

# Research on the Export Strategy of Chinese Films from Marvel Films

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**Abstract.** Under the trend of globalization, cross-cultural communication has become a necessary condition for the export of national cultural soft power. Marvel movies have a wide fan base worldwide and are very well-developed in the film industry. Although Chinese films have made great progress in recent years, the domestic film market is also extremely active, and a few Chinese films have won large awards at international film festivals, but the influence on the world is minimal. Therefore, this article will use the case analysis method to analyze in detail the successful cases of Marvel movies exported in cross-cultural contexts from three aspects: film production, film content, and marketing promotion, and derive the reasons and methods for their success, hoping to help Chinese films better go to the world and help Chinese culture break cultural barriers and better go to the world.

## 1 Introduction

### 1.1 Research background

In the context of globalization and cultural power, Chinese films are an important way to spread Chinese culture and enhance China's cultural soft power. In addition, the entry of Chinese films into the international market is also conducive to China's expansion and the reversal of the trade deficit. It is also useful for promoting exchanges between countries and reducing cultural barriers. Since 2012, Chinese films have developed rapidly. China has become the world's - largest film market and third-largest film producer, and many Chinese films have also won many awards at international film festivals. These phenomena are all gratifying for Chinese films. However, even though the development of China's film industry is developing with rapid momentum, and domestic films have performed well at the box office and through word of mouth, "Wolf Warrior 2", set the highest box office record for Chinese films, has experienced a cold situation in North America [1]. At the same time, Marvel superhero movies have attracted many followers in China, their film production of very high quality and their excellent reputation among the public and kept a high level of popularity in the Chinese film market in the form of a series of films. If you look at the Chinese film market, since 2016, the top ten box office films present Marvel superhero films every year. Based on the above, Marvel Studios has formed a Marvel pop culture that is unique in the world.

### 1.2 Literature review

Wang & Tang analyzed in the paper "The Plight and Strategy of Chinese Film Export" that the dilemma of Chinese films' export to the outside world mainly manifests in First, the export genre is relatively single, with martial arts films as the most. Second, most export films are screened for free through public welfare exchanges, and less profit. In addition, they also pointed out that Chinese films have problems such as insufficient top-level design, insufficient policy support when exporting, and poor media marketing, which ultimately led to cultural discounts in the export process of Chinese films, which were not effective. The author greatly inspired these ideas in the process of writing this paper [2].

Based on Hofstede's theory of cultural dimension, Li conducted a textual analysis of the 22 superhero movies launched by Marvel Studios in the past ten years from six dimensions: power distance, individualism and collectivism, masculinity and femininity, uncertainty avoidance, long-term orientation and short-term orientation, and indulgence and restraint, aiming to find out the reasons why the cultural values embodied in Marvel films can break down cultural barriers. Learn about intercultural communication strategies from Marvel films in China [1].

Yang & Peng published the paper "Cross-border Integration: an analysis of the Industrial and cultural mechanism of the Marvel Cinematic Universe". According to this article, in the context of globalization and post-modernity, the cross-border integration strategy implemented by Marvel Studios and its parent company, Disney Group, has created the

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success of the Marvel Cinematic Universe. There are four parts to the cross-border integration strategy: introducing elements of “American independent films” into film creation for cross-genre innovative expression; Using cross-text modes and fans to build a cross-text cinematic universe between different films, series and short films; In addition to the box office of movies, create a derived consumption space based on the franchise model through multimedia multiplatform storytelling; Integrate global story telling and localized marketing, looking for intercultural communication of film products. These four dimensions progressively build the Marvel Cinematic Universe’s unique industrial and cultural operation mechanism [3].

### 1.3 Research gap

Most scholars in the academic field analyze the output mode of Marvel movies or analyze the output dilemma of Chinese films, and there are still research gaps in analyzing the reference of Marvel movies to Chinese films. This article will analyze the aspects of Chinese film output that need to be learned from in combination with the output mode of Marvel movies.

### 1.4 Research framework

This paper analyzes the 22 superhero movies launched by Marvel Studios in the past ten years from four dimensions: marketing strategy, film production, narrative mode, and cultural core, aiming to find out the reasons the reasons why the cultural values contained in Marvel films may break cultural barriers, and explore Marvel's intercultural communication strategies in China. According to studies, Marvel has successfully communicated across cultural divides and included many cultural elements into the movie in a way that makes sense. Along with Hollywood's flawless and developed film industry chain, Marvel leverages cross-media narrative to collaboratively create a vast Marvel world across film, television, and other formats, resulting in a global pop culture of superheroes. Research on Marvel's strategy for communicating across cultures reveals that domestic movies still fall short in terms of foreign export. The countermeasures that can be used for reference from the export of Chinese films to the outside world are proposed from the four perspectives of creating Chinese cultural brands, improving narrative capabilities, improving the film industry chain, and improving the legal and regulatory system of films, in the hopes that the research findings can aid in the overseas export of Chinese films.

