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The Vitality of Dubbing Culture: Shaping IP Characters from the Perspective of Character-Design Culture and Their Impact (Postprint)

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Abstract

The voice acting industry has gradually transitioned from a behind-the-scenes contributory role to a representative of front-stage prominence. The presence of voice acting and its inherent culture collectively inject soul and powerful vitality into the successful characterization of figures in IP works across various media during their creative process. This actualization of vitality manifests through diverse forms of existence. This paper will examine, in conjunction with the burgeoning “character design” culture in recent years, the unique appeal that voice acting provides for successful character portrayal in IP works, as well as strategies for effectively leveraging its distinctive features in future development.

Full Text

The Vitality of Voice Acting Culture: The Shaping and Influence of IP Characters from the Perspective of Character-Setting Culture

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Abstract

In recent years, the voice acting industry has gradually transformed from a behind-the-scenes contributor to a representative of front-stage fame. The existence of voice acting and its inherent culture have injected soul and powerful vitality into the successful shaping of character images in various forms of IP works. This vitality manifests in diverse forms of existence. This paper will explore, in conjunction with the burgeoning character-setting culture, the unique charm that voice acting provides for the successful shaping of characters in IP works and how to effectively utilize these characteristics for future development.

Keywords: Voice acting culture, “character-setting” culture, IP characters

In recent years, various IP works have exploded in popularity, with their characters becoming “rising stars” that dominate discussions. Amidst this fervent discourse, one previously overlooked behind-the-scenes industry has emerged into the spotlight: voice acting. Whether in film, television, games, animation, or audio dramas, the voice actors behind each character have become subjects of public interest and exploration, with many claiming that “they successfully shaped the characters.”

This phenomenon stems from the fact that characters in IP works possess specific character settings and image designs. When these images are perfectly presented, voice acting becomes the most crucial cornerstone for constructing this perfect image. In the minds of IP work fan communities, these characters perfectly align with the work’s settings as well as their personal desires and impressions for self-presentation and imagination. Therefore, only when perfect character images are paired with the magnetic vocal charm and linguistic interpretation of voice actors can these characters comprehensively present the perfect character setting in the audience’s minds, thereby enabling these characters to exist more vitally in the real world.

I. Giving Soul: The Integrated Cross-Dimensional Existence of IP Characters and Voice Actors

The popularity of IP works across various fields such as games, film, television, animation, and audio dramas can be attributed to many factors including production and acting, but an indispensable element is the soulful pairing that voice actors provide for characters in IP works. When audiences encounter voiced IP characters, the spoken words, tone, and timbre become representative features beyond the characters’ original settings, transforming these virtual figures from screen-bound entities into multi-dimensional beings with complete sonic, visual, and coloristic presence. Through voice actors, these virtual characters exist in “reality” through various alternative and special forms that transcend dimensions.

(I) Economic Existence Through IP Character Merchandise

IP character merchandise can be specifically divided into two major categories of extended products. The first category consists of merchandise related to popular IP film and television productions, which mostly includes items directly related to the productions or extensions of the lead actors. The second category comprises merchandise related to completely virtual character images from animation, games, novels, and audio dramas. This latter category relies more heavily on the interpretation and meaning-making of voice actors. It is precisely because voice actors endow these virtual characters with more complete image shaping that they can break free from the limitations of the original works to gain people’s affection and willingness to consume.

For instance, in the popular mobile game “Honor of Kings” in recent years, many players spend money not merely for gameplay upgrades, but simply to purchase cosmetic “skins” for various game characters. Whenever a specific character’s skin is updated, the extended story behind that skin is also updated, along with corresponding updates to the game’s voice acting. The specific voice acting for characters in this game has also become a major promotional feature. For example, characters like “Angela” and “Xiao Qiao” have attracted significant attention and affection through their “loli voice,” with voice acting adding special promotional appeal to these characters and, to some extent, enhancing the diversity of character image design. This enables these virtual characters to exist in reality through various economic forms such as figures, standees, pillows, and other merchandise.

(II) Social Existence Through IP Character Fan Communities

Unlike fan communities for IP works themselves, fan groups devoted to specific characters within these works rely more heavily on the existence of voice actors and voice acting forms. Through the voice actors’ performances, their participation in events, and the integration of some voice actors’ personal character traits with beloved characters, fans can fill out the character images and settings in their minds to become more perfect and complete, approaching the maximum degree of authenticity close to their own social reality.

