



Studies on the Sino-Foreign Co-productions of Anti-Japanese War Films in the 21st Century

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Abstract: This paper explores the evolution of Sino-foreign co-productions of Anti-Japanese War films in the 21st century, particularly highlighting the impact of globalization and China's film market opening. It begins by contextualizing China's War of Resistance against Japan (1931–1945) and its enduring significance in Chinese post-1949 cinematic culture, where films reflect historical memories and national sentiments while acting as cultural bridges in international exchanges. The study focuses on a selection of co-produced films, including *The Children of Huangshi* (2008) and *John Rabe* (2009), which have redefined historical narratives by emphasizing the experiences and traumas of Chinese victims and foreign witnesses. This paper aims to reveal shifts in China's public discourse surrounding national identity in cinematic representations while emphasizing the importance of historical consciousness in reshaping China's global image. Ultimately, it argues that these co-productions not only serve to memorialize the past but also engage with contemporary themes that resonate on an international scale, contributing to a multifaceted understanding of the Anti-Japanese War.

Keywords: Sino-Foreign co-produced films; Anti-Japanese War; China's film market

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China's War of Resistance against Japan (1931–1945), also called the Anti-Japanese War, refers to China's resistance against the Japanese Imperial Army's invasion, beginning with the Marco Polo Bridge Incident. The War encompassed widespread military and civilian struggles, culminating in China's victory as part of the Allied forces and shaping China's modern politics. Since establishing the People's Republic of China (the PRC) in

1949, the Chinese film industry has produced numerous cinematic productions portraying the Anti-Japanese War. After China implemented the reform and opening-up policy, the Anti-Japanese war films, as an important part of Chinese film culture, not only carry historical memory and national sentiment but also serve as a cultural bridge for facilitating international cultural exchanges and reshaping China's global image.

It is worth noting that Sino-foreign cinematic co-productions have become a trend with the acceleration of globalization and the opening-up of China's film market. In particular, an increasing number of Sino-foreign co-produced films direct their attention towards the refashioning of the Anti-Japanese War, including *The Children of Huangshi* (2008), *John Rabe* (2009), *Ballet in the War* (2015), to name just a few. These Sino-foreign co-produced films have not only re-accentuated the traumatic historical memories suffered by the Chinese people and reinforced the historical consciousness but also re-mediated images of foreigners, such as Americans and Japanese, to weave a more internationalized version of war narratives. Previous studies have focused on the construction of interracial encounters between the foreign witnesses, the Chinese victims, and the Japanese perpetrators (Zhang, 2020, 2024), the problematic images of Japanese perpetrators (Zhu, 2013), and the critical historical consciousness evoked against universal values of salvation and sacrifice (Dai, 2018).

According to genre theory, genres function through repetition and variation (Neale, 2000) and consist of semantic (iconography, characters) and syntactic (structure, themes) elements (Altman, 2019). Rick Altman describes the multiple functions of genre as follows: Genre as blueprint, as a formula that precedes, programs and patterns industry production; Genre as structure, as the formal framework on which individual films are founded (2019: 14). For Altman, genres are not fixed or stable categories, but rather social constructs. They are shaped by both the industrial system of Hollywood filmmaking and by audiences' expectations. According to Altman, genres emerge from the interaction between cinema as an industry (which uses genres to maximize profit) and audiences, who have particular expectations based on past experiences with similar films. Genres, in Altman's view, function as a form of social communication: they are shaped by both cultural conventions and by the needs of the film industry. Therefore, genre is flexible and ever-changing, subject to the pressures of both the marketplace and social context. In a similar vein, Neale points out that genres are always in play rather than being simply re-played and that genres often evolve and respond to changing cultural and political climates (2000).

