

Opportunities and Challenges of Crosscultural Communication of Chinese Mythical Films in the Digital Age

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Abstract: Under globalization, the crosscultural dissemination of Chinese mythological films faces both opportunities and challenges. Based on crosscultural communication theory, this paper analyzes the cultural conflicts and adaptation issues in their dissemination. Factors such as cultural differences, language barriers, cultural affinity, and overseas market barriers in the cultural discount theory hinder dissemination. The cultural adaptation theory, however, requires films to adjust language, cultural elements, and narrative styles according to the target market. Taking films like *Ne Zha: I Am the Destiny* as examples, the paper dissects the manifestations of cultural conflicts; the success of *Chang'an Chang'an* and *The Wandering Earth* proves the importance of crosscultural adaptation. Digital media technology has enhanced visual effects to attract international audiences, but the transmission of cultural connotations and values is equally important. This paper argues that enhancing cultural sensitivity, achieving crosscultural adaptation, and improving visual effects can help Chinese mythological films showcase the charm of Chinese culture on the international stage and promote the global spread of Chinese culture.

1 INTRODUCTION

In the context of globalization, crosscultural communication has become a vital means of interaction between countries (Samovar & Porter, 1972; Holliday, 2011). China, with its profound history and rich culture, holds unique significance in this process. Chinese mythological films, as carriers of Chinese culture, play a crucial role in enhancing its global influence and fostering intercultural understanding. However, cultural differences pose challenges in crosscultural communication, including conflicts and adaptation issues, as well as the impact of film visual effects on communication effectiveness. This article will explore these challenges from a theoretical perspective and propose solutions to support the international development of Chinese mythological films (Zhang, 2024).

2 THE ORETICAL BASIS OF CROSS-CUTURAL COMMUNICATION

2.1 Theoretical Background

In the views of Larry A. Samovar and Adrian Holliday, explaining the process of information exchange between people from different cultural backgrounds and critically examining crosscultural communication in the context of ideological inequality is referred to as crosscultural communication behavior (Samovar & Porter, 1972; Holliday, 2011). However, there is a clear imbalance in cultural exchange between different countries in the extensive trading of cultural products, which is inevitably related to differences in the acceptance of imported cultural forms (Zhang, 2024). The academic community has conducted years of research on this and established a certain theoretical foundation. Hiliman Egbert (1988) proposed the cultural discount theory and the cultural adaptation theory. With the acceleration of globalization, crosscultural communication has become increasingly necessary

and important. The rapid development of film has made it an important channel for crosscultural communication. Film is a special cultural product that has both cultural and social attributes. However, in the process of dissemination, they may also encounter some problems such as cultural discount theory and cultural adaptation theory (Redfield, Linton, & Herskovits, 1936; Yan, 2010).

2.2 Cultural Discount Theory

2.2.1 Cultural Differences and Cultural Cognition

Movies are not only a form of entertainment or symbol that spreads entertainment functions through specific media but also carry and express a country's social life and national culture. In crosscultural film exchange, the economic development level, political form, social cognition, and historical system of different countries are not the same, so cultural differences are inevitable (Zhu, 2008; Yin, 1996).

2.2.2 Language Barriers

Language is an important carrier of culture, and language differences are also an important source of cultural discounts. The language and text in local film and television works often have a strong local cultural color, making it difficult to fully convey their original emotions, charm, and cultural connotations during the translation process. For example, some poems, idioms, etc (Hou, 2006). in Chinese film and television works are difficult to find corresponding expressions in other languages, which makes it difficult for overseas audiences to understand their deeper meanings.

2.2.3 Cultural Kinship

From the perspective of communication studies, they can see that audiences have different levels of acceptance. Chinese mythological films mainly explore the roots of Chinese culture, and those with similar cultural backgrounds are better able to appreciate the excellent traditional Chinese cultural connotations that directors want to express (Zhang & Wang, 2018). However, the cultural affinity in overseas markets is weaker, making it difficult for audiences to understand the connotations of mythological films during their dissemination.

