

Analysis of IP Adaptation of Female TV Series-Taking Story of Yanxi Place Palace as an Example

Shiqi Xu

Nanchang No.2 High School Sino-Canadian Program, Nanchang, China
xushiqi08@outlook.com

Abstract: IP adaptation for film and television refers to transforming original works with intellectual property rights such as novels, comics, games, and animations into films and TV series. In recent years, with the rapid development of the film and television industry, IP adaptation has become an important content creation method, particularly prominent in TV dramas, web series, and movies. IP adaptation not only brings box office revenue or viewership but also expands commercial value through product placements, merchandise, games, and theme parks. Therefore, this study will take *Story of Yanxi Place Palace* as a case study to explore how to use IP to adapt and create popular dramas with strong female themes, increase commercial value and attract more viewers to pay attention to feminism. By selecting the right IP, creating multidimensional characters, emphasizing female themes, incorporating social issues, ensuring high-quality production, leveraging cross-media collaboration, adopting a global perspective, and enhancing commercial value, it is possible to create hit series with strong female themes that have both social impact and commercial success.

Keywords: IP adaptation, commercial value, feminism

1. Introduction

With the rise of women's social status and economic power, work focusing on women's lives and growth has garnered increasing attention in the domestic film and television market. Female-centric themes have demonstrated immense market value. In 2015, *The Journey of Flower*, centered on female growth, successfully captured the mass market. In 2017, *The First Half of My Life*, which tells the story of a middle-aged, divorced woman who rebuilds her life and achieves personal growth, sparked widespread social discussion. In 2018, *Story of Yanxi Place Palace* became a highly talked-about summer hit, marking a new peak of interest in female inspirational growth themes. These works have resonated with audiences through their female perspectives, allowing viewers to psychologically project themselves onto the characters. The impressive viewership numbers, exceeding billions of plays, reflect the high recognition and acceptance of such themes in the audience market [1].

The market for female-centric content has entered a new stage, characterized by increasingly diverse and in-depth audience aesthetic demands. Online literature IP has become an important upstream incubation site, with audiences forming a complete chain from online content reception to offline feedback. IP content is beginning to influence the real economy, necessitating higher-quality content that not only records female growth but also reflects contemporary characteristics.

Data from online literature reading platforms show that the proportion of female readers is as high as 88%. In the 2018 film and television market, several dramas focusing on female growth, such as

Legend of Fuyao, *Ruyi's Royal Love in the Palace*, and *Our Glamorous Time*, became hits. Among these, works adapted from literary IP achieved particularly notable success [2]. This indicates that the IP selection mechanism in the upstream online literature market plays a crucial role in downstream film and television output. Therefore, this study will use the adaptation of *Story of Yanxi Palace* from online literature to explore how to select suitable film and television IP and how to create more impactful IP [3].

2. Literature review

Some scholars, through comparative analysis of *Empresses in the Palace*, *Story of Yanxi Palace*, and *Ruyi's Royal Love in the Palace*, reveal the evolution process of female images in mainland palace struggle dramas, emphasizing the growth trajectory of female characters from passivity to initiative, from endurance to resistance [4]. Some scholars focused on the development path of big heroine drama taking *Story of Yanxi Palace* as an example, to explore how such series shape independent and wise female images to meet contemporary audiences' expectations for female strength [5]. Some scholars analyze the unique aspects of *Story of Yanxi Palace* in narrative strategies, character settings, and emotional resonance from the perspective of the causes of its popularity [6]. In addition, some scholars and others start from the perspective of traditional Chinese aesthetics, combining *Story of Yanxi Palace* to discuss how Qing palace dramas display the charm of Chinese traditional culture through costumes, props, set design, and other elements [7]. Some scholars' research further expands the perspective to the field of feminism, pointing out that the female characters in *Story of Yanxi Palace* demonstrate the support and strength between women through unity and mutual assistance, reflecting the important issue of unity in feminism [8]. Although some researches do not directly involve *Story of Yanxi Palace*, the analysis of feminist activities on Chinese social media provides an important background for understanding the gender discussions triggered by palace struggle dramas in contemporary society [9]. In summary, these literatures not only analyze the artistic characteristics and cultural connotations of *Story of Yanxi Palace* from the internal text but also explore its role in promoting the spread of feminist trends from the external context, jointly constructing a multi-dimensional research framework, which helps to understand the social and cultural significance of such series more comprehensively.

3. Case study

The success of *Story of Yanxi Palace* is the result of multiple factors working together. High-quality content creation, excellent production, effective marketing strategies, understanding of audience psychology, integrating cultural backgrounds, outstanding performances by actors, IP derivative development, and the generation of social topics are all key factors in its success. Through these strategies, *Story of Yanxi Palace* not only achieved great success domestically but also gained widespread attention and recognition in international markets, becoming a successful case of IP adaptation for film and television.

