

# A Study of the Chinese Cultural Symbols from a Cross-Cultural Perspective

Ke-Liang Liu<sup>1</sup> and Won-Ho Choi<sup>2,\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Dept. of Visual Contents, Dongseo University, Korea; Doctoral Candidate; [collinsfilmm@gmail.com](mailto:collinsfilmm@gmail.com)

<sup>2</sup> Dept. of Visual Contents, Dongseo University, Korea; Professor; [choiwh@gdsu.dongseo.ac.kr](mailto:choiwh@gdsu.dongseo.ac.kr)

\* Correspondence

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**Abstract:** *This study presents a four-tier integrated framework that combines Saussure's semiotics, Barthes' mythology, Hofstede's cultural dimensions, and Hall's encoding/decoding model to analyze cultural symbol exchange in cross-cultural cinema. By examining *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000) and *Mulan* (2020), we demonstrate how this framework facilitates a systematic, multilayered analysis across structural, semantic, mythological, and reception dimensions. Through a detailed exploration of key symbols—the Green Destiny sword, bamboo forest, phoenix, and costume color systems—we uncover how cultural meanings are encoded within production contexts and interpreted differently by audiences based on their cultural backgrounds. Our findings indicate that symbols that engage all four theoretical dimensions create a richer cross-cultural resonance compared to those that prioritize visual spectacle over cultural authenticity. Methodologically, this study outlines how the framework's structured approach can be adapted for future large-scale content analysis and cross-platform reception studies, with potential applications in computational text analysis and multilingual audience research.*

**Keywords:** Four-Tier Integrated Framework; Encoding/Decoding; Cultural Symbols; Cross-Cultural Cinema; Semiotic Analysis; Multilayered Analysis

## 1. Introduction

In globalization, film is an important tool of cross-cultural communication that comes with cultural symbols of wide-ranging influence. The misuse of cultural symbols or their misunderstanding can cause misunderstandings and lead to prejudice. Thus, accurately presenting and representing cultural symbols is vital in cross-cultural filmmaking.

As a result, *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* achieved huge success in the international market, becoming a model for promoting East-West cultural understanding [1]. *Mulan*, however, presents different approaches to adapting Eastern cultural heritage for a global audience [2]. The two different approaches towards cultural symbols profoundly affect both films' international receptions and cultural impacts [3].

### 1.1 Terminological Clarification

Following recent scholarly discussion, we clarify our use of “cross-cultural” in this study. As Gudykunst and Mody [4] note, cross-cultural research emphasizes comparative analysis between cultures (kulturvergleichende), examining how cultural systems differ in their symbolic structures and interpretive frameworks. This differs from “intercultural,” which focuses on interactive processes and dialogical encounters between cultural subjects, and from “multicultural,” which describes the coexistence of diverse cultures within a single social space [4]. In film studies, Cross-cultural film analysis has often been used to explore how cinema operates across national and cultural boundaries, often attending to processes of translation, adaptation, and reception in multiple cultural contexts [5]. Our study adopts “cross-cultural” to emphasize the comparative mechanisms of meaning-making between different cinematic systems and audience groups, rather than focusing on production-level collaboration or policy frameworks implied by intercultural approaches.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

### 2.1 Hall's Encoding/Decoding Model

Hall [6] suggests that communication takes place as a linked circuit that has four discrete moments: production, circulation, consumption, and reproduction. Breaking from previous linear frameworks, Hall argues that meaning is not simply passed along through a linear sender-receiver model; instead, it is actively constructed at each moment in the process, with special consideration for the role of cultural context. Hall presents three possible decoding positions to account for different audience interpretation:

1. Dominant-Hegemonic Position: Audiences decode the message meant by its producers
2. Negotiated Position: Audience members partially accept the preferred meaning but modify it according to their local situation
3. Oppositional Position: Audience decodes the message to the opposite of what it says [7]

#### 2.1.1 Recent Applications in Digital and Algorithmic Media

Recent scholarship shows Hall's framework to contemporary media environments. The encoding/decoding model effectively analyzes algorithmic media platforms (*Netflix*, *Spotify*), where "intended uses" are encoded into platform affordances and audiences decode algorithmic recommendations through dominant, negotiated, or oppositional positions [8]. Hall's framework for *Netflix* originals, analyzing gender construction through encoding/decoding processes and mythic levels, with explicit attention to cross-cultural intertextual comparison [9]. These applications confirm the model's continued relevance for understanding how producers encode cultural symbols within production contexts and how diverse audiences decode them through culturally specific interpretive frameworks—the core mechanism our study examines in cross-cultural cinema.

### 2.2 Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions as Context for Encoding and Decoding

For film analysis, power distance can help to explain how audiences of different backgrounds understand authority relationships and hierarchical structures. China has a high-power distance (PDI=80); in contrast, the western societies such as the United States have a more lower power distance (PDI=40) [10].

Recent film studies validate Hofstede's framework for analyzing cross-cultural reception. Yu et al. [11] apply cultural dimensions theory to Chinese audiences' acceptance of American animated films, demonstrating through structural equation modeling that individualism-collectivism, power distance, and masculinity-femininity significantly predict viewing motivation and acceptance. This quantitative validation confirms that Hofstede's dimensions remain robust explanatory variables for understanding how cultural value differences shape audience interpretation of cinematic symbols—justifying our focus on power distance while acknowledging other dimensions' relevance.

### 2.3 Semiotic Theories: Foundations for Understanding Cultural Symbols

Semiotic theory describes how symbols mean. As described by Saussure [12], a sign is made up of the signifier (material substance) and the signified (idea or meaning). Their relationship is random and culturally agreed upon, and thus the same sign can mean different things in different cultures [13]. This theory is essential in describing how cultural signifiers work in cross-cultural cinema, and how visual and auditory elements mean things to different groups of people [14].

#### 2.3.1 Distinguishing Cultural Symbols from Symbolic Devices

Building on Saussure's foundational framework, contemporary semiotic analysis distinguishes between "cultural symbols" as substantive signifiers carrying deep mythological meanings (e.g., the dragon in Chinese cosmology) and "symbolic devices" as representational tools that invoke cultural associations without constituting autonomous symbols (e.g., calligraphic couplets as decorative elements encoding Confucian values).

Recent digital culture research demonstrates this distinction's continued relevance. Huang et al [15] show how cross-language internet memes operate at multiple semiotic levels—from denotative visual signs to ideologically coded multimodal discourse—paralleling Barthes' hierarchy of denotation, connotation, and myth. Similarly, Zhang and Wei [16] operationalize a four-tiered visual framing model (denotative, stylistic-semantic,

connotative, ideological) to analyze how the *Peppa Pig* character was re-encoded with Chinese family values, demonstrating the glocalization process through which global symbols acquire localized mythological meanings.

