

Sunzi's War Rhetoric Meets Hollywood: Educating Teenagers about Bullying through Movies

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Abstract

Background: Teenagers experience wars not only in the actual war zones but also in the home, school, and street fronts. Sometimes they are the innocent victims of bullying. Often confused, they do not know how to survive in bullying situations. Adults such as movie makers and educators have taken on the responsibility of helping teenagers. The 2008 Hollywood movie *The Forbidden Kingdom*, presents a modern war between an American teenage boy and street bullies. With the help of Chinese Kungfu (martial arts) masters, the boy overcomes his fear and becomes a powerful protector in real life.

Study: This article examines three aspects of Sunzi's rhetorical war strategies that are prominent in the movie: becoming a benevolent leader, cultivating crafty wisdom, and mastering Kungfu. Furthermore, I critique Chinese cultural authenticity in this movie. Through exploring Sunzi's rhetoric and Chinese cultural representation, educators can take the opportunity to discuss survival strategies in a bullying situation with teens and help them deal with their daily struggles. In addition, educators can help cultivate youngsters' critical views towards cultural authenticity while watching this cross-cultural movie.

Keywords: bullying, movies, martial arts, Sunzi

孫子的戰爭修辭藝術與好萊塢之交匯： 電影對青少年處理校園凌霸的教育功能

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摘要

背景：青少年經歷的戰爭不僅僅局限於戰場，還包括發生在家庭、學校、街頭的衝突。他們常常淪為各種校園凌霸事件的受害者。在種種的掙扎、迷惑與惶恐裡，他們往往不知道什麼才是最好的生存之道。一些電影製片人、教育者擔任起這項幫助青少年的責任。2008年好萊塢電影《功夫之王》呈現了一個美國少年和街頭凌霸的現代版戰爭。藉由中國功夫師父的幫助，那個少年克服了恐懼，變成了現實生活中勇敢的保護者。

本文：探討孫子的戰爭修辭藝術在這部電影中的體現。我將從三方面來探討：成就一個仁慈的領導者、培養狡猾的智慧、發揮功夫的作用。再者，我批判電影中中華文化失真的問題。經由探討這部電影中的孫子戰爭修辭和文化表現問題，教育者可以和青年學子討論如何處理凌霸事件和在生活中掙扎中求生的策略。在觀看電影的同時，教育者也培養青少年形成對文化表現的批判性思考。

關鍵字：校園凌霸、電影、武術、孫子

Introduction

Teenagers experience wars not only in the actual war zones but also in the home, school, and street fronts. In our global society, the wars that they confront are complicated - wars fought between the good and the evil, father and son, the bully and the bullied, the colonizer and the colonized, and among nations, races, and genders. In March, 2010, the tragedy of Phoebe Prince captured headlines in the U.S. news media. Nine teens bullied the teenage girl for three months. She committed suicide after being raped and tormented by classmates both in person and online. According to the District Attorney Elizabeth Scheibel, Phoebe's teachers witnessed her suffering but did not intervene. Similar bullying cases happen again and again in the United States and elsewhere (Boulton & Underwood, 1992; Murakami, 1985; Olweus, 1997; Stephenson & Smith, 1989). After the Phoebe case was reported, hundreds of individuals expressed their anger and sorrow on the Internet. Some of them recalled their own experience of having been bullied in their teenage years. One former victim said that such an experience would leave a mental scar forever. When he reported the abuse to his teachers, they thought he must have done something wrong to provoke his classmates' anger. He wished that teachers had believed him at the time and intervened.

Teachers and parents need to educate teenagers about bullying. Bullying is defined by Hazler (1996) as "repeatedly (not just once or twice) harming others. This can be done by physical attack or by hurting others' feeling through words, actions, or social exclusion. Bullying may be done by one person or by a group. It is an unfair match since the bully is either physically, verbally and/or socially stronger than the victim" (p.6). Bullies are often

recognized as having physical strength, impulsive desire to dominate others, and less empathy (Olweus, 1991). Victims generally fall into two types: passive and provocative (Olweus, 1978). Passive victims tend to feel anxious, sad, hopeless, lonely, and depressive. When they are attacked by perpetrators, they usually accept the abuse and withdraw or cry, not fighting back. In contrast, provocative victims show anger and aggressive retaliation. They rashly stand up against the perpetrators and, according to research, more likely become potential perpetrators. They might aggress against weaker children while then being abused by stronger peers.