## 2 Case description

The case analysis method, also known as the typical analysis method, is a scientific approach that carefully and in-depth researches representative occurrences in order to gain a general knowledge.

This paper first analyzes the four dimensions mentioned in the introduction (marketing strategy, film production, narrative mode, and cultural core) of the

Marvel superhero movies (taking the Avengers series as an example). It obtains the reasons for the success of the export of Marvel movies. Then analyze Chinese films such as “Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon”, “Hero” and “Wolf Warrior” to find the reasons for their failure and success, respectively. After case analysis, this paper will compare the case of Marvel movies with the cases of Chinese films and comprehensively explain the export strategy of Chinese films from four aspects (building Chinese cultural brands, improving narrative capabilities, improving the film industry chain, and improving the legal and regulatory system of films) based on China’s national conditions and the current situation of Chinese films.

## 3 Analysis of problems

### 3.1 Marvel movies

#### 3.1.1 Cultural pluralism in marvel movies

As one of the most important cultural products in the modern cultural industry, the film is often disseminated to the specific public of the nation-state and national cultural community with the same language or culture as the unit carrier. Among them, cultural communication transcending linguistic and cultural boundaries and political geography boundaries can become “cross-cultural communication”. In the understanding of the successful cross-cultural communication of Marvel series movies, some scholars believe that Marvel series movies, as works joined by many American stars and top industrial teams, are an effective communication strategy for cultural colonization of global culture with narrative methods, discourse composition, and core values based on Western values [4]. Some scholars believe that in the logic of capitalism with developed science and technology, the public generally pays more attention to their own entertainment enjoyment, and the Marvel series of movies meet the public’s needs for visual effects, genre stories, and hero worship psychology is the most common phenomenon in the film consumer market [5]. In the context of global culture being wary of American cultural hegemony, the first strategy for the success of cross-cultural communication of Marvel films is to abandon traditional American monistic values and adhere to diversified cultural concepts.

As a successful industrial product and genre film, the Marvel series of movies has made substantial adaptations in terms of the character set, background design, story writing, and actor selection and strives to get as close as possible to cultural pluralism of “seeking common ground while reserving differences” in the era of globalization. In Marvel stories, there are typical white heroes, such as Captain America, and superheroes of other skin colors, such as Black Panther and Shang Qi. In selecting actors and fitting the character image, Marvel is even more ingenious. British gentleman Benedict Cumberbatch was chosen to experiment with Doctor Strange, “America’s Sweetheart” Chris Evans

was chosen to play Captain America and powerful Chinese actor Tony Leung was selected to play Shang Qi's father Wen Wu. The use of multinational actors to interpret Marvel superheroes is itself a manifestation of diversity. This can not only make the actor's fan base pay attention to Marvel movies and become Marvel fans but also open up the film markets in various countries and continue Marvel's cultural boom.

### 3.1.2 Growth narratives

The reason Marvel movie superheroes can attract fans worldwide is not only because the cool special effects of the movie bring people sensory stimulation. The growth line of superheroes is an important part of the emotional core of Marvel movies. Superheroes are not flawless and are even seriously flawed compared to ordinary people! Take Iron Man, for example, who was originally a super genius, rich second-generation playboy, and an image of an American capitalist in the standard sense. Living from the arms business, not caring about the lives or deaths of others, just for their happiness. However, when he came to the Middle East and saw that the arms he made were being used by terrorists, making the local people miserable, he resolutely shut down the arms production line and announced that the company would no longer produce arms! Later, in the early days of the establishment of the Avengers, he was still unruly in the team, did not like team battles, did not listen to commands, and still acted arrogantly, but the later Iron Man, we can see for all, he can fly into the black hole of the universe alone with an atomic bomb in order to defend the earth; In order to protect the entire universe, he can resolutely take Thanos' gloves and snap his fingers.

The contrast between these plots is the growth line of Iron Man. Compared with special effects and character settings, heroes' growth seems more able to impress the audience. It is worth mentioning that Marvel always likes to lay very hidden for heroes' growth. Therefore, when the audience appreciates the story of the Marvel Universe, there is always the pleasure of digging for treasures, which is also the success of the Marvel movie narrative.

