

Cultural Imagination of the Other: Representation of Chinese Actresses in Hollywood Movies

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Abstract: Images of Chinese women in Hollywood movies are the embodiment of Western cultural imagination of the East since the representation is a complex, meaningful, and concrete symbol signifying communication between different cultures. In the Hollywood imagination, the Chinese female is the Other who not only stands for exotic female images but also Chinese culture. The purpose of this paper is to address the following questions: How do Chinese women tend to be portrayed in Hollywood movies? Which characters do these Chinese actresses play? What is the aesthetic difference between East and West, and what is the connection between Chinese culture's self-recognition and the Western representation of Chinese culture? By conducting visual and textual analysis, I will undertake a comparative examination of the depictions of Chinese women in four movies: *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000), *Rush Hour 2* (2001), *X-men: Days of Future Past* (2012), and *I Am Not Madame Bovary* (2016), spanning the years 2000-2020 (two from America and two from China). This investigation will specifically center on the portrayal of two Chinese actresses, namely Ziyi Zhang and Bingbing Fan, both of whom have attained prominence within the realms of both Chinese and American cinema.

Keywords: Representation, Chinese actresses, Hollywood movies, Orientalism, the Other

1. Introduction

Gina Marchetti (1993, p. 1) has argued, "Hollywood has long been fascinated by Asians, however, Hollywood's romance with Asia tends to be a flirtation with the exotic rather than an attempt at any genuine intercultural understanding". It seems that Hollywood tends to promote a homogenous sense of American identity in which the only place for otherness is on the outside (Richardson, 2010). Therefore, Chinese characters in American cinema have been compared to a Western core in an Eastern shell, which caters to the aesthetic of Americans but disappoints the Chinese (Zhang, 1999). Literary critic Edward Said (1979, p. 71) famously wrote that "we don't need to look for correspondence between the language used to depict the Orient and the Orient itself, not because the language is inaccurate but because it is not trying to be accurate. What it is trying to do is to characterize the Orient as an alien and to incorporate it on a theatrical stage whose audience is European." Although Said focuses on the representation of the Middle East in Europe in literary works, it can be applied to the representation of Chinese women in Hollywood cinema as well.

The representations of the Orientals were developed during the time of colonialism. In the era of colonialism, the East had little power to speak against the West, while some Westerners

refused to admit the devastating consequences of colonial rule and instead emphasized the strong connection between colonialism and civilization and laid down the dishonest equations: Christianity = civilization and paganism = savagery (Desai & Nair, 2005). The so-called benefits of colonialism, such as improved living conditions, the introduction of democratic principles, and conversion to Christianity were just one-sided and disingenuous “evidence” of progress (Cesaire, 1972). Even after those Eastern colonized countries regained their independence, the East was still subordinated to the West. The geographical colonization had disappeared, but the Mother Country still influenced and even controlled the decolonized country culturally (Sharp, 2008). Westerners’ self-righteousness is also reflected in the cinema. In movies, Westerners tend to portray themselves as civilized people, while Orientals are portrayed as uncivilized. The Orientals are the cultural Other who cannot represent themselves but are represented. Their role is to highlight the nobility of Westerners while their destiny is to become “civilized” or dead (Liu 2013). For example, in the movie *The Toll of The Sea* (1922), the American, Allen, is represented as a savior to a Chinese girl Lotus Flower; the only dream Lotus Flower has is to go to the United States with Allen and be his honorable wife. Therefore, when her dream is shattered, she chooses to end her life by committing suicide.

According to Simone de Beauvoir (1949), women in gender relations have failed to achieve equal status to that of men because they are the Other who has never been seen as the subject but rather as the second sex. The oppression of women also exists in the cinema. According to feminist Claire Johnston (1973), as the cinema developed, men have been depicted with strong and distinct characteristics. However, women are depicted differently. They are presented as eternal and unchanging, with insistence on female passivity and submission to male domination. They are represented as the extension of the male’s view, the embodiment of the male’s desire. The situation for Chinese women in Western cinema is even worse. They are represented as male’s desire, and the femalized China, suffering from the Western gaze. For example, in the movie *The World of Suzie Wong* (1960), Suzie dresses in a very revealing cheongsam dress throughout most of the film, and the camera always focuses on her body. She is represented as an exotic sexy and fallen woman waiting for salvation from the white civilized man.

