

**An Analysis on the Cultural Function of Films from the
Perspective of the Commercialization of Chinese Films**

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Abstract

In 2019, China released his first hard science fiction¹ film by Hollywood standards, which is an important step for the exploration of the development of Chinese commercial films. Much of the literature on this film is devoted to the analysis of its visual effects or to comparing it to Nolan's *Interstellar* (Christopher Nolan, UK & USA, 2014). At the same time, most documents focus too much to the “science fiction” label of this film, separating it from non-sci-fi commercial films. For the Chinese film industry, which is still in the initial stage of development, linking this epoch-making film with the previous films on the road of Chinese film development is beneficial to the exploration of the future film development. The focus of this dissertation, after linking these films, is to explore the relationship between commercial films and culture, raising related questions, such as: what are the factors that affect the spread of films overseas, or how does the film affect the cultural self-confidence of the country he belongs to? The rules represented by these relationships may be one of the consideration methods for the exploration and prediction of future film development. On the basis of exploring the relationship between commercial factors and culture as the goal, the experience summary of the correct path, ways of avoiding making detours as well, in the development of the Chinese film industry may be a reference for other countries or film groups in the world.

Keywords: Commercial Films; intercultural communication; Chinese films; Hollywood; Kung Fu;

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hard_science_fiction

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INTRODUCTION

The reason why I chose this subject is that due to the guidance of neoliberalism, globalization has been increasing since the 1990s. And this change in the world pattern became the greatest change in the postwar era. At the same time, the film industry is also embracing many of its digital technology revolutions, creating a flourishing development of the film expression space and the film language, which greatly strengthens the upper limit of the film commercialization. Therefore, the context of globalization combined with the highly digitalized film industry made the consumer society become the mainstream of most countries. This is not only an opportunity for every country in this era, especially the emerging nations in the film industry, to promote its own economic development, but also an important way for countries to spread their culture abroad. Therefore, I think that in addition to caring about the artistic value of the film itself, we should also pay attention to the gradual renewal of the role of the film in the high-speed society and the guiding direction of the film market. Because of the influence of the digital age, films are now having a subtle cultural impact on many people in a country. It represents values, ways of thinking, or ideology. Therefore, the focus on this aspect of it enables the films to become a better messenger between national cultures.

With the above background in mind, this dissertation attempts to address a question that is concerned with the search for the rules that exist between the commercial films and national culture. Some other studies in the literature have suggested the possible connection between the two, but they have rarely been explored in depth. In this dissertation, we try to analyze some typical cases to find the rules and relations of interaction between the commercial films and national culture.

Objectives of the study

In this dissertation, I will take China, the world's second-largest film market, as an example, to explore several aspects of the impact of a strong foreign culture on

another country's inherent culture in the context of globalization and it will take several films as main cases to analyze such as *The Wandering Earth*, *Interstellar*, *Hero* (Zhang Yimou, China, 2002), as well as how can a developing country like China maintain its own cultural film development potential under the dual impact of economy and culture in the film industry, so that the local films can be exported to foreign countries without being destroyed by foreign films, and then based on this their films can "seek common ground while reserving differences" with all the other films from different cultural backgrounds in the globalized world. This may also be a reference for other countries in the world that want to develop local culture with the tool of films in a consumer society in the new global context.

Contribution to the area of studies' knowledge

On the one hand, summarizing the rules of the film market in this new era can protect and enhance the development of local film culture and traditional culture, so that the country's soft power - culture can be further packaged in the film industry. For example, Wang Chuansong wrote:

If Nolan's films have fulfilled their cultural mission in a cross-cultural context, then finding a way to reduce the "cultural discount"² by making up for cultural differences in disguise is the main topic of Chinese films in a cross-cultural context..... Chinese films must find a balance point in line with the culture of other countries on the basis of promoting its own culture. Only from this balance point can they truly enter the world cultural communication order. (Wang, 2017, p.141)

The dissertation will improve on these researches to make the methods and rules of the communication of films among countries more concrete. And It may even play a certain role in predicting the future development of one' countries' domestic films.

² Cultural discount is an important theory put forward by American media economist Colin Hoskins. He believes that cultural products will inevitably suffer different degrees of loss and devaluation due to huge cultural differences when they break through cultural boundaries and spread across countries and ethnicities.

On the other hand, it supplements the achievements of some investigator who have researched the Chinese film market and the global market, so that more people can understand the significance of the films which are bundled by commercial and cultural elements in China, the United States and other countries. At the same time, from the commercial films in China in recent years, we could see the possible ways for some countries or film groups to develop their own film and cultural industries, and make good use of the film market in countries such as China in the new era.

Methodology

The methodology used in this dissertation to study this issue is still mainly an analysis of films, but also an analysis of historical developments, through which the interaction between films and society is observed in order to obtain a possible rule. This rule will be partly applied to the film under analysis as a hypothesis, to observe its application.

Through the relevant bibliographic research in this area and the literature review, this dissertation will study the unique cultural value and regional philosophy hidden in the film being analyzed, and then understand their role in cultural communication between countries, such as between China and the United States. At the same time, based on the analysis of Eastern and Western cultural elements, some accurate surveys and statistics will be quoted to analyze the derivative effects of cultural influences on their respective societies.

Contents

1. *The Wandering Earth* (Guo Fan, China, 2019). A new milestone in Chinese cinema. As an introduction, it contains an analysis of the distinctive Eastern values and Chinese philosophy in the film. The film is adapted from a novel by the writer Liu Cixin, who is famous for his sociological and philosophical thinking in his renowned series *The Three Body Problem*. Regardless of whether it is *The Wandering Earth* or

The Three Body Problem, it is a manifestation of enhancement of the China's soft power as a developing country. From a national perspective, China began its reform and opening up in 1978 and joined the WTO in 2001. The economy has improved significantly. But, since the development of culture usually depends on the guiding role of the economy, the re-development of Chinese films is nearly 10 years behind after the economic rise, and so far, it doesn't have a great influence in the world. And what is worse is that the Hollywood films have a dominating influence on the Chinese film market.

Therefore, the main point in this part will be that to find the reason why *The Wandering Earth* could be a possible way to defense China's own film market, and to find the significance of protecting one's country's domestic film market. And to achieve the goal, some analysis on the *The Wandering Earth* as well as the *Interstellar* will be conducted. The analysis generally described the collision of the Eastern and Hollywood philosophy: from Christopher Nolan to Liu Cixin. The discussion includes the "cultural unconfidence" before the rise of Chinese local pop culture and commercial films, which has always been a shadow of the country's soft power development. Hollywood's cutting-edge film technology and unique value packaging skills make it occupy the spiritual life of many young people. Wang Chuansong wrote:

After this treatment (of Hollywood), both local and overseas audiences can gain a profound and vivid understanding of the material culture, institutional culture and spiritual culture of American culture in the film. (Wang, 2017, p.106)

This section contains the exploration of Hollywood in the United States as the world's dominator of commercial films and the Chinese film industry as one of the challengers. The analysis of the hidden culture and values in the films of the two parties tends to seek common ground while reserving differences, and explore how one country combines its own national values to form its own genre under the impact of Hollywood.

the way to pass the national culture, social thinking and values wrapped in science fiction or martial arts and other commercial elements, intellectual property, and popular culture to the whole world is the only way for China's film industry.

2. Based on the results of the above discussion and analysis, we first conclude that in order to spread culture abroad we should first try to protect our own cultural market. So that our own culture cannot lose its way of development when some influential foreign culture enters. Only on this basis can we be qualified to export our culture. This section focuses on the analysis of the spread of Chinese Kung Fu culture on films. At the beginning of the analysis, this part puts forward some hypothetical concepts, such as the study of three dimensions that may be encountered when films are spread overseas, which to a certain extent determine the effectiveness of intercultural communication abroad. In this section, Kung Fu culture is chosen for analysis because it is a rare and classic case for China, which is weak in soft power, to successfully spread Kung Fu culture abroad. The case mainly includes three stars who have made unmistakable contributions to the Kung Fu culture: Bruce Lee, Jackie Chan and Jet Li. The dissertation will sort out their backgrounds, contributions and Kung Fu philosophy. Through this case, the section will analyze this history in the context of the film, as a way to in turn test the hypothesis presented at the beginning of the section. In this way, the ideas in this section on the methods and processes of foreign cultural export are further strengthened.

3. After the analysis of Kung Fu films in the previous part and the verification and explanation of the hypothetical theory, it is possible to see the advantages of this communication method while noting its limitations. Based on the results of the second part, the third part is a complement to the second part. And the complement taken in second part is developed by the analysis of joint venture films. Under the discussion here, it is easier to understand how the joint venture film makes up for the above-mentioned limitations. At the same time, in the case study of *The Great Wall*

(Zhang Yimou, China, 2016), we will propose some concepts such as the threshold effect, the halo effect and “seeking novelty” psychology to study how the joint venture film packages the narrative content and cultural elements of a commercial film. In addition, we investigate how the narrative content and cultural elements packaged as “commodities” in commercial films affect the intercultural communication ability of a film in overseas markets.

Finally, the dissertation will summarize the rule based on the above analysis and discuss the extension product of its influence, that is, its role as a back-feeding and driving role for the national film industry, and to further improve the theoretical viewpoints that countries could open up their outward cultural communication through commercial films, protect and strengthen their own national cultural self-confidence, so as to enable their own film industry to develop in all aspects.

CHAPTER ONE: FIRM ONE COUNTRY’S CULTURE IN THE WAY OF CINEMA

1.1 Basic concerns on intercultural communication

As mentioned in the introduction, people in different countries may have different cultures due to their respective country’s history, geographical location, ethnicity, and other factors, leading to different perspectives on the outside world. Therefore, they have different responses to the external world. In the relatively stable post-war world and a period after the third industrial revolution, due to the continuous improvement of information technology and the popularization of the Internet, media methods including films have exploded intercultural communication and collisions among countries. The meaning of intercultural communication is very important, and it may allow different cultures to learn from each other.

Intercultural communication in this context refers to a process in which different countries learn about each other's cultures and learn from each other's strengths and weaknesses. This process may include many aspects, including language, literature, art and values. Here, based on the focus of this dissertation on films, values are broadly defined as the cognition, understanding, judgment or choice made based on certain thinking of human beings, that is, a kind of thinking or orientation that people determine things, determine right and wrong, and when faced with the same thing, how would people from different cultures react to it, such as making a choice, making an affirmative or negative judgment on it, etc.

But the result could turn to be a “double-edged sword” just like it does in many other fields. In this intangible intercultural communication process, there may be a long-term weakening effect of a culture being dominated by some other relatively predominant culture. Like some scholars have always been worried in a globalization era “A ruling culture can easily open the gate to a country with a weak culture and has

a clear advantage in the process of cultural globalization”. (Yang, 2014, p. 191-192)

In terms of intercultural communication, at the film level, taking advantage of its natural transnational radiation capabilities, especially the commercial elements that contain specific cultures and values, films could easily become a subtle role in intercultural communication. The values of different countries or ethnics contained in the culture may have a direct impact on the social levels or even more. It can range from the daily life of the individuals of a certain country to the focus of the media, and even to some of the people's policy demands for their country. For example, in the face of a common motif of films - the disaster, based on different values, films under different national backgrounds may have large or very subtle differences in choice.

1.2 *The Wandering Earth* and the defensive posture of culture

First of all, I would like to define "commercial films" from the perspective of this dissertation. The commercial nature of films is a characteristic of itself, something that is inherent in films, so as an art, film is also a commodity. (Zhang, 2013, p. 3) Essentially, films are inseparable as they are both commercial and artistic. However, this dissertation believes that films can be divided into commercial films and artistic films based on the purpose of filming and target audience. Specifically, “Commercial films aim at making money and profit, and are cultural commodities for the public’s amusement. Art films, on the other hand, belong to the creators’ artistic exploration in pursuit of unique ideological connotation and personal style, and are minority art works for the intellectual class and film art fans.” (Zhang, 2013, p. 114) A director can certainly pursue a very strong personal style in a commercial film as defined in this dissertation, with a very clear artistic experimentation and exploration, but what is necessary is that this director needs to be responsible to the market and his profits are tied to those of the producer and the investor. This necessity is a “sufficient and necessary condition” for judging whether a director is making a commercial film,

while on the contrary, the pursuit of artistry is a “necessary but not sufficient condition” for judging whether this film is a commercial one. We can further see that “whether a film can be called a commercial film is not judged by the amount of commercial returns it receives. Rather, its positioning suggests that it is the premise and ultimate goal of film production to achieve the greatest possible commercial return.” (Zhang, 2013, p. 2)

Based on the above two conditions, commercial film directors can give up a certain amount of personal style or even “de-personalize” their films, such as in the case of director Zhang Yimou, in China's first real commercial film *Hero* and the Sino-American joint venture *The Great Wall*, he almost completely gave up his strong personal style and exploration of art in his films of 1980s and 1990s when he made Chinese Rural-themed historical films such as *Red Sorghum* (Zhang Yimou, China, 1988), and instead, devoted himself to making *Hero* or *The Great Wall* a commercial film that could be accepted and consumed by as many viewers as possible. Such a specific distinction between commercial films and art films is, to some extent, a factor in Hollywood’s success:

In the heyday of Hollywood, the producers were the highest decision maker in a studio where everyone has a clear division of labor. All power was concentrated in the hands of the producer [...] Once he found out that someone include directors was not in line with his intentions, he would remove him at any time [...] Since Stroheim did not listen to the producer when he made the film *Greed*, as a result, he was fired midway through the production of *Queen Kelly* shortly after he started shooting it. Film historians Georges Sadoul said “Stroheim’s fate was symbolic in that it showed that Hollywood was beginning to destroy and obliterate the individuality and personality of the artist.” [...] This system, while stifling artistic genius and individuality, created the glory of commercial films and brought lasting prosperity to Hollywood. (Zhang, 2013, p. 41)

Based on the analysis of the above theories, we clarify the definition of

commercial films from the perspective of this dissertation. At the same time, one of the important bases of intercultural communication in this dissertation is the influence of films, which precisely matches the core purpose of commercial films, which is more audiences and box office revenues.

