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Imperialism and American Love In Two International Media Contexts

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Lynn University

Imperialism and *American Love*
In Two International Media Contexts

By

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In Partial Fulfillment Of The
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Abstract

This study applies the Fantasy Theme Analysis to explain the rhetorical vision that emerges from the mass media on the value of love as a product of America's imperial influence. The study questions if the American mass media influences the value of love in the Asian culture, and if Americans' distinct way of loving is emulated in their media. The rhetorical visions of the value of love examined in this thesis reveal that Americans believe that one should 'love your heart' as demonstrated in the movie Beloved, and that 'love can create miracles' in The Notebook. On the other hand, Asians believe that love must be 'real' in the movies House of Flying Daggers and 'love is firm as heaven and earth' in The White Dragon. The fantasy theme analysis's use of these movies show that Asians do in fact have their own way of loving, however; there exists an infiltration of American Love – the way Americans portray love - in their media.
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Chapter 1

Introduction & Theory

Many developing countries are located in Latin America, Africa, and Asia. Political instability caused by unstable economic situations is prevalent in the Third World (Barzanti, 2006). Third World countries cannot keep pace with the technological developments of the developed world (Jones, 1997). Development involves the creation of a modern infrastructure. Developed countries usually have economic systems that are based on continuous, self-sustaining economic growth (Countries of the First World, 2006). The development of a country is usually measured with statistical indices such as income per capita (GDP), the rate of illiteracy, and access to water. The United Nations (UN) puts forth a compound indicator using these lists of statistics, to create, a ‘human development index’ which gives a sense of how developed countries are (Human Development Index, 2006).

Economically underdeveloped countries usually have common characteristics including poverty, high birthrates, and economic dependence on superior countries. These conditions in developing countries are linked to the absorption of the third world into the international commercial economy, by way of conquest or indirect domination. The main economic effect of Western domination was the creation of a world market. By setting up throughout the third world sub-economies associated to the West, and by introducing modern institutions, industrial capitalism disrupted traditional economies and, as a result, societies (Chaliand).

Culture refers to the customs of people as a group including dress, music, economic and political systems. People in society create culture and as a result, culture shapes the way people relate and understand the world around them (Arsenault, 1997). In another sense, culture can also be discerned through the use of symbolic representation—the meanings that we store in our minds and share with others through verbal and nonverbal means within a common context. People in any geopolitical location tend to have a similar culture and distinct underlying values. Values are
socially shared ideas about what is ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ in society. They vary from one society to another and one way to study culture is to examine the values held by its members. Values are important because it is from them that people derive the norms or rules that govern their everyday lives. One of the more subtle aspects of culture has to do with the way one thinks about the world (Arsenault).

People feel differently about their own culture and other people’s. According to Zhang (2002), “Before we understand why other people misunderstand our own culture, we need to understand why we misunderstand other cultures.” We are initially instilled with our own culture from childhood. The values that are taught to us form a reference system from which we learn, compare, and understand new things. As such, we are conditioned when we look into other cultures. People have a tendency to look at differences in other cultures. The fact is that all cultures share the same values but they have different ways to demonstrate them. In modern society, some of our misconceptions about other cultures are due to the influence of the media (Zhang).

A country such as China is regarded as one that has been moving towards a fully industrialized, first world country. American culture is prevalent in the Chinese culture from American forms of advertising (*Coco-Cola and Pepsi*), to the domination of fast food giants, and the increasing immigration of Chinese people into the continental United States. China’s culture has become immersed in western civilization. It is often debated whether a country like China is a part of the Third World, with which it once identified itself on racial, cultural, and developmental grounds. As of the writing of this work, China is regarded as a Third World or developing country according to the United Nations statistics (Barzanti). Many people, who are living outside of America, recognize American culture and values as that of fast food, *Coca-Cola*, divorce, crime, lawsuits based on the media. On the other hand, China is well-known for many things in its culture through its media such as: Feng Shui, Gong Fu, acupuncture, food and favoring boys.
Power and Modern Media Society: Imperialism

The United States of America is regarded as the world’s most powerful nation. With the US concentration of economic and technological means of power, the mass media have served to influence the minds of people and take advantage of the economic and intellectual wealth of the majority of the world’s population. The media play their role in developing certain values, attitudes, and behaviors. Some of these are manifested in the perceptions, values, and behaviors of cultural concepts like beauty, success, femininity, masculinity, love and sex (Hitchens, 2002). In the 1960’s media research linked this kind of relationship of concept to social/cultural behaviors as imperialism – ‘a system of exploitative control of people and resources’ to culture (Fakazis, 2002, p.212). “Cultural imperialism affects the media in two ways: the dominating of one culture’s media (texts, practices) over another or as the global spread of ‘mass-mediated culture’ (McQuail, 2002, p. 223). “ Media and cultural imperialism are the accompaniments to economic imperialism. Althusser of the Frankfurt School, Gramsci and other researchers analyzed the effects of cultural imperialism (widespread exportation of the Western, mainly American values) of mass media corporations, products and technology and other cultures (Fakazis).

The American mass media transfer their inclination to social and ideological thinking from its culture to other international sites. Third World countries can learn how to consume and how to be modern from American mass media. In the article “Neocolonism and Media’s Dark Age”, Nawal El Saadawi, argues that the mass media has been quickly expanding in power and coverage, and it represent both public and private life in the West. The American mass media can be viewed as the central cultural reference point of modern Western capitalism (El Saadawi, 2000). Among the global spread of ‘mass-mediated culture’, a concept that has often been overlooked in the literature is love.
An important value in many societies is love. Love is a complex aspect of human life. The American culture has traditionally glorified love with the notion that people fall in love and live ‘happily ever after’ (Galician, 2004, p.5). This American Love ignores the reality of relationships. Many love relationships depicted in the media are really ‘love addicted’ relationships. From the time when we are young, we are barraged with fairy-tale depictions and stereotypes of sex, love, and romance in the American culture - movies and television, books and magazine, radio and music, advertisements and the news. Fairy-tale romances, such as Cinderella allows females to think that love relationships always last forever or ‘happily ever after.’ In the movie, When Harry Met Sally the media defines sex as crucial in a love relationship between men and women. In American movies such as Beloved and The Notebook, the portrayal of filial love and romantic love are shown to overcome all tribulations. Romantic and maternal love in the American media is regarded as highly rewarding experiences (Galician).

The Media Cultural and Cultivation Theories

The media cultural and cultivation theories provide a framework within which American Love can be better understood. The Media Cultural Theory states that Western nations dominate the media in other parts of the world. Its powerful effect on Third World cultures can be seen by the American media imposing western views of love. The Third World countries watch the media that is filled with the western world’s way of living, believing, and thinking. The third world’s cultures then start to want, and do the same things in their countries and ultimately can destroy their own culture’s view of love. The origins of media cultural theory lie mostly in morals and normative judgments about cultural value. Within the mass media, these judgments were originally prone to damn the ‘culture of the media’ as inferior in quality, demeaning or politically exploitative. The most popular culture is western in origin and expression, and one of the features of this model is that it has a dominant influence on the world media systems and performance.
The adaptation of the western media systems involves exploitation of economically underdeveloped societies and export of global consumer culture (McQuail).

In the cultural theory, John Dewey has said that “Society exists not only by transmission, by communication, but it may fairly be said to exist in transmission, in communication (McQuail, p.37).” In other words, societies are dependent upon communication in order to exist. Communication is essential for societies to endure. Exported cultures do not necessarily replace and obliterate existing cultures when they are present in other cultures. Exported cultures may have no significant effect or where they do, they are subject to the process of negotiation of meanings; that is, they acquire quite a different significance for other cultures. The transmission view of communication is defined by terms such as imparting, sending, and transmitting information to others. It originated from the metaphor of transportation. In the 19th century, the movement of goods or people and the movement of information were seen as identical processes and were described as ‘communication’. The core of this idea of communication is the transmission of signals or messages over distances was for the purpose of control (McQuail).

Gerbner’s Cultivation Theory argues that the mass media cultivate attitudes and values which are already present in a culture: the media maintain and disseminate these values amongst members of a culture, thus binding it together. Gerbner has argued that television tends to cultivate particular perspectives. Cultivation research looked at the mass media as a socializing agent and has concluded that television viewers come to believe the television version of reality the more they watch it (McQuail). Therefore, based on the premise of these theories, it is quite possible for countries in the world who are dominated by the American media to adopt the American perception and qualities of love as a model.

Gerbner and his colleagues, however, contended in their research that television drama has a small but significant influence on the attitudes, beliefs and judgments of viewers concerning the social world. The focus was on ‘heavy viewers.’ People who watch a lot of television were likely to be more influenced by the ways in which the world is framed by television programs.
This thesis argues that the American media has 'heavily' dominated other cultures. The Cultivation Theory proposes that the media present a 'pseudo reality’ that is different from the social reality most people experience. People who watch television many hours daily will tend to replace their own social experiences with that which is seen on television, resulting in a 'television view' of the world (McQuail).

In the late 1970's researchers reanalyzed the cultural imperialism theory. It was concluded that:

- The existence of 'local elites' who acted as relays in transmitting global culture at the local level; recognizing that audiences are not passive recipients of media messages but can appropriate cultural products or create positional readings; and recognizing that a theory of global media needs to take into account the interplay between powerful global economic structures and less powerful local 'audiences' (Fakazis, p.212).

The Cultivation Theory has been criticized by many scholars because it is a US theory that has been applied mostly to studies in the US. As of this time, the Cultivation Theory is no longer applicable to the US alone. There have been numerous cross-cultural studies of the Cultivation Theory. It has been applied to British, Arab and Asian cultures. For instance, Al-Shaqsi (2002) studied the cultural impact of satellite channels among university students in the Arab society of Oman in the study entitled: 'Cultivation Analysis: A Middle Eastern Perspective'. The Cultivation Theory was able to support some of these studies with regards to people cultivating values from a medium (Al-Shaqsi).

These theories give support to this thesis with the fact that many developing countries can be heavily influenced by American values because of the dominant inflow of American media in these countries. The Media Cultural and Cultivation Theories are compatible as they both promote a high possibility of American values infiltrating other cultures and thus changing the
way, the ‘receiving cultures’ carry out these values. For this study, Gerbner’s Cultivation theory adds to the notion that an adaptation of the western media systems can be geared at developing societies to improve their economic development. The actual portrayal of the value of love transmitted through the American mass media can truly be cultivated and maintained in a developing society’s cultural norms. The American media is very influential to actually manipulate a developing society’s value of love by suggesting that their American acuity of love is paramount, and is the most refined way of expression. The acquisition of this perception and portrayal of love can be regarded as ‘progress’ for a developing country. A value such as love that is already in the ‘receiving’ culture can be refined particularly to portray love in an American way as seen in the American mass media.

Rationale

This study will demonstrate that American Love is imposed on international media as an economic product, and will examine the kinds of genres in which American love lays its head in the lap of international cultures. A rhetorical critical analysis will reveal if the superimposition of love in the media is believed to be a part of the process of modernization or whether it is an imperialistic feed or drain from countries cultural resources.

There will be an analysis of the presence/influences of imperialism in the media as it relates to the portrayal of love in international media. This study will use the American movies, The Notebook and Beloved to explore the portrayal of American Love in this medium.

The movies, House of Flying Daggers, and The White Dragon present a contrasting view of Asian culture on the value of love. The literature on love in the Asian culture is very limited. In fact, based on my research there exists no solid reputable literature on the portrayal of love in the Asian context.

As such, the research questions to be examined in this thesis are:
What are the cultural distinctions of the portrayal of love in the American movies, *The Notebook* and *Beloved*, and the Asian movies, *House of Flying Daggers* and *The White Dragon*?

How has American imperialism demonstrated its universal appeal of love in the Asian movies, *House of Flying Daggers* and *The White Dragon*?

Does the presence of American imperialism in the Asian culture replace the Asian perception of love in the movies, *House of Flying Daggers* and *The White Dragon*?

