

# “Acceptance” and “Recreation”: The Works of Jon Fosse in China

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**Abstract:** This study examines the development and influence of Jon Fosse’s works in China from the perspectives of reception and reinterpretation. By analyzing the translation, performance, and dissemination of his works, the study explores audience feedback, identifies the characteristics and challenges of his creations, and discusses how cultural, aesthetic, and historical differences impact the reception of his works. It also investigates the barriers in cross-cultural communication and cases of cultural misinterpretation, as well as the diverse pathways of reinterpretation in drama, literature, and film adaptation. Furthermore, the study highlights the cultural value and social significance of the dissemination of Fosse’s works, emphasizing their inspiration for Chinese drama and the construction of cultural interaction. The research aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between Fosse’s works and Chinese aesthetics, and to promote the dissemination and localization of Nordic literature in China.

**Keywords:** Jon Fosse; Acceptance studies; Recreation; Cultural exchange; Dramatic adaptation

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## 1. The acceptance of Jon Fosse’s works in China

### 1.1. The translation of Fosse’s works in China

Since Jon Fosse’s works were introduced to China, their unique literary expression and narrative style have attracted considerable attention from Chinese academia. In recent years, Chinese academia has gradually constructed a basic framework for the study of Fosse’s works through translation and commentary. In terms of translation, Fosse is renowned for his poetry and drama. The translations of several of his plays and poems by Yu Zemin were among the first to be introduced to China, enabling more Chinese readers to initially experience the Nordic minimalist aesthetic style and the complex emotions and philosophical reflections it conveys through linguistic mediation. These translations generally adhere to the original text, striving to represent the author’s unique creative vocabulary and narrative strategies. Within the academic publishing system of universities, studies such as “Autumn Harvest and Autumn Wind: A Study of Jon Fosse’s Works” and “A Preliminary Exploration of the Translation of Fosse in the New Nordic Literary Horizon” have provided important references for the accumulation of Fosse’s literary translations in the Chinese context. Additionally, some Chinese translators have adopted a dual approach of “preservation and reconstruction,” accurately reproducing the original meaning while adapting it to the Chinese context. They reinterpret the works by incorporating traditional Chinese art and

dramatic techniques, attempting to find intersections and expressive tensions between Eastern and Western narratives. This has become one of the core paths for translating Fosse's works in recent years <sup>[1]</sup>.

## **1.2. The performance and dissemination of Fosse's works in China**

In recent years, Jon Fosse's works have gradually gained attention from the Chinese theatrical and academic communities, achieving varying degrees of acceptance and recognition in performance and cultural dissemination. His texts, characterized by their minimalist language style and unique rhythm, present a quiet power and deep artistic infectiousness, becoming increasingly familiar to Chinese audiences. Domestic theater groups and universities have successively adopted his works as important case studies and practical materials for cross-cultural research, exploring and analyzing them from both stage practice and theoretical interpretation. In particular, the translation of Fosse's representative works, such as "Someone Is Coming" and "Autumn Past," began in the early 21st century within the literary domain and has since developed into practical applications with the acceleration of Sino-Norwegian cultural interactions. Since 2016, several Chinese theaters have hosted "Small Theatre" units and international contemporary drama exhibitions, which have included Fosse's original Nordic stage aesthetic works to present the depth of his ideological dimensions and the simplicity of his expressive forms <sup>[2]</sup>.

## **1.3. Chinese audiences' reactions to Fosse's works**

Chinese audiences' reactions to Jon Fosse's works reflect the unique process and cultural reinterpretation of this Nordic dramatic system as it integrates into the Chinese context. In-depth analysis of various performance feedback and discussion data shows that Chinese audiences exhibit distinct understandings of the sense of stagnant time, minimalist language style, and symbolic expression in Fosse's works. The majority of Chinese audiences believe that Fosse's works, through the repetition and pauses in language, reinforce a profound sense of alienation in everyday life. This approach subverts the traditional Chinese emphasis on narrative and functional storytelling, bringing a new sensory experience. The portrayal of characters' destinies and existential philosophy in Fosse's works has also sparked extensive philosophical discussions, especially as he tells tragic stories in a plain tone, allowing Chinese audiences to resonate emotionally with existentialist reflections on life. On the other hand, some viewers indicate that the significant cultural differences may create barriers to understanding the deeper meanings of the works, particularly the abstractness of some symbolic scenes and backgrounds, which causes hesitation between aesthetic and emotional experiences. Overall, Chinese audiences' reactions to Fosse's drama encompass both an interest in and acceptance of Nordic aesthetic culture, as well as a focus on individual identity and universal significance in cross-cultural exchanges <sup>[3]</sup>.

