

An analysis of Disney's Cross-Cultural Communication ——Taking Mulan Live-Action Film and Disney Theme Park in Hong Kong and Shanghai as Examples

Jiarong zhang^{1,*}

¹School of information, Qingdao Menual International school, Qingdao Shandong 266200, China

*Corresponding author. Email: zhangjiarong031217@163.com

ABSTRACT

In the globalized and Internet era, the outstanding performance of entertainment giant Disney in the global market cannot be separated from its successful concept of cross-cultural communication. China has gradually become the largest overseas market for Disney. Based on cross-cultural communication theory, this paper takes Mulan live-action film and Disney theme park in Hong Kong and Shanghai as examples to analyze the cross-cultural communication content, communication effect and communication strategy of Disney film and theme park. Finally, the study will find reasons for the failure of cross-culture communication of Mulan, the success of cross-culture communication of Shanghai Disneyland and further reflect on the cross-cultural communication and industry of Chinese film and television.

Keywords: cross-cultural communication, Disney film, theme park, communication content, communication effect, communication strategy

1. BACKGROUND

With technological innovation and globalization, the rapid development of the world is quietly changing, and the fast-developing and ever-changing entertainment products affect people's habits and rhythm. In this era of inclusive, open and diversified development, we can experience not only domestic entertainment products, but also products from all over the world that providing people with high-quality entertainment resources. Besides, the development of globalization and networked entertainment is creating more surprises for us.

Entertainment companies are an important part of the entertainment industry. Walt Disney Company, full of dreams and magic power, is now the most popular and successful entertainment enterprise in the world. In October 2019, 9th place on the 2019 Forbes Global Digital Economy 100 list. On January 22, 2020, it ranked 4th on the 2020 Fortune List of the world's most Admired Companies. In July, 2020, it was released by Forbes 2020 Global Brand Value 100, and Walt Disney Company ranked 7th[1]. No amount of amazing data and gorgeous words can show the rapid development of

Disney on the road of entertainment. However, the success of Disney is not only based on the excellent quality of its products and the production concept of family happiness, but also inseparable from its development concept and strategy of globalization and network.

Disney's main film industry and its derivatives (theme park and the peripheral products) is given priority to. The Walt Disney company's film distribution brands are: Walt Disney film, the film company of the 20th century, pixar animation studios, marvel studios, forward-looking development planning and its strong economic strength to Disney occupied half of Hollywood movie resources. In 2019, Disney's films grossed more than \$13 billion at the global box office, accounting for more than 50% of All Hollywood studios and the most for any studio [2]. The performance also confirm the development strategy to the success of the Disney globalization, Disney's works not only in North America is strong, its great appeal in overseas region also help it to get a better box office, by the Disney's marvel studios entertainment film the avengers 4 proud of global sales reached 2.7 billion, more than the film avatar for ten years of the global box office result, and

the overseas markets contributed 1.9 billion would be enough to confirm Disney's appeal in the global market [3]. Disney in dispersing pertains to the forefront in the market, the streaming media Disney+ carried out by Disney, in recent years and achieved good results. This special year in 2020, many movies are unable to log in cinema, Disney+ is the best choice, people can set his mind at to the choice of viewing at home, and for Disney, streaming media distribution of film to allow them to get a higher net profit, and the management method of streaming media around the world has already attracted more than 60 million users worldwide subscriptions, four years ahead completed insiders predict level [4], a masterpiece to say that globalization and network entertainment products, Disney+ is one of them.

With the rapid development of China's economy in recent years, the Chinese market has become the second largest ticket warehouse in the world. To seize the Chinese market is bound to be an important goal for the globalization development of entertainment enterprises. On June 2, 1938, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* was screened in cinemas in Shanghai, Nanjing and other cities. A few fans in the Republic of China were lucky enough to be the first Chinese audience to appreciate the charm of Disney animation. The film earned more than 7 million yuan at the box office in China [5], becoming the box office champion of the year. So the Chinese people's recognition of Disney's culture is evident.

Cross-cultural communication studies may be the best suitable theory to explain the success of the Disney in China. A person's cultural gene is Shared training after the day after tomorrow, and the culture of a nation is formed after thousands of years by changes and tempering.

The national cultural differences among nations are constantly changing and progressing. National cultural differences among different countries constantly change and progress, and we need find consensus among different cultures and be able to accommodate culture differences. People in different countries have different language, character, psychology, and habits, and how to make these group of people attracted to a cultural works is the essence of cross-cultural communication.

2. CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION OF DISNEY MOVIES

2.1. Cross-cultural communication content analysis

Disney's worldwide box office success cannot be achieved without the strong support of the Chinese market, and its films have achieved outstanding box office performance in China. *COCO* In recent years by its sincere and touching story, eye-catching and colorful

pictures, exotic cultural transmission made Chinese audience's heart, *ZOOTOPIA* made all age and mature solid plot and liked the image design of strong performances in the Chinese market, by 2019, the two animation works respectively in Chinese animation film of the second and third in the total list, Disney animated film by family type of cross-cultural communication business harvest in China. And *Iron Man 3*, *Mulan*, films were taken to join the Chinese elements, actor, story, heat gain in the way of cross-cultural communication in China, but the effect of polarized obviously this way, the *Iron Man 3* joined Fan Bingbing and other Chinese actors for fragment, the fragment not only is nothing to do with the movie plot, and its special supply type of present unbridled also caused a wave of hot, irony and controversy, the most Chinese audience does not recognize the box office of this kind of simple and crude way of harvest, *Iron Man 3* is achieved good box office, but Disney in China, the wind and through word of mouth is affected by a lot, In recent years, Marvel And Disney have also been learning the lesson, not by pleasing Chinese audiences with this simple fudge, but by luring audiences into theaters with its more impressive film reputation.

Taking *Mulan*, a live-action movie, for example, the famous Chinese story finally hits Chinese screens in 2020. In April 2020, at the world premiere held in Hollywood, half of the Chinese Actors and actresses in Hollywood gathered together, which was not only the final "highlight moment" of the film's creators, but also a manifestation of Disney's determination to truly understand Chinese culture and realize cross-cultural communication. However, the development of globalization and the arrival of risk society have closely linked the fate of all countries. At the beginning of 2020, the COVID-19 suddenly had a huge impact on the global economy, culture and social life, and Hollywood's business development and cultural promotion plans were severely hit by the epidemic. Not only has *Mulan* gone through many changes and deferrals, but the interest, patience and passion of many audiences for the film has plummeted. Four months later, when Disney had no choice but to announce that the film would not be released in The North American theaters and went directly to the streaming media, *Mulan* went from being the most commercially influential and significant film in 2020 to being the first Disney film to meet the global security demand.

An analysis of the specific content of *Mulan* film can reveal Disney's actions, efforts and results in courting and expanding the Chinese market and balancing the cultural conflicts between China and the United States. *Mulan*'s cast includes Liu Yifei, Donnie Yen and other stars with high commercial value and popularity in mainland China. Ironically, they are mostly foreign Chinese, which has also become one of the controversial points of the film. Many mainland

Chinese audiences don't like it. In addition, the Disney considered that the Chinese audience acceptance of musical is lower than American. In order to have a wider audience in the mainland China, the higher the box office, the song and dance scene in the live-action *Mulan* all disappear. But the animation *Mulan*'s strength is the combination of music and comedy, coupled with the unique style of Chinese culture, to become a classic, live-action that take its dress, to its essence is do not please painfully. However, the core values of the film are still based on American heroism and feminism, and some of the film's visual style has some misunderstanding of Chinese culture. Coupled with the continuous tension between China and the United States at the time of the film, *Mulan* is doomed to fail to have high reputation and high box office.

2.2 Cross-cultural communication effect analysis

This article holds that the analysis of the communication effect should focus on whether *Mulan* film has realized the effective cross-cultural communication between China and the United States, and between the East and the West. The effect of cross-cultural communication depends on the quality of the content to a certain extent. The cultural content of *Mulan* film does not express the familiar Chinese culture, nor does it properly and properly integrate the western culture, thus presenting the situation of cultural conflicts and barriers to cultural communication.

The reason for this is that Disney wants to please markets of both sides and integrate Chinese and American culture. On the one hand, Disney needs to consider how to restore the historical story of *Mulan* so that it can meet the needs of Chinese audiences. On the other hand, it needs to take into account the acceptance degree and emotional attitude of western countries towards Chinese culture.

