

# A Study on the Cultural Misreading of Film Mulan

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## **Abstract:**

As a typical cross-cultural dissemination blockbuster, Disney's live-action film *Mulan* was released in China in September 2020, and has attracted worldwide attention. However, after its release in China, the film received low box office and poor word-of-mouth, which polarized the film compared to its high word-of-mouth abroad. In view of this phenomenon, this paper studies why the box office is low and why the word of mouth is poor. The first is to collect relevant data of films through the box office market and network channels; the second is to conduct comparative analysis with other types of cross-cultural dissemination films; the third is to study the film itself from the perspective of dissemination and culture. The film cost \$200 million to make but took in \$42 million at the Chinese box office, falling short of expectations. Douban.com, a Chinese film rating site, scored a low 4.9 points. It was found that the application of Chinese culture in the film does not conform to the cognitive mental state of Chinese viewers, resulting in cultural misreading. From the perspective of cognitive mental state and culture, the film is interpreted and the reasons are analyzed. The coders' cognitive dissemination bias towards Chinese culture leads to cultural misreading, which is reflected in the application, integration and dissemination of culture. The integration and expression of Chinese and Western cultures transmitted across cultures by taking Chinese culture as the shell are ineffective. The core culture uses western knight culture, which leads to the inadaptable cross-cultural mental state interpretation of Chinese audiences in the process of watching and decoding the film. This paper makes an in-depth analysis of the problems in films and puts forward countermeasures to improve the box office and reputation of such films. First, in the process of making films related to Traditional Chinese culture, it is necessary to understand Chinese culture, improve cognitive mental state and grasp the core of Chinese stories; second, in the process of making films related to Traditional Chinese culture, it needs to realize that if there are problems of cross-cultural dissemination, how to adopt real-time strategies is very important for the dissemination effect of films. Thirdly, the epidemic has caused great losses to the film industry around the world. In particular, cinema films are limited by the epidemic, and audiences cannot go to the cinema to watch movies, resulting in a collapse of the global box office. In view of the difficulties, it is necessary to make reasonable use of new media platforms to maximize the publicity effect with less investment and promote films through new media platforms.

**Keywords:** *Mulan, Chinese culture, Cultural misreading.*

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## I. INTRODUCTION

The film *Mulan*, produced by Disney Company, was released in China in September 2020. The success of the animated film *Mulan* has made *Mulan* a high-profile film, but after the release of the film, its word of mouth has been polarized in foreign countries and China, and its word of mouth in China has been declining rapidly since its release. The producers of the film come from Hollywood in the West, and the stories in the film are from ancient China. The goal of the film makers is to integrate Traditional Chinese culture into the film, and effectively use the strategy of cross-cultural communication to improve the acceptance of the film, and finally achieve both box office and public praise. There have been many successful examples such as *Crouching Tiger*, animated film *Mulan* and *Kung Fu Panda*, which have fully integrated Chinese culture and American values and achieved corresponding results in the application and dissemination of these films. However, *Mulan*, based on traditional Chinese folk stories, has used a large number of Chinese elements and hopes to achieve high audience acceptance through the combination of Chinese culture and American values. However, the opposite situation appears in the specific application process. Compared with other successful films of the same genre, the film *Mulan* has cracks in the fusion of Chinese and Western cultures, leading to a rapid decline in the film's reputation. First of all, in terms of the specific application of Chinese culture in the film, the film makes full use of Chinese elements. However, the application of Chinese elements in the film is essentially presented in the shell of film packaging, which belongs to the essential elements in the film. Secondly, cracks appear in the combination of Chinese culture and American values in the expression of cross-cultural communication, including the lack of localized transformation of Chinese culture and the stealing of cultural concepts, which leads to great differences in the understanding of the film by the viewers as decoders. Finally, it seems to be a film that combines Chinese culture with American values, but the core culture it expresses is the knight culture of the Western middle ages. As a filmmaker, there is a big error between the encoded meaning of the film and the decoding result of the film, which directly affects the acceptance and cognition of the film. Through the cultural interpretation of the film, we can understand the core meaning of the film more deeply.