Both types of victims show low self-esteem. They blame themselves overly and regard themselves as useless, stupid, and ugly persons. They usually experience peer rejection and dislike by their peers. Studies evidence that their low self-esteem causes psychosocial and psychosexual obstacles which will continue far beyond the bullying event (Carney & Merrell, 2001; Olweus, 1997; Hazler, 1996). In order to implement successful assist, social workers and psychologists suggest that for a passive victim, educators should offer them assertiveness training and a stronger visual profile of self; for a provocative victim, less aggressive solution to solve problems (Dodge, Coie, Pettit & Price, 1990).

There are practical ways to prevent bullying in schools. Since most victims belong to the category of passive victims, Tattum (1997) suggests that educators should offer them peer support by carefully matching victims with elder and stronger companions whose role is to protect and support the victims. The elder companion had better come from the same school and the same neighborhood, thereby they will see each other often, which helps to build up a sense of security and self-confidence in the victim during

transition times. In addition, according to Tattum (1997), educators should raise victims' awareness of bullies' habits and identify bullying hot spots; place bullying on School Board agenda; invite parents to discuss the bullying issue; encourage community support and advocate for changes to school policy in legislation.

In this article, I focus on the issue of helping passive victims and potential bullies strengthen their self-esteem. Besides seeking strong peer support and improving school policy as suggested by Tattum (1997), parents and educators can also make good use of media literacy to help teenagers cultivate their physical and psychological power. They can discuss bullying and solutions with teenagers using popular teens bullying movies, such as *Welcome to the Dollhouse* (1995), *The Chocolate War* (1988), *Mean Creek* (2004), and *The Karate Kid* (1984; 2010).

The responsibility of educating teenagers on conflict resolution has been taken on by some fiction writers, movie makers, and educators. The 2008 Hollywood movie *The Forbidden Kingdom* presents a modern war between a teenage boy and street bullies. The movie entertains young audiences; more importantly, it helps them to face the challenges of being bullied and to survive various struggles through the spirit of Chinese martial arts. The movie producer Casey Silver explains that, "My son practices martial arts and I started to wonder why there hasn't been a broad appeal movie for the West with a deeper idea about the beauty and poetry, as well as the deeper philosophy that underlies Kungfu" (Cited in Burns, 2008, p.11). The screen writer John Fusco echoes Silver's aspiration. He hopes Western moviegoers come away from this movie wanting to read the classic Chinese mythology *The Journey to the West*

and learn that Kungfu is a philosophy, a way of life, a way of thinking, not just a way of fighting. Fusco says, "at the end of his adventures, the young hero in *The Forbidden Kingdom* would learn to face his fears while learning the deeper meaning of Kungfu" (Cited in Burns, 2008, p.11).

As evidenced by the glowing appraisal, the movie makers believe that Chinese martial arts and its philosophy can assist teenagers to appreciate the beauty and poetic elements in fighting and inspire them to solve problems in their daily lives. This movie depicts a Boston boy Jason who encounters bullies in Boston's Chinatown. At the most dangerous moment, he is miraculously whisked away to ancient China and learns Kungfu with Chinese masters. He learns to fight with an understanding of the spirit of Chinese martial arts. When he returns to contemporary United States, he becomes a new teenager who bravely fights with the bullies and no longer lives under the fear of teenaged gangs. Jason can overcome bullying because he has learned Kungfu and its philosophy, which boost his self-esteem and confidence.

The movie makers instill the philosophy of Chinese martial arts by informing the movie with Sunzi's war rhetoric. In this article, I will examine the movie based on three aspects of Sunzi's discourse on wars: becoming a benevolent leader, cultivating crafty wisdom, and mastering Kungfu. When teachers and parents watch this movie with teenagers, they can take the opportunity to discuss Sunzi's war rhetoric with them. I also suggest ways that classroom teachers can engage students in sensitive and critical discussions of the movie from a cross-cultural perspective.

