



REVIEW

New Practice of International Communication of Chinese Films under the Sight of “The Belt and Road”—— Taking the Film “Xuan Zang” as an Example

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ABSTRACT

At present, “The Belt and Road” initiative has risen from the China initiative to an international consensus and has become a popular international public product and a high-profile international cooperation platform. As the soul of the “Belt and Road”, culture’s leading advantages can promote the all-round and multi-field exchanges and cooperation between China and various countries along “The Belt and Road”. As an important carrier for spreading Chinese culture, domestic films play an important role in further expanding the international communication practice of Chinese cultural influence. This paper takes the film “Xuan Zang” as an example, explores the new international communication practices of domestic films under the framework of “The Belt and Road”, sums up the new path of domestic film international communication, and looks forward to the new opportunities and bright prospects of cooperation in the field of film and television art under the framework of “The Belt and Road”.

1. Introduction

In September and October 2013, during his visit to Central Asia and Southeast Asian countries, President Xi Jinping successively proposed a major initiative to jointly build the “Silk Road Economic Belt” and “21st Century Maritime Silk Road”, which received high attention from the international community. Since the Han and Tang Dynasties, the Silk Road has continued to expand on the world map, witnessing and spreading the moving stories of people’s friendly communications, cultural exchanges, people’s minds and feelings blending, and mutual benefit along the way. As an important part of the great

power diplomatic strategy of with Chinese characteristics, the “The Belt and Road” is not just a space concept or an economic cooperation strategy. President Xi Jinping emphasized: “Culture is the soul of the ‘The Belt and Road’”. The culture’s leading advantages can promote the all-round and multi-field exchanges and cooperation between China and various countries along the “Belt and Road”. As an important carrier of cultural communication, film is based on the concept of cultural history, linking the history, reality and future of the countries along “The Belt and Road”, which plays an important role in further expanding the international communication practice of Chinese cul-

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tural influence.

As “another iconic cooperation in the 100-year history of Chinese and Indian films”,^[1] The film “Xuan Zang” pursues the journey of faith by recreating the mysterious journey of the mysterious history in the history of China-Indian cultural exchanges, organically integrating Buddhist Culture, Central Plains Culture, Western Regional Culture, and Ancient Indian Culture, which is highly concerned by public opinion in China and India. “Xuan Zang” is an excellent example of the international dissemination of domestic films under the background of “The Belt and Road”. This paper takes film image expression as the starting point, and explores the new practice of international communication under the framework of “The Belt and Road”, the new revolution of communication concept and the new path of film and television cooperation, generalizing and summarizing the successful experience of the film “Xuan Zang”, thereby looking forward to the future, the countries along “The Belt and Road” will have new opportunities and bright prospects for cultural exchange, mutual reference and mutual benefit, especially in the field of film and television production.

2. Open and Inclusive New Practice of Film and Television Communication

After more than three years of development, “The Belt and Road” initiative has risen from the China initiative to an international consensus and has become a popular international public product and a high-profile international cooperation platform. As an important part of the cooperation of the “The Belt and Road” cultural field, the film needs to find a practical path that conforms to its own artistic characteristics and international communication rules in this national strategy. The practice of film and television communication under the framework of “The Belt and Road” is not a simple cultural output, but should be based on a broader and open cultural and artistic vision, and on the basis of seeking a broader cultural and psychological identity, to achieve cultural exchanges and interactions.

2.1 Real Historical Narrative and Broad Creative Horizon

“Xuan Zang” vividly interprets this practice of film and television communication based on the concept of openness and inclusiveness. Xuanzang went to the exotic area regardless of the danger, holding a stick and carrying books to travel alone. The westward desert was unable to stop the ambition of Xuanzang to go on a pilgrimage for Buddhist scriptures. The opening of the film was in-

troduced by a British student who looked through Indian archaeological books at the university library. On the one hand, it shows that the film’s image representation and meaning expression for Xuanzang’s westbound journey is based on the historical truth excavated from the real historical text. For the filming and portraying of the historical figure of Xuanzang, It is obliged to face the predicament of the majority of the audience’s understanding of “Journey to the West” far beyond of the true historical event of Xuanzang’s westbound journey. In the moment that “Journey to the West” is regarded as a popular film and television IP, and the entertainment film and television adaptation is quite prevailing, “Xuan Zang” has a new way to find a balance point between the artistic performance and the historical reality that meets the expectations of the mainstream culture and is easily accepted by the audience. It is no longer confined to the image of Xuanzang in the original film and television works, and presents us with an organic integrated artistic image of a great historical figure and an ordinary life individual.

