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by

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**Causes, Effects, and Countermeasures? A Qualitative Research on the
Relationship between Cultural Discount and Film Stories in the
Cross-cultural Communication**

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Dedication

To my family, for their love, support, and encouragement

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Abstract

Causes, Effects, and Countermeasures? A Qualitative Research on the Relationship between Cultural Discount and Film Stories in the Cross-cultural Communication

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In 2017, the Chinese film box office surpassed \$86 billion, making it the second largest film market just behind the United States. However, a series of data show that the international competitiveness of the Chinese film industry is still very low, which has limited its potential to influence Chinese culture more broadly. This dilemma could be accounted for by both economic and cultural reasons. The special cultural properties of the films provide a new perspective, the cultural discount, for the research of international competitiveness of the film industry. Although the influence of the overseas audience's reception of the film by the cultural discount has been confirmed, how the cultural discount affects the international competitiveness of the film industry, or what roles the cultural factor plays in the film industry, provide more diversified perspectives for this study to research on this topic.

This research mainly focuses on the relationship between the cultural discount and the international competitiveness of the film story. Based on Story approach, concepts of

narratology, cultural geography, cultural distance, and linguistic affinity are applied to analyze how is culture encoded in the film story to produce the cultural discount. In different story elements such as structure, setting, characters, genres and meaning, the reasons that may cause cultural discounts in the process of film production are found and analyzed respectively. The function mode of the cultural discount in the cross-cultural communication between films and the foreign audiences is also concluded by utilizing Encoding/decoding theory. Three American films have been taken as a case study to explore their methods of reducing the cultural discount from the angle of narrative transparency. Using clear narrative structure to promote the audience's understanding of the film plot, applying the prototype story and universal life experience to shape the film characters, and exploring the common feelings in different cultures to convey the meaning and guide the audience to correctly accept, are the successful approaches to reduce cultural discount in cross-cultural communication. In combination with the current situation of Chinese films, the internationalization of Chinese stories is discussed as a practical application of the research conclusion.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

RESEARCH CONTEXT

In 2017, the Chinese film box office surpassed 559 billion yuan¹, making it the second largest film market in the world just behind the United States. However, a series of data show that the international competitiveness of the Chinese film industry is still very low, which has limited its potential to influence Chinese culture more broadly.

In 2017, the domestic box office of Chinese films reached 30.11 billion yuan, and the overseas box office of nearly 100 domestic films released overseas totaled 42.53 billion yuan². In the same year, the domestic box office of American films was \$9.333 billion, and the overseas revenue reached \$29.5 billion³. The overseas box office of American films is about 2.8 times that of the domestic box office, while the overseas box office of Chinese films is only about 14 percent of the domestic box office. Chinese films, have entered into overseas commercial cinemas, are still limited in number. Zhang Yimou's film *A Woman, a Gun and a Noodle Shop* has only been released in five theaters in the United States. *If You Are the One 2*, which did well at the domestic box office in China, was only released at AMC theaters in major Chinese communities in North America, and its overseas box office was also mostly created by overseas Chinese. *Aftershock*, which cost more than \$18 million, grossed just \$60,000 at the U.S. box office⁴, and *Red Cliff*, which cost \$80 million and was aimed at the U.S. market, grossed just over \$620,000 in the U.S.⁵. Moreover, many foreign film producers do not buy the distribution rights for

¹ 2017 China Yearly Box Office Result. Retrieved from May 1, 2019. From <https://www.boxofficemojo.com/intl/china/yearly/?yr=2017&p=.htm>

² 2017 China Yearly Box Office Result. Retrieved from May 1, 2019. From <https://www.boxofficemojo.com/intl/china/yearly/?yr=2017&p=.htm>

³ 2017 Yearly Box Office Result. Retrieved from May 1, 2019. From <https://www.boxofficemojo.com/yearly/chart/?yr=2017&p=.htm>

⁴ *Aftershock* Mojo Box Office. Retrieved from May 1, 2019. From <https://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=aftershock13.htm>

⁵ *Red Cliff* Mojo Box Office. Retrieved from May 1, 2019. From <https://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=redcliff.htm>

Chinese films, but only the remake right. Echoing the overseas box office fiasco, Chinese films also missed out on major awards at the major international film festivals.

This dilemma could be accounted for by both economic and cultural reasons. The special cultural properties of the films and the curiosity of the dilemma of the Chinese film industry provide a new perspective, the cultural discount, for the research of international competitiveness of the film industry.

The appearance of the cultural discount after cross-border deals is due to the foreign audience's difficulty in identifying the lifestyle, values, history, institutions, myths and physical environments of films from different culture. The understanding of language, dubbing, subtitling and different accents interfere with the audience's appreciation of the film (Hoskins and Mirus, 1998). According to Colin Hoskins's theory of cultural discount, the film, as a cultural product realizing expression with the aid of the imagination, metaphor, and symbolism through the picture and sound, may face cultural distance from the viewer through cross-cultural communication. The degree of cultural discount becomes an important factor affecting the international competitiveness of the film industry (Hoskins 1998)⁶.

RESEARCH STATEMENT

This research will mainly focus on the relationship between the cultural discount and the international competitiveness of the film story.

This study will mainly analyze how is culture encoded in the film story to produce the cultural discount. Firstly, this study will use Robert McKee's Story approach as the framework for exploring the factors in the occurrence of cultural discount in film stories. McKee bases his understanding of "story" on the overall structure of the story. In his estimation, a story is a series of acts that lead to the story's climax which brings about absolute and irreversible change. In order to complete this kind of irreversible change, certain elements are needed to organize the story: structure, setting, genre, character, and

⁶ Colin Hoskins. *Global Television and Film: An Introduction to the Economics of the Business*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998

meanings⁷. In addition, McKee suggests a story needs a basic form, the beginning, the development, the climax, and the ending. Then, based on Robert McKee's Story approach, concepts of narratology, cultural geography, cultural distance, and linguistic affinity will be applied in this research to analyze the causes of cultural discount in the film story by observing different story elements.

By utilizing Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding theory, the possible mechanism and the function mode of the cultural discount in the cross-cultural communication between films and the foreign audiences will also be discussed in order to analyze the impact of cultural discount on the cross-cultural communication effect of film stories. Because this thesis will study primarily on the encoding process, I will focus on the perspective of producers.

Based on these analyses, this research will take three American films as a case study to explore their methods of reducing the cultural discount in the film story and achieving cross-cultural communications. The theory of transparent narrative from Robert Olson will be chosen as the theoretical perspective to find the answer to this case study. By summarizing the research results, some suggestions will be put forward to the Chinese film production based on the current situation of its international communications.

RESEARCH SIGNIFICANCE

Although the influence of the overseas audience's reception of the film by the cultural discount has been confirmed in former studies, how the cultural discount affects the international competitiveness of the film production in different countries, or what roles the cultural factor plays in the film story, are still unclear.

Using the cultural discount theory to analyze the film industry would research include both economic and cultural perspectives, which could study the theme more thoroughly and deeply. Compared with the previous research, this article creatively introduces the cultural discount to the research, which could help to grasp the characteristics of the international competitiveness of the film industry, and could make

7 Robert McKee. *Story: Style, Structure, Substance, and the Principles of Screenwriting*. NYC: HarperCollins, 2010, P42

some contributions of providing a basic analytical framework and methodology reference to further complete the theory of international competitiveness of the film industry. It also has the certain reference value of improving the theory of cultural trade and industrial studies. Besides, the cultural discount is a ubiquitous phenomenon in the global cultural trade. The new research perspective, based on the cultural discount theory, of the international competitiveness of the film industry also has important reference significance for other general cultural trade theory and other cultural industry research.

In terms of social significance, this research will help to arouse the attention of film workers on cultural factors, especially the cultural discount phenomenon, and improve the international competitiveness of the film industry from the perspective of culture. The film producer could refer to the specific analysis of the cultural discount in different elements of the film story to avoid the related possible generating reason for the cultural discount in the production process. At the same time, it would also provide some reference for the relevant countries, whose film industries have relatively weak competitiveness in the global market, to revise and perfect the related policies of the development of the film industry in order to improve their national cultural soft strength, which has great practical value.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The International Competitiveness of the Film Industry

When it comes to the international competitiveness of the industry, the research tends to focus on the economic aspects. The classical theory is the competitive advantage or diamond model theory by Michael Porter, a professor of management of Harvard University. It recognizes four pillars of research (factor conditions, demand conditions, related and supporting industries, firm structure, strategy, and rivalry⁸) that one must undertake in analyzing the viability of a nation competing in a particular international

⁸ Michael E. Porter. *The Competitive Advantage of Nations*. Washington DC: Free Press, 1998

market, but it also can be used as a comparative analysis tool in recognizing which country a particular firm is suited to expanding into (Porter, 1998).

Chinese scholar Huawei Du uses the diamond model to analyze the international competitiveness of the Chinese film industry and finds that the industry develops fast in the aspect of the investment in infrastructure and the salary of employees instead of the aspect of the demand condition, supporting industries, and the strategy⁹. Shuyu Qi and Guojun Yin take the diamond model as the basic framework to make a contrastive analysis of the international competitiveness of the film industry of 15 typical countries and put forward several strategies for Chinese film industry¹⁰.

Further, several scholars revise the diamond model according to their research needs in order to make this basic theory more suitable and effective in their studies. Using film products as the core, Xiaoling Li and Xiaomei Wang refer to the earth's enclosure structure and establish an evaluation system of the international competitiveness of the film industry¹¹, which has the soft power system and the hard power system as the main body, uses the visual externalization elements as the surface layer, and depends the political and economic situation as the periphery. In a 2011 global media industry development report, written by Zhengrong Hu, researchers Jihui Cai and Runjue Wang add four elements, including the entrepreneur, the worker, the professional manager, and the politician¹², on the basis of the diamond model to study the internationalization of the film industry. Similarly, Fangqi Ling takes five indexes, involving the international market share, the export growth advantage, trade competitiveness, revealed comparative advantage, and the net export revealed comparative advantage, into consideration to study the international competitiveness of the Chinese film industry¹³, in order to predict

⁹ Huawei Du. Analysis of the International Competitiveness of the Chinese Film industry, Journal of Economy and Management, vol.4 (2012): 105-109

¹⁰ Shuyu Qi, Guojun Yin, Evaluation and Suggestion of the International Competitiveness of the Chinese Cultural Industry, Journal of International Administration, Vol.2 (2015): 50-53

¹¹ Xiaoling Li, Xiaomei Wang, Construction of the Evaluation System of Chinese Film International Competitiveness under the Wave of Soft Power Competition, Beijing Film Academy Press, (2011)

¹² Zhengrong Hu, Global Media Industry Development Report. Beijing: SSAP, 2011

¹³ Fangqi Lin, Research on International Competitiveness of Chinese Cultural Industry based on Diamond Model, Journal of Nanchang University, (2012)

the internationalization of the Chinese cultural industry development. Besides, the film value chain, the film technology chain, and the film culture chain are introduced as industrial chain factors by Liu Yang to explore the mechanism and principle of the international competitiveness, which could help people to realize the internal rule of the film industry competitiveness¹⁴.

There is no doubt that as a kind of industry, the competitiveness theory and method are suitable for the film industry. Economic factors have played an irreplaceable role in the improvement of the international competitiveness of the film industry. However, this is not sufficient. The film industry is different from general industry, in which it also has a unique cultural attribute, the serious cultural preference. What kind of movies the audience choose, to a large extent, depends on the understanding of film culture and identity. Using cultural discount to analyze the film industry would research on both economic and cultural perspective, which could study the theme more thorough and deeply. Comparing with the previous research, this article creatively introduces cultural factors to the international competitiveness of the film industry, which could help to fully grasp the characteristics and regularity of the international competitiveness of the film industry, and could make some contributions of providing a basic analytical framework and method reference for improving the theory of the international competitiveness of the film industry.

Cultural Discount Research

The concept of “cultural discount” was put forward by Canadian scholar Hoskins and Mirus in their article Reasons for the US dominance of the international trade in television programmes in 1988, which also was the first time to apply the concept of “cultural discount” in the research on the film and television program trade¹⁵. In 1998, in the book Global Television and Film—An Introduction to the Economic of the Business,

14 Yuting Jin. Study on Industrial Competence Factors of Cultural Creative Industry Based on Diamond Model, Journal of Northeast Normal University, (2010)

15 Hosins, Mirus, Reasons for the US dominance of the international trade in television programmes, 1988

these two scholars further studied the cause, performance, and control strategy of the cultural discount. They argue that the appearance of the cultural discount after cross-border deals is due to the foreign audience's difficulty in identifying the lifestyle, values, history, institutions, myths and physical environments. The understanding of language, dubbing, subtitle and different accents interfere with the audience's appreciation of the film (Hoskins and Mirus, 1998)¹⁶. In further studies, they identified the cultural impact of different types of programs on trade and found that the strength of cultural discounts varied depending on the type of product.

In the later research, researchers tried to find the cause of the cultural discount in the global media product market. They verified that language barrier is the important reason for the high cultural discount. Due to the differences of language, different thinking modes and narrative logic will greatly reduce the local acceptance of international media products.

In the aspect of the result of the cultural discount, several case studies have been conducted to specify the effect. Francis Lee, from the Chinese University of Hong Kong, empirically analyzed the cultural discount for different types of films in East Asia and proved that the comedy has the biggest cultural discount, and the science fiction film is most widely accepted in his series of studies on cultural discounts, which take the box office of the Hollywood film in East Asia and Hong Kong as examples (Lee, 2006)¹⁷.

In recent years, some scholars began to empirically analyze the trade competitiveness of film industry from the perspective of cultural geography. In 2001, with the help of predecessors' theory and the research of the cultural distance data, Jeongho Oh found that the farther distance a country has with the American culture, the higher market share of its film and television products in its domestic market it will have¹⁸. In 2003, during

¹⁶ Colin Hoskins. *Global Television and Film: An Introduction to the Economics of the Business*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998

¹⁷ Lee.L.Francis. "Cultural Discount and Cross-Cultural Predictability: Examining the Box Office Performance of American Movies in Hong Kong", *Journal of Media Economics*, vol.4 (2006): 259-278

¹⁸ Oh, Jeongho. "International Trade in Film and the Self-Sufficiency Ratio", *The Journal of Media Economics* vol.1, (2001): 31-44

evaluating the impact of cultural discount in content trade value, through comparing the American television program exporting price in more than 30 countries, McFadyen, Hoskins and Finn found that different countries, which have different cultures, buy TV programs at a relatively low price, and countries, which have similar cultures, import TV programs at a relatively high price. Cultural distance affects the international competitiveness of TV programs to some extent. In 2008, Fu and Lee found a similar situation in the Singapore film market that the further away from Singapore's culture, the lower the box office of the Singapore films it has. Therefore, to enter the international film market and improve the international competitiveness of domestic products, cultural consultation should be carried out to overcome cultural barriers in the region (Fu and Lee, 2008)¹⁹.

Some Chinese scholars have constructed relevant models to combine the cultural discount with the international competitiveness of the film industry. Zhizhong Qian introduces non-economic factor resources such as reputation resources, cultural discounts and film innovation ability to his model²⁰. Xiaoling Li further details the affecting model of the international competitiveness of the film industry, which involves both soft and hard power. He thinks the film product is the soft power center of the film industry, which could be broken down as the film audience, cultural context, filmmakers, international awards and a series of non-economic factors. He built a class earth structure model diagram of the international competitiveness evaluation system of the Chinese film²¹.

These studies reveal the impact of the cultural discount on the development of the international competitiveness of the film, which provides a theoretical foundation and reference for this study to choose the cultural discount as the perspective. The imperceptible influence of the overseas audience's reception of the film by the cultural

19 Fu.WW, Lee.T. "Economic and Cultural Influences on the Theatrical Consumption of Foreign Films in Singapore", *Journal of Media Economics*, (2008): 21-27

20 Zhizhong Qian. "Analysis of Influencing Factors of the International Competitiveness of the Film Industry", *Journal of Nanjing Art Institute*, vol.4 (2007)

21 Xiaoling Li. "Research on International Competitiveness of Chinese Films since the New Era", *Journal of Lanzhou University*, vol.5 (2008)

discount has been confirmed and found. Their different analytical perspectives also provide the space and significance of the study. However, because the word "cultural discount" has appeared only in recent years in the research field, there are still relatively few related research studies on the combination of cultural discount and the international competitiveness of the film industry.

Studies of the cultural discount have caused the attention of scholars, and some scholars have begun to notice that cultural discount could impact the international competitiveness of the film industry. As Chao Zou and Zhen Pang argue in their article that the cultural discount becomes the major obstacle for Chinese films to enter the international market²². However, how the cultural discount affects the international competitiveness of the film industry, or what roles the cultural factor plays in the film industry, are still unclear in the existing research, which lacks a specific study approach. Therefore, some strategies for reducing cultural discount are also in the form. The important goal of this research is to propose an analytical framework of how the cultural discount influences the international competitiveness of the film industry, which could be used to understanding the relationship between these two concepts and be taken as a reference to find the improvement of international competitiveness.

The Methodological Approach

By comparing the previous literature and research findings, researchers mainly use the empirical approach to analyze the impact of the cultural discount on the international competitiveness of the film industry. Quantitative analysis is widely used, and the qualitative analysis involves case study.

For countries with nearby geographical locations, which share the similar culture to some extent, the impact of the cultural discount on the international exchange of the film industry varies in different cases. Based on telephone surveys in four of the largest cities in the Mexico, Jose'-Carlos Lozano presents data about film consumption that suggest

²² Chao Zou, Zhen Pang, Analysis on Cause, Effect and Countermeasure of Cultural Discount of Chinese Movie, Journal of Beijing City University, 2013 No.5, P39-44

that cultural proximity factors are stronger in Mexican northerners than their geographical, commercial and historical proximity to the US²³. The concept of cultural discount seems to apply in this part of Mexico, due to the differences in language, practices, and traditions despite the proximity and familiarity with US culture (Lozano, 2011)²⁴. Drawing on box office data, audience surveys and interviews with industry players, Huw David Jones from University of York argues that European films generally perform badly in the UK box office because they suffer from a heavy 'cultural discount'. Those European films which do 'breakout' are either English language films with qualities designed to appeal to a mainstream British audience or foreign-language films with cultural elements which many British cinemagoers are already familiar with (Jones, 2017)²⁵.

Some scholars tend to choose the case from countries, whose culture are totally different, as the sample to study the cultural discount influence. Francis Lee analyzes box office figures from 1989 to 2004 to examine whether Hollywood movies of different genres are more or less subject to cultural discount and lack of predictability when they travel to Hong Kong. The results show that comedies are highly particularistic and that science fiction is apparently the most universal²⁶. Mixed results are obtained for other movie genres. Later, the writer makes another empirical analysis of examining the box office performance of 585 U.S movies from 2002 to 2007 in nine East Asian markets. It proves that different types of cinematic qualities and achievement would be discounted by cultural differences to different extents. Non-drama awards relate positively to box office receipts, but drama awards relate negatively to box office receipts (Lee, 2010)²⁷.

²³ Straubhaar J, Beyond Media Imperialism: Asymmetrical Interdependence and cultural proximity. *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 8: 39-59

²⁴ Jose´-Carlos Lozano. Consumption of US television and films in Northeastern Mexico, the *International Communication Gazette*, SAGE, (2011)

²⁵ Huw David Jones. The box office performance of European films in the UK market, *Studies in European Cinema*, vol.14 (2017): 153-171

²⁶ Lee.L.Francis. "Cultural Discount and Cross-Cultural Predictability: Examining the Box Office Performance of American Movies in Hong Kong", *Journal of Media Economics*, vol.4 (2006): 259-278

²⁷ Lee.L.Francis. Cultural discount of cinematic achievement: the academy awards and U.S. movies' East Asian box office, *Studies in Culture & Art*, vol. 4 (2010): 239-263

Chinese scholar Lingxia Chen uses content analysis to find the Korean film box office in the American market and their artistic characteristics, and on the basis of text analysis, he also points out that the strong consciousness of political communication in the Korean film and excessive nationalism are main causes of their large cultural discount²⁸.

The approaches in these previous researches include the questionnaire survey, the content analysis, the box office statistics, the experiment, the interview, the case study, the text analysis, etc., which offer many examples to refer and imitate. Besides, the object selected by the research is also very extensive. Except for the United States, Europe, China and other world major film markets, South Korea, Mexico, the Middle East, Africa and other regional market are also be taken into investigations. The selection of objects in each study is also very consistent with the needs of the research and is representative. Generally, most scholars tend to choose the quantitative analysis to learn the cultural discount in the international competitiveness of the film industry, which involves a large number of calculations and data processing. The data and their sources are also relatively diverse, ranging from official government statistics to collection by private enterprises. From the research results, the majority of the quantitative analysis is the negative impact of the cultural discount on the international competitiveness of the film industry.

Conclusion

The above-mentioned sections are the progressive process of the summarization of the research status of the cultural discount influence on the international competitiveness of the film industry. Many researches using the diamond model and its different modifications to study the international competitiveness of worldwide film industries. Due to the unique cultural attribute of the film industry, only studying this topic from the economic perspective is not sufficient. This imperfection let the cultural discount to be selected as a more thorough entry point to study this topic, which provides us an opportunity to combine the cultural perspective with the economic perspective in later

²⁸ Linxia Chen, The artistic form, national image and cultural discount of Korean films, *Studies in Culture & Art*, vol. 6 (2013): 185-194

studies. Although the imperceptible influence of the overseas audience's reception of the film by the cultural discount has been confirmed in the former studies, how the cultural discount affects the international competitiveness of the film industry, or what roles the cultural factor plays in the film industry, provide more diversified perspectives for me to research on this topic. Propose the mechanism and function of the cultural discount in the film industry in the process of global spread remains the main problem toward researchers. The extensive use of quantitative analysis methods in previous studies also inspires me to add a new layer to that research by looking more qualitatively at how a selection of films deal with the issue of reducing the cultural discount during the process of cross-cultural spreading. How to find out the cause or actual performance of the cultural discount in the international communication of the film from the perspective of the qualitative analysis or the textual research could supplement the existing research results and make the research in this direction more comprehensive and systematic.

