

An Analysis on the Appearance and Influence of Chinese Culture in English Movies

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Abstract. In the past few decades, more and more Chinese culture appears in the English movies, which suggests that Chinese culture plays a more important role in the arena of English movies. It is true that the development of China attributes to the movie industry all over the world, it cannot be neglected that the Chinese culture in English movies is an effective approach to occupy the Chinese movie market. The essay analyzes the appearance and development of Chinese culture in English movies on the basis of a survey to more than 100 movies, and reflects the influence of the phenomenon to the transmission of Chinese culture all over the world, as well as the outlook to promote Chinese movie in the world market.

1. Introduction

From the appearance of the movie *Mulan* in 1998, to *Kungfu Panda* in 2008, and *Mortal Engines* in 2018, the audience all of the world can find more and more Chinese culture in English movies, which include the famous Chinese proverbs, Chinese historic people, Chinese paintings, Chinese movie stars, Chinese directors, Chinese buildings, Chinese scenes, and Chinese animals as well. All the Chinese culture, which presents the unique Chinese society and spirit to the world, helps to make the world know China better, also provoke us to think about the reasons and influences to our movie industry as well.[1]

2. The history and current situation of Chinese culture in English movies

2.1 The history of Chinese culture in English movies

In the 1970s, the famous Chinese movie star Bruce Lee shocked Hollywood with his movies such as *Fist of Fury*, *Way of the Dragon*, etc. In his movies, he presented the world with a Chinese Kungfu hero who fought against the evil and for the justice. His movies aroused a trend of “Chinese Kungfu Trend” all over the world, which also changed the stereotype of Chinese people being weak in minds and physical health. Since 1990s, such Chinese movie stars as Jackie Chan, Chou Yun-fat, Leung Tong, Donnie Yen, Michelle Yeoh and Maggie Cheung, followed the steps of Bruce Lee to struggle for a position in Hollywood. Among them, Jackie Chan costarred with Chris Tucker to present the *Rush Hour* series, which made him a Chinese police officer full of justice and a sense of humor. And his outstanding performance gained the movie a box office of 200 million dollars. Michelle Yeoh starred in *Tomorrow Never Dies*, in which she fought with James Bond to save the world. Meanwhile, the famous Chinese directors like Ang Lee, and John Woo, and Wong Kar-wai, directed dozens of English movies, especially the *Brokeback Mountain* and *Life of Pi*, which gained him the 78th and 85th Oscar Award for Best Director.

However, with the development of Chinese movie market, the Chinese directors and movie stars decided to return to China. Chou Yun-fat, Jackie Chan and Jet Li began to be seen in Chinese movies, while Ang Lee and John Woo restarted to direct Chinese movies. From the trend of struggling in Hollywood to the return to China, the phenomenon shows the great development of Chinese movie industry on the one hand, and the status of Chinese movie stars and directors in Hollywood on the other hand. [2] As for Chinese actors, they are either Kungfu masters or sexy girls in the Hollywood

movies, which cannot represent their real performance skills and talents. Even in *Tomorrow Never Dies*, Michelle Yeoh is nothing but a sexy agent who merely helps James Bond to finish his task, while Jackie Chan and Jet Li cannot be accepted by Western audience other than Kungfu stars. Therefore, it can be seen that there is a long way before Chinese movie stars and directors to be appreciated for their real talents and performance skills.

2.2 The current situation of Chinese culture in English movies

With the development of Chinese economy and movie industry, the influences of Chinese culture in English movies have improved greatly, which is the combination of the efforts of Chinese movie directors and actors, and the requirements of expanding market in China. And the Chinese culture presented in English movies are not limited to Chinese directors, movie stars, but are expanded to Chinese buildings, clothing, setting, proverbs, customs and even philosophy. In *Mission: Impossible III*, a beautiful traditional landscape of Southern China was unfolded in front of the audience. In the series of *Kung Fu Panda*, the audience can get a much deeper understanding of Chinese culture, including “Chinese Treasure” --Panda, Chinese ancient buildings, clothes, martial arts, and customs. [3] In *Mortal Engines*, the leader of Shanguo is a Chinese who cherishes peace and never start a war from his side, which is also in accordance with Chinese foreign policy. In *Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse*, we can even find the product placement in it. It is the instant messenger QQ, which is popular in China. In 2012, when all the hopes are lost, Chinese built a dam and some huge ships to provide shelter for the survivors. In the movie, we can hear Voice (O.S.), “Some among you will even have the chance to work for the glorious People's Republic of China building the biggest dam project in the world.” From all these changes in English movies, it can be seen that Chinese culture is being presented in the positive way as it should be.