More importantly, the character Xuanzang plays an important role in archaeological research in India. The “Traveling Notes of the Western Regions in Great Tang Dynasty” by Xuanzang provides important clues and guidelines for the discovery and excavation of important Buddhist sites in India. The Indians’ understanding and feelings about Xuanzang are even more profound because of the unwritten history he has written. The full respect of the cultural context of international communication objects and the broader creative vision make the real historical narrative of the opening of the film focus on the vivid elements that can stimulate emotional resonance in the culture and history of China and India, which allows the annihilation of the true Xuanzao image in the historical dust, presented in front of the audience in a sensible and touching form, and realizes the artistic perception of Xuanzang by linking with each other’s cultural memories.

2.2 Buddhist Implication Integration and Cultural Psychological Identity

In the past domestic film and television works, works that directly express Buddhist thoughts and monk images are rare. Whether it is the “A Bright Moon” that expresses Li Shutong’s legendary life, or the classic martial arts film “Shaolin Temple” or “New Shaolin Temple” showing the choice of warlords in the age of Shaolin disciples, Buddhism thoughts and images of monks are more of a type and element of symbolism that enhances the appreciation and artistry of the film, and are placed under the narrative background of the film. “Xuan Zang” breaks through the

expressions of the original Buddhist thoughts and the image of the monks in the film and television works, and organically integrates the Buddhist thoughts and ideas that seem to be difficult for ordinary audience to understand. Whether to borrow the ordained ceremony of Shi Pantuo hosted by Xuanzang on the way of westbound journey to clarify the specific contents of the Five Precepts obeyed by Buddhist Catu Parisa, or the basic concept of the Four Holy Principles of Buddhism “suffering, origination, cessation and path” brought by Xuanzang’s lecture of Buddhist Sutras, and then to the end of the film, the distinction and spread of the convention of Mahayana and Hinayana conducted by Xuanzang when participating in the UDra Buddhist Sutras Debate Conference, which has intensively integrated the thoughts and meanings of Buddhism into the narrative process of the film, helping the audience to understand the cultural connotation of the Buddhist spirit in a subtle way.

In his keynote speech at the opening ceremony of the “Belt and Road” International Cooperation Summit, President Xi Jinping pointed out: “Buddhism originated in India and was carried forward in China. It was passed down in Southeast Asia. In the countries along “The Belt and Road”, Buddhism has a broad support of believers and social and cultural backgrounds.” “Xuan Zang” vividly interprets Xuanzang’s persistent pursuit of Buddhist beliefs and the dedication spirit of devotion to seeking Buddhist scriptures by reproducing Master Xuanzang’s westbound journey through the seventeen years of trials and hardships, which shows the Chinese people’s perseverance, persistence and tenacious spiritual characters and the cultural concept of compatibility with foreign cultures. Taking the Buddhist implication as the core, and the national spirit for extension, the film “Xuan Zang” relies on the social and cultural foundation of the target audience and the background of religious beliefs to minimize the “cultural discounts” that other films cannot avoid in international communication, and seeks the greatest common denominator of cultural identity in the cross-cultural international communication, which has done a good job of telling the Chinese story and spreading the Chinese voice.

3. Integrative Mutual-reference New Concept of Cultural Communication

The concept of cooperation, openness and inclusiveness, as emphasized by “The Belt and Road”, highlights the practice of international dissemination of domestic films in the context of the “Belt and Road”, which is the important significance of the new concept of cultural communication

in this “World Cultural Dialogue Road”. Internationalization and nationalization are not two opposite concepts in the cultural cooperation of “The Belt and Road”. The current cross-cultural international communication practice of Chinese film, from the initial goal of “going out”, it has developed to today’s own advantages and characteristics, and seeks to achieve sustainable exchanges and the widest international recognition in international communication.