METHODOLOGY

This exploratory research will mainly focus on the relationship between the cultural discount and the international competitiveness of the film industry. The film industry not only has economic attributes, but also has cultural characters. These cultural connotations appear in the process of film production, and gradually are revealed in the subsequent distribution, screening, and the development process of the film derivatives. The cultural discount in the film industry occurs in the process of film production. The cultural factor of the film runs through the story told in the film, so the story becomes the cultural core of the film industry.

This study will take Robert McKee's Story approach as the research framework to explore the factors in the occurrence of cultural discount in film stories. Stuart Hall's Encoding/decoding theory provides a perspective for this study to explore the impact of cultural discounts in film stories on the international communication of films. From the perspective of the producer, the encoding theory could help to explore the influence of cultural processing in film stories on cross-cultural communication. Starting from the

receiver, the decoding theory takes the film audience as the perspective to explore how the film story is accepted or not by the audiences from different cultures. In this study, the encoding theory will be chosen to focus on how the culture in the film story is processed by the producer to generate cultural discounts. Based on the above theoretical analysis, three American films will be selected as the analysis object and a case study will be conducted to study the experience of American films in eliminating cultural discounts. The intermediate research questions in this study will be listed as follows.

How is culture encoded in the film story to produce the cultural discount?

How do a sample of American films tend to solve the culture discount problem in the film story construction to improve their international competitiveness?

How is culture encoded in the film story to produce the cultural discount?

McKee's understanding of cultural importance starts with the structure of the story. In his opinion, "a story is a series of acts that build to the story climax which brings about absolute and irreversible change (2001, P50)."²⁹ In order to complete this kind of irreversible change, a series of factors will be needed to organize the story: the story structure, setting, genre, character, and meanings, which are all the elements of the story. In the analysis of this problem, McKee puts forward the basic form of the story, which is the beginning, the development, the climax, and the ending.

Based on the brief analysis of the importance of the story in the film industry chain, this section will put forward that the story production in the film production process is an important factor in producing the cultural discount. Using McKee's idea of the story as the framework to find the cultural discount in the film industry. Analyzing the generating reason of the cultural discount in the six elements of the story, including the structure, the setting, the genre, the character, and the meanings.

The international competitiveness of the film industry could be reflected in the international box office. The box office is created by the audience, so the high

²⁹ Robert McKee. *Story: Style, Structure, Substance, and the Principles of Screenwriting*. NYC: HarperCollins, 2010, p50

competitiveness of the film industry is judged through the audience's approval. The influence of the cultural discount begins through the action of the film story to the audience, which could be realized by the encoding mechanisms.

Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding theory could give us a more appropriate entry point. Any encoding of information and meaning is inseparable from a particular environment, including the material and cultural contexts³⁰. In the process of reconstruction, the information is influenced by the cultural environment to some extent, and certain customs, lifestyle, system, and others could affect the way of information construction. Therefore, in the process of film encoding, the producers often produce codes in a certain cultural environment based on some cultural experience and cultural significance. Once the encoding process is completed, the film will go into circulation³¹. The encoded information will be interpreted by the audience in a variety of ways, trying to attract the attention of the audience.

In the circulation process, encoders lost control of codes, and the information will be decoded by the audience. Therefore, information terminal decoding is implemented by the consumption of the audience. At this point, Hall puts forward his own view that consumption and reproduction are almost simultaneous. The decoding of the audience is also carried out in a certain environment and context, which inevitably will be influenced by the individual's traditional ideas and cultural attainments, even their lifestyles.

Because both the encoder and the decoder interpret the same symbol in their own symbolic system, the result is not the same. There is the same possibility that the meaning could be presented smoothly with the intention of the encoder, and there are different possibilities, like the completely undecipherable or opposite interpretation. Based on this consideration, film production and transmission do not completely equal to general commodity production and circulation. Although both of them have the value realization of the four processes, whether the value could be realized truly and completed is still

³⁰ Stuart Hall, (1973), Encoding and Decoding in the Television Discourse, Retrieved October 23 2018, from <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/81670115.pdf>

³¹ Stuart Hall, (1973), Encoding and Decoding in the Television Discourse, Retrieved October 23 2018, from <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/81670115.pdf>

unknown. In addition to economic factors, there are cultural factors that impact this process. The film also uses the external expressions of sound and images to convey their intrinsic meaning and value through the story.

This study will mainly analyze the encoding part of the film production. Based on the encoding theory, the possible function mode of the cultural discount on the story structure, the story context, the story genre, the story character and the story meaning will be discussed respectively, which are aimed at finding the specific ways and means of impacting the international competitiveness of the film story through the cultural discount. This approach could help the researcher to recognize the influence of the cultural discount in the film story from the perspective of the producer.

The potential problems generated in the story

In the story structure part, the pace and the time of the beginning, the development, the climax, and the end of films will be analyzed to find some potential generating reason of the cultural discount for the global audience. There is also a certain cultural discount in the links of the structural chain. Every link in the story structure, whether it is a subtle change or a huge reversal, is expressed and experienced in a certain value, which is named as the story values by McKee. How films use the story structure to express their story value also could be a perspective to find their solution of cultural discount in the story structure.

In the story setting part, the analysis of films will mainly focus on finding answers to the following problems. Different cultural audiences are unfamiliar with the story setting. The setting is contrary to the expectations of different cultural audiences. Different cultural audiences have difficulty understanding complex settings. Illustrating three question above could help us to summarize some ways of avoiding the cultural discount in the story setting process.

In the story genre part, films will be classified according to their own genres. Different film types that have different cultural contents will produce different degrees of cultural discount. The reason that some genres have the lower cultural discount will be analyzed in order to summarize some regularities.

In the story character part, the main characters in films will be separately analyzed. Based on the cultural discount produced in these characterizations, the personality traits of different cultural backgrounds integrated into these films, and the way of packaging these different characters to be understood and identified by the audience through specific story plots or story meanings will be studied and concluded. Heroes with dual personalities in The Avengers could be taken as a point to explain how to shape these heroes to solve the cultural discount between common people and heroes. For example, superheroes have the philanthropic feelings of saving the world and protecting the common people, but at the same time, as ordinary people, they also have their own love, friendship and kinship. Through these emotions shared by all human beings, the characters and images of these superheroes are shaped to arouse the emotional resonance of the audience for the hero and eliminate the sense of distance generated by culture.

In the story meaning part, the connotation of the story meaning in films will be illustrated to find what kinds of story meaning will have less cultural discount relatively and what kinds of story meaning could be decoded directly and correctly by the audience from different ethnic and cultural horizon. Besides, the presentation mode of the meaning also could cause the culture discount. How to combine with other elements of the story, including the setting, the character, the structure, to avoid the cultural discount to express the story meaning smoothly also will be studied.

How do American films tend to solve the culture discount problem in the film story production to improve their international competitiveness?

Based on the theoretical analysis of the generation and the impact of the cultural discount, this case study will take three American films as examples to analyze their methods of solving the cultural discount problem in the film story, which make them become successful in the global film market.

It has become a fact that American film stories transcend cultural discount and enduring popularity, which make them keep strong international competitiveness. The international competitiveness is based on the concept of industry international

competitiveness, which refers to the occupancy ability of a country's film industry in the international film market, including the film production, distribution, and screening process. The strength of the international competitiveness of a country finally could be reflected in the share of its industrial products in the international market. The higher the share of a country's film in the international market is, the stronger the international competitiveness of the film industry the country has. The film industry's share of the international market is reflected in the international box office. So the international competitiveness of the film industry could be reflected in the international box office.

The Selection of Films to Analyze

Based on the following logic, the top 3 films that satisfied the specific selection criteria could be selected as the films to examine this textual analysis.

The first selection criterion is box office performance. The direct performance that films could overcome the problem of cultural discount, achieve cross-cultural communication, and be accepted by audiences from other cultural backgrounds is the foreign box office. Therefore, this research is based on the performance of American films in the Chinese film market and other overseas film markets around the world to select the object of this case study. Besides, in the evaluation process of overseas box office performance, films that were released at certain special times will be selectively excluded from this research. These special times include Christmas and New Year in western cultures, Spring Festival and Lantern Festival in East Asian cultures, and summer holidays from June to August. Such considerations are designed to ensure that the research object is selected more objectively and is not affected by factors such as the extra box office bringing by the increased number of the audience during the special time, which exclude the interference and influence of other factors on the performance of the box office.

The second criterion is the time span. Due to the influence of social environment, economic condition, number of screens and cinemas, the scale of the world film market and the box office are also increasing year by year. For films released in different years, their audience size, viewing time and box office are also affected by these objective

factors. Therefore, in order to ensure that the research objects have more reference value, conform to the characteristics of the times, and exclude the research bias caused by the time span, the object selected by this research focuses on American films released worldwide limited to the recent decade, that is from 2008 to 2018. Such choices also echo the first criterion to a large extent, ensuring the objectivity of the box office performance set forth above.

The third item in the selection criteria is the range of film genres. In this study, Mackey's Story theory is used as the basis to find the reasons for the formation of cultural discount in different elements of the film, and the genre as a part of this theory needs to be taken into account when selecting the analysis object. A film can be defined as different film genres according to its content elements. Therefore, in the selection process, the analysis object will try to cover as many different film genres as possible.

The Film Example Sources

After browsing several global box office databases, Box Office Mojo will be chosen as the sampling source. Founded in 1999 and owned by IMDb and Amazon, the Box Office Mojo tracks box office revenue in a systematic way, and publishes the data on its website. The website is widely used in the film industry as a source of data. The international section covers the weekly box office of 50 countries and includes historical box office information from three more, as well as provides information for box office results for individual films from up to 107. The site also creates an overall weekend chart, combining all box office returns from around the world. The site additionally has yearly and all-time features for its various territories. The all-time box office chart currently tracks the Top 800 films as well as approximately fifty additional films with no ranking. This chart reports the worldwide film from the United States, Canada, Australia, the Czech Republic, France, Germany, Japan, Lithuania, the Netherlands, the Philippines, Norway, Russia and the CIS, South Korea, China, Japan, the United Kingdom, India, and other countries.

Another sampling resource is the Chinese Box Office website of Entgroup Corporation. Entgroup started from collecting and analyzing box office intelligence, and

gradually expanded products and services to various entertainment functions. Taking advantage of integrated multi-screens consumer behavior data analysis and advanced calculation models, Entgroup has been improving data analysis services including real-time box office tracking system, film marketing campaign monitor, new media viewership, and celebrity commercial value analysis. For over 7 years, Entgroup has released hundreds of marketing observation reports, organized dozens of industry events, served thousands of renowned clients domestically and globally, and offered go-forwarding recommendations for tens of blockbuster movies. Therefore, the Chinese Box Office website of Entgroup, which is based on advanced big data collection and analysis, is an appropriate choice for this study to consider the box office of American films in the Chinese market.

The Sampling Results

From the rank of all-time worldwide box office from the Box Office Mojo, *Avengers: Infinity War*, *Furious 7*, and *Zootopia* are listed as the top 3 American films³², which meet the selection criteria and have the best performance relative to other films in China. *Avengers: Infinity War* was released in April 2018 and hit the Chinese film market in May. Its box office in the Chinese market is 351.5 million dollars, ranking No. 3, and in the overseas film market is 1367.9 million dollars, ranking No. 3³³. As an action and crime genre film, *Furious 7* was released in the global film market in April 2015. Its Chinese box office was 356.9 million dollars, and its overseas box office was 1163 million dollars, ranking second and fourth respectively. In March 2016, *Zootopia* won the Chinese box office of 225.1 million dollars and the overseas box office of 682.5 million dollars. As an animation with love theme, it ranked the 8th and 31st in the Chinese market and the overseas market respectively. These 3 films will be used as the samples to do the textual analysis. The basic information of these 3 sampling films will be listed as follows.

32 Box Office Mojo. All Time Box Office. Retrieved 2018.11.3, from <http://www.boxofficemojo.com/alltime/world/>

33 Chinese Film Box Office. 2018.11.3, <http://www.cbooo.cn/Alltimedomestic>

Title	Studio	China	Rank	Overseas	Rank	Genre
Avengers (2018)	BV	\$351.5 million	3	\$1367.9 million	3	Science Fiction, Comic Adaptation, Superhero, Sequel
Furious7 (2015)	Uni.	\$356.9 million	2	\$1163.0 million	4	Action, Crime
Zootopia (2016)	BV	\$225.1 million	8	\$682.5 million	31	Animation, adventure Love Story

Table 1: The Sampling Results

Toward these 3 samples, the theory of narrative transparency will be used as an approach to illustrate their methods of handling the cultural discount from the story perspective, including the story structure, the story setting, the story genre, the story character, and the story meaning.

The Theoretical Perspective of the Case Study

The theory of transparent narrative was proposed by American critic Robert Olson in his 1999 book *Hollywood Planet*. Olson thinks Hollywood's storytelling style makes it possible for American media to communicate with audiences of different cultural backgrounds. Transparency means being able to integrate various texts, break down cultural barriers, and allow audiences of different cultures to participate in their own local values, beliefs, emotions and meanings, and trigger resonance³⁴. Transparent narratives blur the boundaries between American culture and non-American culture, which is also a means of multicultural communication.

The theory of narrative transparency is derived from the mythological theory, which expounds the stimulation and satisfaction of universal emotional needs through mythology. Myth conveys and satisfies a universal emotion, which is fundamental. These theories are called mythotype by Robert Olson. These mythologies contain narrative

34 Scott Robert Olson, *Hollywood Planet: Global Media and the Competitive Advantage of Narrative Transparency*, New Jersey, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1999, p18

structures and elements of emotion, and the text created by using these narrative elements has narrative transparency³⁵. Olsen has identified 9 specific devices through which mythotypes are conveyed, so each is an apparatus of transparency.

The Operationalization of the Case Study

In *Zootopia*, the case study will focus on the story structure, characters and meaning. As for the story structure, this paper will analyze how the film attracts audiences of different cultures and ages to participate in the story structure development through the linear narrative structure and suspense plot setting, so as to realize the inclusion of the narrative transparency theory. In terms of story characters, this paper will focus on the analysis of the main characters of *Zootopia*, Judy rabbit and Nick fox. Through the analysis of their character Settings, this paper will elaborate on the producer's approach to the realization of virtuality and archetypal dramatis personae. As for the meaning of the story, this paper starts from the concept of negentropy in the theory of narrative transparency. By explaining the practical application of negentropy in cross-cultural communication, this paper explores how the producer chooses the meaning of films recognized by the global audience and guides the audience to correctly interpret and accept them through appropriate ways.

The structure, characters, and genre of the story will be the focus of the case study of *Avengers: Age of Ultron*. In the story structure, this section will discuss how the producer realizes the openendedness and circularity of narrative transparency through the conflict mode of binary opposition and the causal narrative. In the discussion of the characters in the story, we will analyze the huge interpersonal network among many heroes in *Avengers: Age of Ultron* and their characteristics such as civilian identity, ordinary emotion and fighting against evil, so as to explore how the producers use these methods to arouse the audience's identification and resonance for the hero characters. Since the superhero movie represented by *Avengers: Age of Ultron* is a relatively new genre, this case will choose the superhero movie as the object. The internal and external features of

35 Scott Robert Olson, *Hollywood Planet: Global Media and the Competitive Advantage of Narrative Transparency*, New Jersey, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1999, p91

superhero films in terms of the genre will be summarized to explore the ways in which this genre can achieve cross-cultural communication.

The case study of *Furious 7* focuses on the meaning of the story. In this part, we also introduce the negentropy in narrative transparency to analyze how the film-makers make street racing subculture, a sport related to negative social issues such as crime, drugs, and smuggling, accepted and recognized by the global audience. This exploration will start with the producer's choice of the youth street racing subculture as the method of spreading the meaning of the story, discuss how the producer legitimizes the street racing and shows its positive aspects, and how to arouse the resonance of the global audience through linking the motor racing with resistance to hegemony and evil.

Titles	Choice of Mythotypes Devices	Perspective
Avengers	Openendedness, Circularity	Structure
	Production Values	Genre
	Special Cultural Identity Strategies	Character
Furious 7	Negentropy	Meaning
Zootopia	Negentropy	Meaning
	Inclusion	Structure
	Virtuality, Archetypal Dramatis Personae	Character

Table 2: The Operationalization of the Case Study

RESEARCH LIMITATIONS

The number of films, which will be used as case studies, are relatively small, and their genres are mainly concentrated in science fiction, action and adventure films, which could not cover most genres. This restriction will make the conclusion of how American films avoid cultural discount through the film story could not be applied to other genres of films.

This research will mainly use the textual analysis to find the answer of research questions from the perspective of the film story construction, which will lack the

audience reception perspective. Besides, if the quantitative approach could be introduced in the research design, there will be more entry points to study this topic.

Chapter 2 The Cultural Discount in the Film Production

In the era of booming commercial films, the film industry, like other industries, such as steel industry and automobile industry, has the property of economy and commodity. In the process of making a film, a series of labor forces and means of production are organized together. After the production of goods, they are put into different markets for sale, generating economic value. Due to their huge investment, mass production and distribution, these films could undoubtedly be called industry, thus closely related to the commodity³⁶. Therefore, the film industry refers to the collection of various functional subjects with upstream and downstream relations, which are based on the film products in the market economy era and the industrial structure³⁷. Generally speaking, the film industry refers to the general designation of the economic forms of relevant industries, such as the film production, distribution, screening, the production of film derivatives, and the construction of cinemas³⁸. The film industry in the traditional sense includes the integrated process of film production, distribution, and projection. In a broad sense, the film industry extends at the upstream and downstream market the original industrial chain, adding film investment and financing at the front end and film derivative products at the back end, including audio and video products, advertisements, games, and expanding other projection channels, such as broadcasting in cable TV, MP4, network and other media. In such sense, the film industry has broken through the space of the cinema, making the film economy go beyond the traditional box office economy and radiate continuous economic energy in the star economy, the advertising industry, the record industry, the game industry and other related industries³⁹.

Cultural and economic attributes of the film industry, which have long been like two sides of a coin, are both unitary and opposite. The cultural attribute of film is reflected in

³⁶ Yue Yuan, *The Value Analysis of the Film Industry from the Relationship between the Artistry and Commodity of the Film*, Nanjing University Press, 2010, P2-3

³⁷ Barry R. Litman, *The motion picture mega-industry*. Allyn & Bacon, 1998 / Complete citation for book or article

³⁸ Liu Pan, *Economics of Film Industry*, Culture and Art Press, 2010, p19-23

³⁹ Liu Pan, *Economics of Film Industry*, Culture and Art Press, 2010, p203-221

its unique artistic language, while the commodity attribute is reflected in its inseparability from economic cost and management. Although from the perspective of film product composition, the artistry and commodity of importing spiritual content for the film are unified, the contradiction between them is also prominent. The paradox could be illustrated by two points. First of all, the film could not get rid of the economic basis determines its positioning. The films invested by the state often have the educational characteristics of the main theme. The pursuit of commercial interests in films produced by film enterprises is obvious. Artist-funded films have more original intention of artistic exploration. Besides, the necessary management of films will have an impact on its cultural attributes in every link of the whole film industry⁴⁰. In terms of unity, if the art team can give consideration to both the aesthetic habits and artistic tastes of the audience, and create a film with a certain artistic level, as long as it is managed and operated properly, it will often reap rich commercial returns⁴¹. Similarly, if the film management team succeeds in business planning and operation, it will first provide a correct positioning and stable material guarantee for the production of the film. When the film with certain artistic level is completed, most of them will also get rich profits. Commercial success also laid a material foundation for later artistic pursuits.

From the perspective of economics, film products have exchange value and can meet the market demand, so they have economic properties⁴². The production process of the film is a series of processes from abstract discussion to actual implementation. Different from painting, music and other art types, which can be completed by individual artists, the creation of films embodies the joint efforts of the art team and the management team⁴³. The production of the film first needs a sum of money as the foundation, and then the money will be turned into artistic works through the creation of the art team.

⁴⁰ Yue Yuan, *The Value Analysis of the Film Industry from the Relationship between the Artistry and Commodity of the Film*, Nanjing University Press, 2010, P5-11

⁴¹ Yue Yuan, *The Value Analysis of the Film Industry from the Relationship between the Artistry and Commodity of the Film*, Nanjing University Press, 2010, P10

⁴² Liu Pan, *Economics of Film Industry*, Culture and Art Press, 2010, p31-32

⁴³ Yue Yuan, *The Value Analysis of the Film Industry from the Relationship between the Artistry and Commodity of the Film*, Nanjing University Press, 2010, P7

Therefore, this process involves the participation of many different types of enterprise and various forms of economic activities. When a film is made, it is both a work of art and a commercial project. In the artistic aspect, from film subject conception, script writing, to actor performance; From director shooting, film editing to sound processing; From the film subtitles, the beginning and end of the film design to the poster, the creative trailers; All these embody the complex composition of the artistic team in the process of film making. In terms of business, whether it is law or finance, whether it is logistics or human resources, whether it is publicity and promotion or schedule management, the respective division of labor of the film project operation team could be clearly found. For the film industry, the production of film content is one of the most important factors in its product competitiveness.

However, films also have cultural characteristics. As an audio-visual art, it expresses certain thoughts and emotions through the display of artistic images, reflects the culture of different societies, the times and national spirit. As a part of human cultural life, it directly reflects the culture of a nation and a region in a specific period.

British scholar David Putnam argues that the film is a means of cultural recognition⁴⁴. As an integral part of human cultural life, the film comprehensively displays the production and living habits of a social group, a nation, a country and its basic cultural qualities. The film industry not only has economic attributes, but also has cultural characteristics to a great extent. The film has the ability to carry information, and its essence is to tell stories through moving images. In the process of narration, it contains the transmission of culture. As one of the background factors of film narration, the culture will appear in the film from beginning to end. Therefore, film has become a part of cultural issues. A specific cultural background, cultural consciousness, values, and lifestyle are conveyed in the film. These cultural connotations appear in the process of film production, and are gradually revealed in the subsequent distribution, screening, and

⁴⁴ David Puttnam, *The Undeclared War: the Struggle for Control of the World's Film Industry*, Harper Collins, 1997

the development process of the derivatives such as film posters, pre-film advertising, video products, toys and games.

