

The Acceptance and Recontextualization of Chinese-Language Films in Foreign Streaming Media Markets

Xinghao Li

*College of Humanities and Social Sciences, Beijing Normal University-Hong Kong Baptist
University, Zhuhai, China
s230031122@mail.uic.edu.cn*

Abstract. Against the backdrop of the rapid development and expansion of the global streaming media ecosystem and the popularity of localized operation strategies, Chinese-language films, if they want to "go global", are confronted with continuous challenges of "visibility - understandability - likeability". This paper, based on the comprehensive research of platforms and cross-cultural communication, and by sorting out the content acquisition and algorithmic recommendation mechanisms of platforms, the preferences of audience types, and the recontextualization strategies, constructs an analytical framework of "platform - audience". Research indicates that: Firstly, the platform's procurement of works/self-production of content and personalized recommendations jointly determine whether Chinese-language films can "be seen", but they may also cause the audience to be confined to specific circles, resulting in the predicament of being unable to break out of the circle for development; Secondly, historical/realistic themes are restricted by the cultural environment in which the audience grew up and the narrative rhythms they encounter in daily life, making it difficult for them to be accepted across cultures; Thirdly, a variety of recontextualization strategies centered on high-quality multilingual subtitles and local dubbing, limited reconstruction of rhythm and cultural symbols, are key factors in enhancing the completion rate, audience word-of-mouth, and positive feedback on the work. Based on this, this paper proposes that the platform should form a systematic synergy in the communication chain of "visibility enhancement - comprehension support - feedback reinforcement" to provide strategic support for the global dissemination of Chinese-language films.

Keywords: Chinese-language films, Streaming media platform, Cross-cultural acceptance, Recontextualization, Algorithm recommendation

1. Introduction

This study focuses on the historical process and current pattern of global streaming media platforms reshaping cross-border film and television dissemination through "global distribution + localized operation". Under this framework, the overseas dissemination of Chinese-language films is confronted with the challenge of a continuous leap from "visibility - understandability - likeability".

To solve this difficult problem, this paper proposes a dynamic system in which the platform mechanism, audience preferences and cultural context work together.

This research mainly unfolds from three specific aspects: First, the mechanism of platform content acquisition and presentation; Secondly, there are differences in the structure and type of audience acceptance; Thirdly, the recontextualization strategy. This research is of significance both academically and practically. On the one hand, integrating platform governance, algorithmic recommendation, audio-visual translation and media research can explain the path dependence and structural imbalance of cross-border dissemination of non-English content from the mechanism level, and make up for the limitations of the single "content-audience" perspective. On the other hand, in practice, actionable strategies can be provided for streaming platforms and content providers: by enhancing visibility, offering understanding support, and strengthening positive feedback to improve completion rates and word-of-mouth, thereby expanding the global influence and audience of Chinese-language films.

2. Background

In the context of the rapid reshaping of the global media landscape, streaming media platforms have replaced many traditional cinema chains and TV stations and are becoming the main channels for cross-border film and television dissemination. International mainstream platforms represented by Netflix have restructured the dissemination path of film and television works with their personalized distribution mechanisms and global coverage networks [1]. Meanwhile, with the improvement of the production level of film and television works in non-English speaking countries and regions and the increase in global acceptance, they have gained more say and opportunities in international film and television dissemination. As one of the countries with the greatest development potential and the fastest progress in the world, China produces a huge number of Chinese-language films every year and continuously expands its international influence and popularity through the promotion of cultural soft power construction.

However, in the face of the complex ecosystem of foreign streaming platforms, the acceptance of Chinese-language films is still at a relatively low level. These films have not gained wide recognition in overseas markets, and the impact they have formed is also very limited. Although in recent years, a few films such as "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon" and "The Wandering Earth" have achieved a certain degree of overseas dissemination through streaming media platforms [2,3]. Overall, however, the influence and acceptance of Chinese-language films on foreign platforms remain relatively low, in sharp contrast to the situation in China [4]. This disparity has drawn widespread attention: Why do Chinese-language films have a fragmented phenomenon where they are highly popular in China but often fail to gain popularity overseas?

Against this backdrop, recontextualization, as a means to connect cultural producers and target audiences, has become an important keyword for understanding the differences in the acceptance of Chinese-language films. Recontextualization not only involves surface language processing such as subtitles and dubbing, but also concerns the marketing recommendation logic of the film, visual packaging, and even the cultural adaptation of emotional rhythm [5,6]. It is more like a re-arrangement of cultural significance, directly influencing overseas audiences to watch, understand and evaluate works from the Chinese-speaking world. The acceptance of Chinese-language films is not merely about the act of watching itself, but also involves a series of deeper cultural activities such as cognition, understanding, emotion, reflection, and social participation.

