

Intercultural Communication and Mutual Learning Focusing on Light and Shadow——Taking the movie Coco as an example

Hairong Sun^{1*}, Xuezhu Zhang²

¹Beijing Information Technology Academy, Beijing 100015, China.

²Hunan Science and Technology University, Xiangtan 411201, Hunan Province, China

Abstract: This article analyzes the main elements of intercultural communication of films based on the five elements of communication, taking the movie Coco as an example. It states that in the modern global world, all countries should continuously promote cultural communication and mutual learning, consolidate the humanism of the community of common destiny, and promote the progress of the society. Meanwhile, we need to make full use of new media to continuously explore new methods and new forms of intercultural communication; we need to strengthen cultural confidence and take diffusing our national culture as our duty; we need to strengthen researches on intercultural communication, resolve cultural differences, and better achieve our localized national culture.

Keywords: Cultural communication; Film; New media; National culture

Publication date: July, 2020

Publication online: 31 July, 2020

***Corresponding author:** Hairong Sun, 562217964@qq.com

On October 20, 2017, the movie Coco was released at the Morelia International Film Festival in Mexico. The film became the highest-grossing animated film in Mexico after a week. In the first month, the movie also became the highest-grossing film in Mexico's history. A bigger hit came from the Chinese market across the ocean: the movie Coco became one of Pixar's best-selling movies in China, bringing more than 70 million dollars in box office returns, greatly exceeding Pixar's original estimated box office return of 30 to 40 million, which is even twice more than its previous

documentary, Finding Nemo! So what is it contributed to the intercultural communication of the movie Coco and turning it into a dark horse in the film industry?

1 Cultural Communication

Communication is the transmission of social information and the operation of social information systems. It includes five elements of communication: information source, information destination, media, message, and feedback. The information source refers to the leader of the communication; information destination refers to the receiver of the information; the media refers to the channel, means or tools of communication. Intercultural communication refers to the communication activities between individuals, groups or organizations under different cultural backgrounds. Throughout ancient and modern times, there are many vivid examples of intercultural communication in China's and foreign history, such as Xuanzang's Journey to India, Monk Jianzhen's Journey to Japan, Zheng He's Voyage, and Marco Polo in China. At that time, intercultural communication needed to cross thousands of mountains and rivers. However, today in the world of online international communication, people can have intercultural communication at home. It has become a way of life for people in the global village^[1].

With the strengthening of globalization, cooperation among countries is becoming closer and closer, and economic and trading exchanges have emerged. The rapid development of new media such as satellite communications and networks has promoted cultural communication and information exchanges among different countries. As Frederick described in Global

communication and international relations: the world has become a multiple organism connected by all kinds of information. It's filled with enormous data, with the submarine cables and satellite networks connected. Every day, it is full of hundreds of hours of TV programs and large amounts of information. The message of *Coco* is that Pixar (information source) has used the interactive feedback from the world's huge information organism: film and television media, online media, and movie viewers. Based on its unique cultural connotation, the interaction through the media can achieve the hitting effect.

2 The Advantages of Spreading the Movie *Coco*

2.1 Perfect media promotion

In addition to the common promotional media such as previews and newspapers, Pixar also launched *Coco* VR, the first virtual project, a large outdoor social space on the eve of the film. Here users can move freely and experience the magical world of the dead in advance. It is undeniable that this experience from VR movie has played a very good role in promoting the film.

Meanwhile, in the promotion of the film, it benefits from the right time, right location and harmony. The reason why Pixar chose to promote it in Mexico on October 20, 2017 is to take advantage of the Mexican International Film Festival; and to take advantage of the major day of the dead, which is closely related to Mexicans— Every year on November 1st, the day of the young dead, and on November 2nd, the day of the dead are important festivals in Mexico. As Octavio Paz, the winner of Nobel Prize in literature and native Mexican writer said, death is not often mentioned in New York, Paris, or London, because the word deserves to be banned. But Mexicans often tell about death, laughing at it, dreaming about it, and celebrate it. Death is one of the most beloved activities in Mexico. It is Mexicans' permanent love. Based on a deep understanding of Mexican culture, Pixar grasped the marketing time of the Day of the Dead, which made the promotion in Mexico successful.

