

# Study on the Oriental Aesthetic Value of “Eternal Love” Under the Receptional Aesthetics of Film\*

Juan Qian

The College of Foreign Studies  
Anhui Xinhua University  
Hefei, China 230088

**Abstract**—Receptional aesthetics is a new methodology proposed by RH Jauss in literary studies in the 1960s. On this basis, in the early 1970s, he combined the filmology of receptional aesthetics together with audience study, opened the prelude of film receptional aesthetics research and he proposed a very unique methodology. This article takes the film receptional aesthetics as principle, deeply analyzes the narrative theme and cultural connotation of the television work "Eternal Love" which adapted from the online novel with the same name, and makes meticulous interpretation of the audience's expectation and aesthetics as well as other aspects, aims to explore the aesthetic value and aesthetic taste of the traditional Chinese culture implied in the work.

**Keywords**—receptional aesthetics; expectation horizon; aesthetic acceptance; "Eternal Love"

## I. INTRODUCTION

The TV series "Eternal Love" is based on the online novel with the same name wrote by Tang Qi Gong Zi. It tells the story of the Qingqiu Fox Emperor's little daughter Bai Qian who disguised from a women as "Si Yin". In Kunlun, she studied for several years and took care of "Ye Hua" who raised in the golden pond every day, thus forming the love of the lifetime; after that, in the war of the Tianzu and Yizu, when Bai Qian sealed Qing Cang, she lost all her power, memory and appearance, turned into "Su Su". She fell into the human world and met Ye Hua, then fell in love with him and continued the love of a second lifetime. Later then she was repeatedly framed and misunderstood. Bai Qian felt heartbroken, after gave birth, she jumped off the Zhu Xiantai. A hundred years later, the two met by the East Sea, Ye Hua recognized "Bai Qian" and accompanied her every step of the way. At this time, Qing Cang once again broke out of the seal and Ye Hua killed Qing Cang personally without enough time to explain, and paid his whole life to sealed Dong Huangzhong, facing the soul of Ye Hua, Bai Qian regrets and blames himself. Fortunately, three years later, Ye Hua awakened, the two were able to continue the story of three lifetime love and hate.

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\*Project No.: Research on the Translation and Influence of Chinese Network Literature under the Background of the "The Belt and Road" Strategy of the Key Project of Humanities and Social Sciences in Anhui Province in 2018 (SK2018A0646).

## II. RECEPTIONAL AESTHETICS

### A. The Theoretical Basis of Receptional Aesthetics

Receptional aesthetics, also known as reception theory, was proposed by Hans Robert Jauss, a professor of literary studies at the University of Constance in Germany in 1967. Its core emphasizes the audience and acceptance. Jauss believes that "The understanding of the first reader will be enriched and filled in the chain of acceptance from generation to generation. The historical significance of a work is determined in this process, and its aesthetic value is also confirmed during this process".<sup>[1]25</sup>, from the theory of receptional aesthetics, the literary works created by writers exist as the "first text", and the artistic emotions and comments created by readers or audiences after appreciation, resonance and integration are "The second text". Moreover, to a certain extent, the second work is truly an aesthetic object, and the literary work conveys its rich aesthetic value through the second work generated by interaction with the reader and the audience.

### B. The Main Idea of Film Receptional Aesthetics

On this basis, R.H. Jauss and Issel founded the theory which combined film aesthetics of literature receptional aesthetics together with audience study in the late 1960s and early 1970s, named the film receptional aesthetics. It emphasizes the reasons for the various differences in the reading response, deeply study the specificity of the aesthetic activities and the role of the recipients, put forward and emphasize the subjective concept of accepting and criticizing activities. The complete system of receptional aesthetics provides a theoretical basis for film receptional aesthetics.

From the perspective of film receptional aesthetics, this paper will carefully explore the profound Chinese traditional culture and aesthetic value that this television work present to the audience from the narrative theme and cultural connotation contained in the TV series "Eternal Love".

