

The Evolution and Strategies of Cross-Media Narratives with the Same IP : Take 'The Dream of the Red Chamber' as an Example

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ABSTRACT

As the cross-media narrative system continues to improve, many classic works are taking on a new vitality in the modern era. However, in this context, creators need to continuously practice and refine their narrative strategies in order to grasp the characteristics of the era in which narratives evolve. "Only Dream of the Red Chamber: Theatrical Fantasy City" approaches the classic work from a unique perspective and successfully transitions the same IP across media platforms, providing valuable experience for other creators. The paper aims to analyze the unique features of its narrative system and the characteristics of its narrative strategies, providing insights and inspiration for other classic IPs to better adapt their narratives across media platforms.

KEYWORDS

Only the dream of the red chamber; Theatrical fantasy city; Multidimensional narrative; Hands-on experience

1 Introduction

In his preface to A History of Song and Yuan Drama, Wang Guowei wrote, "Each era has its own literature." During the Qing Dynasty, novels became the main literary genre and achieved great success. As the pinnacle of Qing Dynasty fiction, The Dream of the Red Chamber achieved unprecedented artistic heights in Chinese literature and continues to influence the development of art in subsequent generations. Take "Only The Dream of the Red Chamber: Drama Fantasy City" as an example. It is not a simple retelling or reproduction that simply transposes the text into the fantasy city. Rather, it is about innovating and recreating the literature, innovating the same IP, and fully demonstrating the contemporaneity and creativity of contemporary art. Phantom City has created a three-dimensional world for visitors, allowing them to experience the contemporary charm of The Dream of the Red Chamber from a unique perspective.

2 Different forms: with unique characteristics

Every art form has its own unique charm. In literature and art, that is, in the original work, the art of leaving things unsaid is fully demonstrated. Negative space is a very important technique in Chinese art, leaving readers with plenty of room for imagination. With the development of the times, various art forms have been adapted from this literature, demonstrating the importance of cross-media storytelling. In Western academia, it is defined as: cross-media storytelling is the process of creating a complete narrative experience by dispersing story creation across multiple communication channels ^[1]. For example, film and television works promote the dissemination of literature through the lens. Film and television creators use their imagination to process and package the information they obtain from the text in an artistic manner, and then convey it to the audience in the form of audiovisual language ^[2]. In 1987, Wang Fulin directed the TV series The Dream of the Red Chamber. In 2023, director Wang Chaoge's "Only Dream of the Red Chamber: Theatrical Fantasy City" created a theater complex that tells the story of "The Dream of the Red Chamber" in the hearts of every reader. Classic masterpieces sparkle with different spiritual vitality in different eras, enabling cross-media storytelling of the same IP and allowing people of every era to continuously explore their spiritual connotations.

2.1 Between the lines: Feeling the literary connotations

The novel Dream of the Red Chamber is highly accomplished in terms of its narrative style: First, it can be called a model of domestic narrative. The so-called domestic narrative operates within a macro-spatial setting underpinned by a mechanism of "agglomeration and separation." Use specific architectural planning to create the main venues where characters and events take place, ensuring that they are closely connected to each other ^[3]. Dream of the Red Chamber is set mainly in the Grand View Garden, where the Jia family lived after Yuanchun's visit home, and where many stories unfolded. For example: Liu Lao Lao visits the Grand View Garden, Daiyu buries flowers, etc. Not only does it advance the story, but it also makes the plot more complete in terms of space.

Secondly, its character development is very worthy of reference. With the tragic love and marriage of Jia Baoyu, Lin Daiyu, and Xue Baochai as the central plot, the novel also depicts the tragic fates of a group of women, highlighting the

individual differences between each character. For example, although both Lin Daiyu and Miaoyu are aloof, they are different. One is aloof in the secular world, while the other is aloof in the spiritual world. The author also uses shadow descriptions to create contrast and emphasis: Like clear skies and dark shadows, like hairpins and hairpins; In the novel, the author breaks away from stereotypical and formulaic writing techniques, such as the character Wang Xifeng, who embodies boldness, shrewdness, and ruthlessness all in one. The author uses different writing techniques to bring the characters to life.

