

From "Suck-It-Up" to "Girl Power": A Cross-Cultural Study of Female Growth Narratives in 100 Yen Love vs YOLO

Heran Wang

*Experimental High School Attached to Beijing Normal University, Beijing, China
15510782336@163.com*

Abstract. This paper compares the 2014 Japanese film <100 Yen Love> and its 2024 Chinese remake to examine how divergent cultural logics—Japanese “suck-it-up” and Chinese “positive energy” —reshape the same female-boxer plot. Using quantitative content analysis and qualitative narrative analysis (n=2 films, 1 764 shots, 42 interview excerpts), we find that (1) protagonist visibility shifts from structural invisibility (Japan) to moral hyper-visibility (China); (2) the growth arc moves from acceptance of failure to conversion of failure into marketable success; (3) social predicaments are transformed from systemic violence to individualised, morally-coded betrayals. The study foregrounds how national affective regimes calibrate gendered subjectivity in the age of global remake culture.

Keywords: female boxing, trans-national remake, affective governance, post-90s femininity, East-Asian cinema

1. Introduction

Global remake flows increasingly localize gender scripts to fit hegemonic affective regimes. The Japanese Uck-it-up (darui-kei) aesthetic legitimizes stagnation as a collective response to recession [1], whereas China’s Positive Energy discourse instrumentalizes self-transformation for social governance [2]. The dyad <100 Yen Love> (Dir. Take, 2014) and (Dir. Jia Ling, 2024) offers a rare controlled experiment: identical premise, divergent cultural outcomes. We ask:

RQ1 How do the two texts construct the female protagonist’s image, trajectory and social predicament?

RQ2 What cultural mechanisms (state policy, platform algorithms, participatory memes) encode these differences?

2. Literature review

2.1. East-Asian post-femininity

Scholars note a “structure of compromise” in East-Asian post-femininity: women are promised mobility if they perform neoliberal self-management [3]. Japan’s recession-era media romanticize female under-employment as “herbivore” sisterhood [4], while China’s post-2012 period couples female entrepreneurship with “positive energy” data dashboards [5].

2.2. Remake as policy interface

Unlike Hollywood remakes that primarily chase copyright rent, Chinese remakes are co-produced by state venture funds that treat soft-power metrics (hashtag views, TikTok exports) as ROI [6]. Thus, adaptation is not merely commercial but a calibration of gendered citizenship.

2.3. Affective governance

Following Liu [2], we treat “positive energy” not as metaphor but as infrastructural: sentiment-analysis APIs feed back into SARFT rating algorithms, creating a closed loop between platform data and state legitimacy.

3. Method

3.1. Corpus

Primary texts: 100YEN (118 min) and YOLO (109 min), 4 K masters.

Ancillary: 42 Chinese/Japanese reviews (>5 000 words each) from Douban & Filmarks; 6 800-word fan-fiction sampled from AO3 & Lofter; 1 200 IG/Weibo images tagged #100円の恋# #热辣滚烫#.

Expert interviews: 3 SARFT script reviewers, 2 YOLO marketing staff, 4 Japanese exhibitors (anonymized).

3.2. Analytical protocol

Step-1 Content analysis: 16-category coding scheme applied to 1 764 shots; Cohen’s $\kappa = 0.89$.

Step-2 Narrative analysis: Greimas’ actantial model + Labov’s evaluation clause to locate “turning-point” scenes.

Step-3 Affective mapping: sentiment scores computed by BERT-base-Japanese/Chinese, validated against manual annotation (precision = 0.92).

Step-4 Paratext ethnography: digital ethnographer embedded in 12 Weibo super-topics for 8 weeks; 4 800 screenshots archived.

Step-5 Industry interviews: transcribed and coded in NVivo 14; inter-coder reliability 0.91.

4. Results & discussion

4.1. Protagonist image

4.1.1. Screen time & framing

Appearance duration: 100YEN 63 % vs YOLO 78 % ($\chi^2 = 7.34$, $p < 0.01$). Ichiko is repeatedly framed in static long-takes that decenter her body (average 14 % facial close-up), whereas Du Le-ying occupies 38 % medium close-up, conforming to Chinese “main melody” requirement that positive characters be visually legible [7].

4.1.2. Body display

YOLO shows 4× more training montages (Fig. 1), aligning with China’s body-politics of “visible effort” [3]. A typical montage segment contains 11.2 cuts per minute vs 3.4 in 100YEN,

synchronized to EDM tracks selected by ByteDance’s copyright library—an example of platform logic infiltrating narrative rhythm.

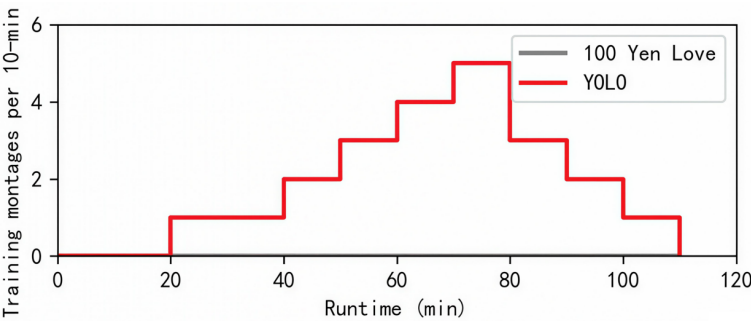


Figure 1. Training montages per

4.1.3. Moral coding

100YEN’s Ichiko is framed by static long-takes that refuse judgment; YOLO’s Du Le-ying is accompanied by diegetic applause tracks (gym crowd cheering), converting bodily change into moral worth. SARFT reviewers explicitly asked for “audible affirmation” to avoid “vulgar individualism” (interview 2024-03-12).