Our analysis applies this distinction systematically: we examine how core symbols (the Green Destiny sword, phoenix, bamboo forest) function as multilayered signifiers operating across Saussure’s signifier-signified relation, Barthes’ mythological dimension, and Hall’s encoding-decoding circuit, while symbolic devices (architectural elements, costume colors, calligraphy) serve as contextual markers that anchor these symbols within specific cultural frameworks.

### 2.4 Research Progress of Chinese Cultural Symbols in Cross-Cultural Cinema

Research on Chinese cultural symbols in cross-cultural film have evolved significantly. Yudeshan [17] identified two modes of culture: Hollywood rewrites (exemplified by *Mulan*) and art cinema convergence (*Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*). This underlying framework has been further developed by recent research.

Post-2020 study reflects intensified attention to cross-cultural reception dynamics. Chinese *Douban* reviews of *Everything Everywhere All at Once* and *Shang-Chi*, revealing polarized nationalist versus cosmopolitan readings that reflect broader tensions in representing hybrid identities [18]. *Mulan* (2020)’s compromises between cultural appropriateness, progressive feminism, and commercial success, arguing that attempts to assimilate Non-Western stories into “universal” themes often sustain Western cultural biases [19]. Li et al. [20] document how streaming platforms (*Netflix, Youku, Bilibili*) reshape cross-cultural reception through multilingual subtitles, algorithmic curation, and social media discussion ecosystems (*Douban, Weibo*). These studies demonstrate that the cultural authenticity-global appeal tension we examine remains central to contemporary cross-cultural filmmaking, now amplified by digital distribution and platform-mediated reception.

### 2.5 An Integrated Model for Analyzing Cultural Symbols in Cross-Cultural Cinema

By combining Hall’s encoding/decoding model with Hofstede’s cultural dimensions and semiotic theories, we developed a Four-Tier Integrated Framework to study cultural signification in cross-cultural film. Figure 1 illustrates this integrated model.

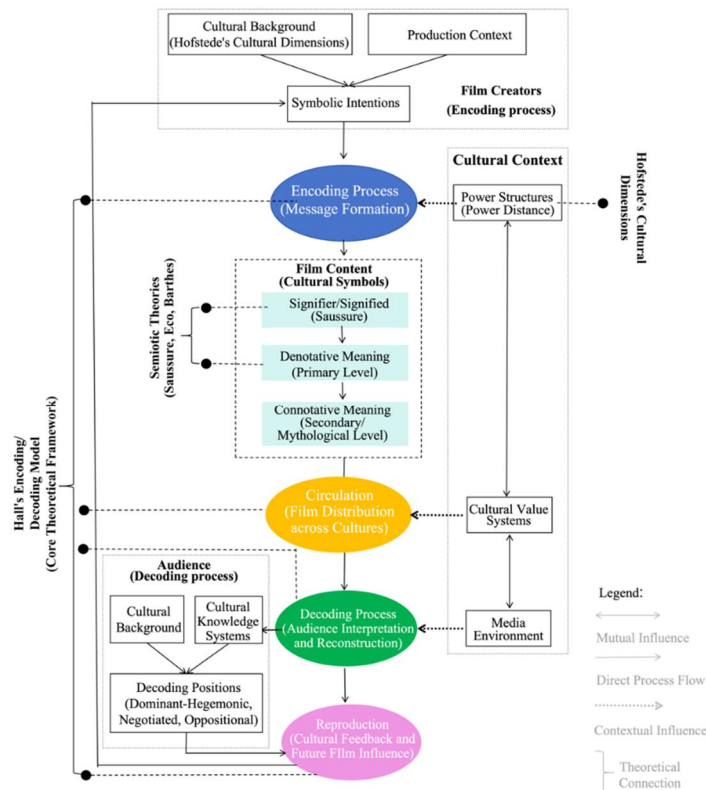


Figure 1. Four-Tier Integrated Framework of Cultural Symbol Exchange in Cross-Cultural Cinema

Our integrated model has four stages that exist simultaneously and correspond to Hall's stages of the communication circuit: encoding, content/circulation, decoding, and reproduction. The coding (blue) starts with directors whose motivations are driven by the culture they are a part of (controlled by Hofstede's dimensions) and working environment. Cultural symbols in filmic narratives operate at three ascending levels: Saussure's signifier/signified dynamic, denotative meaning, and Barthes' connotative/mythological meaning.

The circulation phase (yellow) is the way films travel across cultural borders. Decoding (green) is when audiences decode symbols based on their cultural filters, depending on their cultural background, knowledge systems, and decoding position (dominant-hegemonic, negotiated, or oppositional) as described by Hall.

The reproduction stage (pink) shows how audience feedback influences future creation, completing the communication circuit. The model illustrates multiple connection types: direct process flows (solid arrows), contextual influences (dotted arrows), mutual influences (double-headed arrows), and theoretical connections (brackets).

Current studies of the Chinese audience reception of culturally hybrid films provide some practical details on the functioning of this model. One study [21] in 2023 demonstrates the practical application of this model in showing how production values, shared themes, perception criteria, and emotional identification influence cross-cultural audience reception. The composite model enables the systematic exploration of cross-cultural symbol exchange in cross-cultural films, the foundation of our case studies.

### 3. Research Methodology and Case Study Selection

#### 3.1 Methodological Approach

This study employs a cross-theoretical synthesis approach to examine cultural symbols in cross-cultural cinema. Our integrated model combines Hall's encoding/decoding theory with Hofstede's cultural dimensions and semiotic theories to analyze the complete process of cultural symbol exchange from creation to reception. This approach allows us to discover ways in which filmmakers insert cultural symbols, how these symbols get distributed throughout the world, and how audiences perceive them.

#### 3.2 Case Study Selection Rationale

##### 3.2.1 Historical and Contemporary Significance

Both *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000) and *Mulan* (2020) remain highly relevant in cross-cultural cinematic scholarship, even after two decades have passed since their release. The two films revolutionized how Chinese symbolic traditions were explored for global screen representation, and their effect can be felt today in filmmaking.

*Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* achieved unprecedented commercial success for a Chinese film, earning US\$128 million box office in North America and US\$280 million worldwide [22]. Beside of this, this film won multiple prestigious awards including the Oscar for Best Foreign Language Film. Its popularity in Western territories demonstrates its successful cultural hybridization, integrating Eastern martial arts traditions with narrative techniques accessible to Western audiences [23].

*Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*' represents what Wu [22] calls 'reversed cultural flow'—the movement of cultural products from East to West through strategic positioning and global-local partnerships. This early success, however, contrasts sharply with current problems. Research by Yang [24] in Belt and Road co-productions reveals a trend of 'dual cultural devaluation,' where numerous recent Chinese co-productions struggle to achieve comparable levels of cross-cultural connect, both facing artistic and commercial challenges in overseas markets.

*Mulan* is a representation of Western adaptations of Eastern cultures for a global audience. Although *Mulan* has been criticized for its cultural authenticity [25], it exemplifies the tension inherent in such cross-cultural adaptations. These very different methods provide an ideal basis for analyzing culturally symbolic representations in cross-cultural film.