## III. THE NARRATIVE THEME AND EXPECTATION HORIZON OF "ETERNAL LOVE"

Since the birth of a work, the level of expectation of the work has arisen, that is, what is expected to be read from the work. Therefore, experienced authors often establish dialogues with readers through their works by adjusting and changing

their works in order to reach all the reader's expectation horizons from the works. Expectation horizon means that "in the process of pre-reading a literature work, as the subject of acceptance, the reader often has a formed structure in mind based on the complex reasons of the individual and the society, the psychological illustration of the reader's reading text is expectation horizon" [2] 52.

#### *A. Love, Feelings of Teacher and Disciple*

"The social function of literature is to cultivate readers' understanding of the world and change the social attitude of them through reading and circulation". Most of the fantasy and Xianxia novels in Chinese online novels usually use "cultivation" and "sentimentality" as the two creative themes. The traditional culture is combined with the martial arts novels, mainly describing the story of the characters through the pursuit of cultivation and immortal.

"Eternal Love" is also writing a traditional Chinese love concept of obstinacy and long-lasting love in the framework of the eternal motif of "love". The TV series is photographed from Siyin, Susu, to Bai Qian, love and death together through lives. They all reflect the process of constantly reconstructing the motif to meet the audience's "expectation horizon". Since the first life, the daughter of Fox Emperor Bai Qian has dressed up as a man and became the student of Mo Yuan, the god in Kunlun, and become his seventeenth disciple. She carefully took care of the golden lotus in the Kunlun pool every day, and then awakened Ye Hua who rose in the golden lotus by chance; they accompanied each other day and night, confiding troubles with each other, thus forming the love of the first life. Although the two did not really know each other in this life, they caused the audiences' full expectations, and lead to the entanglement for their second life. When the Qing Cang was sealed again, Si Yin (Bai Qian) was also hurt, so her power, memory and appearance were also been sealed, she fell into the human world to become a normal human Susu, and fell in love with the reincarnation of Ye Hua, the supposed happy ending further broken the audience's "expectation horizon", after Susu (Bai Qian) gave birth, she decided to jump off the Zhu xian tai due to various misunderstandings. In this life, one person is a prince of Tian zu who is from royal family, the other person is a normal human Susu, who has no authority, and the disparity in the status of the two is also determined that this life they cannot be happy together for long, which in fact satisfies the audience's "expectation" of the deep-rooted marriage value of "Matched marriage", satisfies people's expectations of the routine plot mode of "The talented and beautiful novels are often the two people fell in love at the first sight, in the middle they suffered bad people's dissension or the parents' obstruction, but finally they live happily ever after". [3] 126; The reunion after three hundred years, it is the third life, Ye Hua opened the "Battered" wife-chasing model, which inspires the audience's expectation of the Three-life story. After that, Qing Cang broke out and the Ye Hua sacrifices Donghuang Zhong with his life, and then after three years, Ye Hua awakened so the two people were able to renew their love. "The sentimental clues of the fairy tale run through all the way, satisfying the ordinary audience's love imagination of the twists and turns and the perfection. There are thousands

of coats but the core remains unchanged, which also shows another horizon expectation of the audience". [4] 15