Here we take *The Wandering Earth* as our case, which was released in 2019, taking 700 million USD at the box office and that year was the first year for China to opened its own hard science fiction. Without doubt, in terms of film technology, the film team has always been followed the example of Hollywood. Although there are many shortcomings, the merits of the film outweighed such flaws. However, its oriental narrative with Chinese characteristics is the significance of this film as a milestone in Chinese film industry. Before detailed analysis, let's make a summary of the most obvious values in this movie: China's expression of building a community with shared future for mankind³. The community with shared future for mankind is a community that aims to take into account the legitimate concerns of other countries in the pursuit of its own interests and to promote the common development of all countries in the pursuit of its own development.

Based on this common motif in Hollywood - disaster, the story of *The Wandering Earth* is also unfolded on this basis. At the beginning of the film, there is a narration that sets the tone of the film:

The Sun will engulf Earth in 100 years. The solar System will no longer exist in 300 years. To face this coming cataclysmic catastrophe, mankind united like never seen before. In order to maximize the chance of human survival, the United Earth Government or the UEG decided to propel Earth out of the Solar System to fly towards our new home located 4.2 light years away. This mighty and enduring human migration is named as the Wandering Earth Project.

³ Also known as Community of common destiny for mankind
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Community_with_shared_future_for_mankind#:~:text=Community%20with%20shared%20future%20for%20mankind%2C%20more%20accurately%20translated%20as,officials%20organs%20of%20the%20Chinese

In addition to the film, although the objective of constructing the “Great Unity Society” in Chinese ancient history and the proposal of the construction of the community with shared future for mankind in recent years have been the cultural consensus and value guidance of many Chinese people nowadays, films, as a media, which can “quickly and intuitively” visualize the “objective” of this cultural consensus has never been conducted before 2019. Even in the 20 years or so during the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century, when China faced the medium of commercial films, just like the worries mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, Hollywood has always been the absolute dominator. Its advantages are manifold, and one of the surveys is quoted here:

Contemporary college students in China are mainly born in the 90s who grew up in the influence of film and television culture accompanied by movies and TV. According to the “2011-2012 Chinese Movie Audience Survey Report”, 90% of the movie audiences in China are mainly 15-35-year-olds, of which 15-25-year-olds account for 55%. Among this group of people, 75% of them like American Hollywood movies, far higher than domestic movies. (Zhang, 2017, p.37)

In the movie of the same motif, *Interstellar* by Christopher Nolan, which is well-loved by many Chinese audiences, Nolan adopts many American individualistic values. What needs to be stated here is that the dissertation does not criticize the personal heroism dominated by American values, because it is indeed formed in the background of the country’s long-term development history and its current social situation in the United States. It is the visualization of a choice based on values, or to be more specific, this is how Americans really act and behave when they have to choose between individualism and collectivism, so in this context the values are a kind of criterion to deal with things to judge right and wrong and to make choices.. After all, one of the main purposes of the dissertation is to discuss the role of culture (or we could say the function of culture) in intercultural communication (among different countries). Returning to the discussion about Nolan’s *Interstellar*, one of the

outstanding points of this movie is that it successfully links family affection with human destiny. For the protagonist Cooper saving his own daughter equals saving the human world, and this optimal solution of this American narrative method is indeed tied to individual heroism, because in this way the contradictions are concentrated to avoid the theme being generalized, which also allows the audience to easily bring emotions into a particular character. And this character is usually being modeled as an elite like in many Hollywood movies who is encircled in an “institutionalized system”(Here we can understand it simply as a social group of people who are used to fixed thinking, who do not want to change the status quo, even if the status quo is wrong) that needs to be broken by the elite. In *Interstellar*, the “institutionalized” ordinaries wouldn’t allow spending on space exploration. Nevertheless, it is the elite who broke the institution saved them.

And we may have to analyze this case. If we only do the related discussion about its motif of disaster film and do not involve some other American culture for the time being, it is a “concretization” of events that have not happened in reality. Then the value of determining the choice of most people by the behavior of a sole hero is partly included in the American commercial blockbuster with huge box office, and it has become the only solution to the hypothetical disaster in the Chinese film market. It is inappropriate, neither because of the choice between individualism or collectivism, nor between Great Man Theory⁴ or People's History⁵, but because of the choice’s “uniqueness”. It means we need multiple choices when we face the hypothetical disaster. This dissertation tends to believe that breaking the “uniqueness” of imported films on different film motifs can be a defensive posture of one country’s culture and soft power.

Like in this case, China itself has to produce a film with its own solutions based on its own culture. At the same time, being equivalent to films with the foreign invasion culture, like the Hollywood, the film team conducts a commercial blockbuster of the same motif with its own characteristics (like *The Wandering Earth*

⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_man_theory

⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/People%27s_history

is of the same film motif with *Interstellar*), so that the film can be popular among as many people as possible of the country, to attract their own people's attention, making them be aware of that in front of the hypothetical disaster, they can have the solution of *The Wandering Earth* instead of that of *Interstellar*. What we look forward to getting in this way is to gain a choice or a solution belongs to our nation based on our culture and values to a hypothetical or metaphorical problem and conflict point in the narrative of this film. And this choice could probably seem to be incorrect for the moment since in reality different period needs different choices, but at least it is definitely a way that can't be abandoned. In this way, it could lead to a promising results, namely, subconsciously making one's own country believe in one's own country's culture, and one could directly witness the "implementation process" of one's own country's values at the level of commercial films (in other words, one can see how the values of his country are put into practical application when facing the hypothetical or metaphorical problem), during which the national confidence is widely shared among the people of the country. It's important for the positive cycle of the development of culture. After all, "people are the creators of culture, and culture is the shapers of people"⁶.

1.3 Narrative based on culture at the macro level

Therefore, *The Wandering Earth* in this science fiction theme shows for the first time an alternative to American personal heroism, making American values not the only solution to the difficulties that people appeal to, that is, China's own value orientation. To be more specific, in the two films when facing the difficulty (disaster), *The Wandering Earth* offered a way of solution, which is more collectivistic, and this might be a suitable way for the Chinese instead of the American solution in front of the hypothetical disaster. And in this way, it could be called "breaking the uniqueness" as mentioned above.

6 Krause and Rosas (eds.). "Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff, 1995, p.230-231"

Thus, based on this background, in the movie we can see that there are several typical storylines:

1. After problems occurred to the earth engines, the protagonist's team responded to the United Earth Government's call to support the repair of earth engines. They went through a lot of hardships but eventually were told that due to “saturated rescue”, countries other than China had already arrived and restarted the engines.

2. When informed by the United Earth Government that even if the engine was now repaired, it was too late. The earth has no time to escape Jupiter's gravity. In desperation, the protagonist team thought that people could light up part of Jupiter's hydrogen with the earth's oxygen that had been taken away and use shock wave to push the earth away from Jupiter. However, just like the “community with shared future for mankind” value of the movie mentioned earlier, the plot of the movie here is arranged in a different direction from the standard Hollywood plot, that is, while the protagonist team was trying to conduct the plan, they were told that before they came out of the solution of saving the Earth, some Israeli scientists had already proposed this method, and they also proved that it could not be done.

3. Before the protagonist team knew that this method was not feasible, they tried every means to implement this method to the equatorial earth engine. But after getting there, they found that their manpower was not enough to ignite the engine. Therefore, with the consent of a French liaison in the United Earth Government, the female student Duo Duo in the team made a voice to the rescue teams in all different countries around the world on the global broadcast, asking them to support here. Many rescue teams in despair, after hearing Duo's call, decided to choose hope together to save their common home-the Earth. Then everyone of different nations tried their best to push the “percussion pin” to ignited the equatorial engine. At the same time, in the international space station Pei Qiang, an astronaut, with the help of his Russian colleague, was able to use this engine flame to sacrifice the space station to ignite Jupiter.

This is the result of the joint efforts of the people of the world. When facing the hypothetical disaster, *The Wandering Earth* assume that it are the teams from all over

the world who saved the Earth, not just one team from a certain country. This narrative can be a very classic interpretation of the “community with shared future for mankind” on the screen, showing the theme that people in all countries are heroes in the face of this disaster.

Moreover, one of the most ambitious narratives in the movie is the 2500-year long-term strategy for mankind to propel the entire planet to the new galaxy, which seems to be different from the Hollywood narratives. This may also be the part that can most arouse the empathy of Chinese audiences. In China, which is deeply affected by the Confucian cultural created by Confucius. Almost all traditional culture and values come from Confucianism⁷, which is a system of thought and behavior originating in ancient China. “Attached to the Land and Unwilling to Move” (A traditional Chinese idiom, similar to the nostalgic provincialism) is one of the important concepts. It depicts the Chinese people's special feelings for the land - we and the land under our feet are inseparable. Therefore, instead of the Hollywood escape ship plot like in the film *Interstellar*, in *The Wandering Earth* the concept of escaping with the “land” is actually a kind of oriental unique method. As mentioned above, as a movie that attempts to be equivalent to a Hollywood commercial film, the *The Wandering Earth's* main purpose is to let audiences in this country see the realization of their country's culture and values on the screen. Only based on this it is possible to carry out cultural output in the next stage.

Therefore, the dissertation here in this context is more willing to summarize this point in this way: In the process of the intercultural communication among countries, if the external culture, or we could say the culture from another country, and values are too strong on a certain proposition, then on the equivalent motif the purpose of the films of the country with relatively weak culture influence is best not to rush to conduct output, but to gain the large-scale recognition as much as possible of the citizens of its own country, which could be consumed as a defensive action. This also determines that a film with this purpose cannot be a film for some certain small groups. It needs to use the existing cultural consensus of the people of the country (for

⁷ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Confucianism>

example, in this dissertation, the cultural consensus for Chinese can be the Confucianism or collectivism) on this problem a firmer consensus, like the case of the *The Wandering Earth*. In terms of form, in order to include more people groups, at least under these circumstances it is generally best to include cultural stance in various commercial elements. For example, *The Wandering Earth* is an attempt to have the cultural stance of the Internationalism, and then the film built a future spaceship as a commercial element, and inside this spaceship you can see the faces of people from different countries in the world. According to Zhang:

In the 1990s, the world structure has undergone the most dramatic changes in the post-war era. The trend of globalization led by neoliberal ideology has become increasingly obvious, and the gradually formed consumer society has made economic development a hegemonic. (Zhang, 2012, p.1)

Therefore, in era of globalization, the commercial value of movies also represents its “hegemony” to a certain extent. Here the value only refers to money.

1.4 Narrative based on culture at the micro level

As mentioned above, the expression of the influence of the community with shared future for mankind contained in the film is a macro expression of the realization of this national consensus. However, the micro narrative is the background of the entire story, so it may not be as intuitive as the micro expression. Therefore, driven by the purpose of allowing more people to reach a consensus and make it sufficiently “commercial”, exhibiting the unique characteristics of the country that its people are familiar with, such as daily life, common landmarks, familiar sentences and other micro-level exhibition, is a more intuitive way to shorten the cognitive distance between the audience and the movie. It is worth noting that since China has

not made a “Hollywood blockbuster” before, this micro expression is very straightforward in the film *The Wandering Earth*. This straightforward approach is even a bit too “vulgar”. For example:

1. At the beginning, the movie showed the life pictures of people already living in the dungeon under the earth engine. Even in the underground city, there is still a Chinese-style class scene, in which students are reading aloud the junior high school text books that Chinese students are all familiar with. 2. When the movie was released in 2019, it was on the first day of Chinese New Year, and people in the movie also played traditional New Year songs and performed various traditional New Year performances.

