

Interaction, Transmedia Narrative Adaptation and Visual Communication: A Case Study of the Internet Fiction Adapted Film *Better Days*

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ABSTRACT

With the rise of Internet popular literature in the new era, the increasing strength of new media and the further expansion of the audience market of Chinese cinema, the phenomenon of contemporary popular literature adapting films has become common in the recent decade. The transformation from contemporary popular literature works to adapted films is dynamic and imaginative, and it is also a mutually supportive process, which includes readers' support for popular literature, filmmakers' re-creation of original works, audiences' acceptance of adapted films, and the re-innovation of original works stimulated by adaptation activities, etc. This study aims to explore trans-media storytelling and its vital interactive importance in the context of increasing global influence through the case study of a recent blockbuster film *Better Days* (2019). *Better Days* represents a growing number of movies adapted from literature about hot social topics to reflect social problems. By deconstructing the cross-media narrative and analyzing the audio-visual language of the popular fiction adapted film, this paper tries to explain the reasons for the success of the film and the social thinking triggered by the film. The results show the intervened relationship of transmedia narrative and audio-visual language in contributing to form a popular literature adaptation film with innovative interactions with the audience, and serves as a reference for the interactive cross-media creation of adapted films and the mutual achievement of the original novels.

Keywords: *Film adaptation, Visual communication, Intertextuality, Transmedia storytelling, Photography*

1. INTRODUCTION

Better Days, directed by Derek Tsang, is a mixture of two themes: love and crime-solving. It not only confronts school bullying but also faces the hardships of marginalized people's lives. In the 132-minute film, the director guides the plot with an inventive style of scenes and characters, telling the audience a cruel truth with pulling emotions. The purpose of choosing *Better Days* as a case study is the social sensation it produced when it was released, and what prompted this adaptation phenomenon to occur under the popularity of Internet fiction adaptations. Ranking 39th on the 2019 Worldwide Box Office (Box office Mojo) [2], high box office is indeed the most intuitive manifestation of a film's commercial value. However, with the rapid development of media platforms today, interaction on new media platforms such as Weibo topic discussion also promotes the development of China's film industry. According to the trend of the Chinese film and

television industry in recent years, the scripts of many movies and TV dramas are derived from highly popular online novels. When a novel can be put on the screen to become a film and television work, it often represents that the creation of this novel is in line with the taste of the public. In the Internet environment, a mature and audience-based script is more favored, and "Better Days" is one of them. There has been a lot of attention and discussions of the film since the casting, which ensures that fans of the original literature and the actors will be watching the filming process and waiting for the film to be released. With a certain fan base, coupled with the reflection of hot social issues, the level of the whole film has been sublimated, which has become one of the reasons why "Better Days" stands out in a series of domestic youth films.

Nominated for Best International Film at the 93rd Academy Awards, *Better Days* not only records youth, but also examines society. This is perhaps the reason

why *Better Days* is different from the narrative of previous school films. The important significance of this film lies in it arouses the attention of the whole society to school violence. *Better Days* is adapted from the serialized novel "In His Youth, In Her Beauty," published by popular author Jiu YueXi on Jinjiang. The adapted film tells the story of the "transformation" of teenagers who are bullied by their classmates. Different from the previous campus stories, this atypical story does not take the campus romance as the mainline to render the emotional twists and turns and development of the characters, but adapts to the social reality and pays attention to the lives and destinies of ordinary characters. In the traditional sense, the audience of campus love stories is mainly teenagers or young adults, with plots such as first love, adolescent anxiety, adulthood, rebellion, and parental conflict as the main content, twining them and appearing together in a film, but the film *Better Days* breaks through the inherent elements and traditional storylines of the genre.

This film only pays attention to one or two of the so-called essential elements of the film type in order to avoid a hodgepodge. In terms of narrative, it can better grasp the key points to be told, so as to catch the attention of the audience. In this film, the most important characters are the psychologically twisted abuser headed by Wei Lai, the helpless social gangster Xiao Bei, and the equally lonely victim Chen Nian. Focusing on these three types of characters, the film tells the story of Wei Lai's increasingly violent bullying of victims like Chen Nian, who seek protection and finally accidentally injuring Wei Lai, leading to a three-way tragedy. The commendable point in the adaptation of novels and movies confirms the youth theme, while completing the transfer of literary works to the film screen is bound to make them conform to the expression of film art.