## 3.2 Chinese movies

### 3.2.1 The current situation of film export to the outside world

Data show that the number of moviegoers in urban cinemas in China reached 1.167 billion in 2021, a year-on-year increase of 112.96%, recovering to 67.57% in 2019, and the number of moviegoers remained the first in the world. It can be seen that there is no shortage of movies in China, nor is there a shortage of good movies with double harvests at the box office. However, there are still many shortcomings in terms of external exports.

First, Chinese films have a single genre. In recent years, China's films exported to the outside world and achieved relatively good results, including "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon", "Heroes" and "Ambush on Ten

Sides". In fact, it is not difficult to find that martial arts films occupy the main position. Entering the Asian market, popular movies in Japan and South Korea include "The True Color of Heroes" and "Qiannu Ghost" also with some elements of action movies.

Second, when Chinese films are exported to the outside world, most are mainly based on public welfare exchanges, and commercial output is rare. There are even fewer films that have entered mainstream theaters overseas. Overseas tickets for Chinese films in 2010 Housing is only more than three billion yuan, less than 1/40 of the United States; In 2013, the overseas box office of only eight major American film and television companies exceeded 12.35 billion U.S. dollars (more than 50 times that of China's overseas box office). The overseas box office contributed more than the North American market, accounting for 56%. In 2014, the overseas box office of American films was 14.6 billion U.S. dollars, while the overseas box office and sales revenue of domestic films were 1.87 billion yuan, and the United States was more than 40 times that of China [2].

### 3.2.2 The reason why it is difficult to export Chinese films

First, cultural variations. Chinese movies are still in their infancy compared to American movies, and there is a significant disparity in both story and production. The telling of Chinese stories in Chinese movies is still a priority. The target audience for the movie is mostly Chinese, not foreigners. As a result, it is challenging for Chinese-made movies to appeal to audiences abroad. There are numerous cultural distinctions.

Second, the issue of film narrative. Chinese films have big problems with the narrative. Take "The Wandering Earth 2" released in the Spring Festival of 2022, as an example, Director Guo Fan obviously wants to emulate the Marvel Universe to lay his own cinematic universe, but it seems a little urgent in the story arrangement of The Wandering Earth 2. The two storylines of "Space Elevator" and "Digital Life" are loosely intertwined, and the narrative of the entire movie is more abrupt. In addition, the narrative in Chinese cinema does not yet reflect a global view. The movie's story is more based on the love of children and the feelings of Chinese families and countries. The protagonist's growth line narrative is hasty, and the sideline is even more insignificant, which has led to the problem of a single emotional core of Chinese films.

Third, film publicity and policy support are insufficient. In recent years, many Chinese films have been able to stir up a lot of waves overseas. However, films widely acclaimed overseas are not cared for at home or are even not released. In China, film is not only a comprehensive art with aesthetic value but also a modern medium for disseminating culture and information; it acts as a propaganda tool for national ideology and plays the role of profit-making industry. The diverse and mixed identities make Chinese films encounter more embarrassment when spreading to the outside world. The external broadcast of Chinese films seems to be actively called by the academic community,

but the industry and the government have not seen the global strategic deployment, lack of macro deployment, meso guidance, and micro implementation so when the output and box office of Chinese films blow out, the output of Chinese films shows a downward trend.

## 4 Suggestions

### 4.1 Create movies across genres

A comprehensive analysis of the Marvel Cinematic Universe was published in 2019 by Harvard Business Review. It gathered information from 20 Marvel films that had already been released by the end of 2018, analyzed 243 interviews and 95 video interviews with various producers, directors, and screenwriters, as well as 140 reviews from mainstream film critics, and surveyed the professional networks of 1,023 actors and 25,853 crew members. Last but not least, the Marvel Cinematic Universe's main creative team's composition, which has successfully struck a balance between innovation and continuity [6].

When hiring directors, Marvel Studios does not tend to hire directors with superhero filmmaking experience but to dig for talent from directors of other genres. To date, none of the 20 directors who have directed 27 works in the Marvel Cinematic Universe had directed superhero movies before they directed Marvel Studios looks for talent from directors of different genres rather than selecting directors with expertise making superhero movies. Only Joe Johnston served as an art director for the "Star Wars" franchise; Joss Whedon had written the script for The X-Men but it wasn't used in the movie; Taiga Waititi took part in "Green Lantern"; and as of right now, none of the 20 directors who have overseen 27 works in the Marvel Cinematic Universe had previously directed superhero movies. These filmmakers are frequently preferred by Marvel Studios due to their innovations in various genres. As an illustration, Alan Taylor was chosen to helm "Thor 2" following the popularity of the television series "Game of Thrones" that he also co-directed. Because they challenged the "superhero" molding model in the sitcom "Scrappy League," the Russo brothers were presumably selected to helm "The Avengers." Before directing "Spider-Man: Homecoming," Jon Watts had only made a few lesser-known films, but he previously admitted in an interview that he exposed his Spider-Man tattoo on his breast to stand out in the director's campaign and demonstrate his fascination with the character [7].

