

The Expression of Confucian Culture in Chinese, Japanese, and Korean Film and Television Works

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Abstract:

Confucian culture, as an important spiritual heritage of East Asian culture, has had a profound impact on the ethical concepts, behavioral norms, family structures, and personal growth of the societies of China, Japan, and South Korea. This article mainly focuses on Chinese, Japanese, and Korean film and television works, aiming to systematically analyze how the core concepts of Confucian culture are presented, interpreted, and reshaped in the film and television narratives of various countries. Through the characteristics reflected in their film and television works, it is found that the expression focus and narrative style of film and television works in the three countries are different. Based on the analysis of the above issues, the reason is due to the different social and historical backgrounds and socialization methods of various countries, which lead to different expressions of Confucian culture in film and television works in different countries. Finally, from a cross-cultural communication perspective, this article analyzes the positive role of film and television media as a way of cultural communication and exchange in expanding cultural development paths and promoting cultural exchanges in various countries. Therefore, this article proposes that in future cultural communication and exchange, it should continuously absorb the experience of excellent cases, create better works, enrich communication forms, and expand the influence of local culture.

Keywords: Confucian culture; Chinese drama; Korean drama; Japanese film and television works; cross-cultural communication

1. Introduction

Confucian culture has had a profound influence on

China, Japan, and South Korea, shaping their social ethics, morality, and behavioral norms. However, under the drastic changes of modernization, the

traditional values of the three countries have undergone some degree of transformation. As an important carrier for showcasing culture, film and television works transform their narrative expression into observational samples. Although there has been some research accumulation in the analysis of Confucian culture and East Asian film and television works, there is still relatively little research on how Confucian values are presented in film and television works and the reasons for these differences. This study uses a cross-cultural comparative perspective, integrating methods of literature research, case analysis, and comparative analysis to discuss some Chinese, Japanese, and Korean film and television works. Through the differential expression of cultural symbols, the aim is to analyze how the three countries display different interpretations of Confucian culture in their respective social backgrounds, and to provide inspiration for promoting future media communication and cultural exchange.

2. Literature Review

Based on the topic of the article, this review mainly sorts out the existing literature on scholars' research on the Confucian cultural philosophy itself, and then explores the elements of expression through film and television, as well as the study of Three Kingdoms film and television works, aiming to provide a clear theoretical framework for studying the differences expressed in Three Kingdoms film and television works from a cross-cultural perspective and the path of cultural dissemination through film and television. Firstly, the core of Confucianism lies in its core concepts of "benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, and integrity". Since ancient times, the Confucian cultural concept has been constantly improving and spreading to other countries, which is a process of continuous advancement and development. Therefore, scholars from the three countries' research on Confucianism and its localization characteristics, as well as the study of Three Kingdoms film and television works, can be traced back to the mid-20th century. Chinese sociologist Fei Xiaotong proposed the concept of hierarchical pattern in "Rural China", revealing the characteristics of traditional Chinese society, and Confucian traditional ethical norms are important factors in maintaining this concept [1]. The concept of realism is particularly evident in China domestic film and television dramas that have continued to this day. In "History of Korean Confucianism", South Korean author Yoon Si-chun said that Korean Confucianism was formed according to the specific region of South Korea, and was aimed at the Korean people as the main body. This is the limiting condition that distinguishes the Chinese and South Korean Confucian culture from the

