

The COVID-19 Crisis and Social Responsibility of New Media Art

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Abstract: Through a large number of data analysis, this paper analyzes the different influences of COVID-19 on the traditional art and the new media art in China. China's industries of new media art have made a rapid development during the pandemic. The industrial growth of the new media art has enabled them to play an important role in safeguarding employments, and to assume greater social responsibility in fighting the epidemic. With the help of internet technology, new media art can quickly adjust to the broadcast plan, timely send excellent artistic content to the audience who stay at home through the network, and help them vent their fear and soothe their wounded hearts in face of the pandemic.

Keywords: The COVID-19 Crisis, Social Responsibility, New Media Art, China, Cultural Industries.

INTRODUCTION

The global spread of COVID-19 has had a tremendous impact on the world economy and human life. Many factories and schools had to be closed. Many people had to stay at home and cancelled social gatherings. As a result, many offline art activities have been transferred to the online, and new media art has attracted more public attention and favor.

In this paper, new media art refers to the new type of art supported by internet technology and multimedia technology. Technological changes directly impact upon cultural practices, enabling operative conditions, conventions, community and institutional practices etc. (Lopez-Varela, 2011:7-22). Nowadays, the rapid development of the new digital media technology has completely changed the ways of people's thinking and social life, and triggered a series of new cultural phenomena. Through the integration of digital new media technology and traditional arts, a series of new types of arts such as internet literature, network TV series, internet movie, digital animation, and online games have emerged. The new media

art has not only created new aesthetic value, but also developed into an unprecedented ultra-large scale industries.

The industrialization of new media art in China, which had not been involved in the traditional institutes before, has become an important issue which the institutes must face now. The artistic researchers not only should follow the logic of aesthetic modernity which emphasizes the doctrine of “art for art’s sake”, but also should care about the social responsibility of new media art. Theodor W. Adorno points out that the culture industry finds ideological support, “without concern for the laws of form demanded by aesthetic autonomy” (Adorno, 1991:101). From the perspective of the historic background, Chinese industries of new media art is a part of Chinese contemporary cultural industries. Since the late 1970s, China has implemented the strategy of reform and opening up, and the national economy has gradually recovered from the great decline caused by the "Cultural Revolution" (1966-1976) and achieved initial development. The reform of the economic system has promoted the reform in the cultural and ideological fields. The cultural industries has started to sprout. In 1992, the Chinese government put forward the construction of a socialist market economy system with Chinese characteristics to lay a foundation for the healthy and rapid development of the cultural industries in the following period.

There is another important background for the industrial development of China's new media art, that is, the great development of digital new media represented by computer network in China. China has the largest number of Internet users in the world. The 45th statistical report on the development of China's Internet network released by CNNIC (China Internet Network Information Center) on April 28, 2020 shows the number of China's Internet users reached over 900 million. The huge number of Internet users has laid a solid foundation for the development of digital economy, which has become a new driving force for the industrial development of new media art in China. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the digital economy has played an important role in safeguarding consumption and employment, and promoting the resumption of production, showing strong growth potential (CNNIC, 2020:EB/OL). new media art has also assumed many social responsibilities and played a great role in catharsis of people's emotions and soothing people's hearts.

THE INFLUENCES OF COVID-19 ON INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT OF CHINA'S NEW MEDIA ART

The COVID-19 outbreak coincided with the Spring Festival, a traditional holiday in China which is a peak season for consumption. The film's box office revenue during the 2019 Spring Festival period was around 7 billion yuan. This year, many cinemas have excellent films ready and prepare to make a lot of money. However, Covid-19 has forced nearly all cinemas in China to be closed. In fact, not only the film industry, but almost all the art industry has been affected by COVID-19, such as art performance, art galleries, art exhibitions, art auctions, art education, art parks, etc. According to one researcher's estimate, the direct loss caused by the epidemic to China's cultural industry is between 120 billion yuan and 190 billion yuan (Xiang, 2020: 38-39).

Affected by the epidemic, the operation of the domestic art industry has almost stagnated, and all gathering activities are forced to be cancelled. At the same time, many art organizations use the Internet to save themselves. Art galleries and museums organize online exhibitions. Art fairs and auction houses expand online transactions. Art training institutions explore online classes. Almost all traditional arts try to speed up the transformation of new media forms. The COVID-19 pandemic has a negative impact on the traditional art industry, but it has an unexpected positive impact on the new media art industry.

As a result, high-quality movies, TV series and other artistic resources make the traffic of major video websites surge, and the utilization rate of each terminal of network customers rise substantially, bringing a wave of traffic bonus to video websites. During the Spring Festival holiday in 2020, the daily activity rate of smart TVs in China reached 52 percent, increasing up 15.6 percent compared with the same period last year and up 10.6 percent compared with the week before the festival (Cai, 2020: 56-65).