This paper builds upon the genre theory to further explore the ever-changing cinematic narratives of the Sino-foreign co-productions and look at the development of these productions in the past few decades. It explores the evolution of Sino-foreign co-productions of Anti-Japanese War films in the 21st century, particularly highlighting the impact of globalization and China's film market opening. It begins by contextualizing China's War of Resistance against Japan (1931–1945) and its enduring significance in Chinese cinematic culture post-1949, where films reflect historical memories and national sentiments while acting as cultural bridges in international exchanges. The study focuses on a selection of co-produced films, including *The Children of Huangshi* (2008) and *John Rabe* (2009), which have redefined historical narratives by emphasizing the experiences and traumas of Chinese victims and foreign witnesses. This paper aims to reveal shifts in China's public discourse surrounding national identity in cinematic representations while emphasizing the importance of historical consciousness in reshaping China's global image. Ultimately, it argues that these co-productions not only serve to memorialize the past but also engage with contemporary themes that resonate on an international scale, contributing to a



multifaceted understanding of the Anti-Japanese War.

1. *Empire of the Sun* (1987) and *Children of Huangshi* (2008)

Empire of the Sun, directed by Hollywood auteur Steven Spielberg and released in 1987, follows a young British boy, Jim (played by Christian Bale), during the Anti-Japanese War in Shanghai. After his parents are separated from him during the Japanese occupation, Jim is interned in a Japanese prison camp. As he grapples with survival, he befriends a resourceful American named Basie (John Malkovich) and grows increasingly independent. Amid the harsh conditions, Jim navigates his loss of innocence, the trauma of war, and the complex relationships between prisoners and captors, all while yearning for a return to normalcy. In this film, Westerners such as Jim suffer miserably from hunger, disease, forced labor, and beatings in the Japanese concentration camps. Apart from fear, Jim also learns to adapt, showing moments of empathy, understanding, and even a sense of respect for some Japanese officers in the camp.

The film offers a cruel, realistic portrayal of the hellish experiences suffered by Western characters like Jim in the Japanese concentration camps. The film portrays this treatment as one of gradual degradation, brutality, and dehumanization, reflecting the general treatment of Western civilians and POWs during wartime. The experiences of the Western characters, particularly Jim (the protagonist), provide a window into how foreigners are treated during internment in a foreign, hostile environment. Jim and the other Westerners live in squalid conditions, constantly reminded that their status as foreigners in Japan has little to no bearing on their treatment—they are treated as prisoners, plain and simple. While the film portrays the dehumanizing treatment of Westerners, it also highlights moments of resilience and defiance. For example, Jim's relationship with Basie, an American scavenger in the camp, reflects a clash between survivalist pragmatism and a desire to retain human dignity. Basie is often willing to compromise his morals for survival, but Jim, despite his circumstances, holds onto a sense of self-worth, particularly when he expresses his desire to maintain a connection to his family. The film's dehumanized portrayal of the Japanese camp officers further reinforces the logic of the Japanese army's war cruelties that are popular in later Sino-Foreign co-produced films.

While primarily focusing on Jim's journey as a British child in a Japanese internment camp, the film portrays China and its people mainly through Western characters and experiences. In this film, Chinese characters are often depicted as background figures, passive victims of Japanese aggression, or as part of the prison camp's labor force. They lack significant development or agency within the narrative, reinforcing a Western-centric perspective on the war. Film critic Jana Monji harshly criticizes that the audience of *Empire of the Sun* is asked to sympathize with the British imperial forces that preceded Japan in China, and it fails to adopt the Chinese point of view, that the film “oddly erases the Chinese from a story in China. The Chinese are chauffeurs, gardeners, nannies, and beggars or part of the nameless throngs around the cars, beaten out of the way for the Westerners in their cars” (2024: Age of the Geek). While their presence emphasizes the dire situation faced by the Chinese during Japan's occupation, the film does not offer much depth or exploration of their individual experiences. This narrative lacks the necessary criticism of the atrocities committed by the Japanese army. It shows an indifferent or even contemptuous attitude towards the Chinese, frequently portraying them as thieves and robbers. The three-hour film lacks the depiction of the disasters brought to the Chinese by the

war, adopts a typical Western perspective, fails to convey China's war experience entirely, and even inadvertently falls into a negative portrayal of the Chinese.

