

Research on the Derivative Development of Super IP in *Journey to the West* (西游记)*

LIANG Chen, ZHANG Pei

Beijing Institute of Graphic Communication, Beijing, China

This paper is devoted to excavating the mode of production of the culture of *Journey to the West*—taking the creators of derivative works of *Journey to the West* as the main body, and from their free and conscious expression in the process of creation, to find out the path of works' development that conforms to the law of social aesthetics and creation. In the aspect of spiritual expression of the works, the freedom of the artist is reflected in the art producers' emotions, concepts, tastes, and accomplishment in the works, which is related to the artist's life background, experience, and aesthetics: Wan Laiming (万籁鸣)'s classic national animation, *Princess Iron Fan* (铁扇公主), is adapted from the version of hundred times of *Journey to the West*. In addition to the necessary secondary creation in the text and presentation, the theme expression has also been updated and adjusted according to the social background and the author's emotion; in the text expression of the works, the freedom of the artist is shown in the uniqueness of the work—the form and content of the works come from experience and are different from experience. The idea of building Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU, 漫威电影宇宙) is similar to the framework of “Core Task + Unit Stories” in *Journey to the West*; A lot of high-quality films and animations such as *The Forbidden Kingdom* (功夫之王), *Panda do Kung Fu* (功夫熊猫) and *Jackie Chan Adventures* (成龙历险记) used western context and culture to create cross-cultural works, but retained unique oriental corpus and images, forming the works' unique style and label. Artists' ability and experience enable them to be acutely aware of the law of artistic creation; they compare and think about different cultural works, and then apply the law to the secondary creation. The artist's self-consciousness comes from the appreciator's degree of acceptance of the works; it is reflected in the creator's reasonable adjustment to the works due to the market, policy, and appreciator's habits and tastes. The image of Sun Wukong (孙悟空) in the anime film *Monkey Kin : Hero Is Back* (大圣归来)—a hero of rebirth—has refreshed the audience. From the perspective of cultural studies, this is a negotiated secondary creation of Sun Wukong's image in *Journey to the West* based on the interpretation psychology of the audience. In short, to analyze and summarize the ideation of various derivative works is to study the creative laws shared by artists, so as to provide more experience and reference for subsequent creation.

Keywords: *Journey to the West*, art production, artistic creation, IP development

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LIANG Chen, postgraduate of Journalism and Communication, Beijing Institute of Graphic Communication, Beijing, China.

ZHANG Pei, L.D., post-doctoral of law, associate professor, master instructor, School of Journalism and Publication, Beijing Institute of Graphic Communication, Beijing, China.

The basis of artistic creation comes from the artist's ability and style, and is more affected by various factors in the social environment. First of all, the age of the artistic works which came into being gives them a certain time brand mark. Taking *Journey to the West* as an example, it included the motifs of resistance, struggle, good and evil, and self-cultivation. According to the update of their time background and ideas, the secondary creators will add the theme with subjective emotional tendency to the new works to create derivative works in line with the law of the change of the world.

The Creative Basis of Art Producers

In the 1930s and 1940s, under the influence of the background of the Anti-Japanese War, most of the literary works at that time were aimed at strengthening the spiritual strength and the sense of collectivism. Therefore, during that period, the creative themes in the adaptation of *Journey to the West* were mostly "resistance", "struggle", "unity", and so on. For example, *Princess Iron Fan*, a classic nationalized cartoon adapted from *Journey to the West* at that time, is a masterpiece that highlights the theme of the Anti-Japanese War. Its author Wan Laiming also mentioned:

We deliberately and implicitly used the metaphor of overthrowing the Ox Demon King (牛魔王) to reflect the theme of the film, that is, "the people of the whole country unite against the Japanese invaders and strive for the final victory of the Anti-Japanese War". I think it is not difficult to see through at a glance those who have seen *Princess Iron Fan*. (Zhang, 2002, p. 47)

