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Western Transmedia Projects in China: Growing Phenomenon with Cross-Cultural Challenges?

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Abstract

In recent years, many Western transmedia projects have entered into the Chinese market, with their own cultural influences. In this situation, we should pay attention to how Chinese transmedia projects are developing, what are the collisions between Chinese and Western cultures, and what are the opportunities and challenges brought by transmedia projects. The purpose of this research is to understand the popularity of Western transmedia projects in China, to examine the reasons for their popularity, and to recognize the opportunities and challenges in this situation. The study uses mixed methodology: secondary data analysis, online survey, and in-depth personal interviews. It has been found that Western transmedia projects are popular in China due to the cultural, technical, and promotional reasons which have been discussed in details. One of the reasons for Western transmedia projects been not popular deals with the problem of cultural distance and alienation.

Keywords

Transmedia; China; Cross-Cultural Communication; Mass Media; Communication; Transmedia Projects; Social Media; Storytelling; Popular Culture; Global Communication

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Западные трансмедиа проекты в Китае: растущий феномен с проблемами в межкультурной коммуникации?

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Аннотация

В последние годы на китайский рынок вышли многие западные трансмедийные проекты, имеющие собственное культурное влияние. В этой ситуации следует обратить внимание на то, как развиваются трансмедийные проекты в Китае. Важно также понимать, как именно происходит столкновение китайской и западной культур в области массовой коммуникации и какие возможности и вызовы несут западные трансмедийные проекты для Китая. Цель данного исследования — понять популярность западных трансмедийных проектов в Китае, изучить причины их популярности и осознать возможности и проблемы этой ситуации. В исследовании используется смешанная методология: анализ вторичных данных, онлайн-опрос и углубленные личные интервью. Выяснилось, что западные трансмедийные проекты популярны в Китае по культурным, техническим и рекламным причинам, которые подробно обсуждаются в тексте статьи. Одна из причин непопулярности западных трансмедийных проектов связана с проблемой культурной дистанции и отчуждения.

Ключевые слова

трансмедиа; Китай; межкультурная коммуникация; средства массовой информации; коммуникация; трансмедийные проекты; социальные сети; сторителлинг; популярная культура; глобальная коммуникация

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Introduction

Since the 1990s, the Internet has spread and developed rapidly, gradually entering every part of people's lives. The growth of the Internet has laid a solid foundation for the development of cross-cultural communication. With the help of the Internet, people around the globe can exchange information quickly and easily with each other, and the transformation of the Earth into a "global village" is no longer a dream: the whole earth is wrapped and covered by a huge information network (Lule, 2012). In this situation, the active exchange of information brings about communication between different cultures. Frequent encounters and exchanges between different cultures present opportunities that can contribute to one's own development, as well as challenges that can stifle it. Transmedia projects, as a new phenomenon in the media industry, create a unique universe through storytelling in all types of media. Transmedia projects also rely on the Internet for their own development including movies, television, games, books, and newspapers. During the process of dissemination, the transmedia projects stimuli exchanges and collisions between different cultures.

This study chooses transmedia projects as a sample among many types of cross-cultural communications. The study examines the popularity of Western transmedia projects in China, the reasons for their popularity, and the cross-cultural communication brought about by transmedia projects. The frequent contact between cultures brought by transmedia projects stimulates exchanges and integration between different cultures and encourages the development of cultural diversity. But at the same time, because most of the information on the Internet is still guided and controlled by the Western developed countries, this cultural inequality can easily lead to the infiltration of one culture into another. In the face of this situation, we need to be able to understand the problem of cultural influence by transmedia projects, to maintain the development of our own culture, and at the same time to be able to absorb foreign cultures and to integrate them with our own for innovative development.

Transmedia Projects at the Glance

Transmedia is a way of expanding stories using multiple media platforms. It emphasizes collaboration and complementarity between various media, as well as the extension and development of stories across different media. The concept of transmedia was first introduced by Marsha Kinder in 1991 to describe the multiplatform and multimedia expansion of media content (1991). In 2006, Henry Jenkins reintroduced the term and proposed the concept of transmedia storytelling, which has been widely adopted and explored (2006). In the context of digital change, transmedia has become an important method and tool for understanding media and the world around us. Transmedia produces media

content through multiple channels of communication, and each channel has commercial or democratic objectives, thus providing creative and participatory opportunities for sustained intellectual and emotional engagement. Transmedia is not just about multi-platform media; it is about the relationship between multiple forms of media. Transmedia encompasses the emergence, disappearance, change and development of different media platforms and creates consistency by bringing together elements from different media forms.

One thing to note is that there are a few confusing concepts: transmedia, cross-media, and multimedia. Cross-media is a story that runs across different media. And multimedia is a story that uses different media (Tellería & Prenger, 2019). A transmedia project is a project that transmits a story or a series of stories through multiple media in order to build a unified virtual universe dedicated to that story or series of stories. In addition to this, a transmedia project also takes into account a number of different dimensions, such as cultural integration, marketing, the commercial value of the virtual world, etc. Transmedia project is a complex phenomenon with multiple dimensions of design. Table 1 summarizes channels of communication used by the transmedia project to reach an audience in China.

