

A Brief Discussion of Japanese Trendy Drama in the 1990s

Xiaobo Huang

College of Foreign Languages, Sichuan University, Chengdu, Sichuan Province, China

Keywords: 1990s; trendy drama

Abstract: This paper first discusses the various subtle changes in the national psyche as Japan enters the Reiwa era and suffers from the global plague, especially the growing social craving for simple youthful romance. On this premise, we reopen the examination and discussion of Japanese trendy dramas that were popular in the 1990s. The reasons why the topic of trendy dramas in the category of youth idol dramas has been emphasized in the new era are examined and discussed in terms of the relevance of their creation methods to the era.

1. Introduction

In May 2019, Emperor Naruhito succeeded to the throne and changed the reign to ReiWa. From 1989 to this, Japan's Heisei era has slowly come to an end after 30 years of sinking. The impact of the collapse of the economic bubble at the beginning of Heisei made recession the key word of the 30 years of Heisei, and the economic downturn brought turmoil at all levels. Emperor Akihito's intention to abdicate is also closely related to a sense of real crisis [1]. Japan, which has just entered a new era and is expecting a new look, has been taken hostage by a sudden global virus and has entered a state of social "incubation". Faced with an unknown virus that is difficult to eradicate, the Japanese people are gradually losing patience and falling back into inexplicable anxiety. The inability to go out freely has made it more and more difficult to nourish and heal the nation's psychological problems, and the phenomenon of "spiritual dryness" has emerged on a large scale.

As society struggles to move forward, the entertainment media, which bears the burden of healing, has been frequently criticized by sensitive and discerning viewers even though it has tried its best. In early 2020, among the dramas in Japan's winter season, there are six medical dramas alone (The series is available on the Japanese Fuji TV network platform POD and streaming on Amazon Prime Video). In the face of the great melee of homogenized dramas, one has to reflect on whether the trend of so-called "socialist" criminal police and medical dramas that have been popular in the Japanese drama market in recent years is social for the sake of society and away from the original purpose of popular entertainment. In the face of the socialist serious drama series, viewers are getting "aesthetic fatigue" and negative viewership. Among those who prefer TV entertainment, especially the middle and high school viewers, there is an expectation theory that they want to see light dramas (light drama) again. Amidst much anticipation, a modern version of Tokyo Love Story, once considered the gold standard of popular dramas, also came to life in the spring unit of the network in 2020 [the series is available on the Japanese Fuji TV network platform POD and streaming Amazon Prime Video], and aired in the fall unit of Fuji TV in 2021. In addition, the 1991 version of the same drama was broadcast on the ground wave of the 2020 version and then broadcast for free on many streaming platforms represented by FOD. Since then, the production of content for new-age romance dramas has become the next anticipated windfall. In view of this, the author thinks it is necessary to regurgitate the glorious trendy drama of the late 20th century to see the panther.

2. Trendy Dramas in the Context of Bubble Economy

Emperor Showa died in early 1989. It is the Heisei Era for Japanese people who are enjoying the lunar New Year holiday. By the end of the 1990s, the economy was in a downward spiral, culminating in the collapse of the bubble economy of the mid-1980s. While the economy was

sliding down to the bottom like a roller coaster, the nation's habits and aesthetic consciousness were still sliding fast in the inertia of consumerism. This is evidenced by the popularity of "trendy dramas" in the 1990s, which started in the mid-1980s and even culminated in the 1990s [2]. In terms of ratings data, it is difficult to replicate the success of the 1990s dramas during the Heisei 30 years, as shown in the following table 1 (top 20 highest rated dramas of the Heisei 30 years).

