

Imaginative Constructs and the Devaluation of Cultural Production: The Case of Legend of the Condor Heroes

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Abstract

The film adaptation of Legend of the Condor Heroes serves as a compelling case study to explore how imaginative constructs—shaped by Edward Said’s concept of Orientalism—intersect with celebrity-driven media framing. With lead actor Xiao Zhan commanding over 100 million followers, pre-release discourse framed the film as “fan-service production,” overshadowing its artistic merits. This study examines how media criticism, digital discourse, and marketing strategies contributed to this reductive portrayal. By analyzing audience reception across domestic and international markets, this research reveals disparities in interpretation and the role of fandom-driven narratives. The findings suggest that dominant media frameworks often prioritize spectacle and celebrity influence over cultural and narrative depth. To address these challenges, this paper calls for a reassessment of promotional strategies and film criticism frameworks to ensure a more balanced evaluation of non-Western cinematic productions.

Keywords: imaginative constructs, Edward Said, Orientalism, media framing, fan cultures, cultural translation, film adaptation

1. Introduction

1.1 The Role of Media in Constructing Cultural Value

The role of imaginative constructs in shaping cultural production and media reception has long been a focal point in critical theory. In Orientalism, Edward Said (1978) argues that Western frameworks reshape and simplify non-Western narratives through selective classification and commercial strategies. These pre-existing constructs influence how films like *Legend of the Condor Heroes* are received globally, often framing wuxia through market-driven expectations of martial arts spectacle rather than its historical and philosophical depth.

Imaginative constructs, in this context, refer to pre-existing cultural narratives—reinforced by media discourse and digital engagement models—that shape how films are categorized and valued. Films from Chinese cinema, including *Legend of the Condor Heroes*, are often pre-framed as high-action spectacles or mystical fantasies, reinforcing Orientalist expectations that non-Western films prioritize entertainment over narrative complexity. This preemptive genre classification determines not only marketing strategies but also critical reception, constraining how non-Western works are assessed in global cinema.

In the contemporary digital media landscape, algorithm-driven platforms amplify high-action content and commercially viable narratives over nuanced storytelling. Streaming services, social media, and review aggregators curate discussions based on virality rather than depth, favoring spectacle over substance. As a result, wuxia films like *Legend of the Condor Heroes* are predominantly framed as market-driven entertainment products rather than serious artistic works. This reflects a digital extension of Orientalist representation, where engagement-based monetization prioritizes familiar, easily digestible narratives over complex storytelling.

A key example of this preemptive framing is the film’s association with Xiao Zhan’s global fandom, which significantly shaped pre-release discourse. Before the film’s artistic merits could be evaluated, discussions were dominated by Xiao Zhan’s celebrity influence, reinforcing perceptions of it as a “fan-service production” rather than a serious cinematic adaptation. With over 30 million followers on his personal account and more than 300 million discussions in his fan community on Weibo, his presence overshadowed critical debates about the film’s historical and literary significance, pushing it toward a commercialized media narrative centered on fandom appeal.

(Weibo, 2025).

This trend is not unique. Films associated with highly engaged fanbases—such as BTS concert films, Marvel franchise releases, and anime adaptations—often face similar media reception biases. Rather than being assessed on their artistic contributions, they are frequently categorized according to audience demographics and marketability. This preemptive classification system plays a significant role in shaping box office performance and long-term cultural valuation.

The discrepancy in reception is evident across media platforms. On Rotten Tomatoes, one reviewer praised the film for its visual spectacle and character depth, whereas another critique dismissed it as a nostalgic wuxia throwback that prioritizes action over storytelling. Similar discussions on Douban, a Chinese review platform, reflect a more nuanced engagement, where audiences debate the film's adherence to Jin Yong's literary vision and its interpretation of historical themes. These divergent readings demonstrate how media framing and audience segmentation reinforce Orientalist and commercial simplifications, ultimately reducing rich cultural narratives into simplified commercial products.

1.2 Case Selection: *Legend of the Condor Heroes* and Global Cinema Bias

The reception of *Legend of the Condor Heroes* highlights broader patterns in global media valuation. Rather than being assessed as a literary adaptation, the film was preemptively categorized within market-driven expectations of wuxia as a high-action genre. This framing shaped both Western critical discourse and commercial strategies, reinforcing the ongoing challenge of non-Western cultural productions being reduced to entertainment commodities rather than artistic works.