##### 3.2.2 Comparative Value of Different Production Contexts

The different production contexts of these films provide valuable comparative insights. *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* is the product of a collaboration between a Taiwanese filmmaker (Ang Lee) and a number of

production companies in China, Hong Kong, Taiwan and the West. In contrast, *Mulan* was created entirely within the American studio system of interpreting Chinese cultural heritage.

These different production contexts reveal different ways of encoding cultural symbols. Animation and live action also represent different mediums of cultural representation-animation allows for symbol abstraction, while live action allows for direct identification with the real environment [26]. Therefore, different methods is important for understanding contemporary cross-cultural filmmaking.

### 3.2.3 Evolution of Reception Over Time

The reviews of both films have changed over time. *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* continues to receive mixed reactions between Western and Eastern audiences [27].

These changing explanations reflect the evolution of the social environment and an increased global awareness of cultural representation. Contemporary Chinese filmmakers continue to seek a balance between tradition and innovation [28], demonstrating how these pioneering films have established ongoing dialogues about cultural representation that remain relevant to current cross-cultural films.

### 3.2.4 Relation to Contemporary Cross-Cultural Cinema

In our exploration of these trailblazing films, it is necessary to look beyond the recent progress of cross-cultural films. *Shang-Chi* (2021), *The Farewell* (2019), *Crazy Rich Asians* (2018), and *Turning Red* (2022) draw on the frameworks created by our case studies, introducing new paradigms for portraying Chinese cultural stories to international audiences.

The 2020 live-action remake of *Mulan* by Disney provides a particularly relevant point of comparison, as it attempted to address criticisms leveled against the 1998 animated original by incorporating more authentic cultural representations without sacrificing broad appeal. Audience responses to this remake further clarify the complex dynamics that we examine through our main case studies.

Far from reducing the relevance of the films we have selected, these recent productions highlight the pioneering strategies for cross-cultural representation used by *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* and *Mulan*, which continue to shape present filmmaking practice.

## 3.3 Analytical Framework

Our analysis examines four key aspects of cultural symbol representation and interpretation in these films:

1. Cultural Power Structures and Film Narratives: Analyzing how power relationships are encoded through character interactions and narrative structures, drawing on Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory, particularly power distance.
2. Interpretation of Symbols and Cultural Expressions: Examining specific cultural symbols (e.g., the sword in *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* and architectural elements in *Mulan*) through Saussure's semiotic framework to understand their signifier-signified relationships.
3. Open Text and Deconstruction of Culture: Applying Eco's concept of the open text and Barthes' mythological analysis to understand how cultural symbols operate at both denotative and connotative levels.
4. Global Encoding and Cultural Decoding: Using Hall's encoding/decoding model to analyze how cultural symbols are encoded by filmmakers and decoded by diverse audience groups.

## 4. Case Study

### 4.1 Cultural Power Structures and Film Narratives

**Table 1.** Analytical Framework for Power Structure Theory

Theoretical sources	Core concepts	Application: <i>Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon</i>	Application: <i>Mulan</i>
Hofstede	High Power Distance	Traditional Confucian Values	Military hierarchy
Hofstede	Low Power Distance	Acts of resistance	Questioning gender roles
Hall	Encode location	The Symbolization of Power in Transmission	Cultural Ecoding of family responsibilities
Hall	Decode Location	Differences in the Acceptance of Symbols of Power between China and the West	A Cross-Cultural Interpretation of Gender Role Subversion

#### 4.1.1 Applying the Integrated Model to Cultural Power Structures

Table 1 provides an analytical structure for our study of power structures in the two films, linking theoretical concepts to their specific application in each case study. This framework guided our comparative analysis of how cultural power dynamics are encoded and decoded in different cultural context.

As shown in the table, we studied how each movie used different aspects of power distance to structure narrative tension and character relationships. This structured methodology allows us to systematically compare the cultural encoding strategies of the two films while linking them to our integrated theoretical framework.

#### 4.1.2 Encoding Cultural Power Structures in *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*

*Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* presents a complex encoding of cultural power structures through its characters and narrative. Ang Lee unambiguously puts the story at center stage around three female characters: Yu Shu Lien, Jen Yu, and Jade Fox—each representing different relationships to the traditional centers of power.

Yu Shu Lien embodies traditional Confucian values. A panoramic scene shows her home with a couplet (Figure 2) that reads “春祀秋嘗尊萬古賢禮樂聖，左昭右穆序一家世代源流” [3]. This couplet functions as both a denotative sign (decorative wall hanging) and a connotative sign (encoding Confucian values). The text emphasizes seasonal rituals, ancestral respect, familial hierarchy, and heritage importance—all elements encoding the high-power distance culture of traditional Chinese society.



**Figure 2.** Couplets on the Wall

Jen Yu portrays a complex conflict between power dynamics, boldly challenging existing hierarchies while operating within their confines. She frees herself from the confines of an arranged marriage, dressing as a man to defeat a string of male opponents [29]. In her portrayal, Lee explores conflict between collectivist tradition and desire for pursuing personal goals.

Jade Fox represents a type of oppositional representation in her actions—stealing, murder, and deception—all embedded in a framework of radical individualism that counters formal authority. Her very fate—death as punishment for her rebellion—demonstrates the consequences of strongly opposing traditional frameworks in a high-power distance cultural context.

#### 4.1.3 Encoding Cultural Power Structures in *Mulan*

*Mulan* shows how Western studios are taking a page out of Eastern narrative traditions centered on gender roles and subverting the restrictions placed on women in ancient China.

The pivotal encoding moment occurs when *Mulan* secretly replaces her father in military service. She ties up her hair, grabs her father's sword, and dons the military uniform. The scene is one in which resistance to gender constraint is articulated in very Western terms. Existing empirical research [11] concerning Chinese audiences' reception of American animated films demonstrates how cinematic reception can be influenced by cultural values like individualism versus collectivism. The empirical studies examine how films from cultures with predominantly Western individualistic orientations pose barriers to Chinese audiences, who themselves are collectivist oriented.

As the film progresses, *Mulan*'s narrative shifts from a tale of filial piety to a tale of self-discovery. Her quest for "who am I?" is consistent with the American film's emphasis on personal growth and self-realization [30]. While this focus on individualism makes it easier for Western audiences to accept, it may also cause a distance in interpretation for those audiences who come from collectivist cultural traditions and have higher power distance values.

#### 4.1.4 Circulation and Reception of Cultural Power Structures

The reception and circulation of such encoded power structures demonstrate the complexity of cross-cultural communication. The extraordinary global success of *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* demonstrates effective communication across cultural boundaries.

Western views approached *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* from a dominant-hegemonic position confidently proclaiming their opinions about its artistry while traversing its cultural aspects, specifically the transgressive feminine heroes who transgressed conventional norms. Chinese views, however, watched the film differently, taking a critical stance that involved higher forms of negotiation or even oppositional meanings as they scrutinized its authenticity and how it reinscribed the conventional martial arts genre film.