3.1 Multicultural Integration and Symbiosis

The film “Xuan Zang” has restored the unique natural and historical features of the countries along the ancient Silk Road and the many monuments of countries along the way and India. The historical and civilized imprints of the Indus and Ganges, the Yellow River and the Yangtze River are fully demonstrated in the film. Central Plains Culture, Western Culture, Ancient Indian Culture and Buddhist Culture are presented in the film, which are no longer just a type of element added to enhance artistic expression. The organic integration and symbiosis of multiculturalism create a magnificent historical and cultural landscape for the mysterious westbound path of the film. As a unique historical and cultural symbol, Xuanzang has a prominent topical and role tension in the cultural exchanges along the “Belt and Road” countries, especially between China and India. In the film “Xuan Zang”, whether Xuanzang was invited to the king city of Chotscho to discuss the unique features of the Central Plains Culture and the kingcraft with Buddhist implication, or the discussion with the Siladitya in the Kumbh Mela from the Traditional Indian drum music and dance to “Music of King Qin Breaking up the Enemy’s Front”, the film is based on real historical materials, starting from the details, fully demonstrating the background of the grand historical narrative, the Chinese culture on the ancient Silk Road by the people of the countries along the line of understanding, understanding, understanding and even acceptance and recognition of the moving picture, which is a cultural gene that can be widely recognized for today’s “The Belt and Road” international cooperation.

The image of Xuanzang, which is shaped by the film “Xuan Zang”, represents the cultural communication concept that domestic films should pursue in the international communication. Although Xuanzang’s westbound journey is for Buddhist scriptures, in the film, Xuanzang represents the Nalanda Monastery to participate the Buddhist Sutras Debate Conference with his belief background of Chinese Buddhism. In the birthplace of Buddhism, Xuanzang, who has the ambition to seek the Buddhist scriptures, uses the attitude of being neither humble nor pushy, and the equality as the criterion for communication, calmly examining

himself and others, and knowing his own advantages and disadvantages in the process of study. Neither blindly denying the characteristics of his own cultural traditions, nor rushing to blindly pursue the cultural identity of the target of communication. This kind of cultural self-confidence and cultural quality derived from the inner cultural spirit is the concept that domestic film and television works should follow in the process of international communication under the background of “The Belt and Road”.

3.2 In-depth Excavation on the Spirit of Silk Road Culture

In the film, when Xuanzang managed to get out from Guazhou, he met with a trade caravan on the Gobi Desert and went company with them. The director specially designed an episode of dialogue between Xuanzang and the caravan leader. At the beginning, the caravan leader took out the silkworms that were taken out from Tang Empire, so as to bring the technology of raising silkworm and silk and textiles back to the Western Regions, regardless the big risk of losing his life. Then, the caravan leader asked Xuanzang a question: What is the world? For the caravan leader, his world is “to take something here to a place where there is no such thing.” Through this historical road, China’s porcelain, silk, iron, tea, gold and silver crafts and other handicrafts are continuously transmitted to countries in West Asia and Europe through Persian, big food and other countries by these caravans on the ancient Silk Road; while the goods, technology and culture of Western countries are brought into China through them, too.

It can be said that the camel bells of these caravans have closely linked the Eurasia continent and promoted the exchange and development of Eastern and Western civilizations. The purpose of Xuanzang’s westbound journey to seek the Buddhist scriptures is precisely the same as these caravans “to take something here to a place where there is no such thing”. In spite of the difficulties and dangers, both Xuanzang and the caravans on this ancient Silk Road had never given up. This episode of the film “Xuan Zang” shows the spirit of the Silk Road with a long history and a heavy historical significance, and echoes today’s cooperation of countries along “The Belt and Road” with a profound historical and cultural heritage and a broad mass base, which further explains China’s cultural communication concept of harmony in diversity, mutual reference and mutual benefit under the framework of the “The Belt and Road” and the premise of fully understanding and respecting the spiritual creation and cultural traditions of the people of the countries and regions along the “The Belt and Road”.

