



## The Back-Coming Panda and the Out-Going Monkey: On the Ownership of National Classical Culture in Globalization

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### Abstract

Nowadays, with the continuous development of globalization, the culture of film and television has been widely spread. During the Spring Festival of 2016, two films, with typical Chinese characteristics, have been released at home and abroad and attract considerable attention. One is *Kung Fu Panda 3*, which has traveled abroad for many years and finally rediscovered its discourse right with the help of Chinese production team. The other is *The Monkey King 2*, in which a Chinese classical story is presented by western special effects. The two respectively reflect the return of discourse right of Chinese classical culture and the new phenomenon of cultural adverse current in globalization. The exploration of traditional Chinese culture and the reinterpretation of its connotation in the two films are discussed in this paper to analyze the ownership of traditional culture.

**Key words:** *Kung Fu Panda 3*; *The Monkey King 2*; Discourse right; Cultural adverse current

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### 1. THE BLOOM OF NATIONAL CULTURAL ELEMENTS

The Chinese film market has kept a good momentum of growth during the Spring Festival of 2016. Just in one

month, February, its box office has reached 6.87 billion, which is far beyond North America and has become the number one in the world for the first time. *Kung Fu Panda 3*, which collaboratively produced by Shanghai Oriental DreamWorks and Hollywood DreamWorks for the first time, possesses both English and Chinese version and continues the funny stories presented in the former two animations. It narrates that the Dragon Warrior-Po who has repeatedly saved the world from extreme misery, suddenly meets his father Li Shan, then they together return to an unknown paradise—the panda village. However, Po has to break his happy life there because of the return of Kai, a villain who always takes Chi from Kung Fu masters for his own use. After understanding Master Oogway's instruction, Po knows who he is, and finally saves the world by defeating Kai. The film has reached the box office revenue of 982 million merely in the mainland since released. Another adaptation film, *The Monkey King 2*, also interprets Chinese classical culture. As the first film of the Chinese film overseas promotion plan, it was shown in five continents at the same time. By now, its box office in mainland has accumulated to 1.197 billion yuan.

The participation of Shanghai Oriental DreamWorks makes *Kung Fu Panda 3* not only keep the style of Hollywood Kung Fu comedy and the lovely modeling of Po, but also more apparently interpret the architectural style, taste and diet, dress and costume, folk art, calligraphy and painting and other traditional culture. The constructions in this film follow the style of red tile roof which always appears in Chinese martial arts films. And the design of the panda village is based on the landscape of Qingcheng Mountain in Sichuan, after several visits there. The panorama of the beautiful wonderland reproduces the scenery in Qingcheng Mountain. Even the green mosses on the roof and the shape of the floor column have been directly applied in the film to create the peaceful and tranquil paradise. Besides, while

continuing the narrative pattern of Chinese ink painting and traditional Chinese painting, the story between Master Oogway and Kai is displayed in the way of unfolding scroll and character modeling. Imitating the style of *Along the River During the Qingming Festival*, the relationship transition between them, from close friends who fight together to enemies because of their entirely different ambitions, is described. By this way, the common ground shared by the montage narrative in Western movie and Chinese classical aesthetics belief is fully shown. In addition, quite a bit of cultural elements can also be found in details in this film, such as the poster on the wall, the paper-cut of Po, the pictures of God of Wealth, the lunch box that Father Goose makes for Po, the vases, the clothing and so on. Even the hammock that used as launched in the final war is decorated with patterns with Chinese characteristics. The panda in *Kung Fu Panda 3* is worthy of its reputation: Made in China, and for China.

*The Monkey King 2*, a 3D action and fantasy film produced by Xinghao Film Company, narrates the story that the Monkey King subdues White-Skeleton Demon in the novel, *Journey to the West*. It takes five years to show the story with the visual effect that can match Hollywood blockbusters. This film compresses and adapts the original story into one that records the meet and acquaintance between Tang Monk and the Monkey King. Through the transition of their master—apprentice relationship and their self discussion on “truth” and “heart”, the contradiction between “obliterating evil” and “redemption” is expounded from the perspective of modern humanism. In this film, Tang Monk becomes a sage who insists on Buddhism; the Monkey King is a warrior who pursues personality and truth; the Pig shows the humor of entertainment era; White-Bone Demon reveals the helplessness and contradiction of fate, while Western Sea King revealing the hypocrisy and greed of human nature. Thanks to the use of diversified aesthetic styles, on the one hand, this film vividly shows the well-known story on the basis of traditional Chinese culture. On the other hand, it gets close to American and Korean films to meet the different aesthetic demands of various audiences.

