A comparative study of cultural differences in transnational remakes of film and television dramas

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Abstract: In this paper, a comparative analysis of the adaptations and remakes of Chinese, Australian and Vietnamese television dramas is conducted through content analysis and in-depth interviews, taking the Chinese classic Journey to the West, the Australian version of The Legend of the New Monkey King and the Vietnamese version of Journey to the West as examples in the context of cross-cultural communication. The conceptual distinction between adaptations and remakes is made from the perspective of the similarities and differences between the media, and the origins, dilemmas and possible trends of the development of both are summarised. The study finds that the Vietnamese version of Journey to the West and the Australian version of The Legend of the New Monkey King are very different from the Chinese classic in terms of plot adaptation, and that the transnational remakes are less effective in terms of dissemination. The more similar the country is to our traditional Confucian culture, the lower the cultural discount is. It is hoped that film and TV drama practitioners will make rational judgments and positive actions from the concept of intercultural communication, and hopefully, it will be useful for future film and TV drama remake productions and for the intercultural communication of remade film and TV dramas.
Keywords: intercultural communication; film and television drama; cultural differences; localisation

1 Introduction

At the beginning of 2022, the global epidemic was widespread, and media products developed rapidly as a result. In this context, the remakes of Journey to the West in countries such as the United States, Japan, Australia and Vietnam have achieved very good communication results. We have observed that remakes change the costumes, presentation and even the lines of the characters, so that the greater the cultural differences between the remake country and ours, the greater the cultural discount and the stronger the localisation effect. We are curious about this: do remakes have a cultural exchange effect? In what way is cross-cultural communication achieved in remakes? Does cultural discounting occur in the process of remake distribution? Through a comparative study of China's classic film and television drama Journey to the West, the Australian version of The Legend of the New Monkey King and the Vietnamese version of Journey to the West, this article compares the different presentations of the same story in different countries in terms of form and connotation. Through the superficiality of the films and dramas, we compare them with the original texts and the gaps between them from various perspectives,

such as production mechanism, film content, dissemination channels and dissemination effects, and then analyse the advantages and shortcomings of the international remakes, especially the characteristics of localised changes to cultural differences in cross-cultural communication, in an attempt to find a way out for remakes under cross-cultural communication, in the hope that it will be useful for future remakes of films and dramas. It is hoped that this will be a useful reference for future remakes of films and TV dramas, and that it will be useful for the future intercultural communication of remakes of films and TV dramas, and that new discoveries can be made in the way that remakes of films and TV dramas can enhance the soft power of the country's culture.

2 Review of the literature

2.1 Literature review of transnational remakes of films and TV dramas

A search on the Internet for key keywords revealed 21 doctoral theses on "intercultural communication, remakes". There were 212 master's theses. Among them, 75 articles were on video communication, accounting for 35% of the content of intercultural communication. There are 29 articles on film and television dramas, accounting for 38% of the content in the general category of image communication direction, but there is less literature on film and television dramas. The phenomenon of the impact of intercultural communication models has attracted research from multiple perspectives in both domestic and international academia. Domestic scholar Wen Min's article 'A study on the dilemma of intercultural communication and countermeasures for Chinese costume serials' combines the phenomenon of the export remake of many of China's costume dramas with theories of peripheral communication and cultural discounting, and analyses the intercultural communication profile of Chinese costume dramas in terms of plot, theme and context. The introduction of many policies to protect cross-culturally transmitted works is proposed. Dong Xiaowei, a domestic scholar, in 'A Comparative Study of the Remake of the Film and TV Drama 'The Dedication of Suspect X' in the Perspective of Intercultural Communication - Taking the Remake of Chinese, Japanese and Korean Versions as an Example', he proposes that regardless of the country, the ultimate goal of remaking a film is to reap more viewers and box office, to spread the culture of the country well and to make more viewers understand its artistic value He also suggests that the ultimate goal of remaking a film is to gain more audience and box office, to spread the culture of the country, and to make its artistic value known to a wider audience. He also puts forward more requirements for transnational art workers.

YipengYuan, a foreign scholar in the field of intercultural communication, focuses on the opportunities and risks presented by the characteristics of influencers in intercultural communication. He points out that influencers have great opportunities in the development of multiculturalism, intercultural communication in a pluralistic context, and corporate marketing in the global marketplace. Foreign scholar HairongSun, on the other hand, analyses the key elements of cross-cultural communication in film and television dramas, using the example of The Quest for Dreams and Travels. He pointed out that in modern globalisation, countries should constantly promote cultural exchange and learn from each other to promote the overall progress of the world.