## II. AN ANALYSIS OF THE CURRENT SITUATION OF MULAN

The film *Mulan* received a relatively low score of 4.9 on Douban.com, a Chinese film rating website, and a relatively good score of 81 percent on Rotten Tomatoes, an American film rating website. In terms of box office comparisons, the film, which cost \$200 million to make, grossed \$42 million in China and \$24.8 million in other countries, making the global box office less than satisfactory.

### 2.1 An Analysis of the Chinese Box Office of *Mulan*

By November 13, 2020, under the influence of the global COVID-19, the global box office of *Mulan* reached 66.8 million US dollars, including 42 million US dollars in China and 24.8 million US dollars in other countries and regions (Table I). The film was not released in theaters in North America. Due to the effective control of the epidemic in China, the competition of the films in mainland China was still

considerable. Such hollywood blockbuster was expected to stand alone, but the final box office only reached 21% of the \$200 million cost, which was far from the film producers' expectations and was a failure in China's box office. In contrast, the 1998 animated film Mulan was a success, earning nearly \$300 million for an investment of \$70 million. As a matter of fact, the filmmakers should be thankful that the film's box office revenue in China was concentrated in the early stage of its release. There are three main reasons for its box office success as follow. The first reason is that the film has been widely publicized globally, which has played a spreading effect to some extent and attracted viewers' intention to watch the film. Secondly, the film adopts the narrative mode of Hollywood movies, telling the content of ancient Chinese folktales, containing a large number of Chinese elements, which attracts the audience's expectation. Third, the leading actress in the film is Chinese actress Liu Yifei. It is the first time for A Chinese actress to play the leading role in a Hollywood blockbuster, so that the audience has a deeper sense of intimacy with the film. It is because of these reasons that the film gained a certain box office, but failed to reach the expected goal. At first, it was thought to be a global hit film, but the film's box office and reputation both showed obvious lack of momentum.

**TABLE I. Box office of Mulan**

<b>BOX OFFICE OF MULAN</b>		
Box office (US \$)	China	42 million
	Middle East	5.8 million
	Russia	4.4 million
	Thailand	2.8 million
	Other countries and regions	9.4 million
Total	64.4 million	
Time	Box office statistics of Mulan (as of November 13th, 2020)	

## 2.2 The Word-of-Mouth Performance of the Film Mulan in China

The film Mulan received polarized reviews after its release. In foreign countries, the film rating website Rotten Tomatoes (Rotten Tomatoes is an American website which mainly focuses on film reviews and is a famous film review website in America) achieved 81% freshness (Table II), indicating good word of mouth [1]. On the Chinese mainland, movie rating site Douban.com (Douban.com is an authoritative film rating website in China, with rating group covers a wide range of people, including professional film critics, film and television producers, and people from all walks of life. The rating of a film on douban.com basically represents the reputation of the film, and the total score is 10 points) gave a low score of 4.9, indicating poor word of mouth [2]. A total of 250,000 people rated the film, of which 85% scored 6 or less. The film's low score is reflected in many aspects, including the unreasonable use of Chinese culture in the film. The war scenes in the movie do not suit Chinese audiences, and the martial arts reflected in the film

do not conform to the characteristics of traditional Chinese martial arts. It is worth exploring the reasons why the same film generates polarized public praise in China and abroad.

**TABLE II. Word of mouth score of Mulan**

WORD OF MOUTH SCORE OF MULAN		
Score	Rotten Tomatoes	Freshness 81%
	Douban	4.9 point
Time	Score Statistics of Film Mulan (as of 2021.7.5)	