Table 1. Top 20 Highest Rated Dramas Of The Heisei 30 Years

Rank	Heisei era	Gregorian era	Name of the drama	Maximum audience rating(%)	Broadcasting TV station
1	25	2013	Hanzawa Naoki	42.2	TBS TV Station(Sunday Theater)
2	12	2000	Beautiful Life	41.3	TBS TV Station(Toshiba Sunday Theater)
3	23	2011	Kaseifu no mita	40.0	TV TOKYO
4	5	1993	Under One Roof	37.8	Fuji Television Network(Monday-9 Theater)
905	14	2003	Good luck	37.6	TBS TV Station(Sunday Theater)
6	6	1994	Homeless Child	37.2	TV TOKYO
7	13	2001	HERO	36.8	Fuji Television Network(Monday-9 Theater)
8	3	1991	Say Yes	36.7	Fuji Television Network(Monday-9 Theater)
9	8	1996	Long Vacation	36.7	Fuji Television Network(Monday-9 Theater)
10	10	1998	Great Teacher Onitsuka	35.7	Kansai TV
11	9	1997	Life Everyday	34.2	TBS TV Station
12	12	2000	MISIA - Everything	34.2	Fuji Television Network(Monday-9 Theater)
13	4	1992	Love you	34.1	TBS TV Station
14	9	1997	Under One Roof 2	34.1	Fuji Television Network(Monday-9 Theater)
15	5	1993	The Secret	33.7	TBS TV Station
16	5	1993	High School Teacher	33.0	TBS TV Station
17	4	1992	In the Name of Love	32.6	Fuji Television Network(Thursday Theater)
18	9	1997	Love Generation	32.5	Fuji Television Network(Monday-9 Theater)
19	17	2005	Great Teacher Onitsuka 2	32.5	TV TOKYO
20	3	1991	Tokyo Love Story	32.3	Fuji Television Network(Monday-9 Theater)

(The above data is from: ciatr, the largest entertainment information website in Japan)

The above data shows that among the top 20 dramas, there are 14 dramas from 1991-2000, 4 dramas from 2000-2010, and only 2 dramas from 2011-2019. In terms of quantity, the 1990s have an absolute advantage, with 8 "Monday-9", 6 of which are strictly trendy dramas, and there are only nearly 30 trendy dramas in total [3].

3. What is “Trendy Drama”

Trendy drama is a part of Japanese youth idol dramas produced in the second half of the 1980s and the first half of the 1990s during the Showa to Heisei era bubble economy. The translation type in China generally refers to youth idol drama, which expands the number and genre of this type in a

broad sense. This paper adopts a narrow definition.

The word trendy drama is in Japanese English and translated into "trendy drama" by Hong Kong film critic Zhenzhao Tang [4] (2000), but there was no clear definition at the time. As its name implies, trendy means "superficial and influenced by trendy ideas." The genre focuses on the urban Yuppies' love stories, and positive display of current trends (The English word "Yuppie", emerged in the 1980s in developed capitalist countries, not entirely defined by income or class, but as a cultural phenomenon of the late 20th century concerning self-focused young professionals who enjoyed high salaries and were intoxicated by the sophisticated urban life.). In terms of the selection criteria, the cast is based on handsome men and women with outstanding personalities and high favorability among the audience. The majority are popular entertainers and singers born in the 1960s and 1970s. Actresses are known as "W Asano" Asano Wenko, Asano Yuko, as well as Ka Ka Ka, etc. represented by the mature generation, young successors have Tomoko Yamaguchi, Nakama Miho, Suzuki Ono, Yasuda Narako, Nakano Nakano, Koizumi Imari. Among the male actors, there are the idol predecessors of Akashi Ishika, who became active in the entertainment industry in the future, as well as the stallions such as Hiroshi Migami, Miniyo Yanaba, Takanori Zinouchi, Junichi Ishida and Yosuke Eguchi. Of course, known as the "fashion royal three" Yuji Oda, Yoshida Eisaku, Kashi Daizhou and other active children can not be ignored. As for scriptwriters, young scriptwriters, such as Yuji Sakamoto, Nojima Nojima, Etsuko Kitagawa, also emerged.

