MAGIC, POWER, AND KNOWLEDGE:
TECHNOLOGICAL REPRODUCIBILITY IN CHINESE AND AMERICAN ANIMATIONS

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ABSTRACT

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Whether we are considering Eastern or Western embodiments of technology, it is clear that in both cases artistic products and technology are inseparable. Their mutual correspondence is seen most clearly in the production of narratives that relate power to knowledge. What is the relationship between technology and the arts and culture, and how is this manifested in Chinese and American animated films that attempt to produce narratives of hope, dreams, and magic? This thesis seeks to understand the magic promise that technology offers within and across cultural and temporal locations.

Technology is a means of maintaining authority. Cultural discourse and the culture industry rely on the reproduction of technology to produce narratives and sublimely influence readers and viewers. In China, animated films produced in association with Disney, or those produced independently, seek to create a similar form of magic that returns the viewer to a process of searching for secrets concealed by the authority to formulate power structures. Globally, the Disney Enterprise has dominated an industry that distributes and spreads cultural myths that tell children about social interactions and that create magical dreams that are appealing to such an audience. Disney’s Mulan is a new world Mulan who transcends time and space but only with her last name added as Disney.

The present inquiry into technology reviews considerations of art and mechanical reproduction in culture by members of the Frankfurt School, including Walter Benjamin, Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer; my thesis examines the past to imagine a future of technological reproducibility by considering the effects of the culture industry on late-capitalism and popular culture by considering the works of Disney as read by Frederic Jameson and Jack
Zipes, among other scholars of Disney. Finally, through discussion on Umberto Eco’s semiotics and his popular novel *The Name of the Rose*, the thesis comes to an end in hoping that we as readers could decode the dominant discourses and authoritative ideologies manifested in magic and technologies in popular culture.
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INTRODUCTION

Technology is as ancient as recorded knowledge, and technological changes help to determine the ways that art is produced and reproduced in history. The English word *technology* is defined in *The Oxford English Dictionary* as “[a] discourse or treatise on an art or arts; the scientific study of the practical or industrial arts” (“Technology”) and in *Merriam Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary* as “the practical application of knowledge especially in a particular area”, “a capability given by the practical application of knowledge”, and “a manner of accomplishing a task especially using technical processes, methods, or knowledge” (“Technology”). Technology does not refer to a specific piece of tool or machine; however, *technology* is derived from the Greek word *tekhnologia*, which has its origins in *technē*, meaning “belonging to the arts, crafts or skill, and is also related to tactics” (Rooney 3). Since ancient times, technology was not only related to tools, but also had a lot to do with “skills, know-how, and the art of doing things; it was knowledge, actions and ‘gadgets’” (Rooney 3). Lewis Mumford’s book *Technics and Civilization* (1934) clearly relates these two terms:

No matter how completely technics relies upon the objective procedures of the sciences, it does not form an independent system, like the universe: it exists as an element in human culture and it promises well or ill as the social groups that exploit it promise well or ill. (Mumford 6)

In his book *The Technological Society*, the French philosopher Jacques Ellul, used the French word *technique* to mean both technology (machines and tools) and technique. He said,

It is the machine which is now entirely dependent upon technique, and the machine represents only a small part of technique…we could say not only that the machine is
the result of a certain technique, but also that its social value and economic applications are made possible by other technical advances. (Ellul 4)

Jacob Schmookler, the economist, also supported this understanding of technology in his book *Invention and Economic Growth*: “A method of producing a given good or service is a technique” (Schmookler 2). All of these definitions and explanations of technology unavoidably include knowledge and arts instead of confining it to specific tools or machines.

The meaning of technology as a “science of the mechanical and industrial arts” is first recorded in the west in 1859 (“Technology”). At that time, the Western industrial revolution was gaining momentum, and it was dependent largely on modified forms of technologies that had their roots in ancient Chinese culture. Whereas the Western industrial revolution came to the foreground with modernity (c. 1820-1940), Chinese industrialization took on several different formations and contributed to technological developments since before the Tang Dynasty (CE 618-906), extending back at least as far as 1000 BCE when the first abacus was used.¹

As Jacques Ellul claimed, “[t]echnique is essentially oriental” (27) and “the East was the cradle of all action, of all past and primitive technique in the present sense of the word, and later of spiritual and magical technique as well” (28). Joseph Needham, a British scientist, published in the 1950s accounts of Chinese technologies borrowed by Europeans but rarely acknowledged. His detailed list of the borrowed technologies accords with Ellul’s opinion. He claimed at the

very beginning of his article, titled “Poverties and Triumphs of the Chinese Scientific Tradition” that the West had been profoundly affected not only in its technical processes but in its very social structures and changes by discoveries and inventions emanating from China and East Asia. Not only the three which Lord Bacon listed (printing, gunpowder and the magnetic compass) but a hundred others—mechanical clockwork, the casting of iron, stirrups and efficient horse-harness, the Cardan suspension and the Pascal triangle…all had their effects, sometimes earth-shaking effects, upon a Europe more socially unstable. (30)

He explicitly investigated the “size and scope of technology transmission from East to West…often through the medium of Islamic North Africa and the Near East …sometimes easy to trace, or to postulate, sometimes more mysterious” (Gies and Gies 15). Some technologies like specific tools can be directly transported to the West, but some others, like an idea of what is art, may never be traced.

Whether we are considering Eastern or Western embodiments of technology, it is clear that in both cases artistic products and technology are inseparable. Their mutual correspondence is seen most clearly in the production of narratives that relate power to knowledge. What is the relationship between technology and the arts and culture, and how is this manifested in Chinese and American animated films that attempt to produce narratives of hope, dreams, and magic? This thesis seeks to understand the magic promise that technology offers within and across cultural and temporal locations.

Technology is a means of maintaining authority. Cultural discourse and the culture industry rely on the reproduction of technology to produce narratives and sublimely influence
readers and viewers. In China, animated films produced in association with Disney, or those produced independently, seek to create a similar form of magic that returns the viewer to a process of searching for secrets concealed by the authority to formulate power structures. Globally, the Disney Enterprise has dominated an industry that distributes and spreads cultural myths that tell children about social interactions and that create magical dreams that are appealing to such an audience. Disney’s *Mulan* is a new world Mulan who transcends time and space but only with her last name added as Disney.

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My thesis will have three parts that focus on Chinese and American animations respectively and a popular movie. Four Chinese animations will be a case study to show how technology, when referring to technological objects and gadgets, is used by authorities to maintain power by hiding it and denying access to it. Disney’s *Mulan* will be discussed in Chapter Two as a case study to show how Disney appropriates Chinese arts and through mechanical reproduction blind the boundary of high arts and low arts and maintain its dominant power by ‘Disneyfication’ of ancient Chinese *Mulan*. Eco’s *The Name of the Rose* will be
examined in Chapter Three and serve as a continual discussion of relationship between high arts and popular culture. With these case studies, the researcher hopes to expose the ideological function of mass culture by revealing how it is formed, in what form it is concealed and thus hoping that we need to be conscious of the ideology embedded in our current mass culture.
CHAPTER ONE

THE DREAM OF POWER THOUGH MAGIC AND SECRECY

Ancient Chinese technology is not only a myth to Westerners; it also contains magic power to Chinese people. The gourd, brush, lantern, and book that appear in four Chinese animations function as magical technologies in, respectively, The Secret of Magic Gourd, The Magical Brush and Ma Liang, The Lotus Lantern, and The Secret of the Heavenly Book. The magic power they perform, how that is kept secret and how they are fought for by different people indicate a hierarchical ideology and show how technology is related to magic and power control. “Magic is about controlling the uncontrollable world” (Luhrmann 154). Luhrmann further states that “[s]ecrecy is about control. It is about the individual possession of knowledge that others do not have, and from the psychological consequences of this privileged possession follow its effects in magical practice” (161). In the following discussion of the four animations, magic power carried by certain technology is used in a way by insiders (those who possess authority and control over knowledge) to control and manipulate outsiders (the masses who are being deprived access to knowledge): By making domination invisible and easier, the insiders keep technology inaccessible to outsiders.

The Secret of Magic Gourd (Bao Hu Lu De Mi Mi)

The Secret of Magic Gourd (2007) is the first movie co-made by Disney and a Chinese animation company. It is the first attempt by Disney to get into the market of mainland China by cooperating with China Film Group and Hong Kong Centro Digital Pictures Limited. The movie has one animated gourd and other real characters. It was made from a novel (of the same name, and written in 1958) by a famous Chinese contemporary author Zhang Tianyi. The novel has been republished many times since it was very much welcomed by Asian children. It was once
made into a movie by Yang Xiaochong in 1963 in China, which was a black-and-white movie because of the limitation of the technology at that time. Disney also made an English adaptation that was narrated and voiced by *High School Musical’s* Corbin Bleu.

The co-made movie starts with Wang Bao, the protagonist’s dream of being a pilot of a spaceship. The audience does not know it is a dream until he is woken up by his grandma, who brings him and the audience back to reality. He has to go to school, an activity which he hates a lot. He is not good at math or sports, so he feels frustrated at school. He doesn’t want other kids to laugh at him and he wants to be a top student but without putting in the necessary effort. Then one day he hears of the story of Magic Gourd told by his grandma to his sister. He laughs at her and says he doesn’t believe in that magic. That is just a kid’s story. However, one day he comes across a magic gourd while he is fishing at a lake. The magic gourd then uses its magic power to give to Wang Bao fish, food, and the experience of flying that he has long imagined.

The magic gourd functions as a piece of multifunctional technology to satisfy its master’s every need: an alarm clock, a calculator, and anything that can help him with his study; cleaning the room, cutting his nails, swimming, and so forth. It shares the chores and hard work, so that Wang Bao does not need to study hard but only needs to enjoy playing games. His friends used to think he was lazy and he denied that. By manipulating the magic power of the gourd, he actually becomes lazier. Also, he starts asking for more from the gourd when one day the gourd makes a mistake again on the math test. Wang Bao gets angry at it and he aggravates the gourd and it turns into a monster, which is the inner part of itself. Wang Bao decides to not depend on the gourd anymore but only on himself. He practices swimming more and finally he is able to realize his dream of winning the swimming contest and earns the respect of his peers. The gourd finally leaves and says he needs to learn more because he abuses its power to get things without
any effort. He needs to learn more of how to use its magic power. The last sentence from the gourd to Wang Bao is that it will call him in the future.