These “seems too vulgar” scenes which showed to the audiences that “Here is China” are due to the fact that in the commercial blockbuster field and in the same context as Hollywood science fiction movies, people including Chinese audiences have never put the image of “China” and “science fiction blockbusters” together on the screen. It was somehow hard for them to be linked visually and to be imagined. It's not like in the famous Hollywood director Nolan's *interstellar* that it hardly needs “hint” to prove that here is the United States or this is American scientists because under the influence of Hollywood, science fiction has almost become an American label. So what the dissertation wants to further express here is that under a certain theme in the context of the film, to enhance the cultural influence of the country's films, especially those in a “cultural defense posture” could give up some of the film's artistic or experimental ambition, and more directly use understandable images to show these micro features to continuously allow the audience to accept the strengthening of the connection between the country and this type of film at the psychological level. The link between the country and the target label might need a number of strengthening before it's formed.

Among these micro features, landmarks are the most common. In Hollywood superhero movies, cities such as New York, Los Angeles, and San Francisco are often used directly or indirectly as “the key points that determine the destiny of mankind”. Therefore, whether it is hard power or soft power, these cities and the country where

these cities are located will be like some commodities which are preferred by the people of the world. *The Wandering Earth* also uses the landmark approach, or we could say to show a special place of a country, but it is worth noting that this approach has benefited from the country's adjustment of film censorship policies. In another word, *The Wandering Earth* would not have been able to use the country's city as the landmark in the film. According to the previous film censorship policy, it may be difficult for images like Frozen Beijing or Frozen Shanghai to appear on the screen, largely because it damages the appearance of the city. But in fact, whether it damages the appearance of the city depends on the background introduction of this change of look of this city on the screen and does not necessarily depend on the pictures it directly presents. The two frozen cities on *The Wandering Earth* are just two of all the cities destroyed in the world, and in a sense, if we compare the cities to human beings these frozen cities are actually heroes who sacrificed themselves. The two destroyed cities are also the “monument” of those who sacrificed themselves in the story. In this way Hollywood is not afraid to show the destroyed city of its country, since it brings audiences psychologically some label of the city as “hero” or “key point” and the benefits of strengthening the impression of a leading role for the country. And from this we see a good case in which the country's policy was able to support its own cultural industry.

CHAPTER TWO: THE CULTURAL EXPORT IN THE ASPECT OF COMMERCIAL FILMS

2.1 Two gradients of the effects in the process of exporting culture

In the previous chapter, we explored the role of film in protecting. The Chinese culture, especially through the China's expression of building a community with

shared future for mankind in *The Wandering Earth*. The process of establishing a clear stand point and symbol of the nation's own culture, is also the initial process of exporting the culture. Therefore, based on the premise that China's own culture has been initially protected, this chapter tends to explore the further role of films. in the stage and process of spreading the culture. But in fact, the external output also roughly contains two gradients, which we could see as two achievements of the result of exporting: the first gradient is being able to actively reduce some external stereotype. It refers to a situation when this country hasn't gained the right or become powerful enough to speak for its own culture, but already been assumed by other countries in the world some inaccurate definitions, or a stereotype with a strong subjective view. As a phenomenon that is generally encountered worldwide, it also inevitably occurs in China, which is still a developing country. Like the image of Fu Man Chu and Charlie Chan that we would talk about in the following discussion. Nevertheless, it might be somehow a good example to study owing to its relatively fast and concentrated changes and revolutions during recent decades. The second gradient is the ability to export culture, so that other countries can accept some element of the culture of this "certain country" to a certain extent. Moreover, in this gradient, it may even cause some greater impact on some other countries, like when one of these foreign countries' cultural self-protection capacity is insufficient as we mentioned in the first chapter, then the culture of this "foreign country" will be influenced excessively by our "certain country". In this dissertation, this "foreign country" could be China, and the "certain country" could be America and the Hollywood. The development of commercial films in China is largely based on the development of imitation of Hollywood models. For example, although the film *Wolf Warrior 2* (Wu Jing, China, 2017) is a patriotic film for Chinese about the Chinese army overseas. Because of the patriotism, the film reaped a huge box office income, becoming the number one film at box office in China with \$874 million. But such a Chinese patriotic film is on the Hollywood model in terms of story and narrative structure. Its story is similar to the *Rambo: First Blood Part II* (George P. Cosmatos, USA, 1985). As for the narrative structure:

In the late 1970s, a Hollywood narrative structure called the three-act structure was confirmed in Sid Field's book *Screenplay: The Foundations of Screenwriting* in terms of technical theory, and the three-act structure became the basic structure of Hollywood films. And *Wolf Warrior 2* follows exactly this three-act structure of Hollywood. (Han, 2018, p. 19)

This imitation started from the first Chinese commercial film *Hero* and has continued until now. The direct reason for adopting the Hollywood model from the period of *Hero* was that “Starting from the early 1990s, the Chinese film market was shrinking and the reform of film management was progressing even more slowly.” (Zhang, 2013, p. 2) The fundamental reason is the lack of accumulation of experience and the need for time to develop since “After the year of 1949, a socialist planned economy was introduced, and commercial films lost their basis of existence. Since then for a very long time, they have been extinct in mainland China.” (Zhang, 2013, p. 2) And after the film *Hero*, “*Kungfu Cyborg* (Jeffery Lau, China Hong Kong, 2009) was modelled on Hollywood films such as *Mutant* (John Bud Cardos, USA, 1984), *Transformers* and *Blade Runner* (Ridley Scott, USA, 1982) [...] *Future X-Cops* (Wong Jing, China, 2010), which is an imitation of Hollywood's *The Terminator* (James Cameron, USA, 1984) [...] The treatment of the plot of *Crazy Stone* (Ning Hao, China, 2006) is a copy of *Mission Impossible* (Brian De Palma, USA, 1996)” (Zhao, 2013, p. 5) For nearly two decades, Chinese commercial films have had a hard time making some impact in terms of story and narrative structure, and have borrowed much from Hollywood. As an attempt to break this situation, Guo Fan, the director of *The Wandering Earth*, expressed his concern in an interview after the film's release that “By today Hollywood will gradually turn the Chinese market into a Hollywood market [...] The most important thing we need to do now is to improve the industrialization of Chinese films and find our own “pen and paper” as soon as possible, otherwise in another ten years, when Hollywood learns to make films that Chinese people like, we Chinese filmmakers will not have the advantage in our own

country.” (Guo, 2019, p. 32) From this point of view, director Guo Fan is inclined to take the film *The Wandering Earth* as an important step in strengthening its self-protection capability.

2.2 The three dimensions for intercultural communication

When discussing the realization process of these two gradients, we can introduce the "three dimensions", which are the three thresholds in the process of cultural output in terms of films. The analysis of these three dimensions is done mainly through the history of China's changing process on the Hollywood screen. It mainly includes virtual images such as Fu Manchu and Charlie Chan, as well as real images such as Bruce Lee, Jackie Chan and Jet L. The first dimension is the people. This dimension is mainly about the image of people displayed on the screen, and this image mainly conveys an impression, including temperament and ability. The second one is the social identity. The main focus is on further exploration of the people on the screen, such as the image of society that this image represents. And the third one is the purpose. This is a kind of summary based on the first two, such as the values represented by this image. As stated above, this dissertation considers these dimensions as a kind of judgment, each of which is a threshold in terms of cultural output and represents three different levels. This chapter hopes to study the rule and function of these dimensions. We will unfold these concepts as we study some cases.

2.2.1 The basic dimension - People

2.2.1.1 The context of one case study of Kung Fu

As far as commercial films are concerned, the first dimension “people” could be quite intuitive to us. This element is the most direct and basic element in the interaction between films and the audience. And the other two dimensions build a more complex system based on the first dimension. First of all, in the world outside the film, there is a natural symbol or we could say a symbol that is naturally accompanied with films on screen in the communication of culture of films, that is which country the people in the films are from, or sometimes ethnic and race concerns will also be paid attention to. As a carrier of cultural communication, “people” could help and benefit this intercultural communication, but also in many cases become a huge obstacle to this process. Liu wrote in his essay:

In the hundred-year history of Hollywood Films, the image of Chinese people and related films have been emerging endlessly, which almost represents the psychological feelings, political attitude and cultural vision of the United States towards China in the past century. (Liu 2016, p.37)

The image of the Chinese can be traced back to the pre-war period, around the 1930s. The image was a single, evil image of Fu Manchu. This image lasted for half a century until the last and eleventh Hollywood Fu Manchu film was released in the 1980s. The dissertation will explain the image of Fu Manchu as well as Charlie Chan as follows.

Two of the most iconic male characters in the history of Hollywood’s Chinese images - “Fu Manchu” and “Charlie Chan”. Fu Manchu is the Chinese character in Sax Rohmer⁸’s novels, and the series was introduced to the United States and made into more than ten films by Hollywood, such as *The Return of Dr. Fu Manchu* (Rowland V. Lee, USA, 1930). However, Fu Manchu, as defined in the book, is a fearsome Oriental demon. The image of the Chinese it represented appeared occasionally on the Hollywood screen, becoming a generally accepted stereotypical

⁸ Sax Rohmer, an English novelist who is remembered for his series of novels of Fu Manchu.

prejudice, while Charlie Chan is the image of the Chinese in Earl Derr Biggers⁹'s novels. There are only six novels in Biggers's Charlie Chan series, but they have been adapted into 47 films such as *Charlie Chan in the Chinese Ring* (William Beaudine, USA, 1947). The emergence of the "fine model minority" image of Charlie Chan is a symbol of the improvement of the image of China in American films in the 1920s. The image of Charlie Chan is a cultural allegory of American assimilation and identification with ethnic minorities, but it also inevitably has racial prejudice and cultural discrimination.

In her book Jiang analyzes the images of Chinese masculinity conveyed by American popular culture works. Two images above are extreme; one is a sinister and cunning man like Fu Manchu who is a deadly enemy that Americans must not cooperate with. The other is a meek man like Charles Chan, who would willingly serve as an assistant and vassal to the Americans. But in Jiang's opinion, both have something in common, namely the lack of masculinity, an image that serves to eliminate their threatening imagery to American society. (Jiang, 2007, p. 221) These two images also have the same commonality as many of the later Chinese images produced by Hollywood, namely speechlessness. To make this concept clear:

Research shows that although American films today are eager to exploit Chinese resources, they are not conveying Chinese cultural connotations, but instead the American values, while attracting audiences with Chinese flavors and elements. Although China has provided American films with relevant materials and resources, it has no idea how to express itself on the Hollywood screen. In terms of image creation, the traditional American film image of China is strongly orientalist (We will talk about Orientalism in the third chapter), with the "stereotyped images" of Fu Manchu, Charlie Chan, the mysterious and ancient East, the suffering land, and the world to be saved being repeatedly reproduced and interpreted in American films. (Zhou, 2009, p. 1)

⁹ Earl Derr Biggers, an American novelist and playwright.

In her opinion even if there are Chinese actors on the Hollywood screen, these actors are only used to provide an exotic flavor. They have no right to interpret their roles. At the same time these images are imitated by some Chinese films, and the American stereotypes of themselves are transformed into what they want to see, which may be a bit of “self-orientation”. For example, there is criticism that the unreal Chinese folklore in Zhang Yimou’s *Red Sorghum* mentioned above is a kind of self-orientation. (Yu, 2007, p. 148) We will talk about this topic later.

2.2.1.2 An Accidental Breakthrough: Kung Fu

Chinese Kung Fu is rooted in Chinese traditional martial arts, which itself is a means of training for ancient soldiers. Like the phenomenon discussed in first chapter, it became a typical commercial film element that protected its own national culture and national spirit in the 1970s. At that time, mainland China was in the tough period of the Cultural Revolution, which also gave the element of Kung Fu a special mission. Thus, we need to introduce a key person, Bruce Lee, an influential Chinese in the film industry. Zhao summarizes the context of the era faced by Bruce Lee:

Bruce Lee's first film came out in 1971. From the 1960s to the 1970s, the mainland China was suffering from turmoil, and its international status and image were severely damaged. In particular, the "Cultural Revolution" caused domestic panic. But at the same time, it was the golden age for Americans in the 1970s [...] and the status and superiority as a super power make America's racial discrimination serious. Hong Kong, where Bruce Lee was located, was a colony at that time, and the government promoted Western education. At this time, Hong Kong was not able to be protected by the mainland, and it was also influenced and controlled by the strong popular culture of the United States [...] the identity of the colonial residents of Hong Kong makes them urgently need the support of the national spirit ... At this time, Bruce Lee used Chinese

unique martial arts to promote the Chinese national spirit in the films, meet the spiritual needs of the people, and build up the national image for Chinese people in the world. (Zhao, 2009, p. 9)

Although Bruce Lee died young in 1973, he did use his films to change the image of the Chinese in the United States from a single, negative symbol to at least a complex one. At the end of the 1970s, China's Cultural Revolution ended and the reform and opening up began. All industries are waiting to be flourished, and they are ready to be in line with the international standards. Among them, especially the Chinese film industry, which has been suppressed for at least ten years, getting rid of the “Revolutionary model drama¹⁰” and beginning to look for a new way out for films. The handover of the fourth and fifth generations of directors in China also started in this time. However, due to the lack of research on its own culture and external symbols in the film industry during the Cultural Revolution, the film industry entered a tough period in the face of the economic pressure of development in the new era. In the period after the Cultural Revolution, the word “scar” appeared in literature, followed by the emergence of scar films, through which intellectuals expressed their long-accumulated anger and complained about the Cultural Revolution, and in a narrow sense, “scar films” are films that record the memories of “scar” in the Cultural Revolution. (Fang, 2019, p. 2-3) Those “scar films” that reflect on the Cultural Revolution cannot solve the problems of the development of the Chinese film industry. Even though some of them are excellent, after all, they are short-term and have little integration with its own long-term national culture. Thus, this type of film is bound to be unable to condense into a film element that can become a cultural consensus of the entire nation as mentioned in the first chapter, and it is also difficult to become an influential commercial element. But at the end of the Cultural Revolution, films including scar films did have a brief boom because they satisfied the spiritual thirst of the audience caused by the cultural desert of the Cultural Revolution decade.