### **III. THE FILM MULAN FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF COGNITIVE PSYCHOLOGY AND CULTURE**

Compared with other successful Hollywood blockbusters that express Chinese culture, Mulan, an adaptation of an ancient Chinese story, has suffered from poor performance at the box office and word-of-mouth after its release in China. From the perspective of cognitive psychology and culture, the analysis of the film shows that the lack of cognitive psychology of the film coders to Chinese culture leads to certain problems in the expression of cultural application. It is precisely because of these problems that affect the expression of the film, which leads to the strangeness of Chinese viewers to the film. This is mainly reflected in three aspects: first, the film's application of Chinese culture is shallow, and only takes Chinese traditional culture as the shell of the package; second, in the strategy of cross-cultural communication, Chinese and Western cultures are not effectively integrated and spread; third, the core cultural output in the film is not the culture familiar to Chinese viewers, but the western traditional knight culture. These cultural expression problems eventually lead to the film's unsatisfactory box office and public praise in mainland China.

#### **3.1 As the Shell of the Package: the Application of Forms of Chinese Culture**

The film Mulan is adapted from the folk song Mulan Ci in the Southern and Northern Dynasties of China. Aiming at the traditional Chinese story, the film-maker reproduced the history of the story to a certain extent in the creation of the film. In the film, a large number of Chinese elements are used, including the phoenix representing auspicious harmony and rebirth from fire, clothing and modeling reflecting the characteristics of women in the Northern and Southern Dynasties, lanterns, couplets, tea ceremony and so on, which fully demonstrate the traditional Chinese culture and express the beauty of traditional Chinese artistic conception.

##### **3.1.1 Unique shape**

Phoenix is the king of birds in China, a symbol of good luck and harmony. The image of phoenix appears many times in the film, forming the artistic technique of repeated montage, enhancing the

importance of its image and enhancing the effect of narration. In the film, the image of the phoenix first appeared when Mulan destroyed the stone phoenix made by the family. Her father told Mulan that the phoenix is an emissary sent by the ancestors and can be reborn from the fire, which sets the stage for the whole story. The second appearance of the image of the phoenix is when Hua Mulan joined the army for her father, who took out a jade pendant with the image of a phoenix to pray for peace. The third appearance of the phoenix image is when Hua Mulan encountered difficulties on her way from the army, at this point the phoenix flying in the sky points the way for her to get out of the difficulties. The fourth appearance of the phoenix is when in Hua Jun was killed by a wizard and the phoenix awakens Mulan. At this point, the identities of Hua Jun and Mulan have are switched, representing a female "Mulan" reborn. The existence of phoenix represents that Hua Mulan has a very important "qi", which is the foundation of the war. The fifth appearance of the image of the phoenix is when Hua Mulan and the wizard communicated with each other and expressed their positions with goals. At this point, Hua Mulan represents the righteous, chose to fight for the country, accompanied by the phoenix. The sixth appearance of the image of the phoenix is when the military members and Mulan set out together, set foot on the road to save the country. When she was in a duel with her opponent, phoenix appeared in time. When she lost her most important sword, it was through the protection of phoenix that she finally successfully defeated her opponent and protected the country.

Red is the dominant color in costume styling. The application of Chinese red permeates the whole film. A large number of red tones are used in the plot of the Tulou, which makes the whole space a warm color style, implying the harmony between neighbors. The dress of Hua Mulan is mainly in red. The restless child Hua Mulan, The Hua Mulan who joined the army for father and the Hua Mulan who returned home from victory were wearing red dress, expressing extremely strong self-confidence from beginning to end. The clothing of ordinary soldiers is red, and the same red has a strong visual impact. Unlike the red color of soldiers, generals as the leaders of the whole army and a symbol of power are dressed in gold. The palace is resplendent and its main color is golden yellow, the traditional color of Chinese palaces and a symbol of imperial power.

In terms of makeup design, the film shows the image of Hua Mulan as a woman to be married. When she has reached the dating age, the elders dress her up carefully. The design of dressing and makeup is consistent with the makeup in the Southern and Northern Dynasties of China. The filmmakers recreate the makeup of women at the time, adding to the authenticity of the film and giving viewers more knowledge of China's history.

### 3.1.2 Traditional elements

Traditional Chinese elements are used in the film, including tea ceremony, calligraphy, couplets, architecture, lanterns and Chinese kung fu. By watching the film, the audience learn more about traditional Chinese culture and strength the recognition of Chinese culture in the film.

