

Original Paper

Analysis on the Interactive Embodiment of the East and West Values of Life in Chinese and American Movies

Zhongtang Wei^{1*}

¹ School of Foreign Languages, Qilu Normal University, Jinan, China

* Zhongtang Wei, School of Foreign Languages, Qilu Normal University, Jinan, China

Received: November 8, 2022 Accepted: November 20, 2022 Online Published: November 27, 2022

doi:10.22158/sll.v6n4p149

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.22158/sll.v6n4p149>

Abstract

The discussion of the contents and differences and interrelations of east and west values has been keeping on for a long time and has made much progress. But few studies have done on the interactive embodiment of the east and west values. The paper illustrated, under the background of economic globalization and cultural communication; firstly, the traditional embodiment of east values in Chinese movies and west values in American movies; secondly and more specifically, the interactive embodiment of the east and west values of life in Chinese and American movies. Through the lens of movies, we can behold the inner secrets of different values, which are demonstrated in distinct perspectives like the subtle and implicit plots. It is expected that, when we compare the values in two countries and cultures, we will be more aware of our own cultures. We could be capable to grasp in our cultures what we are good at and what we should be better, which further would help us enhance the confidence of our own cultures and values and learn from others better to refine and improve the development of our traditional cultures and then to spread it more and better to the whole world.

Keywords

value, movie, east and west, interactive embodiment, Chinese and American

1. Introduction

Different types of values of east and west have been illustrated in relevant studies (Li, 1999; Zhou, 2014) and the differences of them (Zhang, 2002; Zhang, 2015) and the mutual influences of the two streams have been manifested (Duan, 2004; Sun, 2008). However, there is few academic studies demonstrating how the embodiment of other values is in own national artistic forms and how the rolls of waves are in another stream. This paper aims at illustrating the interactive embodiment of the east and west values in Chinese and American movies, for the purpose of analyzing how the cultural

communication and economic globalization influence people's conventions and behaviors of two counties and. Through the lens of Chinese and American movies, we can better understand the contents of the pictures and be more self-aware and self-confident to our cultures and be more objective and rational to the differences between the east and the west.

1.1 Chinese Values of Life

According to *Free Dictionary*, value means the important and lasting beliefs or ideals shared by the members of a culture about what is good or bad and desirable or undesirable. Values have major influence on a person's behavior and attitude and serve as broad guidelines in all situations (Note 1).

The core of Chinese values of life is collectivism. It emphasizes, on the one hand, that people should devote themselves to serving the society and dedicate to helping others. The measure of a man's value is how much he has done for the whole society. On the other hand, when personal interests contradict with collective interests, people should give up their own goals and be subordinate to the whole team or group. In China, people believe that fish cannot live without water and human cannot survive without collectivity (Xu, 1999, pp. 178-180).

1.2 American Values of Life

The core of American values of life is individualism. They consider themselves as separate individuals who are responsible for their own situations in life and their own destinies. God helps those who help themselves. Americans view themselves as highly individualistic in their thoughts and actions. They resist being thought of as representatives of any homogeneous group. Even Freedom and Equality, which are their other vital values, are within the zone of Individualism (Slaughter, 2007, p. 2). By freedom, Americans mean the desire and the ability of all individuals to control their own destiny without outside interference from the government or any other organized authority. Rules are made to be broken. As stated in their Declaration of Independence, that "all men are created equal" (Jefferson, 1776) (Note 2).

In China's culture, people also treasure the value of freedom and equality. But it is different from American's. Freedom in China is limited in the norms, traditional concepts and family relationships. And with equality, they are all in the charge of collectivism (Sun, 2008, p. 80).