Audience reception further illustrates this divide. Western reviews often assessed the film in terms of visual spectacle and action choreography, aligning with preconceived notions of wuxia as primarily an action genre. In contrast, Chinese audiences engaged more deeply with its faithfulness to Jin Yong's literary legacy, debating its narrative interpretation and historical depth. These differing evaluations underscore how cultural expectations shape film reception, often sidelining non-Western narratives' artistic and philosophical complexity in favor of commercialized genre classifications.

This contrast also reflects a broader paradox in global cinema: financial success does not necessarily equate to cultural recognition. While the film achieved record-breaking pre-sale figures and generated extensive digital engagement, its artistic value was diminished by branding it as a “fan-service production.” This categorization positioned it as a niche product for existing fans rather than as a work of cultural significance. Such framing not only limits the film's reach but also reflects structural biases in how non-Western cinema is evaluated in global markets.

1.3 Contribution of This Study

This study adopts a multidisciplinary approach to assess how cultural devaluation operates within media ecosystems. By integrating quantitative economic indicators (box office performance, audience engagement analytics) with qualitative discourse analysis (film criticism, social media narratives, and promotional strategies), it examines the mechanisms that drive cultural misrepresentation.

This study contributes to the understanding of how cultural devaluation operates within media ecosystems through several key areas of analysis. First, it examines media framing, evaluating how film reviews, promotional campaigns, and digital platforms shape public perception of non-Western narratives. By analyzing critical reception and marketing strategies, the study highlights how dominant media structures influence audience expectations. Second, it explores audience reception, comparing Western and Chinese discourse to illustrate differing interpretative frameworks. While Western reviews often frame wuxia films as action spectacles, Chinese audiences engage more with their literary and historical significance. Additionally, the study investigates cultural translation and adaptation, focusing on how linguistic, visual, and thematic modifications affect the global consumption of films like *Legend of the Condor Heroes*. Finally, the research addresses the tension between market success and artistic valuation, demonstrating how financial performance does not always correlate with cultural recognition. By integrating these perspectives, this study presents a comprehensive account of how the film was received across different cultural and commercial contexts.

By incorporating direct citations from diverse review platforms, critical discussions, and empirical data, this study presents a comprehensive account of how *Legend of the Condor Heroes* was received in different cultural and commercial contexts.

Ultimately, this research serves as a call to reexamine the valuation of non-Western cultural productions, advocating for a more inclusive evaluative framework that recognizes artistic complexity beyond market

categorizations. It also emphasizes the need for cross-cultural dialogue in media studies, urging industry professionals, scholars, and critics to engage with non-Western storytelling traditions on their own terms rather than through predefined Western aesthetic standards.

2. Theoretical Framework: Orientalism, Cultural Translation, and Media Framing

2.1 Orientalism and the Construction of Cultural Narratives

Edward Said's seminal work *Orientalism* (1978) remains central to understanding the ways in which non-Western cultures are represented in dominant global narratives. Said argues that the "Orient" is not an objective reality but a Western-constructed discourse shaped by imperialist power structures, defining and framing the East through selective and ideologically driven representations (Said, 1978). This framework extends beyond historical colonial contexts, continuing to influence contemporary cultural production, particularly in literature, film, and media.

Modern scholars have expanded on Said's ideas by illustrating how Orientalist frameworks persist in contemporary cultural industries. Clines (2020) explores how Renaissance-era Orientalist narratives still inform modern cultural geographies, reinforcing Western interpretive dominance. Similarly, Mualem (2021) highlights how dialectical Orientalism manifests in literary analysis, where non-Western narratives are often reshaped to align with familiar Western tropes. These studies suggest that cultural productions originating from non-Western contexts frequently encounter a form of structural misrepresentation, in which their artistic and thematic richness is reframed through externally imposed lenses.

The adaptation and reception of *Legend of the Condor Heroes* illustrate these dynamics. The film's global distribution and critical discourse reflect a persistent tension between cultural authenticity and external narrative frameworks. While the original literary work by Jin Yong is deeply embedded in historical allegory, Confucian philosophy, and national identity, Western interpretations frequently emphasize its martial arts spectacle, framing it as a fantasy action film rather than an intellectual or historically significant adaptation. This study, therefore, examines the extent to which *Legend of the Condor Heroes* has been shaped by both traditional Orientalist paradigms and contemporary digital media practices, assessing how critical reception, audience discourse, and marketing strategies contribute to its positioning within global cinematic narratives.

