Africa's Image on American and Chinese Screens: Case Study of 'Black Panther' and 'Operation Red Sea'

Taling Tene Rodrigue

Zhejiang Normal University

Abstract. In the wave of industrialization and internationalization of the Chinese Film Industry, the Chinese blockbuster 'Operation Red Sea' burst out as the 2018's revelation in terms of quality standards and visual effects. The movie starred a Chinese navy team, 'Jiaolong', made of eight highly-trained and well-armed commandos to protect overseas Chinese nationals, rescue hostages, and handle a terrorist organization involved in nuclear weapons' deals. However, Africa is featured as the film's background story, and warfare actions' playground, displaying to the domestic and world audience the old made-up clichés of Africa blended with war, terrorism, piracy and desert. Meanwhile, in the same year, Hollywood released 'Black Panther', a blockbuster which as well featured Africa as the film's background story and actions' playground, but that surprisingly overturned Hollywood's century-old tradition of picturing a dark Africa full of political turmoil, wars, famine, diseases and illegal migrations. It also downplayed Marvel's obsession with 'White Super-heroism'. With regards to these paradigms shifts, the article, through a comparative study of the two hits mentioned above, aims at highlighting the media portrayal of Africa on American and Chinese screens, digging out the motives behind Hollywood upturn on Africa's narrative, and identifying possible solutions for the Chinese Film Industry to improve its experience of 'African thematic movies' while avoiding Hollywood's past mistakes.

Keywords: Media portrayal of Africa, African thematic movies, Hollywood, Chinese film industry, Black Panther, Operation Red Sea.

1. Introduction

In recent years, as China's global status continues to rise, as its technology performances continue to progress, the Chinese films and digital works are developing rapidly and are gradually keeping the world's attention. As matter of facts, new Chinese films are flocking movie theaters than ever before. In 2000, China released just 91 films. That number jumped nearly tenfold to 902 by 2018. In 2019, the Chinese box office raked in $9.3 billion, making China the second biggest player in the film industry after North America as shown on the figure below (Source: Motion Picture Association of America).
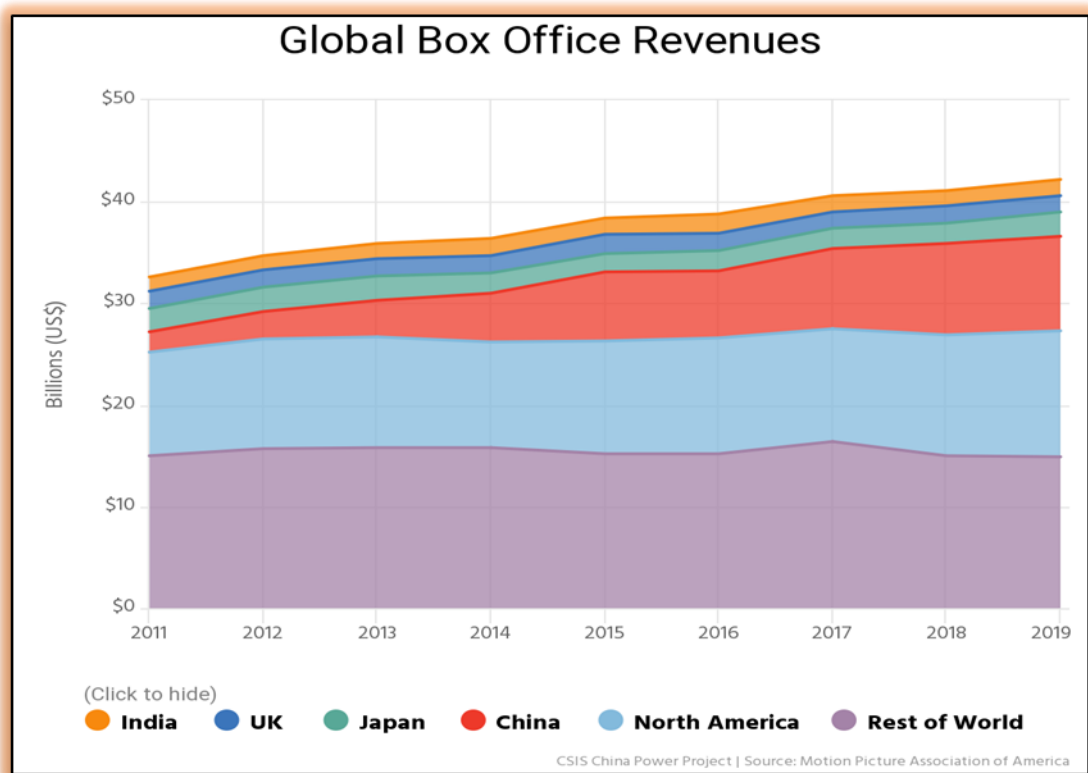

