

Some Thoughts on the Global Trend of Film and Television Works from the Perspective of Communication: The Case of Squid Game

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Abstract

In 2021, The *Squid Game* has set off a craze all over the world. Within less than a month after its premiere, the show not only gained high ratings and attention, but its derived games also attracted wide audience participation. The *Squid Game* has become Netflix's most-watched works ever. The show has been successfully exported to the global scope and achieved gratifying results. Its communication strategy has certain reference significance for the output of film and television works.

Keywords

Squid Game, Transmission, Strategy

1. Introduction

1.1. Soft Power

Huang Renwei, executive deputy dean of the Institute of Belt and Road Global Governance at Fudan University, proposed that the Belt and Road initiative can be divided into hard power and soft power. Hard power is the base and soft power is the multiplier. With the gradual advancement of globalization, the country is increasingly aware of the importance of building soft power and attaches more importance to the construction of cultural soft power. At the Fifth Plenary Session of the 19th CPC Central Committee, one of the main objectives of economic and social development during the 14th Five Year Plan period was to improve the level of social civilization and expand the influence of Chinese culture. At this meeting, it was also clear that the goal was to build China into a cultural power in 2035.

1.2. TV Drama

Therefore, among many communication carriers, TV drama has become a typical one, which stems from the ontological advantages of TV drama. First of all, the spread of TV series is wide, which means that its audience and even potential audience are quite a large group. Second, the coherence of TV series is easy for the audience to accept. Third, TV plays have a stronger drama than films and novels. This enables the TV series to firmly attract the attention of the audience. Combined with the latest data from the National Bureau of Statistics, 7.3938 million episodes TV dramas were broadcast nationwide in 2020, which shows that the volume of TV series is so large, the influence is large and the scope is wide. Compared with books, periodicals, newspapers and other media, popular films and TV dramas naturally become one of the powerful carriers of China's cultural soft power. This is also the necessity of the author's analysis from this perspective.

1.3. Communication Status

The copyrights of popular TV dramas such as *Empresses in the Palace* and *Nirvana in Fire* have been purchased by Netflix, and *Shan Hai Qing* has been broadcast in more than 50 countries or regions. From the perspective of communication, there is no lack of good TV dramas in China "going overseas" in recent years. However, after exporting, there are often problems such as cultural discounts and narrow channels. As a cultural product, return to itself, the proportion of fine works is relatively low. Through the understanding of the status quo, we are not difficult to find in the scope of delivery, means of communication, plot content problems and deficiencies. Therefore, the communication effect has become a focus worthy of attention in the field of TV drama production in China. The author hopes to find a breakthrough in TV drama communication through this incision and provide a new perspective for the promotion of cultural soft power.

2. Analysis of the Reasons for Success

On September 17, 2021, *Squid Game* was officially launched on Netflix. The play uses an unrealistic creative method to tell the story of 465 debt-ridden south Korean bottom marginal characters, driven by desire, enter a survival game. Game similar as storyline, the exaggerated audio-visual modeling, and the human nature of the marginalized characters in desperate situations made the show not only heated up rapidly in South Korea, but also spread rapidly from country to country, and the audience ever covered the whole world. In many countries and regions, *Squid Game* in recent years become a phenomenon-level hit show. Ted Sarandos, Netflix's chief content officer, has publicly called *Squid Game* Netflix's most successful series to date.

Whether it is the border less communicate or the attention that the topic has rapidly heated up, there is no doubt that the homemade drama *Squid Game*

launched by Netflix has become the best example of cross-cultural communication in 2021. From its launch on September 17, 2021 to October 8, Netflix's stock price has risen by 7.35% and its market value has increased by about 123.7 billion yuan. Squid Game has maintained a good result of topping the global popularity charts for two weeks, except in Denmark. The Dalgona Candy game in the show has also set off a crazy on Tik Tok, attracting a large number of audiences to imitate and participate. The discussion of it on global social media platforms is also unabated. Actress Zheng Haojuan's followers on Instagram, a global social media platform, have grown by nearly 500%. It became the most-watched non-English language series in two weeks and became Netflix's most-watched series ever in less than a month. As a Korean drama series, Squid Game has successfully exported the drama to the world, and has gained a gratifying number of view counts and discussions. The communication strategy of the play provides a certain reference for the output of Chinese cultural works.