A month after its release, the movie *Coco* has more than 2,000 reports from various news media, and has received over 3,700 positive reviews in Douban movies. These satisfying numbers prove the indispensable fifth element of communication---feedback.

2.2 Nice messages

2.2.1 Be familiar with the unfamiliar topic interpretation

The film not only connects the Day of the Dead with the audience's experience, but also brings a sense of origin in the wave of cultural shocks, thus getting popular among China's audiences. One of the messages: the profound national culture and the wonderful and interesting customs have all brought many surprises to China's audience. The fantastic golden marigold bridge is the way to connect the living and the dead. The terrifying matters turn into "sweet skull", which contains the Mexican culture, and the enthusiastic Papel Picardo's paper-cutting makes China's audience feel completely different. Through the visual hit and the impact of their consciousness, the movie showed two different and wonderful worlds to China's audience. The land of the living is warm, full of life, love and family. The land of the dead is full of cool colors--blue and purple. These two worlds are balanced, interdependent and mutually reinforcing.

The Mexicans celebrate the completion of the life cycle happily at the Day of the Dead, singing and dancing to welcome the returning dead. China's Day of the Dead "Tomb-Sweeping Day" is the scene that a drizzling rain falls like tears on the Mourning Day; The mourner's heart is going to break on his way. What exactly causes such a big difference? This is inseparable from the culture. The Mexican Day of the Dead is a combination of Indian and Spanish cultures dominated by Indian and indigenous cultures. It is an ancient festival with a history of at least 3000 years. They believe that after death, people will experience a long journey to Mitland, the world in which people live. Only on the Day of the Dead can the dead return to the world to meet their living relatives[2]. For Mexicans, death does not mean an end, but a new beginning. Therefore, the return of the dead has become a celebration day for the family. Tomb-Sweeping Day in China is closely related to the Cold Food Festival. People banned fire and cold food for a day or two before Tomb-Sweeping Day. According to the legend, it was passed down in memory of Jie Zitui during the Spring and Autumn Period. When Jinjun was exiled and lacked food, Jie Zitui cut the meat from his leg and make soup for Jinjun. After Jinjun became the monarch, Jie Zitui resigned and lived in seclusion with his mother. In

memory of Jie Zitui, Jinjun commanded this day to be Cold Food Festival. Later, the day after the Cold Food Festival was ordered as the Tomb-Sweeping Day. So death is a heavy topic for the Chinese. So we can learn that these two different cultures cause different opinions on life and death.

At the same time, China's audiences in the film also saw something that they once learned. For example, to welcome the returning dead, Mexicans will set up altars in their homes, display their photos and worship with water, fruits, paper cuttings, candles, etc. The water is to feed the dead coming from afar. Fruit stands for the earth and is used by the dead. Paper-cutting stands for wind. The candle stands for fire, symbolizing light and hope. These are similar to China's previous sacrifices. However, the symbols of wind, fire and soil are completely different from China's metal, wood water, fire, earth. Meanwhile, China's audiences in the film also saw things that they once knew. For example, to welcome the returning dead, Mexicans will set up altars in their homes, display their photos and worship water, fruits, paper cuts, candles, etc. All of them are connected with the information destination, but at the same time they give it a completely new experience. These also reflect the beauty of cultural diversity and compatibility.

2.2.2 Generalization of the selected themes

If the Day of the Dead allows us to see the beauty of the differences, then the theme of the film is so breathtaking that affects all humans. The two main themes of the story are dream and love, which cannot be removed by people of any era and any country. Miguel was not beaten with his perseverance and hard work. Grandma Coco never forgets his father Ector, the living cannot forget the dead, all of which are the most simple emotion across cultures and eras. Regardless of what skin or language, the audience will be impressed. In the film, the four generations of Miguel's family share many joys and happiness, and their strong and warm feelings have moved the past years of China's audiences.

The movie Coco has moved both the local and world-wide audiences through the integration of love and dreams. It has attracted audiences from all over the world. Under the globalization, we need to strengthen cultural communication, promote mutual understanding, and constantly promote mutual learning between different civilizations. This is the humanistic basis for building a community of common destiny, a bridge for

enhancing the friendship among people of all countries, a motivator for the progress of human society, and a bond for maintaining the world-wide peace.