While, simultaneously, Western views identified with *Mulan* from a hegemonic perspective, enjoying its feminine empowerment and personal success themes, Chinese views will be less likely to do so from a critical position drawing from their heritage.

Hall's encoding/decoding model presents a starting point for understanding reception of cross-cultural films, yet more recent work in theoretical inquiry has illuminated more complex dynamics of meaning-making in multicultural communicative contexts [31]. This shift reflects the increasing complexity in cross-cultural communication in an increasingly globalizing media environment.

#### 4.1.5 Conclusion: Power Structures in Cross-Cultural Cinema

Examining the dynamics of power in *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* and *Mulan* reveals the complex level of transnational cultural representation. Both films present different paradigms of cultural power relations, influenced by the production conditions and the audience each film is intended for.

Rather than evaluating these strategies on a simple success-failure measure, we recognize the various ways in which filmmakers negotiate the complexities of cultural specificity alongside international accessibility. Both films play a significant role in the field of cross-cultural communication studies, though they do so in different manners and approaches.

Next, we will explore how these power dynamics are represented through symbols, such as the Green Destiny sword in *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* and the architectural elements in *Mulan*, demonstrating how these items express more complex cultural meaning beyond their narrative functions.

## 4.2 Interpretation of Symbols and Cultural Expressions

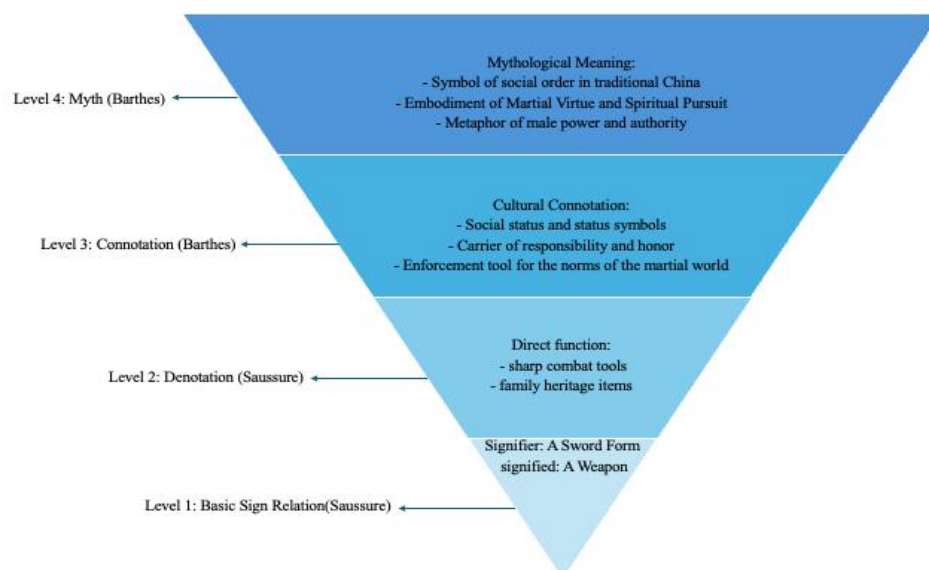
### 4.2.1 Applying the Integrated Model to Cultural Symbols

Based on the analysis of cultural power structures, we will explore the specific cultural symbols that reflect these power dynamics. In the previous section, we focused on power relationships encoded through character interactions and narrative structures; this section analyses how tangible artefacts function as semiotic vehicles, carrying cultural meanings across boundaries, specifically the sword in *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* and the Tulou architecture in *Mulan*.

We will analyze how these symbols are encoded with cultural meanings, spread through visual representation, and decoded by audiences from different cultural backgrounds. This way reveals not only what these symbols represent but also how they function within the complex process of cross-cultural communication

### 4.2.2 The Sword as Multidimensional Symbol in *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*

The sword serves as a crucial cultural symbol in *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (Figure 3), operating on various semiotic levels. According to Saussure, the sword as a signifier relates to its literal meaning (a weapon) as well as its cultural implications (power, status, and responsibility). Yan [32] points out that in Chinese martial arts films, the sword represents male power and dominance, while also allowing female characters to break free from gender constraints.



**Figure 3.** Levels of semiotic analysis of the Green Destiny Sword

On a denotative level, the Green Destiny sword is merely an ancient weapon with a history of 400 years. However, on a connotative level, it symbolizes the hierarchical power of ancient China [33]. Li Mu Bai's choice to give up the sword reflects both his personal philosophical detachment and the traditional values of social order. By entrusting it to Beile (a Qing-dynasty princely title), he shows respect for authority within the Chinese social hierarchy.

The sword's symbolic significance shifts when it comes into the hands of Jen Yu. As Yan [32] observes, the Green Destiny sword becomes "a site of contested power and identity, especially for the female protagonist Jen who seeks freedom through its ownership." This change illustrates Barthes' idea of symbol recording, where cultural symbols can be reinterpreted to challenge existing structures.

At Saussure's structural level, the sword's Chinese name "青冥" (Qing Ming, literally "Green/Blue Darkness" or "Azure Void") operates as a complex signifier. "Qing" (青) in Chinese cosmology denotes not merely green but the entire blue-green spectrum associated with the East direction, spring season, and the Wood element in Wu-Xing (五行) theory [34]. "Ming" (冥) signifies the mysterious void or netherworld. Thus, the signifier "青冥" connects to signifieds spanning Daoist cosmology (the azure void of the heavens), martial philosophy (the mysterious realm beyond mortal conflict), and elemental theory (Wood's generative power). At Barthes' mythological level, "Green Destiny" encodes what Kustedja et al. [35] identify as the Qing-Long (青龍, Azure

Dragon) symbolism within the Si-Xiang (四象) cosmological system—representing the yang principle, benevolence, and imperial authority associated with the East. The sword thus mythologically encodes not merely a weapon but a cosmic principle: the generative, authoritative power that legitimate martial artists must responsibly steward. When Jen Yu seizes it, she appropriates not just physical power but cosmological authority itself—a transgression registering at the mythological level for audiences versed in Chinese symbolic systems. Through Hall’s encoding-decoding framework, Ang Lee strategically encodes these layered meanings for differential reception. Chinese audiences, accessing the “青冥” signifier’s cosmological resonances, decode the sword through a dominant-hegemonic position that recognizes its Daoist-Confucian symbolic density. The sword represents the Dao (道) itself—the cosmic principle that Li Mu Bai seeks to transcend and that Jen Yu recklessly misappropriates. Western audiences, decoding primarily through the translated signifier “Green Destiny,” construct a negotiated reading: they grasp the sword’s importance as a plot device and status symbol but may not access its cosmological mythological depth, instead interpreting “destiny” through Western notions of fate and individual will. Hofstede’s power distance dimension illuminates why the sword’s transfer carries such weight. In high power distance cultures (China’s PDI: 80), swords historically functioned as status markers within rigid hierarchies—bestowed by emperors, inherited through lineages, or earned through martial achievement. Li Mu Bai’s choice to entrust the sword to Beile (a princely title) rather than to his beloved Yu Shu Lien or his disciple reflects this hierarchical logic: only those positioned within legitimate power structures can responsibly steward such authority. Jen Yu’s theft thus violates not merely legal norms but the hierarchical cosmological order itself—a dimension that explains the profound moral weight Chinese audiences assign to her transgression beyond Western viewers’ readings of her action as romantic rebellion. This multilayered analysis reveals what single-theory approaches miss: the Green Destiny operates simultaneously as linguistic signifier (青冥), cosmological myth (azure dragon/dao), hierarchical status marker (high PDI), and differentially decoded cultural text (dominant vs. negotiated readings). Our integrated framework enables systematic examination of how all four dimensions interact to produce the sword’s dense symbolic resonance across cultural contexts.