¹⁰ Films and Dramas for the Cultural Revolution. *The Shaolin Temple: The Film Communication Spectacle in the Early Stage of Reform and Opening-up*, p. 124

Although a lot of criticism of the Cultural Revolution could be seen in these films, the Cultural Revolution left deep scars on people's hearts, which through the films were repeatedly “poked” and the audience felt pain. (Liu, 2014, P. 91) Moreover, the Cultural Revolution was only a decade in the long history, and those who experienced it were mainly the fourth and fifth generation of Chinese directors, after whom the “scars” were not easily felt by the audience afterwards. “After the boom, starting in 1980s, the film market began to slump [...]. Under such circumstances, the box office was mainly supported by commercial films that were characterized by entertainment. The films which ranked at the top of the film box office were the Kung Fu films. (Zhang, 2013, p. 39) This is precisely the case we focus on in this section.

2.2.1.3 Correct grasp of the cultural elements in commercial films

The image of “sovereignty” of the Chinese films at that time is still in Hollywood, which means based on the images of Fu Manchu and Charlie Chan, the Hollywood possessed the right to interpret the images of China. Although Bruce Lee used Kung Fu movies to change the image of the Chinese, due to his premature death, the image of the Chinese on the screen might be regressed to images like Fu Manchu, a negative and misleading image. If it develops in this way, with the progress of the reform and opening up policies, foreign commercial films led by Hollywood films are continuously introduced into the country, then China would not only lose the sovereignty of the film economy market and the right to interpret the Chinese own roles, but also it denies its own national image. And on the issue of losing the sovereignty of the film economy market, Zhang expressed her concern in her thesis, in which she said:

In the two decades since 1994, Hollywood films in China have had a smooth and growing influence. From 2010 to 2015, in terms of the Chinese domestic market box

office occupied by Hollywood films released in China, Hollywood films occupied at least half of the top 10 films at the annual box office every year, and their total box office soared from \$2.5 billion in 2010 to \$8.6 billion in 2015. (Zhang, 2017, p. 21)

The image of “people” is very important. For example, Fu Manchu represents evil on the screen, while Bruce Lee represents justice. As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, “people” is the carrier and the foundation of the other two dimensions.

Therefore, as we can see from the results now, for the Chinese film industry of that period, the traditional Chinese culture of "Kung Fu" became the only element after the successful transformation by the "Pioneer" Bruce Lee into a usable commercial film element. Around 1980, Mainland China cooperated with Hong Kong, which has some experience with Bruce Lee's films, and tried to combine the birthplace of martial arts and cultural heritage in the Mainland to produce a phenomenal commercial film *Shaolin Temple* (Chang Hsin Yen, China, 1982) ". The film starring Jet Li won a total of more than 100 million Chinese yuan at that time in the domestic box office, in the case that the movie ticket price at that time was only 0.1 to 0.2 yuan. Since then, Kung Fu has become the most common commercial film element in China after the reform and opening up. In addition to the achievements of another superstar Jackie Chan in Kung Fu films, Kung Fu, a Chinese traditional cultural element, has successfully enriched the image of the Chinese, which has reduced the world's misunderstanding on the image of the Chinese on the screen, giving the Chinese the chance to improve the external impression.

In the Chinese cultural context, the bare chest to expose the power of muscle is not the best way to show the Chinese masculinity. The “muscular man” that the Americans promoted was obviously not in line with the traditional Chinese civilization's aesthetic imagination of graceful man. It was not until the 1960s and 1970s, when the “bodybuilding” craze spread in Hong Kong, that the image of the topless “muscle man” appeared for the first time in Hong Kong films. But at that time, the Kung Fu film was not formed, and the image of Chinese people was still in the system composed of Fu Manchu and Charlie Chan. At that time, the Kung Fu in the

film was still in the traditional image of a graceful gentleman with a beautiful face, and this image was like the image of Charlie Chan. But Bruce Lee's body is clearly meant to be shown for Hollywood to see, to counter Hollywood's prejudice against Chinese. By using the American identification of "muscular masculinity" to rebuild the dignity of Chinese. The British scholar Chris Berry commented on the political significance of Bruce Lee's physical display: Bruce Lee's presentation of his body as a weapon to win the struggle between nations and between races has been largely seen as a victory for the oppressed in China. (Berry, 2014, p. 94)

2.2.2 The second dimension - Social identity

In the discussion above, we see how China re-shaped its image. At least, it changed the Chinese image on the screen of Hollywood. From this we may be able to see the second dimension brought about by it, that is, the issue of "social identity". This dimension is slightly obscure, not as intuitive as the "people". For example, although Bruce Lee, Jackie Chan and Jet Li all represent a powerful image of Chinese people, the Kung Fu they seem to use is basically indistinguishable, and their images in general seem to be the same. What is not intuitive is the social identity they represent, the kind of Chinese people they metaphorically represent in real life. The protagonists of Bruce Lee's Kung Fu films are cynical but civilian-style national heroes, physically tough and highly skilled in Kung Fu. The comedic style of Jackie Chan's Kung Fu films meets the aesthetic needs of modern people, and his films are all about enthusiastic, responsible, mediocre but heroic civilian heroes with mediocre martial arts skills. Jackie Chan accelerates the spread of martial arts in the world, and from the roles he often plays as police officers and secret agents, his Kung Fu is more of a common social attribute, assuming this social identity of maintaining the law and order of daily life. Jet Li, on the other hand, shocked the world with his film *Shaolin Temple*, which set off a trend of martial arts. His Kung Fu films portray a refined

master or urban master with superb martial arts skills. His films interpreted Kung Fu meditation, and his Kung Fu represents an identity of Buddhist master, assuming a kind of social responsibility to soothe and strengthen people's spiritual world by external Kung Fu assistance. The three people's Kung Fu films spread the true social identity of martial arts, because the concept of Kung Fu is not only skillful martial arts, but also includes a society formed by those who practice martial arts, which has been preserved in Chinese history along with martial arts, and the nature of this society is collectivist, and it is similar to the Japanese samurai society, which represents the idea that everyone is a hero and everyone has the obligation to serve the collective.

The social identity dimension could be roughly understood as the combination of the "people" and the film elements attached to the "people". And if we take Jackie Chan's Kung Fu films that are mentioned above as our example: Jackie Chan as an individual in the films, he is an image of a Chinese who can do Kung Fu on the screen. Most of the Hollywood films he has starred in contain elements of police, secret agents, and ordinary citizens. And as Chen has summarized in his essay:

To sum up, Jackie Chan has two types of roles in Hollywood films: police and civilian, especially the former. For example, the inspector in *Rush Hour* (Brett Ratner, USA, 1998-2007), the guard in *Shanghai Noon* (Tom Dey, USA, 2000), the Hong Kong police officer in *The Medallion* (Gordon Chan, USA, 2003), the secret agent in *The Spy Next Door* (Brian Levant, USA, 2010) and so on [...] The police image has opened a window for Jackie Chan's "second handshake" with Hollywood. (Chen, 2013, p. 79)

On this basis, Jackie Chan's Kung Fu image takes on a social identity. And the role that a Chinese who knows Kung Fu in society is that of a mediocre civilian hero who maintains social stability. Jackie Chan's Kung Fu films are one of the important carriers for shaping the identity of Kung Fu practitioners, and the identity of these people is also the main content expressed in Bruce Lee's and Jet Li's Kung Fu films. Among them, Jackie Chan's Kung Fu films have both inherited and innovated roles in shaping the cultural image of Kung Fu, inheriting the benevolent heart of martial

artists and creating screen martial art heroes in modern society, which are recognized by the world and play an important role in the social positioning of Kung Fu. (Zhao, 2009, p. 4) The image of Kung Fu police or Kung Fu agents portrayed in Jackie Chan's Kung Fu films has shaped a new hero for the world, which is the mediocre civilian hero mentioned above. Although different countries, nations or regions in the world have heroes of their own, and each worships a different image of heroes, the feelings for heroes are the same. In the history of development of martial arts before modern times, martial artists were synonymous with heroes, and Jackie Chan's films show the feelings for the martial artists on the screen and let the world appreciate the magical martial arts of China by shaping this image through films, and the world is amazed and fascinated by them at the same time. Overall, Jackie Chan's films have been one of the best mediums to develop the social identity of Kung Fu from the early 1980s to the present. In addition to Jackie Chan, the practical significance of Bruce Lee's and Jet Li's Kung Fu films for the development of the social identity is that they not only create their own image as Chinese, but also complete the social significance of Chinese people and Kung Fu to real life, clarifying their position in the society of the multi-ethnic cultures in the world. This is how this chapter understands the meaning of the social identity of Kung Fu.

2.2.3 The third dimension - Purpose

In our discussion of *The Wandering Earth* in the first chapter, we noted that as the first Chinese hard science fiction film, it primarily spreads an idea of collectivism, which attempts to make assumptions in the film about building a community with shared future for mankind. And we can see this concept of collectivism as the film's purpose. Compared to *The Wandering Earth*, *Interstellar* is a film with a different purpose under the same film motif - disaster. In *Interstellar*, the protagonist Cooper shows an elitist temperament that is different from that of the general public,

specifically when the majority of human beings do not want to make great changes to their existing lives in the face of disasters, Cooper opposes the inertia of thinking that the general public has. And the inertia of thinking is that the public do not want to seek change, which we will also mention in third chapter. So, as an individual, Cooper shows a spirit of resistance. This spirit of resistance is one of the manifestations of individual heroism, and it is often found in Hollywood superhero films. While at the same time, it also appears in many Kung Fu films, such as Jet Li's *Shaolin Temple*. In *Shaolin Temple*, the spirit of resistance becomes the purpose of the film, and this is partly in line with the individual heroism. This may also make Kung Fu films have a higher rating and a broader influence in the United States and the world than other types of Chinese films. According to Tian and Chen:

In 2014, the research team of the Chinese National Academy of Arts researched on the "*Feasibility of Chinese Film Overseas Market Competitive Strategies*" conducted a questionnaire on "Foreign Audiences' Aesthetic Acceptance and Consumption Trends of Chinese Films". The results showed that: Among the Chinese films liked by the interviewees, the most selected is *Hero* (Zhang Yimou, China, 2002), the second is *Rumble in the Bronx* (Stanley Tong, China, 1995), the third is *Fist of Fury* (Lo Wei, China, 1972), the fourth is *Farewell My Concubine* (Chen Kaige, China, 1993), and the fifth is *Shaolin Temple* (Chang Hsin Yen, China, 1982). Among them, Bruce Lee, Jackie Chan and Jet Li are among the top three who are well-known, among which Jet Li has the highest recognition in North America. (Tian & Chen, 2018, p.126)

Except for "*Farewell My Concubine*", the other four of the above five films are all Kung Fu films. Just like the next dimension, the "purpose" based on these two dimensions, these commercial films often carry more or less the mission of exporting and spreading cultural, changing the image of the country, or fighting for the right to speak for its own cultural elements. As mentioned above, the *Shaolin Temple* in 1982 is essentially showing a spirit of resistance. The protagonist played by Jet Li lived in ancient China. At that time, the country was dominated by evil men and became

divided. He and other people's families were being persecuted by those wicked people, the whole film conveys a spirit that opposes division, longs for unity, and hopes that everyone in the world can live a good life. Up on that, with such characteristics, the goal of the film reflects that the Kung Fu brought by the Chinese has a temperament and feature to resist oppression and meanwhile benefits ordinary individuals. The same feature also appeared in the *Hero* in 2002. This kind of temperament and feature is closer to the needs of Hollywood commercial films.

This cultural symbol has gradually been partially accepted by the American commercial film industry. In subsequent films, we can see the emergence of elements of Chinese Kung Fu from time to time, such as *The Matrix* (Wachowskis, USA, 1999), *Kill Bill* (Quentin Tarantino, USA, 2003), *Mulan* (Barry Cook and Tony Bancroft, USA, 1998), and *The Forbidden Kingdom* (Rob Minkoff, USA, 2008) and *Kung Fu Panda* (Mark Osborne and John Stevenson, USA, 2008). To a certain extent, this achieves the second gradient of external effects, that is, cultural output, so that foreign countries can accept this element of the culture to a certain extent. Based on the above, we can roughly observe how the three dimensions of external output affect the spread of the element of Chinese Kung Fu. The degree of completion of these three dimensions also predicts and determines how far the two gradients could reach under certain circumstances.