As Daniel-Henri Pageaux (1985) states, foreign images are comprehensive and complex. They are a description of others or an expression of the relationship and disparity between two types of cultures. In this way, the images of Chinese women symbolize China (Liu, 2016). Because of the international influence of Hollywood, how Chinese females are portrayed in American movies affects not only the American view of China but also how and to what degree Eastern culture is disseminated and understood globally.

2. Female Images in Cinema

The study of female images in cinema started in the 1960s and was influenced heavily by the second wave of feminism. In *Woman’s Cinema as Counter-Cinema*, Claire Johnston (1973) points out that since the beginning of silent films, women have been represented as an extension of the male view. Molly Haskell’s (2016, p. 4) opinion is similar to Johnston’s. In *From Reverence to Rape: The Treatment of Women in Movies*, she says: “Hollywood was not interested in sponsoring a smart, ambitious woman as a popular heroine. A woman who could compete in a man’s world would defy emotional gravity, would go against the grain of prevailing notions about the female sex. A woman’s intelligence was the equivalent of a man’s penis: something to be kept out of sight.” Influenced by Jacques Lacan’s idea of “Mirror Stage” and

Sigmund Freud's idea of sexuality, feminist film theorist Laura Mulvey (1975) argues that the presence of women is an indispensable element of spectacle in film, but it has nothing to do with the storyline. Rather, women are there to make a strong visual and erotic impact. What counts is what the female character represents: she is the love or fear of the male character. However, in herself, the woman has not the slightest importance. And in the foreword of the third edition of *From Reverence to Rape: The Treatment of Women in Movies*, the American film critic Manohla Dargis (2016, p. ix) writes that, "while women were being kept out of the studio front offices and the director's chair, the star system was producing immortals like Mary Pickford, Greta Garbo, Jean Harlow, and Marilyn Monroe—and on and on. Women were shut out of the power corridors of an industry that they were helping to build, creating art and beauty, obscuring sexism and racism."

The study of female images in cinema is still a hot topic, although the theories that feminists use to criticize films are disparate. However, they share a common understanding: female identities are informed by social codes rooted in popular culture. Continued analyses of media representations help to shed light on the ways in which our normative ideas about femininity are formed in popular culture (Gilpatric, 2010). And in some movies, female figures are still relegated to a subordinate position—either as sexual subjects lacking agency or by being placed in stereotypical domestic roles as mothers and wives—over which a relentless and unquestioned hegemonic masculinity looms large (Petrescu, 2020).

2.1 Chinese Female Images in American Cinema

Before Hollywood replaced New York as the center of the American film industry in the 1920s, an extremely negative "Chinese imagination" had already been broadly recognized in American society. This imagination, on the one hand, came from the discourse of "the yellow peril", which had been forming since Genghis Khan's invasion of Europe; on the other hand, it is related to the first batch of Chinese immigrants to the West coast of the United States who brought their cultural impact to local European immigrants (Zhang, 2012). In the early twentieth century, Chinese female images in American cinema were the objects of racism and sexism, like the Dragon lady in the film *Daughter of the Dragon* (1931), who represented the patriarchal mainstream American society's superiority as well as anxiety when faced with the "Orient" (Chang & Shi, 2019). Zhiqin Jiang (2007) states, in her book *Fumanchu & Charlie Chan: Chinese Images in American Popular Culture*, that the Chinese females in American film are represented as weak and waiting for salvation from white men.