The ancients often mentioned that "Once a teacher, forever a teacher like father". The traditional Chinese teacher and student relationship is an important item in the human race. "The place where the rule exists is the place where teacher exist", the relationship between the teacher and the student is measured by "morality". Confucius traveled around the countries in order to spread his thoughts with his three thousand students are traveling together with him. "Eternal Love" is satisfying the expectations in the audience's mind for thousands of years about the relationship between teacher and students and the relationship of classmate which always adhered by China's Confucian doctrine. After Mo Yuan sealed the Donghuang Zhong with his soul, his soul flies and scatters, and Bai Qian intentionally get her senior fellow apprentices drunk, and took Mo Yuan's body away and hide in the "Yanhua Cave" of Qingqiu. On one hand she did not want to see her senior apprentices suffered from protecting their master, on the other hand she want to return to the master's many years of teaching so she took this responsibility on her own. At the beginning, Zhe Yan led Bai Qian up the mountain to learn the skills, her master treated her with a different look and presented with the powerful weapon of "Yu Qing Kunlun Fan". "Xue Ji" contains: "All the way to learn, good teacher always is strict. If the teacher is strict, then the knowledge will be respect; if the knowledge is respected, then the people know how to learn". In the 30,000-year teaching of Siyin (Bai Qian), Mo Yuan pays equal attention to kindness and severity, not only he punished her for privately play downhill, but also saved her in the dungeon of God Yaoguang., even more he kept the sky thunder which happened when she is about to become a god away for her. "Respecting the teacher" is the traditional ethics of the Chinese who abide for thousands of years, the special article "Respecting the teacher" in "Lv Shi Chun Qiu" said: "Life is about regimen, the way of regimen is to nourishing heart; when death happened, it should apply sacrifice, the skill of sacrifice is about time and season; and that is why we respect the teacher". Bai Qian once mentioned to her parents and brothers that "Master treats me with the grace of the mountain". It is with this grateful heart that after she failed to borrow the "Jade Soul" from her former lover, current enemies Li Jing, she fed her master Mo Yuan's body with heart blood everyday for 70,000 years( legend says the heart blood of nine-tailed fox could prevent dead body from rotting). In addition, Mo Yuan also passed the secret skill to seal Donghuang Zhong to his most proud disciple- Si Yin (Bai Qian), which is in line with the traditional mentoring relationship in the audience's psychological sense, and also it represented an artistic inheritance, a spiritual transmission in Chinese cultural traditions.

#### *B. Big Righteousness and Small Righteousness*

Different from the "science fiction" and "magic" novels, the Xuan Huan works are combined with martial arts novels and metaphysical stories. The so-called "metaphysical" factors focus on the exploration, interpretation and description of Taoist thought, Yijing, folklore, supernatural state and occultism. Not only it can give full play of audience and

reader's imagination, but also arouse the "moral spirit" in their hearts.

What is more prominent in this type of novel is the sharp contrast between "Big righteousness" and "Small righteousness". Small righteousness refers to too much attention to one's own small thoughts, small consciousness, small tastes, and everything should around its own interests, limit the pattern to itself. And what is big righteousness? Big righteousness means justice and righteousness. Confucianism emphasizes go into the society, serve the society. Confucian scholars often regard the rise and fall of the country and the settlement of the people as their own responsibility. From Mencius's "If you want to rule the world, who will be the perfect choice in the world beside myself", to Fan Zhongyan's "To worry before the common people worries; to enjoy only after the people can enjoy", and then to Gu Yanwu's "Everybody is responsible for the fate of his country", they all put their own honor and disgrace aside, and put their safety at risk for the sake of morality, the country, and the people

The complete story of the forty years recorded in "Zi Zhi Tong Jian" is enough to prove that big righteousness is always higher than Small righteousness. When there is conflict and contradiction between the two, it is necessary to abandon the small righteousness for the big righteousness. "Liu Guan Zhang" puts the self-small righteousness above the big righteousness, and ignores the interests of the country and the people, so their failure is inevitable. During the war between the Tian zu and the Gui zu, when the pattern of God Mo Yuan was broken, God Yao Guang put down his personal grievances with Mo Yuan, focusing on the whole heaven and the world, willing to act as vanguard to draw away the enemy, he personally led 10 thousand soldiers to draw away a hundred thousand soldiers of Yi Zu, and finally he died in the battlefield, his sacrifice earn the living chance for the two hundred thousand soldiers in the pattern map. The Tianzu branch Su Jin race took the initiative to be the bait in order to make sure Mo Yuan's plan to feint to the east but attack in the west successful, and eventually the whole race was destroyed. For the safety of the world, the stability of the world, the two brothers Mo Yuan and Ye Hua, abandoned their personal feelings and emotions, and successively used their soul to sacrifice to fight the war for the sake of personal interests.