different influences on society. Korean people realized the "Korean" of Confucianism by applying the localization of Confucianism to their specific social background [2]. This can also be found in Korean film and television dramas with the characteristics of "emphasis on emotions" and "emphasis on righteousness". Confucianism has a more profound history in Japan. In ancient times, Confucianism was once a weapon for Japan to strive for political rule. As Yu Shiyi said, based on the reference to Confucian culture, Japan developed Bushido and extended the "Bushido spirit". So, they added the concept of "courage" again, and bravery and loyalty became the ultimate goal and criterion of "righteousness" [3]. In modern times, Japan is facing a crisis of identity recognition. In the context of declining birth rates and social distancing in Japanese society, its film and television works have the characteristics of deconstruction and reconstruction. There is still a relative lack of comparative research on the film and television of the Three Kingdoms. Therefore, by comparing the different ways of dissemination in the film and television of the Three Kingdoms, it can discuss the characteristics of the Three Kingdoms reflected in the film and television itself. China's film and television industry strictly reviews domestic national broadcasting and television stations, and then broadcasts them through satellite channels or mainstream film and television media platforms (such as WeTV, YOUKU, IQIYI, etc.). In recent years, it has adhered to the "main theme of going global" to spread works with significant Chinese elements to the outside world. Japanese film and television are mostly market-oriented, and under continuous competition, Japanese film and television have developed increasingly complete industrial chains. In this situation, Principal Sugiyama proposed "Cool Japan", which essentially aims to export Japanese anime overseas for cultural dissemination, thereby promoting Japan's economic development. This has indeed achieved corresponding results to a certain extent, but it has shown a lack of innovation in live-action film and television in Japan. The South Korean film and television industry, as its pillar industry, cannot do without the strong support of the government through policy incentives. To this day, the government and wealth groups have jointly promoted the continuous development of the South Korean film and television industry. Especially Chalaby J K mentioned that in recent years, there has been a focus on deep customization and global broadcasting of Netflix, which has led to the birth of globally popular products. Korean entertainment companies have also actively transformed to provide Netflix with dramas, with the aim of vigorously maintaining the popularity of their country's popular culture and driving the country's economy [4]. In summary, the Three Kingdoms had some

different perspectives on Confucian culture; although their core concepts did not change, the characteristics presented were different. The root cause lies in the differences in social history and current social development, and the mode of dissemination is also one of the important factors affecting the film and television works themselves.

3. The Development of Confucian Culture and Its Manifestation in Chinese, Japanese, and Korean Film and Television Works

3.1 The Expression of Confucian Culture in Chinese Film and Television Works

The core of Chinese film and television dramas focuses on the fate of the family and the country, and the main plot of the story development is set against the backdrop of the times, linked to major policies issued by the state, and the social responsibility that everyone shoulders. The expression of filial piety often pursues ultimate sacrifice and unconditional dedication. For example, in the drama *A Lifelong Journey*, there are three siblings in the Zhou family. The eldest brother and second sister have gone out to work hard in the mountains and countryside, leaving only their youngest son, Zhou Bingkun, to take care of his paralyzed mother at home. He has also gone from being a slacker in the family to a pillar of support. In terms of benevolence and righteousness, support within the family and assistance from friends and neighbors are often reflected. Both the dramas *A Lifelong Journey* and *Romance in the Alley* mention an important time point of “resuming the college entrance examination”, and both depict some characters’ efforts to prepare for the exam, objectively reflecting the importance of the college entrance examination in China for crossing social classes (from the working class to the intellectual class, and then to the officialdom class). Personal destiny also varies through the continuous changes in policies of the times.

3.2 The Expression of Confucian Culture in Korean Film and Television Works

The core of Korean film and television dramas focuses on idealizing neighborly emotions, achieving a balance between family harmony and personal self-worth through communication and harmony. In terms of its ethical and moral values, South Korean society has a clear hierarchy (seniority, workplace hierarchy, and between generations) and strict use of honorifics. In the drama *Reply 1988*, there is a scene where Sung Bo Ra (one of the daughters in a family with a strong personality and excellent grades)

politely calls out “brother” to her neighbors even though they are familiar with each other. Even after falling in love with Sung Sun-woo, she still asks them to speak in honorifics. In the family, order is clear, but communication has become an important way for them to regulate intergenerational conflicts. In *Reply 1988*, there is communication between the female protagonist Sung Duk-seon and her father, and in the drama *When Life Gives You Tangerines*, there is communication between the daughter Kim Myeong and her mother. Both dramas focus on the harmonious resolution of conflicts between two generations through extensive time, and can even serve as the main storyline.