2. Traditional Embodiment

2.1 Chinese Values Demonstrated in Chinese Movies

Iron Man, directed by Yin Li in 2009, tells us the story of Wang Jinxi, the man who led the team to drill in the deep well for oil successfully for the first time in China in 1960. At that time, he and his team didn't think about themselves too much. No matter how severe the circumstances were, even without enough food, Wang Jinxi and his colleges kept working hard in the oil field. Even he got injured, he hurt and he cried but he did not complain and never yielded. He tried his best to dry out the last drop of blood to achieve what he valued most, which is the future of our country. Everything he did not for

himself, not for his salary, even regardless of his life. The way he sacrificed himself for the country is the way Chinese value pursues, of which the core is collectivism.

Deng Jiaxian, a biographic film directed by Wang Jixing in 2009, tells us the career and contribution of the man the male leading actor acts whose name is just used as the name of the movie. When he got his PhD in Purdue University in America in 1950, he determined decisively to come back to China to help develop a new country in spite of the superior life and study condition in America. In the rest of his life in China, he devoted his all into the development of China's nuclear weapons. He was the leader of the whole research team, and his leadership of the detonation physics and other basic theoretical research completed the theoretical atomic bomb program. After the success of the atomic bomb test, he continued to explore hydrogen bomb. During the exploration, he got cancer but still stood in the first line to light up the dark area of China's academic field. For the security of all nation of People's Republic of China, he kept working till his death in 1986. He was posthumously awarded the Two Bombs and One Satellite Medals in 1999. The film manifested the value of life is measured by how much he did for the country and for the whole nation but not just for himself. So it is the pure Chinese movie with pure Chinese values of life.

In Chinese movies, this value is seen not only in Chinese people, but also in the foreigners.

Bethune Medical, directed by Zhang Junxiang, Li Shutian and Gao Zheng in 1964, tells us the story of Norman Bethune who was a Canadian doctor and came to help China during the period of Counter-Japan War. As a surgeon, he unshakably performed operations on wounded soldiers regardless his personal life and death. He once stood beside the operating table for sixty-nine hours in 3 days and just for one aim which is to save one more patient. When he had the chance to go back to Canada, the peaceful place where his family was, he gave it up. And finally he infected with disease germs and died in the battle field in China. To help the people in need, especially the people in the war against aggression and no matter how far they are, is the virtuous spirit and Chinese value. Bethune was one hero in Chinese people's hearts and minds.

Moreover, the movie about ancient times also illustrates the similar kind of ideal.

Hero, directed by Zhang Yimou in 2000 which demonstrates a fictional story that happened in the Warring States period, tells us that the assassin wanted to assassinate the emperor who was ambitious to conquer other six states. The assassin struggled with all his efforts to get close to the emperor who was protected just as strictly as a prisoner. However, at the last moment, he gave up killing the most powerful man with the supreme throne and walked into pool of death. Why? Because he knew the emperor was the only one who was capable to defeat other states and to unify the whole nation, which could bring peace and stability to the ordinary people. That was not only the expectation of all human no matter which class they were, but also the only way to stop the battle lasting for so many years. So at the terminal, the assassin who was the Kong Fu master, dropped his sword and received his death and was shot by arrows. He died for the future of human race and for the national unity. In the flick,

even though the story was a fiction of two thousand years ago, we are also fostered that what makes life greater is to die for all human. It is, of course, the core value of life of China.

2.2 American Values Demonstrated in American Movies

The Graduate, starred by Dustin Hoffman in 1967, describes the youngsters' spiritual outlook, in which the new generation desired to pursue their own dreams and freedom. The male leading actor took his lover ran away from her wedding ceremony but didn't know where to go. And the actress decided to leave with him without thinking about her parents and her fiancé and ran for her own pursuit. All of this reveals the American core value, individualism. They started to reject to follow what their parents wanted or ordered them to be and to do. They listened to their inner heart and cherished their own thoughts and were brave enough to break the yoke of traditional convention and norms. Even though they didn't think over what the result would be, they treasure more the freedom of life, the freedom of spirits and the humanistic liberation. The movie not just manifested the values. Simultaneously, it encouraged a large number of teenagers and university students to follow. This movie helped to improve the cognition of people about their values of life. Because it is in line with the core American values of life.