In the context of successful film adaptations and transmedia storytelling, *Better Days* film contributes noteworthy artistic communication value and reference significance. The protagonist in the film is not a particular person, but a large group of people who often appear in news reports in recent years. As soon as *Better Days* (2019) was released, it attracted a lot of attention, and even resonated with some people's real experience. Hence, this article tries to access how the characters portrayed in the adapted film all have distinct characteristics, the character is typical, but also has a certain degree of universality that resonance with the audience to some extent. And secondly, I try to interlink the art conveyed through storytelling to the perspective of real-life context, as well as how the authenticity of the fiction theme itself instantly shortens the gap between the audience and films through audio-visual techniques. In reality, the vast majority of people have lived on campus, and a large number has been more or less exposed to campus violence personally or indirectly.

Following this, it can be reasonably discussed that this film is adapted according to the side of many people, attracts more audiences through star effect, and arouses deep reflection and empathy through detailed pictures, and the influence of sublimation produced by its linkage with the original literature is worth pondering.

2. OVERVIEW

Fictions and films have been cooperating for a long time. About one hundred years ago, Méliès adapted Jules Verne's *The Trip of the Moon* into a film of the same name. Since then, novels have become one of the main creative sources of film scripts. With the popularity of online media resources, physical copies of novels are declining, and online novels have become the popular trend of literary publications, which indirectly leads filmmakers to pay more attention to finding high-quality online novels for adaptation. In this process, the changes of the media have a tremendous impact on film productions, and cross-media narrative has realized the integration and interaction of a variety of media. Transmedia narrative allows the dissemination of the same content into different media contexts. As information carriers, novels and films have their own media attributes since the study of transmedia narrative needs to proceed from the basic characteristics of the media in order to explore the function of media in cross-media narrative more deeply [3]. Henry Jenkins defines transmedia narrative as: "A transmedia story is presented across multiple media platforms, in which each new text makes a unique and valuable contribution to the whole story. The ideal form of transmedia storytelling is one in which each medium does its job brilliantly[4]." The media becomes a part of the narrative and determines the rhythm and presentation effect of the narrative. Novels are made up of words, which are arranged in a linear way. Readers read them line by line, which cultivates their logical thinking ability unconsciously. Movies, on the other hand, attach more importance to the feelings of the audience. Film narratives juxtapose time and space in a single picture, and such synchrony narratives bring more authentic movie-watching experience to the audience.

Specifically, investigating how to tell a story that the audience can relate to in a way that the audience can enjoy is the key to the success of realistic films in the current market. The essential feature of the realistic theme is to face reality, reflect the real social problems and possibly adhere to the problem orientation. In recent years, many realistic themed films have achieved great success in integrating into commercial operations, such as the award-winning film, *Parasite* (2019). They have been widely recognized by combining the social issues that people are concerned about with the current trend. Released in October 2019, the *Better Days* also continued the practice of reaching social issues, but

different from previous successful realism film adaptation themed on social issues, *Better Days* show the phenomenon of campus bullying clearly and directly throughout the film. The film *Better Days* focuses on the issue of school bullying, referring to the unequal bullying and oppression of students, including physical or verbal aggression, resistance, and exclusion in interpersonal interaction. This is a universal problem in all countries in the world that does not happen just on campus but covers more varied cases off-campus. Students often suffer the double blow of both body and mind, and it takes a long time to heal. Faced with the growing numbers of school bullying, society has expressed vital concern, and the government has attached great importance to it. Relevant departments have taken a series of measures to improve the situation. Thus, the function of showing and criticizing society through films relates to the social functions of films as a medium. When it accumulates in a certain intensity, it can further lead to the improvement of the provisions at the institutional level and realize the reconstruction of the reality. The comprehensive artistic characteristics of films make a subtle imitation and transcendence relationship with reality which reshapes society. Its artistic attribute is advocated to show the real social life as the purpose of the film and criticize the troublesome social phenomenon with a concise narrative. Furthermore, it also makes use of a simple film storyline to reshape the current reality with inspiring educational attributes [5]. Nevertheless, criticizing society is only the primary social function of realistic films. Its ultimate function is the enlightenment and remodeling of reality, which realizes the interaction between film and reality in a real sense. Bazin advocates the particular mission and moral value of a film praising Italian neo-realism, which pays attention to reality and people's livelihood [6]. Movies have the function of shaping the spiritual world of moviegoers. On the basis of individuals, they will further trigger audiences to transform the society, either quickly or slowly, explicitly or implicitly with the thoughtful aspirations delivered from the film [7]. The derivation of such products is material, while the dissemination of culture is pedagogic.

