

German Theatre and Intercultural Cinema: A Study of the Japanese Film Adaptations of Gerhart Hauptmann's Plays

[Teatro alemán y cine intercultural: un estudio de las adaptaciones cinematográficas
japonesas de las obras de Gerhart Hauptmann]

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Abstract: In the 1920s Westernization and modernism characterized the cultural life of big Japanese cities, and the cinema quickly became the main entertainment of the urban masses. In this decade studios began to shoot movies following the cinematic techniques and narrative styles of European and American cinema, and increased production of film adaptations of Western literature works popular at that time. This paper focuses on the adaptations of German literature works, specifically of Gerhart Hauptmann plays, produced in Japan during the 1920s. While those films have been lost, stills and reviews of film magazines published at the time of screening have been archived. The study draws on these materials and examines the intertextual and intercultural relations between the films and the literary works. It provides a brief overview on the reception of German literature in Japan, compares the plays and films analysing the permutations in narratological elements, and offers insights on how cultural, political, and social context influenced the directors' adaptation process.

Keywords: German literature; Gerhart Hauptmann; Japanese cinema; intertextuality; intercultural adaptation

Resumen: En los años 1920, la occidentalización y el modernismo caracterizaron la vida cultural de las grandes ciudades japonesas, y el cine rápidamente se convirtió en el principal entretenimiento de las masas urbanas. En esta década, los estudios comenzaron a rodar películas siguiendo las técnicas cinematográficas y los estilos narrativos del cine europeo y americano, y se aumentó la producción de adaptaciones de obras literarias occidentales que eran populares en ese momento. Este artículo se centra en las adaptaciones de obras literarias alemanas, específicamente de las obras de Gerhart Hauptmann, producidas en Japón durante los años 1920. Aunque esas películas se han perdido, se conservan fotogramas y reseñas publicadas en revistas de cine de la época. En este estudio se analizan estos materiales y se examinan las relaciones intertextuales e interculturales entre las películas y las obras literarias. Se proporciona una breve descripción de la recepción de la literatura alemana en Japón, se comparan las obras teatrales y las películas analizando las permutaciones en los elementos narratológicos, y se ofrece una perspectiva sobre cómo el contexto cultural, político y social influyeron en el proceso de adaptación de las obras teatrales.

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Palabras clave: literatura alemana; Gerhart Hauptmann; cine japonés; intertextualidad; adaptación intercultural

1 Introduction

Intercultural filmmaking, or the film adaptation of a literary work from one cultural sphere into another, is a process that often involves the modification of the cultural codes of the original source. That phenomenon began in Japan decades before Kurosawa adaptations of Western literature works were world-renowned and exhibited at international film festivals². From the beginning of the film industry in the nation, numerous short films and feature films were based on Western literary works, especially during the 1910s and 1920s. In the 1910s, adaptations of popular works mostly of French and Russian literature by authors such as Tolstoy and Victor Hugo were being produced. Nevertheless, the 1920s also witnessed films based on works of different literary traditions, including German literature by authors such as E.T.A. Hoffmann, Wilhelm Schmidtbonn, and Gerhart Hauptmann.

The objective of this research paper is to survey and examine the film adaptations of works by Hauptmann produced in Japan in the 1920s, and to explore the intertextual and intercultural relations between the films and the literary works on which they were based. The investigation, therefore, aims to describe how the German literary works were transformed and adapted to the Japanese cultural sphere as well as how the socio-historical context and the cultural tradition influenced the process of adaptation. Given that this topic has not been studied, the present research provides valuable insights into understanding the relationships between Japanese and German cultures, as well as shed light on the impact of the arrival of naturalism in Japanese literature and film.

Despite the loss of these films, preserved reviews published in the Japanese film magazine *Kinema junpō* enable a comparative examination between the films and the literary works³. Thus, following Stam's intertextual dialogic approach (2000: 54-76), the

² The best-known example of intercultural cinema would be the films of Akira Kurosawa, *Kumonosujō* (THRONE OF BLOOD: 1957), a period film based on Shakespeare's play Macbeth, which was exhibited and nominated for the Golden Lion at the Venice Film Festival; *Hakuchi* (THE IDIOT: 1951), based on the novel *The Idiot* by Fyodor Dostoevsky; and *Donzoko* (THE LOWER DEPTHS: 1957), an adaptation of Gorky's homonymous play.

