Abstract
Hailed by both male and female audience, and thus making an unprecedented box-office miracle of RMB 5.6 billion Yuan in mainland China, Warrior Wolf II (战狼 II) has become a cultural phenomenon worth our serious study. As the triumph of this film is mainly attributable to its success in shaping Chinese masculinity, my study tries to examine how the Chinese masculinity is constructed and presented in this film. My examination includes three aspects: masculinity shaped and presented under the background of globalization, masculinity shaped and presented by showing the relationships among men, and masculinity shaped and presented by showing the relationships between men and women. Based on the above analysis, my paper evaluates the film’s significance in reshaping Chinese masculinity on the global cinema screen and its historic position in the process of Chinese cinema’s going out to the global market.

Keywords: Masculinity, Gender Relations, Chinese Film, Cultural Studies, Globalization
Masculinity in *Warrior Wolf II*

With a record-breaking box-office of more than RMB 5.6 billion Yuan (CBO), the film *Warrior Wolf II* has created a miracle in the Chinese cinema. As a modern action and gun-fighting blockbuster, this film should have belonged to the “men only” genre, but the director and leading actor of the film, Wu Jing, declared on the premiere ceremony: “*Warrior Wolf II* is a love letter for women audience” (Xinhuanet), releasing his wish to demonstrate how a true Chinese man looks like in the film. Mr. Wu’s ambition does come true: data from the ticket selling APP Maoyan shows that, not only among male audience, but also there is a craze for watching *Warrior Wolf II* among female audience, counting for more than 50% in audience number of all age groups under survey (Tencent Entertainment). Indeed, as an outcome of cultural integration around the globe, the film *Warrior Wolf II* is one of the budding endeavors of Chinese cinema to present and establish the Chinese masculinity on screen, which is worth a careful examination. Therefore, by taking a perspective of gender relations, this paper tries to study how the Chinese masculinity in *Warrior Wolf II* is constructed under a highly international background, so as to evaluate the film’s significance in reshaping Chinese masculinity and its historical position in the process of Chinese cinema’s going globalized.

I. Masculinity presented against the background of globalization

*Warrior Wolf II* tells the heroic story of Leng Feng (played by Wu Jing) -- a former member of Warrior Wolf, the special detachment in the C.P.L.A. -- who rescues civilians from the besieging and kidnapping of local and international terrorists in an Africa country.

In the film, Leng Feng is a hero and a protector of the weak. More notable is that his protection goes beyond classes, nations and skin colors. He is not only royal and devoted to China and the Chinese people, but also very friendly to the indigenous of the African country. There is a pure and genuine friendship between him and Tundu (played by Nwachukwu Kennedy Chukwuebuka), an ordinary African boy whose affection and admiration to Leng is so deep that he addresses Leng as Godfather. When terrorists attack the country for a coup, Leng even risks his life to rush to a Chinese factory located in the area under the occupation of terrorist group to rescue Tundu’s mother Nessa (played by Anne James) as he has promised Tundu. When arriving at the factory, Leng finds that there is a large number of indigenous and Chinese workers besieged in the factory, but only one UN helicopter will come, which means that only a small group of people can board on the helicopter. At this critical moment, Leng stands up, and unlike the factory manager who intends to put the Chinese management of the factory in to the helicopter first, he shouts to the crowd, including indigenous African and Chinese, “I brought the helicopter. I call the shots. Everyone leaves tomorrow. Women and children leave by the helicopter. All men follow me on foot.” Then he repeats firmly: “Everyone, we leave together.” While Leng speaking, the camera has direct close-ups of him as a man who is very resolute.

