

# Discussion on the Cultural Confidence of Chinese Films

## Taking the Movie *Wolf Warriors II* as an Example

Mengyao Hou

The College of Literature and Journalism  
Sichuan University  
Chengdu, China

**Abstract**—*Wolf Warriors II* as the only Chinese-language film that has entered the top 100 global box office, has won a lot of reputation in Chinese market in 2017. However, its overseas box office was depressing, and few foreigners paid attentions to it. It did receive a few film reviews, but most of them were criticism. Some Chinese scholars believed that the box office harvest of *Wolf Warriors II* in the mainland of China was attributed to its patriotic theme and its cultural confidence, but they did not mention the reasons why the film was not welcomed overseas. Based on a Chinese scholar, Mr. Jin Huimin's researches on cultural confidence, the author thinks that *Wolf Warriors II* does not show the cultural confidence, but indicates the nationalism with the features of post-colonial culturally resistance. A film like it cannot be effectively recognized around the world, and may do harm to China's responsible image as a great power that is peacefully coexisting with countries of the world.

**Keywords**—*Wolf Warriors II*; Jin Huimin; cultural confidence; nationalism

### I. INTRODUCTION

Among global movies in 2017, the Chinese film *Wolf Warriors II* was the most eye-catching one. On the world's highest box office movie list, *Wolf Warriors II* ranked 55th at the box office of 87.03 million US dollars. However, it was a fact that the 99.7% of its box office came from Chinese market, and only 0.3% came from overseas market (mainly in North America). *Wolf Warriors II* was not only "bleak" in overseas movie market, but also received sharp film criticisms from Western film reviewers.

From the perspective of Mr. Jin Huimin's cultural confidence theory, the author believes that *Wolf Warriors II* shows little cultural confidence, and it actually displays a nationalism with the features of post-colonial culturally resistance. A film like it could not be effectively recognized around the world, and might do harm to China's image of a responsible country that is peacefully getting along well with countries of the world.

### II. COMMENT ON THE MOVIE *WOLF WARRIORS II*

#### A. The Type of the Film

Divided by the type of films, *Wolf Warriors II* belonged to the action/military type, and was produced as the commercial mode of blockbuster films. The whole movie showed dozens of light and heavy firearms, fighting vehicles from off-road vehicles, tanks to warships, fighting, killing and shooting between positive and negative characters, as well as powerful explosions. Besides, the commercial style of this film was also reflected on its visual presentation that features of characters were hardly described, and fighting actions were heavily emphasized. In other words, visual stimulation rather than story plots weighed in this movie.

#### B. The Role Setting

The character setting in this movie was very typical in Hollywood commercial blockbusters. The heroine Leng Feng (played by Wu Jing) was set as a bloody and staunch superhero with the loyalty and patriotism. The villain was the mercenary leader from Europe, "Daddy" (played by Frank Grillo), who was cruel and vicious. The positive and negative characters were set as absolutely opposite, without considering the complexity of human nature.

#### C. The Story Plots

In addition to the simple role setting, the story plots of the movie basically accorded with the routines of Hollywood commercial blockbusters: the fighting between the positive and negative protagonists constituted the main conflicts of the film, while the main plot of the story was rather rough and flat. Concerned with the picture, sound effects and action design, *Wolf Warriors II*, a Chinese action/military film upgraded to a "Hollywood" commercial movie under the help of the international production team. However, in terms of character building and story creation, the film showed an obvious weakness, which was lack of the reasonable performance of characters and the preciseness and the logic of story plots.

#### D. The Film Review

*Wolf Warriors II* as an action/military commercial blockbuster, set and clearly expressed the theme of patriotism. The film continued to use dialogues, words and images to manifest China's powerful, prestige, friendliness and justice. Many Chinese audiences' national pride and patriotism were strongly evoked by these factors. In the scene of the end of the film, where the Chinese power was heavily rendered, Leng Feng was standing on the top of a truck with the arm as the flagpole, holding proudly the Chinese flag high. He, just like a winner, was leading the truck teams fully loaded with rescued Chinese workers and local residents to pass through the war zone where the rebels and government forces were fighting fiercely.