2.2.4 Cultural Barriers in Overseas Markets

The institutional and cultural barriers in overseas markets can also lead to cultural discounts. Some Western countries impose strict restrictions and content censorship on imported film and television works, limiting the entry and dissemination of foreign film and television works. These barriers not only affect the exposure of works but may also lead creators to sacrifice the unique features of their works in order to cater to the local market (Dai & Qiu, 2004).

2.3 Cultural Adaptation Theory

The theory of cultural adaptation refers to the need to adjust cultural products according to the cultural characteristics of the target market in crosscultural communication, in order to improve their acceptance and influence. Run Yugang and Guo Xinru's *Cultural Discounts and Product Strategies for China's Foreign Cultural Trade* believe that cultural background, language, and historical traditions are important reasons for the emergence of cultural discounts. Choosing a cultural affinity market can to some extent alleviate cultural discounts (Jiang & Zhang, 2022). Liu Ling and Peng Zhubin's *Analysis of the Development Status and Strategies of China's Film and Television Trade* also believes that utilizing the cultural affinity advantage of the Han cultural circle is one of the strategies for Chinese films to go global (Zhang & Wang, 2018).

2.3.1 Adjustments During Language Translation

Language is an important carrier of cultural dissemination, and the dialogue and subtitles in movies need to be adjusted according to the language habits of the target market. For example, in the translation process, it is important to avoid direct translation and instead use expressions that are more in line with the local language style and cultural background (Feng, 2023). In addition, the language style and tone in mythological films should also be adjusted according to the cultural characteristics of the target market to enhance audience resonance.

2.3.2 Localized Changes to Cultural Elements

The cultural elements in movies, such as values, customs, historical background, etc., need to be adjusted according to the cultural cognition of foreign markets. For example, movies can introduce cultural symbols and story elements familiar to the target

market to enhance the audience's sense of identity. Meanwhile, Chinese mythological films can also simplify or explain some cultural elements that are difficult to understand, making them more easily accepted by audiences in other markets. In crosscultural communication of movies, to successfully achieve crosscultural dissemination, it is necessary to have a deep understanding of the target culture and ensure that the content meets its acceptance. Movies not only need to draw on the essence of local culture but also present it in the form of ethnic aesthetics and emotional art, while considering the interpretation ability of audiences from different cultural backgrounds, and triggering emotional resonance. Although cultural differences are challenges in crosscultural communication, they are also opportunities. Cultural differences are the foundation of crosscultural communication, and it is precisely because of the existence of differences that the necessity and urgency of crosscultural communication are more prominent. The core of crosscultural communication lies in the exchange and interaction between different cultures (Zhang, 2020).

2.3.3 Adjustment of Narrative Style

Audiences from different cultural backgrounds have different preferences for narrative rhythm and plot structure. But it is necessary to capture the global common culture and emotions when writing, and movies can adapt to the audience habits of the target market by adjusting their narrative style. For example, Western audiences may prefer linear storytelling and explicit conflict resolution, while Asian audiences may be more receptive to multi line storytelling and implicit emotional expression. The film production team can adjust the narrative rhythm and plot settings based on the cultural characteristics of the target market to enhance the audience's viewing experience (Jiang, Croucher, & Ji, 2021).

3 CULTURAL CONFLICT AND ADAPTATION IN CROSSCULTURAL COMMUNICATION OF CHINESE MYTHICAL FILMS

3.1 Conflict of Values and Cultural Differences

In Feng Zhenzhao's (2023) *Research on the Mechanism of Resolving Cross Cultural Conflicts*

