

Brief Analysis of the Excellent Confucianism Embodied in Mulan

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Abstract: As we all know, Mulan is a brave hero in China. The spirit of Mulan has deeply influenced generations of people. What made people impressed most after watching the film called Mulan is usually the Confucianism. By Mulan's words, actions and the details of the story, the paper will illustrate how the actions and words manifest the cultural phenomenon of excellent Confucianism like the connotation of kindheartedness, filial piety and three principles and five virtues, etc.

Keywords: Mulan; The Excellent Confucianism; Benevolence; Filial Piety

1. Chapter One Introduction

The past decades have witnessed that today culture has increasingly become an important source of national cohesion and creativity, and an important factor in the competition of comprehensive national strength. As President Xi Jinping has mentioned in the government work report of the 19th National Congress, we should strengthen cultural confidence and boost the prosperity of the socialist culture.

Directed by Niki Caro, the movie Mulan was released in the Disney on 4th September, 2020, and was released in Chinese mainland on 11th September, 2020. Adapted from the Disney animation in 1998, this film tells about Hua Mulan who disguises herself to be a man under the pseudonym "Huajun" to replace her father to join the army. This film will be conducive to promoting the excellent traditional Chinese culture, manifesting Chinese pursuit for peace and development and facilitating the cultural soft power.

Hua Mulan featuring courage forged ahead to fight for her country and she has become one of the most famous female heroes in the history of China. With the joint efforts, the whole army won the battle against the invaders from the north and uphold sovereignty and territorial integrity. In this movie, we can fluently see the sword engraved with the words: "loyalty", "courage" and "sincerity". Obviously, the Confucianism has been vividly expressed. By analyzing the words and actions in the film, the paper will express how the characters' words and actions manifest the Wen Hua Shi Xiang and the excellent Confucianism.

2. Chapter Two The Definition of Wen Hua Shi Xiang

Wen Hua Shi Xiang is a typical and symbolic thing in the development of culture, which is usually the synthesis of ideas, materialized forms, and the cognitive product of people's perception. It is a vivid and active form of the "text" in the specific context and closely connected with some components like the participants in the film, actions, times, occasions, social background, historical tradition; these components remain the "cultural context". There are some scholars who take this kind of "cultural context" as the "cultural space", too. This kind of "cultural space" does not mean one type of intangible cultural heritage, but also refers to the people's range of activity or a "style" of life in the social space. And the "cultural space" includes the "Wen Hua Shi Xiang"; if the cultural events are separated from the "cultural space", the cultural events will be meaningless.

3. Chapter Three Brief Analysis of the Excellent Confucianism in Mulan

This part will specifically interpret the embodiment of excellent Confucianism in Mulan from two perspectives.

3.1 The Filial Piety and Fraternization of Confucianism

In the long course of history, the idea of filial piety and fraternization has been deeply imprinted in Chinese heart. According to

the Confucianism, the loyalty and filial piety are interdependent. On the filial piety and fraternization, there are different forms: loving our parents means filial piety; loving the brothers means fraternization; loving the friends means reliance; loving our own country and nation means loyalty, etc. This part will detail the idea of filial piety and fraternization from two aspects: loving parents means filial piety and loving our country means loyalty.

3.1.1 The Loyalty to the Emperor and the Country

When the country is in trouble, everyone should shoulder the responsibility to protect it. In the movie, there were invaders called Rouran, causing unfavorable suffering to the people. To protect the territorial integrity and create a safe environment, the emperor ordered the people to join the army to maintain peace. Huazhou, Mulan's father still showed great resolution to fight for the country, despite the disability caused by the previous wars. This is the vivid expression of the loyalty to the emperor and country. In addition, in the final part of the film, the witch seduced Mulan, took refuge in Rouran and killed the emperor. Having resisted the tempt and adhered to the principle of loyalty, Mulan rode a horse without hesitation to return to the army camp, reported the situations and entered the capital to protect the emperor. This film has meticulously described Mulan's firm belief and noble pursuit, enabling the audience to understand the connotation of the Chinese culture: people would protect their country even if they may sacrifice their lives. The philosophy of loyalty to the country and the emperor still conforms with the patriotism of the socialist core value.

3.1.2 The Filial Piety and Love to the Family

Mencius, a philosopher in ancient China, once stated that filial piety is the source of the good virtue, and loyalty could make people upright. As the Chinese saying goes, filial piety is the foundation of all the virtues. In this movie, Mulan served her father to take the medicine, which could show Mulan's filial piety and imply that Mulan would replace her father to join the army. We can image that Mulan will encounter many difficulties; Mulan, however, replaced her father to join the army without hesitation. Mulan's actions have reflected her filial piety and loyalty to the country; Besides, after winning the final victory and returning to her hometown, the emperor sent people to give Mulan a new sword engraved "loyalty", "courage", "sincerity", on the other side of the sword engraved "filial piety", and the emperor regarded the words as the "three virtues in the army". This is the affirmation and praise of Mulan's filial piety to protect her father as well as the praise of love to the family.