Sunzi's Philosophy of War

To understand the spirit of Chinese martial arts, Sunzi's *The Art of War* is a crucial reference and a good starting point. The text, as Mair (2007) comments, is "the earliest and most important Chinese book that deals exclusively with strategy and tactics" and "it is concerned more with the overall planning for war" instead of simply the use of various weapons (Précis). To learn how ancient Chinese strategists solve military and political strife and how they defeat opponents with the least expenditure can help young people deal with their contemporary conflicts.

Sunzi is one of the earliest Chinese warfare sages. He lived in the Spring and Autumn period (722 BCE-481 BCE), in a time when a slave-owning society was shifting to feudalism and small states were fighting against each other frequently. To seek peace and reduce casualties, Sunzi researched war strategies and developed his thinking on military leadership. According to Sunzi, a commander must establish his convincing words through four means: morality, the knowledge of weather and geography, good management, and strict laws. In Sunzi's terminology, those means are called the Way (道dao), Heaven (天tian), earth (地di), command (將jiang) and rules (法fa). If a commander is kind and trustworthy, he possesses moral influence by which the people will think in line with him until they die. A good commander operates troops in accordance with changes of weather and the geographic features. He is able to put the military laws into practice strictly and understand how his subordinates feel and what they value.

As a military strategist and rhetorician, Sunzi deeply understood human psychology. Conceived as persuasive communication, rhetoric has been

practiced in every culture and nation (Combs, 2005). Comparable to Aristotle, who holds that the best speaker must demonstrate authority, good character, logical arguments and the ability to manipulate the audience's emotion effectively, Sunzi built a system of persuasion in an ancient Chinese context. He proposes that understanding the self and the Other is a significant step to winning a war. Mutual understanding and appreciation prevents lethal destruction and promises the greatest outcome for both warring parties. Sunzi's war strategy has guided Chinese political and military leaders in every dynasty and continues to help modern people deal with various kinds of struggles. Before an in-depth discussion of Sunzi's rhetoric in the movie, I will first offer a summary of the movie.

The War in *The Forbidden Kingdom*

Living in Boston's Chinatown, seventeen-year-old Jason Tripitikas is fascinated by Chinese Kungfu. One day, in a pawnshop he happens to run into a staff with a bronze monkey symbol engraved in it, of which he has dreamt before. The store owner Old Hop tells him that his family has kept the staff for more than a century and is waiting for its destined seeker to return it to its rightful owner. In the late evening, some street gangs bully Jason and shoot Old Hop. Before he dies, Old Hop thrusts the staff at Jason and enjoins him to return it to its proper owner. The bullies run after Jason trying to capture him. In a harrowing action scene, the staff miraculously brings Jason to an ancient Chinese village.

Tipped off that the staff is within the village, the Jade Warlord persecutes the people during his search. Jason is rescued by Kungfu masters Lu Yan and Silent Monk. They tell Jason the story of this staff based on the Chinese mythology *Journey to the West*.

Monkey King was born out of a rock. He is skilled in the boundless magic of transformation. Angry at not being invited to the Jade Emperor's banquet, he attends anyway. Infuriated by the monkey, the Jade Warlord turns him into a stone statue. Then a prophecy says that there will be a destined seeker who returns Monkey King's lost staff and frees him.

Jason, Lu Yan, Silent Monk, and Golden Sparrow, a pretty Chinese girl who wants to avenge her parents' death caused by the Jade Warlord's hands, join the mission to rescue Monkey King. Despite numerous attacks by a Jade Warrior, the White-haired Witch, they finally defeat the Jade Warlord and free Monkey King. The closing scene shows that Jason flies back to the moment in which he faces the bullies in Boston. The lessons in Chinese Kungfu and Sunzi's philosophy have transformed Jason into a brave boy. He fights back and drives the bullies away with his martial arts. In the following passages, I will explore Sunzi's war rhetoric as shown in this movie.