2.1. Communicator (Dissemination Subject)

From the TV series, the communicator is the production team of the series. Squid Game can quickly attract the audience's attention and become a phenomenon-level Korean drama, which is inseparable from its strong creative team and cast. The exchange of culture is the commutation of symbols. Among all cultural symbols, star is a special symbol with strong communication power. Hwang Dong-hyuk, the director of Squid Game, had already produced films with high social recognition, such as *The Furnace*, which has an unprecedented position in the history of Korean films, *Strange Her* and *My Father* with strong humanistic care and so on. With his mature shooting techniques and realistic shooting style, Hwang dong-hyuk has been nominated for the Best Director of the Blue Dragon Film Award, one of the three major Korean film awards. As a result, Hwang Dong-hyuk's appointment as director of Squid Game not only attracted a large number of fans, but also attracted the attention of a lot of professional film critics at home and abroad. As a social fashion and a consumption symbol, the star has become an active and unconscious choice of the audience. In addition to the joining of powerful directors, The Squid game also assembled a group of powerful actors, not only the acting schools of Lee, Park Hae-soo who have been in the industry for a long time, Hoyeon Jung, Ha Jun Wi and other potential rookie, more Yoo Gong, Lee Byung-hun have both works and traffic. The actor came to make a cameo. South Korea's top cast lineup not only guarantees the quality of Squid Game show itself, but also with its own influence for the drama to bring high traffic, which has become one of the important factors for the drama to spread without borders.

2.2. Audience Analysis

It is not hard to find from various rating websites such as IMDB and Rotten Tomatoes that The Squid Game has no age or gender restriction and division of the audience, and it faces a broad audience rather than a small circle of culture.

In the modern society where, fragmented visual perception has become the living state of contemporary people, the fast-paced social life has transformed the audience's viewing mode from a complete "gazing" to an economical and time-saving "glance", and fast-food-style information consumption has become the limited choice of the audience (Zhao, 2017). Therefore, the long storyline, complex character relationships, and lengthy game rules are not conducive to the audience's understanding. Once the audience is interrupted in the process of watching, they cannot continue. Because of this, the short video format can quickly take over the market. Squid Game adopts the form of a unit drama, which blocks and simplifies the content to a certain extent. Without too much background and important results, each unit tells a story. This approach not only reduces the difficulty of dissemination, but also enables viewers to learn about the content of the show, and the production team does not need to consider the grand worldview factor in the choreography and shooting.

2.3. Content Production

1) Cultural discount: The origin of the concept of cultural discount can be found in general economics. In general economics, it refers to the factors of cultural differences that must be taken into account when determining the economic value of entertainment product transactions (Yan, 2008). Facing a broad audience, the squid Game's handling of story structure, plot and theme laid a foundation for the transnational spread of the drama. Compared with 12 episodes of regular Korean teleplay, Squid Game has only 9 episodes, each of which is 60 minutes long. Small-scale short plays can not only conform to the current viewing psychology of young people, but also provide favorable conditions for dissemination while reducing aesthetic fatigue. At the same time, in order to elaborate the complex human nature in the society in a short time and episode, Squid Game not only been unitized in structure, but the plot setting has also been simplified. In the play, there are a series of children's games that were popular around the world in the 1970s and 1980s. The rules are simple and the recognition is high, such as one-two-three wooden people, tug-of-war, etc. The basic structure of the show is pieced together from start to finish, often reaching a climax at the end of the game. Such treatment has lowered the threshold of audience acceptance to a certain extent. In addition, the Korean language, Korean scenes, Korean social issues, and explores deep-seated human issues. In the domestic market, it keeps the non-national audiences fresh and curious, and successfully balances cultural discounts.

2) Dystopian themes: Squid Game is a typical dystopian drama. The creation purpose of dystopian films and television works is not to simply deny utopia, but to reveal the dialectical relationship between human's good will to live, utopian practice and utopian spirit from the opposite direction (Long, 2012). Squid Game builds a utopia for a group of disillusioned in South Korean society, where they can win a prize of 45.6 billion won by winning children's games. But at the same time, the cruel rules of the game also portend the collapse of utopia. Only

the final winner can win the prize. If the game fails, he loses his life. Behind the seemingly simple rules of the game, there is a challenge of human nature, hidden violence and killing. In addition, Squid Game from the beginning embodies the insurmountable class divide of the underclass in South Korea. In the setting of characters, I chose middle-aged people who were laid off by the company, employees who lost public money, elderly people with brain tumors, illegal workers who were squeezed, and girls from unfortunate families of origin were selected. Each typical character reflects the social problems behind it, such as layoff, embezzlement of public funds, medical security, labor protection and family of origin, reflecting the social meditation and humanistic care of dystopian themes. According to "The New York Times", the show captures South Korea's reduced social inequality and opportunities, thereby triggering a sense of familiarity with global audience. The above works are not confined to the social system of their own countries and can easily arouse the emotional resonance of the global audience by breaking through the restrictions of cultural context and circles.

