



A Comparative Study of Modern Film Narration and the Performance of Chinese Traditional Musical Instruments: The Camel Bells on the Silk Road in *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*

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Abstract. This paper mainly discusses the role of music played by traditional Chinese musical instruments in the narrative of modern movies, and mainly takes the film *Crouching Tiger, hidden dragon* as an example to demonstrate. This paper introduces the unique shape and timbre of the Ruan, a traditional Chinese musical instrument, analyzes the consistency between the picture and music of the *Silk Road camel bell* inserted in the film, and compares the relationship between the picture and music arrangement. At the end of the article, the subtleties in understanding the film and music caused by the cultural differences between China and the West are also discussed.

Keywords: Crouching Tiger · Hidden Dragon · film narration · Silk Road camel bell

1 Introduction

French film director Godard once said: that the film is 24 frames per second. In these 24 frames, how we accurately, fully, and creatively interpret this truth, maybe what the film narrative wants to pursue [1]. Take modern film narration as an example. There are many kinds of narrative techniques, but besides pure film techniques, to achieve dramatic conflict or sufficient atmosphere rendering, other artistic forms must be used to pave the way. Then music is one of the best choices for film narration [2–4]. Victor Hugo once said: that music expresses something that cannot be described in words, but it is impossible to keep silent. In movies, when some emotions or conflicts can not be expressed in words and can not be explained by the actors' bodies [5]. The music mentioned here is a “special material” that can replace words with notes and enrich the performance with melodies. Music is not only an art of expression but also an art that can arouse excitement. In movies, many moments need such excitement. Therefore, modern film narration and music are inseparable [6]. Among such movie music, this study would like to talk about the comparative study between the music with strong national flavor played by traditional Chinese instruments and the narrative of modern movies.

When it comes to the use of music played by traditional Chinese instruments in modern films as the bedding for narration, we have to mention the *Crouching tiger, hidden dragon*, which has been shown in both the East and the West and directed by Ang Lee, a Chinese director who has developed in Hollywood for many years. This film can be said to be a household name. Especially in North America, it broke the box office barrier of US \$100 million. It has brought unprecedented shock to the western film industry. Compared with the film itself, *Crouching tiger, a hidden dragon* carries more cultural missions. This film is based on literature and adapted from the novel of the same name by Wang Dulu, a novelist of the Republic of China. The film uses more intuitive and vivid artistic techniques to present the stories and characters in the novel to the public. This story of the East is shown on the western big screen, and it is the self-voice of the local culture of the East [7]. This film mainly tells that martial arts expert Li mubai has the intention to quit the Chinese martial art world and entrusts his friend Yu Xiulian to bring his 400-year-old Qingming sword to the capital to show his determination to leave the Chinese martial art world. However, the Qingming sword was stolen before it reached the capital. Yu Xiulian guessed that it was Yu Jiaolong. Yu Jiaolong is a miss of a wealthy family. When she was in Xinjiang which is a city in Northwest China. She once fell in love with the local bandit Luo Xiaohu without telling her father. Now she has returned to the capital. Her father asked her to marry another person. On impulse, Yu Jiaolong stole Li mubai's sword and rushed out to wander the Chinese martial art world. However, this move has involved much love and hatred. Yu Xiulian and Li mubai find Yu Jiaolong and cherish her martial arts as a rare talent, so they want to teach her hard. But later, Li mubai died of poisoning needles to save Yu Jiaolong. Under the guidance of Yu Xiulian, Yu Jiaolong came to Wudang Mountain. Yu Jiaolong felt that he had not got everything he wanted and that the freedom he wanted was also Utopian. She jumped down from the mountain and chose to commit suicide.