Table 1. Dissemination of transmedia projects in China (2023, composed by the authors)

Name	Novels and comic books	Films	TV serial	Games	Magazine	Amusement Park
Harry Potter	√	√		√		√
Marvel	√	√	√	√	√	
Tom and Jerry	√	√	√	√	√	
Disney	√	√	√	√	√	√
Barbie		√	√	√	√	
Kung Fu Panda	√	√		√		√
The Hunger Games	√	√		√		
Forrest Gump	√	√				
The Terminator		√	√	√		√
Game of Thrones	√		√	√		

Transmedia projects and transmedia storytelling have some things in common, but they are not the same. Transmedia storytelling is the process of adding new content to the same storytelling system through a number of different media (e.g., movies, games, comics, etc.) to create a unique universe that belongs only

to that story. For example, in the *Marvel Universe*, there are multiple characters, such as Black Widow, Iron Man, Captain America, etc., who live together in the same virtual world, and have their own characterization and storytelling, but at the same time are able to relate to each other in the same world. Usually, transmedia projects include transmedia storytelling. The first step is to be able to tell a story, and after that, one can exploit other dimensions, such as user participation. In transmedia projects, users are encouraged to become active participants. Users are to be involved in the world constructed by the project. They are able to immerse themselves in this virtual world through various media. At the same time, they are encouraged to create secondary works. In this way, they can publicize this project, increase the popularity and influence these series of stories, and let more users enter this "universe", thus generating more user-generated content, forming a huge community of fans in the cycle of recirculation process.

According to Dena, there are four types of transmedia and these four types are divided into two groups (Dena, 2009). The *first type* of transmedia can be understood as the transmedia storytelling we mentioned earlier, which adds different content to the same universe in different media. Dena argues that "the most accessible example of this is what is commonly known as a 'franchise', where a book, film and perhaps a console game all contribute distinct stories to one overarching 'storyworld'" (2011). The process focuses on adding more details to the universe through different media platforms.

The *second type* of transmedia is telling a story through multiple media platforms, with the content of the story distributed across different platforms. For example, the character from a certain TV-serial has a personal account, and this character can post information on his/her personal account and even respond to comments or reply to emails. This kind of transmedia requires the reader to know the information on all media platforms to understand this complete story.

Davidson et al. suggest that transmedia can be divided into retroactive transmedia and proactive transmedia (2010). In Dena's opinion they are the *third* and the *fourth types* of transmedia. *Retroactive transmedia* is a type of storytelling that crosses media in time. This type of transmedia project is usually based on the expansion of an existing single-media story, which is achieved by extending the story line across different media. It usually is a story that already exists in a single media such as a novel or a comic book; as the story becomes more and more popular, it leads to the production of other media like new films, TV shows, video games, etc. The development of this type of transmedia follows the timeline and is not planned before the production of the project. For example, American author Winston Groom published the novel *Forrest Gump* in 1986, and years later, in 1994, it was made into a film by director Robert Zemeckis.

Whereas *proactive transmedia* is a type that was designed at an early stage. This type of project is a challenge for the creator, because at the very beginning of the design it is necessary to consider the direction in which this project will subse-

quently develop. The creator has to consider from which media platform should this story move on to which media platform. In the process, a question arises: what changes need to be made to the story content so that it can be adapted to the characteristics of the new media platform? This requires creators to understand not only the characteristics of the various media, but also the interactivity associated with them, so that they could attract viewers from one media platform to another. One example is *The Tulse Luper Suitcases*. In addition to the three 120-minute films, *The Tulse Luper Suitcases* includes 16 30-minute TV series, books, exhibitions, DVDs, and a four-year Websites art-project. While telling this story through the film, it establishes an interactive relationship with the audience in a different way than the traditional way, through a combination of several mediums other than the film.

The popularity of transmedia projects is grounded on a popular culture approach. In this aspect one must be curious about how transmedia projects succeed in the complicated cultural environments such as Chinese culture.

Culture could be defined as "the sum of material and spiritual wealth created by human beings in the course of social and historical development, and refers specifically to spiritual wealth, such as words, art, education and science" (Contemporary Chinese Dictionary, 2012: 1363). Yao treats a cross-cultural communication as an exchange that exists between two or more different cultures, with cultural inflows and outflows (Yao, 2018). Ji points out that cross-cultural communication is a two-way process, and it is necessary to learn how to "bring" and "send", meaning how to "bring the advantages of other cultures", and "send the essence of one's own culture" (Ji, 1986). In other words, cross-cultural communication is not a unidirectional output, but a mutual communication, tolerance, and reference among various cultures.