For Chinese audience, Leng Feng is very attractive as a man in the above scenes with strong conflict, and it is Leng’s spirit of selflessness and universal fraternity that makes him really very masculine. This kind of masculinity is very distinctive from that of the heroes in the western cinema to the extent that, in the western films, such
as Mission Impossible series and James Bond series, which emphasize more on the realization of an individual’s own value, masculinity is seldom constructed through such straightforward and explicit propagation of fraternity transcending classes, races and nations. Such masculinity is very Chinese, also because the spirit of selflessness and universal fraternity on which it is based originates from Confucianism, the philosophy prevailing in the Chinese society for thousand years and advocating benevolence (“Ren”), justice (“Yi”), and “the whole world as one community” (“Tian Xia Da Tong”) (Feng 37-38; Kang 60). In China, a man holding in his mind the people and the whole country tends to be regarded as a good and true man. Hence, Chinese films are adept at presenting masculinity through heroes who devote themselves and fight for the country and the people. What is more important is that, as Warrior Wolf II is a story in a highly globalized environment, Leng Feng not only fights for the Chinese people but also for the civilians of the other countries threatened by the terrorists. In this way, his heroic actions transform the tenet of Confucianism to the universal values of the whole world -- humanitarianism and world citizenship, and thus highlight and exalt some Chinese cultural foundations for masculinity: benevolence, justice, and universal fraternity.

II. Masculinity presented by the relations among men

The late Professor Franklin, a famous scholar on masculinity studies, maintained that masculinity is formed by the relationship among men and a man’s relationship with himself (11). Based on the gender relations among men, the famous Australian sociologist Raewyn Connell proposed four main types of masculinities: hegemony, subordination, complicity, marginalization (Masculinities 76-81). For the convenience of analyzing and without compromising the gist of Connell’s definition, this essay simplifies and adapts hegemony as a type of masculinity legitimized by holding of superior social status, complicity as a type attached to hegemony and benefiting from the dividend of hegemony’s social resources, and subordination and marginalization as the types determined by lower social status. The relations among men in Warrior Wolf II clearly demonstrate the hierarchy of such masculinities and the process of the shifting between them.

The most amusing character in the film is Zhuo Yifan (played by Hans Zhang), who is an epitome of China’s “Fuerdai” or “Guanerdai” – a Chinese term that refers to the children born with a silver spoon in their mouth due to their parent’s status as nouveau riche or high government official (Wikipedia). He is the owner of the factory, so at the beginning, his superior position enables him to assume an overbearing and masculine air. He is very bossy to his employees He Jianguo (called “Lao He” in the film, and played by Wu Gang) and Lin Zhixiong (played by Chunyu Shanshan), especially to Lao He, a veteran of a reconnaissance company of C. P. L. A. Both Lao He and Lin behave humbly in front of Zhuo, respectfully calling Zhuo as “Fan Ge” (meaning “Big Brother Fan”), although Zhuo is much younger than them. The leading hero in the film, Leng Feng, in Zhuo’s eyes, is just another ordinary guy who should be subordinate to him, so Zhuo behaves in an arrogant manner in front of Leng, proudly showing off his factory’s military weapons and militia, and the specimen of the wolf reportedly hunted by him. At this initial stage of peacetime, Zhuo’s masculinity belongs to “hegemony”, more precisely, “complicity”, because his masculinity comes from his superior status as a factory owner derived from his father’s social resources, in other words, he benefits from the dividend of his father’s social status and the
overall subordination of marginalized masculinity, to which Leng Feng, Lao He and Lin belong.