The film "Lost in Russia" is directed by Xu Zheng, a famous Chinese director, and produced by Happy Media. The film tells the story of the young boss Ivan, who was involved in business disputes with his wife, but accidentally got on the train to Russia with his mother. During the journey, he and his mother clashed fiercely, and at the same time had to fight wits and courage with his wife. But in order to finally arrive in Moscow, he had to overcome difficulties with his mother and finally gained a new life

insight. That is, "Love is not about control and taking, but tolerance and acceptance." This allowed him to reconcile with his wife and divorce peacefully.

The film was supposed to be screened in major theaters across the country during the Spring Festival. However, due to the epidemic, the film had to be withdrawn from the theaters and screened on some online platforms instead, beginning from the first day of the Spring Festival. As a result, in just three days, "Lost in Russia" had been viewed more than 600 million times online, and the total number of viewers reached 180 million. Correspondingly, the stock price of Happy Media, the producer of this film, has increased by 19%. "Lost in Russia" achieved a box office revenue of 630 million yuan during COVID-19 pandemic and became the first popular movie broadcast online during Spring Festival. The combination of this film and the online video platform has saved the box office of this movie, and has also provided new possibilities for the innovative operation of traditional cinema.

According to Marshall McLuhan, the content of any medium is always another medium, "The content of writing is speech, just as written word is the content of print and print is the content of a telegraph" (McLuhan, 2003: 19). Similarly, we can also logically say that the content of internet movie is movie. In other words, what we usually call "Internet movie" is an extension of movie in the network media. During the special period of the epidemic, the film "Lost in Russia", as a traditional cultural consumer product, relying on the Internet environment and the huge user group of video platforms, tried to transform to a new type of consumption in the era of digital economy, and would definitely have a profound impact on the changes in consumption patterns (Cai, 2020: 56-65).

In addition to internet movies, the electronic game industry also grew rapidly during the epidemic. The electronic game, or online game, as a product of computer technology and multimedia technology, is a new form of arts. In the first quarter of 2020, due to the impact of the covid-19 pandemic, people's leisure time increased, which makes the number of online game users increase to 654 million and the sales volume of domestic electronic games increase to RMB 62.35 billion yuan, 29.68% more than that of the fourth quarter of 2019 (Wan, 2020: EB/OL). In the seven days from the Spring Festival eve to the sixth day of the lunar New Year in 2020, the revenue of the TOP10 games on apple's APP Store increased by

more than 40%, compared with the same period last year, and the revenue of the top 10-60 games increased by more than 100% (Cai, 2020: 56-65). These big-growth games include traditional leisure games like *My Kung Fu Is Great*, and chess and card games like *Happy Landlord*. Among them, the online board and card game downloads have exploded, with the download peak rising by more than 200%. *King of Glory*, a long-popular online game, has seen its revenues explode. From January 23 to January 29, 2020, the number of daily hits exceeded 100 million, compared with about 70 million in the same period last year. On the eve of the Lunar New Year, the single-day revenue was about 2 billion yuan, increasing by more than 50 percent, compared with 1.3 billion yuan in the same period last year (Cai, 2020:56-65).

In general, during the pandemic, the industries of new media art in China was not harmed, but developed rapidly. According to National Bureau of Statistics of China, due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, in the first half of 2020, the overall operating income of China's cultural industries fell by 6.2% over the same period last year, but the industries related to new media have increased by 18.2% over the same period last year, and the operating income of electric games and online animation both have grown by more than 10% (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2020: EB/OL).

SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY OF CHINESE ENTERPRISES OF NEW MEDIA ART

The industrial development of China's new media art benefits from the development of Chinese society, so it should repay and contribute to the society and assume more social responsibilities.

According to the data of the Ministry of Education, the number of graduates reaches 8.74 million by 2020, and the employment pressure of students is increasing. In January this year, the sudden outbreak of new crown pneumonia has a great impact on China's economic operation and graduate employment. A large number of small and medium-sized enterprises can not resist the huge impact of the epidemic. Some take the form of layoffs. Some take the form of no longer recruitment or delayed recruitment this year. This emergency poses a threat to the health of the graduates as it causes a certain psychological impact on the students,

leading to some graduates to produce anxiety, panic, worry, tension, numbness and other negative emotions. Obviously, it can increase the burden on the students who originally had employment pressure. In this case, the enterprises of new media art should accept more college graduates for employment.

More importantly, new media art should shoulder the responsibility of soothing people's emotions, especially when other traditional arts cannot play such a role. The new media art, such as network literature, internet movie, online TV series, electric game, and digital animation, are particularly suited to channel pro-social human centred approaches because of their emphasis on emotional content. new media art has unique advantages in maintaining group emotion and constructing group identity. Compared with traditional arts, it can connect people in different spaces at the same time, arouse the collective consciousness from the level of individual emotion and social value and reach the consensus of the group, so that everyone has a stronger sense of identity and belonging. The COVID-19 pandemic does not discriminate between borders, races or classes, and everyone is a potential target for the virus. Individuals tend to feel fear and helplessness when facing COVID-19 virus. This is a time of special need for artistic comfort and healing. new media art can form the common experience and collective memory of the whole people, generate the pursuit of truth, goodness and beauty, and strengthen a sense of community with a shared future for mankind (Hu & Chen, 2020:7-19). This is because, with the help of network technology, new media art can quickly respond to the new outbreak of the epidemic, timely adjust to the operation plan and quickly change the broadcast content, so that the art can timely meet the needs of the audience in the epidemic when they stay at home.

