

A Study on Japanese Film and TV Drama Remakes from the Perspective of Reception Aesthetics

Centered on the Chinese Version of Midnight Food Store*

Zhijuan Fang

School of Foreign Language and International Business
Guangdong Mechanical & Electrical Polytechnic
Guangzhou, China 510000

Abstract—This article focuses on the upsurge of Japanese film and television remakes in recent years, combs the course of Japanese film and television remakes in China, and analyzes the current situation and existing problems of Japanese film and television remakes from the perspective of reception aesthetics. At present, the ratings and reputation of remakes of Japanese films and TV dramas are not as satisfactory as expected. From the perspective of reception aesthetics, there are problems such as failing to fully meet the expectations of the audience, ignoring the calling structure, and failing to maintain appropriate aesthetic distance, so as to provide some references for the development of remakes of Japanese films and TV dramas.

Keywords—Japanese film and television drama; remake; aesthetics of reception; expectation horizon

I. INTRODUCTION

Remakes are not uncommon as a means of artistic creation in the film and television circle. In addition to remakes of China's domestic classics, excellent foreign film and television dramas are also popular types of remakes, especially American dramas and Korean dramas. Following the popularity of remakes of American and South Korean TV series, there has been a boom in Japanese film and TV series remakes recently. *Midnight Food Store*, which was released in June 2017, has won the attention from the whole country, and the remaking of Japanese films and TV dramas is also attracting more and more attention. At present, the remakes of foreign TV dramas are mainly centered on American and South Korean TV dramas, while there are few studies on remakes of Japanese TV dramas. The research on Japanese film and television remake mainly focuses on the cultural differences between China and Japan and the imbalance of implantable advertising. For example: Zhang Chunli (2018) pointed out that "in the East Asian cultural circle, Japanese culture is a unique existence. Many of the plots of Japanese TV and film dramas have a deep cultural imprint, which is the epitome of Japanese customs, social environment and

family relations." Sun Jie and Huang Ying (2018) pointed out that "from a certain point of view, the Chinese version of *Midnight Food Store* highlights the imbalance of implantable advertising and the imperialist tendency of advertising culture."

The theory of acceptance aesthetics put forward by the Constance school in Germany has jumped out of the shackles of the previous author-centered theory and works-centered theory, and explored the readers' understanding, acceptance and response to works. He believed that aesthetic practice should include three aspects: production, circulation and acceptance of literature. Aesthetics of reception starts from the audience and reception, and emphasizes the active role of readers in receiving works, the creativity of reading and the subjectivity of receiving. This theory is a new perspective for the traditional western theory of literature and art, and also provides a new perspective for the study of contemporary film and television.

Therefore, the author tries to sort out the process of remakes of Japanese films and TV dramas in China, and analyzes the process, current situation and existing problems of remakes of Japanese films and TV dramas from the perspective of reception aesthetics with the Chinese version of *Midnight Food Store* as the center, so as to provide some references for remakes of Japanese films and TV dramas.

II. THE HISTORY OF JAPANESE FILM AND TELEVISION REMAKES

A. Imitation of Japanese Films and TV Dramas (Around 2000)

In a strict sense, the film and television works at this stage are not remakes, because there is no copyright purchase and they are just pure reference and imitation of certain themes, plots and characters. For example, the shadow of *愛という名のもとに* (In the name of love) and *あすなろ白書* (white paper of love) can be seen from the character setting and plot of the originator of China's pioneer in youth idol dramas "Cherish Our Love Forever", which is very popular because it is close to campus life and full of youth. In addition, *Eighteen of the sky*, based on *GTO*, has attracted a lot of audiences due to its novel themes and interesting

*Fund: This paper is the research result of the 2018 University-level Science and Technology Plan Project of Guangdong Institute of Mechanical and Electrical Technology — "Research on Japanese Film and Television Drama Remaking from the Perspective of Reception Aesthetics" Project No.: YJYB2019-43.

characters, despite the fact that it divorced from the reality of Chinese education. The same is true of Ms News, which is based on ニュースの女 (News Girl). Although these dramas were not remakes in a strict sense, they drew lessons from Japanese films and TV dramas in terms of theme, plot and character setting. The vivid plots and distinctive characters brought a fresh wave to the domestic TV market at that time.

