

Research on the Dissemination and Channels of Chinese Culture in the Age of Convergence Media: Taking Theme Movies in Recent Years as Example

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Abstract: In recent years, theme movies with various genres have become an important part of the domestic movie box office and a spiritual and cultural feast increasingly valued by the nation. The wide dissemination of Chinese culture among the people is inseparable from the innovation of convergence media communication channels. This paper uses content analysis, literature research and case studies to analyze the Chinese cultural connotations of theme movies released in theaters in recent years, and to analyze the innovation and development of Chinese culture dissemination and channels in the era of convergence media.

1. Introduction

In recent years, the box office of domestic theme movies has been increasing, leading the domestic film market to break through the negative impact caused by the epidemic and gain momentum. Theme movies play a significant role in building the national image, international communication, promoting the spirit of patriotism and revolutionary heroism, publicizing the core socialist values and shaping the personal character of the nation ^[1]. In the era of convergence media, many forms of media have emerged and many new cultural elements have been born, which have greatly enriched the cultural variety in China ^[2] and have an important role in the dissemination of Chinese culture in theme movies.

2. Rich in Chinese Cultural Characteristics

2.1. Patriotism Theme

Patriotism is the core of the Chinese national spirit and the basis of the core values of socialism, and it should be an important spiritual character that every Chinese son and daughter should internalize and externalize in their actions. In recent years, many war-themed domestic genre movies go on line; movies telling the story of the war to resist U.S. aggression and aid Korea such as *The Battle at Lake Changjin*, *The Battle at Lake Changjin II* and *Sniper* have entered the line of people's sight. Some people comment that the main theme of absolute sincerity is straightly hit the heart. Such comment exactly tells the feeling that such movies bring to the audience. The two series movies of *The Battle at Lake Changjin* tell the story of the shocking and tearful battle of Changjin Lake in the war to resist U.S. aggression and aid Korea, in which the Ninth Corps of the volunteer army fights hard against the U.S. Army's ace marine division I with a strong will in the freezing snow, and finally achieves a stage victory by seriously hits the enemy. The *Sniper* tells a story of a life-or-death battle between a volunteer reconnaissance team and the U.S. sniper team, in which volunteer soldier Liu Dayong himself alone continues to fight tenaciously and eventually defeats the opponent.

Several movies are centered on the main theme of patriotism, spreading the heroic feats of our forefathers in defending our country. In today's international situation where China and the U.S. are still at loggerheads, where China has long been under the cloud of U.S. suppression in various aspects, and where Western thoughts have been stimulating and influencing the national spirit after the reform and opening up, telling the historical story of China's victory over foreign invasion is indeed the right time to promote the cultural confidence of the Chinese nation. At the same time, no matter "family" or

"country", it is a kind of "collectivism" in essence, a convergence of people ^[3]. This is especially evident in *Sniper*, which does not fall into the shackles of individual heroism, but rather emphasizes the national spirit of "one man down and millions to stand up". War movies that highlight the theme of patriotism include *The Eight Hundred* and *Sacrifice* and those kind of movies have a wide audience in China, from the elderly who lived through that era to young people and teenagers. Watching patriotic movies in cinemas has become an important way for the nation to celebrate holidays, reunions and entertainment. The significance of watching movies is not limited to the movies themselves, but has risen to a kind of cultural behavior with patriotism as the core value.

2.2. Life Inspirational Theme

The outbreak of the epidemic since 2020 has become a major blow to the people of China both materially and spiritually, and the whole society has been overwhelmed by the cloud of panic and helplessness caused by the rampant disease, and people's emotions are at a depressed bottom. In the so-called "post-epidemic era", several excellent theme movies with the theme of life inspiration such as *My People My Homeland*, *A Little Red Flower* and *Embrace Again* are released one after another.

My People My Homeland tells the stories of the homelands of five major regions in China, with five separate sections presenting the protagonists' joys and sorrows with their homelands from different perspectives. Although the movie contains many tearful episodes, it maintains a positive, optimistic and humorous mood overall, which provides a good time for domestic audiences who have been trapped by the epidemic for a long time to vent their emotions. For example, *The Last Lesson*, one section of the movie, focuses on an old teacher who has lost his memory, and his students mobilize the whole village to help him recover his memory based on an old photo, reflecting the good qualities of the people in his homeland such as kindness and knowing how to repay; *Maliang with the Magic Pen*, another section of the movie, is a humorous story about a young aspiring painter who gives up his further studies at a Russian art school and chooses to return to his village to support the construction of his homeland without his wife's knowledge. People are impressed by the feeling of laugh with tears in the movie. *My People My Homeland* highlights the social changes from the tears, laughter and pain of the small characters, and expresses a serious thought and viewpoint in a light-hearted and witty way ^[4]. This movie evokes the nostalgia of the nation's hometown and is the inheritance and promotion of Chinese vernacular culture in the new era.

