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The Impact of Medium-Capacity Differences Between Long and Short Dramas on the Presentation of Homologous Scripts: A Case Study of the IP How Dare You!?

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Abstract. Short dramas, as a recognized new medium, are characterized by "short," which is also their marked difference from long dramas. This paper takes "medium difference" as the entry point and starts from "short", using the long-drama and short-drama adaptations of the IP *How Dare You!?* as the research objects to compare the differences between the two. The study finds that the series narration is fast because of short and broken because of short, characters are cut and merged because of short, character relations are made explicit, and plots are simplified and displaced because of short. And the "short" of short dramas strengthens the "pleasure" of watching.

Keywords: Medium comparison, medium capacity, long drama, short drama

1. Introduction

In 2025, the traffic of short dramas continued to grow. Whether in terms of users' usage duration or usage frequency, there was significant growth compared with 2024, and the short-drama market continued to expand [1]. As a currently popular new medium of communication, short dramas, with the characteristics of high traffic and adaptation to algorithmic dissemination, have attracted many long-drama IPs, and many IPs have both long-drama and short-drama forms, such as *How Dare You!?*, *The Prisoner Of Beauty*, and *Ban Xia*, realizing the cross-media parallel narration of IPs. When different media tell the same story blueprint, the two are said to be adapted from a homologous script.

The short drama and long drama of the IP *How Dare You!?* are both adapted from the novel of the same name by Qi Yingjun, with a homologous script, telling the story of Wang Cuihua, a modern office worker, who time-travels into a book and becomes Yu Wanyin, the villainous demon concubine, and allies with Xia Houdan, the tyrant who is also a time-traveler (possessed by Zhang San), and the two fight and laugh in the perilous palace with wit, trying to rewrite their predetermined fate. And the copyrights of both the long drama and the short drama belong to the iQIYI platform, which is the same IP of the platform and an attempt at two presentation forms. Therefore, this paper takes the long drama and short drama of the homologous script of the IP *How Dare You!?* as the research object, and analyzes the impact of medium differences on the homologous script in three aspects: narration, characters, and plots.

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2. Literature review

Most researchers recognize that short dramas are an emerging medium of communication and are markedly different from long dramas: through a systematic analysis of British and American online short dramas, Tu Yan and Chen Yuanchun found that online short dramas have formed an independent narrative closed loop and diversified audio-visual styles, and are a brand-new narrative form relying on digital media, rather than a simplified version of long dramas [2]; Tan Sihui and Li Yang also hold a similar view that "micro-short dramas are not a simple compression of traditional long dramas, but a reconstruction of a new form under the media ecology" [3].

When talking about the relationship between long dramas and short dramas, most researchers start from the perspective of media convergence and pay attention to the convergence of long dramas and short dramas, such as the short-drama tendency of long dramas [4] and the intertextuality and complementarity of the two [5]. While seeing the connection, researchers also pay attention to the impact of the medium on the story itself: McLuhan believes that the medium is the message, and Zhang Jing and Li Xiaocai emphasize the shaping effect of the scale and form of the medium on the story, and both agree that different carrying media will lead to different presentations of the same story [6]. But at present, the academic community lacks a systematic analysis of the different presentation effects of long dramas and short dramas due to their media characteristics.

Short dramas are a product of the accelerating social environment and the reading willingness of "scattered viewing" [7], and "short" is its prominent feature, which is also its most marked difference from long dramas. The long drama of *How Dare You!?* is about 40-50 minutes per episode, with 32 episodes in total, while the short drama is about 1-2 minutes, with 89 episodes in total, so whether from the perspective of total duration or single-episode duration, the medium capacity of short dramas is significantly less than that of long dramas. But the academic community rarely takes "short" as the entry point for the narrative research of short dramas. Scholars Shi Tianyue and Huang Jinhua pay attention to the social environment in which short dramas are produced, and explore the narrative characteristics of short dramas based on the "social acceleration theory" [7]; researcher Shen Qirong takes the pleasure-production mechanism as the core entry point to analyze the narrative strategy of short dramas [8]. Therefore, this paper starts from the perspective of "medium capacity" and takes the long drama and short drama of the IP *How Dare You!?* as the research objects to compare the narrative differences between long dramas and short dramas.

