

Cultural Differences in Mulan between Chinese Version and Disney Version

Lei Wang

School of Foreign Languages, Jining Medical University, 276826, China

Bing Han

School of Foreign Languages, Jining Medical University, 276826, China

Guofei Xu

School of Foreign Languages, Jining Medical University, 276826, China

Abstract—This article puts Chinese Mulan and Disney Mulan's plots as the starting point, analyzes of the adaptation of the plots to show the different cultural significance given by different nationalities. The purpose of this paper is to research the cultural differences reflected in the films made by Hua Mulan in different countries. In this era of globalization, and in the face of different cultures, only by taking its essence and its dross will produce masterpieces that attract worldwide attention. There are indeed many cultural differences between the Chinese film Mulan and the American film Mulan. After analyzing the reasons for the differences, this study summarizes the enlightenment of these differences to cross-cultural research and shows some views.

Index Terms—cultural differences, collectivism, individualism, patriarchy and feminism, equality consciousness

I. INTRODUCTION

From ancient times to the present, the heroine Mulan has been using “Mulan Ci” in “Haw to reply Haw, Mulan as Household Weaving”. “I didn't hear the sound of the machine, but I heard the sigh of the woman”. The traditional image of ancient Chinese women exists in the hearts of every Chinese. In the American Disney animated film Mulan, it gives another interpretation of Hua Mulan and the whole heroic deeds from the perspective of Westerners. Disney has studied a large number of historical documents in order to produce "Mulan" with "Chinese flavor", and in the end, it presents us with the legendary story of Mulan and her well-known story, which is regarded as the closest to Chinese culture in the eyes of Westerners. "Men are superior to women and they defend their country, but daughters should obey the four virtues, pray for crickets, respect for ancestors, dragons and so on." As a Chinese audience, they do not feel that these Chinese elements in the film are abrupt and difficult to accept, which shows Disney's sincerity. In spite of these, the collision of Chinese and Western cultures and values can be seen everywhere in the film. From the point of view of the cultural differences between China and the United States, this paper analyzes the differences between the two films by comparing the interpretation of the same theme of Mulan. In particular, this paper makes a comparative analysis of the plot and theme of Hua Mulan in the performance of the two films, so as to explore the cultural difference caused by it. Hua Mulan is a well-known heroine of the Chinese nation, first appeared in Mulan Ci. After the remake and production of the Disney Company, it presents a film and television masterpiece different from that recognized by Chinese nation. The film is Disney's first classic based on Chinese stories, adapted from the Chinese folk poetry, which successfully combines oriental stories with western culture. Hua Ying(2017) called it an example of the use of Chinese stories and Chinese elements in animated films.

A. Background Analysis of Mulan Film

During the Northern Wei Dynasty, the Rouran nationality of the northern nomads continued to harass the southern areas, and the regime of the Northern Wei Dynasty stipulated that each family had to send a man to go to the front. But Mulan's father was too old, frail and sickly to go to the battlefield, and his brother was still young, so Mulan decided to join the army for her father and began her more than ten years of military life. Going to the border to fight is a hard thing for many men at that time, but for Mulan, she has not only to hide her identity, but also has to kill the enemy with her friends, which is even more difficult than ordinary people who join the army. The good news is that Mulan finally completed her mission and returned home triumphantly decades later. Because of her meritorious service, the emperor pardoned her crime of deceiving the monarch and thought that she was capable of serving in the court. However, Hua Mulan refused because she had an old father to take care of and asked the emperor to allow him to return to his hometown to compensate and honor his parents.

