

# The Influence of Cross Culture on Drama Adaptation

## ——Take Throne of Blood and Ran as Examples

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### ABSTRACT

Shakespeare's four tragedies as the original script, are shown in the film lens of different directors in different ways. Akira Kurosawa, as one of the best film adaptations of Shakespeare's dramas, who makes the film more in line with the Japanese nation's reading psychology and embodies the style of Japanese society. Based on the adaptations of *Ran* and *Throne of Blood* to *King Lear* and *Macbeth*, this paper discusses the influence of culture in the adaptation of drama. From script, audiovisual language and emotion these three aspect, this paper summarizes the influence of cross culture on drama adaptation, and concludes that under the premise of retaining the original theme of the works, cross-cultural adaptation adds many native cultural elements to the adapted works. It not only absorbs the essence of foreign culture, but also shows the characteristics of native culture.

**Keywords:** *Shakespeare, Akira Kurosawa, drama adaptation, comparative literature, cross culture*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Shakespeare is a shining star in the history of world literature and has numerous excellent works of art. These great works of art also derive many wonderful adaptations. After the Lumiere brothers brought the film into the public view, various directors from different countries also invited the great man of this era into their own lens. The adaptation of Shakespeare's plays has a long history. One of the most distinctive people is the famous Japanese director Akira Kurosawa. In 1957, his film *Throne of Blood* adapted from *Macbeth* won the nomination of the Golden Lion Award. He is also known as "Shakespeare of the film world" because of the film *Ran* adapted from *King Lear*. Akira Kurosawa's adaptation is not just rote, but integrates his own national culture and reinterprets Shakespeare's drama from a Japanese perspective. The influence of cultural differences is shown in all aspects of the film. For example, what is the impact of different cultural backgrounds on drama adaptation? Will it affect the audio-visual language of movies? This paper will analyze the script, audio-visual language and emotion to explore the influence of cross-cultural on drama adaptation.

## 2. THE INFLUENCE OF CROSS CULTURE ON THE SCRIPT

The cross-cultural influence on the script is mainly reflected in the character and plot. *King Lear* originated from an old English legend in the eighth century, and *Macbeth* is a Scottish chronicle adapted by an ancient British historian, Rafael Hollingsant. The first step of Kurosawa's adaptation was to set the background in the Warring States period. Under the influence of China, the Japanese attach great importance to loyalty, filial piety, benevolence and, kindness and faith to one's friend, and also adhere to *giri*, which is a Japanese value roughly corresponding to "duty", "obligation", or even "burden of obligation" in English. However, the war has damaged human nature to a certain extent. Whether it is the event of driving father out of the house regardless of loyalty and filial piety in *Ran*, or the regicide in *Throne of Blood*, there is a more reasonable explanation in this context. This is the inevitable tragedy after the war killed human nature.

Similarly, Kurosawa also made changes in the image of the characters. Anthropologist Ruth Benedict proposed in *The Chrysanthemum and The Sword* that the Japanese are "conform to their social roles", and their trust in hierarchy is based on the whole concept of the relationship between people and their associates, as

well as between individuals and the state.[1]As stated in Japan's hierarchy and its influence, "In Japan, the privilege caused by seniority and gender is very great." [2] The Japanese attach great importance to the order of the eldest and the young, and the difference between the superior and the inferior. Therefore, it is unimaginable for the Japanese to imagine that Edmund, the son of concubine, framed the eldest son to seize power in King Lear and his daughter drove his father out of the palace. Based on such a cultural background, Kurosawa removed Edmund as an auxiliary line in the process of shooting *Ran*, and focused on the description of Hidetora's two daughters-in-law, so as to promote the development of the plot. The three daughters were changed into three sons, which turned the story into the story of Japanese general Motonari and three sons during the Warring States period. In *Throne of Blood*, the image of the three witches is also replaced by Yamauba. Yamauba is a kind of monster that can understand people's heart. In addition, Banquo's honest image is replaced by Miki Yoshiteru, who is in collusion with Washizu Taketoki. Compared with ancient England, where the idea of loyalty is popular, this change more closely relates to the historical background of the Warring States period, when the government lost its real power and the hierarchy system was destroyed to a certain extent. Hence, this change has made it closer to the national psychology.

Cross culture also has a great influence on the film plot. The Japanese believe in Buddhism. The change of the plot mainly reflects the influence of Buddhist culture on Japanese culture. Karma is often said in Buddhist culture. Unlike Macbeth in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, who is killed by an aristocrat Macduff who has no superior subordinate relationship, Washizu Taketoki in *Throne of Blood* is killed by his subordinates' arrows. Just as he was a minister but killed his own monarch for his rights, it fits in with the song at the end of the film: "perseverance is Asura, and there is no change in the past and the present", showing the fate of causality.

This kind of Buddhist thought is more prominent in *Ran*. In the movie *Ran*, the eldest daughter-in-law Kaede, revenges and stirs up the relationship between the eldest son and the second son, and she is also an important element to promote the development of the plot. The second daughter-in-law of the old lord, Sue, is more like a spiritual symbol. Sue believes in Buddhism, which is different from Kaede's long cherished desire for revenge. Similarly, Sue chooses forgiveness because of the collapse of Nakadai country. However, such forgiveness has not come to a good end for her. Finally, she becomes the victim of Kaede's revenge and is beheaded for Kaede. And the end of the film is not like King Lear in which new monarch appeared, but the Buddha in Tsurumaru's hand falls from the ruins in the shrill voice, indicating that the Buddha can not save the

chaotic world, reflecting Kurosawa's transcendence of religious views and thinking about the world, which makes the ideological value of the film have more long-term vitality.