Figure 1. Global Box Office Revenues 2011-2019

The Chinese government has clearly outlined growth targets for the Chinese Film Industry. At a national symposium held in February 2019, Wang Xiaohui, the director of China's National Film Bureau, called on China to become a "strong film power" like the US by 2035 (Rebecca Davis, 2019). Determined to promote the Renaissance of Chinese civilization, the Chinese government in its new development's strategies has prioritized the opening up through exchanges and cooperation with the outside world. That opening up strategy is noticeable in core foreign policies' concepts such as *"Sharing Economy"*, *"Community of Shared Future"*, *"Common Destiny"* and so on. These concepts are gradually shaping the image of China as a great power and enhancing its cultural soft-power. Following

the same trend, the Chinese Film Industry has grown up central concepts and produced digital contents oriented towards *"Patriotism", "Great power", "Humanitarianism"*, etc. (Dongyao Nie, 2018).

As the dynamics of the changing global geopolitics have driven China and African Countries more and more close, number of movies, documentaries and digital contents have emerged from the Chinese Films Industry, reflecting the global apprehension of Africa by Chinese filmmakers. These apprehensions have been materialized in a new wave of Chinese made "African Thematic Movies" (Rodrigue, Taling T., 2018). An *"African Thematic Movie"* is to be understood as a non-African made film themed on Africa or Africans. It is a movie which thematic is related to African realities as portrayed by people other than African themselves. Such movies cannot be counted as genuine African films despite they may use black actors and sometimes black directors. It is worth mentioning that, this category of films is recent in the Chinese mainland contrary to the Hong-Kong that was already influenced by earliest western-made African Thematic Movies since the 1980's as pointed out by the Chinese scholar and movie director Zhang Yong. For him, the recent years' improvement of China's comprehensive national strength and the rapid development of the film industry have led some Chinese films to be shot directly in Africa, reconstructing African narratives and African cultural images, and so providing a new vision space for the Chinese audience. He further noticed that, due to the lack of narrative experience, the four (most influential) domestic films with African themes have been "unconsciously" influenced by the Hollywood-style African thematic movies, and thus reflect problems such as warlike plots, sceneries exaggeration, characters symbolization and cultural marginalization, shaping a completely different image reception at home and abroad (Zhang Yong, 2018).

As result, from early Hong-Kong made "African Thematic Movies" such as ' Crazy Safari (*Billy Chan, 1991)*', ' *Crazy Hong Kong* (*Wellson Chin,1993)*', ' *The gods Must Be Funny in China (1994, Dick Cho Kin-Nam)*', to the recent most prominent ones made on mainland China such as '*Ultimate hero (2016, Ragon Chen,Sky Li)*', ' *China' Sales Man (Tanbing, 2017)*', '*Wolf Warriors II (Jason Wu, 2017)*', '*Operation Red Sea (Dante Lam, 2018)*', one can easily perceived the resemblance and rapprochement between these movies and Western-made "African Thematic Movies" such as ' *The Gods Must Be Crazy 1-2 (amie Uys, 1980, 1989)*', '*Black Hawk Down (Ridley Scott, 2001)*', '*Hotel Rwanda (Terry George, 2004)*', '*Blood Diamond (Edward Zwick, 2008)*', etc. where Africa is depicted as backdrop of all terrible things that could ever happened to mankind, and African characters always unfortunate and powerless. Such movies have contributed to shape a bias media portrayal of Africa to the world audience, and so, reinforcing the general mindsets and prejudices established even earlier on Africa by western media discourses (Rodrigue, Taling T., 2018).

In fact, the 2018 Hollywood movie directed by the African-American Director Ryan Coogler is the first Film in Marvel's history to feature a "Black Superhero". Although a considerable number of African-American or African actors have been used in previous Hollywoodian movies, they were mostly needed in supporting roles with whites leading roles, just as argued the magazine's editor Ansver Versi: *"There have been a rising number of outstanding black actors in American films and some, like Will Smith, Samuel L. Jackson and Halle Berry, carried films but they almost always either supported or partnered a white protagonist"* (Ansver Versi, 2018). Unlike 'Black Panther', the previous Hollywood films themed on Africa tended to portray a poor and backward Africa, in desperate needs of western charities and assistance to reverse the sad fate to which the continent seems to be destined. Another fact to be pointed out that has made 'Black Panther' controversial around the world, was its reverse effects on "White Supremacism". Institutionalized white supremacy is still a fact in American society (Brooke M. Feldman, 2017).