It can be seen that Marvel Studios does not have fixed criteria when selecting directors but hopes to use the director's previous experience directing other types of films or innovative spirit to bring fresh elements to superhero movies. As the Harvard Business Review concludes, "These directors often come from independent films, and past experiences allow them to bring unique visuals and tones to each film: Thor 2: The Dark World has the color of Shakespeare; "Ant-Man" is a robbery film; "Captain America 2" is a spy film; Guardians of the Galaxy is a dazzling space opera. Moreover, most directors are used to shooting on tight

budgets, and their budget before making MCU movies is about one-seventh of the MCU's budget [6].

Marvel movies now feature rich stylistic changes thanks to the introduction of various independent filmmaking techniques. For example, the "Iron Man" series has many humorous elements, while the "Thor" series is darker and sadder, the "Guardians of the Galaxy" series exhibits a strong sense of retro nostalgia, and Black Panther is strongly socially and politically critical. These advancements have improved the reputation of the Marvel Studios superhero films. The average approval rating of Marvel movies on the website Rotten Tomatoes for professional movie critics is as high as 84% in 2019 (the average approval rating of the 15 highest-grossing movies at the box office is 68%), and each movie receives an average of 64 nominations and awards [6].

As mentioned above, Chinese films have the problem of a single genre in terms of production and export. This also directly leads to the phenomenon of a small number of overseas audiences. Even if there is no comparable film production company in China that can create multiple types of films under the same conditions, the film industry should strive to innovate and develop different types of films to meet market needs rather than just repeating the same types of films in the comfort zone.

### 4.2 Create a cinematic universe by creating cross-text creations

Marvel Studios' second major innovation mechanism is to spearhead the implementation of the "cinematic universe" strategy, which has planned its superhero movies from the beginning, establishing clever connections between different films, thereby driving each other and sustaining brand appeal to audiences.

The linking of several movie plots is merely one way in which the building of the cinematic universe is made evident. For audiences, the connections between the Marvel films are already well-known. The Avengers television series has attained the pinnacle of content linking. A richer text matrix is produced as a result of the Marvel Cinematic Universe's influence on numerous areas, including television shows, short films, and other cinema and television content types. For instance, the series is crucial in bridging the time between the release of separate movies. The episodes usually react to and enhance the significant events in the movie. For instance, Agent Carter, who debuted in the first "Captain America" film, returned in a number of "Agent Carter" and "Agents of S.H. I.E.L.D." season two (2014, 2015) episodes, and she later took on the lead role in the 2015 ABC TV series "Agent Carter" [8]. This "Captain America" supporting character's backstory is thoroughly depicted in the show. Even though they might seem less significant, the short movies that are a part of Marvel's DVDs and Blu-ray discs are a crucial component of the Marvel Cinematic Universe. These short films, which include "S.H.I.E.L.D. Advisor" (included in the "Thor" Blu-ray version), "Agent Carter" (included in the "Iron Man 3" Blu-ray version), "Item 47" (containing "Avengers" Easter egg content), and others, will spend



a few minutes telling the stories of some of the minor characters in the movie and connecting some of the suspenseful plots in the movie. Marvel short films, like "Item 47" and "Agent Carter," which got positive audience feedback and gave rise to the television shows "Agent Carter" and "Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.", are also crucial in gauging how the Marvel Cinematic Universe will be accepted by audiences [8].

Chinese cinema is still in its infancy in terms of the formation of the cinematic universe. One of the more successful cases is the Detective Chinatown series, directed or produced by Chinese director Chen Sicheng. The series is released every Spring Festival and is presented to the public at the rate of updating once yearly. Like Marvel movies, the film content of the Detective Chinatown franchise is interconnected. In addition, director Chen Sicheng also supervised the production of the series of online derivative dramas to advance the film's story.

In fact, the difficulty of Chinese films in creating a film universe is that no film company or director can create their own unique film and television I.P. Much of China's current filmmaking comes from literary adaptations. It can be said that major film production companies are all grabbing I.P. in the same "database". Original scripts can be said to be pitiful. Therefore, if Chinese films want to develop and grow, they still need to work on film content.

