



# The Filmization of the Classic Script “Peony Pavilion”

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**Abstract.** The filmization of classic works has gradually become an inevitable trend in the fast-paced era, and this paper explains how the Chinese classic work “Peony Pavilion” should be effectively filmed and filmed through plot adaptation, cultural communication, character display, and other aspects. As an excellent traditional Chinese culture, “Peony Pavilion” is worth learning and inheriting the female issues in its plot, the “love” and “reason” interspersed in the structure, and the content of Kunqu opera as the presentation method, but how to combine it with modern science and technology to push it to the world stage and how to make trade-offs in the adaptation process are issues worth exploring. The filmization of “Peony Pavilion” is a good way to make it have a broader market, based on classics, audience-oriented adaptation can stimulate creativity and arouse people’s cultural confidence.

**Keywords:** Peony Pavilion · female portray · female consciousness

## 1 Introduction

As things have evolved, the overall pace of development of things has shown a fast-paced change, and there is an increase in the types and quantities of films and television dramas [1, 2]. But it cannot be ignored that it is under the influence of such a fast pace that society approaches an impetuous state. The output of good scripts is starting to slow down. More producers are turning their attention to novels and old works, reworking and innovating on an existing basis, updating their content, and creating revised versions [2–4]. In such an environment, more and more written works began to be translated and remade. “Peony Pavilion” a brilliant pearl in the history of Chinese drama, also has the experience of being adopted. The predecessors in “Peony Pavilion” and modernization work have made a lot of exploration, “pioneer version”, “legendary version”, and “youth version”. This is an adapted version for the global audience [5, 6]. The same Kunqu version of “Peony Pavilion” has also been filmed as a Chinese opera film on the big screen. It is this kind of adaptation that reveals the drawbacks that adaptors should pay attention to in the adaptation of classic works. In today’s cultural globalization, how to effectively film and television “Peony Pavilion”, how to correctly spread the original classic plot content to the world, and keep up with modern civilization without abandoning excellent traditional culture are questions that everyone is constantly exploring.

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Film and television are a form of artistic expression that is appreciated by both the common and the common people [7]. It is a realistic aesthetic art, and the language of the characters has colloquialism characteristics, is easy to understand, and is easily accepted by people of all ages and cultural levels. Opera is a narrative performance on the stage in the form of song and dance. It is more of an aesthetic art of writing in large places and realistic in small places. Dr. Wang Feiyan of Shanghai Theatre Academy said in the article "Peony Pavilion" in communication research, "Film and television use the convenience of lens processing details, which to some extent also promotes the pursuit of details in performing arts, which is conducive to the audience's appreciation." And it has more temporal and spatial superiority over stage communication [8]. Of course, when opera is used as a carrier to spread culture to the masses, it should mainly focus on lyrics and confessions, supplemented by dance. This should be combined with the expressions and movements of the actors to show the ups and downs of the storyline. In addition, it should show the rich emotional activities of the characters.

## 2 Peony Pavilion and Its Female Portray

The play "Peony Pavilion" has progressive ideas from a female perspective [9, 10]. "Peony Pavilion" was created in the Ming Dynasty, when the mainstream thought of Confucianism began to become pedantic and rigid and began to bind people's thoughts and stifle human nature. This made the status of women, who already lived in the patriarchal society, even inferior, and the imperial family of the Ming Dynasty even wrote the "Women's Ring" to emphasize women's chastity and innocence, spreading such distorted ideas from top to bottom. More documented that: "The woman was forced to commit suicide, and the family beat gongs and drums to celebrate the fame of Achievement Day. If the woman did not want to die, her family would verbally abuse her and even whip her." But at the same time, the commerce of the Ming Dynasty also began to develop rapidly, the economy is the foundation of culture, the development of the economy spawned a lot of vibrant ideas, and some voices advocating individuality emerged. It is the collision of these creative and old ideas that stimulates Tang Xianzu's desire to create. He appreciates, cares for, respects women, and praises the emergence of women's consciousness, so his "Peony Pavilion" starts from a female perspective and carries the idea of social progress at that time. In "Peony Pavilion", Du Liniang, who had never been out of the boudoir by her parents with feudal rite education, heard for the first time that there was a back garden at home and had the idea of going to the garden, which is the germination point of the heroine's thoughts, and then went to the back garden, fell in love with the scholar in the dream, wanted to dream again to find the scholar and other plots are her resistance to feudal bondage. In today's society, women's issues are a topic of increasing concern, and this topic has caused a lot of debate and even scolding. And the content of "Peony Pavilion" provides an opportunity for discussion and provokes people to think: why does the issue of women still exist after such a long period of change? This can well arouse the resonance and attention of more women, and such content can also be highlighted in the plot setting of film and television.