Shunsaku Kawake, Ryoaki Yamada, Ryo Doji and Kozo Nagayama are active directors. Through the preliminary exploration and development of works in the 1980s, the production and public acceptance of fashion drama became more and more mature after the 1990s, and the whole process of editing, directing, acting, producing and broadcasting has been completely typified. Through the preliminary exploration and development of works in the 1980s, the production and public acceptance of fashion drama became more and more mature after the 1990s, and the whole process of editing, directing, acting, producing and broadcasting has been completely typified. With the strengthening of the depth and strength of commercial development, the influence of this type of TV drama goes out of Japan and spreads rapidly in East Asia. The most typical example is the commercial marketing of the theme songs of popular works and TV dramas, which leave a deep impression on the audience and become popular songs. In particular, since the 1990s, when idols and music shows were in a slump, the theme songs of TV dramas have dominated the popular songs in Japan, with single sales approaching two million and songs exceeding two million. In addition, the title of the theme song is often used directly in the subtitle of the final episode of each TV series. "Sudden Love Story" from "Tokyo Love Story" and "SAY YES" from "101 Proposals" were the top two singles of 1991. The former showed strong momentum in the subsequent polls, and became one of the most anticipated songs in music programs such as NHK's Red and White Songs. The latter has sold more than 3 million singles, and in 2013, a romantic film with the same name was released in China [5].

Fashion dramas have sprung up because of the bubble economy. The great abundance of material has brought about the popularity of aesthetic materialism, which aims to satisfy the young women whose dreams are inflated by the bubble economy, including the easy and convenient love dreams mainly carried out by girls' manga. In particular, the revision of the Employment Equality Law in 1985 established equal employment relations between men and women and welfare policies that favored women, which improved gender discrimination [6]. With the abundance of material life and the reduction and elimination of the consumption difference between men and women, women become open and independent, leading the trend and fashion, and the psychological needs of women who break male centrism are paid attention to, and the popular fashion dramas arising at the moment quickly become the favorites of The Times. Its popularity makes the overwhelmingly male audience feel left out and often criticized. During the premiere of Long Vacation in 1996, it was said that "Mondays disappeared from the streets." Thanks to the drama, more and more men are taking piano lessons, leading to the phenomenon of long vacations.

4. Characteristics of Trendy Dramas

Although there is no clear definition of the term "trendy drama", not all the young stars and idols lead in the so-called popular fashion dramas. From the existing works, the following six distinct characteristics can be summarized as the non-fixed open standards. Namely: (1) broadcast platform and target audience (2) role setting and narrative style (3) character and social relations (4) narrative skills and camera language (5) utilitarian composition elements (6) auxiliary tools and music, etc. The following is a detailed elaboration of the typical form of fashion drama from the six aspects.

4.1 Broadcast platform and target audience

From the perspective of the locking strategy of broadcast platform and target audience, the seasonal dramas aired in prime time are targeted, such as Fuji TV's "Monday-9 Theater" and TBS's "Friday Theater". The target audience is precisely targeted, mainly housewives with the highest ratings, the OL class, and social figures. It is known as "F1 tier" (The F1 layer is an abbreviation of "female-1" and is a generic term for the gender and age distinction of women aged 20-34. It is a marketing term widely used by the advertising industry, private surveys, ratings, and mass media.) women of new humans are the target audience, the same age group as the actors and actresses, neither younger nor older (The concept of new humans was introduced by Shinichiro Kurimoto to refer to young people in the 1980s who have different values and norms of action from those of the past. Nowadays, it is mainly used for market segmentation and is generally defined as people born between April 1961 (Showa 36) and April 1971 (Showa 46)). From the mid-1980s, Shinobu Otake, one of the earliest leading actors, to Nakamori Nina, one of the new leading actors, the age span is about 15 years. The main actors are represented by actresses known as "W Asano", most of whom were born in the 1960s. It can be seen from this that, in terms of the positioning of fashion love dramas, only the setting of mature people with certain consumption power can successfully shape the psychological expectations of the public for the "yearning life" in the bubble economy period.