### **4.3 Cross-cultural: a combination of global storytelling and localized marketing**

Superhero movies, as represented by Marvel, have unavoidably enjoyed success in the United States since the turn of the twenty-first century from a social and cultural standpoint. The context of the 1960s, when Marvel's superheroes were created, reflects the context of the twenty-first century in the United States. The killing of President Kennedy in 1963 was the most profound illustration of these conflicts, which were brought about by the civil rights movement of the 1960s, the Vietnam War, and the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union. Marvel Comics sales were at their peak during that time, and many of their characters rose to fame as campus idols around the United States. A 1965 *Esquire* poll showed that college students ranked Spider-Man and the Hulk as the most beloved counterculture representatives, along with Bob Dylan and Che Guevara. Compared with the more traditional American superhero image created by D.C. Comics, the orthodox image of white heterosexuality [9]. The superhero characters created by Marvel have a bit of "deviant" color; they have different personalities, most of them have hot tempers, and the process of becoming heroes is often not what they want. Although they questioned their heroic identity, they ultimately chose to take on the responsibility of heroes. The inner contradictions of Marvel superheroes were a catharsis for American society because at that time "America was right." Struggling between the best and worst selves is filled with anxiety and tension." This anxiety and tension has been reheated in the United States with a series of crises such as the 911 terrorist attacks, the war

in Afghanistan, the war in Iraq, and the financial turmoil of 2008. A socio-cultural background has also supported the popularity of superhero movies. As a *New York Times* review "Why We Are Obsessed with Superheroes" said: "We can guess the ending of superheroes, so we find stability and comfort, which also allows them to stay in our hearts for a long time, whether you admit it or not, the birth of superheroes has created a necessary American myth that we turn to for help when humans can't control everything around us [10]."

Marvel chooses actors to play the characters in the play from a variety of nations, races, and skin tones. In addition to character development, this helps the movie become more recognisable. The Marvel movie franchise may be able to expand internationally with the help of this strategy. In this aspect, Chinese movies have a significant gap. Ideological influences make it uncommon for performers of various nationalities or races to be the protagonists in Chinese movies. Even fewer films that are set in different cultures exist in terms of content. This logically explains why it is challenging to export Chinese movies outside. Films' lack of cultural identity is the main cause, and as a result, Chinese films will eventually become enmeshed in a self-indulgent circle.

In terms of marketing, Marvel prioritizes collaboration with international businesses. After 2015, the company established a staff to handle partner affairs globally and launch marketing offensives through collaborative marketing. Marvel superhero films, such as "Iron Man" and "Audi," "Guardians of the Galaxy" and "Ford," "Thor" and "Honda Acura," etc., all have rather consistent automotive partners [11]. Marvel, on the other hand, will employ localization tactics for significant international markets, some of which are risky initiatives. For instance, "The Avengers" had simultaneous red carpet premieres in Rome, Beijing, London, and Moscow, making it the first film to be released in foreign markets [12]. The American hero regained his health with the aid of traditional Chinese medicine, and this conclusion was inserted to the Chinese version of "Iron Man 3" as a "special offering" for Chinese viewers. Marvel also collaborated with the Training Bureau of the General Administration of Sports of China to invite six Chinese athletes to correspond to Marvel superheroes and launch themed posters and videos to coincide with the release of "Avengers 4: Endgame" in China. Ma Long corresponds to Iron Man, Zhu Ting corresponds to Captain Marvel, and Wu Dajing corresponds to Black Panther [13]. These efforts show that Marvel values the fast-growing international market that China represents.

It can be seen from this that when Chinese films are exported to the outside world, they should pay attention to the marketing of film content and the localization marketing of films. After all, in a cross-cultural context, localized marketing can give more viewers a sense of identity, which can win a better box office.

## **5 Conclusion**

This paper provides a detailed analysis of Marvel movies from three aspects: film production, film culture, and film marketing through case analysis. Derive the uniqueness of Marvel movies in terms of production content, production process, and post-sales. In addition, this paper also analyzes the current situation of the export of Chinese films in a cross-cultural context. It is concluded that Chinese films have many problems in the export to foreign countries, such as single film content, imperfect film industry, and little policy and legal support. This paper compares Marvel movies with Chinese films to show the shortcomings and improvements of Chinese films in the export to foreign countries and puts forward some suggestions for exporting Chinese films in a cross-cultural context. Do our best to export Chinese films to the outside world, hoping that Chinese culture can be better disseminated with the help of Chinese films.

This paper lacks first-hand data sources in the discussion process and uses existing data for case analysis. Therefore, there are no obvious unique analysis results in terms of data analysis. No extensive data or situational surveys were conducted during the writing process, so there may be little bias in the conclusions of the analysis. In the process of future investigation and research, a survey can be carried out within a certain range to investigate the public's views and suggestions on the current situation of Chinese films to make the paper's conclusions more convincing.

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