

Research on the Difficulties and Strategies of the Popularization of Accessible Films from the Perspective of Cultural Equity

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Abstract

As a processed form that allows visually impaired and hearing-impaired people to perceive audiovisual art "without barriers", accessible films are a powerful practice of cultural equality. The author attempts to explore the difficulties in the popularization of accessible films in the context of reality from the cognitive, creative, and institutional levels. Based on the analysis of the above obstacles, innovative promotion strategies are proposed to promote cultural equity and protect the cultural rights of visually impaired and hearing-impaired people.

Keywords

Cultural equality, Accessible movies, Action Path.

1. Introduction

The film "Ne Zha 2" directed by Jiao Zi broke through the encirclement during the Spring Festival in 2025 and created a box office myth of over 10 billion yuan. With the popularity of the film, more and more accessible cinemas have responded to the trend and launched an accessible movie version of "Ne Zha: The Demonic Children Roar in the Sea", accepting nearly 17 million visually impaired people and providing them with an unforgettable cultural feast. Such measures not only break the traditional viewing experience of "delayed viewing" for the visually impaired group, but also reflect the care and understanding of society towards this group. This is undoubtedly a powerful practice related to cultural equality. In the current context, cultural equality is not only a moral responsibility but also an inevitable logic of social development. As a means to break the "able-bodied centered" cultural hegemony through technical means (audio description, sign language translation, etc.), accessible films are playing an important role. Therefore, this article attempts to explore the popularization difficulties and action paths of accessible films from the perspective of cultural equality, in order to promote the realization of cultural fairness and protect the cultural rights of the visually impaired and hearing impaired groups.

2. Theoretical Background: The Cultural Equality Attribute of Accessible Films

2.1. The Real Challenges of Practicing Cultural Equality

According to the data from the second national disability sample survey, there are over 85 million disabled people in China, accounting for 6.34% of the total population. Currently, China implements the "two exemptions and one subsidy" policy for disabled children and adolescents in the compulsory education stage to provide educational guarantees for the disabled. In terms of employment and social security, corresponding laws and regulations have also been enacted to offer a certain degree of care to the disabled. However, there is little attention paid to the cultural life of the disabled, and relevant policies are difficult to implement due to the actual situation of the disabled and the lack of facilities. Article 27 of the United Nations' Universal

Declaration of Human Rights states that the right to culture is an important part of basic human rights, including the right of everyone to freely participate in the cultural life of the community, enjoy the arts, and share in scientific progress and its benefits. Cultural equality further emphasizes that all people (regardless of physical condition, age, or economic status) have the right to participate in cultural creation and enjoy cultural achievements. It is evident that cultural equality is the cornerstone of eliminating discrimination and achieving social justice.

However, in reality, the disabled often cannot enjoy their due cultural rights due to physical impairments and the lack of complete social infrastructure, creating a significant gap between their cultural life and that of the able-bodied. The implementation of cultural equality in the real world faces significant challenges. Among them, promoting the accessibility of information dissemination and building an accessible physical environment have become important aspects of practicing cultural equality.

2.2. The Practical Significance of Building a "cultural access pathways"

In the 1920s, the disability rights movement emerged, and the concept of "accessibility" was subsequently extended to the cultural field, giving rise to early practices of cultural equality such as sign language news and Braille publications, which significantly promoted the recognition of the cultural subjectivity of disadvantaged groups by society. In 2006, the United Nations' Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities explicitly stated the principle of "unobstructed access to cultural products," marking the entry of cultural equality into a stage of institutionalization. Subsequently, various countries have successively introduced relevant laws and regulations. For instance, the Americans with Disabilities Act requires that federally funded cultural projects be accessible. In China, the Third Plenary Session of the 20th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China emphasized the need to "improve the social security system and care service system for the disabled," and to strengthen the construction of an accessible environment to enable people with disabilities or those with special needs to participate in social and cultural life equally, fully, and conveniently. On this basis, renowned director Jia Zhangke has been vigorously advocating for the establishment of standards for accessible films, promoting the development of accessible film industry in our country. Raise awareness among people from all walks of life regarding the special cultural and entertainment needs of the disabled population. In recent years, the accessible film industry has gathered more and more public welfare organizations or related units, bringing positive impacts to the spiritual and cultural life of disabled groups. Therefore, this article attempts to explore the possibility of cultural equality practices from the perspective of promoting accessible films.