Based on the above situation, this article focuses on the acceptance status and recontextualization path of Chinese-language films in foreign streaming media markets, explores the interaction and

dissemination logic among platforms, works, and audiences, aiming to answer and solve the following questions: Against the backdrop of the prevalence of streaming media platforms, which Chinese-language films can be seen? After being seen, can one be truly accepted? Through what recontextualization mechanism can this cultural connection be achieved?

3. Content selection mechanism for streaming media platforms

In the era of global streaming media, streaming platforms like Netflix play a crucial role in content dissemination. As the platform with the largest number of subscribers worldwide, Netflix is positioned for global local operation. Through its diverse film library and original content, it attracts audiences from all over the world. In recent years, Netflix's subscriber base in the Asia-Pacific region has exceeded 50 million, accounting for 15% of its global user base and making it the largest growth market [7]. This growth is mainly attributed to the platform's active expansion of Asian content represented by Chinese-language works.

Streaming media platforms adopt a dual-track model of procurement and self-production in the acquisition of content for Chinese-language films. In terms of copyright procurement, the platform will select promising works based on the popularity and reputation of Chinese-language films in the domestic market to purchase overseas streaming media Copyrights. For instance, Netflix purchased the global streaming rights to the Chinese sci-fi film "The Wandering Earth" in February 2019, and the film was released in May of the same year [3]. In this way, this film that achieved great success in China was introduced to global audiences, exploring a new path for Chinese-language blockbusters to go global. In terms of original collaboration, Netflix invests funds to work with Chinese-language creators to develop works and has a dedicated Asia-Pacific content team responsible for discovering film types with dissemination potential in the Chinese-speaking region [7,8]. In this series of introduction processes, the platform selected Chinese-language films suitable for global distribution by taking into account both commercial potential and cultural adaptability.

These platforms not only meticulously plan for content acquisition but also optimize content display through advanced algorithms and dissemination logic. Netflix is renowned for its highly personalized recommendation algorithm. However, this algorithm also has its limitations: although it can actively explore the preferences of the audience and precisely recommend Chinese-language films to potential target groups, this also leads to dissemination limitations. Foreign audiences who have not been exposed to Chinese-language films may encounter the situation where the platform rarely recommends Chinese-language films, thus lacking channels to discover high-quality Chinese-language films [9]. Therefore, the platform needs to make a trade-off between refined recommendations and enriching user experience, and strike a balance as much as possible.

4. Analysis of acceptance of Chinese-language films

To assess the acceptance of Chinese-language films in the global streaming media era, it is necessary to clearly define the data and indicators for measuring acceptance. As important indicators of a film's popularity, the number of viewers and the duration of viewing are the key points we must pay attention to. At the end of 2022, a survey conducted by the Global Times of over 8,000 viewers in ten countries showed that more than 80% of the respondents had watched Chinese film and television works [10]. This indicates that Chinese-language films and television programs have achieved certain results in global cultural dissemination. User ratings and word-of-mouth are also important indicators for judging acceptance. Take the Rotten Tomatoes fresh rating as an example. "Wolf Warrior 2", one of the top five box office films in Chinese film history, has a Rotten Tomatoes

fresh rating of 67%, which is higher than the average score of 58%. Meanwhile, Ang Lee's "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon" has a Rotten Tomatoes fresh rating of 97% [2,11]. The differences in such scoring indicators reflect the varying degrees of cross-cultural acceptance of different films: action, fantasy and comedy films have relatively lower dissemination thresholds and can be more easily accepted by foreign audiences.

Overall, in recent years, the global dissemination of Chinese-language films has shown a polarized pattern. On the one hand, few Chinese-language works can break through cognitive barriers and gain global recognition and popularity. Even if a few works can receive relatively high praise, their market share abroad is still far lower than the box office scale of foreign blockbusters in China, which often amounts to hundreds of millions of dollars. It can be said that there is still a long way to go for Chinese-language films to be widely spread in the culturally unfamiliar overseas markets. The reasons for this are not only limited by the distribution channels and screening times, language barriers and subtitle quality, but also due to cultural differences and emotional acceptance, non-Chinese audiences have low interest in Chinese-language films. First of all, the accuracy and contextual adaptability of subtitle translation are the foundation for the audience to understand the content of the work. However, many works use literal translation language, which, although smooth, cannot accurately convey cultural semantics [5]. Secondly, the sense of performance in dubbing is a key means of conveying emotions. In mainstream media platforms in Europe and America, providing localized voice dubbing is an important way to increase the completion rate of viewing. Chinese-language films lacking local dubbing often make it difficult for audiences to immerse themselves in the atmosphere of the works. Meanwhile, poor-quality dubbing can also have the opposite effect.