This is a movie full of technology. There is old technology like a book or a clock and there is new technology like a spaceship at the very beginning and a cell phone call at the very end. There is a lot of technology, although the theme is not “technology” but “magic”. In the movie, magic performed by the gourd is like technology; however, it is manipulated by modern people, even kids. It is not supposed to be like that. Technology should just help people to better their life but by abusing it, people have to suffer more serious consequences like Wang Bao does in the movie with the magic gourd.

However, the image of the gourd changes from the original one in the novel to the Disney one. The original gourd in the story is something that is evil and tempting because it fulfills a child’s dream of escaping from hard work. It uses its evil power to control a child and misleads him to make some mistakes or cheats for him so that he can avoid hard work. But the Disney Magic Gourd is a cute one. It is still tempting for kids to have the magic gourd, but it looks nothing like evil but is, in fact, appealing. It misunderstands its master’s order and thus embarrasses him although it tries to help him. It can use its magic to get him fish, food, toys, but it gets it all in a way that brings some trouble to its master. For example, he likes fishing, and he asks the gourd to bring him some fish. When he gets the fish and shows them to his friends, they laugh at him because he should not be able to get goldfish in a pond. When he wants to get the book to search for the information about fish, the gourd uses its magic to put the book into his bag and makes him feel like a thief. When he plays Chinese chess with another boy, he needs to capture minor pieces like the cannon or the horse (in Chinese to capture is pronounced as chi, meaning to eat), so the gourd misunderstands him and uses his magic to put several real wood
chess pieces into its master’s mouth! When he wants a full score for a math test, the gourd just transfers every word from somebody else’s paper to his master’s paper including her name, so the teacher finds out and criticizes him for cheating. Wrong doings like these enrage him and he finally decides to give the gourd up.

Thinking about the magic power of the gourd, we can easily relate that to the magic of the lamp of Aladdin, or the mirror in *Snow White* and the magic stick of a witch. However, what matters is not the technology itself, but rather how the technology is used. Technology itself is neither right nor wrong. That evaluation depends on how technology is used. It’s exactly the same for magic! For example, a good witch always uses her magic to help people like Cinderella to get the crystal shoes and find her happiness with the prince, while a bad witch uses her magic to make a poison apple to kill Snow White. The magic power itself is not to be blamed. Using it in a right way will bring help and happiness but using it in a wrong way will cause trouble and lead to failure or disaster.

Mumford, in his book *Technics and Civilization* said, “Magic, like pure fantasy, was a short cut to knowledge and power” (39). That statement relates fantasy to knowledge and power by serving as a bridge between them, and, as also remarked on in that same book, “magic was the bridge that united fantasy with technology: the dream of power with the engines of fulfillment” (40). However, real power lies in exact knowledge and science, not in the concoctions of magic. Nevertheless, magic initiates the search for knowledge and even helps in developing scientific techniques of inquiry.

The movie starts with Wang Bao’s fantasy: he is dreaming of becoming a pilot and he saves people’s lives by preventing a disaster in the universe. Everybody congratulates him and praises him. His fantasy of being a pilot and being looked up to by his peers, teachers, and
family drives him to search for something magical. However, in reality, he does not like math; he is not good at sports (both are compulsory to being a pilot). He is laughed at by his peers for making mistakes in front of everybody; he is pushed and pressured all the time by his grandma; his parents have many expectations for him. All this is the reality that he has to conquer. As Mumford states, “The dream of conquering nature is one of the oldest that has flowed and ebbed in man’s mind” (37). It is like when people see birds flying, they also want to fly. But they have to conquer the reality that they have no wings. Related to this is Wang Bao’s dream of conquering the reality that he is not good at math or sports and his nature of being lazy, his dream of winning something without working for it.

Similar to the dreams of conquering nature held by primitive people fighting with cruel natural conditions (such as no irrigation, no air-conditioning or heating systems in ancient times), Wang Bao’s dream also reveals the difficulty of overcoming one’s nature and reality. The difficulty for him is that he needs to study hard, take care of himself for his daily life, and grow up independently. Besides that, to be a pilot, he needs to build up his body well and acquire much more knowledge than he has acquired. The dream of becoming a pilot for a kid of 11 is so hard to achieve that he could only refer to magic. The magic gourd offers him the best way to conquer his nature and his reality. Like a wish-fulfiller, it brings him what he wants. It does not even need him to put in any effort; instead, he just needs to order it orally for it to give him everything.

Does the magic of the gourd finally lead to his dream coming true? Unfortunately it does not. The “shortcut” turns out to be useless in a literal sense. It brings him embarrassment, guilt, and total failure in his math exam. What makes him fail even with the magic gourd is his wrong intention of abusing its power. However, the gourd helps him for his self-quest process, which is
essential for every child. By giving him several good lessons by embarrassing him in front of others, the gourd teaches him that he needs to put in his own effort and depend on himself to achieve power, and this power must be earned through his own efforts. Superficially, the gourd only brings him trouble although well-intended; the truth is that the gourd brings him a crucial lesson that nobody can avoid in one’s growing-up process. It is his initiator. It enlightens him so that he may achieve self-reliance, something that all mature people must achieve.

Mumford agrees with Lynn Thorndike’s idea that “[t]he operations were supposed to be efficacious here in the world of external reality” by saying that “magic presupposed a public demonstration rather than a merely private gratification” (39). The public demonstration of the efficacy of magic is obvious in this movie. It involves everybody in the movie. When the gourd gets Wang Bao the fish, he shows them to his classmates to show off his fishing talent. They even bring them to his teacher. The gourd works as an alarm clock and also helps him brush his teeth, wash his face, organize his bag, and gets him ready for school which impresses his grandma a lot. The gourd makes a robot for him which is the envy of all his classmates. The gourd helps with his math in answering his teacher’s questions which wins him appraisal from his teacher. The gourd does not only gratify him but at the same time shows other people, in a very public fashion, its magic power by making its master seemingly successful.

What is also interesting in the movie about magic, technology and power is that magic brings him power temporarily and he is acknowledged by his peers but it does not offer him real power; this resembles Mumford’s idea of magic as a show or a public display to mesmerize and astonish others, therefore gaining publicity and recognition; on the contrary, real magic involves more than that. A real magician needs to know himself; he needs to go through a process of coming to understand himself in order to perform magic. Ashcraft-Novicki writes about
teaching manuals of magic: “knowing yourself is the first, and one of the most important steps in ritual” (12). Luhrmann, agrees with him in saying that “[s]elf-knowledge leads to self-control and to control of an outer world” (150). When Wang Bao, like a magician, has the magic gourd, he has to go through troubles and failures until he finally knows himself, and only then is he able to better handle the magical technology—the gourd, and fulfills his dreams.

Gourd in Chinese culture is symbolic of “blessing and fortune” because of the similar pronunciation of “Hu lu” (gourd) and “fu lu” (happiness and high rank). Gourd was related to good magical powers in its traditional sense not only because of the similar pronunciation. People use gourds as charms on a necklace with the hope that it brings them more fortune. Parents make a gourd for their children hoping that it protects them from sickness. In traditional folklores, some gods like the god of longevity has a gourd all for himself because of its durability when it is dried; some use it as a container for magic pills because of that, too.

It also symbolizes prolificacy because gourd has a lot of seeds. Another Chinese traditional animation about gourds is “Gourd Brothers”. In this animation, each gourd has its own magic power. One can see far; another can throw out fire; but they have the most power when they work together. Gourd symbolizes the importance of unity and only with the unity of them all can they use their magic power to defeat the most powerful evil.

In American culture, gourd has several symbolic meanings. It symbolizes water, was the “sacred emblem of the goddess of the earth and moon”, and power. In some places of America, it was the symbol of female and peace (Wilson 164). In sum, the gourd in history and in different cultures occupies a place of dignity and respect except for a specific period of time in Chinese history.
It was in 1950s when the author wrote this novel. It was a time when people criticized the “something for nothing” ideology which was prevalent before when the rich just inherited from their ancestors and were the upper class, thus enjoying power by exploiting the poor. The image of gourd symbolizes the container of the inherited fortune and people crashing it would be an opposing power to fight against the controlling class, the exploiting class. The author of Zhang Tianyi encourages children to depend on themselves to get their own success. That is when the image of gourd was described as kind of old, symbolizing the old ideology in Chinese history. It tempts people to do nothing but be lazy with things inherited, gained without their own efforts.

Wang Bao has to keep all the things as a secret as the name indicates “The Secret of the Magic Gourd”. Although he gets all things effortlessly, he cannot share with his friends the secret about the gourd. He can only show them the gold fish, but he can’t tell them how he got the fish. He brings the robot to class but he cannot explain to them how he has made it. That frustrates him a lot. However, magic has to be kept a secret because when it is known to people, the power one has from it disappears. Imagine if he were to tell everybody that he has a magic gourd and it is that which helps him gain everything, then he would not be envied by his friends. They would give all credit to the magic gourd. Keeping the gourd a secret helps him maintain authority over other kids. As Luhrmann says about magicians, “More important, by treating their magical knowledge as secret, they make it seem powerful and desirable” (140). If the secret is let out, their authority will depart with it.

**The Magical Brush and Ma Liang (Shen Bi Ma Liang)**

*The Magical Brush and Ma Liang* is a Chinese animated stop-motion film produced by Shanghai Animation Film Studio and released in 1954. It was a Chinese traditional story and was adapted by several authors, like Han Xing and Hong Xuntao, into similar stories. An
American writer, Molly Bang, wrote an English version called *Tye May and the Magical Brush*. It’s very similar to the Chinese story, almost like a translation of that story. The 1954 stop-motion film won the Outstanding Film Award at the Poland Warsaw International Film Festival in 1957, the Children’s Entertainment Films Award at the Venice, Italy 8th International Children’s Film Festival, the silver award at the Damascus, Syrian 1st International Film Festival Expo and several other awards.