3) memetic: The application of meme is quite mature in the dissemination of Squid Game. The word "meme" was originally derived from Dawkins' book "The Selfish Gene", and meme was translated by He Ziran and He Xuelin. He argues that many human behaviors do not come from genes, but from culture (He, 2005). Meme is the basic unit of cultural communication, such as sugar cake, red man, three figures, wooden girl and other symbols can be marked as a meme. The sugar-touching game has become the most popular challenge game on Tik Tok, and videos with the label of Dalgona Candy have been played 150 million times on Douyin. Meanwhile, topics like "Dalgona Candy Production" and "Homebrew Dalgona Candy Game" have been developed. This is when the new host receives the picture and text information conveyed by the first batch of host. After storage and extraction, it is created through personal expression on the basis of retaining the core meaning of the meme. The number of such participants is large, the scope of influence is large, and the spread meme with fast speed and long survival rate are called "power memes". Strong memes generally have the characteristics of being easy to copy and leave room for second creation. Therefore, the promotion of symbols should be taken into account in the production stage of TV dramas. The sense of participation and interest, attracting new hosts to re-encode and continue to heat up.

4) Media: As Netflix's self-standing show, Squid Game is undoubtedly standing on the shoulders of giants. Its more than 200 million paying subscribers worldwide, global audience is guaranteed. As a pioneer in the streaming media service industry, Netflix has accumulated a good reputation with countless high-quality dramas before. Meanwhile, its user-oriented business thinking has also gained a favorable rating from the public.

It is worth mentioning that Netflix has a new cooperation model in recent years. Netflix will choose to cooperate with local teams in overseas markets, directly invest in production teams, or cooperate with producers. Before directing

Squid Game, Huang Donghe already had high-quality dramas such as *The Furnace* and *Strange Her*, and the actors also had a large fan base and representative works, as well as a sophisticated production team. Recently, Netflix's works include not only *Squid Game*, but also *Kingdom*. Kim Eun-hee, won the best Screenplay award for *Signal* at the 52nd 100 Thoughts Art Awards. In addition to increasing local user engagement and expanding the market, Netflix's cooperation strategy has achieved win-win cooperation between strong players.

3. Reference Significance

There are not a few professional production teams in China, and the script creation is supported by thousands of years of cultural heritage, which is also guaranteed by national policies. In 2009, The State Council executive meeting adopted the "Cultural Industry Revitalization Plan". In 2010, The General Office of the State Council issued the "Guiding Opinions on Promoting the Prosperity and Development of the Film Industry". The report of the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China affirmed the core status of cultural confidence. With the support of many parties, it is not difficult for domestic TV shows to go out of the overseas market, and how to create a global phenomenon-level TV series deserves in-depth study.

3.1. Communication Content: Improve the Quality of Plays and Lay a Solid Foundation for Communication

Although it is still in the fragmented era of information explosion, the audience's aesthetic consciousness is gradually awakening. The era of bad money driving out good will eventually pass, and the quality of film and television works is always the top priority. At the beginning of the acquisition, *Empresses in the Palace* had a one-star rating in the US and Canada, but has since soared to 3.7. *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* scored a 3.9 point. From this point of view, only high-quality works are left after the big waves wash away the sand.

1) technology: On the one hand, it is upgraded from the production technology. A *Writer's Odyssey* combines several methods to realize the digital performance of its characters, namely pre-production of motion capture, live motion capture and facial capture (Xu, 2021). Among other things, the team pioneered the pore system on the red-haired Ghost character. In order to solve the subtle changes caused by pore following the character's movement, the team produced the prototype in a week and put it into the film production for about a month under the pressure of unprecedented domestic pressure. The premise of technology development is to fundamentally polish the work, and it also brought new breakthroughs for the film and television industry. Get rid of cliches and bring refreshing works to the audience.

2) content: On the one hand, scrutinizing the content does not mean blindly deepening the ideological value and plot arrangement. For *Squid Game*, can try

to simplify the plot and the depth of focus social problem. This approach can not only surpass cultural barriers in the process of cross-cultural communication, also can make the show rich humanistic feelings, at the same time simplified content easier to extract symbols in the TV series to carry on the establishment and spread of a strong, extend the deepening degree of the spread of TV. Of course, excellent content is not required to abide by this model. The works are injected with rich ideological connotations, continuous innovation in the art forms, and the production team strives for perfection, etc. (Yang, 2008). Only excellent quality production can lay a solid foundation for dissemination.

3.2. Communication Audience: Consider the Audience Range, Advanced and Popular

In the statistics of the overseas operating income of Huanrui Century and Huace Film and Television, Huanrui Century accounted for 0% and 16.99% in 2019 and 2020 respectively, while Huace Film and Television accounted for 2.14% and 2.41% in 2019 and 2020 respectively. According to the financial statements of the two film and television companies, export revenue does not count for a high proportion of total income. It shows that most of the domestic companies are fully committed to the domestic market, without taking the overseas market into consideration.