³ Reviews and critiques of these adaptations have been sought in various magazines of the time, such as *Geki to eiga*, *Eiga to engei*, *Katsudō gahō*, or *Katsudō no sekai*. However, only reviews published in the magazine *Kinema junpō* have been found.

paper analyzes the permutations in narratological elements (location, plot, and characters) and describes the transformation or inclusion of cultural codes in order to reach the objectives posed.

2 Reception of German Literature in Japan

In 1867, imperial power was restored in Japan, initiating the Meiji era (1867-1912) and ending a period of more than 200 years of isolation imposed by the clan Tokugawa. The country opened, eager to leave behind its feudal past and reach the cultural, economic, technological, and military level of the Western nations. The growing curiosity and interest in Western culture was manifested in the large number of translations of both important and unimportant literary and philosophical works during the Meiji Era (JANEIRA 2016: 128). Throughout the 1870s, a wide range of complete or partial translations of Western books were published, separately or serially in newspapers and magazines. They were often selected according to political, didactic, or practical content, rather than aesthetic criteria, literary quality, or the significance of the author (BEASLEY 2013: 89).

However, due to the poor training of translators, or their poor command of foreign languages, the translations at the beginning of the Meiji era were actually loose adaptations in which large sections were often omitted or added and sometimes only the most essential plot of a book was retained (VARLEY 2000: 261). This did not prevent interest in Western literature from continuing to grow and evolve throughout the next decades. At first, English and American literature was the most translated, although subsequently French and Russian literature came into vogue. Also, works from German and Spanish literature were translated before the end of the century, although most translated from versions in English.

The first translation of a German literary work was Friedrich Schiller's *Wilhelm Tell*, which appeared in 1882. A second translation of the same play was published in 1905. In 1884, the first translation of a Goethe's work, the fable *Reineke Fuchs* (1794), was published. After its publication, three biographies of Goethe appeared in Japan. The most well-known works of Goethe — *Die Leiden des Jungen Werthers* (1774) and *Faust* (1808 and 1832) — were not translated and published until 1901 and 1904 respectively.

Werther became a literary success, and after its first publication, the book was translated several times in subsequent years. By 1960, around thirty different Japanese translations of *Werther* had appeared in the country.

Most of the German literature published in Japan throughout the Meiji era consisted of translations from English, with the exception of several works translated directly from German by Mori Ōgai, an officer of the Japanese army who studied in Germany and became a prominent translator, novelist and poet. Before the end of the nineteenth century, he translated works of German poets and dramatists such as Heinrich Heine, Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, Heinrich von Kleist, E.T.A. Hoffmann, Gerhart Hauptmann, and Rainer Maria Rilke (KEENE 1998: 356).

The most influential of these authors on the Japan's literary scene was Gerhart Hauptmann (HENSHALL 2013: 234). For instance, his play *Die versunkene Glocke* (1896), is considered a significant source of inspiration and a model for the Kyōka Izumi's play *Shinja daiō*, (SHINJA THE GREAT 1904) (INOUE 1998: 260). Also, the first overly autobiographical I-novel, *Futon* (THE QUILT 1907), by Katai Tayama — considered a prominent figure in the naturalist movement in Japan — substantially paralleled Hauptmann's drama *Einsame Menschen* (1891) (HENSHALL 2013: 175). Hauptmann's popularity grew in Japan during the Taishō era (1912-1926), a period in which several editions of his works were published.

