

# *From Interpretation to Localization: An Inquiry into the Audience Response of European Drama Adaptations in China*

Liang Huiyu

*School of Arts and Design, Yanshan University, Qinhuangdao, Hebei, 066004, China*

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**Abstract:** This study employs an interview-based approach to deeply explore the interpretation and localization of European drama adaptations in China, providing a detailed analysis of the audience's reception and specific feedback on the adapted works. By conducting interviews with multiple target audience groups, we reveal the audience's reactions and expectations towards different adaptation strategies and how these responses influence subsequent adaptations. The research found that most audiences are open to and accepting of Chinese adaptations of European dramas. They tend to appreciate works that not only retain the artistic essence of the original but also make the story more relatable to Chinese society and culture through localization. For example, many audience members interviewed gave positive reviews of the Chinese adaptation of "Romeo and Juliet," stating that it made it easier for them to resonate with and understand the characters' emotions and conflicts. Through interviews, we not only gain a direct sense of the audience's feelings and evaluations of adapted works but also gain a deep understanding of their cultural backgrounds, aesthetic habits, and expectations for drama. This information is significant for promoting the exchange and integration of Chinese and foreign theatrical cultures. In summary, the research methodology used in this study provides new insights into understanding audience reactions to European drama adaptations in China and offers practical references for Sino-foreign theatrical cultural exchanges.

## 1. Introduction

This paper focuses on the adaptation of European drama in China, and explores the adaptation of European drama in the context of Chinese culture. On the basis of previous studies, this paper uses the interview method to further analyze the audience's acceptance of different adaptation strategies and specific feedback in the process of adaptation. It is found that when European dramas are adapted in China, they need to skillfully integrate the artistic essence of the original works with the cultural background and aesthetic habits of the Chinese audience in order to be positively recognized by the audience. At the same time, the diverse reactions of the audience to the adapted works also provide an important reference for the subsequent adaptation creation.

## 2. The Path of European Drama Adaptation in China: Cross-Cultural Exchange and Artistic Innovation

The process of adapting European dramas in China involves cross-cultural communication, artistic expression, and the collision and integration of values, making it a significant topic. Brown (2017) suggests that cross-cultural drama adaptation serves as a vehicle for cultural export and import, as well as an inspiration and challenge for contemporary Chinese drama creation.

### 2.1 Conveying Cultural Connotations

Effectively conveying the cultural connotations of the original work is key during the adaptation process. Adaptation techniques that align with the aesthetic habits and cultural cognition of Chinese audiences are more likely to resonate and evoke emotional responses. Therefore, adapters need to deeply interpret the original work and integrate it into the Chinese cultural context, endowing it with localized expressions and cultural connotations. For instance, in the Chinese adaptation of "Romeo and Juliet," a lyric that stands out for its rich Chinese imagery is, "*bai yi pian pian ,qi du bu fan ,yuan yu xiao jie ,xi jie yin yuan,*" which has been praised and memorized by audiences as a significant point of study in cross-cultural drama adaptation.

### 2.2 Artistic Innovation

The adaptation of European dramas in China requires artistic innovation while maintaining the original spirit to meet the aesthetic needs and emotional expressions of contemporary Chinese audiences. By incorporating contemporary artistic elements and stage design, adaptations can be given new forms of expression and aesthetic tension, making the works more relatable to the audience's lives and emotional experiences. Most audiences highly recognize the stage design of the Chinese version of "Romeo and Juliet," although it closely resembles the original in overall design, with only minor differences in details.

### 2.3 Dialogue of values

During the adaptation process, it is essential to balance the values and ways of thinking of different cultures, promoting dialogue and communication between artistic works. By either introducing traditional Chinese values or comparing them with contemporary Chinese social realities, adapted works can have deeper cultural connotations and social enlightenment, achieving a diverse voice and rich meaning in artistic works. In the Chinese version of "Romeo and Juliet," one audience member expressed that the adaptation seemed to only retain the shell of the love story, possibly due to the significant cultural differences between Europe and China, leading to a misinterpretation or incomprehension of the expression. This is an area that needs improvement. She also mentioned, "Copying and pasting allows us to understand foreign cultural backgrounds, but if it's just that, why not watch the original version, which offers the most direct expression?"

Adapting European dramas in China is both a testament to cultural exchange and an exploration of artistic innovation. By summarizing experiences from previous research, we can better understand the significance and methodology of cross-cultural drama adaptation, providing a broader platform for Sino-foreign cultural exchange and artistic creation[1].

## 3. Interview Methods and Results

Through interviews with several groups of target audiences, we explored their views on Chinese

adaptations of European dramas. These audiences come from different age groups, cultural backgrounds and professional fields, ensuring the comprehensiveness and diversity of our research.

### **3.1 Audience acceptance of adapted works**

Most audience members expressed a willingness to try Chinese adaptations of European dramas, seeing these adaptations as opportunities to encounter more diverse theatrical works and new viewing experiences. Many audiences felt that they could sense the collision and integration of Chinese and Western cultures in the adapted works, with cross-cultural experiences bringing them excitement and curiosity. Most audiences hold an open and accepting attitude towards Chinese adaptations of European dramas, believing that such adaptations allow Chinese audiences to access more diverse theatrical works and promote cultural exchange and integration between China and foreign countries.

### **3.2 Evaluation of Localization by the Audience**

In the interviews, audience members gave varying evaluations of the localization of adapted works. For example, in the Chinese adaptation of "Romeo and Juliet," starring Ayunga, the stage design initially amazed most audiences with its grandeur, receiving mixed reviews. The adaptation of the lyrics received relatively high praise. Audiences who had seen the original version generally felt that there was insufficient innovation in the plot, describing it as too much of a copy-paste. Given the entirely different social backgrounds between Europe and China, optimizing the social context might make it easier to understand the core of the play[2].