From real life to movies, it is clear that some (not all) white Americans discriminate against people of color as featured in the 2019's American biographical comedy-drama film 'Green Book', directed by Peter Farrelly and inspired by the "true story" of a tour of the Deep South by the African-American classical and jazz pianist Don Shirley and Italian American bouncer Frank Tony. Movie based on a true story showing case of black segregation and centuries old racism that could be traced back from the time of slavery to today's police shooting and mass incarceration of black people in American society. With the decline of the US economy and the rise of developing countries happening in recent years, one is tempted to believe that Hollywood hides domestic and global commercial interests in improving the narratives of films about people of color, or as far as Africa is concerned, that the US government through its movie industry rhetoric changing, is trying to win the hearts and minds of African people for a political agenda. In any case, 'Black Panther' is a step forward for a positive Media Portrayal of Africa in comparison to 'Operation Red Sea' as shown in the following lines.

2. Africa's Narrative In 'Operation Red Sea'

'Operation Red Sea' is a 2018 Chinese action war film directed by Dante Lam and starring Chinese leading character Zhang Yi, Huang Jingyu, Hai Qing and Du Jiang. According to Chinaculture.org, the film is in similar style to that of *Operation Mekong* from the same director but couple of years earlier (Chinaculture.org, 2017) which is based on the evacuation of foreign nationals and almost 600 Chinese citizens from Yemen's southern port of Aden during late March in 2015 Yemeni Civil War. 'Operation Red Sea' is a gift film

presented to Chinese audience for the 90th anniversary of the founding of the Chinese People's Liberation Army, as well as the party's 19th National Congress (Sina Entertainment, 2017). This film is said to be "China's first modern naval film" (Emperor Motion Pictures, 2017).

The film has grossed USD$579 million, and received critical acclaim from critics, making it currently the seventh-highest-grossing ever in China and highest grossing Chinese film in 2018. It was selected as the Hong Kong entry for the Best Foreign Language Film at the 91st Academy Awards, but it was not nominated (Karen Chu, 2018). The film sets two relatively clear story lines. The first one is *"The Chinese Navy brings you home"* through an evacuation process full of suspense, and the second is to *"Protect every (oversea) Chinese, not one less" (*Li Xun, 2018*)*. The two missions connect two hours of war plot, which develops from the line of saving the Chinese citizen Deng Mei to the line of stopping the yellow cake trade with the journalist Xia Nan, and ends with the success of stopping the terrorist group's next large-scale drug attack. In addition, 'Operation Red Sea' borrows the cool visual effects of Hollywood blockbusters, with fast fragmented editing (Zhou Yuning, 2018), and therefore, creates a highly attractive visual effect.

Figure 2. 'Operation Red Sea' Movie Poster

a. The Highlights of the Operation Red Sea

Team Spirit. Unlike the previous hit 'Wolf Warrior II', which portrayed individual heroism, 'Operation Red Sea' rather focuses on collectivism and team spirit. There is no single-handed scene in the film. In every battle, the "Jialong" team members have to cooperate with each other, everyone performing its own duties at an individual level but

coupled with a tacit and strategic cooperation at the team level. *"All the members of the commando team are hero at an individual level. Everyone having its unique skills and weaknesses, but they are twisted into a rope to complement each other so that to generate a resultant force, and become invincible"* (Ren Xiaochen, 2018). This may express the spirit of socialism with Chinese characteristics where society's members have to complement each other to achieve a common development goal. It reflects the spirit of cooperation promoted by the Chinese leadership to the world through major projects such as "The Belt and Road Initiative" where world countries are call upon to work as the "Jiaolong" team to win the challenge of development for all nations.

Anti-terrorist Spirit. Terrorism have become a major threat to the world's security. No country today is totally sheltered from the fright of terrorist organizations. The September 11 attacks in the United States is still a hot souvenir in the memories and the hearts of many American families. From the jihadists attacks and bombs explosions using human bodies as shields in the Middle East, to the Boko Haram terror in the Sahelian part of Africa, and even considering the growing terrorism in stable countries such as China and Russia, one cannot stay indifferent. International cooperation is unavoidable to stop the gangrene of terrorism and restore the world peace and stability without borders. Through the lenses of 'Operation Red Sea', viewers can indirectly feel the threat and impairment brought by terrorism. This sounds as an emergency call to be conscious and value the peace we usually ignore. Peace is dear to all of us, but its real value is hard to be gauged until it is lost. 'Operation Red Sea' is a masterpiece dedicated to the Chinese military in particular, and to the world militaries personnel in general, for it gave common civilians and idea of how hard and risky is the job of those fellow humans who have dedicated their lives for peace and security, so that the world can be a better and safe place to live.

