

# **Adaptation of Classical Theater in Modern Cinema: A Comparative Analysis of Narrative and Performance**

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**Abstract:** Based on the perspective of narrative and performance analysis of classical theatre adaptation in modern film, can understand its characteristics and differences in the relevant aspects, in-depth interpretation of the development and innovation of classical theatre, combined with the new era of film and television drama creation theory, put forward the corresponding development suggestions, for the cultural heritage and growth of classical theatre to provide strong support. In the research, this paper explores the relationship between classical theatre and modern film, analyzes the adaptation of classical theatre in modern film in detail, compares the differences in narrative and performance, and obtains inspiration from it, providing reference for the creation of film and television drama.

**Keywords:** Classical Theatre; Modern Cinema; Narrative; The Show

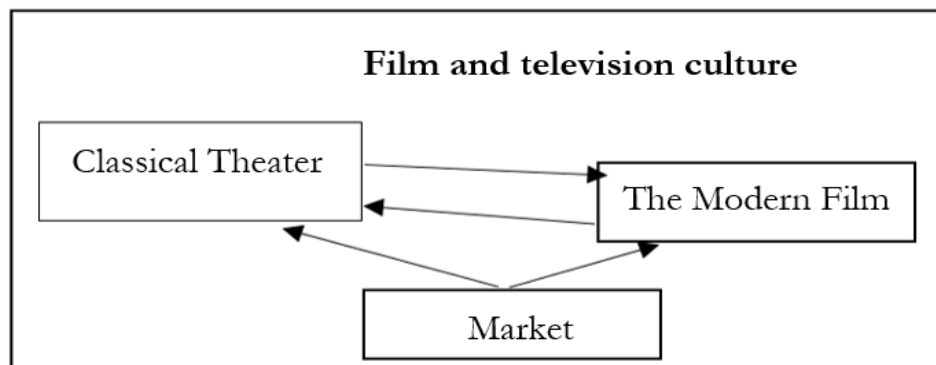
## **1. INTRODUCTION**

The adaptation of classical theater in modern film is a trend, which is inevitable when drama develops to a certain period. However, it has profound cultural foundation and historical accumulation, and has far-reaching influence. It will not be completely abandoned, but will be appropriately changed according to the development of The Times (T. Li, 2021). Therefore, the classical theater will now carry on the appropriate adaptation in the modern film, reflecting a certain "new idea". When studying it, we should choose the research perspective reasonably, analyze it deeply, and draw the results and conclusions, which can be used as the basis for the historical research of the development of classical drama and the creation of modern film and television drama.

## **2. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CLASSICAL THEATRE AND MODERN CINEMA**

The classical theater has been inherited for a long time, and its cultural deposits are relatively profound, which has become an important part of

the film and drama in our country. It is not limited to the performance of film and drama, but also the creation of certain plays. Therefore, it has outstanding value in the development of drama. Modern film is the "result" of the development of film and television drama to a certain extent under the influence of new culture and new trends. It is relatively "free" and full of new ideas, which can be closely combined with social development to form a unique film and television culture (Zheng, 2022). The analysis of the relationship between the two is embodied in three aspects: first, the classical theater is the basis of the generation of films in the new era, and it cannot completely eliminate the "cultural atmosphere" and influence of the classical theater, so it should be deeply studied and properly used (Gu, 2022); Second, modern film has basically become the mainstream, and the classical theater needs to think about and learn from it, and improve on it to meet the needs of the development of The Times. Third, the relationship between classical theater and modern film is close, which is not a game relationship, but a relationship of common development and collaborative progress. Therefore, their differences should be "respected" (Zhao, 2021). However, both classical theater and modern film should serve the reality and pay attention to the satisfaction of market demand. Otherwise, it will lose its vitality. Therefore, market demand is the key driving force for its growth. Based on this setting, the following relational model is shown in Figure 1.



**Figure 1:** Relational model

### 3. AN ANALYSIS OF THE ADAPTATION OF CLASSICAL THEATRE IN MODERN CINEMA

#### 3.1 Analysis based on narrative perspective

Based on the comparative analysis from the perspective of narrative, the adaptation of classical theater in modern films is mainly reflected in three aspects: combining reality, propaganda and education, and paying

attention to demand. The details are as follows.