The cultural attribute of film as a commodity also makes the problem of the cultural discount appear in the film industry. The concept of the cultural discount was put forward by Canadian scholars Hoskins and Mirus in their article *Reasons for the US Dominance of the International Trade in Television Programmes* in 1988, which also was the first time to apply the concept of cultural discount in the research on the film and television program trade. In 1998, in the book *Global Television and Film—An Introduction to the Economic of the Business*, these two scholars further studied the cause, performance, and control strategy of the cultural discount. They argued that the appearance of the cultural discount after cross-border deals is due to the foreign audience's difficulty in identifying the lifestyle, values, history, institutions, myths and physical environments.⁴⁵ The understanding of language, dubbing, subtitle and different accents interfere with the audience's appreciation of the film (Hoskins and Mirus, 1998). In further studies, they identified the cultural impact of different types of programs on trade and found that the strength of cultural discounts varied depending on the type of product.

The cultural discount in the film industry primarily occurs in the process of film production. Cultural discount makes the audience in the import market not adapt to or even reject the language, cultural content, subtitles, and dubbing of imported films, and find it difficult to identify with the lifestyle, cultural customs, ideology, values, history and system described therein. *Lost in Thailand*, a Chinese comedy that has been hugely profitable in the domestic market, has failed in the North American market. Due to the differences in the definition, understanding, and taste of humor in different cultures, the humor in the film language will lose its charm in the translation process. In addition, Chinese comedies often use dialect culture as a comedy factor, which leads to the difficulty in understanding by foreign audiences.

⁴⁵ Colin Hoskins. *Global Television and Film: An Introduction to the Economics of the Business*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998

The film production not only includes the production of film content, which is the script of the story to be told, but also contains the production of film forms, such as music, sound, lighting, scenery, editing, etc. Film content gives the audience emotional satisfaction, which is largely made by the story structure⁴⁶. The cultural factor of the film, which include the characters, the meaning, and the language runs through the story told in the film, so the story becomes the cultural soul of the film industry.

THE STORY IS THE CULTURAL SOUL OF THE FILM

The Meaning of the Story

Stories are based on daily life. Leaving the original taste of real life, there is no story. But stories are not exactly life. Famous creative writing instructor Robert McKee argues that the story is the metaphor for life. The story must resemble life, but it is not real life. In life, we inevitably have to experience a variety of trivial events, these are just "facts", rather than "stories". The reason is that the story is abstract in life and takes the essence of life, and can lead people to the true meaning of life. It allows us to transcend the superficial phenomena to achieve the essence of things. In other words, the story must have a reflection on the event, namely the truth. Therefore, the story constitutes the event and the truth.

The Story Is the Narrative Core of the Film

With the help of technological innovation, films can even show us spectacular scenes never seen before. They can take us into a vast universe, into the face of a vanished dinosaur, or into the havoc of the future world. There is no doubt that we are excited by this exciting, dazzling image, but the feeling is short and not profound. Just like *Forrest Gump*, after a few years, people will not remember what special shooting techniques are used in the film, they will only remember what story it tells and what things it narrates. However, film narration is different from ordinary narration in daily life. It is important

⁴⁶ Robert McKee. *Story: Style, Structure, Substance, and the Principles of Screenwriting*. NYC: HarperCollins, 2010

to avoid direct narration. The narrative of the story in the film is full of desires, contradictions, conflicts, and choices, which are necessary to attract the audience. Most of the story is about the change happened in the character's life, which lets their life be in conflict not in peace. Then, the story goes to great lengths to tell how the character chooses and behaves in the conflict in order to recover their original life. If the narrative of the film is lack of various and circuitous stories, then the film also lost its original meanings.

The Story Is the Carrier of the Film Meaning

Including the film, any kind of art, often contains profound connotation and significance, which could attract more favor and attention from the audience. Since the film originates from life, its meaning is also centered in the value of life. Values, the positive/negative charges of life, are at the soul of our art⁴⁷. What is the value of life? What is worth living and dying for? These questions about deep values are abstract and esoteric, and the story becomes the perfect carrier to interpret them through the mass media channel of film.

Aristotle talks about the relationship between story and meaning in this way, he asks: when we see a dead body in the street, we are one kind of reaction, but when we read about death in Homer, why are we another kind of reaction? Because in life, thoughts and feelings come separately. Thinking and passion operate in different spheres of human nature, and they are seldom in harmony and often in conflict with each other⁴⁸. Although life separates meaning from emotion, art could unite the two. A story is a device through which you can create that realization as you please. A well-told story can provide meaningful emotional experiences that are not available in life. In life, experiences

⁴⁷ Robert McKee. *Story: Style, Structure, Substance, and the Principles of Screenwriting*. NYC: HarperCollins, 2010 p17

⁴⁸ David Bordwell, *Making Meaning: Inference and Rhetoric in the Interpretation of Cinema*, Translated by Xuguang Chen and Tao Su, Peking University Press, 2017, p25-28

become meaningful through reflection; In art, experience takes on meaning the moment it happens⁴⁹.

Values and the truth, goodness, and beauty of human nature need to be demonstrated and spread by the story, which also is its real goal. When we evaluate and value an action, a person, or a thing, we base our judgments on specific facts, and those facts are what the story is about. The book *The Significance of Cinemas* contains a description of the failure of movies to convey meaning correctly. One is an individual story, the other is over-commercialization⁵⁰. The individual story are structurally inadequate. They are just dull depictions of life fragments, mistaking the verisimilitude of appearances for the reality of life. Since the author only sees the surface of things, the transmission of meaning in such stories is completely distorted. Over-commercialized film is a kind of over-structured, over-complicated and over-set sensory stimulation that has nothing to do with life. Filmmakers of this kind think that if enough visual effects are put together, the audience will be excited about them. *Avatar*'s director Cameron is based on the story of the protagonist's experience, conveyed deep meaning that people should respect nature and should not over-seize resources. Of course, the story itself is not the purpose, the real purpose is the meaning of the story.

The Story is the Channel of Empathy for the Audience

To some extent, the story can be understood as the form of communication between people. Each person's living environment, life experience, educational background and other factors are different so that the emotional experience, impacted by these factors, of each person is different. How to integrate the emotional thoughts conveyed by a film with different emotional thoughts, and how to make different audiences recognize the significance and value of the film? The story provides an excellent channel for communicating emotional thoughts, making them collide and communicating, and

⁴⁹ David Bordwell, *Making Meaning: Inference and Rhetoric in the Interpretation of Cinema*, Translated by Xuguang Chen and Tao Su, Peking University Press, 2017, p39

⁵⁰ Christian Metz, *The Significance of Cinemas*, Translated by Senrao Liu, Jiangsu Educational Press, 2005

allowing different audiences to agree on its meaning and value. As a famous Hollywood producer's saying goes that the meaning of film lies in telling each other stories, spreading worldviews and understanding people's hearts, thus achieving emotional and cultural communication.

Certainly, people living in different parts of the world have different cultural and emotional differences. Facing the same story, the audience will have different experience, which is the reflection of the cultural discount in the film story.

ANALYSIS OF THE STORY ELEMENTS FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE CULTURAL DISCOUNT

Generally speaking, the basic form of the film story should have three parts: beginning, development, and ending. World famous creative instructor Robert McKee further deepened the study of the film story. This study discusses the cultural discount in the film industry, which is based on McKee's "story" theory, and analyzes the elements of the "story" theory from the perspective of the cultural discount.

What is Story? The Overview of the Story Theory

McKee's understanding of the story starts from the structure of the story. In his opinion, "a story is a series of acts that build to the story climax which brings about absolute and irreversible change⁵¹." In order to complete this kind of irreversible change, a series of factors will be needed to organize the story: the story structure, setting, genre, character, and meanings, which are all the elements of the story. In the analysis of this problem, McKee puts forward the basic form of the story, which is the beginning, the development, the climax and the ending.

The Cultural Discount in the Story Structure

In traditional film theory, the structure has always been regarded as the constituent elements of drama. Louis Giannetti uses the classical model to discuss the narrative

⁵¹ Robert McKee. *Story: Style, Structure, Substance, and the Principles of Screenwriting*. NYC: HarperCollins, 2010 p42

structure of the film in his book *Understanding Movies*.⁵² In *The Film Idea*, Stanley J. Solomon argued that the story without a plot structure is not a complete film script.⁵³ The story structure of a film is a powerful means to express the theme. Once there is a problem with the structure, the whole story cannot be supported effectively. Structure is crucial to a film.

The Introduction of the Story Structure

McKee argues that structure is a selection of events from the characters' life stories that are composed of a strategic sequence to arouse specific emotions and to express a specific view of life. The structure is the narrative framework that supports the whole film story.

McKee makes a microscopic perspective on the structure of the film story and summarizes the chain of a film story structure.

BEAT ➡ SCENE ➡ SEQUENCE ➡ ACT ➡ STORY CLIMAX

Figure 1: The Chain of a Film Structure

A BEAT is an exchange of behavior in action/reaction⁵⁴. Beat by beat these changing behaviors shape the turning of a scene. One beat after another constructs the transformation of the scene. A SCENE is an action through conflict in more or less continuous time and space that turns the value-charged condition of a character's life on at least one value with a degree of perceptible significance. There is no scene that does not transform⁵⁵. A SEQUENCE is a series of scenes—generally two to five—that culminates with greater impact than any previous scene⁵⁶. An ACT is a series of sequences that peaks in a climactic scene which causes a major reversal of values, more

⁵² Louis Giannetti, *Understanding Movies*, Pearson, 14 edition, 2017, 329

⁵³ Stanley J. Solomon *The Film Idea* M Beijing, Beijing, China Film Press, 1983, 384

⁵⁴ Robert McKee. *Story: Style, Structure, Substance, and the Principles of Screenwriting*. NYC: HarperCollins, 2010 p37

⁵⁵ Robert McKee. *Story: Style, Structure, Substance, and the Principles of Screenwriting*. NYC: HarperCollins, 2010 p38

⁵⁶ Robert McKee. *Story: Style, Structure, Substance, and the Principles of Screenwriting*. NYC: HarperCollins, 2010 p39

powerful in its impact than any previous sequence or scene. A series of acts constitute a large structure, the STORY⁵⁷. As McKee's argument, the story is a huge main event that brings life from the beginning to the end of the situation, which is different from the change brought by the scene and it is irreversible.

From the perspective of narrative structure, the film structure can be divided into linear, non-linear and anti-linear. The earliest concept of linear structure can be traced back to Aristotle's Poetics⁵⁸. In the interpretation of narrative, Hillis Miller believes that linearity is just a metaphor, referring to the fact that the narrative itself is like a line, which is closely connected, timely and uninterrupted. The linear narrative focuses on the integrity of the story, the unity of time and space, the causal nature of the plot and the coherence of the narrative, which make it easy to be accepted by the audience⁵⁹. But the nonlinear structure is the time ellipsis, the repetition and the backstepping, and the flashback is its main method. The main starting point of nonlinear narration is the psychology of the characters, rather than the practical reason. It jumps in time and space as the characters recall, the plot is incomplete and the ending is relatively accidental. The audience's acceptance is an important reference factor to investigate whether it belongs to the nonlinear narrative⁶⁰. The anti-linear narration shows the feature of not advocating narration, it intentionally talks about narration, plot and character relationship, and more about expressing a kind of emotion⁶¹.

In addition, narrative theory is also a way to study the structure of a story. In the book *Structural Semantics: An Attempt at a Method*, French Semiotician Algirdas Julien Greimas believed that narrative theory mainly studies narrative structure and language

⁵⁷ Robert McKee. *Story: Style, Structure, Substance, and the Principles of Screenwriting*. NYC: HarperCollins, 2010 p41

⁵⁸ The Analysis of Film Narration Structure, Retrieved from May 1 2019, from <https://www.douban.com/group/topic/119426357/>

⁵⁹ Fengzhen Wang and Min Zhou, *Selected Writings of J. Hillis Miller*, China Social Science Press, 2016

⁶⁰ Charles Ramirez Berg, A Taxonomy of Alternative Plots in Recent Films: Classifying the "Tarantino Effect", *Film Criticism*, Meadville, Vol 31, Fall 2016

⁶¹ The Analysis of Film Narration Structure, Retrieved from May 1 2019, from <https://www.douban.com/group/topic/119426357/>

rules of stories.⁶² Every story can be divided into two parts. One is the story itself, which means what happened to which people. The second is discourse, that is, how the story is told. Roland Barthes proposed in his famous work *Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narrative* that narrative works should be divided into three levels of description.⁶³ In the story, the events that play a positive role in the development of the story and lead to different suspense are the core events. Other relatively trivial events are subsidiary, which reflects the role of core events in the storyline.

The Cultural Discount in the Structure

The arrangement of the film story and the shooting of the film almost always follow the structure chain of the story above. The film revolves around the main plot.



Figure 2: The Structure Chain of the Story

These three acts are not artificial, but are identified in order to achieve the purpose of the story, according to the general rule of people's emotions. According to people's expression habits in different countries, it can be expressed in 5 minutes or even 5 hours, but such speed is often not recognized and accepted by people in most countries, which is the cause of cultural discount in the form of structure.

There is also a certain cultural discount in the links of the structural chain. Every link in the story structure, whether it is a subtle change or a huge reversal, is expressed and experienced in a certain value, which is named as the story values by McKee. Story Values are the universal qualities of human experience that may shift from positive to negative, or negative to positive, from one moment to the next⁶⁴. For example, love and

⁶² Princes Gerald, *Narratology*, trans Xu Qiang, Renming University Press, 2013

⁶³ Yang Yi, *Chinese Narratology*, Renming University Press, 2009

⁶⁴ Robert McKee. *Story: Style, Structure, Substance, and the Principles of Screenwriting*. NYC: HarperCollins, 2010 p69

hate, good and evil, courage and cowardice, loyalty and betrayal, wisdom and ignorance. However, the story value is not necessarily the measure of the audience's own value, which provides an incision for the generation of the cultural discount.

Narration is the foundation of human's understanding of the world.⁶⁵ From the perspective of narrative theory, the process of film story construction can be regarded as a cognitive process. The film story should actively mobilize the audience's perception, let them find clues from the structure of the story, and finally understand the inherent meaning of the story. If the narration of a film lacks initiative and requires the audience to use more subjective initiative to clarify the structure of the story, it is possible to produce cultural discount.

In the narrow sense, narration simply refers to the narration of a story, while in the broad sense, narration refers to the artist's overall artistic cognition of narration, performance, and structure. Narration in a broad sense is the combination of producers' subjective value orientation and their ability to control artistic expression⁶⁶, which echoes McKee's story values to some extent. Narration is a way for the producer to expand his spiritual life based on his subjective understanding of real life. They can turn the trifles of life into warmth and romance, transform the regrets into permanence, and change the impossibilities with possibilities through the story structure design. However, in the interpretation of the story, the national audience's understanding of life is different due to its cultural origin. Therefore, in the choice of narrative method or the design of story structure, there should be less obvious geographical values and spiritual expression.

Crazy Rich Asians is a vivid example. The rare all-asian film earned 174 million dollars in the United States⁶⁷, compared with just 1 million dollars in the Chinese film market, where appears to be more culturally similar. Although *Crazy Rich Asians* was highly sought after in North America, especially by Asian audiences, the design of its story structure would inevitably lead to the cultural discount for Chinese audiences. First

⁶⁵ David Bordwell, *Film Art: An Introduction*, McGraw-Hill Education, 2012, 78

⁶⁶ Chen Linxia, *An Analysis of the Cultural Discount of Chinese Films in North-American Market*, Journal of Shanghai University, 2015 Vol32

⁶⁷ Box Office Mojo, <https://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=crazyrichasians.htm>

of all, in the design of the story structure, the plot focuses too much on the economic differences between the hero and the heroine's family. Numerous shots and scenes depict the luxurious life of Asian tycoons, which include about 30 minutes of exaggerated weddings, family gatherings, bachelor parties and so on. Such an unbalanced structure design makes Chinese audiences feel that the plot of the story is too old-fashioned, the content of the story is false, and the relationship between the characters is messy. In this exaggerated story structure, Chinese audiences cannot see real human nature, only the traditional conflicts between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law, and a boring story about Cinderella married with the rich.

In addition, in the conception of the story value, the contradiction between the mother-in-law and the heroine is the main cause of the structural chain reversal in the film. Behind the contradiction is the difference between Chinese and American culture in family concept and women's status in the producer's opinions. The mother-in-law the producer create is a traditional Asian woman whose most important thing in life is to care for her husband and children. And the heroine, who grew up in the American education environment, has a stronger sense of autonomy. What seems to be a distinctive design from the producer makes it difficult for Chinese audiences to identify with and to generate resonance. Chinese women nowadays have become more independent and self-reliant than traditional women created by the producer. Work and self-independence have become as important to Chinese women as the family. Although the cultural differences between China and the United States still exist in this aspect, the contradictions are not as profound as those depicted in film stories by the producers. The difference in story value between the producer and the Chinese audience has resulted in cultural discounts in the film's Chinese-market spread.

The Cultural Discount in the Story Setting

Any story is not out of thin air. It is always out of natural or human history has existed in the material, therefore, the occurrence of any story is inseparable from a specific background, whether the background is the past, the present or the future.

The Introduction of the Story Setting

McKee points out that the story setting has four dimensions, involving the first time dimension -- the period, when the story takes place; the second dimension -- the duration, is the length of the story in time; The third physical dimension -- location, where the story takes place, the fourth human dimension -- the conflict level, is where the story is in the hierarchy of human struggle. As a result, the story setting can be summed up as a sentence that in about two hours, a series of incidents occurred in a certain period of time in a particular era. However, in addition to the above four objective aspects, I believe that there should be the subjective emotional background in the story setting. In any film, a subjective emotional background is necessary. The subjective feeling between characters, such as friends, lovers, and opponents, is also one of the important settings of the story narration.

The Cultural Discount in the Setting

The story setting is the sum of the objective and subjective environment that the director intends to bring the audience into. The audience's grasp of the environment has a direct bearing on the story. In the story setting, the cultural discount may arise from the following reasons.

Different cultural audiences are unfamiliar with the story setting. The occurrence of any event has its specific background. Leaving the specific background, the occurrence of the event is difficult to be accepted and recognized by the audience. If the audience is familiar with the background of the story, then what happens in this setting seems to be similar to the audience's own life. However, the foreign cultural audience is unfamiliar with the background, which often makes them be familiar with the background firstly, and the understanding of the background degree directly influences its understanding of the story.

The setting is contrary to the expectations of different cultural audiences. The setting is a premise for the audience to understand the story. When the audience interprets the story, they are often unconscious into a preset background, but at the same time, the audience also unconsciously want to understand the story in this specific background.

Once the audience has mastered the regulation in this setting, if the story is slightly illegal and contrary to the expectations of the audience, the audience will reject the work as illogical and unconvincing⁶⁸.

Different cultural audiences have difficulty understanding complex settings. Most of the successful film in the history often started from current story, which only has a small amount of information. Generally, this kind of story does not need to provide any information on the setting that the audience can understand directly. Even though some films need to be told in the setting, they tend to be very simple. Uncomplicated background stories that could be mastered without any special information. In James Cameron's *The Terminator*, the voiceover tells that there was a bad terminator going to kill John Connor, and there was a good terminator out there to save him. The problem is, which terminator first found him. This is the sample setting that the audience needs to know at the beginning of the story. The audience does not need to know about the complex and complete historical process of the future war, nor do they need to know the motives of the characters, just to know why things are going to happen. This simple setting also enhances the audience's watching interest to a certain extent.

Hoskins believes that language, dubbing, letters, and different accents in the film are all part of the film setting, which could interfere with the audience's acceptance of the film and thus produce cultural discount (1998). Language and writing are carriers of culture. One of the reasons for the cultural discount during cross-culture spread is that the language and characters in the heterogeneous culture could not be correctly interpreted.⁶⁹ In the international spread of a film, the distributor will often add subtitles and re-dub the film, and the language misinterpretation in the translation process may lead to the misunderstanding of the audience. Even if the translator strives to achieve a complete linguistic match with the producer, it is difficult to convey the same emotions and flavor as the original. For example, the translation of the title of a film will affect the audience's

⁶⁸ Robert McKee. *Story: Style, Structure, Substance, and the Principles of Screenwriting*. NYC: HarperCollins, 2010 p72

⁶⁹ Colin Hoskins. *Global Television and Film: An Introduction to the Economics of the Business*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998

perception of the film story setting. The English title of Chinese martial arts film *Brotherhood of Blade* could only briefly explain that the story setting of brotherhood instead of directly letting overseas audiences know that this is a story about the special intelligence agency of the imperial court in the Ming Dynasty of China. This inappropriate translation of the film title not only lost the opportunity to provide the audience with the story setting before watching the film, but also erased the cultural features that were most attractive to foreign audiences.

Besides, some scholars' research from the field of cultural geography can also demonstrate that religious belief and historical origin will affect the audience's attitude towards the story setting, thus resulting in cultural discount. Sheila Hones, from The University of Tokyo, argues that for the story to happen readers must contribute to the event not only a high level of participatory engagement but also a willingness to exercise a particular kind of spatial knowledge.⁷⁰ *Memoirs of a Geisha*, featuring Chinese actors and telling stories about Japanese culture, had suffered cultural discounts in both China and Japan. Having been failed to find Japanese actors with good acting skills and fluent English, the American producers chose Chinese actors Zhang Ziyi, Gong Li and Michelle Yeoh, who are similar in appearance and temperament with Japanese. On the one hand, due to the historical reasons of World War ii, Chinese audiences have a certain degree of resistance to Japan. Then, Chinese audiences have less awareness of Japanese geisha culture, which is easily misunderstood as prostitutes. Therefore, they were full of antipathy to Chinese actresses playing Japanese geisha and lose their subjective initiative in understanding the story setting. On the other hand, Japanese audiences believed that Japanese stories should not be performed by foreigners because they do not fully understand the traditional geisha culture. This preconception had also influenced the Japanese audience's perception of the film setting.

