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## Overseas Communication of Chinese Online Series. From the Perspective of *The Untamed (Chen Qing Ling)*

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ZHE WANG<sup>1</sup>, XIAOFENG DAI<sup>2\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Communication University of China, Beijing, China

<sup>2</sup>St. Petersburg State University, St. Petersburg, Russian Federation

\*Corresponding Author

Email ID: 442385354@qq.com, dai\_xiaofeng@126.com

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**Abstract:** In 2019, the online series *the Untamed (Chen Qing Ling)*, adapted from the online novel *the Founder of the Devil's Path*, not only achieved a good harvest of popularity and good reputation in China, but also spread to Thailand, South Korea and other places, successfully landed on Netflix, YouTube and other foreign websites, aroused attention and heated discussion in overseas markets. Now the online series *the Untamed (Chen Qing Ling)* becomes another successful example of overseas communication of Chinese online series. This paper is mainly aimed to interpret *the Untamed (Chen Qing Ling)* from the internal driving force such as elaborately polish and create high-quality scripts and overseas adaptation reduces cultural discount, and external driving force of overseas communication of online series, to analyze its success from the aspects of content and marketing, and to explore the causes of its strong overseas influence in order to provide ideas for the future overseas communication of domestic online series.

**Keywords:** The Untamed (Chen Qing Ling), Online Series, Overseas Communication.

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### INTRODUCTION

After more than 10 years of exploration and development, China's online series have become an indispensable part of the film and television industry and widely spread abroad with the unique advantages of new media Broadcast since its inception in 2009. Domestic Online series are exported and have achieved good results from content to scale, such as *Day and Night (Baiye Zhuixiong)*, *Burning Ice (Wuzheng Zhi Zui)*, *Story of Yanxi Palace (Yanxi Gonglue)* and *The Longest Day in Chang'an (Chang'an Shier Shichen)*. Domestic online series have ushered in the outbreak period of going abroad (Zhou Genhong, 2019). In June 2019, the online series *the Untamed (Chen Qing Ling)* produced by Xinpai media are released not only through Tencent video exclusive broadcast but also at the same time, actively expanded to overseas, spreading to Thailand, South Korea and other places.

Topics related to this online series are not only on twitter, an overseas social platform, but also at the top topic in Thailand. It has also been listed in the top ten world trend topics and published on My dramalist with the high score of 9.4/10 ranking first in Asian TV series. (Li Yang and Shao Lu, 2020)

### BACKGROUND

On October 31, 2015, online famous female novelist Moxiang Tongchou serialized his original novel *Founder of the Devil's Path* on the literature website *Jinjiang literature city*. On March 1st of the next year, the first edition of the online novel was finished, and on September 7, it was finally finished. Up to now, the score of the novel *Jinjiang literature city* has been nearly 14 billion, the number of collections has been more than 1.09 million times, the total number of book reviews has been more than 440000. *Founder of the Devil's Path* is on the top sales list, thousand word gold list, and the total number of overlord tickets, etc. In view of this, Xinpai media bought the IP copyright, and the online series *the Untamed (Chen Qing Ling)* adapted from *Founder of the Devil's Path* was exclusively broadcast on Tencent video on June 27, 2019. By the end of August 14, Douban's score of the *Untamed (Chen Qing Ling)* continued to increase from 4.8 to 8.2, even surpassing *Nirvana in Fire (Lang Ya Bang)*, becoming the most rated television series (Liu Tingting, 2019). The online broadcast volume of the *Untamed (Chen Qing Ling)* exceeded 6 billion, and the maximum broadcast volume in a single day exceeded 200 million. During the hot broadcast period, the *Untamed (Chen Qing Ling)* continued to occupy the top of the microblog series list, and won the first place in the microblog TV series super talk list, the first place in the cat's eye network hot list, and the first place in the Yien series list.

From online novels to series, the *Untamed (Chen Qing Ling)* has successfully completed the broadcast of Tencent's overseas version of WeTV, and also successfully landed on Netflix, YouTube and other foreign

websites. It has won a lot of praise from local audiences and successfully achieved the export of overseas culture. More than that, Xinpai media plans to promote the *Untamed (Chen Qing Ling)* to continue to go abroad, export to Japan and other countries, once again expand the overseas marketing territory. In this way, to maximize the value of IP, Xinpai media has achieved the ultimate goal of creating the linkage mechanism of IP industry chain with the *Untamed (Chen Qing Ling)* as the starting point.

### **Content is King--The internal driving force of overseas communication of online series**

#### **Elaborately Polish and Create High-quality Scripts**

Due to the differences in artistic expression between literary works and television works, the creators of television works need to focus on script polishing and artistic processing based on the original text framework in the process of adaptation. Although *Founder of the Devil's Path* is one of the most popular novels of tanbi at present, the most difficult problem for the creator is how to abandon the plot of tanbi but still keep the elements of tanbi perfectly after being adapted as a script, so as to transform the narrative of the novel text into a reasonable TV narrative (Du Yingjie and Yang Jie, 2019). *The Untamed (Cheng Qing Ling)* made the crew devote all their energy to the detailed polishing of the script for two years before shooting. Based on the respect for the original work, they adapted it into television series. In line with the principle of content as king, they tried to show the famous aspects of the novel in detail and in depth. They actively restored the characters, plots, props and so on. Finally, they won more and more audience after the broadcast, especially recognition and affection from the original works fans.

