

“Yellow Skin, White Masks”: A Post-colonial Study of Disney Live-action Movie *Mulan*

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Abstract: *The live-action movie Mulan is Disney’s latest masterpiece in 2020. Previous scholars mainly studied “The Ballad of Mulan” and the animated film Mulan (1998) from the theme, narration, film art, feminist theories and other aspects. Based on Postcolonial theory and Orientalism, this paper takes the latest live-action movie Mulan (2020) as the research object and makes a comparative study of Mulan’s adapted image in the movie and the original Mulan image in “The Balled of Mulan”. Reconstruction of the ancient Oriental empire China and major characters around Mulan are further discussed. It is found that creators of the movie adopt Chinese elements and characters to convey American ideology and values and thus the implication of this study is evident: to arouse readers’ awareness of cultural invasion through media like movies and of the significance of rebuilding China’s international image in the new era.*

Keywords: *Mulan, Post-colonialism, adaptation, Americanization*

1. Introduction

1.1 Background of the Research

The balled that Mulan enlisted for his father is one of the classic Chinese traditional cultural stories, and its protagonist, Mulan, is a well-known female figure in China. Her image of “loyalty”, “filial piety”, “righteousness” and “bravery” is deeply rooted in Chinese culture. In a sense, it is a carrier of Chinese traditional culture, attracting researchers and filmmakers from all over the world. As a “princess” dream workshop Disney has made the story of Mulan into a Disney animation as early as 1998. In 2020, it gathered the familiar faces of the East including Liu Yifei and Gong Li and created the live-action movie *Mulan*.

The latest version of the live-action movie *Mulan* is adapted from “The Ballad of Mulan”. In ancient China, a young woman disguised herself as a man and joined the army in order to save her aged and feeble father. She ascended to the general and found her inner warrior, and in the end, the emperor and her homeland were rescued from foreign invaders.

The setting and cast of the latest version of Disney’s live-action movie *Mulan* are undoubtedly closer to the cultural background of Chinese audiences. Unexpectedly, after being screened in Chinese theaters, it encountered continued decline in audience comment scores and reputation. The live-action movie *Mulan* has already Americanized the native Chinese Mulan and thus, packaged the narrative into an American version. The white American female literary and artistic elites represented by the film *Mulan* combined the Chinese elements they yearned for, with history and imagination intertwining through the film, to reconstruct a Mulan belonging to Disney and the United States.

The purpose of this paper is to analyze the adaptations in the latest version of the live-action film *Mulan*. The paper falls into two parts besides this introduction and a conclusion. The first part analyzes and compares the images of Mulan in the movie and “The Ballad of Mulan”. The second part analyzes the ancient Oriental Empire and people around Mulan in the film.

1.2 Significance of the Research

At present, in the literature searched by the author, there are few studies on the Americanization of Mulan’s image in the latest Disney movie *Mulan* in 2020 from Post-colonial perspective. Most of scholars from home and abroad have analyzed the narrative in the movie from Cross-cultural perspective and

feminist perspective. However, few studies on the Americanization of the latest version of Mulan's image from the Post-colonial perspective.

On the one hand, China is a big developing country that has attracted the attention of the world. Its long history and culture are desirable, and it has also attracted the research interest of many domestic and foreign scholars. Meanwhile, under the background of the widespread popularity of feminism in the 21st century, Mulan as a female protagonist in a traditional Chinese story with her beautiful femininity and heroism, is worthy of discussing again.

On the other hand, because of the continuous exchange and integration of cultures, some local things are being given new characteristics of the times, and some have encountered cultural invasions and have been transformed. For some adaptations in the latest version of the live-action film *Mulan*, analysis based on Post-colonial theory can get some new inspirations and warnings.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

"The Ballad of Mulan" is one of the classic Chinese folk stories, and in a sense, it is a carrier of Chinese traditional culture, attracting researchers and filmmakers from all over the world.

According to the previous research, there has been a gap between American filmmakers' construction and interpretation Mulan's image and her heroine image commonly accepted in Chinese culture. This gap can best explain a sense of abruptness for the Chinese film viewers despite an intensive demonstration of cultural elements of ancient China before their eyes. To explore the source of this gap, we can adopt Edward Said's Orientalism and post-colonialism to navigate the study.

