Analysis of Chinese Cultural Symbols in Hollywood Movies

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Abstract. As China's international status and influence continue to grow, Hollywood movies have also made corresponding changes in the way they spread Chinese cultural symbols. This article uses cross-cultural communication theory, specifically semiotic analysis and case study methods, to study the advantages, disadvantages, and methods of Hollywood movies in spreading Chinese culture. By studying China's cases in cultural communication, we finally summarize and come up with some better solutions that will help Hollywood movies spread Chinese culture. The study found that Hollywood movies show complex characteristics when using Chinese cultural symbols. Hollywood uses highly visual material and spiritual cultural symbols to create an easily recognizable "Oriental wonder". However, this choice of symbols is often limited by a Western perspective, which can easily lead to cultural misunderstandings or reinforce stereotypes. In addition, some works have stripped away their cultural core in order to cater to commercial interests, thereby weakening the accuracy of cultural communication.

Keywords: Cross-cultural communication, Hollywood movies, traditional Chinese culture.

1. Introduction

As China's international influence grows, Hollywood films are increasingly incorporating Chinese cultural symbols into their narrative systems. Represented by works such as Kung Fu Panda and Mulan, "Oriental Wonders" are constructed through elements such as pandas, kung fu, architecture, and food, which not only satisfy the aesthetic curiosity of the global market but also reflect the dual logic of cultural communication. Such films deconstruct the core of traditional culture with commercial narrative strategies. Based on superficial cultural dissemination, they indirectly engage in cultural invasion - either falling into the reproduction of stereotypes, or dissolving cultural subjectivity through technical "misreadings". This research is very meaningful in helping spread Chinese traditional culture internationally.

This study mainly focuses on the Chinese cultural symbols in several classic Hollywood movies, using case analysis and semiotics analysis, taking typical movies as cases. Analyze the types of Chinese cultural symbols in Hollywood movies, dissect Hollywood's coding strategies and dissemination mechanisms for Chinese cultural symbols, and study China's more successful cultural dissemination cases in recent years, such as Black Myth: Wukong and Nezha 2, and analyze the reasons behind their success. The ultimate goal of this study is to propose optimization suggestions

on the methods and approaches of Hollywood movies in spreading Chinese culture, and to provide critical inspiration and path reference for the global narrative of Chinese culture.

2. Literature review

In his article "A Brief Analysis of the Misunderstanding and Convergence of Chinese Cultural Elements in Hollywood Movies - Taking Mulan and Kung Fu Panda as Examples", Bi Wenjia studied the Hollywood embodiment of Chinese elements, The three main parts of the article, namely, the misreading of Chinese cultural elements and the convergence of Chinese cultural elements, have contributed to this study in terms of article structure. However, the book does not cover much about the specific interpretation of cultural symbols. Apart from the two films it mainly studies, it does not involve research and analysis of other Hollywood films. In the article "Western Expression of Orientalism: Western Cultural Psychology in the Hollywood Film Mulan, Guo Weixuan and He Zhihong studied the manifestation of Orientalism in Hollywood films, and analyzed the West's misunderstanding and reconstruction of Eastern culture using "Mulan" as an example. The article points out that Hollywood demonstrates Western cultural superiority and hegemony through stereotyped Chinese images and symbolic oriental elements, while trying to cater to the Chinese market. The research revealed issues such as the conflict between collectivism and individualism in films and the Westernized expression of feminism, but it involved less in-depth analysis of the localized application of Orientalist theory and cultural symbols. In the article "How to Innovate the Dissemination of China's Excellent Traditional Culture in the Digital Age", Li Mengmeng studied the role of digital technology in promoting the dissemination of China's excellent traditional culture, and proposed innovative strategies such as technology empowerment, building a media matrix, and strengthening emotional resonance. The article emphasizes the integration of traditional culture and modern technology, such as the application of AR, VR and integrated media platforms, but it does not go into the details of specific technical implementation and case analysis of cross-cultural communication, and the research is not in-depth. Hao Mengyuan and Zheng Liqiao studied the role of electronic games as a new carrier of cultural communication in the article "The Communication of China's Excellent Traditional Culture in the Digital Age - Taking Black Myth: Wukong as an Example". The focus is on analyzing how Black Myth: Wukong showcases the charm of Chinese culture and promotes cross-cultural communication through game language, music, plot design, etc. The focus is on analyzing how "Black Myth: Wukong" showcases the charm of Chinese culture and promotes cross-cultural communication through game language, music, plot design, etc. The article emphasizes the potential of digital technology for innovative expression of traditional culture, but there is little research on the long-term impact of the game industry ecosystem on cultural dissemination and the differences in acceptance among players from different cultural backgrounds. This article will start with the embodiment of more specific cultural symbols in movies, and conduct a comparative study between local and Hollywood in the dissemination of Chinese excellent traditional cultural symbols, to fill the existing research gaps. The cultural symbols referred to in this article are all references to the traditional Chinese cultural elements that appear in the research objects.