⁷⁰ Sheila Hones, *Literary geography and the short story: setting and narrative style*, Cultural Geographies, London, vol 17, 2010.10

The Cultural Discount in the Story Genre

Story genres can be classified into different forms so as to locate the story context of different films.

The Division of the Story Genre

The human society has produced countless stories, and more will happen. In order to understand and show these various stories, people developed a variety of story classification standards and principles, and according to the differences in the common ingredients of the story were summarized and sorted, they are divided into different types. On the basis of practice, McKee sums up the classification of universal film genres and subgenres, including the love story, horror film, modern epic, war genre, maturation plot and other 20 types. Although the genres of stories interact and fuse with each other over time, the genre still has its relative stability. At the beginning of every film creation, the first thing is to determine its genre.

The Cultural Discount in the Genre

Hoskins points out that cultural discount varies with different genres of films. He believes that films that achieve successful cross-cultural communication are usually a few specific genres.⁷¹ Different genres of stories need to be highlighted in different elements, so there are certain genres of stories that have higher specificity and higher cultural discounts. Different film genres that have different cultural contents will produce different degrees of cultural discount. It is generally believed that the humor has strong cultural specificity, therefore, the culture discount in the comic is relatively high, and martial-arts action due to the less cultural specificity has the relatively small cultural discount. As a result, Chinese Kung-Fu films tend to be relatively more marketable in the international film market than other genre of films.

But specifically, different genres of Kung-Fu films produce different extent of cultural discounts. Relatively speaking, the most popular Chinese films overseas are martial action films. Bruce Lee, Jackie Chan, Jet Li, Donnie Yen, and Michelle Yeoh are

⁷¹ Colin Hoskins. *Global Television and Film: An Introduction to the Economics of the Business*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998

all Kung-Fu stars loved by foreign audiences. Martial action films, with their emphasis on action sequences and special effects, are relatively easy to cross the cultural gap. This kind of film overcomes the difficulty of cultural background and language communication. Audiences from different cultural backgrounds can clearly and directly understand the heroes and villains in the film as well as their respective martial arts movements. Therefore, martial action films relatively receive the least cultural discount and convey the most complete meaning.

A slightly different genre from the martial action film is the martial arts film, which is generally based on ancient China as the historical background and has the main characters appear in ancient costume. This film genre also has wonderful martial arts plots while it contains more Chinese cultural connotations, involving Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism and other religious doctrines, and even the old feudal hierarchy, comparing with the martial action films. These cultural elements make it difficult for foreign audiences to fully understand the profound meaning behind them.

Comedy films have a relatively high cultural discount. Audiences from different cultures are always willing to watch comedy films that belong to their own culture. As Wayne Fu argues that members of a society may find it hard to comprehend the humor in U.S. comedies, for example, while still being fond of comedies made in their own localities.⁷² This is because different cultures have various definitions, understandings and tastes of humor, and the humorous language may lose its charm due to improper translation. In addition, the dialect culture, different accents and on-line expressions involved in comedy films need profound cultural accumulation in understanding. Therefore, the local production of comedy films provides a way to reduce the cultural discount. Domestic productions that localize an imported genre can fill audience demand for that genre (Straubhaar 2007)⁷³. This explains why *Detective Chinatown 2*, which learn

⁷² W. Wayne Fu, National Audience Tastes in Hollywood Film Genres: Cultural Distance and Linguistic Affinity, *Communication Research*, Vol 40, Issue 6, 2013

⁷³ Straubhaar, J. D. (2007). *World television: From global to local*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

from Hollywood comedies in terms of plot and story, can effectively reduce the cultural discount and get 527 million dollars in the Chinese market.

The number of film genre is limited, but the amount of film story is infinite. Every genre is repeated by countless stories. The audience, however, still likes to watch in a formulaic form over and over again. Many film researchers believe that genre films are always about the time and place in which they are made. Inevitably, they are expressions of the cultural zeitgeist, instances of society engaging in dialogue with itself. They speak to cultural issues both timely and timeless, and attempt to resolve them as narrative rituals⁷⁴. The story genre and ritualization of festival rituals are somewhat surprisingly consistent. The invariable festival rituals and ceremonies reaffirm the cultural value of a certain tradition or custom, thus satisfying the needs of people's emotions and values⁷⁵.

The Cultural Discount in the Story Character

Famous director Frank Capra once said: "you only attract the audience into the story with the characters... If you give them something to worry about, someone they worry about and care about, you have an audience, and you can engage them"⁷⁶. In other words, if audiences are not interested in the most human element of a film story, the characters, they are hardly interested in the whole movie. The importance of the characters is evident.

The Feature of the Story Character

McKee makes a distinction between character and characterization. Characterization refers to the sum total of all observable qualities of a human being, everything knowable through careful scrutiny: age and IQ; sex and sexuality; style of speech and gesture; choices of home, car, and dress; education and occupation; personality and nervousness; values and attitudes; all aspects of humanity we could know by taking notes on someone

⁷⁴ Barry Keith Grant, Genre Films and Cultural Myth, Film International, Bristol Vol.1, 2003: 27-35

⁷⁵ David Bordwell, Kristin Thompson, Film Art: An Introduction, p383

⁷⁶ Eric Sherman, Directing the Film: Film Directors on Their Art, pp.308-309.

day in and day out⁷⁷. Characterization makes each person have unique characteristics that distinguish them from others. But characterization is not the character.

McKee defines the true character that it is revealed in the choices a human being makes under pressure—the greater the pressure, the deeper the revelation, the truer the choice to the character's essential nature⁷⁸. The function of character is to bring to the story the qualities of characterization necessary to convincingly act out choices. A character must be credible: young enough or old enough, strong or weak, worldly or naïve, educated or ignorant, generous or selfish, in the right proportions. Each must bring to the story the combination of qualities that allows an audience to believe that the character could and would do what he does.

In the case of characters, McKee emphasizes that pressure is fundamental. The character's truth is revealed only when one makes a choice under pressure. Simple choices don't create stress or reveal the truth about the character. Only in the face of "Sophie's choice"⁷⁹ when the invisible power of cultural transfer will make them make a spontaneous choice, thus exposing their unconscious nature. In McKee's opinion, the most basic element of all good storytelling is the use of contrast or contradiction in the story to reveal the real characteristic of the characters and create situations that seem like this but are not.

In narrative theory, characterization can also be achieved through narration. According to Bordwell, a character's appearance should be designed to highlight his personality so that the audience could have an accurate first impression of him. Character determines character's behavior and psychological activities, which is reasonable. When it is difficult to directly express the character in a narrative, the character can be

⁷⁷ Robert McKee. *Story: Style, Structure, Substance, and the Principles of Screenwriting*. NYC: HarperCollins, 2010 p100

⁷⁸ Robert McKee. *Story: Style, Structure, Substance, and the Principles of Screenwriting*. NYC: HarperCollins, 2010 p101

⁷⁹ *Sophie's Choice*, 1982 American film. The film here refers to the meaning of a dilemma. In this film, a Nazi officer forces Sophie to decide which of her children could have the chance to live

visualized through lines and behaviors⁸⁰. Nameless in the film *Hero* has no exaggerated facial expressions, and his voice and intonation are basically unchanged. These are the characteristics of Nameless, which determine his actual behaviors and psychological activities. It was because of Nameless's firm belief that he walked all the way to the place only ten steps away from King. But it was Nameless's understanding of the martial art and his great love for the common people that made him give up his goal. He died liberally for the unity of the world. This approach that using the action and mentality to depict the character make Nameless have more profound significance at the end of the story.

The Cultural Discount in the Character

According to McKee, the characterization sometimes produces cultural discounts. Compared with Chinese and foreign films, we could find that Chinese films tend to have strong personalities in the treatment of characters, while many of the characters recognized by the world have the complex mentality.

Take Chinese martial arts film, which has relative advantages, as an example, the character in the film often has a sense of moral purity and sanctity. Because the characters have this kind of almost perfect characteristics, the audience cannot produce identification and empathy.

The character, who has pure and perfect characteristics, will result in his alienation from the audience as ordinary people. At the same time, the character's behavior is restrained to a large extent because of the character's moral stereotype, which directly affects the audience's understanding of the character's plight. In *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, Master Li Mu Bai was admitted to the academy when he was young. Later, he learned martial arts from his teacher. He was famous in all corners of the country for killing evil and saving people. He fell in love with friend's wife, but because of the value of friendship, after the death of the friend, he resolutely determined to suppress his

⁸⁰ David Bordwell, *The Way Hollywood Tells It: Story and Style in Modern Movies*, University of California Press, 2006, p35

feelings, and not married with Yu Shu Lien. Although the design of the characters is consistent with the moral concept of Chinese culture, such an almost perfect character is difficult for foreign audiences to get understanding and recognition. In addition, Master Li Mu Bai deliberately suppressed his love for the sake of friendship, which made it difficult for the audience to understand his conflicted and helpless mood when he came out again to Yu Shu Lien in the story. Such cultural discount has weakened Master Li Mu Bai's three-dimensional image in the eyes of foreign audiences. Although Gong Er in *The Grandmaster* is a woman, she is clam and tough without indecision when she meets difficulties. In order to take revenge, she cut her hair short, wear in black, keep single, and live without children. This seemingly distinctive character is difficult to understand by foreign audiences who do not know Chinese culture. Besides, when Gong Er was faced with the unresolved love with IP Man, the bitterness and loneliness in her heart also made it difficult for foreign audiences to understand, which further weakened the character's image features of independence and stubbornness. The characters in Chinese films are moral idealists, and they are immaculate. This kind of design makes the story character be simple, also caused the story plot to lack waves.

In terms of the character, Hollywood has actually more heroic features than the Chinese film. It uses a hero with a dual personality to catch the audience. In the mainstream superhero series, the audience could find a way for empathizing with the character in the transformation of ordinary people and superman. To some extent, the differences between Chinese and western stories also bear the difference between Chinese and western cultures: Chinese culture is idealistic, while American culture is realistic.

Take the Americanized character Mulan as an example. The American Mulan is very different from the Chinese Mulan, who has been changed from the traditional Chinese ancient woman to a lively woman, having a courageous pursuit of her ideal and happiness. In the film, Mulan is a feisty rebellious woman who doesn't keep old regulations. She doesn't use makeup, and runs down the street and makes a mess of the meeting place. Thus, in essence, the American Mulan has departed from the essence of

Mulan in Chinese folklore, and has become an American woman with bold personality. What she is pursuing is not the traditional life, but how to manifest her own personality.

So the war and conscription gave the Mulan a chance to show herself. She had the courage to disobey the orders of her father and stole her father's army certificate and armor to join the army. She cut off her long hair and sold it to buy a military horse, not only to show her filial piety, but also to realize her own value. The traditional theme of "loyalty" and "filial piety" have been supplanted, which was replaced by the implementation of the self-worth. This bold move by Mulan is an expression of the enterprising spirit of American women.

She also relies on her own efforts to pursue love and happiness through her own actions. She jumps out of the cage of traditional marriage, and returns to her hometown with her true love. It is the true character of the American version of Mulan. It emphasizes the strong individual consciousness of Mulan and the desire to realize her personal value. Her military purpose has changed from pure filial piety in Chinese stories to filial piety, and to prove her ability and realize her dream. This character more embodies the American people's pursuit of personal value.

The Cultural Discount in the Story Meaning

The meaning of a story is also called a theme in many places. According to Paul Schrader, "movies are about something -- even bad movies are about something. Even if it doesn't want to have a theme, it still has a theme."⁸¹

The Connotation of the Story Meaning

In *Dictionary of Film Art*, the theme of a film is defined as the central idea expressed by the screenwriter in the script through characterization and description of life. It is the screenwriter's understanding, evaluation and ideal expression of life, history and reality⁸². Wendy J Henson believes that the theme is composed of three parts, including some kind of emotion, some kind of behavior and the motivation and obstacles of the main

⁸¹ Dennis Petrie, Joe Boggs, *The Art of Watching Films: A Guide to Film Analysis*, p17

⁸² Xu Nanming, *Dictionary of Film Art*, Chinese Film Press, 2005, p107

character, which could form a sentence to summarize the main content of the film⁸³. The theme of the film is what is stated in this sentence, and the scriptwriters will expand and extend the script along with this sentence. Also, Sid Field thinks that the subject of a film includes the character and his behaviors⁸⁴. McKee's definition of the theme is very similar to that of the scholar above. They all define the theme as a sentence that expresses the meaning of the story.

In McKee's view, he prefers the term "controlling idea" to the story meaning. The controlling idea may be expressed in a single sentence describing how and why life undergoes changes from one condition of existence at the beginning to another at the end⁸⁵. A controlling idea has two components, the value and the cause, which express the core meaning of the story. Controlling idea identifies the positive and negative charge of the story's critical value at the last act's climax, and it identifies the chief reason that this value has changed to its final state.

However, the story is always about the emotion, and the controlling idea also needs to carry certain emotion. According to different emotion types, the controlling idea of the story can be divided into the following three types.

The idealism, which mainly expresses optimism, hope, and human dreams, such as love and kindness, overcoming evil, human courage and wisdom. Most commercial films could be categorized into this type.

The pessimism, including the cynicism, loss and unhappiness, which are negative views of the depravity of civilization and the dark side of human nature.

The irony, which is the combination of idealism and pessimism, expresses the complexity and dichotomy of our existence. For instance, the compulsive pursuit of contemporary values, including success, fortune, fame, sex, power, will destroy you, but if you see this truth in time and throw away your obsession, you can redeem yourself.

⁸³ Wendy J Henson, *Screenwriting: Step by Step*, Pearson, 2004, p37

⁸⁴ Sid Field, *Screenplay: The Foundations of Screenwriting*, Translated by Zhong Dafeng, Houlang Film Press, 2012, p19

⁸⁵ Robert McKee. *Story: Style, Structure, Substance, and the Principles of Screenwriting*. NYC: HarperCollins, 2010 p115

This kind of ironic pattern is very popular in Hollywood film stories. In *Schindler's List*, Schindler gave up the fortune he had been pursuing, but he got the noble soul. In *Othello*, the moor finally confirms his wife's fidelity, but he just kills her. In *Farewell my Concubine*, Cheng Dieyi committed suicide, but he finally became the woman he dreams. This magical turn and contrast on the level of meaning shows the multifaceted nature of life incisively and vividly. It has been proved that the irony film can best stand the test of audience, critics and time. It can not only get the double harvest of box office and reputation, but also become an eternal classic in history.

The Cultural Discount in the Meaning

Stories convey ideas, emotions and values to us, which is exactly the meaning of stories. Although producers from different nations and cultures are aware of this, the meanings they present in their films and the ways in which they present them are different, resulting in different cultural discounts.

The cultural discount could appear in the connotation of the story meaning.

Values are the deepest part in the field of culture, which dominate people's behavior, belief and value orientation⁸⁶. The establishment of values will be affected by the living environment, social environment, educational background, cultural tradition and other factors, with a strong geographical, stability and autonomy. People who have different ethnic or cultural horizon would form the different value judgments and choice, and show the different emotional response to the same things by the influence of the historical tradition and life experience. Different countries may have different film stories due to their differences in values, and these films will inevitably cause frictions and conflicts of values in the process of cross-cultural communication, thus resulting in cultural discounts. This means that people from different regions might make different judgments and reactions toward the value and emotion carried by the story meaning, resulting in the cultural discount problem in the reception process.

⁸⁶ Wang Suya, *Cultural Discount in the Cross-cultural Communication of Chinese Films*, Zhengzhou University, 2014

Take the value of personal agency in Chinese and American films as examples. American films emphasize individual will, advocate individualism and encourage individual competition and independence. Chinese films tend to advocate collectivism, believing that the interests of collectivism are greater than those of individuals, and that individuals can sacrifice their will for the interests of the collective, so as to achieve overall harmony. Chinese film *Back to 1942* and American film *2012* both depict human nature in disasters. Because of the different values in the culture, the characters in the films make different choices in the face of the disaster. In *Back to 1942*, 19 different characters played out peacefully in their own story timelines, and they listened to their superiors' plans for their fates. In the face of famine, Chiang Kai-shek said that if farmers starve to death, China will survive; if soldiers starve to death, China will perish. This tragic spirit of collectivism is in stark contrast to the individual heroism in *2012*. In *2012*, the main characters believe that everyone is equal and has the right to survive. When they learned that Noah's ark prioritized the rescue of politicians, intellectuals and other social elites, they showed obvious anger and shame. The differences in values between Chinese and American audiences lead them to be confused about the choices made by the characters in the face of disasters. This cultural discount, to some extent, has weakened the humanity and significance of the stories portrayed by the producers.

The presentation mode of the meaning also could cause the culture discount.

In the story, the producer must give equal weight to both the positive and negative sides of the value and make them equal to each other. Sometimes, in order to achieve the reversal of the primary value in the climax of the story, the producer has to give more description of the antagonistic value before, so that the primary value is often in a passive position, or even make the audience think that the primary value has been completely defeated. After that, it revives the primary value and beats the opponent at the climax. The appeal of the controlling idea is derived from the strong value of confrontation. The stronger the value of confrontation is, the stronger the primary value it will be, which could make the controlling idea of the story be more appealing.

However, the audience often see a kind of film, which are always preaching a certain truth, and their chatter makes the audience very disgusted. If a film causes this kind of reaction, then its story must be in the didacticism. The positive and negative sides of the story value are not evenly matched, but always in the situation of great disparity in strength. As the primary value side always overcomes the opponent, it wins repeatedly, while the other side has no strength to fight back. By this time, the producer has turned the controlling idea of the story into a didactic idea.

The story is not only the place where the artist expresses his thoughts, but also the place where his ideas are proved. In France, artists are more willing to present their stories in the language, and persuade the audience to be convinced by a large number of dialogue between characters. Meanwhile, the Hollywood is more inclined to translate ideas into actions in the way of presentation of the meaning, and to express a view of life with the real results of the character's choices and actions. As a result, when French films enter the American film market, there was a huge difference in meaning presentation, which brought huge cultural discounts to French films.

In returning to *Mulan*, Disney transformed the story of Mulan, the raw material in Chinese folklore, to a standardized Hollywood film product. The typical American mainstream culture's ideological core is packaged in this gorgeous Chinese culture. The "loyalty and filial piety" of the original Chinese culture have been deconstructed, and the American spirit of individualism and feminism has become the connotation of the film.

The national spirit of American individualism expresses the affirmation of personal supremacy. Mulan is a Chinese traditional story, telling about a woman acting out of filial piety, dressing as a man, and joining the army for her father. The meaning of the original story shows the value orientation of self-sacrifice for the nation and the country. After the story was brought to the big screen in the United States, the spirit of the story changed. It emphasized that Mulan, in order to prove herself, became a soldier, and overcame all difficulties with her individual wisdom, and won the victory of the war. The core values conveyed by the film are like Mulan's own saying, 'I'm proving myself'. This fully reflects her individualistic thought, namely the reappearance of the American spirit. Such

core values also give audiences from different cultural backgrounds a spiritual comfort and inspiration.

Mulan has an Americanized understanding and interpretation of Chinese culture. It takes the values of individualism of American mainstream culture and value system of western society, to replace the culture and connotation of the traditional Chinese stories of Mulan. It portrays a heroic woman with strong feminist color and personal heroism to the global audience.

Of course, in a film story, its cultural discount is not the result of a simple role of story elements. All the elements of a story often work together on the culture contained in a film story, thus resulting in cultural discount. In the following chapters, the mechanism of action of the story elements, which affects the reception of the story of the film by audiences from different cultural backgrounds, will be analyzed.

Chapter 3 The Impact of the Cultural Discount on the International Competitiveness of the Film Story

"Culture" seems to be an invisible thing. Philosophers, sociologists, anthropologists, historians and linguists have been trying to define the concept of culture from the perspective of their respective disciplines, but there is no accepted definition. Generally speaking, culture is a social phenomenon, formed gradually in a certain time and space, and is the accumulation of social history. Different peoples gave birth to different cultures. Then, how does this intangible "culture" make tangible films "discounted" and how does it affect the international competitiveness of the film industry?

The international competitiveness of the film industry is based on the concept of the international competitiveness of the industry, which refers to the ability of a country's film industry to have a larger share in the international market compared with other countries in terms of the production, distribution and screening of films. The international competitiveness of an industry is ultimately reflected in the international market share of its products. The higher the share of a country's film industry in the international market, the stronger the international competitiveness of its film industry will be. The film industry's share of the international market is reflected in the international box office. However, the box office is created by the film audience, so the high competitiveness of the film industry is ultimately to make the film products gain the audience's recognition.

In a film story, the elements of the story often work together to produce a huge cultural discount. The mechanism of these elements influencing the international competitiveness of the film industry becomes the next question. Previous research on the issue of cultural discount could provide us with a basic framework. When defined the cultural discount, Hoskins started from the differences in the cultural structure, and pointed out that style, values, beliefs, history, myths, social systems, natural environment and behavior patterns are the reasons for cultural discounts. After incorporating these elements into the study of the film industry, they are presented in a different way, permeating every shot, every statement, every story. The influence of cultural discount on the international competitiveness of the film industry is through the action of the film

story to the audience, which could be realized by two mechanisms, the encoding/decoding, and the audience empathy.

THEORETICAL OVERVIEW OF THE TWO MECHANISMS

The Encoding/Decoding Mechanism

As a kind of cultural products, the film contains a variety of cultural symbols in the specific cultural system. Film creators express their ideas and opinions through the permutation and combination of these cultural symbols. Therefore, it is a reasonable perspective to analyze the film industry from the perspective of semiotics. Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding theory could give me a more appropriate entry point. He argues that as a kind of commodity, TV program should realize its value through production, distribution, exchange, and consumption.

The production process of the TV program is the encoding process of its information and meaning. Any encoding of information and meaning is inseparable from a particular environment, including the material and cultural environments. In the process of reconstruction, the information is influenced by the cultural environment to some extent, and certain customs, lifestyle, system, and others could affect the way of information construction. Therefore, in the process of TV program encoding, the producers often produce codes in a certain cultural environment with some cultural experience and cultural significance. Once the encoding process is completed, the TV program will be gone into the circulation. The encoded information will be interpreted by the audience in a variety of ways, trying to attract the attention of the audience.