Admittedly, in recent years, Hollywood cinema has made notable strides in adopting alternative narratives when depicting Asians, with a particular focus on Chinese women. For instance, *Crazy Rich Asians* (2018) boasted an entirely Asian cast, while *Mulan* (2020) featured a Chinese warrior woman as the lead character, effectively challenging traditional stereotypes that had previously objectified Chinese women and denied their agency. Furthermore, American independent cinema has ventured into more substantial productions, exemplified by *Everything Everywhere All at Once* (2022), which delves into the complexities of the Chinese American immigrant family experience and mother and daughter relationship. These endeavors signify a palpable progression within American cinema. Nevertheless, it is essential to note that most of these noteworthy examples received relatively negative reviews within the Chinese film market, highlighting both aesthetic and cultural disparities between East and West (Yu, 2022). Furthermore, despite these notable attempts, the prevailing depiction of Chinese women in

American cinema, particularly in Hollywood cinema productions, still predominantly features submissive roles that lack agency.

According to Xinxin Gao (2014), the changes in Chinese female images in Hollywood movies reflect the changes of Sino-American relationships, in terms of both international status and cultural interactions. The global communication of Hollywood movies enables Chinese females to perform on an international stage. But it is still hard for Chinese women to look for recognition, since in films they tend to indicate their cultural identities by choosing to stay close to other Chinese people, for example by staying in Chinatown (Kung, 2018).

This paper contributes to the ongoing academic debate on the portrayal of women in cinema. It specifically focuses on the depiction of Chinese female characters in American films as opposed to their counterpart in Chinese cinema. The objective of this paper is to discern recurring themes and trends in their representation. To achieve this, the paper conducts a comparative analysis between Chinese females in Chinese cinema and Chinese female characters in American cinema, aiming to uncover distinctive representations within these two cinematic contexts.

2.2 Research Samples

To analyze the cultural reasons behind the aesthetic differences in the depictions of Chinese females in Hollywood films and Chinese films, the chapter explores four movies, two from Hollywood and two from China, focusing on two famous actresses from 2000-2020, a time when China gained a higher international recognition than ever before. This recognition implies more possibilities for Chinese actresses to fight for their roles and images in Hollywood movies.

This research centers its attention on two prominent figures from mainland China who have made contribution to Hollywood cinema and international cinema: Ziyi Zhang and Bingbing Fan. Forbes China consistently ranked Zhang among China's top 10 most influential celebrities from 2004 to 2014, and similarly, Fan held a place among China's top 10 most influential celebrities between 2008 and 2018. As a result, Zhang and Fan garnered worldwide recognition during the periods spanning from 2000 to 2010 and from 2010 to 2020, respectively. Therefore, their works provide valuable insights into the cultural significance of Chinese women representations in Hollywood cinema. This research will focus on an in-depth analysis and comparison of four characters portrayed by these two actresses.

3. Visual Analysis and Comparison of Images

3.1 Ziyi Zhang: *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (Chinese) vs. *Rush Hour 2* (Hollywood)

Ziyi Zhang is a celebrated actress in China. She gained a stellar reputation within China after taking part in *My Father and Mother* directed by Yimou Zhang. After that, she secured one of the leading lady roles —Jiaolong Yu—in Ang Lee's movie *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000). This role helped her obtain worldwide recognition. In 2001, she started to look for chances to act in Hollywood movies and was cast in the leading role of Li Hu in Brett Ratner's movie *Rush Hour 2* (2001).

The narrative pattern of these two movies is associated with the Chinese Kongfu drama involving the “Swordswoman”, which features a fight against orthodoxy or patriarchy. However, in *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, the film critiques the oppressive nature of patriarchy towards women, portraying Jiaolong Yu as a swordswoman with a unique sense of agency and subjectivity. Conversely, in *Rush Hour 2*, it appears to perpetuate the Dragon Lady stereotype, portraying women as a potential threat to patriarchy, and depicting Li Hu as an object of the male gaze while adopting a Kung Fu girl persona.

