

Research on the Localization Strategy in the Remake of Film and TV Drama

—Taking the Japanese Remake of *Journey to the West* as an Example

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Abstract: Against the backdrop of globalization, the opportunities for cross-cultural exchanges in the cultural field are gradually increasing, and the development of film and television culture in various countries has ushered in opportunities. However, cross-cultural film and television communication also face obstacles due to the differences in cultural values and national identities among countries. In remakes, it is important to recode the stories and elements of the originals in such scope to reflect the localized folklore stories. The theme of this paper is to explore the dissemination of *Journey to the West* in Japan within the framework of popular culture and communication studies based on the theory of cultural localization. This paper finds that the Japanese remake of *Journey to the West* adopted methods of reimagining characters, incorporating traditional Japanese elements, and reflecting contemporary Japanese aesthetics to create a new local culture, and accelerated its localization through unique promotional techniques. At the same time, these approaches offer revelations of cultural transformation and pushing the boundaries of remakes.

Keywords: localization strategy, film and television drama, Japan, *Journey to the West*

1. Introduction

Film and television remake is an important form of modern film production, which can meet the audience's needs for different cultural backgrounds through localization strategy while maintaining the classic elements of the original. As an important form of cross-cultural communication, the effect of the remake is restricted by many factors. Many remakes end up as failures due to conflicting customs, characters that do not match the audience's aesthetics, and strong logic, etc. The *Journey to the West*, as an ancient Chinese classic, has been localized to meet the audience's needs. *Journey to the West*, one of the four great ancient Chinese masterpieces, has been remade by

many countries. Studying the successful strategies of the Japanese remake of *Journey to the West* is of great significance in helping the cross-cultural dissemination of cultures from different countries.

At present, the academic research on the Japanese remake of *Journey to the West* focuses on the analysis of the reasons for success based on the completed works, attributing the reasons for success to the localization of various elements. As for the process of dissemination of *Journey to the West* in Japan, Kan Zehui believes that the dissemination starts from both TV dramas and animation; and the variation is mainly carried out from two aspects, namely, the variation of the mother theme and the variation of the artistic image [1]. Xiao Yang, on the other hand, introduces the concept of modernity, analyzes the rationality of the Japanese adaptation of *Journey to the West* in the light of the historical background, and attributes the adaptation techniques to two kinds of changes in characterization and episodic narrative structure [2]. Taking time as a clue, Ma Xikui traces the introduction of *Journey to the West* into Japan as well as the establishment of Japanese characters of *Journey to the West*, and their evolution and development. The localization of Japanese popular culture and *Journey to the West*-themed anime mentioned therein provides directions and ideas from the perspectives of economy, socio-culture, religion, and women's social status [3]. Shen Chen and Yuan Xilin similarly analyzed the mode of variation of each element of related works in each period in chronological order, and in their early adaptations, the genetic modulus accounted for a larger proportion than the mode of variation. However, as time advances, the genetic index declines and the mutation index rises, and the proportion of genetic modality has equalized with that of mutation modality when it develops to the middle period, and the proportion of mutation modality has been significantly higher than that of genetic modality in the late period [4].

In addition to adding local elements to film and television works, embodying national character, and reconstructing narrative logic, how to use propaganda to make the localization of film and television works more effective is a problem that needs to be solved in China. This study will use the case study method and the literature analysis method to take the version of *Journey to the West* broadcast by Fuji TV in Japan in 2006 as the research object and combine the collation and analysis of the literature as well as the citation of part of the data to summarize the strategies of the Japanese cross-cultural remake of *Journey to the West*.

2. The Influence and Significance of *Journey to the West* in China

Journey to the West is the first romantic chapter-length novel about gods and demons in ancient China. The novel mainly tells the story of the Monkey King was born, following the master Bodhi to learn the art and make trouble in the Palace of Heaven. Then they met the Tang Monk, Pigsy, Monk Sha and the White Dragon Horse, westward journey to fetch the scriptures. The novel Xuanzang fetches scriptures as the blueprint for this historical event, by the author of the artistic processing, profoundly depicting the social life of the people of the Ming Dynasty.