2.3 Limitations of the "Kung Fu" element and a new way out

2.3.1 The essential objective of Kung Fu and all the other cultural elements

In many cases, the culture of a country will also change dynamically with the development of national strength, the progress of research on its own history, and the change of ideology. This dissertation believes that one's own country should have

certain "sovereignty" over the cultural elements that it has produced or that have not been spread abroad, and the initiative to change and update it should still be retained within the country instead of becoming an element that belongs to others and are controlled by them. This section will try to explain this point of view by exploring the limitations of Kung Fu.

The cultural element of Kung Fu, as described before, its rise is a phenomenon of being entrusted with a mission at a critical and difficult moment. For Chinese film industry, which has undergone the Cultural Revolution, the only hope was brought by Bruce Lee in the seventies and eighties when soft power was weak. Somehow, this returns to the key word at the beginning of this chapter, which is stereotype. One of the purposes of our cultural export is to enrich the image of our country and become more authentic and concrete, so that misunderstandings will become less and less. Like Bruce Lee used his Kung Fu image to squeeze out a part of the Chinese Manchu image at that time. Coincidentally, that period was the period of normalization of diplomacy between China and the United States. According to Zhang's dissertation, in the 1950s and 1960s, the United States had long imposed an economic blockade and political isolation on China, while in the 1970s, with a series of diplomatic activities such as Nixon's visit to China, Sino-US relations began to normalize, trade between the two sides developed considerably, and cultural communication gradually became frequent. (Zhang, 2015, p. 21) Although the film didn't have a direct impact on this, it was undoubtedly beneficial to the further elimination of prejudice among the people. With the development of the times, just like the advancement of film technology, the elements of cultural symbols contained in the contents of films also need to be improved. The element of Kung Fu also needs to be improved and renewed. In the past decade or so, some Chinese films have overused this element of Kung Fu, imitating films like *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* and *Hero*, or using Kung Fu to catering to the world's orientalism (Chen, 2013, p. 82) as we will talk about it in the third chapter, but none of these films have gained enough influence. There is a certain decline of this element of Kung Fu. In the third chapter we will analyze the decline of Kung Fu films and at the same time

analyze how *The Great Wall* made a change and improved the element of Kung Fu.

2.3.2 The exploration beyond Kung Fu

In addition to the factors mentioned above about the element of Kung Fu, another fact is that after Jackie Chan, Jet Li and other international Kung Fu superstars gradually retreated, the element of Kung Fu showed a clear decline. According to statistics, the ten highest-grossing overseas movies (all of them are Kung Fu movies) were distributed in the years from 1992 to 2009. A large part of this decline is reflected in this aspect: Kung Fu in Jackie Chan and Jet Li's Kung Fu films are stories in both modern and ancient societies, so it is easy to become popular films. After them, the era of "Kung Fu" almost all retreated to ancient times, which not only caused aesthetic fatigue, but also made the image on the screen monotonous. Like the case of Bruce Lee, avoiding that the image becomes monotonous is on account of avoiding misunderstandings and stereotypes.

So, after this, new cultural elements are being searched. But whether it can achieve the self-defense function described in the first chapter is still a problem. The films other than Kung Fu films are basically limited to comedy films, romantic films. This period of time, around 2000 to 2010 also coincides with the popularity of Hollywood's *Avatar* (James Cameron, USA, 2009), *Inception* (Christopher Nolan, UK & USA, 2010), the Marvel Universe series and so on. The results of "2011-2012 Chinese Movie Audience Survey Report" described in the first chapter are not surprising. In this period, the Kung Fu element can only play a protective role on a small scale, and China faces the risk of being occupied by Hollywood from the cultural to market aspects.

Facing this situation, in accordance with the point of view of the first chapter in the dissertation, the standpoint should be stabilized first on commercial films, that is, internally, films of equivalent themes of foreign films like the Hollywood films

should be made to counterbalance the cultural input. Externally, it is necessary to find a path that can complete "the three dimensions" as much as possible. For instance, after the period of trough nearly 10 years for Chinese film industry, the new exploration of the new blockbuster mode has been concentrated around 2018, including the science fiction film *The Wandering Earth* (2019), the animation film of the traditional myth *Nezha* (Jiaozi, China, 2019) and the two war films *Wolf Warriors 2* (Wu Jing, China, 2017) and *Operation Red Sea* (Dante Lam, China, 2018). These four movies consecutively broke China's box office record. And they are the second time that China explores the combination of its own culture and films since Bruce Lee's Kung Fu films. However as for output process, these films failed to achieve a breakthrough in the threshold of the "three dimensions". Naturally, the foreign box office was not good, and it was difficult to form new cultural elements for cultural export, because these films are Chinese versions of Hollywood films, for example, *Wolf Warrior 2* is creating a Chinese version of *Rambo*, and they are not essentially creating new cultural elements, but trying to replace some of the Hollywood elements with Chinese images. A big part of the reason is that these films are for the domestic market. And as the first chapter said, as a kind of defensive action, and also as an important way to enhance national confidence. Thus, they do not showcase and package their own cultural elements like *The Great Wall* that we will talk about in the third chapter.

A problem arises here, that is, sometimes a film made is expected to achieve a certain cultural spread, but some contents of the film that need to make the audience resonate with the narrative of the film such as the emotion of experience of the characters in this film, and also need a certain cultural background to understand, but for a domestic producer, it might not be easy to understand the cultural needs of foreign countries. Zhang said in his dissertation:

The reason lies in the failure to solve the problems of differences and integration of different cultures, resulting in cultural discounts... they can touch the past experiences and secret desires in the hearts of local audiences, but it is difficult to be understood by

Western audiences who are not well aware of Chinese social history and culture. Coupled with language barriers and translation difficulties, it is difficult for them to accept elements from the film. Since audiences cannot understand, they cannot have emotional resonance, and it is difficult to generate interest in watching it. (Zhang, 2013, p. 98)

In order to solve this problem, we might find a model that could be used as a reference, that is, joint venture films (Co-productions). Although the joint venture film is a kind of compromise, some of his changes to the film elements may make local audiences uncomfortable, but it is indeed at least at the producer level that the optimal solution to cultural conflicts and contradictions has been discussed and generally solved, so that it might benefits the film's market income first by gaining more audiences overseas and based on which, the cultural elements could be spread more broadly, especially for the part whose soft power is temporarily weak, such as China in this case. Here quotes Zhang:

The two commercial blockbusters *The Mummy 3* (Rob Cohen, USA, 2008) and *The Karate Kid* (Harald Zwart, China & USA, 2010) co-produced by China and the America, with the help of Hollywood's global distribution network and pervasive marketing channels, soon spread globally. Among them, "The Karate Kid" won 2.4 billion RMB for China's overseas box office (about 37 million USD). However, in 2011, although 23 production companies in China launched 52 films (including 50 co-produced films) to 22 countries and regions, because none of them were co-produced with Hollywood, the total overseas box office dropped to 2.024 billion yuan, which is not as good as the box office record of one single film "*The Karate Kid*". (Zhang, 2013, p.99)

In this way, in the next chapter, we would continue with the discussion of joint venture films to explore more possibilities to carry out cultural dissemination as well as to find a better mode of cultural communication among different countries.

CHAPTER THREE: ADVANCED DISCUSSION ON THE JOINT VENTURE FILMS

3.1 Joint venture film perspective from *The Great Wall*

In the previous section we showed the effect of commercial films in intercultural communication and the three dimensions they have to go through by exploring mainly the Kung Fu films. However, we also noted that the differences between cultures can make a blockbuster less influential overseas. One of the solutions for commercial films whose main purpose is the box office is to start with the capital, that is, use overseas capital to drive overseas publicity. Working with Hollywood, which is experienced in global publicity, one can learn about their approaches. Wang talked about the characteristics of Hollywood in her dissertation:

Hollywood must present its distinctive cultural traits to audiences around the world in order to achieve the desired communication effect. Unlike Europe and East Asia, which have long and illustrious histories, the United States has a simple and short history, so Hollywood focuses on providing audiences with an American culture with the following characteristics. The first one is high-tech [...] Second, simplicity and straightforwardness [...] Third, the vital importance of individual heroism. (Wang, 2017, p.129)

This chapter attempts to add to the issues left in the second Chapter by a case study of *The Great Wall*, the joint venture film between China and Hollywood, the central point of which is to explore possible solutions to the obstacles encountered in intercultural communication of films from the perspective of joint venture films.

The film *The Great Wall*, a Sino-US co-production directed by Zhang Yimou and

produced by the Hollywood team, was released in 2016. According to the Internet Movie Database (IMDb), *The Great Wall* cost \$150 million to produce. It is not the first Sino-US joint venture film, but it is the first truly Chinese blockbuster of Hollywood version. The film's overseas distribution is being handled by Universal Studios, Hollywood's oldest company, and through Universal Studios it was shown in more than 100 countries and territories around the world. It was a milestone for the overseas distribution of Chinese commercial films, though not as good as traditional Hollywood films at the box office. But if not, judging from the past experience of Chinese films spreading abroad, the number of Chinese films that actually make it to overseas commercial theaters are very small. And *The Great Wall* is a film that has been promoted overseas precisely through overseas capital. In terms of the film itself, *The Great Wall* is a new attempt to tell the Chinese story to international audiences. The 'shell' of the film, including production, special effects, editing, screenwriting, actors and even story development mode, is basically "Hollywood", while the 'core' of the film focuses on telling an easy-to-understand Chinese story and tries to integrate traditional Chinese values. The film provides a certain reference for future Chinese films to be disseminated to the outside world. The director said "We want to make *The Great Wall* a film that is acceptable to a global audience. Although the Chinese elements are particularly strong, we hope that both foreign and domestic audiences will love it. It has to meet the national conditions of China, and it also has to meet the commercial standards of a global blockbuster." (Zhang, 2018, p. 128)

The story depicted in *The Great Wall* set in 11th century in China during the Song Dynasty, and the protagonist is a mercenary played by the famous actor Matt Damon, who enters the world of the East from a Western perspective, which allows Western audiences to be brought into the story more quickly. The story is about the elite army of the Song Dynasty as they respond to the empire's call to fight a monster called Tao Tei by heading to the Great Wall at the empire's border. The soldiers are building institutions on the Great Wall, which was built to resist foreign aggression, to resist the attacks of monsters. At this point, the Great Wall is not only a representative of physical defense, but also the main carrier of the spiritual core of this film. The

imprisoned mercenary William, having witnessed the horror of the Tao Tei, was impressed by the spirit of unity of the Song Dynasty's elite army in defending its territory and he gave up the chance to escape, deciding to join the Chinese army in a common resistance and achieving the final victory. *The Great Wall* is a film that adheres to the typical characteristics of Hollywood films, with an uncomplicated story. In fact, as we explore, we will notice that its core purpose is not located in the narrative, but in the exploration of the cultural elements' diversity. Its essence is a high-concept film, supported by famous actors, focusing on market opportunities, and having an easy-to-understand plot. Wang mentioned high-concept film in his paper:

High-concept film is a kind of stylized film production mode in Hollywood. It is a commercial narrative strategy that pursues the largest audience and sufficient marketing power with attention-grabbing gimmicks, concise plots, clear themes, high audio-visual impact, stars and other elements. High-concept films are those produced under this strategy and mode. Since the 1970s, high-concept films have matured and become the current mainstream program for Hollywood film production, escorting its leading position in the global film market. (Wang, 2018, p. 1)

Such films often require strong visual effects to hold the interest of the audience. *The Great Wall* is considered to be the first heavy industrial film co-produced by China and the United States. The term "heavy industry film" refers to a world-class film with high concept, high investment and high technology, which is made in full accordance with the Hollywood film industry system and has direct access to Hollywood's global film distribution network. *The Great Wall* was directly planned by the CEO of Legendary Entertainment, and took 7 years from conception to completion, and 3 years to produce. *The Great Wall* was produced with the help of Industrial Light and Magic and Weta Digital, the best special effects companies in the world. The visual effects have completely reached the world-class level. These were unprecedented for a Chinese film and the most expensive film ever directed by a Chinese director. (Wang, 2020, p. 1)

So, with Hollywood responsible for the use of Computer-generated imagery to create grand scenes and metaphysical things, these diverse cultural elements are packaged like commodities on an assembly line into easy-to-understand symbols that are more accessible to people of different cultural backgrounds. We will interpret this further.

