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From “Classics” to “Radical Remix”: Aesthetic Reconstruction in AI-Generated Remix Videos

Xijin Pang*

School of Arts, Liaoning University, Shenyang 110036, China

**Corresponding author: Xijin Pang.*

Abstract

In recent years, the rapid growth of AIGC has brought a wave of AI-assisted remix videos to major online platforms. What began with relatively simple face-swapping and voice synthesis has gradually developed into dramatic rewritings of well-known film, television, and literary IP through generative AI. Once a marginal form of online parody, this type of content has become a visible part of contemporary digital culture. Its development can be understood as a shift from technological novelty to cultural deconstruction and, increasingly, to aesthetic reconstruction. In this article, aesthetic reconstruction is described as the method by which users use AI to depart from the original work's fixed narrative structure, character backgrounds and values, and reconstruct it into a novel form. Previous research has indicated that AI remixing modifies canonical texts by means of visual combination, change of narrative and reversal of character identities. However, most discussions focus on copyright and ethics, or are limited to specific instances, not deeply investigating the internal mechanism of aesthetic reconstruction. By taking AI remixes of well-known intellectual properties such as Empresses in the Palace and Dream of the Red Chamber as examples, this study applies Bakhtin's theory of carnival and Baudrillard's theory of simulacrum to explore how aesthetic reconstruction occurs when classic works are significantly changed by radical AI adaptation.

Keywords

AI remix videos, radical adaptation, aesthetic reconstruction

1. Introduction

The continuing development of generative AI has accelerated the spread of AI-assisted remix videos. Radical rewritings of familiar IP such as Empresses in the Palace and Dream of the Red Chamber have moved beyond small technical communities and become a form of online culture in which large numbers of users participate [1]. By reducing the difficulty of image creation, the AI tools enable common people to participate in the reproduction of famous works: they can change the appearance of a character, modify the plot, or produce a version which clearly differs from the original setting. During this procedure, the AI remix has progressed from showing the skill of new technology to cultural criticism and finally to aesthetic reconstruction [2].

Previous research has presented various aspects how AI-based radical change affects the original characters and stories. Nevertheless, most of these investigations focus on copyright issues, media ethics or other related disputes, while the theoretical discussion about the production of aesthetic reconstruction is still insufficient. Therefore, this paper selects AI remix videos of classic intellectual properties (IP) as the object of study. By

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referring to Bakhtin's theory of carnival and Baudrillard's theory of simulacra, it investigates the cultural impacts and expressive rules behind the aesthetic reconstruction, discusses the arising problems and considers some methods to establish a more healthy aesthetic environment for AI remix culture.

2. The Development of Radical AI Remix

2.1 Literature Review

Scholarship on AI-managed remix videos has been studied from various perspectives. Certain researches focus on the combination of visual elements, alteration of the narrative structure and inversion of character identities to modify famous works, leading to examples such as “Lin Daiyu Uprooting the Willow Tree” [3]. Some other scholars examine this issue from a legal standpoint, investigating the possible copyright infringements and the corresponding regulation methods [4]. According to the subcultural theory, the extensive use of AI is considered as an online carnival and the cultural psychology behind the participants' involvement in the recreation of classics is also analyzed [5]. Moreover, some studies investigate how the technology affects the contents of short videos and the changes in the aesthetic standards after the production process is influenced by AI [6]. Although these studies have achieved certain progresses, the literature mainly concentrates on the copyright, ethics and descriptions of obvious phenomena. Few studies pay attention to the internal mechanism by which the classical intellectual properties are reconstructed aesthetically, particularly in the three areas of character, narrative and value. This shortage provides the foundation for our present research.

2.2 Defining the Core Concepts

A distinction should first be made between conventional audiovisual remix and AI-based radical remix. Traditional remix practices rely mainly on manual editing, commentary, and the rearrangement of existing footage. AI-based remix, by contrast, uses generative technologies to create new audiovisual material, rewrite existing content at a much deeper level, and in some cases produce synthetic or deepfake imagery. This difference in the mode of production is central to distinguishing the two forms.

