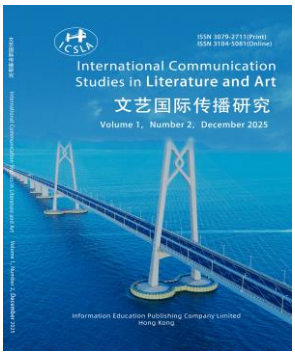

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The Revelation of the "Dual Other" under the Cross-Cultural and Gendered Gaze: A Review of *A Study on the Image of China in American Films and Its Influence's* Examination and Reflection on the Images of Chinese Women in American Cinema

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Abstract: The book *A Study on the Image of China in American Films and Its Influence* (Zhou Wenping, 2015) systematically analyzes the image of China in Hollywood films while also dissecting the construction of Chinese female images within them and their cultural significance. It argues that American films have long constructed the image of Chinese women through "stereotypical images" (such as the "Dragon Lady" and the "Lotus Flower"). These Chinese female characters possess a dual "Otherness" attribute—they are simultaneously symbols of Eastern culture under the Western gaze and objects of desire within gendered power relations. This type of stereotypical narrative has also led to the phenomenon of "self-orientalization" in Chinese cinema. The proposition of "stereotypical images" falsifies the "progressive narrative" of female images crafted by the West, revealing that the underlying ideology is one of power dominance and contestation. The perspective on the construction of Chinese female images as "Otherized" exposes American Orientalism and the predicament of Chinese women—and China at large—being rendered voiceless and powerless. Finally, the critique regarding Chinese cinema's embarkation on a path of "self-orientalization" sheds light on how the shaping of China's screen image has long been trapped in a dual cultural cage: external Otherizing imagination and an internal impulse for self-colonization.

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标题：跨文化与性别凝视下的“双重他者”揭示——评《美国电影里的中国形象及其影响研究》对美国电影中国女性形象的审视与反思

摘要：《美国电影里的中国形象及其影响研究》一书在系统分析好莱坞电影中国形象的同时也剖析了其中中国女性形象的塑造及其文化意涵（周文萍，2015）。论述了美国电影长期通过“定型化形象”（如“龙女”与“莲花”）建构中国女性形象，中国女性形象具有双重“他者”属性——既是西方凝视下的东方文化符号，也是性别权力关系中的欲望客体。这类刻板的定型化形象叙事也导致了中国电影的“自我东方化”现象。“定型化形象”的提出证伪了西方所塑造女性形象的“进步叙事”、揭示出其背后的意识形态是权力的支配与博弈；对中国女性形象“他者化”的构建的观点则是揭示了美国的东方主义与中国女性乃至中国失语失权的处境；最后批判性提出了中国电影走上“自我东方化”道路的观点，则透视了中国银幕形象的塑造长期受困于双重文化囚笼——外部的他者化想象与内部的自我殖民冲动。

关键词：中国女性形象；东方主义；定型化形象：他者

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As a core medium of cross-cultural communication, cinema fundamentally shapes collective national memory and encodes cultural identity. In the evolution of the global film industry, the Hollywood system, through its dominant production models and value projection, has established a pervasive network of cultural power whose influence remains markedly evident in contemporary Chinese cinematic and television ecosystems.

Zhou Wenping's monograph, *A Study on the Image of China in American Films and Its Influence* [1](World Book Publishing Company, 2015，hereafter “Zhou's work”), examines the representation of China in modern American cinema and its societal impact, analyzing the methods and principles underlying the construction of China's image and the narration of Chinese stories. Imagery carries profound cultural symbolism.

As Daniel-Henri Pageaux, a leading figure in comparative literature imagology, argues in “From Cultural Image to Collective Imaginaire,” an image constitutes both “a society's collective interpretation of a foreign

[1]Zhou Wenping (2015). *A Study of Chinese Images in American Films and Their Influence*. World Book Publishing Company.

country"and "the synthesis of perceptions about the foreign and the familiar, formed through a process that is simultaneously literary and social" (Meng Hua, 2001, pp. 7-37).

Consequently, the construction and representation of imagery in film are intrinsically linked to national imagination and the perception of the nation-state. In this context, Zhou's critical examination and reflection on the Chinese image crafted by Hollywood hold significant relevance.

