

Discussion of the Artistic Aesthetic Transformation between Film and Literature from the Perspective of Adaptation*

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Abstract—Literature relies on text reading to realize its artistic value. With the continuous replacement of communication means, literal reading may become a kind of classical or aristocratic sentiment. More and more people meet the needs of reading by means of image. Therefore, TV series or computer network related to it have become the most popular way, while film has become a very unique artistic way between literature and TV series. Since Chinese films have made some achievements in literary adaptation, this paper attempts to explore and discuss the essence of the artistic subject of the transformation of film and literature.

Index Terms—film, literature, adaptation, artistic transformation

I. INTRODUCTION

In the past century, the adaptation of Chinese films to literature has been synchronized with the development of Chinese films themselves. After the 1980s, the adaptation of contemporary literature once showed a strong momentum. Many adaptations won international awards, which made the status of Chinese film in the world filmdom much higher than that of Chinese contemporary literature in the world literary arena. However, if the Chinese film is viewed against the background of the literary history of more than 2,000 years, the number of adapted films is not only small, but also the quality of art and the original literature can not be compared. On the one hand, there are a large number of literary resources for adaptation and the literary noumenon is profound and broad; on the other hand, the adaptation and production are weak and the film is imperfect and superficial. These problems may not be unique in the adaptation of Chinese films to literature, but have existed since the establishment of artistic transformation relationship between film and literature, which can not be avoided in any country's film adaptation.

II. THE INNER RELATION AND ESSENTIAL DIFFERENCE BETWEEN FILM AND LITERATURE

Both film and literature belong to the field of art. They both express society and life and are narrative and lyrical art. Film and literature belong to the same field of art. They both express society and life. They are both narrative and lyrical art. They are created and appreciated through the shaping of aesthetic feeling. Their ultimate purpose is to form cognition and aesthetics through the pleasure of reading or watching. That is to say, their aesthetic connotation is the same, but their aesthetic forms are different. Literature is expressed by the language, while film is expressed by the sound and picture; literature is a simple language form, while film contains many other art forms (such as painting, music, dance, etc.). Literature has existed since the day when human characters came into being, while film was invented in 1895, after the highly developed industrial civilization (Cao, 1988). Therefore, it relies heavily on the power of science and technology. This dependence leads some writers to doubt the expressiveness of films, especially the ability of films to re-express literature. But film, after all, is a new art form. Its expression is three-dimensional, including the abstraction of language, the visibility of pictures, and the mobilization of sound to human auditory ability. Film is a creation that has never been created in the history of human art. More and more writers not only warmly embrace the film, but also welcome the film to adapt their own literary works without hesitation. The adaptation of film to literature comes from its own expressive force. As Henry Miller said, "film is the freest of all means, and you can use it to create miracles." The film not only makes the works of countless writers on the screen, but also brings them great reputation and infinite wealth (Burke, 1986).

Film has become the way of communication that many writers dream of. It also has an inestimable impact on the writers' creation. From narrative structure to character language, from environmental design to psychological description, literature has accepted many techniques of film. Even Leo Tolstoy, who has a strong sense of literary noumenon, has to admit that film is changing the life and creation of writers. Film has become a part of the writer's life, almost every modern writer can not be free from the influence of the film. The film's ability to adapt literature can

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penetrate into any part of literature, any kind of creative techniques, including stream of consciousness and other creative techniques highly dependent on human's inner activities (Zhong & Shu, 1995). The works of zengms Joyce and Thomas woolguan became the targets of film hunting. And the works of Hemingway and Steinbeck were also even called "cinematic" novels. There are also many contemporary Chinese writers who can be called film writers, such as Zhang Xianliang, Zhan Rong, Gu Hua, Jiang Zilong, Jia Pingwa, Zhang Chengzhi, Wang Shuo, Liu Heng, Su Tong, and so on. This kind of interaction between film and literature seems to give people an illusion: it seems that the film's ability to adapt literature is infinite, everything in literature can be shown under the camera, and literature can increase the proportion of adaptation without limit by using the performance skills of film.