### 3.1.1 Degree of material combination

Before the appearance of "beauty drama", the plays performed in the classical theater were all ancient plays or changed through some legends and historical stories to form specific plays. Peking Opera, in particular, has a long history and has become a unique cultural heritage of China (Ren, 2022). It can be seen that the plays of classical theaters, whose subject matter comes from folk and history, are adapted on their basis to form new plays. When elaborating on the relevant events, it is relatively simple, mainly taking loyalty, filial piety and justice as the core idea, reflecting certain educational significance. In the late period of the May Fourth Movement, the New Culture Movement pushed "civilized drama" onto the stage of the classical theater, rewriting and performing the traditional drama, reflecting a new form and new ideas. Up to now, the modern thought of modern film has become more prominent, closely combined with the trend and culture of The Times, highlighting the characteristics of novelty, and the strong attraction of poor students (Pavis, 2003). Based on the perspective of narration combined with reality, this paper makes a comparative analysis of the adaptation of classical theater in modern films, which is specifically manifested in the following three points: first, the way of narration. The plays performed in classical theaters have a relatively simple narrative mode, mostly based on the telling mode. Different performers dress up as different characters and show the plot through lines, expressions and actions (Shi, 2022). However, modern films have many ways of narration, including the mode of memory and the mode of commentary, etc. Therefore, some traditional plays have been adapted to give the audience different feelings. For example, the story presentation of *The Orphan of Zhao* in the classical theater is completely different from that in the modern film, which makes the audience feel different about the characters, the theme of the historical story and the significance of the play itself. The simple culture of loyalty and filitarianism is gradually expanded to the thinking of human nature, the cognition of society and even the change of values. Second, narrative content. In terms of drama narration, classical theater is relatively simple, and the design of the proportion of relevant content is more inclined to the needs of performance. However, modern films pay more attention to the display of the theme, the prominence of the leading role and the contrast of the main events in the design of narrative content. Therefore, the actual content changes greatly in the drama, and there are more prominent changes. Third, describe the

purpose. The purpose of modern film narration is not to focus on the actual authenticity, but to pay attention to the realization of other purposes. Therefore, there is a certain "fiction" for the actual story display, and the degree of fiction is far beyond the degree of classical theater. Take "Three Dozen Zhujiashuang" as an example, when performing in classical theater, the biggest feature is "lively". The modern film is indeed "connotation", that is, through the plot to show the character, strategy, wisdom and so on.

Table 1: Material Combination Degree

Degree of Material Combination	Basically Completely Display the Material	A Few Changes Based on the Material	Most of the Changes
Classical Theatre	58%	40%	2%
The Modern Film	13%	42%	45%

### 3.1.2 Positioning of publicity and education

Both classical theater and modern film have strong propaganda ability and can achieve the goal of propaganda and education through specific performances. Based on the analysis of the social environment in which the classical theater is located, it needs the will of the ruler during the performance of the plays, mainly for entertainment, and the propaganda content is basically for traditional culture. As a modern film, it is more free and can show different political ideas. However, it needs to be reviewed by the State Administration of Radio, Film and Television, and if it has content that violates relevant regulations, it will be prohibited from being broadcast (Geraghty, 2008). Based on the narrative analysis from the perspective of publicity and education, the characteristics of the adaptation of classical theater in modern films are mainly reflected in the following two aspects: first, publicity and education investment. The plays performed in classical theaters have relatively little investment in publicity and education, but only regular narration, and the publicity and education effect belongs to the added value (F. Li, 2021). Therefore, it does not have too much input and tendency in the process of narration. However, in modern films, more investment is made in publicity and education, and certain viewpoints and positions are reflected through the narration of a certain event, a certain person and a certain sentence, thus generating strong educational significance. History is made by the people, and we must let the people be the masters." It can be seen that the play pays attention to the propaganda of revolutionary thought in the new period and embodies

certain political purposes. Second, the purpose of publicity and education. The plays of classical theaters, through narrative propaganda and education, are mainly aimed at "moving the audience, increasing influence and popularity", focusing more on the realization of the interests of the theater itself. The purpose of modern film propaganda and education is relatively complex, with diversified and personalized characteristics, and the purpose is more prominent. For example, the *White-Haired Girl*, *Liu Hulan* and other plays are revolutionary films, whose purpose is to promote the fearless revolutionary combatant spirit, rather than simple narrative plays.