In the circulation process, encoders lost control of codes, and the information will be decoded by the audience. Therefore, information terminal decoding is implemented by the consumption of the audience. At this point, Hall puts forward his own view that consumption and reproduction are almost simultaneous. The decoding of the audience is also carried out in a certain environment and context, which inevitably will be influenced by the individual's traditional ideas and cultural attainments, even the lifestyle.

Because both the encoder and the decoder interpret the same symbol in their own symbolic system, the result is not the same. There is the same possibility that the meaning could be presented smoothly with the intention of the encoder, and there are different possibilities, like the completely undecipherable or opposite interpretation. Based on this consideration, TV program production and transmission do not completely equal to general commodity production and circulation. Although both of them have the value realization of the four processes, whether the value could be realized truly and completed is still unknown. In addition to economic factors, there are cultural factors that impact this process.

Similar to TV programs, film products also use the external expressions of sound and images to convey their intrinsic meaning and value through the story. Therefore, this theory is suitable for the study of the film industry.

The Audience Empathy Mechanism

Another approach to find the impact of the cultural discount on the international competitiveness of the film industry is the audience empathy mechanism. An important indicator of the international competitiveness of the film industry is the acceptance of the audience. Therefore, audience theory is an important theoretical basis.

Audience empathy mechanism is based on reception theory. The German academic and the founder of the Receptional Aesthetic, Hans Robert Jauss argued that before the reading of literary works, the reader's consciousness is blank, but has already had some tendency, aesthetic requirements, standards and so on, which are closed related to readers' daily life experience, artistic accomplishment, and social thought. Jauss defined this consciousness as Horizon of Expectations⁸⁷, which means that the reader already has the initiative psychological foundation before reading, and this foundation could influence his reading and reception of literary works. If the work is completely opposite to the reader's horizon of expectations, the reader could not aware of the situation, and the effect

⁸⁷ Jauss, Hans Robert; Elizabeth Benzinger (1970). "Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory". *New Literary History*. 2 (1): 7–37. Viewed 15 March 2013

is almost nonexistent. This horizon of expectation could be the basis for both understandings and accepts of a story, as well as a reason for the audience to reject a story. When watching films, this kind of horizon of expectation could arouse the audience oriental expectation, lead the audience to a certain emotional state, and cause various expectations for in the middle and the end of the film. In this way, only films that conform to the audience's thinking mode could attract the audience and resonate with them.

Cultural empathy refers to the ability to accept another cultural point of view, to think of the particular way in which the people in a foreign society think and interact as the right way in the cross-cultural communication⁸⁸. Empathy enables the audience to appreciate and comprehend the cultural information and cultural feelings in the film, and to create a psychological blending, so as to accept the values and information conveyed in it. In the story, the audience could find themselves in the other world, which is different from themselves or similar to themselves. In the contradiction and conflict of the characters, the audience could more or less find one side of their humanity, and thus show the empathy. If I were the character, how would I behave and choose? We go to the films to enter a new, fascinating world, to inhabit vicariously another human being who at first seems so unlike us and yet at heart is like us, to live in a fictional reality that illuminates out daily reality⁸⁹.

JOINT FUNCTION MODE OF TWO MECHANISMS

While the encoding/decoding mechanism and audience empathy mechanism have the different theoretical basis, semiotic theory and reception theory respectively, these two mechanisms are almost functioning simultaneously in the process of the cultural discount effecting the international competitiveness of the film story.

⁸⁸ Xiao Qishu, Research on Cultural Empathy in Appreciation of Foreign Films

⁸⁹ Robert McKee. Story: Style, Structure, Substance, and the Principles of Screenwriting. NYC: HarperCollins, 2010,p5

The Impact on the Story Structure

The design of the time distribution of the beginning, development, climax, and ending, and each of the reverse plot is not only the encoding process of the story structure but also the implanting process of cultural elements in the story structure. The emotional occurrence of the audience tends to have certain regularity, too long foreshortening and too frequent climaxes often cause them to lose interest and produce aesthetic fatigue. Therefore, filmmakers' unreasonable design of the story structure will often bring the decoding and accepting obstacles to the audience.

In the anticipation of the audience, replacing the next incentive event by some innocuous plots could cause the audience's decoding to be contrary to the expectation, which will be difficult to arouse the audience's cultural experience and emotion, and lose watching interest and desire.

The Impact on the Story Setting

As mentioned above, the occurrence of any story is in a certain background, and specific background carries certain material, culture and story. Therefore, in the creative process of the film, it is always necessary to set the background of the film story in advance and encode the background information. However, the encoding process is inevitably accompanied by the certain cultural situation, cultural emotion and cultural significance.

When the audience interprets the story, they are often unconscious into a preset background, but at the same time, the audience also unconsciously want to understand the story in this specific background. Once the audience has mastered the regulation, a set of rules of decoding, in this setting, if the story is slightly illegal and contrary to the expectations of the audience, the audience will reject the work as illogical and untrustworthy.

The Impact on the Story Genre

Different story genres tend to have their own unique set of systems in the decoding process, some of which have more cultural factors than others. This situation affects the possibility of the correct decoding of the audience to some extent, thus impacting emotional transfer of the audience to the story. When a genre of story is carrying a common cultural value of human, the different decoding modes could be applied to achieve the same interpretation. This sense of decoding mode could maximally meet the needs of the audience's emotions and values, and it is easy to promote the emotional resonance of the audience.

The Impact on the Story Character

The story is inseparable from the character of the story. The encoding of the character is to give them specific characteristic and emotion. In this process, filmmakers often consciously or unconsciously transfer certain cultural qualities and cultural emotions to the story character. However, different audiences often have their own standards for the identification and judgment of different characters. Such standards in different cultural systems are often the important basis of the audience for decoding characters. Although the film is a fictional reflection of life, people are still more likely to find their own experience in it, thus obtaining emotional satisfaction, which is to generate empathy. No one is perfect. A perfect design of the character could make a false sense for the audience in the process of decoding, which makes the character be difficult to identify and influences the approval of the whole film story for the audience.

The Impact on the Story Meaning

The encoding of the story meaning refers to the form and the meaning expressed by it by the filmmaker. According to their own language habits and ethnic expression habits, filmmakers are used to choosing the form of encoding the story meaning, which could be lengthy or concise. When the audience is decoded by their different language habits and

expressions, they will produce different emotional judgments, such as love and boredom, which will influence the reception of the story.

Even on the basis of the correct interpretation of the meaning, it could be influenced by different values and generate different audience responses. Film stories convey specific cultural meanings in certain cultural contexts with the help of specific cultural emotions. These cultural elements are imperceptibly embedded in the process of encoding the meaning, trying to let the audience to a certain emotion framework, in order to arouse the audience's expectation of the story meaning. Therefore, only the meaning, in accordance with popular cultural feelings and values, have the possibility to arouse the public's recognition and cause the audience empathy mechanism in the case of correct decoding.

From this point of view, the encoding of the whole film story penetrates the cultural experience and cultural emotion of the encoder, which has endowed the story with certain cultural meaning. When these symbols with strong cultural factors are put into different cultural backgrounds to decode, the audience will make various positioning for them, which mainly based on their own special cultural experience and emotion. In this encoding and decoding process, due to the subjective and objective difference of the encoder and decoder from various culture systems, a lot of cultural symbols in the original film could not be interpreted correctly and accurately. The loss on the cultural value of the original film, the cultural discount, will generate in such situation and make the audience reject the film to a certain degree instead of inducing empathy, which definitely impacts the international competitiveness of the film industry.

Chapter 4 How to Eliminate the Cultural Discount in the Film Story—A Case Study of Three American Films

NARRATIVE TRANSPARENCY APPROACH

The theory of transparent narrative was proposed by American critic Robert Olson in his book *Hollywood Planet* in 1999. Transparency is the capability of certain texts to seem familiar regardless of their origin, to let the viewer project him or herself into the film or text, to seem a part of one's own culture, even though they have been crafted elsewhere⁹⁰. Transparency means being able to integrate various texts, break down cultural barriers, and allow audiences of different cultures to participate in their own local values, beliefs, emotions and meanings, and trigger resonance.

The theory of narrative transparency derived from the mythological theories of Roland Barthes and Hans Blumenberg, who respectively expounded the commonness of inspiring and satisfying the universal emotional needs in mythology from different perspectives. According to Roland Barthes, myth is a way of speech, which not only belongs to the ancient people's understanding of the world, but also can be the verbal construction of modern and post-modern world by modern media⁹¹. Hans Blumenberg answered the question of why people need myths. In his view, myths transmit and satisfy universal emotions, and these emotions are fundamental⁹². These theories are what Robert Olson called mythotype. These mythotypes contain the narrative structure and elements of emotion, and the text created with these narrative elements has narrative transparency⁹³. Olsen has identified 10 specific devices through which mythotypes are conveyed, so each is an apparatus of transparency. These devices are Open-endedness, Virtuality, Negentropy, Circularity, Ellipticality, Archetypal Dramatis Personae,

90 Scott Robert Olson, *Hollywood Planet: Global Media and the Competitive Advantage of Narrative Transparency*, New Jersey, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1999, p18

91 Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, New York, Hill & Wang

92 Hans Blumenberg, *Work on Myth*, Cambridge, MIT Press

93 Scott Robert Olson, *Hollywood Planet: Global Media and the Competitive Advantage of Narrative Transparency*, New Jersey, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1999, p91

Inclusion, Verisimilitude, Omnipresence, and Production Values. Their specific definitions and implications will be listed as follow.

Open-endedness

An open-ended narrative is one that has no end. Open-ended narratives insist on further elaboration.

Virtuality

The virtuality of the media enhances their transparency by connecting the audience to the affective mythotypes that undergird mythic narratives. It confounds the absolutism of reality by permitting resistance to it; in contrast to the “real” environment, which is chaotic, unpredictable, and hostile, the virtual experience is orderly, dependable, and inviting.

Negentropy

Kubery and Czisktemaholy proposed one of the most compelling observational and theoretical explanations of how the media can become a virtual reality for its audience. They used the term Negentropy to describe the psychological pull that television has on particular members of its audience, “the amount of order it produces in their consciousness”⁹⁴.

Circularity

Circularity refers to the tendency of the narrative to arrive where it began, to restore equilibrium and deposit its dramatis personae in a circumstance similar to the one from which they departed, what Ang called the *ad infinitum* effect.

Ellipticality

Ellipticality refers to the narrative apparatus through which detail is left out. Ellipticality primarily reinforces the mythotype of participation. Participation is served because the absence of detail allows the spectator to be involved in completing the picture; missing bits of time and space then belong to the viewer. This helps to draw viewers in, making them a participant in the narrative they observe.

94 Scott Robert Olson, *Hollywood Planet: Global Media and the Competitive Advantage of Narrative Transparency*, New Jersey, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1999, p98

Archetypal Dramatis Personae

The most transparent of characters are those whose own situation and personality are closest to the mythotype: those engaged in awe, in choice, in participation.

Inclusion

The narratives that will create the greatest pleasure for the majority of the audience are those that foster a sense of inclusion, a sense that the spectator is somehow a participant in the spectacle. This is one of the mythotypes, a major function of myth being the encouragement of participation and acculturation within the culture.

Verisimilitude

Verisimilitude is a generic construct like any other, what passes for realism is a function of conventional rules to which artists assiduously adhere.

Omnipresence

This omnipresence of the narration of story point of view serves the mythotype: it instills a sense of inclusion and participation, because the media are everywhere.

Production values

The scale, budget, and time of the film. Production values are a modern equivalent to the Taj Mahal or St. Peter's Basilica: an opportunity to marshal extensive human and capital resources toward an object with mythic significance. The result in the spectator is awe, one of the fundamental mythotypes.

It can be seen that narrative transparency combines two media theories. The first one is Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding theory. The communicator presents the content in a certain code that is encoding, while the receiver interprets the code that is decoding. Once a TV program is completed and the meaning is injected into the TV discourse, the language and discourse rules that give the meaning to the TV program are dominant⁹⁵. At this time, the TV program became an open and polysemantic discourse system, so that viewers can decode according to their own situations and understandings. Another theory is John Fiske's textual polysemy theory. According to him, in order to make a text to be

⁹⁵ Stuart Hall, *Encoding and Decoding in the Television Discourse*, Hangzhou, University of Zhejiang Press, 2005, P85

popular, it must be able to make sense to different audiences⁹⁶. The audience can construct the meaning from the text, break the existing rules, or mock the authority, or create another interpretation space, and get pleasure from it.

Olson thinks Hollywood's storytelling style makes it possible for American media to communicate with audiences of different cultural backgrounds. It not only smoothly outputs ideas to the audience, but also enables the audience from different culture to interpret the text from their own cultural values. Although different cultures have different meanings for mystery, the audience's desire for mystery is universal. This explains why *Raiders of the Lost Ark* can be transparent and cross cultural barriers, so that audiences from different cultures can find the elements of local culture in the film. Transparent narratives blur the boundaries between American culture and non-American culture, which is also an approach in this study to find the method that American films could reduce the cultural discount and realize cross-cultural communication.

Next I am going to introduce three case studies, which will be examined closely to see how they reflect different approaches to cross cultural audiences.

ZOOTOPIA

Zootopia is a 2016 American comedy animated film produced by Walt Disney Animation Studios and released by Walt Disney Pictures. It opened to record-breaking box offices in several countries, and earned a worldwide gross of over \$1 billion, making it the fourth-highest-grossing film of 2016, the 34th-highest-grossing film of all time, the fourth animated film to pass \$1 billion in global box-office earnings, and Walt Disney Animation Studios' highest-grossing film since 2013's *Frozen*⁹⁷.

Zootopia's largest markets overseas are China (\$235.6 million), followed by Japan (\$70.1 million), Russia and the CIS (\$39.2 million), Germany (\$34.2 million), the UK (\$34.2 million), France (\$31.9 million), and South Korea (\$31.6 million)⁹⁸. In China, it is

⁹⁶ John Fiske, *British Cultural Studies and Television*, Beijing, China Society Science Publishing House, 2000, P11

⁹⁷ Nancy Tartaglione and Anita Busch (April 5, 2016). "'Zootopia' Hops To \$800M+ Global; Top 2016 Grosser Still Has Play To Come". *Deadline Hollywood*.

⁹⁸ "*Zootopia* (2016) - International Box Office Results". *Box Office Mojo*. IMDb.

the highest-grossing Disney film in local currency (¥1.530 billion), surpassing *Avengers: Age of Ultron* (¥1.464 billion), as well as the seventh-highest-grossing film of all time⁹⁹. In Russia, it is the second-highest-grossing film of all time in local currency (₽2.3 billion), behind only *Avatar* (₽3.6 billion). It topped the Russian and German box office for three weekends, and the Chinese and Korean box office for two weekends¹⁰⁰.

Zootopia captivated audiences with its simple story lines. It details the unlikely partnership between a rabbit police officer and a red fox con artist, as they uncover a conspiracy involving the disappearance of savage predator inhabitants of a mammalian metropolis. From the mountain village to the zootopia, from chasing the dream to realizing the dream, from loss to determination, and all the positive energy of trying to do everything, a variety of action is transferred to the screen skillfully. In this animal world utopia, there are innate prejudices and sincere changes. There are shining ideals and the hidden reality of crisis. These two pairs of binary opposite elements show the essence of the meaning that the film wants to convey. Throughout the history of global cinema, dreams, change and heroism are the eternal factors of positive energy¹⁰¹, which makes it easy to understand the success of this film in theme. *Zootopia* not only meets the diversified demands of American animation, but also meets the market demands of realizing cross-cultural communication. The reason for its success is that an important mechanism of Hollywood movies has played a role, which is narrative transparency.

The Story Structure of Zootopia

Zootopia tells the story of Judy rabbit's struggle to realize her dream in zootopia. In a modern animal city, every animal does its job and lives a regular life. Judy was determined to become an animal police officer since she was young. Although everyone

⁹⁹ Entgroup, Chinese Box Office, <http://www.cbooo.cn/Alltimedomestic>

¹⁰⁰ Nancy Tartaglione (April 17, 2016). "'The Jungle Book' Packs \$136.1M Offshore As WW Cume Nears \$300M; 'Batman V Superman' At \$516M Overseas – Intl B.O." *Deadline Hollywood*.

¹⁰¹ Joe Wilson, Consistency and Transparency of Classic Narrative Films, translated by Chen Xiaomo, *Global Cinema*, 1997, 16-18

questioned her, she became the best graduate of the police school through her own efforts. She was in the police department with a number of large animal colleagues at the beginning, and she was not assigned to do anything. In order to prove herself, Judy accepted a carnivore missing case task. In the quest for the truth, Judy asks Nick, a fox who makes a living as a swindler, to help her. After several twists and turns, they finally uncover the truth behind the plot to restore the original order in zootopia.

First of all, the inclusion in the narrative transparency theory provides a perspective to analyze the structure of the film story. The narratives that will create the greatest pleasure for the majority of the audience are those that foster a sense of inclusion, a sense that the spectator is somehow a participant in the spectacle¹⁰². This is one of the mythotypes, a major function of myth being the encouragement of participation and acculturation within the culture. Inclusion means that the film story invites the audience to participate in the plot development of the story, which requires the film to have a simple story and complex characters, so that the audience can think together as if they are on the scene. The dramatic demand of Zootopia is to solve a case, which includes finding the small animals mysteriously disappeared in zootopia and bringing the crimes to justice. Characters also go through their own multiple changes to achieve a complex characterization. Judy rabbit experienced the process from full of confidence in herself to suffering a blow to regain confidence; Nick fox become a policeman himself finally, moving from being unreliable and untrusted.

Besides, the story is told from a restricted third-person perspective, attached to the character Judy rabbit. By choosing the perspective of the character in the story, the audience can only know what the character has experienced and what she is doing, but cannot predict the following story. This forces the audience to follow the character Judy rabbit step by step to uncover the truth of the case, maintain a high degree of enthusiasm in the whole process of watching the film, and pay attention to the direction of the story.

¹⁰² Scott Robert Olson, Hollywood Planet, Mahwah, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1999, 107

The linear narrative structure of the sequence is used in *Zootopia*. The advantage of this classic narrative structure is that it can clearly and completely unfold the story one by one, which is convenient for the audience to accept and understand. The linear features of narration the narratologist Todorov believed that narration started with a state of balance in some form, and then the balance was broken and then returned to the state of balance¹⁰³. It is a narrative mode that includes balance, the break of balance, the search for a new balance, and the return to balance. The narrative chain of *Zootopia* begins with the orderly and perfect state of zootopia, followed by the phenomenon of carnivores going crazy without any warning, then the hero and heroine solve the case and catch the real murderer, and finally zootopia returns to peace.

Different from the love story mode of Disney's classic princess series, the film adopts a different narrative mode, birth-frustration-regeneration-success. The innovation of the story lies in that the truth of the case revealed for the first time is set as the false truth. The process of finding the truth again enriches the content of the story. The steps of frustration, regeneration and success are repeatedly spliced together to make the story full of twists and turns. This mode makes the logic of the animation script very clear. Adults can achieve the purpose of entertainment and relaxation, and younger audiences can better understand the content conveyed by the film. Compared with the subversive mode of adventure, the classic narrative mode does not cause an obstacle to the understanding of the audience, nor does it mean that the story is less attractive. Audiences know that the animation script will end up as a happy ending, but they are still curious about how the process works and are attracted by the charm of various characters.

In *Zootopia*, the plot is controlled precisely, without any delay, and the emotional stimulation is also timely. As a single-line narrative animation, *Zootopia* adopts chronological narration in terms of narrative time, with progressive story layers and rigorous logic. In terms of structure, the story is full of details, thus fully mobilizing the audience's senses, and guiding the audience to appreciate something deeper than the

¹⁰³ Long Nian, *Transparent Narrative Strategy of American TV Series*, Modern Communication, Beijing Union Press, Beijing, 2011-08, p10-15

punchline. The main clue of the film is Judy rabbit's efforts to realize her dream, while the deep clue is the racial conflict hidden in zootopia. Judy's actions lead to the deep clues of the story step by step that make the alternation and connection of the two clues be smooth.

In addition, the suspense setting in the story structure can attract the audience's desire to watch. Zootopia isn't a mystery, so there's not a lot of suspense. After Judy rabbit accepts the case of missing persons in zootopia, solving the case is to solve the problem of who is behind the crime. As a result, it becomes a big mystery who is behind the crime, and the audience will be curious about it. At first, all kinds of evidence pointed to the Lion Mayor, finally found out that the real villain is the Deputy Mayor Sheep who looks like a very weak character. But she was not evil in the traditional sense, and she did so because herbivores were prejudiced against carnivores. Setting some questions as the development of the story and answering the audience's doubts step by step, Zootopia creates a psychological addiction for the audience.

Zootopia uses almost all of its space to tell the story of a crime that has many twists and turns. Starting with Judy rabbit and Nick fox in search of the missing Otter, the story step by step lead the audience into a more unfathomable conspiracy. In the process of looking for the crime, there are an exciting road chase, train jumping, nervous and dangerous forest escape, the tension of being shot, and the peace and satisfaction of being survived. In the film's conversational rhetoric, Judy rabbit repeatedly asks herself "what's going on" and "who's manipulating this". It seems to be a self-questioning design, but in fact it is to attract the audience to think about the problem, pay attention to the case itself, and master the rhythm of the film. These carefully designed suspense and foreshadowing both perfectly bring the audience into the story.

The Character of Zootopia

The relationship between character design and the narrative is very important. According to *Introduction to Narratology*, the author argues that in the process of the development of character structure and narrative structure, the understanding and feeling

of characters are gradually deepened, and complete characters are created in the narrative space and time. Such shaping includes direct description and indirect expression, and these views are also applicable in animated films¹⁰⁴.

Animated characters are the most intuitive elements and visual symbols in animated films. As the core and soul of a film, animated characters, when created by producers, not only need to have the shape to catch the audience's eyes and meet the aesthetic needs, but also have the personality charm to attract the audience, so as to convey emotions and make the audience resonate. The character design is not given by the designer at will, but after comprehensive consideration of the film's living environment, social background, values and other aspects, the character is given some social commonness and personal characteristics, so that the character is suitable for the story plot, which is conducive to promoting the development of the plot.