Journey to the West has an extraordinary status in the history of Chinese novels, it is the first Chinese romantic novel of God and magic. As the beginning of Chinese divine and magic novels, the stories of *Journey to the West* record the ritual culture, customs, and local conditions of the Tang Monk and his disciples as they traveled to various countries, which are folkloric in content, trans-geographical in space, and culturally diverse. In terms of characterization, it creates various contradictions through various complicated plots to outline the flesh-and-blood image of the protagonist. With its refined language and complete structure, the novel is still the benchmark for the creation of Chinese divine and magical novels to this day. From the Ming Dynasty to the present, *Journey to the West* has experienced hundreds of years of historical and cultural precipitation, and the culture and spirit of *Journey to the West* have been widely disseminated and persistently inherited, which have accumulated and provided opportunities for future generations to create and develop again. It can be seen that, as a literary masterpiece accumulated over generations, it is no

exaggeration to say that it is an inexhaustible cultural treasure trove that can be developed, which lays a good foundation for the cross-cultural dissemination of *Journey to the West* [5].

3. Japanese Version of *Journey to the West*

3.1. Social Background of Japan at the Time of Remake

In December 2001, the Japanese government issued the Basic Law for the Revitalization of Culture and the Arts, which established the important position of “culture as a nation” in the national development strategy [6]. In December of the following year, the Cabinet of Ministers issued the first Basic Policy for the Promotion of Culture and the Arts, which encourages the strengthening of cross-cultural communication and exchanges, the creation of unique new cultures, and respect for the independence and creativity of film and television arts organizers [6]. In addition, since the 21st century, the Japanese film and television industry no longer only takes historical stories and heroes as the main creative themes, but the new era of period dramas are more modern ideas and consciousness, and closer to the living conditions of contemporary people. Thanks to this, the Japanese film and television industry has flourished during this period, and a large number of localized adaptations of *Journey to the West* have appeared.

3.2. Japanese Version of *Journey to the West*

Japan began to remake *Journey to the West* in 1940. The black-and-white movie Enomoto no Monkey King was the real beginning of the Japanese film and television adaptation of *Journey to the West*. 1978 saw the release of the TV series *Journey to the West* starring Sakai Shojo and others, which had a far-reaching impact in Japan, Asia, and even English-speaking countries, and it became one of the wildly popular TV series in the 1970s. Since then, the 2006 version of *Journey to the West* has been extremely well received in Japan, with the highest ratings of any of the Japanese *Journey to the West* TV series. In addition, a large number of Japan’s national manga involve elements of *Journey to the West*. For example, the protagonist of Dragon Ball, Kakarot, is also called the Monkey King; the ninth theatrical version of Doraemon is called Doraemon: Nobita’s Parallel *Journey to the West*; and the Four Tails of Naruto is called the Monkey King, with the appearance of a red “gorilla”. Overall, *Journey to the West* is a very famous work in Japan.

The 2006 drama *Journey to the West* starring Shingo Katori was a mythological television series premiered by Fuji Television from January 9 to March 20, 2006, adapted from one of the Four Great Masterpieces of Ancient China, *Journey to the West*. It was the Japanese remake of the four *Journey to the West*-themed television series with the largest investment and greatest response, with an average rating of more than 20%, and the highest ratings of 29.2%, making it Japan’s most popular drama in 2006, which became the most popular TV series in Japan in 2006 [7]. In it, the character personalities, character costumes, and story backgrounds were adapted to a certain extent, adding a large number of Japanese elements and personalities. In addition to the common Japanese adaptations of *Journey to the West*, such as women playing the role of the Longevity Monk, the Hedoization of the Monk Sha, and the addition of romantic elements, the ending of the story leaves the viewers with a lot of suspense, which is not yet finished [8].

4. Similarities and Differences of *Journey to the West* Between China and Japan

China’s 1986 version of *Journey to the West* and Japan’s 2006 Fuji version of *Journey to the West* are both very famous film and television dramas adapted from one of China’s four masterpieces, *Journey to the West*. Although both versions are based on the original *Journey to the West*, there are some differences in production ideas and styles.