The narrative difficulty of this story, which belongs to the world of Oriental Wulin, lies in how to clearly express the vertically and horizontally intertwined clues and draw out the main line from them so that other story clues can unfold around the main line. There are two clear clues in the film: one is the clue that Li mubai and Yu Xiulian pursue the Qingming sword, and the other is the sideline that Luo Xiaohu and Yu Jiaolong break the class shackles. "On the whole, *Crouching tiger, hidden Dragon* conforms to the theory of big plot put forward by Robert McKee. However, because the protagonist is not alone, and the design and arrangement of small plots constantly appear during the period, small flashback narratives are constantly added at the same time as linear narration, to enrich the characters' images. Therefore, the film is biased toward the middle of the" story triangle "when telling the story" [8]. in this film, Yu Jiaolong's external struggle with feudal forces and classes does not become the main narrative part of the film. What is more prominent in the film is her inner change and growth. As a commercial film, this film does not excessively pursue luxuriance and neglects the story itself, which is one of the reasons why it is praised repeatedly. In my opinion, there are two great features in the narrative of this film. The first is the switching of perspective. The film mainly uses the different perspectives of Li mubai and Yu Jiaolong to show their understanding of the Jianghu and love. At the same time, the perspectives of Yu Xiulian and Luo Xiaohu are also interspersed. This kind of narration makes the film

more abundant and the characterization more full. Every bit of the film is integrated with Chinese culture. The cultural connotation is based on the film narrative, which makes the narrative style of the whole film thicker and more colorful.

2 The Oriental Concepts

The Jianghu mentioned above is a very interesting term in China. The word “Jianghu” can be found in the CCL corpus of Peking University, the best university in China. It first appeared in Taoist classics during the Warring States period. The original text is “it is better to forget the Jianghu than to help each other.” To be more specific, this sentence means that we can help each other with our meager strength in difficult situations. Sometimes we might as well give up our persistence and welcome the world with a new self. It is a relatively free and easy worldview. At that time, Jianghu was still a geographical term, only referring to distant mountains and rivers. But after that, Jianghu appeared frequently in Chinese classics and poems. Later, *Shi Ji*, a biographical historical book written by Sima Qian, a historian of the Western Han Dynasty, is one of the most famous historical books in China. Among them, the word “Jianghu” was mentioned. At this time, “Jianghu” already had the concept of “a remote place that can not be covered by the emperor’s law”. Further, the “Jianghu” at this time.

It has initially derived the meaning of a place that can avoid disasters even further than the geographical terms of high mountains and far waters. During the Ming and Qing Dynasties, there appeared many novels with martial arts themes that were not based on history but created by people’s imagination. In these novels, Jianghu gradually became a synonym for the world of Chinese martial arts. Since then, the Jianghu has represented the place that Chinese martial arts learners yearn for. The Jianghu represents freedom, righteousness, breaking through the obstacles of reality, and a world where love and hate are distinct.

In addition to the narrative style and technique, as a film with oriental characteristics, it is indispensable to have Chinese national style background music that is consistent with its temperament. This film uses some traditional folk music. The combination of the pictures and folk music in the film immediately brings the audience into the oriental charm. “This film adopts the appropriate national music to fully reflect the national characteristics. The melody of the music is different from that of previous films. It is simple, simple, and consistent. The harmony in the film is also very simple, and the characteristics are fully utilized and reflected” [9]. Many of the film’s music comes from the performance of traditional Chinese instruments, such as the bamboo flute, Xiao, Ruan, and so on. These traditional musical instruments bring us the voice of China.

3 Analysis in Details

Take the background music of the film from 57 min 35 s to 59 min 45 s as an example. This music is an excerpt from the song “Camel Bells on the Silk Road” played by Ruan, a traditional Chinese musical instrument. Ruan is a traditional musical instrument of Han nationality, which is short for Ruan Xian. It is said that Ruan Xian in the Western Jin Dynasty was good at playing this instrument, so it was named after Ruan Xian.