The release of the Sino-Australian co-produced film *Children of Huangshi* in 2008 marked a significant turning point. The film shows a more balanced and respectful Chinese perspective in portraying the inter-racial encounters during the Anti-Japanese War, reflecting that China is gradually exerting discourse power over cinematic co-productions. The film follows a young British journalist, George Hogg, who becomes involved with a group of orphaned Chinese children in rural China. Along with an Australian nurse, Hogg leads the children across dangerous terrain to safety, all while grappling with the horrors of war and his growing attachment to the children. Compared with Spielberg's *Empire of the Sun*, *Children of Huangshi* focuses more on the suffering and struggle of the Chinese people in its narrative and constructs several full-blooded Chinese characters. For instance, one of the central characters is Mrs. Wang, a Chinese woman who works alongside George Hogg and helps care for the children on their survival journey. Another leading character is a Chinese guerrilla soldier, Chen Hansheng, who saves Hogg from the Japanese and helps others transport the children. Hogg himself is portrayed as an essential witness to the war atrocities, as he coincidentally runs into the Japanese army's massive execution of the Chinese prisoners of war and uses his camera to document the atrocities. Michael Berry points out that Hogg "takes his photos from an elevated vantage point, which seems to indicate a moral distance between his objective stance as a recorder of history and the crowds of perpetrators and victims huddled below" (2016: 179). Therefore, Hogg is no longer a passive bystander but an active participant in this painful history.

On the one hand, this narrative shift is partly attributed to Chinese-American writer Iris Chang's non-fiction bestseller *The Rape of Nanking: The Forgotten Holocaust of WWII*. Chang's book significantly raised the international community's awareness of the Nanjing Massacre and profoundly impacted the narrative of subsequent films and television works. The Nanjing Massacre, also known as the Rape of Nanjing, occurred between December 1937 and January 1938 during the Second Sino-Japanese War, when Japanese forces captured the Chinese capital of Nanjing. According to historian Takashi Yoshida, over six weeks, an estimated 200,000 to 300,000 Chinese civilians and disarmed soldiers were killed, and tens of thousands of women were raped. The atrocities included widespread looting, arson, and brutal executions, marking one of the most horrific episodes of the war and a profound trauma in Chinese history. Before Iris Chang, many Westerners' knowledge of World War II was limited to the European battlefield, they lacked understanding of the war fought in East Asia, and they knew little about the atrocities of the Japanese army and the suffering of the Chinese people.

Besides, China is also trying to take a leading stand to make its voice heard in the globalized world. Having more voice in the international film distribution market and broadening the scope of dissemination of Chinese-themed documentaries are the main goals of China's participation in international cooperation in filmmaking. In the context of globalization and cultural diversity, the production and distribution of Sino-foreign co-productions of Anti-Japanese War films is a commercial behavior and a cultural strategy. Attracting international audiences and promoting Chinese culture provides a practical platform for internationalizing China's film industry. The screening of award-winning films at international film festivals has enhanced the international image of Chinese cinema and opened up new ways for the global dissemination of Chinese culture. China's strategic planning at the national level has integrated the improvement of the international communication capabilities of mainstream media



into the national overall development blueprint, indicating the Chinese government's determination to upgrade external communication to a national strategic deployment.

2. The Sino-German Co-produced Film *John Rabe* (2009)

Since the beginning of the new century, with the improvement of China's international status and influence, China's cinematic productions have gradually integrated into the global standards and practices. The 20th National Congress of the CPC ordains that the Chinese film industry should build a strategic communication system with distinctive Chinese characteristics, improving the persuasiveness of Chinese discourse, the guidance of international public opinion, the influence of global communication, the appeal of Chinese culture and the affinity of Chinese image (Shen and Yu, 2022). The enhancement of China's soft power has made China shift from learning from Western culture to promoting its own culture. Spreading Chinese stories from Chinese practice and showing Chinese ideas in Chinese stories are the starting point for China's aim to promote its soft power. The national image is also an aspect that the Sino-foreign co-produced Anti-Japanese war films and TV series in the 21st century are trying to shape. With humanistic care and national justice at the core, they continue accumulating positive national images, demonstrating the hardworking, brave, and self-reliant national spirit. The national image is closely related to the development of China today and complements each other.