4.1. Storyline

In the storyline part, China's 1986 version of *Journey to the West* is not only faithful to the original but also pays attention to the in-depth analysis of the moral of the story, which is rich in content and presents a fresh, natural, light-hearted, and humorous style. On the other hand, Japan's 2006 Fuji version of *Journey to the West* is a bold adaptation of the original, which emphasizes more on modernity and adds some emotional lines between the characters, making the story more emotional. For example, in the Fuji version of *Journey to the West*, in addition to the four masters and disciples, there is also a female character named Rin-Rin, who often helps the four masters and disciples in times of crisis.

In addition to that, compared to the Chinese 1986 version of *Journey to the West*, the Fuji version of *Journey to the West* also added episodes about marriage [9]. For example, in the tenth episode, "Land of Separate Existence", Rin-Rin forces Wukong to marry him to protect the four masters and disciples from traveling to the West, and Wukong shows his true feelings towards Rin-Rin during the wedding ceremony because an assassin has injured him. Such a plot adaptation seems to be more in line with modern values, which makes the audience enjoy it. The White Dragon Horse, familiar to Chinese audiences, does not appear in the Fuji version of *Journey to the West* but is instead replaced by the four masters and disciples traveling on foot to Tenjiku. The order of appearance of the four masters and disciples has also been adjusted. In the TV series, the calm Sha Wujing becomes the eldest disciple, while the lively and playful Sun Wukong becomes the third disciple. Such a plot arrangement facilitates the Fuji version of *Journey to the West* to cut down the plot appropriately in the limited space and increase the dramatic conflict by enhancing the emotional line between the characters, making the story more concise and coherent.

4.2. Character Image

In terms of characterization, the Fuji version of *Journey to the West* has been heavily adapted based on the original, especially the four masters and disciples are significantly different from the original. The biggest change is the character of the Tang Monk. In the Fuji version of *Journey to the West*, the Longevity Monk is played by a woman, showing the softness and delicacy of women. Unlike the brightly colored robes of the Chinese version of the Longevity Monk, the Fuji version of *Journey to the West* has light-colored costumes, which is inseparable from the Japanese pursuit of simplicity and elegance. Characteristically, the Chinese version of the Tang monk in some episodes will show weakness and cowardice, the right and wrong situation, but the Fuji version of "*Journey to the West*" no longer needs to be rescued by the object, on the contrary, she is always with the disciples to participate in the battle, but also highlights the role of the Tang monk's spiritual leader [1].

Although the three disciples are demons, they are more humanized than the original. The Fuji version of the Monkey King, while maintaining the impulsiveness and straightforwardness of the original, exaggerates his speech and behavior, and also focuses on portraying his gentle and delicate side. In the chapter of "Land of Children", the Monkey King takes care of several orphans and even reveals his father's love [10]. In terms of appearance, the Fuji version of the Monkey King's monkey image has been significantly weakened, with the appearance of the man almost indistinguishable from that of an ordinary person. Unlike the original Pigsy's fat head and ears, the Fuji version of Bajie's appearance has been greatly embellished, only a pair of beckoning ears are still retained, and his clothes are more colorful, with a hat with red and green stripes on his head, and wearing a yellow-green lapel robe. In terms of character, although he is still lazy, he is willing to sacrifice himself for the sake of his lover and has more human emotions. In the Fuji version of *Journey to the West*, Monk Sha has also changed a lot, with his character modeled on the Japanese

folklore of the river boy, no longer wearing a beard and no longer picking up burdens and leading a horse; on the contrary, he has long hair and looks very funny with two small forks in his hands [7]. In terms of personality, unlike the simple, honest, and silent monk in the original, the Fuji version of *Journey to the West* is greedy for beauty and talks a lot, often at odds with the Wukong and the Eight Preceptors, but always has no choice but to rescue his friends when they are in danger.