Ma Liang is a boy who loves painting but he is too poor to have a brush. One day when he passes by a school and sees a teacher teaching kids painting, he asks the teacher whether he can have a brush to paint. The teacher laughs at him and refuses him because he looks like a beggar and like a poor kid who can’t afford to attend school. His dignity is hurt and he then starts practicing painting whenever possible. He uses sticks to draw birds in sand; he uses his wet finger to draw fish when he is fishing. His painting skills improve fast but he still has no brush. One night, an old man comes into his dream and gives him a paintbrush and tells him to draw only for the poor. He wakes up and uses the brush to draw a rooster and it comes to life! He realizes that it’s a magical brush and starts drawing practical things for the poor to have and use. Unfortunately, the local authority figure finds out about his magical abilities and puts him in prison and forces him to draw money for him. He refuses to do so, and, instead, draws a door on the wall and escapes with all the poor prisoners. He then continues drawing more useful things for poor people to use but once again is caught by another local authority. He asks a painter to use Ma Liang’s magical brush to draw him a money tree, but it does not turn into a real one. He asks Ma Liang to draw a money mountain for him and Ma Liang does but he also draws a sea and a ship to bring the governor there. When the governor gets onto the ship, Ma Liang draws
wind and high waves. The governor is drowned and Ma Liang gets his freedom and goes back to drawing more things for the poor.

The magic of the brush in the animation is that things drawn by it will come to life. Whatever Ma Liang draws, it will become real. But when another painter gets the brush and paints a money tree, it doesn’t become real. Why is that? The brush belongs to Ma Liang and it serves only its owner; additionally, the brush requires people to have good intent and a pure heart for the magic to manifest itself; it does not serve a person with an evil will. What Ma Liang draws with the brush is all that the poor people need to use for their work and that helps them survive, but what the governors and authorities ask him to draw is just money, which is fortune without any hard work. They just want the brush to fulfill their greed. Why doesn’t Ma Liang draw money for the poor people? Money can help the poor to survive. Why does he draw a cow to help an old man to plough instead of money to buy some food? Money will be spent and disappear; only skills and tools can help people in the long run, because they last for a long time. He knows that and he knows how to make good use of the magical brush. He always comes up with his own idea of what to draw. He helps make life easier for them, but not too easy, only to aid in their normal work. He uses the magical technology correctly, not to corrupt them or make them lazy but just to give them a hand. I would say the magic lies more with his skills of drawing and his good judgment and good intent, instead of solely within the brush itself. He has magic power to use technology (brush) to create more proper technologies (plough, wind power station…) instead of creating money, which is the end, evil result sought after by greedy people.

Ma Liang gets the brush in his dream but it is not without any effort. It does not come to him like the gourd comes to Wang Bao. Ma Liang has to practice a lot and acquire skills of
painting and only then does he get the paintbrush from a god. Before he gets the brush, he is already able to draw things that look real. He draws a rabbit on a rock and it is mistaken as a real one and a hunter tries to shoot it. He draws a chicken on the ground and it is mistaken as a real one by an eagle that flies downward to catch it. Magic in this story seems to be directly related to the brush, as the name of the story indicates: “The Magical Brush and Ma Liang”; however, the title also suggests a connection between the magical tool and its owner. Without proper use of a good owner, the magic of the brush never reveals itself.

This might also be the reason why he does not need to keep it as a secret, as different from Wang Bao’s magical gourd. Since the magical power of the brush won’t show if not properly used, there is no need to keep it as a secret. For people who can’t draw, the brush has no magic. For people who have an evil greedy heart, it won’t show its magic power either. In this story, the magic of the brush is closely related to skills of drawing and the good intentions of a pure heart. Magic comes from his dream, talents and his own hard work; it comes true with his self-development. One can say that the real magic is not within the brush; but is within Ma Liang himself. Like for most actual magicians, it’s not the magical wand that creates a bird, a horse or a cart; it’s their skills that needs to be practiced years to acquire perfection.

Compared with the magical gourd, Ma Liang’s paintbrush is more like a tool instead of a magical thing itself. The gourd has its own magical power and uses its magical power to help its master. It seems that its magical power causes him some trouble but in fact it brings him self-realization, and helps him for his initiation into adulthood (responsibility). Only after he experiences those troubles that he realizes the way to fulfill his dream is to depend on his own hard work. In contrast, Ma Liang knows this from the very beginning. He practices drawing all the time so that he finally gets a magical brush; without being able to draw things in a realistic
manner, he could never fulfill his dream of having a brush or even the ability to use the brush. He also knows that to draw people, the “final product” must not be money, because it is not a correct way of using magic; rather, he only draws what can be “used” to help people. People must self-realize, be self-reliant, like he has learned to be, because this creates a purer heart.

The image of brush in Chinese culture is like a pen in western culture. It was used for painting and writing. In ancient China, people didn’t have a pen or pencil like now; they used brush and ink to draw and write. Even now, Chinese people still use brush for both purposes. They use brush especially for calligraphy which is a typical art form in Chinese culture. Pen or brush is a way of outputting ideas. When it is in the hand of the authority, it is used for domination; when it is used in the hand of the dominated, it is used as rebellion. Whoever has it, has a certain power to control. Brush is a symbol for knowledge. As Luhrmann said, “All knowledge is a form of property, in that it can be possessed. Knowledge can be given, acquired, even sold” (137). Since it can be possessed, concealment of it “separates one group from another and one person from the rest…The difference can create a hierarchy, wherein secrecy cedes social power to those who control the flow of treasured information” (137). This explains why Ma Liang was refused when he asked for a pen or brush from a teacher. It is asking for access to knowledge. The teacher laughed at his demand because the authority always denies the poor people the access to school, to reading or writing. Knowledge to a magician is similar to that to an authority. Since “literacy has increased the opportunity for secretive concealment, it opens the way to manipulate prestige” (137). The literate authority is granted prestige because he has more knowledge, just like a magician who can “command the secrets hidden in the written text” (137) and also keeps poor people to be outsiders because “when insiders assert themselves as insiders, they have power over outsiders” (137). This is how the authority, as
insiders, keep poor people as outsiders, working for them and obeying them all the time. The poor people can never dare to think of rebelling against the authority if they never have the chance to be enlightened. What the authority does is to decrease the chance for the poor to gain the power to rebel.

The hierarchical social order and conflict between the exploiter and the exploited is shown very clearly in the movie. The governors have absolute power over all the poor people. They can put them into prison with any excuse. They make rules for their own sake. The poor people don’t even try to fight against them because they are still struggling for food and life. Without any power, they can do nothing. Magic is the only way for them to get power because they have nothing else to turn to for help.

Wealth and power are derived from knowledge, and those who possess the one are believed to have the other within their grasp. All who are able to establish authority over others and who prosper are believed to own some secret knowledge which explains their good fortune. (d’Azevedo 29)

Poor people are denied any access to knowledge or power because if they are granted that, they are harder to control. The authority of those in power is going to be threatened. The best way to keep the authority is to either keep the dominated not being able to afford knowledge or to keep it as a secret. What’s worse is what happened in Chinese history, which I will discuss concerning the animation The Secret of Heavenly Book. To keep power, the ancient Chinese authority took extreme measures to deny the access to knowledge from the dominated.

*The Lotus Lantern (Bao Lian Deng)*

*The Lotus Lantern* is a Chinese animation made by Shanghai Animation Film Studio in 1999. It was adapted from a Chinese mythical story of a young boy who splits a mountain to
save his mom. The young boy is Chen Xiang. His mom is a goddess who violated the law of the kingdom of the gods by falling in love with an ordinary human being. They gave birth to the boy Chen Xiang. But his uncle knows this and wants to punish his sister (Chen Xiang’s mother) for breaking the law. He kidnaps Chen Xiang, and threatens his mom to give back the magical Lotus Lantern and be punished. With Chen Xiang’s life being threatened, she has to give in and then she is kept alive beneath Hua Shan Mountain.

When Chen Xiang knows the whole story, he escapes from his uncle and decides to practice Kung Fu to save his mom. He gets back his mom’s Lotus Lantern and goes through troubles and difficulties in order to save her. His perseverance touches Monkey King who then decides to teach him Kung Fu. The young boy’s uncle, Er Lang Shen, is a cruel god, but with the help of the magical Lotus Lantern, Chen Xiang defeats him and uses an axe to split the mountain and free his mom.

The Lotus Lantern reveals its magic only once when Chen Xiang needs it to defeat his uncle and save his mom. It is said that it was from Nyu Wa, the goddess of sky-patching, in Chinese mythology. It can protect its master from monsters and ghosts. However, when Chen Xiang meets an impostor, it does not help him to fight. Chen Xiang still has to learn to grow up and learn to tell right from wrong from his own experience. He still needs to ask Monkey King to be his master and teach him Kung Fu. The Lantern does not give him what he wants directly as food, clothes, money, or Kung Fu. It does not offer anything to him. It seems to be just like a normal, pretty lantern. It is not magical until the last minute when Chen Xiang needs more power to defeat his uncle. It gives out its light and implants power into him and becomes united with him. The lantern shows its power through Chen Xiang and it’s only him who deserves its
magic and can reveal its power. It’s only when he undergoes what he needs to and only through his own power can he activate its magic power and get strong enough to defeat his uncle.

The lotus is a very important symbol in Asian countries like India and China and is also important in the religion of Buddhism:

In brief, it refers to the complete purification of body, speech and mind, and the blossoming of wholesome deeds in liberation. The lotus refers to many aspects of the path, as it grows from the mud (samsara), up through muddy water it appears clean on the surface (purification), and finally produces a beautiful flower (enlightenment). The white blossom represents purity, the stem stands for the practice of Buddhist teachings which raises the mind above the (mud of) worldly existence, and gives rise to purity of mind. (“General Buddhist Symbols.”)