Apart from language, the construction of the communication context is also an important factor influencing whether audiences are willing to watch Chinese-language films. A good promotional and marketing strategy can not only expand the reach of the film, but also provide the audience with channels to understand the background, try to make up for cultural differences and reduce the risk of misinterpretation [12]. At the same time, Chinese-language films also need to make certain adjustments to the narrative rhythm and appropriate cultural reconstruction at the content level to better align with the cognition of the target audience. Of course, this kind of reconstruction is not blind accommodation, but rather an optimization of cultural symbols, the rhythm of the work and the emotional arrangement without affecting the main theme. Secondly, many Chinese works adopt a structure of emotional twists and turns, which is different from the traditional Western three-act model of rapid development and conclusion. They are often criticized by foreign audiences for their fragmented plots and sluggish pace. Some export films will, in response to this situation, adjust the length of the film, re-edit it, compress the build-up, and move the climax forward to adapt to the viewing habits of overseas audience [13].

In conclusion, cultural reconstruction is a strategic fine-tuning of the content of a work, which is reflected in starting from the core of the story, eliminating understanding barriers through means such as optimizing the narrative rhythm and replacing cultural symbols, and achieving better emotional resonance with emotional functions.

5. Strategy research

Apart from the adjustments made by the producers of the works to the recontext, the recommendation strategies and page structures of the streaming media platforms themselves are also crucial factors in determining whether Chinese-language films can be recognized in foreign markets.

The adjustment of the cover visualization is a major move by streaming media platforms for recontextualization. For instance, for those with a preference for animation, users can design the covers of Chinese-language films with a more anime-like feel. As for viewers who enjoy watching action films, the platform will emphasize the main character designs and explosion scenes on the covers. Meanwhile, the tags of movies can be optimized, such as Asian action, Emotional Stories, etc., to achieve cultural segmentation. For audiences in non-Asian contexts, these labels are important anchor points for them when choosing films [14]. Secondly, the design of interactive pages also plays a significant role in recontextualization. Streaming media platforms will provide auxiliary information such as character introductions and plot annotations when users are playing films as interfaces. Through these modules, cultural information is supplemented to help viewers understand the content of the works in real time [15]. It should be noted that the platform's goal for recontextualization is not to rewrite the content of the work, but to build a bridge of understanding and acceptance for the audience through the design of the visual interface and the adjustment of the recommendation algorithm.

This study focuses on the acceptance and recontextualization of Chinese-language films in foreign streaming media markets. Through the analysis of platform mechanisms, the comparison of audience acceptance, and the sorting out of contextualization paths, the following main findings have been obtained:

First of all, the acceptance process has a ternary structure of platform - audience - context. The overseas dissemination of Chinese-language films is not merely a traditional single-threaded model of content and audience, but rather a dual-threaded structure dominated by platform mechanisms, focusing on adjusting audience preferences and reconstructing cultural contexts. The platform determines the possibility of Chinese-language works being seen by overseas audiences through the introduction of mechanisms and algorithmic decisions, while the cultural background of the audience profoundly influences the depth to which the works can be understood. It is not difficult to find that the recontextualization strategy is the mediating mechanism connecting the two. Without the platform's recommendations, viewers will have no entry point to watch, and without cultural adaptation, they will not generate emotional resonance.

Secondly, there is a path dependence in terms of viewing types and a lack of context in terms of acceptance. Through the observation of cases, this paper finds that there is a structural asymmetry in the acceptance of Chinese-language films on foreign streaming media platforms. Action, kung fu and comedy films are easier for audiences to understand and accept due to their relatively low acceptance threshold. In contrast, historical and realistic themes have a lower acceptance rate among foreign audiences because of the asymmetry in narrative rhythm and emotional expression. This phenomenon indicates that audiences have inertia in their genre preferences and also shows that the current mainstream Chinese-language films, after taking into account the local acceptance preferences, have not well coordinated the emotional identification on a global scale, thus leading to an imbalance in development both at home and abroad.

Finally, recontextualization is the core variable that links the willingness to watch and the depth of acceptance. Through the comparison of cases and the construction of strategies, it can be found that high-quality dubbing with multilingual subtitles, trailers and posters that suit the tastes of local audiences, adjustments to the plot rhythm and the embedding of cultural annotations and other recontextualization means can significantly improve the completion rate, rating performance and positive feedback of Chinese-language films on foreign platforms. Without changing the main content, the way the core of the work is perceived has been improved.