In its early stage, AI remix activity was concentrated largely in technical communities such as GitHub and Hugging Face. Content often took the form of static face swaps or simple style transfers, and its audience consisted mainly of technology enthusiasts. As tools such as Stable Diffusion and Sora became more accessible, this material moved quickly onto mainstream short-video platforms including Bilibili and Douyin. The range of themes also expanded, from technical demonstrations to cyberpunk reinterpretations of classic film and television and absurdist remixes of historical figures. The audience has likewise broadened from specialist users to general entertainment audiences. Viewers are no longer interested only in visual novelty; many now consume the deliberate sense of incongruity produced by AI as a recognizable subcultural pleasure. This change in taste has helped move AI remix from a marginal technological experiment into a more visible cultural phenomenon [7].

2.3 Research Design

This study combines textual analysis with case study. The sample consists of AI remix videos based on well-known IP, including Empresses in the Palace, Dream of the Red Chamber, The First Half of My Life, and Romance in the Rain, collected from Bilibili and Douyin. The analysis focuses on three dimensions of aesthetic reconstruction: character, narrative, and value.

At the theoretical level, Bakhtin’s theory of carnival and Baudrillard’s theory of simulacra are used to interpret the cultural logic behind the phenomenon. Existing scholarship is read alongside specific short-video cases in order to identify the mechanisms through which aesthetic reconstruction occurs and to consider possible responses to the problems that accompany it. Because the sample is limited to mainstream short-video platforms, remix practices circulating in smaller or more closed communities are not fully represented. This is one limitation of the study.

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3. Why Aesthetic Reconstruction Emerges in AI Remix

The aesthetic reconstruction of classic IP through generative AI does not arise from a single cause. Rather, it develops through the combined effects of technological change, cultural practice, and audience psychology.

3.1 Technological Factors: AI Lowers the Threshold for Audiovisual Production

Generative tools for image creation, face swapping, and voice cloning have become increasingly accessible, reducing many of the technical barriers that once limited audiovisual remix. In the past, changing the appearance of a film character or reconstructing an entire plot generally required professional production resources. Today, ordinary users can use AI tools to alter a familiar character's appearance, voice, and storyline with comparatively little technical training [8].

3.2 Cultural Factors: Online Symbolic Carnival through Bakhtin's Theory

At the cultural level, radical AI remix can be read as a carnivalesque practice within online youth culture. Bakhtin's account of carnival emphasizes parody, inversion, and the temporary dismantling of established authority. Classic film and television IP already carries a degree of cultural authority, and AI remix gives users a convenient means of playing with, overturning, or mocking that authority [9]. Within a participatory media environment, audiences no longer remain passive viewers of a text; they increasingly act as its rewriters [10].

3.3 Psychological Factors: Compensating for Narrative Regret and Adapting to Fragmented Viewing

Audience psychology is another important force behind the circulation of AI-based aesthetic reconstruction. Many classic films and television dramas leave viewers with memorable tragic endings or unresolved emotional regrets. Radical AI adaptations can change a character's fate or rewrite an ending, offering a form of imaginative emotional compensation. At the same time, short-video platforms have cultivated fragmented viewing habits and a preference for immediate emotional payoff [11]. The fast, gratifying narratives often found in AI remixes fit this pattern of media consumption and further encourage the reconstruction of familiar classics [12].

4. How Aesthetic Reconstruction Is Expressed

4.1 Character Construction: Remaking Familiar Figures

The rewriting of classic characters in AI remix videos often proceeds from the outside inward: visual signs are changed first, followed by alterations to personality and moral identity, until the character no longer functions in the same way as in the original text [13]. AI remixes of Empresses in the Palace, for example, have produced complete gender-swapped versions of the cast. Female characters in the imperial harem are regenerated as male aristocratic figures: Zhen Huan becomes a restrained but invincible young nobleman, Consort Hua is recast as the flamboyant and rebellious "Lord Hua," and characters such as Shen Meizhuang and An Lingrong are also given male appearances. The familiar visual coding of the original drama is replaced by a deliberately disruptive set of new images.