Therefore, based on Orientalism and post-colonial theories and previous studies, this thesis intends to explore the reasons why Chinese elements are frequently favored in foreign films, as well as to reflect on and raise the awareness of the strong invasion of Western culture to the "other".

2.2 Previous Research of Mulan

2.2.1 Previous Research on the Adaptation of "Mulan" From Different Perspectives

Previously, scholars from home and abroad discuss the image of Mulan from different perspectives. Among the searched documents, most of the research on the Americanization of Mulan's image are from the cross-cultural perspective, under the influence of sexist culture, and explain the adaptation of the original works. Kuang's study states that Mulan's wide popularity with Disney is actually related to the values of the United States, one is civilian heroism, and the other is a sense of equality (230-231). Jia proposed that Disney portrayed Mulan as a woman with strong self-awareness and fights hard against the whole society of male superiority (108). Mulan is a brave new American woman who is pursuing freedom and equality in China (Wan 43). Jiang agrees that the West attaches more importance to the awakening of Mulan's female consciousness (19). It is found that the awakening of female consciousness and independence of personality are the expressions of the film. The theme of the Disney story is more inclined to the description of individual consciousness common in Western culture (Jiang 19). It can be observed that the Western image of Mulan is inseparable from the emphasis on individual consciousness and the reflection of women's status in contemporary era.

On the other hand, Wan believes that the image of "Mulan" in the United States is a foreign image that exists as an "otherness" (40). Disney succeeded in shaping a culture of "the other", which turned the original story of the country into a story of personal struggle (Jia 108). The localized story, after being processed by Disney, shows a strong American color (Xia 70). Regarding Disney's adaptation of Mulan, Wan questioned that it seems to have expanded China's influence, but the character's deep core has been distorted: its core American flavor has not changed. The output is the collective consciousness represented by the publisher. This kind of consciousness is a kind of cultural penetration (Wan 42). This shell of Chinese stories actually promotes American culture, consciously or unconsciously with a creative prejudice of deliberate embezzlement or unconsciousness (Jiang 19). Regarding the story of Mulan created by Disney and the story of native Mulan, Xia believes that Disney often uses some symbolic elements to interpret them, and these elements are blended together without any sense of time or geographical distinction (70). In fact, this is not simply considered to be the theme of Mulan's story being given new meanings, but it reflects the "desire of being out of the body" in shaping the image of

foreigners in the United States (Wan 42). “The USA could take advantage of Hollywood movies to instill China’s circumstances into their national’s mind” (Liu 30).

2.2.2 Definition of Orientalism

For the American adaptation of Mulan’s image and stories in “The Ballad of Mulan”, we need to mention post-colonial theory and Orientalism. Post-colonial theory refers to “a very complex theoretical study of the continuing effects European imperialist powers in culture, politics, and history, which are different from their old colonies” (Wang 54-62). It is a “critical concept” (Ye 174-175). Wang pointed out that post-colonial criticism has inherited “commonwealth literature” and “third world literature”. Post-colonialism did not happen overnight, “but gradually developed through long-term reflection on colonialism” (Xu 64). According to post-colonialism, the West always has a sense of superiority and intends to dominate the world. The Third world or the East is a kind of “otherness” role. Said’s Orientalism is a concept in post-colonialism, and it has been incorporated into the post-colonial theory. Edward Said is an important critical theorist in contemporary America, and also the representative of post-colonial critical theory. His theory directly refers to Western hegemony and power politics, using his *Orientalism* published in 1978 as the theoretical cornerstone. “The three long chapters and twelve shorter units into which this book is divided are intended to facilitate exposition as much as possible. Chapter One, “The Scope of Orientalism”, including historical time, experiences, philosophical and political themes. Chapter Two, “Orientalist Structures and Re-structures,” attempts to trace the development of modern Orientalism by a broadly chronological description, and also by the description of a set of devices common to the work of important poets, artists, and scholars. Chapter Three talks about “Orientalism Now” (Said 25). “In short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient” (Said 3). It can be observed that the West’s perception of the East is not progressive and comprehensive, but “embedded in one set up a pre-existing value model” (Xu 51). From the perspective of the West, Eastern culture “first to be known, then invaded and possessed, then re-created” (Said 92). This shows two important aspects of Orientalism. The first part is the wrong representation of the East by the West, and the second is the cultural colonization derived from it. This is also the case in Mulan adapted by Disney. Xu believes that in the Western vision, the entire Eastern culture is trapped in a static civilization and can only wait quietly for Westerners to give it meaning and glory (2020). “...As a warning, the system thought like Orientalism are too easily made, applied, and guided” (Said 328). The latest version of the live-action movie *Mulan* is an Oriental story adapted by the West. We can use Orientalism to analyze character adaptations and plot adaptations, and use this theory to analyze whether the application of Oriental elements in movies is reasonable and the reasons why it is unreasonable.

