

# The Evolution of Chinese Cinema in the New Century: From Martial Arts Classics to New Mainstream Blockbusters

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## Abstract

This study explores the evolution of the new century film from martial arts to the new mainstream film blockbuster era. Firstly, the article reviews the heyday of martial arts films and their influence on film industry and culture. Then, it studies the transformation and evolution of martial arts films in the new century and the background of the rise of new mainstream films in this period. Subsequently, the article analyzes the characteristics and value orientation of the new mainstream blockbuster, as well as the fusion and difference between martial arts and the new mainstream. Furthermore, the audience and market performance of the two film styles and the influence of technological progress on martial arts and new mainstream films are studied. Finally, the article discusses the roles and challenges of directors and producers in the transformation of film style. This research reveals the evolution and diversification of the film industry in the new century, as well as the interaction and development between different film genres.

**Keywords:** new century, martial arts, new mainstream blockbuster era

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## 1. Introduction

The development of film is closely related to the times, and different times give birth to unique film types and styles. Since the beginning of the new century, Chinese films have undergone transformation from traditional to modern, from single to diverse, among which martial arts films and new mainstream blockbusters have become the most notable focus. The martial arts films are famous for their oriental charm, romantic feelings and gorgeous martial arts scenes, which show the core values of Chinese traditional culture and enhance the level of filmmaking. Writers such as Kim Yong and Gulong provide

rich material, while filmmakers turn these classic novels into thrilling films. With the advance of technology, special effects films have come to the fore and expanded their imagination. New mainstream blockbusters, such as sci-fi, superheroes, fantasy, etc., gradually dominate the market. They not only rely on advanced technology, but also focus on storyline, characterization and visual effects to provide viewers with a unique audio-visual experience.

Martial arts and the new mainstream film blockbuster permeate each other and influence each other. Martial arts elements are common in modern blockbusters, and some martial arts

films also draw on the techniques and techniques of new mainstream blockbusters to form interesting interactions. Together, they shape the diversity of Chinese cinema and reflect the multiple faces of the times.

## **2. The Prosperity and Influence of Martial Arts Movies**

From the end of the 20th century to the beginning of the new century, martial arts films have experienced a heyday in the Chinese film industry and are loved by the audience. These films not only have a strong visual impact, but also have a distinctive personality in narrative skills, characterization and cultural connotation.

In the cross-border communication between the stage and the screen, martial arts films provide a wealth of creative materials and performance skills. The emotional entanglement between the characters, the complex family background, the grand historical background and various martial arts stunts all provide the actors with a stage to show their talents. The martial arts films of this period benefited greatly from the accumulation of previous literary works. For example, Jin Yong and Gulong's classic novels provide rich material for filmmakers. By bringing these literary works to the screen, filmmakers have succeeded in presenting complex character relationships, delicate emotional depictions and magnificent scenes. In addition, the new century film technology, especially special effects technology, also provided technical support for the prosperity of martial arts films. For example, the classic martial arts elements such as falling eaves and fighting in the air are presented more realistically and shockingly through special effects technology. From the cultural point of view, martial arts movies also carry a deep Chinese cultural tradition. It reflects the traditional Chinese concepts of loyalty, friendship and love, and also conveys deep thoughts on family conditions. The Taoism and Confucianism among them add the depth of philosophy to the martial arts film, making it not only an entertainment, but also a cultural heritage. During this period, some martial arts films have also achieved good box office success abroad, such as *Hero* and *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, which have not only been successful in China, but also won word of mouth in the international market. These films convey Chinese culture, history and aesthetics to audiences around the world, giving them a deeper understanding of traditional Chinese art.

The prosperity of martial arts films has undoubtedly promoted the development of Chinese films in the new century. It not only broadens the scope of film types, but also provides new creative ideas and techniques for film production. At the same time, as a professional teacher of drama, film and television literature, we should realize that the cultural and artistic values behind martial arts films have immeasurable enlightenment and educational significance.

