**Africa’s Image on American and Chinese Screens: Case Study of <Black Panther> and <Operation Red Sea>**

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**Abstract:**

In the wave of industrialization and internationalization of the Chinese Film Industry, the Chinese movie <Operation Red Sea> burst out as the 2018’s revelation in term of quality and visual effects. The movie starred a Chinese navy team “Jiaolong”, a team of eight highly-trained and well-armed commandos in a mission of protecting 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 playground actions. So, the movie displays a picture of Africa blended with war, terrorism, pirates and desert to the domestic and world audience. Meanwhile in the same year, Hollywood released <Black Panther>, a movie which as well featured Africa as the film’s background story and playground actions, 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 of “white Super-heroism”. With regards of these changes, few questions come to mind: what are the motives behind Hollywood upturn in <Black Panther>? What lessons could the Chinese Film Industry pick up from Hollywood experience of “African Thematic Movies” to avoid the American Film Industry’s past mistakes? The article suggests that the Chinese and American film industries should integrate the features of African film industries, embrace new and progressive narratives rather than old made-up clichés of Africa and strengthen their cooperation with African filmmakers in order to improve Africa’s image domestically and their own images in Africa.

**Keywords:** Africa’s Image, African Thematic Movies, American and Chinese Screens, 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 movies and digital works as matter of facts are growing at the almost same paces and are gradually keeping the world’s attention. Determined to promote the Renaissance of Chinese civilization, the Chinese government in its new strategy has prioritized the opening up through exchanges and cooperation between China and the outside world. This will of the Chinese leadership can be seen in leading 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 Films Industry as a window for China to communicate with the world has grown up central concepts and produced digital contents oriented towards *“Patriotism”*, *“Great power”, “Humanitarianism”*, etc. 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 Chinese filmmakers on Africa. These apprehensions have been materialized in a new wave of Chinese made “African Thematic Movies”. An *“African Thematic Movie”* here is understood as a non-African made film themed on Africa, it cannot be counted as a genuine “African Film” despite it may use black actors and sometimes black directors. It is worth mentioning that the Chinese Film Industry as well as the Chinese audience were largely influenced by earliest African Thematic Movies from western countries as brilliantly acknowledged by the Chinese scholar and movie director Zhang Yong: In recent years, with the improvement of China’s comprehensive national strength and the rapid development of the film industry, Chinese films began to be shot in Africa, reconstructing African narratives and African cultural images, and providing a new vision space for Chinese audiences. However, due to the lack of narrative experience, the four (most influential) domestic films with African themes are unconsciously influenced by the Hollywood-style African thematic movies, and reflects problems such as warlike plot, Scenery exaggeration, characters symbolization and cultural marginalization, forming a completely different image reception at home and abroad *(Zhang Yong, 2018)*. As result, from early Chinese 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)*> or the recent one 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 perceive 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 pictured as the backdrop of all terrible things that could ever happened to mankind. Not only such movies cannot help the world audience get a better understanding of Africa, its people and culture, but contribute to reinforce the general bias, prejudices and mindsets established even earlier on Africa by western media discourses (Taling T. Rodrigue, 2019).

<Black Panther> broke down the tradition. 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). Moreover, unlike <Black Panther>, the previous Hollywood films on Africa tended to show a poor and backward Africa in desperate needs of western charity and assistance to reverse the sad fate to which the continent seems to be destined (as plotted by related narrators). Another fact to be pointed out that has made <Black Panther> controversial around the world and in the United States in particular was its reverse effects on “White Supremacism”. Although the United States in its constitution do advocate equality for all human beings and do struggle against discrimination of people of color, white supremacy is still a fact in American society. From real life to movies, it is clear that some (not all) white Americans discriminate against people of color as pictured 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 African American classical and jazz pianist Don Shirley and Italian American bouncer Frank Tony. <Black Panther> seems definitely to turn things upside down.