With the development of globalization, communication among countries has become easier, and the exchange of information has become faster and more frequent, which has further promoted exchanges among countries and cultures. As a result, more and more countries take culture as a kind of soft power, considering it an effective way to promote their own culture, spread their own ideas, export them to other countries and increase their international influence. This has also promoted the development of intercultural exchanges. However, while publicizing one's own culture, cross-cultural communication can also become a means with a purpose to adversely affect other cultures, or even a kind of strategic means of national political development – to increase one's international popularity and seize the right to speak on the international stage through cross-cultural communication. Compared with military means, cultural means are cheaper and more "civilized". Therefore, when facing cross-cultural communication, we should not only absorb the advantages of other cultures and publicize our own culture, but also be able to see the challenges brought by cross-cultural communication and be alert to the "aggression" and "transgression" hidden inside them.

Research methods

This study uses mixed methodology. It combines several research paradigms. The first research method is secondary data analysis. We used open sources to collect the data about transmedia projects' popularity in China. Because transmedia is a project that tells stories and builds unique universes across multiple media, we have a lot of relevant information spread across all kinds of media, with a very high degree of topicality and attention. Cross-cultural communication is also a very popular topic nowadays, because cultural communication means the collision and fusion of different cultures, and it also involves the point of how to protect one's own culture, which is an issue that every country and every culture needs to pay attention to.

We have found the data about Western transmedia projects' popularity in China in social media, published ratings, search queries, ticket sales, etc. These data have been aggregated in order to compose a list of the most popular Western transmedia projects in China. In the process, we collected a large amount of relevant data, including ticket sales, views in social media, search queries in Baidu, China's largest search engine, etc. By collecting and analyzing these figures, we can get some visual charts and tables, which will make it easier for us to understand the popularity of a certain project in China, and thus study the cross-cultural communication and challenges brought by transmedia projects.

The second research method is an online survey (N=214). The survey aims to build a rating of popularity among Western transmedia projects. In this way, it became possible to understand which of the Western transmedia projects are the most popular in China and which are not. It makes possible to analyze the similarities and differences between them in terms of technology, storyline, main idea of the story, and marketing methods, so as to analyze the reasons for the popularity of these Western transmedia projects in China, and to summarize the conditions that must be owned by the transmedia projects in order to promote their own development of transmedia, and then apply them to our own transmedia projects to improve the ability of cross-cultural communication.

The third research method consists of in-depth interviews with Chinese persons who are heavy users of contemporary popular culture or experts in the field of cross-cultural communication and media-studies. We have applied results of the survey and suggested to our respondents to think about the reasons of popularity and unpopularity for the Western transmedia projects in China. Each interview has taken about 30-40 minutes. There are four respondents: two of them one can call 'heavy users' of popular culture', one – professional screen-writer, and one – professor of media studies.

To sum up our research design, the study aims to answer three research question:

1. What is the list of the most popular Western transmedia projects in contemporary China?
2. Which Western transmedia projects from this list are more or less popular?
3. Why some Western transmedia projects are more or less popular in China?

Popularity of Transmedia Projects in China

The first stage of the empirical study uses data collection from open sources. However, we should mention a problem with addressing transmedia projects in China.

In China, to label a transmedia project, it is common to use the term Intellectual Property (IP). Various companies often co-brand with some popular IPs. For example, at Christmas, Chinese company "luckin coffee" cooperates with *Disney* to produce *Tom and Jerry* paper cups, paper bags and other products (see Picture 1).



Picture 1. Company "luckin coffee" (China) co-branding with *Tom and Jerry*

Therefore, when researching which transmedia projects are more popular in China, we can use the summary of IPs that are more popular in China taking netizens as a reference. The western transmedia projects mentioned in this summary

are *Game of Thrones*, *Marvel*, (since *Marvel* contains multiple universes, in this article, *Marvel* refers to the main universe excluding *The X-man*), *Harry Potter*, *Disney*, and *Star Wars* (Table 2).

Table 2. Popularity of Western Transmedia Projects in China (NetEase, 2019)

Transmedia Project	Popularity
Star Wars	93.47
Mario	86.91
Hello Kitty	77.33
Disney Winnie the Pooh	65.23
Marvel	63.27
Disney princesses	56.63
Aquaman	49.4
Pocket Monsters	42.01
Disney Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck	35.87
Harry Potter	16.54

In terms of ticket sales, we only choose the ticket sales of movies in the last ten years as a reference. We argue that this timelapse is enough to figure out general trends. Table 3 summarizes records of ticket sales of foreign movies from 2013 to present. From these data, we can see that in China, the movie *Avengers: Endgame* has the highest ticket sales. The movie belongs to the *Marvel* transmedia project. The second place has got *Fast and Furious* 8, which belongs to the transmedia project of *Fast and Furious*.