#### 4.2.3 The Tulou as Cultural Symbol in *Mulan*

In *Mulan*, the Tulou house that is the Hua family’s home reflects a distinct understanding of cultural symbolism. Such traditional communal houses, originating from China’s Fujian province, function on multiple levels of semiotics. At a denotative level, the Tulou is simply an oddly circular building. On a connotative level, it represents “traditional Chinese family culture with emphasis on community relationships and collective living” [36].

The circular form symbolizes unity and the feeling of collective identity, values that are at the center of Chinese culture [37]. By employing this style of architecture for *Mulan*’s home, the animators incorporate her tale within a familiar symbol of Chinese tradition, rendering her leaving to take part in the army that much more emotionally and visually powerful.

However, the Tulou structures have their beginnings in the Tang Dynasty, after the Northern Wei Dynasty, which is the historical setting of the legend of *Mulan* [38]. Such a chronological discrepancy has raised criticism about cultural authenticity, particularly among viewers who are very familiar with Chinese history.

Recent research suggests that media representations of Tulou have assisted in maintaining interest in this traditional architectural style [36]. This suggests that animated films can choose visual uniqueness and symbolism over fact-based historical correctness - a creative choice that allows traditional cultural symbols to be presented to an international audience [39].

##### 4.2.3.1 Architectural Symbolism Through the Integrated Framework

Through Hall’s encoding-decoding views, Disney’s choice of Tulou encodes a strategic decision: selecting the most visually distinctive Chinese architectural form regardless of historical accuracy. The circular Tulou’s immediate visual recognizability—its fortress-like walls and communal courtyard—encodes “Chineseness” through architectural spectacle. Western audiences decode this through a dominant-hegemonic position aligned with Disney’s encoding: the Tulou registers as authentically “exotic” without requiring historical knowledge. However Chinese audiences adopt negotiated or oppositional positions: some appreciate the architectural beauty despite anachronism, while others resist the historical inaccuracy as symptomatic of superficial cultural engagement. The Tulou’s circular form encodes collectivist values (Hofstede’s individualism- collectivism dimension) through spatial organization—families living in communal rings rather than separate Western-style houses. This architectural encoding of collectivism aligns with *Mulan*’s narrative emphasis on family duty, creating visual- thematic coherence even if historically misplaced.

#### 4.2.4 Decoding Cultural Symbols Across Cultural Boundaries

Different audience groups decode cultural symbols in very different ways, which reflect Hall's decoding stance model. In the case of the Green Destiny Sword in *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, for example, Chinese audiences familiar with martial arts traditions can extract its full cultural significance, but Western audiences primarily decode its narrative function without being able to comprehend all the cultural nuances embedded in the symbols of traditional Chinese weapons.

Similarly, *Mulan* creates a different mode of interpretation in terms of architectural representation. While Western audiences generally recognize the Tulou as authentic Chinese architecture, Chinese audiences with historical knowledge appreciate its narrative purpose while questioning its historical representation.

These multiple interpretations highlight the challenges for filmmakers in representing cultural symbols for views worldwide. According to Zhang [33], internationally successful films need to balance "traditional Chinese cultural elements and Western cinematic conventions" to create representations that can cross cultural boundaries.

#### 4.2.5 Comparative Analysis: Symbol Encoding Strategies

In *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, Ang Lee establishes the Green Destiny Sword as a multifaceted symbol within the Chinese martial arts tradition while making it accessible to an international audience. Its significance is established through visual imagery, narrative centers, and connections to character development, allowing for cross-cultural appreciation despite different interpretations of it.

Disney favors visual uniqueness and symbolic meaning over historical accuracy in *Mulan*. This allows animation's potential for "faithful reproduction and creative reinterpretation of traditional themes" [40] to be maximized. Having settled upon visually evocative Tulou as their representation for family and community values, filmmakers were then able to develop a working shorthand that could convey all these themes between cultures.

These varied approaches illustrate several strategies for balancing cultural specificity and global availability. While *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* maintains a strong cultural specificity, *Mulan* showcases thematic clarity and visual appeal. Both films handle well the challenge of projecting cultural notions across frontiers.

#### 4.2.6 Conclusion: Cultural Symbols in Cross-Cultural Cinema

The comparison between the sword in *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* and the Tulou in *Mulan* illustrates how symbols from one's own or another's culture allow for cross-cultural interchange. They work on various semiotic levels—from straightforward representations to complex mythos-giving views from different cultural access to meaning in new contexts.

Filmmakers reflect different aspects when addressing the use of symbols from cultures: one movement celebrates cultural authenticity, while another takes a path toward symbolic emphasis for effect and thematic impact. Nevertheless, one sees that both courses encourage cross-cultural comprehension in its own ways. Scholars argue that world cinema's visual elements constitute a "bridge between tradition and modern discourse" [32], which exposes possibilities for mutual comprehension through representation.

These principles provide a theoretical framework for making more effective cinematic representations that are balanced between a commitment to maintaining cultural identity and making them more universally available, ultimately enriching cross-cultural communication through motion pictures.

### 4.3 Open Text and Deconstruction of Culture

#### 4.3.1 Extending the Integrated Model Through Open Text Theory

Following our discussion about cultural powers and unique cultural symbols, this part will examine how these two movies are open texts that welcome various explanations from various cultures. We will analyze how symbolic objects such as the forest of bamboos in *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* and the phoenix in *Mulan* provide a backdrop for varied multicultural understanding.

As Gilyazova [41] explains, open text welcomes readers to partake in a free and dynamic interpretation without, however, excluding the author's viewpoint. The concept fits perfectly with Hall's encoding/decoding model since both theories recognize that people take meaning from an active interpretation instead of a passive reception. Applying Eco's theory to cross-cultural cinema helps to explain how films can generate multiple valid interpretations in different cultural contexts while maintaining narrative coherence.