Becoming a Benevolent Leader

According to Sunzi, the best military rhetoric is claiming to be a benevolent leader who fights for justice. When a commander exhibits his moral inspiration and shows that helping others is his only concern, he will generate powerful persuasion and identification among his people. Kings in the Spring and Autumn period were interested in military invasion rather than helping others. Their ambition of expanding territories and gaining wealth and power prompted them to wage wars. Sunzi (1999) taught the kings that "a commander who decides to advance without any thought of winning personal fame and to withdraw without fear of punishment and whose only concern is to protect his people

and serve his sovereign" is a virtuous leader (p.78). Since the commander fights for justice instead of for his personal fame or for the fear of punishment, his people will trust his altruism and fight to death for him.

The emphasis on becoming a benevolent leader is infused into *The Forbidden Kingdom*. Lu Yan and Silent Monk fight against the Jade Warlord with a just cause, which turns them into benevolent leaders. Both have a benevolent intention of saving the people, thus they hold substantial moral capital. The claim of fighting for justice inspires Jason, Golden Sparrow, and the monks who follow the lead of Lu Yan and Silent Monk to save Monkey King. In the movie, Lu Yan and Silent Monk risk their lives to save common people. They teach Jason Kungfu in order to enhance his ability to survive the battle. Sunzi (1999) suggests that when a leader "cares for his soldiers as if they were infants" and "he loves his soldiers as if they were his own sons, they will stand by him even unto death" (p.79). People will follow the leader through every vicissitude, whether to live or die, without fear of moral peril. Because Lu Yan and Silent Monk act not for their own benefits, their leadership inspires their followers.

In contrast, the Jade Warlord is portrayed as an evil leader. He tricks Monkey King into giving away his magic staff by saying that only fighting with bare hands is a fair fight. However, when Monkey King puts away his weapon, the Jade Warlord does not keep his word. He uses his witchcraft to imprison Monkey King as a stone statue for five centuries. The young audiences of the movie can clearly see that Monkey King is innocent and that he was defeated unfairly. Thus, the rescuing mission led by Silent Monk and Lu Yan naturally turns into a just war.

When applying Sunzi's war rhetoric in

education, teachers and parents may use this movie to explain that persuasion should aim for justice and for helping others. When teenagers face a bullying situation, they could persuade their friends to stand with them by describing the righteousness in fighting the bullies. They can list what evil things the bullies have done to other teenagers, so as to establish the negative ethos of the bullies. Then the teenagers could argue why a group of friends need to be united and fight back. If they fear to face the bullies, they will inevitably be hurt. However, chronic victims are usually weak in character and lack confidence. How could they persuade others to stand with them, not to mention to become leaders? Educators should provide victims a transition training to turn them from a poor coward to a benevolent leader. Tattum (1997) suggested pairing them with elder, stronger companions who could demonstrate braveness and protect them. The transition training is exemplified in the movie. Jason initially acts as a weak victim. Then he encounters Kungfu masters, who show him a virtuous character and invincible martial arts. Later they teach Jason martial arts to enhance his self-defense ability and his understanding of Daoist philosophy. Paired with capable and benevolent leaders, Jason has opportunities to mimic them and becomes one himself.

Cultivating Crafty Wisdom

Sunzi argues that the wisest way to win a war is to win it without fighting. How to make it happen? Sunzi suggests using verbal persuasion first. According to Kennedy (1998), rhetoric is a physical and psychological energy reacting to a particular situation. In ancient times, aboriginal people found that using physical strength to solve problems causes bloody deaths, harming each other gravely, so

gradually they developed verbal communication art to substitute the physical fight. Similarly, Sunzi (1999) renders that “The best policy in war is to thwart the enemy’s strategy. The second best is to disrupt his alliances through diplomatic means. The third best is to attack his army in the field. The worst policy of all is to attack walled cities” (p.17). To lower the cost of a battle, one should thwart the enemy’s plan and disrupt his inner unity through verbal persuasion.