3.1. High-quality content creation

The series incorporates a wealth of traditional Chinese cultural elements, such as court etiquette, traditional clothing, and classical music, satisfying the audience's interest in and appreciation for traditional culture. Although set in ancient times, the series conveys modern values such as female independence, female freedom, and gender equality, aligning with the spiritual needs of contemporary female viewers [10].

Set during the Qianlong period of the Qing Dynasty, the series combines historical events with fictional elements, adding a sense of historical depth and authenticity. In the genre of historical palace

dramas, Qing Dynasty dramas are the most numerous and influential. This series is set during the Qianlong period, the same era as the iconic childhood summer memory for those born in the '80s and '90s, *My Fair Princess* (*Huan Zhu Ge Ge*). This setting allows for connections with characters from other popular palace dramas like *Empresses in the Palace* (*Zhen Huan Zhuan*) and *Ruyi's Royal Love in the Palace* (*Ruyi Zhuan*). The comparison of character portrayals across different series, such as the past and present lives of Empress Fucha and Xia Ziwei, has become a popular topic of discussion, successfully attracting the target audience of those born in the '80s and '90s. The storyline is fast-paced and tightly woven, avoiding lengthy setups [11]. With the explosion of content, TV dramas are being produced at an unprecedented rate, but viewers' time and patience are becoming increasingly limited. Capturing the audience's attention quickly is crucial.

The Story of Yanxi Palace's topic attracted the audience's interest. Women have always been the primary consumers of TV dramas, and the principle of "winning over female viewers means winning the market" is well understood by all producers. The female protagonist in *Story of Yanxi Palace* is no longer portrayed as kind and naive but as someone who is fiercely vengeful and cunning, relying on her own abilities to achieve the highest status without depending on male characters. This character design caters to the tastes of the audience.

3.2. High-quality production

The Story of Yanxi Palace did not rely on star power or popular celebrities. Both the original novel and the lead actress were relatively unknown. However, the actors' superb acting skills and outstanding performances won the audience's admiration. By employing new and seasoned actors, the series avoided the high costs associated with top-tier celebrities and their exorbitant fees. This approach allowed for a larger portion of the budget to be allocated to refining the script, costumes, and set design. Consequently, this strategy not only reduced actor salary costs for the production team but also minimized risks for the platform [12].

The costumes, props, and set designs in the series are meticulously crafted to recreate the grandeur of the Qing Dynasty court, providing viewers with a visually immersive experience. The costumes, makeup, and props in the series are largely based on historical paintings and records, with modifications to enhance their appeal. The integration of various intangible cultural heritage elements, such as the Buddhist beads and silk fans held by the actors, as well as the traditional embroidery on their clothing, aligns with the historical trends of the time.

The visual beauty of the *Story of Yanxi Palace* is closely tied to its sophisticated use of Morandi color palettes and meticulous composition. Many scenes are shot using central composition, which emphasizes the main subject by creating a clear visual hierarchy between the subject and the background. Additionally, the use of lighting is highly professional, involving key light, fill light, ambient light, base light, modeling light, and special effects lighting. Given that male characters in the Qianlong period wore hats, top lighting was avoided, and lighting was adjusted from below to ensure the visual appeal. These details ensure the visual excellence of the series, enrich the visual language, and enhance the artistic expression of the drama.

3.3. Marketing strategy

The Story of Yanxi Palace promotes its popularity and broadcasting volume through multi-channels and international promotion. The series was simultaneously broadcast through multiple channels, including television and online platforms such as iQIYI. It utilized the most influential self-media KOL matrix in the entertainment industry, covering major apps like Toutiao, Yidian Zixun, Phoenix, NetEase, Tencent News, Beijing Time, and Baijia. From July 12 to August 31, over 100 platform accounts published content daily, achieving a total daily readership of 100 million and a

recommendation volume of 8.6 billion. The new media end of the entire project reached a total readership of over 10 billion and a recommendation volume exceeding 80 billion, creating a strong word-of-mouth effect. The series was broadcast on international platforms such as Netflix, covering new media platforms in North America, Europe, and Australia. The overall view count on YouTube also exceeded 100 million, attracting a global audience. Each year, Google releases the Google Trends annual hot search list, and *Story of Yanxi Palace* topped the 2018 global TV series hot search list, enhancing the series' international influence.

3.4. IP derivative development

On the streaming platform's online store, a series of "IP derivative" products from *Story of Yanxi Palace* was released. These included items such as pillows, phone cases, and canvas bags featuring the vivid embroidery patterns from the costumes. The best-selling items were pillows, T-shirts, phone cases, and canvas bags, with sales reaching 2 million yuan. Additionally, accessories, cosmetics, and clothing identical to those worn by the characters in the series were launched. The series mentioned that Emperor Qianlong enjoyed stamping famous paintings and calligraphy, and his desk was filled with various stamps. Capitalizing on this unique quirk, a set of Qianlong stamps was released on Taobao, achieving monthly sales of 4,000 units. This further expanded the commercial value of the IP.