from the Perspective of Embedding Theory, it is proposed that culture is a collection of human knowledge, religious beliefs, customs, and habits, all of which influence our way of thinking and speech. In different cultural backgrounds, the values subject will experience cultural differences due to different ways of negotiation. Similarly, in the dissemination of Chinese mythological IP, the dissemination of Chinese elements is also embedded. In the international dissemination of films, different cultural differences are inevitable. The academic community has extensively studied this issue, mostly based on cultural dimension theory, and believes that cultural heterogeneity is the main cause of conflict. However, crosscultural communication is not always smooth sailing. Cultural conflict is an inevitable problem in crosscultural communication, rooted in cultural differences. For example, Chinese culture emphasizes collectivism while Western culture emphasizes individualism, and this difference may lead to conflicts in values and behavior patterns (Feng, 2023; Zhang, 2024). In the past two days, the popular film *Ne Zha: The Birth of the Demon Child* has achieved both box office success and good reputation in China, but its response overseas is average. 65% of the audience in the North American market are Chinese, and European cinemas view it more as an "Eastern curiosity show". This phenomenon of "internal heat and external coldness" reflects cultural discounts. The film is based on traditional Chinese mythology, and the Chinese cultural symbols and values contained in the film are difficult for overseas audiences to fully understand. For example, elements such as bone cutting back to the father and spirit bead magic pill lack cultural background support overseas. The reasons why Yuan Shi Tianzun designated the reincarnation of the spirit bead and the antagonist setting of Shen Gongbao have not been clearly explained, making it difficult for Western audiences to understand the cultural connotations behind them. Secondly, there are a large number of dialect dialogues and localized humor points in the film, which makes it difficult to preserve the original meaning in translation, resulting in a lack of resonance among overseas audiences and insufficient overseas distribution and promotion. After the film achieved great success in China, overseas distribution was rushed and there was no optimal window period for early layout of international market measures. In addition, in *Fengshen Part One: Chao Ge Fengyun*, the film attempts to integrate traditional Chinese culture with Hollywood narrative mode, but fails to balance them well, resulting in the story appearing flashy and lacking

profound cultural connotations. The film pursues spectacle in visual effects but fails to effectively convey core values in cultural output, resulting in the superficial dissemination of cultural symbols.

3.2 Language Translation and Localization Challenges

When cultural products are produced in other languages, the audience needs to rely on dubbing or subtitles to understand the content. Even when using the same language, accents with regional characteristics may pose difficulties for the audience's understanding and appreciation, in which case dubbing and subtitles are equally indispensable (Yan, 2010).

There are some issues with the subtitles and dubbing of the overseas version of *Ne Zha: The Birth of the Demon Child*, such as the controversy surrounding the translation of "dragon" from "Four Seas Dragon King" into "dragon", as the image and meaning of "dragon" in Western culture are different from those in China. Some of the vocabulary and lines with Chinese cultural characteristics in *Fengshen Part One: Chaoge Fengyun* may also affect the audience's understanding if the translation is not accurate enough or not close enough to the language habits of overseas audiences. Secondly, when released over-seas, if the localization process cannot be well carried out, such as selecting suitable voice actors, adjusting subtitle translations to conform to local cultural habits, etc., the attractiveness of the film will be reduced. For example, if the voice of a voice actor does not match the character's image, or if the subtitle translation is too literal, it will make overseas audiences feel unnatural. This affects the perception of the film.

3.3 The Influence of Audience Cultural Background

Due to the lack of familiarity of Western audiences with Chinese mythological stories, it is difficult for them to resonate emotionally with the plot and characters in the film as Chinese audiences do. For example, in the movie *Ne Zha: The Birth of the Demon Child*, Ne Zha's shout "My fate is determined by me, not by heaven" may have a strong emotional resonance among Chinese audiences, but it may not have the same effect among Western audiences.

Western audiences are more accustomed to Western mythology and superhero stories, such as Greek mythology, Norse mythology, or Marvel

Universe, which have a deep cultural foundation and a wide audience base in Western culture.

3.4 Development of Digital Media Technology

Based on people's evaluations of Chinese mythological films from different eras on IMDB, they can find that people have a clearer and more comprehensive understanding of Chinese myths released more recently, and their evaluations are higher. This reflects that with the advancement of technology, film production companies have made Chinese mythological stories more vivid and interactive through technologies such as artificial intelligence, virtual reality, and motion capture, providing Western audiences with a better viewing experience (Du, 2023; Alforova et al., 2021). These technological means not only reduce the difficulty of understanding caused by cultural barriers, but also enhance the audience's immersion, thereby improving their acceptance of Chinese mythological stories.

4 SUCCESSFUL CASES OF CROSSCULTURAL ADAPTATION

One important way to resolve crosscultural conflicts is crosscultural adaptation, which is one of the core concepts of crosscultural communication. American anthropologist Robert Redfield (n.d) proposed that when two cultures continue to contact, the cultural model will change, which is called cultural adaptation. Therefore, as an important medium of communication, if movies want to successfully achieve crosscultural dissemination, they must have a deep understanding of the cultural background of the target audience and ensure that the content conforms to certain characteristics of the culture and the audience's acceptance level. For example, *Chang'an* has successfully adapted its story to better suit the tastes of international audiences in international dissemination, which is a successful case of cross-cultural adaptation.