As the lotus flower grows up from the mud into an object of great beauty, people also grow and change into something more beautiful and more successful. The symbol represents the struggle of life at its most basic form. In order to become powerful enough to save his mom, Chen Xiang has to go through a lot of hardship and finally gets magic power with the lotus lantern. For example, he, only a seven-year-old boy, has to escape from his uncle, a fierce god; he survives without his parents or relatives; he has no place to live, no shelter to stay at, no food to eat; he has to go find a master to teach him Kung Fu to fight against his uncle. He is in no sense competent to fight against him, but he does. All the difficulties which he goes through and suffers help him grow up into a strong brave young man capable of defeating his evil uncle.

Lotus also symbolizes somebody who goes through a hard time and now is out of it. The magic reveals itself in the lotus lantern at the last moment which indicates that Chen Xiang’s torture and sufferings are over and he is coming out of it and will defeat his uncle and free his
mom. Chen Xiang and his mom are talking about the lotus lantern at the very beginning of the movie, and the story develops based on it—how it is given up by his mom, where it is kept and guarded, how Chen Xiang gets it back, but it shows no magic at any time until almost at the end of the movie when it unites with Chen Xiang and empowers him. Unlike the magical gourd which shows its master its magic, or Ma Liang’s magical brush which can make things come alive, the lantern seems not fantastic in its magic show. Its magic is more mythical and hidden. Only with enough torture, can he who possesses the lantern acquire its magic power. This is related to Buddhist dogma. In order to be a real Buddhist, a follower must go through hardships and be tested by experiencing torture, struggle, fighting with evil, in addition to reading a lot of Buddhist scriptures. It is like the famous Chinese story “Journey to the West” in which Master Tang and his apprentices undergo 81 troubles during their journey to get the real Buddhist scriptures.

Lotus Lantern is also a symbol of power and authority in its religious sense and its political sense. The throne that Guan Yin (a goddess in Buddhism) sits on is in the shape of a lotus. In the movie, the lotus lantern should belong to a goddess in the upper world, but Chen Xiang’s mom decides to live on earth and be a normal human being and she still has it. Its magic is to keep somebody who has it safe from any other monster or ghost. His uncle could do nothing to his mom while she had the lantern. His uncle wants the lantern but no matter who has it, it should be somebody who belongs to the upper world because it has magic; it has power.

Thinking of the reason why Chen Xiang’s mom should be punished, we can see the clear line between the upper world of gods and that of ordinary human beings. The class difference is shown and there is no possibility for the two classes to be together. The gods in the upper world have supreme power over all ordinary human beings. All people on earth have to obey all the
gods and can’t offend them or even fall in love with them. Chen Xiang’s mom’s violation of the rule is that she falls in love with an ordinary human being and would sacrifice her immortality for him. There should not be any bridge between the upper world and the earthly world because it would threaten the gods’ authority. The reason for the existence of the upper world is to be worshipped, to give orders to be followed and to dominate. All roads leading to it, or that might lead to it, must be blocked.

*The Lotus Lantern* made in 1999 is much influenced by *The Lion King*, which was released in 1994. Although it’s a typical Chinese mythical story, it is very similar to Disney’s *The Lion King*. The minor characters Timon and Pumbaa in *The Lion King* are substituted by a little monkey in *The Lotus Lantern*; Simba’s best friend Nala is Chen Xiang’s Dai Mei who is also a girl; Simba who loses his father is as Chen Xiang who loses his mom; both of the antagonists are the main characters’ uncle. Although the stories are totally different with their different cultural elements and settings, most of the audience will easily think of *The Lion King* when watching *The Lotus Lantern*. Even the theme songs in the movie sound the same.

Chenxiang and Maliang are two characters who don’t really go through their initiation but are born to be perfect characters. They don’t change at heart but only change physically. They are born to be good boys, with loving hearts, knowing right from wrong, and acting bravely. They have self control and are more like adults instead of children. But comparatively, Wang Bao goes through his initiation with the help from the gourd. It’s more about his inner growth instead of physical growth. The magic of the gourd is to help Wang Bao realize his own value and depend on himself, while that function of magic is not needed in the other two stories.

*The Secret of the Heavenly Book (Tian Shu Qi Tan)*

The animation of *The Secret of the Heavenly Book (Tian Shu Qi Tan)*, also referred as
Legend of Sealed Book, Book Which Came From the Sky, and Tales about the Heavenly Book, was adapted from a Chinese mythical story called Ping Yao Zhuan (meaning Suppression of the Demons) in 1983 by Shanghai Animation Film Studio. It impressed children of the 1970s and the 1980s by its typical traditional Chinese painting, suspense, and humorous scenes in the story.

As the various names of the story indicate, it centers on a “Heavenly Book” guarded by Yuan Gong for about 3000 years in the Heaven. One day when all the gods go to see Jade Emperor, Yuan Gong opens the door and takes the book out to view, because of his curiosity. The book has 108 magic arts described within. Yuan Gong thinks it should be shared with ordinary people in the mortal’s world to benefit from the magic arts, so he steals the book, leaves Heaven, and carves the content on the wall in a mountain cave.

Three fox spirits spy that and they try to steal the book to learn the magic arts for their evil desires. Yuan Gong tells Dan Sheng (a name which means born from an egg, as he was), a boy to steal the book and practice the magic arts according to the book to serve people. He has a lot of fights with the fox spirits and finally defeats them and gets the book. Yuan Gong asks Dan Sheng to memorize the whole book before he burns it and he goes back to Heaven to receive his punishment for revealing holy secrets to the masses.

The Heavenly Book, since it is the magical object, will be focused on now. It is kept in a safe place in Heaven and is guarded by Yuan Gong for 3,000 years. Nobody including Yuan Gong has the right to read it. It is in a shrine guarded by two lions behind a door. When Yuan Gong tries to open the door, it gives out lightening to stop him. The inapproachability of the book makes it mysterious. The room looks like a library with many books on shelves but only the Heavenly Book is hidden behind a secret door. Yuan Gong works more as a guard than a librarian because his primary function is to protect the book. As said by Marian Green, “magical
robes, equipment and ritual books should always be kept under lock and key as power is built up in and around them and this becomes dissipated if things are just left about” (87). Even when Yuan Gong steals the book and carves it in a mountain cave, it is still hard to get to. When Dan Sheng goes there to “steal” it as told by his master, he encounters a storm and has to walk on the thin rope to get across the rock cliff within a limited time. When the fox spirits go there to steal the book, they are almost caught. The mountain cave is like the labyrinth in Umberto Eco’s The Name of the Rose, which nobody knows how to enter.² Even when Dan Sheng gets the copy, he cannot read it. It looks like an empty book! He gets more help from Yuan Gong, his master and he finally sees the words. Caitlin Matthews said in the book The Western Way: A Practical Guide to the Western Mystery Tradition that “the mystery guardian can only give the guidelines and keys to knowledge, not the actual knowledge itself, which is revealed to the initiate by personal experience and revelatory realization” (37). Yuan Gong, the guardian can only tell Dan Sheng where the Heavenly Book is but the boy has to experience troubles and fight with evil to finally obtain it.

A book symbolizes knowledge in both eastern and western cultures. Instead of spreading knowledge, old authority usually blocked the way to knowledge to the masses (as will be discussed later in the discussion of The Name of the Rose). “The concealment of magical names, words, images and gestures heightens the value of what has been hidden by implying that its power is too great to be lightly shared” (Luhrmann 142). In Chinese culture and myth, Jade Emperor has the supreme power over all the gods, the demons, and human beings. Only he has access to the Heavenly Book and only he dominates the heavenly world and the mortal’s world. The Heavenly Book therefore symbolizes absolute authority and power from the Jade Emperor.

² This will be addressed in chapter three in my thesis.
Consequently, it needs to be safeguarded from ordinary people. The reason for this is that the Jade Emperor needs to keep people from learning magical arts so that they won’t threaten his authority. Paul Huson says in his book *Mastering Witchcraft* that “witchcraft consists of knowledge, and knowledge brings power. Power shared is power lost” (27). For this reason, power can never be shared and access to knowledge must be blocked. All gods have their own strengths and perform specific magical arts but only Jade Emperor can master more than any of them and dominates them. Control over the Heavenly Book is a control of power that nobody should be able to utilize to overthrow the authority, and the power of magical arts; knowledge concealed within the Heavenly book possesses the power to control all worlds, both earthly and heavenly.

Books also often contain knowledge about religion, belief, and ideology, and such knowledge is a form of indirect power to control people. Authority would do more than just “hide” books to block the way to knowledge; they do more than that. For example, in Chinese history, “Burning of books and burial of scholars” happened in 213 to 206 BC to enforce the domination of Emperor Qin. His Chancellor Li Si suggested burning all classical books of the Hundred Schools of Thought except his own—the school of legalism. What is worse is that many alchemists were buried alive because they couldn’t make elixir for the emperor. For “burning of books”, the purpose is to suppress the freedom of speech and unify thoughts to support the Emperor Qin’s control over the people. Before Qin Dynasty, scholars of different schools had freedom to express their ideas and each school was developing more by competing and arguing for their philosophy. However, in order to unify a country, the Emperor felt it not enough just to invade and defeat it. He needed to unify people’s thoughts and make them believe in one thing. He demands all to burn the Classic of Poetry, the Classic of History, and every
ancient book except for Li Si’s book of Legalism. This is a worse case than hiding books in a labyrinth or in a secret mountain cave, and it arouses more rebellion because it is a reflection of absolutism. It worked well for establishing temporary domination but could not secure a more permanent dominion, as shown in the collapse of the Qin Dynasty in 206 BC, only seven years after the event.

The “burial of scholars” was actually the “burial of alchemists” because they could not make elixir for Emperor Qin. However, things like this happened many times for different emperors in ancient China and people used it as an idiom to refer to the massacre of intellectuals. They don’t kill the officials or ordinary people because they work for the authority and listen to him. Only the intellectuals constitute a threat to their domination by voicing their own thoughts. The way they express their thoughts and try to influence people with their thoughts leads authority to take actions like “burning books and burying scholars” or hiding books in a secret place to repress the threat. Books and intellectuals are the strongest enemy to the authority. Thus, either by keeping ordinary people from obtaining access to books or knowledge or by stopping scholars from spreading their thoughts by burying them, the authority tries to keep power over others.