However, as Connell put it, the positions of different masculinities are not immutable, but exchangeable in circumstances that the relations among men change (Masculinities 76-77). Very soon, Zhuo’s lack of decision in handling the contradiction between limited seats on the UN rescue helicopter and large number of besieged factory workers, and his clumsiness during the direct combat with the attack of the terrorists betrays his immaturity, feebleness, and his authentic nature as a green-hand big boy. As situation getting tougher and crueler, the relation between Zhuo and the other men begin to change -- Zhuo can no longer assume the overbearing air and hold the dominant status as a boss, and thus loses the position of “hegemonic masculinity”. The show-time goes to Leng Feng and Lao He. As both of Leng and Lao He have the common status as veteran of C. P. L. A., they pay sincere respect and empathy for each other, so their brotherhood is established soon after their first meeting, and becomes deepened when they fight shoulder by shoulder against the terrorists attacking the factory. Leng and Lao He’s intimate cooperation during the battle is the wordless communion between two true men and between two soldier brothers whose “native hue” of masculinity has long been “sicklied over” during the peacetime. Such brotherhood makes them really masculine for the Chinese audience. Meanwhile, the incompetency and timidity of Zhuo becomes a sharp contrast to the two veteran’s quickness, resoluteness, bravery, smartness, tactfulness, and power to fight again terrorists’ violence, and thus effectively highlights their masculinity. During hard time, Leng and Lao He’s masculinity shifts from a subordinate position to a dominant one, and marginalizes that of Zhuo, which has shifted into “subordinate masculinity”. The changing of men’s relations in the film vividly demonstrates that “complicity” is just a quasi-masculinity, and that authentic masculinity should be the one which can go through the toughest test at critical moment.

This exchanging between the positions of different masculinities is highly instructive for the Chinese audience. “Fuerdais”, “Guanerdais”, and the overindulged youth is a special group of people in China who inherits the social resources and social status from their parents without any personal effort. They tend to live a very lavish lifestyle without any care of common people’s weal and woe. They usually highly over-evaluate themselves, but actually lack the ability to hammer a nail down in practical fields. If such group of people become the ruling class of China, which is very likely, the future of the whole nation would be at risk. By creating an extreme and dramatized environment on screen, Warrior Wolf II exposes this social problem, breaks “Fuerdais”, “Guanerdais”, and the overindulged youth’s illusion and blind-confidence on themselves, and provoke people to think about what genuine masculinity should be.

Such design of one type of masculinity prevailing over the other also reflects the director’s attitude toward “Little Fresh Meat” and his understanding on what is real masculinity. Little Fresh Meat is an internet buzz word in China used to describe handsome young males, and it is most commonly used for celebrities, particularly a rising star (Wikipedia). In the commercialized society, the aesthetic of male body and masculinity are processed and transformed into cultural product for consumption (Lv 88-90). In such social context, the Little Fresh Meat can produce high commercial value under certain operation, and become a guarantee for films’ box-office
performance with their Star Power. However, the film Warrior Wolf II evidently shows its doubt or even negation on the masculinity of “Little Fresh Meat” by putting the Little Fresh Meat (Zhao Yifan) as a comic release for the film full of blood and tension, and thus foregrounds the hegemonic masculinity of the veterans (Leng Feng and Lao He). Actually, even during the process of selecting actors, the director Wu Jing showed his inclination. When investors urged him to invite the first line Little-Fresh-Meat actors to safeguard box office, he rejected and said “I would rather choose the right ones than the expensive ones” (Luzhou News), indicating his disdain on Little Fresh Meat’s unprofessional working attitude unworthy of the astronomical high price claimed by them. According to Wu Jing, what underpins real masculinity is the ability to undertake heavy tasks at challenging moment (Tencent Culture). This is the very spirit the Warrior Wolf II is showing, a severe blow on the social phenomenon of Little Fresh Meat. Therefore, it is very educational and thought-provoking for Chinese audience.

III. Masculinity presented through relations between men and women

Professor Franklin also maintained that masculinity is formed by the relationship among men and women (11). Connell has the similar argument that “[m]asculinities do not first exist and then come into contact with femininities; they are produced together, in the process that makes a gender order” (Men 40). For this reason, most western action and gun-fighting blockbusters have a beautiful heroine to go with the manly hero. As a Chinese film with the ambition to distribute globally, Warrior Wolf II learns from this paradigm. Hence, the relations between the heroine Rachel (played by Celina Jade) and the key male roles are an essential aspect for constructing Chinese masculinity in the film.