While Zhou's work provides a systematic analysis of China's image in American films, its most noteworthy contribution lies in its interpretation of Chinese female representations. This article will take the portrayal of Chinese women, as delineated in Zhou's work, as a focal point for in-depth analysis. By virtue of their distinct gender identity and symbolic resonance within Orientalist discourse, Chinese female characters embody a dual alterity: they are simultaneously the cultural "Other" beyond the Western-centric paradigm and the gendered "Other" within patriarchal power structures. Under this dual framework, Hollywood's construction of Chinese women undoubtedly serves as a profound exemplar for studying Western societal perceptions, imaginations, and influences regarding Chinese culture. From the "Dragon Lady" to the "Lotus Blossom," these doubly "Othered" female representations reflect American cinema's ambivalent psyche—simultaneously desiring and rejecting the exotic—while subtly influencing Chinese cinema's own trajectory of self-representation. Therefore, Zhou's critical reflection on female imagery, and by extension China's image, carries substantial significance for contemporary Chinese cinema as it seeks to assert cultural discourse power, transcend the Hollywood-orchestrated Orientalist filter, and express authentically Chinese narratives.

Zhou's work meticulously documents the specific archetypes of Chinese women portrayed in American films and interrogates the cultural attributes and cognitive frameworks they reflect. Has the evolution of these roles over nearly a century genuinely demonstrated progress, diversity, and depth? What cultural ideologies are implicated in the transformations and persistences of these portrayals? Since the past invariably informs the present, critical retrospection is essential for contemporary development. Based on this premise, this article analyzes the value, significance, and insights of the perspectives articulated in Zhou's work.

From early cinema to contemporary works, the Hollywood portrayal of Chinese women has been characterized by distinct representational modes across different periods—from the humiliated sex worker, the mystified Dragon Lady, the Western-reinterpreted Mulan, to the spectacle-driven Spider Woman and the objectified concubine (Sun Meng, 2010). These figures collectively refract specific cultural connotations, forming cultural symbols marked by distinct Western gaze. Zhou's work traces the evolution of female representations in Hollywood from the early 20th to the early 21st century, noting that despite superficial variations, their essence remains an imaginary construct of the "Other," articulated primarily through the discursive practice of "stereotyping." It offers a focused analysis of representative female stereotypes—*the* "Dragon Lady" and the *"*Lotus Blossom*"* (Zhou Wenping, 2015)—thereby elucidating the inherently "Othering" nature of China's image in American cinema.

1. "Stereotypical Images": Falsifying the "Progress Narrative" and Revealing Power Dynamics

Zhou's work introduces the concept of the "stereotypical image" of Chinese women shaped by Hollywood in American cinema and explores its creative characteristics. It offers a deep interpretation of stereotypical Chinese female archetypes such as the "Dragon Lady" and the "Lotus Blossom," with its academic and practical significance manifesting in two dimensions: firstly, it exposes the underlying ideology of gendered imagery—namely, the domination and contestation of power; secondly, such stereotypical images provide a critical impetus for the creative transformation of Chinese cinema itself. The portrayal of women in Chinese films must break free from stereotypical templates and global clichés, striving instead to depict the diverse spectrum of Chinese women.

The so-called "stereotypical image" is a common method for depicting foreign figures, reducing complex perceptions of another country to a singular, monolithic representation conveyed through a fixed form and meaning (Zhou Wenping, 2015). In other words, while these constructed images of Chinese women may appear varied on the surface, their essence remains fundamentally unchanged. The two archetypes of the "Dragon Lady" and the "Lotus Blossom" are particularly evocative, recalling the "witch" and the "Madonna"—the former denounced as a dangerous aberration, the latter mythologized for her selfless maternal virtue. Both deny women their complex humanity. These templates virtually encompass all Eastern and Western female portrayals in American cinema of that period. Furthermore, Zhou's work points out that such "stereotypical images" are not merely simplistic representations; they inherently involve hierarchies and power relations, effectively constituting a method of "Othering" the perceived foreign entity.

