A Monster Mash(up) with Chinese Characteristics: Breaking News from the PRC for those Intrigued by the "Pride and Prejudice and Zombies" Phenomenon

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A Monster Mash(up) with Chinese Characteristics: Breaking News from the PRC for those Intrigued by the "Pride and Prejudice and Zombies" Phenomenon

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By the end of this post, readers will have been able to click on a word to be introduced to the sounds of "Redgrass Music" (a genre that uses Chinese instruments in a novel manner), seen the special look of a curious vehicle recently displayed in Shanghai that one journalist has said should be called a “Lexiac” (like a Pontiac from the front, like a Lexus from behind), and discovered something important that Zhang Yimou and Jane Austen have in common (hint: surprise appearances by the undead are involved in each case).

First, though, some background about "mash-ups" (aka "mash ups" and "mashups"), for "China Beat" has dealt with this subject before and even run pieces with mash-up-like titles, but never before confronted the phenomenon of contemporary mash-up mania head on.

The first point to stress is that mash-ups are not completely new by any means.

Even if the term has a short history, the mixing and matching it suggests has been taking place in China as well as all sorts of other place for ages. Fusion food was already a big thing way back in the twentieth century. (And what were nineteenth-century creations like chop suey and chow mein if not a kind of culinary mash-up avant la lettre?) Artists have been bringing together elements from and playing with juxtapositions of features of different genres and even different media for centuries, even if it is only recently that such efforts have been called “mash-ups,” “samplings,” or “post-modern” efforts. Turning from cuisine and art to politics, China is one of many countries that has a long experience with approaches to ideology that involve striking juxtapositions of concepts and assumptions, with just two of many examples being the effort by the Taipings (1848-1864) to fuse aspects of Christian eschatology with various kinds of indigenous concepts and the current experiment with “Socialism with Chinese Characteristics,” which Nicholas Kristoff has dubbed “Market Leninism,” a term that captures even more effectively the mash-up-like quality of the approach.
Still, one could certainly argue that, thanks partly to the ease with which new technologies allow for re-mixing and combining, there’s something special about the current rage for various kinds of mash-ups. (Even though the literary one currently making news, which features Austen characters battling zombies could have been published before the days of computers; it could just not, as the creator has noted, been published before *Pride and Prejudice* went out of copyright and entered the public domain.) The mash-up has become so omnipresent that there’s not just one entry for the term in Wikipedia, which likes the hyphen-less spelling of this sort of hybridity, but four separate ones, running the gamut from “Mashup (digital)” to “Mashup (web application hybrid),” with “Mashup (music),” aka “bootlegging,” and “Mashup (video),” aka having fun with YouTube (a format that has introduced new audiences to such classics that of the genre that pre-date the coining of the M word as “Bambi Meets Godzilla” and “Stairway to Gilligan’s Island”), in between.

This said, I’ll invite readers to figure out where exactly they fall on the spectrum that runs from the “there’s nothing new under the sun” to “the coming of the web has changed everything” continuum where mix-and-match creations are concerned, and simply make what they will of these 5 mash-ups created within the PRC (the first two of which have ties to the Warcraft family of games, whose popularity in China we’ve dealt with before on this site, here and here:  

1. *Pride and Patriotism and Zombies* (hat tip to Danwei)...

Not content to wait to see exactly how Zhang Yimou, who choreographed the Opening Ceremonies of the Beijing Games, handles the 60th anniversary of the founding of the PRC, some Chinese students, who don’t seem to have a satirical intent (but I’m not sure how one would know if they did) have come up with this version of that upcoming event (the real thing takes place October 1, 2009), substituting monstrous and mythical characters from Warcraft 3 (like those shown below) for the humans who will actually do the marching that day.

2. *One World (of Warcraft), One Dream*
In a similar vein, here, from the ChinaSmack site, is a monstrous mash-up, featuring World of Warcraft characters, which has fun with the song that was used to whip up excitement for the Beijing Games (note the original version of the song below it, which has Jackie Chan and other celebrities taking turns with the lyrics).

3. Redgrass Music (hat tip to James Millward of "The World on a String" blog, and Chris Hesselton for alerting me to the good post awaiting me there)... The music speaks for itself if you click here.

4. Confucian Blue
Staying with music, there’s a fascinating video of novelist/vocalist Liu Sola available here, originally broadcast on CCTV, which looks at her writings and includes clips of her on-stage experiments with fusing styles as dissimilar as Chinese Opera and American Blues.

5. Last and Maybe Least, the Lexiac...
Shown here with front and back views, of course...