B. Sporadic Remakes of Japanese Films and TV Series (2005-2015)

In the past 10 years, there are few remakes: With The View Of Meteor Shower based on はなよりだんご (Hana Yori Dango), Come on, tennis prince!, remake of the Japanese anime, based on The Prince of Tennis. Remake of the world's other me by the same name: Another Me in the World and Joyful Tears based on 1 リットルの涙 (Only Human). With Taiwan and South Korea's youth idols sweeping across the mainland, Japanese film and television drama remake in this stage is also dominated by youth icon. One of the most famous is With The View Of Meteor Shower, which produced a number of idols. Although there are classic Taiwanese, Japanese and Korean versions before, it has become an unforgettable youthful memory for people born in 1990s despite its low reputation. The Prince of Tennis and Come on, tennis prince! The two are two dramas produced under the vigorous singer's talent show in the Mainland. The leading actors were both new generation idols from "Go on, boys". The audience mainly are fans of the new generation of idols. However, the two shows were criticized as crudely-produced since they started to broadcast, with a score of 4.0 and 5.5 points respectively in Douban (out of 10).

C. Outbreak Period (2016-2018)

As of July 2019, the Japanese remake film and television dramas that have been released include the film Can't Stop Love, The Devotion Of Suspect X, What a Wonderful Family!, TV series Midnight Food Store, Operation Love, Problems in restaurant, Dating High, Beijing Women's Guide, Shanghai Women's Guide, as well as Saikô no Rikon (The perfect divorce), Dragon Sakura and The Secret that are about to be remake. In addition, there are also news reports about remakes of My Dangerous Wife, Love Letter, Under One Roof, Long Vacation and Legal High. Not only has there been a significant increase in the number, but also the diversity of themes.

These Japanese film and television dramas that have been remake are classics of word of mouth and box office or good viewing, which pose a challenge for the latter. So can these remakes overcome cultural inadaptability and rebuild classics in a foreign country, and restore the peak of public praise and audience rating? According to the reputation of the China's film and television drama to the standard Douban network (as of the data of 2011.6), the rankings are as follows from high to low. (See "Table I")

TABLE I. COMPARISON OF JAPANESE AND CHINESE REMAKE DRAMAS

	Japanese original name	Score of points in Douban (out of 10)	Chinese remake name	Score of points in Douban (out of 10)
1	容疑者 X の献身 (The Devotion Of Suspect X)	8.3	嫌疑人 X 的献身 (The Devotion Of Suspect X)	6.5
2	問題のあるレストラン (Problems in restaurant)	8.8	问题餐厅 (Problems in restaurant)	6
3	デート～恋とはどんなものかしら～ (Dating High)	8.6	约会恋爱究竟是什么 (Dating High)	5.1
4	家族はつらいよ (What a Wonderful Family!)	8.1	家族之苦 (What a Wonderful Family!)	4.7
5	世界の中心で、愛をさけぶ (Can't Stop Love)	(TV series: 8.3 Movie 7.6)	在世界中心呼唤爱 (Can't Stop Love)	4.2 (Movie)
6	プロポーズ大作戦 (Operation Love)	8.7	求婚大作战 (Operation Love)	4.0
7	Shinya Shokudô (Midnight Food Store)	9.2	深夜食堂 (Midnight Food Store)	2.3
8	Tôkyô Joshi Zukan (Tokyo Women's Guide)	8.7	北京女子图鉴 (Beijing Women's Guide) 上海女子图鉴 (Shanghai Women's Guide)	6.2 6.7

As shown in the above table, Midnight Food Store score is the one with lowest score, scoring only 2.3 points. The Devotion of Suspect X directed by Su Youpeng is the one with highest score. According to the statistics of Maoyan Movie, the film has taken 401 million Yuan at the box office since its release in 31days despite constant online ridicule, which can be seen as a slight victory. What a Wonderful Family!, adapted from the Japanese namesake film, suffered from grief both in reputation and box office, with only 32 million Yuan at box office in 11 days. The TV series Shanghai Women's Guide can be regarded as a relatively successful remake compared to other remakes. However, it is still not a success compared with the original one, which has a score of 8.7 points (out of 10). Midnight Food Store, which touched millions of people because of its warmth, scored only 2.3 points after 4 episodes, which can never match with original one, scoring 9.2 points. It can be seen that in recent years, although the remake of Japanese drama shows a blowout trend, the word of mouth is not satisfactory.