In the early days, the image of China caused many misunderstandings for various reasons. The image of China from the Western perspective is a cultural fantasy about the Asian others projected by Western culture. As pointed out by Edward Said, the West often holds a complex and two-sided imaginary attitude towards the Orient, which is mixed with various factors such as politics, economy, and culture. Under the influence of these factors, the image of Chinese culture has been misinterpreted and even distorted. Take the 1998 Hollywood animation film *Mulan* as an example. In the traditional Chinese legend, the girl Mulan disguised as a man joined the army out of filial piety towards her sick father, one of the conventional virtues adored in the Chinese nation. However, what is presented in the film *Mulan* is the awakening of Mulan's self-consciousness, which is obviously a Westernized twist of the original story. Meng Xiangfei points out that what was delivered from *Mulan* was "certainly not Chinese but American values by the presentation and narrative of Mulan from the Western perspective and the demonstration of the fabricated rebellious spirit of this historical Chinese figure of about 1,500 years ago" (2020: 105).

The 2009 Sino-German co-produced film *John Rabe* is a historical drama based on the true story of a German businessman who played a crucial role in saving Chinese civilians during the Nanjing Massacre in 1937. Set in the Japanese invasion of Nanjing, the film follows John Rabe (played by Ulrich Tukur), who, despite being a Nazi Party member, uses his position as the head of the *Siemens* factory to create a safety zone for refugees, protecting thousands of Chinese from the brutality of Japanese forces. However, in the film, the Chinese characters are relatively weakly portrayed, appearing to be fragile and helpless, lacking sufficient spirit of resistance. Moreover, the film's narrative focuses mainly on the behavior of the protagonist, John Rabe, and his transformations. Not much is shown about the personal experiences of Chinese victims, causing some Chinese viewers to feel that the emotional resonance is not strong enough. Chinese film scholar Chen Linxia considers that the deliberate universalism and de-politicization of John Rabe's story has turned the film into a tale emptied

of nation-building metaphors. Still, it exhibits that “Germany dare to face their history and is willing to make efforts to alter their public images in the realistic environment” (2010: 88). Given that a German director directed this film with a cast of primarily German actors, it seems reasonable that this film is more interested in displaying the conflictual mental status of John Rabe instead of the Chinese characters. Rick Altman’s (2019) concept of genre hybridity (where genres borrow elements from one another) is helpful here: *John Rabe* blends war film conventions with a biographical drama’s focus on individual legacy. The individualistic heroism of Rabe contrasts sharply with the collective focus typical of war films, highlighting moral agency within the chaos of war.

In exploring the narrative evolution and national image construction of Sino-foreign co-production films, we have witnessed the profound transformation of China’s national image. This process vividly interprets China’s leap from a one-dimensional traditional narrative to modern responsibility and multicultural expression on the international stage. As the comprehensive strength of China grows day by day, the shaping of the national image is ushering in a profound change, and the image of an oriental power with a prosperous culture, stable society, united people, and beautiful mountains and rivers is gradually being established. In the film *Children of Huangshi*, although China is suffering from the persecution of the Japanese invasion, the Chinese people depicted have not lost their benevolence, righteousness, courtesy, wisdom, and trustworthiness. The guerrilla leader Chen saves his life to save Hogg, an American, from Japanese persecution, and the Chinese government assists Hogg in finding an empty, safe temple to accommodate the Chinese orphans. In the film *John Rabe*, when the Chinese face the murderous, inhumane Japanese invaders, they still swear to protect their compatriots in the safe zone and fight for their lives. For instance, *John Rabe* constructs a young, beautiful Chinese college girl, Langshu, who receives a Western education and develops a romantic relationship with the German ambassador, George Rosen. Langshu is portrayed as a strong-willed woman who bravely fights against the Japanese aggressor and fully utilizes her wisdom to save children from the Japanese. In the 2017 Sino-Russian co-produced film *Common Victory*, the protagonist, General Xue Yue, led his troops to repeatedly block the Japanese invaders’ invasion of Changsha, the southwestern fortress. At the same time, the people of Changsha in this film fought bravely and made great sacrifices.

