Proceedings of the 3rd International Conference on Social Psychology and Humanity Studies
DOI: 10.54254/2753-7048/2025.18061

A Comparative Study of Ethnicity Differences Reflected in Films Mongol: The Rise of Genghis Khan and Old Beast In the Context of Multiculturalism

Juncheng Chen[1,a,*]

[1]*The Experimental High School Attached to Beijing Normal University, Beijing, 100032, China*
a. 18911189896@163.com
**corresponding author*

Abstract: The transition of Mongolian cinema begins with New Historicist advancements in the post-industrial era. Through comparing *Old Beast* and *Mongol: The Rise of Genghis Khan*, this paper examines the development of both old and new Mongolian ethnic cinema, focusing on the factors that contributed to the emergence of new Mongolian cinema. Under the influence of multiculturalism, Inner Mongolia has experienced significant social transformation, shifting from a single-ethnic to a multi-ethnic society. Its people have moved from a traditional nomadic lifestyle to a more settled way of life. Against this backdrop, Inner Mongolia has achieved decentralization of Mongolian culture, showcasing both ethnic diversity and cultural plurality. As a result, Inner Mongolian ethnic cinema no longer focuses solely on portraying Mongolian ethnic traits but instead presents the local way of life through a New Historicist lens. Building on this, *Old Beast* takes a step further and breaks through the confines of New Historicism by emphasizing "historicity" and "contextualization," providing insights for the further development of Chinese Cultural Poetics. This paper aims to explore the transformation of post-modern Mongolian society and the emerging development of New Historicism as reflected in Mongolian cinema.

Keywords: *Old Beast, Mongol: The Rise of Genghis Khan*, new historicism, multiculturalism, cultural poetics.

1. Introduction

In recent years, the field of ethnic cinema in China has not seen significant advancement. This is because the history of Chinese ethnic cinema has been relatively short, and within this brief development period, most ethnic films focus solely on a single ethnicity. Changes in ethnicities, the exodus of ethnic minority populations, and the influx of external populations drive social transformations, which in turn give rise to new forms of artistic expression. This shift can be observed in the transition of perspective in Mongolian ethnic films. *Mongol: The Rise of Genghis Khan* portrays nomadic identity and nature worship; *Old Beast* explores social issues stemming from economic stagnation in the post-industrial era, while *The Cord* dives into the post-modernist exploration of ethnic roots prompted by the exodus of the Mongolian population. The rapid development of society, along with the ensuing emergence of new artistic expression, has outpaced the progress of film studies, leaving ample room for further studies of the relationship between the two. Therefore, this paper aims

© 2025 The Authors. This is an open access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License 4.0 (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

DOI: 10.54254/2753-7048/2025.18061

to determine the new development trends of Mongolian cinema as a part of ethnic minority cinema and the key factors driving social development by analyzing the stark contrast between ethnicity-focused films represented by *Mongol: The Rise of Genghis Khan* and post-modernist films represented by *Old Beast*. It also explores the new dynamics of social development, examines the multiculturalism brought about by these changes, and discusses the future direction of Mongolian cinema.

2. Brief Introduction of Two Films: The Cord and Mongol: The Rise of Genghis Khan

In 2023, a Mongolian-themed road film, *The Cord*, was released in China. The film tells the story of Alus, a band member in a city who returned to his hometown in Mongolia and took his mother Narenzuo to trace their roots. Narenzuo suffered from Alzheimer's, leaving only her hazy memory as a guide. They embarked on a search for a half-live-half-dead tree that Narenzuo once visited with her father in her childhood. Narenzuo never had the chance to see the tree before her death. She passed away in a quiet yet dramatic manner—someone awaited her in the distance. While for Alus, he cut the rope that symbolized the "cord." This reversed mother-son relationship depicts the life-and-death philosophy of Mongolian grassland culture, where death leads to life [1]. The film's director, Qiao Sixue, also echoed in an interview that, within the cycles of the world, the half-live-half-dead tree always perpetuates in another form despite its appearance of withering. On the other hand, the monumental *Mongol: The Rise of Genghis Khan* tells the story of the rise of Genghis Khan, the emperor of the Yuan Dynasty, promoting Mongolian culture. It reflects an abstract understanding of the national characteristics of traditional Mongolians around 2007, such as bravery and resilience [2].

3. Changes in Artistic Expression Driven by Inner Mongolia's Development

The changes in ethnic literary and artistic forms over the past few decades are an epitome of the social transformations, reflecting the changes of not only the narrated but also the narrators. The 21st century ushered in the fastest period of industrialization in China. Since the implementation of the reform and opening-up policy, coastal economic zones were established, China's socialist market economy gradually expanded nationwide, and large numbers of rural populations migrated to cities, driving significant industrial growth. In such circumstances, every region needed a medium to showcase its culture to both the outside world and its own people. With this need came the early ethnic films that emphasized cultural traits. The emergence of this type of film is based on the introduction of a unified and abstract form of singular cultural identity, using "existence" to deduce "essence." These films feature strong artistic expression, reproducing local customs and culture in great detail, but they did not provide in-depth discussions of ethnicity. In this sense, *Mongol: The Rise of Genghis Khan* is less of a traditional film but more of a visual presentation of local aesthetic characteristics, similar to the Western mimesis theory guided by idealism. It uses the abstract and singular ethnicity as an ideal, "replicating" the real life on screen.