The plot takes "love" as the main line and "reason" as the clue, and the two are interspersed with each other in the plot, which is thought-provoking. Among them,

“love” is one of the most discussed and influential emotional value symbols in academic circles. The classic of “Peony Pavilion” is that it not only tells a love story but as well shows the culture and philosophy of the time. The plot of “Peony Pavilion” is unconventional from a modern perspective, with both a fascinating love story and a deep irony. The heroine Du Liniang ended up depressed because of the book in her dream, and the hero Liu Mengmei even opened the coffin to be with Du Liniang. “Love” of this kind transcends life and death, moves the audience, and is also one of the reasons why “Peony Pavilion” is a classic of its time: its plot, especially the reunion of a lover who becomes dependent, is loved by the audience. But “Peony Pavilion” is not only the main line of support for love but also reflects the current social situation at that time and satirizes the social atmosphere at that time: Du Liniang still let Liu Mengmei continue to take the test for fame and gain social recognition after she came back from the dead. Du Liniang could change her thinking, but she could not change the social situation at that time by herself, and instead, she was forced to adapt to such an environment. Setting up this plot is firstly in line with the reality of the time, and secondly, it is indicative of a sense of helplessness that this status quo cannot be changed. The combination of “love” and “reason” makes the whole plot full, and the meaning of thinking does not float on the surface. “Peony Pavilion” not only shows the love story of Liu Mengmei and Du Liniang across life and death but also shows the philosophy and culture of Dangshu society.

The filmized “Peony Pavilion” needs more dimensions in the display of characters. Compared with written and dramatic, film and television will be richer and more detailed, and the audience does not understand the plot of some characters due to the different backgrounds of the times, such as the silence when the two are in love. On the contrary, Western audiences are directly expressed. Therefore, when adapting, the character set of the protagonist needs to be fuller, and a richer storyline is needed to explain the reasons for this. Because of the limitations of written expression, the shaping of the character image is not so detailed, and it is more understood by the reader after reading it himself. But bringing written content to the big screen requires the reader to understand this step first. The difference between film and television and the script is that the script is on paper, and the creator can express the character and character image directly through words, but it will be slightly shriveled. Film and television need to be expressed through pictures, which will make the characters more vivid, but “there are a thousand Hamlets in the eyes of a thousand readers.” The creator as the first feeler will add his understanding to it, to let the audience watch the film-based “Peony Pavilion” without too much confusion and deviation, which requires the multi-dimensional display of the protagonist’s image of the picture. Du Liniang was originally a lady who grew up under feudal rites, but her natural nature was not extinguished, and when she first came to the garden and saw the spring color of the garden, she allowed her to awaken her mind. She yearned for freedom and the pursuit of love, and dared to challenge feudal thought, but also had to succumb to reality. How the character image extracted in this way jumps onto the screen requires the screenwriter to write more content in the adaptation process. This is to support and highlight such a distinct character image. For example, the progress of her thinking can be highlighted through the before and after changes of Du Liniang,

and the communication between her and the maid can also be increased to highlight Du Liniang's yearning and pursuit of freedom.

"Peony Pavilion" is based on a script in the form of Kunqu opera, and how to rewrite it into modern film and television content also needs to be repeatedly scrutinized. First of all, in terms of lines, the original "Peony Pavilion" is mainly based on singing lyrics and classical Chinese, which leads to the difficulty in understanding modern audiences. So in addition to the choice of plot focus, there is also the problem of translation: how to translate the content of classical Chinese into the form of vernacular and Chinese into English? On the foreign opera stage, they all use the translation of the American Chinese writer Cyril Birch. This is the earliest English translation of "Peony Pavilion", which is also the basis for the research of later generations in their field, and has indelible importance. Traditional Chinese classical Chinese is mostly characterized by implicit and introverted, which is part of the embodiment of the gentle beauty interpreted in the Kunqu opera singing voice. However, after translation into the vernacular, it will be more straightforward and will make it lack some of this beauty. However, film and television is a form of artistic expression that is appreciated by both elegant and secular people, and it is a realistic aesthetic art, and the language of the characters has the characteristics of colloquialism, which is easy to understand and easy to be accepted by people of all ages and cultural levels. Multiple versions of Peony Pavilion have been produced for world audiences, but these adaptations have also exposed many problems, which can also serve as a reference for later adaptations. The "pioneer version" of "Peony Pavilion", only adopts the original plot and integrates the Western drama perspective, lacking a lot of content with Chinese characteristics. However, it promotes Western audiences to pay more attention to Chinese opera, which is great progress for Chinese opera to enter the Western vision. With the emergence of this version of "Peony Pavilion", to cater to the preferences of Western audiences, the "legendary version" of Peony Pavilion came into being, which is the first opera to put the complete version of "Peony Pavilion" on the European stage and its return to the Eastern perspective, although innovative, but mixed with too many traditional Chinese elements, not strictly screened but insisted on catering to the curiosity of Western audiences, which led to a lot of bad cultures. Then the "youth version" of "Peony Pavilion" appeared on the stage, which is a very progressive version because it embraces traditional Chinese freehand beauty and reduces the barriers for Western audiences to watch. This development process has helped creators to better understand the audience's acceptance of the process of film and television, and then create works that are more in line with the taste of the public.