3. New Docudrama: *Scars of Nanjing* (2017)

In the process of film production, the director plays a vital role. The director has to think about how to present the story and what methods can be used to present the best effect. This includes the director’s views on the photography style and the overall visual style of the film. Looking at the development history of Sino-foreign co-productions of Anti-Japanese War films, a very significant change is that Chinese directors began to participate in international film productions. The 1987 *Empire of the Sun* was directed by Steven Spielberg, and the 2008 *Children of Huangshi* was a film shot together by China, Australia, and Germany and directed by Roger Spottiswoode. The 2008 documentary film *Iris Chang: The Rape of Nanking* was directed by Ann Pick and Bill Sphaic. These are all famous Sino-foreign co-productions of the Anti-Japanese War, but there was no Chinese director’s presence in their production process.

The year 2009 is a turning point. Starting from the release of the *City of Life and Death* narrative film in



2009, Chinese directors began to gradually appear on the stage in the production team of Sino-foreign co-productions of Anti-Japanese War films. Chinese director Lu Chuan spent a lot of effort preparing *City of Life and Death*. Before shooting the film, he read a lot of historical documents, such as Japanese military diaries. To recreate Nanjing City during the war, the crew spent more than 30 million in Changchun to restore the 800-acre ruins of Nanjing. The design drawings marked the structure, size ratio, location of houses, etc., of Nanjing City. The crew determined the location of essential scenes and restored them individually. Due to funding constraints, the crew failed to replicate a larger Nanjing, nor could they shoot a panoramic view of Nanjing City. In order to ensure authenticity, all the props on the shooting scene were imitated according to cultural relics. Even a newspaper torn by John Rabe, a German who rescued the Chinese during the Nanjing Massacre, was copied from a German newspaper on December 13, 1937. In addition, during the filming process, all the characters and details in the film strictly stick to historical facts. The commercial success of *City of Life and Death* at home and abroad shows the advantage of Chinese directors leading the production of Sino-foreign co-production films on the theme of the War of Resistance Against Japan. Still, the film incited numerous debates over its sympathetic portrayals of a humane Japanese soldier and a Japanese comfort woman.

Since then, Chinese directors have begun to play an increasingly important role in the production of Sino-foreign co-productions on the theme of the War of Resistance Against Japan. In 2015, the Sino-Russian co-produced film *Ballet in the Flames of War* directed by Dong Yachun was released. The film is set in the cold winter of 1945 in Heilongjiang Province, Northeastern China, where the Chinese girl-ballet dancer Eer met with an injured Soviet soldier, Andre, and the two lovers fought against the Japanese. It is a war film that reflects the joint fight between China and Russia against Japanese fascism. Instead of grand history, the film focuses on the changes in individual Chinese families under the shadow of war and the harm caused to each family by the cruel war. Through freehand brushwork, unique tones, contrast of tones, and light and shadow design, the film poetically glorifies transnational love and shows that history cannot be forgotten. This film combines realism and romanticism and wins the audience's appraisal with beautiful scenery and narratives, showing the innovative strength of Chinese directors in making films on the theme of the War of Resistance.