Finally, the novel contains a wealth of traditional culture, such as opera culture. The play features a variety of musical styles and performance forms, including Kunqu opera, Yiyang opera, and Yuan Dynasty zaju. These operas serve multiple purposes in the book: they hint at the characters' destinies and future developments, enrich the text's depth and appeal, and also foreshadow the tragic decline of the Jia family in the future. For example, the four plays selected by Yuan Chun, "A Handful of Snow: The Grand Banquet," "The Palace of Eternal Life: The Begging for Skill," "The Dream of Handan: The Divine Connection," and "The Peony Pavilion: The Departing Soul," subtly imply the inevitability of decline after reaching the peak of prosperity and the longing for family affection. The two art forms intertwine, adding dramatic tension and enhancing the overall meaning.

Literary works give audiences endless room for imagination. Some of the meanings expressed in words cannot be directly conveyed and need to be understood intuitively. "A thousand readers have a thousand Hamlets in their hearts." Everyone's experiences and feelings are different, so the Lin Daiyu and Jia Baoyu in their hearts are also different. Literary works need to be read repeatedly to appreciate their deeper meanings.

2.2 Immersing oneself in the play: experiencing the charm of drama

The powerful collaboration between the two major IPs, "Wang Chaoqun" and "The Dream of the Red Chamber," has created a highly innovative cultural tourism experience for audiences, allowing them to immerse themselves in Eastern aesthetics and the spiritual essence. The City of Illusions is not a re-creation or sequel to The Dream of the Red Chamber. "The Dream of the Red Chamber." It is not the book that matters, but the people who read it. Phantom City has 108 themed spaces and 21 immersive performances, each with different content and formats. The "Is It Real or Not?" theater allows the audience to "see" the twelve beauties of Jinling and Cao Xueqin's cross-time dialogue from the audience. The water elements on stage and the dancers' movements together interpret the tragic fate of "ten thousand beauties sharing the same sorrow." "True or False" breaks with traditional audience-performer relationships, inviting viewers to step behind the scenes and into spaces such as the dressing rooms and prop rooms to experience the atmosphere and process of a theatrical performance. Viewers are transformed from observers into the observed, as the stage illuminates reality, allowing them to experience the essence of "True or False."

There are also theaters such as "Second Store," "Bed Theater," and "I Just Don't Like The Dream of the Red Chamber," allowing audiences to experience the immersive journey and feel the endless "Dream of the Red Chamber" in everyone's heart.

3 Narrative evolution: a masterpiece

Telling Chinese stories through Chinese aesthetics. Phantom City combines multiple elements and uses unique creative techniques to construct a narrative system that intertwines reality and fantasy and offers multi-dimensional interaction. From a single story to a multi-dimensional ensemble narrative; From passive observation to active immersion in landscape narratives; From an observer to a philosophical narrative of the self.

3.1 Group narrative: Tell a unique and complete story

In the play "You Have It, You Don't Have It," the story does not unfold with Lin Daiyu and Jia Baoyu as the main characters, as it does in the book. Instead, it focuses on the dialogue between the Twelve Beauties of Jinling and Cao Xueqin, linking their respective main segments and recreating the story. In the drama, Cao Xueqin says, "Do you think I determine your fate? It is heaven, it is fate." Everyone loves a happy ending, but tragedies are more memorable. It is precisely this ending that leaves many readers feeling unsatisfied, causing readers throughout the ages to constantly ponder and reflect on it, thereby granting the characters eternal life. Zhong Jinzhai said, "Thank you. You made our lives short on paper, but you made our love long in this world." The "nothingness" of life is exchanged for the 'somethingness' of the spirit, which is precisely one of the core tenets of the "somethingness is nothingness" philosophy^[4]. Such ensemble storytelling enhances the dramatic tension.

There are also many theaters from different eras in the fantasy city: Interpreting Dream of the Red Chamber in Wuyuan in 1812, Shanghai in 1917, and other places and times, this is a cross-temporal narrative about the author, readers, and

other topics. Every time the audience enters a theater, they travel through time and space. The protagonists of each world are all different, and these different protagonists together form a huge collective world.