3.1.1 Ancient Chinese Swordswoman and Hollywood Modern Kongfu Girl

In *The History of Chinese Martial Arts Film*, Mo Chen (2005) contends that the spirit of the swordsman is an outlook on life. And Ang Lee’s *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* is a typical film focusing on discussing swordsmen’s (swordswomen’s) outlook on life. Zhang plays Jiaolong Yu, one of the leading roles of the film. Yu is the daughter of a noble family. Seemingly, she is a normal noble lady who can meet her family’s expectations, which are to be elegant, demure and obedient. But beneath the persona, Yu is a true warrior; in the movie, she battles her way to freedom, to escape from the oppression of traditional patriarchy. In the movie, Jianghu (江湖) is the metaphorical free land for Yu, and Mubai Li is exactly the kind of person that she wants to become. Yu plans three escapes but frees herself by committing suicide when she realizes that there is no so-called free land in the world.

Rush Hour 2 generally follows the traditional Kongfu drama narrative, with elements like a master (Ricky Tan) and an apprentice (Li Hu), orthodox power (Government) and un-orthodox power (Triad), rebellion and suppression being included. In the movie, Ziyi Zhang plays a Kongfu girl, Li Hu, who is the right-hand woman of Ricky Tan, the main villain in the movie. Hu is an orphan who is adopted and raised by Tan. She is trained to be a skillful killer who can fight beautifully. Hu is killed at the end of the movie by a bomb that she detonates herself.

3.1.2 Comparison

Although both Yu and Hu are associated with “swordswoman” narratives, they differ substantially. Yu is a character with agency and a strong sense of subjectivity, and the film *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* emphasizes this aspect through three distinct scenes. The first is her escape from her noble identity. While traveling to Xinjiang with her mother, Yu is robbed by a group of brigands led by Xiaohu Luo. Instead of staying with her mother to be rescued, Yu starts to chase Luo herself. While chasing and fighting Luo, Yu is attracted by his way of living. Therefore, she chooses to stay with him and gives up her noble identity.

The second part depicts Yu’s escape from her marriage. Persuaded by Luo, Yu goes back to her parents but is forced to marry into another noble family. Longing for freedom, Yu chooses to run away on her wedding day and dresses herself up as a male. She starts her new life as a swordswoman.

The third part is an escape from life. After being saved by Li and killing him by accident, Yu finally realizes that there is no free land in the world, oppression of women exists in Jianghu as well. Thus, in the last scene of the movie, Yu chooses to break the invisible chains on her by committing suicide.

In contrast to Yu, who possesses a strong sense of self-awareness, Li Hu in *Rush Hour 2* is portrayed more as a puppet, manipulated and controlled by Ricky Tan; everything she does is

plotted by Tan. In the movie, Hu lacks agency and is replaceable. There are four key scenes in which Hu is featured, all revolving around a common theme: fight and kill.

In the first scene, Hu is instructed by Tan to kill Hong Kong Police Chief Inspector Lee but fails. In the second scene, Hu kills Tan, but it turns out that Tan is behind this and the so-called kill is just a ploy. In the third scene, Hu is asked by Tan to kidnap Lee, and in the last scene, Hu's only purpose is to kill Lee even though her accomplices are controlled and Tan is dead. Hu is nothing but a killing machine. She is a character with no agency. Feelings, thoughts and emotions—all of the characteristics related to humanity — are removed from her, making her nothing but an object waiting to be manipulated.

The portrayals of Yu and Hu's appearances are also quite different. Yu has two main appearances in *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*. While staying at home, Yu is dressed up as a noble lady: she wears a luxury Qi dress and Qi shoes with beautiful earrings, intricate hair accessories and light makeup. In Yu's very first scene, the lens starts from a full shot and then moves to her upper body while she is talking, and finally focuses on her face with focused light when she starts to lead the conversation. According to eye tracking studies, the human face is the focus of attention whenever we see one on a cinema screen (Brown, 2015). Therefore, lots of close-ups are used to highlight Yu's facial expression, which can be helpful for the audience to understand that she has another identity behind this noble lady persona. For example, when Yu holds Li's sword for the first time, the lens focuses on her eyes to highlight her curiosity and excitement. When Yu says that she will get married soon, there are close-ups on her face again to show her sense of loss.