Patriotic Spirit. From a Chinese perspective, 'Operation Red Sea' is a patriotic film, a space to boost the morale of an entire nation. Patriotism is sometimes synonymous to nationalism. The love of one's own nation and country's vision is something common to all countries of the world. Especially when coupled with internationalism which promotes the political, economic and cultural cooperation between nations. Protecting its citizens at home and abroad is a fundamental mission of every responsible government. We have seen at many occasions western governments through military interventions, protecting and securing the expatriation of their civilians in some African and Asian countries in times of conflicts and political turmoil. Since the Deng Xiao Ping's opening up policies, the number of Chinese people migrating out of China had been rising sharply (Li Anshan, 2000), though is it difficult to estimate the

real number of overseas' Chinese. They have been gradual concerns over the security of these oversea Chinese citizens in some countries where peace had long fade away. In the case of Africa, 'Operation Red Sea' attempted to picture a scenario over whether or not the Chinese Navy can ensure safety for the overseas Chinese in case something was to happen. *"Chinese Navy, we take you home"* is the Chinese government promise to every overseas Chinese in the movie. So, 'Operation Red Sea' not only appears as patriotic, but also as naval propaganda.

b. Stereotypes in the Operation Red Sea

Melvin DeFleur and Timothy Plax in their proposed "Meaning Theory of Media Portrayal" hold that, how humans behave is a product of inner understandings based on how an individual constructs meaning for symbols, images or events that they see through media, and this happens only when their culture gives shared interpretations to those media content. Through participation in a variety of communication processes, our meanings are shaped, reshaped and stabilized. The content presented by the media can shape meaning and establish similar meanings among large audiences. This is how stereotypes are created (DeFleur, M. L. & Plax, T. G., 1980).

'Operation Red Sea' contains three of the most basic and stereotypical images that ordinary Chinese people have on the African continent: *piracy*, *desert* and *war*. From chasing off the pirates on Somalia waters in the opening scene, to the vast dusty mountainous desert of Morocco as the main backdrop for most of the warfare scenes, and to the made-up story on the premise that an African nation is at war with a western blackmailed terrorist organization, the whole film is set up to plunge viewers into a nerve-shattering, immersive experience with an ostentatious display of weaponry bordering on geekiness, and a graphic depiction of human casualties that manages to be as shocking as it is stomach-churning. Of course, we are not denying that piracy battles, desertification and conflicts are still part of some African countries' contemporary stories, but as globalization progresses, they are positive changes taking place and should be part of their narratives as well. From American to Chinese screens, there is no need to demonstrate how deep stereotypes have been affecting Africa's image. Just as brilliantly acknowledged by the Chinese scholar and movie director Zhang Yong: "*The nation of Yewaire in Operation Red Sea is at war with three forces: government forces, rebels, terrorist groups and extremists. Audiences familiar with Hollywood can easily find that these films were more or less influenced by 'Tears of the Sun (2003)', 'Black Hawk Down (2001)'…After watching the film, the audience is left with the impression about Africa that there is only war (Zhang Yong, 2018)*".

Some thinkers as Maggie Lee in reviewing the movie 'Operation Red Sea', have rose up the propaganda role play of the movie for the Chinese Army, as well as the trend of extended patriotism and nationalism. According to her, despite the premise similarity to 'Wolf Warrior II' , Hong Kong action-director Dante Lam's 'Operation Red Sea' is a war propaganda that comes off as antiwar, a patriotic film so carried away by its own visceral, pulverizing violence that patriotism almost becomes an afterthought. Military geeks and genre fans in overseas markets will be awestruck by the mind-blowing action, but domestic audiences expressed disappointment at the film's downplaying of individual heroism and feel-good nationalism (Maggie Lee, 2018). The "Meaning Theory of Media Portrayal" again tell us that, individuals create, interpret and retain a sense of meaning through the media content. Meaning resides with in people and we relate it with the media content. Media content is constructed in the form of messages and interpreted within the context of those messages (DeFleur, M. L. & Plax, T. G., 1980).

From this perspective, a simple meaning conveyed to the audience by 'Operation Red Sea' would be something like *"It's lucky to be Chinese, and unfortunate to be African"*. That mean for African audience a sentiment of being cursed and powerless. In reality, Africa is the continent with the largest concentration of developing countries in the world, the most resourceful and energy abundant continent, coupled with a fast-growing population and the hub of business opportunities of the future. Despite the global economic recession due to Covid-19 pandemic, Africa is still home of the world fastest growing economies. In fact, 5 out of the 10 world fastest growing economies in 2020 were African according to NASDAQ (Nasdaq, 2020). Africa is no longer part of the golden triangle of the slave trade depicted in history books, nor is it the land of extreme water shortage and abject poverty. Africa has a great potential and limitless positive energy to offer to such an extent that, the U.K based magazine *The Economist* went from labelling Africa back in the year 2000 *"The Hopeless Continent"*, to the today's rhetoric of *"Hopeful Continent"* (Alexander C. R., 2020). Yet, the today's mainstream media and films industries blindly ignore the developing Africa, only willing to show the backward and barren side of the continent as in 'Operation Red Sea'. This is a problem to be taken seriously and globally in the world's movie industry.