### **3.3 Audience Reactions to Different Adaptation Strategies**

Regarding different adaptation strategies, audience reactions and expectations varied. In our sample survey, some preferred adaptations that stayed true to the original, believing this best preserved the original's charm and artistic value. Some audiences appreciate adaptations that present the essence of the original through superb acting and directorial skills while retaining the framework and characters of the original. These audiences believe that only by preserving the core of the original can the audience truly appreciate the charm of European dramas. The numbers were relatively evenly distributed.

However, other audiences preferred innovative and unique adaptations. They felt that adaptations should break through the framework of the original, injecting new elements and creativity to provide fresh and exciting experiences for the audience. These audiences appreciate adaptations that combine the original story with Chinese culture and social reality, believing that such adaptations can evoke empathy and reflection from the audience[3].

### **3.4 Expectations for localization adaptation**

According to Xiao Li, localized adaptations should fully integrate Chinese culture and values, making the plot and characters more relatable to the lives and emotional experiences of Chinese audiences. He gave an example, saying, "Besides 'Romeo and Juliet,' I also look forward to seeing other classic European plays adapted in China, such as 'Hamlet' or 'Macbeth.' If these works could be localized, cleverly integrating the original classic plot into the context of Chinese history or traditional culture, it would bring new shock and reflection to the audience." From Xiao Li's words, we can see that the audience has high expectations for the localization of European plays in China, hoping to feel the spiritual resonance and cultural collision brought by cross-cultural exchange

through adapted works.

### **3.5 Comparison between previous studies and audience feedback**

Our interview results align with previous research. Cui Xuechun (2016) in "The Spread and Reception of European Renaissance in China" noted that Chinese audiences' acceptance of European dramas is gradually increasing, showing tolerance and expectations for diversified adaptation strategies. Our research further confirms this, finding that the audience's acceptance and feedback on adapted works are influenced by various factors, including adaptation strategies, localization handling, and personal preferences[4].

Previous research (Johnson, 2019) indicates that audiences expect localized adaptations to include elements of traditional Chinese culture, reflections of contemporary Chinese social reality, and reinterpretations of character images. Careful design and handling in these areas can enhance the appeal of adapted works, earning audience recognition and appreciation.

Through this in-depth study, we clearly see that the journey of European drama adaptation in China is full of challenges but also great opportunities. In this process, we not only strive to accurately convey the artistic essence of the original work to Chinese audiences but also ingeniously integrate it with China's rich cultural heritage, allowing the works to maintain the original charm while showcasing unique Chinese appeal.

This adaptation process is, in fact, the process of integrating Sino-foreign theatrical cultures. We are pleased to see that more and more Chinese audiences are exposed to and appreciate European dramas, and European dramas are entering the hearts of more Chinese families through adaptations. Such cultural exchanges not only enhance mutual understanding but also promote cultural diversity and innovation.

However, the adaptation process is not smooth. We face many challenges, such as how to perfectly combine the original work with Chinese culture and how to meet the diverse needs and expectations of the audience. But these challenges motivate us to continually explore and innovate. Through interviews, we gained a deep understanding of the audience's views and feedback on adapted works. This valuable information provides important references for our future adaptation creations. In our future work, we must continue to respect the audience's choices and feedback, continuously explore and innovate adaptation strategies. This includes, but is not limited to, deeper interpretations of the original works, more comprehensive exploration of Chinese culture, and more accurate understanding of audience needs[5].

In conclusion, although the path of European drama adaptation in China is full of challenges, as long as we persist in exploration and innovation, respecting the audience's choices and feedback, we will surely promote the exchange and integration of Sino-foreign theatrical cultures, bringing richer and more colorful theatrical experiences to the audience. This is also our mission and responsibility as cultural workers.

## **4. Audience Response and the Significance of Promoting Cultural Exchange**

Through interviews, we not only obtained the audience's direct feelings and evaluations of adapted works but also gained a deeper understanding of their cultural backgrounds, aesthetic habits, and expectations for drama. This information is significant for promoting the exchange and integration of Sino-foreign theatrical cultures. Smith et al. (2017) in previous research also pointed out that audience response reflects cultural cognition and emotional resonance, providing important insights for the cross-cultural transmission and cultural export of drama.

## 4.1 Audience Response Perspective

Audience response surveys are not a new research method, but they play a crucial role in the film and television culture industry. Aristotle's definition of tragedy includes the phrase, "through events to arouse pity and fear in the audience," highlighting the importance of the audience. Audience response is a critical standard for evaluating drama. Without the audience, there is no drama, and the audience's immediate feedback can influence the actors' performance, indicating the significant role of the audience's perspective and consideration.

## 4.2 Practical Reference for Sino-Foreign Theatrical Cultural Exchange

In promoting Sino-foreign theatrical cultural exchange, the importance of audience response cannot be ignored. Through detailed analysis of the audience's reception and expectations, we can better grasp their cultural cognition and emotional preferences, thereby better integrating Chinese elements into adaptations and showcasing the artistic charm of the original works. As Johnson (2019) pointed out, audience response is a key part of promoting drama cultural exchange and mutual learning.

## 5. Conclusion

In summary, the research results of this paper not only provide new perspectives and insights into understanding audience reactions to European drama adaptations in China but also offer practical references for Sino-foreign theatrical cultural exchanges. By collecting direct feedback and opinions from the audience, we can better understand their needs and expectations, promoting the exchange and integration of Sino-foreign theatrical cultures, making drama art bloom with new vitality in cross-border settings.

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