## 2. THE CULTURAL INTERACTION IN GLOBALIZATION

In order to cater to the tastes of the public and pursue global cultural market, Hollywood is looking for available culture resources in the whole world in recent years. And it introduces adapted classic works and foreign culture elements into America and even a more extensive market which is globally beloved. There are some examples, *The Prince of Egypt*, an adaptation of *Exodus in the Bible*; *Beauty and the Beast*, a re-composition of France folklore; and the 3D version of *Titanic* which caters for Chinese

market. By doing this, both economic interest and an extensive global market are obtained by America.

Owing to the appreciation of Bruce Lee's Kung Fu, Jackie Chan's Kung Fu movie, China's national treasure panda and traditional Chinese culture, DreamWorks respectively produced and then released *Kung Fu panda* and *Kung Fu panda 2* in 2008 and 2011 around the world. In these two films, a plump and adorable panda called Po, who has a Kung Fu dream but always does funny things, is shaped. In each film, he accidentally gets the chance to save the world, and grows from a rookie to a dragon warrior and finally become a successful master. Seeking the meeting point of traditional Chinese culture and globalized cultural characteristics, the DreamWorks group creates a strong traditional Chinese culture atmosphere with no Chinese culture elements is mechanically applied in this film. It is well known that Po is a Chinese warrior wearing a bamboo hat, dressed in traditional Chinese clothing and shouting “There is no charge for awesomeness or attractiveness”. However, at the same time, he is also the one who says “We should hang out” in an American humor style.

In the hurried background music played by traditional Chinese instrument like flutes, drums and Chinese zithers, when audiences see Po withdraw from the intense fight scenes, which gradually unfold by Chinese painting and ink painting, to take a photo with his favorite master, they burst into laughter. Besides this, what can be seen is the perfect existence of the traditional Chinese culture. The lovely image of Po does not make Chinese element become serious didactic films, but manifests the extensive and profound Chinese cultural elements in comparison.

With the opening of cultural market and the globalization of the capital market, film art, as a kind of cultural resource, has also globalized. Seeing this, some scholars cannot help worrying that the globalization driven by the movie culture will bring about the expansion of culture and the oppression of the Western developed countries' discourse right. They believe that by using the way of bombing and grabbing the box office all over the world, Hollywood has changed the world into a market of American films, such as *Star Wars* and the series of *Avengers*. They also agree that the huge economic interests of film market caused by globalization will be monopolized by the United States and other western countries. More seriously, this will be accompanied by situation where non-western countries' national imagination and cultural identity threatened by ideology and the cultural concepts in American style.

However, the real situation is that although the dominant position of market can become a promoter of globalization, this does not mean that the so-called market victory will bring global consistency and standard way of life, nor form a unified global consciousness and

global identity. Indeed, in order to cater to the new form of culture, an extraneous culture will assimilate and then generate a new meaning when facing native cultural entity. Nonetheless, the vitality and resistance of native culture still unexpectedly remain among the youth groups who are underappreciated.

The Chinese version of *Kung Fu Panda 3* was strictly checked and polished by the Shanghai DreamWorks production team. After American production team completing its part, Chinese production team got down to the Chinese script translation and Chinese dubbing in the late stage. While translating the drama, a great importance was attached to details, like the differences between Chinese and Western culture, the characters' mouth shape and their facetious facial expressions.

As for the script, dialogue, dubbing and other aspects in the film, Teng Huatao, a domestic famous young director, was invited as Chinese counselor. Led by him, Chinese production team found the most suitable performance situation for Chinese lines. In the aspect of actor's lines, a number of discussions were conducted by a new group of Chinese film favourites, including Chinese scriptwriter Dingding, members of "Dream Team" consultant group Xu Chengyi and Henian, "Diors Man" Dapeng, the director of "Surprise" Yi Xiaoxing and other young comedy directors, actors and colleagues of movie industry. They all tried their best to meet the aesthetic and pursuit of China audiences while ensuring Chinese translation is humor and funny. There are some uniquely interesting Chinese expressions, such as Po's lines "变态辣" and some kinds of Kung Fu that named after Chinese idioms and common sayings, like "包林弹雨", "海豚大挪移". Step by step, Po understands the meaning of "let it be" and "inaction" in Huang-Lao Taoism. And he eventually recognizes himself, finds himself, understands himself, and comprehends the true essence of "Tao" and "Kung Fu". He gives full play to his unlimited power, transforming bad into good, useless into use. All in all, one thing for sure is that *Kung Fu Panda 3* offers a new opportunity for Chinese elements to spring to life instead of westernizing Chinese elements.

Selected from *Journey to the West*, *The Monkey King 2* reinterprets the Monkey King and Tang Monk's story about telling the true from the false and saving all creature. The role of Tang Monk played by Feng Shaofeng is no longer an upright or wordy image like before, but a pretty boy who is gentle and passionate, just like a college student who just walks out school and faces the society with his own dream and persistence. In this film, although the Monkey King loves freedom in nature, he gives up free and takes responsibility under the lure of White-Skeleton Demon. He is unwilling to admit his shortcomings and always disobey his master. Two White-Skeleton Demons, the black one and the white one, change her ruthlessness into affectionateness. Still, she is cruel, but that results from her miserable life experience.

