

# A Comparative Study of Chinese and American Films from the Perspective of Heroism Theme

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## ABSTRACT

Film is not only a symbol of culture, but also a product of culture, and the two influence and promote each other. The unique cultural traditions of different countries give the film themes strong regional cultural characteristics. Chinese and American films have their own strengths. Chinese films should not only learn from the experience and essence of American films, but also develop Chinese traditional culture and unique style to a deeper level. This article compares and analyzes the different character images portrayed in Chinese and American films from the perspective of heroism, promoting cultural exchange between Chinese and American films, and gaining a deeper understanding of cultural and value differences between the two countries, which has a profound impact on cross-cultural communication between the two countries

**Keywords:** *Heroism, Theme, Chinese and American movies.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Movies carry the fate and cultural spirit of a country. A deep understanding of a movie can help us gain a better understanding of a country's history, culture, and the lives of generations at different times. Therefore, film appreciation is one of the most important ways to understand a country's social and cultural context. Due to the fact that movies are adaptations of past history, real life, and culture, made from various materials, to some extent, movies can better reflect the spirit and culture of a country than other ways.

Every country's culture in the world has some commonalities, as each culture reflects the customs and thoughts of people in that culture, and the unique parts of each culture inject different elements into movies. Therefore, there is a close connection between movies and culture, and culture is presented to people through movies. And the theme of a movie should be the core part of film culture. At present, movies with heroic themes in China and the United States have been enduring for a long time.

## 2. HEROISM - AN ETERNAL THEME IN CHINESE AND AMERICAN FILMS

History is the biography of heroes, which is the reason for the existence of hero worship in history. This worship is based on the power of historical reform. Without this foundation, modern reforms will never succeed. Every country or nation has its own heroic epic and special attitudes or expectations towards heroes. More importantly, movies adapted from this heroic epic are inherently unique and can reflect or represent people's expectations for the existence of heroes.

As one of the countries with the longest history in the world, China's 5,000 year history is filled with various heroes and epics created by their strength. Since ancient times, Confucianism has been the mainstream ideology in China. More specifically, the focus of this ideology is charity, which makes all heroes in China very kind. Moreover, traditional Chinese culture always puts the interests of the country rather than individuals, which leads to all heroes being willing to sacrifice their own interests for the country. As one of the countries with the shortest founding time, the

United States has had its own heroic epic since its founding. Freedom and individuality have always been at the core of American culture, and these two important elements have been infused into the souls of American heroes. Therefore, all heroic figures are born with intelligent personalities, extraordinary strength, and extraordinary courage. Such heroes usually fight alone and are very brave when acting alone. Such heroes are brought onto the movie screen, and their images become increasingly concrete and vivid. Although elements such as nationality, era, gender, and so on lead to differences in the specific situations of heroes in Chinese and American heroism themed films, all heroes living in similar backgrounds strive for the same goal. Heroes emerge during times of war, and the struggle between justice and evil inspires them to fulfill their missions. Heroes share similar views, so heroes with great ideas are fulfilling their mission to rescue and protect humanity. Similarities can be found in all heroism themed films in China and the United States.

### ***2.1 Similar Background During Wartime***

The movie "Mulan" produced in China in 2009 is adapted from a famous story in history - "Mulan". The movie Mulan tells the story of a girl named Mulan. At the beginning, like other girls of that period, she knew nothing about the cruel world. But when the terrible war arrived, the tranquility of the village was shattered, and all men had to participate in the war, including her elderly father. In order to protect her father, Mulan decided to join the army in his place. On the battlefield, she witnessed countless soldiers who died, and gradually her thoughts became stronger in order to survive on the cruel battlefield. She avoided her weakness and fought fiercely on the battlefield like a man. In the end, she became a great general and defeated the enemy. A weak woman eventually becomes a hero. However, without the background of war, she could never have become a hero. It was the brutal war that propelled her onto the stage of heroism.