3. Africa's Narrative In 'Black Panther'

'Black Panther' background story is very authentic and displays two storylines as well. The first one is the story of a kingdom's protector who incarnates ancestral values and bear the hope of a nation. The second one is that of a prince's revenge who struggle all his life to restore his lost identity and to conquer the throne he believes to have the equal rights of succession. The two storylines display two distinctives but pragmatics African realities.

The first one takes place a long time ago, when a meteorite from outer space crashed into Africa containing large amounts of "Vibranium", the most powerful material in the universe. Humans were born here, and the five tribes called this place Wakanda. Later, because of the wars between the tribes, a warrior united the five tribes and became the first king of Wakanda. The inhabitants used "Vibranium" to develop their technology and culture on a massive scale, far surpassing any other civilization. But along with the development of science and technology, the power of other regional countries also grew, and eventually they developed colonialism and began to invade and establish colonies everywhere. Wakanda, in order to protect the "Vibranium" and its people, has decided to hide itself from the world, and to ignore the events and controversies of the outside world.

The second storyline featured two princes, one grew up on the road of survival and adaptation in a world he does not belong to, while the other grew up in the cradle of a greenhouse with all the care and attention. The different environment shaped the different characters. One has become a cold blood killer *"Killmonger"*, and the other a gentle and brave warrior *"T'Challa"*. For the sake of revenge, *"Killmonger"* puts his plan into practice, and successfully conquer the throne. The dethroned King *"T'Challa"* with the help of the ancestral herb, will reconquer the throne and overthrow his hateful cousin. At the end, good triumphed over evil with the happy ending of peace restoration and the opening up of Wakanda to the world.

This is the very first for Hollywood to picture Africa as the most developed land powered by advanced High-Tech far surpassing all other nations on earth, and willing to keep the world balance and peace. One can questioned such generosity and consideration from the American Film Industry. Of course, given the success of the movie in box offices, one can simply realize that such a creative imagination was mainly fueled up by commercial purposes. But, with regards to the controversies raised by the movie in the world's audiences, it would be too naïve to think of 'Black Panther' as a simple commercial tool, or to simply ignore Hollywood intentions to confess and repent some past mistakes and wrong doings with regards of the continent of Africa.

Figure 3. The movie poster of the Black Panther

a. The highlights of the Black Panther

Reservoir of African culture. Despite not being an authentic African film, 'Black Panther' still displayed a great understanding of African culture globally. The movie can simply be considered as reservoir of African cultural and traditional values. No American made movie in the past has gathered so many African cultural elements. From the king's intronization ceremony to the wonderful traditional costumes, dresses and looks, as well as the African spirituality such as totemism and gods worshipping, the ancestor's realm all featured in the same movie. 'Black Panther' therefore appears as the embodiment of African culture, a compass for the African cultural soft-power's expression.

Panther's symbolization. Since ancient times, felines have enjoyed a special status in Africa, among which "Lions" and "Panthers" directly symbolize "Power" and "Strength". In sub-Saharan Africa it is not hard to find in every royal palace a lion or panther skin either dressed over the king's royal seat or affixed to the wall, or even lied on the ground right under the king's feet. In ancient African societies just as in some villages of the today's Africa, many dignitaries, traditional guardians, and tribal warriors wear panther' skin, especially during traditional festivals or ceremonies. In the Zulu culture of southern Africa, leopard skins are symbols of royal status and their use is restricted to royalty (Ian Knigt, 1989). In the cultures of Kenya and Uganda in East Africa panthers are directly associated with martial arts activities (Hobley, Charles W., 1902). In short, 'Black Panther' provide the keys for decoding the mysterious feline Tradition in black Africa.

African spirituality. The understanding and handling of the supernatural in Africa is very different from that of the West and the East. In African traditional religious belief systems, any living thing has a soul (Ru Xin, Zhou Yichang, 1999). *"The basic contents of the black African traditional religious practices include: nature worshiping, ancestors worshiping, totems worshiping, tribal gods worshiping and the supreme God worshiping. (*Schneider, Harold K., 1981*)*. Animal, trees, stones etc. can be deified in traditional African spirituality and then worshipped. But where an outsider sees the physical object, the African initiate will see the spirit behind it. The black panther is basically a symbolization of the alliance between the spiritual world and the physical one. And similar for other totemic animals that represents every tribe of Wakanda. In fact, Wakanda is made of 5 tribes each of them worshipping a particular animal such as the black panther, the white gorilla, the crocodile, the lion, and the hyena that symbolize the totemic animal of each tribe, also referred in some African languages as *"Eseneya"* or *"Esenga"* (Laburthe-Tolra 1985). We can see T'Challa going back and forth between the living and the ancestors' world, trespassing death under the spiritual power of the ancestral herb empowered by the Vibranium. The movie has done considerable display of African spirituality.