The 2017 Sino-US coproduced film *The Scars of Nanjing* is directed by Chinese director Zhang Hao and US director John Ealer. It is the first Chinese docudrama on the Nanjing Massacre to be broadcasted on the Western media. The film was released on the moment of the 80th anniversary of the Nanjing Massacre. Like Guttenberg's film *Nanjing*, *Scars of Nanjing* employs actors and actresses to cast as historical figures of westerners who stayed in the city to help Chinese civilians. The film restages multiple real historical incidents such as the Japanese officers' killing contests, the Japanese soldiers' grabbing of Chinese women from refugee camps, and the medical treatments of patients with bayonet wounds. The adaptation of historical events creates a theatrical sense of glooming danger and sentiment of desperation and fear.

During the filming process, there are many unknown behind-the-scenes stories. The first example is about the selection of filming locations. On December 15, 1937, Archibald Steele, an American reporter for the *Chicago Daily News*, left the occupied Nanjing. On that day, he used the radio station of the American warship to send the first news report on the Nanjing Massacre to the world. The reporting news described the massacre this way: "It was like killing sheep. How many troops were trapped and killed is difficult to estimate. Still, it may be anywhere between 5000 and 20000...streets throughout the city were littered with the bodies of

civilians and abandoned Chinese equipment and uniforms” (Lu, 2004: 20). This is the first piece of evidence of a mass massacre by the Japanese army witnessed by a Western journalist in the existing historical materials related to the Nanjing Massacre.

In order to recreate this dramatic scene, the Chinese and American teams had a heated debate. The US side believed that the “wall” mentioned in Steeler’s news was the famous city walls of Nanjing. However, the Chinese historical advisory team collectively opposed it. Experts used a large number of historical maps, photos and other materials to prove that any section of the city wall in Nanjing at that time was far away from the river. They suggested that the “wall” mentioned by Steeler should be the high river embankment exposed after the winter dry season. In the end, the American director was convinced and adjusted the shooting location. Similar things happened again. In writing the film script, in order to ensure objectivity and neutrality, the US team demonstrated its strong professional ability and intellectual reserves. The US team sent a research team to collect historical materials about the Nanjing Massacre in the United States in advance, and went to the National Archives of the United States, the Yale Divinity School Library and other places to inquire about the original historical materials of the Nanjing Massacre. They conducted a detailed investigation of the whole picture of that period of history, as well as the deeds, testimonies and records of Westerners who stayed in Nanjing. The producer and screenwriter Frederick Rendina also made a special trip to Nanjing to visit some of the places where the incidents occurred and interviewed the survivors of the massacre. After more than five months of careful preparation, the screenwriter and producer were full of confidence and took the first draft of the script to Nanjing to listen to the opinions of experts. What he didn’t expect was that experts from the Jiangsu Academy of Social Sciences, the Memorial Hall of the Victims of the Nanjing Massacre, Nanjing University, and Nanjing Normal University put forward dozens of revisions of her script regarding historical accuracy. Whether each detail is faithful to the historical facts, they were examined and reviewed one by one, and discussed for a whole day and night. How detailed was the research? According to the recollections of Zhang Hao, the director of the Chinese team, every Western person mentioned in the film had a daily schedule after the fall of Nanjing in 1937, and they sorted out what they did, who they met, and what records they made.

The making of the film not only reflects the indispensability of the Chinese team in this docudrama, but also strongly demonstrates why Chinese people must participate in the production process of Sino-foreign co-productions of Anti-Japanese War films. *Scars of Nanking* received the Daytime Emmy Award for Outstanding Cinematography in April, 2018. However, the film failed to incite strong sentiments from the American audience and in the meantime, was not well-received in China as well. Such is also a common dilemma faced by Sino-foreign filmic co-productions, that a lot of these films fail the high expectations of both their foreign and Chinese audience. It seems that the Sino-Foreign co-productions still have a long way to go to achieve maturity in filming technique, plot and characterization.

