

# ***The Role of Values: A Study of Female Heroes in Chinese and American Movies***

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**Abstract:** Hero is a figure who embodies the national spirit and represents the values and spirit of a nation. With the development of film production, there has been a notable increase in the number of people who have focused their attention on female heroes. This paper employs Hofstadter's dimension framework to elucidate the distinctions between female heroes in Chinese and American movies. In order to facilitate a comparative analysis of the portrayal of female heroes in Chinese and American movies, four war-themed movies were selected for this study. Ultimately, it is found that values exert the greatest influence on individualism, Collectivism, Masculinity, Femininity and power distance. Concurrently, as bilateral exchanges between China and the United States become more profound, there is also a mutual influence on each other in terms of values. The research of Chinese and American cultures of heroism also creates more space for individuals to reflect on life and society later and to preach heroism in the contemporary era.

**Keywords:** Chinese and American values, film, female heroes.

## **1. Introduction**

The film industries of China and the United States have developed quickly in recent times. The film is shaped by culture, environment and values, and it is an important way to build people's cultural values. In China and the United States, cultural values shape the expectations of the public with regard to the portrayal of heroes. However, female heroes were previously overlooked, functioning merely as objects under male dominance. This essay employs the theoretical framework of Hofstadter's five dimensions of culture, especially his focus on individualism, collectivism, and power distance to analyze the impact of values on building Chinese and American female heroes. This essay will also examine three war theme movies produced in China and the United States as case studies to elucidate the differences between the two nations. A comparative study of Chinese and Western cultures through movies is conducive to the promotion of cultural exchanges and the advancement of cultural understanding. It also facilitates the rapid and accurate grasp of opportunities and changes within the current internationalized context, particularly in the case of Chinese film. Furthermore, this approach is conducive to enabling China's movie to seize the opportunity and change positively in the context of the current globalization of the film industry [1].

## 2. Theoretical framework: Hofstadter's five dimension' culture

Hofstadter's cultural dimension theory model provides a framework for cross-cultural communication. All of these dimensions reflect the impact of cultural values on social members[2]. It concludes with five dimensions: individualism-collectivism, power distance, uncertainty avoidance, masculinity-femininity, and long-term and short-term orientation. The objective of this paper is to gain insight into the films *The Flower of War* and *Gone with the Wind* through the lens of Hofstadter's individualism-collectivism, masculinity-femininity, and power distance dimensions.

### 2.1. Individualism and collectivism

In Hofstadter's theory, collectivism refers to people all in a cohesive group, emphasizing collective internal harmonization. On the other hand, the relation of people is loose, everyone is an independent unit[2]. Table 1 illustrates the differences in detail.

Table 1: Differences Between Collectivist and Individualist Societies[2]

| Individualism  | Collectivism   |
|--|--|
| Everyone is supposed to take care of him - or herself and his or her immediate family only | People are born into extended families or clans which protect them in exchange for loyalty |
| " I "- consciousness   | " We "- consciousness  |
| Right of privacy   | Stress on belonging  |
| Speaking one ' s mind is healthy   | Harmony should always be maintained  |
| Others classified as individuals   | Others classified as in - group or out - group   |
| Personal opinion expected : one person one vote  | Opinions and votes predetermined by in - group   |
| Transgression of norms leads to guilt feelings   | Transgression of norms leads to shame feelings   |
| Languages in which the word " I " is indispensable   | Languages in which the word " I " is avoided   |
| Purpose of education is learning how to learn  | Purpose of education is learning how to do   |
| Task prevails over relationship  | Relationship prevails over task  |

### 2.2. Masculinity – femininity

It refers to value distribution between genders[2]. Males usually be seen as the symbol of bravery, strength, confidence, and competitiveness. On the contrary, females usually be seen as the symbol of effeminate, melting, gentle, and dependence. Table 2 illustrates the differences in detail.

Table 2: Differences Between Feminine and Masculine Societies[2]

| Femininity  | Masculinity   |
|---|---|
| Minimum emotional and social role differentiation between the genders   | Maximum emotional and social role differentiation between the genders |
| Men and women should be modest and caring                               | Men should be and women may be assertive and ambitious                |
| Balance between family and work   | Work prevails over family   |
| Sympathy for the weak   | Admiration for the strong   |
| Both fathers and mothers deal with facts and feelings                   | Fathers deal with facts , mothers with feelings                       |
| Both boys and girls may cry but neither should fight                    | Girls cry, boys don't; boys should fight back, girls shouldn't fight  |
| Mothers decide on number of children                                    | Fathers decide on family size   |
| Many women in elected political positions                               | Few women in elected political positions                              |
| Religion focuses on fellow human beings                                 | Religion focuses on God or gods                                       |
| Matter - of - fact attitudes about sexuality ; sex is a way of relating | Moralistic attitudes about sexuality ; sex is a way of performing     |

### 2.3. Power distance

Power distance represents the unequal and it reflects that the social organization accepts the extent of power distance [2]. Under the low power distance context, social member pays attention to their power and are strong. On the contrary, the members in large power distance contexts rarely query authority. Table 3 illustrates the differences in detail.