African rhythm. 'Black Panther' is the collision between African music culture and some modern Western music culture. For example, the hip-hop music at the beginning of the movie appropriately represents the hip-hop style music in the slums of the United States in the 1990s. However, the special Musical Instruments played when the prince T'Challa was going to inherit the throne reflects the unique charm of African music, and can let people who are not familiar with African music have more insights. This effect was made possible thanks to the genuine cooperation between African traditional musicians and the movie crew. In fact, after reading the film's script, the Swedish composer and record producer Ludwig Emil Tomas Göransson traveled to Africa to research traditional African music for the film. He went on tour with Senegalese musician Baaba Maal, and recorded performances by Maal and other African musicians for use in the score. Notably, Göransson used recordings of talking drums and a tambin for character themes in the film, while Maal sung an original song for the opening of the score. Göransson combined these traditional African elements with the classical orchestra that is often used in superhero films. The orchestra was recorded at Abbey Road Studios, along with a choir singing in the Xhosa language (Buchanan, 2017). As a large number of African music and dance are used in movies, African rhythm is no longer mysterious to the world audience.

b. Stereotypes in 'Black Panther'

'Black panther' after all is not an authentic African art work, but a combination of African, African-American and American work. The American mind will always see African realities with a slightly different approach that African themselves. And a US company above all will first serves national interest. Therefore, 'Black Panther' still bears without doubt American stereotypes and mindsets on Africa.

Backward Africa. The movie still reflects the idea that Wakanda is a third world country despite all the vibranium gifted by mother nature. In fact, as the highest high-tech army that Africa has ever made, one would have expected very advanced weapons than those existing in the actual world's military powers such as vibranium nuclear missiles or anti-missiles, vibranium nuclear submarines, etc. Instead of that, the people of Wakanda used vibranium to empowered cold weapons such as knifes, spears and all kind of archaic weapons. Instead of vibranium's armored tanks we have armored rhinos and the list goes on. It is even questionable if Wakanda could really win the war against the actual modern US army with all its nuclear arsenal as known today. Watching Wakanda tribes confronting each other with daggers and spears is reminiscent of the cavern men fighting for foods. That the typical Hollywoodian mindset about Africa resurging despite all the efforts made. Moreover, it is noticeable that without the help of the white agent, the secret weapons of Wakanda would have been shipped out to conquer the world. That means Wakanda would have not been able to keep the world's peace balance without the withe man intervention. The message here is that "Black people could not really rule themselves without the White Man help". Typical American mind of playing the world's gendarmes and to view Africa as "The White Man Burden".

The Black Problem. In recent years, with the rapid economic development of the third world countries, the status of "Black people" in the United States has been constantly improving (Don Beyer, 2020), and the ratio of the colored people in the Film and TV Industry in the United States has consequently been rising. With this new tendency, the United States had to adapt not only to solve internal problem such as racial conflicts, but to cope with the global market that is more and more oriented towards developing countries. It is wise not to talk bad of people you want them to consume your products, instead you must show that you understand them and can feed their needs. 'Black Panther' begins by telling the living conditions of Black Americans in the 1990s. The backstory of this section takes place in 1992, the year of the Los Angeles riots, in which the Los Angeles police officers were acquitted of using excessive force against African-Americans, which led to unrest. Today the US is still facing the same problem as we've seen with the death of "Georges Floyd". It triggered a nationwide protest as

reported by BBC News, *"The US has been convulsed by nationwide protests over the death of an African-American man in police custody."* (BBC News, 2020). Racial problems and identity crisis of black people is a reality in the US.

Added to this, is the tendency for Hollywood to stare on white protagonist. Reinforcing the sensation of "white dominance" as well described by editor Ansver Versi: By and large, Hollywood's time-tested formula for stereotypes has always been the primacy of a white protagonists, who through violence, wisdom or charm, prevails over the world. The white man or woman are king or queen, supported or undermined by people of other races, but ultimately triumphant. In the same vein, locations outside the US are regarded as mere backdrops for white stars to live out their dramatic lives while the locals hover about in the background, either helping or getting in the way and usually, most conveniently, becoming targets, either to be killed off or saved (Ansver Versi, 2018). Therefore, featuring a black protagonist may have been solutions' attempts for the Black problem, and also a strategy to conquer new markets, mainly in the developing world, and catering to African-American audiences in the United States and other countries.