3 Adaptions of Western literature in the 1910s and 1920s

Film arrived in Japan shortly after its invention, in 1897. During the early years it frequently consisted of the filming and exhibition of brief scenes of life on the streets of Tokyo, geisha dances, or sequences with well-known kabuki passages. Later, *jidaigeki* films (period films set in the Edo era) based on kabuki plays, and *gendai geki* films (set in a modern context), inspired mostly by *shinpa* (new school) theatre scenes, began to be filmed. This type of theatre appeared in the 1880s as a replacement for kabuki, whose themes and style were no longer capable of reflecting the concerns of modern Japan. Both the *gendai geki* films and the *shinpa* plays dealt with contemporary themes in a realistic and melodramatic style, although they still shared some features of kabuki theatre and mannerisms in the performance and presence of *oyama*, that is, male actors who played female characters.

In the 1910s, studios such as Nikkatsu also began to produce films based on Western literary works, that had previously been performed in *shingeki* (new drama) theatres⁴. This type of theatre, started at the beginning of the twentieth century, tended to be highbrow, avant-garde, and political (SATŌ 2008: 20). *Shingeki* theatres staged works by prominent Western authors such as O’Neill, Ibsen, Chekhov, Gorki, Hauptmann, or Tolstoy, along with works by Japanese writers such as Kaoru Osanai. These adaptations, such as Kiyomatsu Hosoyama’s *Kachūsha* (RESURRECTION 1914), based on Tolstoy’s novel *Resurrection* (1899), or *Ikeru shikabane* (THE LIVING CORPSE 1918), by Eizō Tanaka, based on Tolstoy’s homonymous play published in 1911, were targeted at an educated audience familiar with Western literature. These adaptations tried to be faithful to the original and reproduce, as in a *shingeki* stage, the cultural codes and context of the play through scenery, staging, and setting.

In the 1920s, Westernization and modernism characterized the cultural life of big cities and cinema quickly became the main entertainment of urban masses. In those years, in which aesthetic standards were established and the modes of production, distribution and exhibition were set (WADA-MARCIANO 2008: 2), new film companies such as Shōchiku emerged with the aim of producing films following the cinematic techniques and narrative styles of European cinema and the Hollywood melodrama⁵. During this time, theatrical techniques and conventions that had been prevalent in earlier years were gradually abandoned. Oyama actors were no longer used, and new narrative techniques, such as flashbacks, were introduced. Additionally, intertitles became widely used, reducing the significance and presence of live narrators known as *benshi* (ANDERSON 1992: 273). Theatricalized cinema, also referred to as “canned” cinema (KOMATSU 1992: 231), became obsolete as new studios started producing films that employed techniques and styles similar to those used in American and European films, which held a dominant 75% share in the Japanese market (GEROW 2008: 8).

Throughout the 1920s, a significant number of films were adaptations of Western works that had previously been staged in *shingeki* theatres. Additionally, filmmakers began to create free adaptations of plays, novels, and short stories that had never been

⁴ The Nikkatsu company (short for Nippon Katsudōshashin Company) was established in 1912. By 1914, it was producing an average of 14 films a month, leading the production in Japan. It also dominated the importation and exhibition of foreign films during the 1910s.

⁵ Shōchiku bet on Americanization by creating a style called *Kamata*, which openly emulated Hollywood melodrama.

performed on stage. Most of them were based on Russian, French, and German literary works popular at the time and written by contemporary authors, some of whom, such as Gerhart Hauptmann, had won or would go on to win the Nobel Prize in Literature.

The first film based on a Western literary work made in a non-theatrical cinematic style and adapting the story to the Japanese cultural context was *Rojō no reikon* (SOULS ON THE ROAD 1921), directed by Minoru Murata in cooperation with the *shingeki* theatre director and writer Kaoru Osanai. Based on Gorki's *The Lower Depths* (1902) and Wilhelm Schmidtbonn's drama *Mutter Landstrasse* (1916), the film was acclaimed because of his technical innovations and the portrayal of the characters' misfortune in a way Japanese viewers could identify (RICHIE 2012: 39). One of the consequences of the success of this film was that studios and directors became less interested in producing faithful adaptations that strictly adhered to the cultural codes of the literary work. Following the success of this film, adaptations of Western literature — such as those based on works by Hauptmann — were created through intercultural and intertextual processes. These adaptations involved freely modifying the literary works, relocating them to Japan, and adapting the cultural codes to make the stories more relatable and appealing to the general urban audience.