Data showed that in October 2020, *Mulan*'s film in mainland China's Douban score was only 4.8 [6]. Internet users and film lovers in Douban, Zhihu and Weibo and other social media said that the film was not in line with Chinese history, nor could it reflect the true *Mulan* spirit, just borrowed *Mulan*'s coat to tell an American-style Chinese history story. *Mulan*'s first day box office was less than 50 million yuan [7]. The reputation and box office of *Mulan* movies show that *Mulan* is not popular in the Chinese market, and the Chinese audience has not accepted the image of *Mulan* created by Disney to some extent, nor does it believe in American-style Chinese historical stories. To sum up, Disney obviously has many obstacles to overcome on the cross-cultural communication road of live-action films. Although Disney's cross-cultural communication effect is not ideal for the time being, Disney can bring *Mulan* to the world and show and promote Chinese

culture. To some extent, it is also conducive to the exchange and integration of cultures from different countries, nationalities and regions, laying the foundation for cross-cultural communication in the future.

3. CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION IN DISNEY THEME PARKS

The film and television industry reflect Disney's online cross-cultural communication, while the theme park is a more authentic and perceptual offline cross-cultural communication experience. This dream factory has brought much happiness and affection to countless men, women and children. Disneyland is a deep exploration and extension of Disney's film and television industry. It is the benchmark of theme parks around the world and the happiest place in the world. Los Angeles, Orlando, Tokyo, Paris, Hong Kong and Shanghai are six magic places in the whole world, and Disney shows it up again and again of business acumen and entertainment spirit. In the 2019 annual report, released by the global theme park industry, eight of the top ten theme parks in the world were from Disney, including the number 10, Shanghai Disneyland, just opening in 2016 [8]. However, Hong Kong Disneyland opened in 2005 was ranked 21st in the total list (Global Enterprise News 007, 2020). Besides, in the 2019 China Theme Park Competitiveness Report, it was also pointed out that Shanghai Disneyland's comprehensive strength ranked first among Chinese theme parks[9]. As a result, many scholars and practitioners have reflected on the reasons for the huge gap between the two Disneyland parks located in China.

Hong Kong Disneyland cross-cultural communication is failure to a certain extent. Hong Kong Disneyland opened in 2005 and made the first step of the Disney theme park into the Chinese market. But it's small size and no new idea became people's first impression of Hong Kong Disneyland, followed by traffic plummeted and mocking upsurge. Hong Kong Disneyland didn't realize Chinese tourists have little understanding of its culture. People may know that Mickey Mouse is an animated character, but they did not understand its core and essence. It is difficult for tourists to resonate with the cultural connotation of a foreign country, let alone have fun from it.

The success of Shanghai Disneyland lies in its cross-cultural communication strategy, which is to inject more Chinese elements into the park and make it local. Grand opening of Shanghai Disneyland in 2016, was to make the change and innovation. After Hong Kong's failures and setbacks, Disney with brand-new appearance and attitude meet with Chinese tourists. Disney has invested the largest ever of money and effort to build the magic kingdom of the east and has the world's biggest Disney

castle and a new project with the theme of the park. Incorporating unique Chinese elements, Shanghai Disneyland is destined to live up to expectations and be brilliant. Disney brought American culture to take root in China, joined the Chinese characteristic, and the wonderful chemical reaction makes the eyes shine. In Shanghai Disneyland, there are Chinese traditional architectural modeling building named Wandering Moon Restaurant, the Chinese peony on the top of castle which is a symbol representing good luck, parade tour of Mulan and Chinese garden greening design. Detail decides success or failure, not to mention Chinese tourists exclusive to build a new roller coaster tron speed nimbus won the consistent high praise.

4. CONCLUSION

Disney has experienced many years of efforts and development in the Chinese market in a satisfactory answer. Unique characteristics, charm of the film and Disney theme park of Disney in China brought too much reflection and lessons. It is worth thinking about why China has such a rich cultural heritage and historical resources, but it is unable to make a cultural themed IP comparable to Disney, let alone go abroad for cross-cultural communication and publicity. In recent years, the sudden emergence of domestic animation such as Ne Zha may be a turning point for China's film and television industry. Although there is still a gap between the mature and stable series of Ne Zha and Disney Animation, there is already light and hope for the domestic animation industry. In the future, it is hoped that China will create its own cultural and entertainment universe, form a healthy competition with Disney, and bring more possibilities to the Chinese market. We believe that in the near future, there will be a new upsurge of cross-cultural communication between China and the West.

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