After all the trials and tribulations of life's journey, do people still have the motivation to move on, do they still have a positive attitude toward society and life, do they give up its dreams early, and do they just go on like that? Just like the setbacks brought by the Covid-19 - economic stagnation, career setbacks, heart-breaking parting moments. *Embrace Again* restores the special period when Wuhan is closed to the public, and connects the lives of several groups of ordinary citizens based on real-life footage, outlining the human scene in the context of the "national fight against the epidemic". The movie contains laugh-out-loud comedic elements, as well as tragic and realistic episodes that bring tears to the eyes. At the end of the movie, Wuhan is finally unlocked and the golden haze is reflected on the Parrot Bridge, which is actually a kind of awakening, arousing the nation's hope and passion for life and the beauty and aspiration of life. Director Xue Xiaolu says: "The movie hopes to show the comfort and support between people. In my opinion, the Chinese people's solidarity in the epidemic prevention and control brings warmth to life ^[5]."

In addition, *A Little Red Flower*, a warm drama movie with youthful elements, is chosen to be released at the New Year's Eve to welcome the new year and to bring the audience out of such a rather depressing situation. The story is about two teenagers' understanding of life and emotions in the process of fighting cancer, and the intertwined life trajectories of two families facing the disease. From the perspective of the movie's structure, *A Little Red Flower* has a mature model of inspirational storytelling. Though some of its sequences may not seem original, the movie focuses on the strong emotional tension generated by its narrative, so that the audience is constantly inspired and encouraged as the characters grow. In terms of the movie's content, what *A Little Red Flower* wants to cure is not only the cancer in the body, but also the "cancer" that exists in people's hearts. Life is not always full of darkness, but also hope. "We have experienced too many blows and depression, what

we lack is a healing, a pick up courage to start again. Each and every one of you who continue to move forward deserves a small red flower." [6]

2.3. Family Companionship Theme

Whether it's the realistic *A Little Red Flower* or the time-traveling magical comedy *Hi, Mom*, warm movies about socialist family relationships with the theme of family companionship have been a big hit in recent years. The movie's portrayal of characters is very vivid, and the portrayal of their family relationships is also much grounded, presenting a family supporting each other to face life's difficulties together.

The parents in *A Little Red Flower* have to take care of the life of their son whose brain cancer may recur at any time; on the other hand, they have to pay attention to the difficult knots in his heart arising from his long struggle with the disease. The two people support each other by virtue of their tacit understanding, fighting tirelessly and without regard to dignity for the sake of life, but always in front of their children with a posture that everything is fine. In *Embrace Again*, A Yong, a courier, is not able to enter his home due to the epidemic, but he still cares for and accompanies his son in various ways. In *Hi, Mom*, the heroine travels back in time to witness her mother's life back then. She changes a few paragraphs of history to reverse some small regrets in her mother's heart, but eventually discovers that her mother actually joined the journey, which is actually her mother's last farewell to her daughter before she died.

Such movies are a true portrayal of the Chinese family under mainstream values, the meaning of which can be derived from the fact that despite the difficulties and challenges of the current world changes, the family is still a harbor to rely on. Spreading the happiness and beauty of family life is also a universal value in Chinese culture.

2.4. Hero of the Times Theme

A nation with hope cannot be without heroes, and a country with a future cannot be without pioneers. Whether in response to the national call or to provide market demand, in recent years, domestic theme movies have paid great attention to the portrayal of heroes when telling the characters, and the great figures on the screen have moved the audience and left a deep impression on people. For example, the heroes in the war: the volunteer soldiers who fight against the American's aggression with their flesh and blood in *Sacrifice* and *The Battle at Lake Changjin*; the anti-Japanese fighters who pounce on the enemy with bombs in *The Eight Hundred*; the father who sacrifices his son to save the masses in *Ride the Wind*, a section in the movie *My people My fathers*. The peace and strength of the motherland today cannot be achieved without the sacrifice of these heroes.

The Chinese nation is a nation that reveres heroes, achieves heroes, and has many heroes, and also needs heroic sentiments in times of peace. For example, in the movies *Embraces Again* and *Chinese Doctors*, many of the white clothed heroes in harm's way step forward, risking their lives to support the front line just to protect the lives of others; in *Encounter* and *Poem*, sections of *My People My fathers*, the researchers who leave their love and families and even gave their lives to develop atomic bombs and missiles; in *Winning the Championship*, the story of the Chinese women's volleyball team with Lang Ping as the archetype of the protagonist, who trains hard against strong opponents, overcomes physical limits and develops a strong heart, and competes for the country in the international arena for 30 years. In *Pioneer*, a section of *My People My fathers* arouses people's heartfelt admiration of our fathers in the tide of reform and opening up with Zhao Pingyang, the creator of the first advisement, as representative.