1.1 The Dragon Lady

The first stereotypical image Zhou's work elaborates on is the "Dragon Lady," detailing its origins, characteristics, and evolution. Influenced by the racial discrimination and "Yellow Peril" sentiment of the time, Western cultural production gave rise to the highly symbolic figure of "Fu Manchu"—a veritable amalgamation of Western malign perceptions of China, embodying the negative imaginations of Eastern peoples held by white society. His female counterpart was the "Dragon Lady," an incarnation of Oriental-marked lust and evil. She is a symbolic existence, inheriting her father's malevolent will. Her external appearance is bold and exposed, imbued with the mystique and decadence of a distant, exotic land. Her methods are exceptionally vicious and cruel, blending seduction with danger, reflecting the West's voyeuristic "spectacular" imagination and desire.

The stereotypical pattern of the "Dragon Lady" is: "She" is beautiful yet venomous, often employing the seduction of white men to execute her criminal plans, but in the process, she frequently genuinely falls for them (Zhou Wenping, 2015). The author not only categorizes this "femme fatale" image but also reveals the dual ideology implicit within it: on one hand, it reinforces the mystique of the Eastern woman as a sexual symbol; on the other, it consolidates the dominant status of Western men in terms of race and gender. It is precisely through this paradoxical emotional structure that the "Dragon Lady" archetype has achieved

enduring prototypical power within Hollywood cinema. Through cumulative repetition, it has become a paradigmatic sample for representing Chinese women under the Western gaze.

1.2 The Lotus Blossom

The other major stereotypical female image is the "Lotus Blossom." This role stems from the Madame Butterfly-esque narrative of sacrifice. Unlike the seductive and dangerous "Dragon Lady," the "Lotus Blossom" is endowed with sanctified, suffering traits—beneath an appearance of pious devotion and purity lies an imagination that aligns with the West's contradictory framing of Eastern women: possessing both the pure, gentle beauty of the traditional Orient and an implied sexual attraction to white males. The essence of this image construction places the Eastern woman in the position of a gazed-upon object. They are imagined as contradictory beings combining pure exteriors with potential licentiousness, thus perfectly fitting the desire projections within a colonial context.

Moreover, the "Lotus Blossom" image reflects a psychological mechanism of internalized racial hierarchy. The "Lotus Blossom" is self-consciously aware of the inferiority and low status of her yellow race identity; she is a servant, inherently lesser, whose role is solely to wait, be saved, and devote herself. This stereotypical image reinforces the dominant relationships of Western centrism, not only objectifying the identity of Eastern women but also providing an emotionally legitimizing veneer for the power structures of colonialism.

Zhou's work reveals that whether it is the "Temptress"—the captivating yet fearsome "Dragon Lady"—or the "Victim"—the pure, waiting-to-be-saved, eager-to-devote "Lotus Blossom"—neither constitutes a depiction of the true likeness of Chinese women, nor do they represent a genuine Western impression of them. Instead, they are malicious, symbolic constructs. These seemingly captivating, eye-catching, and "unique" images are, in essence, a means to vilify and consume Chinese women. The continual repetition and dissemination of such stereotypical images by American cinema has amplified and deepened various stereotypes about Chinese women on a global scale.

From the perspective of the historical evolution and impact of Chinese female portrayals in American films, the "stereotypical images" summarized by Zhou's work further theoretically falsify the "progress narrative" commonly used in Western academia. They expose a culturally pathological phenomenon, meticulously packaged within the film industry: what appears to be a prosperous and diverse evolution of types remains, in essence, unchanged, consistently trapped within fixed patterns. Even in 21st-century American cinema, new roles like the kung fu warrior or female agent have emerged, such as the fierce Hu Li in Rush Hour 2 or Michelle Yeoh's character partnering with Bond in Tomorrow Never Dies. However, a closer look reveals that this "progress" is merely superficial. The camera still lingers on their curves accentuated by tight outfits and high-slit cheongsams, and their ruthless, exceedingly seductive appearances, never truly departing from the sinister and alluring "Dragon Lady" stereotype. Meanwhile, films like The World of Suzie Wong and The Painted Veil continue the "Lotus Blossom" tradition of characters who are

always saved, docile, remaining mere symbols. Postcolonial theatre theory argues:

"The very process of theatrical representation is always capable of imposing one set of cultural values upon the members of another culture, under the guise of representing their difference; of caricaturing them while claiming to celebrate their existence; of obliterating them while purporting to represent them" (Janelle G. Reinelt & Joseph R. Roach, 1992).