2.2 Literature review of remakes of classic masterpieces

A search was conducted using "remake of classic masterpieces" as the keyword. Ren Zhiming, a domestic scholar, takes the film and television adaptation of "red classics" as the research object, and on the basis of reviewing and reflecting on the research of film and television adaptation of "red classics", he makes a study of "red classics". On the basis of reviewing and reflecting on the research on film and television adaptations of "red classics", the research on film and television adaptations of "red classics" raises expectations and goals. She analyses the reasons for the growing phenomenon of film and television remakes in the current context of commercialisation, as well as the problems, impacts and corresponding measures that should be taken. She also explains that the remaking of classics can, to a certain extent, lead to the loss or obliteration of some of the originality inherent in them.

To sum up, films occupy a large part of the research on intercultural communication, but there is a lack of research on remakes of television series. There are few articles that combine intercultural communication and TV series remake together, and the existing articles do not clearly define the scope of intercultural communication research, and the research on theories related to intercultural communication is not deep enough, and the research on the remake of classic masterpieces such as Journey to the West is almost extinct. The studies that have been conducted on TV remakes from the perspective of culture and communication have mostly concluded on the practical strategies of TV remakes, while ignoring the interests and psychological aspects of the audience. These studies do not examine the phenomenon of intercultural communication from the perspective of audience interest and psychology, nor do they answer the question about cultural discounting due to cultural differences. This paper will therefore attempt to answer the following question from the perspective of intercultural communication theory: whether the cultural discount is lower in countries that are closer to our Confucian cultural traditions.

3 Research methods

3.1 In-depth interview method

In-depth interviews were used to provide an in-depth analysis of the perceptions of each viewer on a longitudinal basis. A sample of 15 people aged 20-25 who had watched the Australian version of The Legend of the Monkey King and the Vietnamese version of Journey to the West in the month prior to the interview were asked to talk about their feelings, regardless of the scope of their feelings. After all, when a film is finished, the audience's feedback cannot be returned to the film, but the audience's feedback can be used as a reference for future remakes.

The interview questions were divided into three main sections. The first section deals with the basic information of the interviewees, including their age, income and occupation. In the second part, the research questions were downscaled into interview questions. It includes their perceptions of cultural differences, specific acceptance, non-acceptance strategies and approaches

to cross-cultural communication. In the third part, the preparation mainly deals with possible deeper questions.

This study conducted 45-minute semi-structured in-depth interviews with each of the 15 interviewers aged 20-25. The interviews began in December 2022 and ended in January 2023. Interviewees included firstly overseas students and secondly a larger research sample was recruited through international students. In accordance with the maximum sampling principle of the qualitative research methodology, the 15th interviewee was recruited with enough content to answer the research questions and the sample collection was closed. The interviewees differed in age, occupation, level of education and location, with a low degree of homogeneity. Interviews were conducted by telephone, text interview by WeChat and one-to-one face-to-face interviews. The results of the interviews were collated into verbatim transcripts, with a total of 3,000 words.

3.2 Content analysis method

In this study, the content analysis method was used to analyse the works of CCTV and Surge, comparing the dimensions of make-up, discourse, props, scenes and sub-plots, with higher scores indicating a closer degree of similarity.

4 Research content

This study provides a conceptual definition of remakes and adaptations of film and television dramas, as well as a broad perspective and analysis of the long-standing historical tradition of remakes and adaptations, the pursuit of both artistic and market values, the dilemmas faced today and the possible future trend development.

Through a comparative analysis of the internal and external messages of the film and television dramas, the study examines the presentation of different works in the language of the film and television dramas under the same blueprint of the original, the narrative sequence after the change of media, and the deconstruction and reconstruction of the other culture presented in the original Journey to the West, including the plot and ideological connotations, by the Vietnamese and Australian versions of The Legend of the New Monkey King.

Afterwards, the audiovisual effects and psychological feelings conveyed to the audience by the films and dramas, as feedback from this case study film and drama, are able to provide lessons for future remakes from point to point. Finally, from the theoretical point of view, we suggest conceptual improvements for future remakes, in the hope that practitioners will find the right fit between grasping their own culture and identifying with the culture of others, and play a long-lasting and positive role in remaking films and dramas in a cross-cultural context.