3. Research methods

The academic community has formed a relatively mature analytical framework in cross-media comparative research, mainly covering multiple dimensions such as plot modification, character reshaping, structure adjustment, theme change, audio-visual language, and narrative rhythm. Due to the difference in medium capacity, the presentation of the plot, structure, *characters,* and rhythm of the same story on different media is bound to be different. For example, the film *Doctor Zhivago* had to condense 600 pages of text into more than 200 minutes, so it cut the character Vajeniyaping and the story of the protagonist with him [9]. Different media will significantly affect the theme presentation of the same story: constrained by duration and international communication positioning, the film *The Flowers of War* tends to express a concise, universal, and strongly visualized humanitarian theme; the TV series *Forty-Nine Days: Memorial* and *The Flowers of War* are adapted from the same story, and relying on the advantages of long-form narration, it pays more

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attention to historical restoration, detail elaboration, and local stance, and the two form a clear difference in theme emphasis [10]. Therefore, this paper follows the traditional analytical framework and uses the text analysis method to analyze the presentation impact of medium differences on homologous scripts mainly from the aspects of narration, *characters*, and plots.

4. Research findings

4.1. Narration: fast because of short, broken because of short

Foreign scholar Mieke Bal proposed in *Narratology: Introduction to Narrative Theory*. A narrative text is a text in which a narrator or subject transmits ("tells" to the reader) a story to the narrative receiver through a specific medium, such as language, image, sound, architectural art, or a mixture of these media [11]; domestic scholar Liang Along believes that film and television narration includes two levels: one is narration, and the other is the story. The story is the story, and narration is the method of telling the story [12]. When elaborating the concepts related to narration, both pay attention to "telling stories", which shows their strong correlation with the concept of "narration". In film and television dramas, the material for telling stories is video clips, and different media have different capacities. Under the condition of presenting fewer video materials, short dramas need to complete the telling of the same story, so short dramas adopt means such as compressing time and space, presenting plots through dialogue, and omission to speed up the narrative rhythm. When describing the return of General Luo, the long drama shoots pictures such as General Luo riding a horse through the street and people welcoming him on both sides, while the short drama chooses to use one sentence "Congratulations to General Luo on his return with the generals" to explain this plot, compressing the other time and space except the palace audience. For the same plot, the short drama takes 6 seconds to complete, and the long drama takes about 1 minute to complete.

Although short dramas accelerate the narrative rhythm, the small capacity of 1-2 minutes per episode determines that they cannot complete the narrative task of a single episode of a long drama, and cannot even complete a complete plot narration. Therefore, short dramas can only break off and increase the number of episodes to complete the narration of the whole story. In order to increase the viewing stickiness of the audience and ensure that the audience continues to watch after watching a single episode, the break points between episodes of short dramas show the characteristics of splitting the complete narration, giving priority to suspense plots, and breaking at highly emotional nodes. In contrast, although the break-point selection of long dramas also gives priority to suspense plots, the narration is more complete. Taking the first episode of the short drama and the long drama as an example, the first episode of the short drama breaks when Yu Wanyin has just entered Xia Houdan's bedchamber and Xia Houdan yells "Get out" at Yu Wanyin, and the picture stays on the heroine's exaggerated shocked expression. The first episode of the long drama has already completed the plot narration of Yu Wanyin and Xia Houdan recognizing each other, seeing through that Xie Yong'er is a time-traveler, and Yu Wanyin and Xia Houdan deciding to go separately to instigate Xie Yong'er and Xu Yao.

4.2. Characters: cut and merged because of short, made explicit because of short

The significant difference in medium capacity between long dramas and short dramas also affects the selection and presentation of *characters* by the two. Deleting *characters* means reducing the total amount of narration and easing the narrative pressure; merging *characters* can ensure the normal progress of the story under the condition of deleting *characters*. Short dramas delete many

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characters that appear in long dramas and even take up a certain length to depict, such as the imperial physician Xiao Tiancai, and Cen Jintian and Du Shan of the student group. In the selection process, short dramas usually retain *characters* that have a more promoting effect on the plot and are more memorable. For example, among the student group, Yang Duojie, compared with other students, appears more in the subsequent stories and key plots, for example, Yang Duojie went to Beishan with the emperor as the imperial astronomer. Er Lan is a student in ancient times who disguises herself as a man, and has a strong memory point. For the steady development of the story, after cutting *characters*, the short drama chooses to merge character functions. For example, Er Lan in the student group has the character characteristic of disguising as a man in the long drama, and her speech has a female perspective. The important function of Du Shan is to die in the East Lake accident, so that Yu Wanyin realizes the ruthlessness of Prince Duan and decides to fight against Prince Duan. But in the short drama, because Du Shan is deleted, Er Lan simultaneously undertakes the function of Du Shan and is injured and dies.