Film as an open text enables what Campbell [42] describes as “a multiplicity of interpretation possibilities that actively mobilize the interpreter’s existential credentials.” This flexibility allows viewers from different cultural backgrounds to interact meaningfully with cultural symbols, even if they are from different cultural backgrounds than the filmmakers.

#### 4.3.2 Bamboo Forest as Open Text in *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*

The Bamboo Forest Fight in *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (Figure 4) is an example of an open text that can lead to multiple interpretations. Beyond the surface narrative of Li Mu Bai chasing Jen Yu, the scene creates what Li [43] calls “an atmosphere of subject-object metaphors and mutual contrasts” through its visual composition.

In the symbolism of Chinese culture, bamboo represents a person of refinement—possessing a mild demeanor paired with strong convictions—embodying the values of emotional restraint and moral integrity. When Li Mu Bai and Jen Yu, dressed in white, chase and fight each other through the waving bamboo forest, their combat movements create a powerful poetic visuality, as the director blends martial arts choreography with dance elements to convey what Li [43] describes as “traditional Chinese cultural flavor and ancient martial arts imagery.”

Chinese audiences may understand this series of martial arts choreography - Li Mu Bai represents the strength and principles of bamboo, while Jade Yu represents the flexibility and adaptability of bamboo. Their conflict between symbolic branches and leaves reflects the broader tension between tradition and rebellion.

##### 4.3.2.1 Vertical Space and Moral Symbolism

Beyond the open text interpretation discussed above, the bamboo forest encodes specific cultural dimensions that deepen its symbolic resonance. In Chinese literati tradition, bamboo (竹, Zhu) exemplifies the JunZi (君子, exemplary person) ideal through its “虚心直节” (Xu Xin Zhi Jie)—hollow heart representing humility, straight joints symbolizing moral integrity. This four-character phrase, deeply embedded in Confucian ethics, establishes bamboo as a moral exemplar in Chinese cultural consciousness. The vertical choreography of the bamboo forest fight encodes social mobility anxieties within hierarchical structures. When Li Mu Bai and Jen Yu ascend the bamboo stalks, their bodies defying gravity through QingGong (轻功, lightness skill), the vertical space becomes a metaphor for transgression of social boundaries. Vertical movement in Chinese cinema often symbolizes attempts to transcend fixed social positions [44]. Jen Yu’s ability to match Li Mu Bai’s vertical prowess—despite lacking his decades of training and legitimate lineage—visualizes her refusal to accept prescribed hierarchical positions. The bamboo’s flexibility-with-strength duality encodes the Daoist principle of “overcoming hardness with softness” (以柔克刚, Yi Rou Ke Gang). Unlike rigid trees that break in storms, bamboo bends and rebounds—a principal Li Mu Bai embodies through his controlled, flowing movements. Jen Yu’s more aggressive, rigid techniques contrast with this bamboo-like adaptability, encoding her insufficient internalization of the dao despite her raw talent. The bamboo forest thus becomes not merely scenic backdrop but active participant in encoding the philosophical conflict between authentic mastery (Li Mu Bai) and appropriated technique (Jen Yu). For Chinese audience’s familiar with literati painting traditions, the scene evokes the “四君子” (Si Jun Zi, Four Gentlemen) motif—plum blossom, orchid, bamboo, and chrysanthemum—representing scholar-official virtues. The bamboo’s ubiquity in classical painting establishes visual intertextuality: Chinese viewers decode the scene through centuries of ink-wash bamboo paintings, accessing aesthetic codes that Western audiences experience primarily as exotic visual spectacle. This differential decoding validates Hall’s model—the same visual text generates culture-specific interpretations based on viewers’ access to embedded cultural codes.



Figure 4. Bamboo forest in *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*

### 4.3.3 Phoenix as Contested Symbol in Mulan

The phoenix in Mulan functions as a multilayered symbol that diverges sharply from the culturally grounded symbolism of the bamboo forest. In the Disney adaptation, the phoenix serves as Hua Mulan’s spiritual guide and embodies her path of transformation

The symbolism of the phoenix is fundamentally different in China and the West; Zhang and Wang [45] point out that the Western phoenix symbolizes death and rebirth, and the Chinese phoenix (凤凰, Feng Huang) “never withers,” with completely different associations. Rooted in Chinese mythology, the phoenix is usually accompanied by the dragon, symbolizing female virtue, fertility, and imperial authority [46].

Disney recontextualizes the symbol through the perspective of Western mythology, emphasizing the symbolism and spiritual guidance of the resurrection rather than the traditional Chinese associations. This transformation reveals that cultural symbols change significantly when they cross cultural boundaries.

Audience reactions also reflect this cultural difference. Western audiences often interpret the phoenix within a familiar mythological framework—as a symbol of personal rebirth and transformation. Chinese audiences usually realize the difference between this representation and the traditional understanding; they respond with different interpretations based on their own cultural knowledge.

#### 4.3.3.1 Cross-Cultural Symbol Transformation

The phoenix transformation illustrates what Zhang and Wei [16] term “glocalization” of global symbols—local adaptation of transnational signs. Disney recodes the Chinese FengHuang through Western phoenix mythology, creating a hybrid symbol that functions differently across cultures: Chinese phoenix “never withers” and symbolizes yin-female virtue paired with yang-male dragon, while Western phoenix emphasizes death-rebirth cycles [34]. This recoding enables differential decoding: Western audiences decode the phoenix through their existing mythological frameworks (dominant-hegemonic position relative to Disney’s Western encoding), while Chinese audiences experience cognitive dissonance—the visual signifier resembles FengHuang but the narrative signified (individual transformation, spiritual guide) contradicts traditional meanings (imperial femininity, marital harmony). This misalignment validates our integrated framework: the symbol’s failure to resonate authentically with Chinese audiences stems from misalignment across all four theoretical dimensions—structural (signifier/ signified mismatch), mythological (death-rebirth vs. eternal virtue), hierarchical (individualist vs. collectivist encoding), and reception (oppositional decoding).

**Table 2.** Application of Eco’s Open Text Theory to Key Scenes

Concept from Open Text Theory	Application: Bamboo Forest Scene	Application: Phoenix Symbolism
Plurality of Interpretations	Bamboo as moral duality: firmness vs. flexibility	Phoenix as moral duality: rebirth vs. balance
Cross-cultural Reception	Visual poetics perceived beyond cultural context	Symbolic poetics perceived via universal archetypes
Tension between Authorial Intent and Audience Interpretation	Chinese aesthetics encoded, open to reinterpretation	Cultural meaning encoded, open to reinterpretation

### 4.3.4 Conclusion: Open Texts in Cross-Cultural Cinema

In this section, we analyze the bamboo forest and the phoenix while revealing how cultural symbols function as open texts in cross-cultural cinema and hold multiple meanings within them, while also facilitating cross-cultural understanding. They reflect values deeply ingrained in culture, philosophical ideals, and overall themes of a story alike, which people of different cultures are interpreting in their own ways.