Table 3. Top-10 movies of transmedia projects in China's by ticket sales (Dengta Application, 2023)

Film	Ticket sales (Yuan)	Project
Avengers: Endgame	4,250,000,000	Marvel
Fast & Furious 8	2,670,000,000	Fast & Furious
Jurassic World: Fallen Kingdom	1,695,000,000	Jurassic World
Zootopia	1,531,000,000	Disney
Warcraft	1,486,000,000	Warcraft
Mission: Impossible – Fallout	1,245,000,000	Mission
Despicable Me 3	1,037,000,000	Minions
Kung Fu Panda 3	1,000,000,000	Kung Fu Panda
Star Wars: The Force Awakens	824,000,000	Star Wars
The Hobbit: The Battle of the Five Armies	766,000,000	The Lord of the Rings

Now, we would like to look into social media data starting from the Douban (Douban, 2023). Douban is a Chinese community website that provides ratings, reviews and information on books, movies, music, and other works. And all of this information comes from users, that is, user-generated content. According to the ratings on Douban, we get a list of the top 10 transmedia projects in the film rankings: *Marvel*, *Barbie*, *Disney*, *Titanic*, *Forrest Gump*, *Avatar*, *The Pursuit of Happiness*, *The Hunger Games*, *The DC Universe*, *The Lord of the Rings*. But in the ratings on Douban about TV-serials, there are only four transmedia projects in the top 50 TV-series: *Marvel*, *Stranger Things*, *Game of Thrones*, and *Tom and Jerry*. By compiling the information mentioned above, we can get a general list of 22 transmedia projects that are popular in China: *Avatar*, *Barbie*, *Disney*, *Fast & Furious*, *Forrest Gump*, *Game of Thrones*, *Harry Potter*, *Jurassic Park*, *Kung Fu Panda*, *Marvel*, *Minions*, *Mission Impossible*, *Star Wars*, *Stranger Things*, *The DC Universe*, *The Hunger Games*, *The Lord of the Rings*, *The Pursuit of Happiness*, *The Terminator*, *Titanic*, *Tom and Jerry*, *Warcraft*. To find out which transmedia projects are more popular in China, it is necessary to analyze the data related to these 22 transmedia projects further.

In order to find out which transmedia projects are more popular, we are going to analyze data from the Baidu search engine. Baidu is the most popular search engine in China (Rankings123, 2023). The number of search queries represents general public interest in the particular issue. The information here is gathered from the last ten years of search queries about transmedia projects (table 4).

Table 4. Top-10 search queries about Western Multimedia Projects (Baidu, 2014-2023, composed by authors)

Name	Search queries (average daily)	Ranking
Tom and Jerry	14673.6	1
Harry Potter	12640.2	2
Game of Thrones	10770.8	3
Fast & Furious	7400.7	4
Titanic	7385.3	5
Minions	5682.7	6
Avatar	5100.0	7
Forrest Gump	5000.5	8
Star Wars	4710.6	9
Disney	4426.9	10

To know whether a transmedia project is popular in China or not, the most important point to consider it is to look at the followers and viewers of this transmedia project in the popular social apps in China. Here we choose a few of the more

popular apps in China as reference. These apps are Baidu Tieba, Weibo, Bilibili, Taobao, Xiaohongshu and Tik-Tok. In Baidu Tieba, users are able to create a corresponding "bar" and get together to post discussions about films, computer games, books, etc. In Weibo, users can create themes (tags) and post information with themes, but Weibo is more about discussing real-time news and not sharing experiences. In Xiaohongshu, users usually share makeup and clothes, but also have moved to sharing experiences, daily tips, 'howtos', opinions, etc. Bilibili is a video app where anyone can upload videos including films, computer games, etc. It is more comprehensive. In the beginning, Bilibili mainly showed anime and then gradually developed other areas, such as games and films. Like YouTube, the content mainly consists of long videos, and short videos do not dominate the space. Taobao is one of the most common online shopping programs, similar to OZON or Amazon. Then we can get a result about the popularity of these transmedia projects (Table 5).

Table 5. Western transmedia projects in popular social apps in China (2023, December, composed by authors)

Transmedia project	Baidu Tieba (followers, thousand)	Weibo (page views, thousand)	Bilibili (Video views, thousand)	Taobao (hobby, thousand)	Little Red Book (page views, million)	Tik-Tok (Video views, million)
Marvel	562	2237	21160	60	1210	69550
Harry Potter	933	2645	17105	90	4460	27000
Disney	41	18330	23020	270	6550	33050
Tom & Jerry	100	704	56540	30	1240	45200
Barbie	156	390	9880	70	1270	5960
Fast & Furious	318	-	10630	5	180	19170
Game of Thrones	1470	2390	7770	7	180	5350
Warcraft	13660	1865	5463	20	57	14980
DC Universe	15	135	22970	20	120	5950
Star Wars	228	1003	5900	30	83	3120

Data in table 5 show that Western transmedia projects are well-known in Chinese social media. Because participation culture is an important feature of Transmedia projects it is important to provide these data. Popularity of Western transmedia projects in social media reflects trends of digital culture in China. Xu argues that "participatory culture not only represents the fan culture, but also involves more content for more and more people in different sectors" (Xu, 2022).