When starting her life as a swordswoman, Yu wears loose, coarse clothes with flats. Her hair is tied up and she wears no jewelry or makeup at all. The combination of a panoramic lens, full shots and close-ups portrays Yu as a swordswoman of great skill. While fighting with Li in the bamboo forest, the panoramic lens shows the fierceness of the fight, and then there is a full shot, highlighting Yu's great fighting skills. The following close-up on her firm eyes shows that Yu is persistent.

However, Hu has four main appearances in line with her four key scenes in *Rush Hour 2*. On a roof in Hong Kong, Hu has her first fight with Lee. In this scene, Hu is in a tight black Chinese style dress and wears heavy makeup (dark blue eye shadow and shiny red lipstick) with her long black hair down. There is no close-up of Li Hu in this scene. The lens focuses on her upper body with a low angle to amplify her body from the perspective of the weak, therefore, highlighting her cruelty. Hu looks at the camera and smiles maliciously and silently. What audiences can learn from this scene is that Li Hu is like a fighting machine with a beautiful figure.

Then, on Tan's yacht in Hong Kong, Hu is in a black suit with a pink shirt. She has her hair tied up and wears dark red lipstick with golden eye shadow. There is only one close-up of her face, and it shows her brutality while fighting Lee's partner. Ironically, Lee's partner does not even see her as a threat, but flirts with her during the fight. Most of the time, the camera focuses on her upper body or regards her as part of the *mise-en-scène*. In other words, Hu is the accessory of the man, arousing the lust of men both in the and out of the scene.

Next, in a car in Los Angeles, wearing dark lipstick and eyeshadow, Hu is in a tight black leather jacket with her hair tied up. This scene focuses on the interaction between her and a woman who is an undercover agent of the FBI. There is not much conversation between them, mainly just eye contact. Close-ups are used to show Hu's exaggerated facial expressions, fake smile, and mean eyes highlighting that she is a crafty and suspicious person while the undercover agent with firm eyes is a brave counterpart.

And finally, at a casino of Las Vegas, Hu is in a black Tang suit and her hair is tied up with a red chopstick. In this scene, Hu acts like a real killing machine. Even though she is beaten again and again, she never runs, escapes or even flinches. She shows no human feelings but fights emotionlessly, coldly. Ironically, even though the fight is tense, both Lee and his partner spare some time to flirt with Hu physically and verbally. Lee kisses Hu, and Lee's partner praises Hu during the fight, he says: "*I'm gonna pretend you're a man. A very beautiful man with a perfect body... Who I'd like to take to the movies.*"

In all, in *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, the appearances aligned with the identities of Yu and the uses of the lens help the audience to understand Yu and her inner world better, while in *Rush Hour 2*, all of Hu's appearances are trying to highlight one thing: Hu is an attractive but vicious exotic woman. Although Hu is aggressive, the uses of the lens and the interaction between her and the other characters indicate that she is the object being gazed at by men.

Also, the lines of Yu and Hu reveal their differences. According to Louis Giannetti (2008), dialogues can be a rich source of meaning in films and can reflect the character's feelings, thoughts, attitude, and even personality and status. In *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, rich dialogues between Yu and other characters help to build Yu's tangled identities and embody her personality. At the Lord's home, Yu meets Xiulian Yu for the first time. The long conversation between these two characters reveals their personalities and different attitudes to life. There is a line spoken by Yu that indicates her longing for freedom, for Jianghu: "*I'll get married soon, but I have never experienced the life I want. Getting married is good, but living in freedom with someone we really love and love him in our own way is the real happiness.*" In a forest, Yu and Li have a fight and during the fight Yu yells: "*You are just another person who is trying to discipline and chain me, I don't need that. I only need the sword.*" Yu's lines enrich her personality, and portray her as a character longing for pure freedom and to be in control of her own life.

In contrast, in *Rush Hour 2*, Hu only has eight lines in total, and most of them are as simple as: "*Go to hell!*" "*Get them into the car!*" "*Out!*". Hu is teased by Lee's partner; however, she barely responds verbally, and instead, fights back silently. In contrast, the undercover FBI agent has more lines. She takes the initiative to flirt with Lee and his partner and her lines convey more information through which her character can be understood better. For example, when Lee's partner meets her for the first time at a yacht, the long conversations between them introduce her to the audience as an elegant upper-class lady, and then, her true identity as an FBI agent is revealed both to Lee and his partner after another long conversation between them during a mistake made by Hu.