## **3. Transformation and Evolution of Martial Arts in the New Century**

In the new century, technological progress has brought unprecedented possibilities to film. The application of special effects, the popularization of 3D technology and the development of computer animation have made martial arts films reach a new height in visual effects. More realistic scene reconstruction, more elaborate characters and more shocking fighting scenes are the distinctive features of martial arts films in this period. This is also due to the skilled use of technology and the unremitting pursuit of art by filmmakers. The martial arts theme itself has undergone the transformation from traditional to modern. The original martial arts worldview, characterization and plot design began to interact with contemporary culture and social reality. The characters in the movie are no longer just chivalrous and evil people in the traditional sense, but more complex and multifaceted modern people. The problems they face are no longer just feuds, but related to the contradictions and challenges of modern society. In the new century martial arts movies, the status of female characters has also been significantly improved. They are no longer just a part of the main character or a supporting role in the love line, but they begin to play a more critical role in the story. They are independent, intelligent, brave, and stand shoulder to shoulder with male characters, demonstrating the strength and wisdom of women. In addition, martial arts movies of the new century are more open and diversified in plot design. In addition to the traditional martial arts plot, many movies began to introduce other types of elements, such as suspense, thriller, fantasy, etc., making martial arts movies more rich and diverse in narrative. This change not only enriched the content of martial arts films, but also expanded their audience.

In the transformation and evolution of martial

arts films in the new century, we can see the maturity and progress of Chinese film industry. Filmmakers dare to innovate and break through on the basis of preserving traditional culture, showing the infinite possibilities of Chinese cinema.

#### **4. The Rise of the New Mainstream Blockbuster Background**

Entering the new century, China's film industry has faced unprecedented opportunities for development. A series of social, economic, cultural and technological factors have contributed to the emergence of new mainstream films, which have achieved remarkable success not only in the domestic market but also in the international arena.

Economic globalization has brought unprecedented opportunities to China's film industry. With China's entry into the World Trade Organization, the film market began to open to the outside world, and domestic film production and distribution companies began to cooperate with international giants to create high-quality films. At the same time, China's rapid economic growth has provided huge financial support for film production, allowing filmmakers to experiment more boldly with high-cost production and innovative narrative techniques.

At the social level, with the improvement of people's living standards and the increasing cultural consumption, the audience's demand for movies began to change. Instead of being content with simple entertainment, they began to pursue deeper cultural experiences and more complex emotional resonance. This provides a broad space for the new mainstream blockbuster to develop, allowing it to explore more freely complex human and social topics.

In the cultural field, the new mainstream blockbuster absorbed the essence of Chinese traditional culture and organic integration with modern culture. This combination is not only reflected in the content of the story, but also in the narrative style, artistic technique and aesthetic orientation of the film. The new mainstream blockbuster is not only a reflection of reality, but also a deep reflection and a strong response to traditional and modern culture.

Advances in technology provide strong support for the rise of new mainstream blockbusters. The application of digital technology, special effects technology, 3D technology, etc. has made the

film production level significantly improved. This is not only in visual effects, but also in sound, music, photography and so on. New mainstream blockbusters can thus be more realistic, more in-depth discussion of human nature, more effective in moving the hearts of viewers.

Under this background, the new mainstream blockbuster has become a new growth point of Chinese film and an important carrier of Chinese culture export. It not only represents the present situation of Chinese cinema, but also represents the future direction of Chinese culture.

#### **5. Characteristics and Value Orientation of Mainstream Blockbusters**

In the new century, the mainstream blockbuster plays an important role in the Chinese film market with its charm and power. The characteristics of these works not only represent the high level of contemporary Chinese cinema, but also reflect the culture and values of the current society. In order to understand this phenomenon in depth, we need to analyze the intrinsic characteristics and value orientation of mainstream blockbusters from all dimensions.

From a narrative perspective, mainstream blockbusters usually have grand narrative structures and deep emotional expressions. These films often choose big background, big events as their narrative content, in order to show the human nature in a particular historical or social background of choice and struggle. They often incorporate social realities into narratives, which resonate and reflect on the audience.

From the aesthetic point of view, the mainstream blockbuster shows a high degree of artistic perfection. The film is well-made, whether it is scene design, characterization, sound processing or special effects presentation, all reach the highest level in the industry. This pursuit of art and technology has not only enhanced the audience's viewing experience, but also won the attention and recognition of the international market for Chinese films.