3. METHODOLOGY

Through a thorough case study on visual and photography analysis of the film *Better Days*, this paper aims to explore the transmedia narrative of adaptations and the creative visual interaction caused by media change. The purpose of this attempt is to carefully expose the relationship between cross-media adaptation and narrative through the case of "*Better Days*", as well as its cross-media attribute and dissemination through an in-depth analysis on its narrative and audio-visual language. This article takes the film *Better Days* as a powerful interpretation of the combination of

commercial and social realistic films and addresses its presentation as a popular Internet fiction adaptation.

Posing the questions of trans-media storytelling, the analysis draws on the *Better Days*' narrative and intertextuality which focuses not only on the bullying phenomenon itself but also lights on the difficulty of problem-solving. It also depicts parents' dereliction, making the value and meaning of the film uncommon in the school life genre. Laying "school bullying" as the theme background, the reality behind the theme is worth reflecting on: the profound lack of family education and school education is the root cause of the series of a school tragedy. *Better Days* is adapted as a realistic film with its unique aesthetic mainly embodied in two aspects. One is the use of social issues as the background to boldly captures the reality social topic of "school bullying" using "movie" as a public art media to present in public. The second is the profound meaning behind the topic. As a heated topic, school bullying is usually headlining news in nature. However, the film fully presents the critical factors, including characters, plots, and emotions in the heated topic through the method of adapted narratology and visual communications, thus expanding the influence of the topic itself to the audience. After watching the film, comments show that the audience unconsciously associates with the similar events that happened to them or others, which they ignored before, thus triggering a profound reflection, which is also the chain reaction generated by hot topics on social media today. The release of a popular film is unlikely to change reality fundamentally, but as long as it can genuinely reflect the social concerns of the real problems, arousing the attention and reflection of the public enough. Hence, the treatment of these details in *Better Days* is worth studying in terms of its transmedia commercialization and social impact.

4. NARRATIVE TECHNIQUES: FILM SUBVERSION AND DECONSTRUCTION OF POPULAR FICTIONS

4.1. *The Integration and Interaction in Trans-media Narrative*

4.1.1. *The novelty of Better Day's trans-media adaptation*

The plot completes narrative innovation through genre hybridity in its script structure. The double-sided design of the three main characters makes the film adaptation picturesque. It not only vividly shows the details that readers can only imagine when reading the novel through the picturing and sounding, which gives the audience fiery visual conflicts and more fulfilling endings, but also adds new elements and changes the plot slightly so that people who have read the original

work still have a connection but fresh experience when watching the movie, producing a linkage effect. As the screenwriting space for an adaptation of the literature into film is often the adaptation and re-interpretation of the plot, which also makes the readers of the literary version have new expectations [8]. Since *Better Days* is adapted from Jiu Yuexi's novel "In His Youth, In Her Beauty". The biggest difference between the two approaches of expression is the ending. In the novel, Xiao Bei was sentenced to seven years in prison for Chen Nian, while Chen Nian was admitted to the ideal university as Xiao Bei wishes. The ending sets suspense on the future of the two characters into an open end. In contrast, the film version sets Xiao Bei, was detained for three months for committing perjury, while Chen Nian was sentenced to four years in prison. Many years later, she returned to society and lost her former glorious future. She only worked as an English teacher in a humble school. But it is gratifying that on the way out of school, Xiao Bei followed Chen Nian as he did many years ago, and their relationship got a happy ending in the film script. In fact, this film is not the first case, many film and television works adapted from the novel are not exactly copied from the original.

Moreover, *Better Days* is not the first film to show the theme of campus violence, but it is simultaneously profound and direct. It may not show the inspirational story of positive energy to the audience, but it shreds the reality in front of everyone's eyes and looks directly at the truth. The script shows the audience an obstinate sense of justice and hope. Chen Nian is surrounded by Zheng Yi, a policeman who pursues fairness and justice just like his name, Xiao Bei, who is a gangster but is just and righteous and a mother who supports and cares for her. The existence of these people makes her have a little warmth and support even though she is a victim of school bullying. In this film, every abuser is also a victim, just like Wei Lai, she is a good student who is obedient and hard-working, and secretly she is an abuser who bullies her classmates. But at home, she is an unsatisfied child who longs for the affirmation of her parents but does not succeed. Her experience brings the audience to think about the influence of the original family on a child's character development.