Secondly, the evolution of audience and market are the main reference objects of artists' consciousness, and also are the indispensable factors for the shaping of works. In terms of the current market situation, the audience of animation is not only children, but the compatibility of the age of audience in animation market has gradually expanded. According to *I Research's 2020 Chinese Animation Industry Research Report*, after 2018, the scale of Two-Dimensional Space (二次元) users in China began to enter a period of steady growth. It was predicted that General Two-Dimensional Space (泛二次元) users were expected to breakthrough the 400 million by 2020, among which, audiences of all ages were likely to become loyal fans of animated movies. Correspondingly, drawing materials of animated films in China have also shifted from a single ground to young children to face audience of different ages, and the themes are gradually enriched, so as to grasp the audience market of different ages. Based on this survey, the adapted works of *Journey to the West* in the market are also being updated and adjusted in time. The 2015 high-scoring anime film *Monkey King: Hero Is Back* re-pulled the adaptation of *Journey to the West* from previous TV series or movies into the animation market: The Tang Monk (唐僧) became a seven-year-old boy, Jiang Liuer (江流儿), and Sun Wukong became a hero of the past without fame. The adaptation of this differentiated narrative timeline and animation form are not only in line with logic of human nature, but also succeed in the animation market, which can be said to kill two birds with one stone.

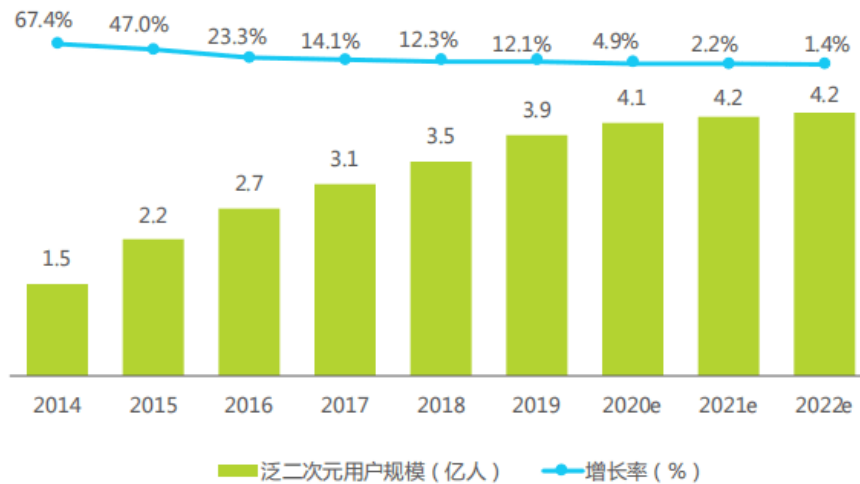


Figure 1. The scale and forecast of General Two-Dimensional Space users in China from 2014 to 2022 (provided by I Research Academy).

Different creative techniques are focused on different audience groups and market environment. In the next part, we will introduce in detail several mainstream adaptation methods in the history of adapting *Journey to the West*.

The Creative Methods of Art Producers

Stuart Hall, 1932-2014, the father of contemporary cultural studies, who based on semiology, structuralism, and Antonio Gramsci's hegemony theory in his analysis of discourse production, summed up three modes of audience interpretation of the text: preferred reading, negotiated reading, and counter-hegemonic reading (Hall & Xiao, 2018, pp. 33-45, 106, 125-126). When the audience are as the artists of the second creation, their interpretation modes of the original works will be shown in the thought of the derivative works. Another way of creation is to use original works with different contents and the same logical structure as the reference object to carry out feasible construction and adaptation, which is the imitation and reproduction of the form.