Today's era is an era in need of heroes, the theme movies portray heroic characters, which subconsciously bring people enlightenment and inspiration - only by revering heroes will heroes appear, and only by striving to be heroes will heroes emerge. In today's international situation, our people are facing the epidemic, the trade conflict between China and the United States, and the border conflict, the new era needs new heroes to stand out, and the theme of heroes of the times in theme movies is also an important characteristic of Chinese culture.

3. Case Study: Increasingly Rich Ways of Convergence Media Communication

Convergence media is an important product in the era of network economy. It concentrates the important advantages and characteristics of various media, which can innovate the concept of cultural communication while maintain the traditional media communication thinking, thus bringing more experiences to the audience [7]. Innovative traditional culture communication has a very important role in the guidance of the mainstream national values [8]. The war-themed movie *The Battle at Lake Changjin*, the trilogy of "My People and My" series, namely *My People My Country*, *My People My Homeland*, *My people My fathers* and the movie *A Little Red Flower* which spread the emotional value of Chinese culture, have achieved double success in box office and reputation. This is largely due to the marketization of theme movies in China. This is largely due to the marketization of China's theme movies, which have gained rich channels of media dissemination through the market.

3.1. "My People My..." Series' Boom on Whole Network

As the opening work of the "My people My" series, *My People My Country* differs from grand historical narratives such as *The Founding Ceremony* and *The Founding of a Republic* in that it is positioned from the perspective of small people, thus presenting the relationship between the motherland and individuals in a more figurative form and highlighting the great moments of ordinary people in small events. This form of selection also sets the tone for the subsequent works in the series, which very typically and powerfully captures the common emotions of the whole nation.

First of all, the movie's official launches singing relay, the theme song, song by Wang Fei, has the same name of the movie, gaining great popular among people. Many celebrities use the song templates provided by major media platforms to sing, and then spread the relay to the general public so that everyone could show their singing voice. The Tik Tok official even adds a new music section for this purpose, conveniently providing users with a small video template for recording songs, a series of initiatives to make the main melodic content of the movie more approachable and grounded. In addition, CCTV News, CCTV.com, People's Daily, the Central Committee of the Communist Youth League, Global Times and other domestic mainstream news media has issued articles to express their support.

My People My Homeland", the second part of the "My People My" series, is lighter and even more comedic than *My people My Country*, and explains the changes in the homeland from various angles. Before its release, the movie officially has launched seven TVCs on the theme of homeland, expressing the main theme of "my homeland" in the movie through the presentation of "nostalgia" in Qingdao, Beijing, Chongqing, Guangzhou and other cities. In addition, the official launch of the two topics of "film the homeland for the movie" and "homeland fashion" immediately arouse the attention of movie stars, famous bloggers on Weibo, famous writers of Public Accounts and the general public, and become a very popular activity in Tik Tok. The above media communication channels effectively enhance the impact of the movie and invariably strengthen the core value of "love for hometown" advocated by the movie.

As the final movie in the series, *My People My Fathers* continues to explore the IP user base through the foundation established by the two previous movies. Prior to the release of the movie, Wang Fei's music video for *As You Wish* is released - the second dedication after *My People My Country*, which has been widely distributed through online media and has accumulated over 10 million views. At the same time, the movie's officials launch corresponding thematic screening activities for each individual short section, gathering senior people from all walks of life to participate: for example, a special screening of "Pioneer" - *Witness to Youth* is held by a well-known university; the creators invite General Zhu Heping, Sassou, and other war veterans to participate in a special military-themed screening; and hold a special space-themed screening and discussion with space hero Yang Liwei, space experts Qi Faren and Gao Chongwu in Beijing Space City.

Of course, although *My People My Fathers*, like its predecessor, is a masterpiece that brings together the nation's top resources, its box office is much lower than the previous two works due to the "marginal diminishing effect", not to mention the differentiation advantage of *The Battle at Lake Changjin* and other movies in the same period. This shows that while pursuing the value of subject

matter and novel content, theme movies need to take into account the audience's viewing experience in order to prevent aesthetic fatigue.

3.2. Weibo Marketing of *A Little Red Flower*

The convenience of the Internet and the rapid changes in new media make it easier to engage audiences in marketing and create interaction and a closer relationship with them^[9]. The cumulative box office of *A Little Red Flower* has exceeded 1.4 billion, and the audience has been very positive about this emotionally delicate work, with a Douban rating of 7.3. The movie is a realistic movie with both word-of-mouth and box office success, in which the highly restored emotional fragments of daily details are very relevant to people's lives, and it has been promoted through Weibo outside the movie. The movie has done a lot of promotion work outside the movie through Weibo.