4. Towards a Positive Media Portrayal of Africa: Suggestions and Recommendations

China and the United States as the actual two leading economies and the world leading manufacturers of digital contents, consequently share greater responsibilities than any other country of the world. As both countries are competing in very advanced high-tech fields such as 5G, Automatic Intelligence technologies etc. the peaceful use of Film Technology largely depends on the common visions and shared values of both powers. Great powers bear great responsibilities and great responsibilities imply dialogues and concertation with others on subject matters such as "the way we picture others", and "the way we want others to picture ourselves" in the society we share as common heritage. Africa's global image has to be improved both at home and globally, for as long as they will be stereotypes and frustrations, they will be no possibility for a healthy development and prosperity. And when there is no development nor prosperity, the economic migration of the left-behinds naturally follows with all its consequences, and the vicious circle goes over and over. Great powers must come to understand that in the globalized society of today, there is no development but *co-development*, there is no prosperity but *co-prosperity*, there is no operation but *co-operation.*

African people around the world of today are struggling to restore their identities and rebuild their images destroyed by centuries of slavery, colonization and neo-colonization. They must be understood and supported. Since the 1970's, the Chinese Kungfu movies have largely contributed to shaped a certain image of China and build up a Chinese identity globally as they have been very welcome and supported by the world audiences. Very famous Kungfu movies were even made or distributed by foreign countries or in cooperation with non-Chinese compagnies in support to the cultural cognition of Chinese people (Rodrigue Taling T., Zhang Yong, Lei Wen, 2019). Likewise, digital contents from China and US not only should contribute to construct a positive image of Africa, but also should help African audiences to build positive feedbacks on other countries. Movies are two edges swords that could elevate or degrade the image of its consumers as well as its manufacturers. China possesses around the 20% of the world population, that means a great deal of the world audiences. And therefore, have a say on the global image of Africa at home, in neighboring countries and on the world stage. China in its new global strategy of cooperation with the world is working hard to improve its domestic and global image. But such efforts should seriously consider the media portrayal of China' strategic partners, and primarily African countries. The changing perception in 'Black Panther' and 'Green Book' is the kind of paradigm shift we are expecting from great powers so as to improve Africa's image.

From a media portrayal perspective, both the Chinese and American film industries display the problem of "stereotypization of Africa". Now, with China and the United States increasingly playing an important role in the development of the Continent of Africa, and for the sake of a better cooperation and positive sentiment, there is a real need for both powers to improve the continent's image domestically and internationally. Additionally, African themselves must work hard to make African narratives more accessible to the world audience. In that regard, our thoughts and suggestions go as follows.

a. African Thematic Filmmakers Must Set boots in Africa

The success of 'Black Panther' partly relies in the fact that the movie director Ryan Coogler visited Africa prior to the shooting. Added to the fact that parts of the movie were directly shot in Africa. This has largely contributed to reduce the gap between imagination and reality. Despite the trend of globalization and rapid tech-development happening on the continent of Africa, mindsets and misconceptions are still plugging the minds of those who have not yet visited Africa. Media discourses and internet contents still, deliberately choose to focus on the negative rather than the positive side of Africa. Which is misleading for a filmmaker foreign to the continent. Moreover, Africa is home to 54 independent countries, nearly 2000 languages and ethnic groups (UNESCO, 2012),

therefore very diverse culturally. For an African Thematic Movie to be balanced and successful, an in-depth field work in Africa is required prior to the shooting. This is for moviemakers, to update their knowledge of the continent so as to reflects the contemporary narrative of Africa.

b. Embracing new and progressive narratives rather than old made-up clichés of Africa

Our world is developing faster than ever, and major development projects around the world are involving developed and developing countries alike. Among others, the *"UN Development Goals 2030",* the *"AU Agenda 2063",* the *"Belt and Road Initiative",* the *"Paris Climate Agreement",* etc. that involve the cooperation between Africa and the world can be guiding lines for contemporary narratives of Africa. Africa is known to be the origin of Mankind, and together with China both are cradles of human civilizations with long histories and splendid cultures. Both sides shared a 2000 years cultural exchanges and trade relation (Zong He, 2005). This shared history is an unexploited and limitless source of inspiration for new narratives of Africa for a Chinese filmmaker. And such positive storytelling is far more beneficial as compared to the outdated narratives themed on wars, famine, diseases, etc. They will be more truthful and helpful as they will be reflecting the unique charm of the African continent and positively describe the relationship between Africa and the rest of the world.

c. Upgrading the roleplay of African characters in African Thematic Movies

Hollywood movies traditionally have shaped the horizon of its audience and fans with the "white leading role, black supporting role" doctrine alongside with the "white super-heroism", thus creating a kind of "white supremacy, black inferiority" dependance to its audience. The four recently most influential Chinese made movies on Africa, namely *'Ultimate hero (2016, ragon Chen,Sky Li)',* ' *China'Sales Man (Tanbing, 2017)', 'Wolf Warriors II (Jason Wu, 2017)', 'Operation Red Sea (Dante Lam, 2018)',* echoed the same problem of "Black Inferiority". A common denominator of such tradition is to downgrade black characters. Hollywood's 'Black Panther' has made considerable efforts in solving this problem, by featuring a *"Black Superhero"* and endorsing a *"Black leading role, White supporting role"* so as to downplay the old doctrine. But this is just a baby step forward as the evil is very deep.

