from the tragedy of a family to the concern for real issues. (Qin Can, 2023) Just like the fates of Wang Rang, Gong Biao, and Captain Ma, the fate of Northeast China has also experienced ups and downs against the backdrop of a sinking society. From the glorious Northeast to the declining Northeast. When people think of the Northeast, all they can think of are fragmented concepts and memories. In this historical process, *The Long Season* is a requiem, a way to "don't look back" and "look forward", soothing the inner tremor of our time. (Huang Ping, 2023) When the train starts to roar again at the end of the film, Wang Rong lets go of his obsession with the truth of Wang Yang's death, Gong Biao finally reconciles with himself in the joy of his dreams, and Captain Ma finally solves the eighteen-year old unsolved case that has been haunting him in the mirror. All of them came out in the heavy snow at the end. Good-sized snowflakes fall on everyone's shoulders, and also this snow

drifts from eighteen years ago to eighteen years later through director Xin Shuang's magical realism. "This snow, Dad has seen." Wang Yang looked at the snow and said the words of release.

Kang Yuhang's "Looking Back Again", which plays at the end of the film, gives the memories even more emotion. Looking back again is the fragile life of each corner, and a memorable passage about the Northeast that the film crew wanted to show that is worth people's attention. According to many audience feedback, when the song played, they seemed to be transported to the end of the twentieth century. The resonance of that epochal memory once again made the power of the medium evident.

## 5. Conclusion

In the space of cross-media narrative, the original Winter's Edge completes its own metamorphosis. *The Long Season* presents the audience with an intimate Northeastern mystery story through the use of the screen world and light and shadow. It is essentially a story about a mysterious murder case eighteen years ago, on which the cultural memory of the Northeast and the annual track of the times are relatively perfectly presented. In Northeast China, the cold Northeast China with a sense of killing can also be the sunny Northeast China with warm colours. Behind the mystery case is the aphasia of individual life, and also the aphasia of individual destiny involved in the flood of the times, and both aphasias have become thorns buried in the eighteen-year-long long season.

*The Long Season* serves as a symbol for the exceptional "Northeast Renaissance" works, such as Ban Yu's novels and Xin Shuang's films and videos, which have long since transcended the boundaries of "local literature" and profoundly responded to the state of the world today in addition to being tied to the Northeast and layoffs. In any case, "layoffs" have already existed for the past 20 years, and the generation of laid-off workers that the author's parents came from have progressively reached their senior years and have been relocated under pension protection and other benefits. The "Northeast Renaissance" is so popular because a segment of the modern audience can relate to the struggles of previous times.

*The Long Season* is warm: the contrast between the father and the son of two generations in the macroscopic Chinese parent-child relationship is a silent statement of affection; the love and affection between the father and the mother of the two sexes in the swirling currents of the unequal emotional appeal, but even so, Wang Xiang and his wife, Gong Biao and Liru, four people are still willing to go through the important stages of each other's lives; the camaraderie of the colleagues from the bottom of their hearts, no matter how much the younger time How eager to tear each other's faces to expose each other's ugly self-interest, years later will choose to respect the colleagues who have spent half their lives. Years later, they will choose to honour their colleagues who have spent half of their lives together. The appreciation of each other after so many years is more a matter of empathy for the experience of a common and painful destiny. Empathy can be exciting, but it can also be pathos.

The Long Season has assembled a cast of mature actors. In today's advanced film and television media, screen

storytelling relies not only on the setting of the text and the sophistication of the production team, but also on the pure acting skills of the actors. The tension-filled character relationships and interactions with the characters showed the audience the sincerity of the actors. This undoubtedly provides a classic model for the film and television industry and cross-media narrative space.

As the warm sun illuminates the fields of autumn, *The Long Season* ends in golden hues, turning potential conflict into reconciliation and shining a light on the value of ordinary people. The writers and directors of the "Northeast Renaissance" will eventually merge into the current of creating new literature and art for the times. This may confirm the author's outlook when he first proposed the concept of the "New Northeast Writers Group" in 2019: "The rise of the 'New Northeast Writers Group' will not just be a change in 'Northeast Literature' but a change from 'Northeast Literature' to 'Northeast Literature'," said the author. "but a change in literature that begins in the Northeast." Behind what seems to be a simple suspenseful story is a series of elements related to the social and cultural aspects of Northeast China, such as the era, family, ethics, friendship, etc. These elements combine to complete the story. The combination of these elements completes the wonderful imagination of the original readers for the memories of Northeast China. *The Long Season* is undoubtedly an important addition to the Northeast Renaissance. Let the Hua Lin's train run faster, farther, and to the world.

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