2.2 Cultural Translation and Adaptation in Global Media

The reception of non-Western cultural productions in global markets is significantly influenced by processes of cultural translation and adaptation. As Bassnett (2014) notes, cultural translation extends far beyond linguistic conversion, encompassing a reconfiguration of narrative, visual, and thematic elements to align with the expectations of different audiences. This process inevitably shapes how films like *Legend of the Condor Heroes* are perceived across diverse cultural contexts.

Studies on transnational cinema have demonstrated that films crossing cultural boundaries frequently undergo modifications to ensure broader accessibility. Chua (2018) highlights that cinematic adaptations targeting global audiences often adjust visual and narrative structures to meet commercial expectations, sometimes at the expense of cultural specificity. This phenomenon is particularly evident in wuxia films, where Western marketing campaigns tend to emphasize action and fantasy elements, downplaying the historical, philosophical, and literary dimensions that define these works within their original contexts.

In the case of *Legend of the Condor Heroes*, several adaptation strategies have played a role in shaping international reception. The film's subtitling and dubbing choices have altered the nuance of certain dialogues, at times simplifying complex historical references and character dynamics. Meanwhile, its visual framing in promotional campaigns has prioritized high-energy action sequences over character development, reinforcing existing Western genre expectations of wuxia as a martial arts spectacle. Additionally, the thematic emphasis in global marketing largely overlooks the Confucian values, national identity, and allegorical depth present in Jin Yong's original narrative. These strategic choices, while commercially motivated, contribute to the reinforcement of Orientalist interpretations, presenting the film more as an entertainment product than as a culturally significant work.

By examining these adaptation strategies and their effects, this study highlights how cultural translation mechanisms contribute to either the reinforcement or disruption of Orientalist narratives. The extent to which such adaptations reshape audience perceptions reveals the challenges faced by non-Western cultural productions in achieving a balanced and authentic global reception.

2.3 Media Framing and the Role of Digital Platforms

Henry Jenkins (2006) defines participatory culture as a shift from passive media consumption to active audience engagement, where fans contribute to the cultural discourse through content creation, online discussions, and

reinterpretation of narratives. Unlike traditional media frameworks, where professional critics dictate cultural value, participatory culture empowers audiences to shape the meaning and legacy of cinematic productions (Jenkins, 2006). This dynamic is particularly relevant in the case of *Legend of the Condor Heroes*, where fan-driven narratives played a crucial role in shaping the film's reception. Rather than viewing fandom as a commercialized byproduct, Jenkins (1992) argues that fans function as "textual poachers", reinterpreting and repurposing media texts to reflect their own cultural and social identities.

Modern media plays a decisive role in shaping the discourse around cultural productions, particularly in a digital landscape where social media platforms, film review aggregators, and fan communities influence public perception. Framing theory (Entman, 1993) suggests that media outlets and online communities do not simply report on cultural texts—they actively shape how these texts are perceived by emphasizing particular themes, omitting others, and positioning narratives within broader ideological frameworks.

For *Legend of the Condor Heroes*, media framing manifests in several distinct ways. Western film reviews on platforms such as Rotten Tomatoes and Metacritic frequently apply an Orientalist lens to wuxia films, emphasizing their 'exotic' appeal at the expense of their narrative complexity. Chinese film reviews on platforms like Douban and Weibo, by contrast, tend to focus on the film's faithfulness to the source material, historical accuracy, and place within Jin Yong's literary tradition. The role of social media is equally significant, as viral discussions on YouTube and TikTok frequently highlight the film's martial arts spectacle, reinforcing a global framing of wuxia as an action-driven genre rather than a complex cultural narrative.

These divergent framing strategies contribute to the misrepresentation and simplification of non-Western cultural productions, reinforcing market-friendly stereotypes rather than encouraging critical engagement. This study will explore these framing mechanisms in depth, utilizing both qualitative discourse analysis and quantitative data from review platforms to assess how media narratives shape public perception of *Legend of the Condor Heroes*.