3.2 Symbols of films

As mentioned in the previous section on joint venture films, these are, in a sense, a compromise for intercultural communication, sometimes sacrificing the depth of content for the display of cultural elements, like advertisements. As Meng said:

The classic Marxist writers have also discussed this: 'The object of art creates a public that knows art and can appreciate beauty. Any other product is no exception, and as an aesthetic consumption object, advertising products will to a certain extent also reshape the aesthetic subject. In this sense, what kind of advertising product there is will be what kind of accepted subject, and the subject will be constantly reconstructed in the consumption of the aesthetic object provided by advertising again and again. (Meng, 2005, p. 202)

The depth of the content is something that can only be easily understood by people who know about the culture of the country behind the film. The process of creating depth will more or less ignore a lot of background explanation, which is the reason for the emergence of cultural discounts, which also increases the difficulty of the film in spreading culture worldwide. Although *The Great Wall* is a film that seems too shallow, it caters very much to the linear narrative of Hollywood's magical films, keeping the story as simple as possible. Common, established Chinese symbols, such as the Great Wall, are used to quickly bring the audience closer to the narrative

content of the film, thereby constantly adding new Chinese elements while symbolizing them, such as elements of the Tao Tei, black gunpowder, armor, and sky lanterns. As far as possible, people from different cultural backgrounds around the world can quickly accept and remember these conspicuous, non-obscure, “no depth” cultural elements. As an important way of acquiring information, vision is an instinctive way of perceiving the world. In modern society, reading and seeing no longer simply define vision, but along with the increasing use of figurative symbols that appeal to the senses, the ability to interpret pictures and films needs to be constantly enhanced. For this reason, vision is more about “interpreting” some kind of figurative objects, and more about cognitive (Huang, 2017, p. 166). Meng said in his book:

Cognitive ability is one of the important differences between humans and animals, and the strength of human cognitive ability and the cognitive activities cannot be carried out without the subject's own hardware system (material organs) and software system (mental organs). (Meng, 2005, p. 202)

Such figurative objects are composed and constructed by visual symbols, such as the sky lantern. Here, however, we can refer to the sky lantern as a strong symbol. Strong symbols are usually man-made, customized for a specific culture, and they are usually highly stimulating to our vision on the film screen. Weak symbols are usually natural, or even if they are artificial, they must have generality, that is, a thing that most countries have. And they are less stimulating on the screen. The sky lantern, as an ancient Chinese invention, is simple, like a hot-air balloon. But what is different is that in ancient times, the Song dynasty made these lights small, structured by paper as canvas and by candles as a source of fire, being put into the sky by the thousands. Such a method of production and such use is a strong stimulus for the eyes, and a typical exotic object for countries outside of China. Therefore, we refer to sky lanterns here as a strong symbol. We generally consider the strong symbols as a common element in commercial films, but this can also be seen as a complement to

the films which emphasize economic efficiency over depth of content. For example, whether in *The Great Wall* or *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (Ang Lee, China, 2000), there are long braids worn by Chinese men, and of course, such symbols are often used in other Chinese films. But in fact, male hairstyles varied from dynasty to dynasty throughout history, but the long braids became a frequent symbol in Chinese commercial films. When Matt Damon was interviewed by an American program after filming *The Great Wall*, he was also asked: Where did your long braids go? Even though he doesn't have long braids at all in the film. This is a typical symbol that is highly recognizable and exotic. This symbol represents ancient China in a very simple and efficient way, but it doesn't really represent it. The frequent use of one symbol makes the symbol tacky or lacking in taste. As a strong symbol, the film also makes it very simple and clear that the Sky lantern is used as a military message or a way to mourn the deceased, and now because it is used for the first time on screen, millions of sky lanterns appear floating in the sky at night, and underneath the lanterns are two unique natural scenery - the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Dunhuang Yardang National Geopark and Zhangye National Geopark. The soundtrack here is a strong national character of ancient singing - Qinqiang, and the loud and clear singing on the Great Wall with the exciting drums, this whole image is particularly visually impactful and becomes an excellent demonstration of the film's use of strong symbols. This rich Chinese-style picture makes people feel very much like *The Great Wall's* director - Zhang Yimou's another masterpiece, the 2008 Beijing Olympic opening ceremony directed by him. Whether it's *The Great Wall*, a film that could use Hollywood distribution network for world-class publicity, or the 2008 Beijing Olympics, director Zhang Yimou seems to be doing the same thing: desperately seizing the rare opportunity to create strong symbols of Chinese cultural elements for the world.

Language itself is also a strong symbol, which can be more easily felt in *The Wandering Earth*. Because *The Wandering Earth* itself is a theme about all humans participating in saving the world, the language of other countries often appear in it. It is worth noting that, perhaps in order to escape the shadow of Hollywood science

fiction films, it seems to deliberately avoid communication in English, as the protagonist's father's most trusted comrade on the space station speaks Russian, and the person who conveys the top directives on behalf of the United Earth Government, including one of the most crucial lines, "We have decided to choose hope" in French instead of English. The language and the people who speak it on screen represent the country.

When it comes to weak stimuli or weak symbols, such as the corn field in *Interstellar*, or the watch that the protagonist Cooper gives to his daughter. Such objects do not carry the cultural characteristics of a particular country. They are common materials. However, the ability to make these common materials have a symbolic meaning is a more difficult but brilliant method, and if it is done, the depth of the content of the film will increase with these weak symbols. The corn field in *Interstellar* is the last grain that mankind can grow and also a symbol of mankind's only hope, whether it is Cooper or Cooper's son working as a farmer to cultivate this last hope. As the last and dying cereal, the vastness of the cornfield rather accentuates the lack of hope. The watch that Cooper gives to his daughter, though broken, is a metaphor for the relative slowdown of time near the black hole, a physical means for Cooper to send his daughter the key message to save humanity, and of course a bond of longing between father and daughter. The advantage of weak symbols such as these is that it is easier to add content and emotional depth to the film, the disadvantage is that it does not bring obvious strong excitement. If not used delicately, it may easily make the film obscure and become a less known film, and its ability to spread is limited, so we might have to find a balance.

In addition, there are some originally weak elements, but because of the unique characteristics, it somehow turns to strong symbols, like the bamboo. As another representative of the oriental image, it is a symbol of integrity and toughness in traditional Chinese culture. The fight scene between the two protagonists in the bamboo forest in *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon* is not only a metaphor for the spirit of Chinese martial arts, but also a symbol of justice and nobility. This symbolism from bamboo was often used in many films later as well. Saussure's semiotics is the

idea that symbols have two aspects of composition, namely, that the ‘signifier’ and the ‘signified’ are oppositely unified. The signifier + the signified = the symbol. (Huang, 2017, p. 166) The signifier here in our case is about the concrete sound, a picture such as the above-mentioned bamboo, a sky lantern or a watch, while the signified is a psychological concept, such as the above metaphors. From this point of view, symbols need to have metaphors and meanings, and the absence of metaphors or the lack of clear metaphors may make a picture or a sound hardly constitute the meaning of the symbols, and at least in commercial films it cannot be considered as a complete element packaging process, this dissertation believes that symbols can be considered as a commodity in commercial films, and the elements disseminated in the film are by and large packaged into these symbols. In this dissertation, we argue that the symbols can be considered as commodities in commercial films, and the elements transmitted in the films are largely packaged into these symbols.

3.3 Orientalism in *The Great Wall*

Orientalism¹¹ is an imagination of the Western world about the ancient East, as suggested by Edward Said. He pointed out that the Orient is almost a Western invention, a place of strange experiences that has surrounded people's memories and horizons since ancient times, full of romantic legends and exoticism. "Orientalism" has a unique development process in the context of Hollywood in the United States. The Fu Manchu and Charlie Chan mentioned in the second chapter are actually in the low point of the entire Orientalist period, and these two images constitute the early representation of Orientalism in the films. The monotony image of the East in this context is very likely to prevent normal communication between cultures. In the post-war period, especially in the “post-Bruce Lee” period, Orientalism gradually

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<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Orientalism#:~:text=In%20art%20history%2C%20literature%20and,and%20artists%20from%20the%20West.>

returned to its normal position or in other words, the image of Orientalism gradually began to be enriched. It is worth noting that, in the context of globalization, Orientalism is not only constructed by Hollywood, but some Chinese directors have begun to self-Orientalize and add elements to it. Yu and Lin explain "Self-Orientalism" as follows:

"Self-Orientalism" means that orientalists take the logic of Westerners in discussing the Orient as a reference and starting point, solidifying and essentializing the behavior and discourse expression of "Orientalism". (Yu & Lin, 2015, p. 8)

The main manifestation of self-Orientalism is the transformation of elements from the perspective of the Orientals to the Westerners, in order to conform to the inertia of the inherent Orientalist definition of the East. This kind of activity involving both sides is actually more conducive to the expansion of the influence for the film, and even to a certain extent can turn the opposition into integration and cooperation between both sides. For example, the case we have chosen here is *The Great Wall*, a joint production between China and the United States, which is a typical example of such activity in practice. But in fact, as Said said, "the East" is an invention, because it is so far from the real East. Nevertheless, as far as the film is concerned, we might be able to find no way to show the real East or the West directly through films. Cultural discounts are inevitable in the process of the communication overseas, and the intensity of the discounts depends on how many efforts are made by both sides, such as the use of Orientalism and self-orientalism mentioned above to shape the image in films in order to reduce discounts. Raymond Williams describes "image" as an artifact or public impression that is created to appeal to the public rather than to reproduce reality; it implies a degree of falsity in which reality does not correspond to the real image. (Wang, 2018, p. 148) The practice of Orientalism in cinema confirms this statement of Raymond Williams. It should be added here that this "unreal" image (For example, the self-Orientalized image is an unreal image) is less necessary in the films that do not attempt external and overseas publicity. Like in *The Wandering*

Earth, it went with the defensive posture as mentioned in the first chapter, and has no self-Orientalism in it.

The Great Wall is a film with a number of such orientalist transformations or conceptual enhancements, and these created elements are most intuitively imagined by overseas audiences outside of China: the winding and majestic Great Wall at the border, the elite army standing at attention on the Great Wall, the black gunpowder hidden inside the Great Wall, the ancient singing paying tribute to the dead soldiers, these elements are symbols that are more in line with the world's perception and imagination of China at the time of Song Dynasty¹². What is depicted inside the film is an image of huge feudal machine, an army that served the totalitarian power to guard the borders for the empire, and an invention of black gunpowder that shocked the world. These imaginations of the East have led people from other parts of the world coming here. The two western mercenary soldiers in the film are the embodiment of this mystical fantasy, and they break into China with a perspective that belongs to the Western world, an arrangement like this really falls into the narrative structure of Orientalism and caters to the expectations of the Western audience's vision.

3.4 The Threshold Effect

At this point, the dissertation also wants to look at the essence through the phenomenon. In fact, *The Great Wall* could have been made without being a high-concept film *per se*, or without such a simple Hollywood classic motif (monsters). It could have added some depth to the content, but director Zhang Yimou keep it simple anyway. Wang talked about Hollywood films in his dissertation:

Unlike Asian and European films, the stories in Hollywood films tend to be simpler and the interactions between people tend to be more straightforward, a characteristic that

¹² Song Dynasty (A.D. 960 - 1276) https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Song_dynasty

is very different from the subtlety of Asian and European cultures and makes Hollywood films easier to enjoy. (Wang, 2017, p. 130)

As a fifth-generation Chinese director, Zhang Yimou has excellent works with depth like *Red Sorghum*, and for the first time, he made his film extremely simple, greatly lowering the threshold of watching his film, with the huge fame of Hollywood film stars, making foreign audiences first accept the existence and setting of the film, keeping them from resisting, and then he use his best efforts to “sell” these cultural symbols, making them more easily accepted by overseas audiences. As we mentioned the threshold, we could get a better understanding of this through the threshold effect, which could be also mentioned as the Foot-in-the-door technique¹³, which refers to a compliance tactic that aims at getting a person to agree to a large request by having them agree to a modest request first.