Known as the kingdom of animation, Disney has created a batch of popular cartoon character images for the audience since its inception, and has accumulated relatively mature creation theories and rich creation experience. Directed by Byron Howard, *Zootopia* is even more outstanding in production technology and social significance, winning the audience of different ages around the world. And in the film, let the audience take delight in talking about most undoubtedly is one vivid character image. The makers of *Zootopia* are unique in character modeling, personality building and dramatic effects, creating highly personified and distinct character images, which broaden the audience's vision of animation and trigger emotional resonance of global audiences. The success of this film shows the importance of animated characters with unique personality charm and emotional interaction to the cross-cultural communication of animated films.

In Roland Barthes' theory, modern media are constantly creating new myths¹⁰⁵, and all kinds of film and television always contain images of real-life characters. In terms of the characterization, *Zootopia* also aims to achieve the transparency of the characters and

¹⁰⁴ Junqiang Tan, Introduction to Narratology: From Classical Narratology to Postclassical Narratology, Higher Education Press, 2008, 198

¹⁰⁵ Roland Barthes, From Work to Text. In R. Barthes, Image, Music, Text, New York, Hill & Wang, p155-164

arouse the resonance of the audience through the two approaches of Archetypal Dramatis Personae and Virtuality. According to narrative transparency, the most transparent of characters are those whose own situation and personality are closest to the mythotype: those engaged in awe, in choice, in participation¹⁰⁶. Besides, the virtuality of the media enhances their transparency by connecting the audience to the affective mythotypes that undergird mythic narratives¹⁰⁷. It confounds the absolutism of reality by permitting resistance to it; in contrast to the “real” environment, which is chaotic, unpredictable, and hostile, the virtual experience is orderly, dependable, and inviting. It is in fact so orderly, dependable, and inviting that many extensive users of the media find the virtual environment preferable to the physical one, experiencing separation and isolation from the latter.

In this part, Judy rabbit and Nick fox will be selected as the main objects of analysis to elaborate how *Zootopia* creates characters through narrative transparency. This paper will discuss the character image building of *Zootopia* from the aspects of character image growth, multi-facet and contrast. In addition, through the analysis of the inspirational complex and critical consciousness behind the protagonist image, the connotation of the protagonist image in this excellent American animated film is interpreted.

Judy

In any film, character images are not static. With the change of the surrounding environment and the increase of experience, human appearance behavior and character concept will change. Similarly, the character image in animated films will also change. Generally speaking, animated characters have many good qualities and are loved by the audience, but they also have some disadvantages. Driven by the storyline, the characters deepen their cognition of the surrounding environment and their own abilities, seek changes, improve themselves and surpass themselves, which is the growth of characters in animated films. In *Zootopia*, Judy rabbit is questioned by large animals and male animals in the process of pursuing her dream because there are neither small animals nor

106 Scott Robert Olson, *Hollywood Planet*, Mahwah, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1999, 105

107 Scott Robert Olson, *Hollywood Planet*, Mahwah, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1999, 96

female animals in the police department. Under the dual restriction of physiological condition and social cognition, Judy rabbit created miracles with her own courage and persistence. Judy's growth is embodied in the external and internal aspects.

In terms of physical appearance, Judy was thin and weak when she entered the police academy at the beginning, and lagged behind other students in the assessment. But Judy is not willing to fall behind, through hard training and strong will, Judy becomes stronger than before, and she became the outstanding student, and entered the police station. Later, with Nick's cooperation, she successfully solved the case of missing mammals through countless difficulties and dangers, and became a police model.

On the other hand, Judy's ideas have also been transformed and sublimated with the increase of experience. In the film, Judy's dream is to be a policeman. Although she was often laughed at by other animals when she was a child, she persisted in her dream and proved that even a weak herbivore could become a policeman. She became a police officer and was assigned to manage the road traffic, but she still did her best and expected to do her best. When she spoke to reporters about the disappearance of a mammal, her answers were revealing. Her opinion that carnivores are different from herbivores, and carnivores can never change their savage nature hurt Nick's feelings and cause a riot and panic in zootopia. Fortunately, Judy realized her bias in time and apologized to Nick, hoping to get Nick's forgiveness. After reinventing her values, Judy and her partner uncover the truth and turn the chaos around. At that time, Judy's idea was to achieve freedom and equality among all animal groups, to pursue mutual respect and harmonious coexistence, and to realize the transformation from individual concept to collective concept.

In addition, the shaping of Judy rabbit's character also increases the audience's recognition of this role. Although she is brave, persistent, wisdom, Judy was naive and impatient when she entered society at the first time. The word, tomboy, which means a girl who exhibits characteristics or behaviors considered typical of the gender role of a boy, is apt for Judy's image. Judy, as a weak rabbit, dares to fight for justice when she is unarmed. From the backward police academy to the excellent police officers who solved

the biggest security problem in zootopia, Judy has fleshed out her image as a tomboy with various experiences. This kind of rich character image can go deep into audience's hearts and arouse their resonance, which makes the film's inspirational complex break the limitation of heroism and become amiable. A little man can dream big and be a great hero, which is the transparency of Judy.

Nick

A successful character image is flexible and vivid, which can arouse the emotional resonance of the audience, while a simple and rigid character image is not attractive. As a result, the designers of Zootopia gave the characters a multi-faceted characteristic. If the leading character Judy rabbit carries the inspirational complex in Zootopia, then Nick fox carries the critical consciousness of social prejudice in the film. Nick, the eventual hero of zootopia, has a very distinct personality. In the first half of the film, the director presents the image of Nick fox to the audience, who is very cunning. He makes profits by taking advantage of the kindness of Judy rabbit. He is a fraudster in zootopia and bears the collective prejudice of other animals against the fox in zootopia. Such a portrayal for the audience created Nick opportunistic, cunning image.

But as the story progresses, the audience learns more about Nick's childhood. Young Nick is pure and kind, and dreams of being a member of the boy Scouts made up of herbivores. However, he is rejected and insulted by herbivores. After that, Nick gives up the belief of correcting social prejudice with his own actions and gradually becomes a cunning fox in everyone's eyes. Through the plot design in which Nick tells the story of his childhood, the audience can realize the kindness and justice in Nick's heart.

Usually, Nick is still glib. However it is through his glib characteristics that Nick could help Judy get clues, solve difficulties, and find the truth finally in the later adventure. At first, Nick's cunning is a little annoying, but as the story goes on, the audience can see Nick's inner goodness and justice under the surface of his cunning with the deeper understanding of Nick.

In Zootopia, the director expresses his criticism of social prejudice by interspersing Nick's growth experience. In fact, the most frightening thing in zootopia is not the

predators or the big animals, but the inherent prejudice between different animals, which makes it difficult for Judy and Nick to achieve their dreams. It even leads Nick to give up his dream and live by cheating.

Producers use Nick's image to create a mapping of the real phenomenon of human society, thus arousing the audience's resonance. In the real society, prejudice can be seen everywhere. Individuals in prejudice disguise themselves as much as possible due to their helplessness and fear of prejudice, thus forming a vicious circle between prejudice and anti-prejudice. Just like what Nick said in the film, "don't let others see your tears", many individuals who are pushed to the edge by social prejudice hide their real and vulnerable side, presenting a gesture of conforming to prejudice and cynicism, and the tragedy behind this gesture is worth people's reflection. In Zootopia, Nick finally overcame the negative influence of his inner shadow caused by social prejudice under the influence of Judy, and put his wisdom and courage into the defense of zootopia, becoming the first fox policeman in the history of zootopia. Such a happy ending is not only the consistent style of American animation films, but also reflects the creator's hope to eliminate social prejudice.

The little-man heroism character image in the film is similar to that in many American films with hero themes. In Hollywood movies, the heroism of little people is almost the source of cultural values in many films. So it's not so much zootopia as it's a reflection of the human ideal of a city. The personal heroism reflected from the image of the film has dreams, justice, energy, and sunshine, which almost satisfies all audience's fantasies about superheroes and gives the audience infinite authenticity.

The Story Meaning of Zootopia

Kubery and Czisktemaholy proposed one of the most compelling observational and theoretical explanations of how the media can become a virtual reality for its audience¹⁰⁸. They used the term Negentropy to describe the psychological pull that television has on

¹⁰⁸ Scott Robert Olson, Hollywood Planet, Mahwah, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1999, 140

particular members of its audience, “the amount of order it produces in their consciousness”¹⁰⁹.

Entropy, one of the parameters used to represent the state of matter in thermodynamics, is represented by the symbol S , and its physical meaning is a measure of the degree of disorder of the system. The story meaning in front of the audience, like entropy in the physical world, becomes increasingly disordered. The audience will decode the meaning conveyed by the producer through the film story according to the different cultural background, which will lead to the correct or biased different understanding and produce cultural discount. Negentropy, the decrease in entropy, is the negative change in the entropy function. Negentropy is a measure of the order, organization and complexity of a material system. For the story meaning, negentropy represents the reduction of the increment of chaos. It is a process in which the encoder guides the audience to correctly understand the meaning of the story through specific methods. The encoder can make the audience correctly interpret the meaning contained in the story and realize negentropy by selecting the meaning that the audience is willing to accept or the way that the meaning is transmitted.

As an animated film, *Zootopia* faces audiences of different ages and cultures. When interpreting the story meaning of *Zootopia*, audiences around the world will be influenced by their own age, culture and other factors, and then have different understandings of the meaning that the producers hope to convey. It is particularly important for the producers to lead audience to correctly interpret the meaning of the story according to their ages and cultural backgrounds. In this part, the following two perspectives will be adopted as the entry points to analyze how *Zootopia* can export meaning to the global audience and guide them to correctly understand the meaning.

The Classic Narrative of the Antagonism between Good and Evil

The so-called classic narrative refers to some kind of enduring narrative theme and narrative mode. In Hollywood, the antagonism between good and evil is a kind of classic

¹⁰⁹ Kubey, R., & Czisktemaholy, M. (1990). *Television and the Quality of Life: How Viewing Shapes Everyday Experience*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, p4

narrative, which widely exists in many film genres. There are clear advantages to this kind of storytelling. First of all, the antagonism between good and evil directly creates the dramatic tension. In addition, in the antagonism between good and evil, the two sides of the contradiction are relatively clear, which facilitates the audience from different cultural backgrounds to understand the film stories of strange cultures.

In Zootopia, justice is represented by Judy rabbit, while the villain is the Deputy Mayor Sheep, a politician who maliciously antagonizes carnivores and herbivores. In the contest between good and evil, the fox, the rabbit and the people around them show the beauty of human nature. For example, Judy rabbit out of a sense of honor to save the underworld boss Mr. Big's daughter, the other side is to make Judy rabbit the godmother for their children. The fox who bullied Judy rabbit when she was a child grows up and realizes his mistake, which made the fox and the rabbit live happily together finally. The meaning, good prevails over evil forever, is in line with the basic human emotional needs and primitive desires, and Zootopia chooses this sameness approach to realize such classic narrative. To show the common ideal of human beings in a just way, this film has strong emotional power for the audience.

The use of the classic narrative of the antagonism between good and evil does not mean that Zootopia is too juvenile in its narration. Zootopia in English means the utopia of animals. Although from a marketing perspective, the term "utopia" is easily confused by the audience. However, its precision is hard to replace. Zootopia has no intention to create a perfect world in animation. From the history of Disney's animation feature films, it is not hard to find that although Disney provides a beautified world, the happy ending of the protagonist in the end is still a pity, which is especially true in Pocahontas (1995) and Little Mermaid (1989). Even in the pure animal world, the ideal world does not exist. Simba in Lion King eventually overcomes scar to reclaim the throne, but his late father Mufasa will never see the day Simba becomes the lion king.

In zootopia, the young audience sees the Deputy Mayor Sheep finally brought to justice, while the other animals hold a grand carnival, and everyone sings and dances together under the lead of the Sharkey Sheep, which marks the end of the nightmare.

However, for the adult audience, the film's hidden regret is that even if it is a utopia, it is still imperfect.

The conflict between herbivores and carnivores was temporarily eased, and everything returned to the old order. The DMV remains inefficient and gender equality in the police department remains incomplete. Mr. Big and his team is still doing illegal business. The animal world is not a homogenous society.

The Realization of Individualism

Individualism is one of the values continuously exported by Hollywood movies, which is also regarded as the embodiment of American spirit. Compared with collectivism, individualism is easier to obtain the projection of audiences from different cultures. Zootopia delivers individualistic values through the creation of characters. The film requires the audience to place part of their emotions and will on the protagonist in the process of watching the film, so as to worry about the safety of the protagonist from the bottom of their hearts and be affected by their emotions. Only by identifying with the characters can the audience identify with the meaning of the film.

As a child, Judy rabbit dreamed of being a police officer to punish evil and improve the good. Although this ideal was questioned, ridiculed and denied by her parents, other people and instructors of the police school, Judy rabbit never gave up her dream. Instead, she redoubled her efforts to become an excellent graduate of the police school. After entering the police station, Judy rabbit volunteered to solve the important case of crisis in zootopia, and finally became a meritorious police officer. Through two stories, Judy rabbit is depicted in different stages of struggle to achieve personal goals, evoking the audience's resonance for the realization of personal ideals.

Nick, who is always cheating, abducting and cynical, joins the police force under the influence of the positive and righteous Judy rabbit, saying goodbye to the past life in the gray area. It is worth mentioning that the act of joining the police force is only a brief summary of the "more active" life in the film, and the film does not negate the lifestyle of people like Mr. Big who are obviously walking on the edge of the law. The point is that whatever life Nick chooses is his conscious choice. When Nick and Judy choose to be

policemen, it is more important to realize their own value and give full play to their own talents, rather than to be bound with a certain collectivism spirit.

Heroism often comes along with individualism. Heroes are the best of many individuals, with superior qualities and a mission to defend themselves and others. In Hollywood movies, dramatic conflicts originate from the survival crisis, including the destruction of the natural survival environment and the human survival environment, encountered by the protagonist, while the appearance of the hero can comfort people's fear, doubt and worry. Heroism is also the undertaker of the aforementioned classic narration of good and evil.

However, contemporary audiences have long been accustomed to the traditional heroic narrative that has existed since ancient Greek mythology, which involves disaster appearance, the hero appearance, and the hero saves the world. This leads to the emergence of an anti-heroic narrative. In Zootopia, Disney transcends the traditional heroic narrative without violating the values of individualism and heroism. In the film, Judy rabbit has become a hero twice. The first is "solved case", not only found the missing Otter and other carnivores, but also revealed the plot of the Lion Mayor, crushing the "midnight howl" group. However, the film does not end there, the development of events later proved the mistakes of Judy rabbit, who also handed over her badge and went back to the countryside. But still being Judy rabbit, she discovered unexpectedly in her home town "midnight howl" the truth, resolutely returned to zootopia to expose the conspiracy of deputy mayor sheep.

In the film, there is a small anti-hero narration between the two heroism narrations. This setback plays the role of encouraging and restraining the final success of Judy rabbit. The failure of solving the case for the first time shows that Judy rabbit is not born with super ability and foresight, but the decisive, resolute, brave, and other qualities of the character guarantee her final victory. This also enables the audience to identify with the two characters and see the value of struggle, dream and friendship no matter they hold an idealistic or pessimistic attitude towards life.

AVENGERS: AGE OF ULTRON

Avengers: Age of Ultron is a 2015 American superhero film based on the Marvel Comics superhero team the Avengers, produced by Marvel Studios and distributed by Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures. It is the sequel to 2012's *The Avengers* and the eleventh film in the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU). In the film, the Avengers fight Ultron, an artificial intelligence obsessed with causing human extinction.

Avengers: Age of Ultron grossed \$459 million in the United States and Canada and \$946.4 million in other territories for a worldwide total of \$1.405 billion¹¹⁰. It became the fifth-highest-grossing film worldwide and the fourth-highest-grossing 2015 film¹¹¹. *Avengers: Age of Ultron* earned \$200.2 million in its first weekend from 44 countries, opening in first in all, which was 44% above its predecessor's opening. Additionally, the film saw the largest non-China international IMAX opening with \$10.4 million. The top earning countries were South Korea (\$28.2 million), the UK (\$27.3 million) and Russia (\$16.2 million)¹¹². The film broke records in many countries, including opening-day records in Mexico (\$6.8 million), the Philippines (\$1.6 million), and Indonesia (\$900,000)¹¹³; opening-weekend records in Mexico (\$25.5 million), Russia and the CIS (\$16.2 million), Hong Kong (\$6.4 million), and the Philippines (\$7.7 million); and highest opening weekend for a superhero film in the UK, Ireland and Malta (\$27.3 million), Germany (\$9.3 million), Sweden, Norway, and the Netherlands¹¹⁴. *Avengers: Age of Ultron*' success at the global box office has been helped by its design for transparent storytelling. In this case study, different points of structure, character, genre, and meaning will be chosen to analyze specifically.

¹¹⁰ *Avengers: Age of Ultron* (2015)". Box Office Mojo. Retrieved November 11, 2015.

¹¹¹ "Worldwide Grosses". *Box Office Mojo*. Retrieved May 10, 2015.

¹¹² "2015 Worldwide Grosses". Box Office Mojo. Retrieved July 5, 2015.

¹¹³ Tartaglione, Natalie (April 27, 2015). "'Avengers: Age of Ultron' Hammers Out \$200.2M Overseas – Update". *Deadline Hollywood*. Archived from the original on May 4, 2015. Retrieved April 27, 2015.

¹¹⁴ McClintock, Pamela (May 1, 2015). "Box Office: 'Avengers: Age of Ultron' Set for Massive \$85M-Plus Friday, Eyes Record U.S. Debut". *The Hollywood Reporter*. Archived from the original on July 6, 2015. Retrieved May 2, 2015.

The Structure of Avengers: Age of Ultron

First, from the perspective of sequel movies, the Avengers series presents a narrative characteristic of open-endedness and circularity in structure. An open-ended narrative is one that has no end¹¹⁵. On the whole, there is always a storyline running through all the episodes. By increasing the story span to maintain the continuity of the story, the Avengers series show the characteristics of open-endedness. Circularity refers to the tendency of the narrative to arrive where it began, to restore equilibrium and deposit its dramatis personae in a circumstance similar to the one from which they departed, what Ang called the ad infinitum effect¹¹⁶. From the perspective of each film, each episode narrates a relatively complete and independent story with a temporary narrative ending. This narrative form appears repeatedly in each episode, forming the feature of circularity. The nested structure of the Avengers films, in which a big story is followed by several smaller stories, keeps the narrative intensity and pace and makes the global audience be attracted.

In the case of *Avengers: Age of Ultron*, the story focuses on the burnout of the battle-hardened superheroes. Tony Stark, who has been stripped of his iron armor, has therefore invented Ultron, a self-aware, learnable robot with artificial intelligence, and has given Ultron the task of commanding a legion of robots. To the superheroes' surprise, the evolving Ultron comes to the conclusion that humans are the greatest threat on earth, and begins to carry out a plan to cleanse humans. The avengers must reassemble to resolve this crisis of their own making. The whole story remains in a suspense state, whether the superheroes can stop Ultron from eliminating human beings promotes the development of the plot, and stimulates the performance of the characters. This kind of plot design makes the audience who is expecting the ending of the story follow the adjustment of the information and fill in the blanks constantly, so they can't help participating in the expression and construction of the narrative. In order to better illustrate how the film improves the viewing experience and acceptance of global audiences by designing story

¹¹⁵ Scott Robert Olson, *Hollywood Planet*, Mahwah, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1999, 95

¹¹⁶ Scott Robert Olson, *Hollywood Planet*, Mahwah, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1999, 100

structure, the following analysis will focus on the conflict mode of binary opposition and the narrative structure of causal advancement.

Conflict Mode of Binary Opposition

Binary opposition is the main way to create conflicts in the Avengers films. In *Avengers: Age of Ultron*, superheroes have specific value systems and character symbols. Despite their different personalities, they all agree on the need to preserve the existing social order. However, as the antagonistic villains and heroes, they often want to break the existing order for their own selfish desires, and thus have a collective conflict with the Avengers. The conflict mode of binary opposition is the foundation of the construction of dramatic conflicts in Marvel films. As the core conflict of Marvel films, binary value opposition usually leads to two progressive key plot points and dominates the whole film. It is based on this dualistic conflict mode of the confrontation between good and evil that the individualism value of superheroes is manifested. However, the character conflicts between superheroes, or the fact that some heroes are not accepted by the mainstream society, are only based on the conflict of binary opposition and designed to promote the story. For example, the gap between Hulk and human, the conflict between Captain America and SHIELD, and the conflict between Captain America and Iron Man are not binary values. However, these conflicts and frictions create the personal charm of each hero and make the narration of the film more intense.

The conflict mode of binary opposition is formed by the creator after summarizing the experience of a large number of audiences. It is an important reason why superhero movies are recognized around the world and remain popular. Although the ending can be expected, in the process of plot advancement, the audience gradually vents their emotions and obtain an aesthetic satisfaction of novelty seeking. When the film ended, justice eventually prevailed over evil, the audience's emotions also got the maximum stimulation.

A Causal Narrative Structure

Cause-driven storytelling is the way Marvel superhero movies are usually structured. This linear narrative structure often takes time as a clue to introduce the generation,

intensification and resolution of contradictions. This seemingly stylized approach to causality fits well with the themes of superhero movies. In superhero movies, the main selling point is the cathartic function of plot progression. And this catharsis function is generated by the narrative structure of causal advancement. This kind of narrative structure, with a close logical relationship, will attract the audience to pay attention to the development of the story. As the confrontation between the two sides heats up, the evil is finally defeated, and the audience's emotions are released in the process.

In the Marvel superhero genre, the causal narrative is used not only for individual films, but also for the interconnection of different films. The twins told Ultron that they had volunteered to join Lord Straker's transformation because their parents had been killed by a missile made by the Stark industry. At the end of *Captain America 2*, Lord Straker appears to explain the origins of the twins Quicksilver and the Red Witch. In the second season of *SHIELD*, 19 episodes also mentioned Lord Straker, thus interacting with the plot of *Avengers: Age of Ultron*. In the film, Straker says he is not only a Hydra member but also a SHIELD member, taking on *Captain America 2*'s story plot. These sorts of causal connections make the entire Marvel cinematic universe relevant, and make the script seem well-crafted and justified.