4 Intercultural adaptations of Gerhart Hauptmann's plays

Several films based on Hauptmann's plays were shot between 1923 and 1925. In 1923, *Chichi yo izuko e* (Where is Father Going?) was released, directed by Norimasa Kaeriyama, an important figure for his contribution to the modernization of Japanese film during the Taishō era (1912-1926) (JACOBY 2013: 124). The movie, for which no stills or film reviews exist for comparison, was an adaptation of the symbolic play *Hanneles Himmelfahrt* (1893). The play was first translated into Japanese in 1913, and a second version was published in 1916. Shortly after its publication, it was performed on stage by the *shingeki* troupe, *Butai kyōkai* (The Stage Association).

In 1923, another film based on a Hauptmann's play entitled *Yama no senroban* (The Crossing Watchman of the Mountains) was released, directed by Yasujirō Shimazu. The director was known for employing a subtle social criticism in his films (JACOBY 2013: 158), which mostly focused on the dynamic of modernity in Tokyo's middle-class neighbourhood life (WADA-MARCIANO 2008: 170). Shimazu's film was an adaptation of

the naturalistic social drama play *Führmann Henschell* (1898). The play had been previously performed on the stage by *Butai kyōkai* between 1913 and 1918, following Hauptmann's receipt of the Nobel Prize in 1912. The play, set in 1860, revolves around the drayman Henschel and his relationship with Hanne, an unfaithful and careless servant who becomes Henschel's second wife. A summary of Shimazu's film, published in the March 1923 issue of the magazine *Kinema junpō* by an unknown reviewer, reveals that the story was adapted to fit the Japanese cultural context. This adaptation involved changes to the timeframe, characters, and plot:

Yūhei, a railway guard on a calm mountain, was living in peace with his wife Osada and their daughter Omitsu. However, a sorrowful wind started to blow through this peaceful household; Osada suddenly fell sick and passed away. Omitsu became more and more timid once the new wife, Otaka, who had formerly worked as a barmaid, came into the house. As time went by, Otaka became a typical abusive stepmother. While Yūhei was away, Otaka threw a smoking pipe at Omitsu and burnt her with hot tongs. Omitsu eventually reached the point where she could no longer just put up with such abuse: she cried out and ran to the level crossing where her father worked, but she was run over by a train on her way and became a cold corpse. Yūhei went mad. Otaka collapsed under the shine of a blade [murdered by Yūhei]. Yūhei, with a sinister smile on his face, stood alone under the sky as night fell. (*KINEMA JUNPŌ*, March 1923, p. 5)⁶.

As in the play, the story takes place in a mountainous area. However, the action, is set in the 1920s rather than in 1860, a contemporary time when the railroad had already reached almost all parts of Japan. In the film, the character of the drayman Henschel is renamed Yūhei and is portrayed as a railway guard at a level crossing. In addition to having different names and occupations, the two characters also have completely opposite personalities: Henschel is depicted as a weak and sad man, who is aware that his occupation is being displaced by capitalist and technological progress and is being superseded by the railway (GROSS 1998: 320). He succumbs to Hanne's sensuality and her manipulative behaviour, unable to confront her and her lover, even when he begins to suspect that she was responsible for the death of his first wife and daughter. Instead, distressed by guilt and consumed by melancholia, he ends up committing suicide. In contrast, Yūhei becomes enraged when he discovers that his second wife, Otaka, was responsible for the death of Omitsu. Similar to many protagonists in Japanese plays, novels, and films, Yūhei feels compelled to seek *katakiuchi* (blood revenge) and takes his revenge by killing Otaka with a sword. This ending likely appealed to the Japanese

⁶ Review translated by Yuta Yasuda in collaboration with the author.

audience, as *katakiuchi* is a common motif in Japanese literature and film, and has been depicted in numerous well-known *kabuki*, *bunraku* plays, and novels (KOMINZ 1995: 139)⁷.