4.1.2. Narrative structure causes emotional resonance

The storyline of the film guides the audience to reflect on the contradictory relationship between people and society, and reexamines humanistic values. Clearly, *Better Days* tries to find a balance between artistic expression and realistic themes in terms of narrative strategy. The narrative of this film attempts to explain the complexity of campus bullying by subjectively presenting the social phenomenon of bullying. In the narrative, the theme of bullying is outlined as an

abstract expression of the current social reality. The audience's expectation vision directly guides the audience whether to choose or give up watching a movie. This expectation is a psychological expression of the audience's long-term experience in artistic aesthetics and expectations [9]. An appealing story can quickly arouse the curiosity of the audience. In addition to the star effect brought by the leading actor Jackson Yee, the main reason for *Better Days* arousing such a social discussion lies in how does its narrative structure arouse emotional resonance.

In *Better Days*, the gaps in the narrative process are also worth studying. The nonlinear narrative techniques commonly used by filmmaker Derek Tsang have left a large number of gaps in the story: the absence of key plots such as the cause of Hu Xiaodie's death and the truth of Wei Lai's death. These puzzle points constantly stimulate the audience, enhance the sense of participation of the audience, and through the process of the audience solving the puzzle to complete the construction of the film story integrity. The scene of Hu Xiaodie's death appeared at the beginning of the film. The students talked around the body, and only Chen Nian covered her with her school uniform. Why did Hu Xiaodie die? And whether her death is just a simple suicide urges the audience to continued to watch the film with such questions, but the camera turned elsewhere, and the school surrounded the teaching building with fences in all directions in order to prevent students from committing suicide again. This summoning structure coincides with the audience's understanding of the film in the trailer, so that audience can read out the ignorance represents that the school is only acting on the surface. The school did not try to uncover the real cause of Hu Xiaodie's suicide, but used physical means to cover it up, and the school did not care about the truth, but blindly wanted to put an end to the matter; in order to make the students who are about to take the college entrance examination return to a tense state of study as soon as possible, these practices set the sad tone of the whole film. The questioning of "Why Hu Xiaodie committed suicide" and the audience's accountability and reflection on bullying aroused in the questioning are the clever use of "mystery points". Through these mysteries, filmmakers lead the audience to constantly reflect on the complex proposition of campus violence: who is the maker of tragedy? And How to deal with bullying correctly? In this constant questioning and speculation, the audience gets the answer according to their own aesthetic experience and personality interpretation; at the same time, the uncertainty of the answer also increases the thickness and tension of the film expression.

Another point that particularly resonates here is the narrative structure on the "used to be" scene at the beginning and the end of the film. Different from the common timeline structure, the narrative structure here

breaks through the spatio-temporal relationship of the linear narrative. By superimposing suspense and reconstructing the timeline, it can not only enhance the mystery of the plot, but also better present the theme of the film. The three sentences "This use to be our playground!", "This was our playground!", "This is our playground!"; echo at the beginning and end. At the very beginning of the film, Chen Nian teaches children English. In her class, there is a little girl who keeps her head down. Chen Nian seems to see herself who was once weak and bullied. At the end of the film, Chen Nien takes the girl home after class, followed by Xiao Bei, who has been protecting her from behind. The three sentences seem to correspond to Chen Nian's campus life, which also expresses her hope that there will be no more bullied children around her, that her tragedy will not happen again, and that the school will really become a playground for every child. However, the unhappy little girl in the English class seems to point to another case of bullying, meaning that this social phenomenon still exists. Therefore, the adapted scene implies the seriousness and universality of practical problems.

4.2. Transferrable/ Literary Cinema: Building the Audio-visual Effect

4.2.1. Realistic story script

The film tells a "real" story that delivers a depressing atmosphere from the very beginning, and the somber tone of the film continues through story peek. The classmate's accidental fall, and the police's inquiry reminded Chen Nian to suddenly realize the incident was not an accident. Chen Nian's forbearance every time was just for a bright future after the upcoming college entrance examination so she can leave this hazy environment, but this kind of forbearance brings her even more harm, until in the end, Chen Nien accidentally killed the abuser Wei Lai, for which Chen Nien also paid the corresponding price. Carefully dissecting this film, "pressure" can be labeled as the essence of this film. Chen Nian lived alone, avoiding different people to collect debts. Xiaobei grew up alone and supported himself to live. Wei Lai was afraid of his parents' condemnation, she tries to restrain her inner personalities, and shows an innocent appearance on the surface. These are the pain and stress brought by her original family. And Chen Nien was bullied by her classmates at school, scared and helpless, which was the pressure and pain imposed by the external environment. From these, the comprehensive artistic characteristics of the film make it have a subtle imitation and transcendence relationship with reality. The pain of the whole film comes from the real existence of the story, which may be the tens of thousands of students who are suffering from campus violence. What the picturing creates is the more intuitive transmission of reality for

