China's Image in Cross-Cultural Perspective: An Analysis of Stereotypes in Hollywood Films

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Abstract. According to L.S. Harms' theory of communication, with the continuous development of science and technology, communication in modern human society has reached the fifth stage. Human beings have stepped into a society mainly characterized by intercultural communication. Intercultural communication exists everywhere in life. As a medium of cultural communication, movie art plays an important role in cross-cultural communication. The research object of this paper is American Hollywood films. By analyzing the classic Hollywood films in the early 20th, late 20th and early 21st centuries, we show the changes of China's image in Hollywood films, and further discuss the causes of stereotypes in the cross-cultural communication media. It is concluded that the causes of stereotypes in Western Hollywood films are mainly divided into three categories, namely, stereotypes caused by historical bias, stereotypes caused by information gaps in the media, and stereotypes caused by cultural centrism. Next, this paper will analyze these three causes with examples.

Keywords: Stereotype Studies, Intercultural Communication, Postcolonial Literary Theory, Image Studies.

1 Introduction

The intercultural communication, in sociology, refers to a kind of communication engaged in by people with different cultural backgrounds. Intercultural communication takes various forms; it can be either on-site two-way communication, in which people from different cultural backgrounds use the same language to communicate, or unidirectional communication through the media, such as communication using communication media such as radio, television, and the press. As an important part of cross-cultural communication, Hollywood movies have long attracted the attention of moviegoers all over the world with their high investment, high production and diversified themes, and have become an important tool for cultural exchange and collision. However, due to the wide dissemination of Hollywood films around the world, they often become the main source of stereotypes of specific cultures and ethnic groups.[1]Therefore, an in-depth analysis of Chinese stereotypes in Hollywood films is of great practical significance for deepening the dissemination and understanding of

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Chinese culture, facilitating cross-cultural exchanges, and enhancing the cultural self-confidence of Chinese culture.

2 Stereotypes in Cross-Cultural Communication

2.1 The Concept of Stereotypes

Stereotype was first a printing industry term until 1992, when Lippmann borrowed stereotype in his book Public Opinion to refer to the stereotype of a certain type of people based on gender, race, age or occupation, etc., and then the concept of stereotype was gradually introduced into the field of cross-cultural communication research. Stereotypes are closely related to cross-cultural communication, and Hu Wenzhong, in his book Introduction to Cross-Cultural Communication, believes that stereotypes are one of the main causes of cross-cultural communication barriers.

Later, Zu Xiaomei further developed the concept of stereotype. According to Zu Xiaomei, stereotypes are neither always wrong judgments. Stereotypes can be both positive and negative, and they can be more correct judgments as well as biased, fixed and simplistic judgments. Stereotypes tend to have the following characteristics: they are a quick and portable way of categorizing and are part of our normal thinking; stereotypes become part of people's unconscious once they are formed, and people seldom think about their correctness; they become part of the culture; stereotypes have the limitation of generalizing and ignoring individual differences.[2]

2.2 Relationship of Stereotypes to Prejudice and Discrimination

In cross-cultural communication, stereotyping is often associated with prejudice and discrimination. In 1989, Strobe defined the three and discussed the relationship between them. Chinese scholar Zu Xiaomei further discussed the relationship between stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination in 2015.

Stereotypes are at the level of people's cognition, and they are part of their normal thinking. Stereotypes generally work on a certain social group and can be either positive, for example, Chinese people are all more diligent, or negative, for example, Chinese tourists are all of lower quality. Stereotypes are generally not entirely true or false because they are over-generalized, oversimplified judgments that are always at variance with the individual circumstances of the group. At the same time, however, there are a number of stereotypes that are correct, or even almost completely correct, for example, that all Chinese people speak Chinese.

Prejudice is a preconceived idea created without in-depth knowledge, and prejudice is more of an attitude based on people's perceptions. Prejudice is negative and often shows strong emotional colors. The essence of discrimination is a behavior, and discrimination is often based on prejudice or other unjustified reasons to treat the target differently.

3 Analyzing the Causes of China-related Stereotypes in Hollywood Films

One of the earliest movies related to Chinese in modern times was "Scenes from a Chinese Laundry" shot by William K.L. Dickson and William Heise in 1894, in which the image of a Chinese man dressed in a wide cloth coat with a long braid was left as the foundation of Hollywood movies. Since then, the image of China in Hollywood films has evolved continuously, from the sinister and scary Fu Manchu in the early days, to the exotic Bruce Lee, and nowadays it is gradually becoming more and more diversified and complex, and has undergone great changes with the development of China. Next, the author will analyze the causes of Chinese stereotypes in Hollywood films according to the clues of time.