Justification of Study

The terms imperialism, globalization and westernization have become synonymous. According to Hernandez-Truyol, globalization is “the process by which movements of capital, information, and persons within and across national borders serve to influence local norms, traditions, processes of learning, the exchange of information and goods, and lifestyles (Hernandez-Truyol, 2002, p. 358).” An examination of America’s overseas conquests has revealed in previous literature how this country has used its powers such as citizenship, international status, economic dependency and American idealism to convince its citizens and the world that its relationship with ‘conquered people’ is not a colonial one (Roman, 2002, p.271). Studying imperialism reveals the use of economic and human resources by dominant groups to produce and impose a particular truth on others. This thesis will facilitate a more informed view of imperialism as a system of exploitation and control that functions by defining and imposing a particular morality. New information will be added to the current literature on the effects of imperialism. This study aims to find out the validity of the presence of a type or brand of *American love*; how this love is shown and if there exists a relationship between imperialism and love in the media.

Further analysis will seek to find out if this brand of *American Love* is distinctive in other cultures as the American way of demonstrating love. This thesis is different from previous
research as it is a critical analysis of imperialism in the form of *American Love* in the media, which has not been done before.
Chapter 2

Methodology

The appropriate methodology for this research is a rhetorical critical analysis. Rhetorical criticism is ‘the process of systematically investigating and explaining symbolic acts and artifacts for the purpose of understanding rhetorical processes’ (Foss, 1996, p. 6). Systematic analysis involves engaging in a process in a focused way. The objects of a study in rhetorical criticism are symbolic acts and artifacts. One motive to engage in criticism is to understand particular symbols and how they operate. A critic is interested in finding out what the artifact teaches about the nature of rhetoric. The critic tries to discover what an artifact suggests about symbolic processes in general and as such contributes to rhetorical theory. The purpose for writing a critique is to evaluate existing literature in order to increase the reader's understanding of it. A rhetorical critical analysis is regarded as subjective writing because it expresses the writer's opinion or evaluation of texts (Foss).

A rhetorical critical analysis is appropriate for this study as it will provide epistemological assumptions behind previous research on imperialism. Specifically the rhetorical critical method will be the Fantasy-Theme Criticism. This method, unlike other research methods, will enable the revelation of hidden motivations behind a text or medium. This method will enable readers to understand the conditions behind this phenomenon. This method will contribute to the application of critical thought to social situations and the revelation of hidden politics within socially dominant belief systems. An example of the use of Fantasy-Theme criticism analysis is Sonja K. Foss’ article ‘Equal Rights Amendment Controversy: Two Worlds in Conflict.’ Critical analysis interpretations of current social practices can lead to fundamental changes in the practices of an institution, the profession, and society as a whole. Critical analysis provides an insight based on continuous debate and argumentation (Foss).
In developing the methodology for this thesis, the study breaks down various parts in the concept, context, and content of love as observed in the Asian and American cultures. For each of these situations, I will identify the medium’s purpose and analyze the structure of the work by identifying all main ideas. An outline of the work will be described along with a summary of each medium. A determination will be made as to the purpose of the factual material. The purpose could be just to inform factual material, to persuade with appeal to reason or emotions or to entertain. An evaluation will then be made of how the medium (film) has accomplished this purpose. Questions that will be used to evaluate include:

- If the purpose of the content of love is to inform, what is the driving value behind it? Can it be seen on the surface or is it hidden in symbols?
- If the purpose was to entertain, what were the emotions? Would a person laugh, cry or get angry?

The methodology will be in three parts. The first part will follow Bormann’s method of analyzing data. The second part will classify hidden meaning by identifying symbols related to messages of love in the context of the program. The third part of the methodology is an examination of how the material is organized, the intended audience, writer’s assumptions about the audience and kind of language and imagery used.

Fantasy-Theme Criticism is appropriate for this thesis as it is designed to create a credible interpretation of an experience. This criticism provides a comprehensible form of making sense out of an experience. According to Foss (1996), ‘fantasy is the creative and imaginative interpretation of events.’ A fantasy theme is the way in which the interpretation is accomplished in communication. This theme could be a word or phrase, or statement that interprets events in the past, predicts actions in the future, or depicts current events that are removed in time from the activities of a specific group (Foss).
Ernest Bormann is the father of Fantasy Theme Analysis. His work on symbolic convergence encompasses important current rhetorical theories with demonstrated practical applications for improving communication.

Symbolic Convergence

The theory began with rhetorical criticism and led to Bormann's method known as fantasy theme analysis. He used this analysis to study a distinct type of communication in small groups. Bormann studied these small groups and found that his theory maintained that the sharing of group fantasies created symbolic convergence. Bormann's idea of symbolic convergence is that by sharing fantasies individuals can become a group (Bormann, 1980). Bormann believes that one of the most important notions to come out of fantasy theme analysis research is the identification of the process of symbolic convergence, 'the communicative processes by which human beings converge their individual fantasies, dreams, and meanings into shared symbol systems' (Bormann, p. 189).

When we share a fantasy theme we make sense out of what prior to that time may have been a confusing state of affairs and we do so in common with the others who share the fantasy with us. As a result we come up to symbolic convergence on the matter and will envision that part of our world in similar ways. We have created some symbolic common ground and can then talk with one another about that shared interpretation with code words or brief allusions. Bormann describes the word fantasy as a creative and imaginative interpretation of events that fulfills a psychological or rhetorical need. These interpretations can be expressed as stories, jokes, metaphors, and other imaginative language. The symbolic convergence theory is interested in the response that a group gives. By the response, Bormann is able to depict a fantasy chain reaction. Bormann’s rational is that if you could look at the dramas believed by a small group and learn something about group values, you could similarly look at the dramas which chain out to a much larger group or an entire society and learn something about that society's values. By putting
fantasy themes together we can find the construction of a group's world view or rhetorical vision (Bormann).

Elements of Fantasy Theme Analysis

In order to appreciate the fantasy themes of a message, we must identify the fantasies and the elements within them. Fantasy theme analysis assumes that when persons read or hear dramatic narratives, they contribute to a social reality defined by the stories being told. The reality involve characters with whom people identify and others whom they oppose; it has implied values people accept when they are moved by a character's struggle. If an audience get fully caught up in the drama, they can be motivated to certain actions or beliefs in their own lives based on the values in the drama Bormann defines a fantasy theme as a precise telling of an incident with a solid plot and characters. In every situation, we deal with interpretations of how individuals see their world and cast it into dramatic form (Bormann). Bormann (1972) explains that “the explanatory power of the fantasy chain analysis lies in its ability to account for development, evolution, and decay of dramas that catch-up group of people and change their behavior (p. 399).” Bormann uses the phrase ‘fantasy type’ to refer to different stories with different characters and situations which tell essentially the same story with the same general plot and a common theme. A fantasy theme can become so widely accepted that it can be used to explain related experiences which occur under very different circumstances. When this happens, the subject becomes a 'model' shared fantasy theme (Bormann).

Characters

Fantasy themes revolve around characters. When a message is studied, major characters in the dramas are identified with the intention to extricate the human traits these characters represent. The audience’s perception about each of the characters is indicated by the viewpoint of the story and the degree to which the characters are presented. A story must have a central persona for the audience to identify with. The central character has some admirable goal which we want him to achieve. The accepting audiences are attracted to the sympathetic central
character, often identifying with both the character and his or her goal. These responses arouse emotions and generate their involvement in the story (Bormann).

Setting

Dramas are set in a particular locale. Setting usually refers to day, time and place. The setting can be real or imaginary. In some cases, the setting indicates how near to you the story is. Often the setting is symbolic (Bormann).

Plot

The scenario or plotline explains how the central character faces conflicts in his effort to reach a goal. The way the struggle is resolved provides models to the audience for how problems should be faced. If dramas are to be accepted by audiences, those who create them must take into account social reality links or factual data recognized by the larger community (Bormann).

Rhetorical Visions

A fantasy theme rarely operates by itself. According to Bormann (1972), various fantasy themes fit together in a complex web of 'composite dramas which catch up large groups of people in symbolic reality' (p.398). This world view is called a rhetorical vision. It is a vision of the world literally conveyed rhetorically. We construct a coherent world view from stories we hear and believe about how the world works. Some rhetorical visions are so all-encompassing and impelling that they permeate an individual's social reality in all aspects of living. Once accepted, rhetorical visions can be quite persuasive. When a person appropriates a rhetorical vision, he/she gains with the supporting dramas, constraining forces which impel him/her to adopt a life style and to take certain action (Bormann).

Those who accept and participate in a particular rhetorical vision comprise its rhetorical community. These people who have a sense of the rhetorical vision, derived in part from their own descriptions are the insiders. Those who do not accept the ideas are regarded as the outsiders. Bormann explains, 'They often share fantasies that depict themselves as better than outsiders and
their rhetorical innovations as an improvement over current ways of viewing the world (Bormann, 1985, p.12)."

How Fantasy Themes Work

When a story catches the attention of individuals, a fantasy either begins to chain out or fails. If a fantasy theme chains out, the audience responds to it. This can be on a small scale, such as an odd phrase only a small group understands. An audience's failure to chain out a story can tell something about them. An audience does not necessarily accept a drama totally. Individuals do not necessarily imitate characters absolutely. Audiences do not expect to encounter in their environment the exact situation portrayed in a fantasy theme. However, fantasy themes and characters do serve as models. Rhetorical communities expect to encounter similar problems to those portrayed in the fantasy themes they accept and they can be expected to selectively emulate the characters' personality traits. As Bormann explains, "The fantasizing is accompanied by emotional arousal; the dreams embodied in the fantasies drive participants toward actions and efforts to achieve them . . ." (Bormann, 1985, p.9).

The Fantasy Theme Analysis & Media Cultural/Cultivation Theories Connection

The Media Cultural and Cultivation Theories are compatible with the Fantasy Theme Critical Analysis and work well together for the purposes of this study. Many developing countries are heavily influenced by American values because of the dominant influx of American media. An adaptation of the western media systems is geared at under-developed societies, and actual values transmitted can truly be cultivated and maintained. As such, fantasy theme analysis aims to extricate human traits, which characters in an artifact represent. Consequently, a value such as love can be portrayed in an 'American' way. As humans, we all have fantasies, and as such we can be persuaded to emulate characters' traits, especially if we encounter similar situations to those portrayed in the fantasy themes via the media. The Media Cultural theory suggests that a value can be transmitted to a culture through its media and at the same time, the fantasy analysis shows how the dramatic representations foster a particular way we should act or
carry out the value of love. Rhetorical visions are potent when the few experiences a person have are seen via the mass media. A person can understand the social reality that is created the more they watch American media. Many of us live vicariously through the media. Since the Cultivation theory concludes that audiences come to believe what they see the more they watch it, clearly once rhetorical visions are accepted, they can be quite influential which impel an individual to adopt a life style and to take certain action.

Evaluation of Methodology

In order to justify the use of fantasy theme analysis, studies using this critical method should be discussed. Since its beginning, studies using fantasy theme analysis have gained popularity. Examples of fantasy theme analyses include studies of politics campaigns (Bormann, 1973, 1982a; Callahan, 1993; Rarick, Duncan, Lee, & Porter, 1977), political incumbency (Porter, 1976), religious movements (Bormann, 1977), television shows (Foss & Littlejohn, 1986; Schrag, Hudson, & Bernabo, 1981), scientific views of homosexuality (Chesebro, 1980), teachers’ bargaining groups (Putnam, Van Hoeven, & Bullis, 1991), and romantic novels (Doyle, 1985) (Arsenault). Fantasy theme analyses offer critics crucial clues as to how a rhetorician craft messages to symbolically address audiences. These studies suggest common patterns to fantasies that exist in specific message genres.

A fantasy theme analysis was done by Benoit, Klyukovski, McHale and Airne entitled ‘A fantasy theme analysis of political cartoons on the Clinton-Lewinsky-Starr affair’. Benoit et al (2001) used Symbolic Convergence Theory to analyze 2,000 political cartoons on the investigation, impeachment, and trial of the president. The cartoonists' vision incorporated components from Starr's and Clinton's visions: ‘Our public figures (Clinton, Starr, Congress, the news media) are engaged in a tawdry burlesque drama.’ They showed that several, self-governing rhetors can create a rhetorical vision. These messages were highly visual and generally critical. The messages freely use metaphor and allusions, and allowed multiple interpretations and rendering of the fantasy themes in these dramas accessible to readers with different attitudes.
Although 'fiction', these messages concern important issues and made moral judgments on public figures.