In fact, *The Great Wall* itself is more significant than the content. As mentioned above, symbols are like commodities in commercial films, and *The Great Wall* happens to be a collection of complete Orientalist symbol systems that have appeared in other Orientalist films before, and in this joint venture film, director Zhang Yimou has gathered the symbols together as much as possible in a new arrangement, which gives overseas audiences the opportunity to reconstruct in their minds the Chinese image in their minds. (Huang, 2017, p. 168) It also has the significance of using its status as a joint venture film to convey that Chinese culture is open and tolerant and willing to accept other outstanding cultures from around the world. In the film, the Great Wall itself represents the intention to defend the empire against foreign attacks, and the first time the Great Wall gates are opened passively because of the attack of the monster Tao Tei. This seems to confirm the idea that the opening of the Great Wall is harmful, but the second opening of the Great Wall gates implies cooperation, with warriors from the Western world. Both sides were at first suspicious and distrustful, with the Chinese female general Lin (also protagonist) telling William that "we are different". In the end, when the individualism of William and the collectivism of

¹³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Foot-in-the-door_technique

Chinese soldiers collided and merged, the two sides began to try to understand each other and to compensate for their own shortcomings with each other's points. The female general Lin expressed the meaning that "We are the same". In this way, the meaning of the Great Wall is conceived as a defense against greed, not against the beauty of truth. In addition, the film does not shy away from some negative phenomena in the development of Chinese society, such as the greedy and ignorant Song emperor, who hid behind the throne because of the siege of the Tao Tei in the previous moment, but immediately became arrogant once he saw the reinforcements coming, as well as the sycophancy of the ministers around the emperor, all of which foreshadowed the gradual demise of Chinese feudal society. Although the film uses Tao Tei, the enemy outside the Great Wall, as a symbol of greed, it does not neglect to consider the human nature of greed in the form of feudal society. The Tao Tei is a symbol of human greed, signifying the punishment of human greed. The mercenaries represented by William came all the way to China because they coveted Chinese black gunpowder; the detained William's partners took the horses and black gunpowder because of greed, and betrayed their fellows. Because of greed, the ministers around the emperor wanted to bring the Tao Tei to the capital, in order to ask rewards from the emperor, but it attracted more Tao Teis and brought extinction to the empire and the people. All these show that the greed of human nature has not disappeared with the progress of mankind. This portrayal of the greed of the Tao Tei and the greed of human nature can actually be considered a kind of anti-orientalism, which conveys a message through the portrayal of the common evil in human nature, that no matter what civilization it comes from, it will eventually return to the discussion of the common humanity of mankind, and in this regard, both East and West need to be warned. This film-based advocacy represents the reconcilable differences as well as commonalities between the East and the West. This common topic made the film more accessible to a wider range in the world, and in this way the film's threshold is lowered. In this way, the film's threshold is lowered. From this perspective, even though *The Great Wall* has been de-Chineseized and instead it Hollywoodized as much as possible for compromising reasons, and meanwhile

lowering the threshold, the film still succeeds in packaging a lot of Chinese cultural elements beyond these thresholds, which is the function of the threshold effect and has achieved director Zhang Yimou's real goal - to create strong symbols of Chinese cultural elements for the world. And at the same time, this "Hollywood" film, in turn, becomes less American and individualistic with the addition of the Chinese side. In contrast, *The Wandering Earth* has a much higher threshold. Zeng and Zhang talked about the collectivism in *The Wandering Earth*, which could be a huge threshold:

The principle of collectivism rejects and condemns the putting of individual interests above national and collective interests, and does not allow individual interests to negate national and collective interests... The fact that only half of the global population, 3.5 billion people in the film have migrated underground shows that at the critical moment of human survival and the continuation of civilization, all people should put the interests of humanity first, subordinate individual interests to collective interests, and maximize the protection of collective interests. (Zeng & Zhang, 2019, p. 60)

At the beginning of the film, the director takes the initiative to tell the audiences that the first wave of human crisis brought about by the Earth's active cessation of autobiography will kill and injure many people, before the first crisis humans will decide through a lottery which part of the people can enter the safe dungeon to take refuge. This sacrifice set in the film is the only way for the immediate suffering of the extinction of the human race, but this straightforward and specific "Trolley issues"¹⁴ will inevitably be very difficult for audiences to accept. In *Interstellar* or *2012* (Roland Emmerich, USA, 2009), the films have avoided the emergence of such problems, such as in *Interstellar*, the human race itself is slowly dying, the main team is just going to gamble on hope, even if they fail, it won't have influence to human fate. In *2012*, most people do not even know or do not believe that the disaster will

¹⁴ Or Trolley Problem
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trolley_problem#:~:text=The%20trolley%20problem%20is%20a,to%20save%20a%20larger%20number.&text=Opinions%20on%20the%20ethics%20of,immaterial%20to%20the%20abstract%20dilemma.

come before it actually happens, they do not know the life-saving ship was secretly built before the disaster happened. “Trolley issues” like this are ignored, and therefore it’s not easy to have controversy outside of the films. *The Wandering Earth* was announced at the beginning of the “Trolley issues” that seemed real and cold-blooded, which for some people made them resist at the beginning, equivalent to increasing the initial threshold, so that the rest of the content inside *The Wandering Earth* may be difficult for them to accept because of this initial threshold.

At this point, a thought derived from this concept is presented to us. That is, how would *The Wandering Earth* change if it were not a local Chinese science fiction film, but like *The Great Wall*, a Hollywood-led joint venture film? For example, with regard to the threshold issue explored in this section, we imagine that the protagonist of *The Wandering Earth* is replaced by an American Hollywood superstar, and that the story moves away from the film’s original plot, which is: the protagonist team is one of the many teams who try to save the world, and the heroes who save the world are actually the rescue teams of various countries around the world and the United Earth Government who offers ultimate support for the rescue plan. Thanks to all countries, mankind finally saved themselves into a new plot: the United States of America’s elite, our protagonist do not approve of the current plan, and he makes his way through disaster and danger to the earth engines, uses it to ignite Jupiter, accidentally pushes the planet away, and then saves the world. This change can make the threshold of *The Wandering Earth* lower, specifically because from the perspective of the second dimension of the second chapter, the social division of labor and social identity return to that Americans lead the plan, which is a common theme of commercial films, so that the tone of the new version of *The Wandering Earth* would not be so aggressive. After all, according to Bai and Li in their study, 17.3% of the English reviews on the Internet were negative “Sings the praises of the Chinese; Overemphasizes patriotism; Sacrifices the interests of the people; Reflects China’s global ambitions; Conceals cultural superiority”. (Bai & Li, 2021, p. 75)

If, as mentioned above, these changes bring down the threshold of the film to some extent, then perhaps other elements of the film will be more easily accepted. For

example, the protagonist team seems kind of mediocre compared to some traditional Hollywood films. We already know the reason, that is, *The Wandering Earth* tends to convey the information the mankind can unite together, to build a community with shared future. However, it means that the protagonist team cannot have abilities that exceed those of ordinary people, and the protagonist team is just one of all the teams who try to save the world. This concept and element could be good. However, if the film itself is hard to accept because of the relatively high threshold, this element may not be accepted as well. Like I said, the concept of being one of all the rescue team could be mediocre. What is easy to be accepted is still the concept from some Hollywood films, making audiences be elite. In the *Interstellar*, Nolan set a cruel scenario for human beings that may exist after many years: The Earth's ecological destruction is serious, dust storms rampant, crops coincidentally die, the quality of human life seriously deteriorated. In such an environment, humans shut down NASA, resulting in astronauts like Cooper becomes farmers, and even the textbooks of U.S. moon landing were banned from public, and all because short-sighted humans take for granted that the most important thing at the moment is to produce food, rather than explore the universe. The inertia of thinking was still pervasive around Cooper, even after his son had got chance to get into college but was determined by his teachers that he should become a farmer instead of engineer. Murphy's teacher also said "We need to teach our kids to about this planet, not tales of leaving it." As it turned out later, it was by leaving the planet that humans eventually regained its life. This narrative is a relatively common one in Hollywood, and it is a contrast between the "mediocre" and "elite". "Mediocre" here does not exactly refer to a mediocre social identity, but mainly represents the inertia of thinking bound to it. In *Interstellar* the majority of people is bound by this inertia, and they seemed to be "Boiling frog"¹⁵ in the environment on Earth. Cooper, the protagonist, is the opposite of this mediocrity. He condemns the teacher who says the U.S. moon landing was a fake, not only because as an ordinary individual, Cooper's wife lost her chance to be treated because mankind abandoned most of the exploration of advanced technology, including some

¹⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Boiling_frog

medical treatment, but also because as a former elite pilot, he says “we are explorers, pioneers, not caretakers”, expressing his dissatisfaction with this policy of steady demise.

Later, Professor Brand could not solve the problems in his gravitational equations even he spent forty years on it. Of course, in the American culture of individual heroism, Cooper was the ultimate mystery solver. He leaves behind the traditional perceptions of the past, enters the space, and finally creatively passes the data to his daughter by swinging the hands of the watch. It is through these data from the black hole, Murphy solve the problems of the gravitational equations, and successfully save the humans on Earth. Interestingly, in the film, it is Cooper who has the creative thinking to successfully make humans out of the harsh Earth environment, and it is Cooper who saved those mediocre people deeply affected by the inertia of thinking. From this point of view, Nolan seems to give us a small irony: Although the inertia in the traditional mode of thinking has created the basic perspective of our understanding of the world, it also increasingly becomes the ruling economic, political, and especially intellectual and cultural thinking shackles. Cooper’s different thinking and his strong self-confidence and personal ability make him out of the shackles, becoming an elite, and in a sense, it is actually another form of superhero film, and through this contrast of mediocre and elite, there is a greater emphasis on the ability of the individual in this meaning.

And in *The Wandering Earth*, there has also been a similar human’s choice to face disasters with *Interstellar*. One of the differences is that the metaphor of *The Wandering Earth* is more obvious, and the other difference is that the person who makes this choice in *Interstellar* is the protagonist Cooper, while the person who makes this choice in *The Wandering Earth* is the entire human race. But in fact, these propositions in the two films are both essentially about human nature, and although there are differences between different cultures, there are also many commonalities. However, the “threshold” magnifies these differences, making some exotic elements are not easily accepted. Sometimes when the threshold is lowered and the audience accepts the general direction of the film, the small directions inside may be easily

accepted. Probably for *The Wandering Earth* it is possible to reduce the argument of “sacrificing the interests of the people or reflecting China's global ambitions”. From the novel *The Wandering Earth*, as well as his author Liu Cixin's other works: the trilogy *Three Body Problem*, Liu Cixin's work tends to add questions that are still being debated about among our society to evoke thinking about humanity. From the Chinese perspective, these elements or questions added into the film are on the same level with other films around the world, and the lowering of the threshold may be more conducive to spread these reflections and elements. Of course, for *The Wandering Earth*, “lowering the threshold” could be one of the compromised solutions, and we could try to explore other ways out.

3.5 Halo effect and “seek novelty”

The halo effect¹⁶, refers to in people’s perception in the interaction with others, the other person’s particular outstanding characteristics, qualities will cover a person’s correct understanding of this person’s other qualities and characteristics. This phenomenon of illusion is called the “halo effect” in psychology.

For example, for many American audiences, the Kung Fu films of Bruce Lee, Jackie Chan and Jet Li constitute the Chinese world of their experience, the world of martial arts. These Kung Fu films have had a large share of fans. In the 21st century, these actors have faded from film industry and new stars have taken over their work. For example, *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* and *Hero* are the signs of the beginning of the new generation. Although these new Kung Fu films have new cultural elements and narrative backgrounds, in the case of *Hero*, it is much less accessible than in the case of Jackie Chan. In the film *Hero*, compared to the easy to understand films of Jackie Chan, which are mostly based on the interpretation of martial arts, the profound cultural expression in the new generation films is more

¹⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Halo_effect

obscure. But even so, the box office has reached the peak of the U.S. overseas film box office, and the reason lies in the halo effect and the “seek novelty” psychology (We will talk about this later). However, the Kung Fu films after *Hero* did not think of change, neither complete symbolic packaging of some new elements nor lower the threshold, and still repeated the formula of *Hero* in a way that was not adapted to overseas audiences, the halo effect driven by Bruce Lee, Jackie Chan and Jet Li was gradually depleted, and *Hero* became the second highest-grossing Chinese film in North America because it was the closest to the halo effect of its predecessors. Thus, the film *Hero* remained the second largest Chinese film in North American box office during more than 10 years. The Kung Fu films after *Hero* gradually lost their influence on the world.