Once the audiovisual surface has been altered, many remixes go further by reversing the personalities of the original characters. This is often changed from "good-to-dark" or "dark-to-good". In some chapters of Empresses in the Palace, the kind and virtuous Shen Meizhuang is depicted as intelligent and ambitious. Conversely, in the revised version, the envious and harmful actions of An Lingrong in the original play are deleted; her low social status and inferior position are emphasized, making her a pathetic tragic character. These modifications do not conform to the original character plot or the intended theme. They are adapted according to the logic of entertainment and the emotional appeal demanded by short-video sites. When taken out of their original story, the characters lose their original features and become flexible symbols in an online entertainment program.

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4.2 Narrative Form: Dissolving the Original Narrative Order

According to the narrative structure, AI remix separates the original coherent story by cutting it into several small units and then recombines them by using an algorithm. The long continuous plot is divided into different visual parts which can be rearranged based on the temporary emotion or the popularity on the platform. As a result, a scattered collage style is formed. One usual method is to change the genre or the emotional aspect of the original work, rewriting tragedies or ethical dramas into a satisfying "wish-fulfillment" story. For example, in the AI remix of "The First Half of My Life", Ling Ling, who originally acts as a third party affecting the family, can be reconstructed from selected scenes and replaced contextually as a faithful and ideal romantic partner. This reversal of morals leads to a change in the original work's ethical evaluation and tragic development, meeting the audience's need for emotional compensation.

AI reduces the distinctions between physical time and space, which makes it easier to integrate encounters and fuse narratives from different works or imaginary worlds. Characters from unrelated stories, periods or fictional backgrounds can be put into the same story background, producing an absurd and new effect. For example, unexpected romantic couples appearing in various dramas or casual conversations between heroes and villains in different works do not conform to the original story's internal logic anymore. They are based on a kind of "hypertext logic" influenced by the algorithmic recommendations and the readers' imagination, thus questioning and reconstructing the authority of the classical stories [14].

4.3 Value Systems: Shifting the Spiritual Core of Classic Works

At the value aspect, radical AI modification might change the fundamental spirit of the original works. The original functions of reflection, criticism or moral education may be reduced when the immediate emotional satisfaction becomes the main criterion for evaluation [15]. The attention of the audience changes from the conformity to the original text to the desire for fast emotional pleasure. This transformation is consistent with Baudrillard's theory of simulacra. In the simulated world generated by AI, social metaphors and humanistic reflections may be considered as hindrances to circulation and be eliminated, while an algorithmic sense of 'hyperreality' will take their place.

This change is particularly evident in the AI remixes of Romance in the Rain. In the original drama, Yiping's singing in a dance hall is connected with economic difficulties, family disputes and the misfortune of her historical environment. In the AI remixes, however, these aspects can be rearranged by means of face changing, voice synthesis and other techniques. Yiping is then portrayed as an autonomous and independent heroine or the main character of a revenge story, and the hard struggle for survival is converted into an unsuitable background of successful career and personal achievement. Baudrillard explains the evolution of the simulacrum as progressing from reflecting reality, to concealing it, and ultimately becoming unrelated to any underlying reality. In the AI remix culture, Yiping might not any longer represent a tragic female influenced by a specific historical background, but only serve as a symbol which is reduced to the enjoyment of "making money" and "avenging."

Under this form of reconstruction, the value of a classic work is increasingly measured not by the depth of its ideas but by its capacity to provide stimulation detached from the logic of the original world. Critiques of patriarchal family structures and reflections on women's historical circumstances can be replaced by shallow, fragmented forms of emotional gratification. In this sense, AI remix risks turning the classic into a copy without an original: serious social pain is covered over by entertainment, while cultural meaning becomes hollowed out. This is one of the clearest expressions of the logic of cultural production associated with the age of simulacra [16].