In a word, one is tempted in the one hand to believe that, with the decline of the American economy and the western world’s economy in general, and given the rising of Asian and African countries on the global stage, the American film industry in general and Hollywood in particular have improved the narratives of films about people of color, perhaps in order to win over the vast market that constitutes the so called “Third World”. And in the other hand to suspect that the Chinese narratives of Africa doesn’t look so naïve or unconsciously influenced by western Hollywood style of Africa’s narratives, but reflects its own path which yet at its embryonic stage, is trying harshly to connect Chinese and African reality in a single package. In this case, suggestions and recommendations are to be made to help integrate the cultural resources and as well as the long-standing civilizations of China and Africa that can provide inspiration sources for new and good-looking image of Africa to the Chinese audience.

1. **Africa’s Narrative In <Operation Red Sea>**

**2.1 Background Story**

***<Operation Red Sea>*** (Chinese: 红海行动) 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. The film 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. (BBC, 2015) 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). It serves as the highlight film presented to audiences as a gift 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”* in the process of evacuation, and the second is to *“Protect every Chinese, not one less” (*Li Xun, 2018*)*. The two missions connect the two hours of war plot, which develops from the line of saving Chinese citizen Deng Mei to the line of stopping the yellow cake trade with 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, created a highly attractive visual effect.

* 1. **<Operation Red Sea>’s Highlights**

**Team Spirit.** Unlike previous hit <Wolf Warrior 2>, which portrayed an 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’s 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 form complement each other so that to generate a resultant force, and become invincible”* (Ren Xiaochen, 2018). This may express the Chinese spirit of communism 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 Initiave” where world countries are call upon to work as the Jiaolong team to win the challenge of development for all nations.

**The Anti-terrorism Spirit.** Terrorism have become a major threat to the world’s security. No country today is totally sheltered from the terror 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 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 the terrorism. This is a call up 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 world militaries 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 so that the world can be a better and safe place to be.

**Patriotism.** 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, though is it difficult to estimate the real number of overseas’ Chinese, it is common to almost all countries of the world to encounter with a Chinese person. And they are real concerns over the security of these Chinese in some countries where peace had long fade away. In the case of Africa, <Operation Red Sea> attempted to picture a solution on 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 Navy’s promise to every overseas Chinese in the movie. So <Operation Red Sea> is not only patriotic, but also a naval propaganda film.

**2.3 Stereotypes**

<Operation Red Sea> contains three of the most basic and stereotypical images that ordinary Chinese people have of the African continent: *pirates*, *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 pirates battles and deserts are still typical hot news stories in few African countries, but as globalization progresses, they are positive changes taking place in those African countries, and those changes should be part of the African narratives. From American to Chinese screen, there is no need to demonstrate how deep stereotypes have been affecting Africa’s image. Just as recognized by the 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, which further deepened the impression on Africa based on Hollywood movies (Zhang Yong, 2018).* Some thinker 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’s similarity to “Wolf Warrior II” , Hong Kong action-director*[*Dante Lam*](https://variety.com/t/dante-lam/)*’s “*[*Operation Red Sea*](https://variety.com/t/operation-red-sea/)*” is 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).* A simple sentence to describe a Chinese moviegoer’s feeling after watching this film would be something like “Uh, fortunately I’m Chinese and not African. I’m lucky”. And what about an African moviegoer feeling? Certainly nothing positive or encouraging. But the sentiment to of being cursed by being African. A sentiment of needing Chinese or American care and compassion to live a meaningful live. 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 largest concentration of business opportunities of the future. In the movies sector, Africa is an important market for digital contents and without doubt the most important audience for the world movies podium in the decades to come. It is also an industrial base of digital contents with promising industries such as Nollywood (the Nigerian Film Industry) that is by now counted among the first in the world in term of volume of films productions.

Africa is no longer the part of the golden triangle of the slave trade depicted in history textbooks, nor is it a land of extreme water shortage and poverty. We can witness the emergence of mega-cities as Lagos (Nigeria) and Cairo (Egypt), green economies as in Ethiopia, Kenya, advanced hi-tech cities as Kigali (Rwanda), sky-crappers as in cape-town (South-Africa) and great tourism resort as in Cameroon. Every African country has a lot to show and limitless positive energy to offer. But the today’s mainstream films industries blindly ignore the developing Africa, only willing to show the backward and barren side of Africa to the audience. This is a problem to be taken seriously and globally in the world’s movie industry.