Value orientation is at the heart of the mainstream blockbuster. Such films often emphasize family feelings, emotional bonds between people, the pursuit of justice and truth, and respect and inheritance of traditional culture. They are not only entertainment works, but also a carrier of national spirit and cultural

identity. In the complex and changing social background, the values conveyed by the mainstream blockbuster provide a common cultural reference and emotional sustenance for the audience.

It should not be overlooked that mainstream blockbusters also face some criticism and controversy. Some critics point out that some films are too commercial and entertaining, sacrificing depth and artistry. Some films have been criticized for oversimplifying the treatment of real problems, lacking depth and breadth. However, it is these controversies and discussions that make the mainstream blockbuster leave an indelible mark on the history of Chinese cinema and provide valuable experience and reflection for later filmmaking.

## **6. The Fusion and Differences Between Martial Arts and the New Mainstream**

Martial arts and the new mainstream blockbusters seem to be very different, but in some ways they have become more and more intermingled in Chinese films in the new century. At the same time, they still maintain their own unique styles and characteristics. In order to better understand these interactions and differences, we need to delve into their origins, characteristics and value orientation.

Martial arts movies originated from ancient Chinese cultural traditions, especially martial arts novels. It is about the benevolence and righteousness of the rivers and lakes, the love of the hero's children, the sword and the sword confrontation. People in the world of martial arts pursue a kind of heroism that transcends everyday life and romance. Its visual style often has a strong oriental color, such as flowing long shirt, holding a long sword chivalry, ancient Jiangnan water township and so on. The moral concepts of martial arts stories, such as chivalry, kindness and justice, have been deeply embedded in the genes of Chinese culture.

The new mainstream blockbuster represents the values and aesthetic orientation of modern society. They often pay attention to the life, emotions and social problems of modern people, showing the prosperity of the city, modern technology, and the background of globalization. Compared with the historical and traditional background of martial arts films, the new mainstream blockbusters are more closely related to the life reality of modern audiences. They are richer and more diverse in narrative

techniques, characterization and theme selection.

However, in the new century, the fusion of martial arts and the new mainstream has become a phenomenon that cannot be ignored. Many directors try to incorporate martial arts elements into the modern context, or inject martial arts spirit into new mainstream blockbusters. For example, martial arts heroes appear in modern urban settings, or those who pursue martial arts feelings in modern cities. This kind of fusion makes the film more diversified and brings a new experience to the audience. But at the same time, there are still obvious differences between martial arts and the new mainstream. First, their value orientation is different. Martial arts emphasized heroism, while the new mainstream paid more attention to realism. Second, they differ in narrative techniques. Martial arts tends to use traditional narrative patterns, such as linear narration and heroic epic, while the new mainstream pays more attention to individual psychological description and social reflection.

During the development of the film, martial arts and the new mainstream have always influenced and integrated each. They are not only the two pillars of Chinese cinema, but also the two representatives of Chinese culture. In the future, they will still play an irreplaceable role in Chinese films.

## **7. Audience and Market Performance of Two Film Styles**

In exploring the changes in film genres and styles, we have to focus on two core issues: audience and market. As two distinct styles, martial arts films and new mainstream films, their audience composition and market response reveal the diversity and depth of film culture and commercial operation.

### *7.1 Audience and Market Performance of Martial Arts Films*

With its unique cultural background and artistic characteristics, martial arts films have long attracted a group of loyal fans. These fans often have deep feelings for the martial arts culture, they are not only the audience, but also the inheritors of the culture. Over time, although the audience level of martial arts films is gradually increasing, a new generation of young people are also exposed to and enjoying this style, indicating that the charm of martial arts culture is epochal. In the market, martial arts films often

show the characteristics of “small but fine”, that is, despite the small number of productions, but each production is warmly welcomed by the market, box office revenue is stable.

### *7.2 Audience and Market Performance of New Mainstream Films*

The new mainstream film is more focused on popular tastes and is designed to meet the widest audience needs. Audience groups range from adolescents to middle-aged people of all ages. Because of its rich content and diverse themes, most people can find their favorite elements in it. In terms of market performance, new mainstream films usually have high box office potential. The promotional and marketing strategies for these films are also more advanced and extensive, tapping audiences’ needs and interests from social media to offline events.