Other studies, such as Bormann (1973) center on individuals or persona within campaigns and their need for consistency within a rhetorical vision. The study of George McGovern’s 1972 presidential campaign by Bormann demonstrated how people who are relatively unknown can become popularized through fantasy chaining. McGovern was well known for his ‘1000 percent’ backing up of running mate Senator Eagleton. However, McGovern dropped his backing for Eagleton after the media publicized information that Eagleton suffered a nervous breakdown. This inconsistency on McGovern’s part lost him the electoral vote because his persona changed which hurt his credibility. Americans could not support a candidate who one moment proclaimed public support for a running mate and the next moment changed it (Arsenault).

The current study will concentrate on how images and content within the American movies are made consistent and what these images suggest about the rhetorical communities addressed. The fantasy theme analysis methodology is especially useful for studying American imperialism in Asian media because the movies were written by skillful rhetoricians that have created fantasy themes that have a broad appeal.
Chapter 3

Literature Review

Love is complex and complicated. Robert J. Sternberg (1987, 1998) has established that there is no single definition that has described love throughout the ages or across cultures. Although philosophers, theologians and poets have studied the nature of love for centuries, love research as a scientific field is quite new in the mass communication field. Love means different things to different people at different historical periods and in different cultures (Galician).

Romance has become a prerequisite for most intimate relationships in the United States (Lauer & Lauer, 1994). The divorce rate in the United States is now half the marriage rate (National Center for Health Statistics, 2001). Many social critics, relationship therapists, and popular books about relationships have accused the mass media of indoctrinating consumers with portrayals of love that is unachievable as a goal and unhealthy as a model, and thereby, contributing to unrealistic expectations (Dyer, 1976; Fromm, 1956; Johnson, 1983; Norwood, 1985; Peele, 1975; Russianoff, 1981; Shapiro & Kroeger, 1991; Shostrom & Kavanaugh, 1971)(Galician).

‘The mass media both shape us and reflect us’ (Galician, p.82). The mass media is a socializing agent. Social learning theory considers the mass media to be primary socialization agents, as well as family, peers and teachers (Bandura, 1969, 1971, 1977, 1986). This theory asserts that we learn by modeling the behavior of real people or fictional characters through imitation and identification. Bandura believes that the mass media messages offer considerable inducements and rewards related to certain ideas, feelings and behaviors. Cultural critical theorists view the mass media as dominating. That is, the mass media reinforces the status quo by deliberately producing mass content by making the empowered dominant’s group ideas and assumptions seem commonsensical and normal. On the other hand, this theory also asserts that although the mass media is powerful, media consumers can enhance or thwart these influences by
the way that they interpret meaning from them. However, Signorielli (1991) has concluded that “television might be the single most common and pervasive source of conceptions and actions related to marriage and intimate personal relationships for large segments of the population (Galician, p.88).” The mass media presents situations whereby individuals are made aware of the behavior that others expect of them regarding the norms, values, and culture of their society.

Marshall McLuhan viewed the mass media as ‘extensions of our very senses’. “The media supplement the natural reach of our eyes, our ears, our brain – even our touch, giving us the ‘feel’ or the sense of the parts of the world well beyond our own neighborhood and our own century” (Galician, p. 26-27). The mass media has created a world that is a ‘global village’, where the mass media affects everyone. McLuhan believes that these effects are considerable and can change our senses and society. Mary-Lou Galician’s research has shown that higher usage of certain mass media is related to unrealistic expectations about love. Her findings have revealed that the medium itself has a direct impact on how society and individuals think and act (Galician). Galician’s research has reinforced McLuhan’s ‘the medium is the message’, which was based on the premise that the mass communication medium does not just send out a message. McLuhan’s previous theory suggests that the media can actually shape people’s perceptions/behavior.

McLuhan’s theory suggest that with the heavy exportation of American films to developing countries, there is a likelihood that audiences can change their opinions and actions as it relates to the value of love despite cultural norms. The media can be designed to persuade audiences to act by its messages. These messages can form cultural behaviors.

Many developing countries have tended to be absorbed into the dominant culture, or acquire the developed country’s attributes indirectly. America has dominated the film industry worldwide. The power of information and technology has empowered the American media to transfer its cultural values such as love through the film industry. The reality is that poorer countries do not have enough money to invest in their own programming and they buy American films. The domestic market becomes saturated with American products; and the local audiences
become caught up in the global transmission of a dominant, western ideology that both naturalizes the western way of life as the only life worth having, and imitates its social relationships and lifestyles (Redmond, 2001). The ‘receiving’ culture may not realize that they are inculcating the portrayal of love from this developed country and absorbing into their own passively through the use of foreign media. For instance, the Baywatch series perpetuated western values about individualism, morality, and love from an American perspective (Redmond).

Katz and Liu (1988) formulated a ‘false love syndrome’. This syndrome can be described as having an illusion so influential that it becomes difficult to imagine any other realistic kind of love. The false love standard can be linked to many mass media American stereotypes. These are:

- “Finding the one person who is right for you”
- “Being intensely attracted to your partner”
- “Feeling excited whenever you’re with your partner”
- “Rarely fighting”
- “Rarely wanting to be apart from your partner”
- “Having great sex”
- “Never being sexually attracted to anyone else”
- “Enjoying constant romance”
- “Never needing anyone but your partner in your life”
- “Complete fulfillment” (Galician, p. 56).

The ‘false love syndrome’ reveals that the mass media can present an ideal love that predisposes any other type of love or way of loving. Galician’s research does reveal that the media are in fact carrying these messages about love in America. Consequently, since a large percentage of American films are seen in many parts of the world, the messages that are
conveyed in these movies are transported to other cultures. Since the Asian culture is immersed in American cinema, there is a possibility of infiltration of the American value of love in this culture.

The Republican era (1911-1949) was a period of commercialization of Chinese mass media as a result of the combination of technologies and theories from the West with existing Chinese cultural practices. Since media forms were imports from American tradition, western influence on Chinese media and love is widely understood, but insufficiently studied (He, 2006).
Chapter 4

Data Presentation

This chapter depicts the events in the movies, *Beloved*, *The Notebook*, *House of Flying Daggers* and *The White Dragon* and explores cultural trends by using fantasy theme analysis. In this analysis, elements of setting, characters, plot and rhetorical community within the movies are described and analyzed in order to reveal the underlying nature of American and Asian media portrayal of love. The movies function as a powerful rhetorical tool for the study of love for several reasons. First, these movies were presented to a worldwide audience where audience members are allowed to question the perception of love as depicted. This kind of communication supports the importance of culture and provides audiences with an informal arena to be educated about cultural values. Second, it suggests the importance of specific values to Asians and Americans and proclaims these values in a symbolic form of communication. This symbolic form of communication allows the audience to understand the importance of love in different cultural settings.

Introduction: The American Cinema

American movies allow us to escape reality and to live an experience temporary. Movies are much more than mere entertainment - they intensify our lives. They can help us understand the interrelationships between culture and society. Movies reveal a wealth of information about how our civilization works. Although films may entertain, they also educate, indoctrinate and even captivate the mind. Great films enlighten us and form much of the world's perception of what culture is all about and caters to cultural trends. Two American films, *Beloved* and *The Notebook* present a cultural view of love in the American setting. The analysis will begin with the movie *Beloved*. 
Beloved

Summary

*Beloved* is a movie that gives its audience an understanding of the complications and simplicity of love. Many movies have portrayed love relationships as undergoing the same different stages such as boy meets girl; boy falls in love with girl then boy marries girl. The main character, Sethe and her lover, Paul D have shared a love relationship that is convincingly realistic. There are certain aspects of Sethe and Paul D’s relationship that occurs in real scenarios that are portrayed on screen. The movie, *Beloved*, can be investigated through fantasy theme analysis in order to distinguish which fantasy themes are immediately apparent and which are hidden, and what these elements reveal about the rhetoric of the movie writers. The following sections describe these findings in detail.

Characters

Characters are depicted as heroes or villains or secondary characters. There are three characters who are involved in most of the story in the present, namely, Sethe, Paul D and Denver. Then there is Baby Suggs Holy who represents the past life but her spirit is also in the present life.

Sethe

Sethe’s character is governed by her love. Sethe’s love is all-consuming, irrational, passionate, complicated and powerful. Sethe’s well-being is governed by the love that she shared for her children. Paul D’s presence in her life is secondary to the love that she has for her children. She has a high expectation of love. She loves deeply and expects the same in return. It appeared as if Sethe did not want to share her love between a man and her child. When Paul D asked her if there was a place in her heart for him, she told him that if she had to choose, she would choose her children. Sethe held onto the hope that Halle, her true love, would find his way to Ohio to her and the children.
Paul D

Paul D is a wanderer. He has been walking for the past eighteen years since he left Sweet Home. He showers Sethe with love and attention. He believes that Sethe’s love is too thick. He initially does not think love would overcome the obstacle that he faced when he learned of Sethe’s past brutal slaying of her daughter. His way of dealing with Sethe’s past was to leave her or ‘walk’ away from their relationship. Paul D realizes that in order to win Sethe’s heart, he has to reach out to Denver. Sethe’s real love is her children, dead or alive. He eventually returns to Sethe’s home to take care of her during her illness. His love matures and becomes forgiving.

Denver

Denver is Sethe’s daughter. She is an important character as she is level headed. She is first presented as been shy and withdrawn. She then grows to become a mature and outgoing young lady. She took on the responsibility of the household during Sethe’s breakdown. As such she is an element that binds all of the relationships in the story.

Baby Suggs Holy

Baby Suggs Holy is an ex-slave who becomes a preacher after gaining her freedom. As a grandmother to Denver, she represents strength, love and dedication. She is also a mother to the community. She is well respected and her authority is renowned. Her reputation helps Denver in getting help for Sethe when she has a breakdown. Baby Suggs Holy presents a spiritually charged persona who has ties to all the main characters in the past and present life. Her stories enrich the plot and provide the audience with an insight into life after slavery.

Secondary Characters

Secondary characters are minor characters in the sense that they are not as prevalent or important to the fantasy as the heroes and villains. There are secondary characters that enrich the movie’s plot. These are Buglar, Howard and Stamp Paid. Buglar and Howard are Sethe’s children who ran away from 124 (family home), and Stamp Paid took Sethe across the river to Ohio to her present life. Stamp Paid is an onlooker in the life of Sethe but he also plays an important role in
the transfer of Sethe’s past life to the present. He is the one who relayed information of Sethe’s slaying of her daughter to the ignorant Paul D. Beloved is a runaway who Sethe thinks is her reincarnated daughter.

Setting

Setting in fantasy themes refers to where the fantasy takes place. The setting can be real or an imaginary place. The movie begins in the aftermath of slavery and the Civil War in 1873. The settings in Beloved greatly reflect the mood and the characters in the plot. The settings in the movie evolve from bright sunny days, and dark blue nights to snowy white days. There are various scenes of the yard, in the shed but primarily inside the house at 124. Few scenes are in the city of Cincinnati.

The day of the first meeting after eighteen years between Paul D and Sethe was a clear sunny day, suggesting that something good – love – was about to happen between two persons. When Sethe invited Paul D into her home, he entered her heart. The red light that shadows the scene of Paul D entering the home relates to the audience that he would struggle for Sethe’s love. Sethe and her daughter refused to leave their home, 124 Bluestone Road, despite an angry baby ghost presence in the house. The time of the carnival was a clear blue sunny day. The trees were overshadowed and green. This suggested a coming together of Sethe’s home, as Sethe and Denver were outsiders in the community. It was the first time in a long while since they had been a part of the community. The thunder rumbled on an evening at dinner. Sethe said ‘...The clouds look like they’re gonna burst...’ This was a forecast of what was to happen in her relationship with Paul D. At the dinner table, with the thunder roaring, Paul D provoked Beloved which in turned upset Sethe. This was their first fight in the relationship. Paul D could not comprehend the relationship that Sethe had with Beloved.