Over a century has passed since the birth of cinema, yet these caricatured, paradigmatic images of Chinese women have not been dissolved; instead, they have become solidified, accumulated, and continue to exert influence. Therefore, the proposition of "stereotypical images" like the "Dragon Lady" and the "Lotus Blossom" effectively explains why, when the world thinks of Eastern women, the predominant image that comes to mind is the intensely vivid, yet monolithic, highly objectified vessel of desire crafted by Hollywood.

Cinema possesses such powerful communicative functions, and these stereotypical images continue to exert a persistent influence, even impacting domestic creative endeavors. This serves as a stark reminder that contemporary filmmaking must strive to present authentic images of Chinese women, rather than perpetually revolving around symbols like the cheongsam and kung fu. To dismantle such stereotypes, female characters should no longer be depicted solely as temptresses or victims, nor should they function as mere decorative props designed to attract attention or signify racial/gendered power dynamics. Instead, the focus must shift to portraying a fuller, more diverse spectrum of Chinese women—characters with agency, rights, capacity for growth, and multifaceted identities.

2. The "Dual Othering" of Women: Revealing the Predicament of Being Silenced and Powerless

Through a critical study of the image of China in American film and television, particularly focusing on female representations, Zhou's work reveals that Hollywood employs a fixed symbolic system to construct the East as the "Other." It exposes how, under the guidance of a specific ideological orientation, Hollywood film texts perpetuate a narrative tradition that portrays China as backward, in need of salvation, and awaiting conquest. This not only hinders the dissemination of a true and objective national image but also weakens China's rightful cultural discourse power. The proposition of "Othering" uncovers the duality of Western cultural hegemony: while exploiting the Chinese film market, its creative core consistently maintains a Western-centric stance, perpetually Othering the image of China. The concept of Othering reveals that the incorporation of Chinese elements in American cinema more often serves the reproduction of existing stereotypes rather than facilitating equitable cross-cultural dialogue.

Zhou's work dedicates considerable space to discussing the fundamental nature of China's image in American films, arguing that the portrayal of China in traditional American cinema is essentially an imagination of the Other. It is simultaneously the foreign Other, the cultural Other, and the Othered Other (Zhou Wenping, 2015).

The images of Chinese women in American cinema, whether the Dragon Lady or the Lotus Blossom, are products of the West's voyeuristic "spectacular" imagination of a mysterious and distant ancient Eastern land. They have become vessels for power and desire, possessing a dual attribute: they are cultural Others due to their alien race and land, and they are gazed-upon Others due to their gender. In this author's view, Zhou's revelation of the "dual Otherness" of Chinese female images acts as a mirror, reflecting not only the predicament of women themselves but also the predicament of China's silenced and powerless image.

2.1 The Cultural Other

The concept of Othering reveals China's long-standing passive and silenced position in cultural transmission. Much like women silenced in a patriarchal society, Chinese women on screen represent a "represented China"—a collective Eastern image defined by the West. As Edward W. Said's Orientalism (2007) stated, "They cannot represent themselves; they must be represented by others." During periods when China's film industry and national strength were underdeveloped, Chinese resources were excavated and utilized by American cinema, and even disseminated through it, but only from the position of the cultural "Other," in a state of being represented. The East is to the West as the female is to the male. Due to their doubly marginalized identity based on both gender and race, Chinese women become quintessential representatives of the "Other" Compared to male characters, their images more intensely reflect the Orientalist imagination from a Western perspective, becoming gazed-upon, encoded cultural symbols.