The Devil Wears Prada, which was acted and performed by Meryl Streep and Anne Hathaway in 2006, tells us a story about a little girl who was lucky to get the job and did her best to win her boss's trust but in the end of the movie she left. Why? Was the job not alluring? Of course the job she got was admirable. Was her boss rude to her? Surely, the boss was the so-called Devil. Notwithstanding, the devil liked the little girl who successfully incarnated as a beautiful swan from a black duck, which was unimaginable for everyone in the company. She left just because she wanted to live a willing life. When she knew her boss's intentions and behaviors, even if she herself was well treated, she didn't like the things her boss did and the complicated relations among the colleges. Therefore, for the less shining but more satisfactory tomorrow, and as the American values which were freedom and individualism influenced, she turned back and moved away firmly. It is like the movie, *The Walk to the Clouds* which was directed by Robert Zemeckis in 2015, in which the female leading actress at last left the main actor who was her boyfriend and his dream just came true, and went to pursue her own dream.

The values were shown not only in the live action movies, but also in the cartoons.

Moana, which was shown on the screen in 2016, demonstrated the process of the growth of a girl Named Moana. She had friends who were willing to help her, and even the sea was her subordinate who was ready to offer services at any time. But the key for her to get the destination and to defeat the enemy and finally to save the people in her hometown, was her brave heart which let her know that she can do it and she is good enough to achieve her goal. The soul of her grandmother was the awakener of her heart. She was to Moana what the movie was to us. They all told us that self-confidence values and counts. The recognition of our own value values. Self-worth is the American values. And man can do great things.

The eighty-eighth Oscar Award for Best Animated Feature Film, *Inside Out*, was praised for its stunning visual effect, vivid plots, lovely characters and the perfect fusion of five distinct figures with the girl's mood. However, all of that is inconvincible for the film to get the Oscar. What makes this film so extraordinary and unforgettable is that, every mood in the movie and in our mind values and counts. When the girl needs to move to another place, and when she confronted with all the difficulties, it is Joy in her mind helped her to be positive. And when she was bored with the surroundings, it is Anger urged her to leave. When she cannot leave and came back home, especially when she was hugged by her parents, it is Sadness who made her cry and let her give full vent to her own sadness, and finally she accepted her new environment and grew more mature than before. Again, every character, every mood in our mind takes its unique and irreplaceable role. Everyone has its value. So till here, a conclusion can be drawn, that is what made this film incredible is the American values it expressed through five different cartoon figures. We ourselves make the world remarkable.

Why is Marvel so popular among all the people in every corner in America and in the west world for nearly one century? Superhero is somehow the symbol of individualism and the representative of courage of fighting for the rightness and for the things people want. When it comes down to it, they are American values. And the values have been influencing other countries more and more as the process of globalization of information goes on and have been showing up in other countries' movies.

3. Interactive Embodiment

3.1 American Values Demonstrated in Chinese Movies

Eat Drink Man Woman which was directed by Ang Lee in 1994, shows us that the old father married a lady of the same age as his daughters. His family members and the lady's mother were all opposed to his decision, but he determined to be with the lady and to support the rest her and her daughter's life. And finally the family members admitted and accepted the result of their true love. In Chinese values, it is unacceptable and unreasonable. People would not do as the old man does, and would not compromise with the forbidden love. However, the movie went along the other side of the traditional channel, in which people cherish more the reputation of the whole family and simultaneously, restrain their own desires. So, the fact revealed itself that the value here is American's. To be with the one you adore no matter how old he or she is and no matter what the family members say just interprets the core of American values, individualism and freedom.