The writers used the flashback technique to give the audience a glimpse of the past, which has influenced the present. Baby Suggs Holy had numerous scenes that were located mostly in the woodlands. Baby Suggs Holy held sermons that provided the audience with much
of the information that weaved the story together and is told with memories and wisdom of her past slave life. There were various scenes where it was snowing. However, right after Paul D left Sethe, there was a succession of three settings that are significant. It began with a scene of a fallen tree followed by ice melting in a nearby lake and then a showing of a mother deer and its baby leaving her in the grass. These scenes were a prelude of Sethe’s imminent breakdown and Beloved’s disappearance from 124 ‘again’.

Now that setting and characters have been described within the context of the movie, the plot must be analyzed to better understand what are the cultural portrayals of love and the media’s portrayal of this love.

Plot

The plot or action in fantasy themes depicts what is happening in the drama. Knowing what action is taking place gives listeners and readers an understanding of what the movie is about.

The plot begins to unravel when Paul D visits Sethe at 124 Bluestone Road. After eighteen years of knowing Sethe, Paul D clearly has some feelings for Sethe as she asked him what his reason for coming to her home was. Paul D told her that his main reason for visiting was to see Baby Suggs Holy ‘and you’. Sethe for a second turned her face away from Paul D as he affirms that he is here because of her. After introducing Denver to Paul D, Sethe told Denver to heat up the stove as ‘...can’t have a friend stop by and don’t feed him’. Initially, this seems like a friend offering guests something to eat. However, food essentially became one of the ways in which Sethe wins Paul D’s heart. Paul D sings about food and women when he is contented. His song: ‘...Hard work ain’t easy. Dry bread ain’t greasy. Little rice. Little bean. No meat in between...’ is an indirect ode to Sethe. He also sings: ‘Well I said come here black woman ...I said run here black woman...I know your house...’ For the rest of the movie, Sethe lovingly provides meals for her man as a way of showing love for her family and Paul D. Paul D enjoys
the meals that Sethe cooks. In almost all instances where Sethe and Paul D jokingly refer to food, he grabs her and takes her upstairs to make love.

‘Bread ain’t no trouble’ according to Sethe. ‘Bread’ was essentially ‘love’. You need love in order to survive. Sethe welcomes the love that Paul D has to share although she seems non-committal initially as she wants to ‘leave things the way they are.’ Paul D also said he likes the way Sethe refers to her home as ‘my house.’ Sethe’s house is a symbol of love. She will not leave her house despite her firstborn’s ghost occupying the house. She stays there although the baby makes mischief by throwing a table and cupboard at Paul D and almost killing the dog. Sethe’s love causes Paul D to stay in Cincinnati. Sethe’s love is intense. In her heart, there is her daughter and her daughter only. The ‘tree’ on Sethe’s back is her love, as well as her burden that she carried since leaving School Teacher. After explaining how she got the scar in her back, Paul D gets up from his chair and embraces Sethe. He opens her corset and kisses her scars. Paul D is gentle and loving. He gives Sethe his undivided attention, although he believes that it is best to just love a little.

Paul D and Sethe make love often. His love is passionate as he touches her lips and cheeks. He caresses the scars in her back and unbraids her hair. Paul D seems very contented and comfortable with his love for Sethe. He sings constantly out of contentment for being in love. Paul D tries his best to gain Sethe’s love. Sethe’s love is already taken by her children. Paul D hopes that some of that love is left over for him. He realizes that in order to get some of Sethe’s love, he will have to love her daughter too. He spends his money by taking out both Sethe and Denver to the local carnival. Sethe eventually takes a chance on Paul D. She asks Denver to give Paul D a chance because of her. Sethe needs the support of her daughter. The conversation between Sethe and Paul D eventually becomes one that is informal and intimate. There is a tone of been in love – such as giggling and playing. Sethe and Paul D are able to decipher each other’s meaning or know what the other is thinking when they look at each other. Love makes Sethe feels young again as Paul D meets her at work to accompany her home. Paul D constantly refers to
Sethe as his ‘baby’. The plot begins to unravel when a stranger – Beloved - appears in the yard. Paul D tries to figure out why Sethe is holding onto Beloved. It is evident that Paul D never wanted to share his love with a stranger – ‘...Sethe, Sethe, baby. We were startin’ to feel a little like a family ourself til’ she come along...’ Paul D’s respect for Sethe can be seen in the fact that he has never mistreated a woman. Sethe believed that Halle mistreated her as he left her and the children. Sethe is skeptical of men and love. Sethe sees love as unconditional. A person is supposed to stick with the one who they love by all means. Love has clearly devastated her life and caused her heartache. Love has not been what she expected. Sethe is devastated to know that Halle saw what School Teacher and his boys had done to her in the barn. Sethe believes that you kill for the one who you love. This may have being her justification of killing her first born. She believed that Halle should not have allowed School Teacher and his ‘boys’ to nurse her milk and keep on living.

One day at work, Paul D’s coworkers thought that he was saving up a gold mine because of his happy demeanor. Actually Paul D was in love. His exuberance of being in love is echoed by his statement that: ‘...If a man can make a plan, the man can make the good times happen...’ Paul D likens his love to be better than gold. Gold is a symbol of wealth. Gold is a precious metal that is valued for its beauty and purity since it does not tarnish like other metals. The fact that he is planning on starting a family with his woman is a ‘good time’ and better than gold.

Rhetorical Community

The rhetorical community refers to the community at large who are paying attention to a rhetorical event and its symbolic messages. The movie Beloved, attempts to draw its audience in by its content and images presented. The content is designed by the writers in ways that appeal to the rhetorical community and compel its audience to act. The words used in the movie are cleverly crafted to allow the action taking place in the movie appear very realistic. For instance, Sethe said to Paul D when she was speaking about Halle: ‘Who he leave then if he didn’t leave me?’ The use of broken English by characters convinces the audience of the time period that the
settings occurred, making costumes, characters, plot and events appear more realistic. The conversations among characters are very long and sometimes lengthy. An instance of this was seen when Sethe tells Paul D of her killing her baby. She starts off by telling him about life on the plantation with School Teacher all the way to the time when she came to Ohio. The writers use flashback and literary devices such as similes and allusions to attract the community members. The content was designed by writers in ways that appealed to the audience. The writers used songs such as a children’s song for Denver:


The content of the movie is designed to compel listeners to love. Sometimes the audience felt sad and other times, happy. The major community represented is persons of western cultures. However the movie appeals to a diverse audience. The message is aimed centrally at an American audience so that they will get involved in the action of the story. However, the writers are attempting to attract those who are interested in love relationships, racism, slavery, filial relationships and spirituality. These are all topics that would attract anyone since they apply to the human experience. Instead of creating defensiveness by pointing out particular groups who are at fault for the dilemma that the main characters find themselves in, the writers allow a ‘nonaligned’ point of view for all the characters so that the rhetorical community will not be offended. It must be expected that there will be supporters from other races and ethnicities who are empathic or sympathetic towards the major themes presented in the movie. For example, Baby Suggs Holy
preached: “Here in this place, we are flesh, flesh that weeps, laughts, dances barefoot in the grass. Love your flesh, love it hard…” These words and phrases are used to draw the audience to accept messages no matter what his race, nationality or ethnicity. The tone of Baby Suggs Holy’s message is positive rather than negative. The tone is hopeful rather than condemning.

**The Notebook**

Summary

This movie is narrated by a man reading from a notebook to a woman in a nursing home. *The Notebook* reminisce the lives of two North Carolina teens from different social class. The main characters, Noah and Allie spent a summer together before they are separated by their parents and then World War II. After Noah comes back from the war, Allie becomes engaged to a successful businessman. Noah lives alone with his memories in a 200 year old house that he restored, because of his love for Allie. When Allie sees an article in a local paper about Noah’s house, she makes a decision to choose between Noah and her fiancé. *The Notebook* is a classic tale of love. It represents a definitive concept of the way Americans view love.

Characters

**Allie**

Allie is a carefree teenager. She becomes enamored with Noah quickly. Allie once asked Noah if she could be a bird. The use of the term ‘bird’ symbolized freedom. A bird is free to fly wherever it chooses. Allie wanted to be free; free to love. Noah remarked that ‘If you’re a bird, I’m a bird.’ They were both birds living in the moment. Love allowed them to take chances.

**Noah**

Noah is an ambitious person. He is determined to have Allie in his life. He realized from earlier on that he would not have a lot of money to support Allie as was expected by her parents. He is realistic and realizes that love is something that he and Allie would have to work on everyday. He is loyal and honest. He stood by Allie’s during her senile dementia’s episodes in
their elderly years. He reads to her as a way of helping her memory despite the doctors’ insistence that she will never regain her memory.

Mr. and Mrs. Hamilton

Allie’s parents, Mr. and Mrs. Hamilton, tried very hard to keep Allie and Noah apart. Allie’s parents were foes of love. The parents’ attempted to suppress Allie’s love for Noah. Mrs. Hamilton stole 365 letters that Noah had written to Allie to keep them from communicating. Their romance was regarded by the parents as only a ‘summer romance’ or fling. Mrs. Hamilton believed that the only result of a relationship like that would include Allie getting heart broken or getting pregnant. Mrs. Hamilton referred to Noah as ‘trash’ because of his social class. The romance was improbable based on their social class and finances. Allie ‘had the world at her feet’ while Noah was poor. At Allie’s parents Sunday dinner, it was clear that Noah was not accepted. Noah did not fit into Allie’s world of money. Love meant defying all odds. Ironically, Allie’s father seems more sympathetic to Allie’s love relationship than Mrs. Hamilton. Mrs. Hamilton wanted her daughter to marry someone of the same class.

Secondary Characters

The secondary characters who completed the story’s intricate plotline included Lon Hammond, Frank Calhoun, Fin, Sara and Martha Shaw. Lon Hammond is Allie’s fiancé who is everything that Allie’s parents wants for her. He is wealthy, good-looking, charming and an ex-soldier. He offers sincere advice to Allie. He was understanding and gave Allie all the personal space she needed before their wedding without rushing her. Frank Calhoun is Noah’s father who helped Noah rebuild the Windsor Plantation. Fin and Sara are responsible for the love relationship between Noah and Allie occurring after Allie’s adamant refusal of Noah’s advances. Martha Shaw was Noah’s companion in his adult years before he rekindled his romance with Allie.
Setting

The movie’s primary settings occur in a nursing home and the Windsor Plantation mansion. The movie is set in the 1940’s in the small beach town of Seabrook and Charleston. There are numerous settings throughout the movie including streets, a carnival, a battlefield, lumberyard and the Hamilton’s summer mansion.

The night of the carnival, the couple’s first meeting, is buzzing with excitement in the air. The Windsor Plantation mansion is Noah’s symbol of love for Allie. The house was built in 1772 by Francis Marion. Both Allie and Noah made plans for the future to rebuild the house. Frank Calhoun gave Noah the drive to follow through on love. He sold his home so that Noah could have the Windsor mansion. Noah’s lifelong dream was Allie. ‘Noah took a look at the house, but only saw one thing—Allie.’ Noah believed that if he restored the house, then Allie would find a way to come back to him. He labored in love. His love led him to insanity. Allie visited him at the rebuilt mansion. The room where they had dinner that afternoon was the room they had come in their ‘summer of love’ to make love. The room was refurnished with a piano nearby in the same position it was years ago when they were young.

The movie opens with white birds flying towards a white nursing home. Noah reads to Allie in her old age at the nursing home as was requested by her. In their prime years, Noah lived among Allie and the elderly at a nursing home despite their children’s insistency on him to come home. Noah told them that ‘This is my home now. Your mother is my home.’ There was a downpour of rain at the dock as Allie and Noah outpour their hearts when they rekindled their romance. The rain came down in torments as the emotions after seven years being apart, came flooding over.