# **2. Factors influencing the acceptance of Jon Fosse's works in China**

## **2.1. The impact of cultural differences on acceptance**

Jon Fosse's works enjoy international acclaim, yet this global attention has not fully translated into comprehensive understanding and research within the Chinese academic community. Cultural differences are a primary reason for this situation. Firstly, in terms of literary form and style, his creation tends towards minimalist narration and repetitive structures. This narrative strategy, innovative at the linguistic and rhythmic levels, offers a novel experience for Chinese readers. However, its formalistic characteristics may pose comprehension challenges for Chinese literary recipients accustomed to traditional structures and plot development. Secondly, in terms of cultural context, his works are rooted in the Scandinavian social and cultural milieu, where the modes of emotional expression and thematic content often diverge from Chinese philosophical concepts. This is particularly evident in his exploration of human indifference and alienation, which contrasts with the Chinese emphasis on collectivism and interpersonal relationships. Additionally, Fosse's language, influenced by the Nordic literary tradition, often carries profound and implicit historical and cultural significance, which can lead to barriers in cross-cultural understanding <sup>[4]</sup>.

## 2.2. Differences in literary traditions and aesthetic concepts

When examining the acceptance of Jon Fosse's works in China, it is essential to consider the profound differences between the literary traditions and derived aesthetic concepts of Norway and China. As one of the most influential new realist playwrights and literary figures in contemporary Europe, Fosse's works are deeply embedded in their unique cultural context. His creative language and narrative style often exhibit a minimalist yet symbolic quality. His literary sensibility frequently embodies the cultural characteristics and geographical background of the Norwegian region, which contrasts sharply with the Western linear narrative that emphasizes clarity and logical progression. This mode of expression poses certain obstacles for Chinese readers accustomed to the traditional Chinese chapter-based narrative style and the structural technique of introduction, development, turn, and conclusion <sup>[5]</sup>.

In comparison, Chinese culture has long valued the aesthetic of linguistic rhythm and parallelism. The narrative structure in Chinese literature tends to favor gradual unfolding over the emotionally direct and tightly structured Western approach. This cultural tradition influences the Chinese perception of concise and abstract language, making the interpretation of Fosse's creative intentions more challenging. Additionally, the symbolic imagery in Fosse's novels and the use of pauses in his plays require interpretation within their cultural context. Unlike Western readers, who may more readily grasp the text's meaning due to greater cultural familiarity, Chinese readers may experience a greater deviation in understanding. From an aesthetic perspective, Chinese literary works often pursue overall harmony and emotional richness in narration <sup>[6,7]</sup>.

## 2.3. The role of social background and contemporary factors

The dissemination of Jon Fosse's works in China has been significantly influenced by the complex interplay of social background and contemporary changes. As China rapidly urbanizes and its cultural life diversifies in the twenty-first century, the audience's aesthetic reception of foreign cultural products has become increasingly pluralistic. On one hand, economic globalization has facilitated the exchange of cultures between China and other countries, providing convenience for the introduction of Fosse's works and leading some viewers to develop high expectations for the "uniqueness of Nordic culture." However, this context also complicates the understanding of the texts. In the highly commercialized cultural market, dramatic and plot-driven narratives tend to attract the attention of the mainstream audience more easily. Moreover, the concise poetic expressions in Fosse's plays and his deep inquiries into everyday life and human existence may create a sense of alienation for viewers accustomed to grand historical narratives or strong stage impacts. On the other hand, the contemporary era has seen a renewed appreciation for avant-garde drama in the field of literary criticism, which has provided some cognitive and evaluative resources for Fosse's works. A group of scholars, through their interpretation of postmodern artistic concepts, have injected interpretative potential into his creations at the theoretical level <sup>[8]</sup>.

# 3. Forms of recreation in Jon Fosse's works in China

## 3.1. Recreation in dramatic adaptation

When exploring the forms of literary recreation of Jon Fosse's works in China, it is inevitable to focus on the crucial aspect of dramatic adaptation. Fosse's plays are renowned for their minimalist language style and intense emotional tension. Transplanting his original narratives to the stage is not only a profound interpretation of the intrinsic qualities of his texts but also a further shaping force in cross-cultural communication. Research indicates that Chinese directors, in their stage expressions of his works, have not simply copied the original plot structures. Instead, they have endowed the works with distinct Chinese cultural characteristics through delicate dramatic direction. Notably, they often reconstruct the implicit imagery in the dialogues, expanding the highly introspective narratives into collective mirrors associated with the times. This creative technique has shown unique effects in several successful practices.

The reorganization of dramatic language is not only an enrichment and development of the text, but also expands the cross-disciplinary dialogue space for Fosse's works. From the polyphonic discourse relationships of characters to

the cyclical metaphorical expressions in plot structures, Chinese adapters respect the original language aesthetics while introducing localized narrative grammar, thus achieving an artistic rebirth of the works in a localized context. For example, in one adaptation case, “dialogue” is shaped into a space for communication and collision among people from different cultural backgrounds, integrating Jon’s lonely individuals into a more universal thematic discussion. This change highlights the spirit of recreation in the global context of the text <sup>[9,10]</sup>.