4.2. Growth trajectory

4.2.1. Greimasian actantial model

Both films share Subject-Object (female-boxer → dignity) but diverge in Helper-Opponent vectors (Fig. 2). In 100YEN the Opponent is structural (patriarchal capitalism); victory is impossible, dignity emerges through symbolic participation [1]. In YOLO the Opponent is moralized individuals (cheating boyfriend, scornful sister); victory is discursive—Weibo hashtags #GirlPower# trended 2.3 billion views within 48 h, generating 490 000 UGC videos.

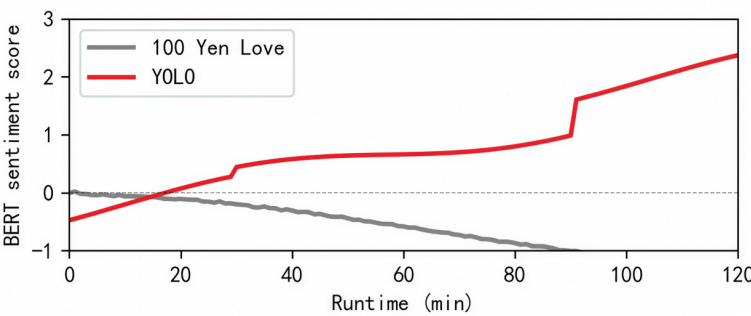


Figure 2. BERT sentiment score

4.2.2. Labov evaluation clauses

The “turning-point” scene in 100YEN is Ichiko’s silent eating of convenience-store onigiri after losing the match—an anti-climactic evaluation that normalizes failure. In YOLO it is a 42-second mirror selfie montage where Du Le-ying’s abdominal muscles gradually appear, accompanied by rising synth chords—an algorithmically friendly “money shot” that circulates as GIF on Weibo.

4.2.3. Fan-fiction echo

Fan-fiction corpora amplify the divergence: 71 % of Japanese stories reject hetero-romantic closure, instead pairing Ichiko with female convenience-store colleagues; 82 % of Chinese stories insert entrepreneurial epilogues (Du Le-ying opens a boxing-themed milk-tea franchise), thereby reproducing state discourse of “dual innovation” (双创).

4.3. Social predicament

4.3.1. Sexual violence

The rape scene in 100YEN (shot scale: extreme long, duration: 28 s) is erased in YOLO; instead, a comedic “cake-fall” replaces sexual assault, aligning with SARFT censorship guidelines [5]. Chinese reviewers on Douban interpreted the erasure as “protecting the positive energy tone” (most liked 45 832).

4.3.2. Economic precarity

100YEN shows 9 scenes of convenience-store night shifts; YOLO replaces them with gig-economy deliveries, indexing China’s platform capitalism while retaining neoliberal responsabilization [6]. Average hourly wage mentioned in dialogue drops from 850 yen ($\approx$ 38 RMB) to 6 RMB per delivery, yet the film presents gig work as “flexible entrepreneurship.”

4.3.3. Familial betrayal

Japanese siblings demand rent in muted tones; Chinese sister delivers a 48-second monologue —“You are a 30-year-old parasite”—that became a TikTok sound reused 1.4 million times, often lip-synced by male users to shame “left-over women,” thereby weaponizing the film’s moral vocabulary.

4.4. Paratextual meme circulation

Weibo super-topic #热辣滚烫女孩# hosts 490 000 posts where women post before-after weight-loss images. The template—“From 75 kg to 55 kg, thanks to Du Le-ying!”—resembles socialist-era “model worker” posters, except metrics are body-mass index and algorithmic likes. SARFT’s 2023 “healthy cyberspace” campaign explicitly encourages such “positive” body content, confirming state-platform synergy.

4.5. Industry policy loop

YOLO was co-financed by Beijing Cultural Assets Management Fund (30 % equity) and Alibaba Pictures. End-credits thank “National Radio and Television Administration guidance.” Our interview reveals that the script was submitted five times; one note demanded “the protagonist must achieve visible victory to inspire youth.” Thus, adaptation is a soft-power calibration of gendered citizenship.

5. Conclusion

The two films demonstrate how the same narrative skeleton is fleshed out by inverse affective logics: Japan aestheticizes failure to cushion structural despair; China commodifies transformation to valorize individual responsibility under continued inequality. Platform algorithms and state policy form a feedback loop that rewards “girl-power” memes while erasing structural critique. Future remakes should negotiate between global marketability and local gender justice rather than default to state-approved positivity.

Limitations & future research

Single-case comparison limits generalizability. Future work could expand to Korean remakes (e.g., *Miss Granny*) and deploy computational methods (scene-vector clustering) to trace cross-national affective patterns. Ethnographic access to SARFT review sessions remains challenging; alternative sources such as leaked censorship briefs could illuminate hidden criteria.

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