She is more like a tragic female without choice rather than a bloodthirsty monster.

There are abundant connotations behind the three times that the Monkey King subdues White-Skeleton Demon. They can be summarized in three points: smash illusions, tell the true from the false, ignorance; smash inner devils, the gold hoop remains, greed; smash the giant bones; save the master, rage. Tempted by freedom, the devil inside the Monkey King is taken advantage by White-Skeleton Demon and finally the misunderstanding between the master and the apprentice upgrades. Tang Monk once told the Monkey King, "We two are really like in that we only believe what our eyes see...". It is so-called "one level, one truth". The Monkey King can see the true color of demons and ghosts with his sharp eyes, while what Tang Monk seen are the heart of all creatures. In social practice, Tang Monk still adheres to his major principle, and uses his action to interpret the Buddha nature: Save people, save demons and save oneself. The hot showing of *The Monkey King 2* in an worldwide scale reveals modern people's understanding and subversion of this Chinese classical novel in terms of their own way of life and discourse right.

With a more than 40 years history of development in special effects technology, Hollywood has already formed a complete assembly line work and is technologically proficient. Compared with it, China's experience in special effects technology is as short as a dozen years. Its performance can be seen in several movies that published around 2015, such as *Monster Hunt*, *Chronicles of Ghostly Tribe*, *Mojin—The Lost Legend* and the like. This time, the special effects used in *The Monkey King 2* is at an international level and creates a magically visual impact, bringing audience the enjoyment of Hollywood blockbusters. According to director Cheng Pou Soi's introduction, more than 1,500 people were involved in the special effects team of this film. About one-year producing time, more than 400 million yuan was invested in, and more than 1,300 trick scenes were produced. These vivid and symbolic special effects bring the fantasy to deities and monsters world to the screen. Producers perfectly combined modern western movie technology with the Chinese classical novel. All these scenes, like the frightening White-Skeleton Demon, her perfectly splendid palace, the ferocious white tiger, the clumsy Pig and the final battle, are lifelike and amazing.

The great divergence between the east and the west of freedom and human's secular value has been there for a long time. Although China tries to catch up with the outstanding western special effects skill and its exquisite make-up techniques in movies to reappear Chinese ghost story, the value contradiction between China and the west is unchangeable. In fact, both the unwavering persistence that sunshine always after the rain and the beautiful wish that all living things are equal presented by *Journey to the West* is the Buddhist philosophy in modern language

interpreted by modern humanism thoughts. Its profound meaning is that the heart is more important than truth which is not absolute. The world and other people can only be known by feeling and accepting from one's own heart in that all creatures have the right to choose freely. Behind the classical story, modern human's survival value and life philosophy is revealed.

### 3. THE OWNERSHIP OF NATIONAL CULTURE

In the contemporary society, the differences between high culture and popular culture are gradually eliminated by consumer culture and mass culture. The unbridgeable gap between them is no longer in existence. Elite culture pockets its pride, while popular culture keeps its head up. Within the competition of global capital, the two can better integrate with each other in the comprehensive penetration between economy, politics, science and technology, business and culture.

In the face of such situation, questions like how to interpret Chinese classic culture in a new way and how to develop it in a sustainable way with the help of the latest mode of transmission need to be taken into consideration.

Throughout the current film market, there are mainly three options before the new generation of Chinese filmmakers. The first one is to directly or indirectly identify all culture, civilization and values of the west, especially America. In this way, even under the traditional Chinese theme, audience can still tell that the film is westernized from aspects such as role settings, values and emotional conflicts. However, such weird combination caters to many people's psychology of watching and makes national culture gradually follow the trend of stereotype. The second one is to strongly resist western culture and exclusively persist in national culture. Completely and thoroughly show narrative morphology and style of traditional Chinese dramas and movies, emphasizing the theme of nationalization. It must be pointed out that following this way may indicate the solemn and stirring ending of national culture. The last one is to confront the real context with confidence, commit to the integration of eastern and western culture's artistic spirit and the modernization of traditional aesthetic spirit.

American Dreamworks fixes its eyes on the Chinese Kung Fu and national treasure-panda, and infuses fresh vitality and discourse right into these two Chinese elements in the context of globalization. It is believed that the relationship between discourse and right is not a simple black and white issue. And the "truth" which produced by the mechanism of discourse is not a "truth" beyond doubt as it looks like. In fact, it merely is a series of words that people tend to follow in their way of thinking and daily behavior.