d. Listen the Voices of African filmmakers

No one can provide a better narrative of African realities than African people themselves. It is a sole duty for African filmmakers to provide a fair interpretation of African realities, a new visualization of the continent's past and present so that to liberate the minds of the ignorant or miseducated masses, what Tsehloane Keto had categorized as the *"intellectual prisoners of blind universal history"* when he argued, *"what they worship as universal history 'is…as much a product of the mind of the historian who wrote it as it is the product of the actions of the people who actually lived it'"* (Tsehloane, 1989). The Movies Industries of African countries should be at the frontlines, armed with the latest technologies, talented human resources and knowledgeable experts to be able to fabricate worthy digital contents that could raise the continent's image to the highest peaks. Authentic African movies are sometimes ignored on international markets or simply inexistant due to the lack of cultural propaganda or cultural diplomacy of African countries, but mostly due to its low quality. Efforts must be deployed at governmental level, not only to strengthen the propaganda machine of African countries and push up the existing African movies from the local industries to the global markets, but most importantly to improve the qualities standards of local movies through more investment and better management.

e. Strengthening the Cooperation with African Local Film Industries

It is worth mentioning that African local film industries are developing and making progress continuously. While absorbing ingredients from elsewhere, they keep a certain authenticity. The Nigeria's film industry "Nollywood" for example, has become the world's second largest films producer, only behind Bollywood (Jake Bright, 2015). Even if the quality of authentic African films in their majority still lags behind that of other cinema giants of developed countries, they still maintain their uniqueness. Among other are their unique "African storytelling perspective". The Chinese and American film industries can study and integrate the characteristics of African film industries to better improve themselves, grow their African audiences while improving Africa's image and impact positive feedback from African moviegoers. Furthermore, the cooperation with local film industries of African countries is indispensable to better display African stories on the Chinese and American screens. Such cooperation should be visible from the stage of script writing, directing, shooting, acting to the stage of producing and marketing. With the growing cultural and economic exchanges between China and Africa, many Africans are studying and working in China, and many Chinese are sent to Africa for exchanges and cooperation. They are somehow getting closer to each other and

deepening the understanding of each other's realities. This beyond doubt will set up strong basis for future China-Africa film cooperation.

5. Conclusion

With the increasingly frequent economic and cultural exchanges between China and Africa, African Thematic Movies have become a new tendency in the Chinese Film Industry. 'Operation Red Sea (*Dante Lam, 2018)*', one of the four most influential Chinese made African Thematic Movies, although very welcome domestically for its patriotic and feel-good nationalist and inti-terrorist spirit, remain infected by misconceptions and mindsets on Africa, and therefore displays a bias media portrayal of Africa blended with war, desert, piracy and terrorism. As demonstrated above, such a media portrayal is somehow inspired by Hollywood old practice of negatively picturing the continent of Africa. Controversially, the 2018 released 'Black Panther' represents a paradigm shift in the American Film Industry, as the film looks at the development of the African continent from a brand-new perspective, shows up the huge potential of Africa, and write down a legacy that could inspire future generation of Africans just as well resumed by the international retired basket-ball legend Kareen Abdul Jabbar, *"If you're black, you'll leave 'Black Panther' with a straighter walk, a gratitude for your African heritage and a superhero whom black children can relate to"* (The Hollywood Reporter, 2018). A perspective which is worthy of reference and learning for the Chinese Film Industry.

Moreover, in order to better integrate emerging markets of African countries with their fast-growing populations, China and the US have to improve their media portrayal of African Countries as potential leading consumer markets of digital contents in the years to come. Finally, the local African Film Industries should voice out their unique perspective of the African realities to help reconstruct the media portrayal of Africa internationally, and African governments should support their movie industries, speed up the cooperation with the world leading film industries such as that of the U.S, China and more. In a word, building up a positive image of Africa globally is a joint a necessary effort in which the US and China have a greater role to play, but that must follow the determination of African countries primarily.

Notes on contributor:

Taling Tene Rodrigue has a PhD. from Cameroon. He is a Research Fellow at the Institute of African Studies, Vice-Director of the Center for Francophone Studies, Secretary General of the Center for African Films and TV, Zhejiang Normal University, China.

Email: rodriguetaling@outlook.com

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Notes on contributor

Muzayin Nazaruddin is a lecturer at the Department of Communication Universitas Islam Indonesia. His academic expertise is ecosemiotics, disaster studies, cultural memory and environmental communication. Email: muzayin.nazaruddin@uii.ac.id.

Lana Senja Indah has graduated her bachelor from the Department of Communication, Universitas Islam Indonesia.

Nadila Anindita has graduated her bachelor from the Department of Communication, Universitas Islam Indonesia.

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