

Cross-Media Communication of Chinese Mythical Animals in the *Fantastic Beasts* Series Films

Yingying Han, City University of Macau, Macau

The Asian Conference on Arts & Humanities 2025
Official Conference Proceedings

Abstract

Compared to *Mulan* (Bancroft & Cook, 1998), *Kung Fu Panda* (Osborne & Stevenson, 2008), and other Hollywood films featuring Chinese elements that still largely follow Western narrative structures, *Fantastic Beasts: The Crimes of Grindelwald* (Yates, 2018) marked a notable shift by introducing the Chinese mythical creature Zouyu into the cinematic universe. Later, in *Fantastic Beasts: The Secrets of Dumbledore* (Yates, 2022), the third installment in the series, another Chinese mythical animal, Kylin, appeared—further continuing the Western magical narrative style while incorporating Eastern cultural symbolism. The appearance of Chinese mythical animals in Hollywood films reflects not only a process of deconstruction and reconstruction within the framework of globalized cinematic language, but also demonstrates how Chinese cultural symbols are disseminated worldwide through audiovisual media. Taking the *Fantastic Beasts* series as a case study, this paper explores the cross-media communication of Chinese mythical animals, offering insight into the creative transformation and innovative development of traditional Chinese culture in a transnational context.

Keywords: Chinese mythical animals, Hollywood film, cross-media communication

iafor

The International Academic Forum
www.iafor.org

Introduction

Under the background of globalization, cultural soft power has become one of the important fields of competition in comprehensive national strength, besides enhancing cultural soft power and promoting culture to go global has become an important part of the cultural development strategy. Chinese mythical animals, as cultural elements, appearing in Fantastic Beasts series film, not only spreads the cultural implication and cultural aesthetics of Chinese traditional culture to the world, but also promotes the realization of cross-cultural identity of Chinese traditional culture.

The Cultural Implication of Chinese Mythical Animals and the Embodiment of Traditional Aesthetics

The image of mythical animals appeared along with the folk beliefs, which was born and formed since the primitive times, it plays an extremely important role in various periods. In the thousands of years, during world cultural development, many artistic images with unique cultural connotations and traditional aesthetics have emerged. Such as the ancient Egyptian Shinx, Anubis; Pegasus, water monster Hyella and Lion Griffin in Greek mythology. These images are widely used in architecture, literature, art and other fields. Most of them have a common feature: compound. Most of these mythical animals reflect a slightly grotesque traditional aesthetic. The law of aesthetics is not the same, in the harsh living environment, the ancestors' cognition of beauty was very savage and extensive. With a desire to survive, they want to have soaring wings and solid claws, so they combined these animal traits together. With the awakening of self-cognition, human beings also integrated their own images into the shaping process of them, which appeared the image of half man and half beast, such as the Greek mythical animals Kentaulos. In the early stage, because they cannot resist natural disasters, people hoped to gain the power to conquer nature through these mythical animals. Therefore, most of these mythical animals reflect the characteristics of tall, strong and divine power, and have the traditional aesthetic characteristics of grotesque.

With the collapse of the primitive society and the progress of social culture, the primitive thinking began to die out, and the ancient myth also began to change. These mythical animals gradually changed from survival sustenance to belief culture and began to integrate into the moral thought of ren, yi, li, zhi, xin. With the establishment of the feudal rites and music system and the spread of Confucianism, the mythical animals also began to acquire their own specific cultural meanings. It can be seen that Chinese mythical animals are inseparable with traditional culture. From them, we can see the evolution of Chinese civilization and the turn of traditional aesthetics for thousands of years.

Cross-Media Communication of Chinese Mythical Animals in Film and Television

At the beginning of the 21st century, Henry Jenkins put forward the concept of cross-media, which refers to the transformation of one media to another or more media, emphasizing the characteristics of different media to promote the cross-border presentation of a story in different fields.

A cross-media story unfolds across different media platforms, and each platform has new texts that make different and valuable contributions to the whole story. Every kind of media is outstanding in doing its job and responsibilities. (Jenkins, 2006/2021, p. 157)

Chinese mythical animals, due to its unique external image and cultural implication, widely appears in the film and television works. The cross-media communication phenomenon of them has also attracted the attention of the academic circles.