To illustrate with a more concrete example, consider the popular otome game “Love and Producer” and its character “Li Zeyan, the Domineering CEO.” With his exquisite and perfect game image, combined with the game’s storyline and character setting, this gentle yet domineering CEO figure that women yearn for has become a character that audiences obsess over. Building upon this foundation, the magnetic vocal charm of voice actor Wu Lei has made Li Zeyan’s image exist more completely and three-dimensionally within his fan community. Fans purchase his related merchandise, set his voice lines as their ringtones, and immerse themselves in the role of the game’s female protagonist to enjoy the romantic process designed by the game.

Under the enjoyment and affection of such fan groups, these virtual characters are no longer merely fictional, distant two-dimensional existences, but have become indispensable companion figures in their lives—“three-dimensional” beings that can provide them with companionship and psychological comfort. In this process, voice actors serve as the key to injecting soul into these characters. For fans, a character’s complete and vivid social existence is proven when, the moment a character image appears, they can simultaneously see it and hear its voice, with the voice actor having provided specific voice lines for particular character scenes.

II. Synesthesia: The Shift of Auditory Attention Promoting IP Character Image Shaping

Human senses—including sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch—are interconnected, with the connection between sight and hearing being the most common. Human attention enriches hearing through visual richness. Therefore, when non-physical characters from IP works, in today’s era where visualization is indispensable, generate a series of visual content for image design and shaping, the exquisite image design paired with cleverly crafted voice acting forms transforms audiences from simple visual attention markets into synesthetic markets that combine audio-visual experiences. The integration of these two senses effectively promotes the comprehensive shaping of character images.

For example, contemporary popular online audio dramas continuously employ advanced recording, sound processing, and mixing technologies to develop scene descriptions, storylines, and character shaping. By optimizing sound waves to develop listeners’ visual imagination, they create an artistic aesthetic effect where hearing a voice is like seeing the person and being present in the scene. The reason voice acting can play such an important role in IP character shaping is precisely because it satisfies audiences’ various sensory needs when experiencing things, providing them with extremely fulfilling experiences that demonstrate the unique vitality of voice acting in IP character creation.

(I) Sense of Space: Auditory Synthetic Space and the Formation of Character Environments

For most people, the space perceived by eyes and body is their first space—the physical space. Sound can, to some extent, shape another space. Under mobile audio, people can perceive the mapping relationships among input space, generic space, and blended space, constructing common information between virtual and real spaces and causing the two different scenes—personal subjectivity and the fictional story—to overlap. For example, in the otome game “Love and Producer,” the character “Bai Qi, the Special Police Boyfriend” is designed as a protective boyfriend with the ability to manipulate wind. His famous line is: “As long as you are in the wind, I can find you.” In the voice acting for this iconic line, besides the heartfelt performance of voice actor A Jie, listeners can also clearly hear the gentle wind in the background. Based on the generic space, listeners experience a “chemical reaction” between their real world and the sonic virtual world, resulting in a virtually imagined blended space. The combination of narrative dialogue and delicate background sounds makes the “deep confession” scene more authentic, allowing listeners to immerse themselves in the story and more easily empathize with the character.

Closing one’s eyes, the independent spatial scene brought by hearing carries deep significance. Its meaning lies in the fact that modern urban internet residents yearn for a clearly defined spiritual space of their own—a space that coordinates with physical perception and provides solace and catharsis for emo-

tions such as loneliness, solitude, and sadness. The auditory synthetic space of modern broadcasting constructs a spiritual world that individuals can trust and rely upon, and through voice actors' interpretations of various storylines, it shapes more beloved companions within this spiritual world. This spiritual world transcends the complexities and pressures of the real world, allowing for immersive experiences of otherwise unattainable virtual world storylines.

(II) Sense of Time: The Flow of Hypertext Fragmented Time and Immediate Companionship

The widespread adoption of mobile internet has fragmented users' online time, and audio happens to be an advantageous content carrier that satisfies this fragmented demand. Media personality Luo Zhenyu once proposed the concept of "Gross National Time," with the central idea that "time will become the ultimate battlefield for business, and every consumption-upgrading industry needs to compete for time." On the temporal dimension, various branches of the cultural communication media industry become competitors. People cannot watch content while walking, driving, or doing housework, making video and text inconvenient to access. Sound, however, possesses exclusivity. The usage duration of mobile audio products rivals or even exceeds that of mobile video, and by deploying various valuable scenarios, it can effectively capture more fragmented time from mobile internet users. For example, Qingting FM focuses on more refined vertical scenarios such as sleep, Ximalaya FM emphasizes knowledge learning layouts, and Lizi centers on voice live streaming.