the content of the text and its acceptance to the audience. Chen Nian in the film also suffered insults, beatings, strip videos and other humiliating behaviors when she was bullied, which is not made up, but really comes from the realistic news which links to common memories of the audience. The bullying experiences are different, but in the ends, they are passively malignant memories with attack, exclusion and even hypocrisy.

At the end of the film, although Chen Nian accidentally killed Wei Lai, the ending makes the audience psychologically hope that the life of Chen Nian and Xiaobei is no longer just living in haze and pressure, but full of warmth. So, the switch at the end of the film allows the audience to see Chen Nian teaching English in a sunny classroom. After school, Xiao Bei is still behind Chen Nien, but this time Xiao Bei no longer dodges and shows his face under the surveillance camera. In the picture, the weather is sunny and bright, and the color tone in the picture has changed compared with the previous scenes. This visually gives the audience comfort as a release. The narrative conveys the film message that they have made a mistake, and after taking responsibility, they can still meet a bright future and find a relief that has been lost. The setting of this plot also conveys the authenticity by not giving the protagonist a dramatic reversal and an as-planned future after a "prison experience" as usual in youth literature or movies. There is also a related use of symbols that is worth discovering, the surveillance camera serves as evidence, but also because of the camera's recording. Cameras record happiness and unhappiness. As it is always passionlessly recording, it may represent the bystanders during school bullying events. Perhaps the adapted scenes from the original literature are not only a show of realistic pursuit in representing the reality but also a reflection of the director's desire for an enhance in social vigilance and responsibility.

4.2.2. Long shots show the real life of the characters

Behind the great success, the rich camera language in the film also has significance to ponder and study. Long shots ensure the authenticity of film time, restore reality to the audience to the maximum extent, and give the audience the right to make their own choices and thinking. *Better Days* consciously uses long shots to show the exquisite scenery of the film so that the film retains much authenticity. These include the college entrance examination and the set for Xiao Bei and Chen Nian's home. At the beginning of the film, a real scene of the college entrance examination comes into view: the rapid sound of endorsements, encouraging banners, and the review materials piled up on the desks... And the ending of the film echoes the beginning and shows the scene of the college entrance examination. These exceptionally realistic and "original" scenes break

through the audience's real-life experience, making them feel as if they were in the scene. Therefore, the layout of the scene needs to invest a lot of material resources, as well as the details of the setting. Xiao Bei has an unattended teenager image, the setting in his home of this request must accord with his identity. If Xiaobei's home is excessively furnished and disorganized, it cannot reflect Xiaobei's character of kindness and justice. A rusted water pipe, a shower with simple curtains, and an old-fashioned refrigerator all represent essential parts of the living environment of Xiao Bei and reflect his tragic experience. His home is consistent with his identity which audibly and visually delivers Xiao Bei's life is neglected and chaotic to audience. On the other hand, Chen Nian is a high school student with excellent grades, so the bookcase in her

bedroom is full of books. However, because of her mother's illegal business, warning letters were often posted outside the home signing her unstable living condition. Putting through a sense of reality can not only bring viewers into the plot to experience the emotional development of the characters but also expand the social benefits generated by the realistic film as well as let the audience convey a profound reflection from the film adaptation of the story. Thus, it can be summarized that the vivid twists and turns in plot can capture the hearts of the audience in order to increase the attraction of the movie plot and establish a connection with real-life experiences. Movies always bring life events to the screen through a series of artistic processing methods such as exaggeration and deformation.



Figure 1 Xiao Bei's home located in the city corner.