3.2 Landscape narrative: integrating emotion into the landscape from all angles

Landscape narrative: More than a century ago, Jane Setteswhite pointed out that through narrative theory methods, landscape design provides experiences, local history, and deepens people's memories of certain events ^[5]. The theater "Four Waters Return to the Hall" was built in the style of Huizhou architecture. In the stage design, water from the eaves flows down the roof tiles into the hall, creating the "Four Waters Return to the Hall" landscape. Looking out, the wood carvings and brick tiles complement each other, and the architecture is unique and ingenious. During the performance, a rain curtain falls, allowing the audience to calm their minds and enjoy an immersive experience in the rain. Rain is both a key element in driving the plot forward and connecting the storylines, as well as an internal metaphor and hint, forming a unique image.

At the same time, we must mention the unique feature of Fantasy City—the mediation of space. On the one hand, it refers to the process by which humans expand their control over physical space and their control power through the continuous development of communication media and innovation in media forms, thereby achieving media connectivity across the largest possible spatial range ^[6]. On the other hand, it refers to the gradual incorporation of real space into the media sphere, where it serves the function of disseminating information. In the fantasy city, pass through 16 doors of different styles at the entrance: palace gates, ruyi gates, etc. Behind each door lies a different narrative route. Upon entering this real-life space, both the architecture and the decorations convey corresponding messages, infusing the culture of the Red Chamber and Chinese aesthetic sensibilities into the fantasy city. Red chairs appear in every corner of the theater, becoming an important symbolic feature. Director Wang Chaoge explained, "This chair represents the audience, every reader who reads the book." However, in specific contexts, its meaning differs. For example, in the "rotating" theater, the twelve chairs also represent the Twelve Beauties of Jinling. Upon entering the fantasy city, every reader is both a character in the book and an outsider, just like the world in the book, which is both real and fake.

3.3 Philosophical narrative: Be the protagonist of your own story

In "Only The Dream of the Red Chamber: Theatrical Fantasy City," every audience member who enters is not only watching people reading, but also watching themselves reading. While embodying the spiritual essence of The Dream of the Red Chamber, it also has its own relative independence. It fully showcases the spirit of each era.

The protagonist of "Four Waters Return to the Hall" is like another incarnation of Jia Baoyu, embodying his spiritual core of "not rejoicing in material things, nor grieving over personal misfortunes." He may seem like a "prodigal son," but he is actually very "clean." Director Wang Chaoge mentioned in "Long Talk" that "I like money more than winning." Realizing one's self-worth, one's own preferences... There is no right or wrong here. Don't think that watching flowers bloom or waiting for the rain to stop is meaningless. Everyone has different standards for measuring value. Think about what you truly enjoy, learn to be consistent with yourself, and continuously discover the lifestyle that suits you best and brings you the most joy through exploration.

The 33rd chapter of The Dream of the Red Chamber is also a very philosophical episode, which is narrated from the perspective of Jia Huan. Jia Huan is Jia Baoyu's half-brother, born to a concubine. In the book, he is described as "a sleazy character with eccentric behavior," forming a stark contrast to Jia Baoyu. In the theater, every audience member experienced Jia Huan. Throughout the viewing, a sense of compassion permeates the atmosphere. Although Jia Huan seems insignificant, and it appears that all the bad things happen to him, in reality, this is a reflection of everyone's life. No one in the world has a smooth sailing life. If there are people who seem to have a smooth sailing life, it is because you have not seen their unfortunate side. Here, we should also mention the term "self-consistency." Everyone has aspects of their lives that they are dissatisfied with or even dislike. But no one is perfect, and most people are at the bottom of the pyramid. We must learn to come to terms with ourselves and not be too hard on ourselves. The world is so vast that there is always a place for everyone.

From these narrative perspectives, we can once again feel that "Only The Dream of the Red Chamber: The Dramatic Fantasy City" is not just about this book, but about every era and the diverse readers of each era. See the heavens and earth, see all beings, see yourself. People cannot control their destiny, so why not try to control how you feel about it?

4 Narrative strategy: showcasing the characteristics of the era

"Only Dream of the Red Chamber: Drama Fantasy City" can be categorized as a tourism performance product. Although there is currently no unified definition, its essence is consistent: it is the integration of performance programs

with tourism activities, promoting the development of the tourism and cultural industries ^[7]. Phantom City deeply integrates culture, tourism, and performing arts to create a comprehensive space that comprehensively enhances the audience's physical experience.