### 3.1.3 Audience needs met

Under the background of the new era, both films and dramas should consider the needs of marketization and establish marketization operation mechanism, so as to achieve the goal of sustainable development. Therefore, in terms of narrative, it is necessary to consider the needs of the audience, appropriately adjust the narrative mode and related content according to the needs of the audience, and strengthen its expression effect (Li, 2023). However, there are great differences between classical theater and modern film in relevant aspects, "not the same day" and language. To summarize it simply, the classical theater in the relevant aspects of the performance of "what I say, you listen", modern film is more inclined to "what you want to hear, I say", the two are completely different (Lowe, 2021). Based on the degree of audience demand satisfaction, this paper analyzes the adaptation of classical theater in modern film, which is embodied in the following two points: first, emotional demand. For the classical theater, it did not consider the needs of the audience in detail when telling the stories in the plays. The main reason is that the social environment at that time was not rich in material and spiritual aspects, and the needs of the public were relatively simple, so it could meet the needs of the public. And with the repeated performances of the corresponding plays of the Decisive Theater, the public has developed feelings for it. In many cases, the public choose to watch the classical plays not because of its outstanding acting, but because of the "old feelings". For example, an editorial of Xinhua News Agency once pointed out that "the majority of farmers still love old operas, and there are relatively many people watching them during temple fairs and fairs." Take Shijiazhuang as an example, there are nine old theaters in one place, with more than 10,000 people watching them every day (Krebs, 2014). As for the new modern films, it takes time for the audience to form their emotions, so it is difficult to show their

advantages in a short period of time. Second, cultural needs. Relatively speaking, the old plays of classical theaters have profound cultural connotation and have become a kind of "quintessence of Chinese culture". For example, in Beijing Opera of our country, the characters are different, and they all show certain "characteristics" in clothing, color tone and dress up, which reflect each other with the characters and have a strong cultural atmosphere, while modern films are difficult to achieve this effect. On the whole, narration is not completely based on language, but can also be reflected through clothing, action, situation and other aspects. It should pay attention to the audience's emotional and cultural needs, and appropriate adaptation can be used.

Table 2: Audience demand satisfaction

<b>Satisfaction of Needs</b>	<b>Create Plays Based on Audience Needs</b>	<b>Less Consideration of Audience Needs</b>	<b>Not Considering Audience Needs</b>
Classical Theatre	10%	20%	70%
The Modern Film	90%	5%	5%

### 3.2 Analysis based on performance perspective

In terms of performance, there is a big gap between classical theater play performance and modern film, with different styles and advantages, which are specifically reflected in three aspects: performance form, performance subject and performance demand.

#### 3.2.1 Subject of performance

There are great differences between the performers of classical theater and modern film. Classical theatre has relatively few performers, while modern cinema has relatively many. The comparative analysis shows that the performers in classical theater plays are relatively fixed, single and small in number, which will not make the audience form a new "positioning". Although the subject of performance in modern films has certain positioning, it will change due to the performance of the performer himself, and there may be a phenomenon that the "supporting role" becomes the "leading role". In addition, in the process of play performance, the main body of the classical theater is the actor, through the actor's language, expression, action, etc., and some actions are relatively single and repeated, the performance effect is strongly dependent on the actor himself, there is a relatively small number of actors, the leading actor performance accounted for "too large" phenomenon. There is even a phenomenon of

"one actor, one play", that is, a well-known actor can completely determine the effect of the whole play. For example, in Peking Opera, some famous casting masters have a strong influence and belong to the core and "viewing point" of the whole drama. Relatively speaking, the protagonist in modern movies is not one, there may be multiple protagonists, and in terms of performance, there are many forms, relatively rich, and closer to the reality of life (Hall, 2010).

### 3.2.2 Form of performance

Based on the analysis of visual language, the performance form is one of the important factors affecting the performance effect, which directly affects the audience's feeling and recognition of the play. Compared with modern movies, classical theaters have poorer technology and rely more on the quality of the actors themselves when performing. However, modern film is different. It has certain advantages in graphics, music and other aspects, which can strengthen the performance effect from multiple angles. However, the audience's appreciation and evaluation of film and television drama has multiple perspectives, and the effect of performance can not be generalized. Relatively speaking, the performance form of classical theater mainly focuses on imitation and similarity, and makes the audience have a certain identification through its visual impact and plot guidance. For more complex displays, it is appropriate to simplify and achieve "understanding". For example, the fight scene in Peking Opera is mainly reflected as a formal display. In the duet or Pingopera, only simple movements are combined with the singing content to strengthen the display effect. Modern films, on the other hand, focus on the closeness between the performance form and the real form, and will communicate various means to strengthen the performance effect and try to enhance the sense of reality. Therefore, the difference between it and the classical theater is large (Casetti, 2004).