2.3 Summary

Among the researches above, some scholars have conducted research through cross-cultural gender perspectives and have observed that Disney has made innovations in themes and ideas in shaping the story of Mulan and the character of Mulan, and some scholars have seen the Western cultural invasion behind the adaptation. Since there is little in-depth research on Disney’s latest live-action movie *Mulan*, it is meaningful to analyze and study the latest live-action movie from the perspective of Orientalism and explore the cultural differences and innovations behind the characters and stories. This article will start with post-colonialism and make a preliminary analysis of the live-action film *Mulan*. First, it discusses how the movie’s cast represented by white female elites portrays Mulan’s character, compares Mulan’s image adapted by Disney with the native Mulan in “The Ballad of Mulan”, and discusses the differences in character creation under different cultural backgrounds. Secondly, post-colonial theory is used to analyze the output of the team in the setting, plot and characterization of the movie.

Finally, this paper will try to reflect on the dissemination of Disney’s Mulan image, actively seeking the dominance of China local culture and the intention behind the gendered and americanized adaptation. Furthermore, we can contemplate on the measures we should take when communicating and exchanging with other cultures and how to spread Chinese stories to people of different cultural background.

3. A Comparison of Mulan’s Images in “The Ballad of Mulan” and the Disney Live-action Movie *Mulan*

3.1 The Image of Chinese Native Mulan

“Alack, alas! Alack, alas! She weaves and sees the shuttle pass” is a ballad that even eight-year-old

children can catch on. “The Ballad of Mulan” and “The Peacock Flies Southeast” are collectively called Yuefu Double Wall, which shows its historical research value. The length of “The Ballad of Mulan” is not long, but predecessors have interpreted them a lot, and as the protagonist, the image of Mulan is also very worthy of appreciation.

At the beginning of the narrative poem, it describes that Mulan was upset and sighed because his father was old, but he had to go to war. It portrays an image of a common girl worrying about the safety of her family. Mulan did not have an elder brother and as the eldest daughter of the family, she resolutely decided to join the army instead of her father and was subject to the arrangements of the court. This reflects that there is always a support in the family when an ordinary family encounters an accident. Then, Mulan is undoubtedly a bearer of responsibility. In addition to family responsibilities, what forced her to make this decision was her intention to protect her family.

In pre-Confucian and Confucian China, filial piety is the ultimate value that upholds the order of the family. The traditional parent-child relationship prescribes kindness or affection on the part of parents and filial duty on the part of children. Filial piety, as the guiding principle of the parent-child relationship, demands sincere respect and moral obedience of children to parents. It delineates how children should behave toward their parents and avoid causing stress to their parents. (Jing 65)

In this sense, Mulan is a role model of what children can do for their family in traditional Chinese culture: to conduct filial piety and show the upmost love to their parents.

When describing Mulan’s military expedition, the poem repeatedly mentioned “At night she listens for folk’s familiar call, but only hear the Yellow River’s roar”. It is a very realistic depiction of a strong girl who is reluctant but she has to restrain herself from crying out of missing her family. Although the poem describes the fighting on the battlefield in a few words, it leaves space for readers to establish reasonable imagination of the bloody storm and the ruthless swords on the battlefield. Moreover, Mulan is a civilian woman who has never been on the battlefield, and she surely encounters overwhelming violence and danger. There would be no home if there is no country. “Loyalty is the core of feudal ethics, emphasizing the ability to abandon the original blood relationship and be loyal to the country” (Zhao 48). “Therefore, the notion of filial piety was expanded to include a person’s relationship with the country as loyalty” (Jing 67). However, there is a saying in China that loyalty and filial piety have been hard to satisfy at the same time since ancient times. This time Mulan chooses to be loyal to protect both her family and the country, and her courage on the battlefield can’t help being admired.