Hauptmann's drama subtly suggests themes of violence and cruelty, although it is not explicitly described (GROSS 1998: 322). In the play, the characters of Malchen and Gustel, Henschel's first wife and daughter, become sick and die: first the mother, and then, shortly after Henschel's marriage to Hanne, the baby. The townspeople suspect that Hanne is responsible for their deaths. In the film, Yūhei's first wife, Osada, also dies of sickness, but her daughter Omitsu, who is older than a baby, does not. Otaka, who works as a barmaid and does not live with the family, plays no role in Osada's demise. However, after marrying Yūhei, Otaka becomes a cruel and abusive stepmother. Her mistreatment of Omitsu leads to the child's death when she runs away to escape another beating and is struck by a train. Thus, the film deviates from the play's plot to explicitly depict violence against the child by her stepmother, exploring the motif of *mamako ijime* (mistreated stepchild), which was prevalent during the establishment of the patrilineal household system (KARATANI 1993: 100). It became habitual in traditional medieval Buddhist oral tales — collectively known as *sekkyō-bushi* (Sermon Ballads) — in stories such as *Shintokumaru* or *Aigo no waka* (ISHI 1989: 288); in late medieval narrations, such as *Hachikazuki* (The Bowl Bearer Princess) (STEVEN 1977: 303); and in modern novels of the Meiji and Taishō eras, such as Roka Tokutomi's *Hototogisu* (THE CUCKOO 1900), one of the most widely read novels in the Meiji era (KARATANI 1993: 100). It is remarkable that the film reviewer also praises the film's portrayal of child cruelty and its psychological impact, acknowledging that it is presented in a realistic and therefore unsettling manner, before transitioning to a more conventional and superficial depiction:

[...] I am glad that the movie depicts the so-called 'abuse of a stepchild' in a humane way, unlike the conventional, unpleasant way, by expressing the daughter's mental state becoming timid. However, toward the end of the movie, it is negatively affected by the conventional depiction. There is a very minor compromise in the middle of the film. The dramatizer's experiences can be seen in the film's dramatization, but I expected it to be critically summarized a little better. Firstly, the director is successful in making use of the girl who plays the main character, but the movie seems to be too shallow for Shimazu's work. Sekine [playing the role of Yūhei] is old, and his calm smile is indescribably good. Mitsuko [playing Yūhei's daughter] does an excellent job. Tamaki

⁷ The most notable instance of this is the 1748 *bunraku* play *Kanadehon chūshingura* (The Treasury of Loyal Retainers, also known as The 47 Loyal Vassals). It became successful immediately and was quickly imitated innumerable times.

[playing Yūhei's first wife] is good in acting a soft character, and Chitose [Yūhei's second wife] does quite well in portraying exactly the opposite strong character. Nevertheless, it seemed difficult for them to act because of the compromises, as formerly mentioned. The way of filming was as beautiful as *hinoki* [Japanese cypress] and picturesque in a sense. Other than that, the movie was careless in two or three parts (*KINEMA JUNPŌ*, March 1923, p. 5)⁸.

The plot summary and critique published in *Kinema junpō* reveals that Shimazu's adaptation deviates from the common themes of the naturalistic drama depicted in Hauptmann's play, such as the complex dynamics of the husband, wife, and lover triangle, the loss and recovery of a child, or the psychological displacement caused by Henschell's experience of rapid social change. In contrast, Shimazu transforms the story into a characteristic melodrama of Shōchiku Kamata's Hollywood-style films. He introduces Japanese motifs that are familiar to the audience, such as the depiction of child mistreatment and its impact on the child's mental state, as well as the pursuit of blood revenge following the daughter's death as a result of mistreatment.