Ang Lee is a director who have been influenced by the conflicts and combinations of two cultures, so he expresses values of the east and the west naturally. We can smell the western blood in his Chinese movies and we can also recognize the eastern soul in his American movies. And his another Chinese movie, *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon* is no exception. This knight-errant film showed us a world which was as attracting and beautiful as pieces of canvas, and in this world Yu Jiaolong broke up the norms of that time to seek for her dreams, love and freedom. Luo Xiaohu, Jiaolong's lover, didn't want

to be locked by the regulations and be limited by worldly rules either; hence, he proceeded for his love without hesitation. Yu Jiaolong didn't think about her parents too much and she didn't want to be struck. What she valued most was her inner heart, her real feelings and her own wishes. She wanted to be a *loong* to hover over the azure sky. Even though at last she sacrificed herself, she didn't want to live in a world that she really lived in. When this film was firstly shown on screen in China, it was not welcomed and not understood by most of the audiences. Why? Quite a few times spectators said that they didn't get the real theme and the deep thought of the film. They didn't understand why Yu Jiaolong chose that way. The reason that this masterpiece was commented by many Chinese people as meaningless stage plays is that they do not know the core value of this movie is American's, which is freedom and individualism. Personality liberation in China is not as popular as in America. And in the ordinary Chinese films, the actress would definitely not make the same choice as Jiaolong, such as *The Grand Master*, directed by Wang Karwai in 2013, in which the female leading actress restrained her true feelings towards the main actor just for the reputation of her whole family. So only grasping the right direction of values can we get the correct ideas and the essential thoughts of the flicks. This film, *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon*, is one typical sample of interactive embodiment of west values.

There are some other Chinese movies conveying the American values but not throughout the whole film. For instance, the comedy *Legend of Dragon* which was performed by Stephen Chow in 1991. In the last few minutes of the movie, when Zhou Xiaolong, with the help of Lady Luck won the last round of the game, he was not allowed to touch the trophy. At this moment, he and his family members fought against the bastards into the ground and succeeded to raise up his honor of triumph. This plot would be unimaginable for Chinese audiences. Because it is not the Chinese way to solve problems. Nevertheless, the movie was American's type. As for the value here, to get what you want no matter what is in your way, is the golden apple in American conventions' tree and it shines its attractive lights in many American films. Just as in *Vacation* which was acted by Ed Helms and Christina Applegate, the family finally made it to get the destination, the biggest roller coaster in North America, but was told they cannot get on because there was no seat for them. So they fought against the family who were in front of them and caught the last straw to enjoy the blowing waves of the air.

Not only in live action movies, some cartoons also play the similar role on the interactive embodiment. *Kong Fu Panda 3*, which was produced by DreamWorks Animation in 2016, shows us firstly the hometown and the family of Po. The film is not made by China, but the story happened in China and the factors, the characters and the ideas are all from Chinese culture. But it is the Chinese skin that holds the American soul. Po was trying to make sense of Qi, the essence and the heart of Chinese Kong Fu. In Chinese culture, Qi has some things with the theory that man is an integral part of nature. And it is not very easy to comprehend or to grasp. However, in the film, we are told that Po knew the meaning of Qi by knowing himself. He understood he was different with his own power so he could vanquish the enemy. Obviously, it was not the real meaning of Qi but the American values, knowing yourself and

believing yourself. Everyone counts. This film is just like a banana film with yellow skin and white stuff. The movie which is about China and Chinese culture embodies the American values and spirits. Kong Fu Panda is the classical flower blossoming in the tree of interactive embodiment of east and west values.

And in the other side of the tree, the flowers are also colorful and vivid.