The 1994 American film "Braveheart" is widely recognized as a classic heroic film worldwide. The protagonist William Wallace is a hero in the movie. He used to be an ordinary person in Scotland, without great ideals, only hoping to live an ordinary and peaceful life. After his fiancée was killed by the British army, he decided to fight against them and defend the freedom of England. Under the leadership of Wallace, the Scottish people rose up step by step in rebellion. If you choose to continue

fighting, you may die. If you choose to run away, at least you can live longer. But are you willing to feel guilty every day from now on just to get such an opportunity? We should tell our enemies that maybe they can destroy our lives, but they can never destroy freedom

Mulan and Wallace lived in different periods and countries, but they were both heroes in war. They won the war, and at the same time, the war also shaped their roles in history and movies. The interrelationship between heroes and war is vividly portrayed in movies, both of which showcase the transformation of heroic thinking on the battlefield. Before they learned about war, they were just ordinary people who had never been affected by war. After arriving on the battlefield, their potential was unleashed and they grew into leaders of that era. They ultimately achieved their life goals, and their value was validated in the war.

### ***2.2 Heroic Epic Movies with Similar Tragic Endings***

Some studies suggest that epics can be defined as stories about heroes who play important roles in military, religious, ethnic, regional, and other fields. More importantly, the background of such stories is different from other stories, and their historical environment usually involves many countries. The elements of war are most evident and essential in this epic story. A movie made on the basis of this epic story can be considered a heroic epic movie. Regardless of the country, this type of movie always ends tragically on the screen.

The movie 'The King of Western Chu' was produced in China in 1994. This movie tells the story of Xiang Yu, a great hero in Chinese history. Due to Xiang Yu's many victories, he became a famous general during that period. Xiang Yu was a genius on the battlefield, and he became the king in a series of victories. However, as a genius on the battlefield, his talent was not as strong as cruel history required. The only one who can defeat him is himself. In the end, his personality flaws led to his suicide on the banks of the Wujiang River. In heroic tragic films, the development and destruction of the hero are clearly visible, and his tragic suicide is recorded in history.

Another 2004 American film, Troy, can be classified as a tragic epic of heroism. Although this movie is about the Trojan War, it mainly tells the story of the protagonist - the hero Achilles. In ancient Greece, the love between the Prince of Troy

and the Queen of Sparta led to wars between these two countries. War is so cruel that it can destroy all civilizations. The hero Achilles is the only person who can change the situation of war with his own strength. So, his greatest wish is to be a glorious hero who will forever go down in history, and this wish inspires him to bravely fight to the last moment. As a hero of ancient Greece, Achilles was born great. Without his persistence, he wouldn't have died. Great heroes are ultimately recorded in history as tragedies.

The similarity between these two movies lies in their tragic endings. Heroic epic films from any country usually end in tragedy. The reason for this situation lies in culture.

### **3. DIFFERENCES IN HEROIC THEMED FILMS BETWEEN CHINA AND THE UNITED STATES**

All movies are created on different cultural foundations, and the cultural differences between China and the United States are also the basis for the differences in film production between these two countries. In addition, different social types also produce different social environments. Specifically, Chinese and Americans live in two different social environments, and their value systems and moral standards are different. All these differences can be reflected in movies and become part of the unique personality of Chinese and American films.

#### ***3.1 Different Sources of Energy for Achieving Heroes in Movies***

The movie "Ip Man" was filmed in China in 2008, telling the legendary story of martial arts master Ip Man. The film achieved great success in both commercial and cultural aspects. Ye Man lived in the war years of the 20th century. In order to protect the dignity of the Chinese people, he used martial arts to resist the Japanese. After the war, Ip Man and his family lived in poverty in Hong Kong under British rule. The British boxing champion came to Hong Kong and insulted Chinese martial arts. In order to once again uphold the dignity of Chinese martial arts, Ye Wen participated in a boxing competition. The competition was extremely dangerous because the opponent was incredibly strong, but with a strong will and relentless spirit, Ip Man ultimately won the game.