5 Research findings and discussion points

5.1 Cross-media narrative structural settings in film and television drama

Journey to the West mainly adopts a combination of linear narrative and circular narrative, the technique of ambush, and symmetrical narrative. Its storyline is enacted through a relationship between two pairs of characters characterised by a conflict of beliefs and a conflict of personalities. On the way to get the scriptures, Sun Wukong returns to Mount Huaguo twice, and Pigpai also mentions "you go back to your Quicksand River, and I go back to my Gaolaozhuang" several times. The contractual structure consists of the recipient of the contract (Party B), the party who concludes the contract (Party A) and the conditions of the contract (the contract), and it is also important to note that "the functional group that constitutes the contractual structure takes a negative form at the beginning of the narrative but becomes an affirmative form at the end". In the twenty-seventh episode of Journey to the West, the monk orders the Monkey King to be expelled, which means that he breaks the contract of his own accord, and the Monkey King breaks off his journey to the West and returns to the Mountain of Flowers and Fruits as the Monkey King, restoring his true state (i.e. the negative state according to Grimes). It is easy to see that Sun Wukong has entered into a contractual relationship with the Tang monk and the Buddhism behind him, and the tightening of the curse is the punishment for Sun Wukong's breach of contract. By extension, the Pig, the Sand Monk, the White Dragon Horse and the Tang Monk can all be analysed in this way.Pig Bajie, Sha Monk and White Dragon Horse had similar experiences before the contract was signed. Pig Bajie once introduced himself as follows: I was originally a heavenly marshal in the River Heaven, but because I was teasing Chang'e with wine, the Jade Emperor beat me with 2,000 hammers and relegated me to the mortal world; Sha Monk once told himself as follows: I was a curtain general who served the Luanglui in the Heavenly Palace, but because I broke a glass jar by mistake at the Peach Festival, the Jade Emperor beat me with 800 hammers and relegated me to the mortal world. The Bodhisattva Guanyin had introduced the Little White Dragon in this way: This guy is the son of Ao Leun from the Western Sea; he set fire to the pearl on the temple, his father sued him for disobedience, and he committed a capital offence in the Heavenly Court, so I personally met the Jade Emperor and asked him to come down. It is clear that all three of them were originally members of the Heavenly Court and had been relegated for their transgressions. In the midst of their suffering, the Bodhisattva Guanyin appears and claims that if they sign a contract to escort the Longevity Monk to the Western Paradise to obtain scriptures, they will be spared their suffering and become righteous.

The latter eighty episodes of Journey to the West are typical of a linear time structure, with the Tang monk and his party travelling a hundred and eighty thousand miles and undergoing eighty-one hardships before finally making their way to Mount Ling to obtain the true scriptures. Zheng Zhenduo points out in The Evolution of the Journey to the West that, apart from the first four hardships, the rest of the so-called eighty-one hardships are all experiences during the journey to the West, but the so-called eighty-one hardships are only exaggerations; in fact there are no eighty-one stories, there are several hardships, all of which are just variations of a story itself. Following this line of thought, we will take the forty-one stories, from the Tang Monk's encounter with a tiger outside the city to the old softshell turtle haunting the Tongtian River, as the object of our analysis of the structure of these adventure stories.

The forty-one stories of the Journey to the West are not entirely repetitive in structure, which means that there is a certain logical relationship between them, as we can see more clearly if

we combine these short stories into several clusters. The first cluster is from the thirteenth to the twenty-sixth, where the main narrative line is the formation of the scripture-retrieving team. The second story group is from the twenty-seventh to the fifty-eighth, and the main narrative line is the elimination of the team's duplicity. In the twenty-seventh episode, "The Demon of the Corpse Plays Tang Sanzang, and the Holy Monk Hates and Expels the Monkey King", the greatest internal crisis occurs in the scripture-retrieval team. In addition, the conflict between Sun Wukong and Porky Pig is also brought into focus. The third story group is after the fifty-ninth episode, when the team is completely united and united, and even the Tang Monk is basically no longer missing. In other words, the author intends to make the four master and disciples not to be scattered, but to act as a whole to fight for justice and help all beings. The story is no longer centred on the rescue of the Monk by the Monkey King, the rescue of the Camelot, the opening of the Thorn Ridge, the rescue of the children in the Bijou Kingdom, the rescue of the Empress in the Zi Zhu Kingdom and the rescue of the Princess in the Tian Zhu Kingdom.

In the above analysis, it is clear that there is a narrative logic between the clusters of stories in the story of the fetching of the scriptures that involves the formation of a team, the elimination of duplicity and the unity of the master and disciples in rescuing the others.