3 Inspirations from the movie Coco

3.1 A nation's culture must be the world's culture

China is a country with profound culture and is full of wonderful stories in the movie Coco. These wonderful stories and cultural elements have been learned from other cultures more than once. In the 20th century, Japan drew Chinese elements to its animation. The work Dragon Ball of the famous animation master used the image of Sun Wukong, one of the four famous Chinese works "Journey to the West". It was first produced as a TV animation and released on Fuji TV in Japan, and later it was derived from theatrical version of animation, Hollywood movies, and many peripheral products and gaming software. Therefore, Dragon Ball is a case of opening up the international market through cultural learning.

The Hollywood movie Kung Fu Panda, released in 2008, showed the image of China and combines the national treasure of China and the profound martial arts, which has caused a heated response worldwide. In the film, both the mighty tiger boxing, the swift monkey boxing, the elegant crane boxing, the agile snake boxing, and the rigid and flexible mantis boxing are all designed in fancy^[3]. However, for many foreign film companies, China's elements are just a stepping stone to open the home market. In contrast, what they concentrate more on is the huge potential of China's market. Tian Huiqun, a doctor of film science at Beijing Normal University, once commented that no matter how many Chinese elements are in a Hollywood movie, it always tells about the American stories and always reflects the American values. There will be misunderstandings in the interpretation and presentation of different values and moral views behind China's elements.

As we all know, different values and moral views have their political attributes. As Schiller states: "Films, radios and television shows, books, reports and other cultural products or services can provide not only information and entertainment, but also tools for diffusing social values or political opinions." This circuitous way to achieve the purpose is the second face of power: behind the influence of the culture and values is the ability to influence and shape the will of others, which is a invisible hand, as well as the soft

power of a country^[4]. This shows that although cultural communication can promote exchanges among different cultures, it can also bring cultural conflicts. A strong country in communication will not only cause image damage to the poor countries, but also cause some cultural invasions.

Our original national culture is our world-wide identity and the source of our self-confidence and faith. The nature of benevolence, the way of harmony and the behaviour of respect have become the world-wide consensus. China's outstanding traditional culture and its national spirit not only created a great historic China, but also gave birth to a new future for China. Therefore, we must strengthen cultural self-confidence, tell our stories, speak on the international stage, and present an objective, true, comprehensive and modern country to the world.

3.2 Use the new media to promote communication

From the production of a language to its informationization, communication has gone through oral communication, text communication, print communication, and electronic communication. They merge into the information highway. From ordinary phones to smart phones, from snail mail to email, communicating technology is advancing rapidly. Today's new media usually refers to media that appear and influence on the information processing, using digital, network, and mobile technologies. Through the Internet, wireless communication networks, satellites and other channels, and terminals such as computers, mobile phones, and digital televisions, it provides users with information and entertainment services in the form of communication and media (New Media and Cultural Industries.). In the 21st century, various streaming media and we-media have emerged continuously. Different from traditional media communication, the communication tools of the new streaming media are no longer in the charge of individual organizations or institutions. The social media based on the Web2.0 era, Social Media, gives everyone the ability to create and disseminate the content^[5]. The word "audience" has double meanings of information producer and consumer under the rapid development of media technology, and has become a "prosumer", that is, producer and consumer. The virtual nature, sharing, and interaction of the networking media enable different groups to exchange information at any time and place, which results in a more diverse communication relationship.

Take the British BBC TV Peppa Pig as an example: In October, 2015, Peppa Pig was launched on three major video platforms such as IQiyi, Youku and Tudou. For just one year, the number of viewers reached more than 10 billion, which has brought a powerful economy of attention. Meanwhile, with the help of the Quick Worker, Tik Tok, podcasts and other platforms, Peppa Pig has become a wealthy pig. According to the data released by Tmall, compared with that in February, 2018, the searching volume of Peppa Pig on Tmall in March 2018 increased by 5 times, reaching nearly 20 million; in April, the searching volume reached more than 2,000 Million. Tmall sold 3.03 million pieces of Peppa Pig's IP pants at Double Eleven, 2019, which not only confirms once again the American communication scholar Bodrial's assertion of the symbolization of consumption, that is, the consumption in modern society has actually exceeded meeting the actual needs, and has become a symbolized item; Peppa Pig has evolved from a simple animated character to a phenomenon of communication.