The patriotism was rendered largely in this film, which might be one reason why the film won nearly 5.7 billion "explosive box office" and received lots of good comments from domestic mainstream media in mainland China. However, due to its positioning as a commercial action film, it had obvious defects of cultural cognition and artistic innovation, and its performance on the patriotic theme was not based on the film art, but depended on mechanical use of patriotic elements.

When *Wolf Warriors II* was bleak overseas, some Chinese scholars still immersed in the great success of the movie in China, and attributed its success to the cultural confidence shown in the film, saying that *Wolf Warriors II* has shaped the image of Chinese heroes and the image of China's great power in the new era, as well as started a conversation between China and the world. In fact, *Wolf Warriors II* was just a popular blockbuster that could not go abroad. It did not promote the communication between Chinese contemporary culture and world culture, but interrupted this communication by a kind of opinionated expressions. So, the author believes that *Wolf Warriors II* did not show cultural confidence, but showed a nationalism of post-colonial culture.

### III. WOLF WARRIORS II WITH LITTLE CULTURAL CONFIDENCE

A few international commentaries on *Wolf Warriors II* generally pointed out that the film only piled up the movements and military images that attracted audiences' attentions, and lacked emotional and meaningful story plots; It was not only old-fashioned, but also contained many logical flaws. As Chris Buckley from *New York Times* said, even with the standard of the action type, it was also logically vulnerable. However, besides the criticism of its storyline, the international media put a sharper criticism towards its controversial cultural connotation, saying that *Wolf Warriors II* was not only full of mediocrity, but also filled with the fever of nationalism.

#### A. The Chinese Version of *First Blood Part II*

Many critics had pointed out that *Wolf Warriors II* was the Chinese version of Stallone's "White Savior" character in *First Blood Part II*, which has been criticized by international film critics for its deficient design including

violent, bloody, exaggerated plots, and excessive deification of Rambo's characters. Critics believed that it was extremely representative of the supremacy of the United States, the white's superiority and strong national hostility. The *New York Times* article pointed out that Rambo is a superhero shaped as a "pure combat machine", and there was no mission he could not accomplish.

By comparing *First Blood Part II* with *Wolf Warriors II*, the author found that from the role setting to the plot design, the latter is strikingly similar to the former. As a white savior and a lone wolf-like superhero, Rambo appeared with the power and the spirit of the Savior. He destroyed the barbaric and evil enemies with the sacred will, thus saving the world. Concerned with the role setting, Leng Feng in *Wolf Warriors II* was essentially the same as Rambo.

#### B. Unreasonable Imitation

However, when making response to netizens' criticism of *Wolf Warriors II* imitating Hollywood action/military blockbuster, and deifying Leng Feng's super combating ability, Director Wu Jing complained in an interview: Why did an American killing a division of the army alone and having not been shot, become an awesome hero? He played a Chinese soldier killing several mercenaries and didn't die, which can't be accepted by audiences. Why? Wu Jing wanted to condemn the unfair treatment, but at the same time he clearly recognized this unfairness by imitating the "super hero" mode of Hollywood blockbusters. He thought Chinese movie also could produce a super hero like Hollywood movie used to. Nevertheless, he paid too much attention to shaping a powerful character like Rambo, without reflecting the rationality of the character like that. The phenomenon that *Wolf Warriors II* created in overseas was not welcomed, indicating that Chinese films' trying to imitate and catching up with the "American hero" of Hollywood's to declare China's cultural strength was an inaccessible and contradictory path.

### IV. EXPRESSING CULTURAL CONFIDENCE PROPERLY

As for the innovation of Chinese films and overseas communication, the cultural misunderstanding from *Wolf Warriors II* posed a serious question about how to correctly express patriotism and cultural confidence in Chinese movies. The author believes that Mr. Jin Huimin's researches on cultural confidence can provide some useful ideas for answering such question.

#### A. The Meaning of Cultural Confidence

What is the cultural confidence? Mr. Jin pointed out that the cultural confidence included not only the confidence in the national contemporary values of traditional cultures, but also the ability to creatively transform and innovatively develop foreign cultures, and then used them properly. In other words, the cultural confidence is the confidence in cultural tolerance, learning and absorption. Cultural closedness and arrogance are not the cultural confidence but cultural inferiority.