After returning from the battlefield, Mulan rejected the reward of being an official in the court. Instead, she looked forward to returning home to reunite with her family and living the ordinary life like a common girl. The poem presents readers with the detailed sequence of how Mulan dressed up. “Before the windows she arranges her hair, and in the mirror sees her image fair”, which describes a lovely girl who loves life and loves beauty.

From the fact that there is less description of war but lots of descriptions of Mulan’s life about shopping and dressing herself and spending time with family, it can be seen that the author of the poem did not focus on the setting of a heroine in “The Ballad of Mulan”, but showed more interest in the image of a lovely ordinary woman who loves life and family. In a word, “The Ballad of Mulan” is more an ode to a civilian young woman who is righteous, brave, filial, loyal and lively, than a legend of an untouchable heroine with super strength.

3.2 The Image of Mulan in the Latest Disney Live-action Movie

As the beginning of the film reveals, Mulan is the eldest daughter of her family and she has a younger sister. She liked to play sticks and practice martial art when she was a child. She looked like a naughty, open-hearted little boy. This figure of Mulan is not ladylike in everyone’s mind. The neighbors suspect that Mulan is a witch, and her mother is worried that the lively Mulan can’t find a good husband. Mulan’s father also persuaded Mulan to hide her talent (“Qi”) and said to Mulan, “Your chi is strong, Mulan. But chi is for warriors, not daughters”.

The words laid the foundation for the characterization and plot development in this movie.

As soon as the screen turned to the adult Mulan, she was practicing martial arts and riding horse in the wild, instead of sewing at home like her sister. Her lively and bold personality became more distinct. When Mulan was preparing for a blind date as highly expected by her parents, she was not used to makeup, and she joked about her makeup with her younger sister.

MULAN. I'm starving.

MOTHER. I've already told you, you can not eat. It will ruin your makeup.

MULAN.(smile)The fiercest winter storm could not destroy this makeup.

It can be seen that Mulan is a tomboy who doesn't like makeup, and she is very humorous. When facing the preaching and teaching of the matchmaker, Mulan's perfunctory attitude showed that she was not a traditional boudoir girl, whose life pursuit is confined to marrying a good family to be a good wife and mother. The "chi" repeatedly mentioned in the movie always surrounds Mulan. Because she has "chi", her martial arts stand out among a group of men, and she can carry two buckets of water and reach top of the stairs in the army, surpassing all the male soldiers. General told Mulan "But only the most true will connect deeply to his chi... and become a great warrior".

This "chi" is obviously a Western interpretation of the mysterious energy or magic rooted in the ancient Oriental martial arts, and gathering energy from the body can release power beyond ordinary people. According to *Change*: change has Taiqi, which gives birth to two states. Two states are then developed into four images, and the four images give rise to eight hexagrams. Tai Chi is the origin of the world, but it is generally believed that "Tai Chi" means "Qi (chi)". Yang Qi rises, Yin Qi falls. All things change when they blend together. In Chinese culture, everything in the world is born of Qi (chi), which constitutes the spirit and energy, while Yin and Yang complement each other. "In addition, QiGong emphasizes the balance of Qi (chi) between man and nature, which requires long-term cultivation to achieve harmony between man and nature" (Lv & Lian 205). The application of Qi (chi) in Kung Fu is a process of self-cultivation. It's not to say that the "aura" that the West often presents in movies is close to that of superpowers. In the second chapter of Genesis in the Bible, it is mentioned that God blows breath into man's nostrils to make him a living person. This kind of "breath" is the connection between God and mankind, and is a blessing given by God. The Qi (chi) out of China is cultivated by itself and born in response to all things. However, the Qi (chi) in the West is closer to an external supernatural power given by the gods. The film takes "chi" as one of the cores of the film, and mentions Mulan's own spirit, but this kind of chi is more like a kind of determination and gift. Due to the profoundness of Chinese Yin and Yang studies, simply changing the ability to chi makes the film connotation seem to be close to Chinese culture, which is far from enough to make up for the differences between Chinese and Western cultures. "Different ways of interpretation show that there is no purely objective understanding" (Lv & Lian 205). Western culture and Chinese culture have very different connotations and origins, so the film does not explain the chi in Mulan till the end of the film.