3. Typological analysis of chinese cultural symbols in Hollywood movies

3.1. Material cultural symbols

The compass in Pirates of the Caribbean 3 and the copper coin sword in The Mummy 3 were further mystified by Hollywood movies. In this way, the movies successfully integrated Chinese cultural elements into Western narratives, but this also strengthened the Western stereotype of Eastern metaphysics. The above reflects the artifact symbols in Chinese traditional cultural symbols.

In the movie Mulan, Mulan's costume design combines elements of Han and Tang dynasties. The upper body adopts the low-neck design of the Tang Dynasty, and the lower body is matched with a curved hem. This design not only shows the style of ancient Chinese clothing, but also fits the character's era background. Mulan's hair accessories use traditional Chinese hairpins and hairpins, showing the hair accessories culture of ancient Chinese women. The above reflects the clothing symbols in the traditional Chinese cultural symbols.

Noodles, which appear repeatedly in the movie Kung Fu Panda, are a classic symbol of Chinese food culture. This design cleverly sublimates daily food into a cultural ritual, conveying the Chinese philosophy of life that "food is the first necessity of the people". The above reflects the food symbols in Chinese traditional cultural symbols.

3.2. Spiritual and cultural symbols

Master Oogway in the movie Kung Fu Panda is a typical representative of Taoist culture. His line "Your heart is like a lake. When it is turbulent, it is unclear. Only when it is calm can you see the solution clearly." is conveying the Taoist view of "ruling by doing nothing". The above reflects the Taoist philosophical and cultural symbols in the traditional Chinese cultural symbols.

In the movie Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon, Li Mubai and Yu Xiulian's emotional restraint well demonstrated the Confucian moral value of "self-discipline and restoration of propriety". The above reflects the Confucian philosophical and cultural symbols in the traditional Chinese cultural symbols.

In the movie Mulan, the story of Hua Mulan joining the army in place of her father is the core embodiment of the traditional Chinese concept of filial piety. In order to protect her elderly father, she disguised herself as a man and rushed to the battlefield. This is a kind of responsibility and filial piety to the family. The above reflects the cultural symbols of filial piety in Chinese culture.

In the scene where the heroine Beatrice learns kung fu from Taoist Master Baimei in the movie Kill Bill 2, the director introduced the concept of yin and yang complementation. For example, Baimei's "Five Thunders Piercing the Heart Palm" requires the philosophical understanding of "yin produces yang" to master, which reflects the Taoist dialectical thinking of unity of opposites.

4. Encoding of cultural symbols

4.1. Symbol selection to satisfy the curiosity of western audiences

Influenced by a series of factors, there are great differences between Eastern and Western cultures. As an ancient civilization with a history of 5,000 years, China must have its own unique cultural heritage. When making a film, if it involves Chinese culture, the Hollywood production team can often extract the most representative Chinese cultural symbols.