The concept of accessible movies originated from the West and is a processed film that is convenient for visually impaired and hearing-impaired people to listen to or watch. It is a vivid process that allows visually impaired individuals to perceive the world of light and shadow without barriers through re editing or adding voiceover commentary, adding subtitles, and sign language commentary. In 2005, Wang Weili founded the first "Mind Cinema" in China specifically for screening films for the blind in Beijing, marking the beginning of China's accessible film industry. The barrier free film creation promoted by "Heart Cinema" is only aimed at the blind population. Volunteers regularly narrate movies to visually impaired people through live narration, which is an early practice of "oral images". Afterwards, there were also some films that were written in text and explained in sign language for the hearing-impaired to watch, enriching the creative types of accessible films and further promoting the new situation of accessible information dissemination in China in the era of digital intelligence. At present, the "Bright Cinema" of Communication University of China has benefited more and more disabled people by producing and presenting barrier free film works, and many streaming media platforms have also participated in it to jointly build a "cultural access pathways". It can be said that accessible films provide equal opportunities for visually impaired and hearing-

impaired people to participate in cultural life, enabling them to appreciate film works and enjoy cultural achievements like other audiences, with distinct cultural equality attributes.

3. Realistic dilemma: analysis of obstacles to the popularization of accessible films

3.1. Cognitive level: Prejudice towards 'charitable gifts', marginalized status

As an important practice to promote cultural equality for people with disabilities, the implementation of accessible films has always been accompanied by a deep game of social cognition, which has caused huge obstacles to the normal promotion and popularization of accessible films. Accessible movies are activities aimed at the visually impaired and hearing-impaired, with strong public welfare attributes. The "Bright Cinema" project launched by Communication University of China is currently the most typical. Since June 2019, the "Bright Cinema" project has been promoted nationwide, achieving public welfare screenings of accessible films in 30 provinces, regions, and municipalities. In recent years, online platforms such as Tencent, Youku, and iQiyi have also opened up accessible theaters to provide public welfare viewing services for people with disabilities. The various measures should have been a manifestation of goodwill, but they have deepened the public's understanding of accessible films, which is only limited to the stereotype of "charitable gifts" rather than "rights realization". The lag and deviation of general social cognition have led to the marginalization of the service supply of accessible films.

At the 2024 conference organized by the State Administration of Radio, Film and Television, the Ministry of Civil Affairs, and the China Disabled Persons' Federation to ensure public cultural services for people with disabilities and promote the "Bright Cinema", data showed that the "Bright Cinema" provided a total of 210 accessible films, which is one-quarter of China's total film production in 2024. In addition, the public welfare screening of "Guangming Cinema" has been included in the fixed public welfare screening unit of the Beijing International Film Festival, which subtly obscures the fact that watching movies is a basic right of the disabled population. Even more subtly, only 0.07% of film research papers involve accessible adaptations (according to CNKI database statistics), and the neglect of academic production further exacerbates the marginalized position of accessible films in the academic system. Therefore, only by establishing the correct concept among the public that accessible films are a basic right of disabled groups and a concrete practice of cultural equality, can we help address the neglected situation in the promotion of accessible films.

3.2. Creative level: Lack of artistic self-awareness, rough and crude works

Based on the stereotype that accessible film services are only limited to "charitable gifts" rather than "rights realization" among the public, the concern of art practitioners for accessible film production is also lackluster, mainly reflected in the lack of professional production talents and the lack of artistic consciousness of creative subjects. Accessible films generally add sign language, subtitles or commentary on the basis of the original film, and then are professionally synthesized for visually impaired and hearing-impaired people to watch. This requires the production of accessible films to have professional text writers, commentators, editors, and other talents. However, current universities do not offer relevant training programs, and most accessible film producers are concentrated in public welfare organizations and volunteer teams. The training period is short and the professionalism is relatively lacking, which may lead to difficulties in meeting market demand for the production and quality of accessible films, making it generally challenging. Secondly, there is currently no technical standard for accessible film production in China, and the lack of unified and standardized constraints may lead to uneven quality of works. The standard vacancy makes it impossible to assess the professional skills of

the production personnel. Moreover, due to the complex production process, the production cost of accessible films is usually high, which makes it difficult for many small and medium-sized institutions to afford and also limits the popularity of accessible films.