Table 3: Differences Between Small- and Large-Power Distance Societies[2]

| Small Power Distance  | Large Power Distance   |
|---|--|
| Use of power should be legitimate and is subject to criteria of good and evil | Power is a basic fact of society antedating good or evil: its legitimacy is irrelevant |
| Parents treat children as equals  | Parents teach children obedience   |
| Older people are neither respected nor feared                                 | Older people are both respected and feared   |
| Student - centered education  | Teacher - centered education   |
| Hierarchy means inequality of roles, established for convenience              | Hierarchy means existential inequality   |
| Pluralist governments based on majority vote and changed peacefully           | Autocratic governments based on co-optation and changed by revolution                  |
| Subordinates expect to be consulted   | Subordinates expect to be told what to do  |
| Corruption rare: scandals end political careers                               | Corruption frequent ; scandals are covered up  |
| Income distribution in society rather even                                    | Income distribution in society very uneven   |
| Religions stressing equality of believers                                     | Religions with a hierarchy of priests  |

### 3. Chinese hero's characteristic

In 1937, the Japanese army launched an assault on Nanjing, which became known as the Flower of War. A cohort of students, a group of courtesans and an impostor godfather sought refuge in a church. However, they ultimately perished. Twelve courtesans volunteered to rescue the young girls, despite the considerable risks involved. This film constructs a group of female heroes operating within the Chinese culture context. Meanwhile, the movie pulls in both types of women both marginalized by societal norms. These include the Qinhuai River women, and the schoolgirls, who suffer from gender oppression[3].

#### 3.1. Collectivist consciousness

Chinese female heroes exhibit a high degree of collectivist consciousness. *The Flower of War* selected an unrecognized group in the secular sense: courtesans who are typically regarded as individuals who do not prioritize the interests of their country. They are initially perceived as selfish, yet when young girls meet the dilemma, they demonstrate courage and resilience. None of them care selfish or leave the group in danger, it is a collectivism that surpasses the individual[1]. Under the influence of Chinese Confucianism, people have a strong collective consciousness, just like the thirteen heroines in the movie, who put the interests of the collective above their personal interests. It is possible for individuals to make sacrifices, including the ultimate sacrifice of their own lives, for the benefit of the collective.

### 3.2. Under the male perspective

The director presents the female encounter from the male perspective. In the account, female heroes, as an observed object conclude the male gaze when showing female glamour and body. Males are the subject of the gaze action that involves controlling. On the other hand, women are the objects of the gaze and the ones who are shaped. Instructor Li is a typical representative of Chinese soldiers. The feelings they show of being at home with death and donating one's life for the sake of the past are all more in line with the pursuit of males. It also reflects the main position of men in the war. The film depicts a greater number of scenes in which the soldiers are engaged in combat, with a focus on the violence and brutality perpetrated by the Japanese invaders. However, in contrast to this, the women are portrayed as more sympathetic and protected, which serves to highlight the men's sense of heroism and the way in which they become the cover for the women. The male characters serve as a protective barrier for the female characters, and the portrayal of feminism in the film gradually diminishes as the narrative progresses[4].

### 3.3. Consistent with traditional

In 2009, the film *Mulan*, directed by Hong Kong director Ma Chucheng, depicted portrayed *Mulan's* character in a manner that was more consistent with traditional. The tale of *Mulan* joining the army for her father and subsequently returning to her hometown after the battle is a well-known narrative in Chinese folklore. *Mulan* was originally a woman of high moral standards who remained in the domestic sphere and fulfilled the traditional roles of women. She has the equipment of ordinary fabric and her words are elegant. At home, *Mulan* brings tea and water for her father. *Mulan* in the film is for the sake of loyalty and filial piety, so she is always leaving her interests. The draft order was inviolable because of the large distance and the royal order was divine. In the Chinese movie there is no emphasis on *Mulan's* personal growth, much less *Mulan* exploring her own energy as in the American movie. In the final battle, the collective efforts of the crowd ultimately lead to victory, and there is no portrayal of an individual hero.

## 4. American hero's characteristic

The film *Gone with the Wind* narrates the experiences of the characters *Hoskar* during the Civil War, *Scarlett*, *Bradley*, *Ashley*, and *Melanie* during the Civil War. The director employs the image of *Scarlett* to convey his thoughts on the social status of women in the social context of that time. The director employs the image of *Scarlett* to convey his thoughts on the social status of women in the social context of the time. Through the transformation of *Hoskia's* outlook before and after the war, as well as *Scarlett's* three marriages, the director creates a full-bodied female hero image.