As urban populations grew rapidly, cities soon reached the limits of their resource and environmental capacity, leading to a trend of counter-urbanization. Urban society became more complex, and population flows were no longer unidirectional. By that time, the substantial industrial dividends have come to an end. It is often said that China accomplished in a few decades what took Western countries hundreds of years in industrial development. Now the burden falls on society to accommodate the effects of this "centuries-long" progress. Epistemological issues, which have been relatively understudied in Chinese philosophy for thousands of years, now loom large against the backdrop of globalization. Rationalism and empiricism begin to take root among today's youth; Western rationalism grounded in idealism has disintegrated, while literary and artistic works centered on post-modernism, like *The Cord*, continue to evolve through the narrative of traditional cultural

DOI: 10.54254/2753-7048/2025.18061

genes. *The Cord* blends the inherent death-to-life philosophy of Mongolian society and its derived views on family, and then returns to the grasslands from an urban perspective to trace cultural roots. This approach contrasts with mimesis theory and aligns more with expressionism, where the work seeks to express the inner emotions found within the exploration of art and the mind.

4. New Development of the Mongolian Ethnic Group in the Context of Multiculturalism

Multiculturalism emerged in the early 20th century as a response to the issues of imbalanced ethnic development and identity inequality left by chauvinism, colonialism, and imperialism[3]. Multiculturalism revolves around the core values of "equality, freedom, diversity, and inclusion" [4]. When interpreted through post-modernism, multiculturalism exhibits decentralization and diversity [5]. Inner Mongolia follows a similar track. Before the founding of the People's Republic of China, Inner Mongolia remained relatively isolated, but with the expansion of industry and the increase of migrant populations, it rapidly developed into a multi-ethnic region [6]. Coming along with this important shift is the decentralization of Mongolian cinema: its artistic expression no longer focuses solely on portraying traditional Mongolian ethnicity but instead tends to depict the living conditions in Inner Mongolia.

This process is reflected in the backstory of *Old Beast*. After rapid industrial development, the glut of urban commercial housing, the commercialization of grassland animal husbandry, and the increased coverage of compulsory education have all contributed to stripping the new generation of Mongolians of their connection to the Mongolian language and traditional nomadic lifestyle. This phenomenon, coupled with the mistress's status as a university exchange student in the film, further emphasizes how multiculturalism in the post-industrial era has influenced society in various ways.

5. Depiction of Post-Industrial Inner Mongolia in *Old Beast*

From *Mongol: The Rise of Genghis Khan* to *The Cord*, Mongolian cinema has undergone significant transformations in less than twenty years. This shift is shaped not only by multiculturalism but also by cultural exchange, communication, and development in the context of post-industrial globalization. In 2017, the film *Old Beast* was released. It is set in contemporary Inner Mongolia. In the film, the once-thriving cities now show signs of decline, with houses remaining unsold and the economy being sluggish. Against this backdrop, Lao Yang, once a wealthy man, gradually fell into poverty. Years of caring for his paralyzed wife drained him both physically and mentally. His children grew distant, rejecting and resenting him. Yet, Lao Yang stubbornly clung to his habits of his prime—supporting friends, keeping mistresses, and remaining convinced that he was still the pillar of the family. This film is a powerful portrayal of modern Chinese society, reflecting how pre-modernism and modernism manifest in two successive generations. The most captivating aspect of this film is its reflection on certain perspectives of Chinese historical and cultural views [7].

Though we often say that we have completed in a few decades what took Western countries hundreds of years in the industrial development, on a deeper cultural level, we are still centuries behind, with a "cultural debt" that must be repaid to catch up with the extensive research done in the Western context. Therefore, interpreting literary and artistic works within the context of Chinese culture must adopt a different approach from the traditional Western perspectives. For example, in contrast to the new development in New Historicism proposed by Stephen Greenblatt, Chinese Cultural Poetics has emerged to engage with the cultural products of China's rapidly developing society within the context of globalization.

DOI: 10.54254/2753-7048/2025.18061

6. New Development of Chinese Cultural Poetics, Derived from New Historicism

Cultural Poetics was originally proposed by Stephen Greenblatt to partially replace New Historicism [8]. It factors in historical interpretation, cultural background, and political inclinations when analyzing works, emphasizing both "internal study" and "external study" [9]. However, Professor Li Chunqing argues that the "poetics" aspect only emphasizes the "cultural" attributes within a post-modernist context, while overlooking the aesthetic qualities from a modernist perspective. He believes that Chinese Cultural Poetics should emphasize "historicity" and "contextualization" [10]. Given that China has traditionally lacked a logocentric mode of thought, it is crucial to explore research from the perspective of the narrator's subjectivity. Just as Professor Li Chunqing states, "we must first abandon the 'conceptual metaphysical' thinking mode and view literary phenomena as activities constantly in the process of flowing, generating, and evolving, rather than objects that remain static and unchanged" [11].