### **3.THE INFLUENCE OF CROSS CULTURE ON AUDIO-VISUAL LANGUAGE**

Compared with literary works, film has a more intuitive expression of image, color, sound, lighting and shadow. Compared with drama, it also breaks through the limitations of the environment. The development of modern technology can better convey the theme and emotion of the film to the audience. German philosopher Frederick Schelling once compared music to flowing art.[3]As an important element in movies, music is also an art of time and space, and becomes a medium for directors and actors to express their emotions. Shakespeare's plays have a sense of grandeur. In order to express this feeling, Western musical instruments such as trumpet and organ are often used as background music. But Kurosawa's two films have a kind of desolation and depression of "rain is coming, wind is full of buildings". One of the expression forms of this emotion is Noh. Noh is a traditional Japanese drama, which is a stage performance art combining dance, music and drama. Akira Kurosawa likes to integrate this form into the film very much. Noh is essentially a symbolic stage art. Its importance lies in the ceremony and hint in the rare aesthetic atmosphere. In *Ran*, Kurosawa integrates several works of Noh into the film through the role of Kyoami, and also carries some predictive effects. Although *Ran* is based on legend of the daimyo Mori Motonari, Kurosawa completely reconstructed the whole story in the process of writing the script, which makes the existing space different from the real space. Therefore, the music in the film also gives people a sense of illusion, and forms a desolate aesthetic feeling in such illusion. In composing music for the film, Takemitsu often used traditional musical instruments such as Shakuhachi, wadaiko and nohkan. Due to the influence of Mono no aware culture, Japanese music often has a kind of continuous sadness. In the play of Nakadai encountering Tsurumaru in the thatched cottage, the sound of the wadaiko brings sharp a indignation and replaces the dialogue with music. The voice of complaint hits Nakadai heart. *Throne of Blood* is also influenced by Noh. When Washizu decides to kill the lord, his wife walks alone in the room. The accompaniment music at this time is Noh, and the score externalizes his wife's expectation and anxiety. In addition, photography has also become the auxiliary of this form, because the basic expression of Noh is through the whole body movement, so in the process of shooting, the panoramic lens is used as far as possible to let the audience see the whole body image of the actor. These forms not only make the audience feel the

performance form of Noh, but also convey the oppression and bondage of the Japanese nation itself.

These forms not only make the audience feel the performance form of Noh, but also convey the oppression and bondage of the Japanese nation itself. In addition to music, the film also breaks through the space limitations of drama and shows the story more comprehensively. Oriental people do not prefer to externalize their emotions in forms of language and words. Based on this, the director will utilize many other elements as the symbol of the film. For example, in the *Throne of Blood*, there is a scene at the beginning where Washizu and Miki are riding in the fog. There is no dialogue in the whole process, only the sound of horse's hooves and neighing. The fog is also the externalization of the protagonist's inner confusion and entanglement. Later, Washizu goes back to the city to tell his wife the prediction of Yamauba. When his wife analyzes for him and gives him advice, the background is the soldiers' constant riding around and galloping horse's hooves. The confusion of the sound of horse's hooves is the symbol of Washizu's heart. In *Ran*, the change of Nakadai's mood and state also coincides with the change of the sky. From the clear sky at the beginning to the dark clouds covering the whole sky, nature watches the mutual killing of human beings, and the dark sky also implies the fate of human beings towards tragedy.

#### **4. THE INFLUENCE OF CROSS CULTURE ON EMOTION**

Japan's outstanding haiku writer, Masaoko Shiki, summed up the literature of the East and the West: "the art of the East tends to be negative beauty; the art of the West tends to be positive beauty." [4]The Israeli novelist Amos Oz once said in the interview that there are only two ways to end tragedy, one of which is Shakespeare's, that is, the stage is full of corpses, but there is some kind of justice hovering in the sky. It can be seen that although Shakespeare's tragedy is sad, his emotion is still passionate. He has a fighting spirit against evil forces, and the emotion of drama is external.

In contrast, Akira Kurosawa's films have obvious dramatic conflicts compared with other Japanese directors represented by Yasujiro Ozu, and the use of close-up lens also makes the characters express their emotions more strongly. However, because his films are full of realism and he attaches importance to realistic analysis, the film still adopts a calm and objective way to show the social unrest and personal suffering. In *Ran*, Akira Kurosawa employs a large number of long-range shots to create a grand sense of tragedy. In the classic five minute war scenes, he uses extremely quiet but hellish pictures to replace the hoarse fighting. This silent and repressive tragedy makes the audience sad more

than roar, and is much more restrained than the Western emotion.

#### **5. CONCLUSION**

Art is the mirror of the times and the portrayal of the artist's heart. The greatness of Shakespeare's plays lies in the fact that his works are not only mirrors, but also sharp edges. He analyzes the times and analyzes the human nature. Kurosawa respects the spiritual core in the process of movie adaptation, uses cultural differences to put Kasaya on Shakespeare's play, and puts the essence produced by the collision of eastern and Western cultures into his own films. This paper discusses the influence of cross culture on the script, audio-visual language and emotion in drama adaptation, and draws the conclusion that the adapted works are more in line with the Oriental Culture in the script, the audio-visual language uses more Oriental music and express feelings with environment, and the emotion is more introverted. It has some enlightenment on the relationship between cultural differences and literary creation.

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