The merging of character functions changes the shaping of character images. Taking the student group as an example, the long drama depicts six members of the student group with distinct personalities: the eloquent and humorous Yang Duojie, the upright but somewhat rigid Li Yunxi, the quick-thinking Er Lan, the sickly but good-at-farming Cen Jintian, the diplomatic Wang Zhao, and the romantic Du Shan, but the short drama only presents two students, Yang Duojie and Er Lan, and both students respectively take on the character functions of other students. Yang Duojie replaces Li Yunxi to question the emperor when meeting on the lake, so in the short drama, Yang Duojie's character image is mixed with part of Li Yunxi's upright character, and the character shaping has changed. In addition, the medium capacity also affects the length of the short drama's depiction of supporting roles. The long drama shows the growth and emotions of different students in the student group, such as Li Yunxi learning to understand Er Lan's flexible style of doing things, and the emotional line between Er Lan and Cen Jintian, and the supporting roles are vivid and three-dimensional with memory points. But in the short drama, unless they shoulder necessary plot tasks, supporting roles rarely appear, and there are also few shots depicting supporting roles, and the overall image is relatively flat and more utilitarian.

The character positioning and basic personality of the main *characters* (Yu Wanyin, Xia Houdan, Xie Yong'er, Xia Houchun) have not changed, but the *characters* in the long drama are more multi-dimensional and complex than those in the short drama. Taking Xie Yong'er as an example, the Xie Yong'er in the long drama realizes that she is also a paper figure and tells Yu Wanyin before her death. In the short drama, Xie Yong'er comforts Yu Wanyin before her death that "she will return to the world outside the book". McKee proposed in *Characters* that "the dimensions that a character's personality can change into are only the dimensions developed in his heart by the story complex of various opposing forces" [13]. The Xie Yong'er in the long drama has one more layer of opposition of "am I a real person or a paper figure" than the character in the short drama, showing more complex character thinking. In addition, in the long drama, before Xie Yong'er is summoned to serve the emperor, she has a paragraph of inner monologue: "Do I really have to be with a man I don't love" and "Why, even with the script, I still cannot control my own life", which reflects the character's independent thinking and pursuit of freedom. But in the short drama, Xie Yong'er's view of serving the emperor is "I am all for Prince Duan", which is relatively more functional.

Compared with long dramas, the character relations in short dramas are more explicit. First, the character conflicts are sharper and the presentation is more direct. After the heroine Wang Cuihua (Yu Wanyin after time-travel) sees the original plot for the first time, she shows "opposition" to Xie Yong'er: "If I were Yu Wanyin, I would easily solve this book-traveling woman," and Xie Yong'er

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also shows "hostility" and "competitive desire" at the first actual meeting: "Yu Wanyin, I know you want to steal the spotlight by this opportunity, but unfortunately you met me." Second, the emotional relations between characters are pointed out earlier. In the event of using Wei Zi flower juice to frame Yu Wanyin, the short drama has more than the long drama: Xia Houdan pretends to go crazy, locks Yu Wanyin's throat and presses her against the wall, and uses filters and other means to create an "ambiguous" atmosphere between the hero and heroine in the visual picture. The short drama presents the interaction between the hero and heroine based on love earlier.

4.3. Plot: simplified because of short

The impact of medium-capacity differences on the plot is reflected in the focusing, simplified cutting, and displacement of the short-drama plot.

Although both long dramas and short dramas adopt linear narration mainly based on forward sequence, the plot of the short drama is more focused. The short drama cuts a large number of branch-line *characters*, and the narration is mainly from the dual perspectives of Yu Wanyin and Xia Houdan, with some perspectives of Xia Houchun and Xie Yong'er inserted; the long drama, in addition to the main line of the two, increases the appearance time of the perspectives of Xia Houchun and Xie Yong'er, introduces the multiple perspectives of secondary *characters*, and retains the independent story lines of secondary *characters*—such as Xu Yao's lantern-slide memories before death, the daily interaction of the student group planning for the country, and the backstory of Tur, the crown prince of the Yan State, and the beauty Shan Yi.

