

"Copyright and the fast movie case"

1. Introduction

A "fast movie" refers to a digest video of a movie created by making unauthorized use of the main part of the movie and editing it into a length of about 10 to 20 minutes. An ordinary movie takes around two hours to watch, but by watching a fast movie, one can virtually experience the original movie in a short time. It may appear to be a convenient and handy form of entertainment, but it involves a serious copyright infringement issue.

2. Spread of damage and development into a social issue

In Japan, the number of fast movies posted on YouTube and other video posting sites surged from 2020 as people became restricted from going out and spent longer hours at home due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The fast movies brought large advertising revenue to those posting the videos, but caused immense damage to the entire movie industry.

A survey reported in 2021 that the estimated annual amount of damage caused by fast movies would reach approximately 95 billion yen. As such size of damage is equivalent to a substantial fraction of the box-office sales of the entire Japanese movie industry, it is a matter of life and death for movie companies, etc. Therefore, the movie industry and copyright organizations felt a strong sense of crisis, and intensified their calls for regulation of illegal uploading.

3. Criminal conviction

Also in 2021, fast movie uploaders were arrested for the first time. In criminal court proceedings, the uploaders were convicted for copyright infringement, and were sentenced to imprisonment and a fine. As the illegality of fast movies was clearly indicated in court, it prompted a significant shift in the public awareness of copyright infringement.

4. Amount of damages

In civil court proceedings that were conducted in parallel, the court ordered payment of compensation for damage. The focus of attention was on how the amount of damages would be calculated, and the court adopted a method of multiplying the number of views of the fast movies by 200 yen. It is based on an idea that 200 yen corresponds to about a half of the fee users pay for the official streaming service. As a result, the defendants were ordered to pay damages as high as about 500 million yen. Since this is an extremely high amount of damages for copyright infringement in Japan, it will serve as a strong deterrent against similar copyright infringements in the future, and it can also be positioned as an effective judgment for protecting the rights of movie companies, etc.

5. Conclusion

The fast movie case can be considered as a case demonstrating serious damage caused by copyright infringement and robust response by the judiciary. Copyright is not a mere regulation under law, but a platform underpinning the development of culture and industry. In order to protect an environment where creators and right holders can gain legitimate profits, it is important for each individual user to deepen their understanding of copyright and have an awareness of not taking part in creation and distribution of illegal content. The fast movie case strongly sends this message to the entire society.

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