

Chinese Culture in *Kungfu Panda*

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[Abstract] Successfully, Dreamworks in Hollywood stirred a strong wind of Chinese culture through the martial arts cartoon *Kungfu Panda*. Throughout the entire movie, the unique strong fragrance of Chinese culture blows right into your face; Chinese national treasure – panda; the quintessence of Chinese culture – Kungfu; Chinese style philosophy – Buddhist sensibility and spiritual enlightenment; and Chinese style relationships among characters, etc. Chinese elements in the film are impressively presented everywhere, kungfu, panda, noodles, the distinct landscape, shadowboxing, temple fairs, calligraphy and acupuncture, among others.

[Key words] *Kungfu Panda*; Kungfu; Chinese Style Philosophy; Chinese style relationships
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I. Introduction

Dreamworks has explored the splendors of Chinese culture and landscape through martial arts cartoon *Kungfu Panda*. The cartoon's name itself has perfectly combined two most famous Chinese elements – panda and Kungfu, inspiring enough to the world's curiosity.

The film transforms a panda into a Kungfu fighter to save a threatened village in ancient times. The lazy and irreverent panda, Po, must somehow become a Kungfu master in order to save the Valley of Peace from a villainous snow leopard, Tai Lung. Set in the legendary world of ancient China, the story of Po—an unlikely hero—enters the rigid world of Kungfu and turns it upside down. Po ultimately becomes a hero by learning that if he believes in himself, he can do anything.

Although the storyline still follows traditional Hollywood footprints—the most unlikely character becomes the ultimate hero in order to save the world—the directors did succeed in presenting distinctive Chinese elements to shock the world, especially Chinese.

In my opinion, some Chinese, who are radical enough to propose a boycott against the film and claim it a cultural invasion, are holding an attitude of ethnocentrism.

II. Chinese Panda

It's no doubt that the panda is one of China's most precious symbols. Pandas belong to Sichuan, the Chinese nation as well as the whole world. Hollywood filmmakers promote the unique Chinese animal into an edacious but artless, clumsy but funny Kungfu lover. The vivid image of Po is designed totally out of the audience's expectation that the panda might have been handsome and a little bit sentimental.

III. Chinese Kungfu

Chinese Kungfu is said to be the first selling point that

attracted so many people to go to see the film in the cinema. Many foreigners have been fascinated in Chinese Kungfu since Bluse Lee (*Li Xiaolong*) first appeared on Hollywood screen. This film combines all kinds of Chinese traditional Wushu (Kungfu) — the legendary Furious Five — Tigress, Crane, Mantis, Viper and Monkey; Master Shifu (coach)'s most powerful tip with a single finger; and Master Wugui (a turtle)'s world famous Kungfu skill—shadowboxing, etc.. Kungfu may be the most popular and charming Chinese element in western world. For those who are familiar with Chinese Kungfu, they can easily catch the kernel of Chinese Kungfu without further explanation because they share contextualization cue that the film offers in presenting Kungfu.

IV. Chinese Philosophy

In this film, the directors did incorporate Chinese philosophy with which Chinese audience may be in great sympathy.

Despite the whole story of Po and his triumph over his own bungling nature, there is a recognizable Buddhist sensibility, presented by the Shaolin Monastery – like setting where spiritual enlightenment is blended with the mental discipline and mastery over the self that are essentials to enlightenment.

The superior master Wugui, in the film is like an eastern Buddhist, or Lao Tse, a philosopher in ancient China. While Master Shifu struggles in seeking for inner peace, Master Wugui is always poised toward whatever happens—to the critical crisis on Tai Lung's return, and even to his own death. What Wugui says are always full of wisdom:

1. "There is a saying: Yesterday is history; tomorrow is a mystery; but today is a gift. That is why we call it the present." (The word "present" contains two denotations—"gift" and "now". Here, they are wisely used to tell a smart truth.)

2. "There are no accidents." (While Master Shifu refuses to train Po to be a Dragon Warrior because Po was selected only by accident, Master Wugui persuades him by saying this simple sentence which had deep implicative meaning that Po is the right person and everything has its reason.)

3. "Quit, don't quit. Noodles, don't noodles. You are too concerned with what was and what will be." (Master Wugui, who had already penetrated what's in Po's mind, tried to convince Po of his own destiny.)

The most important philosophy that Po finally enlightened by the wordless dragon scroll is "the belief in oneself"—"Be your own hero", which means don't look outside of yourself for the answer. Don't expect some one else to make things right. You are empowered to achieve anything you want, if you set your mind to it. Be the best that you can be.

V. The Chinese Style Relationships

Relationships presented in the film are of typical Chinese style. In a community full of high - context messages, people's communication is highly affected by their surroundings and relationships with others.

5.1 Between Po and his father

Po's father, Mr. Ping, is a duck who makes a living by running his small traditional family business—a noodle shop. And his biggest wish is that his only son, Po, will quit that illusion about Kungfu and take over the family business of selling noodles. Apparently, Po, a panda, was not born by Mr. Ping. But the love and care between Po and Mr. Ping is so sincere and deep that Po had never doubted about his own life story. Mr. Ping was quit a traditional Chinese father who held a implied love to his son.

The son taking over family business once was a typical

Chinese tradition. The family's unique skills or secret ingredients could only be inherited by the eldest son or other sons, but never the daughter.

5.2 Between Master Shifu and the Furious Five

There is a Chinese saying: "One day to be my Shifu (teacher), for the whole life to be my parent." In China, the relationship and affection between Shifu and prentics are as serious as between parent and children. We can see it from Master Shifu's complicated affection to Tai Lung, and the Furious Five's respect and implied love to Shifu.

In the field of Kungfu, relationships are rigidly hierarchical. Prentics obey Shifu's orders without question, and the prentics are listed by the order of time they begin learning. Younger ones should respect the elder ones and submit to them.

5.3 Among Villagers

Like in most ideal traditional villages, people in Valley of Peace are living together in peace and harmony. All members are close as folks. They care about others and are ready to offer help. Whenever there is a big event, they will gather together and deal with it under the leadership of the one of highest prestige (e. g. Master Wugui).

VI. Conclusion

As we have seen, Chinese elements in the film are impressively presented everywhere, kungfu, panda, noodles, the distinct landscape, shadowboxing, temple fairs, calligraphy and acupuncture, among others. Some Chinese critics said the movie had made many Chinese martial art movie directors feel ashamed. On the contrary, I speak highly of the western film makers' smart assimilation of Chinese culture or, their successful acculturation to China.

谈《功夫熊猫》中洋溢的中国文化

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[摘要] 美国梦工厂通过动画电影《功夫熊猫》狠狠刮了一场中国旋风。影片中国文化的独特气息扑面而来,无处不在:中国的国宝——熊猫;中国的国粹——功夫;中式的哲学——佛境、禅意,大智若愚;中式的人物关系——“子承父业”,“一日为师、终身为父”等。另外,包括影片中的风景、建筑、功夫、太极、面馆、庙会、比武选拔等处洋溢中国特色和中国文化。

[关键词] 《功夫熊猫》; 功夫; 中式哲学; 中式人物关系