### 4.1. Individual growth

American female heroes attach importance to demonstrating individual growth. In the film *Gone with the Wind*, the character of *Scarlett* undergoes a significant transformation from an ignorant rich girl to a female hero. The film completely reveals the difference between the early and late period. Young *Scarlett* only knows about pursuing her lover *Ashley* and does not care about the national condition. However, during the national war, she realizes her responsibility and gradually grows into a mature female who can lead to rebuilding their farm. *Scarlett* is not a perfect person, she is selfish and capricious, everything she does seems to be for herself, she is not a good person in the traditional sense, but due to her strong sense of responsibility, she radiates strength and bravery when fulfilling her responsibilities, which makes people admire her [5].

## 4.2. Vulnerabilities of female characters

The director demonstrates a clear focus on portraying the vulnerabilities of female characters in a context of male dominance. In her portrayal, Scarlett showed a female hero image that was both delicate and adamant. That historical context requires females be docile, but Scarlett bravely stands up to resist. After the death of her first husband, Scarlett had to be controlled by social custom that dressed in black clothes and was not permitted to attend any party[6]. However, Scarlett decidedly took out a black dress and enthusiastically danced with Butler. On the one hand, when she faces the domestic calamity, Scarlett abandons narrow notions of gender and chooses to shoulder the responsibility. She firmly believes she can do better than male. Conversely, Scarlett shows obvious subject consciousness and prioritizes her feelings and profit first[7].

## 4.3. Convey Western values

In 2009, the Walt Disney Company produced the animated feature film *Mulan*, which retold a Chinese story to convey Western values. In contrast to the docile Chinese *Mulan*, the American *Mulan* was an active girl during her formative years. However, she has to restrain her light to adopt the social rule. When *Mulan* goes to the barracks, she chooses to become herself and unleash her considerable energy. Finally, she used her wits and talents to repel the enemy and ensure the safety of the emperor. This emphasis on authenticity aligns with the core values of the American ethos. Additionally, the lower power distance is reflected in the American version of the general's willingness to accept *Mulan*'s advice and embrace her in the final victory. It is unbelievable in the Chinese large power distance context. And the most important difference between the Chinese and American versions of the story is that *Mulan* ultimately chooses to become a general rather than return to her home town to live an uneventful life. This also reflects the difference in value choices between China and the United States, as well as the difference in understanding of the concept of filial piety.

## 5. Conclusion

The culture of heroism is an important part of a national culture component. A culture inherits the most valuable and shining things in the culture and is closely related to the culture to which it belongs. Chinese and American heroism films have many distinctions because of the difference in history and cultural values. Although they are based on the same story, American and Chinese movies have big differences in the hero building. China and America both adapt films based on Chinese traditional stories *Mulan* that can reflect their cultural differences. Movies spread values through culture and help people communicate.

The heroism in the Chinese version of *Hua Mulan* is about self-sacrifice and a sense of responsibility towards the protection of the country. This reflects the influence of Confucianism's sentiment of family and country, and it can be characterized as a form of collective heroism. Conversely, the heroism in the American version of *Mulan* embodies the courage and adventurous spirit of ordinary characters fighting for their families, which is typical of individual heroism.

China has a history of thousands of years as a clan-based society, with Confucianism as the core of its cultural ecology. The Chinese people espouse moral leadership with the "Five Constants" and "Eight Virtues" as the main content[8]. Therefore, the images of heroes in Chinese military films show the concept of the big family based on national righteousness, class friendship with revolutionary beliefs, the sense of organization and discipline based on collectivism, and the spirit of sacrifice and dedication to the greater good. This is done with the aim of maintaining and strengthening the "Tao" as a whole. The heroes portrayed in the Chinese movie are not like Hollywood movies where lone hero who saves the world on his own, but rather a collectivist principle of the heroes who follow the principle of collectivism.

American military movies are more likely to prioritize the portrayal of individual soldiers, as in *Field Platoon*, *Saving Private Ryan*, *The Thin Red Line*, *The Battle of Midway* 'The Thin Red Line', 'The Battle of Midway'. These films emphasize the characterization of the soldiers themselves, while providing minimal description of organizations and institutions to which they belong [8]. The role of organizations and institutions to which the characters belong are generally downplayed, and the national government is not a prominent factor. In the American tradition, all individuals are considered equal before God, and thus, any person can become a hero. This is also the reason why civilian heroes keep emerging in the history of American movies. In short, American heroism promotes independence, individuality, righteousness and adventurousness. In conclusion, American heroism promotes independence, individuality, a sense of justice and a spirit of adventure.

It is crucial to highlight that with the global development, Eastern and Western cultures are constantly exchanging towards integration and development, whereby they learn from each other on the female hero side. Historically, war is a man's game, with women often viewed as the spoils of war, along with other commodities such as food, gasoline, and antiques. Under the influence of traditional thinking and a patriarchal social order, women are usually seen as weak and incompetent. However, as society has developed, there has been an increase in the visibility of women's power on screen. An increasing number of female heroes appear as individuals with distinctive personalities, rather than as mere props or tools for advancing the plot. The integration of Chinese and American cultures of heroism also creates more space for individuals to reflect on life and society later and to preach heroism in the contemporary era[9].

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