1. **Africa’s Narrative In <Black Panther>**

**3.1. Background Story**

<Black Panther> background story is very authentic and clearly display two storylines. 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 throne that he believes to have the equal rights of succession. The two storylines display two antithetic but pragmatic African realities.

The first one takes place a long time ago, when a meteorite from outer space crashed into Africa. This meteorite contains 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 this metal to develop their technology and culture on a massive scale, far surpassing other civilizations. 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. This is reminiscent of the Yellow Emperor of China who united the six Chinese kingdoms, build the great-wall as to separate China from the rest of the world, and set the footprints for a strong Chinese civilization as it is seen today.

The second storyline featured two princes, one is on the road all the year round, the other grows up in the cradle of the greenhouse, the different growing environment shapes the two different characters. One violent and fierce, the other gentle and brave. The story frame is similar to that of Chinese palace dramas, a battle for the throne. For the sake of revenge, the little prince who drifts away all the year round puts his plan into practice step by step, and finally drives his cousin off the throne and realizes his revenge plan. The other prince who had been driven away from the throne, challenged the throne again in order to overthrow his hateful and wicked cousin. In the end, good triumphed over evil with a happy ending of peace restoration.

This is the very first for Hollywood to picture Africa as a resources rich land powered by high technology, full of mysteries, and surpassing all other nations on earth and willing to communicate and keep the world balance and peace. One can questioned such generosity and consideration from the American Film Industry: *Why? Why now?* Of course, given the success of the movie in box offices, one can simply believe 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, of to simply ignore Hollywood intentions to catch up with some past mistakes.

**3.2. < Black Panther >’s Highlights**

Despite not being an authentic African film, <Black Panther> still displayed a great understanding of Africa’s status at home and 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. Furthermore, as not every member of the audience, especially the non-African audience were furnished with basics to culturally understand the movie, advanced technology and fruitful American fictional ideas of “Vibranium” and “Wakanda” were introduced to merge the overall movie in a traditional, modern and fictional prism so as to enlarge the field of possibilities in the global audiences’ interpretations.

**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 wore panther’ skin, especially during traditional festivals or ceremonies. In the Zulu culture of southern Africa, leopard skins are a status symbol, so their use is restricted to royalty. In the cultures of Kenya and Uganda in East Africa panthers are directly associated with martial arts activities. Black Panther is the embodiment of African cultural history, the key to the interpretation of the mysterious black African culture, and the compass for the soft power of African culture and the great revival of African civilization.

**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 in the world (humans, animals, plants, etc.) has a soul. *“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 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. The movie has done considerable display of African spirituality.

**African rhythm**. <Black Panther> also uses a lot of original music combined with specific music. It is the collision between African music culture and some modern European and American 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 understanding of African culture. It is authentic to realize that the film uses some modern instruments to perform traditional African music, even if it sounds little bit non-authentic. And sometimes classical symphony or classical music is used. As a large number of African music and dance are used in movies, African culture is no longer so mysterious in front of the world.

**3.3 Stereotypes**

As no human work is perfect, <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 U.S company above all will first serves national interest. Therefore, <Black Panther> still bears without doubt American stereotypes on Africa and Africans.

**Back-warded Africa.** The movie still reflects the idea that Wakanda is a third world country despite all the vibranium gifted by mother nature. In fact, one would have expected very advanced weapons like those existing the actual world’s military powers: vibranium nuclear missiles or anti-missiles 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 instead have armored rhinos and the list goes on. It is even questionable if Wakanda could really win the war against the actual modern U.S army with all its nuclear arsenal as we know today. Watching Wakanda tribes confronting each other with daggers and spears is reminiscent of the cavern men fighting. As the highest high-tech army that Africa has ever made, could they stand a modern U.S army with very advanced nuclear weapons? That the typical Hollywoodian mindset resurging despite all the efforts made. That how American sees and describe Africa, not what African people think or could picture themselves. Moreover, it is noticeable that without the help of white agent, the secret weapons of Wakanda would have been shipped out to conquer the world. That means Wakanda will not be able to keep the world’s peace balance without the withe man intervention. The message here is “Black people could not really rule themselves without external help”. Typical American mind of playing the world’s gendarmes and peacekeepers and to view Africa as “the white man burden”. The movie director Ryan Coogler understood this fundamental and tried his best to bring a solution, as he asserted himself “I hope they take out or it a sense of enjoyment [but also] something that is not disposable, you know? From my perspective, things that are associated with the continent of Africa are often things that are associated with triggering the feeling of shame inside of me when I see them” (Ansver Versi, 2018).