For IP works, whether in film/television or novel form, they require focused visual attention within a certain timeframe and possess partiality. Novels or film and television productions do not provide sufficient understanding of character traits and story content within a limited viewing period. However, when visual IP works are combined with auditory voice acting, it not only allows audiences to understand story content within fragmented time but also enables the creation of immersive spatial experiences through background sounds in the voice acting. Additionally, audiences can understand character settings, personalities, and other aspects through voice actors' performances.

(III) Sense of Self: Satisfying Self-Production Logic and Character Emotional Interaction Logic

Whether in traditional audio content forms or current mobile audio content forms, there is an obvious effect: satisfying people's sense of self. Satisfying the sense of self is a common characteristic of all auditory products, such as the inexplicable spiritual uplifting power of pop music. In an era where various video products like Douyin and Kuaishou short videos are popular, auditory products represent a relatively simple medium for information transmission. When headphones are plugged in, noise is isolated, and the world exists beyond secular experience. "The moment of being alone with oneself is the true moment

of self; the function of headphones is to transform ‘self,’ originally an abstract concept with philosophical meaning, into a clearly perceptible life phenomenon.”

In IP works, whether in storyline or character setting, they satisfy listeners’ self-production logic to some extent, or the interaction logic of character emotions fulfills their own emotional voids or preferences. For example, some people have a particular preference for the opposite sex who possess vocal charm, and a large number of audio content forms such as voiced audio dramas precisely satisfy this preference. When a beloved voice performs emotional stories, listeners can better project themselves into the narrative to achieve self-emotional satisfaction. Alternatively, if a character in an IP work is set as calm and wise, then the voice actor must possess a stable and gentle vocal tone, allowing audiences to better satisfy their emotional needs for immersive storytelling when listening to the work.

The implantation of broadcasting into the ears is the implantation of narrative text. Encoded information undergoes processes of self-analysis, self-propagation, self-infection, and self-identification, allowing listeners to enjoy the process of active self-thinking while consuming auditory products. This, in a sense, also satisfies the self-production logic forms of modern urban internet residents.

(IV) Spiritual Pleasure: The Physical and Mental Joy of Sound Worshipers and Immersive Imagination Satisfaction

After gradually forming social cognition, humans depart from dependence on completely realistic womb sounds and exhibit varying physiological responses to sensory or psychological stimuli with distinct characteristics. Whether in game voice acting or voice acting for text or animation works, this series of auditory products provides people with purely perceptual spiritual enjoyment—a dominated physiological phenomenon that, despite not involving the personal consciousness level, makes people obsessed and cultivates batch after batch of sound “worshippers.”

Listeners make voice matching selections based on their own understanding of characters and character settings. When the voice extremely aligns with character settings and traits, the auditory experience more easily achieves physical and mental joy and spiritual pleasure. Precisely because listeners’ understanding and frequency of spiritual pleasure do not necessarily completely coincide, the voice acting industry frequently experiences situations where voice actors in productions trigger fan dissatisfaction. Fans will enumerate reasons why the selected voice actor is unsuitable based on their own understanding of character settings, and vote to recommend what they believe to be more suitable voice actors. The occurrence of such incidents precisely reflects, from a side perspective, the importance of voice acting for character shaping to listener communities.

Voice acting culture is not a product of new-generation development; rather, it has always existed as an inconspicuous behind-the-scenes industry culture. How-

ever, with the increasing output of virtual cultural works and the development of virtual character-related industries, voice acting culture has gradually moved to the forefront, allowing more and more people to recognize the importance of voice acting and its unique life-giving charm in the character shaping process. From the complete presentation of works in various forms to the perfect shaping of characters; from virtual characters existing as if real in the real world to satisfying the sensory experiences of auditory audiences with diverse preferences, voice acting culture tirelessly presents its own charm. Simultaneously, however, attention must be paid to the proper development of the voice acting industry. How to actively utilize its positive influences to guide the voice acting industry toward a brighter future are key issues requiring subsequent attention and discussion.

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