China's long history has always emphasized collectivism. Thousands of Chinese people act like one person, drumming like one person, dancing like one person, for the sake of national security, for the sake of collective interests, even at the expense of their own lives. The idea of protecting one's own country and people is completely reflected in "Eternal Love".<sup>[5]76</sup>

The reception theory is reader-centered and targets the reader's acceptance. It is believed that in the overall relationship formed by the author-work-reader, the reader is by no means a dispensable and irrelevant factor. On the contrary, in a fundamental sense, literary works are created for readers, and readers are the active subjects of literary activities. For this reason, the narrative theme of the work "Eternal Love" closely follows the audience's expectation vision, and greatly satisfies the audience by placing a small pattern of love into the core

ethical value of "big righteousness" to save all the livings in the world, which satisfied audience's expectations to a great extent, also more likely to resonate and ponder the audience.

#### IV. CULTURAL CONNOTATION AND AESTHETICS ACCEPTANCE OF "ETERNAL LOVE"

Fan Yongge, a literary critic, commented that "the story of 'Eternal Love' is not a clone transplant of foreign gods, but is rooted in Chinese history and culture, inheriting the Chinese-style imagination from "Chu Ci" and "Shan Hai Jing"; The visual effect is not the 'magic dance of the Chinese and foreign gods', but shows the style of Xianxia from the Chinese classical conception".

##### A. Chinese Traditional Culture and Local Style

Iser suggested that all literary works have a certain degree of uncertainty, that is, there is no exact correlation between the current phenomena and phenomena depicted in the works. The reader or the audience starts from the personal experience, measure the work by their own standards, or put forward their own opinions, so that the works do not have a completely consistent correspondence in real life. This openness of rootless roots enables the works to form various scenes in the reading process of different readers that is the so-called a thousand readers have a thousand images of Lin Daiyu.

Myths, fables and historical essays are considered to be the three main sources to influence the creation of ancient Chinese novels. The television work "Eternal Love" embodies a lot of mythological allusions and fable stories that have been passed down from ancient China, thus vividly explaining China's long and beautiful traditional culture, and it is also easier for the audience to accept in sense and psychologically.

1) *Symbolic meanings about "dragon" and "fox"*: The striking feature of literary works is that people are awe-inspiring and eager for the unknown, full of curiosity and inquiry spirit. Dragon is widely discussed in the "Shan Hai Jing" which describes ancient mythology, geography and folklore, and is divided into several categories, such as in "Shan Hai Jing. Da huang jing" recorded that "Outside the Northwest Sea, in the north of Chishui, there is Zhangwei Mountain. There is a god with red snake body and human face, his eyes are long and straight, when he closes his eyes, it will be night; when he opens his eyes, the world will be bright and light. He never eat food, never go to sleep, never need to breath. He can call for the wind and rain, he was called Zhu Long". Also in "Shan Hai Jing·Da Huang Dong Jing", it described that "Ying Long lived at the South of the mountain, because he killed Chi You and Kua Fu, he can not return back to the sky again, so the world was drought for years. When the drought is coming, people will dressed like Ying Long and pray for rain, thus it will rain". And the description of Jiao Long in "Shan Hai Jing" · Hai Nei jing, "Gun was died, after three years its body still haven't been corrupted, so people cut it open with the Wu knife, Huang Long came out from its body".<sup>[6]213</sup>