4.2.3. Close-up: enhancing the emotion and atmosphere from the literature

Derek Tsang used a lot of close-up shots in *Better Days*. The dramatic value of close-ups is that the closer the audience is to the characters, the more likely they are to be sympathetic to the characters in the film. Cinematic stories are generally constructed from many scenes laid out over a timeline, and the presentation of film scenes is not as straightforward as that of a theatrical stage, or as a literary work that can directly describe the inner activities of characters. It is usually composed of multiple shots, arranged with various scenes with intention to express what the director wishes to bring to the audience. Among them, the close-up is a powerful tool to express the director's point of view and emphasize the theme of the story. In *Better Days*, when Chen Nian is bullied on campus, the director often uses a close-up to show the emotions of the characters for it brings a kind of physical closeness to the viewer. In this process, the close relationship stimulates the more sympathetic connection that the audience will feel to the protagonists. While the close-up shot itself has a very

large picture tension, the audience will feel the depression, and the expression of this emotion coincides with the emotion conveyed by the sober theme of the film. Before committing suicide, Hu Xiao Die had a close-up shot in which she stared into the lens and asked, "They have been bullying me. Why don't you do something?" "This sentence seems to have pierced the heart of every audience sitting in the cinema directly through a movie screen and sparked a profound discussion on the issue of school violence.

The camera continues, as Chen Nian becomes the next bullying target, the audience can clearly see the transformation of the actor's emotions, including tears, hate and love, through close-up shots. Because of the large number of close-ups in the provoking scenes, the audience receives emotion from the eyes of Chen Nian and Xiao Bei, and grow an emotional resonance with them. At the beginning of *Better Days*, two facial close-ups of Chen Nian and Xiaobei overlap and switch to the audience to directly emphasize the narrative center of the film. The amplifications under the sunshine shorten the distance between the audience and the film. Consequently, the close-ups run through the whole film,

showing all the facial expressions when facing bullying, she tried to resist the painful helplessness in the close-up and quickly brought the audience into the role, which made the audience not only watch as a bystander, but also react to the authentic resonance under the visual impact, emphasizing that social problems not only need to be paid attention to, but also need to be solved by action.



Figure 2 Chen Nian and Xiao Bei

The interwoven details make the film visually more intriguing. These metaphors bring more stereoscopic audio-visual enjoyment and ideological resonance to the audience through vision, so as to interactively transfer the communication of the story. Through quick cutting, high-speed photography, close-ups, rotating scenes, rhythm and sound enhancement, etc., *Better Days* depicts an enhancingly profound impact. In the film, for example, after XiaoDie commits suicide, the director gave XiaoDie several close-up shots including tears from her helpless eyes.



Figure 3 Hu XiaoDie asking “Why don't you do something?” in a close-up scene

With its initially weak in spatial expression, close-ups effectively highlight the characters' emotions. In relation to the aspects of visual impacts, the use of color can connect the picture with the audience and bring

sensory experiences that other media can not bring. The extensive use of color contrast in the film not only increases the solemn atmosphere but also affects the emotional experience of the audience. This is an experience that cannot be achieved in the medium of words, which is also the unique charm of film adaptations. The experience of Chen Nian and Xiao Bei in the play is undoubtedly heavy, and the tone can express the emotions thus bringing different visual metaphors. For example, given that school is usually full of beautiful memories, but because of bullying, Chen Nian's campus life is always in cold filters. In contrast, in the process of getting along with Xiaobei, the tone is always warm. In the footage of the two people being escorted in a police car, the sun shines into the car and shines on the two faces, which symbolizes the dawn of their lives and also points to the title of the movie.

The use of large numbers of close-ups creates a sense of constriction and disorder to visually show a sense of psychological oppression, using this silent resistance to show the cruelty of school bullying.

5. DISCUSSION: THE REALISM AND COMMERCIAL SUCCESS OF THE SCHOOL BULLYING FILM “*BETTER DAYS*”

The previous discussion covers bullying themed film *Better Days* in the transmedia script adaptation and visual communication interaction, this part mainly analyzes the extension of the film to arouse attention to vulnerable groups, extended to the social significance of the film; as well as educational awareness and legal popularization to promote the improvement of the legal system. Second, it will look into the commercial driving force of such realistic themes in commercial blockbusters: its social value to enhance economic value as an adaptation film, as well as the development and prospects in the macro film market.