5.2 Comparison of localised adaptations of cross-media characterisation

Vietnamese culture developed under the influence of Chinese culture, however, in the modern era, Vietnam also had a painful history of being colonised. After the 1970s, the United States even established a pseudo-regime in South Vietnam, and the cultures of almost all of the great powers of the East and West world took their place in Vietnam, so it is not surprising that Vietnam produced an East-meets-West adaptation of Journey to the West. In the original version of Journey to the West, there are some gloriously bizarre demonic and immortal spells that delighted the audience. The Journey to the West is set in the Tang Dynasty during the Ch'ing-Guan period, when the Chinese still relied mainly on the geomantic timekeeping method, which means that a javelin is set up in a well-lit area to determine the time at that time based on the state of the projection. However, the Vietnamese version of Journey to the West is different in that in its setting, the Tang Empire seems to have seen the dawn of modern civilisation, with the Monkey King already using a watch! The fact that Sun Wukong carries a mechanical watch is understandably a sign that the Great Tang Empire is gainfully developed, but the crew seems to have been constrained by financial constraints to give Sun Wukong an electronic watch, directly giving the Great Tang Empire access to the technological achievements of mankind after the second industrial revolution. It is hilarious to see such a plot set up. I don't know if the director did it to add comic relief or if it was intentional.

As we can see from the stills, the costume design of the four members of the Vietnamese version of Journey to the West is largely based on the 86th edition of Journey to the West. As the camera draws in, the familiar Sun Xing Xing has no witty image as in the original, and his loose clothes match the actors' haphazard acting, not at all resembling the once majestic Qi Tian Da Sheng who once wreaked havoc in the Heavenly Palace, but just like a monkey being played on the street. The actor's clothes still fit the original story, but when you look at his face, you can't

help but suspect that the crew stole the fake beard of Li Kui from the Water Margin crew next door. The actor who played Pig Bajie was not wearing a pig face mask, but was directly cast in his own right. The actor who played Piggy was very thin and his stomach had deflated. And in order to save costs, the part of the White Dragon Horse was cut off. Such a crude plotting is heartbreaking.

Looking at the shabby sets and the odd cast of four, it's hard to believe that such a remake will be well received.

5.3 Cultural differences and cultural discounts

The emergence of the Vietnamese version of Journey to the West has sparked much debate and outrage among netizens, but of course, only Chinese netizens are outraged. However, for the Vietnamese, the drama was interesting, simple and easy to understand, and received extremely high ratings when it was broadcast on television. The fact that Chinese netizens and Vietnamese people have very different attitudes towards the same TV series is a side reflection of the issue of cultural identity. It is true that the Journey to the West is the culmination of the wisdom of Chinese literary figures and should be well preserved and passed on. Therefore, in China, people have an attitude of reverence towards the Journey to the West, and do not allow it to be adapted indiscriminately. For the Vietnamese, even though their former suzerain state is China, the Journey to the West is also of great importance to them. For the Vietnamese, despite their former sovereignty over China, the Journey to the West is just an imported product, so they are allowed to make it for fun.

Therefore, we should look at the Vietnamese version of Journey to the West with a tolerant attitude. We cannot expect the Vietnamese to respect the original Journey to the West as much as the Chinese do, as literature and art works are for the people. As long as the Vietnamese people are happy with it, such a Vietnamese version of Journey to the West is no less an excellent piece of literature. Of course, there are Vietnamese people who have become interested in the original Journey to the West after watching the Vietnamese version, which in turn has boosted the sales of the original Journey to the West in Vietnam, and such a TV series is also a bridge for cultural exchange between China and the outside world. So, even if such a TV series seems useless to us Chinese, it still plays a role in making foreigners more familiar with Chinese culture.

5.4 Description of the interview results

What are the ways in which cross-cultural communication is achieved when we address remade dramas? When we conducted further in-depth interviews and tried to get answers to the question of whether cultural discounting occurs during the dissemination of remakes, we were surprised to find that the closer the countries are to our traditional Confucian culture, the lower the cultural discount. The interviewees' answers to the question of whether or not remakes serve as a cultural exchange confirm my beliefs:

Vietnam is also heavily influenced by Chinese and American culture, and the remake of Journey to the West is a reflection of China's increased soft power in recent years. As China's

literary and artistic market goes global, more and more foreigners are willing to watch Chinese literary and artistic works. On foreign online platforms, the TV series Romance of the Three Kingdoms has become a hit with people in Europe and the US, even as much as the national American series Game of Thrones, which demonstrates the influence of Chinese civilisation, which is a good thing for China. Of course, in the process of cultural diffusion, it is inevitable that foreigners will have a biased understanding of Chinese culture, or not take it seriously enough, and the Vietnamese version of Journey to the West is a product of this.