*The Untamed (Cheng Qing Ling)* deals with the feelings of the two men as "confidant" friendship from the first meeting of fighting against with each other to the end of fighting side by side and helping the weak together. The emotional turn is expressed step by step in the continuous development of the plot, which is reasonable and not abrupt. The lines of the two men who met again 16 years later "it's enough to have a confidant in life", "nothing else, just a clear conscience" confirm the pretty "brotherhood" between them. Although the online series turns love into friendship, it portrays this friendship as "extraordinary". Lan Wangji, the second son of the Lan family, is dignified and upright, and a model of his family. In order to protect Wei Wuxian, he spared no effort to fight against a hundred families. He was punished by his uncle with whipping three hundred times and pondered for three years in cold cave. In order to find Wei Wuxian's soul, he asked for spirit for 13 years. After Wei Wuxian was sacrificed, he guarded him to protect himself from harm. The plots and actions implicitly present the elements of tanbi. Meanwhile the plots and actions are faithful to the original book and skillfully adapted which makes the fans of the original book enjoy themselves to the full (Wu Li, 2019).

Although it is a novel of seeking immortals, it is full of chivalrous spirit and sense of justice. After the adaptation, the *Untamed (Chen Qing Ling)* is on the basis of following the original work with the characters fully and stereoscopically portrayed. Take Wei Wuxian as an example. Although he was taken in by Jiang Fengmian, the head of Jiang family in Yunmeng since childhood, he is unrestrained but chivalrous. He vividly shows the Jiang family precept of "acting after knowing that you can't do it". Even if the golden elixir is removed, he is thrown into the unmarked common grave by Wen Chao, Qishan, and then has to turn to a crafty path. He returns with skills which can kill all sides, and he still sticks to his heart and does justice. In order to save Wen Ning and others who were kind to him, Wei Wuxian spared no effort to fight against a hundred families. He protected the old and weak women and children of Wei Family at unmarked common graves. He practiced the belief that "no matter how busy the well-trodden path is, a single wooden bridge should be chosen to go to the end" and found peace in turbulent days. Even though he was slandered by the world, attacked by hundreds of families, and fell on the Tianshan cliff with the spirit and the form being destroyed, he left behind all kinds of gratitude and resentment in his previous life after being sacrificed. He worked with Lan Wangji to decrypt the murders and seek justice and light. Through the in-depth excavation of human nature of the characters, the *Untamed (Chen Qing Ling)* can stand in the hearts of the audience, so that the audience from different countries can have emotional resonance with the characters in the play.

#### **Overseas adaptation reduces cultural discount**

Communication is a process of "symbolic interaction" between the two sides, which determines that the basis of interaction is that both sides should have common meaning space. If the creators do not pay much attention to cultural differences in the overseas communication of online series, or even choose the ambiguous communication content, it will inevitably lead to adverse effects (Zhao Hui, 2018). Colin Hoskins once put forward the phenomenon of "cultural discount". He thought that:

TV program, film or video rooted in a specific culture is very attractive in the domestic market, because the audience in the domestic market has the same common sense and lifestyle; but in other places, the attraction will decline, because it is difficult for the audience from other places to identify with this style, values, beliefs, history and myth, social system, natural environment and behavior pattern. (Hosklins et al., 2004)

The phenomenon of cultural discount is an inevitable problem that must be faced in the process of cross-cultural communication of China's online series. Due to the cultural differences between China and other countries, the audience in other countries and regions have insufficient or misunderstanding of Chinese culture. If Chinese online series want to maximize the value of cultural communication, they must reduce the cultural discount in

the process of overseas adaptation, find the balance point of cultural exchange, and achieve deep integration (Liang Kun, 2018).