Plot

Noah is initially attracted to Allie and does everything to win her love and trust. At their first meeting, Noah jumps onto a moving Ferris wheel to try to get a date with a stubborn Allie at the local carnival. His attraction is intense as he hangs from a bar to ask her for a date. Noah is
unyielding in winning Allie’s love and attention. Their relationship eventually became childish and playful. For instance, Noah is willing to be anything for Allie. His fascination causes him to be irrational—“I could be whatever you want. You just tell me what you want and I’ll be that for you.” The night of their initial date, their friends, Fin and Sara, kept asking them if they loved each other. Friends suspected love on the first date. Noah eagerly tries to know everything about Allie’s life. Noah uproots Allie’s strict schedule and as such, changed her life. Eventually love became more important to Allie than her educational success. Noah’s perception of love is that it is free. He thought that Allie did not do what she wanted to do. Later on in their relationship, Noah asked her to make a decision on their love instead of what other people want—‘You don’t do what you want.’ Noah wants Allie to learn how to trust. Love meant spending time together as the lovers danced, ride, ate and swam together.

Love is all about taking chances despite the obvious dire outcomes. There clearly were warnings and doubts in the beginning of their relationship such as Allie’s ever-present parents who control all her decisions that she made. Allie hated the fact that her parents tried to keep her away from Noah. She remarked: ‘you’re not going to tell me who I’m gonna love.’ Allie’s way of loving is shown by the way she spoke of her parents’ relationship. She believed that her parents don’t look, touch, laugh, play the way that Noah and her does. The lovers parted for seven years. After World War II, Allie meets Lon Hammond. Allie’s parents wanted a man like Lon Hammond to marry their daughter. He should be wealthy, handsome, smart, funny, sophisticated and charming. Ironically, it is Allie’s fiancé, Lon Hammond who succinctly described Allie’s predicament. Lon thought that Allie should marry him to win a battle of defiance against her parents where her future husband is concerned. Allie rekindles her romance with Noah which proves that love is a fight against defiance.

Rhetorical Community

The Notebook entices its audience by its content and images presented. The content is designed by the writers in ways that appeal to movie watchers and compel its audience to nurture
the fantasies by acting them out. The characters’ speech allows the action taking place in the movie to cause its community to fantasize about a love relationship as that portrayed. The movie’s narration by Noah begins:

I am no one special, just a common man with common thoughts. I’ve led a common life. There are no monuments dedicated to me. And my name will soon be forgotten. But in one respect, I’ve succeeded as gloriously as anyone who ever lived...I’ve loved another with all my heart and soul and for me that has always been enough... (Cassavetes, 2004)

This statement appeals to a large diverse community. The morale of the movie is that real true love comes at any moment in time, and that time does not change real true love. Infatuation shared by two teenagers may actually grow into love. Love is shown to be something that everyone would want to experience even though the outcome of love is unpredictable. As Noah said: “Summer romances end for all kinds of reasons. But when all is said and done, they have one thing in common: They are shooting stars – a spectacular moment of light in the heavens, a fleeting glimpse of eternity. And in a flash, they’re gone.”

The characters Allie and Noah fought constantly during their young and adult years. Noah narrated: ‘They didn’t agree on much. In fact, they rarely agreed on everything. They fought all the time’. Later on Noah told Allie that:

Well, that’s what we do. We fight. You tell me when I’m being an arrogant son of a bitch and I tell you when you’re being a pain in the ass. Which you are 99% of the time. I’m not afraid to hurt your feelings. They have like a two second rebound rate and you’re back doing the next pain-in-the-ass thing (Cassavetes).

The biggest obstacle to harmony in relationships might be our attempt to define love instead of realizing the truth that it arise out of the power of a deep emotional bond. We should
appreciate the powerful, dynamic interaction of love in a relationship. Love is portrayed as everything that is good. Love is constantly referred to as a ‘miracle.’ Allie chose love over money. Love is given a high regard as an important occurrence in life. The true meaning of life is to find the right person to love. Noah seems to have a realistic portrayal of what love is. He thinks that love means fighting and accepting each other for who they are. Love requires effort. He is determined to do anything for love as he wants Allie forever. Noah always had hope for their love. In his older days, he said that ‘the body sluggish, aged, cold, the embers left from earlier fires shall duly flame again.’ The song ‘I’ll be seeing you’ was both Noah and Allie’s song. It echoed the hope for love. There was always the possibility of seeing each other in this life or the next. In the nursing home at dawn with a light blue light shining on them, Noah lay beside Allie as they died holding each other hands. Allie thought that their love could create miracles and would take them away together.

Introduction: The Asian Cinema

China’s film industry became more recognized in the west by numerous films that were made popular by Bruce Lee. Today, China has also increased its popularity in the west by other successful films, such as *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon*, *Hero*, *House of Flying Daggers* and *Kung Fu Hustle*. China is expected to eventually become the world's second-biggest movie market, surpassing Europe ($4.4 billion in annual movie ticket sales) and Japan ($1.6 billion). Time-Warner (an American media conglomerate) is investing in more than 70 cinemas around mainland China through joint ventures (Anjum, 2005).

China’s talented film directors are breaking box office records at home and overseas. In 2004, for instance, two movies from acclaimed director Yimou Zhang - *Hero* and *House of Flying Daggers* - together grossed more than $190 million outside China. The biggest Chinese movie is Ang Lee's *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000). This multiple Oscar-winning film earned $128 million. Chen Kaige (*Farewell My Concubine*), Feng Xiaogang (*Cell Phone*) and Wong Kar Wai (*In the Mood for Love, 2046*) are considered established storytellers with
international appeal. The Chinese are a part of the global entertainment by winning Academy Awards (Anjum).

The films, *House of Flying Daggers* and *The White Dragon* will now be examined. They present a cultural view of love in the Asian setting.

**House of Flying Daggers**

Summary

In 859AD, the Tang Dynasty is in decline. The Chinese emperor is incompetent and the government is corrupt. Unrest is spreading throughout the land, and many rebel armies are forming in protest. The largest rebel army is an underground alliance called the House of Flying Daggers. The House of Flying Daggers operates mysteriously, stealing from the rich to give to the poor. They earned the support and admiration of the people and expanded quickly. Based in Feng Tian County, close to the Imperial Capital, the House of Flying Daggers has long been hated rivals of the local deputies. To the fury of the deputies, even after they fought and killed the leader of the House of Flying Daggers, the House continues to thrive. Under the leadership of a mysterious New Leader, the House of Flying Daggers grows more powerful. Feng Tian County's two local captains, Leo and Jin are ordered to capture the new leader within ten days. Captain Leo suspects that Mei, the beautiful new dancer at the local Peony Pavilion is actually the daughter of the old leader, and makes a plan to arrest her and bring her in for questioning. When Mei refuses to divulge any information on the House of Flying Daggers, the two captains set up another plan. This time, Captain Jin will pretend to be a lone warrior called Wind and rescue Mei from prison, earning her trust and escorting her to the secret headquarters of the House of Flying Daggers. The plan works, and on their long journey to the House of Flying Daggers, Jin and Mei develops feelings for each other. For his part, Jin is surprised to find himself falling for Mei's headstrong charm.
The movie, *House of Flying Daggers*, is unique as it is ingeniously crafted to deceive its audience of the movie’s main subject – love. The audience is unaware of the feature of love until its climax. *House of Flying Daggers* is not just famous for its martial arts technique but for the portrayal of love in an Asian context.

Characters

**Mei**

Mei is a member of the Flying Daggers. She uses her beauty to seduce men for the Flying Daggers. She first appeared undercover as a blind brothel dancer who is the daughter of the former Daggers House leader. She is cunning, convincing and very versed in the martial arts. She tries to resist the charming Jin. She is already in love with Leo. She is able to seduce the playboy Jin.

**Leo**

Leo is a member of the Flying Daggers. He cunningly deceives the Chinese government as a captain in the Feng Tian County. As a mole planted in the government, he uses his authority to convince the local authorities on clues of eradicating the Flying Daggers. Captain Leo sends Jin to infiltrate and figure out the location of the House of Flying Daggers.

**Jin**

Jin is a local captain in the Feng Tian County. He is a playboy who likes flirting with women. He unknowingly is set up by Captain Leo to find out the location of the Flying Daggers. He uses his charm to win the trust of Mei.

Setting

The setting in the movie varies greatly; however, most of the action takes place outdoors. The settings are picturesque. The forests are covered with thin bamboos that allow for minimal sunlight and for the ‘flying’ martial arts technique. The nearsighted flights of arrows are showcased in the deep forests. There is light pouring through the rusty mortal forest; mud and
leaves flung into the air as fights ensue between the Chinese troops and Mei, and the Flying Daggers and the troops as well.

The characters are very natural in the environment as evident in the main character Mei’s bath in the pond in the woodlands, and her making out with Jin in the grassland. There were scenes of the snowstorm that heaped the ending onscreen. Leo and Jin fought for Mei’s love from the time when the trees were green and leafy to a snow covered forest. There was a soft, almost ‘New England’ sunlight glowing through the bristling woods. The settings change very dramatically; especially the skyline which was clear to dark blue in moments. There were very few scenes that took place in the night. Most of the scenes were done in daylight.

Plot

Captains Jin and Leo want to stop the House of Flying Daggers from interfering with the Tang Dynasty. Captain Leo sends Jin to infiltrate and hit on Mei, a dancer in a brothel. Jin must figure out the location and identity of the House of Flying Daggers’ leader, the mysterious identity of Mei and his own ultimate loyalty. The fate of the Chinese empire lies in the hands of Jin. Jin breaks Mei out of jail and he acts as a lone warrior who supports the Flying Daggers. The Chinese troops toss around sharpened bamboo poles and captures Jin and Mei in the forest. Unbeknownst to the troops of which side Jin is on, the invisible dagger-throwing rogues close in on troops in a fight to rescue Mei.

Jin initially planned to scheme but his plans turned into love. Leo who was in love with Mei warns Jin to not fall into love with Mei. After a brief separation from Mei, Jin finally realizes that he loves her and returns to the battlefield to rescue her. Jin is still unsure of his feelings for Mei when the ‘Madam’ in the Flying Daggers asks for his hand in marriage to Mei. Jin is devastated by Mei’s deceit when he learns of her true identity. Jin uses social class as a reason for not committing to Mei. The plot ends in a fight for the love of Mei between Jin and Leo.
Rhetorical Community

Asians and even western communities will acknowledge this drama. The theme of love is
diverse. Love is a natural occurrence so it affects everyone. This love story, although Asian in the
portrayal of its values can appeal to anyone because of the universal appeal of love as a human
emotion.

The Chinese culture stressed love as a secondary value to work. This is evident when the
‘Madam’ of the Flying Daggers told Leo to concentrate on working with the Flying Daggers than
love. He was saddened that Mei was put on the mission of seducing Jin. He would have liked if
Nia, the leader of the Flying Daggers, had considered his feelings. Leo would do anything for
love. He believes that Mei is the only one that understands him. He had her on his mind every
moment for the past three years. Her love kept him alive as he said ‘My love for you was all I had
to keep me going.’ Leo also believes that love take sacrifices and time to form. He believes in a
soul mate as he referred to Mei as the ‘love of my life.’ He is unwilling to share his love for her
with someone else so he kills her. The writers present the portrayal of love as something that will
motivate a man to fight and kill for. The audience is saddened when Leo kills his beloved.

The depiction of Jin as a playboy who called himself ‘wind’ can be applied to social
reality. His comments such as “You know I love flirting with girls...If I die under a skirt, I can
still flirt as a ghost”. Clearly, he did not have any intentions of settling down with a woman. This
shows that love comes at times when you least expect it. The writers of the movie made use of the
symbol ‘wind’ in the movie. This word was constantly repeated. ‘Wind’ symbolizes freedom. For
Jin that is the preservation of his bachelorhood. Jin had tried to make love to Mei, however; she
wanted real love and the commitment that it comes with. After Jin surrenders to the Flying
Daggers, Mei is given the task to kill him. She decides to take the responsibility for her actions of
letting Jin live. Mei’s love for Leo seems to be one of obligation when she told Jin that he had
saved her life many times. Love is free as can be seen in Jin’s proposal to Mei to roam freely like
the wind together as a couple. Jin and Leo fight for love.
The Chinese language is full of tones and symbolism which is clearly portrayed in this movie. An element in Chinese Feng Shui symbolism is to keep things in pairs. For the major part of the movie, Mei and Jin are alone. The ultimate symbol of Chinese Feng Shui is the Ying/Yang symbol which encapsulates the complementary nature of the male/female union. The Chinese are extremely conscious of giving, taking or displaying things in pairs. Many of the prosperity and good luck symbols of the Chinese come in pairs as such love brings luck (DeSpirit, 2006). This symbolism could have been used by the writers as a way of portraying realism to the movie. Asians would be attracted to a plot of two lovers alone in a wooded forest.