In addition, whether providing accessible movies to visually impaired or hearing-impaired individuals, they are all based on the conversion of visual symbols to verbal symbols, this process may bring about changes to the essence of film art. For example, a survey conducted by the Shanghai Film Archive shows that 62% of directors believe that voiceover narration will disrupt the language system of the camera. Therefore, for accessible film works, how to use artistic consciousness to balance the proportion of verbal symbols in the film process and maximize the preservation of the artistic quality of the film is a question that practitioners need to consider. It is precisely the lack of artistic consciousness among practitioners towards accessible film works that leads to an imbalance in the artistic quality of the works, which may bring low-quality viewing experiences to disabled groups and further influence the wider popularization.

3.3. At the institutional level: copyright issues constrain and dissemination is difficult

Currently, the popularization of accessible films in China is hindered by the maze of copyright authorization systems, reflecting the institutionalized dilemma of protecting the cultural rights of disabled groups. On May 5, 2022, the Marrakesh Treaty on Facilitating Access to Published Works for Blind, Visually Impaired or Other Print Disabled Persons officially came into effect in China, which to some extent solved the practical dilemma of difficulty in obtaining copyright and also provided more development possibilities for public welfare service organizations related to accessible films, for example, the "Bright Cinema" of Communication University of China has innovated the types and models of accessible information publishing and dissemination based on this foundation, and has played a good leading role in promoting the implementation of the Marrakesh Treaty in China through practical actions, which has led many university organizations and public welfare institutions to follow suit.

However, in terms of the adaptation of accessible films, the current implementation rules of the Copyright Law have not yet clarified the statutory licensing scope for accessible film adaptations. Article 24 of the Copyright Law limits the production of accessible format versions to "people with reading disabilities", resulting in the systematic exclusion of film adaptation rights for visually impaired groups. The narrowness of this legal concept directly causes nearly 80% of accessible film projects to fall into copyright difficulties, and it is precisely the ambiguity of the definition of "reasonable use" that has further sparked many controversies. For example, an APP operator provided an online playback service for the accessible version of the movie "I Am Not Pan Jinlian" to an unspecified public through the APP without authorization, and was sued for infringement by the copyright owner of the movie to the court. It can be said that the operator's original intention was good faith, but without corresponding legal and regulatory support, it violated the relevant provisions of the Copyright Law, which greatly affects the enthusiasm and initiative of accessible film practitioners in producing accessible films, and restricts the development and promotion of accessible films. Therefore, only by breaking through structural constraints through institutional innovation can accessible films shift from an exceptional state of cultural governance to a normalized mechanism for safeguarding rights. This is not only an inherent requirement for cultural fairness, but also a historical inevitability of the evolution of institutional civilization.

4. Popularization strategy: Action path for promoting accessible films

4.1. Social advocacy: Reshaping cultural cognition and enhancing social participation

At present, the public's understanding of accessible films still remains at the stage of "charitable gifts", lacking a correct understanding of accessible films as a "basic right" for disabled groups. This gap reveals the value of social advocacy in reconstructing cultural rights awareness. Firstly, it is crucial to reshape public discourse and make the public aware of the cultural equality attributes of accessible films. This can be achieved through public education methods, such as broadcasting relevant documentaries and using social media to promote the cultural equality significance of accessible films. Schools can also offer corresponding courses and collaborate with major universities to launch the "Accessibility Film Popularization Action", striving to reshape the public's understanding of accessibility films from "charitable gifts" to "basic rights", in order to form a social synergy.

In addition, it is necessary to increase the participation of all sectors of society, allow accessible film screenings to enter the community, expand the public's correct understanding of accessible films, and further eliminate prejudice. Currently, accessible films have entered communities in first tier cities such as Shanghai and Beijing, providing convenient viewing opportunities for disabled audiences through fixed screening points and regular screening activities. Such behavioral practices have earned respect for the disabled community and effectively enhanced their sense of belonging. For example, Shanghai has established a barrier free cinema line in the Disabled Persons' Federation community, allowing more visually impaired people with mobility difficulties to enjoy movie watching services at their doorstep, achieving high-quality entertainment experiences right at their doorstep. When accessible movies enter the community, they can also be accompanied by themed salons or workshops, attracting different groups to discuss social issues and promoting cross group interaction. For example, the "Silent Caf é" integration project has been established in areas such as Chengdu and Beijing, which expands employment opportunities for the hearing-impaired population through sign language teaching interaction between healthy listeners and hearing-impaired audiences. In addition, when the accessible film project enters the community, able-bodied audiences can also share the viewing space, subconsciously understand the needs of people with disabilities, and further understand the cultural equality connotation that needs to be practiced in the process of promoting accessible films.