Reasons for Western transmedia projects' popularity in China

The second stage of the study deals with the finding of causes. Firstly, we have used a small questionnaire to verify the popularity of these transmedia projects among Chinese student (N=214). The study has involved 214 young people between the ages from 18 to 28. The purpose of the survey was to verify if the list of most popular Western Transmedia Projects is correct. Also, it was aimed to build a rating of popularity among Western transmedia projects. The result of the average score obtained for each project is shown in the Table 6. It becomes clear that all transmedia projects which been discussed before are popular or at least are known.

Table 6. What do you think, how popular this project is in China? (N=214, in scale from 1 to 5)

Project	Average
Tom and Jerry	4.2
Disney	4.1
Marvel	4.0
Fast & Furious	3.9
Kung Fu Panda	3.9
Minions	3.9
Angry Birds	3.9
The DC Universe	3.8
Harry Potter	3.8
Toy Story	3.7
Barbie	3.7
Warcraft	3.7
Game of Thrones	3.6
Star Wars	3.6
Jurassic Park	3.6
The Lord of the Rings	3.6
How to train your dragon	3.6
Mission: Impossible	3.6
The Hunger Games	3.6
Star Trek	3.5
The Terminator	3.5
The Witcher	3.4

Based on the study we have done, we selected the two projects with the highest scores, so to speak, which are the most popular (*Tom and Jerry* and *Disney*) and the two projects with the lowest scores, which are the least popular (*The Terminator* and *The Witcher*). Using these four projects as examples, we interviewed a young Chinese man and a young Chinese woman about their opinions on these projects. Also, we interviewed a professional screen-writer and a professor of media studies. These were the in-depth personal interviews. After analyzing and summarizing the results, we can find out several main reasons that affect the popularity of Western transmedia projects in China.

First reason deals with transmedia communication channels. This topic has been mentioned by all participants of the interviews. As was shown in Table 1, the greater number of channels to contact the audience, the more popular are the projects. Therefore, only major projects are able to invest significant amounts of money in the content which covers a larger area and attracts more audiences. In addition to the usual paper, film and television media, amusement parks are a great way to raise awareness of your project and deepen the connection between the audience and the project. One of the most famous is *Disneyland*. First of all, the park has carefully designed its theme — parks, recreational facilities and shows — to attract a large number of tourists to visit and watch the shows, and it also allows tourists to get immersive experience of the scenes in the world created by this project. Secondly, the interaction between cartoon characters and tourists enhances the affinity of cartoon characters, increases the sense of interaction between the tourists and the project, strengthens the sense of identity for the project and the park, and makes the tourists feel more emotion for the *Disney* project, thus absorbing more audiences and strengthening the connection between the audience and the project.

In addition to these media methods that we have already mentioned, a very important point is the souvenirs related to the project. Among these projects, *Barbie* is one of the more unusual ones. Unlike other projects, *Barbie* is a transmedia project that evolved from a toy. Compared to other transmedia projects, the area where *Barbie* started to develop is different from others; *Barbie* has a strong competitiveness in the area of souvenirs and toys. According to Taobao, in the most recent month, *Barbie's* highest monthly sales were 6,000+ units, while *Marvel's* highest monthly sales were 1,000+, and *The Witcher* – 140+, *The Hunger Games* – 90+. *Barbie*, as a toy, is an option for many people when giving gifts to little girls, and its main sales group is all girls. *Barbie* mainly increases its own popularity by selling toys, and then sets up relevant character identities for the toys, producing products such as movies and TV shows.

Meanwhile in China there is another popular phenomenon, the co-branding campaign, which we have already mentioned in the above article. In addition to drink and food companies doing co-branded campaigns with well-known transmedia projects, many companies also cooperate with popular transmedia projects

to produce dolls, or daily supplies, such as eye masks, towels, and so on. The result of these co-branding campaigns is having the images of these projects on various daily supplies, making them recurrent in daily life, which can appeal to a wide range of prospective audiences.

In addition to these daily supplies, the popularity of blind box culture in China has also contributed to the spread of these projects. From the perspective of the macro-consumption environment, in the current era of high material abundance, sales have evolved from selling commodities to selling entertainment, and this has facilitated the emergence and development of blind box culture in China. Blind box culture comes from the US and flourishes in Japan. The blind box, literally, is a box with a variety of styles of cute dolls, but the box is not labeled with the specific one, and its limited edition of the hunger marketing method, greatly stimulate the consumer's desire to buy and repurchase. Many blind box manufacturers, while launching their own design of blind boxes, often co-branded with a variety of popular transmedia projects to produce new products, and its lovely appearance can often attract many consumers. The co-branding between these companies and transmedia projects leverages each other's fame for marketing, attracting their own consumers to other's brands, while also attracting other's consumers to their own domains, which is a "win-win situation", increasing the visibility of transmedia projects. Therefore, it is easy to see that the popularity of transmedia programs in China is related to the media and ways of dissemination of the program itself. The more media it is disseminated in, the more popular it becomes.