Under the guidance of the matchmaker, Hua Mulan mastered the method of tea ceremony. Through mastery of the method of tea ceremony, it can be known that quietness, calmness and politeness are qualities that traditional Chinese women should have, which are necessary skills before traditional marriage. When the emperor asked each family to choose a male to fight in the war, officials inside the palace were writing, displaying ancient Chinese characters. A pair of couplets pasted outside the matchmaker's house read: "May all lovers in the world be well. May all sentient beings in the world be sentient beings", which is taken from the Romance of the Western Chamber, a drama of the Yuan Dynasty in ancient Chinese literature. The words come from "sigh that men and women in the world are difficult to be bosom friends, wish all lovers will be well" by Wang Shifu in the Romance of the Western Chamber. However, the Romance of the Western Chamber was created in the Yuan Dynasty, while Mulan Ci tells the story of the Northern Wei Dynasty, which is different in time. In the film, the building of Tulou is Hua Mulan's home, which actually exists in China, but the location of the Tulou mainly exists in Fujian, Jiangxi and Guangdong in the south. However, it is inferred from Mulan Ci that Hua Mulan's home is in the north, so there is some error in the location setting. Lanterns are an element of traditional Chinese culture, which are normally used to decorate buildings and express a lively atmosphere. In the film, the Tulou including Hua Mulan's home was decorated with a large number of lanterns, which effectively set off the atmosphere of home. As far as the location of the lanterns are concerned, the lanterns in the film are set inside the house, but in reality, when Chinese families decorate lanterns, they are generally hung outside the house rather than inside the house. Chinese kung fu widely appear in the film. The biggest difference between Hua Jun and Mulan in kung fu lies in the "qi" in kung fu. In the condition of "Qi", she is Mulan and can defeat the enemy. "Qi" is also consciously used by filmmakers.

### 3.2 The Absence of Cognitive Psychology and Cultural Misreading

Along with the realization of commercial value, films also export ideology, and this subtle cultural communication has a significant impact on the social life, values and image communication of the people of the receiving countries. Therefore, Hollywood films have not only become a global commodity, but also an important carrier of American culture export. The important reasons for the success of the animated film Mulan lie in, on one hand, the application of cross-cultural communication strategy in the film, which effectively combines Chinese traditional culture with American values, and makes localized and popular transformation of other cultures, so that the two are integrated; on the other hand, the audiences effectively decoded and accepted the coded meaning of the filmmakers. However, the film Mulan failed to continue the success of animated films by adopting cross-cultural communication strategies. In the process of localization and popularization of Chinese culture, filmmakers failed to combine effectively with Western culture and values and encode according to their own understanding of cognitive psychology. As a result, the meaning generated by encoding does not correspond to the structure decoded by viewers, resulting in cognitive difference. The specific reasons can be attributed to: on the one hand, there is a lack of localized transformation of Chinese culture, on the other hand, there is a problem of changing cultural concepts [3].

### 3.2.1 The lack of localized transformation of Chinese culture

Cognitive psychology is information processing psychology. It uses the perspective of information processing to study the cognitive process of receiving, storing, and using information, including perception, attention, memory, mental image (i.e. representation), thinking, and language. Film coders achieve successful communication through the selection, utilization and reconstruction of Chinese culture and the integration of unique elements of American culture, which is an important strategy for the cross-cultural communication of American films [4]. However, in the film *Mulan*, the battle mode abandoned the localization transformation of Chinese culture and directly chose the ancient European battle mode. In the application of Chinese culture, the filmmakers should have made localization transformation, but chose the way of direct import.

War is an important theme of the film *Mulan*. In the decisive battle between the two armies, large-scale war scenes and traditional Chinese war modes are presented. In this war, the two sides were the Central Plains and the Nomads, but the movie makers imagined the battle scenes as ancient European battles. Instead of using and transforming the traditional Chinese war mode, the movie directly uses the ancient European war mode, which lacks the magnificent war scenes and the overall impact force is not strong, resulting in the lack of shocking visual effects.