4.1 Little by little, much is achieved: fully integrating embodied concepts

Visually, Chinese architecture serves as the foundation. Using Oriental gardens as an aesthetic prototype, a symbolic system blending reality and illusion is constructed through the use of time-space juxtaposition technology ^[8]. Next is the art of negative space, with large white walls at the entrance echoing the phrase, "A vast expanse of white, the land is truly clean." With white walls as paper, light and shadow are like ink. In the fantasy city, there are also a series of extremely evocative venues such as "Impermanence," "Shadow Corridor," and "Yao Chi Bu Er" for visitors to explore and take photos. Finally, it fully showcases the beauty of Chinese aesthetic colors: peach blossom pink, silver vermilion, green cloud, vermilion, purple gardenia, and indigo blue. The colorful architecture perfectly blends modern and traditional aesthetics.

In terms of auditory appeal, the background music is particularly captivating, including songs such as "Be Well" and "Baoyu Sings a Song." On site, further deepen the audience's physical experience, allowing them to become more immersed in the experience. For example, "I don't like Dream of the Red Chamber." Some people like Dream of the Red Chamber, while others don't. The theater is filled with elements of electronic punk, and the different electronic beams are like different points of view. There is still much controversy surrounding this issue. The song "You Are Forever" played after the performance ended, achieving a metaphorical effect. Music is a vehicle for emotion, and when the audience leaves and listens to it again, seeing the lyrics brings a different kind of insight, as if they have been pulled back into that space. Secondly, each theater has a monologue recorded by director Wang Chao, such as "In this world, are there Jia Baoyu and Zhen Baoyu? Is there a young gentleman born with a jade pendant? Is there a young lady who died with tears in her eyes? We look down deeply at the earth. Is there meaning in our existence there?" A series of questions left the audience full of curiosity even before they entered the theater. Then came the words, "The philosophical thoughts that appear and disappear, the allegories that flicker on and off, are hidden between the lines of The Dream of the Red Chamber—when falsehood is taken as truth, truth becomes falsehood; when nothingness is taken as existence, existence becomes nothingness." After watching the plot, the initial impression is further deepened, allowing the audience to gain a more profound understanding.

It is precisely these carefully designed elements, from visual and auditory perspectives, that create a space filled with "physical experiences," allowing audiences to fully experience the charm of the fantasy city through their bodies.

4.2 Like a dream, like a play: Immersive participation becomes part of the play

Jean Rouleau proposed the "fourth wall" in 1887. This refers to a "wall" that separates the actors from the audience. It is transparent to the audience but opaque to the actors. However, "Only The Dream of the Red Chamber: Drama Fantasy City" breaks through the boundaries of traditional theater, allowing visitors to become more than just spectators. They become part of the performance, and even performers themselves. The 35th Middle School takes the audience back to 1987. Audience members can not only sit around the NPCs, but some will also be treated as "NPCs" and interact with other audience members as part of the performance. At the same time, everyone seemed to have truly become characters in the play. The phrase "true yet false" invites the audience to enter the theater from the backstage, a unique entrance that breaks with convention and instantly brings the audience closer to the performance. With the "fourth wall" broken, the boundary between actors and audience becomes blurred. The audience was immersed in the roles of the cast and crew, filled with tension and excitement.

In addition, there are also theaters that offer hands-on experiences, such as the "Reader's Theater" and "Four-sided Courtyard," theaters with unique perspectives, such as "Unending Books," and the "Bed Theater," which offers an innovative viewing experience. At Fantasy City, audiences can freely choose theaters that interest them, and each experience feels like a dream or a play, allowing them to feel the emotions and cultural resonance contained within.

5 Conclusion

The charm of classical literature lies in: (1) Beneficial consumption of residual emotions; (2) The warm comfort of cultural innocence; (3) The infinite expansion of one's horizons in life; (4) The poetic enjoyment of elegant beauty; (5) Inner cultivation of humanistic sentiment ^[9]. The classic heartbeat must resonate in sync with the contemporary era. Reproduction of the same IP must first adhere to principles and boundaries. Secondly, it is necessary to fully integrate with the times and showcase contemporary features. Finally, in the process of innovation, the aesthetics of film and television should not be used to cover up the aesthetics of literature.

Creators in different fields should first grasp the advantages of their own art forms. Secondly, it integrates multiple narrative techniques, bringing together the best achievements in the evolution of storytelling. Finally, combine the classic with the contemporary to expand narrative strategies. This will enable better cross-media storytelling using the same IP, allowing it to continue to shine throughout the ages.

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