Take the Hollywood movie Kung Fu Panda as an example. The protagonist "Po" of the movie chose the "giant panda", a national protected animal in China, as the image source, which is eye-

catching. The fighting scenes in the film do not adopt the conventional Hollywood blockbuster style, but adopt the mysterious Chinese Kung Fu in the eyes of Westerners, such as Tai Chi, acupressure, Qinggong... forming a collage of cultural symbols, strengthening the exotic style. The red lanterns at the Jade Palace, A-Bao's noodle shop, and the ever-present Chinese folk elements, including the setting off of firecrackers, simplify the complex Chinese culture and provide an oriental atmosphere that is "recognizable at a glance." The style of the entire film is poetic, extracting typical oriental imagery such as Guilin landscape, Hui-style architecture, and misty mountains. It is an oriental Chinese element symbol that is clearly different from Western scenery. The reason why these were chosen for the movie is, on the one hand, because they are extremely representative and the audience can tell at a glance that they are "Chinese memes" with clear direction and positioning. On the other hand, these elements are also relatively easy to integrate with the plot of the film, and have strong integration and plasticity. Therefore, Hollywood directors and screenwriters like to add similar Chinese elements and symbols to their films. Kung Fu Panda is a successful embodiment of the combination of Kung Fu and panda elements [1].

4.2. Balance between cultural correctness and commercial interests

After analyzing a large number of Hollywood movies, I found that most Hollywood movies try to combine Chinese classic IP with Hollywood values when explaining Chinese culture, such as Disney's 2020 live-action version of Mulan. In the American film adaptation of the story, the unique ethnic ethics and family spirit of joining the army to replace her father were weakened, and instead the emphasis was placed on Mulan's motivation to enhance her sense of self-honor in the Western context [2,3]. There is a certain deviation from the concept that the Chinese story wants to convey. This behavior of trying to please Chinese audiences while gaining recognition from Western audiences is bound to be the result of taking commercial interests into consideration but failing to balance cultural correctness and commercial interests. Hollywood movies are keen on shaping characters based on the cultural background of other countries, but they also deliberately implant Western culture to complete cultural invasion, resulting in the final presentation of the work being messy and not in line with the reading habits of the people being adapted. The accumulation of cultural symbols also makes the audience feel disgusted and uncomfortable [4].

5. Optimizing strategies for the international dissemination of Chinese culture

5.1. Content production level

In the context of the digital age, the dissemination of Chinese culture should focus more on the cultural heritage and integrity of the culture itself. The fragmented and superficial dissemination of cultural symbols makes it difficult for international audiences to truly understand Chinese culture. Therefore, content creation should deeply explore cultural connotations, philosophical thoughts and historical heritage to show the depth of culture. For example, Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon showcases the depth of traditional Chinese culture through elements such as Tai Chi philosophy and master-disciple inheritance.

At the same time, storytelling and emotional guidance are effective means of cross-cultural communication. Telling specific, personalized, and human stories can transcend cultural differences and touch people's hearts. Mulan showcases filial piety and patriotism through the story of a woman joining the army to take her father's place, which resonates with audiences around the world. This

emotional resonance is an important bridge for cultural communication, and can help audiences from different cultural backgrounds better understand and accept Chinese culture.

In addition, it is also crucial to avoid excessive grafting and integration of Chinese culture with other cultures. Although cultural exchange and integration are necessary, excessive grafting may lead to the loss of cultural connotations and misunderstandings. This requires the West to better understand the core of Chinese culture before citing it, and for China to innovate when spreading China's excellent traditional culture, so as to further expand its influence and give full play to its positive role in the development of the international community [5].

China also needs to innovate when spreading the excellent traditional Chinese culture. Innovation is not only reflected in the presentation of content, such as the use of new media technology and interactive experience, but also in communication strategies, such as enhancing the international influence of culture through international exchanges and cooperation. For example, the Kung Fu Panda film series has successfully attracted global audiences through innovative storytelling and visual effects.

The international influence of Chinese culture can be further expanded by focusing on cultural heritage, adopting storytelling, avoiding excessive integration, promoting in-depth understanding of Chinese culture in the West, and innovating local communication. This will not only help enhance the international status of Chinese culture but also promote global cultural diversity and exchanges.