4. New Voices and New Changes

The traditional Chinese culture is increasingly evident in recent Sino-foreign co-productions of Anti-Japanese War films. In films such as *Children of Huangshi* and *Ballet in the Flames of War*, the benevolence, righteousness, courtesy, wisdom, and trustworthiness that are adored in traditional Chinese culture are fully



displayed, showing the optimistic national spirit of unity, strong-will and self-improvement. In *Children of Huangshi*, British journalist George Hogg was rescued by Chinese guerrilla soldier Chen Hansheng, showing the Chinese good qualities of being helpful and benevolent. In the film *City of Life and Death*, a group of Chinese women volunteer to go with the predatory Japanese soldiers in order to exchange for food and clothes for the refugees, indicating the Chinese people's sacrificing themselves for others. In *Ballet in the Flames of War*, the Chinese family rescued the injured Soviet soldier despite the death threat from the Japanese, glorifying the Chinese people's spirit of self-sacrifice and kindness.

Within the paradigm of Sino-foreign co-production of Anti-Japanese War films and television works, the enhancement of China's discourse power, the optimization of the national image and the rich presentation of Chinese elements have had a profound impact on the creation and dissemination of relevant knowledge, not only changing the international audience's understanding of Chinese history and culture, but also promoting deeper cultural exchanges and recognition on the international stage. As China's influence on the global cultural stage grows, the character image creation, discourse trends, and artistic expressions in co-produced films and TV series have gradually gotten rid of the previous stereotypes and limitations that may have existed in the past.

In terms of character image, the enhancement of China's discourse power has also made China no longer stick to the image of the Western savior to increase the recognition of Western audiences, but more turn to showing the good quality of the Chinese people and the excellent traditional Chinese culture, such as the selfless dedication and patriotism (Han, 2016; Huang, 2022). On the other hand, Sino-foreign co-productions tend to adopt a third-party, international angle in storytelling. For instance, the documentary *Scars of Nanjing* objectively revealed Iris Chang's journey of sticking to the truth, allowing more Westerners to realize the atrocities of the Japanese army on the Asia-Pacific battlefield and the great suffering suffered by the Chinese people. More and more Westerners also reveal the truth from the perspective of bystanders, which further strengthens the Chinese position on issues related to the Sino-Japanese War, is conducive to shaping a good national image, and making a voice in international exchanges. No longer sticking to the creation of stereotyped characters can make the content of Sino-foreign co-productions more diversified and more helpful in telling Chinese stories well.

As time goes by, cultural expression presents more diverse characteristics, not only more innovative in form, but also more profound in content. In the 2007 HBO documentary *Nanjing* (dir. Bill Guttentag), the storyline adopts the perspective of others, mainly interviews with Western researchers and is in the form of a documentary drama with stage reenactments. In this documentary film, American actors play the main role, and Chinese survivors give oral accounts. It realizes the cross-cultural communication that combines the needs of "others" with the demands of "us". *Ballet in the Flames of War* uses ballet as a medium to tell a story about art, courage and hope. Under the shadow of war, ballet has not only become a spiritual comfort for people, but also symbolizes the yearning for a better life and the desire for freedom. It embodies the unique role of art in inspiring human spiritual power in suffering, leaving us with an unforgettable story of the War of Resistance. The film *City of Life and Death* uses a montage method to weave together the stories of multiple characters, showing not only the Chinese military and civilians, but also the lives and struggles of Japanese soldiers, comfort women, and foreigners who stayed safely in China. The film describes this historical event from multiple perspectives from the perspectives of Chinese and Japanese people. The film not only places it in the context of the historical conflict

between China and Japan, but also in the context of global war, which has caused considerable controversy. The documentary *Iris Chang: The Nanjing Massacre* explores the role and influence of Chang in historical writing, emphasizes the importance of women in recording and disseminating historical truth, and provides audiences with a perspective different from traditional male narratives. *Children of Huangshi* focuses on the rescue activities of international friend George Hogg in China, and through his perspective shows the power of friendship between China and foreign countries and the spirit of mutual assistance among humans in difficult times. This cross-cultural friendship and cooperation not only add a warm color to the historical narrative, but also emphasizes the necessity for humans to face challenges together in the context of globalization.