3.1 Stereotypes caused by historical bias

Historical bias refers to one-sided views or misunderstandings arising from individual subjective views and cultural backgrounds when interpreting and evaluating historical figures and events. In modern China, there have been great changes: the 1911 Xinhai Revolution, which ended the feudal imperial system that had ruled China for more than 2,000 years. the New Culture Movement of 1915, which promoted the ideas of democracy and science, and the founding of the New China in 1949, which put an end to more than 100 years of humiliation by invasion and slavery and made China truly an independent and autonomous country.

However, due to historical bias, some Western social groups still have the same impression of China as the backward and pedantic, authoritarian and closed country of the feudal period. On the one hand, they fully express their contempt for the Chinese nation and society in mass communication. On the other hand, it also showed a concern about the possible rise of China in the future and challenged the world order. Therefore, under such circumstances, the "Yellow Peril Theory" was formally created, and "Fu Manchu", as the image of the "Yellow Peril Theory", became the most representative stereotype in the first half of the twentieth century in the Western mass communication.

Dr. Fu Manchu, a character created by the British writer Sax Rohmer in the first half of the 20th century, is a collection of all the stereotypes of Chinese people at that time. In appearance, Fu Manchu is a tall, thin, high-shouldered man with vertical eyebrows, two drooping moustaches, a satanic face, and an evil doctor in Qing dynasty uniform. In status, Fu Manchu is a member of the Qing royal family and has control of the allied organization that conducts assassination operations against Western imperialists. Both in appearance and in background, Fu Manchu is full of evil, creating, in Sax Rohmer's own words, a typical "image of the Chinese villain".

In Orientalism, an iconic work of postcolonial literary theory, Edward W.Said argues that the West has used various powers to construct a concept of the Orient, which is composed of one stereotype after another like Fu Manchu.[3] In the relationship between the West and the East, the East, as an adversary in the West's position,

actually loses its voice. Thus, he concludes that Orientalism is in fact an illusory construction of the East from the Western standpoint, and the purpose of this construction is to validate the West's ego as the superior party. Therefore, Fu Manchu, as a representative of the constructed Oriental stereotype, conformed to the stereotype of China under the historical bias of the mainstream Western groups at that time, and fulfilled the fantasy of the Western society that scorned and feared China at that time, and achieved a great success in the Western society as soon as it was put on sale. A series of films on the theme of "Dr. Fu Manchu" were made one after another, and an indelible stereotype of China was imprinted on the mainstream Western society.

3.2 Stereotypes Caused by Media Communication Information Gaps

Information gap means that the information held by the sender and the receiver of a message are not the same. In cross-cultural communication, due to the different cultural backgrounds of the communicators, the sender and the receiver of the message may have a different understanding of the same message, and once this different understanding forms a stereotype, we call it the stereotype caused by the media communication information gap.

In the middle of the 20th century, after the end of the Second World War, the United States and the Soviet Union were gradually moving towards a bipolar pattern, and the West had little understanding of Eastern culture. In the 1970s, the relationship between China and the United States gradually improved. Against this social background, Hong Kong films gradually moved into the international community and developed rapidly. During this period, although the "Yellow Peril" theory was still very powerful in the West, at the same time, another image of China was also rising, which was represented by Bruce Lee's series of movies, full of romantic flavor of the new image of China.

Bruce Lee was born in San Francisco, U.S.A. He starred in the 1971 kung-fu movie "Fists of Glory", and then moved to Hollywood to make "Enter the Dragon". The powerful and righteous hero image shown in Bruce Lee's movie is a perfect match with western individualism and heroism. The movie caused a worldwide sensation upon its release, breaking the box office record of local movies in less than 3 weeks of its release, enhancing the influence of Chinese culture globally and having a profound impact on a series of kung fu movies that came after it.[4]

While Bruce Lee's kung fu movies changed the previous stereotypes of the West to a certain extent, it also walked into another stereotype. In Said's Orientalism, there is the concept of exoticism. The exoticism is actually a kind of cultural construction and imagination of the West towards the East, and in art works, it is specifically manifested in the glorification of Eastern customs, landscapes, costumes and so on, forming a kind of romanticized image of the exotic. Bruce Lee's kung fu movies set up the characters in such a way that the West thinks that all Chinese people know Chinese kung fu. In Bruce Lee's films, many Chinese grow up learning kung fu and practicing chivalry. In fact, not all Chinese people know kung fu. Bruce Lee and a series of Hollywood kung fu masters, such as Jackie Chan and Jet Li, whose movies were disseminated globally through Hollywood, created a huge information gap, which in a way

reinforced this stereotype. In addition, in terms of setting, most of Bruce Lee's kung fu films are based on the old society of China, and the films create a romantic oriental country that the West has never seen before. In contrast to the social crisis caused by over-industrialization in the West, the audience can go back to the good old days, where the audience can experience the idyllic pastoral style of life in the past. The romanticized Eastern lands of Bruce Lee's kung fu films complemented the aesthetics of the very instrumental Western society of the time, and eventually, a new romanticized Chinese stereotype was born.