**The White Dragon**

Summary

This martial arts film is action-packed with fun, stylized martial arts scenes. A young woman falls in love with a prince of the Imperial House. By accident, she acquires the martial arts skills of the White Dragon. New in her power, she learns that there are definite advantages in performing ‘good deeds’ as the Little White Dragon. When she discovers that a famed assassin is planning to kill her beloved prince, she seeks to prevent this by killing the assassin first. After more than one unsuccessful attempt, she begins to grow in her compassion, love and understanding for the blind assassin. In many situations people instigate their romantic encounters. However the movie *The White Dragon* rejects the American traditional way of portraying love in films. This movie depicts love that grows out of compassion.

Characters

Phoenix Black a.k.a. The White Dragon II

Phoenix is a gorgeous student who is very aware of her own drop-dead looks. She is beautiful, materialistic, egocentric, self-centered, confident and childish. While with her pack of chatty school pals, she declares that Second Prince Tian Yang is the only man worthy of being her lover. Phoenix Black makes a plan for love. She vows to protect Tian Yang by killing the
assassin Chicken Feathers who has threatened his life. She gets to woo her dream guy when he attends her music recital.

Tian Yang

Tian Yang is the second prince to the Imperial Emperor. He is a handsome gentleman who is immediately smitten by Phoenix. There have been numerous attempts on his life. He falls in love with Phoenix and quickly proposes to her after a short courtship. Tian Yang sees love as been valuable to his well being. As such, he is willing to sacrifice anything just to have Phoenix’s ‘heart’. He sees love as happiness as well as luck. After Phoenix cancels their engagement, he appointed her as a White Dragon to officially report to him directly.

Chicken Feathers

Chicken Feathers is a notorious blind assassin. He announces his presence with sudden flurries of chicken feathers. He is charismatic, lighthearted, quirky and humorous. He is an outsider in the community. He justifies his killings by assassinating the rich and/or those who deserved to die because of their wrongdoings. He is a realist. Chicken Feathers is enchanted by Phoenix’s playing the flute. There is compassion on the part of Chicken Feathers for Phoenix. Chicken Feathers is contented for just being around Phoenix. He becomes her help and is there constantly to please and help her get well when she becomes injured. Love was not the intention of Chicken Feathers or Phoenix.

Secondary Characters

The following secondary characters play an important role in weaving the story together. These characters include:

White Dragon I a.k.a. ‘Auntie’

She is an undercover assassin acting as the cleaning lady at Phoenix Black’s school. She makes many attempts at killing Chicken Feathers without success. She transfers her powers to Phoenix to act as a White Dragon when she is injured by Chicken Feathers.
Other Characters

"Principal Wong is the principal at Phoenix’s school. He is killed by Chicken Feathers for sexual assaults on school girls. Deer Tail is a ‘jack of all trades’. He plays the role of a village doctor and secretly employs Chicken Feathers to kill for his clients. Sheng is the first prince to the Imperial Emperor. Gene plays the role of the palace’s investigator of the attempted murders in the palace. He is an ever-present character who appears suddenly in various parts of the plot. Daisy and Mandy are Phoenix Black’s friends.

Settings

The movie opens with a calm and serene image of a bright sun shining through a mountainous region. The action is immediately directed to a dense green forest where Phoenix and Chicken Feathers are fighting. There are numerous settings that range from the green forests, a schoolyard, dormitory and the Imperial palace. The set for the schoolyard, dormitory and the Imperial palace are festooned with traditional Chinese building structures. However, the setting for a major part of the movie takes place in Chicken’s Feathers’ home. His home is a dilapidated dark, boarded structure located beside a pond on the outskirts of the community. The action of the movie takes place mostly in daylight than at night time. The martial arts action is confined to small, short sequences. The martial arts sequences involve sword fights and characters flying through trees. The setting greatly affects the events happening in the movie. An example can be seen when Chicken Feathers loses his powers and he is saddened by Phoenix’s departure from his life. The light in his home becomes even darker. His days at the pond become overcast.

Plot

On one of his assignments, the famed assassin Chicken Feathers gets a run-in with the White Dragon. The White Dragon is a masked super heroine who gets soundly trashed by her sight-impaired foe. Luckily she is able to transfer her power to the closest person: Phoenix, who subsequently takes up the mantle of the White Dragon. Chicken Feathers falls in love with Phoenix Black. When she breaks a limb after attacking him, he nurses her back to health.
Phoenix's love interest is the second prince to the emperor, Tian Yang. There is an instant attraction between Tian Yang and Phoenix Black. Tian Yang tries to impress Phoenix when she arrives at the palace. The couple spends a lot of time together. They stare lovingly into each other's eyes. They skate together and play tennis. Phoenix makes a promise to love which she fulfills by way of annihilating Chicken Feathers. She is resolved that she will not let Tian Yang die and willingly forfeit her own life in this pursuit for love. Chicken Feathers' love of music draws him to Phoenix Black. The White Dragon states that 'even a good man has his weak points.' Phoenix tries to locate Chicken Feathers' weak points in order to kill him. Chicken Feathers reveals his intention to the audience when Phoenix tries to kill him while his back is turned to her. She aims to kill him with her sword and he turns and kisses her. He prevents himself from been killed by subduing her then saving her from being crushed by falling lumber. He uses his body to shield her from harm. This action resulted in Phoenix having a changed heart; however, she still had a hidden agenda. Their bond deepens as they share intimate thoughts.

Rhetorical Community

This lighthearted movie will appeal to its Asian audience as well as an international audience. There are unusual sound designs that dress up the swordplay clangs and swooshes with turbocharged, videogame-like sound effects. Although The White Dragon is a combination of comedy and drama, it should be taken seriously based on its underlying messages and values on love. These messages apply to the Asian society.

Beauty is an important value as it helps to find love. Phoenix becomes upset because a pimple ruins her date with Tian Yang. Women's main concern in life is their looks according to Phoenix. 'Auntie', the original White Dragon, helps Phoenix gets rid of her pimple by telling her that “helping others will bring happiness. A kind heart stimulates blood flow. Blood flows well, pimple disappears.” Time is a very important value to the culture as well as the belief in fate. Education in some way appears to be more important than love. In choosing a future husband, money also plays a central role. The qualities that Phoenix looks for in a future husband are
regarded by her as been ‘simple.’ He must be powerful. She believes that having power will result in having no problems in life.

Phoenix and Chicken Feathers never kissed in the movie’s entirety. Chicken Feathers’ becomes enthralled by Phoenix and asks Deer Tail to describe her appearance to him. Chicken Feathers becomes jealous and outrage when he learns that the object of Phoenix’s affection is Tian Yang, who he is hired to kill. He asks her not to love him. Phoenix protected Chicken Feathers from Tian Yang’s guardsmen although her intentions were to eradicate Chicken Feathers. For a brief moment when Phoenix stabs Chicken Feathers in his back, he sees her for the first time. The audience is upset by her actions since the movie has portrayed a deep bond between Phoenix and Chicken Feathers. It is revealed that Chicken Feathers’ weak point was his heart. The ‘music’ in his life was given to him by Phoenix.

The love connection between Phoenix and Tian Yang did not work out as was planned. Tian Yang was given a choice between love and the Imperial throne. He chose the throne. The audience is elated as Chicken Feathers wins the love of Phoenix. Chicken Feathers’ love is deep. This was shown when he was given the opportunity by the palace to cure his blindness. He realizes that he will never be able to see again after the doctors’ attempt to cure him fails. He thinks that all he needs is his rod and give up on the hope of sight. His main reason for sight was to see Phoenix’s appearance. He does not see the need to see again as he already saw the face of Phoenix for a brief moment. He now cares only about his ‘rod’ to help him find his way since there is no hope for sight, or even a future with Phoenix. However, Phoenix volunteers to be his rod – “I’ll be your rod. You don’t let go, I won’t let go”.

In summary, elements of setting, characters, plot and rhetorical community exist within the movies and can be separated into categorizations to facilitate an understanding. Some of these themes are obvious whereas others were hidden. This section discerned between different aspects of fantasy themes in order to determine what messages these movies’ writers crafted for their audience. The next chapter will recombine these elements into a rhetorical vision that depicts
specific images gleaned from these unified parts and explain how these images are made to relate to its audience by a cultural portrayal of love.
Data Evaluation & Conclusion

A close inspection of the movies revealed that the themes discovered in the previous chapter can be dramatized through the method of fantasy theme analysis into a coherent rhetorical vision. This chapter discusses the rhetorical vision of the movies as defined through its structure of values. This structure of values involves interconnected ideas about love. First, the rhetorical vision is framed within the movies and is discussed in terms of interconnecting fantasy themes and underlying values for both the Asian and American movies. Second, the influence of this vision is examined in terms of the impact the movies has had on society.

Rhetorical Vision

Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous. Love is not proud and does not boast. Love does not do things that are not nice. Love does not just think of itself. Love does not get angry. Love holds no wrong feelings in the heart. Love is not glad when people do wrong things. But it is always glad when they do right. Love forgives everything. Love is always trusting, and always hoping, and never gives up. Love never ends. — 1 Corinthians 13: 4-8 (The Holy Bible, Worldwide English New Testament Version)

A rhetorical vision is a slogan, name, or label, usually with a short title, that defines and provides social reality for a group and its followers. The critic who conducts a fantasy theme analysis must explain the fantasy chaining in terms of a rhetorical vision. Specifically, the critic focuses on what motives drive members and nonmembers responding to these messages to
become involved in the movement. By discovering these motives, the critic will more deeply understand why a group responds to fantasy themes, types and visions.

In the movie, *The Notebook*, through fantasy theme analysis, the phrase ‘love can create miracles’ emerges as a slogan that defines and provides reality for this group and its followers. Allie and Noah’s love was never ending. Love is equated to happiness. Noah eloquently stated the essence of love as: “The best love is the kind that awakens the soul and makes us reach for more, that plants a fire in our hearts and brings peace to our minds.” This term indicated that this group of members would be motivated to act because of love. Such imaging is exemplified in the movie where the vision of love is dramatized as a positive force; one that stands for all people. Romantic love is a normal and healthy emotional state. It is a basic human potential and capacity. However, Noah symbolized ‘love’ as a hero for people as well as a source of great strength.

It takes courage and discipline to stand up against a stronger force for love. In the American culture, couples who stay together tend to be matched on age, physical attractiveness, education plans, and intelligence. Allie and Noah were torn apart from each other by Mrs. Hamilton. It took a ‘miracle’ for Allie and Noah’s love to endure. Allie and Noah fell in love in the town of Seabrook which was the summer vacation home of the Hamilton’s. Mrs. Hamilton realized that Allie spent a lot of time with Noah. She brought up the subject of their staying together at a family Sunday dinner because their relationship was getting serious. She expressed to Noah about the future of their relationship as Allie was going to nursing school in New York. She, then, left Seabrook earlier for their hometown, Charleston, to create a distant between Allie and Noah. She further then stole Allie’s letters that came from Noah during their separation. In both a literal and a psychological sense, healthy romantic love is for grown-ups, not children which were echoed in the movie by the character, Mrs. Hamilton.

Further evidenced in the movie is the fact that romantic love requires considerable work and sometimes, a miracle in performing the kinds of effective communication. New meaning is given to love as just been an emotion that is good. It is good but it is not the only good. It often
comes into conflict with other goods such as personal goals, family, and ethical obligations. The power of romantic love can lead one—even knowingly—into a relationship filled with conflict. Some of these conflicts are external, arising when a love relationship impacts negatively on other bonds and loyalties, particularly those involving one’s family, one’s friends, and sometimes one’s spouse and children. Allie’s love conflicted with her education as well as her social class and family relationships. This is something that many movies as well as real American relationships do not take into account when considering pursuing a love relationship. Allie came to the realization that the love that she and Noah had was in fact real. They fought a lot. They did not agree on anything much but they still loved each other. Their love allowed them to fight and still be together. Their love was passionate and fiery, despite years of being apart.