3.2 The Benevolence of Confucianism

Those who are benevolent know how to love others. "Benevolence" is the ideal personality of Confucianism, and it is the highest goal to solve interpersonal relationship. Today, it still influences our daily life and the social development. From the perspective of loving ourselves and loving others, this part will combine the specific plots to discuss the embodiment of benevolence in the movie.

3.2.1 The Philosophy of Loving Others

Those who love people will be loved by others! Facing the invaders, the soldiers including Mulan, Honghui, Laoyao, etc had to go to the front line, even though they were not sophisticated. The war was approaching. General Dong summoned the army, and reminded the soldiers to stay committed to the three virtues of the army! Mulan, Honghui, Laoyao and others sit together on the ground; Mulan said firmly, "I will do my best to protect you; we will look after each other, advance and retreat together!" And Mulan ended her speech with a joke "take the opportunity to kill Yao", to cover her fear and tension. In fact, Mulan was too nervous to control her shaking hands. The description to the words and actions of Mulan's group members has reflected Mulan's love and care to others. At the last part of the film, General Dong and the soldiers fell into a trap, which tended to lure the army away from their campus; Mulan figured out the trick. But Mulan tackled this pressing situation calmly; she detoured behind the enemy on her own, attracted the enemy and fully took advantage of the collapse of the snowy mountain to kill the invaders. Mulan may sacrifice her life, but Mulan could still prioritize others and try to protect them. Besides, Mulan's red dressing has illustrated that the Chinese people will not surrender to the difficulties.

3.2.2 The Philosophy of Loving Ourselves

There has been a saying that evil does not suppress righteousness! The leader of Rouran rescued Huaniang in the desert, but he regarded Huaniang as a witch without dignity. When Huaniang persuaded Mulan to betray her army and fight for Rouran; however, Mulan firmly told Huaniang that we should not hide our "qi"^①; instead we should stick to our belief, and Huaniang could forsake the evil ways and return to the right ways and could be accepted by the people! So we should not be struck down by the evil ideas. Finally, Huaniang abandoned the evil ideas and saved Mulan who eventually defeated the leader of invaders and successfully rescued the emperor. From Mulan's sincere and stringent persuasion to Huaniang, the audience can grasp that we adhere to our belief in spite of difficult situations. And the excellent Confucianism of benevolence, love, etc has been expressed distinctively.

3.3 The Doctrine of the Mean of Confucianism

According to the Doctrine of the Mean^②, people should tackle the unfavorable affairs in a coordinated, inclusive and integrated manner. If everything in the universe can flourish in a harmonious way, mankind can achieve sustainable development. People should learn to adjust our mode of thinking in accordance with the specific situations. In the movie, not only Honghui, General Dong, Mulan but also others have applied the doctrine of mean into practice. Encountering the massive attack of the invaders, Rouran, General Dong abandoned the previous arrangement of the cavalry, and instead he sent the archers out first in an unexpected way to win more with less and win the weakness with strength, which is indeed the key to defeat the invaders of Rouran.

4. Chapter Four Conclusion

This film has made the voice of China heard by the international community and spread the excellent traditional Chinese culture. The Confucianism of filial piety, righteousness, courtesy, wisdom, faith, etc and the spirit of benevolence, are an important part of the Chinese culture and history. They have deeply influenced the norms and principles that China adheres to when tackling international affairs.

Today, economic globalization and cultural diversity represent an irresistible trend. Under this background, countries worldwide should draw the strength from each other and develop our own culture to boost the development of the global civilization. The film, on the one hand, reflects the improvement of the soft power of Chinese culture; on the other hand, it can also convey China's attitude in coping with international affairs: mutual respect and common development. For instance, for the COVID-19, China has shouldered the responsibility to dispatch the medical teams and donate billions of doses of vaccines, etc. As for the film, China's measures are in line with the excellent Confucianism of benevolence and righteousness conveyed by the film.

To conclude, this paper analyzes the excellent Confucianism reflected in the film, which is the author's understanding after watching it and the author's analysis of the film from the perspective of culture, too.

Notes:

①“qi”: It is the basic category to explain the material existence in ancient Chinese philosophy; it is a concrete and constantly moving material entity, the origin of the universe and an objective material occupying the space. “Qi” is the simple recognition to the origin of the world in ancient China.

②The Doctrine of Mean: It is one of the Four Books (The Great Learning, The Doctrine of the Mean, The Analects of Confucius and Mencius). The Doctrine of Mean embodies the political views, ethical thoughts, moral concepts and educational principles of the Confucianism. It is the source of Chinese traditional cultural thoughts and a treasure for the Chinese people.

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