Although the records and descriptions about dragons are more common in the beautiful myths and legends passed down from ancient times, according to the research of the poet and scholar Wen Yiduo, many ancient ethnic groups in China take dragon as a symbol of their clan or tribe. It can be seen that for the Chinese nation, dragon is a symbol of lofty greatness. "Eternal Love" also tells about the grace and resentment between Heaven, Qingqiu and Gui zu (Yi zu) in the Four Seas and Eight Lands. The gods are divided into Tian shen, which are similar to the extension of abstract concepts like dragons and phoenixes; Di Xian such like nine-tailed fox, tree fairy, and things that are close to nature extension. The celestial princes Ye Hua helped the demon for Zhong Rong country to fight with demons, during the battle with the evil Jin Ni beast; he had no choice but to present his black dragon appearance, and saved the children in danger and release lightning to repel the Jin Ni Beast. The Prince of Tianzu has people in his heart and blessed them; he exerted magic power called for rain to relieve the drought. This is consistent with the setting of traditional Chinese concepts, and also satisfies the audience's reverence for God and accepts the Ye Hua, the Price of Tian Zu as the main characters of the work.

The arrangement of "Bai Qian"'s nine-tailed fox identity is taken from the "Shan Hai Jing": "Three hundred miles to the east is the Qing Qiu Mountain. The south side of the mountain abounded jade, the north of the mountain abounded Qinghu. There is a kind of beast in the mountain looks like a fox but with nine tails and its voice is like crying baby and this kind of beast eat human. If people eat it, then they could avoid the evil hurt". Fox, most of them looked charming, often changed into human shape to tempt people, legend says Da Ji and Bao Si were nine-tailed fox and their records are the most, which can be seen in the "Liao Zhai Zhi Yi" wrote by Pu Songling in Qing Dynasty. In "Eternal Love", the role of Bai Qian is set as a nine-tailed fox, which could reflect more about her beauty among the world, and it is easier for the audience to accept the tough road of their love--the subtle love with her master "Mo Yuan", the failed first love with the "Yi Zu", and the love of the three lives with princes "Ye Hua". In addition, in traditional Chinese culture, the nine-tailed fox was once a positive image, such as Shan Shi, the wife of Da Yu in the "Shan Hai Jing", so the character's image setting of Bai Qian also bears did not failed with her master's teaching and entrustment, risk her own life again and again to seal "Qing Cang" in order to save the people and uphold justice. Bai Qian's nine-tailed fox identity arrangement, "Tianzu" and "Qingqiu"'s marriage relationship, it is more in line with people's sense of social status, in order to better promote the love story of "Bai Qian" and "Ye Hua" from encounter, acquainted to love.

2) *Scene symbols such as "Kunlun Xu", "Dragon Palace" and "Peach forest"*: Kunlun Mountain is known as the "ancestor of all mountains", in "Shan Hai Jing · Hai Nei Xi Jing", it recorded as "The Kunlun Mountain located in the Northwest side, and it is the capital of Emperor God in human world. Kunlun Mountain has a area of eight hundred square meters, with the height of 10 thousand meter." The Western Queen's Yao Chi in "Journey to the West", Yuan Shi Tian

Zun's Taoist rites in "Feng Shen Yan Yi" are also located in Kunlun Mountain. The image of "Kunlun Xu", whether it is the illusion land in the red building, or the place where people try to be immortal which commonly seen in Xianxia themes, it always make the former emperor's heart longing, ordinary people think it is illusory, true and illusory. The first half of the story of "Eternal Love" is set in such a lofty place in people's minds. The magnificent gates built by the mountain stones, the smog created by the dry ice, and the thousands miles of green sea created by computer special effects, in general, it is in line with the place where people learn to become immortal during audience's imagination.

When the Dragon Palace was used as a religious image, it was originally a Buddhist cultural image. The Tang Dynasty recorded Xuan Zang's experience of "searching for Sanzang in the Dragon Palace".<sup>[7]35</sup> When he entered the ancient novel as a literary image, it became a common literary image in the novel. For example, "Liu Yi Zhi" describes the magnificent scene of Dongting Lake Dragon Palace, "Pavilions stand side by side, thousands of family lived there", and introduces the palaces of the Dragon Palace: Ningguang Hall, Lingxu Hall, Qianjing Hall, Xuanzhu Pavilion and Qingguang Pavilion, etc. All of them revealed the rich and majestic atmosphere and show the characteristics of the "King's residence". In the "Eternal Love" after three hundred years, Bai Qian and Ye Hua were once again met in the Dragon Palace in the East China Sea. The interior of the Dragon Palace is dominated by the palaces of the Han Dynasty, which fits well with the classical atmosphere of the Dragon Palace and the lofty status of the immortals up in the nine clouds. Tall coral trees, white shells and a large number of green sedge are the main decoration, thus avoiding the embarrassing atmosphere of the aquarium in the 86th edition of "Journey to the West", which is more in line with the deep fascination of modern audience for the dragon residence deeply in the sea.