### **3.2. Borrowing and integration in literary creation**

When examining the works of Jon Fosse and their recreation in the Chinese literary context, the borrowing and integration in literary creation hold unique and significant importance. Fosse is renowned for his minimalist language style and profound emotional tension, which greatly inspires and references Chinese writers and scholars seeking innovative narrative forms and the modern transformation of Chinese literary traditions. By absorbing and internalizing his works, some Chinese writers have begun to reconstruct Fosse’s narrative structure and linguistic style in their own language, achieving a dual transplantation and integration of form and concept. In numerous creative cases, writers often start with short plays and lyrical essays, reducing narrative redundancy and highlighting the tension of scenes to create emotional space. While maintaining the philosophical and ethical reflections of the original core, they incorporate discussions on Chinese society and human nature. When borrowing from Fosse’s works, writers focus on replacing narration with context, focusing on the subtle yet intense inner conflicts between characters, and using concise yet flavorful language to show the resonance of common human emotions. This process not only enriches the possibilities of modern Chinese literary forms but also expands the space for cross-cultural literary dialogue <sup>[11]</sup>.

## **4. The significance of the acceptance and recreation of Jon Fosse’s works in China**

### **4.1. Implications for the development of Chinese literature and art**

Jon Fosse’s literary works, with their unique expressive techniques and artistic styles, hold significant value in promoting dialogue between Chinese and world cultures. On the one hand, in terms of literary creation, the high artistic sensitivity and ideological depth exhibited in Fosse’s works provide a mirror for Chinese writers. It reflects the contemporary exploration of core artistic issues such as linguistic minimalism, inner ideals, and the reshaping of the relationship between humans and nature in the creative process. His concise and highly suggestive writing characteristics point to a possible path for addressing the current issues in Chinese literature, such as the homogenization of narrative forms and superficial emotional expression in the context of globalization. It also prompts creators to consider how to convey infinite spiritual connotations with limited words. On the other hand, Fosse’s innovative artistic language not only deepens the aesthetic qualities of drama and novels but also offers valuable inspiration for the development of other art forms. Through cross-disciplinary attempts in visual and performing arts, his open-ended textual construction model inspires artists to establish multidimensional sensory experience fields and break through established creative boundaries. In a country like China, which has both a rich cultural heritage and a modern cultural context, the significance of Fosse’s works extends beyond a mirror; it acts as a catalyst <sup>[12]</sup>.

### **4.2. Value in promoting cultural exchange and integration**

The dissemination and acceptance of Jon Fosse’s works in China exemplify the unique significance of Sino-foreign literary exchanges. Their transnational and cross-cultural spreading makes the texts an important bridge for promoting multicultural exchange during cross-linguistic translation. The translational and performative recreation of his dramatic texts in the Chinese context allows these works to rejuvenate their artistic vitality within the local cultural soil. The narrative characteristics of Fosse’s works, such as minimalism, repetitive wording, and imagery, not only enrich Chinese audiences’ and creators’ understanding of contemporary Norwegian modes of expression but also inspire local literature and theater to explore new discourses and performance techniques. This two-way integration significantly amplifies the

complementary traits between Chinese and Norwegian cultures, forming a meaningful pattern of civilizational mutual learning. Further exploration in the field of cultural exchange reveals that the introduction and innovative practice of Fosse's works significantly highlight the intercultural complementarity. It provides a new perspective for global attention to Fosse. This mutual learning value encompasses not only the aesthetic function inherent in the textual works themselves but also the profound significance generated by cultural production methods in different contextual interactions. It injects more diverse content elements into the global drama and narrative aesthetics and offers methodological guidance for other transnational creative projects<sup>[13,14]</sup>.

### **4.3. Enrichment and expansion of audience aesthetic experience**

Jon Fosse's works, since their initial introduction to China, have garnered significant attention due to their profound humanity and philosophical nature, particularly in shaping and enriching the aesthetic experience of audiences. Fosse's works are renowned for their concise language style and strong symbolic characteristics. Through seemingly mundane character dialogues and depictions of everyday trivialities, they actually convey deep inquiries into complex themes such as fate, society, history, and individual existence. This artistic approach breaks away from the traditional dramatic narrative reliance on event completeness and structural closure, focusing instead on the emotional changes within individuals. This allows audiences to not only experience the estrangement effect in the plot but also to deeply perceive the dynamic development of characters' spiritual worlds<sup>[15]</sup>.

This unique and challenging creative philosophy is indispensable in expanding the aesthetic horizons of modern readers, who are accustomed to clear narrative logic and visually splendid display modes. At the same time, Fosse's plays, by starkly presenting the universal dilemmas of individual life on stage, awaken the emotional resonance consciousness that has gradually faded in the context of fast-paced and consumerist backgrounds. Thus, his understanding and innovation of drama have made a significant contribution to exploring the diversification of contemporary Chinese drama and cultivating a more sensitive and delicate audience<sup>[16,17]</sup>.

## **Disclosure statement**

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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