B. An Introduction to the Characters of Mulan

Hua Mulan first appeared in the narrative poem *Mulan Ci* in the Northern and Southern Dynasties, which was written in the Northern Wei Dynasty and was originally included in the *Ancient and Modern Music Records of Chen* in the Southern Dynasty. The monk and wise master said in the *Ancient and Modern Music Records*: "Mulan is not known." It was more than 300 words long and was embellished by the literati of the Sui and Tang dynasties. Adam Key (2015) mentioned *Mulan Poetry* is a rare masterpiece in the history of Chinese poetry. It portrays for the first time the image of an immortal heroine who enlisted in the army for her father, which is both legendary and moving. Mulan is both a strange woman and an ordinary person, a heroine and a civilian girl, a vigorous warrior and a delicate daughter. She is industrious, kind-hearted, resolute, brave, honest, simple, alert and lively, besides, she loves relatives and serves the country, does not admire senior officials and loves peaceful life. Mulan has a heroic character and feminine characteristics. The kind and brave nature, calm wit and perseverance are the necessary connotation of Mulan's heroic character, also the infinite love and dedication to her parents even to the motherland is the greatest source of spiritual strength of her heroic character. At the same time, the whole poem is closely linked to "Mulan is a girl", from "not hearing my mother's voice calling a girl" to "Mulan does not need Shang Shu Lang", from "Mulan household weaving" to "wearing my old clothes", it has always maintained its feminine characteristics. Therefore, the image of Mulan is very real and touching.

II. AN ANALYSIS OF THE DIFFERENCES IN TWO VERSIONS

A. *Different Reasons for Joining the Army*

Whether it is the original text of *Mulan Ci* or the animated movie *Mulan*, the most direct reason for disguising as a man to join the army is that the father in the movie *Mulan* is old (the father in the movie *Mulan* still suffers from injuries). It is difficult to play the role of a normal soldier to resist the long journey to be made on foot of going south, and doing meritorious deeds and even joining the army itself is a meaningless act of death, and flowers as daughters are needed to join the army for their father. Although the most direct reason is the same, what is highlighted in *Mulan Ci* is "filial piety", which has always been respected by Chinese culture. Zheng Jiming (2018) holds the concept of "filial piety first" makes Mulan give up her female identity and play a warm-blooded man who protects his family and defends his country. In the movie *Mulan*, in addition to rescuing the father in trouble, flower self-consciousness is more prominent, which is a western concept. Hua Mulan, who disdained the "three from the four virtues" and the so-called "women's way" at that time, even could be said to be unorthodox at that time. From another point of view, Mulan's joining the army was a kind of exploration and awakening of self-consciousness.

B. *Views and Attitudes towards Ancestors (Deceased People)*

There has always been worship and respect for ancestors in the blood of the Chinese people, and they will also show a solemn attitude towards those who have passed away. This is our culture. Therefore, the images of ancestors rarely appear in Chinese film and television works, and even if they appear, they will be portrayed very seriously. In *Hua Mulan* of Disney's version, the ancestors of the ancestral temple argue with each other in the state of their souls and make a lot of jokes, which shows that the attitude towards ancestors in Western culture is not as serious as that in Chinese culture. Michelle Anya Anjirbag(2018) holds it is an optimistic and not too taboo attitude, in other words, this is the difference in how Chinese and Western cultures treat death.

C. *A Very Different Ending*

In the Disney film *Mulan*, Mulan finally defeated the Xiongnu, declined the emperor's reward, returned to his hometown, and was married to Li Xiang. In this film, the protagonist goes through all the hardships and dangers and finally makes extraordinary honors and achievements, which is the realization of personal value. In the Chinese film *Mulan*, Mulan did not win the war. After being abandoned by the general, Mulan would have been completely defeated that had it not been for the timely mortgage of Prince Wentai. Finally, Mulan went to Xiongnu alone to rescue Wen Tai. For the sake of the overall situation and life, she sacrificed her personal happiness to let Wen Tai marry the Xiongnu princess in order to make friends and stop the war.

III. CULTURAL DIFFERENCES REFLECTED IN MULAN MOVIES

A. *The Concept of Collectivism in China and the Individualism of Disney*

The concept of collectivism in China advocates that individuals are subordinate to society and weaken their interests in order to be subordinate to groups, nationalities, countries and families. The most obvious is reflected in the Chinese concept of family. Every member of the family is closely related to the whole family. If a member does something wrong, the whole family should bear the burden. In the film, *Hua Mulan*, as a member of the family, in order to cater to her parents' wishes and the glory of the family, she gave up her dream and went against her will to join the imperial concubine election at the court. For her, whether she can be elected to the palace or not is closely related to the honor of her family. So when she lost the election, she felt ashamed to face her parents. "if I want to be myself, I will break my parents' hearts," she told herself. She decided to change herself for the sake of her family. Chinese collectivism is reflected not only in the concept of family, but also in the concept of "sacrificing the ego to achieve the greater oneself".