The Character of Avengers: Age of Ultron

From the point of view of the specific character settings, *Avengers: Age of Ultron* designs a large network of interpersonal relationships to organize numerous characters. The expansion and contraction of the character network also show the characteristics of openness and circularity. Numerous characters form a complex arc of characters. New characters can be accommodated into open texts at any time. Smoothly developing characters run through the whole story. Besides, accidents end character arcs sometimes. The characters are woven into blocks by lines and weaved into nets by blocks, showing the organization pattern of relationship group. Characters drive the continuation of the plot and enrich the depth and breadth of the story.

When the lives of two seemingly unrelated superheroes are extended in the longitudinal development of time or the horizontal spread of time and space, it will be found that the causal relationship between them unexpectedly forms for the audience. For example, Captain America, who became famous as early as World War II, turned out to be the experimental work of the father of the Iron Man and another famous professor. Captain America's iconic weapon shield was also made for him by Iron Man's father. In the film, the missing Winter Soldier, who is mentioned by Captain America and the Falcons at a victory dinner, used to be Captain America's comrade-in-arms during World War II. Not only does this deep set of relationships allow audiences to occasionally stumble upon a cameo from one superhero or another in a personal story, but it also makes the origins of Marvel's many superheroes more like a complete epic myth.

In addition to the transparency of the relationship between characters in the Avengers films, some specific cultural identity strategies have been formed in order to gain the acceptance of audiences from different cultures. The first is the civilian origins of superheroes. Most of the heroes in the Avengers are ordinary people who have gained some kind of superpowers due to an accidental major accident. Then, their peaceful lives have been shattered, and they have joined the just fight against war for peace, or against the equally powerful forces of evil and destruction. In *Avengers: Age of Ultron*, the beloved Captain America started out as a small, undersized young man. He wanted to fight for his country, but because of his physical size, he was refused to join the army and was a failure among his peers. He later joined the Iron Man's father's experimental project, after a lot of efforts to become Captain America. Similarly, Scarlet Witch and Quicksilver, the new superheroes in Avengers, are orphans who lost their parents by accident. In miserable vagabonding life, they had the super ability by chance, became superheros. This kind of role setting of civilian origin makes superheroes more immersive to the audience and shortens the psychological distance between the characters and the audience. At the same time, for viewers, the theme of the populist superhero fighting evil easily resonates across borders and languages because everyone has an obligation to protect the earth we live on together, and anti-human forces like the Nazis

are the common enemies of people all over the world. Along with the development of the story, the audience will be aroused by the strong sense of justice and responsibility, and follow the characters in the film to punish evil and to fight for peace. On the other hand, such themes also intentionally or unintentionally cater to the psychological needs of ordinary people. Everyone has a hero dream in his heart. When the real life can only accommodate ordinary forms, people will place their hero complex in the virtual movie plots and look for the sense of substitution and satisfaction in the hero characters.

In addition, when there is a big gap between the world view of superheroes and the reality of ordinary audiences, it is a good way for audiences to accept that superheroes also have the emotional world of ordinary people. Although the superheroes have different from ordinary people's ability, but they also have love, affection, friendship and other aspects of trouble. In the Avengers, Thor from Asgard actually has two storylines, both of which are emotional. First, it is the bromance between Thor and his brother Loki. Thor has a lot of faith in Loki, and no matter what Loki does wrong, as the older brother, Thor always wants to smooth over his brother's problems and lead him on the right track. Even though Loki needs to kill Thor again and again, he never wavers in his belief in saving his young brother. Another storyline is Thor's love affair with the human female scientist Jane. Thor is a god, and Jane is an ordinary person, they support each other through the difficulties, and help Thor to restore the power. Similarly, Iron Man and his secretary Pepper are brave enough to fall in love after they experience difficulties together. At ordinary times, Iron Man and Pepper's life is full of sweet and happiness. But when danger comes, they can help each other and fight enemies with great cooperation. They are the model couple in the Avengers. Despite their superpowers, superheroes are just as emotionally normal as everyone else. To create superheroes based on the emotions of ordinary people, so that these seemingly unusual characters can be more easily understood by audiences in different cultures and regions, and thus generate emotional resonance.

The Genre of Avengers Series Films

In terms of genre, we will take the superhero movies represented by *Avengers: Age of Ultron* as the analysis object, make a summary of the character of such genre, and look for the reasons why superhero films are accepted by the global audience as a film genre.

Thomas Schatz proposed in *Hollywood Genres: Formulas, Filmmaking, and the Studio System* that to determine the basic features and symbolic functions of a genre film, it is necessary to study the iconography of the genre. In order to state the intrinsic or essential significance of objects and characters within the genre, we need to consider the genre of iconography. Iconography contains the process of narrative and visual coding generated by the repetition of a popular story¹¹⁷. For example, the white hat in a western film or the tall hat in a song and dance film is particularly meaningful, because it provides specific symbolic functions in the narrative system. A generic image renders meaning not only through its use in individual genre films, but also in relation to the genre system itself.

According to the view of this iconography, in the study of superhero films, the fixed patterns of superhero film genres, such as the costumes and equipment of superheroes, are abstracted, and the characteristics of these superhero film genres need to be summarized. These attributes represent a very different value when these elements are seen as typological systems of ritual narratives. If we are really to explain the Hollywood genre, we must explore its common social functions and their formal conventions¹¹⁸. In addition to the iconography, in the summary of the characteristics of superhero movies, it is also necessary to clarify the characteristics, narrative structure, character relations, specific social functions, and the theme concept of constant attention of the superhero characters.

This analysis will summarize the external characteristics of superhero film genres by summarizing their specific aspects as follow.

¹¹⁷ Thomas Schatz, *Hollywood Genres : formulas, filmmaking, and the studio system*, Boston, Mass. : McGraw Hill, c1981, p29-31

¹¹⁸ Thomas Schatz, *Hollywood Genres : formulas, filmmaking, and the studio system*, Boston, Mass. : McGraw Hill, c1981, p38-39

Visual system: superhero films form a unique set of visual codes through the special costumes, props and other elements of the main characters.

The special angle movement scenes in superhero films are not found in other types of movies. The direction and angle of this movement are generally related to how the superpowers of superheroes are set.

The binary opposition is inherent in superhero film. The mission relationship of superhero films is made up of the inherent binary opposition between the superhero and the supervillain.

The narrative mode of superhero films is a unique narrative mode with mythological structure. The key of this narrative mode is the journey of superheroes.

The symbolic meaning of the characters in superhero films: the special superheroes with the color of salvation, sacrifice and beyond the scope of ordinary people's ability symbolize the power of the ancient mythology. They protect people and the earth, but always maintain a certain distance from the human community.

An important internal characteristic of superhero films is the relationship between this genre and the sociocultural psychology peculiar to the United States. This genre has made critical progress in the 21st century because it meets the cultural and psychological needs of American society. This is an issue that superhero films as a new genre need to constantly explore. In the category of genre, it needs to seek a breakthrough. Nolan's Batman trilogy is an in-depth interpretation of the current American social and cultural changes, which makes the batman can meet the demand of some of the mass psychology of social consciousness. Nolan's Batman become a superhero in the film is not as external action, but no matter in business or arts are accomplished film, also affects the other superhero film typed and developing directions.

In the development process of more than 30 years, superhero films have also undergone changes and integration in the sense of genre. Once the film achieves box office success, it will immediately continue to develop in the way of series films. Through the combination with other types of films, there is a typological evolution. This

is also an important feature of superhero films: they are flexible in style, and can maintain their own attributes and achieve integration with other genres.

FURIOUS 7

Furious 7 is a 2015 American action film directed by James Wan and written by Chris Morgan. It is the seventh installment in The Fast and the Furious franchise. *Furious7* follows Dominic (Diesel), Brian O'Conner (Walker), and the rest of their team, who have returned to the United States to live normal lives after securing amnesty for their past crimes in *Fast & Furious 6* (2013), until Deckard Shaw (Statham), a rogue special forces assassin seeking to avenge his comatose younger brother, puts the team in danger once again.

Furious 7 premiered in Los Angeles on April 1, 2015, and was theatrically released in the United States on April 3, 2015, playing in 3D, IMAX 3D, and 4DX internationally. Upon release, the film became a critical and commercial success, with praise being aimed at the film's action sequences and its tribute to Walker.

Outside the US and Canada, the film became the third highest-grossing film, the highest-grossing Universal distributed film,¹¹⁹ and the highest-grossing 2015 film.¹²⁰ On April 26, 2015, it became the third film in cinematic history to earn over \$1 billion overseas. The film was a massive box office hit in China. It grossed CN¥1 billion in five days—the fastest time in which that has been achieved¹²¹—and soon became the highest-grossing foreign film ever in China.¹²² In 15 days, its gross in China surpassed those in Canada and the United States¹²³ and became the first film in China to make more than 2 billion RMB.¹²⁴ Besides, It set opening weekend records in 29 countries including

¹¹⁹ "Worldwide Grosses". Box Office Mojo.

¹²⁰ "2015 Worldwide Grosses". Box Office Mojo.

¹²¹ "China Box Office: 'Furious 7' Becomes Highest-Grossing Movie Ever". The Hollywood Reporter. (Prometheus Global Media).

¹²² "CHINA ALL TIME OPENINGS". Box Office Mojo.

¹²³ "Global Box Office: 'Furious 7' Hits \$1.15B, Including Massive \$250.5M in China". The Hollywood Reporter. (Prometheus Global Media).

¹²⁴ "GLOBAL REPORT: 'Avengers: Age Of Ultron' Off To Hot Start, 'Furious 7' Crosses \$1 Billion Overseas; Becomes #1 Movie Of All-Time In China". pro.boxoffice.com.

Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Egypt, Malaysia, Mexico, Middle East, Romania, Taiwan, Thailand, Venezuela and Vietnam¹²⁵.

What kind of film is *Furious 7*? Why is it selling so well on the global market? Or, what is it that draws audiences to the cinema? The film is a Hollywood blockbuster with a theme of motor racing and action. Drag racing, explosions, thrilling fights, cyber hacking, bikinis, and exoticism give the film plenty of spectacle and selling points. The sudden death of the film's leading actor Paul Walker during the filming process has created great suspense and topic effect for the production and marketing of the film, and also brought infinite expectations to fans.

In addition to the rhythm and texture of action blockbusters, there is much to think about in the success of *Furious* series of films from the original performance of the American east Los Angeles street youth racing subculture to the mainstream Hollywood commercial blockbusters. The racing subculture originated in the United States in the early 20th century. In its more than 100 years of development, street racing has been associated with illegal alcohol trafficking, gang activities, drug trafficking, violent conflicts, and marginalized groups, representing the rebellious culture outside the mainstream society of the United States. The culture of racing, with its criminal elements, is remote and alien to audiences in other countries. When watching films about such subcultures, it is natural for foreign audiences to have a very different understanding from that of the American audience who understands this culture. It is worth studying how such seemingly undesirable subcultural activities are endowed with realistic meanings by filmmakers and properly accepted by audiences from different cultures through some dramatic methods.

Furious 7 Integrates Youth Subcultures to Spread its Story Meaning

This case study will focus on how *Furious 7* realizes cross-cultural communication in the design of the way to convey the story meaning, which is accepted by audiences

¹²⁵ "F7' Grabs \$5M Bigger Purse For Monster \$245M Opening – International Box Office". Deadline Hollywood.

from different cultures. In addition to the rhythm and texture of action blockbusters, there is much to think about in *Furious 7* from the niche film that represents the street youth racing subculture in the United States to the successful mainstream Hollywood commercial blockbusters loved by audiences all over the world. Among them, as an entertainment art with young audiences as the main body, the appropriation and compilation of the youth subculture by the producer in terms of the story meaning is also one of the important factors for the success of the film.

The youth subculture mainly refers to a kind of cultural form that represents the interests of the marginalized youth groups, holds a disparaging and critical attitude towards the adult social order and mainstream social culture¹²⁶. Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson described youth subcultures as symbolic or ritualistic attempts to resist the power of bourgeois hegemony by consciously adopting behavior that appears threatening to the establishment¹²⁷. This case study refers to the youth subculture closely related to *Furious 7*, which mainly refers to a racing culture that is both flamboyant and mysterious on the contemporary urban streets. This cultural category, which involves mostly teenage fans, emerges vaguely and conspicuously from the nightfall streets of the metropolis, where young drivers vent their excess of passion and energy in the cracks of the caged urban management system. It has maintained a certain continuity in code style with the youth subculture forms such as the Beatles, Skinheads, Motorcycle Boys and punk music that emerged in the 1950s and 1960s. In the 1970s, cultural researcher Paul Willis analyzed the phenomenon of motorcycle boys and believed that athletic, sturdy, and powerful motorcycles were very consistent with the cultural identity of motorcycle boys. The sudden acceleration of the motorbike, the strong thumping sound of the barrier-free exhaust, and the combination of these symbols symbolize male confidence, masculine peer friendship, verbal masculinity, and the style of social interaction. It shows the

¹²⁶ Ma Zhonghong, Annual Report of Subculture Report, Tsinghua University Press, 2013, 12

¹²⁷ Hall, Stuart & Jefferson, Tony. *Resistance Through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-war Britain*, Routledge, London. 1993

motorcycle boys "taming violent technology for a symbolic human purpose" and the horror of "the great technology of capitalism"¹²⁸.

The taste and temperament of masculinity symbolized by motor vehicles and team spirit are also clearly revealed in *Furious 7*. But with the development of the material economy, the landscape of motorcycles has been replaced by the landscape of automobile which is more daily and commercial. This youth racing subculture symbolizes that the ritual resistance of the youth in the contemporary capitalist society has moved to the interior of contemporary urban landscape and daily life, and drowned in the postmodern cultural landscape of global consumers¹²⁹. Contemporary youth no longer deliberately advocates the establishment of a radical and pure youth subculture with the potential and significance of class revolution that is opposite to the mainstream culture, but seeks more for the balance and negotiation with the mainstream social culture and system to adapt to the cultural trend of global consumerism. Through the design of the story, *Furious 7* conveys the meaning that the youth subculture changes actively in response to the times, so as to arouse the resonance of the global audience to the youth subculture.

The adolescent is in a period of physiological age between childhood and adult, and also a cultural construction system marked by uncertainty, ambiguity and diversity. It allows individuals to temporarily choose or establish their own identity and social position in the gray transition zone between "dependence on parents and adult responsibility" and "unconsciously accepting power system and consciously accepting power system"¹³⁰. Because of this, the youth subculture is often constructed as two sets of social discourses of "problem" and "pleasure" by the mainstream social culture. The so-called "problem" refers to the association of youth with violence, crime, adventure and impulsiveness. The public holds moral panic towards the power of youth's impulsiveness, and then discipline and restrain various youth subcultures. The so-called "pleasure" refers

¹²⁸ Chris Barker, *Cultural Studies: Theory and Practice*, Translated by Kong Min, Peking University Press, 2013, 402-403

¹²⁹ Wang Wei, *The Violence Aesthetics of Contemporary Films from Furious 7*, *Movie Literature*, 2015, vol 23

¹³⁰ Ma Zhonghong, *Annual Report of Subculture Report*, Tsinghua University Press, 2013, 4-5

to the young people have optimistic emotion, passion and romantic spirit temperament, keen on pleasure, relaxed, fashion, leisure lifestyle, thus causing public interest and romantic imagination.

Furious 7 obviously represses the “problem” side of the contemporary youth subculture, while makes the “pleasure” side of it. It presents a technological carnival and audio-visual feast full of speed and passion and stimulating the audience's addiction. The so-called "carnival" refers not only to the control, destruction, and consumption of technology or cars by drivers with full of indulgence and catharsis pleasure, but also to the temporary escape and subversion of the power order of the mainstream society by individuals, symbolizing a kind of resistance through rituals, games, and codes. Mikhail Bakhtin argued that the carnival breaks down social boundaries of identity, hierarchy and refinement, "not only as a temporary rejection of the official order, but also with the promise of a better world (a utopia)"¹³¹. Dominic Toretto's motorcade is the epitome of a multicultural contemporary social utopia. Drivers of various colors and genders here break the differences and boundaries of race, gender, ethnicity, and country, and synthesize a globalized picture of youth subculture. Team members fight together for the common ideal of punishing evil, promoting good, and saving the world. They control and enjoy all kinds of superb media and technical weapons, driving all kinds of famous super cars on the road, experiencing extreme speed. In the film, the automobile has gone beyond the scope of instrumentality and become a part of the character's stylized code and body, which symbolically implies the individual's control and resistance to the power of technology and system. For example, the main character, Dominic Toretto, is shown repeatedly starting the engine and colliding with the automobile of his rival, Deckard Shaw. What impressed the audience in these scenes is not only Dominic's confidence, determination and perseverance, but also the devastating pleasure brought by the violent collision of two automobiles. The attitude and behavior of the character in the film, who

¹³¹ Jeff Lewis, *Cultural Studies: The Basics*, Translated by Guo Zhenzhi, Tsinghua University Press, 2013, 194

controls the automobile while destroying it, arouse the audience's curiosity about the character.

If the technological carnival in the film connects the "pleasure" side of the youth subculture, then the film restrains the "problem" side of the youth subculture by legalizing the elements of violence and drag racing. Through the design of the plot, the automobile in the film could both represent a disturbing force that can be controlled by the characters and a threat to the mainstream social order. As revealed by the film plot, when it is given the mission of eliminating the violent, punishing the evil, and promoting the good, it is transformed into positive energy. The character can use it to fight for justice, heal the wounded, rescue the dying, and punish the bad guys, or they can use it to legitimately ravage and destroy the living world. Audience's moral panic caused by teenagers' drag racing and violent behavior in real life is built into a kind of behavior and power, which are filled with sense of justice, by the narrative of the film, so that the audience can enjoy the visual pleasure brought by violence on the bottom line of moral safety. In the film, Dominic Toretto's motorcade becomes western cowboys in automobiles or space warriors on a mission to save the world instead of being the uncertain rider who roamed the suburban wilderness in Dennis Hopper's 1969 film *Easy Rider*. It is this transformed youth subculture that constitutes the value of the violence aesthetics of *Furious 7* in attracting the audience.

However, if the story plot of *Furious 7* is analyzed carefully, it can be found that although the narrative of genre films with distinct good and evil inhibits the problematic side of the youth subculture, it does not completely eliminate it from the story meaning. For example, in a family scene, Brian O'Connor tells his son that cars do not have the function of flying. However, later in the story, the character drives the car to fly among the skyscrapers in Dubai, which proves that the car can fly to some extent. Through such plot design, the producer has presented the rich binary metaphor to the audience, including "car/plane" and "ground/air", and "reality/ideal" and "id/superego". The audience can understand the arrogant desire of the inner identity and symbolic resistance to the hegemonic order of the system of the character contained in the code of flying car.

Besides, the main villain Deckard Shaw's ambiguous identity is also worth thinking about. In the film, U.S. federal agent Hobbs describes him as a British special forces killer who served in the military and was hired by the government. Due to his knowledge of too many secrets of the government, Shaw became the target of government great purges. In order to revenge for his brother Owen, Shaw cooperated with the terrorists to against Dominic's team. Thus, Shaw has undergone a transformation from a government agent to a terrorist, and he became a reactionary force within the power system. At the beginning of the film, a series of plot devices showed that he was a fierce, ruthless, and torturous person with a diabolical amazing destructive force which is obviously created and endowed by the mainstream power system. In this sense, Deckard Shaw represented not only a moral villain but also a mutated institutional force. The fight between Dominick's team and Deckard Shaw implied a battle with the out-of-control institutional forces, which are full of ridicule and irony of the mainstream social system. In conclusion, the appropriation and incorporation of the youth subculture enable *Furious 7* to complete the moral narration in line with the mainstream social value standard, and also enable it to arouse the resonance of the audience with the spirit and visual pleasure of the youth subculture, thus achieving a high box office in the global film market.

Chapter 5 Conclusion and Discussion

Following the theoretical analysis in the first two chapters and the case study analysis of three American films, in this part, we will summarize the possible causes of cultural discount formed in different story elements and summarize how American films as positive cases solve these potential problems.

STRUCTURE

The cultural discount in the story structure mainly comes from the producer's arrangement of the story structure and the setting of the story value. In terms of story structure, the time arrangement of different plots is different. The time distribution of the beginning, development, climax, and ending, and the design of the reversal of each link are not only the encoding process of the story structure, but also the process of implanting cultural elements in the story structure. In *Zootopia*, the plot is controlled precisely, without any delay, and the emotional stimulation is also timely. The audience's emotion often has certain rules, too long foreshadow and too frequent climax of the story will sometimes make the audience aesthetic fatigue. The unreasonable design of the story structure by the director or producer will cause the obstacles in the process of decoding and acceptance by the audience and affect the attraction of the story. At the same time, if the narrative of the film lacks initiative, and the audience needs to use more subjective initiative to clarify the structure of the story, it is possible to produce cultural discounts. The plot and time devoted to depicting the lavish lifestyle of rich people in Asia in *Crazy Rich Asians* are cited as a negative example in this section. Such unbalanced plot design makes Chinese audiences think the story in the film is too old-fashioned, and the relationship between characters is chaotic and unreal, which leads to the cultural discount of the film in the Chinese film market. The most immediate result of this problem was

that the film grossed about \$175 million in the United States¹³² and only about \$1.64 million in China¹³³.

The story value in the story structure also affects the audience's acceptance effect. The story value is not necessarily the evaluation standard of the audience's own value. Cultural discount occurs when the value of the story that the producer integrates into the story structure of the film differs from that of the audience. Meanwhile, in the interpretation of the story, due to the different cultural roots of the audience, their understanding of life is different. Therefore, in the choice of narrative method or the design of story structure, there should be less obvious regional value and spiritual expression. The producer of *Crazy Rich Asians* chose the family concept and the female status in Chinese and American culture as the story value to reverse the plot. In reality, Chinese women are more independent and have more modern family values, and are no longer traditional Chinese women as in the perspective of producers. This difference in story value makes it difficult for the Chinese audience to understand and accept the ideas of the producer smoothly to a certain extent, thus resulting in cultural discount.