A remake of Hauptmann's *Führmann Henschell* was released in 1925 by Genjirō Saegusa, entitled *Aiyoku no kiro* (Crossroads of Lust). The story is also adapted to the Japanese cultural context, making modifications to the time of the action, the characters, the location, and the plot. According to the film summary published in *Kinema junpō* (April, 1925) by Shigesaburō Suzuki, the story is set in a mountainous area, similar to the play, but is situated in contemporary times. The character of the drayman Henschel, known as Kichizō, drives a stagecoach that transport customers from the nearest village's bus stop to a hot spring resort. After his wife's death, Kichizō marries another woman, Okyō, following advice from a friend. She, like Hanne in the play, mistreats Kichizō's daughter, Omichi, and engages in infidelity. Eventually she runs away with her lover, although they are later apprehended:

A driver of a stagecoach which goes between a small bus stop in a mountain village far from the capital and an *onsen* [hot spring resort], Kichizō was spending lonely days with his daughter Omichi after his wife's death. He later married his second wife Okyō, as recommended by his friend, but Okyō indulged in wicked pleasure and abused Omichi while Kichizō was away from home. By the time Kichizō found out the truth, Okyō and her wicked lover had already disappeared. Eventually, the two culprits were caught by the hand of justice, and from then on, Kichizō and Omichi could continue to live in peace (SUZUKI 1925: 25)⁹.

⁸ Review translated by Yuta Yasuda in collaboration with the author.

⁹ Review translated by Yuta Yasuda in collaboration with the author.

In contrast to Shimazu's version, Saegusa's film, retains the central triangle of husband, wife, and lover depicted in Hauptmann's *Führmann Henschell*. However, the plot of the play undergoes substantial changes, focusing instead, as implied by the film's title, on the portrayal of Okyō's lustful extramarital relationship. The film showcases her escape with her lover and their subsequent capture and punishment by the justice system. This narrative choice aligns with the prevailing family laws of that time, which considered adultery a punishable crime, particularly for women. It wasn't until 1946, with the approval of a new civil code and constitution, that adultery ceased to be a criminal offense. Consequently, the director omits elements from Hauptmann's play such as the loss of the child and the suicide of the protagonist. Suzuki's critique, as highlighted in the review, points out that these changes to the plot and themes introduce inconsistencies, weakening the overall coherence of the story. Additionally, Suzuki praises the earlier adaptation of Hauptmann's drama by Yasujirō Shimazu in 1923:

This movie is directed by Saegusa Genjirō after the film *Yushā no shōri* (The Victory of the Brave). It is translated and dramatized from Hauptmann's *Fuhrmann Henschel*. *Yama no senroban*, produced by Shōchiku Kamata Eiga, was also translated and made into a movie from the same story. Honestly, *Yama no senroban* is incomparably better than this film. This film is a poor piece of work with nothing to be praised other than the beautiful way of filming. However, Nakamura Kichiji's experienced acting is good (SUZUKI 1925: 25)¹⁰.

The film *Kanashiki koi no gensō* (Sad Visions of Love) was also released in 1925, based on Hauptmann's *Die versunkene Glocke* (1896) and directed by Yoshinobu Ikeda. The work was published in Japan in 1907, entitled *Shin'yaku Urashima* (A New Version of Urashima). A new translation appeared in 1917, with the title *Chinshō* (Sunken Bell), which was performed by the *shingeki* troupe *Geijutsuza* (Art troupe) and was one of the company's last successes (ANDERSON 2011: 212). The scope of the play's popularity in the intelligentsia of Japan can be seen in the fact that records of songs performed by the characters Nicklemann and Rautendelein were marketed with great success (MAURER 1985: 74).

Hauptmann's play is a fantasy drama written in blank verse that features fantastical characters. While it retains some naturalistic elements, it aligns with the German literary trend that focuses on the "[...]intimately personal problems of the creative artist" rather than socio-political themes (MAURER 1985: 74). The drama is

¹⁰ Review translated by Yuta Yasuda in collaboration with the author.

considered a self-portrait of its author, reflecting his doubts as an artist following the failure of his play *Florian Geyer* (1896), his problems with his wife, and his spiritual aspirations (*Ibidem*: 75).