Second reason is about advanced technologies. This topic has been mentioned by all participants of the interviews. The continuous advancement of technology has brought great changes in the entertainment industry. Han points out that "digital technology is a revolution for human life, and life today and perception at this moment depend on the development of digital multimedia" (Han, 2018). The popularization of the Internet and the development of digital media have provided the entertainment industry with more space and new possibilities for innovation and experience in entertainment content. With the gradual development of China's economy, people have gradually moved from thinking about how to solve the problem of food and clothing to thinking about how to pursue a better recreational life and spiritual world. But at the same time, much of China's movie technology cannot catch up with that of the famous Western companies. For example, *Jurassic Park*, released in the early 1990s, has also become a classic. On a technical level, *Jurassic Park* was the first movie to make widespread use of computer graphics technology to create animals and became a milestone in movie special effects. At the same time, *Jurassic Park* was the first movie to use Digital Theater Systems. The application and popularization of these two technologies, especially computer graphics imaging, laid down a new standard of audiovisual technology for the film industry to enter a period of rapid development.

Then the movie *Avatar* at the beginning of the 21st century was the first movie to use the 3 Dimensions field of view, as well as its many innovative breakthroughs in stereoscopic visual production, all creating a more virtual and visually impactful Avatar future world for the audience, and bringing the audience into an immersive scenario, thus making *Avatar* in China at that time bring a great shock to the audience. The more advanced technologies are used in transmedia projects, the more potential they have in terms of popularity.

Cultural attractiveness composes the third reason. This topic has been mentioned by all participants of the interviews. The interviewers believe that the popularity of Disney is inseparable from the ideas it spreads. The major ideas propagated by Disney are different in Western countries and China because of the differences in their social ideologies. For example, in China, as a socialist country, more emphasis is placed on the collective, — the collective is more important than the individual, the individuals serve the collective, and the collective can only give back to the individuals when it is powerful. Western capitalist societies, on the other hand, place more emphasis on individual interests and emotions, and advocate human rights and freedoms. Interpersonal relationships within China are more strongly colored, focusing on interpersonal feelings, while the West places more emphasis on individual interests and personal needs.

In China, domestic relationships are more important and focus on the feelings between people; whereas in the West, personal interests are more important and focus on the needs of the individual. Therefore, in a society like China, there will be some extremes that emphasize the collective interests much more than the individual interests, and there will also be cases in which the pursuit and development of individual interests are suppressed for the interests of the collective. At this time, the views spread by *Disney* and other Western transmedia projects that people should pursue their personal interests and learn to find themselves are very attractive in this kind of repressive situation.

Let's consider the *Disney* animated movie *Mulan* (1998). The main character Hua Mulan first took part in a failed blind date, which told the audience an objective situation of Hua: she is lively and active girl who does not like to be quiet, and she differs from the image of a gentle and virtuous woman demanded by the society at that time. Hua Mulan does not like to be disciplined by the society of that time, but because of her family and society, she is powerless. In this situation, Hua Mulan asks herself "Who am I inside?" At that moment, the country started a war and needed to recruit soldiers. Faced with her aging father, on the one hand, and the need to find herself, on the other, Hua Mulan decides to take her father's place in the war. She has made such a choice, in addition to her concern and filial piety for her father, more because Mulan wanted to take this opportunity to escape from the society that made her feel oppressed, to jump out of society's constraints laid on women, to find her heart as a human, to do what she really wanted to do. In the original Chinese version of Mulan Rhetoric, there is no descrip-

tion of Mulan's desire to find her true inner self. Mulan has dressed as a man and has joined the army because her father was too old and ill to join the army, and also, because she does not have any brothers who can join the army, and the country forces every family to have a male to join the army, if not, her family will be punished for going against the emperor's will. In this case, Mulan went to the battlefield dressed as a man in order to protect her family and her father. The story emphasized loyalty for the sake of the collective and filial piety for the sake of her elders. From this we can see the difference between Chinese and Western cultures. This emphasis on self is more attractive and educational for many Chinese people.

The fourth reason is about attitude towards games. This topic has been mentioned by two participants of the interviews. In China, the attitude towards games is negative. Nowadays, most middle-aged and old people think that playing games is bad, it will waste time and money, and sap one's will, so they also educate their children to stay away from video games. 20 or 30 years ago, when China's economy was not in good condition and was in a rising period, the people were focused on rebuilding the strength of the country, and striving to improve the standard of material life, entertainment was a luxury, and to play video games required computers or machines in game halls, and there were some technical limitations, so for that generation video games were a thing far away from people's daily life. On June 20, 2000, China issued a notice indicating that video games can be toxic to the health of young people, and clearly stipulated that the development of video games in China should be restricted, in addition to not allowing young people to enter entertainment venues during non-holiday periods, game halls, Internet cafes, etc., are also not allowed to "engage in business computer game activities using electronic computers" (Circular, 2000). This rule marks video games as a social nuisance and hinders the spread of video games in China.