The simplification of the plot by the short drama causes the long drama and the short drama to take the Beishan conflict as the dividing point and present completely different story plots. In the long drama, the Beishan conflict is a strategic game of four forces: Xia Houdan, Prince Duan, the empress dowager, and Tur, the crown prince of the Yan State, wrestle here; Prince Duan uses Lord Murong to command the actions of the empress dowager's side, the fake Yan group assassination, Prince Duan wants to reap the benefits of the fisherman, and Xia Houdan finally retreats intact and completes the peace talks between the two countries. After the conflict, the plot unfolds in multiple lines: the palace carriage of Xie Yong'er and Yu Wanyin is blocked by Lord Murong, Xie Yong'er is stabbed to death, Yu Wanyin adopts the mute girl Huahua on the way to exile and arrives at Peiyang through a non-official road; after Xia Houdan confesses his time-traveler identity to Bei Zhou, he also rushes to Peiyang to reunite with Yu Wanyin; Bei Zhou disguises himself as Xia Houdan and uses the plan of self-injury and poisoning to alienate Prince Duan and the central army. The short drama simplifies and cuts many plots: the Yan State forces completely withdraw, the assassin sent by the empress dowager is instead Prince Duan's man, and the empress dowager is quickly killed; after the conflict, Prince Duan has a head-on confrontation with the hero and heroine, and Xie Yong'er leads a team of gun-wielding soldiers to support; after Prince Duan breaks free from the restraint, he grabs the gun and counter-kills, and Xie Yong'er blocks the gun with her body and dies. All the political plotting foreshadowing and time-space changes are compressed into the palace scene, and the decisive battle is simplified into a force confrontation in a single place, which produces illogical plots such as Prince Duan riding straight into the palace and the gun in Xia Houdan's hand being easily grabbed.

Some plots are also displaced to serve the explicitness of *characters*. Taking the "book depository fire" plot as an example: in the long drama, this event occurs after the hero and heroine successfully instigate Xu Yao—Prince Duan realizes that Xu Yao has learned the truth of his father's murder, so he chases to the book depository and sets fire. In the short drama, the book depository fire is greatly advanced to before Xu Yao covers up eavesdropping for Yu Wanyin; after the book

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depository fire, Prince Duan takes Yu Wanyin away, and Xia Houdan brings people to stop it. This plot is a head-on confrontation between Prince Duan and Xia Houdan, and is the explicitness of the "opposition" character relation. The short drama chooses to present the character relation in advance.

5. Research conclusions

Medium-capacity differences affect the presentation of narration, *characters*, and plots in long and short dramas. In terms of narration, in order to improve narrative efficiency, short dramas use time-space compression and dialogue explanation to speed up the narrative rhythm, and also break off when they cannot complete the complete story due to time limits. In terms of *characters*, short dramas cut *characters* whose functions can be replaced, further reducing narrative tasks, and merge character functions to ensure the steady progress of narration. The character relations are explicit and sharpened, which facilitates the viewer to understand the *characters* and the story in a short time. In terms of plots, the overall plot is more focused, and some plots are simplified, omitted, and cut [7].

The impact of medium capacity on the three is not isolated. In order to complete the narrative task, the short-drama creator chooses "acceleration," and "acceleration" also means "omission." With the accelerated narrative rhythm, unnecessary plots and characters are omitted, the plot focuses on the main characters, and the secondary characters are deleted or merged, so the personal stories corresponding to the secondary characters are also omitted; the time and space showing the character relations are compressed, and the interactive plots are replaced by dialogue, so the presentation of character relations and conflicts is bound to be sharpened and explicit; in order to match the explicitness and sharpening of characters, some plots are displaced. The sharpened character conflicts just meet the needs of short dramas for emotional breakpoints. The requirement of "acceleration" drives the changes of narration, characters, and plots in a chain, and the changes of the three elements affect each other. The focused character-plot line facilitates the viewer to substitute and share the counterattack and success of the main characters, and the viewer obtains psychological compensation from this emotional experience [8]. The simplification of the plot shortens or deletes the dilemmas of the main characters, and accordingly, the success of the protagonist is more intensive. The intensive successful emotional experience and the fast-paced narration jointly create the sense of "pleasure," and the "short" of short dramas strengthens the "pleasure" of short dramas. The medium-capacity difference starts from "short", chooses the "fast" of the story, and strengthens the "pleasure" of the series.

6. Conclusion

This study takes the long drama and short drama of the IP *How Dare You!?* as the research objects, takes medium capacity as the entry point, and compares the narrative differences between long dramas and short dramas. The study finds that the series narration is fast because of short and broken because of short, *characters* are cut and merged because of short, character relations are explicit, and plots are simplified and displaced because of short. And the "short" of short dramas strengthens the "pleasure" of watching. This conclusion provides a new comparative dimension for the comparative analysis of the differences between long and short dramas, and starting from "short" further shows the interactive relationship among the "short," "fast," and "pleasure" of short dramas.

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However, this study still has limitations. The conclusions of this study are drawn based on case analysis and are difficult to directly generalize to other long-short drama adaptation practices; and the text analysis is based on shot-by-shot observation, which inevitably carries a certain subjective interpretation color, and its objectivity still needs to be improved.

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