Re-interpretation of Traditional Symbols: The Modes of Dominance, Negotiation, and Counter-Hegemonic

The preferred reading means that the readers decode the information according to the encoded information (the content of original works) and interpret the original works completely in accordance with the inclination of the encoder (author of the original works). It is the imitative adaptation reflected in the re-creation. The classic representative works are the 1986 serial version of *Journey to the West* directed by Yang Jie and the serial version of *Journey to the West* directed by Zhang Jizhong (张纪中) in 2011. This kind of adapted works is based on the principle of "faithful to the original and careful in renovation", striving to be faithful to the original works in the aspects of characterization, language arrangement, and story composition, adjusting the content appropriately according to the characteristics of cross-media with the new way of presentation.

The negotiated reading includes not only the partial approval attitude of the audience to the original works, but also the partial opposition attitude of the audience to the original works. It not only recognizes the original works' dominant theme, but also has its own principles and self-reliance. It reflected in the re-creation is the

paraphrasing adaptation, which is popular today: The development of the age and technology brings the evolution of audience, and now the audience's quest for the return of the traditional culture makes the national spirit and the spirit of the times have a further combination and development.

Representative works of this type of adaptation include Stephen Chow (周星驰)'s Series Movie *Journey to the West: Conquering the Demons* (西游·降魔篇) (2013), *Journey to the West: The Demons Strike Back* (西游·伏妖篇) (2017), Pou-Soi Cheang (郑保瑞)'s Series Movie *The Monkey King* (西游记之大闹天宫) (2014), *The Monkey King 2* (西游记之孙悟空三打白骨精) (2016), *The Monkey King 3* (西游记女儿国), and so on. This kind of works takes the original works as the core, on the basis of fully considering the content of the original works, combining with contemporary aesthetics as far as possible in the aspects of character depiction, environment creation and plot design and so on, and presenting the works in an across-media way by means of contemporary technology. They get rid of the stereotype of some classical elements in previous works, and give readers a new sense of interpretation. For example, the characterization of Stephen Chow's Series Movie, the design and conception of the image and habits of monsters in it were more consistent with the description in the original book than the *Journey to the West* directed by Yang Jie in 1986. The description on Sun Wukong in the original works is: "He really was ugly: an irregular, knobby face, a pair of yellow eyes, a bulging forehead, and teeth jutting out. He was like a crab, with flesh on the inside and bone on the outside" (Wu & Jenner, 2014, p. 508). "Damn you, you bony-faced, pointy-browed, flat-nosed, sunken-cheeked, hairy-eyed, sickly-looking devil. You've got no sense of respect, sticking your mouth out like that and insulting an old gentleman" (Wu & Jenner, 2014, p. 928)! The description of Sun Wukong in the original book is more similar to the monster, and the monkey's wildness still exists. Obviously, the version of *Journey to the West* directed by Yang Jie in 1986 has properly beautified and softened the character and image of the figures on the basis of the original book, so as to make it suitable for the taste of the audience of all ages. However, the image of Sun Wukong in the *Journey to the West: Conquering the Demons*, showed his characteristics of monster and recalcitrant character again, getting as close to the original book as possible. With the blessing of technology and special effects, the instruments and supernatural power in the original book were greatly presented, so that the audience have a further understanding of the original book. At the same time, the audience also broke the stereotype of the characters and plots formed by the previous classic works; it also helps them to have a higher degree of acceptance for the subsequent adapted works.



Figure 2. Comparison of the image of Sun Wukong between the *Journey to the West* directed by Yang Jie in 1986 (left) and the movie of *Journey to the West: Conquering the Demons* (right).

Besides, the renovation of the discourse system in *Journey to the West: Conquering the Demons* reflected the creator's subversion of the original book. For example, when portraying the role of Tang Monk, the writer expressed character who is a cultured and profound gentleman in the original book in a special way, and highlighted it by using his nonsense style of speaking and the response to the Duan Xiaoxiao (段小小)'s declaration. "I only live for the Greater Love, Lesser Love isn't for me..." It seems to be a simple and banter expression, but it is related to the thought of Mahayana Buddhism, adhering to the Buddha Nature of helping others as his responsibility. It just set the character's discourse system closer to modern life, recreating it in a popular way, and is also a kind of embodiment of elite culture moving towards mass culture.