The expression “seek novelty” often appears in Chinese film criticism, which refers to the search for new and unusual things to satisfy people’s curiosity. The inclusion of exotic and mysterious Chinese elements and symbols in early American films was one of the forms to satisfy the curiosity of audiences overseas about Eastern culture. International audiences, especially in the United States, have always been interested in ancient Chinese culture, which sometimes can be different from their previous perceptions. Cultural differences have created a curiosity for foreign cultures and a demand for exotic goods, in order to take in scarce elements from foreign cultures into our own culture for purpose of satisfying our needs for diversity in material or spiritual life. (Wang, 2018, p. 129) Therefore, we can think that the gradual decline of Kung Fu films after the *Hero* is also to some extent related to this mentality, because almost all elements in these films are no longer updated and are imitations of previous Kung Fu films. When Kung Fu itself is not updated, the elements for “seeking novelty” becomes cheap. For some American audiences, violence and excitement are the deepest feelings that some Chinese martial arts films give them, and in the later stage it is customary to call martial arts films “chopsocky¹⁷”, which is a slightly derogatory term for this genre of films. “The success of *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* lies in the fact that Ang Lee has provided

¹⁷ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chopsocky>

overseas audiences with an alternative perspective to the violence and excitement of Chinese Kung Fu martial arts films - perspective to the human nature, under the traditional Hollywood narratives. In the U.S., *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* was promoted with the tagline "Kung Fu Titanic." (Weng, 2011, p. 235) This new combination made *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* seem like a new kind of East, bringing new excitement to the audience. After this, Chinese films gradually entered a low period in North America market, like what I said earlier, the mechanical imitation of Kung Fu films consumed a lot of the previously accumulated "halo effect", while other types of commercial films besides Kung Fu films were difficult to meet the curiosity of North American audiences, not to mention the global audiences. Chen also mentioned this phenomenon:

After *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* and *Hero*, it is no longer possible for Chinese blockbusters to emphasize "orientalism" spectacle to gain success at the overseas box office ... Attempts to appeal to the visual spectacle of region, customs and culture, highlighting the dark lust for power and other human curiosities, and catering to the world's orientalism have failed. This shows that the world finds that Orientalism has lost its unique cultural meaning and function when it identifies itself; the Orientalist experience has become increasingly stereotyped and uninspired, which forces the world to search for a new self-identified Oriental culture and to gather self-reflective cultural values in it. And this, as it happens, requires another form of Oriental participation. (Chen, 2013, p. 82)

It wasn't until the emergence of Zhang Yimou's joint venture film *The Great Wall* in 2016 that the Kung Fu film regained its brilliance again, becoming the third largest Chinese film in North American box office after *Hero*. There was a long gap of 14 years between these two. But it can be seen that, up to now, the films that can have a possible voice or a certain status in the North American market are still Kung Fu films, and even now they need to be in the form of joint ventures to get their status back. All this seems to remind people of Orientalism again. One of the important definitions of

Orientalism is “ancient”, which is the opposite of the “modernity” of the United States. The “old” appeals to their imaginary of the Orientalization of China. “Ancient” time means “past”, and in “past” time, love and hate are happening, showing the ancient splendor of Chinese civilization, which they are familiar with, and which seems to be the same inertia of thinking mentioned above in the analysis of *Interstellar*. Here, for example, through *The Great Wall*, the United States revisits the Orientalist portrayal of China through “ancient” China, and condones the darker side of Chinese culture shown in the film for the same reasons - it’s already in the “past”. (Weng, 2011, p. 241)

Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon is a template for the use of the American halo effect on Kung Fu films and the use of the “seek novelty” psychology towards Orientalism. Director Ang Lee's strategy is quite consistent with the way American audiences perceive Oriental films. The process of highlighting “Chineseness” is in fact the process of expressing difference. The representation of Chinese imagery in *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* satisfies the American audience’s romantic longing for a strange and mysterious “others” and fits into the American’s unconscious long-standing imagination of the Orient. As director of the film, Ang Lee identifies with the American discourse on the East and draws on the narrative model commonly used in the Hollywood, to highlight the “universal desire” of human beings in the Eastern stories, thus achieving the goal of fighting for identity and recognition from their audiences. So, in the end, Ang Lee’s films are still the highest-rated Chinese films in North America and has the highest box office. It is undeniable that *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* has had a great influence on the spread of Chinese culture, but also because of the extreme use of the halo effect and the psychology of “seek novelty”, there is a lot of self-orientation in it, and this film with a box office of \$128 million in North America in 2000 was actually lowly rated in China, with a Chinese box office of only \$2 million. The opposite is when in 2002, Zhang Yimou’s *Hero* was rated very well in China, and the Chinese box office reached more than \$40 million. It is 20 times the box office of *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* in China. So this is actually similar to what sometimes happens to a joint venture film, because producer has to compromise between domestic and overseas, it is to find the balance between

one's own country and the target market countries, there has to be a degree and intense to the halo effect and the practice of satisfying the psychology of "seek novelty" in order to satisfy the domestic market and the communication overseas. However, for a domestic film like *The Wandering Earth*, if it doesn't consider for overseas market, there is almost no need to complete the above two steps, instead it has just to complete the defensive mission mentioned in the first chapter.

Nevertheless, if *The Wandering Earth* achieves "self-orientation" and "satisfying the American curiosity", it may be easier for the film to have a chance to compete with traditional Hollywood science fiction films, if we don't talk about visual and sound effects first. For example, transforming *The Wandering Earth* into: in a near-future sci-fi scene, the Chinese people are lined up in their traditional white funeral dresses, playing Chinese drums and performing a praying ritual, because half of the population in the world may be sacrificed because of the plan of the United Earth Government. When disaster strikes, an American came to find a way to change the plan, and he finds some strength inside Chinese traditional equipment. He helps the Chinese people to transformed their ancient armor of the Song Dynasty into modern armor, and head to the earth engine where the United Earth Government is located with them to save the other half of the population in the world. If the film plot unfolds in this way, it might be another "*The Great Wall*" in the American film market, and because of the Halo effect, some flaws in the film may be overlooked, including, for example, the controversy over individualism and collectivism. We could say individualism is generally reflected in *Interstellar*. It is also almost a standard in Hollywood commercial blockbusters. Wang said in his paper:

In no other country in the world's film attaches so much importance to individual heroism in Hollywood, and Nolan's portrayal of the Bat Man is a perfect embodiment of this individual heroism. Not only that, other films also tend to set up a final problem-solving individual of hero at the end, such as Cooper "*Interstellar*". (Wang, 2017, p. 130)

In *Interstellar*, the expedition team to find a habitable planet in outer space consists of four people, but each time it is the protagonist's ingenuity and efforts to overcome one hurdle after another, and finally the protagonist enters a black hole and transmits the data to his daughter on Earth, and it's only because of him that the humans on Earth solve the gravitational equations accordingly. It can be said that the protagonist saved the whole mankind with his own power. But this whole process is only about a few elites among all the human beings. American culture, as an immigrant culture, where there are people from all parts of the world, meeting new people and seeing new things is the norm. In Hollywood films, Americans are not only heroes but also leaders. They are responsible for leading the charge because they have great "personal power". Other countries are occasionally seen in their films, but they are mostly followers, and when America does it, other countries follow. The United States takes its position as the "leader of the free world" very seriously. In *Interstellar*, NASA's former pilot Cooper becomes the key to humanity, and the hero saves all of humanity". Although they don't have a lot of publicity about this, the political concept of "Americans being heroes to save the world" can be reflected, and it is also a triumph of individualism. (Wang X., 2020, p. 175)

And China's collectivism on some specific issues may make the United States uncomfortable, which has made individualism an important part of its culture. Many Chinese films focus on collectivism, which, after all, is considered a mainstream value in China. Chinese collectivism comes from the highly developed feudal society formed by the continuous improvement of the feudal system of Chinese civilization for thousands of years. The ancient feudal dynasties included highly centralized bureaucratic, absolute monarchies and patriarchal systems that were contradictory to individualism, but which did guarantee the prosperity of an agrarian (not industrial) civilization, free of war and feed a huge population with very little available arable land. This is one of the roots of collectivism. The previously mentioned Confucian culture is considered an expression of this collectivist standard of behavior and thought. Since Korea and Japan submitted to China in ancient times, they were also two followers of Confucianism before the modern "de-Chineseization" movement.

Influenced by Confucianism, the Chinese emphasize the interests of the family on a small scale, while on a large scale, they emphasize the interests of the nation and advocate the subordination of the individual to the collective. (Wang X., 2020, p. 175) This is why the beginning of *The Wandering Earth* movie depicts a lottery to determine the life and death of nearly half of the human race, which is different from the traditional Hollywood viewpoint. In this way, this setting is a negative halo effect for some Americans, because the existence of this setting and plot makes some other of the excellent qualities and elements of *The Wandering Earth* are covered up, resulting that they are hard to accept. Based on this, we can imagine if *The Wandering Earth* did not follow the original novel's description of the "lottery" at the beginning, but only filmed human beings trying to survive, it might have eliminated this negative halo effect. Discussion may not be put up here about whether or not we should put the trolley issue into a science fiction film, but this plot is indeed a manifestation of collectivist views.

But at the same time there are many Chinese films that follow Hollywood-style individualism, and this imitation is also a way of learning from the best of their films, and it cannot be ignored that there will also be many films, especially those of the sixth generation of Chinese directors, whose films are to some extent reflections on the shortcomings of collectivism at certain times, and are also strengthening the focus on individualism. However, it is true that *The Wandering Earth* does not "lower the threshold" as previously mentioned, nor does it add exotic elements to satisfy the curiosity or take advantage of the halo of previous successful Chinese films to cover up inadequacies or controversial views as mentioned in this section. Chinese hard science fiction films like *The Wandering Earth* are still mainly in the stage of defending and recovering their own national cultural confidence, just like mentioned in first chapter. After all, at this stage, Chinese commercial films are still unable to escape the overwhelming dominance of Hollywood in China and are unable to define Orientalism by themselves. And as mentioned in second chapter, with the decline of Kung Fu films, even *The Great Wall*, a joint venture with Hollywood, is not as influential at the box office as *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* in 2000 and *Hero* in

2002. Chinese film also needs to go modern (like the case of *The Wandering Earth*), instead of speaking as an ancient for a long time to say what the director or producer want to express to modern society, and also, maybe in the future the Chinese films industry could escape the overwhelming dominance of Hollywood and become able to define Orientalism by itself. In that case, this new, self-defined and modern Orientalism may be another Chinese element that crosses the threshold of intercultural communication to be accepted by the audience of the world after the element of Kung Fu. It might have the opportunity to become another successful case and template for the cultural function of films in addition to the case of Kung Fu, which could have a positive effect on the further study and practice of this function in countries around the world.

CONCLUSION

This dissertation is mainly based on some Chinese commercial films and their development history. As stated at the beginning of the dissertation, this dissertation attempts to find patterns from the analysis of these cases. These rules are mainly about the connection between commercial films and intercultural communication. The main purpose of looking for these connections is to have a better understanding of commercial films in this era of information where the influence of films is increasing and the influence spreads faster and faster, especially the cultural influence of commercial films. At the same time, the seemingly simple cultural elements in commercial films will have many subtle effects on our society, which may be easily overlooked in intercultural communication.

The dissertation mainly analyzes and researches through three chapters. The research process is promoted mainly through the analysis of the film, the interpretation of part of the history and literature, and original arguments about the films. First of all, the film *The Wandering Earth* is introduced in the first chapter to discuss the construction of domestic soft power. The main findings are as follows:

Commercial films and the influence it can bring are of great importance to the protection of one country's culture. In intercultural communication, cultural elements need to achieve some points to protect the film and national values of one's own country. Next, in Chapter 2, through the external dissemination of Chinese Kung Fu films, we found that based on the premise of certain protection of our country's culture and values, if we want to export culture to the outside world, we will generally understand the three dimensions, and the two levels of effect it achieves. Finally, we have seen a viable method of exporting culture to the outside world, but at the same time it has its limitations. On this basis, in Chapter 3 we further analyze the form of joint venture films, and mainly discover the main reasons why joint venture films can have a stronger cultural influence, including the packaging of symbols and the application of threshold effects. At the same time, through further analysis and comparison of films, we have strengthened our further understanding of the feasibility of intercultural communication. In conclusion, this dissertation believes that it is necessary to find the role and function of commercial films in intercultural communication and the way they conduct it. The scope of this study is limited, mainly based on some landmark films in China as a starting point, combined with Hollywood films for comparison and research. In fact, a wider range of comparisons and case studies between different cultures should be carried out. In this way, the relationship and rules based on the existence of culture and film can be more accurately described. By this means, the impact of films at home and abroad is easier to be foreseen, and it is of great significance to the construction of the country's soft power and the healthy communication of world culture.

Filmography

Avatar (James Cameron, USA, 2009)

Blade Runner (Ridley Scott, USA, 1982)

Charlie Chan in the Chinese Ring (William Beaudine, USA, 1947)

Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon (Ang Lee, China, 2000)

Farewell My Concubine (Chen Kaige, China, 1993)

Fist of Fury (Lo Wei, China, 1972)

Future X-Cops (Wong Jing, China, 2010)

Hero (Zhang Yimou, China, 2002)

Inception (Christopher Nolan, UK & USA, 2010)

Interstellar (Christopher Nolan, UK & USA, 2014)

Karate Kid (Harald Zwart, China & USA, 2010)

Kill Bill (Quentin Tarantino, USA, 2003)

Kungfu Cyborg (Jeffery Lau, China Hong Kong, 2009)

Kung Fu Panda (Mark Osborne and John Stevenson, USA, 2008)

Mission Impossible (Brian De Palma, USA, 1996)

Mulan (Barry Cook and Tony Bancroft, USA, 1998)

Nezha (Jiaozi, China, 2019)

Operation Red Sea (Dante Lam, China, 2018)

Rambo: First Blood Part II (George P. Cosmatos, USA, 1985)

Red Sorghum (Zhang Yimou, China, 1988)

Rumble in the Bronx (Stanley Tong, China, 1995)

Shaolin Temple (Chang Hsin Yen, China, 1982)

The Forbidden Kingdom (Rob Minkoff, USA, 2008)

The Great Wall (Zhang Yimou, China & USA, 2016)

The Matrix (Wachowskis, USA, 1999)

The Mummy 3 (Rob Cohen, USA, 2008)

The Terminator (James Cameron, USA, 1984)

The Wandering Earth (Guo Fan, China, 2019)

Wolf Warrior 2 (Wu Jing, China, 2017)

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