However, this is not the objective fact of adaptation. Instead of being popular in adaptation, those novels which widely borrow film skills have lost their reading effect. The ability of film adaptation is not as miraculous as people think, and in many fields of literature, the film lens can never reach in. Literature and film are always two forms of art. They have something in common, and there is an insurmountable artistic gap. The difference between the phenomenon caused by visual image and the concept caused by ideological image reflects the most fundamental difference between novels and films. The basic elements of literature are characters, words, sentences, paragraphs, stanzas and chapters, while that of film are various montages composed of lens.

Between literary elements and film elements, we can find a channel of mutual communication-- the channel of aesthetic transformation. From the very beginning, there is a close relationship between them. No matter from what point of view, their reciprocal relationship between them is clear. But the fundamental difference between the two is precisely reflected in the inherent aesthetic relationship: fiction and film are like two intersecting straight lines, meeting at a certain point, and then extending to different directions. There is little difference between a novel and a screenplay at the intersection. But when the two lines separate, they lose all similarities. When they are farthest apart, novels and films, like all arts for viewing, make maximum use of their materials within the range of programs that a particular reader (audience) can understand. In the farthest distance, the most cinematic and the most fictional can not be transformed from each other unless they are completely destroyed. The works of Proust and Joyce, if turned into films, would be as ridiculous as Chaplin's films into novels. The transformation from literature to film is limited, and the film's ability to adapt literature is not endless. The strength of literature may be the short of film, and vice versa.

III. METHODS OF ADAPTATION AND REALIZATION OF AESTHETIC TRANSFORMATION

The reason why literature can become a film is that it contains the aesthetic connotation required by the film and the aesthetic elements equivalent to the film, such as characters, stories, language, sense of time and space, rhythm and so on. These are the common artistic elements of literature and film. To transfer the elements of literature to films in a certain way is adaptation. Film is essentially a narrative art, which can have lyric, argumentative and other rhetorical devices, but they can be realized only when they are included in the narrative. Therefore, the most fundamental part of the adaptation from literature to film is the transformation of narrative. The process of transformation often needs a bridge composed of screenwriters, directors and actors.

A. *Methods of Adaptation*

Film is a worldwide art language. Although different countries and nations have different requirements for the adaptation methods from literature to film, their basic principles are similar. There are two principles of adaptation: faithfulness and creation. American film adaptation theorists have summed up the adaptation methods into three types: transplantation, annotation and approximation. This division is representative (Zang & Cai, 2020). Most of the film adaptations to literature in Europe and the United States operate in these three modes. Chinese film has experienced nearly a hundred years of adaptation practice, and its basic ways are no more than these three forms. The specific adaptation methods can be decomposed in more details, which can be roughly listed as follows:

1. Parallel transplantation

The capacity of some literary works is similar to the length of an ordinary film (about 100 minutes in length). The narrative mode is also suitable for the performance characteristics of the film, including the structure and characteristics of the characters, which do not need to be changed greatly. Such works can be transplanted to the screen in parallel, forming an internal and external appearance that is very consistent with the written works (Peng, 2020). Such as *Legend of Tianyun Mountain*, *Furong Town*, *the Big Year*, etc. are all adaptations of this type. Most of the original works are novellas or "small full-length novels".

2. Expansion

If some short stories are to be adapted into films with a certain length, and the plot of the original works is not enough, they have to be expanded to add characters and plots, and some even need to adapt the narrative structure of the original works. This kind of adaptation is very difficult. It is a kind of recreation. In the history of Chinese and foreign films, it is a very important adaptation method. Some of Lu Xun's novels are adapted in this way, as are Xu Dishan's *Chuntao* and Shen Congwen's *Xiaoxiao*.

3. Mergence

If the plot capacity of a short story or novella is not enough to be adapted into a film, other works of the same writer can be combined. The plot can be retained completely or part of it can be taken to form a new narrative framework. This

is a common practice in Japanese and Soviet films (Edward, 1993). *Rashomon*, one of Kurosawa's masterpieces, is a combination of two novels by Ryunosuke Akutagawa, namely, *Rashomon* and *Shinzo Bamboos*; *the Night of Petersburg* is based on Dostoevsky's *White Night* and *Nietzvanov*. Since the 1980s, the films merged and adapted in China include *Red Sorghum* which was formed by the merge of *Red Sorghum* and *Kaoliang Wine*.