In traditional literature, peach blossom has rich cultural connotations. In the book "Shi Jing Tong Lun" it says: "The peach blossom has the most beautiful color, so it is often used to metaphor woman, and starts the tradition to use poem to praise beautiful women". Although the appearance Bai Qian is not described too much in the show, but from the relationship with peach blossom, peach forest and peach blossom wine, you can also feel that this is a woman with a "Peach blossom face". Peach" has the same pronunciation with "Escape" in Chinese, and it can also exorcise evils and avoid disasters. Therefore, it has become a symbol of seclusion. In the Eastern Jin Dynasty, Tao Yuanming's "Peach Blossom Spring" is a famous article to use peach blossom to symbolize the retreat of the world. He described an ideal world which is illusory, detached reality for us, and it has also become the background setting in "Eternal Love". Just as Little Ali describes God Zhe Yan who retreat of the secular world, he said, "God Zhe Yan is the God with elegant taste and his interest is even more elegant than his taste". The image of "Peach Blossom" runs through the whole show, the plot atmosphere created by "ten miles of peach blossom" and "Peach Blossom wine" creates the aesthetic tone of the whole work and drives the audience's strong traditional aesthetic experience.

"Eternal Love" sort out the ancient mythology with rich imagination, borrow the wisdom of the ancients to construct the historical utopia, and use the cultural attraction to cover the audience, to provide the audience with the illusion to avoiding the secular and stress, and temporarily let go of the secular world.

### *B. The Current Literary Background and Aesthetic Style*

A basic point of view of receptional aesthetics is that the historical life of literary work exists in the reading and acceptance of chronological readers. Classical works gained the "contemporary existence" of each era, that is, the reality of life, in the acceptance, reaction and evaluation of the readers of the past. Similarly, the ideological and artistic value of classical works are not constant, but changes with the acceptance of readers of previous generations. Because value is always relative to the needs of the subject, it is the relationship of a demand and satisfied demand between the subject and the object.<sup>[8]76</sup>

The target audience of this show is no longer teenagers, but also attracts people of different ages to experience the true feelings close to humanity in the show. The reason is that the TV series "Eternal Love" is supplemented by a beautiful and romantic scene setting, and also it has a picture of oriental artistic conception, beautiful and special effects technology and a catchy theme song with ancient style. The audience who saw a lot of rich colors and high saturation felt the long-lost freshness and gave the audience an enjoyable audio-visual experience.

In addition, although "Eternal Love" is an Xianxia TV series in the Second world, the play is rooted in Chinese traditional culture, and it uses a lot of classical images, myths and legends, poetry and so on, and pays attention to the application of Chinese aesthetics, thus constructing the story background and framework of traditional culture, supplemented by the sensational model, it achieves both connotation and appreciation.

## V. CONCLUSION

"Eternal Love" contains a strong Chinese traditional culture atmosphere, and analyzes the expectation level and practical aesthetic experience generated by the application of these traditional cultural factors, and explores the traditional Chinese characteristics behind the Xian Xia drama, the flower blooms after integrating Chinese traditions can help the audience understand the artistic features of ancient Chinese classics. Drawing on nutrition from cultural thoughts and concepts in traditional culture, and using new ways to interpret moving stories, it has unique artistic charm, and better interprets the aesthetic value of oriental aesthetics, reflecting the aesthetic taste of contemporary audiences.

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