Sunzi proposes that one cultivates crafty wisdom to win wars. When the enemy is formidable, it is presumably governed by a clever leader. The first step of winning a war is to flatter the enemy. Exaggerate his deeds and pretend to be inferior to him. “Feign incapability when in fact capable; feign inactivity when ready to strike” (Sunzi, 1999, p.7). After the enemy has been placated, he might temporarily put away his strong defense. The second step is to provoke the enemy’s anger. Anger will disturb his calmness and interfere with his judgment. When the enemy is blind to the coming danger, “attack where he is least prepared. Take action when he least expects you” (Sunzi, 1999, p.7). A leader holds great responsibilities. If he commits wrong, he does damage on a large scale. Using crafty rhetoric is an important means to defeat a clever enemy.

The Jade Warlord, who may have studied Sunzi’s war strategies as did many real-life Chinese military leaders, capitalizes on the Monkey King’s arrogance and anger. In the Chinese mythology *Journey to the West*, Monkey King is the leader of the Mountain of Fruits and Flowers. With the magic staff in hand, the monkey’s Kungfu is invincible: even the heavenly army cannot conquer him. The Jade Warlord is also an outstanding leader, the highest commander of the heavenly army. However, Monkey King offends him in Jade Emperor’s banquet. Unable to stand the

monkey's arrogance, the Jade Warlord attacks him to validate his authority as a heavenly army commander. He exercises his witchcraft to lift up hundred of fire balls and spears, shooting at Monkey King. However, the Jade Warlord fails. He realizes that he cannot conquer Monkey King in the physical combat.

The Jade Warlord utilizes Sunzi's rhetoric next. He stops exercising his Kungfu but compliments on Monkey King's "most excellent staff fighting." Hearing that, Monkey King becomes very proud. Then the Jade Warlord mocks him that, "but without the weapon, you are nothing but a common monkey. No more weapon, no more magic. Face against face." Monkey King's pride makes him accept his enemy's proposal immediately. He forgets Sunzi's warning that war is a game of deceit. He puts away his magic staff and uses bare hands to fight the Jade Warlord. In a second, the Warlord uses his witchcraft to turn him into a stone. When discussing this movie with teens, educators can teach them how to use crafty wisdom. For example, when teenagers face bullies, they may present their weakness at first, complimenting the bullies' "great power" and "goodness." When the bullies' pride is inflated, the teenagers can use language to trick the bullies to disarm like what the Jade Warlord does to Monkey King. If victims can use verbal rhetoric to ease the bullies' anger, they may less likely be hurt.

Another way to disrupt unity is to generate a cause for conflict. People often fight against each other because of conflict of interests. In *The Forbidden Kingdom*, the Jade Warlord is the person who utilizes Sunzi's war rhetoric on this point. He wants to kill Jason and to gain Monkey King's magic staff. He creates a conflict between White Hair Witch and Jason by offering them one elixir. After Lu Yan is injured by White Hair Witch's arrow, only the elixir

of immortality can save his life. Jason goes to see the Warlord for the elixir. They strike up the following conversation:

Jason: A man is dying back on Song Mountain. I need the elixir.

The Jade Warlord: And why should I give it to you?

Jason: Because I brought you the staff.

The Jade Warlord: The life of your friend for the power to rule a kingdom? A most reasonable offer. This man, a good friend?

Jason: And a good teacher.

The Jade Warlord: A man who honors his teacher honors himself. However, there is a bit of a problem with your request. You see... I've promised the elixir to someone else.

Jason: But she did not bring you the staff. I did.

The Jade Warlord [turns to White Hair Witch]: The boy has the point.

White Hair Witch: My Liege, you made a promise.

The Jade Warlord: There is but one way to resolve such matters. A martial challenge... to the death.

White Hair Witch [answers excitedly]: With pleasure. (Fusco, 2008)

White Hair Witch wants the elixir to stay young. According to Sunzi's (1999) suggestion, "When the enemy is greedy for grain, hand out a bait to lure him" (p.9); the Jade Warlord offers the only elixir as a bait to seduce White Hair Witch to kill Jason. This way the Jade Warlord does not fight by himself but achieves his goal of gaining the staff.