The hero proved to foreigners that the Chinese are not cowards and deserve respect from others.

The movie "Superman" was first created in the United States in 1948 and has become one of the most famous representative works of hero movies. The movie tells the story of an imaginary superhero who will neither age nor die. He is the most typical hero in American cartoons, and the term "Iron Man" first appeared. He can survive at temperatures up to 10 million degrees Celsius, protected by a natural energy layer within his body. Superman will never die or grow old, so that he can appear at any time no matter when others need him. He is a pure hero who has no need to sacrifice anything.

The difference in energy sources can be clearly seen from the above example. In Chinese movies, almost all heroes are ordinary people with strong wills and great personalities, and the source of energy for heroes comes from their ordinary bodies. And the heroes in American movies are all born heroes because they possess stronger superpowers than others. Due to their superpowers, heroes in American movies often exhibit overconfidence. More specifically, another obvious characteristic of these heroes is their personalities. The heroic culture in American movies is as young as this country. From the first day of the founding of the People's Republic of China, Americans have been constantly developing borders and rapidly expanding their power. The heroes created in movies, regardless of their ways of expression, share a common personality trait: individualism, combative personality, and arrogance.

#### ***3.2 Different Preferred Times in Heroic-themed Films***

Each story in Chinese and American movies has a different historical background. Chinese and American movies have different preferences when choosing and setting time backgrounds. Different eras mean different social environments and conflicts, as well as different needs for heroes in movies.

The movie "Jing Ke Assassins the King of Qin" was filmed in China in 1999, telling the story of a famous legendary hero, Jing Ke, who lived during the Warring States period. During that period, Jing Ke's homeland Yan was in danger of being annexed by the powerful Qin state. In 227 BC, Jing Ke began his journey to Qin, knowing clearly that his purpose was to die with the Qin king. Although he was ultimately killed and did not complete his

mission, his courage and loyalty are equally glorious in history. As an ordinary person, Jing Ke was certainly a hero who sacrificed his life and everything to repay the kindness of the Yan state. Unable to understand the limitations and dynamics of history, he can only rely on integrity, kindness, and traditional etiquette virtues to make decisions.

The movie Terminator was first created in 1984 and has become one of the most successful film series in the United States. The story in the movie takes place in 2029, where the hero is the opponent of the robot, the Terminator. In 2029, the Earth will be under the control of computers, and almost all humans will be eliminated. The surviving humans decided to counterattack the computer and ultimately won the victory.

From the examples listed above, it can be seen that there is such a significant difference in the historical preferences of Chinese and American films when choosing to set historical backgrounds. The reason why Chinese films prefer to choose ancient times as the era background of films is that China is one of the countries with a long history, and Chinese people like to learn from what has happened in history. As for American movies, most of the heroes in them are imagined and come from the future world. The United States is one of the youngest countries in the world, and the environment forces filmmakers to search for heroes in the future.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Movies are a form of expression that transforms culture into something easier to understand. In terms of cultural dissemination, Chinese and American films are more conducive to exchanges between the two countries. For movies with heroic themes, they showcase the best and most positive aspects of culture. Treating the entire human race as a social group, heroes in movies have some similar positive characteristics. However, considering different factors, there are some significant differences between the heroes of these two countries. In Chinese heroism themed films, the values of the moral system are first reflected; Secondly, in Chinese culture, the spirit of sacrifice and selflessness is an important part. This leads to the fact that all heroes in Chinese culture and even movies are sacrificial. This spirit makes every hero in the story a touching tragedy. For Americans, they are heroes. In American culture, heroes must be strong enough, and superpowers are necessary for a hero. When they are endowed with great

power, they have to sacrifice themselves for others. By comparing and analyzing Chinese and American films based on the theme of heroism, we have gained a deeper understanding of American culture, society, religion, and the relationships between people. This has also had a profound impact on cross-cultural exchanges between the two countries.

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