In addition to "chi", another key word running through the whole movie is "true". Why is "true" repeatedly mentioned and even become one of the three thematic concepts in the movie? The American creation team directly targets at the biggest gender issue in the original Chinese ballad here: Mulan disguised her female identity and fooled people around despite her righteous motive, approving intention and heroic deeds. In the movie, she always scrupled about herself as a woman, so she hid her own gift. Both the words of the witch and the general reminded Mulan that if there is no way to know herself, face herself, and live her life with authenticity, there will be no way to overcome difficulties. "This adaptation is more inclined to the description of individual consciousness in the West" (Jiang 19), and pays more attention to the awakening of self-consciousness. "Instead of pushing feminism to an extreme by overturning the relation between female and male or to highlight female power by absencing or belittling the male on purpose, the Mulan image has been transformed into a modern understanding of female and human value" (Yang 55).

Every time Mulan encountered danger, the family's patron saint Phoenix had been guarding surround Mulan, so that Mulan could turn the danger into peace every time. The phoenix represents women and is a representative of rebirth. In the West, it is also a warrior who is reborn from the ashes. The meaning here is unified in both the West and China. It implies that only if Mulan admits and accepts her female identity can she be reborn from the ashes and become a real warrior. "Americans narrate a story of national traditions of "other" culture by the story of Mulan and successful shape a story of personal struggle" (Liu 30).

3.3 Conclusion

By analyzing the local Mulan in "The Ballad of Mulan" and Mulan in the latest live-action movie, it can be seen that the Disney production team has a relatively large adaptation of Mulan's characters. In the Chinese ancient narrative poem, the local Mulan is a woman who loves her family and beauty, and is filial, and has great courage, which is more in line with the image a contemporary woman while has the

same courage as a man.

Mulan in *The Woman Warrior*, after transplanting the Mulan myth rooted in Chinese culture into American culture, has become a heroine who embodies both femininity and masculinity, and a feminist who resists every manner of oppression of the female, rather than a traditional Chinese female with virtues of both loyalty and filial piety. And this is the most obvious variation of Mulan". (Yang 53)

Mulan created by Disney, has become an honest girl, unwilling to give in to worldly lady manners, unwilling to yield to the patriarchal power, and wants to prove herself from an early age. "The goals and achievements of post-colonialism not only teach people a tool to criticize Western cultural hegemony, but also give people a certain sense of resistance, and provide an open forum for collision and exchange of such ideologies" (Xu 44). Nowadays, the awakening of feminist consciousness has brought about women's struggle for equality. The adapted Mulan has the characteristics of women in the new era, which can be said to be a cultural exchange between ancient China and modern West.

Furthermore, the contrast between limited description of battle scenes in "The Ballad of Mulan" and Disney's deliberate highlight of the wars indicates the difference here: the former means to build the image of a lively girl of filial piety, courage and femininity; the latter, however, tries to instill post-colonial and feminist view into the Americanized Mulan image and thus the disguised female identity must be revealed and myth of the ancient Oriental empire and its martial arts should be elaborately presented. The film describes how Mulan was cultivated into an effective army soldier, how she saved the whole army with her wisdom and vitality, and how she saved the emperor with his "conspiracy armor", which shows that Mulan has been adapted from a Chinese national heroine to an individual heroine who finishes a journey of self-awareness, self-discovery and self-awakening, and eventually proves her self-strength and realizes her self-value. In the poem, Mulan can finally "take off (her) war robe and wear (her) old clothes" because she has never taken off her identity as an ordinary woman. She went to the battlefield by her own will, undergoing hardships and bitterness no one knew. "It can be seen that Mulan's dangerous action of joining the army instead of her father was completely led by the sense of filial piety" (Zhang & Mou 138). In contrast, the new version of Mulan is a very typical "Disney princess": with strong personal will and ambition of life: she is brave to resist and eventually influence others' will and finally achieve her own ambition. In this movie, the feminism to be expressed is so strong, "it protrudes on the American modern view of traditional ethics and values of Chinese cultural codes behind Mulan, feminism in the 1960s and individual values in Western culture" (Yang 55). "Yet the Orientalist makes it his work to be always converting the Orient from something into something else: he does this for himself, for the sake of his culture, in some cases for what he believes is the sake of the Oriental" (Said 67). The film's "marginalization" (Jing 71) of Mulan's image is in line with "Disney's principle of presenting universal themes" (Yang 11). At the same time, the film also adds its own thought of the East and own understanding of Mulan's character traits. "Disney renders the culture that produced the incredibly woman warrior the most sexist, irrational, and exotic cultural other against which some styles and needs of feminism were deracinated and co-opted into non-threatening individualism" (Jing 71). This eclectic adaptation tries to gain the cultural recognition of the Chinese audiences, and also tries to show the East that it understands the East, but it is vague in explaining chi, loyalty, and filial piety, and the leading role turns out to be a white-skinned, yellow-masked Mulan.