In the field of animation, the mythical animals is an indispensable existence. In the first full-length color animation, *The Monkey King* (Wan & Tang, 1964), the mythical animal dragon had appeared. China's first large-scale color wide screen animated feature film *Prince Nezha's Triumph Against Dragon King* (Yan et al., 1979), we could see the same identity of the dragon. Guofeng animation film *Big Fish and Begonia* (Liang & Zhang, 2016) is introduced Kun and other mythical animals. In *Green Snake* (Huang, 2021), there were not only appearing some mythical animals, but also combining traditional watercolor and realistic oil painting in the scene shaping, creating a unique cultural atmosphere.

In the field of live-action movies and TV series, there are also many mythical animals. The release of the live-action film *Monster Hunt* (Xu, 2015) has brought the cute little monster Huba, whose original shape is the mythical animals recorded in *the Classic of Mountains and Seas*. Different from the fierce beast Dijiang described in the book, in the film, Huba is similar to white radish, with a simple and honest manner and kind-hearted heart.

Since the launch of *Pokemon go* in the United States, monster games have become popular. Many games ,on the role setting, introduced mythical animals from the *Classic of Mountains and Rivers* as elements, In 2016, the game *Onmyoji* developed by Net Ease was released and launched. The game is based on the Japanese story ひゃっきやこう (Hundred Ghosts Night Journey) according to investigation, monsters recorded by the story were mostly introduced from China to Japan during the Tang Dynasty, such as the monster jade algae, its original form is nine tail fox, original form of the てんぐ is the dog monster from the *Classic of Mountains and Seas*, kappa is same as water tiger.

The Spread and Transformation of Chinese Mythical Animals in the *Fantastic Beasts* Series Films

Fantastic Beasts is the branch of the universe of *Harry Potter* created by JK Rowling. The story mainly described the early magical world from the perspective of Newt, the author of the film. Chinese mythical animals Zouyu and Kylin appeared in the film.

Traceability: Tracing the Historical Materials of Zouyu and Kylin

Zouyu first appeared in the *Classic of Mountains and Seas*, its records:

Lin country, there are precious animals, as big as a tiger, with five sets of tools and a tail longer than its body. (Wang, 2004)

Through the record, we can clearly understand that Zouyu's body shape is like a tiger, with a variety of colors on his body and a tail that is longer than his body length. He can travel thousands of miles a day. There were many historical books records about Zouyu, such as *Huainan Zi*, *Zen Wen*, *New Five Dynasties History* and *Taizong Records*. Some referred to its prototype as the snow leopard, which is very similar to the snow leopard based on its recorded characteristics such as white tiger black stripes and tail longer than body.

Kylin, a kind of auspicious beast in ancient Chinese mythology, was generated by the spread of the stars, along with Dragon, Feng, Turtle and Pixiu, they are known as the five great auspicious beasts. from the *Classic of Mountains and Seas · Overseas west longitude* and *The Legend of Gongyang*, we could know that Kylin is benevolent beast. Without wise king, it won't appear. If there is a king, it will arrive; if there is no king, it will not arrive. Male is Qi, and female is Lin. Kylin is the auspicious god pet, masters Taiping and Longevity. The images of the Kylin are many different in the recording. The appearance of the Kylin was recorded in the "Ruiying Tu" as follows: Zouyu first appeared in the *Classic of Mountains and Seas*, its records:

A sheep's head, wolf's hooves, a dome, with a body of five colors, and a height of one zhang and two feet. (The Kylin has a sheep's head, wolf's hooves, a round head, and a colorful body, about 2 meters high.) (Xiao, 1987)

A Song Dynasty stone tablet in the Confucius Temple in Qufu, Shandong Province, engraved the Kylin as: deer head, cow hoof, and ponytail. Juye County, Heze City, Shandong Province, is known as the hometown of Kylin.