4. Excerpt

This method is mainly aimed at full-length novels. Many full-length novels can not be fully expressed in a few hours of film, so one or several chapters have to be chosen as the main object of adaptation, such as *the Yellow River Flows Eastward*, *Xiaohua* and so on. This method is more used in the adaptation of full-length novels, such as *A Dream of Red Mansions* and *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*. There are more excerpts and adaptations to foreign literature. Although the Soviet adaptation of *War and Peace* lasted more than six hours, it could not fully express the content of the novel. *Les Miserables* has been adapted by different directors for more than 30 times, but only part of its content can be taken as the performance object each time (Xie & Qian, 1996).

5. Concentration

In the face of a novel, sometimes the film can not freely select some chapters, or excerpts will damage the integrity of the novel. Only by comprehensively expressing the content of the novel can it reflect the characteristics of the original work, so the film has to condense the content of the original work and put it in a reduced narrative structure. This is a common way to adapt novels, but it is also very difficult to achieve. *Midnight* is a typical example of the failure of concentration. *Xu Mao and His Daughters* is also due to improper concentration, resulting in decrease in value in art.

6. Usage of advantage

Some literary works have their own merits, but they should not be directly adapted into films. The adapters had to take it as a "from the beginning" to recreate. This method is a bit like Lu Xun's historical novels, with only a few reasons and random coloring. There are some artistic lessons to be learned from, and may also be due to some non-artistic factors, such as to obtain the protection of censorship. The most typical example is *The Loess Land*. *Shanghai Triad* is also recreated from the trend of *House Rules*.

7. Creating environment

If the historical and spatial environment presented in literary works is not general or does not conform to the director's habits, the director will recreate a new environment to place the characters and plots in the original work according to his own life experience. This method sometimes leads to criticism of disrespect for the original work, but sometimes it adds new vitality to it. Some of Zhang Yimou's films are successful experiments of this method. *Ju Dou*, *Raise the Red Lantern* and *To Live* all changed the environment in the novel to get new sublimation in the film.

8. Cross-border adaptation

Literature resources belong to all human beings, so the adaptation of film to literature can transcend the national and ethnic restrictions. We can take literature from other countries and integrate them into our own history and customs, or we can also rearrange and adapt the literature of other countries in our own way. The United States, relying on its strong economic strength, has created many achievements in cross-border adaptation. Of course, there are also adaptations of Chinese literature resources. *Hua Mulan*, based on Chinese folklore, is a successful example. Japan is also a big country that is good at cross-border adaptation. Kurosawa is a great master in this field. Moreover, his *The Seven Samurai* has been adapted to the famous western film *The Magnificent Seven* by the United States. Chinese films tried cross-border adaptation in the 1920s and 1930s, but later rarely.

The division of adaptation methods is relative. In practice, it is not completely independent but several methods are often interwoven together. These methods focus on the technical level, and the most important is the transformation of literary spirit, which is to transfer the soul of a work from paper to screen. The division of adaptation methods is relative. In practice, it is not completely independent, and several methods are often interwoven together. These methods focus on the technical level, and the most important is the transformation of literary spirit, which is to transfer the soul of a work from paper to screen (Wang, 1997). Chinese directors and critics have always regarded faithfulness to the original literature as a very important principle. In fact, what is faithful is only external things, such as local plot, language, the authenticity of individual characters and historical events. All of these are superficial. The most important thing is to translate the spirit of literature with the elements that really belong to the film. The fifth generation directors have made some breakthroughs in this respect, but compared with the foreign adaptation attitude, they are still stiff.

After choosing literary works, some western film directors don't have to move the contents of the original works into the films. Sometimes they can even ignore the contents of the original works, just borrow some of them and recreate them. One kind of art, its limitation comes from the image of the activity, the broad audience and the industrialized mode of production. Another kind of art, its limitation comes from the language, the limited number of readers and the individual creative way, the difference between the two is inevitable. In short, after the novel is made into a film, it will inevitably become a complete work of art completely different from the novel on which it is based. Some directors and critics in China have not reached such a level in their understanding of literature and film.