Ruan first appeared in the Tang Dynasty. It was widely spread among the people in the Yuan Dynasty and became a popular plucked instrument. It has a wide range of sounds and rich expressive power. Among the orchestras developed in modern China, Ruan and Xian instruments include middle Ruan and large Ruan. As the middle part of a plucked instrument. After 1949, the Ruan was improved and developed into Ruan musical instruments, including high-pitched Ruan, small Ruan, middle Ruan, large Ruan, and low-pitched Ruan. Among them, the high-pitched Ruan is used to replace the Liuqin as a high-pitched plucked instrument in the Hong Kong Chinese Orchestra, and the middle and low-pitched plucked instruments are commonly used by various folk orchestras. The score of the film, *Camel Bells on the Silk Road*, was played by a large Ruan, one of the Ruan musical instruments. The large Ruan speaker is round and the handle is vertical. It has a total of 24 grades, four strings, and a range of more than three octaves. It is made by the twelve average law and played with fake nails or paddles. It can be used for Solo, duet, song, dance accompaniment, or national band performance. It has rich artistic expression. It is a traditional Chinese plucked instrument. Large Ruan's head is often decorated with carved flowers. The voice of large Ruan is mellow, thick, beautiful and beautiful, and low and gentle. It is similar to the folk guitar but more mellow and deep than the folk guitar. Large Ruan mainly acts as the bass part in the band [10]. Compared with other traditional instruments, the sound it plays is more deep and magnetic, with high recognition.

"*Camel Bells on the Silk Road*" also has its characteristics in the arrangement. According to the introduction of composer Ning Yong in his article, this piece of music was created for the graduation music club during his college years. The music is based on the relevant poems of the Tang Dynasty poet Zhang Ji's poem *Liangzhou Ci*, which describes the caravan leading camels walking in the desert. It is created by absorbing the unique music elements of Xinjiang, China, and is accompanied by percussion instruments such as hand drums. The music depicts a scene of caravans coming and going along the ancient Silk Road in China, riding camels and carrying commodities, trudging on the desolate and vast Gobi desert. "The song" *Camel Bells on the Silk Road* "shows all kinds of magnificent scenes of camel caravans from east to West trudging along the long silk road in the extremely harsh natural environment. The camel bells that ring across the northwest desert are sometimes vigorous and long, sometimes joyful and jumping, sometimes rough and unrestrained, sometimes gentle and affectionate, and deduce one moving movement after another" [11]. There are five pieces of music, three of which are cited in the movie *Crouching tiger; hidden dragon*. They are joyful, dancing Allegro, gentle, affectionate Adagio. In these three paragraphs, # 1, # 2, and # 5 are used to create a strong exotic atmosphere.

After the above-detailed introduction of the song "Camel Bells on the Silk Road" played by Da Ruan, a traditional Chinese musical instrument, the narrative style and screen performance of "Crouching Tiger, hidden dragon" is analyzed. The love story between the protagonist Yu Jiaolong and Luo Xiaohu is interspersed in the film using narration, and the reunion of Yu Jiaolong and Luo Xiaohu leads to the scene of their first meeting. The song "Camel Bells on the Silk Road" appears in the part of the film that narrates the first encounter between Yu jiaolong and Luo Xiaohu in the desert. The story here is that Luo Xiaohu robbed Yu jiaolong's comb and she chased him on horseback.

When she rolled over and mounted the horse, the music sounded. Luo Xiaohu rode in front, showing off with a comb, and Yu Jiaolong rode behind. This fast-paced scene of riding and chasing is matched with the joy in the Silk Road camel bell, and the dance Allegro is perfect. The rhythm of many sixteenth notes in the background music makes the whole music full of color and makes the melody lively. The sound played by large Ruan matches the environment in the desert. Together with the music, a strong exotic flavor comes to our faces. The special rhythm played by using the right hand to control the paddle matches the footsteps of the horses galloping in the desert when the two protagonists ride in the movie. With the help of background music, this chase play is more intense but still witty.