Counter-hegemonic reading means that the readers interpret the works with the completely opposite or irrelevant spiritual core, without considering the will and attitude of the creators, which are changed and deconstructed. It is shown in the re-creation, that is, the adaptation of parody. This kind of works mostly apply the structure of the protagonist and world of the original works but rearrange the context, discourse, and text to form a new work. At the same time, it should be noted that due to the differences in high and low context culture between the Orient and the Occident, the derivative works of *Journey to the West* abroad are mainly adapted in this way, such as the Japanese animation *Dragon Ball* (ドラゴンボール七龙珠) in 1986, the Korean variety series show *New Journey to the West* (신서유기|新西游记) in recent years, and the American TV series *Into the Badlands* in 2015; in China, there are the animation *Tintin War Monkey King* (丁丁战猴王) in 1980, 1995 *A Chinese Odyssey* (大话西游) series movie, 2000 *Sunny Piggy* (春光灿烂猪八戒), and so on.

Mutual Learning of Eastern and Western Narrative Paradigm

According to the context theory proposed by Anthropologist Edward T. Hall, Chinese culture is high-context culture while the majority of English speaking cultures in the West fall into low-context culture. As a high-context cultural country, there are many factors influencing the spread of Chinese classics to western low-context culture countries—religious belief, thinking mode, cultural background, translation spread, and so on. Not to mention the method of marketing and the extension of the product value chain, only in terms of the creation and structure of the text, the narrative paradigm of western works still has a certain reference significance for the works of our country.

On one hand, the construction of the world of story is the framework that can support the text, and a huge and brilliant fantastic world is the premise of grasping the audience's sense of immersion. For example, the "Wizards World" created by the British *Harry Potter* series and the structure of the Marvel Cinematic Universe can inspire the creation of the Mythical World (神魔世界) in our country: The creation of MCU took the "Infinity Stone" as the main clue, connecting various hero stories and subsystems, thus forming a complete circular closed loop of story, which is very similar to the narrative way of "fetching some Buddhist scriptures + suffering eighty-one adversities" in *Journey to the West*. It can be seen that from the perspective of the narrative structure of intertextuality, the creation of any story is the imitation and reference to other texts.

In recent years, the popularity of Chinese animations such as *Ne Zha* (哪吒之魔童降世), *The White Snake I & II* (白蛇1: 缘起 & 白蛇2: 青蛇劫起), and *Legend of Deification* (姜子牙) also indicated that domestic creators have abandoned the childish content and the facial makeup of the characters. They constantly improved the logic of the episodes and the depth of thinking, and their works also gradually connected with the world culture, making unremitting efforts to tell Chinese stories. In terms of source of inspiration, ancient ghost

works such as the *Classic of Mountains and Rivers* (山海经), *Anthology of Tales From Records of the Taiping Era* (太平广记选), and *Canonization of the Gods* (封神榜) have profound Chinese cultural deposits and special national features. The upsurge of adaptation on these Chinese classics in recent years also reflected that modern writers are constantly digging up the rich cultural treasures of ancient China, and the structure of the Mythical World in China has sprouted.



Figure 3. The image of an all-new hero named “Monkey Prince” debuted by Detective Comics.

On the other hand, many excellent western works are also based on Chinese traditional culture. *The Panda do Kung Fu* produced by Dream Works Studios, *Jackie Chan Adventures* produced by Sony Columbia Pictures in the US, and the *Mulan* (花木兰) animation and live-action movie created by Disney, etc., were the worldwide expression of Chinese cultural material. Besides, according to the US media *The Hollywood Reporter* on April 5, Detective Comics will launch a new hero image—Monkey Prince in its *New Journal DC Festival of Heroes: The Asian Superhero Celebration*, which will be issued in May. It shows that the westward road of *Journey to the West* has been paid attention to again in recent years, and how to make hay while the sun shines to advance and enrich the culture of *Journey to the West* requires us to think and review again.

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