In western cultures, romantic partners are generally happy with their partners and their love lives (Cunningham & Antill, 1981). They are competent individuals who care for and trust their partners. They feel free to be open and honest and do not speak for the other person (Galician). In the movie Beloved, the term ‘love your heart’ emerges as a slogan that defines and provides reality for this group and its followers. This term was expressed by Baby Suggs Holy at her woodland services. Baby Suggs Holy declared that love should be intense and all-consuming. She referred to the love of yourself and others as ‘the prize.’ On the other hand, Paul D opposed this statement when he said to Sethe: “…Dangerous to love any one thing that much, Sethe. The best thing is to love everything just a little bit. That way if it breaks, runs off or is taken away…” Initially when Paul D said this statement to Sethe, he thought that she loved too deeply and would be disappointed as she seems to give her heart completely. He later elaborated on his theory about love and said that: ’Your love is too thick, Sethe.’ To which she replied:” Love is or it isn’t Paul D. Thin love ain’t no love at all.”

Paul D consciously said this statement at the time and never realized that the love that he had for Sethe was real and deep. His love was deep enough for him to leave Sethe and then go back to take care of her. New meaning is given to this original statement to ‘love your heart’.
Sethe did love her heart. Her heart was with her loved ones who left her. Sethe knew that love is all-consuming, pure, eternal and real. When you love someone, you give them your mind, body and soul. Love can be ‘thick’ and it can also be taken away but it can also come back to you as a result of its depth. Sometimes people who have had a romantic love such as Sethe and either lost it or gave it up are unable to convince themselves of a replacement or that what they have now is good enough or might perhaps be even better. Sethe’s love was dangerous as her love did in fact ruin her mentally and emotionally. When Paul D came back, the love relationship was accompanied by Denver’s (Sethe’s daughter) approval. We all know that love is something that we should in fact give away. However, because of its uncertainty many in society are unwilling to form a pure, deep, real love as they are afraid of its consequences. When we love, we are open to heartache, or in Sethe’s case, a nervous breakdown. We should love despite love’s unpredictable outcome. A pure form of undying love was created to overcome the love obstacle that Paul D and Sethe faced.

Romantic love is a unique emotional state of intense excitement, great calm, or enhanced well-being in the American culture (Liebowitz, 1983). There is a strong desire for sexual intimacy, exclusivity, and a deep concern for the other’s welfare with great emotional involvement. Some people see romantic love as a powerful but irrational attraction (Galician). In the ending of the movie Beloved, it appears that Sethe needed someone to love. Love caused her pain. Love means making a commitment. Paul D vowed to take care of Sethe. This shows that love is enduring. It overcomes obstacles. Indeed, loving your heart is the prize.

A person’s sense of self can change in a romantic attraction. The person in love feels more attractive, confident, capable, optimistic about the future, more energetic, and in need have less food and sleep (Liebowitz, 1983) as the movie Beloved showed. Love can be considered, not only as an emotion but as an attitude, a process, state, or disposition (Kelley, 1983; Murstein, 1988) with a tendency to take some action in regard to the other (Galician). In White Dragon, Tian Yang felt a longing for Phoenix Black, including the desire to be near her. In his marriage
proposal to her, he reveals that it is hard to sleep not having her in his life. On the other hand, Chicken Feathers had a feeling of loss and loneliness during his separation from Phoenix. The experience of the beloved one is portrayed as a necessity for one's happiness. There is often a desire to know and share many details about the other. There is a preoccupation with and overvaluation of the loved one in the media as well as in real situations (Galician).

Lovers place great importance on appearance and may spend many hours looking in each other's faces (Galician). Phoenix Black initially said that 'love is firm as heaven and earth.' This statement is the rhetorical vision that defines and provides reality for this group and its followers. The community watching Phoenix’s obsession with her appearance because of her love interest will get the message that her love was not firm. Phoenix was preoccupied with getting rid of a pimple in order to pursue Tian Yang. Deer tail referred to Chicken Feathers artificial flaws, ‘...You have so many flaws. Eyes not working tongue so short...’ Real love requires loving another person with their flaws, whether physical or psychological. Real love is firm. Although falling in love and romantic love are wonderful and the initial infatuation that accompanies it, other ingredients and capacities are necessary to sustain a long-term relationship, during which these feelings of love will have both peaks and valleys. Phoenix eventually chooses to be with Chicken Feathers who had never seen her and took care of her when she was least attractive with a broken limp. She thought that: ‘I can’t go out looking like this’. Phoenix’s love choice revealed that real love is more than an instant attraction and how you look.

In the House of Flying Daggers, through fantasy theme analysis, the word ‘real’ emerges as a slogan that defines and provides reality for this group and its followers. Jin never expected to fall in love with Mei. He clearly wanted to remain a playboy. Mei wanted to know if the time that they spent together and the emotions that they were feeling were real. Jin’s refusal to stop being the ‘wind’ to settle in a relationship with Mei caused her to part ways with him. However, it was ‘real’ love that caused him to quit being on the side of the Chinese government to pursue and fight for Mei.
Exclusivity is another important element of a successful romantic relationship. Romantic couples’ deep, romantic emotional ties are reserved only for their partner. Yet exclusivity is not equivalent to possessiveness. For successful and happy couples, the relationship is exclusive by choice and preference with no sense of one partner being the property of the other. Love for one’s current partner is negatively correlated with sharing love with someone else (Galician). Leo chooses to kill Mei because he would not accept the fact that she loved Jin. He then fights out of a jealous rage. He thought that the love between Jin and Mei could not be real after being together for just three days. In retrospect, Leo’s love was not ‘real’ which became evident when he not only killed Mei, but walked away after killing her and leaving Jin to grieve. Indeed, many, if not most, people hope to find and to experience romantic love, to find a partner whom they love and desire. We cannot choose whom we love, nor predict when the feelings will occur, and we usually cannot recapture the feeling when it has disappeared. The fact that love is rare causes people to consider it precious.

A western ideal is the desire to have another to love, for without one we will be lonely and there will be no one who truly knows us. We desire to become one with the other, to be selfless, and to lose ourselves in sexual intimacy. We are also afraid of losing ourselves, for we know that the person we love is independent, and that we can never truly know him or her. This is the predicament of love. Romantic love has the potential to break down healthy barriers. We become so focused on the other person and the relationship that we sacrifice our own identity. We relinquish ourselves because of love and become excessively reliant on the other person for our happiness and the fulfillment of our needs and goals (Galician).

Culture and Values: American Love vs. Asian Love in the Media

Today, the way of life in China is not different from other places in the world due to Western influence. China has become more exposed to western pop culture (He). The following sections focus on the value of love in Asia and contrast them with the value of love in the United States in order to show how audiences’ values can influence the symbolic chaining of messages.
RQ1: What are the cultural distinctions of the portrayal of love in the American movies, The Notebook and Beloved, and the Asian movies, House of Flying Daggers and The White Dragon?

There are numerous cross-cultural unified similarities as to the nature of love such as commitment, tenderness and passion which are common to all human existence. In the movie, The Notebook, Allie and Noah are portrayed in a way to appeal to American audiences and consequently, they are portrayed to project the ideals of the American way of loving. Allie and Noah are portrayed as being perfect partners who clearly are cosmically predestined, so nobody/thing can ultimately separate them. This was shown when Noah was going to the city to have his building plans for the Windsor Plantation approved and ‘fate stepped in and dealt him a sweet card’ when he saw Allie.

People of the western culture are often told that ‘all you need is love’. Romantic love is dominated by the myth of the ‘one and only’ – the soul mate - the idea that there is only one other person in the world for us, and that when we meet that person we will somehow just ‘know’ it. It does not mean that these myths are false. For the most part, they remain unchallenged and taken for granted as the absolute truth about romantic love in America (White, 2001). In The Notebook, Allie and Noah are portrayed as being soul mates and there is no other person for both of them. In Noah’s latter years, he was dating Martha but yet his heart and mind was with Allie. The movie’s audiences are given the impression that these two persons are soul mates, and this is how love should be. The American way of loving is ordained as the ultimate way to love.

A significant cultural distinction in each culture’s portrayal of love can be seen in the role of language. In the American movies, Beloved and The Notebook, there is use of direct language. There is meaning in the explicit, unlike Asian counterparts. Noah and Allie in The Notebook openly said they loved each other. In the movies, House of Flying Daggers and The White Dragon, their language patterns are the opposite of that of American usage. Their meaning is
implied or must be inferred. The Asian community did not express their love as verbally as those in the American movies. In House of Flying Daggers one of the main characters, Leo, was the most expressive in letting Mei know his feelings. An example of this is his expression: ‘My love for you was all I had to keep me going...’ On the other hand, Jin never made use of the word ‘love’ or made physical expression of his feelings until near the ending of the movie. His last words at the end of the movie: ‘I came back for you, my love.’ The Asians sometimes used ‘romantic allusions’ as a way of conveying their feelings. In The White Dragon, Tian Yang proposed to Phoenix Black by saying:

I have always thought that life was easy, until, one day, I saw two ants in the garden. Their feelers touched and they parted. I know then, to be able to meet you is not easy at all...If I’m to exchange for your heart I can sacrifice anything... (Yip, 2004)

Americans were very vocal in telling their loved ones ‘I love you’. Both Allie and Noah in The Notebook repeatedly said ‘I love you’ to each other. Noah would read poetry to Allie but never spontaneously create a romantic elegy for her.

Americans were portrayed as been more passionate and open to physical intimacy. Sethe and Paul D made love constantly. They physically expressed their love by means of hugging, kissing, hand holding, and touching. They expressed their love sexually. In House of Flying Daggers there was never any preconceived notion of Mei and Jin being physical with each other. There is a scene where Mei and Jin hugged, kissed and touched each other for a length of time which suggested that Mei and Jin made love. On the other hand, Sethe and Paul D had non-verbal signs and gestures which openly suggested their sexual intimacy. Culturally, the Asian portrayal of love is reserved in comparison to that of Americans in these movies. The American media portrayed love explicitly. There are no public displays of physical or verbal signs of affection among the Chinese in these particular movies. However, there are other movies where Asians portray love overtly. An example is Cheong Ju-Wu’s film Happy End (2000). This Asian movie
was regarded as controversial because of its themes and graphic sex. This movie documents the
life of a man who learns that his wife is cheating on him and kills her lover as a solution to his
problem. The film's opening graphically depicts a vigorous lovemaking session between his wife
and her lover. Culturally, a Chinese individual may appear shy or withdrawn as a sign of
deferece and respect. Once a relationship becomes more familiar then niceties can develop. Any
personal comments, overly friendly gestures, mild jokes or local slang may be interpreted as
inappropriate or offensive (Hatfield & Rapson, 1996).

Americans tend to place a greater emphasis on love than Asians. Love is a form of self-
fulfillment. In The Notebook Noah and Allie were portrayed as constantly been together when
they met. Sethe and Paul D in Beloved spent a great deal of time together. Love relationships can
be both the source of a great deal of happiness as well as the biggest obstacle to true happiness in
the Asian culture. This reinforces the Chinese maxim that love is blind. While it is often
maintained that love and hate are opposites, it believed that in romance they exist side by side
(White). In House of Flying Daggers, love took a secondary value to working for the Flying
Daggers. Group duty was more important than love. Leo and Mei waited three years before they
had a chance to be together. Even in The White Dragon, Phoenix chose to protect Chicken
Feathers out of compassion than love and cancelled her wedding to Tian Yang. Phoenix felt a
need to protect Chicken Feathers as grave importance as he lost his powers.