To show *Mulan's* confident character, the film uses a line from *Mulan Ci*: "When two rabbits walk along the ground, people cannot tell whether it is male or female." The scene in the film shows *Mulan* was riding a horse alongside two rabbits running on the grass, which is a forced integration of Chinese elements. In the film, literal translation of Chinese characters is adopted. For example, "Two rabbits running side by side, I think one was a male, one was a female .But you know,you can't really tell when they're running that fast." and "4 ounces can move 1000 pounds". The film did not select, utilize and reprocess the traditional Chinese culture, but present it by direct utilization and translation, resulting in the failure to achieve the effect of expressing the corresponding artistic conception.

### 3.2.2 Cultural concept stealing

Culture-identity is a core concept in western studies. Cultural identity is a unique and innate characteristic of a certain culture and nation as well as conscious understanding and grasp of one's own culture [5]. Film, as a kind of media, has naturally become a way for people to gain recognition. The application of culture in film *Mulan* changed the concept of culture to some extent, so that the audiences did not get the corresponding cultural identity.

Sword is a very important element in the film, which is also the spiritual inheritance from her father to *Mulan*. The words "loyalty, courage and truth" are engraved on the sword, but there are no similar words in real Chinese sword. This is the film maker's processing art, which consciously integrates Chinese and Western cultures. At the end of the film, the word "filial piety" is engraved on the sword, but in reality, there is no tradition of carving "filial piety" on the sword in China. This is because Hollywood habitually

applied the western cultural aesthetic system in the process of creating Oriental cultural atmosphere, and finally engraved "loyalty, courage, truth and filial piety" on the sword. "Loyalty, courage, truth and filial piety" are the four characters engraved on Mulan's sword and the virtues emphasized in the film. Although these four characters can find their origins in Chinese culture, they make people feel strange when they are linked together. The core of Traditional Chinese thought comes from Confucianism, and "loyalty" in the Confucian classic, the Analects of Confucius, means "devotion" rather than "loyalty" to the emperor. The idea of loyalty to the king is a common motif in medieval literature. "Truth" is reflected in the film when "Hua Jun" was reborn as "Hua Mulan". Hua Mulan revealed her female body, took off her helmet and armor on horseback, and gained qi, by which she defeated the enemy in the battlefield. After the film was released in China, Chinese viewers were both familiar with the sword and unfamiliar with it, which is mainly because the producer of the film secretly changed the cultural concept in the cross-cultural communication strategy.

Qi is another very important element in the film. Hua Mulan's father mentioned that the qi in her body was the endless source of life before she experienced the sword, and he could not tell her, because only men can use the qi and if women use the qi, they may be humiliated or even exiled. In the patriarchal society, Hua Mulan only had the qi when she was in the female body, but lost the qi when she became a male, Hua Jun. Mulan and the wizard, as two women, both had qi. The wizard also had true qi, and she can convey the true qi into a powerful force of transformation. She was regarded as a sorceress who used magic by outsiders and rejected by outsiders, and discriminated and exiled from her childhood. In ancient China, the word "Zhengqi" originated from Chinese Taoism, which means the true yuan qi, which is the combination of innate qi and acquired qi. Many swordsman novels also mention true qi, which generally refers to a kind of energy existing in Dan Tian. When the meridians in the body circulate, it is just like Qigong. True qi is often innate energy, and it does not only exist in some particular women. Therefore, the application of "qi" does not correspond well with Chinese culture, indicating the problem of cultural identity.