### 3.2.3 Performance demand

When classical plays are performed now, the performance requirements are relatively simple, and the requirements for environment construction and related props are not very high. Some fragments mostly use simple scenes, and this scene is used repeatedly. In contrast, modern films have higher requirements on scene layout and pay more attention to other aspects, so the shooting cost of modern films is "very different" from that of classical plays. However, it is worth paying attention to that some modern films focus too much on technical synthesis, resulting in a strong

technical induction, which to a certain extent makes the films lose their "authenticity" and focus too much on stress reflection. The repertoire of classical theater has its own personalized characteristics, and the reason why it can arouse the resonance of audience is closely related to its own personalized characteristics. If blindly follow the modern film model to improve and upgrade, it will have a negative effect. For example, the People's Daily commented that "the attractiveness of old things is reflected in the old taste. If they change, they will be gone." Therefore, the change of classical theater in modern film needs to be kept within a certain range (Whelehan, 2013).

#### 4. THE ENLIGHTENMENT OF THE ADAPTATION OF CLASSICAL THEATER IN MODERN FILM

##### 4.1 Reinforce the value

According to the above research, it can be concluded that the classical theatre belongs to an important part of film and television drama culture in our country, and even more to the intangible cultural heritage. Therefore, it is necessary to strengthen the protection and development of the classical theatre and enhance its value. The relevant enlightenment is reflected in the following two aspects. Classical theaters should innovate their thinking, change the original business model and development orientation of drama creation and performance, focus on publicity and education, and actively organize relevant training courses and publicity activities with the help of their own influence and cultural heritage, so as to cultivate outstanding talents in classical drama for the country (Slethaug, 2014). At the same time, to make more people understand the classical drama, strengthen the attention and support for it; Second, enhance value through scientific research. Classical theaters should invest more in the study of classical plays, organize relevant research teams, and study the knowledge related to classical plays to make them more rich and professional, thus contributing to the inheritance of classical plays. In addition, it is necessary to study how to integrate the current situation of culture and film and television drama development in the new period to improve the program to meet the needs of development (Babbage, 2019).

##### 4.2 Lower the limit

The development of classical theater must be "position-oriented". For some plays or performance forms that have "gaps" with the relevant requirements and regulations of the new era, they need to be appropriately



improved, rather than "absolute" abandonment. Otherwise, cultural heritage will be lost. One of the reasons for this phenomenon is that some classical plays have the color of feudalism and superstition, and the related content is not conducive to the formation of a good social culture, which will produce a negative impact. For example, in 1951, the Ministry of Culture issued a document ordering the Northeast to ban performances of plays such as Huang's Female Yin, Capture Wang Kui Alive, and The Case of the Ghost. However, the analysis based on the perspective of art and folk culture is not mainly to promote feudal superstition, which should be given a certain understanding rather than restrictions. Therefore, the government and relevant departments should give support to classical theaters, appropriately reduce the restrictions on them, so that they can compile corresponding plays based on the materials of the new period, enrich the content of classical plays, and promote their development (Stam et al., 2004).

#### 4.3 Policy support

This paper holds that the state and relevant government departments should strengthen the support for classical theaters and plays based on the perspective of cultural inheritance and development. It is not mandatory to require classical plays to be transformed into modern films, and it is impossible to blindly "classicize" modern films, so as to avoid the phenomenon of "nonclassicization". It has its own advantages for classical theatre and modern cinema, which can maintain independence. In addition, it is necessary to strengthen the collection and collation of some classic plays, study their performance forms and materials, and provide corresponding financial support for specific work. For example, for some influential and well-known classical theaters, they can be used as the basis to establish a "museum of classical plays" for the propaganda and cultural exchange of classical plays.

### 5. CONCLUDING REMARKS

To sum up, our country should pay attention to the development and protection of classical theaters, strengthen the research and study of classical plays, pay attention to the relationship between classical theaters, plays and modern films, according to the needs of the development in the new era, appropriate adaptation, enhance the integration of classical theaters and the new era. At the same time, it is necessary to pay attention to the display of the unique culture of the classical theater itself, maintain

its personalized characteristics, and not blindly adapt, so as not to lose the "unique charm". On the whole, classical theatre and modern film should seek common ground while reserving differences, seek common development, and provide strong support for the progress and innovation of film and television drama.

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