Yuan Gong in the animation is depicted as a wise intellectual in contrast to other strong rude gods in heaven but he is the one who rebels against the Jade Emperor. Nobody except him tries to challenge his authority and steal the Heavenly Book. He talks gently, never argues, never tries to fight back physically, but his idea is rebellious. On the Heavenly Book, it says, “The rule of Heaven is selflessness; it should be passed on from generation to generation”, but since it is in the hands of the authority, nobody gets any chance to read it. How could it be selfless if the authority just keeps the book out of reach of everyone? Only Yuan Gong, the physically weak
intellectual dares to steal it and challenge the authority!

What Yuan Gong does with the book is not only steal it but, as said in the book, he passes it on to people. He, like most intellectuals, feels the need to spread the knowledge so that people can benefit from it. He asks the boy born from an egg to “steal” the book and he teaches him exactly what to do concerning the book. He tells the boy to learn the magical arts in the book and use them to help good people. His role in the animation is like the role of William in *The Name of the Rose*. He himself is depicted as a scholar; he carves the content of the Heavenly Book on the wall in a mountain cave (which is a high art form of Chinese culture—calligraphy); he functions as a bridge between the supreme authority and ordinary people, which the authority dislikes a lot and considers a threat. What happened to Yuan Gong is like what happened to the ancient scholars who were buried alive. He is deprived of any right and put in a prison in heaven, but he asks the boy to recite the content of the book and burn it to protect it from the manipulation of fox spirits.

The resolution of the whole story is that the Heavenly Book is burnt but the boy has already learned every magical art in the book and remembers everything in it. This resolution is overshadowed by the whole process of concealing it and the efforts to obtain it. In one aspect, the magic power of technological objects like the gourd, brush, lantern, and book is reflected by the secrecy of them. As Beryl Larry Bellman says about secrecy, “the contents of the secrets are not as significant as are the doing of secrecy” (16). Actually, keeping secrets sets a clear borderline “between the privileged who share it and those from whom it is hidden” (Bledsoe and Robey 205). Georg Simmel agrees in his book *The Sociology of Georg Simmel* that

*The sociology significance of the secret is external, namely, the relationship between the one who has the secret and another who does not. But, as soon as a*
whole group uses secrecy as its form of existence, the significance becomes internal: the secret determines the reciprocal relations among those who share it in common.

(345)

Book, as carrier of knowledge, is a way to magic and power. Gourd, brush, and lantern are all technological objects that carry the meaning of power with its magic. As in the animations of *Magical Brush and Ma Liang*, *The Secret of the Magical Gourd*, *the Magical Lantern*, and *The Secret of the Heavenly Book*, guarding the secret of the technological objects brings the owner magic power, rather than the technological objects themselves.

Guarding a secret is the way to maintain authority. The authority has to block the way to knowledge or magic in order to keep it. In *The Name of the Rose*, all the books are hidden in a labyrinth. The monks keep them there because books are knowledge, with which they can employ to govern people. They keep them in a secret place because they don’t want people to have access to knowledge to power and thus shake their control over them. In history, books were hidden or burned because they contain too much information about power. Maps were hidden because they tell people how to find jewelry, treasure or fortune. Authority is either related to money or knowledge as power, and it could be maintained only by guarding the way to it through secrecy.
CHAPTER TWO

WORK OF ARTS AND MASS CULTURE

Technology itself is a kind of art as defined before. How arts loses its aura and becomes a political device to dominate ideology is related to technology, especially in the mechanical reproduction of arts. Just as knowledge was kept a secret to maintain power in ancient China and medieval time, the aura of works of arts was maintained by its authenticity by being the only copy. However, the aura is lost when the works are copied and reproduced thousands of times for thousands of consumers, and thus the high arts became accessible to the masses. Since it is accessible to the masses, it becomes a source and way for the dominator to manipulate and control the masses. Therefore, the new way to dominate or influence the ideology invisible to the masses is to assimilate them with mass culture. Disney would be a typical example of the mass culture and the appropriation of the ancient Chinese story of Mulan would be a good example of how Disney reduces high arts into popular arts, to form and spread its own ideology.

Art and Aura

Art, at the very beginning, was not intended for most people but for only a small group of people as knowledge was concealed from the masses. A piece of art was something for people to worship in a religious sense. The original function of art was its ritualistic function. For this reason, the work of art is worshiped by people and thus has authority and control over them. Before the technology of photography was developed, it was nearly impossible to popularize a piece of art. It must be stored in a museum where people have to go and see it. The technology of photography then made it possible for everybody to have a chance to see the authoritative masterpieces of artists, although just the copy of them, and although they are not as authentic as the original.
Like everything people make, all could be copied or duplicated, including works of art, as said in the first sentence in the essay “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” by Walter Benjamin: “In principle a work of art has always been reproducible” (212). The technology of photography could actually do better than a manual copy. We could take the copy as a new thing. Benjamin said, “Mechanical reproduction of a work of art…represents something new” (212). So there is no real difference between the original one and the one copied because both could have their own aura. It breaks the limit of time and space which confine a specific piece of art.

Authenticity of work of art is related to its authority. As discussed by Benjamin, authenticity lies in the original but not in the reproduced because the reproduced is “branded as a forgery, the original preserved all its authority” (214). Although he agreed that every piece of art through mechanical reproduction could have its own aura, they still lose the authenticity and authority that the original possesses. “It is significant that the existence of the work of art with reference to its aura is never entirely separated from its ritual function. In other words, the unique value of the ‘authentic’ work of art has its basis in ritual, the location of its original use value” (Benjamin 217). However, with the technology of mechanical reproduction, a piece of art loses its ritual value because it makes no sense for people to worship one of millions of copies of a piece of art. “[F]or the first time in world history, mechanical reproduction emancipates the work of art from its parasitical dependence on ritual” (218). Although Benjamin’s discussion of technology in mechanical reproduction is more closely related to works of art, nevertheless it also embodies the relationship between technology and authority, with the work of art taken as the medium.
Since a work of art loses its authority by losing its authenticity when being duplicated, the function of it changes accordingly. Benjamin said, “But the instant the criterion of authenticity ceases to be applicable to artistic production, the total function of art is reversed. Instead of being based on ritual, it begins to be based on another practice—politics” (218). The mass production of works of art changes the way people accept art and its social function. People perceive the original one from an aesthetic perspective, but perceive a copy of the work of art as a consumer. It is no longer for religion or worship, but based on something more realistic and political. The masses are approachable to politicians. The relationship among technology, human beings, and art could be interpreted as follows: human beings use technology to reproduce works of art based on an original work of art so that they may, in some sense, possess it and obtain the previously unattainable as a consumer.

Benjamin took the technology of printing as an example which changed the situation that there were more readers than writers before, to the situation which now exists, that writers outnumber readers because of the technology of printing. Before, people read only masterpieces in literature; with the technology of printing, more and more readers have the chance to write and publish and thus become writers.

In current society, the technology of computers and the internet makes it easy for a reader to become a writer. Publication is easy for everyone just by clicking on a button and one becomes a writer just by replying to somebody else. With the development of technology, the way art or literature or anything of that nature is accepted totally differs. People can forge, can imitate, can change everything about a piece of art and make it to become a new work of art. Technology allows that which is copied the possibility to take on its own aura.
Now people can easily publish their own writings in newspapers, periodicals, or even online. It is not as hard as before to write a book. However, the easiness of publishing decreases the quality of writing. Things that are not yet polished could be published; things that are just emotional outlets could be published; where is the artistic or literary quality in such publications? We could be as positive as Benjamin in that technology helped the spread of literature, but we also need to know that technology blurred the boundary between high arts and mass culture by multiplying arts and making them easily accessible to people. Technology makes it possible for average people to also be artists and thus mass culture to some extent becomes the arts.

The technology of photography and cinematography is another example. It makes it possible for (almost) everybody to become a movie star. Not like drama, where people need to perform to an audience successfully at a specific time, now movie stars can practice and redo the scene many times until it is successful. They can repeat a motion many times till it is up to the highest standard. In this way, more people could be movie stars and become involved in film production more easily.

Benjamin said one might be worried about “that which withers in the age of mechanical reproduction is the aura of the work of art” or “the technique of reproduction detaches the reproduced object from the domain of tradition” (215). Aura exists in the original piece of art, but it also exists in the reproduced work of art, too. An original piece of art has its own history to show its “aura”, but a duplicated piece of art could have its own history, too. If we took a photo of a famous painting, and then edit it with Photoshop to exaggerate some kind of effect, it might have more aura than the original one. It will be different from the original one for sure, but still, the duplicated work has its own history and its own aura.
Take, for another example, Van Gogh’s *Sunflower* painting, which has its own aura. If a man sends a copy of this painting to his wife, and she puts it on the wall and keeps it for many years, then the dust on it, the faded color of it can also tell its history and show its aura. It could also be taken as a work of art. It has its own meaning to a specific person with its own aura, which is different from Van Gogh’s. With this example we can see more clearly that a work of art, although duplicated, may keep or obtain its aura but in a different sense. Its aura is not akin to high arts but more to mass culture. The borderline between high arts and mass culture thus becomes blurred.