III. THE REASONS FOR THE CURRENT UPSURGE OF JAPANESE FILM AND TV DRAMA REMAKES FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF RECEPTION AESTHETICS

Proposed in the late 1960s, the theory of reception aesthetics has gradually integrated into various new thoughts of philosophy and aesthetics in the past 20 years. Since its introduction into China, it has developed vigorously in many fields. Aesthetics of reception discusses readers' understanding, acceptance and response to works, and holds that aesthetic practice should include three aspects: production, circulation and acceptance of literature. At present, this theory is not only applied to the interpretation of literary texts and translation, but also to the study of film and television. Jauss believes that the acceptance of literary works can be divided into two forms: vertical acceptance and horizontal acceptance. The so-called vertical acceptance refers to the acceptance, evaluation and influence of works from the perspective of historical evolution. Audiences in different times have different interpretations of the same works due to different social patterns and historical backgrounds. On the other hand, with the rapid development of technology, the audience's aesthetic needs are constantly changing. The use of new technologies to interpret the classics is also to meet the aesthetic needs of the audience in different times. The Japanese film and television dramas that have been remake are all classics with good reputation, box office or audience rating. The remake of Japanese film and television dramas is born to meet this demand. Level acceptance refers to the different acceptance of the same work by people from different countries and readers in the same country. For film and television companies, remaking a successful series is less risky and easier than the original script. Because the original script is readily available, it doesn't take long to shoot. Moreover, these successful series have accumulated a large audience base, and they can incur the attention before release, which helps to attract many people who have not seen the original one. On the other hand, popular IP in China has been basically bought out, and the price is incredibly high. With the increasingly scarce and expensive online novel resources in China, many production companies have to turn their attention overseas. Therefore, after the remakes of American and Korean dramas, a wave of remakes of Japanese films and TV dramas has been set off in recent years.

IV. THE EXISTING PROBLEMS OF REMAKES OF JAPANESE FILMS AND TV SERIES

A. *Failure to Fully Meet the Horizon of Expectation of the Audience*

The horizon of expectation proposed by Jauss refers to the requirement and appreciation level for literary works formed by various experiences, interests, attainments and ideals of readers in literary reception activities, which is manifested as a potential aesthetic expectation in specific reading. Jauss holds that the potential meaning of the works is gradually revealed and realized in the historical change of the reader's horizon. The receiving subject must constantly change horizon in the continuous understanding of the times,

and achieve a certain degree of "horizon blending" with the author represented by the works and the traditional horizon, so as to deeply understand the essence of the works. The "three ladies always ordering Chazuke" in the Japanese version of *Midnight Food Store* impressed the audience. However, they were adopted into "three ladies always ordering instant noodles" in the mainland version, which failed to fully satisfy the audience's expectation horizon. Chazuke (お茶け in Japanese) means hot tea is poured on the cooked rice. It is said that it is a diet that originated from the servants of the merchants in Heian Period, who can quickly fill their stomachs and recover their strength when they are at work. Gradually, Chazuke Store (おちゃづけ) and other fast food shops appeared in the Genroku age, becoming a typical place selling fast food for common people. Then, Kitaoji Rosanjin, the famous Japanese gourmet, upgraded Chazuke from fast food to delicious food. The choice of apusa, tea, rice and the way to make tea have become very particular and the ingredients have become richer. The nicknames of the "three ladies always ordering Chazuke" in the Japanese version are "Plum", "Trout" and "Gadus", which are named after their favorite ingredients, leaving deep impression to audience. Japanese people like tea rice, not only because it is simple to do, but also because it has a good effect of alcohol relief, digestion and stomach comfort. Japanese men are accustomed to go drinking with their colleagues after work, which is an essential social activity to enhance the relationship with colleagues. When they get home after getting drunk, they usually calm their stomach with Chazuke. It can be seen that Chazuke has a long history as a special diet in the Japanese diet. It can not only ascend the hall of cuisine, but also serve as a comfort food for the sick stomach after drinking, enough to support the touching stories in the late night to arouse the resonance of the Japanese heart. In contrast, the mainland version changed the "three ladies always ordering Chazuke" into "three ladies always ordering instant noodles", and even forcibly implanted a brand of instant noodles, ignoring the potential aesthetic expectations of domestic audiences and failing to fully meet the expectations of the audience.