Within the multi-layered tapestry of cross-cultural encounter, Hall’s encoding/decoding model shines light upon how audience members participate actively in texts, making sense of them through their own knowledge and personal cultures. In turn, Eco’s Open Text Theory further enhances our comprehension by explaining how myriad differing meanings can peacefully coexist, while all along focusing exclusively on just the text itself. In conclusion, these two theories bring about an understanding of the incredible ability of films to touch people from various cultures, hence creating meaningful avenues for cross-cultural communication.

#### 4.4 Global Coding and Cultural Decoding

##### 4.4.1 Extending the Integrated Model to Global Reception

Following from our previous discussions about cultural relations of power, symbolic representation, and open-text interpretation, this section probes the processes in which symbolic meanings in cultures are encoded and decoded across the world, specifically through costume design and visual presentation in *Mulan* and *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*. Our focus is on cross-cultural flows between these films and diverse audience receptions and meanings given those films' messages.

As illustrated by Zou and Joneurairatana [47], Hall's encoding/decoding model can be extended to cover the complex process by which cultural symbols are decoded across cultural boundaries. Their study illustrates a wider communication process: the original encoding of cultural symbols by these producers, followed by their decoding by cultural translators, to further encode into new cultural products, and then followed by decoding by diverse audiences. This model explains the work of filmmakers as cultural translators reinterpreting traditional symbols into new cinematic products that are understood and appreciated globally.

Follow-up research [48] into cross-cultural reception of films explores how different elements of films configure viewers' senses of cultural distance or proximity from other cultures. Ensure that such aspects as composition, verbal and non-verbal communication, and sound supplement how global cinematic narrative is understood when traveling across national boundaries. This understanding adds strength to our comprehensive model through discovering the detailed processes through which semantic encoding and semantic decoding operate in global films.

##### 4.4.2 Costume Design as Cultural Encoding in *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*

In *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, costuming is a multilayered tapestry that interlaces cultural identity and character development. Ang Lee wanted designs that achieve a careful balance between authenticity and universal beauty appeal. This perspective aligns with the sentiments of Zou and Joneurairatana, who view designers as "translators" working through various "language systems," transforming traditional cultures into a form that can be meaningfully interpreted by a diverse range of audience [49].

Jen Yu's costume development in the film is a journey of complex transformation. Her apparel goes through clear phases that represent her evolving identity. She is initially dressed in elaborate palace clothes, symbolic of aristocratic lineage and Confucian correctness—what Barthes would call connotative signs. Her transformation, however, takes a dramatic turn when she decides to dress in all-black attire when she steals the Green Destiny, which symbolizes her rejection of traditional roles.

The change in her look is dramatic as Jen Yu appropriates the Green Destiny sword, dressed in an all-black outfit that includes a veil to cover her face and obscure her identity. The change in her attire represents her rebellion against traditional societal norms, while still maintaining visual links with the long tradition of Chinese martial arts. The black costume is an open text that may be decoded in several different ways: as a functional disguise within the diegesis, as a symbol of her hidden desires and ambitions, and as a visual sign of her resistance to conventional strictures.

Jen Yu's costume also evolves as she becomes new personas. Her shift from aristocratic dress to masculine desert garb and later to sheer white robes reflects a continual reencoding of identity—what Zou and Joneurairatana identify as a visual translation of cultural meaning legible to global audiences [47]. In the bamboo forest chase scene, both Jen Yu and Li Mu Bai wear the same identical undergarments, visually coding their complex relationship. This costuming convention is one of the things that new research on aesthetic authenticity discovers about "representational affordances" [50] of visual composition for expressing character relationships and thematic concerns in a way that goes beyond language. The same costumes code bonding and conflict with the characters, creating a visual icon that is readable to diverse audiences.

This intricate design of costumes is only one part of what Cai et al. characterize as "sustaining cultural authenticity in the face of globalization while modifying content for international appeal" [51]. In embedding cultural identity in terms of dense visual and pertinent narrative costume designs, the film can produce cultural signifiers that are meaningfully decodable for both Eastern and Western audiences, although they may differently interpret the signifiers in terms of their respective cultural environments.

#### 4.4.2.1 Color Symbolism and Yin-Yang Dialectics

The color transformations in Jen Yu's costumes encode deeper cultural logic beyond the narrative function discussed above. White in Chinese culture carries dual connotations: "innocence, honesty, purity, and noble character" but simultaneously "mourning and death" [52]. Black similarly operates at multiple levels, signifying "authority, solemnity, righteousness" as well as "evil," symbolizing both "the supreme sky" and "darkness, coldness and terror" [52]. Jen Yu's costume evolution thus encodes a white-black dialectic paralleling the film's titular "*Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*" yin-yang cosmology. Her initial white palace robes encode yang qualities—visible, legitimate, conforming to social expectations. When she dons all-black attire to steal the sword, she enters yin territory—hidden, transgressive, operating in darkness. This binary opposition creates what Chen and Chu [52] describe as a "combination of colors" that is "crucial to understand connotation" in Chinese visual culture. The white robes she wears during the bamboo forest chase encode her return to visible identity but now in conflict with legitimate authority. The white-on-white composition (both Li Mu Bai and Jen Yu in white) creates visual ambiguity—are they complementary yin-yang forces or mirror images in tragic opposition? This chromatic tension encodes the film's central thematic conflict: Jen Yu possesses the external markers of virtue (white robes, aristocratic beauty) while internally harboring transgressive desires (encoded through her earlier black costume). Western audiences decode these color transitions primarily through universal signifiers of light versus darkness, purity versus corruption—a negotiated reading that grasps moral dimensions without necessarily accessing the specific yin-yang cosmological framework or the cultural weight Chen and Chu document regarding Chinese color symbolism. Chinese audiences' dominant-hegemonic reading recognizes how the white-black dialectic participates in the broader cosmological encoding embedded throughout the film—from the Tiger-Dragon title to the Azure Dragon (Green Destiny) sword to the bamboo's (green) vertical aesthetics. Color becomes not mere decoration but a systematic encoding of philosophical principles accessible to culturally informed decoders.

#### 4.4.3 Costume Design and Cultural Decoding in Mulan

Disney's *Mulan* shows a different strategy of cultural encoding. The film's costume design has been criticized for its historical accuracy - the long purple dress worn by Hua Mulan in the matchmaking scene originates from the Han Dynasty rather than the Northern Wei period in which the story is set.

However, it is important to recognize that *Mulan* is an animated film that uses symbolic representation rather than a documentary that requires strict historical evidence. The costume design creates a visually distinctive image of Chinese culture, prioritizing narrative clarity and visual impact over strict historical accuracy.

This approach creates what is known in studies of aesthetic authenticity as "experiential possibilities despite not conforming to the logic of the genre" [50], offering immersive experiences rather than documentary realism as a legitimate creative strategy for the animation medium. This distinction is crucial when assessing cross-cultural representations in different film genres.