When Zen crossed the northern border of China, the army gathered to protect the emperor, but the emperor said, "No, please protect my people." Under such dangerous circumstances, the emperor thought that the safety of the people all over the world was more important than his own. When Mulan's father was named to join the army, although he was too old to join the army, he did not refuse and insisted on going to the border. For him, "this is a task to defend the country and family, and I will die without regrets." The American version of Mulan adds some American individualistic features. When the emperor heard the news of the Xiongnu attack, he ordered the general to post a recruitment notice throughout the city, and said: "Small soldiers can also make great achievements." The emperor's words show the importance of personal ability and strength. In the battle with Chanyu, Mulan saved the emperor, at this time Mulan's personal strength surpassed the others, which proved that the small soldiers mentioned by the emperor could also make great achievements. The layout of this plot highlights the individualism of the United States. American individualism believes that competition is more exciting than cooperation, and individual glory transcends collective glory. During the battle with Chanyu, Mulan did not follow the orders of the general, adhered to her own point of view and finally won the war. American individualism emphasizes the consciousness of "oneself", the individual will transcend the collective will, and believes that the individual has the right to fight for the protection of his private ownership and to adhere to his own views and beliefs. This cultural feature focuses on individual will and achievements and respects individual decision-making.

B. Right Distance (Concept of Hierarchy and Sense of Equality)

Although Chinese society has been influenced by American culture in some aspects in recent years, the influence of Confucianism on Chinese culture is innate, and the most prominent feature is the existence of the concept of hierarchism in Chinese family and society. China, as a "high-power" country, believes that people are born unequal. In the family, children should respect their parents and the elderly, and this kind of respect is not equal, but has upper and lower levels, and children should unconditionally accept the criticism and responsibilities of their parents, even if the parents are wrong. Parents have the right to interfere with their children's choices for the future. In the film, Mulan's parents did not discuss with Mulan and decided to sign Mulan up for election to the palace. Mulan went to run against her will in order to listen to her parents' arrangement. She knows that if she goes against her parents' wishes, it is unfilial, which is not desirable in traditional culture. In such a high-power country, superiors and subordinates have a relationship between upper and lower levels, so they are not an equal relationship. The higher a person's status, the higher his rights. When General Li Xiang asked to go to the battlefield, the prime minister refused his request and said, "The general is your father, but I am the prime minister in front of the emperor." The prime minister used the power of his superiors to reject Li Xiang's request and made him obey. But when the prime minister received an edict from the emperor asking Li Xiang to lead his troops to battle, although he did not want that result, he had to obey in front of the emperor's orders, because he knew that the power of the emperor was beyond him. Generals, prime ministers and emperors, each of them are at different levels, and their subordinates must be subordinate to their superiors. But the United States, a low-power country, advocates fairness and equality. Thomas Paine shouted in "Common sense" that all independent Americans are equal, and that there is an equal relationship between the people and the president. In the film, when Hua Mulan successfully rescued the emperor, the emperor bowed to her and Mulan gave the emperor a hug. The emperor is the superior, Mulan belongs to the subordinate, the superior bows to the subordinate and hugs, which is a kind of disregard for hierarchy and appreciation for equality. In Disney's *Mulan*, the emperor ordered Mulan and General Li to escort three princesses to Chigu to get married. On the way, Mulan chatted with the three princesses and finally became friends with the princess. In China, due to the influence of the concept of hierarchy, it is impossible for the princess to become friends with the guards. Equalitarianism is crucial in American culture. There is an equal relationship between parents and children, between superiors and subordinates, between teachers and students, and even between presidents and civilians. The Disney version of *Mulan* has a lot to do with the two major values of Americans: one is the civilian hero, and the other is the sense of equality. The concept of "civilian hero". The heroes in Disney's films are all common people, which can be said to be imperfect. This kind of characters satisfy people's desire and pursuit of heroes. In *Mulan*, Hua Mulan is in an ordinary home, but she finally becomes a heroine, which fully satisfies the aesthetic plot of the American audience. The concept of "sense of equality". The sense of equality is a basic value in the national values of American western culture. Under the idea that boys are preferred to daughters in ancient China, Mulan can join the army for her father and eventually become a heroine. Disney incorporated this idea of equality between men and women into the film, fully showing the equality of the people and strong national consciousness.