Zhou's exploration of cultural Othering further elaborates on the underlying value logic, ensuring that the critique of Orientalism does not stop at ideological analysis but extends to considerations of film production itself, revealing the cultural power relations behind the imagery. For instance, Hollywood's Othered construction of Chinese women consistently unfolds according to a value logic that posits the West (Self) as superior to the East (Other): On one hand, the East is alienated as an exotic Other in Western narratives. These characters are often endowed with highly symbolic appearances, such as the Dragon Lady's sexiness and captivating beauty, and behave in highly formulaic ways, like the kung fu girl's agility, combined with a dominant and dangerous presence. On the other hand, they are simultaneously disparaged as backward, passive, and weak. From the initially mysterious and seductive "Dragon Lady" to the later "strong and independent" kung fu heroine, no matter how powerful they become, they ultimately struggle to escape suppression under the Western male gaze, forever remaining foils to the white hero. They are either loyal admirers or obedient followers, never truly breaking through the "white-centric" power structure. These images are not objective truths but projections of the American audience's Orientalist fantasies, typical of the Orientalist narrative. The book cites the example of Disney's adaptation of the Chinese classic Mulan, where the core theme shifts from traditional filial piety to individualistic heroism embodying truth, goodness, and courage. The revelation of this silenced, represented state warrants our deep reflection.

The construction of the Othered image deeply reflects the cultural hegemony of Western centrism. The

relationship between East and West is fundamentally a power struggle, involving a structural inequality of dominance versus subordination, representation versus being represented. As Said pointed out, the "Orient" is essentially a product of Western imagination and construction—a "cultural Other" shaped to highlight Western superiority. As cultural vehicles, film and television works inevitably reflect this ideological penetration. The "Othering" of Chinese female characters is a typical manifestation of this logic: they are assigned backward, passive, or exoticized traits to conform to Western stereotypes about the East. This construction is the result of selective filtering and reconstruction under American cultural hegemony. Even as character images evolve, from the evil "Dragon Lady" to the independent "kung fu girl," they often remain at the level of superficial visual spectacle, their core function still being to reinforce the superiority of Western culture. Therefore, even when Chinese characters seemingly "surpass" the West in terms of ability, it ultimately serves as a means for the West to maintain dominance: consolidating the superior position of the "Self"' by shaping the "Other." Whether the "mysterious Dragon Lady" or the "formidable kung fu fighter," Chinese female characters ultimately serve the narrative purpose of highlighting white subjectivity—they are symbolic tools in a cultural contest, not authentic, diverse subjects. They remain confined within the category of the "Other," struggling to engage in equal dialogue with the West.

The concept of Othering allows us to see that Chinese resources, much like female resources, are discovered, utilized, and represented by American cinema, preventing the Chinese image from being presented with subjectivity. This offers us an insight: the essence behind being represented is the loss of voice and power. Both the image of women and the image of China need to master their own discourse and the right to express it.

2.2 The Gendered Other

Zhou's work also reveals the "to-be-looked-at-ness" of Chinese women: under the dominance of androcentrism and patriarchal ideology in the film industry, Chinese female images in Hollywood are constructed as dual Othering signifiers—they are an Oriental spectacle in the cultural sense and a desired object of the gaze in the gendered sense.

Women in film are not expressions of their own lived experiences but vessels for male desire. The Dragon Lady's sexuality and evil are projections of male desire; the Lotus Blossom's sacrifice, devotion, and servility are representations of the Western male's inner drive for power and conquest. They are not only symbols of the cultural Other but also objects of the gaze, entities to be consumed and objectified. Such shallow, hollow female characters have long existed in Hollywood films, and even in Chinese cinema, persisting to this day. It is as if a web has been woven, obscuring the reality of women, firmly imprisoning public consciousness—their value lies in being ornamental, embedded within visual narratives as objects of cultural curiosity and

vessels for desire projection, becoming targets for Western audiences' exotic and erotic fantasies. This portrayal implies multiple power relations and has long transcended simple gender dimensions. The "to-be-looked-at-ness" of Eastern women is transformed into a symbol of the contest between colonial imagination and postcolonial resistance.

The dual predicament of "being Othered" and "being looked at," as proposed in Zhou's work, exposes the irrationality of Hollywood's constructions. The more dazzling the construction of "exotic flavor" surrounding Eastern women on screen, the more it attempts to conceal the irrationality of "Othering." This irrationality masks a power dynamic: on one hand, there exists a desiring imagination toward China; on the other, fear and apprehension, attempting to cast women as the 'second sex' and China as the 'second nation.' Therefore, Chinese cinema must not only master discourse power but also remain vigilant against the sweet trap of "being Orientalized" and "being looked at."