Manipulation of human psychology is the key to winning without fighting. Many victims of bullying use physical violence to fight back. Sometimes their fighting stops bullying but sometimes they get hurt

badly. Even though school policy tolerates zero counter-aggression by provocative victims, studies indicate that most victims deem fighting back as the most effective technique to stop bullying (Black, Weinles & Washington, 2010). Many victims prefer to place themselves at risk of being labeled as a bully or even being expelled from school. Learning from Sunzi's rhetoric of winning without fighting, educators can discuss alternative ways with teens. Take the Jade Warlord's strategy as an example. He provokes a conflict between Jason and White Hair Witch. The conflict of interests makes White Hair Witch want to kill Jason and Jason to kill White Hair Witch. The Jade Warlord does not need to crash his opponents directly. Following Sunzi's suggestion, when teens encounter bullies, the best strategy is to understand the conflict of interests among the bullies and try to create a conflict to break their unity.

Creating conflicts between bullies seems evil and immoral. However, the real world is very cruel. If educators do not tolerate crafty verbal strategy, the victims may be physically hurt by the bullies. In that case, it is hard to judge who is right and who is wrong. Myers (2008) acknowledges that recent war stories often "confront the moral dilemmas posed by modern wars, with no simplistic accounts of good guys versus bad and no definitions of what constitutes heroism" (p.25). By teaching teens Sunzi's rhetoric, parents and educators can remind them that the suffering of the bullies and the bullied is in fact generated by a vaster, deeper sociopolitical system. Rather than focusing their mental and physical energies on confronting the bully, victims might seek the source of conflicts within the naturalized hegemony and thereby develop more effective solutions.

Mastering Kungfu

In Sunzi's opinion, being benevolent and wise is not enough to win a war. A great commander needs to possess super power to protect others. One of the rhetorical strategies from *The Art of War* is to demonstrate one's supreme ability in martial arts. One who masters the martial arts and military affairs is in a position to offer protection and ward off danger, so that his words would be listened to and obeyed by the saved. The power of protection is an effective rhetoric, since striving to survive is part of human nature. In the movie, Lu Yan and the Silent Monk teach Jason Kungfu and the Daoist philosophy derived from Sunzi and Laozi. Jason desperately wants to learn the masters' Kungfu. He obeys their strict instructions respectfully because the masters have saved his life.

Kungfu training is depicted as strenuous in the movie. In order to increase the flexibility of Jason's legs, they are roped and pulled in opposite directions by his masters. The masters ignore Jason's painful cries, showing no pity on him. The masters teach him that "Kungfu, Kungfu! Hard work over time to accomplish skill" (Fusco, 2008). They also tell Jason an ancient Chinese fable: A butcher cuts meat everyday for many years and his knife never touches oxen's bones. The butcher is able to do so because he has practiced dismembering oxen over thousands of times. He knows every bone and every piece of flesh in an ox. Mastering Kungfu comes from strenuous training like dismembering an ox.

Besides the physical lessons, the masters cultivate Jason's virtue through meditation. They illuminate the spirit of Kungfu in meditation: "Learn the form but seek the formless. Hear the soundless. Learn it all then forget it all" (Fusco, 2008). For example, when a fisherman has caught fish, he will

no longer need a fishing rod. When one reads books and acquires their substance, he has no need to preserve the books. So when the masters teach Jason the form of Kungfu, the lesson is not merely the form but the Daoist philosophy behind those movements. If one knows the true meaning of a form, one can use it freely in any occasion. So the masters tell Jason that, "Learn the way, then find your own way. The musician can have Kungfu. Or the poet who paints pictures with words and makes emperors weep. This, too, is Kungfu" (Fusco, 2008). The spirit of Kungfu is both form and formless, way and no way. The Daoist epistemology contains seemingly binary but complementary forces symbolized by Yin and Yang.

To teach teenagers how to protect themselves and how to be a welcome leader, learning Kungfu is a good choice. The principle is to encourage a victim to acquire Kungfu, broadly defined, and its philosophy which can boost their self-esteem when they face bullies. Youngsters grow up in an era saturated with school and media violence. "[S]hedding innocence and discarding naïve notions of what counts as heroism or legitimate authority" and "searching from alternative values and communities, friends, and surrogate families who typically help them to survive" is a practical suggestion (Myers, 2008, p.24). Kungfu seems violent but is needed for our youngsters' safety.