4.3. Cultural Differences

In terms of cultural differences, China's 1986th version of *Journey to the West* borrowed some elements from traditional Chinese cultures such as stories, idioms, and songs. The Japanese 2006 Fuji version of *Journey to the West* focuses on finding cultural symbols and imagery related to Japan during the creative process to attract Japanese audiences and adds some Japanese humor and jokes for padding.

Many scenes and details in the Chinese version of *Journey to the West* reflect traditional Chinese thought and culture as well as the context of the times. The birth of China's 86th version of *Journey to the West* was strongly influenced by the context of the 1980s, and the principles of the adaptation guided the creation of the TV series, which still carries the shadow of the original "dramatization" model [11]. For example, in the episode "Three White Bone Demons", the expression of opera is used, from the background music to the characters' lines, all of which have the cadence and flavor of Peking Opera.

In the Japanese version of *Journey to the West*, a large number of Japanese cultural elements were added. For example, in the second episode of the Japanese version of *Journey to the West*, when the four masters and disciples were feeling tired, a hot spring appeared in front of them, and the three disciples couldn't wait to run there. Hot springs have a very important position in Japanese culture and are one of the unique symbols of Japanese cultural movement, which is why Japan is called the "Land of Hot Springs". Numerous Japanese literary and film works have appeared in the hot springs as a cultural image, these works show that Japan's hot springs variety, high quality, and unique regional characteristics, including natural terrain, etiquette, culture, and other factors, is the first choice for people to relax and rest. The Japanese version of *Journey to the West* here cleverly inserts hot springs as Japanese cultural imagery, bringing the audience into a more vivid and familiar cultural context, which facilitates the audience's understanding and empathy while also leaving a deep impression on the audience.

5. Revelations

The success of the localized dissemination of Japan's *Journey to the West* provides many insights for the localization strategy of foreign film and television works in China.

First of all, the country should pay attention to cultural and artistic creation to lay a good cornerstone for the development of the cultural industry. At present, artistic creation faces many challenges. On the one hand, artistic creation inevitably goes to vulgarization under the wave of commercialization, which lowers the threshold of creation; on the other hand, due to the limitations of many factors such as politics and society, artistic works can not be given free play, and all of these will affect cultural and artistic creation. To create a good environment for China's cultural and artistic creation, China must strengthen the education of culture and art, popularize the education of culture and art, and at the same time, the public should supervise the quality and level of cultural and artistic works, and more importantly, they should protect the legitimate rights and interests of the creators of culture and art and the freedom of creation, and try their best to provide a free and open atmosphere for the creation.

Secondly, localized works should be close to China's local environment, pay attention to China's real-life problems, and deepen the connotation to polish the aesthetic depth of the works. Such adapted works are more likely to be welcomed by domestic audiences. An excellent localized work will highlight the national spirit of the local people under the framework of the original story so that the work presents a unique cultural personality and has a deep cultural heritage.

Finally, a localized remake cannot ignore originality. The creator's work should express new thoughts and experiences about the times, the market, the world, and society. Works that are simply copied and reproduced in an attempt to rub off on the original will not be recognized by the public.

6. Conclusions

After studying the above issues, this paper concludes that the localization strategy of the Japanese *Journey to the West* remake is as follows: First, the government introduces policies and strategies to cultivate suitable soil for cultural and artistic creation. The national development strategy of "culture as a nation" has made Japan's cultural industry flourish and made the localization of *Journey to the West* possible. Secondly, the modernization of the storyline makes the content more resonant and immersive to modern people. In addition to this, the added emotional lines of the characters also make the story more emotional. Thirdly, in terms of characterization, the changes in the appearance, dress, and personality of the four masters and disciples make them more "human", thus bringing them closer to the audience. Fourthly, the cultural symbols and imagery in the Fuji version of *Journey to the West* are portrayed in a way that is more in line with traditional Japanese culture. These changes make the Japanese audience feel more comfortable and less "exotic", which is conducive to the spread and popularization of the *Journey to the West* story in Japan.

Authors Contribution

All the authors contributed equally and their names were listed in alphabetical order.

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