In Ikeda's film adaptation, the story is set in an imaginary place called Rie and also includes supernatural characters. The main characters of the play, Rautendelein and Heinrich, are renamed Hiname and Takamaro in the movie. Hiname is a girl who lives in the forest, but but lacks the fantastical nature of Rautendelein, who is portrayed as part child and part fairy. On the other hand, Takamaro, like Heinrich, is associated with religion, but instead of being a bell-maker, he is a sculptor of Buddhist images. Other characters from the play, apart from Heinrich's wife, Kiyome, are replaced with different creatures in the film. The symbolic characters of the vicar, the barber, and the schoolmaster, representing the spirit, the body, and the mind respectively, as well as Heinrich's child, the water spirit Nickelmann, the old Wittikin, the wood-sprite, and the elves, trolls, and dwarfs (fantasy folk creatures unfamiliar to Japanese audience) are not depicted in the movie. Instead, it introduces the characters of an old wizard of the mountains, a mountain man named Shurama, and a swamp man named Tankima, who fulfils a role similar to that of Nickelmann.

The plot summary published in the magazine *Kinema junpō* (June, 1925) provides an overview of the film's storyline, which revolves around the affectionate relationship between an artist and a female character residing in the mountains. The narrative also includes her marriage to an unloved creature. However, there are notable differences between the film and Hauptmann's play. In the movie, Hiname is rescued by Takamaro from the swamp man Tankima. Hiname and Takamaro fall in love, but the inhabitants of the mountains forbid their relationship. Despite their attempts to escape twice, their plans are foiled either by other characters or by a curse. Additionally, the supernatural events occurring in the mountains have a profound impact on the humans who are not native to that realm. Takamaro's wife, Kiyome, tragically takes her own life after undergoing a transformation into a grotesque being. Simultaneously, Takamaro descends into madness when his Buddhist sculpture transforms into an evil image. In his deranged state, he rejects Hiname, who ultimately marries Tankima. Realizing that he cannot win Hiname back, Takamaro disappears into a marsh:

One night, Takamaro saved the forest maiden Hiname from the swamp man Tankima. The flame of love flared in her heart, but this love was not allowed in the mysterious mountain. After being accused of talking with a human many times that day, she broke the admonition the following day. Takamaro tried to run away with Hiname but was caught by Shurama [a mountain man] and Tankima [a swamp man] and thrown into the plunge pool of a waterfall. Hiname was also sentenced to a severe penalty. Although Takamaro found a way to escape with Hiname, Tankima prayed to the devil god in the forest, asking him to put a curse on Takamaro and Hiname. Kiyome [Takamaro's wife] went to Takamaro's cursed cabin, but was driven away, changed to an ugly creature. She ended up committing suicide and plunging into the marsh.

The Buddhist sculpture that Takamaro had made gradually looked evil, causing Takamaro to go crazy. He called Hiname a devil, pushed her away, and disappeared himself. Hiname, whose soul was shattered, became Tankima's wife that night. Even the fields, the mountains, and the leaves on the trees moaned with sorrow as Hiname walked around the marsh, soaking in the blue moonlight. Takamaro had nowhere to go in Rie, as he had broken the silence of the mountain. He saw the beautiful girl by the marsh, but he had no way to win her back, and, like a ripple in a quiet marsh, he vanished without a trace. The flowers floated in the marsh, enveloping his soul. The fog once again shrouded the mountain in mystery, while water birds sang sorrowfully (*KINEMA JUNPŌ*, June 1925, p. 26)¹¹.

The movie emphasized the fantastic elements of Hauptmann's play, as suggested by the title, with a plot that focused on the impossible love between the main characters. However, the symbolic elements present in Hauptmann's play, which explored the significance of artistic activity and reflected on human limitations and the pursuit of the perfect work of art, were not depicted in the film. Additionally, the metaphoric role of the mountain as a symbol of human aspiration and ambition was also absent. As a result, Ikeda's film was likely perceived as overly sentimental and simplistic, leading to a poor reception and negative critiques. The unknown reviewer from *Kinema junpō* attributed its lack of success to factors such as poor acting and the Japanese audience's unfamiliarity and rejection of fantasy films at the time. At that time, the subject of the audience's interest was the ordinary, urban, middle-class masses, portrayed in comedies about working men or in sentimental satires, while urban spaces had become emblematic of the cinema. In that sociocultural context, Ikeda's adaptation was doomed to failure:

This film was made based on *Die Versunkene Glocke* by Gerhart Hauptmann. For a Japanese classic fantasy, production of the movie was quite a bold attempt. This kind of film, however, is not well received by Japanese movie viewers, as many might have expected. To make matters worse, it seems that the actors were not confident, which has made people even more reluctant to watch the film. Even though they are beautiful, in

¹¹ Review translated by Yūki Wada in collaboration with the author.

gorgeous costumes, their bad acting is demonstrated once they start to perform (*KINEMA JUNPŌ*, June 1925, p. 26)¹².