5. Problems Created by AI-Driven Aesthetic Reconstruction

Another problem which is clearly seen is the similarity of the content. Though AI tools make the creation easier, they promote the use of templates. Usually, the reproductions of well-known intellectual properties tend to be in the same way: tragedies are transformed into stories of satisfying revenge, characters are only altered from 'good' to 'evil' or conversely, and some unique titles together with automatically generated transitions and comeback plots are repeatedly used in various videos. In most cases, the authors merely adopt a pre-existing rewriting method instead of forming their own opinions. With the increase of similar works over time, the

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creative power about the original IP will be exhausted [17]. Platform algorithms may enhance the situation by promoting unusual or eye-catching content and keeping similar patterns in high visibility, thus stimulating more imitation.

A second problem is the danger of misunderstanding classic works due to one-sided adaptations. Some remix videos modify the relationships between characters or change the main idea of a work in order to enhance the dramatic effect. Those who have not seen the original movie or TV serial may obtain their conception of the classic from only short parts, resulting in an incomplete or biased perception. Moreover, the systems which aim at attracting more attention tend to recommend the exciting remixes more frequently. These videos may receive much higher views than those which preserve the complexity of the original and may be repeatedly suggested to the users, thus reducing the variety of interpretations they are exposed to [18]. These problems are not only textual; they indicate the overall characteristics of the present media situation and offer a realistic approach to enhancing AI remix culture [19].

6. Toward a Healthier Aesthetic Ecology for AI Remix

The issues concerning radical AI remix cannot be solved solely by the creators. A better aesthetic ecological balance needs certain coordination between creators, platforms and audiences.

Creators should not neglect their responsibilities towards the original work when applying AI. The generating systems can improve creativity, but they must not be utilized to ridicule or damage the traditional works merely for attracting attention and fame. The entertainment value can be coordinated with the respect for the cultural and thematic aspects of a text. The creators ought to distinguish between the creative reinterpretation and the deliberate distortion, avoid the repetition of standard patterns, and express their own views in the AI-produced content, at the same time, consider the copyright problems [20].

Platforms have certain duties since they decide the distribution and visibility of the content. It is necessary to improve the review systems for AI remixes which intentionally alter the classic works or violate the copyright [21]. The recommendation systems can also decrease their dependence on the traffic only, provide more attention to the thoughtful derivatives and diminish the influence of the exciting but poor quality adaptations. These modifications can help to decrease the repeated circulation of highly similar content.

Audiences need to improve their aesthetic and media literacy. Viewers should be able to differentiate between AI-reproduced works and the original one, instead of depending solely on short videos to obtain information about famous intellectual properties. Encountering the original text, maintaining critical judgment, and resisting low-quality click-driven remixes are all important forms of audience participation and supervision.

Only when creators, platforms, and audiences share responsibility can the tension between AI remix and the inheritance of classic culture be reduced. Such cooperation may help move AI-assisted secondary creation toward a healthier and more sustainable form of development.

7. Conclusion

AI remix should be approached with neither blanket rejection nor uncritical enthusiasm. The central challenge is to find a workable balance between creative deconstruction and respect for the cultural value of classic works. AI-based reinterpretation can open new possibilities for participation and imagination, but unrestricted distortion can also weaken the thematic and spiritual core of the source material. Creators, platforms, and audiences therefore need to work together to support forms of secondary creation that combine imagination with cultural awareness and that allow classic texts to be transformed without simply being emptied of meaning.

This study also has limitations. Its cases come mainly from publicly accessible short-video platforms, and remix practices within smaller subcultural communities have not been examined in sufficient depth. Radical AI remix is resulted from both technological progress and youth culture. It provides common people with new chances to participate in the interpretation of well-known works, to question the existing aesthetic principles and to widen the spread of familiar IPs. However, too much modification may change the characters, alter the values and increase the quantity of routine productions. With the continuous development of generative AI,

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novel forms of classic-IP remix may emerge. In the future, studies could investigate more cases, observe these changes through time and investigate further how technological advancement can coexist with the distribution of classical culture.

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Author Information

Xijin Pang (born 2007), female, second-year undergraduate student majoring in Drama, Film and Television Literature.

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