In the cultural expression of Sino-foreign co-productions of the War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression in the 21st century, not only have the audience's understanding of historical events deepened, but also the exchange and integration of different cultural perspectives have been promoted, showing the positive role of film and television works in promoting peace, promoting understanding and respecting diversity. In the process of creating and disseminating Sino-foreign co-productions of the War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression, the enhancement of China's discourse power, the optimization of the national image and the rich presentation of Chinese elements have not only changed the image of characters, discourse trends and cultural expression limitations in the works, but also promoted wider cultural exchanges and understanding, and made positive contributions to building a more diverse and equal international cultural pattern. This trend not only reflects China's initiative and influence in global cultural dialogue, but also opens up a new path for the innovation and development of co-productions in the future.

5. Conclusion

Looking to the future, Sino-foreign co-productions can pay more attention to balancing the Chinese and Western perspectives when dealing with historical themes, ensuring the fairness and diversity of the narrative. Adopt Western expressions, break through traditional cultural expressions, and combine the needs of others with our demands. However, regarding attitude, we must stand firm, make a voice, and have more discourse power. While telling Chinese stories well, the characters should be three-dimensional and multifaceted, not flat. We strive to enhance further the dominant position of Chinese film production teams in co-production films. This is not only reflected in financial investment and technical support but, more importantly, in the dominance of creative concepts and narrative strategies. Through cooperation with top international production teams, Chinese filmmakers will have the opportunity to learn and draw on advanced production techniques and narrative methods while also showing the world unique Chinese stories.

The vast potential of the Chinese film market can also provide a broad space for developing Sino-foreign co-productions. As the demand for high-quality films among Chinese audiences continues to grow, more international production companies will be willing to cooperate with China to develop films that meet market demand jointly. Through co-productions, Chinese production teams can not only improve their production level but also continuously improve and perfect their own creations through feedback from the international market. Government policy support is also an essential guarantee for the development of Sino-foreign co-productions. In recent years, the Chinese government has introduced a series of policies to support the development of the



cultural industry and encourage Sino-foreign cooperation in producing excellent film and television works. These policies not only provide financial and resource support for co-productions, but also provide great convenience in market access and distribution channels.

The diversification of international communication channels has provided a new path for promoting Sino-foreign co-productions. With the rapid development of the Internet and digital media, movies no longer rely solely on traditional cinema chains for dissemination. Sino-foreign co-productions can reach global audiences more quickly and widely through mainstream media platforms, social media, and multinational film festivals. The performance of Chinese films in the international market will no longer be limited to box office data, but more importantly, the improvement in cultural influence and value dissemination.

Sino-foreign co-productions of Anti-Japanese films are the product of commercial cooperation and an important carrier of cultural exchange. Through these films, audiences worldwide can have a deeper understanding of China's history and culture and deepen their understanding of China. While telling history, Sino-foreign co-productions are also building a bridge for cultural exchange and promoting dialogue and mutual learning between different cultures. In the context of globalization, the importance of cultural exchange has become increasingly prominent. Sino-foreign co-productions of Anti-Japanese films not only promote the Chinese people's Anti-Japanese spirit and historical contributions internationally by telling China's Anti-Japanese history, but also correct the misunderstandings and prejudices of Western countries about Chinese history to a certain extent. Through these films, the audience can see a more real and three-dimensional image of China, and enhance their understanding and recognition of Chinese history and culture.

In short, the development process and future prospects of Sino-foreign co-productions of Anti-Japanese films reflect the gradual strengthening of China's international discourse power, the improvement of the national image, and the increase of Chinese elements. In the context of globalization and cultural diversity, Sino-foreign co-productions, as an important carrier of cultural exchange, will continue to play an important role in promoting international understanding, spreading Chinese culture, and enhancing the national image. Through continuous innovation and deepening cooperation, Sino-foreign co-productions of Anti-Japanese films will make greater contributions to the development of the world film industry and the deepening of cultural exchanges, and become an important link between the past and the present, the East and the West.

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