4.2. AI Empowerment: Reducing Production Costs and Innovating Watching Experiences

AIGC (Artificial Intelligence Generated Content) is a technical capability that has moderate generalization ability to generate relevant content by learning and recognizing existing data patterns. This technology can generate various forms of content such as text, images, audio, and video, and can achieve conversion and combination between different modalities of content. Generally speaking, in order to provide a better viewing experience for blind audiences, producing a complete accessible audiovisual work requires repeated polishing at various stages. If a 120 minute accessible movie is to be completed, it would require a month of time and effort from the staff, which is a huge workload. When AIGC technology enters the field of accessible film production, it not only improves production efficiency, but also brings innovative viewing experiences to visually impaired and hearing-impaired people.

Firstly, in the process of empowering accessible film production with AI, advanced natural language processing technology (NLP models) can be used to automatically generate text information closely related to the movie content. Then, through machine learning algorithm training, the required commentary segments for the video can be identified, achieving precise

fitting. Currently, with the assistance of Tencent AI technology, the editing and production cycle of accessible films by Tencent Video has been shortened to about 10 days. Throughout the process, production personnel only need to watch about 5 times (usually at least 15 times), greatly improving the production of accessible films. According to the 2024 inventory report released by Tencent Video's accessible theater, the accessible theater has released 193 accessible film and television works with a total duration of nearly 400 hours, covering various genres such as comedy, action, biography, animation, etc. With a cumulative total of over 1 million views. This undoubtedly brings a richer viewing experience to the disabled population, and at the same time, streaming media platforms also provide more convenient online services for the disabled population, allowing them to experience viewing services without leaving their homes.

Secondly, AI enabled accessible movies can achieve intelligent translation of sign language content through the application of sign language digital humans. In the future, with the advancement of technology and algorithms, natural motion and expression capture can be achieved through intelligent algorithms, providing hearing-impaired users with a better viewing experience and connecting users' emotional resonance. It can be said that the empowerment of accessible films by AI technology for disabled groups can achieve higher quality spiritual and cultural experiences, further implementing the practice of cultural equality.

4.3. Policy promotion: Simplify authorization process, refine laws and regulations

Looking back, the development of accessible film industry is largely constrained by copyright issues. Firstly, due to the limitations of the Marrakesh Treaty (which only applies to works published in print), the copyright issue of films cannot be included in the treaty. Secondly, the Copyright Law does not provide clear regulations on copyright issues that may arise during the production of accessible films, and the jurisdiction of the accessible film industry is relatively blank. Generally speaking, accessible filmmakers often need to obtain permission from the film rights holder before starting production, they are in a relatively passive creative state, which highlights the importance of adding accessible film related sections to the Copyright Law. In this way, many unnecessary troubles in the process of making accessible movies can be simplified, and the boundaries between feasibility and infeasibility can be clearly defined. For example, can we add a "fair use" clause for accessible adaptations in the Copyright Law, simplify the authorization process, make the production process more standardized and convenient, and simplify the communication between accessible film producers and film rights holders.

Furthermore, as a powerful practice of cultural equality, can relevant departments clarify the mandatory proportion of accessible versions required for the launch of film and television works, in order to resolve the current marginal position of the accessible film industry and enhance the awareness of accessible films among film and television practitioners. At the same time, in order to increase the enthusiasm of people from all walks of life for the barrier free film industry and promote the future development of the barrier free industry, can the government provide moderate financial incentives, such as tax reductions and special fund subsidies for enterprises producing barrier free versions. Another point that needs special attention is that AI technology is currently deeply penetrating the accessible film industry, bringing about significant changes. The content of accessible films generated by AI may involve controversies over algorithm copyright and other related issues. In response to this, it is also necessary to keep up with the times, establish relevant mechanisms, and clearly define the ownership standards of "human-machine collaboration" to avoid unnecessary disputes. Only by reasonably regulating the laws and regulations of the accessible film industry and filling the current gap can the promotion and popularization of accessible films truly achieve accessibility.

5. Conclusion

Overall, the popularization and promotion of accessible films is a long-term and arduous task that requires joint efforts from various parties such as the government, social organizations, and practitioners. We are well aware of the importance of cultural equality, therefore, as an accessible film that effectively practices cultural equality, its promotion and popularization are crucial. In the future, we can reshape public perception by strengthening publicity and education. At the same time, empowering the production of accessible films through AI technology can enrich film content and innovate viewing experiences. Finally, it is necessary to cooperate with the formulation and regulation of relevant policies to address the practical challenges of accessible films.

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