Rachel is a doctor in International Red Cross, a well-educated woman fluent both in English and Chinese. She has a temperament of American style. Her face and figure is a blend of oriental and western beauty. She is in long hair, and always wearing a low-cut vest matched with an outer shirt with opening front, a pair of short pants and leather boots. Her appearance is clean, simple, and sexy. Throughout the film, there are close-ups from time to time to expose her face and body at the gaze of audience, offering strong visual pleasure for them, especially males.

Rachel and Leng Feng’s relation begins with a conflict between them. After saving Rachel from the control of terrorists, Leng, together with Rachel and Pasha (played by Diana Sylla) drives to the Chinese factory for rescuing Tundu’s mother Nessa. The conflict occurs on the way, as Rachel advises to go to the American Consulate for shelter.

Rachel: “We should go to the American Consulate. The US marines are stationed there. That’s our safest bet.”
Leng: “You think the US marines are the best in the world?”
Rachel: “Yeah.”
Leng: “That may be true, but where are they now?”…

In the conversation, Leng shows his disdain for the American army. Such attitude irritates Rachel. Then she calls the US Consulate for help, but out of her expectation, no one answers her phone. So frustrated, she gets furious and flings the cell phone
away, and covers her face with hands in despair. At this moment, Leng continues to speak, still in a disdainful tone:

“All foreign navy ships have left when I arrived.
As I watched them sail away from the port,
Among the countless departing masts,
I saw one with the stars and stripes…”

When saying this, Leng is like reciting a lyric, and like taking pleasure from Rachel’s frustration. Rachel is even more irritated. After a short moment of silence, she suddenly orders Leng: “Stop the car!”, and then gets out of the car. She is too angry and upset to share the same car with Leng.

This scene is much more than a conflict between a man and a woman. Why Rachel becomes so angry? Because Leng’s words break her illusion on an almighty American army and government. Growing up and educated in America, she is so submitting to the American authority that she gives her full trust on it, and just cannot accept the truth told by Leng, and she feels unhappy when such authority is challenged. Leng’s words do shed a light of bitter satire on the American army and government, which is the symbol of American patriarchal authority, and thus challenges and devalues the established western masculinity. Exalting the masculinity of white males by smearing the males of other races is a commonly-used device in western cinema dominated by whites. *Warrior Wolf II* adopts the same device, but uses it reversely -- exalt the Chinese masculinity by devaluing the American counterpart. This is an obvious measure-for-measure counterattack on the western mainstream, although such counterattack is an implicit and mild one compared with what the western cinema has done. In this sense, this film is highly political and patriotic. To go a step further, this is a sign of the current alteration in the patriarchal order of the whole world, as China emerges as a strong power in the global community, gradually changing the hegemonic “culture and institutions of the North Atlantic countries”, and thus affecting the forming of masculinities in globalization (Connell, *Men* 43-44).

Of course, finally, Rachel does not leave Leng. Though angry and uncomfortable as she is, her reason brings her back on the car, for there are lions beside the road, and terrorists around everywhere… Then in the following process of saving the factory people together, Rachel is gradually moved by Leng’s courage, bravery, and benevolence. Especially on the scene when Leng decides to let children and women leave first with the UN helicopter and all men leave together on foot with him, the focus of the camera shifts between Leng and Rachel, showing Rachel’s expression with glittering light of admiration in her eyes and on her face as well as Leng’s resolution. By that moment, Leng has become very appealing to her. Her hatred to Leng gradually fades away, and she starts to appreciate him.