3. "Self-Orientalization": The Dual Predicament of the Chinese Film Industry

Amidst the growing strength of the Chinese film industry and the continuous emergence of major Chinese blockbusters today, the Chinese film world's shaping of China's image remains influenced by Hollywood and has also fallen into the trap of "Self-Orientalization." *The purveyor of* "*Oriental charm*" *for Western consumption is no longer Hollywood but the Chinese themselves* (Zhou Wenping, 2015). Zhou's work analyzes the female images in the film The Flowers of War, noting how their appearances satisfy the "gaze": vibrant cheongsams, graceful figures, and exquisite makeup, full of Oriental charm and exotic flavor. In terms of content, it repeats the narrative of Western male salvation/conquest and Chinese female sacrifice/devotion, aligning with the Orientalist discourse's conception of China as a "world waiting to be saved." Just as women can fall into the woven "myth of woman," Chinese cinema falls into the "myth of the Orient" woven by the West.

Previous research often compartmentalized the "Western gaze" and "local response." The revolutionary aspect of Zhou's work lies in its integration of postcolonial critique with an analysis of cultural production systems. Tracing the path from Western "Othering" to China's "Self-Orientalization," the author incisively reveals a harsh reality: the shaping of China's screen image has long been trapped in a dual cultural cage—the external imagination of Othering and the internal impulse for self-colonization. This academic discovery of a dialectical relationship not only allows us to recognize the long-hidden straightjacket in shaping both female and national images but also offers enlightenment for Chinese cinema's global breakthrough:

The "stereotypical image" of China shaped by American cinema has had a profound impact, already forming Western audiences' stereotypes of China and their viewing expectations. "In the process of going global, Chinese cinema also has to face this reality and use 'Self-Orientalizing' imaginings to win market share. However, it is important to note that while 'Self-Orientalization' might temporarily win audiences for Chinese films, it cannot change the impression of the Chinese 'stereotypical image' that audiences, especially

Western audiences, derived from American films, nor can it alter their perception of the East-West power relations gleaned from those films. If Chinese cinema is to make a difference in shaping and disseminating a positive national image of China, merely satisfying this [expectation] is far from sufficient." (Zhou Wenping, 2009)

4. Conclusion

Through its study of the "stereotypical images" of Chinese women in Hollywood cinema, Zhou's work reveals how Western cultural hegemony constructs the Eastern woman as a "dual Other"—simultaneously an exotic spectacle for cultural curiosity and a desired object of the gendered gaze—through symbolic archetypes like the "Dragon Lady" and the "Lotus Blossom." These images are products of the discursive practice of Orientalism, as exposed by Said; their essence lies in reinforcing the Western-centric cultural order through the mechanism of "Othering."

The significant academic value of this research is manifested across three dimensions:

Theoretically, it elucidates the generative logic of "stereotypical images." Through a diachronic analysis of Hollywood films spanning the 20th to early 21st centuries, it demonstrates that the seemingly diverse evolution of images remains, at its core, fundamentally unchanged. This profoundly validates the perspective of postcolonial theatrical theory: generic evolution within the film industry often constitutes a refined repackaging of existing power structures.

Methodologically, by focusing on the "Other among Others," it exposes the dual marginalization Chinese women suffer on screen: as both the cultural Other (Oriental spectacle) and the gendered Other (object of desire). This intersectional oppression reveals the collusive relationship between the colonial gaze and the male gaze. The silenced state of the Chinese female image essentially reflects China's structural weakness in cultural discourse power.

Most critically, the proposition of the "self-orientalization" viewpoint exposes the difficult predicament facing the Chinese film market.

In summary, the key insight from Zhou's work is this: Chinese cinema must establish an autonomous system of female representation, one that showcases women with diverse subjectivities. It must challenge Hollywood's narrative hegemony, dismantle stereotypical images, and seize control over both the means of discourse and the power behind it. The imperative is to tell stories of authentic women, not tales of the "second sex"; to narrate the story of the real China, not that of a "secondary nation."

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