##### 4.4.3.1 Color and Visual Encoding

*Mulan*'s costume design prioritizes what Chen and Chu [52] identify as "bright color and bold silhouette" over historical accuracy. The red (红, Hong) predominance in *Mulan*'s costumes encodes auspiciousness and joy in Chinese culture but also serves Disney's animated aesthetic requiring high color saturation for visual impact. This dual encoding—culturally resonant for Chinese audiences, visually striking for global audiences—represents a negotiated approach between cultural signification and commercial animation conventions. The color encoding succeeds where the phoenix symbol fails because red's Chinese cultural meaning (celebration, good fortune) aligns with *Disney*'s narrative encoding (heroic transformation), creating coherent signification across cultural contexts.

#### 4.4.4 Cross-Cultural Audience Reception and Decoding

The reception of the two films demonstrates the complex dynamics of cross-cultural decoding in global cinema. Recent research on Chinese audience reception of Western-produced films with Chinese cultural content suggests that there are significant variations in the way audiences decode cultural representation [21].

These reception differences uncover what Hall would identify as varying decoding positions in terms of cultural background and expectation. Chinese audiences appear to decode cultural representation from a position of more interest in cultural veracity and authenticity, while Western audiences maybe more engaged in narrative interest and visual spectacle.

*Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* was an international success, and this suggests encoding of cultural symbols that could be decoded with meaning to cross-cultural audiences. Through encoding of Chinese cultural symbols in a form both culturally particular and universally appealing, the film generated visual symbols decodable from alternative cultural positions without narrative coherence sacrificed.

*Mulan*, while financially successful, provoked more polarized reception, particularly in its representation of Chinese culture. Such polarized reception may indicate what new studies of cross-cultural audience reception identify as the challenge of maintaining “cultural authenticity in the face of globalization” [51].

Effective cross-cultural encoding requires an awareness of the ways in which diverse audiences will interpret cultural symbols with the recognition that diverse cultural contexts will influence interpretation and judgment.

#### 4.4.5 Comparison of Encoding/Decoding Strategies

Each movie employs a distinct mode of encoding cultural symbols for international viewers. *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* employs what Livingston [53] would identify as a comparative method that is still respectful of its cultural roots even as it builds them for international audiences. Encoding cultural symbols with rich multiple meanings and yet rendering them visually appealing across cultures, the movie generates representations that are decodable in meaningful ways by various audiences.

*Mulan* takes the other approach, what recent research in aesthetic authenticity terms as creating “immersive experiences” that prize narrative involvement rather than historical truth [50].

These different strategies capture what Cai et al. [51] term the trade-off between “cultural authenticity” and “global appeal”. Effective cross-cultural encoding is a matter of balancing cultural specificity and global useability, creating representations that can be decoded meaningfully by a range of audiences without offending cultural norms.

#### 4.4.6 Global Encoding and Cultural Decoding in Cross-Cultural Cinema

Decoding depending on the cultural identification of the audience, some relishing aesthetic choices and others resisting historical authenticity. These reception patterns validate the contention of Hall that communication is active interpretation rather than transmission.

Having analyzed these films through multiple lenses of theory, we’ve gained an understanding of cultural symbol operation transnationally in some depth. Filmmakers navigating these pitfalls must balance competing priorities in consideration of how multicultural audiences are most likely to receive cultural symbols.

## 5. Conclusion

Our research demonstrates enormous advantages in bringing theoretical models together for cross-cultural film study. This synthesizing approach is enriched academically in ways not available when theories were discrete. Combining cross-cultural communication theory with semiotics and encoding-decoding models allows researchers to examine cultural symbol use from multiple perspectives simultaneously.

*Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* functions through subtle integration of cultural symbols and even cultural blending. Director Ang Lee is particularly culturally sensitive to presenting Chinese traditions naturally and yet making them globally palatable. *Mulan* takes other routes to cultural representation, prioritizing narrative appeal and thematic simplicity for the largely Western audience. Both approaches describe viable strategies with different strengths depending on production context and target consumers.

Hall’s encoding/decoding model remains a useful instrument in comprehending how audiences decode movies across cultures. Current discussions at a theoretical level have shed more light on the nuanced dynamics of meaning construction in multicultural contexts. While our case studies discussed two seminal films from many years ago, our presented theoretical model continues to be apposite for cross-cultural films today.

This project has a few limitations deserving of note. First, this analysis addresses a mere two case studies, potentially not giving a nuanced enough picture of whatever diversity exists in cross-cultural approaches to films. Second, our reliance upon text analysis, with minimal empirical data from audiences, limits our understanding of actual reception patterns. Future research would be helpful where it would extend case selection beyond a two-case approach and include audience reception data for a more informed refinement and validation of this theoretical model.

### 5.1 Methodological Contribution and Future Research Directions

Our integrated model makes two methodological contributions relevant to contemporary film studies and digital humanities. First, it provides a systematic analytical framework that bridges qualitative cultural analysis with potential computational operationalization. The four-stage circuit (encoding, circulation, decoding, reproduction) with specific theoretical dimensions at each stage translates into codifiable variables for systematic content analysis. The encoding stage's variables (filmmaker cultural background, production context, symbolic intentions) can be systematically documented through production studies and filmmaker interviews. The content/circulation stage's semiotic levels (signifier- signified, denotative, connotative-mythological) can be operationalized through structured visual coding protocols, as Zhang and Wei [16] demonstrate with their four-tiered visual framing model applied to promotional videos. The decoding stage's variables (audience cultural background, knowledge systems, decoding positions) can be analyzed through reception data from platforms like *IMDb*, *Douban*, *Rotten Tomatoes*, and social media discourse, as recent studies by Zhao [18] and Li et al. [20] illustrate. Second, the model enables cross-platform comparative reception analytics. As streaming platforms increasingly provide multilingual subtitles, dubbed audio tracks, and algorithmic curation [20], researchers can systematically compare how cultural symbols are received across different linguistic and national contexts using platform-specific rating systems, review corpora, and user engagement metrics. The three decoding positions (dominant-hegemonic, negotiated, oppositional) could potentially be identified through computational text analysis of audience reviews, enabling quantitative validation of qualitative theoretical predictions. Future research could extend this framework in several directions. Comparative studies across additional cross-cultural films, including productions like *Shang-Chi* (2021), *Everything Everywhere All at Once* (2022), and *Avatar: The Way of Water* (2022) would test the model's applicability across diverse production contexts and cultural symbol systems. Longitudinal reception studies tracking how decoding positions shift over time would illuminate how cultural symbols' meanings evolve as global audiences become more interculturally informed. Integration with emerging digital methods, corpus linguistics for subtitle analysis, computer vision for systematic visual coding, network analysis for cross-platform reception patterns—would enable large-scale testing of the model's predictive power while maintaining the theoretical depth our integrated approach provides.

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