3.2 Chinese Values Demonstrated in American Movies

As the paper mentioned above, Ang Lee is a director irrigated with the dews of both the eastern and the western. Therefore, his film always has a fuse taste of Chinese tea and American wine. *Broke Back Mountain* which was acted by Jake Gyllenhaal and Heath Ledger in 2005, like the hurricane sweeping across the globe, moved the people of all nations deeply. It is not just a story about homosexual love. What made this film so remarkable and unequalled is the values it conveyed. Ennis cannot totally embrace and thoroughly accept the love between them while Jack wanted to be with Ennis forever no matter the cost may be. Ennis thought more about his wife and his daughters, reluctantly but responsibly. He worried about others' discussion and discrimination, while Jack could do anything for Ennis and braved to pursue the forbidden love. Till here, the phenomenon has been floated above the surface of the mixed water. Ennis held the east values while Jack the west. Ennis refrained his own emotion and couldn't get further step toward his dreamland of true love. What burdened his mind were his responsibility for his family and the limitation of the traditional ideas and views about homosexual. That is what Chinese people care about when they do nearly everything. Notwithstanding, Jack was pushed by his inner heart, the love to Ennis, to bravely walk into the corridor of darkness and the pool of death. He didn't care what others may think of him and what others may criticize what he did. It would not be accepted at that time to see two men swimming together in the lake of true love. But Jack just wanted to jump into the warm water even though it may melt him at last. It is the American value. To do what you want and to be with the one you love whatever the gender your lover is. What people cherish most is freedom and individualism. So till here, we can know clearly that the ending of the story must be tragic. When two different values collide with each other, if they cannot be treated smoothly, the result is doomed to be pathetic.

But there are some examples, in which two values mingled successfully, by the director rather than by the characters in the movie.

The Life of PI, also directed by Ang Lee in 2012, shows us an incredibly amazing journey that an Indian boy went through with a Bengal tiger. This film won the second Oscar Best Director trophy for Ang Lee. But what the deepest thought of this picture? Belief? Did the director tell us or try to persuade us that God exists? Did the And Lee say that he believed in God? And when there were two choices for the audience did he explicate his decision? No. Why? Because he didn't want to proselytize the audience to believe in any religion or to accept his idea. Actually, in this film, Ang Lee used the eastern perspective to view the western belief. And he carved two roads for the main character to reach the

shore. And it is you who decide which one is more convincing and acceptable. Whether there is God or not? It's your choice. Moderation is the core thought of the director as well as the picture. Therefore, in this Hollywood blockbuster, the spirit and value are Chinese. It doesn't tell the exact answer but builds a harmonious world for everyone. When you see this film you will feel comfortable and suitable no matter you believe in God or not, just because the movie itself contains different opinions and there is nothing right or wrong, better or worse in them. The director used Chinese cultures and values dealing with the controversial and contradictory things harmoniously and wisely. So this film was a great success and welcomed by the audiences on both sides of the Pacific Ocean.

Some things themselves are controversial in America but well understood in China. Let's take *Saving Private Ryan* as an example. The whole team needed to save one person regardless their own safety and lives. The person was not the president, the general or a billionaire, but just a boy whose brothers all had died in the battle field. There is one law in America regulating that the only left child should be saved in the battlefield to company his or her parents. But the law itself is controversial. Surely, his mother couldn't live with every child gone. But how about the soldiers who died for saving her son? How about their families and parents and their children? Everyone's life counts equally. This epic film didn't win the Oscar's Best picture. And there are many reasons given by the editors. But as the illustration expressed above, the essential reason is that the value it demonstrates isn't in the line with theirs. It is contradictory with the core value of America, individualism. Notwithstanding, it is Chinese values. To sacrifice ourselves for our trenchmates, for our friends and even for others who we don't know. As long as it is the career of justice and righteousness, especially for the collective, it is regarded as the paramount and supreme honor. It is a great movie and adorable in America, but it is more treasured in China.

4. Conclusion

The east and west values can be embodied in its own countries' movies as well as in other nations' pictures interactively as the mutual influences gets deeper and wider. And only when we make it clear which values the film manifests can we grasp the essential thought and the core idea. And not only does it help us comprehend other country's cultures and values and conventions better, but also and more importantly, we are capable to understand our own values and its influences to this world. And in the way we can be more rational and objective to the differences between the east and the west and we be more self-aware and self-confident, which will help in spreading Chinese cultures more effectively. This paper mainly focuses on the interactive embodiment in Chinese and American movies. And this exploration can be further continued. The analyses of the interactive embodiment of values of China and other countries like Japan, Russia and so on can be wider and deeper made.

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Notes

Note 1. the definition of “value” seen in *Free Dictionary*. <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/value>

Note 2. Thomas J. (1776). *Declaration of Independence*. U.S.