Therefore, most production teams only limited their audiences to domestic audiences from the beginning, but accidentally spread to overseas markets due to the domestic reputation in China. There are not a few “one size fits all” phenomena in overseas communication, or they are cold abroad due to language and other differences. As for as translation is concerned, the translation of film and TV series is different from other types of translation. Its highest level is not only the “faithfulness, expressiveness and elegance” advocated by traditional translation theories, but also highly refined to make it simple and profound, so that audiences can resonate with each other in a short time (Zhang & Wang, 2020). On Viki, Amazon and YouTube, “长安十二时辰” is transliterated as “The Longest Day In Chang’an”. Considering The plot of saving Chang’ a city within twelve hour and the original title of the series, and the translation is very standard and appropriate. But the translation of “Chang’an Twelve Hours” is a long story. It is inevitable to translate Chinese into English, so “天地生吾有意无” is translated into “Why am I born in this world”. Behind the Chinese lines are heavy historical culture, not to mention the overseas audiences, even the local audiences have little understanding of classical Chinese. Therefore, it is also very important to cultivate a good translation team to accurately convey the TV series.

Therefore, this inspires the creator to prepare for going out in the later stage in the early stage of production. The production team needs to take into account aesthetic psychology, customs, laws and regulations, religious beliefs, ideologies and so on. At the same time, on the basis of maintaining the core content, the story should be properly localized to reduce cultural discounts.

3.3. Communication Channels: Expand Multiple Channels to Achieve Win-Win Cooperation

From Squid Game, we can learn from the experience of Netflix cooperation. We can partner with the head media and hold on to their audience. If the play only spreads to the Southeast Asian market, we can cooperate with the leading media in Southeast Asia, do market research in the early stage, clarify the audience positioning, and put it on the appropriate media for the TV series within the expected range.

At the same time, make full use of international social platforms. In recent years, Chinese TV dramas and movies have gradually taken advantage of new media social platforms to release information, such as Weibo and Douyin. In 2018, Bigan's latest film, *Long Day's Journey into Night*, achieved a pre-sale box office of over 100 million, which is due to its communication strategy. Before the film was released, a lot of related film promotions with romantic as the theme appeared on social media, the popularity of Douyin remained high, and the topic on Weibo was frequently searched. The use of social platforms has greatly improved the communication efficiency of film and television works. Squid Game makes full use of international social media platforms. It not only spreads overseas through social media such as YouTube and TikTok, but also promotes domestic social media such as Weibo, Douyin and RED, which greatly increased the speed of dissemination.

In addition, co-production with overseas production groups is also possible. For example, the Successful Sino-Japanese co-production *Legend of the Demon Cat* in recent years. Directed by Chinese director Chen Kaige with the co-starring A-list actors from China and Japan, such as Huang Xuan and Yasuya Tsuya. *Legend of the Demon Cat* has been a success in both China and Japan since its release. Based on the reputation of Director Chen Kaige in Japan and the recognition of the novel *Samana Kukai* by Japanese writer Yumemakura Baku, Japanese audiences have a higher degree of attention to this Chinese film. The movie is based on Japanese writer's fantasy novel which tells the story of a hidden historical truth through an evil spirit incident in the background of the prosperous Tang Dynasty. In the cooperation of the drama, not only elements with Chinese colors are integrated into the plot, but also audio-visual languages such as light and shadow, color, composition, as well as the elements and characters in the film, all show a strong charm of the prosperous Chinese Tang Dynasty. At the same time, in the process of co-production, we should pay attention to the using Chinese stories and Chinese spirits to inject diversification into the series.

In the process of communication, attention should be paid to the role of opinion leaders. Opinion leaders refer to personas who provide information for others in the process of communication so as to influence others' thinking. Since they play an important role of mediation and filtering in the process of mass communication, discourse also has a certain power and credibility. For example, film critics express their views and opinions after watching movies, which usually

affect the audience's choice of film watching. Therefore, looking for film and television talents with a certain right of discourse to promotion and dissemination can bring popularity to TV dramas.

4. Conclusion

Through the analysis Squid Game, from the communicator, audience, content and media four aspects combined with certain theory to analyze the reasons for the success of the drama in communication. Combined with the current situation of the dissemination of domestic TV dramas, and in view of the problems and shortcomings, the author puts forward the direction of future research on domestic TV dramas and feasible suggestions. We hope to make good use of the carrier of TV series to imperceptibly export Chinese culture and value system and enhance cultural consciousness and cultural self-confidence, try to use the Chinese way to tell the Chinese story, enhance the national cultural soft power, and realize the Chinese culture going out.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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