2.4 Counterarguments: Commercial Viability vs. Artistic Integrity

While this study critiques the reductive framing of *Legend of the Condor Heroes*, it is also essential to acknowledge alternative perspectives on why these simplifications occur. Media producers and filmmakers often make strategic decisions to increase accessibility for global audiences, balancing authentic cultural representation with the demands of international markets (Tian & Wang, 2025). Marketability concerns influence the prominence of action-heavy sequences over narrative complexity, aligning with audience expectations and commercial viability. Furthermore, genre expectations dictate that wuxia films are frequently marketed as action spectacles because Western distributors assume this is what audiences expect. The attention economy in digital media also plays a crucial role, as platforms like YouTube and TikTok reward easily digestible, visually compelling content, making nuanced discussions less visible.

Recognizing these commercial pressures provides a more balanced understanding of why non-Western cultural products are framed in particular ways. However, this study argues that such strategies, while commercially viable, contribute to the erasure of deeper cultural significance and perpetuate the historical patterns of Orientalist representation. A more nuanced marketing and framing approach is required to ensure that films like *Legend of the Condor Heroes* receive recognition for their narrative and artistic depth beyond their commercial success.

3. Case Study Analysis: The Reception and Media Framing of *Legend of the Condor Heroes*

3.1 Film Marketing and Promotional Strategies

The marketing of *Legend of the Condor Heroes* played a crucial role in shaping audience expectations and perceptions. The film's trailers, official posters, and early promotional interviews leaned heavily on wuxia aesthetics, visually appealing landscapes, and high-energy combat sequences, often neglecting the intricate character development and historical depth present in Jin Yong's original work.

In Western markets, the promotional campaign primarily showcased the film's martial arts choreography, aligning with pre-existing Western expectations of Chinese films as action-heavy spectacles. This focus on visuals over narrative complexity contributed to the film's positioning as an entertainment product rather than a cultural artifact. Conversely, in the Chinese market, the promotional strategy leveraged fan loyalty and nostalgia surrounding Jin Yong's literary legacy. Trailers featured iconic dialogues, scenic landscapes reminiscent of classic wuxia films, and character moments designed to appeal to long-time fans. Additionally, platforms like Weibo, Douban, and Bilibili saw an influx of user-generated content that often engaged in hyperbolic praise or critique. Viral discussions under trending topics on Chinese social media reflected a dual discourse—some audiences appreciated the effort to revive a classic, while others criticized it as catering to an over-commercialized wuxia market. This dichotomy in marketing approaches contributed to the film's divergent reception across different audiences,

reinforcing the notion that media framing plays a decisive role in shaping public perception.

The discourse surrounding *Legend of the Condor Heroes* was significantly shaped by Xiao Zhan's presence as the lead actor. As one of China's most influential celebrities, with over 100 million followers and a vast online fanbase, his casting led many critics to question whether the film was designed primarily as a star-driven production rather than a historical epic. Reviews on Metacritic noted the film's emphasis on large-scale action and spectacle, while some suggested that it catered more to fans of the actor rather than engaging a broader international audience (Metacritic, 2025). This perception aligned with a recurring trend in Western critiques of wuxia films, which often prioritize their entertainment value over their cultural and artistic significance.

Some reviews framed the film as "another addition to China's martial arts fantasy genre," reinforcing a market-driven expectation that wuxia films should prioritize action spectacle over narrative depth (Metacritic, 2025). In contrast, Chinese film discussions on platforms such as Douban and Weibo engaged with Xiao Zhan's performance in a more nuanced manner, debating his portrayal of Guo Jing in relation to previous adaptations. Some argued that his popularity brought new audiences to wuxia, while others felt that the marketing overemphasized his star appeal at the expense of narrative depth. This divergence in reception reflects the broader tension between celebrity-driven media framing and genuine artistic evaluation.

3.2 Audience Reception and Review Analysis

The film's reception varied significantly between Western and Chinese audiences, a divide that can be observed in online film reviews, social media discussions, and aggregated critic scores.

In Western reviews, aggregated scores from Rotten Tomatoes and Metacritic reveal a pattern of criticism rooted in familiar Orientalist frameworks. Positive reviews praised the film's cinematography and action choreography, emphasizing its "breathtaking fight sequences" (Rotten Tomatoes Critic Review, 2025). However, negative reviews focused on its "inaccessible storyline," with one critic stating, "While the film is a visual feast, it fails to engage a broader audience unfamiliar with Jin Yong's world" (Metacritic Review, 2025). Some reviews framed the film as "another addition to China's martial arts fantasy genre," reinforcing a market-driven expectation that wuxia films should prioritize action spectacle over narrative depth.