Appearance: Chinese Mythical Animals Appear in Hollywood Movies

Fantastic Beasts I mainly told the story of two factions of wizards who analyzed and struggled with each other on how to survive in the Muggle world. *Fantastic Beasts: The Crimes of Grindelwald* (Yates, 2018), continued the story, which was noted that the Chinese mythical animal Zouyu appeared in this film. Its setting was a scarred ornamental animal trapped in a circus. This is the first time that Chinese elements clearly appear in the work of JK Rowling. The image setting of Zouyu in the film was very similar to that recorded in ancient books. In terms of facial shaping, Zouyu's cat eyes, fangs, claws, and colorful long tail movie image is very distinctive of China. Zouyu was trapped in the circus, in the scene where the protagonist rescued Zouyu, the environmental background presented a classic Chinese landscape style. After being rescued, this big cat led the protagonist to leave the archives, Grindelwald's assistant released magic small black cat to block them. During the fight, Zouyu shuttled between the pillars, the movements here were inspired by the traditional lion dance technique of stepping on plum blossom stakes. In the confrontation with black cats, Zouyu only threw the magical black cat with his paws, instead of killing them, which was very consistent with the characteristic of benevolent beasts.

In 2022, *Where are Fantastic Beasts: The Secrets of Dumbledore* (Yates, 2022) once again introduced the Chinese beast as a film element, this time, a highly representative Chinese mythical animal was appearing, Kylin. In the film, the sorcerers were divided into two groups, one was the Dumbledore group who insisted on peaceful coexistence with Muggle, one was the Grindelwald group who wanted to rule the Muggle world. These two groups were looking for the unicorn who could make a fair trial. The protagonist Newt found the Kylin, with a bamboo raft, in Guilin, Guangxi. Grindelwald used witchcraft to create a fake one for the trial, but Dumbledore rushed to the court with the real beast. The creative team has filmed in places such as Detian Waterfall, Lijiang River, Yangshuo and other places in Guangxi. In the film, the scene of Newt riding a bamboo raft looking for Kylin was very similar to the artistic conception of Li Jiang Yu Huo. When Newt was chased, the winged bird, carrying him, flew over a beautiful mountain peak, which was the mountain called Moon in Yangshuo, Guangxi. The image of Kylin in the film was set to look like a deer with scales, different from the traditional portrayal of a mighty figure, it presents an image of thin and weak. The movie

depicted that Kylin had the ability to see through people's hearts and make judgments, representing fairness and justice, which coincided with the Chinese record that Kylin was a benevolent beast that governed good and evil. Although Kylin did not appear in the movie for a long time, it played an extremely important role in driving the plot.

There Are Still Deficiencies in the Image Transformation and Reconstruction of Chinese Mythical Animals

The appearance of Chinese mythical animals in Hollywood movies is undoubtedly a powerful proof of Chinese culture going global, however, there are still urgent issues that need to be addressed during the conversion process.

Fantastic Beasts film team was asked in an interview how to understand Zouyu, they said, they thought Zouyu as a big cat. This is not difficult to see, as the movie has subjected Zouyu to the so-called cat like, cute, and non-beastly treatments. Therefore, in the film, the main character used a funny cat stick to comfort the violent Zouyu and put it into the box just like a Cat Aviation Box, besides when seeing the funny cat stick, Zouyu began to act like a cat. When making the plot, although the creative team tried their best to set a beast as close as possible to the historical records of Zouyu's image, due to differences in cultural background and cultural cognition, they did not fully understand this Chinese mythical beast, just simply overlay the cultural elements they examined, and confined to narrative expression under Western thinking. This is the same as the Chinese dragon that appeared earlier in *Harry Potter*, where they seem to see it only as a cloak for a character who should appear in the film. As a part of Chinese culture, Chinese mythical animals have a very profound cultural connotation and historical origin, to further introduce mythical animal elements and achieve their cross-cultural dissemination in movies, the issue of crossing cultural barriers is worth paying attention to. This is also an important reason for the problem of one-sided dissemination.