After the production of Ikeda's picture, only one more movie based on German literature was shot a decade later. When the emperor Shōwa replaced Taishō after his death in 1926, there began a less democratic and more repressive period (known as the Shōwa pre-war era, 1926-1945), marked by economic strain, social unrest, and the emergence of authoritarian militarism. In this context, studios preferred to be cautious and avoid economic risks by making *gendaigeki* films in the taste of the general audience (focusing on the depiction of the life in the big cities and the concerns of its habitants), by shooting movies based on best-sellers or popular works of Japanese literature, or by producing remakes of the adaptations of Russian and French literary works – such as the novels *Resurrection* by Tolstoy and Hugo's *Les Misérables* (1862) – that had been successfully taken to the screen several times and that were still in vogue.

Nevertheless, in 1937 was released the film entitled *Sengoku guntōden* (Saga of the Vagabonds). It was a period film based on Friedrich Schiller's play *Die Räuber* (1781), directed by Eisuke Takizawa. This movie adhered to the conventions of the "rebel subgenre," a new narrative pattern in *jidaigeki* films that appeared under the influence of the fluctuating cultural, social, economic, and political climate. Movies within this subgenre shared similar themes to those found in *keikō eiga* ("tendency films"), which had a left-wing perspective and depicted progressive, anti-authoritarian, and critical ideas, although paradoxically they were produced by large capitalist studios such as Nikkatsu (THORNTON 2008: 39). Hence, the stories in the "rebel subgenre", such as Takizawa's adaptation of Schiller's play, portrayed nihilistic heroes from the lower classes who challenged authority in their struggle to defend the oppressed, reflecting the common distress of those years and covertly criticizing the social inequalities of contemporary Japan (GEROW 2012: 2).

5 Conclusions

Through the analysis of reviews and critiques of the film adaptations of Hauptmann's plays published in cinema magazines in the decade of the 1920s, it has been possible to examine how the works of this author were adapted to the Japanese context. These cross-

¹² Review translated by Yūki Wada in collaboration with the author.

cultural adaptations resulted in novel modifications in narratological elements such as locale, plot, and characters, influenced by the cultural tradition and the sociological context.

The transformations in locale, which involved transferring the stories to Japan, entailed changes in the plot and therefore in the depiction of certain events and characters. While the main storyline of the literary works was generally followed, a significant number of events were omitted, added, or altered. The plots often underwent modifications to incorporate Japanese motifs or address social concerns of the period. For instance, in *Yama no senroban* (The Crossing Watchman of the Mountains, 1923), Shimazu transformed Hauptmann's story from a naturalistic drama to a Hollywood-Kamata style melodrama. He attains this by showcasing the abuse of a child by a wicked stepmother (*mamako ijime*), which became the main theme of the film, and by introducing the element of blood revenge (*katakiuchi*), a prevalent motif in Japanese literature and cinema. The transmutations in the plot also entailed the omission of certain characters, often often prioritizing those essential to maintain the narrative coherence, and implied permutations in the characters' psychological dimensions.

In summary, the films based on Hauptmann's works were produced following an intercultural and intertextual process, resulting in films whose stories aligned with Japanese cultural codes and, accordingly, were more comprehensible and engaging to the ordinary urban audience of that time. Our study highlights the importance of taking sociocultural contexts into account when analyzing intercultural film adaptations. Recognizing the value of adaptations of Hauptmann's plays provides us with insights into the dynamic evolution of cultural exchange in Japan throughout the past century, particularly before Kurosawa's films based on Western literary works gain international recognition.

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