Then the film lens followed the two men. The long-time desert chase consumed their physical strength. Luo Xiaohu stopped to drink water, and Yu Jiaolong came down with him. At this time, the music changed into a gentle and affectionate adagio. The characteristics of this section of large Ruan playing are on the left hand. The kneading and pushing and pulling of the left-hand strings are special techniques in Ruan's instrumental music playing. The vibration frequency and left and right positions of the strings are changed by the fingers of the left hand, to achieve the effect of melody and flowers that move between half tones. After drinking a mouthful of water, Luo Xiaohu looks at Yu Jiaolong and asks her name. Yu Jiaolong ignores him but he introduces himself first. This seemingly simple dialogue has a completely different feeling from the background music. The gentle and affectionate melody played by large Ruan adds some tenderness factors to Luo Xiaohu and Yu Jiaolong. Luo Xiaohu's love for Yu Jiaolong seems to be pouring out unconsciously with the words "your name" and the gentle background melody. In this section, music helps the film narrative and sets off those emotions that cannot be expressed in words through music. The surface is calm, but in fact, the undercurrent is surging. This way of expressing emotions is very Oriental, implicit but pure.

After that, Luo Xiaohu threw the kettle to Yu Jiaolong. After taking a sip of the kettle, Yu Jiaolong raised his leg and kicked Luo Xiaohu while Luo Xiaohu was unprepared. The two men began to wrestle in the desert. Yu Jiaolong and Luo Xiaohu are both people with martial arts. They don't know whether to win or lose. You can do everything with one move. Finally, both of them are tired and lie down in the desert. This is the climax of the conflict between the two protagonists in the film. When Yu Jiaolong kicks Luo Xiaohu, the score is immediately converted into Allegro with full sixteenth notes. The right-hand technique is also converted from the plucking of one string to the sweeping of four strings. While the volume gradually increases, the melody also becomes faster and faster. In coordination with the conflict of situations in the film, the music plays a role in setting off the atmosphere. At the end of the fight, when both of them had no strength to lie in the desert, the music also changed into a rough and unrestrained loose board. Compared with the previous music, the music slowed down, but the momentum did not decrease, which matched the emotions of the actors in the film.

The whole piece of *Camel bells on the silk road* has a strong exotic flavor. The tone of Da Ruan and the special techniques of his left and right hands add a unique flavor to the music. Such music from traditional Chinese musical instruments, combined with modern films with oriental characteristics, is a natural match. *Crouching tiger, a hidden dragon*, as a modern film, mainly tells the love and hatred in the Jianghu of the Oriental

Wulin and vividly depicts the happy Jianghu of the East. The love stories of the four main characters in the film are also touching. The love between Li mubai and Yu Xiulian is restrained and implicit, while the love between Yu Jiaolong and Luo Xiaohu is vigorous and straightforward. People's pursuit of freedom, their yearning for the Jianghu, and their attachment to love are all integrated into the film and told to the audience bit by bit. The first encounter between Yu Jiaolong and Luo Xiaohu in the desert is a bright color in the film, and it is a warm feeling across the class that runs counter to the feudal monarchy at that time. The song "*Camel Bells on the Silk Road*" is used as the background music here. The overall narrative of the film has the role of setting off the atmosphere, expressing emotions, and helping the film shape the overall style. The music of traditional Chinese musical instruments used in the film telling Chinese stories plays an irreplaceable role in the overall performance, style, and narrative of the film.