Most of the Chinese mythical animals exist in folk tales or fairy tales, and these folk stories were mainly through oral communication in the early stage. With the increasing maturity of traditional techniques, folk stories began to be preserved in the form of text, and these mythical animals also began to spread through paper media. With the maturity of modern technology, the Chinese mythical animals began to jump out from the flat text description, to obtain a more three-dimensional, more intuitive image. Advanced modern media processing technology has led to various appearances and images of them. At the same time, the problem of media adaptability has also appeared. Mythical animals image was first recorded in literature and then produced and presented to the public through modern media technology. However, the formation of appearance in the human brain through viewing literature records is subjectively influenced. As the saying goes, there are a thousand Hamlets in a thousand people. In addition, all characters and images appearing in the movie need to follow the plot arrangement. This may explain why the thin and frail Kylin and the cute Zouyu appeared. As mentioned earlier, unlike written records, imagination has the result of thousands of people and faces, and those divine beast images that are more in line with the arrangement of the work are easier to shape and spread.

This kind of film and television image created through imagination will affect people's cultural cognition and the original image of mythical beasts in the process of repeated dissemination. Subsequent films will also use this as a reference in production, which leads to the problem of homogenization. This situation further affects the audience and leads to

misunderstandings. On the other hand, this situation can also lead to a reduction in the audience's imagination space. People no longer shape the image in their minds through reading words, but instead use mechanical memory to record the animal images created for them in movies. Although from the *Fantastic Beasts* series films, the adaptation of Zouyu and Kylin, while maintaining ancient book records and trying to fit the movie as much as possible, is commendable. However, whether this adaptation completely avoids the problem of cross media adaptability is still a question worth discussing.

To some extent, the cross-media communication of mythical animals appears with the pace of commercialization. The reason is that a certain commercial product needs the cultural elements of mythical animals to serve it. At the same time, this utilization also promotes the process of cross-media communication of mythical animals. However, as a cultural symbol, the modernization process of them under the torrent of commercialization inevitably need to faces the problem of proportional coordination between culture and commerce. First of all, it is worth affirming that, as a cultural resource, the mythical animals have a strong commercial potential. This potential is not only reflected in the images shaping and dissemination in the film and television, but also reflected in the mythical animals effect produced by its own traffic and popularity. In the context of multicultural integration, they may become a trend or even a brand. The mythical animals effect can be seen in the successful marketing of the movies. The introduction of Zouyu may only be an attempt by the main creative team to observe the heat of Chinese mythical animals, but this attempt allowed them to see the unique charm and powerful commercial power generated by the integration of Chinese culture and western magic movies. Therefore, it added the mythical animal Kylin, which is more familiar to Chinese people, to the third film. On the basis of the original traffic of *Harry Potter*, the movies added Chinese mythical animals as a promotional hot spot, successfully arousing the interest of audiences from all over the world and further expanding the audience range. Many Chinese audiences had walked into the cinema to witness the appearance of Chinese mythical creatures in Hollywood movies.

Cultural products are often screened and filtered in the process of commercialization. The element of mythical animals can become a selling point for movie marketing and promotion, which proves that the traffic and popularity of themselves have the ability to be commercially monetized. This also supports that the cross-media communication of the animals under commercialization is a win-win result of culture and business. Culture spreads and inherits through the power of commerce, while commerce creates assets through the blessing of culture. However, the balance between culture and business is not easy to achieve, and the creative team needs to deeply explore the cultural connotation of itself, and reasonably transform it into commercial elements into commercial products. This kind of conversion may not necessarily achieve bidirectional success.

The Strategy of Chinese Mythical Animals to Realize Cross-Media Communication in Film and Television

As an important part of Chinese traditional culture, the transformation of Chinese mythical animals culture under the background of modern media communication has a profound meaning for the development of Chinese traditional culture in modern times. We should think deeply about what we can do to achieve this. Well, in my opinion, we may try these.