Disney Corporation is currently attempting to impose American value systems upon the rest of the world in a deliberately political, colonizing, or imperialist way. It remains important to talk about the power dynamics involved when a company such as Disney decides to tell stories from outside its own sphere, rooted in Western, Anglo-American, conservative-leaning hegemonic culture". (Anjirbag 3)

4. The Ancient Oriental Empire and its People in *Mulan* (2020)

4.1 *The Ancient Oriental Empire in American Imagination*

At the beginning of the movie, Mulan lived in a huge circular house surrounded by high-rise buildings and the inner courtyard was a central courtyard with only one gate for entry and exit. It is not difficult to see that the house Mulan lived was based on a Hakka earth building. This setting is very abrupt. Mulan lived in the Northern and Southern Dynasties, and the Hakka earth buildings originated in Fujian Province of China, which only began to appear during the Song and Yuan Dynasties. Here is a confusion of time and space. "The abstract generalization of the East, especially those based on the texts representing the "classical Oriental" civilization, is always more effective than the direct experience from

the modern Oriental society” (Said 382). The film production team may not have an in-depth understanding of the time and space where Mulan was born or they intentionally weaken the particularity of historical context. Instead, it applies an oriental characteristic that does not fit the environment of the times, which is very abrupt. “But for Western creators, this does not seem to be very important. What is important is that the architecture of Fujian Hakka earth building is more in line with the Western imagination of the life concept of a large family of Chinese people” (Jiang 19). Furthermore, Mulan rode alone from Fujian province across the desert to the army camp located in the Northeast. Perhaps the production team sets this “impossible mission” in order to pave way for the patron saint of Phoenix, but it is indeed very unreasonable in terms of distance. It is like a single-handed hike from China to the United States.

“The East is just a code and an intention to the West, a fixed icon of a fuzzy conceptualization without a specific form” (Xu 78). This kind of fuzzy code has almost become a symbol of the East in the movie. The West is very interested in Chinese “Dao Fa”, “Spells” and “Internal Strength”, and its enthusiasm is just like Kung Fu’s appearance in almost all films with Chinese elements. In the arrangement of characters, they arrange a witch according to the convention of Disney fairy tales. The witch has superpower and Mulan as the protagonist also has superpowers. Her superpower is “chi”, an unspoken and mysterious force. Because she has “chi”, she has the courage to chase the enemy leader alone and because she has “chi”, the family patron saint Phoenix always guards her. “Ancient is associated with mystery and incredibility. Many oriental movies in Hollywood can be included in the ranks of magic movies” (Xu 74). Phoenix is also an important symbol of the East in the eyes of Westerners. The dragon in the animated version *Mulan* was changed to the phoenix, which also has its own unique intentions. First, the phoenix represents women, so it is used to symbolize the protagonist. Second, the phoenix is an auspicious sign in China and the West. However, this kind of ingenuity is slightly abrupt in the movie, which deepens the audience’s impression that Mulan became a warrior through superpowers, and once again positions the movie as magical fantasy movie.

Westerners are half sophisticated and half imaginative about Eastern makeup. The “yellow decals on the mirror” in “The Ballad of Mulan” is very straightforward in the movie - painting her face white and her cheeks yellow. Aesthetically speaking, it is not in conformity with aesthetics. Combining the “Xiao Xia makeup” on the cheeks, the “Shouyang Luomei makeup” on the eyebrows and the “Yellow makeup” on forehead, the expression of this makeup is too straightforward. A patchwork of Chinese elements is also an ugly Chinese aesthetic created by the West. The relatives of the maid-in-waiting with heavy makeup are standing on both sides of the emperor’s palace conference hall. This scene is also the imagination of westerners of the Eastern court. As a matter of fact, the imperial court at that time did not allow the male and female servants of the harem to attend the meetings of the imperial court, let alone be listed as standing officials in the court. It can be said that this is a court gathering in full accordance with the western palace etiquette.