B. The Process of Aesthetic Transformation

From literature to film is the transformation of two art forms. There is a river between them. Literature has already been on this side, and films on the other side need to be transformed from it. Once the transformation is successful, the two artistic entities will exist side by side and set off each other on both sides of the river. On the way from this side to

the other side, a bridge was erected in the air. The aesthetic connotation in literature is transmitted through this bridge and becomes the internal aesthetic factor of the film. The three solid piers supporting the bridge are screenwriters, directors and actors.

It is needless to say that there are differences between the original and the adapted scripts. As far as the adapters are concerned, there are roughly three situations. The first is the author's own adaptation. The second is that the famous film dramatists come out of the mountains, and then they hand it over to the director after adaptation. Third, the director took a fancy to the original work, and asked experienced film playwrights to adapt it according to the director's instructions. The director may participate in the adaptation, sometimes the director himself adapts, the writer and the director merge into one.

It is often very painful for an author to adapt his own works. Every sentence, every character and every plot are made of their own flesh and blood. Now they have to make drastic changes, and many times they have to delete them. This is very difficult emotionally. Even if it is not deleted, it is not easy to rearrange the original perfectly matched art according to the needs of the film. Many American novelists, such as Hemingway, Fitzgerald, Steinbeck, Faulkner, Dreiser and Miller, have been invited by Hollywood to adapt their own works (Sun, 2020). However, few of them can adapt their works to the director's intention. They either feel that they are not suitable for writing dramas or go back to write their own novels, or they think that the film is superficial, and the adaptation of literature is harmful to literature. However, there are still many writers who would rather endure the pain of being dismembered or recreated to adapt their own works. Some other writers are worried that people can't adapt their own works well, so they have to bear the pain to make adaptations. Some Chinese writers feel the same way after they have adapted their works and vowed never to do it again. Liu Huan and Yang Zhengguang can be regarded as representatives of the amphibious.

Because of the plot of masterpieces, many excellent film playwrights constantly challenge the masterpieces, complete the adaptation of the masterpieces with a sacred sense of responsibility, and then hand over the scripts to the director who they think can express the spirit of the play. This way is a "strong combination" of the two artistic behaviors, which generally produces good screenplays and excellent films. However, this kind of adaptation often relies on the adapters too much. Sometimes, the film scripts modified by famous masters will cause the bondage to the director and actors. Even the director's objection to the original work can not be implemented in the shooting process, and the role of the director will be ignored or reduced. The script will eventually fall into the hands of the director, and each director's completed script will have a lot of differences with the film script (Yu & Niu, 1990). In order to reduce this difference, more directors participate in the process of adaptation. Or simply the director takes a fancy to the original work and asks the playwright to change it. The director decides the direction of adaptation, and the playwright recombines the characters and plots of the original work strictly according to the director's intention, and even the style of the original work must obey the director's style. The playwright is essentially a ghostwriter. This one is the original, the other is the director, and the playwright is in the middle. Some directors feel that others can't express their intention clearly, so they write their own works. They are both screenwriters and directors (Wan, 2020). Even so, there will be differences between the script and the finished script, because the director will improvise on the scene and add something that is not in the script. And the really warm films often need this.

Because of this, there has always been a saying that directors and screenwriters are made one.

The role of the director is paramount to the film, and the director's understanding of the original work is also the most decisive factor for the success of the adaptation. Among the three piers of the bridge of transfer, the director bears most of the weight of the whole bridge. He (she) wants to transfer and transform the understanding of the original work into the performance of actors and other film elements, so as to turn the beauty of literature into the beauty of film. The director's attitude towards the original work is roughly divided into two kinds: one is reappearance, the other is freehand. The former plans the film strictly according to the original work, from characters to plots, from time to space, to reproduce the style and features of the original work, and even strive to be comprehensive in terms of the complex themes of the original work, as well as some details. The latter can also be called expressive. It does not require the details to conform to the original work, or even to show the whole of the original work. It only takes the most profound idea of the original work or some part of the content suitable for film expression as the object of adaptation, and mobilizes the wisdom of the director for recreation. Although this sometimes gives people a handle, it is said to be unfaithful to the original. In fact, it only transforms the aesthetic core of literature through partial adaptation or in another way. Another method has a great market in contemporary directors. They seem to have overcome the classic phobia. No matter how great the original is, they have to adapt it according to the rules of the film. The author of the original work is only the creator, but the creation right of the film belongs to the director (George, 1981). It turns out that this approach is closer to the nature of the film and enables the spirit of the original to be shown on the screen. Literature has not been devalued, on the contrary, the author of the original works is well known because of its film communication function. Most of the fifth generation directors such as Zhang Yimou and Chen Kaige are such freehand directors, and their attitude towards literature is obviously different from that of the old Chinese filmmakers.