The first country for *the Untamed (Chen Qing Ling)* to be exported overseas is Thailand, which is also an Asian country. Due to the cultural similarities between Thailand and China and the fact that the plot of the online series conforms to the aesthetic standards of Thai audiences, the cultural discount is low (Zhou Genhong, 2018). On the basis of the success in Thailand's export, *the Untamed (Chen Qing Ling)* continued to march to South Korea, Japan and other Asian countries with similar Confucian cultural genes, and achieved good repercussions. On this basis, Tencent video's overseas version of WeTV released the overseas special edition of *the Untamed (Chen Qing Ling)* at the end of 2019. Compared with the domestic plot, it has changed many scenes and details, not only adjusting the plot framework, but also changing the ending of the story, making the whole plot more suitable for overseas audiences. At the beginning of its creation, *the Untamed (Chen Qing Ling)* made great efforts to explore the means of expressing "universal values" and to seek ways to achieve spiritual resonance with other countries through online series. This is an unavoidable problem in the process of communication in order to win foreign audiences. *The Untamed (Chen Qing Ling)* presents Chinese culture with the most intuitive visual elements, and pays great attention to the use of costumes and props. In terms of the details of clothing, the five families are decorated with Yunmeng, Gusu, Qishan, Qinghe, Lanling and other place names, as well as local folk dialects and places of interest. To a certain extent, the headband and traditional clothing in Lan's clothing show the legendary color and elegant charm in the world of the swordsmen, and highlight the profound cultural heritage of the Chinese nation through the etiquette details (Guangming.com, 2019, July 28). Whether it's big design such as scene decoration, house furnishings and characters' costumes, or small details such as Guqin, saber, bamboo flute and headband, all the elements presented in the play reflect the designer's precise control over the original novel.

It takes root in the spirit of Chinese excellent traditional culture and enhances the massiness of the works. In this online series, Jiang's family precepts "Acting after knowing it can't be done" is taken from Confucius' "knowing it can't be done" in the Analects of Confucius. Zhang Dai's interpretation in "Si Shu Yu" is "Do not knowing it can't be done, it's a fool; Do not act when knowing it can't be done, it's a sage; Act after knowing it can't be done, it's a sage" (Hu Xin, 2019, June 28). Wei Wuxian, the male leader, repeatedly "against the world to do things that others did not dare to do"; Lan Wangji, the other male leader, was concerned about the common life and would come out in times of chaos. He could distinguish between the right and the evil, the black and the white. *The Untamed (Chen Qing Ling)* weakens the love between the two leading characters in the original work and focuses on the depiction of the feelings of sticking to one's original heart and childishness. In this way, it conveys the feelings of home and country that "though as a teenager, he cares about the world" and reflects the cultural confidence imprinted on the characters. With the growth of the two leading characters, the traditional Chinese values of upholding justice and never forgetting the original intention of the play gradually appear in front of the audience. And this kind of value orientation belongs to the common topic and is applicable no matter in which country.

#### **Marketing Strategy-the driving force of overseas communication of online series**

The overseas communication of online series cannot become successful without the active and systematic marketing strategy. As early as the launch of *The Untamed (Chen Qing Ling)*, the production team registered an official account on Facebook to release online series information, and regularly uploaded shooting gags behind the scenes and actor interview clips on Tencent's overseas version of WeTV to attract fans' continuous attention. On September 21, 2019, the fans meeting of *The Untamed (Chen Qing Ling)* was held in Thailand, which aroused the Thai fans' enthusiastic pursuit. Fans not only made costumes to represent the five families in the online series, but also rented all the big screens near the shopping center and the Convention Hall in Bangkok, which were covered with billboards. As soon as the online series are launched, it tops on Thailand's Twitter trend and it is popular in Southeast Asia. In the list of "top 50 TV series in the world" published by Tumblr website in 2019, *The Untamed (Chen Qing Ling)* has been successfully listed, ranking 36th and becoming the first domestic online series listed in this year's list. These achievements are sufficient to prove the popularity of the series in other countries in the world.

The information of a media text can be spread continuously, which has the commercial motivation of the media company, but the more important thing is the promotion of the fans. After fans gain more voice in the current media environment, fan economy has become one of the favorable factors driving the overseas communication of online drama. For fans, participating in the communication of information is not for economic benefits, but for meeting their own emotional needs or promoting social interaction with other fans for communication behavior itself. Henry Jenkins, an American communication scholar believes that not all TV viewers passively accept information like "couch potatoes". On the contrary, many viewers can give full play to their subjective initiative and actively participate in the process of cultural production. They "poach" the rich meta text resources provided by the mass media, and produce new texts in line with their own wishes. For example, fans of *The Untamed (Chen Qing Ling)* will take the initiative to create peer novels, peer pictures, peer videos, etc., upload them to their new media platform and share them with others. Through the production and communication of

these UGC texts, fans can obtain the pleasure of creation in the process of sharing with others, and obtain the sense of achievement after winning others' forwarding, comments and likes. As a producer, fans create new texts in accord with their own unique values and in line with the cultural context of the fans group, which also provides the possibility for other fans to carry out superimposed creation on this basis, so as to promote the creativity of the whole fans group, and further expand the overseas influence of *the Untamed (Chen Qing Ling)*, thus forming a "viral" communication effect.

## CONCLUSION

With the increasing trend of "globalization" and the increasing international influence of Chinese culture day by day, the overseas communication of domestic online series is bound to strengthen. The successful overseas experience of *The Untamed (Chen Qing Ling)* can provide some reference for the overseas communication of other domestic online series. The creators need to work together in content and marketing to create more high-quality works rooted in Chinese excellent traditional culture and attract the audience at home and abroad.

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