According to the case study, *Zootopia* uses a linear narrative structure, which clearly and completely unfolds the story one by one for the audience to understand and accept. The innovation of the narrative structure of *Zootopia* lies in that it sets the truth of the case revealed for the first time as the false truth, enriches the story content through the process of finding the truth again, and repeatedly splices the steps of frustration, regeneration and merit, making the story twists and turns evocative. This mode makes the logic of the animation script very clear. Adults can achieve the purpose of entertainment and relaxation when watching the film, and younger audiences can better understand the content conveyed by the film. The advantage of linear narrative structure can also be found in *Avengers: Age of Ultron*. The film uses the narrative structure of causal progression as the main way to promote the development of the plot. In superhero

¹³² Crazy Rich Asian Box Office, Retrieved from May 7 2019,
From <https://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=crazyrichasians.htm>

¹³³ Crazy Rich Asian Box Office, Retrieved from May 7 2019, From <http://www.cbooo.cn/m/657107>

movies, the main selling point is the cathartic function of plot progression. And this catharsis function is generated by the narrative structure of causal advancement. This kind of narrative structure, with a close logical relationship, will attract the audience to pay attention to the development of the story. As the confrontation between the two sides heats up, the evil is finally defeated, and the audience's emotions are released in the process.

Through the case study, it can be found that the conflict mode of binary opposition can help *Avengers: Age of Ultron* to deliver the story value selected by the producer in a relatively complete and correct way. In *Avengers: Age of Ultron*, superheroes have specific value systems and character symbols. Despite their different personalities, they all agree on the need to preserve the existing social order. However, as for the antagonistic villains and heroes, they often want to break the existing order for their own selfish desires, and thus have a collective conflict with the Avengers. It is based on this dualistic conflict mode of the confrontation between good and evil that the individualism value of superheroes is manifested. In the film, the good use of binary opposition conflict mode and its own causal opposition narrative have an interactive effect. Although the ending can be expected, in the process of plot advancement, the audience gradually vents their emotions and obtain an aesthetic satisfaction of novelty seeking. When the film ended, justice eventually prevailed over evil, the audience's emotions also got the maximum stimulation.

From the perspective of narrative transparency theory, the inclusion of *Zootopia* in the story structure improves the possibility for the audience to correctly understand the story. The story is told from a restricted third-person perspective, attached to the character Judy rabbit. By choosing the perspective of the character in the story, the audience can only know what the character has experienced and what he is doing, but cannot predict the following story. This forces the audience to follow the character Judy rabbit step by step to uncover the truth of the case, maintain a high degree of enthusiasm in the whole process of watching the film, and pay attention to the direction of the story. The open-endedness and circularity in the story structure of *Avengers: Age of Ultron* has

the similar effects. Such transparent narration improves the initiative of the narration method, attracts the audience to participate in the development of the film plot, reduces their deviation in understanding the story plot, and weakens the possibility of cultural discount.

SETTING

The story setting is the sum of the objective and subjective environment that the director intends to bring the audience into. The audience's grasp of the environment has a direct bearing on the story. In the story setting, the cultural discount may arise from the following reasons.

Firstly, different cultural audiences are unfamiliar with the story setting. If the audience is familiar with the background of the story, then what happens in this setting seems to be similar to the audience's own life. However, the foreign cultural audience may be unfamiliar with the background, which often makes them be familiar with the background firstly, and the understanding of the background degree directly influences its understanding of the story. The second possibility is that the setting is contrary to the expectations of different cultural audiences. When the audience interprets the story, they are often unconsciously drawn into a preset background, but at the same time, the audience also unconsciously wants to understand the story in this specific background. Once the audience has mastered the regulation in this setting, if the story is slightly illegal and contrary to the expectations of the audience, the audience will reject the work as illogical and unconvincing. Besides, the difficulties that the different cultural audiences will meet when they are understanding complex settings of the film are taken into consideration. Most of the successful films in history often started from a new story, which only has a small amount of information. Generally, this kind of story does not need to provide any information on the setting that the audience can understand directly.

After summarizing the problems faced by audiences of different cultures in the film story setting, this paper further explores the reasons behind these problems. Having analyzed with the combination of Hoskins's theory, it can be concluded that the above

reasons that may lead to the misunderstanding of the story setting by audiences from different cultures mainly lies in the language, subtitle, letters, accent and other cultural elements used to explain the story background in the film. In the specific analysis above, a Chinese martial arts film *Brotherhood of blade* is used as a negative example of cultural discounts in overseas markets due to improper translation. This inappropriate translation of the film title not only lost the opportunity to provide the audience with the story setting before watching the film, but also erased the cultural features that were most attractive to foreign audiences. In addition, based on the analysis of the box office performance of *Memoirs of a Geisha* in the overseas market and the theory of cultural geography, this paper finds that the different religious beliefs and historical origins also affect the audience's attitude towards the story setting. Among them, this paper specifically analyzes the cultural discount of this American film in the film market of China and Japan caused by the misunderstanding of this film by Chinese audiences due to the historical reasons of the World War II and the neglect of this film by Japanese audiences due to their cultural confidence.

GENRE

This paper first selects the cultural elements contained in different genres as the entry point to analyze the reasons for cultural discounts in different films. Different genres of stories need to be highlighted in different elements, so there are certain genres of stories that have higher specificity and higher cultural discounts. Different film genres that have different cultural contents will produce different degrees of cultural discount. It is generally believed that humor has strong cultural specificity (Straubhaar 2007)¹³⁴, therefore, the cultural discount in the comic film is relatively high, and the Kung-fu film due to the less cultural specificity has the relatively small cultural discount.

In order to obtain more intuitive analysis results, Chinese Kung-fu films are adopted as examples to illustrate the relationship between specific cultural elements contained in

¹³⁴ Straubhaar, J. D. (2007). World television: From global to local. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage

different film genres and the understanding and acceptance of film stories of different audiences. In the specific analysis, Kung-fu action films are taken as positive examples, which illustrate that this kind of film genre is relatively easy to cross the cultural gap due to their emphasis on action sequences and special effects. Audiences from different cultural backgrounds can clearly and directly understand the heroes and villains in the film as well as their respective martial arts movements. As a contrast, Kung-fu art films are introduced to illustrate that even for films of the same genre, films with more cultural elements will often encounter greater cultural discounts in cross-cultural communication, because they require the audience to have a certain understanding of the cultural elements conveyed in the films. Without the pre-understanding of some culture in the film, these cultural elements make it difficult for foreign audiences to fully understand the profound meaning behind them.

Then, from the perspective of cultural distance theory, this paper further explores the problems of cultural elements and cultural discount in film genres through the analysis of comedy films. Similar to the reasons that some of them cause cultural discounts in the story setting, the control of external factors in the production process, such as language, dialogue, translation, and subtitle, to some extent determines whether the film will be accepted by the audience in the overseas market. The high cultural discount of comedy films is precisely because overseas audiences have a large cultural distance to the language, jokes and cultures involved in the films. Furthermore, this genre of film has higher requirements for producers in language translation and culture interpretation, and most inaccurate illustration and translation have weakened the sense of humor in comedy films. Finally, the relationship between film genre and narrative ritual is also mentioned to explain the potential reasons why certain genres of films are welcomed by audiences in certain cultures. The story genre and ritualization of festival rituals are somewhat surprisingly consistent. The invariable festival rituals and ceremonies reaffirm the cultural value of a certain tradition or custom, thus satisfying the needs of people's emotions and values.

In the case study, the superhero movies represented by *Avengers: Age of Ultron* are selected as the object of analysis to explore the reasons why this genre of film is accepted and loved by the global audience. Superhero films are constructed with special costumes, props and other elements, so that audiences can have a vivid visual system for this genre. These films also feature motion pictures with special angles, and link them to the superhero's superpowers. The inherent binary opposition relationship and the unique narrative mode of myth style enable the audience to understand the logic of the story more directly and increase their initiative and participation in the plot development. The symbolic meaning of the characters in superhero films can arouse the emotional resonance of the characters and further arouse their empathy with the meaning of the story. Superhero films are also relatively easy to transmutation and blend in terms of genres, which can not only maintain their own attributes, but also flexibly absorb the styles and characteristics of other genres. In addition, in terms of internal reasons, superhero films are often in line with the development of the times and social reality, and play a role in meeting the current public psychology's demand for social consciousness.

In general, different story genres tend to have their own unique system in the process of coding. Some of them have more cultural elements, while others have less. This, to some extent, affects the possibility of the correct decoding of the story by the audience, thus affecting the emotional transfer of the story. When a genre of film bears the common cultural values of human beings, different decoding rules can often be applied. Decoding in this sense can also meet the needs of the audience's emotions and values to the maximum extent, which is easy to make the audience have emotional resonance, thus making the film story more attractive.

CHARACTER

In this part, the article first reviews the differences between characters and characterization. Characterization refers to the sum total of all observable qualities of a human being, which make each person have unique characteristics that distinguish them from others. The function of character is to bring to the story the qualities of

characterization necessary to convincingly act out choices. Then, the importance of pressure during the process of character design is illustrated through an example of Nameless in the film *Hero*. It is under the pressure of saving the lives, nameless chose to give up the assassination of the King and realize the peace through his own sacrifice.

The encoding of the characters in the story is to endow the characters with certain features and emotions. In this process, filmmakers tend to attach specific cultural and emotional attributes to the characters in the story. However, different audiences tend to have their own standards for the identification and judgment of different characters. This standard in the system of different cultures is often an important reference for audiences to decode characters. Audiences tend to find their past stories and experiences in the characters of the film, so as to obtain emotional satisfaction. Too perfect characters in the decoding process will give the audience a false sense of culture discount.

In order to more clearly explain the potential reasons for the cultural discount among the film characters, this study further compares the differences in the characterization between Chinese films and foreign films. Through the analysis of Chinese films like *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* and *The Grandmaster*, we find that the relatively too much perfect and pure characters in these films could result in their alienation from the audience as ordinary people. Meanwhile, the character's behavior is restrained to a large extent because of the character's moral stereotype, which directly affects the audience's understanding of the character's plight. These points sometimes could provide reasons why these Chinese films have suffered cultural discounts in overseas film markets. Having analyzed the characters in the Disney film *Mulan*, some distinctions could be found that Hollywood films tend to use a hero with a dual personality to catch the audience. In the mainstream superhero series, the audience could find a way for empathizing with the character in the transformation of ordinary people and superman. To some extent, Chinese films tend to have strong personalities in the treatment of characters, while many of the characters recognized by the world have the complex mentality.

In the case study on *Zootopia*, Judy rabbit and Nick fox are selected as the main objects of analysis to elaborate on how *Zootopia* creates characters through narrative transparency. This paper discusses the character image building of *Zootopia* from the aspects of character image growth, multi-facet, and contrast. Through the analysis of the inspirational complex and critical consciousness behind the protagonist image, the connotation of the protagonist image in this excellent American animated film has been interpreted. The little-man heroism character image in the film is similar to that in many American films with hero themes. In Hollywood movies, the heroism of common people is almost the source of cultural values in many films. The personal heroism reflected from the image of the film has dreams, justice, energy, and sunshine, which almost satisfies all audience's fantasies about superheroes and gives the audience infinite authenticity.

After analyzing how American films create common people to achieve the understanding and recognition of audiences from different cultures, this paper also focuses on the popular superhero characterization. First of all, the superhero films represented by *Avengers: Age of Ultron* have constructed a strong interpersonal network in terms of characters. The expansion and contraction of the character network show the characteristics of openness and circularity, which improve the narrative transparency toward the audience. Not only does this deep set of relationships allow audiences to occasionally stumble upon a cameo from one superhero or another in a personal story, but it also makes the origins of Marvel's many superheroes more like a complete epic myth. This kind of character relationship design allows the audience to understand the characters without too much background knowledge, which narrows the cognitive distance between the characters and the audience, and constantly attracts new audiences to be interested in the film story. Besides, several cultural identity strategies of it have been summarized as follows to explain how to gain the acceptance of audiences from different cultures. The first is the civilian origins of superheroes. This kind of role setting of civilian origin makes superheroes more immersive or identifiable to the audience and shortens the psychological distance between the characters and the audience. Secondly,

making superheroes have the emotional world of ordinary people helps to bridge the gap between the world view of superheroes and the reality of ordinary audiences. Besides, the producer adopts the theme of the populist superhero fighting evil to resonate the common sense of justice from the worldwide audience. To create superheroes based on the emotions of ordinary people, so that these seemingly unusual characters can be more easily understood by audiences in different cultures and regions, and thus generate emotional resonance.

MEANING

The encoding of the meaning of a story refers to the form in which the creator of the story expresses the meaning. The cultural discount could appear in the connotation of the story meaning. With the help of specific cultural emotions, film stories convey specific cultural meanings in specific cultural contexts. All these cultural elements are implanted in the process of meaning coding in a hidden way, trying to bring audiences into specific emotional framework, so as to arouse the audience's expectations of the meaning to be conveyed. Different countries may have different film stories due to their differences in values, and these films will inevitably cause frictions and conflicts of values in the process of cross-cultural communication, thus resulting in cultural discounts. This means that people from different regions might make different judgments and reactions toward the value and emotion carried by the story meaning, resulting in the cultural discount problem in the reception process. Therefore, it can be said that only in line with the meaning of popular culture emotion and values, it is possible to trigger the recognition of the public and the audience empathy mechanism. In order to illustrate the relation between the value difference and the cultural discount, the Chinese film *Back to 1942* and American film *2012* are chosen as the contrast sample. The differences in values between Chinese and American audiences lead them to be confused about the choices made by the characters in the face of disasters. American films emphasize individual will, advocate individualism and encourage individual competition and independence. Chinese films tend to advocate collectivism, believing that the interests of collectivism are greater than

thousand of individuals, and that individuals can sacrifice their will for the interests of the collective, so as to achieve overall harmony. This cultural discount, to some extent, has weakened the humanity and significance of the stories portrayed by the producers.

In addition, the presentation mode of the meaning also could cause the culture discount. According to their own language habits and even national expression habits, creators choose the form of encoding the meaning of stories, which can be lengthy or concise. When the audience decodes with their own different language habits and expressions, they will have different emotional judgments, such as love and boredom, and thus affect their love of the story. The brief analysis of *Mulan* provides us an example to explore how to convey some meaning that the creator wishes to express to the global audience through some appropriate methods. It takes the values of individualism of American mainstream culture and value system of western society, to replace the culture and connotation of the traditional Chinese stories of Mulan.

From this perspective, the encoding of the whole film story itself has penetrated the cultural experience and emotion of the encoder, which has endowed the story with certain cultural significance. When such symbols with strong cultural factors are put into decoding under different cultural backgrounds, audiences will make various positioning, which is also based on their own special cultural experience and cultural emotion. In this process of encoding and decoding, due to the differences in subjective and objective aspects between the two sides of encoding and decoding in the system of different cultures, many cultural symbols in the original films are difficult to be correctly interpreted or decoded, resulting in cultural discounts.

In the case study of *Zootopia*, the concept of negentropy in the theory of thermodynamics is introduced into this analysis in order to better explore how American films can convey the story meaning that is easily accepted through appropriate ways from the perspective of narrative transparency theory. Negentropy is achieved when filmmakers choose meanings that audiences are willing to accept and convey them in a form that they like to see, so as to guide audiences to correctly interpret meanings. Through analysis, this study finds that the makers of *Zootopia* choose the realization of

individualism as the core meaning of the whole film. In order to enable audiences of different cultures and ages to correctly interpret the individualism in their perspectives, the producers choose the classic narrative of the antagonism between good and evil as the main means to convey the meaning of the story to the audience. Besides, *Furious 7* provides a unique perspective for us to explore how to choose the right method to guide the audience to correctly interpret the meaning of the story. As a film about street racing, the youth subculture and motor sports embodied in *Furious 7* can easily be misunderstood by foreign audiences who do not understand them. However, the producer of this film skillfully used a series of means to legalize the youth subculture and endow it with the concept of fighting against evil and hegemonic order, showing the positive aspects of the youth subculture, in order to seek the global audience's understanding and identification of it.

SUGGESTION AND DISCUSSION: INTERNATIONALIZATION OF CHINESE STORIES

Each country has its own unique national culture, and only the thoughts generated from the nation are the most vital and soft power. However, national stories have their unique cultural characteristics and are prone to cultural discount. Therefore, there are two tendencies in the selection of film stories in China. The first one is to cater to the tastes of foreign market audiences and abandon national stories. The second is to restore the external form of national stories and highlight the strong cultural nature of national stories, which leads to great cultural discount and is not accepted by foreign audiences. Therefore, based on the above research and the current situation of China's film industry, some suggestions are put forward to reduce cultural discount for reference.

To explore the deep connotation of national stories

According to the previous analysis, it can be seen that martial arts films with the biggest differences between Chinese and foreign cultures are often loved by global audiences. Modern comedies, which on the surface seem easy for foreign audiences to understand, have suffered even greater cultural discounts. This shows the importance of

cultural mirroring in the cross-cultural communication of films. The starting point of aesthetic orientation of overseas audiences is often to explore different cultural mirroring and aesthetic styles.

For Chinese films, the most important thing is how to tell their own stories well. What filmmakers need to focus on is how to make overseas audiences understand the story more smoothly and resonate with them. Most of the films exported now tend to win with casts, special effects, and other minor factors. In order to cater to the aesthetic taste of foreign audiences, they abandon the core of national spirit, resulting in unsuccessful narration. Take Chinese film *The Ghouls* as an example. In the film, there are a variety of Chinese unique customs, such as Feng Shui, Chinese funeral culture, burial chamber traps, etc., which are the cultural core of the story. But the movie seems to tone down those details, focusing on the emotional drama and visual effects of the main characters and loses its most competitive cultural mirror.

To realize the connection between national stories and international values

Chinese films can use international expression to enhance the international competitiveness of the film story. On the external level, the national features of stories, characters, styles, and narration can be used to highlight the national personality. At the internal level, the deep human nature of national stories can be used as a bridge to communicate with the international market audience. Hoskins proposed that to travel to different countries, film and television products must minimize the elements directly related to local culture and use universal values. If the Chinese film wants to capture the overseas market, it is necessary to explore the modern and potentially global connotation of national stories and tell the Chinese stories in a modern way. Each nation's story is different, but we can find universal values in its uniqueness, because the common human emotion is the pursuit of truth, goodness and beauty. Chinese films can attach importance to basic humanistic care, praise the truth, goodness and beauty of human nature, show concern for the survival of all mankind, and dig out the deep spiritual connotation in national stories.

To focus on the logic of the story

While giving universal value to the film story, we should also pay attention to the logic of the story. From the perspective of creation, the narration is an activity of argumentation in a broad sense. In this process, Chinese films should attach importance to the logical principle of narration. If the universal value is a kind of static existence, which roughly defines the space and bottom line of story experience and becomes the premise of story acceptance, then logic is the fundamental way of thinking for human beings to recognize things, understand information and embody the rational spirit. Logic, as a more abstract principle, exists in the specific narrative process and can effectively promote the same understanding of stories in different cultural situations. Narration with logic power can overcome the obstacles of ideology, collective memory, social psychology and emotion, and promote a consistent understanding of different cultural situations.

In the past, Chinese films had a big cultural discount in the overseas market, that is, they lacked rigorous logic, eloquence and emotional appeal. For example, the film *Beginning of the Great Revival*, its discount factor is indeed the different or even relative ideology between overseas and Chinese audience. But for the narrative art, what is more important is how to express ideology. The film only uses time sequence as a clue to narrate major historical events, and fails to demonstrate the inherent reason why the founding of the party can then become the great cause of revival.

To break the limitation and to narrate the global story

To some extent, the film discount reflects the degree of globalization. The growing discount on Chinese films today means that they are less global and more limited to domestic experience. Indian films, by contrast, have been hugely successful in the North American market and are closely associated with a highly global story. Indian films make full use of the September 11 terrorist attacks and cut into the survival state of individuals from the special perspective of daily life. *My Name Is Khan*, *New York*, and other Indian

films timely described the social phenomenon and public sentiment of anti-Islam in the United States, and defended the destigmatization of Islam in fictional stories.

In the process of integrating the domestic market with the advantageous resources of the Hong Kong film industry, excellent Hong Kong filmmakers and actors entered the mainland film industry, which stimulated the market consumption and helped the mainland film industry to re-emerge. However, this overly clear market positioning has resulted in a large cultural discount. Co-productions with "made in Hong Kong and sold in the mainland market" not only have a large cultural discount in North America and overseas markets but also have bad performance in Hong Kong markets.

The internal integration of Chinese cultural circles should not become an obstacle to globalization. Chinese films should not be satisfied with the development and integration of the domestic market, but should form a narrative paradigm to view the world from China and actively seek issues of global significance in China. The Chinese film *The Wandering Earth*, which made a great impact overseas, is a perfect example. What *The Wandering Earth* touches the global audience is the softest emotion in the human heart. In terms of emotional shaping, *The Wandering Earth* extends from "family" to "motherland" and then to "home". At the same time, in the film, it explores the Chinese-style family relationship and the "love earth" feelings rooted in the Chinese people, bringing more awe and touching to the audience. After that, what *The Wandering Earth* presents is not a high nationalist sentiment, but a retrograde international rescue. From individuals to rescue teams, from organizations to countries, when people in every country began to join in the action to save the earth, the human being was saved. At the end, nationalism gives way to internationalism, the vision is placed in the self-salvation of all mankind, and all expressions are displayed in the great love of human beings. The core of the story of the film has been spared no effort to emphasize the disaster in the face of all mankind to ignore racial differences and abandon the unity of national differences. *The Wandering Earth* tells the collective consciousness of mankind as a community with a shared future. Its international linkage in story plot and significance is worth learning and thinking for Chinese filmmakers.

Internationalization is one of the ways for Chinese films to reduce cultural discount, and the process of internationalization is to present and express Chinese stories in an international way. This does not mean that the internationalization of films will replace the national feature, but in the mutual communication between national and international films, it highlights the uniqueness of Chinese film stories and enriches the diversity of film culture.

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