On Douban, Weibo, and Chinese film platforms, reception was more nuanced, reflecting debates over authenticity, fidelity to the source material, and artistic ambition. Positive reviews emphasized its "faithfulness to Jin Yong's vision," with one Douban reviewer stating, "This adaptation captures the spirit of the original text, even if it takes creative liberties in its visuals" (Douban User Review, 2025). Critical perspectives argued that the film overemphasized commercial spectacle, diluting the philosophical and ideological underpinnings of Jin Yong's narrative. Many Chinese viewers framed the film within a larger cultural nostalgia, comparing it to previous *Condor Heroes* adaptations and critiquing its modern cinematic interpretation. This divergence in reception illustrates how audience expectations and cultural context influence film criticism. Western reviews often approach wuxia through a commercial action lens, whereas Chinese discourse engages more deeply with historical, literary, and philosophical dimensions of the film.

3.3 The Role of Social Media in Shaping Perceptions

The rise of user-driven digital discourse has dramatically altered how films are received and discussed. *Legend of the Condor Heroes* became a focal point for online debates, demonstrating how social media shapes contemporary cultural narratives.

On platforms like YouTube and TikTok, algorithm-driven content has favored high-energy fight scenes, reinforcing a global framing of wuxia as an action-driven genre. Meanwhile, on Weibo, Chinese social media users engaged in long-form critical analysis, debating whether the adaptation preserved Jin Yong's cultural legacy or merely exploited fan nostalgia. Viral debates emerged around casting choices, changes to the original plot, and CGI quality, often leading to polarized reactions. This digital discourse demonstrates how audience reception is not just shaped by critics but by social media algorithms and trending discussions. The dominant narratives surrounding *Legend of the Condor Heroes* were influenced not only by professional critics but also by user-generated discourse that amplified particular viewpoints.

Jenkins' (2006) framework helps contextualize the active role of fans in digital discourse, where fan communities engage in meaning-making processes that extend beyond simple consumer behavior. The case of *Legend of the Condor Heroes* illustrates how digital platforms amplify fan engagement, allowing audiences to shape narratives through video edits, fan art, and critical analysis. This challenges traditional media hierarchies, as fans' interpretations often compete with, and sometimes override, professional film criticism. Instead of reducing fandom to mere promotional hype, participatory culture recognizes it as an essential aspect of contemporary media

ecosystems.

3.4 Visual Representation and Orientalist Tropes

A crucial element in analyzing the film's reception is its visual aesthetics and whether they reinforce or challenge Orientalist stereotypes. While wuxia cinema has a deep-rooted tradition in Chinese film history, the Western gaze often interprets it through an exoticized, mystical lens.

The film employs traditional Chinese armor and elaborate silk robes, aligning with wuxia visual conventions. However, certain stylistic choices, such as exaggerated mysticism in character depictions, may cater to Western fantasy stereotypes. The cinematography relies heavily on slow-motion fight sequences and ethereal landscapes, aligning with Hollywood's framing of martial arts as mystical rather than grounded in historical realism. The depiction of warriors, monks, and villains often aligns with stereotypical Western interpretations of Chinese historical figures, reinforcing an aesthetic of "otherness." This study will further explore whether these cinematic choices were a strategic artistic decision or a response to global market expectations. By comparing this film to previous wuxia adaptations, it will examine how visual framing influences cultural interpretation.

3.5 Summary of Findings

This case study demonstrates that *Legend of the Condor Heroes* exists at the intersection of cultural authenticity, global market expectations, and media framing. The marketing strategies influenced audience expectations, reinforcing wuxia as a primarily action-driven genre in the West while emphasizing nostalgia in China. Audience reception was divided, with Western critics focusing on spectacle over substance while Chinese audiences engaged more with narrative fidelity and historical depth. Social media played a major role in shaping discourse, amplifying both enthusiastic fan engagement and critical debates. Visual representation continues to be a contested space, balancing traditional wuxia aesthetics with modern cinematic techniques that may align with Orientalist framing.