In *Old Beast*, to present reflection on modern society and Chinese historical perspectives, the director playfully misleads the audience at the beginning of the film: Lao Zhou sold a friend's entrusted camel, took part of the life-saving money, and spent time with his mistress while his wife was in the ICU. Upon seeing this, the audience may instinctively label Lao Zhou as a "bad old man" for lacking an understanding of the concepts of "contextualization" and "historicity." This preconception could skew the audience's perception of the protagonist later on. Then, the director provides partial explanations, but not fully: Lao Zhou was no longer simply an old scoundrel but a once-successful local businessman; he sold the camel to buy a toy for his grandson and helped his friend trade it for a long-desired calf that could support the family. This is an example of emphasizing "historicity" and "contextualization," a case of studying Cultural Poetics through context.

7. Conclusion

Old Beast and *Mongol: The Rise of Genghis Khan* each have their own distinct artistic expression, which reflect the transformation of ethnic features and the new development in Chinese ethnic cinema. This paper takes a relatively dynamic approach, using the development of film as the main thread to introduce the process of modern social transformation in Inner Mongolia. It explores the manifestation of multiculturalism in Inner Mongolia, the general social conditions in the post-industrial era, and the impact of China's reform and opening-up on the region, and then it segues into broader discussions of the new development in Chinese Cultural Poetics. There are still many important aspects worth examining in this process to complete the overall picture of social development and the full trajectory of film evolution.

This paper primarily sketches the transformation of ethnic films from a broad perspective, focusing on the post-industrial films represented by *Old Beast*. It explores how industrialization and post-infrastructure development have influenced the Inner Mongolia region. However, it does not delve deeply into the ethnic studies behind Mongolian films such as *Mongol: The Rise of Genghis Khan*, nor does it elaborate on the cultural origin issues prompted by the migration of Mongolian populations in "root-seeking" films like *The Cord*. On the societal level, topics such as the understanding of the afterlife, the nomadic thinking logic behind Shamanism, and other spiritual aspects are not addressed. Overall, Mongolian cinema has experienced a significant transformation, largely driven by profound social shifts caused by economic development and lifestyle changes. Mongolians, along with other ethnic groups, have experienced ethnic exchange and integration. In the future, the direction of social development and the topic of ethnicity depicted in Mongolian cinema will inevitably change from being "ethnic" to "regional," with multiculturalism continuing to deepen its influence.

DOI: 10.54254/2753-7048/2025.18061

References

[1] *Tong, Tong. (2023). The Dilemma of the Other: On the Identity Construction of the Elderly Image in the Film Old Beast. Sichuan Drama (09), 78-82.*

[2] *Bao, Tianhua. (2010). The Cinematic Writing and Cultural Construction of Heroic Epics: A Comparative Study of the Films Genghis Khan and Mongol: The Rise of Genghis Khan. Journal of Chifeng University (Philosophy and Social Science Edition) (01), 86-91.*

[3] *Guo, Ruiyan. (2023). Multiculturalism: Provoking Ethnic Conflict or Promoting Integration? History of Political Thought (03), 148-165+200.*

[4] *Sealy Thomas, Uberoi Varun & Meer Nasar. The Resilience of Multiculturalism: Ideas, Politics, Practice. Edinburgh University Press.*

[5] *Yu, Haifeng. (2023). The Limitations of Multiculturalism: Theory, Advocacy, and Practice. Theoretical Circle (08), 75-82. doi:10.13221/j.cnki.lljj.2023.08.007.*

[6] *Alessia Rochira, Serena Verbena, Erica Briozzo, Evelyn De Simone, Francesca Esposito, Rocío Garrido... & Terri Mannarini.(2024).Multiculturalism in dominant ethnic populations: A transnational profile analysis. 102051-102051.*

[7] *Zhao, Jiangnan. (2022). Culture, Technology, and Market: An Observation of Visual Effects Films in China in the Post-industrial Era. Audiovisual (11), 37-40. doi:10.19395/j.cnki.1674-246x.2022.11.016.*

[8] *Hu, Zuoyou. (2009). Traversing Between History and Literature: Interpreting New Historicist Literary Criticism. Journal of the Graduate School of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (01), 89-94.*

[9] *Wang, Jiafeng. (2022). A Review of Western Historicism. Zhejiang Academic Journal (05), 210-220. doi:10.16235/j.cnki.33-1005/c.2022.05.021.*

[10] *Wang, Jianan. (2022). An Analysis of Li Chunqing's Theoretical Construction and Practical Requirements of "Chinese Cultural Poetics." New Realism (15), 45-48.*

[11] *Lu Lu.(2023).New Historicism in Documentary On CCTV's National Treasure. (5).*