### 3.3 The core of the Content: the Spread of Chivalric Culture

In the film, there are a lot of scenes where Mulan rides a horse, goes through hardships, and saves the country at the risk of her life. Based on the content of the film, it can be interpreted that the film shows the western knight culture. What the film tells is a western medieval knight story, but covered with a shell of Chinese elements. Chinese viewers are bound to have a large error when decoding the film, because the film is full of medieval literature, with many typical characteristics of chivalric literature. Through the film, Mulan can be interpreted as a female knight in Western Europe, and the character image can be clearly displayed and matched with the role in the film. However, the problem is that to interpret the chivalric literature, we must first understand the historical background of the middle Ages in Western Europe and the related culture of knights. For western viewers, the film satisfies the knight image in European and American culture, and thus meets their psychological expectation by satisfying their curiosity for oriental culture. However, for Chinese viewers, their understanding of knight culture is generally not very deep, so they will interpret it more from the background of Chinese culture, resulting in a large error. Therefore, the



film *Mulan* should not be viewed from the core of Chinese spirit, but should be interpreted directly from the perspective of chivalric culture. The cultural concepts, behavioral motives and environmental effects expressed in the film are in line with the chivalric culture.

### 3.3.1 Concept of chivalric culture

In the concept of knight culture, it mainly shows the knight's loyalty to the king, protection of the master, chivalry, establishment of meritorious service, fighting for justice and adventure. The three characters "loyalty, courage and truth" engraved on the sword of Hua Mulan seem to be the expression of Chinese culture, but in fact, the core of culture is the expression of chivalry. The core content of chivalry in chivalry culture is to embody "noble spirit and the relationship of allegiance". Specifically, chivalry also includes courage, loyalty, generosity, honesty, honor and other content, helping the danger and helping the needy, eliminating violence and good, chivalry and righteousness are also knights yearning for the spiritual realm. A medieval account shows that the bravery of knights can be measured in varying degrees: the bravery in combat is inferior to the bravery in combat with the enemy; a brave charge in battle is inferior to a brave fight in the melee; and none of the above is more honorable than a special performance on a special occasion in battle [6]. In the movie, Hua Mulan was brave, loyal, honest and attached great importance to honor. In contrast, the image of Mulan closely matches that of the knight.

In this film, Hua Mulan, as a female, is not only a representative of the knight, but also a typical representative of western feminism. A female knight is portrayed in the film (Figure 1). The film fully expresses the female consciousness. Mulan's affirmation of her self-worth is not only the affirmation of the female value shown in the film, but also a typical American feminism and individualism. The film shows an American individualism and Chinese tradition of modesty, heroic heroine, but also a real open, lively cowboy image of the west. In the film *Mulan*, the expression of feminism can be divided into three stages: a woman's self-awareness, the awakening of a woman's female consciousness, and the awakening of another woman. At the beginning, Hua Mulan showed her confident character from an early age. Facing her father's situation, she chose to join the army for her father without hesitation, expressing typical feminist characteristics. In the second stage, Hua Mulan exposed herself, not punished but successfully led the army. She broke through the bottleneck stage of physiological difference between men and women. As a particularly excellent woman, she was recognized by other men, indicating the awakening of female consciousness of Hua Mulan as a woman. In the final stage, inspired by Hua Mulan, the wizard broke out of her cocoon and finally fought against The Roran King and saved Hua Mulan. The emergence of this closed-loop form will give rise to more female self-awareness. In other words, the power of women's heroism to inspire other women to change themselves will not be a flash in the pan for the development of equal rights, but will truly stimulate the potential of women.

In addition, the characters' speech design is typical of Shakespearean drama. For example, The Emperor played by Jet Li says, "Fight for the kingdom." In fact, ancient Chinese emperors did not use such expressions when issuing orders. There is a popular narrative poem in the West called *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, which is regarded as the best work of the Arthurian legend. In the story, Sir Gawain

represents The Knights of King Arthur's Round Table when he was challenged to a duel by the Green Knights, but along the way he received a girdle with the power of invulnerability from a woman. Gawain concealed the truth of his possession of the treasure, fought with the Green Knight while wearing a belt, and was punished for it. The story runs through "loyalty, courage and truth", with special emphasis on the concept of "truth". From this perspective, it can be interpreted as the story model used in the film *Mulan*. "The stories of King Arthur are very popular in the West and the ethical ideas behind them are also accepted in the West. Film *Mulan* is loved by western audiences precisely because it matches western ethical ideas at a deeper level, and sets the Chinese story on the basis of western ethics. This is also the cleverness of the film *Mulan* [7]. However, for Chinese viewers, the characteristics of chivalry culture are generally unfamiliar (Figure 2).