The next section will build upon these findings to explore broader theoretical and practical implications, addressing strategies for counteracting reductive media portrayals and proposing a more nuanced approach to non-Western film evaluation.

4. Discussion and Solutions: Addressing the Devaluation of Cultural Productions

4.1 The Impact of Media Narratives on Cultural Perception

The findings from the case study illustrate how media narratives significantly influence the reception of non-Western cultural productions. The framing of *Legend of the Condor Heroes* as either a "fan-service spectacle" or an "exotic martial arts fantasy" underscores the power of media in shaping audience perceptions. This aligns with previous studies on Orientalism in film criticism (Said, 1978; Clines, 2020), which suggest that media discourse often reinforces reductive understandings of non-Western narratives. Western critics have tended to emphasize the film's visual spectacle over its narrative depth, reinforcing Orientalist expectations that wuxia films prioritize action and mysticism over complex storytelling. In contrast, Chinese audiences have engaged with the film through nostalgia and literary fidelity, reflecting a different set of cultural priorities. The growing role of social media platforms and digital content algorithms has further amplified these divergent perspectives, often rewarding sensationalized reactions over nuanced critique.

Given this context, there is a need for a multifaceted approach to counteracting these reductive portrayals and elevating the artistic and cultural value of non-Western films. This involves interventions at multiple levels—film criticism, marketing strategies, digital media platforms, and audience engagement—to foster more balanced representations.

4.2 The Impact of Celebrity Fandom on Film Reception

The reception of *Legend of the Condor Heroes* aligns with Jenkins' (1992) argument that fandom is a form of cultural participation rather than passive consumption. Xiao Zhan's fan community played an active role in shaping discourse around the film, producing analyses, visual art, and social media debates that extended beyond commercial fandom. Jenkins describes this process as "participatory spectatorship," in which audiences engage critically with media rather than simply accepting predefined interpretations (Jenkins, 1992). In this sense, the film's fandom-driven discourse was not just a marketing effect but an example of participatory engagement that challenges hierarchical definitions of artistic merit.

Labeling *Legend of the Condor Heroes* as a "fan-service production" exemplifies a broader pattern in global media discourse, where strong fan engagement often leads to the dismissal of artistic contributions. Films associated with powerful fanbases frequently experience similar framing, where their cultural and artistic significance is overlooked in favor of their audience demographics. This phenomenon can be observed across various genres,

including concert films, franchise blockbusters, and anime or wuxia adaptations.

For instance, BTS's *Break the Silence* (2020) was predominantly covered as a fan event, with limited critical engagement regarding its exploration of global music culture (Hyperallergic). Similarly, Marvel films are often critiqued for prioritizing fan engagement over narrative innovation, despite their undeniable influence on contemporary cinema and storytelling (Dissent Magazine). Meanwhile, *Demon Slayer: Mugen Train* (2020), despite its record-breaking box office success, was seldom analyzed for its storytelling depth in mainstream Western film criticism.

These examples highlight a recurring bias in media reception, where works with strong fan followings are frequently categorized as commercial products rather than as serious artistic endeavors. This pattern suggests a need for a more balanced approach in evaluating fan-driven productions, ensuring that their artistic and cultural value is recognized beyond their immediate commercial appeal.

The recurring pattern in these examples highlights a fundamental bias in global media reception, where dominant Western critical frameworks resist engaging deeply with non-Western storytelling traditions unless they conform to established artistic norms. Addressing this requires expanding critical methodologies to account for diverse narrative structures, reconsidering how fan engagement influences film valuation, and challenging the binary between commercial success and artistic merit.

4.3 Reframing Film Criticism and Media Evaluation

One of the key challenges identified in this study is the persistent use of Orientalist frameworks in film criticism. Many Western reviews position wuxia films as fantasy action spectacles, neglecting the historical, philosophical, and literary traditions embedded in these narratives. Addressing this issue requires a shift in how non-Western films are critically analyzed and discussed. Film critics and journalists must engage with non-Western storytelling traditions through more diverse educational training, allowing them to evaluate films beyond the constraints of Hollywood-centric storytelling models. Publications should also seek to amplify voices from diverse cultural backgrounds, ensuring that reviews are not solely shaped by Western interpretative lenses. Furthermore, academic institutions could expand film studies curricula to include comparative studies of global cinema, helping to deconstruct Eurocentric perspectives in film education.