The characters, Fin and Sara, made fun of Noah and Allie being in love on the first date
in The Notebook. This suggests that there was ‘love at first sight’, which is an American notion
about love. Noah and Allie fought a lot. A western concept of love is that when a man and
woman fight a lot, it means that a man and a woman really love each other passionately. Another
concept of western love is shown in the movie, Beloved. The ‘right’ mate completes a person—
filling a person’s needs and making their dreams come true. Sethe and Paul D would look at each
other and know what each of them were thinking or feeling without having to tell each other. Paul
D would look at Sethe and they would laugh and then rush upstairs to make love.
RQ 2: How has American imperialism demonstrated its universal appeal of love in the Asian movies, *House of Flying Daggers*, and *The White Dragon*?

Romantic love is an experience of individual intensity and fulfillment. Americans regard love as an emotion that involves cherishing an attachment to another person. Love involves a very deep appreciation for the absolute value of the other person. The beloved is often idealized as one who can do no wrong. Similarly, to love someone involves taking that person seriously. If something is important to the beloved then it must also be important to the other. Love therefore involves a deeply felt emotion of cherishing another person (White).

The courtship between Tian Yang and Phoenix was ingeniously dramatized as ‘American’. To get her prince’s attention, Phoenix wooed her dream guy when he attended her musical recital by doing a musical performance as the lead in a Six Girl Band, complete with a rotating complement of instruments and a rock star finale where she smashed her guitar and jumped into the crowd. Tian Yang was immediately smitten by Phoenix Black. The two spent a lot of time together rollerblading around the palace and engaging in tennis matches—American pastimes. They spent a lot of time together and shared intimate details about themselves. This form of ‘dating’ appears to be the result of American influence. Phoenix thought that there was only one man who was worthy of her love and that was Tian Yang. A belief in the western culture is that there is a ‘one and only’ for each person. Traditional Chinese relationships were arranged by parents or family members. This situation has changed by an influence of western values in the movies. The second prince pursued his love interest without the help of his family. Tian Yang brought Phoenix home to the palace to introduce her to his brother. Initially, there was no involvement of the family in arranging the marriage or courtship.

In *House of Flying Daggers* it was quite unusual for Chinese women to openly express their expectations of love. Western values are more open in their expression. However, Mei was uninhibited in making her demands known to Jin. She wanted to know if Jin’s feelings were
‘real’. She later on initiated physical contact with him. Americans love obsessively. In *House of Flying Daggers*, this was evidenced in Leo’s state of mind. He realized that he could not have Mei for himself and that she was in love with someone. He killed her as a way of not letting her love another. The rhetorical vision of this group that love is ‘real’ is emphasized by Mei and Leo’s insistency or mind-set of what love entails. They both want their love to be reciprocated – love should be ‘real’.

Love in America is often expressed by an intensity of passion in terms of people being obliviousness to everything else. In romantic love, one experiences oneself as distracted and no longer under one’s own control (White). The Asian proverb ‘fall in love, fall into disgrace’ adds support to the fact that the Asian culture does not put much importance on romantic love as a priority, as it has sometimes been regarded as an aberration and a dangerous affair that called social order into question (White). The movie, *House of Flying Daggers* portrayed Jin abandoning his kinsmen (Chinese government) to pursue Mei. This could have affected the Chinese government adversely. This was the use of the appeal of *American love*. In *The White Dragon*, Chicken Feathers is deeply wounded by love. Love in the Chinese culture is not supposed to have a high priority in life. Chicken Feathers’ love can be seen as American as the more he is drawn to Phoenix, the more vulnerable he became to misery and loss. The American way of loving is unconditional. Phoenix asked him what was his ‘weak point’ and he responded that to have her in his life was his ‘weak point’.

Americans believe that love is the most intense form of relationship. A sense of self or who we really are is largely formed in relation to other people (White). This concept was demonstrated by Leo in *House of Flying Daggers*, who became who he was because of love. He said ‘My love for you was all I had to keep me going.’ Americans are encouraged to believe that falling in love is all-important and that without romantic bliss, life would be miserable and unfulfilled. Americans constantly experience great anxiety concerning their romantic lives, for they are encouraged to define themselves by them (White). The image of love is alluring and in
the western culture love is viewed as an essential ingredient of personal happiness. This group’s rhetorical vision that ‘love can create miracles’ also suggest that love allows people to survive. Love is seen as a reason to live by this group. Arguably, love is also a myth that allows Americans to avoid the problems of the real world by escaping into a private realm of fantasy (White).

A strong part of the allure of *American love* lies in powerful expressions of complete and unconditional devotion to the beloved. Romantic lovers promise undying love and the total sacrifice of their own lives for the sake of the other. In *House of Flying Daggers*, Mei sacrifices her life for Jin. This act may not be an American way of showing love. However, the idea behind the act is that love is a powerful expression that causes a person to do things out of an unconditional devotion. *American love* is subtly portrayed in these Asian films as being the only kind of love. These portrayals of love broaden our understanding of love. These Asian movies suggest that there is a likelihood of American influence in the demonstration of love that may go unnoticed due to the subtlety of these messages.

RQ 3: Does the presence of American imperialism in the Asian culture replace the Asian perception of love in the movies, *House of Flying Daggers* and *The White Dragon*?

The popular television series: *Married with Children* had a theme song which said that “Love and marriage go together like a horse and carriage; you can't have one without the other.” The words of this old song are relevant to the western contemporary issue of how love and commitment are related. Although not everyone agrees that ‘you can't have one without the other,’ few would disagree that love and commitment are of crucial importance in people's lives (Fehr, 1988). The subtle presence of American influence in the Asian culture did not replace the perception of love in these movies. The Asian perception of love seems to be deeply rooted in their culture. These movies appear to be geared at attracting a wider audience based on the American elements contained in it.
With the changing values of urban China, love and emotion are playing a greater role in relationships. Ideal ‘love’ has been an obsession in the Western world. Some cultures want to surpass human limitations and others try to maintain social equilibrium. The Asian culture is more cohesive, coherent, rigid and well-bounded and constrained. The Chinese are more traditional than Western people and have stayed loyal to their cultural norms. The Asian culture encourage consensus-building, teamwork, togetherness and we-ness, social regulation, structured socialization, peer loyalty, belonging through allegiance to a group. This culture employs numerous self-preservation mechanisms and strict hierarchy, obedience, discipline, discrimination. The Asian culture derives their sense of meaning, of direction by referring to frameworks which are outside them or bigger than them (Hatfield and Rapson). Godwin Chu (1985) says that the traditional Chinese self exists primarily in relation to the significant other. A Chinese woman and man measured the worth of themselves not by what their personality had achieved, but by the extent to which they had lived up to the behavioral expectations of the significant others as defined by the cultural ideas (Hatfield & Rapson).

Although the movies appeared to be influenced by American imperialism, the Asian culture has a certain way of loving which remained throughout the movies. There are many aspects of Asian love that remained in the movies such as Tian Yang asking Phoenix’s father for permission to marry her in The White Dragon. This only sometimes occurs in the Western culture. Based on House of Flying Daggers and The White Dragon movies, love occurred between individuals very unexpectedly. However, kinship, loyalty, family ties and education seem to play a more important role in the Asian society than love. The Chinese adage of ‘Love is blind, friendship closes its eyes’ proves true in this instance. It appeared that White Dragon’s Phoenix Black’s love of Chicken Feathers grew out of compassion for him than an attraction. The Chinese generally use the word love to describe an illicit liaison between a man and a woman (Hatfield & Rapson). The ‘Madam’ in House of Flying Daggers told Leo: ‘This is not the time for love.’ Asian men and women tend to underplay matters of the heart.
Love is complicated and perplexing. Americans use the expression ‘falling in love’ which suggests how precipitately the event can occur. Asians do not seem to ‘fall in love’ but rather ‘grow in love.’ Asian love is portrayed as one that is driven by companionship than sexual desire. The western perception of love is one that generally involves a mixture of emotional and sexual love. In the Asian media, its portrayal is one where more emphasis is on emotions than physical love. In *The White Dragon* there is no element or implication of sexual love in the movie’s entirety. The absence of physical love resulted in an excessive regard of the beloved as extremely precious. The Asian placed much emphasis on winning the love of the beloved that was motivated by great efforts.

Americans expect that falling in love would be the desirable or even a necessary prelude to a happy marriage (Shumway, 2003). In *House of Flying Daggers*, when the ‘Madam’ asks Jin for his hand in marriage to Mei. He was more concerned with the social class of Mei being the daughter of a king, and he being a humble swordsman than the love that was evidently there (although he also wanted to remain a bachelor). This reflected the Asian culture greatly, as the compatibility of mates for marriage is based on the social status of families. This concept has been ingrained in Asian culture since its existence (Shumway). “Culture affects how people define love, how susceptible they are to love, with which they tend to fall in love, and how their love relationships proceed (Braudel, 1984; Fehr, 1993; Hatfield & Rapson, 1996; Hong, 1986) (Kim & Hatfield, 2004, p.175).” Individualistic and collectivistic cultures differ greatly in the importance people in each culture place on love. Passionate love is highly emphasized in individualistic. In collectivistic cultures such as China, strong kinship networks and extended-family ties exist; passionate relationships are often viewed as negative because they disrupt the tradition of family approved and arranged marriages (Goode, 1959; Nyrop, 1985; Skolnick, 1996). Shaver, Wu, and Schwartz (1992) found that the Chinese thought that love was sadness and jealousy whereas Americans equated love with happiness. Many people in individualist cultures marry for love and believe that love is the most important aspect of marriage. On the
other hand, the Chinese culture marries through arrangement by family, relatives or friends based on similar socioeconomic background, which does not necessarily involve love (Kim & Hatfield).

Researchers find that culture exerts a profound power on how people view love. Culture affects cognitions, emotions, and motivations. In America there is a belief in the inherent separateness of people. Americans value individuality, uniqueness and independence. The Asian culture insists on the fundamental connectedness of human beings. The self is defined in relation to ancestors, family, friends and workmates. These cultures emphasize conformity, harmonious interdependence and attending to and fitting in with others (Hatfield & Rapson). As such, the Asian way of loving will remain because of its culture.

Impact on Society

The impact that this rhetorical artifact has had on society must be examined. The movies provide two memorable items: insights into a culture that was not previously available and impetus for future research to look at love in other cultures. This work has broadened our understanding of love. The use of fantasy themes and rhetorical vision in this artifact suggests that American imperialism has some impact on the portrayal of love in the Asian media. The impact of American influences is subtle and may go unnoticed. Individualistic cultures such as the United States tend to focus on personal goals. Collectivist cultures such as China push their members to subordinate their personal interests to those of the group.

Limitations & Conclusion

This study has only scratched the surface of imperialism. It provided an investigation of the imperialistic relationship between cultures through its media. This study was done for comparison rather than the effect of American imperialism in the media.

This study only applied some of the elements of Bormann’s Fantasy Theme Analysis. The element of saga, which depicts the ongoing story, was not discussed. I did not think that discussing the saga in the movies analyzed was relevant. My aim was to discuss the piece about
love. I felt that readers do not need to know where the drama started or where it ended. To discuss the saga, in my opinion would have distracted the readers from the purpose of the study.

An important direction for future research is the application of this research to actual relationships. That is, a longitudinal study of people’s perceptions of love in the US with another culture could be observed in relation to the media. An analysis could be performed to discover how concepts of love change across a life span in relation to the media’s current perception. Future studies could also examine other forms of mass media in the portrayal of *American Love* such as magazines, television programs, comedies, dramas and romance novels. Other cultures could be examined as units of analysis. Questions should be aimed at where similarities and differences in fantasy themes occur and why these themes were chosen for their audiences. It is quite possible that some groups may have different rhetorical visions but similar fantasy themes.

The use of movies could be examined to ascertain which rhetorical functions they provide as well as the degree of effectiveness needed to promote symbolic convergence and action in audiences. The current study suggested that symbolic convergence and fantasy have been utilized by the movies’ writers. The writers have invented themes that were aimed to maintain and recruit group membership as well as move audiences to act. The themes that were created for audiences have continued to influence ethnic ways of loving. Future careful analysis of this context should uncover further images that may support or conversely alter the movies’ rhetorical vision. Special attention should be addressed to further investigate if other fantasy themes emerge and their relationship with other fantasies and types.
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