4.2 Role setting and narrative style

The characters of this type of drama are mostly people who work in advertising agencies, TV stations, designers, publishing houses, publicity planning departments and other popular cutting-edge personnel, commonly known as "Katakana occupation" wage earners. Traditional occupations include civil servants, teachers and so on. For example: Mukai Li and Kohenji Yamamura are the male and female salarymen in "Love for You"; cellist Kaoru is the female protagonist in "101 Proposals"; and has-been model Minami Hayama and pianist Raimei Hidetoshi are the male and female protagonists in "Long Vacation. Hideitoshi, "Century of Love" advertising agency colleagues hero and heroine Katayuki Tetsuhei and Uesugi Satoko and other character settings. In contrast, the so-called "Katakana profession" practitioners, due to long-term exposure to external information, broaden their horizons and act in a relatively open manner. The shaping of characters plays a good and reasonable role in promoting the development of climax stories. At the same time, the narrative style can also be relaxed and happy, the main content is not work, but the hero and heroine as the center of the polygonal love story, different from the traditional "love and hate revenge drama". Although there are many narrative lines and characters, the story does not stay on the entanglements of dragging character relationships and complex backgrounds. The ending of the story is relatively open and happy, focusing on the expression of the optimism and freedom of young people in the new era, as well as the yuppie youth's timely action mode.

4.3 Character and social relations

Anti-traditional character setting of male and female protagonists, the number of main characters is more than 4. Most men are "three high men" (The name "Sanko-boy" originated in the Meiji era in Japan and originally referred to "high ambition," "high morality," and "high integrity. The term "Sanko man" originated in the Meiji era in Japan. It was not until the late 1980s, the heyday of the Japanese bubble economy, that the term was given a new meaning, referring to the fact that some women at the time were looking for "high education", "high income", and "high length". It was a

popular term at the time.), handsome and gentle, trusted by their friends. The most typical is the pianist Raimei Hidetoshi played by Kimura Takuya in *Long Vacation*, its characters from the beginning to the end, always do not show traces everywhere to care for the bride she ran injured heart. Also by Kimura the male leading role of the "Century of Love", Katayuki Tetsuhei is a lively character. His personality is strong and even a little unfaithful. Female roles are youth beautiful, bright personality, or outgoing, or positive enthusiasm, or wild willfulness, not affectation, loyal to the self and rich intimacy. Take "W Asano" as an example, Asano Wenko both high cold sweet, mostly playing professional noble musicians, illustrators, etc., Asano Yuko is gentle and sweet, mostly playing teachers, OL and other roles. In "Tokyo Love Story", Akina Lika's setting is more inclined to the young, cheerful, careless returnee girl type; Symbolized supporting roles are mainly responsible for dressing up and showing youth, playing the world and acting as catalysts for the main plot. For example: Eguchi Yokuke in "Tokyo Love Story" and "101 Proposals" respectively, both play tall and handsome, free and ungoverned, very popular with women's man-boy type. Therefore, fashion drama as one of the TV drama types, with its distinctive style quickly swept the TV drama market in Japan and even Asian countries, to achieve the goal of win-win TV stations, actors, producers, and derivative products. At that time, young actors who became famous for their roles in fashion dramas challenged themselves constantly in their later acting careers, expanding their range of plays and gradually losing their titles such as "cream boy" or "vase". Typical examples include Takuya Kimura, Yokuke Eguchi and Miho Nakama.

4.4 Narrative skills and camera language

Trendy dramas are with thin narrative logic and brisk rhythm include a large number of drama elements such as encounter, coincidence, surprise, reversal and surprise. Their randomness is strong, there is a lack of rationality of absurd scenes but not absurd dramas. For example, in the beginning of "Love is You" and "Long Vacation," the hero and heroine meet in a very unexpected way. The narrative style obviously refers to family light comedies such as "There is a Fairy Wife" and "Lucy Show" in the 1960s, but it is not confined to the trivial expression of soap opera style. The emotional advance is compact, and they are not limited by the traditional inspirational and didactic system. The dramas are mostly filmed on video, with bright editing, simple picture, warm and bright tone, linear narrative, preference for telephoto shooting, and strong commercial lens language. For example, the telephoto lens showing the emotions and moods of the characters in the crowd, the long distance running and various slow shots and close-ups of the characters, make full use of the characteristics of small TV screens to improve the emotional tension, and gradually settle into a major creative feature of Japanese TV dramas.