Chang'an cleverly combines traditional Chinese culture with modern international elements by constructing a crosscultural story framework and telling a transnational love story between a Kazakhstani student and a Chinese youth. The film further deepens cultural integration and innovation, cleverly integrating the traditional Chinese opera *The Legend of the White Snake* into modern love stories,

using a dual narrative approach that preserves the essence of Chinese culture while making it easier for international audiences to accept. In addition, the film won the Best Feature Film Gold Award at the 30th Minsk International Film Festival, which not only affirmed its artistic value but also further enhanced its international influence. And *The Wandering Earth* has resonated globally with its profound universal values and themes. The film centers around the concept of "a community with a shared future for mankind" and showcases the unity and courage of humanity in the face of disasters. This universal value that transcends cultural barriers has successfully moved audiences worldwide (Lai, 2023). At the technical level, the visual effects and sound design of the film have reached the international first-class level, fully demonstrating the strong technical strength of China's film industry. At the same time, the film conveys the charm and confidence of Chinese culture through its unique narrative style and profound cultural connotations, allowing the world to see the dual breakthroughs of Chinese cinema in cultural expression and technological presentation.

The success of these two films lies not only in their respective cultural innovations and artistic achievements, but also in their ability to transcend cultural differences, establish emotional connections with global audiences, and become exemplary works of crosscultural communication. In crosscultural communication of movies, the key to success lies in a profound understanding of the target culture. Movies should not only absorb the essence of local culture, but also present it in the form of national aesthetic experience and emotional art. At the same time, it is necessary to consider the interpretation ability of audiences from different cultural backgrounds, ensuring that they can smoothly understand the content of the film and resonate emotionally. Only in this way can movies effectively spread between different cultures and promote cultural exchange and understanding (Li & Xiong, 2024).

5 THE VISUAL EFFECTS AND CROSSCULTURAL COMMUNICATION OF CHINESE MYTHICAL FILMS

With the support of digital media technology, the forms of movies have been greatly expanded and enriched. Visual effects, as an important component of movies, play a crucial role in attracting audiences and conveying cultural connotations. The outstanding

visual effects of Chinese mythological films provide strong support for their crosscultural dissemination. For example, movies such as *Megalodon 2* and *Jiang Ziya* have attracted a large number of domestic and foreign audiences' attention by presenting stunning visual effects through advanced digital special effects technology. According to the data provided by IMDB, overseas users have highly praised the visual effects of Chinese mythological animated films. They not only praised the visual presentation of the film but also recognized the technical aspects of the production process. The images produced by high-definition technology can bring a clearer and smoother viewing experience to the audience, which to some extent breaks down cultural barriers and makes Chinese mythological films more easily accepted by international audiences. However, visual effects are only one aspect of cross-cultural communication in movies, and the cultural connotations and values conveyed in movies are equally important. In the process of crosscultural communication, movies need to find a balance between visual effects and cultural connotations, attracting audiences through visual effects while conveying the unique charm of Chinese culture through cultural connotations.

6 CONCLUSIONS

The increasingly frequent cross-border exchanges in the film and television industries of various countries today have led to a highly unbalanced pattern of import and export transactions of film and television products between countries. Not only does it lead to an imbalance in cultural dissemination, but it also profoundly affects the exchange of global film culture and even the confidence attitude of the people in countries with cultural trade deficits towards their own national culture. However, with the support of digital media technology, the crosscultural dissemination of Chinese mythological films has broad prospects. However, to achieve its widespread dissemination internationally, it is necessary to have a deep understanding of the theoretical basis of crosscultural communication, handle cultural conflicts and adaptation issues properly, and continuously improve the visual effects of the film. By enhancing cultural sensitivity, achieving crosscultural adaptation, and improving visual effects, Chinese mythological films can better showcase the unique charm of Chinese culture on the international stage, promote communication and

under-standing between different cultures, and push Chinese culture toward the world .

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