Based on the above research findings, this paper proposes the following adjustment suggestions for streaming media platforms: It is necessary to optimize content visibility, pay attention to the audience's comprehension, generate system collaboration, and further build a virtuous cycle. At the same time, it is necessary to urge content producers in reverse to enhance their international expression and perception capabilities and produce cultural content that is more universal and easier for audiences to understand and accept. This will force policies and industries to establish international communication infrastructure, laying a solid foundation for the wide acceptance of works worldwide.

In the current context where the global streaming media ecosystem is becoming increasingly mature and the cross-cultural communication field is constantly expanding, how Chinese-language films can go beyond China, be seen and understood by foreign audiences and platforms, and then be loved is a common issue faced by the Chinese-language film industry and cultural communication. This article, centering on this topic, starts from the content and mechanism of the platform, and then proceeds to the path of recontextualization. By combining case studies and data analysis, it systematically reveals the crux and breakthrough points of the cross-cultural dissemination of Chinese-language films. Facing the communication predicament, this paper proposes and verifies that recontextualization is the key medium connecting platform selection and audience understanding.

6. Conclusion

Based on the analytical framework of "platform - audience - recontextualization", this paper confirms that the content acquisition on the platform and personalized recommendations jointly determine the visibility of Chinese-language films, but they are also prone to form limited and segmented reach——Action, fantasy and comedy films are more easily accepted across cultures, while historical and realistic themes are less accepted due to the limitations of narrative pace and cultural differences in their growth. Through localized subtitles and dubbing, combined with "subtext optimization" on the platform represented by covers, tags, and plot cards, as well as moderate reconstruction of the rhythm and other recontextualization methods, the completion rate, word-of-mouth, and positive feedback can be significantly improved. From this, it can be concluded that to achieve the continuous leap of "seeing - understanding - liking", the platform needs to form a systematic synergy in the communication chain of "visibility improvement - comprehension support - feedback reinforcement".

In the current context where global audio-visual cultural diversity is confronted with algorithmic convergence and dissemination barriers, if Chinese-language films want to become a part of the world's image and truly go global, they must bravely go out. Let the world's audience not only see Chinese-language images, but also be able to understand, resonate with and be willing to share the emotions and meanings within them.

References

- [1] Juteau, S. (2025) Netflix: Disrupting the entertainment market with digital technologies, time and again. *Journal of Information Technology Teaching Cases*, 15(1), 163-166.
- [2] Xie, F. (2021) The gains and losses in the overseas dissemination of Chinese martial arts films: A case study of *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*. *Audio-Visual*, (05), 102-104.
- [3] Zhao, H. (2025) Localization strategies of film communication and criticism in a globalized context: A case study of *The Wandering Earth*. *Home of Drama*, (13), 160-162.

- [4] Bu, Y.-F. and Li, C.-Q. (2021) Factors affecting the international communication market size of Chinese films: An empirical study based on Netflix streaming. *Journal of China Media and Communication Research*, (05), 103-120.
- [5] Guan, S.-H. and Hu, J. (2021) Recontextualization in English translation of film subtitles: A case study of *Lost in Russia*. *Journal of Harbin University*, 42(04), 111-113.
- [6] Peng, Q. (2022) Characteristics and strategies of film communication in the context of new media. *Western Radio & TV*, 43(7), 113-115.
- [7] Nie, Y.-Q. and Kong, L.-Q. (2024) Netflix's international development strategy and implications. *Media*, (14), 51-53.
- [8] Zhou, Y. (2020) Production and broadcasting patterns of films under streaming media context. Reference Network. Available at: <https://www.fx361.com>
- [9] Gomez Uribe, C.A. and Hunt, N. (2015) The Netflix recommender system: Algorithms, business value, and innovation. *ACM Transactions on Management Information Systems (TMIS)*, 6(4), 1-19.
- [10] Pan, X. and Shan, J. (2022) Intl markets keen on good Chinese stories: GT survey on Chinese film and television's overseas audience. *Global Times*.
- [11] Zhang, X. (2019) Cultural discount in the cross-cultural communication of *Wolf Warrior 2*: Phenomena, causes, and solutions. *Western Radio & TV*, (04), 148-150.
- [12] Araujo, M. and de Albuquerque, A. (2024) Algorithmic orientalism? Netflix's representation of China in Brazil. *Global Media and China*, 9(4), 508-520.
- [13] Wong, K.-W. (Director) (2013) *The Grandmaster* [U.S. theatrical cut]. The Weinstein Company. (Original work released 2013)
- [14] Eklund, O. (2022) Custom thumbnails: The changing face of personalisation strategies on Netflix. *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies*. Advance online publication.
- [15] Jarrett, C. (2022) What is X Ray on Prime Video? How to view bonus content. About Amazon.