5.2. Communication channel level

First, the international influence of mainstream media should be strengthened. As an important force in international communication, mainstream media shoulders the important task of telling China's stories and spreading China's voice to the world. We should enhance the originality and diversity of content, produce more high-quality news reports, special programs and documentaries, and showcase China's development achievements and cultural charm in an objective, truthful and comprehensive manner. At the same time, we must continue to strengthen cooperation and exchanges with international mainstream media, strengthen the construction of English channels of national mainstream media, and jointly create a communication platform with international influence. At the same time, we should give full play to the power of self-media. In the past, the process of cultural dissemination often needed to go through the process of "communicator-audience-communicator", and the dissemination subject was relatively single. In the digital age, the boundary between communicators and audiences has gradually blurred. The subjects of communication have become diversified. Ordinary people can also share their understanding and experience of China's excellent traditional culture through online platforms [5].

Secondly, we should support the orderly development of the film and television entertainment industry. We should encourage the creation of international-level works with Chinese characteristics, and showcase China's history, culture, customs and people to the world through movies, TV series, documentaries, games and other forms. At the same time, we should also focus on using modern scientific and technological means to improve the viewing and dissemination of works, so technological innovation is the key to promoting cultural dissemination and protection [6]. The success of Black Myth: Wukong is a case study of the successful combination of Chinese traditional culture and game technology.

Of course, we must also be aware that international communication still faces many challenges. The differences between different cultures and the complexity of the international public opinion environment all require us to study and respond carefully. Therefore, we must maintain strategic determination, strengthen our cultural confidence, constantly explore and innovate ways and

methods of international communication, jointly contribute wisdom and strength to creating new glory for socialist culture, and work together to create a new situation for the international communication of Chinese civilization.

5.3. Acceptance of environmental aspects

On August 20, 2024, Black Myth: Wukong was officially released on the gaming platform and was hailed by the media as "China's first 3A game" and "the light of domestically produced games" [7]. Three days after its release, sales across all platforms exceeded 10 million copies, breaking the historical purchase record of Chinese games and also breaking the inherent impression of Chinese games among game enthusiasts and ordinary people. Black Myth: Wukong transforms excellent traditional cultural resources into high-quality products and tells the "Chinese story" [8]. Countless game enthusiasts flocked to it and began to study "The Story of a Monkey". "Esports + Culture" has made Chinese culture "out of the circle", and the concept of "technology + culture" is perfectly reflected in the game Black Myth: Wukong, showing the charm of Eastern culture. By using digital technology to create a virtual world and integrating Chinese classical culture with modern and contemporary cultural communication methods, players can experience Chinese culture in an immersive way. The pace of Chinese cultural communication has been further accelerated, and players from different countries have also felt China's cultural confidence [9]. The overseas journey of Nezha 2 proves that the globalization of traditional culture is not passive, but a creative reorganization of civilization genes [10]. The influence of this series of domestic products overseas has laid a good foundation for the further spread of Chinese culture. The acceptance and understanding of Chinese culture in the Western environment will inevitably become higher and more comprehensive under the influence of the digital age.

6. Conclusion

Based on the study of the above films, the research conclusion is that Hollywood films have a dual nature in their use of Chinese cultural symbols. Hollywood has constructed an easily recognizable "Oriental wonder" through highly visual material and spiritual cultural symbols, but the choice of symbols is often constrained by Western perspectives, leading to cultural misunderstandings or the reinforcement of stereotypes. In order to cater to commercial interests, some works strip away the cultural core and weaken the accuracy of cultural communication.

This study provides many valuable references for future research in this direction, and mainly affects the ways and methods of spreading China's excellent traditional culture in film and television.

Future research should focus more on the new trends in cultural communication in the digital age. Ultimately, the global dissemination of Chinese culture should not stop at "being seen" but should pursue "being understood". If Hollywood can use technology as a bridge and narrative as a boat, it may become a catalyst for the "creative transformation" of Chinese culture. However, this process must be accompanied by continuous reflection on the discourse of power - only equal dialogue can prevent cultural communication from becoming a new symbolic colonization. If Hollywood wants to effectively spread Chinese culture, it needs to go beyond the simple appropriation of surface symbols and turn to the deep excavation of the cultural core, from symbol grafting to in-depth narrative. Using cross-media linkage to achieve technical empowerment and cultural synergy, Drawing on the animation, game, and derivative product matrix of the Nezha IP, Hollywood can

display the cultural background in multiple dimensions through "movies + streaming documentaries + virtual reality experience."

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