The director's understanding of the original work and the conception of the film are various. The intelligent director will hold on to the characters. The characters in the original work are created by language, while the characters in the film are composed of body, action, dialogue and other factors. In order to make the characters live on the screen, it is an important job for directors to find actors who can express their ideas and have artistic creativity.

Actors and actresses are the ultimate embodiment of the transformation of literary characters and the ideas of directors, and the carrier of literary character spirit. There are two main criteria for a director to choose an actor. One is the similarity in appearance between the actor and the characters in the literature; the other is the actor's understanding and expression of the original work. Although it is good for actors to be close to literary characters, their appearance conditions are not absolute. Even if one actor's appearance is not the same, if he can reflect the soul of the character, he is also a qualified actor. In the history of Chinese and foreign films, there are many examples of "similar in spirit but not in form". Feng Gong does not have much in common with Zhang Damin in the novel *The Happy Life of Zhang Damin*, but he plays as if he is Zhang Damin himself (Qin, 2020). This shows that the understanding and expression of the original play is the most important factor in shaping the characters. The actors' understanding of the original work comes from two direct channels: one is to read the original text, the other is to understand the script and the director's interpretation. After having thoroughly understood the original work and the director's intention, the actors have to find their own way to enter. Generally speaking, understanding is not difficult, but performance is hard. After understanding the characters in the original work, they should jump out of the characters, not fall into the original works, but get into the role naturally.

Performance is a very profound art, which is called "micro-physiognomy" in film theory. Balaz put forward this concept as early as 1912, and there was a similar saying in ancient Chinese opera. "micro-physiognomy" includes facial expression, body movement, psychological activities and so on (Yang, 2020). Film performance is a kind of "micro-physiognomy", which has its own rules. After a film actor has explored his own "micro-physiognomy", he will be very handy in the performance. According to the different styles of "microphase", there are many kinds of classification methods for film actors, the most basic of which are two kinds: one is personality actor, the other is character actor. The former refers to the actor who often plays the same type of characters and forms a relatively fixed style. Moreover, there are many similarities between the characters in the film and the actors themselves. Japanese film star Takakura is a representative of this kind of actor. This kind of actor seems to show a single performance, but he can always perform the rich character connotation of the characters in the same way. The latter is a very plastic actor who can perform a variety of characters. He can blend his own personality into the characters in the film, and has a strong ability to grasp various characters. Many of the world's performing masters are of this kind.

There has been a trinity of self-editing, self-directing and self-acting since the ancient times. There was Guan Hanqing in the Yuan Dynasty on the stage of Chinese drama. In the era of silent film, Chaplin not only wrote, directed and acted himself, but also composed music on his own. Since the 1980s, such talented figures have rarely appeared among Chinese film directors. If they want to realize the trinity of editing, directing and performing from the original literary works, the understanding and adaptation of the original literary works will become the top priority. Only when the adaptation is successful can they achieve the same success as the adaptation in guiding and acting.

IV. CONCLUSION

The development of media urges literature to express itself in a new posture with dazzling speed. The emergence of film not only makes the popularization and commercialization of literature become a trend, but also makes the film itself become the inspiration and inducer of "mass media". It, together with radio, television, newspaper and other media, pushes literature to a wider public. The film is to rely on great artistic concentration to complete the shaping of an artistic entity in a limited time. This is not so much its weakness as its innate constraints, which provide it with opportunities to achieve its own. It must force itself to use the most perfect way to reproduce the wealth and resources that literature has given to it, and can only use the artistic quality that television does not have to pull the audience to the cinema. As the president of a film company in the United States said: the emergence of television is nothing more than to make the best films survive.

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