Martial arts not only can help the bullied but also the bullies. Since a youngster could be a victim and a bully at the same time, helping teenagers overcome their violent tendency is the responsibility of educators. When a child grows up being bullied and neglected, they derive psychological scars. The bullied sometimes turns into a hardened and angry bully. Some suggest that psychotherapy, community intervention, or high-security detention can "rescue"

young gangs. However, those approaches prove insufficient to change the young gangs' long-term behaviors (Small, Kennedy & Bender, 1999). Twemlow & Sacco (1998) propose that the use of martial arts literature provides an effective treatment for violent youngsters. As demonstrated in martial arts novels, the practitioners of Kungfu must commit to respect and self-control, using violence in a righteous situation. By learning from the martial arts heroes, intractably youngsters will have good models and show off their strength and anger in a controlled way. As Sunzi suggests, the art of fighting is not simply about might but involves Daoist wisdom. Educators should teach youngsters the true meaning of form and formlessness and cultivate their spirit in the pursuit of softness and justice.

Sunzi's war wisdom can be broadly applied to the discussion of other teens bullying movies. For example, *Welcome to the Dollhouse* depicts Dawn Wiener's miserable junior high school life where she is bullied by classmates. Insults and humiliations force her to revenge radically on her friends and family. As a result, she ends up with no friends and loneliness. The last scene shows that Dawn obediently follows other students singing the school anthem, which leaves the audience wonder what is happening or will happen to her. Will her obedience help boost her self-esteem or is it just another form of oppression on a young life? Teachers and scholars can discuss this movie with teens and use Sunzi's wisdom to answer the unsolved questions. According to Sunzi, people who deal with conflicts using force are not the smartest. People who win friends' hearts often cultivate themselves and master a skill that can benefit others. By mastering a skill and helping others, one can build up her confidence among peers. And a welcome person can also easily work with

others through verbal negotiations. For example, when Dawn's parents need a room to celebrate their anniversary, Dawn resists tearing down her clubhouse. Her stubbornness leads to family dispute. According to Sunzi, conflicts can be solved through a harmonious way. If Dawn had learned from Sunzi, she would know that to win a family war is to win the family members' hearts first. Sunzi says that a person who cares of others' need as if his, people will stand by him even unto death. That is the way to become a welcome teenager. Sunzi has offered strategies to deal with various conflicts. Educators and parents can discuss Sunzi's strategies with teenagers and identify proper ones to resolve family and school conflicts.

The Forbidden Kingdom provides not only a venue for students to discuss their daily struggles but also an opportunity for them to explore cross-cultural representations. Through scrutinizing Sunzi's rhetoric in this movie, educators discuss survival strategies with teenagers and help them deal with their daily struggles. However, as an American movie that claims to have embodied the spirit of ancient Chinese culture, does it represent Chinese culture truthfully? Educators need to encourage students to examine the movie critically while watching it.

The Problematics of Cultural Representation

In the globalized world, students get to know other cultures most through books and media. For many Westerners, "movies, television, and stories are the most popular means of obtaining information about these cultures" (Yenika-Agbaw, 2008, p.3). *The Forbidden Kingdom* won the top box office rating in the first week of release in North America, but it was not well-received in China. The reason is obvious. The entire piece largely caters to the taste of Western audiences. It includes many Chinese

cultural elements, combining street fighting, Chinese Kungfu, fantasy, exotic atmosphere, and performance by renowned martial arts stars Jackie Chan and Jet Li. Oriental martial arts offer the Western audiences an infinite scope of imagination. The various martial arts styles such as tiger boxing, mantis boxing, and crane fist combined with the use of diverse weapons like knives, swords, staffs, and whips enhance the entertainment value of the oriental scenes. However, as a Chinese saying goes, "the expert understands the inner working; the layman can only scratch the surface." In the eyes of the Chinese audiences, the movie has betrayed Chinese culture in many places.