Since the 1990s, the emergence of digital technologies has seen the growth of inter-art collaborations, including new ways of storytelling that fuse easily and economically image, text and other forms of telling. After decades of development, China's industries of new media art has blossomed and made remarkable achievements aided by technological changes. In general, the operating modes and strategies adopted by China's industries of new media art mainly are online payment profit model, Intellectual Property industrial chain development model, and the online and offline business model of joint cluster. Due to the adoption of

the above three business profit models, the industrialization of new media art in China has produced huge economic benefits. It has played a pivotal role in the output value of China's cultural industries, and the percentage of China's entire GDP has been increasing year by year (Li, 2016:96-97).

However, many problems still exist in the industrial process of new media art in China. Some enterprises have the psychological tendency of "making quick money". They lack social responsibility and only want to attract users by short and flat means, with no long-term plan. For example, some online game manufacturers are satisfied with the profits brought by classic games online, and have no interest in the development of other links in the industrial chain.

To solve this kind of problem, Chinese enterprises of new media art should adopt the mode of multiple cooperation for profit. Experts in literature, film and television, animation, games and other fields should cooperate together to eliminate the separation of different art forms, and even apply this mode to jointly create IP value. Literature writing, film and television shooting, game development and animation production should be carried out simultaneously, so as to strengthen the linkage innovation of all parties and jointly create an organic ecological system of Intellectual Property industry.

Most importantly, in addition to pursuing economic benefits, the enterprises of new media art should also pursue social benefits. They should assume more social responsibilities so as to achieve a double harvest of economic and social benefits. Sometimes, for an enterprise, it will bring greater economic benefits while undertaking more social responsibilities.

iQiyi video website is an independent video website owned by Baidu, the world's largest Chinese search engine company. iQiyi advocates people's pursuit of high-quality life, and insists on providing VIP members with exclusive mass content, ultimate audio-visual experience, and unique offline membership services. It took only 5 years for iQiyi to be one of the major players in the video industry in China, and its viewers consistently top the list of Chinese video websites.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, iQiyi adjusted and changed its broadcast plan in time, releasing 144 excellent TV series and 64 high-quality films for free, ensuring that every user can find their favorite content in iQiyi. On January 31, 2020, iQiyi and the producer of the

action-comedy film "The Crossing of a Fat Dragon" announced that "The Crossing of a Fat Dragon" would be released in advance on February 1. The film was originally scheduled to be released in the Chinese mainland on February 14 during Valentine's Day, but due to the epidemic, it was moved online to meet consumer's demand for new movies in cinemas without leaving their homes. This is just one case of iQiyi adjusting its broadcast plan during the epidemic. In fact, there are many similar cases. For example, the documentary "Doctor of China", originally scheduled for release in March 2020, had also been adjusted to be broadcast on iQiyi online since the third day of the lunar New Year. The aim of iQiyi is to use this documentary film to pay tribute to all the medical workers on the front lines of the fight against the epidemic (Ai, 2020:52-54). IQiyi has made its own contribution to the fight against COVID-19 by exporting high-quality online audio-visual content to the audience, and giving full play to the social responsibility of online video platforms.

CONCLUSION

According to Walter Benjamin, film is the art in the age of mechanical reproduction which appeals directly to its audience. The mechanical reproduction cannot assure its authenticity, and its uniqueness as a specific object belonging to a specific artist at a specific time and space, therefore it loses its "aura" and "exhibition value begins to displace cult value all along the line" (Benjamin, 2002: 289). However, new media art is the art in the age of digital reproduction which has many differences with the traditional film. Due to the existence of various kinds of interference, there will always be signal distortion in the art of mechanical reproduction. The art of digital reproduction, by using binary digital technology, can remove all kinds of interference, as long as it can determine whether it is a 0 or a 1. Therefore, digital technology can guarantee the authenticity of art.

new media art is not simple combination of the Internet and art. Internet participate in the whole process of artistic behavior, occupying a dominant position, and being the driving force of new media art from production, appreciation, to dissemination (Li, 2019: 211-220). This merit give new media art an advantage over traditional art in the fight against COVID-19. new media art can quickly adjust to the broadcast plan, timely send excellent artistic content to the audience who stays at home through

the network, and help them vent their fear and soothe their wounded hearts in face of the pandemic. This is the reason why the industry of new media art has kept growing economically during the epidemic, while almost all the traditional cultural industries have been hit hard by the epidemic. The industrial growth of the new media art has enabled it to play an important role in safeguarding employments, and to assume greater social responsibility in fighting the epidemic.

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Bioprofile

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