3.2.1. Virtual Weibo Account

In the story, Wei Yihang and Ma Xiaoyuan meet and become friends through Weibo; and a search of their names in Weibo can really find virtual accounts with the IDs "Wei Yihang" and "Ma Xiaoyuan". Such a soft implantation of advertisement and the plot are logical - the two virtual accounts seem to be the other world that Ma Xiaoyuan imagines in the movie, where there is no longer the pain of parting from life and death, but the longing for a better life. Through the communication and interaction on Weibo, the distance between the audience and the movie has been greatly brought closer, and this unexpected bonus scene makes the movie more emotionally contagious.

3.2.2. Behind-the-scenes Documentary Promotion

After the release of the movie, three episodes of behind-the-scenes documentaries, *One United Family*, *Two Households* and *In Life* are premiered exclusively on Weibo, bringing together the creators to tell stories about their families and lives and to explore the themes of life and affection. In turn, they review the important episodes of the movie from different perspectives, expanding the breadth of the movie and causing viewers to engage in more profound thinking.

3.2.3. Little-red-flower DIY and the Value Continuation from the Social Dimension

The "Little Red Flower DIY Contest" is also very hot, with many creators joining the contest, and netizens are also very positive about such an activity, with internet celebrities from various industries filming and uploading the little red flowers they made. The theme of *A Little Red Flower* has attracted wide social attention on the cancer theme, and the humanistic spirit it shows is so touching that the critics in the industry, many doctors, cancer patients and their families have written their personal experiences and feelings on Weibo. The Little Red Flower becomes a symbolic representation of the theme of people uniting and caring for each other to fight against trials and tribulations, which subconsciously brings out the spirit of Chinese culture contained in it. In the rapid development of the convergence media era, information technology and multimedia technology have greatly brought people closer together and provided a new path for traditional culture to spread^[10].

3.3. The Double Promotion of *The Battle at Lake Changjin* in Tik Tok and Weibo

The Battle at Lake Changjin has already occupied a wide range of popularity in the market before its release, and after its release, it has continued to gain attention due to its excellent word-of-mouth, pulling a significant gap with other movies in the same 2021 National Day slot. In addition to the attractiveness of the movie's own content, such as the core of the war to resist U.S. aggression and aid Korea, the realistic reproduction of battlefield situations, and the shaping of patriotic heroes, the movie's continued popularity in China is also due to the excellent convergence media promotion strategy, which is mainly reflected in the dual promotion in Tik Tok and Weibo

The premiere of *The Battle at Lake Changjin* holds four days before the release of the movie nationwide. Through the appearance of all actors on Tik Tok Cloud Live, the movie accumulates twelve times on the Tik Tok Hot Topic List; with the simultaneous viewing of the movie in thirty-three cities across the country, it is reviewed by the audience, and the word-of-mouth and

popularity quickly climb. The movie is also promoted through Tik Tok short videos, such as interpreting historical details of the Battle of Changjin Lake; introducing the real scenes of the movie which is restored with the historical photos as reference one by one; showing the real battlefield scenes in the shooting footage, where the actors have short shaved hair, tanned skin, and are in the trenches; and showing the blasting scenes, which show that the movie is shot with real explosives to visually present the brutality of the battlefield. After the release, the movie continues to be interactive through Tik Tok. For example, with the powerful star advantage, Wu Jing and other main actors collectively reminisce about the hardships and lead people to eat the frozen potato beans appearing in the movie to feel the hardships of the volunteer army back then. The short videos like the soldiers salute to show their respect; the veterans are full of the tears in their eyes; the government organizations take an oath; and for the implied meaning of the bonus scenes -- the good life of today are very popular in Tik Tok.

The film's promotion in Weibo is also a unique highlight. During the movie's release, Weibo launches an interactive emotional topic that touches the hearts of the audience. For example, in the "Stories of Ordinaries in Those Photo Albums" sharing campaign, Weibo links up bloggers in the fields of military, education and history to stimulate discussions on the love of comradeship through photo albums, encouraging users to share the friendship of old comrades; in the "One person confesses his love for the heroes of Lake Changjin" sharing campaign, Weibo links bloggers in the fields of history and movies to voice out and call for the whole network to express their tribute and remembrance of heroic veterans. By fully exploring the details in the movie after the screening, the above multiple activities emphasize the spiritual values conveyed by the movie twice and awaken people's emotional awareness and ideal beliefs based on Chinese culture.

4. Conclusion

With the progress of the times, Chinese theme movies have been innovating in terms of thematic content as well as marketing channels, and have been transforming in the direction of marketization, industrialization and internationalization. The rich and colorful convergence media channels have effectively promoted the spread of Chinese culture, resulting in this national mass movie-watching craze rising to the collective emotional resonance of the entire Chinese nation.

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