The film also presents the relation between Rachel and Zhuo Yifan. Rachel is especially attractive to Zhuo, so he tries hard to show his manhood in front of her. When first meeting Rachel, as a way of attracting Rachel, he suddenly picks up the soldier knife on the tea table and plays it in front the little girl Pasha, saying “this is a real man's toy!”, then he turns to Rachel, “from now on, your safety will be my responsibility”. However, in Rachel’s eyes, this premiere is abrupt, clumsy and by no means manly except being so scary to the little girl Pasha. For audience, the scene is
funny because of the awkwardness of Zhuo’s performance. Later in the evening of the day, when watching fire party together, Zhuo says to Rachel that he does not want to ride his father’s coat tails all his life, so he comes to Africa, a continent with “lions, crocodiles, AK47s, sniper rifles, and the melody of gunfire that you can’t get in a peaceful country”, and he describes gunfire as “the most wonderful sound in the world”. For ordinary woman, such confession may sound romantic, and make Zhuo look manly, but to Rachel, who has witnessed so many bloody scenes brought by the cruel wars and terrorism, Zhuo’s speech with a flirting sense sounds childish, naïve, and laughable. In Rachel’s heart, Zhuo is no more than a big boy, the trueness of which is gradually revealed as the story develops.

Through the above analysis, we can find that there is a vague triangle relations among Leng, Rachel and Zhuo. In such relations, Zhuo again serves as a comic release for the audience and a sharp contrast to Leng’s manhood. He tries hard, but Rachel still refuses his courting, and eventually falls in love with Leng. Actually, in term of appearance, age and social and economic status, Zhuo is much more superior to Leng, and for ordinary woman, he is indeed an ideal man to develop a romantic relationship. Therefore, we can say that Rachel’s choice has a sense of romanticism. By upholding such love disregarding age, appearance and social status, the film suggests that real masculinity origins from the noble virtue of a man, and prevails over the superficial masculinity derived from secular factors such as handsome appearance and superior social and economic status. Such design of relations shows the power of good moral, and offers a cathartic experience for ordinary male audience when they imagine themselves as the hero in the film in the process of viewing (Mulvey 9-10).

Last but most noteworthy is that, Warrior Wolf II does not simply follow the western hero-beauty pattern, it surpasses that pattern while learning from it and successfully develops its own characteristic in representing the relations between men and women. In the conventional western action and gun-fighting films, particularly in the James Bond series, the leading female character tends to be arranged only as a decoration for the manhood of the leading male character, who usually regard female as a sexy object for playing. Warrior Wolf II is different in this respect, because it explicitly exhibits Rachel’s independent soul and her social status equal to that of Leng. Firstly, Leng shows his respect to Rachel, and regards Rachel as a person equal to himself, although he is stronger physically, and in most of the time assumes the role of a protector and rescuer in the film. In the warehouse of the factory, when Rachel holds the gun and prepares to join the fight, Leng stops her, and says, “Your hands are for saving lives, not taking lives”. At this moment, the camera focus shifts to Pasha, the small African girl, who crouches on the floor and looks up at Leng with great esteem, and then shifts to Rachel, who gazes at Leng for seconds, and then nods and gives the gun back to Leng with an obedient smile. Here, the film harmoniously juxtaposes the aesthetic of Leng’s masculinity and Rachel’s femininity by showing Leng’s reasonable dominancy and Rachel’s appropriate obedience. Secondly, in the film, Rachel is a woman with independent and professional spirit, a good example of intelligent woman. When all people in the factory desert Leng after Leng has been found infected by the highly infective and fatal Lamala Virus, Rachel alone resolutely stands on the side of Leng, and leaves the factory together with him, regardless of the risk of being infected. Eventually, she takes a chance and cures Leng by using an experimental vaccine. In this part, Rachel becomes a protector and rescuer of Leng. The roles between her and Leng shift. The equality between male and female is
magnified. Audience should be greatly touched by her courage, selflessness and independence. Thirdly, as the analysis on the previous paragraph, Rachel’s relation with Zhuo shows her spirit of independence and critical judgement. Rachel’s love to Leng, together with her other merits, constitutes a multi-angle demonstration of her graceful personality. In summary, *Warrior Wolf II* largely goes beyond the conventional western paradigm of objectifying female as a vase and sexual toy. The relation between Leng and Rachel is equal and mostly harmonious: they take different roles according to their own strength, each of them accepts their own role, and most importantly, respects the other… Rachel is a well-developed figure in the film. She is full of vigor, love, courage, justice, intelligence, and the spirit of independence, and most importantly not at all lack of female tenderness, which makes her even more attractive. However, the interior and exterior beauty of Rachel does not outshine Leng’s masculinity, instead, the heroine and hero sparkle with each other and highlight each other. By empowering the female character, *Warrior Wolf II* presents equal relation between men and women, and a healthy gender order of mutual support.