Thus, as a Chinese Kongfu girl, Hu's mission is to be an exotic object in the movie. The construction of this character is rather simple. She is born to be a villainess and to die as a villainess. Conversely, Yu is a character with a strong sense of subjectivity. Her personality is complete, including both her appearance and her spiritual side. However, Chinese Kongfu girls in Hollywood movies are accessories to men, triggering their lust, and representing a threat (Liu, 2015). Therefore, Hu is a mysterious and dangerous exotic creature in the movie, and what makes her attractive to Western audiences is not her soul but her appearance; however, her appearance is toxic as well, since she is vicious and dangerous, which is the Western imagination of Easterners.

3.2 Bingbing Fan: *I Am Not Madame Bovary* (Chinese) vs. *X-Men: Days of Future Past* (Hollywood)

Having started her career in 1996, Bingbing Fan rose to fame with the TV series *Princess Pearl*. Fan reached the apex of her career after acting as the leading lady in the movie *I Am Not Madame Bovary* (2016), for which she won the best actress at the Tokyo International Film Festival, the Golden Horse Festival, and the San Sebastián Film Festival. She began actively seeking opportunities in Hollywood movies in 2012, eventually securing roles in *X-Men: Days of Future Past* (2014), *The King's Daughter* and *The 355*. However, the latter two had not yet been released at the time this research was undertaken, and therefore this article will primarily concentrate on her role in the first movie.

I Am Not Madame Bovary is a movie about a divorced woman fighting to defend her reputation in a society dominated by males, while *X-Men: Days of Future Past* is a typical superhero movie from Hollywood. Therefore, these two movies have different narrative patterns.

3.2.1 Divorced Woman vs. Superheroine

In the movie *I Am Not Madame Bovary*, Xuelian Li, played by Fan, is the leading lady. Li is a rural woman. Her husband Yuhe Qin wants to fake a divorce with her to get an apartment in the county. However, after divorcing her and getting the house, Qin marries another woman rather than Li and accuses Li of being Madame Bovary just because she is not a virgin before their first marriage. Li is mad at Qin's trumped-up accusation, so she starts her journey to defend her reputation, going from the local court to the National People's Congress, and all of the officers who accept and hear Li's case are males. The story of Li is the epitome of Chinese females under the oppression of the patriarchy. Li serves as a metaphor, symbolizing the fate of Chinese women ensnared within the confines of patriarchal values (Gao, 2021).

X-Men: Days of Future Past is a film from the *X-Men* series. The story starts in the future when mutants and human beings are having endless wars, and both are on the verge of destruction. Professor X wants to send Logan (Wolverine) to the past to stop an assassination so that the future can be changed so that the mutants and human beings can live together peacefully. Blink, played by Bingbing Fan, is one of the mutants who protects Professor X and his team to make sure that the time travel can be successful.

3.2.2 Comparison

Li and Blink are two very different characters. Li is an ordinary rural woman and a very vivid character. Being uneducated, she is a speculator when it comes to money, lying to Qin's company by faking a divorce with him in order to get a rural apartment. She is also ignorant of the law, and there are two scenes in the movie that highlight her ignorance.

At the court, Li accuses Qin of tricking her to fake a divorce from her, when she is informed that the so-called fake divorce is a real divorce according to the law. Li is so mad that she starts to quarrel with the witness and the judge. When she realizes that Qin will not apologize to her and the local government cannot provide justice to her, she tries to find a man to help her kill Qin as a condition to sleep with him. She is held in contempt of court and tries to obtain justice herself via illegal means.