B. *Ignoring Response-inviting Structure*

Iser puts forward the "response-inviting structure" and holds that this paper has a "blank" in structure, and the literary text only provides readers with a framework of "schematization", which has many "blank" in any direction and level, waiting for readers to fill and enrich in the reading process. This article has not only "blank" but also "vacancy". Iser also puts forward a concept of "negation". A good text should not only arouse the readers' expectation, but also "deny" it and break it, rather than confirm it and realize it. Negativism, blank and vacancy together constitute the so-called "negativism", which is "the basic power in literary communication". Both response-inviting structure and negation are manifested through the narrative of the text. Most Japanese TV dramas consist of 10-12 episodes with short, concise plots. Most TV series in China have more than 30 episodes, which means the length of the adaptation should be increased to at least three times. How two-thirds of the extra scripts are set and whether the added original content

can impress the audience will also directly affect the reputation of the remakes. In the Japanese version of the *Midnight Food Store*, "three ladies always ordering Chazuke" became attached to each other because of their singleness. The ups and downs of life are manifested in just ten-odd minutes. The "three ladies always ordering instant noodles" in the China's version are adapted into doctors, shopaholics and the other single woman. The love story of only one person played more than one episode, which made the audience feel that the plot was old-fashioned and dragged.

C. Failure to Grasp the Appropriate Aesthetic Distance

Jauss proposed the concept of "aesthetic distance", that is, there is an "aesthetic distance" between the individual expectation horizon and the specific reading, and it is constantly changing. When the distance between the receiver and the role in the art work is zero, the receiver enters the role completely and cannot obtain aesthetic enjoyment. On the contrary, when the distance increases, when the guidance effect of expectation vision on the reception tends to be zero, the receiver is indifferent to the work.

At present, the remakes of Japanese film and TV dramas are mostly stuck in the simple copy stage of the original dramas, which only requires changing actors, scripters and directors. The story plots, scenes, lines and even details are all moved to China intact, lacking local reconstruction and innovation, and failing to grasp the appropriate aesthetic distance. *Midnight Food Store* is a popular comic book created by Japanese cartoonist Yarô Abe. The story happens in a small bistro in the bustling urban alleys that don't open till midnight. The story behind the boss and all kinds of guests is combined with various cuisines, with food and story to comfort stomach and heart, touching and comforting countless lonely people in the city. Huang Lei, a master chef in the entertainment industry, plays the role of the boss in the Chinese version of the late night canteen. His appearance is almost the same as the original one, wearing a blue denim jacket and a white apron, with a mysterious scar on his left face. The story is also performed in the same Japanese tavern. When the boss in Japanese costume serves pancake rolled with crisp fritter in a Japanese bistro, the audience feels a sense of incongruity. The plot, scene and props of the story blindly copy the original Japanese drama. For Chinese audiences, the familiar *Midnight Food Store* should be roadside barbecue stalls, dirty food stalls, tea restaurants, Shaxian County snacks and Lanzhou Beef Noodles near home.

V. CONCLUSION

Due to the differences in the potential aesthetic expectations of audiences in the two countries, it would only be considered improper if the remakes of classic Japanese movies and TV series are just the same as before, ignoring the horizon of expectation and response-inviting structure of audiences. While maintaining the original flavor, how to skillfully integrate local elements, how to reinterpret the characters, how to reasonably adapt the plot? Only by fully meeting the expectation horizon of the audience, arousing the audience's familiarity, breaking the "expectation" of the

audience unexpectedly, and grasping the appropriate aesthetic distance, can the audience resonate and win the public praise.

REFERENCES

- [1] Zhang Chunli. Looking at the Remake of Japanese Film and Television Dramas from the Chinese Version of "Midnight Food Store" [J], *Contemporary TV*, 2018 (01). (in Chinese)
- [2] Sun Jie, Huang Ying. Chinese Version of "Midnight Food Store" Remake Tragedy: Cultural Imbalance of Implantable Advertising [J], *Arts Criticism*, 2018 (03). (in Chinese)
- [3] Zhu Liyuan. Introduction to Aesthetics [M]. Anhui Education Press, 2004. (in Chinese)
- [4] Li Jing. The New Form of Chinese Contemporary Film Narrative from the Perspective of Reception Aesthetics [J]. *Jiangxi Social Sciences*, 2008(03). (in Chinese)