4.4 Rethinking Film Marketing for Global Audiences

Marketing strategies play a crucial role in shaping audience expectations before a film's release. In the case of *Legend of the Condor Heroes*, promotional materials tailored to Western audiences primarily highlighted martial arts choreography and grand visual spectacle, reinforcing pre-existing expectations that wuxia films are defined by action rather than storytelling. Meanwhile, marketing efforts in China leveraged fan loyalty and nostalgia, emphasizing the film's connection to Jin Yong's literary legacy. These marketing choices significantly influenced how audiences approached the film, predisposing them to see it in either a commercial action framework or a nostalgia-driven lens.

A more balanced marketing approach would ensure that both the philosophical and narrative richness of wuxia stories are highlighted alongside their visual grandeur. Instead of positioning wuxia films solely as action epics, marketing campaigns should emphasize their literary and historical dimensions, allowing audiences unfamiliar with these traditions to appreciate their depth. Furthermore, localized marketing strategies should consider the distinct expectations of different cultural audiences rather than adopting a one-size-fits-all approach. Collaboration between marketing teams, cultural scholars, and filmmakers could lead to more authentic promotional narratives that reflect the full scope of the film's artistic ambitions.

4.5 Addressing Algorithmic Bias and the Role of Digital Media

Beyond traditional film criticism and marketing, digital platforms play a decisive role in shaping discourse around non-Western cultural productions. Streaming services, review aggregators, and social media platforms rely on algorithms that prioritize high-engagement content, often favoring high-energy fight scenes over critical discussions. As seen in this case study, platforms such as YouTube and TikTok often frame wuxia films through clickbait-oriented visuals, while viral discussions on Weibo and Reddit amplify polarizing opinions. These algorithms inadvertently reinforce market-driven stereotypes by boosting content that conforms to pre-existing audience expectations rather than encouraging critical engagement.

Streaming services and review aggregators should reconsider engagement-based ranking algorithms that prioritize spectacle over depth. Strategies such as featuring long-form reviews, scholarly film essays, and multilingual critiques can help counteract the dominance of viral, market-driven narratives. Encouraging AI-assisted content curation that includes cultural analysis alongside entertainment metrics would allow for a more balanced

evaluation of non-Western films.

4.6 *The Role of Audiences in Shaping Cultural Appreciation*

Audiences are no longer passive consumers; they actively participate in shaping the discourse around films through social media engagement, user reviews, and online debates. This participatory nature of media consumption presents an opportunity to foster more informed cultural appreciation. Encouraging cross-cultural discussions—such as hosting online Q&A sessions with directors, organizing international film forums, and supporting community-driven subtitling initiatives—can help bridge cultural knowledge gaps. Additionally, providing accessible educational resources on wuxia history and Chinese cinema traditions would help broaden international audiences' understanding of the genre beyond its surface-level action elements.

Another crucial step is to support independent film journalism and user-driven film analysis. Independent film critics, bloggers, and content creators who focus on cultural and narrative analysis can offer alternative perspectives to mainstream media criticism. By democratizing film evaluation and allowing diverse voices to contribute, audiences can help challenge dominant stereotypes and reshape public perceptions of non-Western cinema.

4.7 *Toward a More Balanced Cultural Discourse*

This discussion highlights the need for a holistic approach to counteracting the devaluation of non-Western cultural productions. The issues observed in *Legend of the Condor Heroes*—from media simplification and marketing biases to digital platform algorithms and audience expectations—reflect broader trends in global cinema. Addressing these challenges requires collaboration among film critics, marketing professionals, digital platforms, and audiences to reshape discourse around non-Western films.

Moving forward, it is essential for film criticism to become more inclusive of non-Western storytelling frameworks, marketing campaigns to present a more balanced portrayal of non-Western films, digital platforms to support diverse and thoughtful discourse, and audiences to actively engage in informed discussions. By adopting these strategies, the global film industry can foster a more nuanced, respectful, and culturally informed evaluation of cinematic productions, ultimately challenging reductive stereotypes and advancing cross-cultural appreciation.