4.5 Utilitarian composition elements

Due to its fashion keywords, in order to give full play to the advantages of visual media, fill as much as possible personality luxury consumption, show the so-called "fashion", such as the coffee shop where the protagonist dates, the fashion brand department store, the fashion clothing items with obvious logos, the black household appliances and the high-end stereo combination, the exquisite but lacking life atmosphere, the modern and fashionable new sports cars and motorcycles, the skiing and golf sports of the new middle class, etc. At that time, skiing and golf also became popular rapidly. In addition, the shows are filled with clothing, cars, drinks, hotels and other related products of the sponsor companies, and the characters become "billboards" for the sponsors. Although the clothes and hobbies of the characters in the TV series are leading the trend of The Times, such as women's clothes with wide shoulders, famous watches, thick eyebrows, black frame tortoiseshell glasses and so on have been popular, but it cannot be denied that there is also excessive gorgeousness in the design. For example, Koizumi, who plays the heroine's high school teacher in "All Love", today's makeup is in stark contrast, and his British lady style dress is appropriate enough, but his short hair is matched with gold earrings and bright red lip gloss. The strong color is obviously too gorgeous for high school teachers, and gold is the representative color of the bubble economy period. The characters in "Love Hunters", a lawyer, a celebrity and a man and woman

who meet each other in a sorority disguising their identities, fully demonstrate a love drama in the heyday of the bubble economy. The costume of Shizuka Kudo, who plays the sister of the heroine of the unrequited love, is obviously overly mature and does not quite fit the character role of her sister. In particular, at the end of "Love You Most", the shot of the hero and heroine kissing on the street of Harajuku in a new Toyota sports car is a great way to leave the logic of reality behind and create romance.

4.6 Auxiliary tools and music

Trendy drama always seeks to trendy drama and avoid serious and taboo topics whenever possible. Wine, bubbly and Western-style bars are more period specialties than beer and Japanese izakaya (the slang word "bubbly" also means: sunny and energetic; lively and talkative). Pay attention to the anniversary, such as Christmas, birthday, and a variety of exquisite decorations, supplies, etc. In the relationship between men and women, women often take the initiative to confess, "I like you" is a high-frequency line, kissing scenes can be seen everywhere, the background music mostly uses electric instruments, or youthful and energetic strong rhythmic pop music to set the mood. A variety of elements are mixed, showing the unique "full" aesthetic temperament of the bubble period.

5. The Core of Trendy Drama

To sum up, we can generally see that the once-brilliant so-called "trendy drama", is more inclined to promote the concept and way of life in the consumer society than to show interesting stories. While the characters' lives are exquisite and tasteful, and they do their best to convey happy experiences and set trends, the yuppie culture itself is clearly underwritten by a desire to shake off the rustic qualities of the countryside. The lack of knowledge and literary sense, the piled-up fashion, the unknown (absurd) with the forced together with the popular elements, to show the public a collision in the city of money in a timely manner derived from a mini version of the celebrity life style. And in essence, the same as the birth of a large number of rich people at that time. In the end, the people who are bound by materials and not free become more and more unrealistic like bubbles. Thus, the love stories are more and more of the nature of games. Together with the artificially created "sense of reality" of material life, they fully cater to the superficial temperament of the bubble age. As the root of national culture, the "island crisis consciousness" is dissolved by post-modern hedonism, a large amount of money has given freedom to the times, society is crazy because of it, busy for it, the sense of responsibility is left behind, the balance of national fortune is seriously imbalanced between the lesser of freedom or responsibility, the bubble accumulation is ultimately only the "unbearable lightness" of the times, the light-hearted and carefree youth idol can not hide the reckless, easy and shallow behind the pomp and circumstance.