Story of Yanxi Palace collaborated with various online and offline stores, such as Suning.com, JD Daojia, and Meet Fresh, as well as apps like QQ Browser, Sogou Input Method, Meitu XiuXiu, Qingsongchou, Didi Chuxing, Douyin, and Weibo. This series of marketing actions not only boosted the popularity of the *Story of Yanxi Palace* but also provided significant exposure for the associated brands.

3.5. Social topics

Before its release, *Story of Yanxi Palace* generated buzz through promotional activities on forums such as iQIYI Movie Tickets, Maoyan, and Douban. As the series aired, topics related to palace intrigue and power struggles were highlighted through bullet comments and reviews, sparking audience discussions on social issues. These discussions were frequently picked up by influential Weibo users, leading to multiple appearances on Weibo's trending list. This high-frequency exposure and sharing rapidly spread the series among users, attracting a larger audience.

In China, most adult women have their own careers and are increasingly less dependent on men. However, their workplace conditions remain challenging, with deep-rooted stereotypes about female employees becoming harder to change amid growing life pressures and social conflicts. Female viewers hope that literary and artistic works can help shift these perceptions. The independence and strength of the female characters in the series align with modern feminist values, attracting significant attention and support from female audiences.

4. Feminist themes in visual media

4.1. Analysis of female characters (focusing on the protagonist and ensemble)

Story of Yanxi Palace is a widely beloved period drama that captivates audiences with its intricate and suspenseful plot, as well as its portrayal of numerous female characters who are vividly characterized and leave a deep impression.

These female characters each have distinct traits, showcasing their personalities and fates in different ways throughout the drama. *The Story of Yanxi Palace* is not just a simple tale of palace intrigue; it is a profound exploration of human nature, friendship, and the struggle for power. Each

character's path is shaped by historical context and personal choices, offering viewers a glimpse into the complexity and diversity of life in an ancient imperial court.

4.2. The change in narrative perspective (focusing on women's power struggles and an "anti-romantic" emotional storyline)

4.2.1. Power struggles centered on female characters

Traditional palace dramas often place male characters (such as the emperor) at the center, with female characters revolving around these males in their narratives. However, *Story of Yanxi Palace* breaks this mold by placing female characters at the core of its narrative, particularly the protagonist Wei Yingluo, who is no longer a weak woman dependent on men but rather an active and highly strategic powerhouse.

Wei Yingluo starts as an ordinary weaving worker and gradually rises to become Noble Consort Ling. Every step of her journey is filled with wisdom and courage. Unsatisfied with passively awaiting her fate, she actively changes her destiny through her own efforts. Each of her decisions and actions demonstrates a profound understanding of power.

The show portrays not just Wei Yingluo's struggle but also the diverse power aspirations of other female characters. For instance, roles like Consort Gao and Pure Consort have different personalities, yet they all engage in constant scheming to secure their positions in the palace. This portrayal of power struggles among women is not a simple dichotomy of good versus evil but rather showcases the multifaceted and complex nature of human beings.

4.2.2. The "anti-romantic" emotional narrative

Unlike many palace dramas that emphasize the beauty and romance of love, the *Story of Yanxi Palace* presents a more realistic and somber emotional perspective.

The relationship between Wei Yingluo and Emperor Qianlong is not what would traditionally be considered romantic love. Emperor Qianlong's favor towards Wei Yingluo stems more from his recognition of her intelligence rather than pure affection. Wei Yingluo, in turn, does not fall into blind adoration or dependence on Emperor Qianlong. Instead, she remains clear-headed and uses his favor to achieve her own goals. This dynamic makes their relationship more akin to a political alliance rather than a romantic love story.

The interpersonal relationships in the show are filled with complex friendships and betrayals. For example, Wei Yingluo and Er Qing were once close friends, but as their statuses changed, Er Qing gradually turned to betrayal. This fracture of friendship reveals the fragility of human nature in power struggles and underscores the harsh realities of court life for the audience.

In the *Story of Yanxi Palace*, family bonds are portrayed as distant. Wei Yingluo's mother died due to false accusations, and her father no longer cares about her fate. She must rely solely on herself to survive in this cruel environment. This portrayal of distant familial ties further reinforces the "anti-romantic" nature of the plot, highlighting the ruthlessness and coldness of court life.

5. Conclusion

Through a case study, this paper analyzes the commercial price of IP-adapted female-themed movies and TV shows in *Story of Yanxi Palace*. Firstly, it analyzes the quality creation of this film and television article and the superiority of costume props and further analyzes the market strategy of this film and television. Through multi-channel promotion, the film has created a strong word-of-mouth effect and achieved high ratings. In addition, a series of derivatives have been developed, further expanding the commercial influence of the IP. This paper also analyzes the feminism in this film and

television, which reflects the changes in narrative angle and narrative theme of today's film and television content and embodies the artistic value of this film and television. In the future, the film and television industry can refer to *Story of Yanxi Palace*'s production methods in the process of IP adaptation, to further improve the ratings and audience recognition.

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