4 The Nationality in Music Play

Lu Xun, which was a writer, thinker, and one of the founders of modern Chinese literature in the Republic of China had another inspiration for us. He has created many articles with profound connotations, most of which are to awaken people's democratic consciousness and stimulate people's patriotic feelings. Once he said: that only the nation is the world [12]. That means that no matter what kind of art, its irreplaceable is very important. Like the sunflower, it is endowed with Van Gogh's characteristics. It is the unique Van Gogh sunflower that is different from other sunflowers [12]. There are thousands of roses in the world, but because of the little prince's watering and dedication, the rose belonging to the little prince is the most special one. Similarly, there are tens of millions of musical instruments in the world, but it is precisely because each country and each nation has its different methods of making musical instruments, different melodic characteristics, different musical instrument traditions, different cultural histories, different regional environments, and so on, that all kinds of different musical instruments are created. These musical instruments with different styles can play melodies of various timbres and timbres. As for some melodies, you can immediately know which country they come from. This is the charm of music. Therefore, music is a good material for modern films. In addition to the scenes and costumes with oriental elements, the background music played by traditional Chinese musical instruments is also a good choice for those who want to show scenes that match the Oriental elements or shape the oriental traditional style. This kind of music can quickly bring the audience into a situation with oriental characteristics without a word. This is not only true of films made by Chinese directors, for example, the last emperor, an oriental historical film made by Italian director Bernardo Bertolucci. Many of the soundtrack in this film comes from the famous Japanese composer Takaishi Sakamoto. When he made the soundtrack for this film, he used the melodic style with Chinese characteristics in many places and even used Chinese traditional national instruments such as Chinese drums in some melodies. Such use is very consistent and helpful for the overall narrative of the film.

The film is one of the best media for spreading culture. Whether it is the self utterance of the Oriental local culture or the Western gaze of Orientalism. For modern films with oriental characteristics, the expressiveness of Chinese traditional musical instruments

can not be underestimated no matter which perspective. But on the other hand, based on the cultural differences between China and the west, there may be some deviations between the musical feeling conveyed by the music of Chinese traditional musical instruments and the connotation they want to express for the subjective understanding of the West. Because the generation of a culture must be formed through the influence of a long-term region and environment, people who do not exist in this environment may not have a deep feeling for the culture cultivated by this environment.

For example, the Er Hu which is a traditional Chinese musical instrument has a very famous piece called "*Er Quan Ying Yue*". This piece of music was composed by a blind man. This blind man has had a musical talent since he was young. Although he can't see, he can skillfully play many kinds of musical instruments. His life has been very bumpy, so the music that he created, played by the traditional Chinese instrument Er Hu, *Er Quan Ying Yue*, is very sad. The name of the song "*Er Quan Ying Yue*" means that there is a stream named Two Springs pool, which reflects the moonlight alone in the evening. The title of the song has a very lonely feeling in Chinese. The song itself also uses many melodic patterns that often appear in Chinese music to express sadness. The Er Hu also uses some special techniques to express this lonely and sad mood. This piece of music can be called one of the saddest pieces of Chinese instrumental music. But if this piece of music is performed in the west, it may only be a piece of music with a beautiful melody for western people before introducing its cultural background. So cultural background is very important to music.

5 Conclusion

The music inserted in the film narrative may have a smaller understanding deviation in terms of cultural differences than the music that is only felt by hearing. The film is an art of visual and auditory perception. A piece of music, together with the storylines before and after the film, the performance of the actors when the music is played, the color tone of the film, the environment, and so on, will create a situation consistent with the music. To avoid the misunderstanding caused by cultural differences, film narration and musical instrument performance must complement each other. When creating films with Oriental themes, we should first understand some unique oriental cultures related to the film theme. In the choice of soundtrack, it is particularly necessary to use traditional Chinese musical instruments in specific venues to enhance the atmosphere, bring in situations or fill in emotions that can not be expressed in some pictures. It is necessary to understand the role of each musical instrument in local culture. That is to say, every musical instrument has its cultural background. For example, in local culture, a certain musical instrument is played at funerals or sad times. If we do not understand this culture in advance, we can insert the music played by this instrument into a very beautiful and peaceful scene in the film. In terms of hearing and vision, this piece of music may also be suitable, and the melody is gentle and beautiful, but in terms of culture, this piece of music is not suitable. When the film is shown in an area with the local culture of this musical instrument, people in that area will feel the stripping and mismatch of this part of the audio and video. Therefore, at the same time as modern film narration, if we choose the music played by the traditional musical instruments in a certain region as the soundtrack,

we should not only match the music with the picture but also match the local culture of the region where the traditional musical instruments are located with the film narration. Whether it is film or music, it needs cultural and historical background as the framework. In the consistent artistic performance, film narrative can be integrated with traditional musical instruments to present better artistic effects.

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