In “The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception” by Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, it says, “…culture now impresses the same stamp on everything. Films, radio and magazines make up a system which is uniform as a whole and in every part” (33). Like discussed before, multiplication or mechanical reproduction increased the access to arts but at the same time erased or smeared the borderline between high arts and low arts, blending both together in mass and popular culture. Adorno said, “How formalized the procedure is can be seen when the mechanically differentiated products prove to be all alike in the end” (34). Zipes exemplifies Adorno’s idea with his comments on Disney animations. He made a list of common features of Disney animations and Disney characters and draws the conclusion that all those could only lead to one message: “What is good in the name of Disney is good for the rest of the world” (90). Isn’t this authority? Isn’t this domination? It just takes the most unnoticeable form to enforce its authority because it unifies differences and allows no choice for individuals. Audiences can only accept, passively accept, what they are offered. “The ruler no longer says: You must think as I do or die. He says: You are free not to think as I do” (Adorno 39), but the truth is that if you disagree, then you will be “rendered powerless”. Perhaps the ruler (he who
controls mass culture) now simply says: *You are free not to think at all. Just let me do the thinking for you. Enjoy the featured movie.*

Adorno says “In the culture industry this imitation finally becomes absolute. Having ceased to be anything but style, it reveals the latter’s secret: obedience to the social hierarchy” (38). There is nothing like “art for art’s sake” anymore. It is all used to dominate. “Today aesthetic barbarity completes what has threatened the creations of the spirit since they were gathered together as culture and neutralized” (38). There is no high art to aesthetically guide people. Technology and mechanical reproduction transform everything into one—culture industry.

Generally, Adorno is more pessimistic than Walter Benjamin. For him art’s role “was to manipulate listeners and viewers to identify with stars, to take pleasure from such identification, and to see power through identification with star commodities” (Zipes 113). In this fashion, mass culture has already become a kind of technology itself. This is how mass culture exerts its authority over people without their realizing what is happening to them. In a specific sense, Disney, like the general culture industry, has been trying to “control children’s aesthetic interests and consumer tastes” (91). Zipes said, “All of the Disney Studios fairy-tale films focus on synchronization, one-dimensionality, and uniformity for the purpose of maintaining the Disney brand name as champion of entertainment” (93). The heterosexual happiness and marriage, the adorable and mischievous characters, and its unique drawings of those characters are never changing in Disney because this is what the mainstream culture wants.

Technology, as basic as books, maps, or clocks in medieval times, has authority to control and influence people. It seems that they were invented to help or serve people but the truth is that they have always been controlling people when serving them. We use clocks to know time, but now we have to follow the timetable. What’s worse is that technology, especially
mechanical reproduction, changes the function of a work of art and blurs the borderline between high arts and mass culture, unifying art by way of popular culture; in this case, aesthetics loses its true value, becoming increasingly related to commercialization. The culture industry hides its authority but internalizes its domination over the masses by the fusion of all arts into one work. As Zipes said in his comment on Benjamin’s The Storyteller, if Benjamin were alive today, “he would have looked for gaps and traces of hope in the culture industry and one-dimensional societies that might enable people to distribute and share their experiences to undermine conformity” (140). Hopefully, we can have real creative storytellers as Zipes hopes for to “enter the culture industry to subvert it, or at the very least to question and challenge its machinations” (141).

Disney’s Culture Industry

Children and adults alike identify with a Disney movie and thus, they are willingly controlled by its aesthetic standard. Disney has been successfully using animation technology to reproduce movies, through which it tells children what is good or bad and sets standards for everything for children and controls them aesthetically and ideologically.

Jameson points out more problems caused by technology in his essay “Postmodernism and Consumer Society”. He discussed the “effacement in it of some key boundaries or separations, most notably the erosion of the older distinction between high culture and so-called mass or popular culture” (187). He also said, “This is perhaps the most distressing development of all from an academic standpoint, which has traditionally had a vested interest in preserving a realm of high or elite culture against the surrounding environment of philistinism…” (187). But now it is difficult to draw a line between high art and commercial forms of it. This is caused by
technological developments including printing, photocopying, and film making, but certainly not limited to them.

Pastiche is one of the characteristics in the erosion of high arts and mass culture. Defined by Jameson, *pastiche* is:

Like parody, the imitation of a peculiar or unique, idiosyncratic style, the wearing of a linguistic mask, speech in a dead language. But it is a neutral practice of such mimicry, without any of parody’s ulterior motives, amputated of the satiric impulse, devoid of laughter and of any conviction that alongside the abnormal tongue you have momentarily borrowed, some healthy linguistic normality still exists. Pastiche is thus blank parody, a statue with blind eyeballs. (1849)

Pastiche is not satirical, but rather it is a neutral reproduction of an original. It is like the mechanical reproduction of a piece of art by photocopying it, but it has some changes which make it approachable to the masses. Every piece of art is pastiche because, as Jameson says, “the writers and artists of the present day will no longer be able to invent new styles and worlds…only a limited number of combinations are possible” (1851). In literature, they either change the protagonist or part of the plot, but they keep copying things from the original. As Adorno said, “The details are interchangeable” (34). The intertextuality between high arts and pop culture prevails in every form of culture: *Lion King* with *Hamlet*, *Psycho* with the original Aeschylus’ *Oedipus* story, and so on. Technology seems to multiply art by making copies, but mass reproduction blurs the boundary between high arts and mass culture, rendering them mimetically identical—that is to say, different through their repetition, and necessarily intertextually referential. For example, Disney’s appropriation of the Chinese *Ballad of Mulan,*
put forth in the 1998 film, *Mulan*, bridges high and low art to transfer or translate the ancient Chinese narrative into a modern American commodity.

The *Poem of Mulan* (*Mu Lan Shi*) is passed down from ancient China in the forms of a poem and an opera, both being the form of high arts. The original form was a poem composed in the fifth or sixth century A.D. anonymously in the Northern Wei dynasty in northern China. (Han 68) It was printed in “the *Collected Works of the Music Bureau (Yuefu Shiji)*, an anthology compiled by Guo Maoqian in the twelfth century” (Kwa and Idema xiii). Not only the heroic figure of Mulan but also the beautiful rhyming and rich rhetoric helped it to be spread widely. The first stanza as cited below is an English version in Hans H. Frankel’s *The Flowering Plum and the Palace lady: Interpretations of Chinese Poetry*.

Tsiek tsiek and again tsiek tsiek, (*Ji ji fu ji jì,*
Mulan weaves, facing the door. (*Mu lan dang hu zhì*)
You don’t hear the shuttle’s sound, (*bu wen ji zhu sheng*)
You only hear Daughter’s sighs. (*wei wen nu tan xì*)
They ask Daughter who’s in her heart, (*wen nu he suo sì*)
They ask Daughter who’s on her mind. (*wen nu he suo yì*)
No one is on Daughter’s heart, (*nu yì wu suo sì*)
No one is on Daughter’s mind. (*nu yì wu suo yì*) (lines 1-8)

As we can see from the first stanza, it begins with onomatopoeia for the sound of either the shuttle working or Mulan’s sighing. Then it follows three repeating parallel structures. Parallel structure and repetition are used a lot in the poem which makes it easy to read, remember, and recite. The rhyming /i:/ gets repeated seven times in the first stanza (in the Chinese version).
Guo 38

Croce believed that all art is an expression of the artist’s emotion and is therefore ultimately ‘lyrical’—the intuition of an image... Croce even went so far as to affirm that a critic’s primary task was to distinguish between ‘poetry’ and ‘non-poetry’ in a work, and Croce defined ‘non-poetry’ as all elements not reflecting the perfectly achieved expression of the lyrical essence of art. (Bendanella 11)

Although we don’t need to go as far as said about poetic forms stressed by Croce, we cannot deny the beauty of the rhyming pattern in Poem of Mulan. The beginning of the first stanza depicted a Mulan in her deep thought because she was worried about her father. However, in Disney’s Mulan, she was depicted as a worriless naughty girl who was busy preparing for bride selection. She was sloppy with her dress; she made fun of her dog who was jokingly supposed to help her with the chores; she was careless to serve tea to her father; and she was forced to dress up to “bring honor” to the whole family. All this depiction of Mulan as a tomboy gave a hint that Mulan would go to war not for her father’s sake but for herself. She was described as a rebellious “abnormal” girl from the very beginning of Disney’s Mulan, not the traditional obedient Chinese daughter as depicted in most Chinese adaptations of the poem.

Besides the most influential Poem of Mulan, there was a play The Female Mulan Joins the Army in Place of Her Father (Ci Mulan ti fu congjun) written by the late Ming dynasty man of arts Xu Wei (Kwa and Idema xvii). Then different adaptations of the poem into drama and prose followed and blossomed in the Qing Dynasty. Unlike Xu Wei’s version, which is more entertaining and dramatic, The Story of the Loyal, Filial, and Heroic Mulan (Zhongxiao yonglie Mulan zhuan) ended with Mulan’s suicide to show her sincerity. In the eighteenth century, Yong’en, the Manchu prince, expanded the story to a forty-scene legend (chuanqi) titled A Couple of Hares (Shuangtu ji), and his version led to more vernacular novels like An
By the end of the Qing Dynasty, more playwrights adapted Mulan because of the events of the Revolution in 1911. Chen Xu published the first sixteen scenes of *Hua Mulan, a chuanqi* in 1897 and all of them by 1914. (xxiii) From that time on, “Mulan’s references to her political action become more strident as she enters the early twentieth century” (xxiii). In 1903, a Peking Opera *Mulan Joins the Army (Mulan congjun)* was published with emphasis on Mulan’s patriotism. It became a very popular Peking opera starring Mei Lanfang (1894-1961) in 1917, who was the most famous with playing the role of *dan*—the female lead in an opera. In 1939 *Mulan Joins the Army* was produced by Shanghai’s Xinhua Film Company. The playwright Ouyang Yuqian also wrote it as Guilin Opera (Guiju) in 1942. (xxix) Through the twentieth century to the twenty-first, the *Poem of Mulan* was adapted in opera and film versions over the years. Mulan became popular in a Hong Kong film, was rewritten by Maxine Hong Kingston as *The Woman Warrior: A Girlhood among Ghosts* in 1989 and then adopted by Disney in 1998. Among all these opera, film, and novel versions, Disney’s Mulan “plays the most significant role in Mulan’s name recognition to popular audiences in the West” (Lan 235).

Even many people living within Chinese culture are not able to enjoy the versions of Opera *Mulan*, but we cannot deny that the opera is the quintessence of Chinese culture, either in the form of Peking Opera, Henan Opera, or Guilin Opera. It is high art. Its aura lies not only in the story itself but also in the poem-like lyrics and on-stage performance. Its aura lies in the heroic woman Mulan who would rather sacrifice herself for her father out of filial piety, which is the second of the most basic five principles of ancient Chinese morality. However, with the
technology of film-making and animation, Disney appropriates the story and makes it internationally popular, deducing it to a typical mass culture product.