**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, and the ratio of the colored people in the film and television industry in the United States has also 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. The idea here is that “you cannot and should not talk bad of people you want them to consume your product, 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 U.S is still facing the same problem as we’ve seen with the death of “Georges Floyd”.[[1]](#footnote-1) 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 U.S. Added to this problem of the tendency for Hollywood to stare on white protagonist. Reinforcing the sensation of “white dominance” as well described by editor Ansver Versi in the following words: By and large, Hollywood’s time-tested formula for stereotypes has always been the primacy of a white protagonist, 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 this problem and also a strategy at opening new markets, mainly in Africa and the developing world, and catering to African-American audiences in the United States and other countries.

1. **Great Powers, Great Responsibilities**

China and the United States as the actual two leading economies in the world, and the world leading manufacturers of digital contents, they have to work together for the sake of a better world. As both countries are competing in many fields and leading the high-tech revolution in this 21st century, the peaceful use of the film’s technology largely depends on common vision and shared values of both powers. Great powers bear great responsibilities and great responsibilities imply dialogues and concertation on subject matters such as the “way we pictured oneself” and “the way we pictured others” in the human 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 no possibility for a heathy development and prosperity. the post-world wars western world led by the United Stated have ever since struggling to improve human rights status all over the world, but surprisingly facing some of the hardest human rights issues such as racism and social discriminations of people of colors. And digital contents via internet, television and movie theaters have played dominant role. The changing perception in <Black Panther> and in some other American movies such as <Green Book> is a positive sign that things may be moving in the right direction even though they are moving very slowly. From a Chinese side, China possesses around the 20% of the world population and therefore have a say on the global image of Africa at home and even in neighboring countries and on its world global audiences. Moreover, China in its new global strategy of cooperation with the world not only is working hard to improve its own image in front of the world audiences but also must devote similar effort to improve its strategic partners’ image at home and abroad. The Chinese Kungfu movies since the 1970’s has been very welcome by the world audiences, and have contributed to shaped a certain image of China and build up a Chinese identity globally. Africans around the world of today are battling to build up their own identities and must be understood and supported. Digital contents from China and U.S on the one hand must contribute to build a positive image of Africa, and on the other hand must help African audiences to build positive feedback on others through their digital works. For example, a well-appreciated movie by a given audience will definitely leave a good impression of the movie maker to that audience. Movies are two edges swords that could elevate or degrade the image of its manufacturer or its consumer. Africa as a big consumer market of digital contents with its young and fast-growing population, and therefore are setting their own minds and sentiments vis-à-vis of those who are picturing them. Another possibility for great powers to make things easier with digital contents productions would be to cooperate with less developed countries’ movies makers. No one could narrate Africa better that Africans. African narratives must be counted by Africans. Therefore, cooperation is a must between countries no matter their size or influences, for they are all interdepends. We are bound to grow together by destiny. This may justify the Chinese leadership’s vision of “Shared Economy”, “Common Destiny”, “Joint Future”. There concepts, if fully and sincerely integrated in the Chinese and U.S Film Industries, will revolutionize the way things are done and will largely improve Africa’s image on both the American and Chinese screens.

1. **Towards The Reconstruction of a Better Image of Africa**

From a broader perspective, both 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, there is a real need for both sides to improve the continent’s image at home and abroad for a better cooperation. But how can the Chinese and American film industries proceed to achieve this? What can be done domestically by African themselves to make African narratives more accessible to the world’s most influential film industries. Our thoughts and suggestions are as follows:

**5.1 Filmmakers of African Thematic Movies Must Set Boots in Africa.**

The success of <Black Panther> partly lies in the fact that the movie director Coogler visited Africa prior to the shooting of the movie. 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. With the current trend of internationalism and rapid technological development, Africa has joined the wave of globalization. The narratives of Africa have consequently been influenced at relatively similar paces. Meanwhile, the mindsets and preconceptions did not change accordingly for those outside or far away of the continent. Therefore, making a consistent movie on Africa, logically requires the moviemakers to update their knowledge of the continent so as to reflects the current narrative of the continent of Africa. It is only when the creator experiences the reality that its work will be closer to that reality. 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 storytelling.