However, unlike most uneducated rural women, Li is not silent (Gao, 2021). She is a person with a strong faith and a believer in justice. After Qin denies that their divorce had been a sham and a part of their scheme, and he accuses her of being Madame Bovary, Li embarks on a decade-long battle to defend her reputation. Li sues Qin at the local court. After being denied justice, she sues Qin and the local court at the county government. After being denied justice again, she sues Qin, the local government, and the county government before the municipal government, and finally she sues all of them before the National People's Congress. Ironically, all of the officers that hear her case are males. Li is a fighter. She fights males who try to chain her in the name of women's virtues—being demure and obedient. She fights a government that ignores the ordinary citizens' voices. Further, she fights against a patriarchal society that tries to silence females (Hu et al., 2016).

In contrast, Blink is a superwoman possessing extraordinary powers, including the ability to teleport herself and others. However, in the movie, she is portrayed as a character lacking depth or complexity.

Throughout the entire movie, Blink is only featured in three scenes. The first scene is at the beginning of the movie, when Sentinels are hunting her and her partners. Blink runs to the right ahead of the camera and says: "*Time's Up*". The camera focuses on her upper body with soft light on her face, and then the fight begins. Blink works as an assistant to teleport her partners. The second scene takes place when Blink and her fellow partners gather at a Chinese-style temple to join Professor X's team for the time travel mission. During this scene, Blink does not have any dialogue or interactions with other superheroes. She is depicted leaning against a wall, casually peeling fruit. There is a very short close-up of Blink when she is introduced to Professor X, but most of the time she is just a part of the *mise-en-scène*. The final scene featuring Blink occurs when the Sentinels locate their position in China and launch a violent attack on Blink and her comrades. Blink aids her partners in delaying the Sentinels, ensuring the continuity of the time travel mission. Tragically, she meets her demise during the battle. In the film, Blink is given just one line, two close-up shots and three appearances. She is portrayed as a character devoid of substantial personality or depth.

Li is a normal rural woman with moral defects, but she is also an extraordinary woman, fighting for justice. However, Blink is a superheroine without a soul. She is only a body waiting to be turned into an object of male desire.

Li is undoubtedly a beautiful woman in the film. However, her beauty is not emphasized or exploited to cater to the male gaze, both within the scenes and outside of them. Li has two main appearances in the movie. As the sole chef and waitress at her small diner, Li is constantly occupied with various tasks. In the early scenes, she wears minimal or, opts for loose, dark clothing with her arms covered, and occasionally dons a headscarf.

There is a scene in the movie in which Li finds Qin and tries to ask him to tell the truth about their divorce. However, Qin refuses to do so and accuses her of being Madame Bovary. The scene starts with a wide shot focus on the characters' backs. Li stands at the right corner facing off with Qin and his buddies. Then, a follow-up shot focuses on Li's upper body. She wears an ill-fitting old dark overcoat with her hair tied up and carries a worn bag. In the scene, Li's appearance aligns with her identity: she is an oppressed woman who still pins her hope on patriarchy, and she is willing to accept her fate once Qin apologizes to her. But she is disappointed by the lack of remorse on the part of her ex-husband.

After being disappointed, Li cuts her hair, which is a metaphorical new start for her, since in Chinese culture cutting one's hair is a symbol of saying goodbye to the past (Guo, 2015). Li

mainly wears light colors with no arm coverings after cutting her hair. Li frees herself from the chores, which also signifies the awakening of her self-consciousness. Li starts to fight against her former identity, which was built by her husband, males and even the patriarchy. Therefore, after that, the journey of a brand-new Li who fights for her reputation begins.

In contrast, Blink is an attractive superheroine, not because of her great fighting skills but because of her appearance. In the movie, she has only one appearance: she has beautiful long purple hair, and she wears dark eye shadow, deep red lipstick and light green contact lenses. She is in a tight black suit with sequins on the back and a deep V-neck, which defines the curves of her body. Unlike Li, Blink is not introduced as a beautiful woman, but every detail of her is designed to be physically attractive. Therefore, in the movie Blink not only works as a silent assistant but as a sexy object that satisfies males' lustful voyeurism.