3.3 The Expression of Confucian Culture in Japanese Film and Television Works

The core of Japanese film and television works lies in the form of ritual, where families achieve self-reconciliation in a state of separation and alienation. Liu Shidan and Liu Xiaohui analyzed that the relationship between the elderly couple and their children in the film *Tokyo Kazoku* is not satisfactory. When they come to the city, they receive indifferent treatment from their children in different ways, but they do not blame them and do not let their children feel pressure, reflecting the importance of benevolence in the family. But sometimes they have different perspectives on the responsibility of non-blood-related individuals. For example, in the film *Manbiki Kazoku*, the protagonist often wanders on the edge of the law to make a living, but the “family” composed of several non-blood-related individuals is still full of warmth, triggering the audience’s deep reflection on the relationship between morality and law [5].

4. Analysis of Differences and Reasons

4.1 Different Modernization Paths Lead to Different Localization Approaches

Due to the different paths of modernization and localization, Confucian culture in China, Japan, and South Korea inevitably differs. For example, Li Xiaoli’s research has shown that in the context of cultural exchange between China and South Korea, Korean dramas serve as carriers of innovation in tradition. She found that Korean dramas not only contain Confucianism, but also Western ideas such as individualism [6]. As Yan Chenlu said, the trend of women first swept the Western screen, and TV dramas featuring women as protagonists or exploring female emotions and career themes developed rapidly and stood out [7]. Korean dramas particularly demonstrate the awakening of female consciousness, which also breaks

traditional Confucian culture. The Chinese mainland TV drama *A Lifelong Journey* and the Korean TV drama *Reply 1988* are representative of the era dramas of the two countries, but their positioning is vastly different. *A Lifelong Journey* is positioned as a realistic drama, while *Reply 1988* is positioned as a romantic comedy. In addition, the character perspectives of the two TV dramas are also completely different. In *A Lifelong Journey*, the male protagonist Zhou Bingkun is used as a clue to continuously expand the narrative, while *Reply 1988* takes the female protagonist Sung Duk-seon as the main entry point for the narrative. Therefore, it indirectly reflects the rapid improvement of women's status in South Korea, and the screenwriters pay more attention to women's psychology, indicating that South Korea pursues more individual emotional expression. China, on the other hand, focuses on the narrative expression technique of "homogeneity of family and country".

4.2 Different Social Values and Social Structures

Due to their different historical backgrounds, China, Japan, and South Korea have vastly different values and social structures. China, as a collectivist society with the concept of "family state homogeneity," advocates that individuals should combine collectivism (patriotism, spirit of dedication) with some parts of Confucianism. Therefore, Chinese domestic film and television works emphasize family responsibilities and collective interests, and narrate macro and micro (individual) aspects together. Japan has experienced post-war trauma, economic boom, and foam economy. This series of urbanization processes has impacted the traditional big family system and brought a sense of alienation, which has subverted the Confucian ethics. At the same time, Japanese society has serious problems of fewer children and aging. These make Japanese film and television works present a loose or functional connection between individuals and families. Korea and Japan may have some similarities, with Ariffin J T, Bakar H A, and Yusof N H also suggesting that Korean culture is to some extent a combination of Japanese and Chinese cultures [8]. Due to the characteristics of social capitalism, in the process of rapid modernization, society still retains a significant Confucian hierarchy, and there has always been a solidification of economic classes. Korean dramas often depict individuals' struggles and resistance in society through dramatic conflicts. The family concept supported by Confucian ethics is usually a source of warmth for individuals, but at the same time, it is also full of contradictions to inhibit personal development. Therefore, they seek a balance between personal develop-

ment and family harmony, and also have a huge tension in criticizing realism.