We should be tolerant and give them a little more time. After all, our culture advocates inclusiveness rather than forced change, and as the original Journey to the West says: "All are destined to be under the Buddha's tutelage". In the Chinese cultural circle, we and Vietnam are also destined to be together. As China's soft power continues to grow, one day we will see Chinese culture blossoming all over the world, and then our nation will also see the glory that belongs to us.

5.5 Description of the content analysis

From the above results, it can be seen that the Australian version of The New Monkey King Saga scored an average of 3.11 for make-up, 2.08 for discourse, 3.71 for scenes, 3.71 for props and 3.67 for subplots.

Judged by the scoring criteria of this coding, the Australian version of The New Monkey King Saga is less similar to the Chinese version of Journey to the West. In particular, on the discourse dimension, the Australian version of The Legend of the New Monkey King has adapted the line content and linguistic context to a greater extent, suggesting that other countries will make greater discourse adaptations in their remakes of Chinese classics to the phenomenon of cultural discounting in cross-cultural communication brought about by contextual differences. For example: in the Chinese version of Journey to the West there are a large number of localised proverbs, civet words as well as idioms. In the Australian version, they are replaced by their own usual style of speech. The language in the Australian version has a distinctive Australian humour, and there is a repeated emphasis on the Australian sense of national equality in the discourse, etc. The traditional Chinese contextual style cannot be seen in the Australian version. In addition, as the Australian,The Australian version of The Legend of the New Monkey King has adapted many of the episodes, so the content of the lines is very far apart.

5.6 Points of Innovation

It is an innovation to use the in-depth interview method from the viewer's point of view, to analyse the film and television drama from the perspective of the audio-visual language, under the framework of the language of the film and television drama, with different shots responding to different emotional demands and different music aiding different story rhythms. The focus of their viewing may not be on the audiovisual language but on the storyline and ideological content, and also on the objective analysis of established images by in-depth interviews as a bridle. In addition,

in an age of information explosion, it is essential to ensure the quality of content on top of the active interaction of promotional efforts, which is particularly evident in the Chinese remake of 2017, the latest year for remakes, where new media development is in full swing, triggering high media coverage and consequently high box office revenues through the viral spread of social media such as Weibo and WeChat, and making use of the star effect of the actors and even the director to favourably However, it is undeniable that fans are an important group of moviegoers, and even if they are not fans, when information about a film appears around the public like an advertisement for a long time, and when people around them are talking about it, the herd mentality will drive them to consume it; previous studies have not taken external communication channels into account as a factor of cross-cultural communication. Previous studies have not taken into account external communication channels as a factor in cross-cultural communication, but in fact it involves the influence of external factors on the box office and the evaluation of a film or TV show.

6 Concluding reflections

6.1 Conclusion

This study has theorised on the phenomenon of cross-cultural communication in remakes through content analysis and in-depth interviews, in an attempt to answer the question of cultural discounting due to cultural differences. After reading the video and textual materials, a preliminary knowledge of the topic of the study was obtained, followed by the determination of the research method. The content analysis of the short reviews was supplemented by pre-testing with in-depth interviews.

The localisation process is a contextual change made in determining the theme of the film and television drama, and the audience of the film and television drama in the local context is in turn a prerequisite for determining the theme. The intercultural perspective, mastering the essence of one's own culture, gaining a deeper understanding of the culture of others, finding the right fit and using localisation to transform it are the principles that need to be grasped by those who want to remake a film or television drama, and then combine this with a variety of promotional methods to expand the market for the film or television drama in order for it to be well received and well received.

6.2 Shortcomings

The content and format of the short reviews are free, based on each viewer's different feelings about the show, and the comments on the show are scattered, ranging from cultural differences to subtitle translations. The coding sheet cannot cover all the factors mentioned by the viewers, so the coverage of the sample on the whole will be biased.

In the in-depth interviews, respondents made predictions about the direction of the plot in the film and television drama that would be influenced by the amount of viewing. By the length

of time the camera stays on, the multiple frequency of descriptions of the same scene, etc., some respondents were able to make predictions about the murderer and about Ishigami not being a pervert. Those respondents who were both viewers and analysing the direction of the drama may not have had as strong a viewing experience and viewing experience as those who were simply viewers, and their exploration of the film and drama was more biased towards film and drama techniques rather than film and drama connotations. On the other hand, their opinions on the films and dramas are very sharp, going beyond the plot of the films and dramas to make suggestions on the details of them from a vertical perspective.

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