## **8. The Impact of Technological Progress on Martial Arts and New Mainstream Movies**

Film, as an art form highly dependent on technology, its evolution is closely related to technological progress. The martial arts film and the new mainstream film, as two contemporary film styles, are driven by technological innovation. In order to better understand how these two film styles are closely integrated with technology, this chapter explores how technological advances affect their creation and performance.

Combination of martial arts film and technology: martial arts film is well known for its thrilling fighting scenes, fantastic martial arts world and unique ancient background. Advances in technology, especially in the development of visual effects, have enabled filmmakers to present more realistically the spectacular scenes of the martial arts world. The digital special effects technology provides a more detailed and real visual experience for the martial arts movies. At the same time, the application of digital photography technology also makes film shooting more flexible, can capture more details, thus bringing the audience an immersive viewing experience.

The fusion of new mainstream film and technology: The new mainstream film is not so much a film style as a change in the way of film making and narration. Technological progress has provided strong support for this transformation. Whether it is more realistic CGI rendering or more high-definition digital photography technology, the film’s picture is

more delicate and realistic. Advances in sound technology have also added a more three-dimensional and immersive viewing experience to the new mainstream films. Dolby’s panoramic sound technology, for example, makes the audience feel as if they were in the scene, penetrating every scene of the movie.

Technology and creativity are the two-way drive: technology is not just a tool for filmmaking, it also provides a wider space for creators to create. Under the impetus of technology, martial arts films and new mainstream films constantly explore new narrative ways and visual expressions, bringing unprecedented viewing experience to audiences. At the same time, creativity drives technology forward. The filmmakers’ pursuit of more realistic and shocking images and sounds also drives technicians to develop and perfect new technology.

## **9. The Role and Challenges of Directors and Producers in Transformation**

The transformation process of film industry is complex and full of variables, involving many aspects of adjustment and innovation. Among them, directors and producers, as the main decision makers and organizers of film production, their roles and challenges are not to be underestimated.

The director, traditionally regarded as the creative soul of the film, has the task of imparting unique artistic and narrative depth to the film. In the context of film industry transformation, directors need to not only be familiar with the possibilities of new technology for film creation, but also find connections with audiences in changing market environment. This means that directors not only need to renew themselves in the arts, but also have a certain degree of market sensitivity to ensure that the film meets the aesthetic requirements as well as the needs of the market and the audience.

Producers, as organizers and coordinators of filmmaking, their roles are equally crucial in the film transformation. Producers need to ensure that the film’s production process is both creative and economically viable. This means that producers need to consider more factors in the decision-making process, including the cost of new technologies, the impact of market changes on film demand, and how to balance the interests of all parties. In addition, producers

need to work closely with various departments, including technical, marketing and distribution teams, to ensure that the entire process from production to release is smooth.

The transformation of film industry is not only the change of technology and market, but also the renewal of thinking mode and creative mode. For directors and producers, they need to get rid of some of the stereotypes of the past and try new ways of creating and collaborating. For example, with the development of digital technology, many traditional filming methods and production processes have changed, and directors and producers need to work closely with technical teams to take full advantage of the new technology. But at the same time, the core value of the film, that is, its artistic and narrative depth, is unchanged. This means that in pursuing the dual goals of technology and the market, directors and producers still need to keep the artistic originality of the film, ensuring that it meets the market and the audience, but also reaches a certain level of artistic excellence. The transformation of the film industry has brought unprecedented opportunities and challenges to directors and producers. How to find their place in the transformation, how to satisfy the market and audience, while maintaining the artistry of the film, is the question that they need to think and explore continuously.

### 10. Concluding Remarks

In a word, the new century movie era witnessed the evolution of martial arts films to the new mainstream films, marking the diversity and innovation of the film industry. The heyday of martial arts films brought unique cultural influences to Chinese films and aroused worldwide attention. However, with the change of social and audience taste, the new century martial arts films had to adapt to the new market demand, carried on the style transformation and evolution. Meanwhile, the rise of the new mainstream blockbuster reflects the audience's desire for a more diversified and globalized film experience. The fusion and difference of the two film genres provide a wider choice for the audience, but also challenge the roles of directors and producers in the creative process. Advances in technology make film making more advanced, but also provide more creative possibilities for film making. This research shows the continuous development and change of the film industry, and provides useful

insights for filmmaking and cultural influences.

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