4. Mutual Benefit and Win-Win New Path of Film and Television Cooperation

The friendship between nations lies in the friendship between the people, and the friendship between the people lies in the communication between hearts. “The Belt and Road” strategic concept involves dozens of countries and billions of people. The civilizations are different and the styles are different. The exchanges and cooperation between countries along the line are inseparable from the “hard” support of economic and trade exchanges and the “soft” strength of cultural integration. Regardless of the time dimension or the spatial dimension, the film and television creation around “The Belt and Road” strategic concept still has great material mining space and artistic shaping value. This requires domestic films to find a new development path that meets their own characteristics and has good communication and acceptance effects in the strategic plan of “The Belt and Road”.

4.1 New Exploration of Chinese and Foreign Film and Television Exchange and Cooperation

On September 18, 2014, witnessed by President Xi Jinping and Indian Prime Minister Modi, China and India signed the “Agreement on Audiovisual Co-production”, which opened a new starting point for cultural film exchanges between China and India. The film “Xuan Zang” is the representative result of the cooperation and exchange of Chinese and Indian films born on the basis of this agreement. On May 25, 2016, Indian President Pranab Mukherjee met with Director Huo Jianqi and starring Huang Xiaoming of “Xuan Zang” in Beijing, and expressed appreciation for “Xuan Zang”. He said that, “Xuan Zang” has added an important contribution to the cultural exchange between China and India. As of 2016, the film “Xuan Zang” has won 21 awards at home and abroad, and represented the Chinese mainland in the competition for the best foreign language film in Oscar.^[2]

At present, China has signed film co-production agreements with 16 countries and regions including Italy, France, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and India. More than 100 related films have been established. Different from the previous co-production mode, today’s co-production film types and styles are further diversified, becoming an extremely important cultural resource in the process of cultural exchanges with countries. In this dimension, the type meaning of the film “Xuan Zang” is worth further exploration, as a long-term, large-scale cross-border film and television production, in the film, from the making of the crown, to the digital image restoration of the ancient Indian Buddhist ruins; from the Pro-

ducing group of different cultural backgrounds language systems to the establishment of rapid communication mechanism and mutual trust to film propaganda and distribution, in particular, the recognition and understanding of the cultural experience and market environment of other countries accumulated in international communication, which will play a role in demonstrating and guiding the international communication practice of domestic films and the production of Chinese and foreign co-productions.

In addition, “Xuan Zang” can be regarded as a beautiful business card of China for foreign cultural exchanges because of its unique Buddhist implication and distinctive Chinese characteristics, especially in the Southeast Asian, South Asian and East Asian cultural circles, which are deeply influenced by Buddhist culture, the Chinese film and television works represented by “Xuan Zang” highlight the cultural attitude and artistic position of today’s China.

4.2 New Prospects for Cooperation between the People with the Communication between Hearts

Cultural exchange is an important prerequisite for the communication between the people with the communication between hearts, and is an important way to accelerate the implementation of the “The Belt and Road” strategy. The film “Xuan Zang” shows that China’s openness and inclusiveness originated from multi-ethnicity inhabitation and combination, and after suffering so many pains she still stands towering in the east with tenacity. Through the lyrical narrative expression of the romantic spirit of the film, the unique national character is manifested in international communication in an extreme appealing way.

5. Conclusion

It is undeniable that the current practice of international communication of domestic films still faces many chal-

lenges: poor regional influence; communication and acceptance are not ideal; lack of overall strategic thinking and layout; “It is also necessary to strengthen the top-level design of Chinese film in ‘The Belt and Road’ strategic region to expand its influence.”^[3] One of the ideas of the “The Belt and Road” opening up and upgrading version is to realize the emotional integration of the people along the line through mutual recognition and understanding with the cultural images of the countries along the way. A large number of domestic film and television works represented by “Xuan Zang”, the international communication practice promoted under “The Belt and Road” framework, whose focus is to find and highlight the artistic elements in the creation that can stimulate the national and world cultural identity along the “The Belt and Road”, let the world’s eyes focus on today’s China; let the world’s attention be attracted by the splendid Chinese culture; Let the moving Chinese story also have the cultural qualities that highlight the greatness of the country and the commercial value for sustainable development.

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