4.2 Oriental Men and Women in American Imagination

There are four major female characters except Mulan appearing in the film: respectively Mulan’s mother, her younger sister, the matchmaker and the witch starred by Gongli named Xianniang.

Why are these women divided into two categories? Because these two types of women have different degrees of influence on Mulan. First of all, it can be seen that when the creation team is shaping Mulan’s sister, her mother and matchmaker as a contrast to Mulan, which highlights the team’s feminist perspective since this is a contrast between “old” women and “new” woman. At the beginning of the film, Mulan’s mother was always worried that Mulan could not marry a good man. She believed that if Mulan could not marry a good man, she would not be able to glorify the family, because a woman’s marriage is closely related to the glory of the family. Compared with Mulan’s tomboy character, her sister’s obedience and boudoir etiquette are more approved and favored by Mulan’s mother. In the movie, Mulan’s sister pursued to marry a good man, and she did marry a good person in the end. It reconciles with the value of “male authority to rescue women in trouble and suffering” (Xu 174). The matchmaker and the whispering neighbors even more reflected the harsh reality confronted by the boudoir girls at that time. Matchmaker told Mulan “When a wife serves her husband, she must be silent”.

The whole film has been expounding “truth” and “self-recognition”. Mulan has gradually recognized herself as a woman and pursued her own life goals as the plot develops. However, women, represented by Mulan’s mother, are pedantic from beginning to end, thinking that women should always rely on men and be the submissive roles who obey her husband and abides by female morality. They eventually became the victims of feudal society, and Mulan broke through the pedantic etiquette and lived as an

independent individual.

In the context of female independence advocated by Disney, such a comparison is suspected of vilifying Chinese women. The cultural invasion of Westerners is accompanied by stubborn Eastern stereotypes. “The qualities of gentleness and humbleness are not only the patriarchal society’s expectations of ideal women, but also the norms that male authority on female beauty” (Xu 173). Perhaps this imperial consciousness is not intended to be prejudiced against Orientals, but it is indeed a deviation of the Western perception of the Eastern “common sense”.

Xianniang, the witch starred by Gongli in the movie, is a complicated role and of great impact on Mulan’s growth. She was both the enemy and life guide for Mulan and eventually become a friend and shield. She was stigmatized for her witchcraft, she wasn’t be admitted, and thus turned to male power. In several fights and conversations with Mulan, she gradually realized that women can be independent and their strength can be recognized, so she finally sacrificed to protect Mulan; Inspired by Xianniang, Mulan also learned the significance of being true to her female identity and finally chose to fight with her female power. The female image of the witch is a tragedy, and also reflects the reality that women are oppressed. However, such an adaptation has become a tool to promote the plot. Perhaps Disney intended to portray the witch as the second Mulan, and it aims to convey the sense of equality, that is, capable women can also be greatly utilized.

There are few male characters in the film, but they are all helpful to convey the creative team’s clear intention. First of all, Mulan’s father is lame in this adaptation. It can be seen that the father in “The Balled of Mulan” is only old but has no physical disability. The image adapted here unintentionally bears the Western stereotype of the weak and sick male in the East. The emperor had to wait for Mulan to save, which weakened the ability of oriental men; The episode that Mulan saved the emperor by herself is understood not only as defending the country but as being loyal to the monarchy. This is the director’s overall understanding of ancient oriental feudal society. In the end, Mulan was given a sword, which represented the acknowledgement of Mulan’s worth from monarchical and patriarchal power. In essence, she still relied on male power, which did not rise to the depth of female independence that the film wanted to express. Second, Mulan’s father exhorted her to hide her gift and marry a good man to bring glory to the family, which is a kind of submission to the feudal system; Knowing that Mulan was a woman, the general refused to accept her return to the team. It can be said that “as representatives of non-western and non-white heterogeneous systems and defenders of stereotypes”, these representatives of patriarchal systems have become “accomplices of patriarchal systems” (Jia 108).