6. Trends after the Collapse of the Bubble Economy

The bubble economy burst quickly after Heisei, and the aesthetic standards and values of "fashion", as well as the spiritual needs of women and society, changed dramatically. As a result, fashion trend dramas returned to reality, allowing the audiovisual public to feel the bitter taste of the times from entertainment. *Tokyo Love Story* has a lot of fashionable locations such as Shibuya, Aoyama, Nakameguro, Ebisu, Omotesando, etc. Also, after the bubble economy exploded in 1991, the show brought the main characters back to reality with the clouds, changing both the hero and heroine's rooms to single rooms, and adding pro-people equipment such as a heater to the hero's room, and even showing daily shots of oranges baked in the heater with no fashion sense. The story ends with the heroine losing her love affair, which is exactly what the creators intended to create "the aesthetics of the loser girl", and it can be said that Rika Akana is the beginning of the loser girl. "Long Vacation" also unceremoniously set the heroine as a bride who ran away because her marriage partner repudiated her marriage, and even in the context of the economic downturn, the hero and heroine both lost their jobs, so that viewers accustomed to watching sweet and beautiful

fashion trend drama actually feel the cruelty and reality of the times.

The defeat of Rika Akana's romance can also be seen as a sign of the end of trendy dramas. Fuji TV's symbolic saying about content production, "If you're not happy, it's not TV!" still rang true, but the "lightness of meaninglessness" that characterized the fashion dramas that emerged in the mid-1980s was a critique of the consumer society that began at that time. In particular, the fashion trend dramas represented by works from the late 1980s such as "I Want to Hug You So Much! (1988) and "Farewell to Twenty" (1989) were fashion dramas in which fashionable characters living in downtown apartments were used to showcase and sell the most trendy attractions, fashions, goods, and lifestyles in the "window of consumer society. Although "Tokyo Love Story" and its successors are not clichéd, they also depict the anti-consumer side of society to some extent. The hero eventually chooses not Rika Akame, who is as sunny and lively as champagne and modern and stylish, but Satomi Sekiguchi, a supporting character who cooks kanto for him. The play appeared in 1991, the first year of the collapse of the bubble economy. Does the defeat of Rika Akana's end suggest that what the public is after is not an impractical, popular, fleeting bubble? Perhaps this is not some kind of accident but a necessity created by the times. After the 1990s, trendy dramas continued to develop, although they were still popular. The term "trendy drama" faded from the history of Japanese TV drama production, although it was still developing, and there were still many "youth idol" dramas with similar characteristics.

7. Conclusion

In today's plague-ridden Japan, is there no deeper meaning to the seemingly meaningless ease and frivolity of the last century's "drama is fun"? In Japan before the outbreak of the epidemic, after the frustrating Heisei 30 years, all industries were striving to dig deeper into the psychological needs of the user market, even if it was a slight change, in order to create the much-needed excitement of the times with precision and speed. In this context, TV dramas, which have been sitting at the top of mass entertainment for more than half a century, are being gradually dismembered by the many layers of new media. In the process of satisfying the increasingly extreme post-modern consumer psychology of viewers such as curiosity, the positioning is refined and obviously "niche". However, the shock and excitement brought by the epidemic to the world was like a huge wave, instantly overwhelming all the excitement points created by human brainstorming. Amidst the invisible and endless fear and anxiety, the psychological tendency of society at large suddenly turned again, taking advantage of the trend of "retro" to regain the simple relaxation and happiness of the past. There is no doubt that the spiritual value of the fashionable drama that began in the 1980s is worthy of recognition as it is repeatedly remembered by the nation after 30 years of Heisei era.

References

- [1] Sennbon Hideki. Implications of Emperor Akihito's own statement on "abdication before birth" to reorganize and strengthen the symbolic emperor system [J]. *Modern Theory*, 10, pp.87-90, 2016.
- [2] Zhenzhao Tang. Japanese drama frontline [M]. Taipei: Business Weekly Publications, 2000, pp.101.
- [3] See the Wikipedia entry for "trendy drama"
- [4] Fengjuan Liu. Exploring Japanese idol dramas of the 1990s [J]. *Movie Literature*, 07, pp.33-34, 2014.
- [5] Yanli Ren. Interpreting the cultural implications of Japanese trend plays [J]. *China Television*, 08, pp.21-22, 2006.
- [6] Yixuan Wang. Analysis of the characteristics and development direction of Japanese trend dramas with high viewership [J]. *TV Guide*, 04, pp.08-09, 2018.