5. Promoting Cultural Exchange and Development through Film and Television Communication from a Cross-Cultural Perspective

With the progress of modern society and the development of technology, film and television, as an important medium of cultural dissemination, create an atmosphere through audio-visual aesthetics, evoke empathy, and showcase the shaping of different cultures through their content creation and expression. Among them, the most representative Confucian culture can still be found in East Asian film and television works as a symbol of Asian cultural expression. Finally, through global network platforms or television stations for broadcasting, Chalaby J K's research found that contemporary streaming media (taking Netflix as an example) is restructuring the global television industry. The increase in dissemination channels means more opportunities to export one's own culture to global audiences [4]. Regarding the wider dissemination of film and television works, Hu Zhifeng and Zhang Guotao provided relevant suggestions on the prospects of China in East Asian film and television cultural exchanges. They pointed out that the cultural input of Japanese and Korean film and television works to China is an important component of East Asian cultural exchanges, and that Chinese film and television works going abroad and entering overseas markets to achieve internationalization is an inevitable choice. Secondly, the South Korean film and television industry has received tremendous support from the South Korean government, and other countries can also learn from its excellent cases and provide policy and financial support to a certain extent. Regardless of national borders, storytelling is the foundation, and cultural victory is crucial. Excellent stories will resonate with audiences wherever they are. Some themes about love, courage, loyalty, and so on are eternal and interconnected among humans. Meanwhile, this is also something that film and television works need to strive to achieve to expand their cultural influence [9]. At the same time, it is also necessary to have a deep understanding of the cultural characteristics of the target audience and customize the design of communication content and form. This is the strategy proposed by Xu Ning and Liu Ruoxi for the cross-cultural communication of film and television works. Only by understanding the cultural background of the target audience can targeted adjustments be made in the content and form of film and television works. Afterwards, it is also necessary to cus-

tomize the content and form of communication based on these characteristics, including adjusting and optimizing the content, language, music, visuals, and other aspects in film and television works. This is the efficient way to better attract the audience, meet their expectations and needs, enhance their visibility and influence, and promote dissemination [10].

The constantly developing film and television media have become a current carrier of cultural expression, allowing audiences to share and experience different cultures, and gain an audio-visual feast experience. At the same time, this has made popular culture increasingly valuable. Improving the quality of the work itself is the most direct way to attract audiences. Through audience interaction on various media platforms (bullet screen interaction, secondary creation of related works), it can be seen that more and more audiences are focusing on pursuing the development of the story plot. For example, Western film and television works such as Harry Potter and Game of Thrones have achieved great success in different cultural contexts by reshaping their worldviews and creating captivating storylines. And when foreign film and television works are introduced to China, according to data statistics, people are more inclined to watch them on websites with subtitles. Therefore, enhancing factors that influence communication beyond work is also an important means of expanding the reach. Last but not least, as Ma Xueqing said, building an Asian film and television community is a win-win cooperation. Through dialogue, differences can be downplayed, and cooperation based on seeking common ground while preserving differences can be more conducive to jointly promoting the export and dissemination of each country's culture [11].

6. Conclusion

Although China, Japan, and South Korea share the same cultural heritage - Confucian culture, their distinct historical backgrounds, political systems, and economic development models have led to differences in their understanding of Confucian culture. Show the localized Confucian elements of various countries through film and television works. China presents the most comprehensive dimension, focusing on the narrative expression of "homogeneity of family and country", covering traditional Confucian ethics to modern reflection. Japan presents a clear characteristic of "localization", integrating Confucianism into the unique order of Japanese bushido and collectivism, focusing on seeking social harmony and personal value in a specific environment of social deconstruction or reconstruction. In South Korea, the portrayal of family

dynamics is particularly prominent, and Confucian values are often used as the basic criteria for shaping characters' moral qualities. However, due to criticism from modern society, individualism in South Korea has awakened rapidly, focusing more on the pursuit of personal emotional expression and expression, and seeking a balance between family harmony and personal career. Using film and television works as observation samples is not only a way to see the expression and reflection of traditional Confucian culture in various countries, but also a positive exploration of how to spread culture and promote cultural exchange.

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