3. Reflection and inspiration

3.1 Reflection

From the changes and development of Chinese culture in English movies, we can see that it was prejudiced and distorted, but was changed to the normal way gradually. The factors which caused the changes can be analyzed as follows:

3.1.1 Curiosity for Erotic Culture

For many Western people, China is a mysterious country with ancient history. Any stories related to China, especially the Chinese history, can always arouse the interest Western audience. Therefore, in many English movies, Chinese Kungfu and historical people become a consensual choice. For instance, in such English movies as *Rush Hour* starred by Jackie Chan, *The Forbidden Kingdom* by Jackie Chan and Jet Li, as well as *The One* by Jet Li, the fighting scenes with Chinese Kungfu are always to points of attraction for Western audience. In addition, many English movies have taken Chinese scenes as the background of the stories. For example, *The Mummy: Tomb of the Dragon Emperor* has taken the Emperor Qinshihuang as the main stream of the story which happened in Shanghai in the 1940s. In the movie, the audience can enjoy a different Shanghai with historic flavor from the modern metropolitan today. Similarly, *Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen* took part of the story setting in modern Shanghai, *Transformers: Age of Extinction* in Hong Kong, *Mission: Impossible III* in Xitang, Shanghai. And *The Dark Knight* took the setting of Hong Kong, which unfolded the wonderful nightscape of Hong Kong to the audience. All these unique Chinese culture meet the curiosity of Western audience to a large extent, which promote the box office of the movies.

3.1.2 Drive of Market

With the development of Chinese movie market, more and more western English movies aim at the market share in China, which brings great profit for their companies. One way to gain the market share in China is to add Chinese culture in the movies to gain wider identification and higher recognition of Chinese audience. Therefore, we can see more and more Chinese elements in English movies, such as Chinese scenes, buildings, people, language, and philosophy. With proper add-in of Chinese culture, the English movies can be improved for the reflection of multicultural concepts and

artistic level. However, if Chinese culture is placed in English movies just to attract Chinese audience and promote the box office, the result will usually be the opposite. In Iron Man 3, a short video clip with Wang xueqi Fan Bingbing was added just in the version for the Chinese cinema. The video clip was unnecessary at the beginning, just to attract the Chinese audience and gain more money from the Chinese box office. It empowered no artistic values to the movie itself, and aroused great offense to the Chinese audience, which led to the loss of some Iron Man fans in China.

3.1.3 *The Efforts of Chinese directors and actors*

From Anna May Wong in *The Red Lantern* in the period of silent movies, to Bruce Lee in the 1970s, to Chen Chong in *The Last Emperor* in the 1980s, to Jackie Chan Jet Li, and Chow Yun-fat in the 1990s, and to Daniel Wu and Maggie Q in current days, Chinese actors and actresses have experienced the hardship in Hollywood. With their consistent efforts, the status of Chinese in Western movie arena has greatly improved, especially the efforts of Ang Lee, who has directed the well-received movies like *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* and *Brokeback Mountain*, has advocated and spread the Chinese philosophy and culture to the whole world.

3.2 The Enlightenments to Chinese directors and actors

With more and more Chinese culture in English movies, we need to reflect from the current situation, and think about the influences of the phenomenon to Chinese society and culture, as well as our attitude towards foreign culture in Chinese movies.

3.2.1 *The expression of movie themes*

There is no doubt that it is beneficial to promote the spread of Chinese culture to the whole world with more and more Chinese culture in English movies. The Chinese culture can make people in other countries know more of Chinese society, culture and customs. However, the function of the Chinese culture is to reinforce the theme of the movies. Even in such movies as *Mulan* and *Kungfu Panda*, the Chinese characters, scenes, buildings, customs, and even the sayings are to reflect the theme of heroism which is an important part of English culture. Therefore, the movie itself is still to present the English ideas and values with help of Chinese culture.

3.2.2 *The reference signification*

The box office of *Mulan* reaches more than 300 million dollars, and *Kungfu Panda 3* gains a box office of 960 million yuan in China, and 520 million dollars all over the world. From the figures, we can see that movies with Chinese culture are well received not only in china, but also in other countries. In contrast, Chinese movies presenting Chinese culture seldom receives such popularity. No one knows Chinese culture better than Chinese, still the movies produced by Chinese don't gain much popularity other than China. [4] The phenomenon needs Chinese movie makers and producers to think over.

4. Summary

The Chinese culture in English movies makes English movies gain great success, which helps to spread Chinese culture all around the world. While we analyze the success of the English movies, we also need to make self-reflection and introspection about how to spread our Chinese culture and thoughts in Chinese movies. What surprises us is, the success of *Wolf Warriors* and *The Wandering Earth* has shown the world Chinese culture and society. Of course, there is still a way to go for Chinese movies to present and spread Chinese culture to the world.

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