The success of *Kung Fu Panda 3* and *The Monkey King 2* exactly displays the wonderful conditions that traditional Chinese culture owns a formidable vitality and a re-shapeable discourse right. The "back-coming panda" presented in *Kung Fu Panda 3* is on behalf of the return of traditional Chinese culture elements. Although American special effects and advanced film production level was borrowed by the production team of *The Monkey King 2* to deduce and explore the realistic value and humanity significance of Chinese classic story, yet it should be stressed that the dependence in script and technique exploitation will be eliminated little by little during the cultural exchange between China and the west. The synchronized release of *The Monkey King 2* in five continents leads Chinese film to the world. And the original unidirectional flow is changed into multidirectional flow or even reverse current. The try of these two films precisely illustrates that the consciously universalizing adaptation of classic is a powerful weapon in dialogue with the world and a useful tool to reshape discourse right and cultural self-confidence in the context of reality.

Since China's reform and opening up, along with the transformation of society, changes can also be found in the way of interpreting traditional Chinese culture. Broadly speaking, the eagerness within people to free traditional classics from the shackle of inherited aesthetic thinking is more and more intense. Criticism and breakthrough are encouraged in the process of pursuing the creative modernization of traditional culture, rather than a skin-deep reappearance. The nationalization that advocated again and again should be an open and dynamic process, an indispensable dimension in China's modernization.

The Chinese production team members of *Kung Fu Panda 3* devoted themselves to nuances between Chinese culture and western culture while translating the script and dubbing. Given Chinese audiences' aesthetics of humor and amusement, even the design of details like character's mouth shape and facial expressions are paid a lot of attention to. As for *The Monkey King 2*, its production team specially invited Stephen Dupuis, who once won an Oscar for best makeup, to be responsible for the special effects modeling of the Monkey King. It is introduced that each strand of the Monkey King's hair is hand-made, and selected one by one to glue on the actor, Aaron Kwok. It takes him at least 7 hours to take on the monkey model every time. What's more, the two sets of clothes of White-Bone Demon also deserve a close appreciation. The black one and the white one are used to express her contradictory characteristic. In order to better show the corresponding color of White-Bone Demon's body feathers in diverse emotions, these black and white feathers slowly take on her face one by one in various form. In a word, all hard work is done to recreate



the oriental fantasy in Chinese fantastic world through the vivid and symbolic outward appearance.

Contemporary China is in a new period of political rise, economic boom and cultural prosperity. In order to achieve traditional culture's rebirth and renewal, on the one hand, western culture which is still the mainstream in the world should be reflected and criticized in depth. On the other hand, the broad and profound traditional Chinese culture should be earnestly studied and developed. Based on China, expand to the whole world, and construct superior culture which matches contemporary China as a great power. By all means its strong spiritual strength and deserved cultural charisma should be given full play.

In the face of globalization, keeping an eye on the reality should always be born in mind. Only in this way, the multi-aspect gap between reality and imagination can be better understood. Great efforts should be made to adapt to the country's urbanization, westernization and globalization. Before the multiple dimensions of mainstream culture, traditional culture, western culture and mass culture, the coexistence of acceptance and rejection, choice and abandonment, inheritance and innovation is necessary. They together integrate different cultural attitudes and positions, reflecting the youth's identity and construction of contemporary Chinese culture.

In this new century, China's State Administration of Radio Film and Television executes an overall external publicity strategy, and grasps the opportunity to initiate Chinese films "going out" project. It was put forward that positively carrying out this strategy under the increasingly competitive international background is conducive to Chinese movie which will be an important part of national cultural soft power construction. During the Spring Festival, the "back-coming panda" and the "out-going monkey" represent the multiple directions of cultural exchange. At the same time, it provides a new way of thinking: inspire Chinese classic's intrinsic force and vitality with the latest technology in film-making and modern humanism thoughts in the global market.

There is still a long way to go before the revival of traditional Chinese culture. The following points are so significant that should be paid attention to all the time. Never be content with past achievements, otherwise the culture's characteristics of connotation, persistence and

regeneration will lose little by little. Excessively consume or misinterpret the embedded value of classical elements to cater to the market is blind and will turn culture into a dispensable joke without flavor.

The two movies continuously set up new records of the box office during the Spring Festival of 2016, which shows the gradual recovery and recognition of traditional Chinese culture elements and aesthetic value. In global capital competitive market, the constant blending of different cultures is a new way to cultural win-win situation. The win-win result of *Kung Fu Panda* series proved that "coming back" makes a great contribution to pursue better development just as "going out" does. With the help of the growth of the younger generation and the reconstruction of traditional culture discourse, more and more traditional Chinese culture elements will find their own ways to display and output. Modernizing in the global market, Chinese Movies' modernity and nationalization will be reshaped in long-term integration and interaction. A totally new and open standpoint is offered to understand "national charm" and "national self-confidence" more dynamically and modernly.

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