It is common practice for Disney to take established narratives and what was once considered high art and then popularize it. For example, the princess narratives are largely recorded first in medieval tales, and then translated to stories for children by the Grimm brothers and Hans Christian Andersen. By and large, the Disney Empire could be, and has been, taken as a symbol of mass culture because of its nationwide popularity and overseas influence. Its style of animation has become a kind of standard for all animated films. However, in this case, the translation of an ancient poem that became an opera into an animation takes on a different form within the empire of Disney’s popularization of culture. One might ask, is it good, or appropriate, that the Poem of Mulan is made into such a popular movie? It seems good that a Chinese national story should be spread internationally, but many critics criticized Disney’s Mulan as not remaining loyal to the original.

Joseph M. Chan, a professor and former director of the School of Journalism and Communication at The Chinese University of Hong Kong, made a concrete analysis of transculturation as reflected in the Disneyfication and globalization of the legend Mulan in his book In Search of Boundaries: Communication, Nation-States and Cultural Identities.

Mulan is not genuinely Chinese, nor is it all American. It has become a transcultural text: a combination of old and new, traditional and modern, East and West, collectivism and individualism, female submissiveness and women’s liberation, filial piety and reciprocal love between father and daughter. (241) Sheng-Mei Ma agrees in the book The Deathly Embrace: Orientalism and Asian American Identity that Disney’s Mulan “re-orients”. She said,
Just as the global village is becoming complex daily, Disney offers simplistic visions of the exotic other—China—to allay the audience’s fear. In an effort to re-orient (pun intended), rather than dis-orient, *Mulan* supplements Orientalist fantasies with contemporary youth culture. (127)

In Disney’s *Mulan*, it is not important whether Mulan is like a Chinese woman or a western woman; what matters is that Mulan is no longer a national hero as she was, but becomes a globalized, brave, independent, happy, and popular heroine. This is a typical Disney female character, which seems to possess certain universally accepted and inspired qualities. As said by Ma,

Mulan’s hidden last name, however, is Disney. Mulan Disney now joins the lineage of animated female characters, all of them with suppressed surnames—Snow White, Cinderella, Sleeping Beauty, Jasmine in Aladdin, Pocahontas, Belle the Beauty, and others. Although endowed with various cultural and national identities, they are all, by blood, children of Disney. (127)

Mulan’s national identity is not important; her pursuit of individualism is common for both Chinese and western girls; neither her behavior nor her decision tells her nationality. Her identity as a filial daughter (Chinese), a rebellious feminist (American), her bravery in the battlefield (male), and her pursuit of love and happy marriage (female), are all unified in one typical Disney character. Zipes says in his book *Happily Ever After: Fairy Tales, Children, and the Culture Industry*:

In fact, the success of the Disney fairy tale from 1937 to the present is attributable not to Disney’s uncanny ability to retell nineteenth-century fairy tales with originality and uniqueness but to his intuitive genius, which made use of the latest
technological developments in the cinema to celebrate mechanical reproduction in animation and to glorify a particular American perspective on individualism and male prowess. (90)

In the movie *Mulan*, Disney uses the technology of animation to appropriate a piece of high art and popularizes it by unifying contradictory identities into one female character to make her to be a Disney Mulan: she is neither a traditional Chinese one, nor a modern western one. To some extent, Mulan is a product of Jacque Ellul’s idea of technological society as the current society, in which an autonomous technology is in process of taking over the traditional values of every society without exception, subverting and suppressing these values to produce at last a monolithic world culture in which all non-technological difference and variety is mere appearance. (John x)

Although Ellul’s idea of technological society was written in 1964, it is still true in the current situation, proper to Disney’s appropriation of *Poem of Mulan*. Mulan became a world Mulan. She is like any of Disney’s female characters, going through her own problems, although kind and brave and sometimes rebellious, who finally will have a happily-ever-after ending. Her national identity is blurred; Chinese traditional culture with stress on filial piety is overshadowed by quest for individualism. What Disney is doing, as a representative of mass culture, is to win more audience by covering over distinctions and at the same time revealing more similarities. By unifying high arts and low arts, they render no chance for the masses to judge, to choose, to think by themselves, or to create. The authenticity and authority get lost in each piece of art and mass culture has taken on a position of dominance over us.
CHAPTER THREE

SEMIOTICS AND THE NAME OF THE ROSE

Magic and technology function together to create dominant authority over the people who are subject to their power. When magic and technology are in the hands of those who work to achieve authenticity, then, as we have seen in the Chinese tales, the possibility for change is evident. Whether magic is presented as inherent in the person using it, as it is in The Magical Brush, or whether magic is central to the form of technology that it embodies, as in The Magic Gourd, the ability to read the magical power is evident of access to power itself. By finding different ways of protecting, coding, or hiding the magic behind the authoritative systems, the process of reading and the uses of magic in technology become forms of control.

In Adorno and Horkheimer’s view, the culture industry is one way that capitalism maintains control over the masses, thus supporting its own authority. In one view, Disney’s appropriation of narratives that use magic continues to illustrate the way that authority and control are hidden from the masses. However, the Chinese animations that reproduce for a public ancient stories, and which bring high art and low art together through their accessible forms, help to show how Disney films are indebted to ancient and Eastern versions of myths. By taking the magic of narratives of strength and dream fulfillment, the Disney narratives work with the Chinese animations to produce a new form of authenticity that occurs through an awareness that the secret or the magic that we strive for, is often within us. In this way, the common person becomes a possible authority, and mass culture has the potential to liberate instead of alienate or oppress.

Although it is not technically an animated film, The Name of the Rose presents characters who are animated in ways that resemble the figures in cartoons. Their flat character and their
exaggerated qualities lead them to read and view like cartoon figures. William, as a detective in the story, is depicted as a heroic figure such as Superman or Iron Man. Although he does not transform nor has any weapon armed or special costumes to gain power from, he is armed with “knowledge” and “authority”. His coming to the Monastery exposing the mystery is like a stereotype of story with a hero who exposes a secret plot to the mass. Furthermore, it is like a story of quest for secrecy and magic. His persistence in front of difficulties or frustrations and his inhuman, supernatural abilities (not physically but mentally) both constitute a cartoon figure of heroes. The monks in the Monastery are depicted very much exaggerated. The monk who is burned to death is like a devil in appearance. His ugly face, long nose, bloody eyes, and humpback make a cartoon figure whose ugliness is exaggerated to extreme. Besides, he plays with rats, which reminds audience of evil witches in cartoons. The other monks are also depicted as super static with no laughter allowed in the Monastery even in a funny situation. The fat monk Berengar of Arundel is also a typical cartoon figure exaggerated with his appearance and behavior. There is always a fat lumpish character who makes stupid mistakes in most cartoons, and the fat monk plays that role when he tries to hide the book and steal William’s glasses and hide it. Although the peasant girl from the village is not dressed up as Snow White or Sleeping Beauty, she is like them in the way that she keeps silent and does not fight back, waiting for her Mr. Right to save her.

We have seen in this thesis how Adorno and Horkheimer reject mass culture as anti-culture. One of the main figures who helped to develop and popularize semiotics, Umberto Eco, on the contrary, believes that the formula “Apocalittici e integrati” is not a clash but he claims that “apocalyptic texts on the demise of civilization as we know it actually ‘constitute the most sophisticated product on offer for mass consumption’ and believes that the two seemingly
opposed attitudes are, in reality, quite complementary” (48). Eco’s “Philosophers in Freedom”, a little pamphlet with cartoons and verse was to “‘liberate’ philosophy from its overly serious character and to apply laughter to its sometimes all-too-ponderous posturing” (Bondanella 17).

He didn’t despise popular culture and had special preference to humor and laughter, which should be classified as “low-brow” by the Frankfurt school. Peter Bondanella in his book *Umberto Eco and the Open Text* says that,

[I]t is ultimately Eco’s sense of humor that prompts him to apply serious analytical tools usually with ‘low-brow’ mass culture, such as cartoons, advertising, television programs, James Bond novels, and Superman comics. The alteration, or, more accurately, the contemporaneous composition, of erudite and theoretical writings, on the one hand, and less weighty, apparently frivolous books, on the other, will characterize each important phase with humor, parody, and pastiche constitutes one of the fundamental traits of his way of theorizing about literature, culture (both ‘high’ and ‘low’), and the world around him. (18)

Eco’s most famous novel *The Name of the Rose* was the bestseller after its release. He, himself, as a philosopher and theorist, exemplified his theory about semiotics in his popular novels, such as *The Name of the Rose*, which was itself then adapted into a film in 1986 by French director Jean-Jacques Annaud, starring Sean Connery.

The intricate literary games (enunciation squared) played by Eco in *The Name of the Rose* are fascinating, for they aim at every instance at a postmodern bridging of the gap between the erudite, academic, philosophical reader and the avid consumer of best-selling pulp fiction and detective stories. In the process, Eco not only
manipulates literary tradition in entertaining ways, but he also incorporates academic scholarship into his fiction as well. (Bondanella 106)

Different audiences attracted to *The Name of the Rose* “ranging from the great mass of readers of bestsellers to the most serious of intellectuals and scholars” illustrates Eco’s use of semiotics to bridge his approaches to different forms of culture. (95) By combining an esoteric tale of a secret text with the question of the secret of the book and the authority of the church, *The Name of the Rose* creates a mysterious scene in which the book itself is a form of technology that brings knowledge into culture through a magical process. Further, Eco’s novel and the film version illustrate how textual secrets, in this case, a fictionalized Aristotelian treatise on laughter, may complicate and subvert the institutional authority of the church. In this way, *The Name of the Rose* is a good example of a text that bridges technology, magic, and their potential to create change in traditionally authoritative positions.