In addition, during the period of economic rising, China was trying to build up its material world, but at this time the spiritual world was not emphasized. The Internet has got popularity in China, computers and gadgets have come into people's homes, but the awareness of the copyright on the Internet is relatively weak, and songs, movies and television works could be used and downloaded freely from the website without paying for them. And because of the notification issued in 2000 mentioned above, the distribution of video games was controlled, and this has also contributed to the rapid development of pirated games in China to a certain extent.

Due to the prevalence of pirated games, people also believe that they do not need to pay too much for games. At the same time, Chinese game companies such as *Tencent* and *NetEase* have launched a series of games that are free to play but can be recharged within the game, such as *Landlords*, QQ *Speed*, and *Dream Journey to the West*, all of which can be played free of charge, but with recharging channels set up within the game. People do not know much about one-time buyout games such as *The Witcher*. They are not willing to pay money for them, which is one

reason why many transmedia projects such as *Warcraft* and *The Witcher* are not popular in China.

The fifth reason is the brand effect. This topic has been mentioned by two participants of the interviews. They told that 'the brand effect' is one of the reasons for the popularity of these Western transmedia projects in China. In comparison with other transmedia projects, Disney has the advantage of forming its own brand, generating numerous movies, souvenirs, amusement parks, etc. under the brand name of Disney. Disney's products are all very unique and with a strong 'Disney's style', many products combined together to form the famous brand of Disney, promoting the transformation of the Disney series from film and television works to the products. Disney has become a 'warm and dreamy' brand that has gained traction in China. It has attracted a large number of loyal fans from all over the world, gained the trust of viewers, and built a reputation around the world. So, while facing different options, viewers will be more inclined to choose items produced by the famous brands as Disney.

Meanwhile, Disney amusement parks are established all over the world, and Disney has not stopped producing new works, emphasizing and highlighting the existence and capabilities of Disney as a brand in front of the public again and again. Every time before the launch of a new production, all the departments of Disney work together, using all the means of publicity: video media (on TV channels, websites, and other places), amusement parks, toy stores, cooperation with other companies, etc. The point is to promote with the Disney brand and to emphasize the brand's presence in front of the audience over and over again.

The sixth reason is that the Western countries hold the main international discourse. This topic has been mentioned only by one of the participants of the interviews. Today's globalization is dominated by the advanced capitalist countries in the West. The international cultural exchanges are also mainly directed by Western cultural patterns. This situation is conducive to the wide dissemination of Western transmedia projects in the international arena. In this research the study is about western transmedia projects, but the projects we got after screening are mostly transmedia projects from the USA, or products produced by other countries in cooperation with the USA. This reveals that the USA is a huge fountainhead for sending out messages to the world. In this case, the western countries have produced more and more exquisite or realistic video works by using advanced technology, and it has attracted the audience's attention. Western countries have a well-developed media system all over the world, such as CNN (Cable News Network), TMZ (Thirty Mile Zone), BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation), etc. The social media like Google, Facebook[1], Twitter and so on are also owned by Western companies. These communication tools are in the hands of the West and are also influential all over the world. For example, Disney, Marvel, and other transmedia projects have their own accounts on Twitter (X) and often update their accounts with

1 ** – A social network owned by "Meta", which is recognized as extremist in Russia

new information or interact with their audience. *Game of Thrones* at the height of its popularity utilized the huge influence of sites like HBO (Home Box Office), Netflix, and others to create a global transmedia community by placing posters, videos, and interviews for marketing, as well as launching an official community and game. Communication media organizations, Internet platforms and social media, and so on, help Western countries to dominate the global media discourse, thus helping Western transmedia projects to spread widely and achieve greater results in the international arena. This is also an important reason why Western transmedia projects are very popular in China.

Conclusions

First of all, a large number of Western transmedia projects entering China suppresses the development of local Chinese transmedia projects and culture. This tendency reminds what is happening in other parts of East Asia, which "became a major hub for transmedia storytelling due to Japanese manga, animation, and light novels, and later Korean webtoons (web comics). In Japan, many cultural forms like films and digital games have relied on manga and/or anime, and several Asian countries have utilized these cultural forms to develop their own films and television programs. South Korea (hereafter Korea) has also rapidly developed a new type of transmedia storytelling as webtoons have gained popularity" (Jin, 2020).

The same thing happens to China. Here we take Chinese animated movies as an example. Around the year 2000, China hardly produced any popular anime movies. At that time, the West produced many beautifully illustrated and interesting animated films, such as *Ice Age* (2002) and *Finding Nemo* (2003). After these film and television works were introduced to China, they occupied most of the Chinese market, which also prevented Chinese animated films from entering the market for a long time. The main trend in the market was guided by Western animated films. In this case, in order to meet the market demand, it is inevitable to follow the Western mainstream, and at the same time, it is easy to be influenced by the Western mainstream ideas in the production process, which is not conducive to the development of China's own traditional culture.