Chinese elements are increasingly appearing in Hollywood movies, which is the trend and opportunity for Chinese culture to spread around the world. As a cultural element, Chinese

mythical animals appear in Hollywood films, which make the film add an exotic color. These excellent cases undoubtedly create good opportunities for the global spread of it. Therefore, in order to further promote the transformation and development of them in film and television, and realize the global dissemination of Chinese mythical animals culture. We need to actively introduce relevant films, learn film and television language and film and television structure, and reasonably integrate film and television culture with Chinese mythical animals culture. In the process of integration, we should learn the world's excellent cultural expression forms, inherit the unique cultural implication and traditional aesthetics of the culture, and create the image of the Chinese mythical animals with the core of Chinese culture and in line with the world aesthetic. At the same time, cultural creation should be encouraged. The spread and transformation of Chinese culture cannot only rely on foreign films created by foreigners, but also need more Chinese works to provide strength for them. This requires the introduction of relevant cultural policies to encourage cultural creation. In addition, a perfect incentive platform and reward system should also be established to jointly promote the creation and development of relevant high-quality film and television works. The elimination of cultural cognitive barriers under the same language background makes the cultural creation can better excavate the core of the culture and transfer the value of it. To sum up, drawing on excellent international works and encouraging the creation of local mythical animals culture will better promote the global dissemination of Chinese mythical animals.

Under the tide of globalization, many Chinese cultural elements have been transformed into film language to achieve cross-text interpretation development in the Hollywood film universe. As a major branch of traditional Chinese culture, Chinese mythical animals culture's magical color is highly in line with the aesthetic orientation of Hollywood surreal films. This magic color also creates opportunities for the global spread of it. At the same time, in the era of globalization, the concept of postmodernism pursuing the rejection of truth has begun to rise. Under the influence of postmodernism, modern aesthetic began to turn to postmodern aesthetic, and grotesque has also begun to become the artistic orientation of postmodern aesthetic, while the artistic image of mythical animals itself has the characteristics of grotesque. In this context, the artistic image building of Chinese mythical animals should grasp the global aesthetic characteristics, and realize the global communication through the modern artistic expression forms.

Most of the global communication of Chinese mythical animals takes cultural products as the carrier. For cultural exchanges, the output of cultural products has more public significance. Copyright runs through every link of the creation and dissemination of cultural products. With the development of Internet technology, piracy is rampant, and the lack of copyright protection seriously restricts the author's enthusiasm for creation. It is urgent to establish a relevant legal mechanism to deal with related infringement disputes and piracy limited. First of all, a protection structure with copyright law as the core should be built. Without core laws, the treatment of legal issues may lead to different results. Therefore, it is necessary to establish a one core copyright protection model. Secondly, make clear the referee rules. Strictly define infringement behavior, timely update and improve existing laws and regulations, supplement loopholes in rules, and eliminate the behavior of wiping the ball all over. Finally, strengthen the enforcement of punishment. Increasing the production and circulation cost of pirated works can effectively reduce the emergence of piracy. This requires the relevant departments to set up a professional team, timely supervise and punish piracy activities. Only by strengthening the copyright protection of cultural products and shaping a good environment for cultural creation can more artistic and cultural workers be attracted to participate in the field of cultural creation, and cultural creation can have a stronger

endogenous power. The global communication of Chinese mythical animals cannot be separated from excellent cultural products, and the enhancement of endogenous power can improve the quality of cultural products.

Hollywood, which spreads American values as its core, keeps introducing Chinese elements to keep them fresh while also preventing the emergence of cultural invasion. As one of the most common symbols of Chinese culture, the appearance of Chinese mythical animals in Hollywood films inevitably shows the characteristics of westernization. This phenomenon provides support for the above viewpoint. This westernization feature based on cultural cognitive barriers and cultural protection also gradually changes the image of mythical animals in people's cognition through communication. As we cheer for the spread of Chinese culture in the world, how to preserve the national exclusivity and iconic issues of culture requires us to calm down and rethink. To regard Chinese mythical animals culture as pioneers in the global dissemination of traditional Chinese culture, it is necessary to be vigilant about the maintenance of cultural connotation. This requires the joint efforts of all sectors of society. First, strengthen the publicity and guidance of the international cultural core and enhance the export of Chinese values. With a solid cultural orientation and high-level cultural policy command, the loss of the cultural core of Chinese mythical animals in the spread of globalization will be alleviated. Secondly, the academic circle should strengthen the cultural and academic research. We should actively build the field of Chinese mythical animals culture, submit relevant academic papers to high-quality international journals, and hold academic seminars on transnational cultural exchanges. Finally, make good use of the translation language in the process of film introduction. When movies convey values, they are not only through image language, but also through text language such as lines. This requires translators to know more about the characteristics of Chinese culture in the process of language transformation, and better transform the values conveyed in the lines and narration into content more in line with the Chinese cultural context, so as to prevent the risk of cultural invasion to a certain extent.