### B. The Nationalism of Post-colonial Culture

As for *Wolf Warriors II*, the film's dealing with American superhero culture can only be described by the word "copying", which cannot be called as creatively transforming and innovatively developing foreign cultures. *First Blood Part II* was filmed during the Cold War period, when the United States, as one of the two superpowers in the world, created a superhero image to show its comprehensive strength. With the growth of China today, the producers of *Wolf Warriors II* also wanted to use this method to show the powerful image and the increasing strength of China. In the author's opinion, this move is very unreasonable.

Although *Wolf Warriors II* was always labelled as patriotic and tried to demonstrate the confidence of a great power, it actually carried a resistant feature of post-colonial culture. This feature is deeply reflected in its director and leading role, Wu Jing's attitude when accepting an interview. The success of *Wolf Warriors II* in China could be understood as an echo of some Chinese audiences' nationalist sentiment. It is a fact that most Chinese have not forgotten the 100-year trauma and shame that China has suffered since the Opium War. Now the world has established a new order under which China is increasingly playing a leading role, and some Chinese people want to send the message that "my country is strong now" to the world. However, this behavior belongs to the cultural nationalism rather than the cultural confidence. Therefore, the nationalist sentiment reflected in *Wolf Warriors II* is not the correct attitude and position adopted by China when standing in the world and effectively participating in global governance in the era of globalization.

The reason why the nationalist sentiment becomes a post-colonial complex is that Chinese history related to the process of semi-colonization, was full of blood and tears, thus some Chinese's sentiment turning into the sensitivity of resistance and self-protection.

### C. The Uniqueness and the Cultural Confidence

In Professor Jin Huimin's view, the cultural confidence encouraged learning from excellent foreign cultures, but *Wolf Warriors II* blindly copied the Hollywood business model without thinking, which was contrary to the true meaning of the cultural confidence. Mr. Jin said that, the cultural confidence was not a binary opposition between Chinese and Western cultures, and was not a complete copy of Western cultures either. The cultural confidence was not the belief without self-confidence. It was the self-confidence that meant one clearly recognized one's own superiority after becoming fully aware of differences from others. That was, the uniqueness of cultures guaranteed the cultural confidence.

In nowadays when science and technology constantly develop, and all kinds of cultures existing in a "complementary" state ("complementary" means equality, mutual appreciation, and finally reaching the state of integration), the trend of "globalization" cannot be ignored, and it represents the process of foreign cultures' being selected by local cultures. In such a process, no matter how great those foreign cultures are, they cannot control and

suppress local cultures, and local cultures have their own uniqueness.

To summarize, the author thinks that there are two reasons why *Wolf Warriors II* was not popular in markets excluding Chinese market. First of all, the film's practice of copying the Hollywood model and the image of American superheroes violated the regularity of cultural development in the era of globalization; second, the film did not truly show patriotism and the cultural confidence but represented a sense of nationalism with the post-colonial cultural features. So, the film was bleak overseas and criticized severely by foreign media.

## V. CONCLUSION

Concerned with the phenomenal production like *Wolf Warriors II*, the author thinks Chinese people can't be self-satisfied with the achievements made in China, but should pay attentions to the embarrassing situation where the movie was bleak overseas. This article analyzes the causes of this bleak phenomenon to avoid producing movies that violate the cultural rules of globalization in the future. As for the question what kind of Chinese film can correctly express patriotism and the cultural confidence, the author believes that Mr. Jin Huimin provided a good idea that people should not prefer their own cultures to the heterogeneous cultures, and they should focus on the contemporary and modern culture, creatively transforming and innovatively developing local and foreign cultures. In this way, the goal of producing ideal movies containing truly cultural confidence of contemporary China can be realized.

## REFERENCES

- [1] Chris Buckley. "The Review of Wolf Warrior 2". New York Times, Aug 16, 2017.
- [2] Huimin Jin. "Cultural Nationalism Is Not Cultural Confidence — Revisiting Ji Xianlin's 'Hedong Hexi Theory' and Toynbee's Cosmopolitanism". The Journal of Humanities, 2018(3).
- [3] Zhongshu Song. "The Cultural Confidence behind Wolf Warriors II". China Urban-Rural Financial News, 2017(8).
- [4] Vincent Canby. "The Review of Rambo: First Blood Part II". New York Times, May 22, 1985.
- [5] Ying Xiao. "2017: Two phenomenal movies in the world — Wolf Warrior 2 and Dunkirk". Social Sciences in Guizhou, 2017(12).