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

Our world is developing faster than ever, and major development projects are involving developed and developing countries alike. From the glorious past of Ancient Africa and its cooperation with the world, to the major international initiatives that involves African countries such as the *“Belt and Road Initiative”* initiated by China, the *“AU Agenda 2063”* that also involves exchanges and cooperation between Africa and China, the United States and many other countries, the *“U.N Development Goals”*, the regional development agendas of African countries, etc. can be guiding lines for new narratives of Africa. Compared to outmoded narratives themed on wars, famine, diseases, etc. they can 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. Hollywood’s <Black Panther> has made considerable efforts in this direction, and the African-American narrative film <Green Book> released in Hollywood in 2019 has further up the awareness by putting the century-old racial discrimination of black people in the United States on the big screen, which has formed a good response worldwide. These examples prove clearly the need and necessity of a transition to progressive narratives on Africa.

* 1. **Upgrading the roleplay of African characters in African Thematic Movies**

American movies have always shaped the horizon of their audiences and fans with the “white leading role, black supporting role” doctrine along 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”. The cognition of this problem in U.S and Chinese Films Industries are prior steps towards its resolution. Additionally, efforts should be done by those industries to impact a positive change by upgrading the roleplay of African characters in those movies.

* 1. **Strengthening the cooperation with African filmmakers**

An accurate narrative of Africa requires authentic African perspectives. The cooperation between the Chinese and American film industries and the local film industries of African countries is an indispensable solution to better display African stories on the Chinese and American screens. The cooperation should be visible from the stage of script writing, directing, shooting, acting to the stage of producing and marketing.

* 1. **Integrating the Features of 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 and their voices must be heard. The Nigeria’s film industry “Nollywood”, for example, has become the world’s second largest films producer, only behind Hollywood. 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 perspective” of storytelling, the artistic talent of Africans, and the natural filming of the real traditional and modern Africa (in opposite to the computer made ones form foreign film industries). The Chinese and American film industries can study and integrate the characteristics of the African film industries to better improve themselves, grown their global audiences, improve Africa’s image at home and impact positive feedback from African moviegoers.

1. **Conclusion**

With the increasingly frequent economic and cultural exchanges between China and Africa, African thematic movies have become a new wave in the Chinese market. Although the preconceptions and mindsets on Africa are still deeply rooted in most of the Chinese film makers and the average Chinese audience, there is a hope with the new era of China-Africa cooperation. For, filmmakers, scholars and decisions makers in joint efforts could change the perception on Africa’s image in Chinese screen, and so show up African narratives as dreamt and lived by Africans. For the U.S film industry on the other hand, the image of Africa constructed by <Black Panther> is far improved from that of old-style Hollywood African thematic movies 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 film looks at the development of the African continent from a brand-new perspective and shows the huge development potential of Africa, which is very worthy of reference and learning for the Chinese film industry. Moreover, in order to reach out emerging markets with the fast-growing African populations, China and the United States need to improve the image of Africa on their screens to impact positive feedback of the African audiences around the world that will probably be the leading consumer market of digital contents in the years to come. Finally, the local African film industries should voice out its unique perspective of African narratives and reconstruct the image of Africa on the international stage through cooperation with the leading film industries such as that of the U.S and China.

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1. On Monday, May 25, 2020, George Floyd, a 46-year-old black man, was murdered in Minneapolis, Minnesota, United States, while being arrested on suspicion of using a counterfeit $20 bill. During the arrest, Derek Chauvin, a white police officer with the Minneapolis Police Department, knelt on Floyd’s neck for over nine minutes after he was handcuffed and lying face down. (BBC News. George Floyd: What happened in the final moments of his life. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-52861726>. 6 july 2020) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)