The final section will synthesize these findings and explore their broader implications for media studies, cultural representation, and the future of global film evaluation. A more inclusive approach to film evaluation would acknowledge participatory culture as a legitimate form of cultural engagement, rather than dismissing fan-driven discourse as commercially driven noise. Jenkins (2006) argues that media scholars and critics must embrace audience agency in shaping cultural narratives, rather than adhering strictly to top-down critical models. In the case of *Legend of the Condor Heroes*, participatory engagement contributed to a broader understanding of the film's impact, as fans actively debated its merits, historical significance, and thematic depth. Future studies should further examine how participatory culture shapes cultural legitimacy, ensuring that audience discourse is recognized alongside traditional criticism.

5. Conclusion: Reassessing Cultural Value in Global Cinema

This study has explored how *Legend of the Condor Heroes* serves as a critical case study in understanding the intersection of media narratives, digital discourse, and cultural representation in global cinema. By applying Orientalism, cultural translation, and media framing theories, this research has demonstrated how non-Western cultural productions are often subjected to simplified, market-driven interpretations that shape audience expectations and critical reception.

A key finding of this study is the divergence between Western and Chinese audience reception, which underscores the broader issue of cultural valuation in global media. Western reviews predominantly framed the film as a spectacle-driven martial arts fantasy, reinforcing historical Orientalist expectations of wuxia cinema. In contrast, Chinese audiences engaged with the film through literary fidelity, historical depth, and cultural nostalgia, highlighting the significance of localized cultural memory in shaping film appreciation. The role of digital media and algorithmic bias further exacerbates these divergent interpretations, as platform-driven engagement strategies prioritize sensationalist and clickbait-friendly content over nuanced cultural discourse.

The implications of these findings extend beyond *Legend of the Condor Heroes*, pointing to larger concerns regarding how non-Western cinema is positioned in the global film industry. The continued marginalization of cultural depth in favor of exoticized or entertainment-centric portrayals reflects structural inequalities in media representation that require urgent reassessment. Moving forward, several key takeaways emerge:

First, film criticism must evolve to become more inclusive of non-Western storytelling traditions. This involves

expanding academic film studies curricula, hiring more diverse critics, and fostering cross-cultural discussions that challenge Eurocentric evaluation frameworks. By doing so, film critics and scholars can promote a more balanced understanding of global cinema.

Second, marketing strategies should embrace a more holistic representation of non-Western films, ensuring that promotional materials do not exclusively emphasize action and spectacle at the expense of narrative depth. Collaborative efforts between filmmakers, cultural historians, and marketing professionals can help construct promotional narratives that more accurately reflect the richness of non-Western storytelling.

Third, digital media platforms must reassess their role in shaping cultural narratives. The dominance of algorithm-driven engagement strategies continues to reward simplified, easily digestible content, contributing to misrepresentations of non-Western cinema. Reforming content recommendation systems, promoting long-form film analysis, and encouraging user-driven cultural discourse can help counteract the biases ingrained in digital media ecosystems.

Finally, audience participation plays a pivotal role in shaping how cultural products are valued and discussed. By fostering global film appreciation, promoting accessible educational resources on world cinema, and supporting independent film journalism, audiences can actively challenge the stereotypical and market-driven constraints placed on non-Western cultural productions.

In sum, this study demonstrates that the labeling of *Legend of the Condor Heroes* as “fan-service production” was not merely an organic audience perception but a result of structural media framing shaped by Xiao Zhan’s immense popularity. The intersection of celebrity culture, digital media discourse, and Orientalist genre expectations created a critical environment where the film’s artistic and cultural significance was overshadowed by pre-existing narratives. This pattern extends beyond this case to global fandom-driven productions, revealing the need for more nuanced critical frameworks that engage with both fan culture and artistic depth rather than dismissing them as mutually exclusive. Moving forward, media studies must develop more inclusive frameworks for evaluating non-Western films, ensuring that market-driven media narratives do not overshadow their artistic and cultural significance.

While this study offers insights into the media framing of non-Western productions, further research is needed to explore how alternative evaluation frameworks might reshape audience perceptions. Future studies should further examine how digital media platforms contribute to these framing strategies and explore alternative approaches to evaluating fandom-driven productions outside of traditional critical paradigms. Additionally, fostering cross-cultural film criticism through multilingual reviews, comparative media studies, and transnational collaboration can help bridge the gap between regional and global film evaluation systems.

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No additional data are available.

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