Fig 1: Hua Mulan



Fig 2: Medieval European knight

### 3.3.2 Motivation of chivalry

The western knights and the ancient Chinese knights have similarities and differences to some extent. The western knights and the ancient Chinese knights in the novel are both brave in taking risks and making sacrifices, and have the spirit of bravery and persistence. However, their motives and purposes of such behaviors are quite different. The purpose of knight's behavior comes from class status, knightly duty and religious belief. They hold the belief of meritorious service and promotion, with strong utilitarian. In contrast, Chinese swordsman is entirely based on chivalrous spirit, personal courage and conscience, as well as the anger of social reality injustice, to a large extent, for personal motivation. In the film, the motive of Hua Mulan's behavior was consistent with that of western knights. Hua Mulan was a brave and fearless character who dared to take risks and sacrifice herself. There was a set of rules of conduct that they had to follow, which clearly defined their powers and duties, and they had to be loyal to the Lord and the king. Therefore, they could not act against the "laws" made by their lords and kings, and their words and actions were restricted by the "laws". Knights fight for personal gain and honor. Among the characters represented by Hua Mulan, including her father and other characters all abided by the "law" made by the king, so hua Mulan joined the army for her father.

In the adventures of chivalric culture, opponents are not ordinary people, but tigers, monsters or witches, and they fight bravely against their opponents. The witch, played by Gong Li, was Mulan's antagonist, and both of them were able to use "qi". After ontinous fighting, Mulan finally won [8].

### 3.3.3 The event environment of knights

Western chivalric literature is influenced by religion and Greek mythology, and most of the chivalric activities described by them are mysterious, weird, and romantic. Usually, after experiencing hardships, knights finally overcome all kinds of difficulties, which is the typical environment settings. The filmmakers set up a similar environment for the story of Mulan.

In the film Mulan, there was a great leap in time and space after Hua Mulan joined the army in place of her father. In the film, Hua Mulan experienced hardships and finally reached the military camp. In the following life in the military camp, she went through hard training and became a qualified soldier. Finally, after experiencing "death", she was reborn as Hua Mulan from the Hua Jun and led everyone to defeat the enemy. This is consistent with the environment settings of knight culture.

## **IV. REFLECTIONS ON THE POOR REVIEWS OF FILM MULAN**

The film Mulan has shown a poor performance in both box office and public praise in mainland China, which is worth the filmmakers' deep reflection. At the same time, combined with the reasons obtained from the above analysis, corresponding strategies are put forward for this type of films, so as to improve the box office of the film, enhance the reputation of the film, and provide a reference for other films in the future. For the Hollywood commercial films that use Chinese traditional culture, first of all, attention should be paid to the localization of Chinese traditional culture, rather than just adopting and using it. Secondly, it should pay attention to the effective integration of Chinese culture, western culture and western values, so as to effectively spread the film. Finally, new media platforms should be employed to effectively publicize and broadcast films, so as to achieve a win-win situation of box office and public praise.

### 4.1 Improve Cognitive Psychology and Gain a Deeper Understanding of Chinese Culture

In the process of making films related to traditional Chinese culture, it is necessary to understand Chinese culture and grasp the core of Chinese stories. The biggest problem of film Mulan is that the filmmakers do not understand Chinese culture. The western chivalry culture is used in the whole film, which makes Chinese viewers feel strange to the film. Taking the animated film Kung Fu Panda as an example, the film makers had a deep understanding of Chinese culture and tell Chinese stories, the film fully displayed the schools of Chinese martial arts and embodied Chinese traditional culture, and thus the film achieved success in both box office and critical acclaim. Therefore, filmmakers need to understand Chinese culture from multiple perspectives to create high-quality films.