Shadow art is connected, and Tang Xianzu's plays bear more or less resemblance to Shakespeare's plays, which can serve as a foothold for adaptations, thereby diverging the preferences of Western audiences. Shakespeare's works also have a Chinese adaptation: the Peking Opera adaptation of "The Revenge of the Purple Pill Prince", which not only has the plot of Western dramas but also has a lot of Chinese elements and even the background and costumes are Chinese, which is similar to the "avant-garde version" of "Peony Pavilion". It is this exploration of Peking Opera that has led to the collision of Western culture and Chinese culture. The filmized "Peony Pavilion" will inevitably receive many doubts, which are catalysts for progress and development. Finding problems can solve problems. For different versions of "Peony Pavilion" on the Western

stage, even if they play a huge role in “Peony Pavilion” going to the world, there will still be many criticisms. The “youth version” of “Peony Pavilion” still has voices such as “the actors are too young”, “the picture is too beautiful”, “did not explore more about the artistic value of Kunqu opera”, etc. These evaluations are content that can be excavated and discussed in the process of film and television “Peony Pavilion”, and only by constantly polishing can we create classic works.

### 3 Traditional Culture and Something Beyond

Seize the opportunity to promote the globalization of culture through the dissemination of film and television works. “Peony Pavilion” is an excellent traditional drama in China, which contains rich traditional Chinese culture: China’s garden-style architecture, traditional costumes of the Southern Song Dynasty, and the delicate and gentle singing voice of Kunqu opera, etc. These excellent cultures need more opportunities to spread. The dissemination of such excellent culture not only allows audiences around the world to see Chinese culture, but also allows Chinese audiences to build cultural confidence, and at the same time drives creativity so that more excellent culture can be produced in a global vision. In the process of cultural export, we should balance the characteristics of Chinese culture and Western cultural identity, and cannot blindly please Western audiences and ignore China’s audience, which has this problem in the “avant-garde version” of “Peony Pavilion”, which makes it difficult for Chinese audiences to accept this work because of its misplaced cultural interpretation, and simply grafts Western culture and Chinese culture together. Therefore, in the process of film and television, we should strive to take into account the artistry and culture of “Peony Pavilion” while ensuring its traditional literature, so that it can achieve emotional resonance when Western audiences watch it. For the global audience to feel the beauty in “Peony Pavilion” more truly, the film and television process should choose real scene shooting and pay more attention to beauty when shooting empty shots, and take the garden-style landscape as the object, so that the audience can see Chinese beauty and China’s unique garden characteristics. Similarly, the restoration of traditional costumes is also an effective cultural export channel. “Peony Pavilion” is a story based on the Southern Song Dynasty, so in the choice of clothing, costumes, and props, we should pay more attention to the historical environment and can not let actors wear opera costumes. The beautiful singing voice can naturally be retained so that it does not lose any of the charms of the original opera. However, it also allows the audience to feel the charm of Chinese opera singing. Nowadays, there are more and more young people on the Internet advocating the dissemination of Chinese traditional culture, and the film-based “Peony Pavilion” just provides such a springboard and the film-based “Peony Pavilion” is easier to spread, not limited to the region and the number of people like opera performances, which can thereby allow more people to see China’s excellent culture through this work, thereby promoting the integration and development of global culture.

## 4 Conclusion

A national classic must undergo some kind of metamorphosis before it can be reborn as an updated version of world literature. It introduces today's popular elements and makes their film and television, not to achieve the inheritance of opera, but to promote opera. Because only by popularizing opera can it be iteratively inherited. The filmization of "Peony Pavilion" is an inevitable trend with the development of the times. The traditional Kunqu opera form is classical, but its audience can only radiate to the Chinese masses. Western audiences have a limited understanding of Kunqu opera. Film and television can effectively broaden the audience. The filmization and remake of classic works in today's society have gradually formed a development trend. This is the embodiment of scientific, technological, and ideological progress, and also the influence of global economic integration. The influence of region, culture, and knowledge will make them understand differently, and they will put their insights on the stage, which greatly promotes cultural exchange and development. It has also been revealed that cultural globalization has resulted in the adaptation of traditional works to make them shine with a new level of brilliance, as well as the collision of cultures between them. In such a process, we can not only build bridges of cultural exchange, but we can emphasize the importance of self-confidence, take its essence, and integrate China's excellent culture into it, and cannot completely abandon these traditions because they are presented in a completely new way. Based on the original plot, guided by modern social development, and based on the audience's interests, more film and television works that do not deviate from the classic plot and do not violate modern common sense are created. In the process of exploration, we should always reflect and summarize, to ensure the integrity and authenticity of a work, to maintain the historical essence of the work while carrying out secondary creation by the indigenous traditions and habits of Western countries, to maintain awareness of the overall situation and globalization in the adaptation process, and to take its essence so that classic works can be precipitated in the development of the times. The increased productivity of theatrical re-creation may lead to more inspiration, which in turn will lead to more excellent works.

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