*The Name of the Rose* is a story which took place in an Italian Benedictine monastery in the north of Italy in 1327. William, a knowledgeable professor, along with his apprentice, Adso, go there for some political reasons but are greeted with a series of mysterious murders which have recently occurred in the monastery. They find a secret, labyrinth medieval library in which the monastery leaders have hidden all their most valuable books. William uses these books, his knowledge and Aristotelian logical deduction to explore the circumstances surrounding the initial person’s death at the monastery, but in the end he finds that an old blind monk from Spain, Jorge of Burgos, is the evil mind behind the subsequent murders. Jorge’s incentive to the murders is to conceal the lost book of Aristotle on comedy. William and Adso finally escape from the fire that engulfs the monastery and its library.
The Name of the Rose and Power Concealment

To relate to the discussion in Chapter One about power and knowledge, the movie The Name of the Rose is a good example to discuss medieval technology as authority. Books are the best technology to maintain authority in medieval times. They can give people more power over others. In the Chinese animation The Secret of the Heavenly Book, Emperor Jade asks Yuan Gong to guard the Heavenly Book, while in this movie the monks hide books in the labyrinth so that no average person can have access to read them or interpret them. In this way, they all keep their authority of interpretation and maintain their authority of domination. People who have knowledge have control over those who have not. (It is even true in current society to some extent, like teachers over students; physicians over patients; employers over employees, just because of the difference in the amount of knowledge they hold in a specific field.)

The protagonist in the movie, William, also has his authority built upon his knowledge and interpretation, which seems to solve some mysteries in the film and helps build up his authority. He interprets things on the basis of his knowledge and his logical deduction. From his eagerness to find those hidden books and his delight in finding them, we can tell books are the source of his knowledge and power. He seems to be an authority not only to his apprentice but also to everybody in the monastery and even to the audience like us, the viewers. As audience, we follow his logical deductions of the mysteries; we trust him as his apprentice does, because he gets access to those books and he seems to be knowledgeable and almighty. He is an authority.

William is called professor in the movie. The title itself is a kind of technology which renders unto him authority. People don’t need to know who he is but when they know he is a professor, they know he is an authority. Also his apprentice calls him Master, which also obviously indicates his authoritative position. And he is the only monk among all of them to
question the church’s authoritative figures. Many of the monks look up to him for so doing and this admiration also gains him authority. Another example of technology as maintaining authority could be seen in the scribe in the movie. With no modern technology as printing or photocopying, the scribe himself is the technology because he has access to all the books, to knowledge, and the chance even to change the authenticity of knowledge. He has more authority than anybody else because he has paper and pen and ink in his hands, which are the basic but important technologies in the medieval period. With them, he can read the authentic work of art but change it at his will, although he might not choose to do so.

The secret library is also an important authoritative place in the movie—not everyone has access to the library because it has books which are not supposed to be read by everyone. It is not like a modern library which is open to the public. It is like the library found in another movie called *The Librarian: Quest for the Spear*, where the librarian is the only one who has access to this top-secret library and to authentic works of art and technologies, like the *Mona Lisa*, Pandora’s Box, and so on. This relates back to the importance of books which grant people knowledge and power and authority. This library is impossible for the average person to locate. It is built high up and it is a labyrinth which just makes it impossible for people to find those authentic books. In general, medieval technology could not be compared with modern technology but in its simplest forms technology still maintained its authoritative power.

**Semiotics and Popular Culture**

It might not be Eco’s purpose to show authority by keeping knowledge as secret in his novel *The Name of the Rose*; however, his combination of semiotic theory with its practice in this novel is a big step forward; it shows the dependency between high culture and mass or popular culture in the postmodern society. Eco is a representative of the culture left, “clearly
believing in the necessity of incorporating the aesthetics of popular culture into contemporary intellectual discourses” (Bondanella 41). Thinking of aesthetics, we always unavoidably relate it to so-called high arts; however, Eco believes that there is aesthetics in popular culture and it should be seriously analyzed. In order to achieve his purpose, Eco accepts “the basic Marxist premise that culture does, indeed, reflect the ideology of the class with hegemony over society” (42). He gives a definition of “work of arts” in Apocalyptic and Integrated Intellectuals as follows:

Any work of art can be viewed as a message to be decoded by an addressee. But unlike most messages, instead of aiming at transmitting a univocal meaning, the work of art succeeds precisely insofar as it appears ambiguous and open-ended. The notion of the open work can be satisfactorily reformulated according to Jakobson’s definition of the “poetic” function of language. (Eco, The Open Work 195)

Eco’s definition of a work of art ignores anything related to high or low taste, but relates to a message, any open message that could be referred to as semiotics and open to different interpretations. The indefinite and unclear meaning of the message is the core value of a work of arts. The last sentence delivered by Adso in The Name of the Rose is “stat rosa pristina nomine, nomina nuda tenemus” meaning: “yesterday’s rose endures in its name, we hold empty names” (Eco, The Name of the Rose Including the Author’s Postscript 502). The Preface also sheds light on the reason behind the title:

The idea of calling my book The Name of the Rose came to me virtually by chance, and I liked it because the rose is a symbolic figure so rich in meanings that by now it hardly has any meaning left: Dante’s mystic rose, and go lovely rose, the Wars of the Roses, rose thou art sick, too many rings around Rosie, a rose by any other name,
The title rightly disoriented the reader, who was unable to choose just one interpretation; and even if he were to catch the possible nominalist readings of the concluding verse, he would come to them only at the end, having previously made God only knows what other choices. A title must muddle the reader’s ideas, not regiment them. (Eco, *The Name of the Rose Including the Author’s Postscript* 506)

*The Name of the Rose* is not only about technology and power; it is more about freedom and respect for difference. Eco realizes that the world would not be very friendly to thinkers like him who believes that “no one person, church, government, or philosophy stands as the guardian of any authentic orthodoxy” (Bondanella 124). Although the rose could symbolize anything without a fixed truth, Eco realizes that “the semiotic principle of unlimited semiosis can also imply an expansion of human liberty” (125).

Since he generally follows structuralist principles, Eco refers to a work of art as a “system of relationships” containing stylistic elements defined by him as *stylemes*:

A *styleme* that has been abstracted from its original context and inserted into a context whose general structure does not possess the same characters of homogeneity and necessity as the original’s, while the result is proposed as a freshly created work capable of stimulating new experiences. (*The Open Work* 201)

It is acceptable that postmodern literature keeps borrowing plots, characters, or themes from myths or classics; the intertextuality of postmodern literature and classics is also acceptable because it carries new experiences in its contemporary context. However, this does not mean a total blind acceptance of characteristics of postmodern literature as parody, pastiche, or intertextuality; this cannot simply be judged as a decadence of high arts;
For him, the most important consideration resides in the use to which such artifacts of popular culture are put. If they are used by a manipulative power structure to obfuscate reality and to conceal the power relationships present within our contemporary world, or to mask an ideological message delivered through such popular culture phenomena as comic strips, then the intellectual’s task must not be merely to denounce this aspect of popular culture. (Bondanella 52)

Therefore, Eco believes that there is no fault with the popular culture or mass culture as represented by films, pulp novels, or animations only if “a contemporary intellectual must deconstruct—to employ a term popular in current critical practice—the manner in which such a dangerous message is hidden beneath a highly consumable popular culture artifact” (52).

The contemporary intellectuals then need to decode and reveal the ideology concealed in the mass culture to prevent it “from becoming an instrument of passive control” (53).
CONCLUSION

Since we are living in a society full of mass culture, since we are part of the mass culture, we cannot refuse the mass culture totally and alienate ourselves from it. One the contrary, we should not blindly embrace all the pulp fictions, bestsellers, or big hits even when we are enjoying them. From the four influential Chinese animations from 1954 to 2007 as discussed in Chapter One, we can see a similar and repetitive pattern of how magic power is shown through technology and how authority denies access to knowledge and conceals its control over the masses. The four male characters with the help from magical objects exclusively fulfilled their dreams and achieved their initiation.

Eco recognizes and appreciates why we all (Eco included) enjoy repetitious stories or comic strips celebrating a superhero who can never be changed, overcome, or threatened because he or she is invincible. Popular culture, in its many and varied forms, relies more than high culture upon such repetitive iterative schemes containing an extremely high redundancy in their messages: ‘the greater part of popular narrative is a narrative of redundance’. (Bondanella 59)

In more than 50 years, Chinese animations revolved around Chinese myth, magic, its ancient culture, and its ancient technology to reinforce an invisible hierarchical ideology in mass culture and thus influence and formulate children’s value system.

Another approach from the perspective of mechanical reproduction and works of arts is employed in Chapter Two discussing how arts may lose aura by being reproduced and entering mass culture and thus becoming politicized by the current authority to maintain and keep their domination over all others. Disney as a typical example of western mass culture does not only employ repetitive story patterns, but also unifies messages coded in whatever culture into a
Disney one. *Mulan* is used as a case study to show how Disney transformed a national image into a univocal message—Disney is “where your dreams come true” no matter what your dreams are.

*The Name of the Rose* as discussed in Chapter Three, along with Eco’s semiotics, are, on the one hand, a continuation of the discussion in Chapter One on secrecy, knowledge, and power; on the other hand they lead to a continuation of the discussion in Chapter Two on high art and mass culture. In one way *The Name of the Rose* corresponds to the four Chinese animations although it is in the form of a popular novel or non-animated film. Eco does not distinguish so much from animation or popular novel or film because all of them are part of popular culture. In another way, it achieves huge progress from the Frankfurt school by taking mass culture as a semiotic code, to interpret what the image of a Rose suggests.

As said by Bondanella, “[a]ny danger to the intellect and to society at large supposedly derived from popular culture comes not from the redundant messages themselves but, instead, from the implicit or explicit manipulation of popular culture for ideological reasons” (53). Thus, so long as we are aware of the ideological positions of the animations, popular novels, films as discussed in this thesis, either eastern or western, either in ancient China or medieval period, either Disney or non-Disney, “Eco seems to imply, they can do us little serious harm” (53). Thus, an awareness of ideological positions in popular culture by the consumer/viewer/reader is a necessary condition for subverting at least in some fashion, the absolute power of those in authority.
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