China's government also realized the situation and introduced relevant policies to encourage the development of Chinese animated films in 2004, but the effect was not obvious. It wasn't until 2015, with the movie *Monkey King: Hero Is Back*, that things started to improve for Chinese animated movies. However, both in terms of the frequency of output and popularity of the movie, it is still not as good as some famous western animated movies, and these movies only caused a lot of discussion in China and did not open the door to step out of China. The situation is similar to that of animated films in other areas, such as games, TV dramas, novels, etc., all of these areas are in a situation that foreign projects are taking over more of the market. A large amount of Western content has seized the market in China, leading the trend of popularity in society and culture, and bringing great challenges

to the development of Chinese culture. In addition to this, we should also be aware of the challenges posed by those systematic cultural invasions. As we all know, the social systems of China and the West are different, and this will inevitably result in the cultural aspects of the two sides being quite different.

According to Yao (2018), Western countries are treating cultural hegemony as a political resource that can be manipulated, in a conscious and purposeful way. China, after being invaded by the West, was in a weak position for a long period of time. With it came cultural inferiority complex, thinking that Chinese culture was not as advanced as Western culture. There is an opinion in China that what was left of traditional Chinese culture is all dross, and that the Western countries and the Western people are more advanced and honored. The West understands this, introducing Western cultural ideas into China through various transmedia projects such as movies, TV, novels, games, etc. Coupled with the fact that many people in China have a blind admiration for Western culture, these cultures enter China very easily. The strong import of cultural values in all aspects of politics, economics, ethics, and the arts has had a considerable impact on the daily lives of many Chinese people. Because of the ideological differences between China and the West, many of the values of Western culture are more applicable to capitalist societies and do not suit the situation in China, which is detrimental to the building of a socialist society with Chinese characteristics. Culture is the soul of a country and a nation. A country that abandons its own culture will certainly not be strong. A prolonged cultural invasion will gradually change people's way of life, undermine their sense of cultural belonging, influence the direction of their values, destroy China's original cultural roots, disrupt and undermine China's value system, and thus jeopardize the country's development.

When it comes to opportunities, the first thing to mention is the opportunities brought about by technological enhancements. The technological development of Western transmedia projects has provided China with many examples to learn from and promoted to a certain extent China's local learning and development of technology in film, television, games and other areas. Let's take 3D technology in animated movies as an example. 3D, which stands for Three Dimensions, refers to the three dimensions of length, width and height. In simple terms, 3D technology records these three kinds of data on a computer, then simulates and digitizes them to be presented on the screen. The first 3D animated movie was *Toy Story* from *Pixar Animation Studio* in 1995, and in China, the first 3D animated movie was *Lotus Lantern* in 1999. Around the year 2000, we can say that China hardly produced any popular anime movies, and anime TV series all used 2D technology. But western animated movies of the same period, such as *Ice Age* in 2002 and *Finding Nemo* in 2003, used 3d technology. After the hard work of nearly a decade, in 2015, a *Monkey King: Hero Is Back* brought China's animated movies to a whole new level. Reviewing this film, SOHU News wrote: "The movie adopts the classic structure of Hollywood, the classic story of the Orient with the 3D special effects

that pass the world, and the martial arts design of the Oriental charm, making the well-known mythological theme warm with the chivalrous feelings of the world" (SOHU, 2015). The Chinese animated films that have become more popular in recent years all have a very strong Chinese flavor, taking the more classic stories from traditional Chinese culture and reworking them into movies, or, like 2016's *Big Fish & Begonia*, adding traditional cultural elements such as China's *Hakka Tulou* (ancient Chinese rural dwellings) to the film. The improvement of technology has brought about the development of transmedia projects in China, so that Chinese traditional culture can be disseminated in ways that are suitable for all ages, such as movies and TV dramas, so that we can better disseminate the excellent traditional culture and enhance the cultural self-confidence of the Chinese people themselves.

The second point is to promote the integration of Chinese and Western cultures (Tsu, 2022). Chinese and Western cultures were born with different historical backgrounds and development trajectories, and there are essential contradictions and conflicts between the two cultures. Western culture and traditional Chinese culture have their own shortcomings in contemporary times, but there are also advantages that cannot be ignored; they have both opposing sides, but also complementary, mutual integration. For example, at this time, when the whole society is in a stage of rapid development, the Western culture emphasizes the need for independence, tends to acquire skills through practice, and teaches the importance of personal interests, and all these are well adapted to the pace of the society nowadays. At the same time, traditional Chinese culture, such as Taoism, teaches people to protect the inner spiritual world in this fast-changing society. The fusion of Chinese and Western cultures promotes the integration of the world and enriches the spiritual world of the people. Based on the above, one can conclude that the popularity of western transmedia projects in China brings not only challenges but also opportunities. In such an environment, we have to learn to keep up with the times and seize the opportunities to develop ourselves, and at the same time, we have to strengthen ourselves to recognize the dilemmas of the time and meet the new challenges.

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