Conclusion

Under the background of cross-cultural exchanges, Chinese elements repeatedly appeared in Hollywood movies, the spread of the Chinese elements development through several stages, from the initial one-way dissemination of western style culture to the revitalization and vitality, the main body consciousness of Chinese traditional culture began to awaken and gradually take the initiative in the process of globalization. As an important part of traditional culture, Chinese mythical animals culture have appeared in Hollywood films for many times because of their grotesque characteristics in line with the postmodern aesthetic and their high artistic value. Judging from the *Fantastic Beasts* series, The Hollywood journey of Chinese mythical animals is highly anticipated and anticipated. Although the modern spread of it shows a trend of promising future, the difficulties and risks they will face still need us to be vigilant. Globalization not only provides opportunities for the exchange and integration of various cultures and challenges for mutual confrontation, but also provides fertile ground for the invasion of language and culture. The research and excavation of cultural core and the adaptation to changes in textual media are issues that need long-term attention for the global dissemination of Chinese mythical animals. In a word, Chinese mythical animals culture has great potential for development. The evolution and transformation of it from *the Classic of Mountains and seas* to Hollywood is undoubtedly a strong proof of the creative transformation and innovative development of Chinese traditional culture.

References

- Bancroft, T., & Cook, B. (Directors). (1998). *Mulan* [Film]. Walt Disney Pictures.
- Henry, J. (2021). *Fusion Culture: The Conflict Zone between New Media and Old Media*, translated by Du Yongming, Beijing: The Commercial Press.
- Huang, J. (Director). (2021). *Green Snake* [Film]. Light Chaser Animation Studios.
- Jenkins, H. (2021). Fusion culture: The conflict zone between new media and old media (D. Yongming, Trans.). The Commercial Press. (Original work published 2006).
- Liang, X., & Zhang, C. (Directors). (2016). *Big Fish and Begonia* [Film]. Enlight Pictures.
- Osborne, M., & Stevenson, J. (Directors). (2008). *Kung Fu Panda* [Film]. DreamWorks Animation.
- Wan, L., & Tang, C. (Directors). (1964). *The Monkey King* [Film]. Shanghai Animation Film Studio.
- Wan, L., & Te, W. (Directors). (1964). *The Monkey King* [Film]. Shanghai Animation Film Studio.
- Wang, Y. (2004). Ming Dynasty "auspicious" beast "Zouyu" test. *Jinan historiography*, (00), pp. 191-201.
- Xiao, H. (1987). "Rui beast" Kirin and folk decorative art. *Journal of Henan University (Philosophy and Social Sciences edition)*, 2, 114-116.10.15991/j.cnki.411028.1987.02.024
- Xu, C. (Director). (2015). *Monster Hunt* [Film]. Edko Films Ltd.
- Yan, D., Wang, S., & Xu, J. (Directors). (1979). *Prince Nezha's Triumph Against Dragon King* [Film]. Shanghai Animation Film Studio.
- Yates, D. (Director). (2016). *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them* [Film]. Warner Bros. Pictures.
- Yates, D. (Director). (2018). *Fantastic Beasts: The Crimes of Grindelwald* [Film]. Warner Bros. Pictures.
- Yates, D. (Director). (2022). *Fantastic Beasts: The Secrets of Dumbledore* [Film]. Warner Bros. Pictures.

Contact email: hyy19980@163.com