**IV. Conclusion**

*Warrior Wolf II* demonstrates Chinese masculinity from different aspects, much more than what has been analyzed above. Leng Feng, his brothers Lao He and Zhuo Yifan who later grows up as a man together construct a multi-dimensional sculpture group of real Chinese men. The female character Rachel, not at all less heroic than the men when playing her own role, makes masculinity more authentic and complete. As a matter of fact, China never lacks true men. Whether in history or in modern China, there are numerous examples of heroes like Leng Feng et al. In Chinese literary works and other Chinese art works, stories about real Chinese men are countless. Such men, no matter fictional or in reality, constitute the backbone of the Chinese nation. However, for more than one century, objective representation of the Chinese masculinity has been rare in the western cinema. In Hollywood films, Chinese male characters are usually effeminate like Charlie Chan, or cunning and evil like Dr. Fu Manchu and Dr. No in *James Bond* series. Positive image of Chinese men has been extremely scarce. Such distortion of the image of Chinese male is a vicious legacy of colonial culture, as Connell contended that in the colonial and imperialism age, “[t]he imperial social order created a hierarchy of masculinities, as it created a hierarchy of communities and race”, and within the colonial cultural system, “the conqueror was virile, while the colonized were dirty, sexualized and effeminate or childlike” (*Men* 49). In other words, the Chinese masculinity has been categorized as subordination and marginalization all the time in the western cinema. Even today, there is still no positive role for Chinese male on the western screen, which indicates that, although China has been liberated from the semi-control of colonizers for nearly 70 years, it has not yet completely cast off the shadow of colonization, especially in the field of culture.

The situation has to be changed. As the rising of China as a considerable power in the world, the Chinese people is claiming an economic, political and cultural position of greater importance on the global stage. *Warrior Wolf II*’s attempt to shape Chinese masculinity in global cinema is a tip of the iceberg of such claim. The film not only demonstrates to the world how a true man looks like according to the understanding
of Chinese people, but also speaks out the Chinese interpretation of the spirit of global citizenship -- friendship, responsibility, equality, benevolence, justice, and universal fraternity, which, in turn, are a part of the foundation of real masculinity.

As Chinese cinema’s initial endeavor of going globalized, Warrior Wolf II is by no means a perfect work. It is far from sophisticated. Some scenes are not convincing enough. A typical example is that the terrorists use tanks to attack the factory. When watching the scene, the audience would ask, is it logical? Another scene is that Leng Feng drives a cross-country car and breaks through a wall of the hospital hall to rescue people inside. When watching here, the audience would ask again, is it reasonable? Such action is very dangerous to the people in the room, so does Leng break the wall to rescue the people or to kill the people... In one word, logic and credibility has been a persistent flaw in Chinese action and gun-fighting films. Partially because of this reason, in contrary to the box-office miracle in China, the film generates a total cinema revenue of only $2,721,100 in USA (IMDb), which signifies that there still a long road to go before Chinese cinema achieving a global success.

But anyway, Warrior Wolf II is a good beginning, and such momentum will go on. As a man can never rely on other men to prove and claim his own identity as a man, the genuine Chinese masculinity should and could only be presented and shaped by the Chinese cinema itself rather than the western cinema dominated by white supremacy, who not at all has any stake in endorsing Chinese masculinity.

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