C. Male Chauvinism and Feminist Consciousness

Due to the different values and cultural backgrounds between China and the United States, the hierarchical relationship between men and women is different. China is deeply influenced by Confucianism, and the idea that men are superior to women is deeply rooted in traditional ideas. In ancient times, "a woman without talent is virtue". Because in the past, most Chinese thought that women were narrow-minded, short-sighted and unsuitable for education. A woman's mind and freedom are imprisoned like a foot-bound "three-inch golden lotus". "Zhou Li Tianguan nine concubines": "Nine concubines in charge of the law of gynecology, with nine teachings: women's virtue, women's words, women's appearance and women's meritorious service." China's influence on women has "three obedience and four virtues". Fu Jing (2014) believed the establishment of "three obedience and four virtues" is based on the principle

of "internal and external differences" and "men are superior to women", in order to adapt to the stability of patriarch. In the American Disney's *Mulan*, the image of Mulan makes Chinese viewers look both familiar and unfamiliar. In the eyes of the Chinese, Hua Mulan can not only weave cloth at home, but also kill the enemy and serve the country on the cold battlefield. She fully shows the form in addition to the little daughter peculiar to women in ancient China. After the end of the war, Mulan's mood is very happy and cheerful, the happy scene also shows that Mulan is eager to restore the strong desire of women. In Disney's *Mulan*, Hua Mulan is a girl who failed in blind date and love. She is not the traditional Chinese woman at all and joined the army in order to fulfill her filial piety. But the frank woman who wants to realize her value, thinking that women do not have to marry a wealthy family in order to win honor for their families, showing a strong American characteristics of equality between men and women.

D. Traditional Inheritance System and Free and Independent Culture

In ancient Chinese society, Xia Yu changed the Zen concession habit of the tribal alliance, passed the throne to his son Qi, and began the identity inheritance system of "father's death and son's succession", thus forming a political pattern of "family and the world". This pattern is to protect the special interests of the dominant social groups. The Shang Dynasty was an important period for the reform of the inheritance system. In the early Shang Dynasty, the inheritance system was dominated by "brothers and brothers", supplemented by "father and son", and then "father and son" gradually became the mainstream of the throne succession system. In the late Shang Dynasty, the throne succession system of "father and son" was completely established. In the Western Zhou Dynasty, the system of inheritance of the eldest son was carried out in terms of identity inheritance, which was the privilege of the aristocracy, and only the eldest son of the eldest son had the legal right of inheritance. The difference reflects the strictness of the identity inheritance system in ancient China. During the Spring and Autumn and warring States period, the inheritance system was quite chaotic, but from the general situation, the status of the "brother and brother" system went from bad to worse. After entering the warring States period, "father's death and son's succession" replaced the "brother's last brother and" system, and the patriarchal principle of "father's death and son's succession" and "the difference between the elder brother and the elder brother" was established. The identity inheritance of the Qin Dynasty followed the eldest son inheritance system of the Western Zhou Dynasty, which formed the basic principle of ancient identity inheritance, that is, the long-door long-grandson system. In special cases, there was also a designated inheritance system. The traditional impression given by the United States, especially this superpower, is freedom and independence. The freedom and independence of the United States is established in a strict legal system, and no other country can be as free and independent as the United States. The cultural infiltration of freedom and independence of the United States has permeated a short history of more than 200 years, also has trained generation after generation of free and independent American aspiring youth. Americans advocate freedom and independence, freedom because of independence, independence because of freedom. The United States has been advocating the idea of freedom and independence for nearly a hundred years, and it has been put into practice as the idea of being in power. There is no doubt that the American people advocate freedom and independence. In 1775, the United States broke out the War of Independence in order to resist the British economic policy, and issued the Declaration of Independence in 1776. One of the paragraphs fully reflects his yearning for freedom and independence. These words are as follows:

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights, that they are among these are life and liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. we, therefore, the Representatives of the United States of America, In General Congress assembled, appealing to the supreme judge of the world for the rectitude of our intentions, do, in the same, and by authority of the good people of these colonies, solemnly publish and declare, that these United States Colonies and Independent Colonies...

In the United States, people believe that the ideal of a better life can be achieved through unremitting efforts, that is, people must prosper through their own hard work, courage, creativity and determination, rather than relying on the assistance of specific social classes and others.

IV. CONCLUSION

Through the comparison of Chinese and American films, we can see that different cultures will have different interpretations of the same text, and will inadvertently add their own values in the process of interpretation. Taking mulan as an example, for Mulan, a traditional Chinese character, Disney localized its character and part of the plot on the premise of keeping its original plot, so that Mulan finally became a self-seeking Chinese girl who was also recognized by Western values. While the West is carrying out cultural transformation, China should also actively seek to take the lead in global development. If its own culture is completely allowed to be localized by other cultures, then cultural misreading, cultural aggression or cultural conflicts are inevitable. In the process of cultural exchange, the weak local culture should avoid being consciously flattered and externalized, and should reflect its own characteristics and cultural characteristics as much as possible. The cultural characteristics and cultural consciousness embodied in mulan provide us with a special perspective to better observe and analyze the cultural differences between China and the United States.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- (1) Construction of behavioral medicine corpus of English for Specific Purposes (ESP), JYFC2018RW005, Supporting Fund for Teachers' Research of Jining Medical University.
- (2) Research on the Cultivation of English Majors' Cross-cultural Critical Thinking from the Perspective of Qilu Culture's Outputting, 19CWZJ10, Supporting Fund for Shandong Social Science Planning Project.
- (3) Research on the teaching mode of experiential courses based on the training objective of innovative and entrepreneurial talents----a case study of foreign language majors, 18008, Supporting Fund for Educational Scientific Research of Jining Medical University.
- (4) Ruyi Cross-border E-commerce Workshop, Supporting Fund for Jining Medical University Innovation and Entrepreneurship Workshop.
- (5) Research on the Combination of virtual and Real Practice Teaching Mode in Cross-border E-commerce Education, Supporting Fund for Practical teaching education scientific research program of Jining Medical University.

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Lei Wang was born in Shandong, China in 1981. She received her M.A. degree in English Curriculum and Pedagogy from Liaocheng University, China in 2012.

She is currently an associate professor in the School of Foreign Languages, Jining Medical University, Shandong, China. Her research interests include English Curriculum and Pedagogy and Business English.

Prof. Wang hosts the research projects of Construction of behavioral medicine corpus of English for Specific Purposes (ESP), JYFC2018RW005, Supporting Fund for Teachers' Research of Jining Medical University, Research on the teaching mode of experiential courses based on the training objective of innovative and entrepreneurial talents----a case study of foreign language majors, 18008, Supporting Fund for Educational Scientific Research of Jining Medical University and Research on the Combination of virtual and Real Practice Teaching Mode in Cross-border E-commerce Education, Supporting Fund for Practical teaching education scientific research program of Jining Medical University.

Bing Han was born in Shandong, China in 1983. She received her M.A. degree in English Education from UK in 2012.

She is currently a lecturer in the School of Foreign Languages, Jining Medical University, Shandong, China. Her research interest is Business English.

Guofei Xu was born in Shandong, China in 1998. She is currently a senior student in the School of Foreign Languages, Jining Medical University, Shandong, China. Her research interest is English literature.