Thus, Li is a nobody. However, her distinct characteristics give her depth, making her a true superwoman who dares to confront a male-dominated society. In contrast, despite being meant to be a superheroine and a formidable warrior fighting for peace among both humans and mutants, Blink is reduced to a mere physical presence without any distinguishing characteristics or the opportunity to speak. Blink is a real nobody.

4. Chinese Female Images in Cinema: A Retrospective Reflection

The argument about representations of Chinese females in Hollywood is a game between Eastern cultural self-recognition and the Western imagination of the East. The very first Chinese female character, a nameless lantern bearer Anna May Wong in the Hollywood movie *The Red Lantern* in 1919 marked the start of Chinese actresses' journey in the Hollywood movie industry (Leong, 2005). China, back then, was a backward and mysterious country that had little chance to present itself on an international stage. The characters that Chinese females played in Hollywood movies were rather weak, humble, and unimportant, which was a concrete reflection of the Western imagination of China; or they were sexy but vicious, beautiful, and pathetic, which is another typical mode of constructing exotic female images. These characters existed to cater to the curiosity of Western audiences, but their story could never challenge these audiences' cultural superiority. These audiences were the admirers, judges, and saviors.

A century has passed, and although the presence of Chinese female characters in Hollywood movies has increased, their roles largely remain as one-dimensional as they were in the past. Despite some attempts to provide alternative narratives for Chinese women as mentioned earlier in this paper, they are predominantly depicted as either alluring yet villainous exotic figures or as compliant assistants to white male characters. These portrayals typically feature limited dialogues or lengthy lines that could help audiences gain a deeper understanding of these characters. All they need to say is: "*Go to hell.*", "*Help!*", and "*Thank you.*"

The Chinese film industry recognizes Ziyi Zhang and Bingbing Fan, because of their ability to play vivid characters with depth. In the movies analyzed above, Jiaolong Yu and Xuelian Li are ordinary people with defects: they are selfish, cold-blooded and rude. However, they are brave women fighting for freedom and trying to break their invisible chains as well. Although, they both are portrayed as physically attractive, they are not defined by their physical appearance solely. In contrast, Hollywood accepts Zhang and Fan merely for their exotic appearances. What Hollywood wants is simple and highly stereotypical characters, and both Li Hu and Blink are depicted as soulless "Eastern bodies" with lovely faces and beautiful figures that gratify the male and Western gaze. Meanwhile, they either have vicious hearts, or they are always ready to be a

white man's assistant, permanently occupying characterless, subordinate positions in relation to white men. Thus, Chinese women are frequently depicted as subordinate to men. These portrayals often attribute their perceived weakness to their "Oriental" heritage, with such notions of fragility further reinforced by gender-related attributes.

With the development of Eastern culture, China is entering the international stage, and Chinese actresses have more chances to represent themselves. However, they are still struggling at the edge of the stage, since the cultural segregation is not easy to break (Liu, 2015). Moreover, Hollywood has great cultural influence globally, which sometimes even makes the Chinese accomplices in terms of accepting Western stereotypes of Easterners and Eastern cultures.

5 Conclusion

Chinese females, serving as tangible symbols in cinema that project Chinese culture onto the global stage, were historically juxtaposed with Western female archetypes. Their Oriental characteristics, such as black hair, red lips and small eyes were emphasized, coupled with notions of fragility, obedience, and tragic narratives, collectively defining them as the so-called Chinese women in the eyes of Western audiences. The significance of their existence was determined not by themselves but by Western perspectives. They were utilized as symbols within Western discourse to elucidate the East and the Other, thereby reinforcing Western cultural dominance (Wang, 2012).

With the development of Chinese society and culture, Chinese women now have increased opportunities to either be portrayed or represent themselves on the international stage. However, the exchange between Eastern and Western cultures remains imbalanced. Consequently, regardless of the diverse roles that Chinese actresses have played or will play, they continue to be trapped in the stereotype of being the Other. Breaking free from the cultural othering is a formidable challenge. Therefore, to present Chinese women as individuals with agency and a strong sense of subjectivity, it is imperative not only to strive for opportunities to perform on the existing international stage but also to cultivate the capacity to construct an international stage of our own.

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