First, many classical characters appear absurdly laughable as a Western commercial product. For example, Jade Emperor, the head of all gods, acts as an irresponsible emperor in the movie. After the peach banquet, he leaves behind the unsolved internal strife among the Heavenly gods. He goes to seclusion with his wife for five hundreds years and ignores the suffering of people on earth. Jade Emperor's image is obviously twisted. The Emperor is the highest god in Chinese mythology, who is wise at handling gods' relations and earthly problems. He once was a prince on earth, who discarded his throne and went to mountains for spiritual cultivation. He later rescued his people from suffering and underwent millions of challenges. His wisdom and benevolence touched gods and was elected as the highest god in heaven. In the movie, Jade Emperor becomes a naïve ruler, who is merely concerned with his own meditation and indifferent to the internal strife among gods. This twist smears the Chinese god, which has led to harsh criticisms by Chinese audiences on some Internet websites.

Second, this movie portrays an American as the savior of an Eastern world. When Jade Emperor

is secluded away, the Jade Warlord controls Heaven and Earth in a bloody way. Over hundreds of years, no single hero is able to save the world. Then an American young boy, a blond-haired, white-skinned male, emerges; the so-called "savior" finally comes to rescue this world. Does not the movie hail the greatness of White American males? Ancient Chinese Kungfu masters only perform minor roles in the movie, whose job is to assist the white savior. A heteronormative American male, this savior is a convenient placeholder for the gaze of the film's intended audience.

Third, the grand structure of the movie follows that of a well-known contemporary Western fantasy. It borrows some scenes of *The Lord of the Rings* (Tolkien, 2003; 2004) to introduce Journey to the West to western audiences. In *The Lord of the Rings*, a young boy, Frodo, is chosen to destroy the Ring and fend off the threat of Sauron. Frodo sets off an expedition to the Cracks of Doom in Mordor, where the Ring was forged. In *The Forbidden Kingdom*, a young boy sets off an expedition to return Monkey King's magic staff and defeats the evil, the Jade Warlord. Even the appearance of the Five Finger Peak and the army of the Jade Warlord in *The Forbidden Kingdom* strikingly resembles the scenes in *The Lord of the Rings*. In addition, when Jason and his master are injured in a remote place, they happen to come across a nearby monastery and enter a mysterious mountain. The mountain and monks are like the Rivendell in *The Lord of the Rings*.

The movie's only virtue, from the Chinese perspective, is that the Chinese girl, Golden Sparrow, does not devote her body to a white American male. The love story between Golden Sparrow and Jason is handled with a clever and subtle hand. Even though they develop affection for each other, they never hold

hands or kiss in the ancient Chinese context, which retains the Neo-Confucian ritual spirit that "male and female should not have bodily contact before marriage." On this point, the movie makers respect the Chinese tradition. When Jason returns to Boston, the Chinese girl only gives a verbal compliment to his braveness, without showing further sexual intimacy. The ending leaves the movie with endless imaginative possibilities. If *Golden Sparrow* offered vain worship and devotion to Jason, there would be little left to be admired in terms of the movie's cultural authenticity and its portrayed ethnic relationship.

Conclusion

Popular media have a great influence on contemporary teenagers' beliefs and behaviors. Wan & Gut's study (2008) suggests that adolescents spend a lot of time on media. It is necessary to include media literacy education in the academic curriculum to advance young adults' survival skills and help them cope with life challenges. Bullying and martial arts are popular themes depicted in Hollywood movies, which should be closely examined by teachers, parents, and teenagers. With guidance from an adult or teachers, teens can also start to notice certain cultural dynamics between the East and the West in some movies. The Hollywood movie *The Forbidden Kingdom* looms large in multicultural themes and bully issues.

This article offers teachers and scholars Sunzi's war wisdom and a critical perspective of cultural representation in the Hollywood movie. With the help of educators, teenagers can learn some survival strategies from Sunzi's points of view such as benevolence, crafty wisdom, and the virtues of Kungfu. Through exploring Sunzi's rhetoric in this movie, educators can take the opportunity to discuss

conflict resolution with teenagers and help them make friends and deal with bullies. In addition, educators can cultivate teenagers' critical views towards cultural representation and authenticity by watching this cross-cultural movie.

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