In the current cinematic environment, the integration of commercial film and art film has long been cooperative and even has become a trend with complementary and rescue. However, it is indisputable that commercial films' artistic selection can increase the depth of their expression. As a realistic film centered on school bullying, *Better Days* is compatible in terms of the commercial genre. Its excellent performance in the market and choosing campus bullying, a serious social topic lays a firm guarantee for its success and popularity. It ultimately starts from commercial purpose and completes realism's artistic expression. It is in line with the development trend of world film; therefore, this film is an excellent commercial film with exquisite conception, careful production, and rather attempting expression of realistic themes. The narrative core of the film also has its commercialization planning and

industrial prospects, such as running participatory campaigns on Weibo. Transmedia storytelling is not about abandoning the old medium. Instead, it focuses on giving the characteristics of the new media to the old media, making it re-produce value and play a new role in the new media environment. Authors comply with the trend and use the online media to create, which take place the transformation of the printed novels. Adapting the online novel into a film is a cross-media attempt of the filmmaker, which not only brings the audience a fresh viewing experience, but also has achieved commercial success. Under the influence of movies, online novel writers use cinematic language in their novels to bring readers a more audiovisual reading experience. If the film adapted from the novel gets a higher evaluation, it will feedback the original fiction and bring more popularity to the Internet novel. The story adaptation based on reality touches people's hearts and lies in its true expression with the aim of raising public awareness of the social phenomenon of bullying and bringing about change. The events concerned by the film will lead to changes in the social system and laws of a country, so the film based on real events has a reckoned force in promoting social development. When watching the film, the audience will expect the implementation of the corresponding measures. And at the end of the film, the film also explains the results in the film and the relevant policies issued by China against this social phenomenon, which gives psychological comfort to the audience and satisfies the audience's aesthetic expectation. Thus, cross-media narrative closely links various media together, they affect other media with their own media characteristics, attempting to provide the audience with a comprehensive and in-depth narrative experience in the media network. Finally, given its popularity and influence, film as a commodity maintains continuity by representing the value of reflecting the social reality. So the measurements towards making contemporary films carry the responsibility of spreading and re-examine social contexts using the camera lens while also keeping its commercial attractions is a problem worth further at present.

6. CONCLUSION

This paper used the reception of a Chinese blockbuster adapted from popular literature to challenge a stereotypical assumption about a straightforward relationship between an audience's expectations regarding transmedia narratives and audio-visual language in forming the interaction between the film and the original work. The result finds that the upsurge of the film adaptation of contemporary popular literature is a cultural phenomenon that cannot be ignored, especially in the Chinese entertainment industry. As a successful film adapted from a popular online novel, *Better Days* has inspired the industry with

its theme and way of adaptation. After the above analysis, the narrative skills and visual experience based on reality set off this phenomenally popular film because of the detailed analysis of the trans-media narratives of this adapted film and the visual presentation of the complex hearts of the characters. The film embodies the cultural spirit and social reflection of the filmmakers. In addition to the theme of love, school life movies also present campus violence and the pressure of college entrance examination, so as to gain an insight into teenagers, especially those with difficult backgrounds. As a result, this cross-media narrative pays attention to vividly present real life and has social significance in not only meeting the audience's expectations and bringing a full story structure to the audience, but also reflecting the bullying incidents existing in the social reality. Through audio-visual languages, this film focuses on the social hot issues and leads the audience to have in-depth thinking while watching the film. As a breakthrough in school film genre, *Better Days* not only reflects the reality, but also innovates to the success of transmedia adaptation through the innovative perspective of cinematic adaptation while combining with the original literary works. Thus, the success of *Better Days* also provides a good reference for the development of similar films in the future.

Furthermore, starting from the realistic film *Dying to Survive* (2018), Chinese films have made a good start in presenting social reality and arousing profound thinking. Through the audio-visual analysis, it is seen that *Better Days* fully respects the main position of the audience and harmonizes the aesthetic and commercial nature of the film, so as to achieve a win-win situation in terms of box office and good comments. While many films are the one-sided pursuit of commercial value, ignoring the social value, and simply focusing on bringing the audience a fleeting and exquisite pleasure, *Better Days* breaks through the siege. The narrative of the film is touching, and the transmedia aesthetic significance of the film language sets off the phenomenal popular craze in the thoughtful reshaping of school bullying and the presentation of the involved characters. As a result, its artistic value and commercial value sublimates its social value. Its unprecedented success in commercializing realistic themed adaptation Chinese films embodies the cultural spirit and social reflection of the filmmakers and thus bringing excellent commercial value and inestimable social value, as well as providing a new direction of thinking for Internet fiction adaptation films.

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