3.3 Study inter-culture and realize localized communication

UNESCO defines inter-culture as the existence and equal interaction of different cultures and the possibility of generating common cultural expressions through dialogues and respect. Culture is the sum of the material and spiritual products in human society. Different nations have different languages and different cultures, which influence people's clothing, food, shelter, etiquette, customs, aesthetic taste, value orientation, and so on. When different cultures meet, they should recognize differences and respect each other, take verbal interaction as the root, and create a connection in the interaction through dialogues, so as to achieve common recognition and understanding.

The production and promotion of the movie Zootopia reflects a unique sense of intercultural communication. In the design of the scene, the Sports Hall of the Glacier Town in the City uses a Russian onion-shaped dome structure. The indoor tropical garden of the train station is learned from Madrid Central Station in Spain. The climate of Animal City is similar to Southern California^[6]. Among them, it is worth mentioning that the image of the newscaster in the film is based on the location of the film, and localized iconic animals such as China's panda, the Australian koala, the Brazilian

puma, and the British corgi pembroke. In terms of the publicity and promotion, the filmmaker chose to release the posters at China's New Year, and let animal stars send blessings such as being cheerful and confident, realizing your ambitions, and wishing to making money.

Undoubtedly, due to cultural differences, differences in values, and language barriers, communication barriers and wrong dialogues will occur in intercultural communication. Therefore, in addition to intensifying the marketing researches in intercultural communication and conducting detailed marketing researches, local ideology and culture, taboos, and social lifestyles need to be studied. According to the local situation and culture, social developing status, etc., we should develop a suitable cultural communication strategy that is accordance with the local development. Only in this way can we succeed in intercultural communication.

Civilizations will become profound with communication, and civilizations will become rich with mutual learning. Civilization is diversified, just like the diversity of natural species, which form the origin of life on the earth^[7]. Cultural diversity will also make this world more profound. The 21st century is an era of increasingly global cooperation, an era of mutual integration and innovation of world-wide cultures, and an era in which new and old media meet and interact with each other. We need to make full use of new media and continue to explore new ways and channels for the communication of our national culture^[8]. We need to enhance cultural self-confidence, promote our

country's profound culture, tell Chinese stories on the international stage, and take more responsibilities in international affairs^[9]. A single flower is not spring. Only when the countries in the world learn from each other and seek their common ground while reserving differences, can it become the consensus of the whole world to achieve the prosperity and progress of the human civilization^[10]!

References:

- [1] [https://baike.sogou.com/v5843860.htm?fromTitle=Intercultural Communication](https://baike.sogou.com/v5843860.htm?fromTitle=Intercultural%20Communication)
- [2] Jia C. Greetings for the dead - Mexica's Day of the Dead[J]. Garden of Science, 2007, (14): 40-41.
- [3] Luo TY, Zhong Yuanbo. Analysis on Multi-dimensional Interpretation of Chinese elements of Hollywood's "Kung Fu Panda"[J]. Film Review, 2008, (19).
- [4] Joseph. Soft Power[M]. Translated by Ma Juanjuan, CITIC, 2014.
- [5] Mayfield, Antony. "What Is Social Media?" Icrossing.co. Accessed May 7, 2013. Available from: URL: <http://www.antonymayfield.com/2008/03/22/what-issocial-media-ebook-on-mashable/>.
- [6] <https://www.1905.com/newgallery/hdpic/975005.shtml#p3>: Zootopia.
- [7] Xi JP. Speech at the League of Arab States Headquarters, 2016.1.
- [8] Zhang L. Research on Intercultural Communication of Media Discourse[J]. Northern Discussions, 2013, 4.
- [9] Guo QG. Course of Communication Studies[M]. Renmin University of China Press, 2001.
- [10] Richard EP. Cross-cultural communication[M]. Dong Xiaobo translation. Beijing: Peking University Press, 2012.