3.3 Stereotypes caused by cultural centrism

Cultural centrism refers to the tendency of each country or nation to regard its own way of life, beliefs, values, and behavioral norms as the best and superior to those of other nations, and to take the cultural patterns of its own nation or group as the center and the standard by which to measure and evaluate other cultures, and often to be hostile to or skeptical of cultural patterns with which it is unfamiliar.[5]

Entering the 21st century, with the deepening of reform and opening up, China continues to move toward the center of the world stage, and the world's understanding of China has become more in-depth. In Hollywood movies at this time, Chinese people are no longer only portrayed as villains and kung fu masters, but their images have become diversified, such as Wang Xueqi's portrayal of a Chinese doctor in the movie Iron Man 3, and Li Bingbing's portrayal of a business elitist in Transformers: Age of Extinction. However, the diversification of character types does not mean the disappearance of stereotypes; on the contrary, stereotypes are spreading around the world in an insidious way by lurking in movies.

The movie "2012" is a disaster movie launched by American Hollywood in 2009, which was released in mainland China at the end of 2009. After its release, the film won the box office for four consecutive weeks, with a cumulative box office of up to 450 million dollars, completing an important step for American Hollywood to successfully explore the mainland market. However, the film hides a large number of stereotypes generated by cultural centrism.

On the one hand, in 2012, the United States portrays itself as the center of the world. When faced with a worldwide disaster, the U.S. government takes the lead and calls on scientists to build Noah's Ark, while the leaders of other countries only passively agree with the U.S. government's decisions, with little or no ideas of their own. In addition, although the disaster is global, the role of convincing the world leaders to open the ark to allow ordinary people to enter is still American, and the "white savior" plot fully embodies Hollywood's cultural centrism.

On the other hand, negative stereotypes of China lurk in the movie's presentation of China's image. In the movie, although the Noah's Ark, which saves mankind, is made by Chinese workers, the process of making it is full of negative stereotypes of China. The movie portrays the Chinese government as a fool's government, and after receiving the news of the end of the world, the Chinese government deceives the people by falsely using the name of building a dam to trick them into building the ark. In addition, the movie also presents different narratives about the fools' policies in China

and the West. In the West, social groups demonstrate and send out sharp resistance to the Western government with people like Jackson and the Radio Maniacs. In China, on the other hand, it is as if the country is still in a totalitarian society in the feudal era, and the people are only passive and agreeable.

Through the comparison of different countries in the face of worldwide disasters, we can see that even in the 21st century, Hollywood films still have a lot of stereotypes in the depiction of Chinese society, which marginalize the performance of other countries in solving global problems and highlight the leadership of the United States in the world pattern, and in these stereotypes, the culture of Hollywood films is distinctly reflected. centrism.

4 Revelations about Stereotypes

From the 20th century to the beginning of the 21st century, although the stereotypes of China in Hollywood movies have been changing, what remains unchanged is that Western society has always taken itself as the main subject and used its own perspective to scrutinize and construct a kind of cultural hegemony of the East. Therefore, as a cross-cultural worker, we should always be alert to the various cultural symbols that appear in our daily life. On the one hand, we have to avoid self-orientalism, we cannot unconsciously adopt the Western perspective to scrutinize and reproduce our own culture, so as to present an image of the East that conforms to the Western imagination, for example, the white savior plot in the movie The Flowers of War; on the other hand, we have to avoid the East itself, as the subject of power, to construct other countries, like the simplified image of Africa in the movie “Wolf Warriors 2”, which portrays Africa as an ignorant and backward country.[6] As long as we always treat all kinds of cultures in our lives with an open, tolerant and equal mindset, and insist on cultural self-confidence, then I believe that no matter what kind of stereotypes the West has constructed for us, all of them will not be shattered in front of the real, self-confident and equal Chinese people.

5 Conclusion

By analyzing Hollywood films over a century span, this study confirms that the Western screen's representation of China's image has never been able to escape the triple structural shackles:stereotypes caused by historical bias, stereotypes caused by information gaps in the media, and stereotypes caused by cultural centrism.The stereotypes of China in Hollywood movies show that the ultimate dilemma of cross-cultural communication may lie in the fact that when the media is always a prismatic mirror rather than a flat mirror, what we need is not only a clearer lens, but also the courage to turn around and face the reflection in the mirror. The history of Hollywood's Oriental imagination reminds us that breaking the cycle of cognitive bias is essentially an eternal quest for the possibility of equal dialogue among human civilizations.

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