4.3 Conclusion

Through the analysis of the movie’s setting, the ancient Oriental empire, as well as of the characterization of people around Mulan, we can draw the conclusion that the creation team makes great effort in gathering and presenting a diversity of Chinese elements but lack a profound understanding of them. Such an adaptation is a superficial Mosaic of elements, but does not convey the real Chinese cultural connotation. Although it is an Oriental story, it is the American version of the Oriental story told by Americans. It is still Western in its essence and conveys the Cultural connotation of China in the western view. Both feudalism and defending the country were simplified into the decadent royalist system and the social system of male superiority and female inferiority. This Western stereotype of the East basically caters to the imagined Oriental environment and astern politics in the West, ostensibly emphasizing women’s rights, but actually exporting the prejudice against the East.

5. Conclusion

5.1 Reflection on the Present Situation of the Culture Output of China and U.S

The adaptation of the film always involves the use of cultural elements. First, Said’s Orientalism is mentioned in the literature review, and as a theoretical basis, the adaptation of Mulan’s image is analyzed in the third chapter. After the adaptation, Mulan becomes a carrier of female consciousness and self-awakening; Chapter Four still adopts the postcolonial theory to analyze the characterization of people around Mulan in the film. Disney’s success in transforming an ancient Chinese legend to a modern ode of feminism, thus, indirectly reflect that China has not yet formed a strong cultural output.

With the rapid development of China’s economy, Chinese culture has spread to the world. Western production factories, including Disney and other Hollywood production companies, have shown great

interest in Oriental elements. From involving Oriental elements in films to remapping Chinese stories into films, more and more Oriental themed films can be seen on the big screen in recent years. Compared with American films, they prefer to focus on the future world. However, these movies adapted from Oriental themes always seem to focus on the ancient fuzzy timeline, and rarely look directly at contemporary China. "The modern East in Hollywood movies can also be seen as a variety of the ancient East: War, poverty, backwardness, centralization, superstition and so on, reflecting a kind of historical stagnation" (Xu, 76).

It cannot be denied that Disney's production team has made a lot of studies on Eastern culture, but some of Chinese elements have become superficial symbols and some of them do not belong to ancient China. These Chinese elements are put together inappropriately, giving the audience a sense of dislocation across time and space. Admittedly that Disney has given *Mulan* characteristics of the new era. After some adaptations, it aims to exhibit the awakening and rise of feminism. However, this value export is not well arranged, which becomes the connotation of the film as a slogan. As for the description of Chinese politics, there is neither the possibility of development nor the potential for progress. The film was adapted according to the Western impression of "pedantic" and "supremacy of imperial power". As a result, the film conveyed "loyalty", "filial piety", "righteousness" and "courage" via many sword-running scenes through the whole film to introduce Chinese culture to the Western audience.

If the cultural carrier cannot convey the cultural connotation correctly, it will continue to spread the stereotypes. The East is projected by the imagination of the West, just as the film *Mulan* has no subjectivity of its own existence and lacks authenticity and objective perspective.

5.2 Enlightenment for the Solution to the Current Situation of China

Disney's change of *Mulan*'s original image in the latest live-action movie is actually a kind of cultural penetration and hegemony. Its purpose is to continue to expand the Chinese market and "firmly occupy the right of speech in the existing cultural market" (Wan 42). Cultural infiltration is more terrible than brute force invasion. Cultural infiltration is to make people accept identity distortion and prejudice by subtle ways. Cultural hegemony is constantly exporting its discourse power. China has a long cultural history, while the United States, as a colonial power, has been invading, expanding and hegemonizing without its equally profound cultural root. Due to the cultural differences, American culture has its own understanding of Chinese culture, and constantly penetrates and emphasizes its discourse power in ideology.

In today's pluralistic society, we allow the existence of diverse cultures. At the same time, we adopt a positive attitude towards future with tolerance and assimilation, absorbing the essence and rejecting the dross. However, in the face of Western cultural hegemony and cultural penetration, we should first guard against post-colonialism, improve our cultural confidence, and avoid blindly either worshipping or resenting Western culture at the same time. The media should actively and correctly publicize the connotation of Chinese culture. Chinese citizens should actively think about how traditional culture should coexist with, assimilate and exchange with other cultures. The media must actively and correctly advocate the connotation of Chinese culture. Chinese citizens should actively think about how traditional culture should be integrated with other cultures and actively stand up when the West overinterprets or misinterprets Chinese culture. Only positive mutual exchanges and understanding between different cultures can promote the prosperity of world culture.

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