### 4.2 Effective Implementation of Intercultural Communication Strategies

In the production of films related to Traditional Chinese culture, there is a problem of cross-cultural communication. How to implement strategies is very important for the communication effect of films. Cross-cultural communication strategy is very important. Taking the martial arts film Crouching Tiger,

Hidden Dragon as an example, it has similarities and differences compared with traditional Chinese martial arts films, which reflect the importance of cross-cultural communication strategies. The scenes set in the film are characterized by typical Chinese elements such as Chinese kung fu, and the heroes in the film exist in all corners of the country. All these allow the audience to feel the Chinese martial arts culture, so the film can be accepted by Chinese viewers. At the same time, the film effectively blends western values, with the female protagonist, Yu Jiaolong, rocking the entire folk society. Unlike the traditional Chinese chivalrous image, she enters into the swordsman society to find herself, which is a breakthrough of traditional Chinese culture to a certain extent. This can be accepted by Chinese audiences and consistent with the characteristics of seeking freedom in western mainstream culture, so the film can be accepted by Western audiences. The success of the film is that it uses Western values to tell the Chinese story. At the same time, the filmmakers effectively implemented Stewart. Hall's application of coding and decoding theory in school of Birmingham. After film producers encode films, different decoding effects are often produced due to structural differences of viewers in cultural relations and social backgrounds, so it is necessary for film producers to do a good job in the image expression of culture when encoding films. Among them, the film should first fully display the traditional Chinese culture, and then integrate the Western culture and values into the film to achieve the dissemination effect of the film.

#### 4.3 Make Proper Use of New Media Platforms

The film industry around the world has suffered a great loss due to the epidemic. In particular, cinema films were limited by the epidemic, and audiences could not go to the cinema to watch movies, leading to a collapse of the global box office. In view of the dilemma, we need to make reasonable use of new media platforms to maximize the publicity effect with less investment. Film publicity can be carried out through new media platforms. For example, related videos can be shot combining the topics of stars and films and the film information can be spread on new media platforms. The short video platform can also be combined with film creators to interact with the audience; In addition, the film can be broadcast on the platform of new media, which is first released in cinemas and then broadcast on the new media platform to maximize the film's communication effect and revenue. When movies are broadcast in new media, they can be paid online or broadcast free in cooperation with platforms. Taking the movie "Lost in Russia" as example, which was unable to be screened in theaters due to the epidemic, the movie's producer, Joy Media, signed a cooperation agreement with Bytedance. After Bytedance paid 630 million yuan to Hujoy Media, the movie was released for free on ByteDance's Toutiao, Douyin and Watermelon video platforms. Within 14 hours after its release, 78,000 comments were made on the watermelon video. On Toutiao, the program "watching lost in Russia for free at home" garnered 1.14 billion views and 140,000 discussions, respectively. The film spread quickly and effectively through the new media platforms, presenting a win-win effect. In the context of the new media era, attention should be paid to the dissemination of cinema films. On this basis, make reasonable use of new media platforms and fully combine with cinema to maximize the effect of film communication.

## V. CONCLUSIONS

Through the analysis of film *Mulan* from the perspective of cognitive psychology and culture, the reasons for the film's low box office and rapid decline in public praise in China are more clearly sorted out. The reason is that the cultural core of the film *Mulan* is based on the western knight culture, while Chinese culture is just a shell, which directly leads to the low box office of Chinese viewers. Compared with *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, animated film *Mulan* and animated film *Kung Fu Panda*, the film *Mulan* is indeed lacking in the use of culture. This also provides more advice for Hollywood commercial films to create Chinese stories: On the one hand, as a film coder, it needs to pay attention to the excavation and in-depth understanding of Chinese traditional culture, and carry out localization and popular transformation while ensuring the correct use of Chinese culture; On the one hand, cross-cultural communication strategies should focus on the integration of Chinese culture, Western culture and American values for effective communication. In addition, the audience of the film is from all over the world, so the application of culture should be taken into account in an all-round way to accurately grasp the meaning of the film code, so that the audience can accurately understand and accept the meaning when decoding it.

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